

Issue 015



ithra
by aramco

Sustainable Community

Artist: Mohammad Al-Faraj



Ithraeyat Magazine

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Welcome to **Ithraeyat**, a monthly cultural magazine produced by The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra). Created to **inspire minds** and **enrich hearts**, this Saudi inspired platform with an expansive international outlook will capture the art scene and the culture of art by bringing together a mosaic of stories collected from across the Kingdom, the region and beyond.

Behind the scenes:

Ithraeyat is the plural of Ithra (enrichment).

Magazine has its origins in the Arabic word makhzan, a storehouse.

And therefore, Ithraeyat Magazine is a storehouse of unique, enriching stories.

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'The Art of Palms,' an artwork by Mohammad Al-Faraj.



Letter from the Editor

Sustainability & Art

Sustainability and art are two deep limitless fields, and for many, when combined, a special way of life.

Sustainability is more than a green strategy, it requires a full 'reconsideration' of how we consume, manufacture, create art, design objects and live our daily lives.

Meanwhile, sustainable artworks are those of recycled reused materials or found objects that do not damage earth's resources and may even benefit the environment. In this special edition of Ithraeyat, we explore 'sustainability' in all its various forms, and how it means different things to different creatives.



Meet our 'theme-special' featured Saudi artist **Mohammad Al-Faraj**, an experimental mixed media artist who takes inspiration from the natural world around him, creating stories through artworks that reuse, recycle and revive.



Portrait:

‘An Artist with a Sustainable Flare,’ an interview with Mohammad Al-Faraj by Rym Al-Ghazal

“I often use and reuse natural and other materials found in Al-Ahasa and the cities I visit and combine them with children’s games and stories from people in large and remote cities. I do this as an attempt to create works charged with imagination and cases of coexistence between humans, nature and other beings, and the decomposition and decay that affects the relationship between them, with the belief that salvation is always in our hands....”

Known for his distinct earthy pieces sometimes literally using earth and soil, Mohammad Al-Faraj is a Saudi artist who recycles and reuses elements in his pieces, leaving them open to interpretation and reflection. Here we meet this artist, whose cover art is a homage to nature’s little gems, from the dragon fly to the “bulbul” bird, trees, and our own connection with the natural world.

Exhibited at Hayy Jameel, they are part of his cardboard sculptures from his multimedia installation Jasb Al’aesh (2021). The works were made by collaging cut-up boxes from foods that are imported to meet Saudi Arabia’s current demands, which have been changing over time as the country, the lifestyle and food practices evolve.





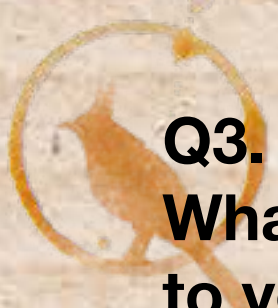
Q1.
Tell us more about the cardboard art pieces?

In the Gulf, a type of bird called the white-cheeked bulbul was always around when I was young. We would always see it and hear its beautiful song, and it could be raised to become your friend. This bird preferred to nest in lemon trees that were planted in abundance in Al-Ahasa, but in recent times, farmers have become overburdened with its cultivation because it is no longer economically feasible due to the import of foreign lemons, which are usually much cheaper. Therefore, the plantation of lemon trees went down, and the number of white-cheeked bulbul began to decrease, in addition to unregulated hunting and increasing hot weather. I wanted to pay homage to this sweet bird and other beings I grew up around, by collecting crates of fruits and vegetables, cutting them and shaping them into creatures and trees that are threatened by the import and export traffic.



Q2.
What does art mean to you?

