

The Tentmakers of Islamic Cairo



Foreword

In the labyrinthine milieu of old Cairo, in the vicinity of Bab Zuwayla, the last remaining gate of the medieval city, craftsmen have been producing textiles of both utility and striking beauty for centuries.

Intended originally for tents, these decorative pieces of stitched cotton, known as *khayamiyya*, have long attracted Cairenes as well as distant travellers. Large pieces line pavilions set up to celebrate weddings or returning pilgrims; other pieces assume a decorative domestic function as wall hangings, bedspreads, or pillow cases.

Whether publically or privately displayed, the floral, geometric, calligraphic, or Pharaonic patterns visually charm and, as both artisans and traders, the tentmakers of Cairo form part of an enduring, creative world which often recedes into a background that few see.

This research project led to the most complete multimedia archive of everyday life and sustainable development efforts of the ancient and beautiful handcraft of the *khayamiyya*.

The present catalogue introduces us to the 40 images from the exhibition which has traveled the UK and Europe since 2014, to land in NYC for a UN-related event in May 2017.

A more extensive selection is available online on massimedia.com/storytelling/tentmakers with the further support of audio and video contributions. By empowering audiences with editing preferences, this interactive platform was carefully crafted to innovate the practice of multimedia storytelling.

Professor James Piscatori
Project Director CASAW
Durham University

Massimiliano Fusari



I am a digital consultant, communication scholar and results-driven visual storyteller.

My well established international education and professional experience ranges from Morocco to China.

Since 1994, I have focused my practice and my research on the politics of representation of the Muslim world.

After a series of collaborations for private, public and third sector assets, including IOM and UNESCO, I was awarded a PhD at the University of Exeter in 2013.

Experimenting with diverse journalistic forms as a multimedia consultant, has led me to my current locus, digital and interactive storytelling for online platforms.

As Senior Lecturer at Westminster University, I infuse a wide range of modules with 20 years of professional media practice and academic research.

Through my current research on The Image As Storytelling, I explore the shifting relations between the real, the communicated and the 'seen,' to assess the socio-political and economic implications of today's personal and social imagery.

In so doing, I inform my digital platforms with interactive features. As a result, audiences are not merely viewers, but fully empowered participants as through montage they co-create with me new and shared narratives.

My book monograph, out Spring 2019 for Intellect, is entitled *Aesthetics As Storytelling*.

The Image As Storytelling

The 1991 Gulf War set – among many socio-political changes - a new communicative milestone, one that arguably reached us in ways as diverse and unexpected as today's 'alternative facts.' The media has, to an unparalleled degree, become the imperative requisite of politics.

Over the last 25 years, as an academic scholar and a multimedia journalist, I have been exploring how communication strategically leverages politics. I have approached these topics from a variety of perspectives, and through different media.

These peregrinations have eventually led to a thorough appreciation of the centrality of the visual, which I address through my research framework - The Image As Storytelling.

The last 15 years of academic research and professional expertise as a photographer have thus moulded my critical outlook regarding the visual and how it works.

I specifically focus on how new media forms (e.g. the digital image) re-combine established communicative formats (e.g. storytelling).

By advancing the appreciation of composition and aesthetics as powerful communicative tools, I aim to pinpoint the extent to which design shapes and informs each and every stage in digital media production, from pre-to post-production, from montage to targeted policies in media distribution.

For instance, camera settings inscribe the recording of the real before it being not only shot, but even 'seen,' and that is indeed designed visual communication. Full acknowledgment of this process is required.

As a photojournalist, I became aware of how aesthetics might lead to a possible disjunction of the recorded real from the designed representation.

As a result, I aim to advance my theoretical research by infusing my professional practice with new ways to develop an ethical visual literacy for today's digital media.

In 2008 Peter Greenaway reminded his viewers that "just because you have eyes does not mean to say that you can see." I agree that, in spite of its richness and complexities, visual communication still remains profoundly overlooked and trivialised.

Whether we *take* or *make* a photograph is not a small issue of semantics, rather it is what truly defines the way we communicate.

The Gallery

The following photographs encapsulate a selection of the stories I edited from the Cairo materials I shot at the end of 2013.

These images became the exhibition which has been travelling Europe since 2014, later anchoring at the Oriental Museum of Durham (UK) as one of its permanent collections. In May 2017, this work contributes to a UN-related event on cultural dialogue.

The interactive platform **massimedia.com/storytelling/tentmakers** is available online as a complete multimedia archive.

With more than 400 photos, audio and videos available, *you* decide how to connect them, to endlessly re-write *your* interpretation of *my own* story...















































































One Last Image

Photography is today a wide-open field, frequented by anyone who possesses a mobile phone, and billions of images are shared at any given moment in the global space. But if we thought that photography has lost its value, just as an excess of money in circulation produces its devaluation, Massimiliano Fusari's images should make us think again.

In the first place, quality is not always defeated by quantity, and the perfection of these pictures prove that such a "survival of quality" is possible, though now more difficult.

But the interest and value of Fusari's photos goes well beyond the realm of photography.

In exploring with empathy and warmth the daily lives of concrete human beings, he reveals a not-so-hidden agenda: that of defeating all exoticism, which – under the

appearance of interest and even appreciation – actually entails a distancing from the Other, seen as totally different from us.

In these photos, on the contrary, we see the Other as sharing with us, while preserving his or her difference, a common and easily understandable humanity.

Our eye is invited to linger on the beautiful banality of daily gestures, and even on the objects that accompany our everyday life.

The end result, therefore, relates not only to aesthetics, but to ethics.

Photographer, anthropologist and humanist, Massimiliano Fusari helps us being more aware, more open. In a few words, more human.

And also to reject all essentialism turning identity into self-contained, ignorant and potentially violent rejection of different ways of being human.

Ambassador Roberto Toscano
Former Head of Policy Planning,
Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World (CASAW)

مركز الدراسات المتقدمة للعالم العربي



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digital production multimedia storytelling



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This storytelling, together with its interactive online interpretation, has been researched, shot and post-produced by Dr Massimiliano Fusari / Massimedia.com.

For any information, please contact fusari@massimedia.com.

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Cairo: 2013

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*The interactive platform is available @
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