

The  
Photographers'  
Gallery

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## Press Release

14 October 2004

### **Mediterranean: A Season of Exhibitions on Views of the Mediterranean**

Between August and November The Photographers' Gallery presents a season of exhibitions exploring the abiding cultural relevance of the Mediterranean. It is the meeting place of continents of Europe, Africa and Asia, with the sea allowing movement of people and ideas to take place. From Algiers to Athens, Barcelona to Beirut, Tangiers to Tel Aviv, this season opens up a conversation between contemporary and historical photography discussing the evolving definition of this contested area.

### **Mediterranean: Pierre Bourdieu, In Algeria**

15 October – 28 November 2004

No. 5 Great Newport Street

Admission Free

The second part of the Mediterranean season continues with a presentation of photographs by the twentieth-century sociologist and cultural theorist, Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002, France). Bourdieu trained as a philosopher at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris and in 1956 was conscripted for military service in Algeria and at the age of twenty-eight became a lecturer at the University of Algiers.

Algeria at this time was unsettled, it became a place of resistance to the French European identity as Algerians sought to assert their own identity beyond that of a colonised country. Between 1958 and 1960 the Algerian government operated in exile in Tunis and Cairo and in 1961 negotiations began with the French government, resulting in Algeria's independence in 1962. Bourdieu realised the tumultuous situation of this country and he sought to "...make myself useful and I decided to undertake a study on Algerian society, in order to make it a bit clearer to people back home what was happening in this country"<sup>1</sup>. This body of work became known as his earliest and most topical work. With a reputation for his pioneering field research, these images provide an insight into the development of his sociological doctrine as well as impressive documents on contemporary social history.

This exhibition presents over eighty photographs that depict the symbolic effect of the conflict between the Algerians and French colonialism on the people living in both rural and urban areas of Algeria. The exhibition offers unique insights into a culture that was on the brink of independence struggling to release itself from an age-old colonial structure. This is the first presentation of these images in the UK.

Bourdieu's photographs capture a moment in time, and for an instant reveal a world where modernism and tradition collide. His study was to examine the way people existed and work out why they lived the way they did, rather than in any other form. Initially, Pierre Bourdieu often expressed reluctance in considering these photographs as having any aesthetic interest: He felt they were produced as tools for research, however, in hindsight, Bourdieu also showed that he was an accomplished photographer with a keen eye. Bourdieu took the photographs both as an aide or memoir and as a "way of looking, a way to sharpen my awareness, to look

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more closely”<sup>2</sup>. Bourdieu became overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility to record the situation, and to give a testimony of those who had no voice. He looked to reveal the symbolic violence of colonialism whereby one set of values is placed before another.

Towards the end of his career, Pierre Bourdieu worked with Camera Austria, an organisation that publishes a magazine under the same name as well as support, through various projects, the exploration of photography in the context of contemporary art, new media and social developments. Bourdieu’s aim was to work with Camera Austria to archive and present a complete project on his fieldwork in Algeria (1958 – 1961) with a view to making this information available to the public in an exhibition and a printed publication. Before his death, in 2002, Bourdieu entrusted this complete archive of photographs to Camera Austria. *Pierre Bourdieu. In Algeria* opened at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (24 January–23 March 2003) and as part of the European Capital of Culture Programme in Graz (14 November 2003 – February 2004).

Pierre Bourdieu (1930 - 2002) is regarded as a key thinker of the twentieth-century whose writings have influenced and reverberated through contemporary artistic production. The author of more than twenty-five books, including *The Algerians*, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste* and *The Rules of Art*.

The exhibition at The Photographers’ Gallery is developed from the archive and curated by Christine Frisinghelli, CAMERA AUSTRIA, Graz, in collaboration with Franz Schultheis, Fondation LIBER, Département de Sociologie, Université de Genève.

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**The Mediterranean Season at No 8 Great Newport Street**

At No 8 Great Newport Street, The Photographers’ Gallery also presents, for the first time, photographs by Hashem El Madani. These two exhibitions feature work from the Lebanon and Algeria, and will continue the investigation of the Mediterranean through an interrogation of people and their occupation of a location that sits in a centre of political change.

Hashem El Madani (b. 1930, Saida, Southern Lebanon) has been taking pictures of his hometown for the last fifty years. These striking images subtly allude to the changing political climate and offer a unique insight into the political and societal shifts that have taken place during the Middle East Crisis.

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1. Pierre Bourdieu in conversation with Franz Schultheis 2001, camera Austria 74, 2001  
2. ibid