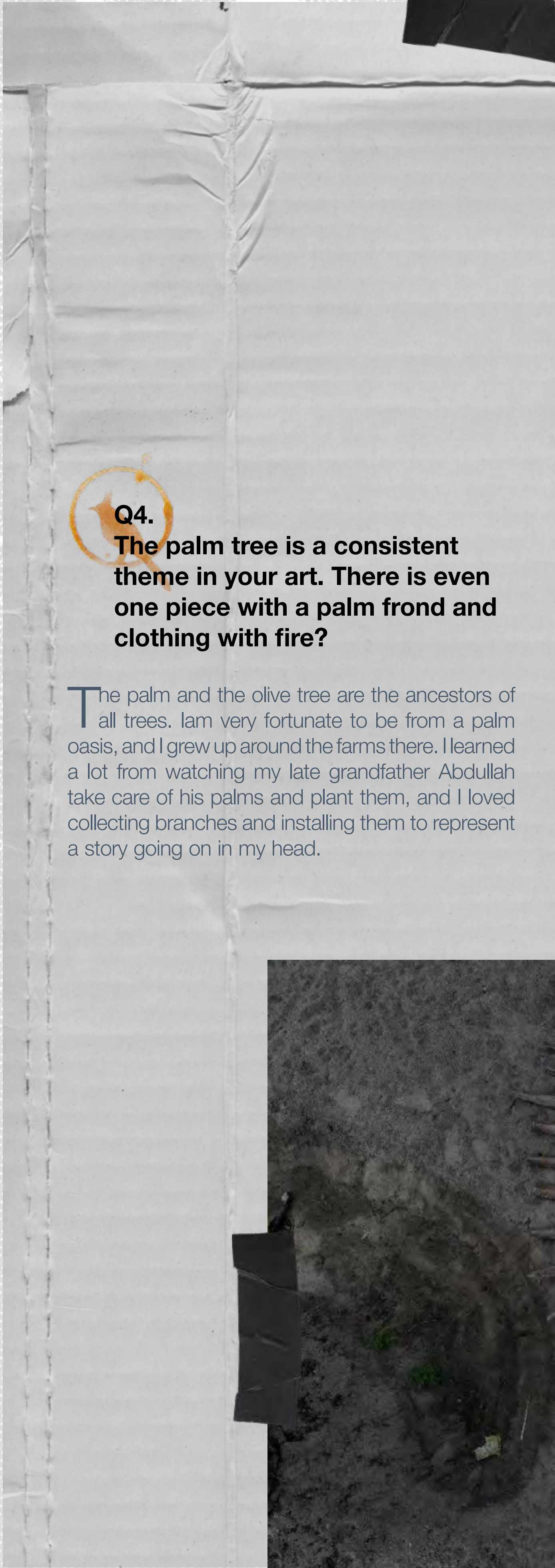
Art or artistic practice is an attempt to communicate with the world, and with others. It is the ability to see and feel poetry in everything. My words are founded on the love and nostalgia I have for this world and its people.



Q3.
What does sustainability mean to you? and why do you use it in your artworks?

Sustainability is a term that doesn't consciously come to my mind. I just work this way with these materials because it's the only way that seems to be significant and profound. When I reuse a tree trunk or a garment, I rediscover the spiritual and material value, the memories of those who wore it, its look and feel. I feel that there are already many materials and things on this earth and it makes no sense to add more if we can reuse so much of it for free! This practice not only will help us and our planet to be healthier, but it is an unlimited, and an inexpensive source for creativity and imagination.





