

**FLUX**  
**ALIA ALI**

# FLUX

Textile unites and divides us, both physically and symbolically. While its functional purposes are evident, its indexical capacities are not. Textile constitutes a nexus in which politics, economics, and histories collide. In her series *FLUX*, artist Alia Ali draws the viewer's attention to the textile as a document in which politics, economics and histories collide. Focusing specifically on wax print, Ali asks, how did these textiles obtain their names? Wax print—a wax-resistant dyeing technique—exists under various monikers, including African wax print, Dutch wax prints, Ankara and batik. These names reveal that colonial histories and economic reactions are woven into the processes and patterns that define the print. A vibrant aesthetic obscures an iniquitous past and embodies a dynamic narrative which accentuates the complex conditions by which these textiles have come into existence.

*FLUX* is a series of shifting photographic artworks that embody silhouettes that are warped by textile, saturated in colors and a medley of motifs. Each frame is uniquely upholstered with wax print sourced from Cote d'Ivoire. While some of the images distort visibility, others create hypervisibility almost negating themselves into animated forms of camouflage. The outburst of saturated colors and hyperoptic motifs in these images, lend themselves to vibrating results obscuring the complex and sometimes iniquitous conditions by which these textiles came into fruition and destabilizing the source(s) from where they came from. The multiple dimensionality creates a kaleidoscope of perspectives, horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, in that this material has come into existence across borders over land and water, and vertically in that they draw from and evoke cosmic, mythical and religious inspirations. Furthermore, these particular wax prints are a key to mapping the colonial trade routes. While they certainly can be seen as escapist dreamscapes, they are also objects of oppression and capitalism.

In most cases the fabric is defined by its maker, but these fabrics in flux are an exception. Who names them? Is it the entity who produces the cloth, or the entity who consumes it? Or is it, perhaps, the one who ensures their passage into a new geographic coordinate? Just like denim raises the question of being French or American, or because of its use of indigo, is it Japanese, Indian or Ghanaen? One could follow a similar line of questioning with wax print: is it Indian, Chinese, Javanese, Dutch or West African, and if so, then what part of West Africa, exactly? What *is* clear is that these particular wax prints present a literal and conceptual space with hidden stories and promised potentiality. They conjure pride and pity, celebration and rejection, power and greed.

While the classification of this cloth is complex, its origins are not. Wax prints have come into existence by a variety of cultures. Batik was first seen in India, China and Java. With the colonial trading that took place within the region, between the British and the Dutch, objects, ideas, and humans were consistently being traded, and it was by water that this passage would occur. Fabric requires water, not only for the growth and harvesting of the fibers and dyeing techniques, but for their migration, as well. The trans-global trade routes networked across the oceans and seas from Europe, around Africa, along the Arabian coast, through South Asia reaching East Asia, and back.

In the mid 19th century, the Dutch would engage new technologies to mass-produce wax fabrics to sell to the Javanese market. The look of the batik would be seemingly similar, ultimately different in that it was not as refined as the labor-intensive handcrafted textiles made by batik masters in Java. In the process, a cracking effect would occur, causing the pigment to seep into the fabric in unintended places. While these batiks were rejected in Java, markets on other parts of the trade routes, particularly along the African coastline, embraced them. An alternative narrative suggests that in the late 19th century, several thousand Ghanaian soldiers served in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army. These individuals would bring back the rejected batiks to Ghana and gift them to their families. The fabric fever caught on and today these fabrics are widely found in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Namibia, and yet, to this day, the majority of the production takes place in the Netherlands, China and India.

These fabrics in flux are a commodity once considered as precious and as commonplace as gold, frankincense, myrrh, jewelry and, as previously mentioned, humans. *FLUX* questions the very nature of how things get named, how they are translated, and how, eventually, are reinterpreted. Furthermore, it questions the intention of their production. If it is not for the preservation of heritage, then is it for the propagation of economic wealth? And for that matter, whose wealth?



