Akram Zaatari
The Fold: Space, time and the image

Akram Zaatari combines the roles of image-maker, archivist, curator, filmmaker and critical theorist to examine the photographic record, its making, genealogy and the role photography plays in the production and performance of identity. As an enterprising auditor of the informal who personally documented moments of Lebanon's prolonged civil war, his work demonstrates an enduring appreciation for amateur, journalistic and commercial photographic practices. To collect and (re)animate this unofficial species of record-keeping on a broader scale, Zaatari co-founded the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) in 1997 as an institution to preserve, study and exhibit photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora from the 19th century to today. Within this endeavor, Zaatari discovered the photographs of Hashem El Madani (1928-2017), who pictured the lives of everyday individuals inside his humble Saida studio beginning in the 1950s. These photos are deceptively factual in appearance, sliding between demure documentation and revealing displays of desire that were never intended for public view. Represented here under a contemporary umbrella, along with other photos whose authors and subjects are only sometimes known, Zaatari deconstructs the archival impunity of photography to cultivate an expanded architecture of interpretation. For this exhibition, he explores the seemingly simple fold as a catalyst; a narrative; a re-organization; an enduring obfuscation; and the memory of a material. In his words, "Every photograph hides parts to reveal others…What a photograph missed and that was present at the time of exposure will remain inaccessible. In those folds lies a history, many histories." This exhibition undertakes a provocative excavation into the avenues afforded by those folds – peering into the fissures, scratches, edits and that which archives previously omitted.