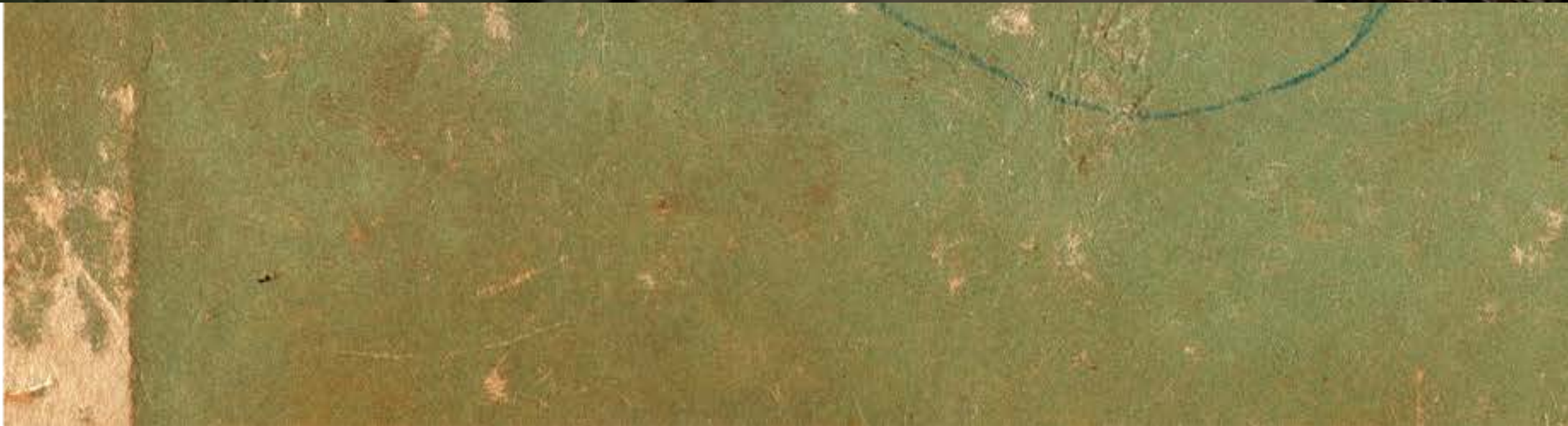
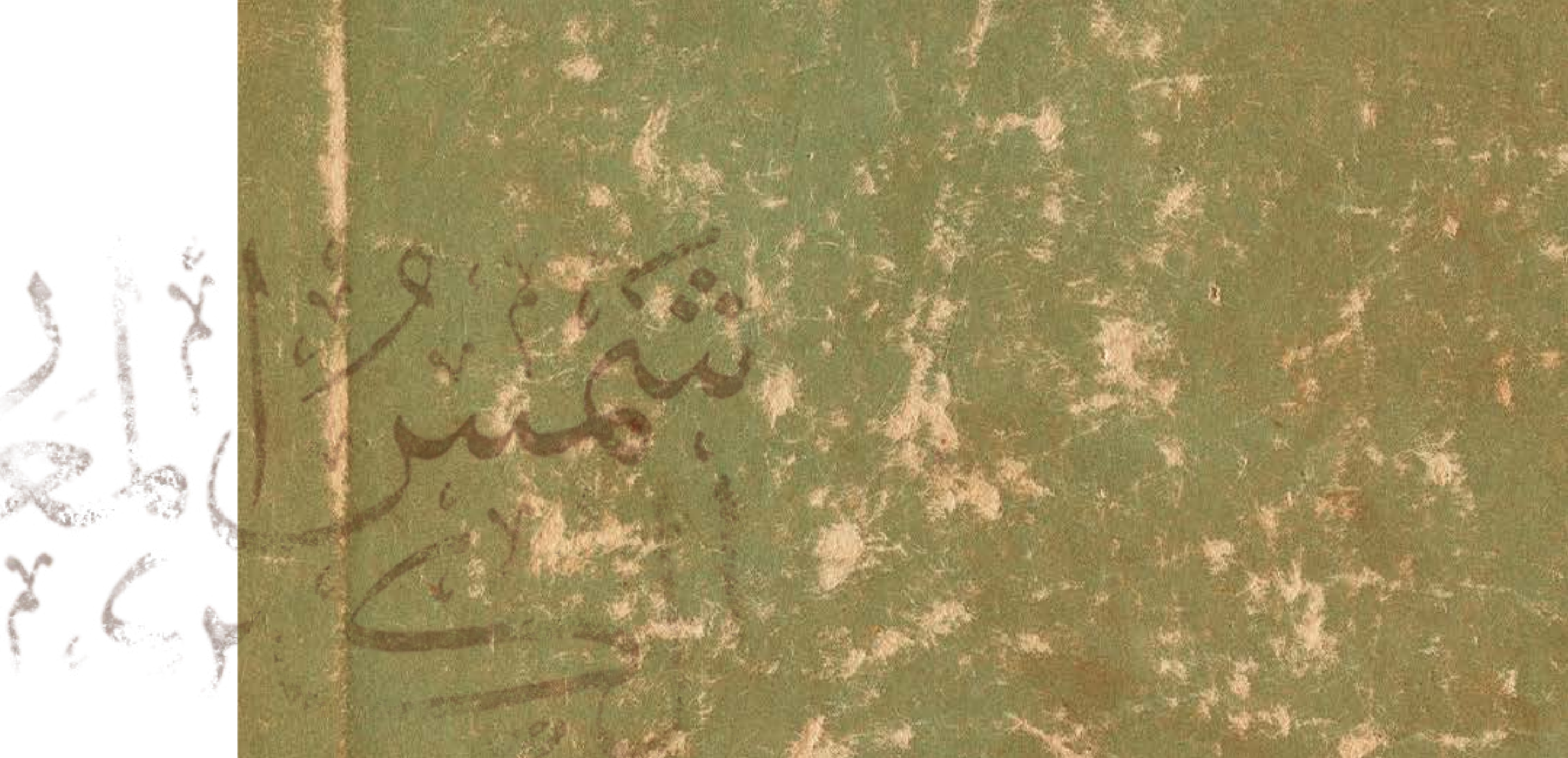
Q4.
The palm tree is a consistent theme in your art. There is even one piece with a palm frond and clothing with fire?

