



Postcards from Yemen: Words of Eyes

By **Jessie Wender** April 21, 2011

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After reading Dexter Filkins's piece "After the Uprising," in *The New Yorker's* April 11th issue, I was curious about what contemporary photography was coming out of Yemen. Online, I read about a photography exhibit initiated by the French Cultural Center in Sanaa in the fall of 2010.

Nabil Boutros, an Egyptian photographer who currently lives in Paris, conducted a two-week workshop with eight Yemeni photographers, which culminated in an exhibit at the National Museum of Yemen.

Boutros told me that the one condition he asked of the participating photographers was that they challenge themselves to take their work to the furthest point possible. "The photographers' levels were different in terms of technique, professionalism, and maturity," Boutros told me. "Their backgrounds were also different. Some were professional photographers (ads, stories, fashion); others aimed to be artists; others were starting to tell social stories, or just talking about life with pictures." The photographers focussed on a specific subject, story, or theme over the two-week period, and then Boutros curated the exhibit, called "Kalimat al-Uyun," or "Words of Eyes." Everyone in the workshop, Boutros explained, felt they had "spoken with eyes instead of the tongue."

I wanted to catch up with the photographers and see what they're working on now. Here's a selection of images from "Words of Eyes" and from some from the photographers' current projects, along with their comments.



Details: Boushra Almutawakel, "Mother-daughter-doll" (2010) "I had stayed away from making images on such an iconic topic for a long time, because I thought it was expected, and because of all of the strong emotions the veil seemed to evoke," Almutawakel told me. "However, as a Muslim Arab woman from Yemen who wears the veil on a daily basis, I thought I owed it to myself and others to express my ideas on the veil. I hope my photos challenge both Western and Middle Eastern stereotypes and views."

Jessie Wender, formerly a photo editor at *The New Yorker*, is a senior photo editor at *National Geographic*. [Read more »](#)