

# Akim Monet

## Seeking Al-Tawhid

22 April—4 May 2013

*The idea for Seeking Al-Tawhid came to me while thinking about the longstanding nonacceptance of depictions of humans and animals in Islamic art, and the resulting development of the Arabesque in which abstract geometry and stylized organic motifs are used to symbolize, within our manifest realm, that which is beyond manifestation.*

*I pondered about a possible connection between the invention of this visual language, which leads the eye back and forth between the second and third dimension, and the practice of photography, in which the representation of three-dimensional subject matter is rendered on a flat surface.*

*I discovered that the infinitely extensible designs in Islamic art, that are themselves made up of individual, self-replicating units have been interpreted as visual demonstrations of the singleness of God and his presence everywhere. They represent 'unity in multiplicity' and 'multiplicity in unity.'*

*Technically the term for this 'Oneness' is Tawhid—a belief in God's uncompromised unity and transcendence. The best-known expression of this Divine Unity is 'La-ilaha-ill-Allah,' (Quran 112:1): 'There is no god but God.'*

*With these thoughts, I embarked on a journey that began in Andalusia, where in the words of British orientalist and archaeologist Stanley Lane-Poole, "Whatever makes a kingdom great, whatever tends to refinement and civilization was found in Moorish Spain."*

Colour is the first element that seduces in an Akim Monet photograph. Molten oranges, rich blues, lurid greens and purples that a Fauvist would envy, saturate the visual field. Then the sheer ornamented exuberance of his subject matter teases the eye with its baroque textures. (...) Monet presents all this in reverse—that is, he prints directly what is on his negatives rather than inverting them into positive images. Doing this appeals to him both aesthetically and conceptually. First off, it's how he's able to achieve such an unexpectedly painterly and heightened palette. It's also for him the most direct transfer of how the light of a particular place and moment burns into sensitized film. Looking at these photographs you do indeed viscerally sense the energy—the colours, smells, music—of his subjects.

While Monet had taken photographs in college and as a dealer documenting the installation of shows, it wasn't until a trip to India in 1992 that the medium got under his skin. He was deeply affected by the power of the ancient temples and monuments that are still a vital part of daily life there, and used photography as a way of processing what he was feeling. Yet when he saw his pictures developed and printed, he was disappointed by their snapshot quality. He found looking at the negative strips, though, much more akin to his actual experience of the places and became obsessed with finding a way to print them as negatives. With no formal training in photography, Monet cobbled together a homemade process—with tools picked up along his travels—of re-photographing projections of the negatives, so the final print would match the original negative.

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What the pictures share is an interest in duality that is underscored by the way Monet plays with idea of positive and negative in his printing technique. (...) Part of the beauty and intensity of these photographs has to do with the convergence of opposites, of past and present. They stand sublimely poised in the space between.

Hilarie M. Sheets, *The Space Between* (excerpts), Infinite Point Press, New York, 2003

Born 1968 in Geneva, Switzerland. Lives and works in Berlin. Studied comparative literature and art history at Cornell University, New York State.

Akim Monet has been showing his work publicly since 2002. He has had several solo exhibitions of which "Passage to India" in New York and Mexico City, "Homage to Gaudi" in Geneva and Belgium, and "Pergamon" in Paris.

Monet's work is on public display at the Deutsche Bank Collection, New York.

In addition to numerous articles in the international press, a monograph about Monet's work was published in 2003: "The Space Between" (New York: Infinite Point Press).

*Fascinated by the moment captured by the opening and closing of the shutter—creating what the artist calls the "burn" of the image—Monet's photographs conjure a mystery and beauty akin to alchemy.*

Liz Christensen, curator, Deutsche Bank Fine Art

*In his works, Monet succeeds in establishing, through careful treatment of light and luminescence, and delicate handling of image and icon, his own personal dialogue within contemporary art.*

Dr. Ariane Grigoteit, curator, Deutsche Bank Collection

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Life Center, 2nd floor (next to CAP)  
Block 2, Street 28, Industrial Shuwaikh, Kuwait  
Saturday–Thursday, 11 am–8 pm

+965 2241 3488  
[info@jamm-art.org](mailto:info@jamm-art.org)  
[www.jamm-art.org](http://www.jamm-art.org)

J A M M

PO Box 127440 | Dubai | UAE | T: +971 4 328 5169 | F: +971 4 328 5179 | [info@jamm-art.org](mailto:info@jamm-art.org) | [www.jamm-art.org](http://www.jamm-art.org)