*Atomic Flower*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate  
upholstered frame in African Wax Print  
comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

*Constellation*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros







*Blue Pearls*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

*Ochre Waves*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros









*Orange Palms*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 SOLD

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

*Radio*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate  
upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 SOLD

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

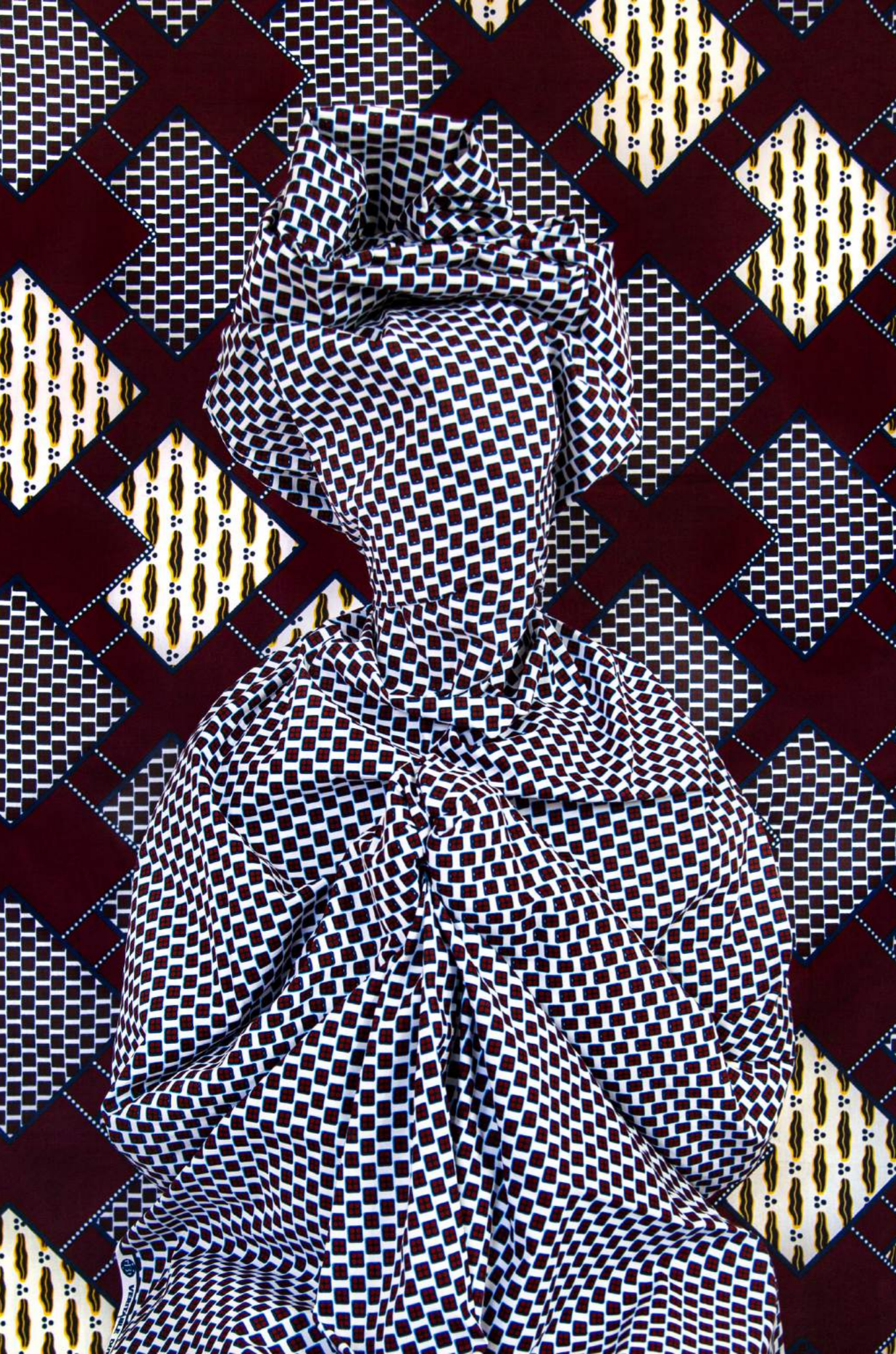
Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros







