

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Charlotte Abrahams, "Akram Zaatari at Thomas Dane", FT How to Spend It, 18 November 2013

Following the Venice Biennale, the Lebanese artist has a London show

2013 has been a busy year for Beirut-based artist Akram Zaatari. In May, MoMa staged an exhibition of two of his key works; the following month he began a six-month sojourn representing Lebanon at the 55th Venice Biennale and on Wednesday November 27 the doors will open on his first solo show in London for almost a decade (running until Saturday February 1 2014). Entitled *Akram Zataari: On Photography, People and Modern Times*, it will occupy both sites of Mayfair's Thomas Dane Gallery and promises to be a must-visit exhibition for anyone interested in vernacular photography and film and the roles they play in the formation of personal and communal histories.

Photography, film and family archives are, of course, classic Zaatari territory (as well as his artistic practice, he is co-founder of the Arab Image Foundation, an organisation that aims to track down and preserve photographs from North African, Middle Eastern and Arabic communities around the world) and this exhibition shows his work at its most expansive. The title piece, for example, is a 38-minute projection made up of photographs and videos (€65,000 + VAT, first picture) taken from the archive of Studio Sheherazade (which was established in 1953 in Zaatari's home town of Saida) and material from the AIF. Installed in a cinema-like environment, the work is both a fascinating and moving insight into intimate personal histories and a meditation on the way memories are preserved.

Studio Sheherazade is also the subject of this show's second major installation, *28 Nights and a Poem*, 2010 (over €100,000 + VAT, detail in

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second and third pictures). Occupying the whole of the 11 Duke Street site, it consists of LCD screens, iPad videos, wall-based photography, photographic cabinets and projected super 8 film and brings the world of the archive's founder Hashem al-Madani vividly to life.

As well as these extraordinary, immersive pieces, the exhibition also contains several wall-based photographs, including *Damaged Negatives: Scratched Portrait of Mrs Baqari*, 2012 (€25,000 + VAT) and *Two Boys Posing with Gevaert Film Advertisement*, 2007 (€15,000 + VAT).

Beautiful and haunting, these are images that will live with you long after the show closes.