



Wesaam Al-Badry, *Sandra # V*, 2020, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wesaam Al-Badry
The Other Language

September 17 – October 29, 2022

OPENING RECEPTION
Saturday, September 17, 2022, 3-5 pm

ARTIST TALK AT 4 PM

Wesaam Al-Badry in conversation with art scholar, Benjamin L. Jones at the Minnesota Street Project Atrium

#theotherlanguageexhibition #jenkinsjohnsongallery
#benjaminljones #wesaambadry
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Jenkins Johnson Gallery is pleased to present Wesaam Al-Badry's solo exhibition *The Other Language*, considering labor, migration, the environment, and notions of otherness in the United States. The opening reception will be on Saturday, September 17 from 3-5 pm. During the reception, Al-Badry will be in conversation with Benjamin L. Jones from 4-5 pm at Minnesota Street Project Atrium to talk about the exhibition and his artistic process. This event will be live on the Jenkins Johnson Gallery's Instagram (@jenkinsjohnsongallery).

Inspired by a Kahlil Gibran poem with the same title, *The Other Language* ties together two of Al-Badry's documentary projects which explore a coal mining town in Appalachia, and migrant workers in the Central Valley. Gibran's poem presents the idea that every person is born speaking a language that we have to forget in order to be understood by others. In these works, Al-Badry combines methods of investigative journalism and art to ask us to rethink how people deal with tragic circumstances created by corporate avarice. By citing Gibran's poetry, Al-Badry's work enters a multidimensional frame, it is at once surface-level and abstract, autobiographical and biographical.

As part of his Migrant Workers series, Wesaam Al-Badry has documented the lives of essential agricultural workers and their families in California's Central Valley and Salinas Valley since April 2020. These areas represent the fertile heart of California agriculture, where farmworkers harvest over a third of the vegetables and 40% of the fruit and nuts grown in the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerabilities of these farming communities already hard-hit by housing shortages, food insecurity, unsafe working conditions, and the threat of deportation. Al-



Wesaam Al-Badry, *Marianna #XIV*, 2019, archival pigment print, 16 x 20 inches

Badry's photographs reveal the "real people with hopes and fears" behind the fresh fruits and vegetables on our tables. During some forty visits over the past two years and in hours of recorded interviews, Al-Badry developed ongoing relationships with the people he met, visiting them at home, in their communities, and at work in California's fields. The photographs convey resilience, empathy, and human dignity, three qualities the artist aims to foreground in all of his work.



Wesaam Al-Badry, *The Garcia Family*, 2021, archival pigment print, 16 x 20 inches

Marianna series is a social exploration project that investigates the Appalachian and post-coal mining community of Marianna, PA. In the course of this ongoing project, Wesaam Al-Badry seeks to personalize and expand the lives of the members of a deeply historical community. With intimate images of family, community, history and industry, the artist opens us up to this small town with stories and unique connections, personalizing and elevating this community beyond reductive stereotypes. Historically, Marianna was once a mining community, and remnants of this remain with a man-made mountain of coal ash. The town itself sits on top of a riverbank. On the one hand, it is idyllic Appalachia with beautiful, wooded forests and winding streams and rivers. On the other, it is a community besieged with problems, from the constant noise and light pollution to rising health problems.

The photographs in these two series of work agitate long-held practices of looking, such as how we construct stereotypes to how we imagine dreamscapes of ruin. For Al-Badry, "I am the other, photographing the others." The artwork lays bare what we think connects and divides us by reaching for a language everyone in the world is born with. *The Other Language* is Wesaam Al-Badry's first solo exhibition at Jenkins Johnson Gallery.

Wesaam Al-Badry is an investigative, multimedia journalist and interdisciplinary artist working with themes related to refugees, labor, migration, war, and technology. His approach to photography is informed by his own childhood experience as a refugee. Al-Badry and his family fled the war in Iraq in 1991 and, after four and a half years in a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia, were eventually relocated to Lincoln, Nebraska. Al-Badry's photographs from this ongoing project have appeared in the New York Times, the Atlantic, Rolling Stone, Mother Jones, and The Nation. Al-Badry received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute, and a Master of Journalism from the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley. Al-Badry's work is in prestigious collections including National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.) and Fine



Wesaam Al-Badry, *Marianna #XL*, 2019, archival pigment print, 16 x 20 inches

Arts Museums of San Francisco (CA). Recent exhibitions include his solo exhibition *Essential Work* at Bernstein Gallery, Princeton University, and group exhibitions such as *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, travelling to Frankfurt's Museum Angewandte Kunst, and *Justice* at Marin Museum of Contemporary Art.

Benjamin L. Jones researches the speculative analysis and praxis of oppressed people. He is a Ph.D. Candidate in Northwestern University's Department of Art History, with an interdisciplinary cluster certificate in Critical Theory. His art-historical interests include contemporary intersections of art and power, futurism, and Black radical visual culture and performance. Funded by the Social Science Research Council and the Mellon foundation, his work engages critical ethnic studies, critical pedagogical practices, and feminist mobilizations of onto-epistemology and quantum mechanics. A practicing artist, Jones graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute with a B.A. in the History and Theory of Contemporary Art (highest honors). He is currently working on two projects: *What We Fin'na Do: Preface to a 5,000 Year Almanac*, and *What We Cain't Do: The Pedagogy of the Black Radical Aesthetic Tradition*. He has been awarded the 2022-2023 Dissertation Fellowship in Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

For more information on this exhibition please contact info@jenkinsjohnsongallery.com
Gallery Hours: Thursday-Saturday, 11am-5pm