

# POSTMASTERS

postmasters 459 w 19 street nyc 10011 212 727 3323

fax 212 229 2829

postmasters@thing.net

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## JENNIFER and KEVIN McCOY

### Abu Dhabi Is Love Forever *one step past the airport*



Postmasters Gallery is pleased to inaugurate the new year with a solo exhibition of Jennifer and Kevin McCoy.

In August of 2010, the McCoy's began a temporary relocation to Abu Dhabi, capitol of the oil rich United Arab Emirates. The projects in this, their fifth, solo show at Postmasters gather their first impressions of life in this complex and often contradictory Middle Eastern culture.

Abu Dhabi has been a sovereign country for 39 years. Its landscape is the newly manufactured oasis, the desert, and the sea. Its recent wealth has taken its small population from camels to Ferraris in a generation. This is only one population in Abu Dhabi, however. Far more prevalent are the workers who are building Abu Dhabi's future. These include legions of, primarily, men who have travelled from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and other countries as well as middle class people of both genders and their families from England, Australia, the USA, and Europe. The former are called immigrants and the latter are called expats. For legal, cultural, and economic reasons, none of either group is likely to stay long. The trend is to come, to do one's job and to move to the next opportunity. In many ways, this nomadic lifestyle strongly parallels the professional practices of contemporary artists.

In this culture of rapid growth and change, it is most appropriate to record immediate impressions before they morph into their next realities.

Abu Dhabi is Love Forever

In the main gallery, the McCoy's present an homage to one of the biggest visual signifiers in the Emirates. In Abu Dhabi there are miles and miles of construction fences covered with an equal expanse of printed images spread across their surface. These surfaces protect and advertise huge scale developments for business, dwelling, and leisure. The ideologies they endeavor to convey are wealth, ease, globalism, and multi-culturalism. Taken at face value, these developments will house Western and Arab populations in settings that are somehow futuristic and

pastoral simultaneously. Draped across the desert landscapes, however, they bring up questions about the scope, value and sustainability of our desires. The McCoys have built their own construction fence, a monumental 30 x 18 feet rectangle, covered with a collage of photographs of fences currently in use around Abu Dhabi. Their images however, contain a wider view of the scene, situating the advertising images on the surface within their actual environments of construction equipment, sand, and debris. Like much of the McCoys' past work, this project moves back and forth from image to object, re-rooting and re-contextualizing the original source of the images.



In the back gallery, Postmasters presents two video projects; a short video entitled *Prayer is more important than sleep* and *Mussafah*. In the *Prayer* video, the McCoys film the sound and images of the morning call to prayer through their bedroom window on the 37<sup>th</sup> floor of their apartment building. In this call to prayer, called *Fajr*, usually at around 5 a.m., listeners are advised (and often aided) to begin their day with prayer.

In the 49 minute video, *Mussafah*, the camera takes a journey through the manufacturing zone of Abu Dhabi. Far from the glittering skyscrapers and beaches, *Mussafah* is the place in Abu Dhabi to fix motors, to bend aluminum, to produce tangible material goods. It is the "back of the shop",



literally the place where the advertising signs are printed. Using a slow tracking shot, the McCoy's video allows the eye to take in the details of this environment with all its complexity. It is a work place, yet there are clothes hanging on clotheslines and chickens in the street. It is Arab, yet multinational logos and English signs abound. Its streets are largely devoid of people, yet it operates on 24 hour work shifts. In previous work, the McCoys fabricated post-apocalyptic miniatures to shoot tracking shots of blown out malls. As they have found in Abu Dhabi, the need to create these landscapes from the imagination was hardly necessary.

### The Halal Series

A popular pastime in the UAE is shopping. From the vast and numerous western style malls to the traditional souks to the local grocery stores, there is a constant flow of imported products into the UAE. The McCoys are also showing a series of collage works which take traditional architectural pattern motifs and inscribe them with snack food wrappers, packaging from canned meats, and labels from beauty supplies all taken from the local market. These are presented in ornate gilt frames that are typically used to frame images of the UAE's rulers or passages from the Koran.



Postmasters Gallery located at 459 West 19th Street between 9 and 10 Avenues is open Tuesday through Saturday 11 – 6  
Please contact Magdalena Sawon or Paulina Bebecka with questions and image requests  
postmasters@thing.net  
[www.postmastersart.com](http://www.postmastersart.com)