

**Trischa GOODNOW**

***Light from the Middle East:  
The Real vs. the Imagined in Contemporary Photography***

In the Spring of 2013, *Light from the Middle East*, a collection of photographs from Middle Eastern photographers depicting images of the region, was exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, UK. The exhibit was unusual, not just because of its sole focus on photographs, but because of its investigation of the boundary between the real and the imagined. While psychologists and neurologists have tested the capacity of the brain to make the distinction between real and imagined, the rhetorical impact of this distinction or lack thereof is absent in the academic literature.

This paper proposes to use the images from *Light from the Middle East* to interrogate the layers of tension between the real and the imagined present in photographs. The exhibit was divided into three sections: recording, reframing and resisting. These three disparate sections play with the notions of what is an accurate depiction of reality versus how manipulation of images can reflect a “truer” reality. It is within this tension that the rhetorical impact of these photographs may lay. The paper will draw implications about photographs, rhetoric, imagination and reality.

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