The palm and the olive tree are the ancestors of all trees. I am very fortunate to be from a palm oasis, and I grew up around the farms there. I learned a lot from watching my late grandfather Abdullah take care of his palms and plant them, and I loved collecting branches and installing them to represent a story going on in my head.

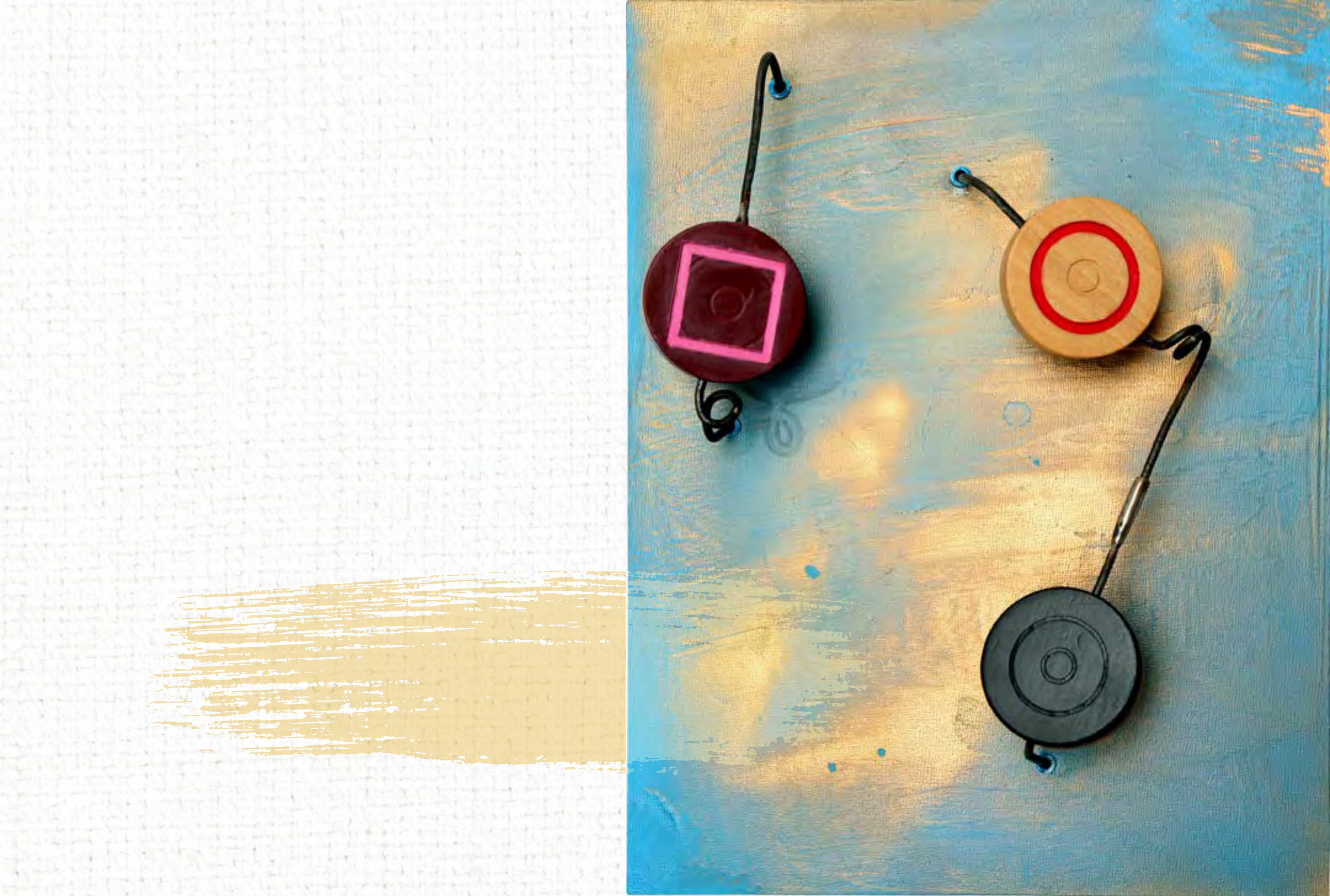


Now I like to work with its parts, especially the discarded ones, and to restore life in it. Most of the shapes look like bones and fossils, so one of my collections I called “fossils of knowledge” because the palm holds sacred knowledge and we have forgotten how to communicate with it.





