

What is Underneath? Toy-Yiebah Cupido

Religion has been an elusive concept for me to grasp. I have come to realise that this is due to the fact that my parents and maternal relatives have taught me in a way that has left me more distanced from the religion than was their intention. I had experienced God portrayed through their eyes and not how He is.

God, who was characterized by my instructors as unforgiving and merciless, seemed unapproachable. I feared that I had sinned too much, and He would disregard me anyway. The headscarf was the issue that bothered me the most. I was instructed by my maternal relatives to wear it and was told why I had to wear it. Of these instructions, emphasis was always put on the consequences if I were *not* to wear the headscarf. Hell was my fate in the eternal hereafter.

The relaying of religious information and the expectation of connecting and adhering to it is the starting point to this project. My mother has been the most significant figure in how my view of Islam has been constructed. She has taught me about religion from her perception and experiences. The photographs of my mother observing the compulsory pilgrimage, Hajj, describes our very different experiences within this religion. Where she seems open to and willing to absorb the customs, I feel as if I need to fully understand what it is I am absorbing. The historic nature of these photographers shows that the same customs have been observed by so many people over many years which emphasizes the perpetual expectations of my family and religious community.

As I was born into Islam, I was expected to follow their lead. The continuous expectation that my sister and I are to wear a headscarf as per religious customs, are simultaneously subtle yet obvious. This expectation is elucidated in the extensive grid of portraits of my older sister who dons most of the many headscarves we own.

This body of photographs explores the tension of the spaces within and around me, focusing on the home I was raised in and the people immediate to me. The intentional sense of confrontation may allow the viewer to feel the visual depictions of the artist's thoughts and emotions. The religious teaching I received was not ideal. I believe that a religious experience is individual, this may be where the idea and importance of spirituality facilitates a successful practice of faith. Spiritually, the idea that there is something far greater than anything palpable, be it the information relayed or the community that lives by it. This is an ongoing thought.

END PAGE





Three images that were strongly considered for the final selection but did not make the cut due to image quality. These images of my Father praying allows for the idea of a blanket influence of customs, traditions and religion.

I have recognised the conclusion, that this may be an ongoing discussion between myself, my parents and those around me. This discussion, however, will be continued through my work, using different elements of my religion to initiate topics of discussion.

This is the first.

I do not intend to go through life, staying ignorant to the essence of Religion and it's vast and true potential. I also, however, will not follow blindly simply because of the way my elders, religious leaders and community understand, practices and relays information about the religion a certain way.

What I will do, is embrace my individuality and focus on nursing and questioning what should be underneath the cover.

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I am Aware.

2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

594 x 420mm



Carte Blanche
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
594 x 841mm



My Sister and Our Many Guises
2021
9 of 60 Total Photographic Prints
152.40 x 228.60mm each



Involuntary.
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
594 x 420mm

I consider my work to be a product of my self-reflection, of the questions I am asking about my religion and the practice thereof, as well as the conversations I am having. The push and pull of social and cultural pressure and expectations affects an emerging youth more than I personally thought. I think there are conversations that need to be had with the youth about the modern world, religion, identity, and how they all interconnect. These conversations might include discussions about the difficulty of navigating feelings and thoughts about an established community and way of being, especially when there is little to no spiritual guidance and only the perpetual relaying of information about the religion, based on personal views or experiences.

It may be difficult to question what God has told us to do. I do believe that wearing a headscarf is part of being a practicing Muslim. The difference, however, between being told what to do and observing spirituality is the deeper connection that helps you practice somewhat effortlessly. With that sense of spirituality, it may seem easier to engage with all that is required of you in any religion.



The Space: Born and Bred, 10 of 10
2021
Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 9 of 10
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 8 of 10

2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 7 of 10
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm

