

HOUSTON (JUNE 11, 2021) – In a spectacular finish to its Spring 2021 programming, Foto Relevance is pleased to announce *Cartographies of Pattern*, the gallery’s debut solo exhibition of works by **Alia Ali**, on view July 9 – September 4, 2021.

Featuring selections from Ali’s *FLUX*, *FLOW*, *INDIGO*, and حب (*hub*) // *LOVE* series, *Cartographies of Pattern* dives headfirst into the intricate and often unreconcilable political, historical, and economic legacies of textiles. Considering everything from the expansive global trade routes traveled by certain fabrics, to the classification and nomenclature of particular prints, to the communicative potential of a pattern’s symbolism, Ali ushers viewers into a conversation about colonialism, cultural cross-pollination, and borders that simultaneously unite and divide people.



In **FLUX**, Ali depicts figures swathed in and backdropped by eye-catching wax prints. Saturated with vibrant colors and designs, each image is, in turn, surrounded by a frame hand-upholstered by the artist with materials sourced from Cote d’Ivoire. The visual effect is one that undulates between clashing hyper-visibility and camouflage, untethering viewers from traditional, encyclopedic methods of identification. This aesthetic complexity reflects a deeper conceptual layer that *FLUX* contends with: the multitude of narratives encompassed in wax print history.

Initially materializing in India, China, and Java, wax prints (characterized by a wax-resistant dyeing technique) have been transported across the world. As such, they are referred to in a variety of ways: as African wax print, Dutch wax print, Ankara, and batik. The discrepancies in these names underscore the tensions that arise between who

develops a textile, who commercializes and/or appropriates it, who consumes it, and who ultimately profits off of it.

With **FLOW**, Ali picks up on a similar thread, delving into ikat fabric production and proliferation. Informed by her experiences studying alongside Master ikat artisans in Uzbekistan, the artist photographs silhouettes swimming in iconic ikat patterns. These patterns embody a powerful visual language – a language that transcends geographic boundaries in its ability to be read and interpreted by myriad cultures. In paying close attention to the craftsmanship necessitated by ikat manufacturing, Ali brings viewers closer to the stories and mythologies behind the textiles.





In **INDIGO**, Ali shifts the scope of her research to ruminate on color. A dark blue dye originating from a tropical plant in the pea family, indigo holds weight across the world, from Japan and Vietnam to Yemen and Mexico. Of particular note to the artist is how indigo's hue resonates not only across regions, but also within multiple domains: the color blue is associated with both sky and water, connecting a realm above our heads with an element comprising the majority of all of our bodies.

In **حب (hub) // LOVE**, Ali refutes the politicization of her native Arabic tongue through the creation of her own visual motif: a hand-painted pattern of the Arabic word **حب** ("love") on fabric-adorned figures. By making **حب** ubiquitous across a mesmerizing, shifting color palette, the artist gives nuance and space to a language that, due to media depictions of Arabs, has long held negative connotations in Western culture.

Works from **حب (hub) // LOVE** are titled with words that augment and expand the meaning of love, such as **راحة** (raha; meaning comfort, rest), **تضحية** (tadhhiya; meaning sacrifice, offering), and **روح** (rooh; meaning spirit, soul, essence). These name fluctuations offer different lenses with which to consider the meaning of **حب**, yielding an acknowledgement of what Arabic script has the capacity to signify. The lexicon, according to the artist, is endless.



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Alia Ali (Arabic: عاليه علي // Sabeen: 1ħ°|°ŷ1ħ°) is a Yemeni-Bosnian-US multi-media artist. Having traveled to sixty-seven countries, lived in and between seven, and grown up among five languages, her most comfortable mode of communication is through photography, video, and installation. Her work explores cultural binaries, challenges culturally sanctioned oppression, and confronts the dualistic barriers of conflicted notions of gender, politics, media, and citizenship. Ali critiques linguistics and inherited political structures and narratives, while simultaneously attempting to counter the polarization and miscommunication that imperils communities across the world, encouraging viewers to confront their own prejudices.



Textile has been a constant in Ali's practice. The belief that textile is significant to all of us has driven her photographic series. We are born into it, we sleep in it, we eat on it, we define ourselves by it, we shield ourselves with it, and eventually, we die in it. While it unites us, it also divides us physically and symbolically. In my work, textiles represent the fabricated barriers in society that can both segregate and connect us. What side of the fabric are we on? Can we exist on both sides at once? Ultimately, do we exclude others from the fear of being excluded ourselves? Is this exclusion a form of self preservation, motivated by primitive fears of social isolation and our search for security? Or does exclusion represent a metamorphosis of the outcast into the villain? What do we fear discovering beneath the cloth?

A graduate of Wellesley College and the CalArts, Ali's work has been featured in the Financial Times, Le Monde, Vogue, and Hyperallergic. She has won numerous awards and has exhibited internationally. Ali also serves on the board of Youth of the World Together (YWT) in Sana'a, Yemen, and Clockshop in Los Angeles, California. Her work is in collections at Princeton University, the New Orleans Museum of Art, the British Museum, and numerous international private collections.

Alia Ali lives and works in Los Angeles and Marrakech, and is currently in residency at the Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program (RAiR) in Roswell, New Mexico.

ABOUT FOTO RELEVANCE:

Since 2016, **Foto Relevance** cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum-quality, contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District in Houston, Texas in close proximity to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Menil Collection, and the Houston Center for Photography.

Foto Relevance is currently open for walk-in hours Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11 am - 5 pm, or by appointment. This is subject to change as we stay current with local COVID-related advisories. Groups are limited to five, with masks mandatory for all guests and staff. Please call (713) 505-1499 or email info@fotorelevance.com for press and other inquiries.