As for the burning thoub piece, it is part of a group of works I am working on, bearing materials, writings, and drawings that draw inspiration from everyday life and folktales. Fire, coal and ash have amazing powers to change, and mud is the symbol of our ancient existence. Dates, coffee, water, leaves and clothes are all materials that interact with each other and carry profound spiritual and material values.



‘The Carrom series,’ by **Sheikha Alyazia bint Nahyan Al-Nahyan**. “The painted backdrop of the enlarged disks has faint arrows to express the importance of interactive practices,” she said.

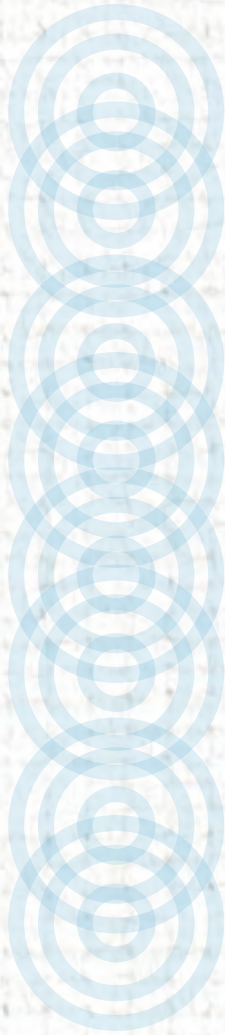


Guest Columnist:

‘Values & Rules of the Social Sustainability Game,’
by Sheikha Alyazia bint Nahyan Al-Nahyan,
Ambassador for Culture for ALECSO.

The funny thing about ancient findings is that the more recognizable they are to us in our modern age, the more we find them astonishing. A few months ago, the oldest limestone incense burner was uncovered in Oman. Social habits stay put and are far reaching. In mythology even deities echoed this human habit; Pythia the priestess of Apollo would be taken into a trance by the fumes, while in Egypt the immortal Hathor was more accustomed to myrrh, the special resin which was for afternoons only.

As early as three thousand BCE, Magan (the lands of Oman & United Arab Emirates according to the Sumerians) produced the first burners for incense. The round shape of the burner is a typical household essential in most Arab homes. Moreso in this pandemic where, just as we joked about it in memes, smoke permeated throughout every house in the region. Many families (mine included) overly burnt oud, frankincense and any other influenza “repellents” we had available.



The 17th century Arab scholar (and student of the University of al-Qarawiyyin) Ahmed Al-Maqqari told us about Friday traditions in the Grand Mosque of Córdoba, and how half a kilogram of rich oud was set to burn the night before Friday, then spreading its essence weekly on the holy evening.

Friday prayer is widely recognized as a constant communal practice, where the formal and non-formal sectors come together once a week.

Each society possesses elements and skills to ensure the continuity of organized systems. Culture and tradition enhance cross-generational and sectoral communication. A Greek proverb puts through the idea simply: “Traditions are a second habit.”

“Traditions are a second habit.”

Just as ancestral items are passed down with care, showcased in museums or in households, it would do good if our values are actively conveyed between one another and attended to with the same concern and importance. We know very well of rivalries that span many lifetimes by being reintroduced every era. The same way, moral attitudes instilled in generation after generation can promote long term stability. The quote “living in the now” may as well be extended to include “for the future.”

Tawayeet originates from a similar Amazigh word meaning “to unify.”

The festival is a five-day gathering of horsemanship and cultural ceremonies that is organized in remembrance of a peace agreement between the tribal sheikhs in the past. The guest family approaches the hosting tribe in verse and poem.

A group known as Abaidat Al Rama perform motivational folklore for the crowds during the days of the festival. Music and art play a major role in sustaining values and relations.