*Warp*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

*Warrior Lips*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

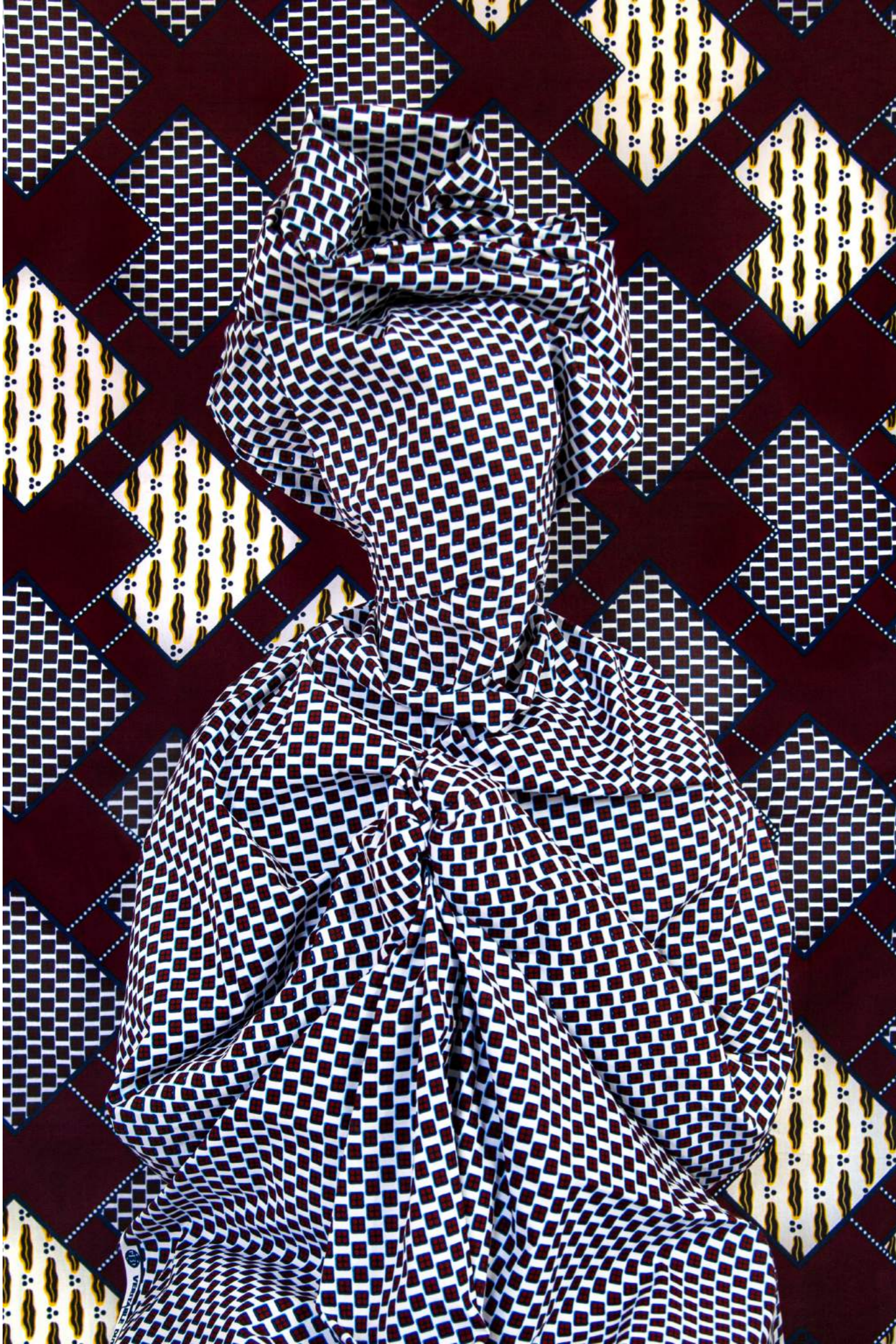
Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros







*Crystalinks*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate  
upholstered frame in African Wax Print  
comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