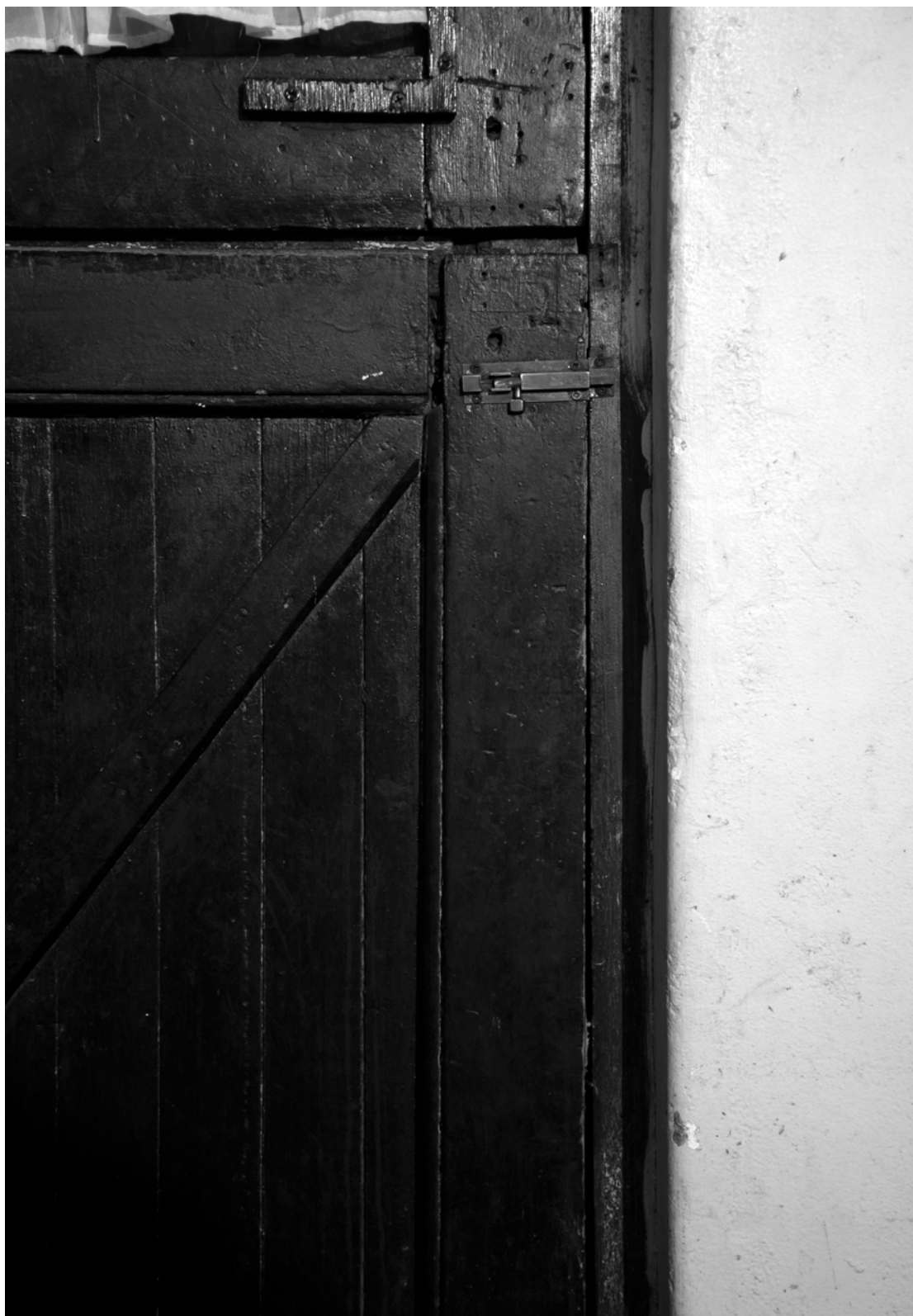


The Space: Born and Bred, 6 of 10

2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 5 of 10
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 4 of 10

2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 3 of 10
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 2 of 10

