

LEILA ALAOUI

EN

MADE IN INDIA

19.01.2024 – 19.03.2024

GALLERIA CONTINUA/PARIS is delighted to present in its gallery space an exhibition dedicated to *Made in India*, a previously unseen series of photographs by Leila Alaoui (1982 – 2016), taken during a trip to India in 2014. Eight years after the attack responsible for her untimely death, the gallery is pursuing its commitment to promoting and disseminating the work of the photographer and video artist internationally, renowned for her emblematic portraits combining photo-documentary, humanism and activism.

Made in India includes a large number of photographs that bear witness to the artist's committed vision. Alaoui travelled to Chennai, formerly known as Madras, in July 2014, to immortalise the faces of a community of women working in a garment factory. Following on from her work on identity, her main aim was to immerse herself in the daily lives of these workers. The artist wanted to meet the women who are often hidden behind the "Made in India" label attached to mass-market clothing. In so doing, she helped bring them out of anonymity, while giving their experiences the power of numbers and the weight of a shared social reality. Alaoui demonstrated her keen attention to maintaining a critical distance, like a photojournalist, while enveloping the subject in a fine, gentle and supportive sensitivity. The exhibition also features a video by Shrikkanth Govindarajan, a young video artist commissioned to document the making of this photographic project.

In a society that constantly pushes for textile overproduction and keeps workers in the shadows, Alaoui undertook meticulous work

to show the public the hands, faces and bodies of those who make our clothes every day. By having her models pose in a temporary studio created within the factory, she brought out the personality of each woman, while capturing their looks, the details of their clothes and the ornaments they wore. For each, she took three shots: a portrait showing just the face, a three-quarter shot and a close-up of the hands. As with her previous series *Les Marocains*, produced between 2010 and 2014, the photographer decided to eliminate any intermediating environment by having the people pose in front of a black background. By choosing to create portraits rather than scenes from life, and by always proceeding in the same way—a frontal view, a neutral background – she gave these individuals a nobility, an autonomy and a solemn dignity.

Leila Alaoui was born in Paris to a Moroccan father and a French mother, and grew up in Marrakesh, where she attended French schools while being nurtured in Arabic culture by her father. She then forged her artistic practice in New York, where she moved in 2000 to study social sciences at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York. There she met film director Felipe Barbosa and became assistant to architectural photographer John Hall, as well as director of photography Kerwin DeVonish and artistic director Maripol. She worked as an assistant photographer on Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men* and Spike Lee's *Inside Man*. She also took part in the filming of Erykah Badu concerts and assisted in the production of three documentary films, travelling to Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico. These experiences, in which she acquired advanced

technical training and became aware of social issues alongside masters of the image, formed the basis of her subsequent artistic work.

In 2007, she returned to Morocco and began a research project which revealed her keen interest in social and societal issues. Sensitive to her country's problems, she began her own photographic work with the series *No Pasara*, documenting the experiences of young Moroccans who dream of crossing the Mediterranean to conquer a European future. A militant artist, Alaoui's work transforms the landscapes of exiles into masterpieces of hope, and denounces the horrors of contemporary society. She joined associations fighting for the rights of refugees. After starting one of her best-known series with *Les Marocains* (mentioned above), in 2013 she embarked on a new project in which she followed sub-Saharan migrants and produced the *Crossing* series. Her series have been exhibited several times in Marrakech, notably at the Marrakech Art Fair (2011), the Musée de la Palmeraie (2014) and the Musée Yves Saint Laurent (2018), reinforcing her trajectory on the international art scene. Her work has been included in major international collections such as those of the British Museum, London, United Kingdom, the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, the Musée Mohammed VI, Rabat, Morocco, and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France.

Leila Alaoui's work also includes photographic assignments for NGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council, Search for Common Ground and the UNHCR. In January 2016, while working for an Amnesty International commission on women's rights in Burkina Faso, Alaoui was seriously injured in the terrorist attacks in Ouagadougou. She died on 18 January 2016. The Leila Alaoui Foundation was created to preserve her work, defend her values and inspire and support artists working for human dignity. In 2022, the foundation inaugurated the Centre Interculturel Leila Alaoui (CILA) in Fontvieille en Provence, a new art centre to promote socially committed visual arts and contribute to the cultural influence of the Mediterranean. GALLERIA CONTINUA supports the initiatives of the Leila Alaoui Foundation and is proud to play its part in perpetuating the work of an exceptional artist.

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