*Flamingo Suns*

42 in x 28 in unframed

48 in x 36 in upholstered frame

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in African Wax Print

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

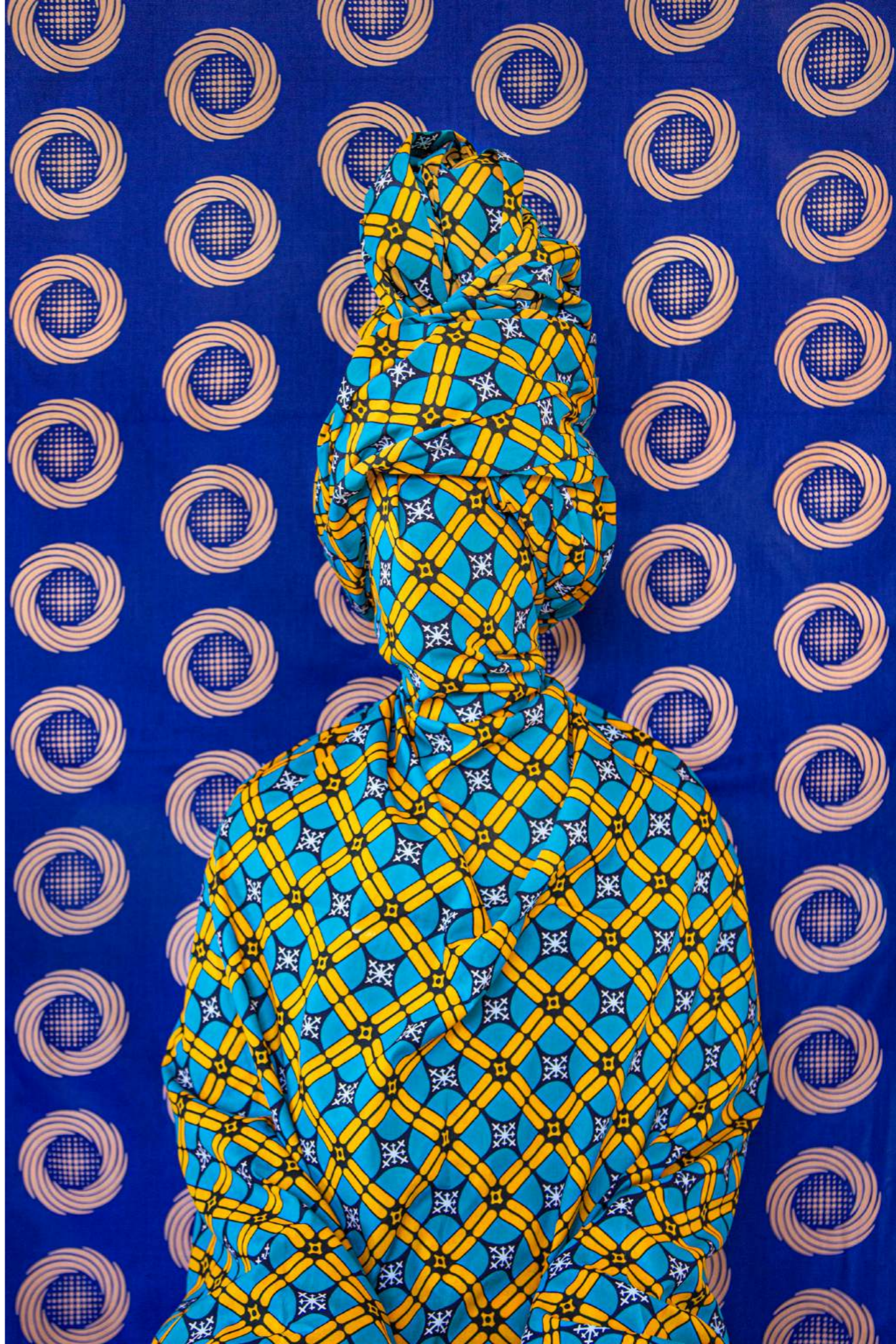
Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