2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

300 x 400mm



The Space: Born and Bred, 1 of 10
2021

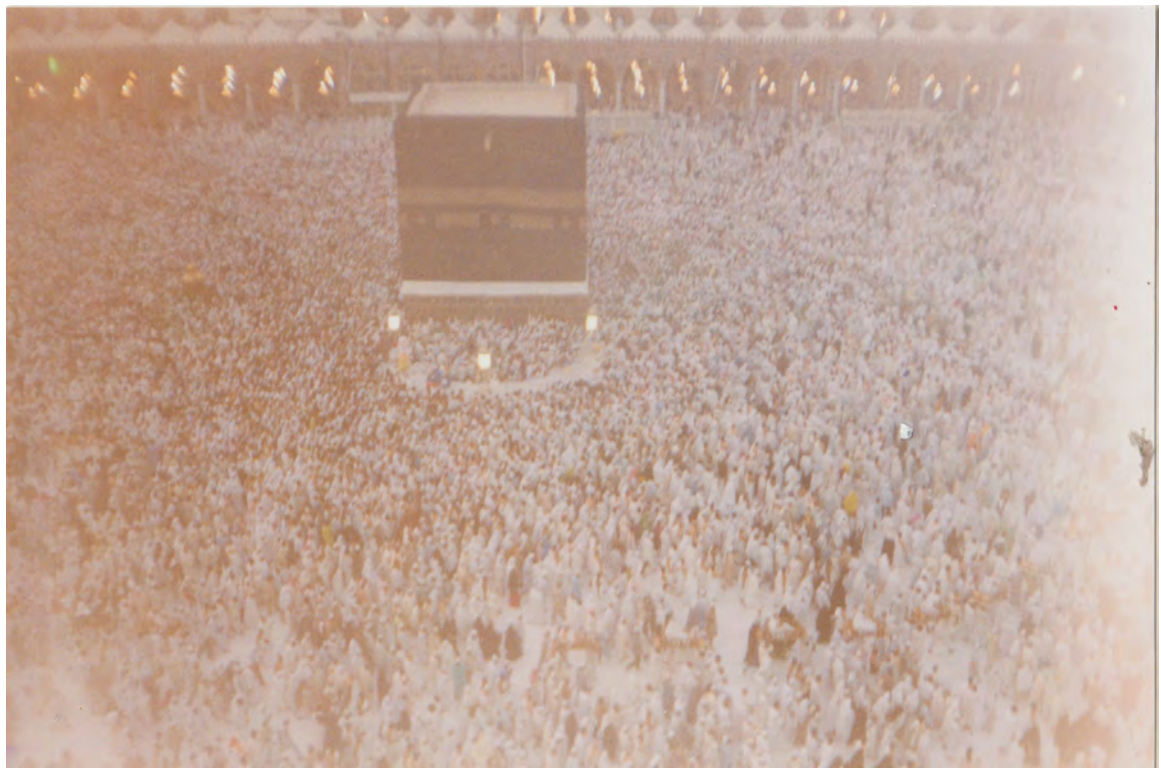
Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
300 x 400mm

Throughout my project, I have been looking at and referring to the work of Shirin Neshat. Neshat is a prominent Iranian visual artist who mainly explores the relationships between women and the religious and cultural value systems of Islam. I specifically refer to Neshat's popular body of work, the photographic series, "Woman of Allah" (1994). *Rebellious Silence* (1994) is one photograph that is a of the afore-mentioned larger series, "one of the most arresting photographs to emerge in contemporary art over the course of the past 25 years. The unforgettable black-and-white portrait, created by the Iranian artist and film-maker Shirin Neshat in 1994, is among the highlights of *I Will Greet the Sun Again*" (Grovier, 2021) The author of the article goes on to describe the effect of the series, "The photographs' ability to compress into a single portrait an array of competing themes and emotions – courage and fear, vulnerability and aggression, feminism and fundamentalism – is at the heart not only of the work's enduring power but of the imagination of the artist who created it" (Grovier, 2021) Neshat's work responds to her experiences of the growing conservative revolution of Iran. The tensions had been between secularists (who favoured the Westernisation of culture, including expanded rights for women) and religiously conservative revolutionaries were growing, making it difficult to remain in Iran (Grovier, 2021). The link lies in the idea of questioning the religion of Islam and the people that practices it, the emphasis is on questioning the people. Where specific parts of the religion are rightfully communally practiced, the spiritual part is particularly individual.

The intention of this project is not only to confront this audience of the double standards of practicing this religion, but also to start a conversation that may lead to education and open-mindedness. A conversation about checking the boxes that makes one look Muslim and putting more emphasis on this, than the very important part of practicing that is spirituality. Am I a Muslim woman because I am wearing a headscarf or because I believe that there is No-one worthy of worship besides Allah (God) and Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His final messenger? Is looking more like a Muslim indeed more important than believing that which makes you one? These are some of the questions I hope can initiate some conversation from this project. I would like to assume the impact will leave the intended audience filled with thought if anything else. Hopefully it is a conversation starter, that is really all I would like, is for people to start thinking about the differences between religion and spirituality.