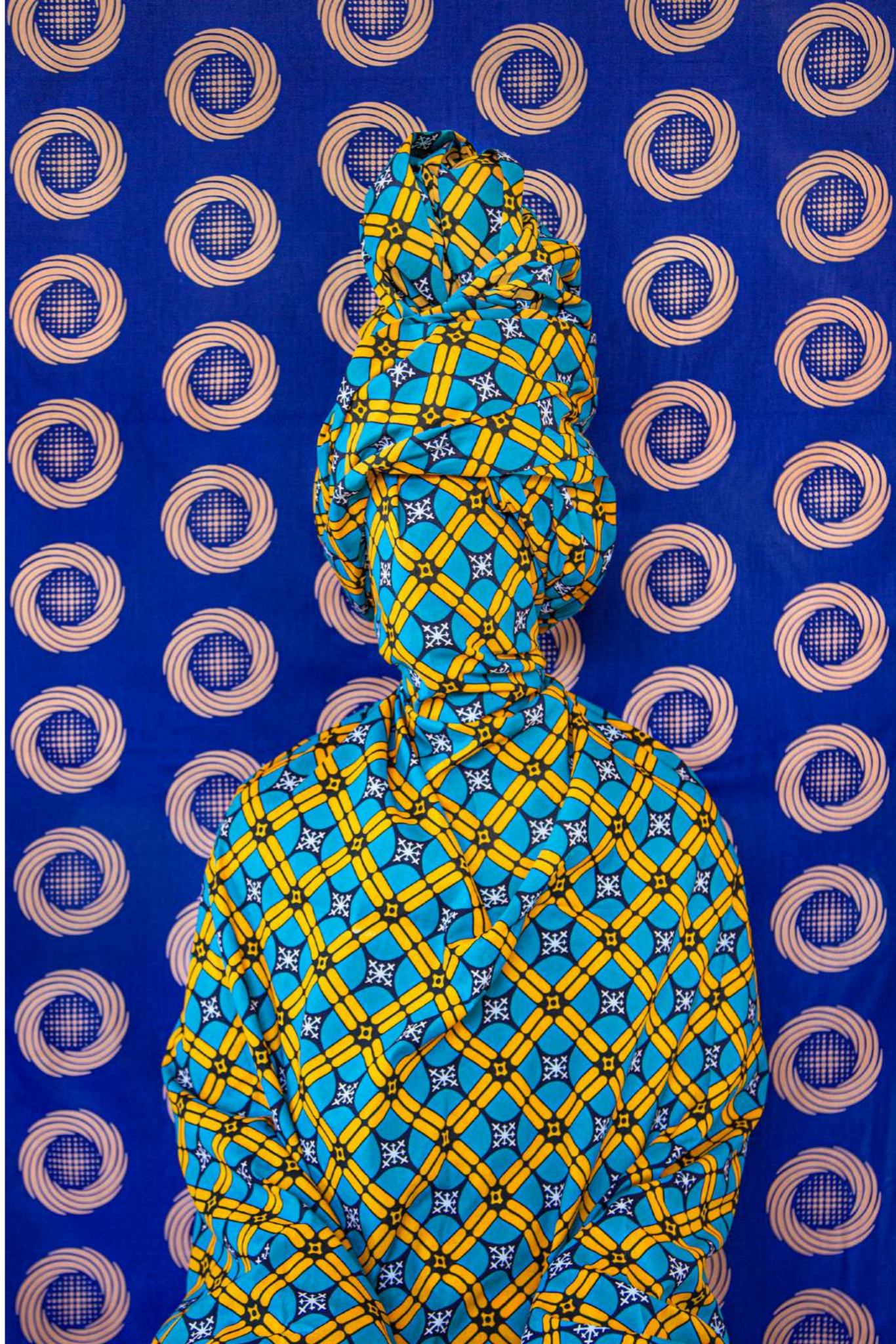
Edition 3 5 500 Euros

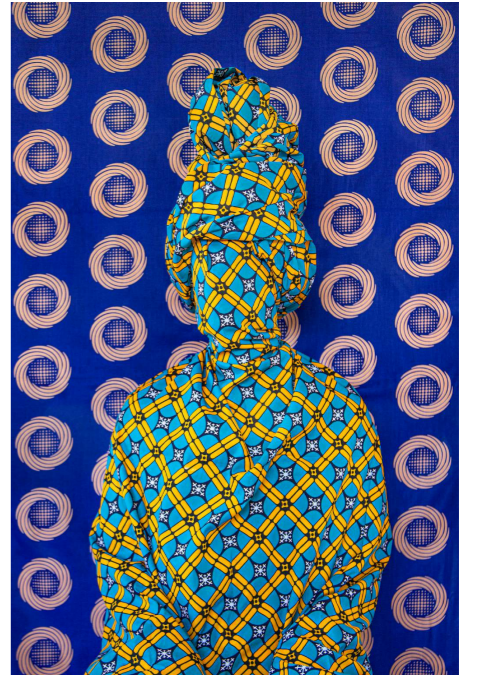
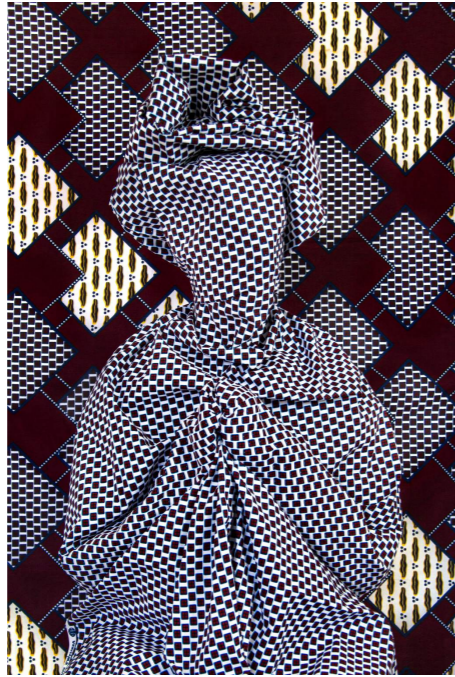
Edition 4 6 000 Euros

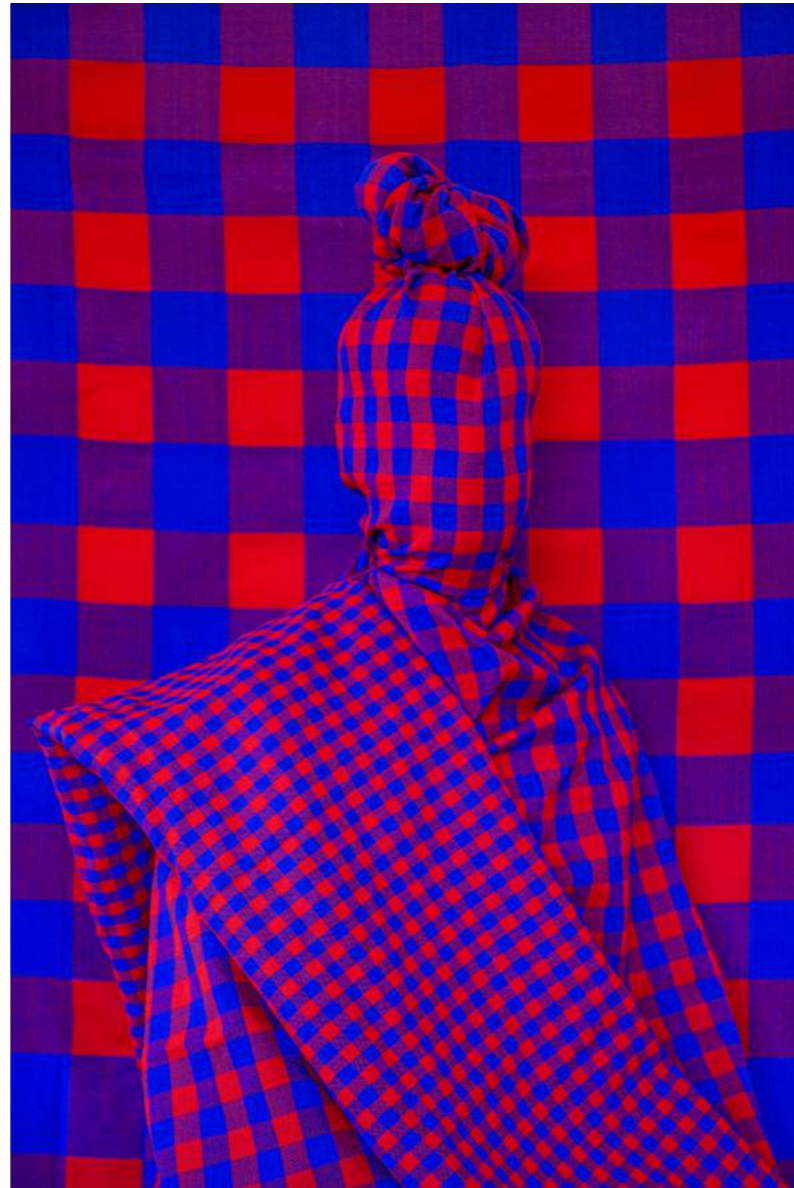
Edition 5 6 500 Euros











*Pulse, Throb, Beat (left to right)*

42 in x 28 in each (unframed)