I chose to use the living room of the home in which I was born and raised as the space in which I capture the “conversation”. This has become a learning space for my mother and me. At first, I had asked my mother to step behind the camera, as I had needed someone to press the shutter for me. My mother had started asking questions about what I was doing, why I was doing what I was and what my project was about. The questions were simple, yet I felt quite uncomfortable answering them. It did not feel correct, to outwardly liberate myself from the things I had been taught by my mother, even though I was doing that right in front of her. I did not explain my concept to her for many shooting sessions, as I did not necessarily know what I was doing either, I did not know entirely, what it was I wanted to say.

The aim of my images is to create a sense of tension and confrontation, either created by or related to the headscarf itself. To show the sense of restriction I felt while nursing the obligation to hold on to what I’ve been taught. Simultaneously, eye contact and facial expression is quite confronting and compelling which allows for the viewer to perhaps feel the artist’s feeling of restriction. There is also a feeling of resolve that I had intended to relay in the body language. As far as possible, I wanted to portray the burden that the expectation of my instructors regarding the practicing of this religion puts on me. Although there is a sense of performance, I wanted to be as clear and authentic with as little staged elements as possible.





Photographer unknown

1995

Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Three reproduced images on Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin

297 x 420mm

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Under the influence
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
670 x 1000mm

God, who was characterized by my instructors as unforgiving and merciless, seemed unapproachable. I feared that I had sinned too much, and He would disregard me anyway. The headscarf was the issue that bothered me the most. I was instructed by my maternal relatives to wear it and was told why I had to wear it. Of these instructions, emphasis was always put on the consequences if I were not to wear the headscarf. Hell was my fate in the eternal hereafter.



What comes after?
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
670 x 1000mm

Religion has been an elusive concept for me to grasp. I have come to realise that this is due to the fact that my parents and maternal relatives have taught me in a way that has left me more distanced from the religion than was their intention. I had experienced God portrayed through their eyes and not how He is.



Tense.
2021

Photographic Giclee Print on Premium Satin
1000 x 670mm

Lastly, to every single person who had an encouraging and supportive hand in this journey, know that I appreciate all that you have done for me over these past few years. Ms Vivienne Stewart, Ms Loren Mentor, Nadine Daniels, Lauren Daniels and so many more. I cannot grasp how lucky I am to have so much support and love in my life.

I am eternally grateful.

Alhamdullilah.

“Thanks be to Allah”

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I give thanks to Allah, my Creator, for everything I am and have accomplished thus far.

My brilliant supervisor, Jean Brundrit. Thank you for your intellect, guidance and care. Your reassurance and support made this year easier to navigate.

I am truly grateful.

My Father, Faadhil Cupido. My Mother, Zuleigah Cupido. My older Sister, Mas-oodah Cupido. Shukran for your constant support and encouragement over the years, it means more to me than you know. My Mother, shukran for being a big part of my project this year. From being the topic of conversation to being part of the conversation. Shukran for your willingness to learn and grow.

I am grateful.

Sitaara Stodel. Thank you for your excellence. Your technical assistance has been immensely appreciated and your humour even more so. Thank you for your constant willingness to help and reassure. Thank you, mostly, for your light-hearted nature. You are appreciated.

I am grateful.

Kirstie Pietersen, Lorraine Kalassa and Bevan Blankenberg. Thank you for the many opinions, suggestions, thoughts and support over the course of the past few years. It means so much to me. You have a piece of my heart. I am truly grateful.

Uncle Stanley. A brilliant man who lives his life of service to others.

May God continue to bless you. Thank you so much for your technical assistance over the years. A special thank you for the many prayers and words of wisdom that allowed us to realise our purpose here on the days when we couldn't see. You are appreciated.

I am grateful.

Thank you to Amy Tertiens at Orms for your help with printing. You made the last stretch as smooth as it could possibly get. You were a significant part of this journey too. I hope there will be many more printing appointments with you.

I am grateful.

*“I’m Muslim and I do see the world through
those lenses”*

*“I am not necessarily a religious person, I
don’t practice as I should but I do believe.”*

-Igshaan Adams on *Works in Progress* for the
National Arts Festival

What Is Underneath?

Toy-Yiebah Cupido
CPDTOY001

University of Cape Town
The Michaelis School of Fine Art
31, 37 Orange St
Gardens
Cape Town
8000