48 in x 36 in each (upholstered frame)

Pigment print mounted on aluminum dibond with UV laminate

upholstered frame in Masai Wool

comes with certificate of authenticity

Edition of 5 + 1 EP + 1 AP

Edition 1 4 500 Euros

Edition 2 5 000 Euros

Edition 3 5 500 Euros

Edition 4 6 000 Euros

Edition 5 6 500 Euros

Each edition from each photograph is a unique artwork in that the frame is hand upholstered by the artist, herself.  
The artist reserves the right to choose the fabric for each frame.  
All prices are quoted in Euros. Please note that the prices in this document do not reflect taxes or shipping costs.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

I come from two countries that no longer exist: South Yemen and Yugoslavia. My parents are migrant linguists, speaking seven languages, sharing only English. I grew up between Sana'a, Sarajevo, Istanbul and Bloomington, Indiana. Later in my life, I lived in Wales, Vietnam, the United States and Morocco. As a female artist who exists on the borders of Arab/European/American, culturally Muslim/spiritually independent, my work explores cultural binaries and challenges culturally sanctioned oppression. Working primarily with photography, I address histories of colonization, imperialism, sexism and racism in projects that take patterns and textiles as their primary motif.

Textile is significant as it is something that 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 simultaneously divides us, both physically and symbolically. In my work, textiles represent the fabricated barriers in society that often segregate and connect us through fear, discrimination, and misunderstanding. What side of the fabric are we on and can we be on both sides at once? When we exclude, does it come from the fear of being excluded ourselves? Isn't exclusion motivated by a primitive fear and search for security? A form of self-preservation? Or is it a metamorphosis of the outcast into the villain? What is it that we fear from discovering that lies beneath the cloth?

My work seeks to blur these boundaries and encourages people to confront their prejudices by countering the polarization and miscommunication that imperils communities across the world. My own multi-lingual lens has shown me how language can be a form of misinterpretation rather than a means of understanding. My immersive installations of light, pattern and textiles seek to move past language to offer a more expansive, experiential understanding of self, culture and nation.

Alia Ali (1985)

For CV, please visit <http://alia-ali.com>

Alia Ali is a Yemeni-Bosnian-US multi-media artist. Having traveled to sixty-seven countries, lived in seven and grown up among five languages, her most comfortable mode of communication is through image and multi-sensory mediums. Her extensive travels have led her to process the world through interactive experiences and the belief that the interpretation of verbal and written language has dis-served particular communities and presents more of a threat than a means of understanding.

Alia's aesthetic interests stem from people, place, and the processes which unite and divide us, all at once. Her work reflects on the politics and poetics of contested notions surrounding the topics of identity, physical borders, universality, mental/physical spaces of confinement, and the inherent dualism that exists in everything. Her work blurs the lines between what we claim to be objective and subjective, illusion and reality, truth and interpretation.

Her work has been featured in publications including the *Financial Times*, *Le Monde*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Hyperallergic*, and *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*. Alia has won numerous awards including the LensCulture Emerging Artists Award, the Allan Sekula Social Documentary Grant, the Magenta Foundation's Emerging Talent Award, and Gold in the Fine Art Category of the Tokyo International Foto Awards. She has exhibited internationally and has most recently shown at Galerie Peter Sillem in Frankfurt, Galerie Siniya 28 in Marrakech, Gulf Photo Plus in Dubai, PhotoLondon 2019 in the UK, 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in Morocco, the Lianzhou Photo Festival in China, the Stedelijk Museum Schiedam in the Netherlands, and the Katzen Museum of Art in Washington DC. Alia has presented lectures and workshops at Harvard University, the LACMA, the Middle East Institute, Gulf Photo Plus and the Arab American Museum.

In 2020, Alia will be exhibiting at the New Orleans Museum of Art, the Benton Museum of Art, the CAFKA Biennial, Galerie Peter Sillem and Galerie Siniya 28. She will also be presenting her work at the College Art Association (CAA) Conference in Chicago.

Alia Ali lives and works in Los Angeles and Marrakech.

**ALIA ALI**

<http://alia-ali.com>

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