The word “value” is defined as being fully beneficial and expressing a valuable function. Equivalent to unity, Arabs value the tradition of being earnest or modest. Communities benefit from it in lots of ways.

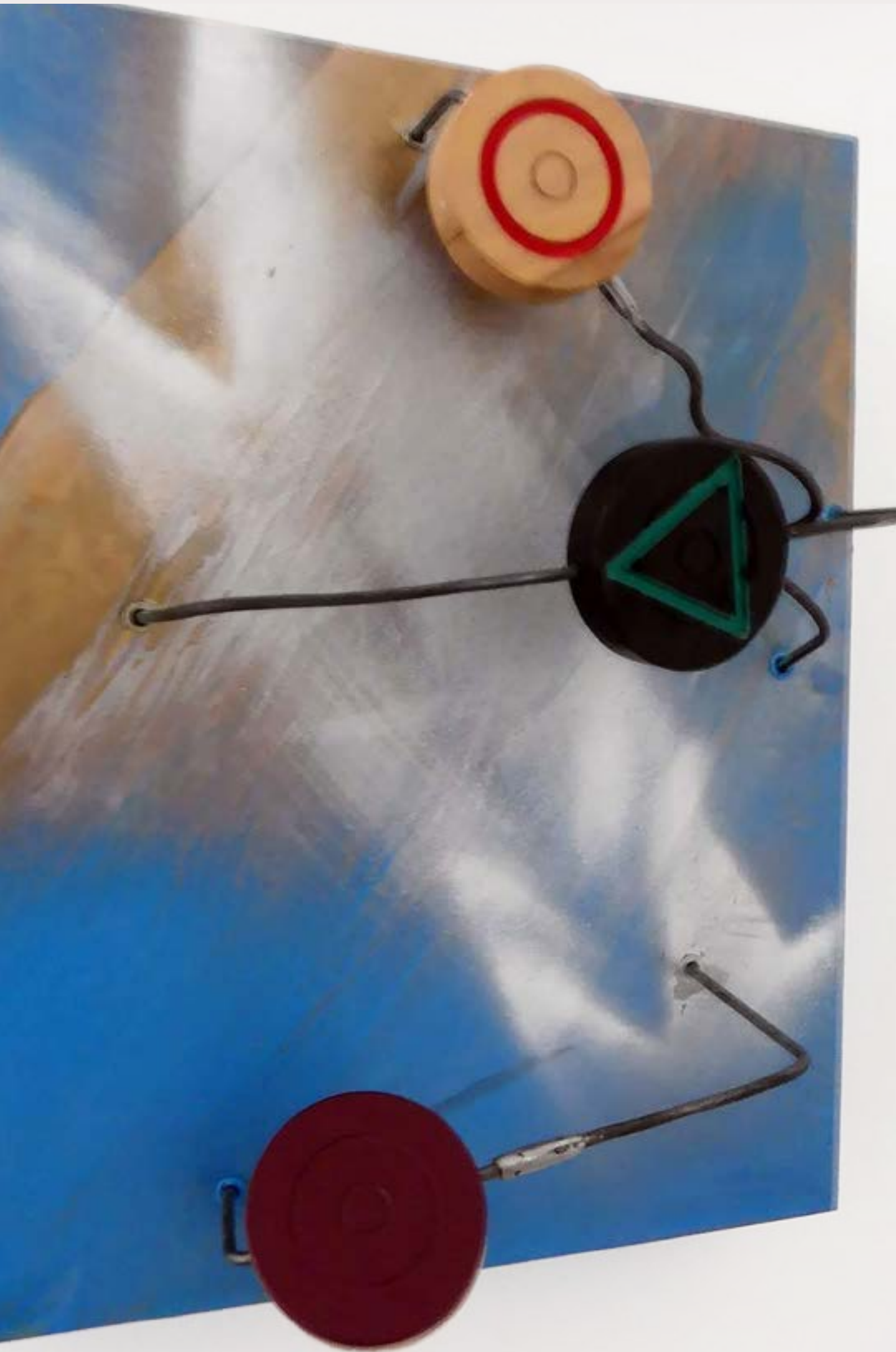
Omar Ibn Al-Khattab encouraged his son to always behave modestly, except in relation to education and knowledge.



In Morocco, from Rabat all the way to Casablanca, a 300-year-old tradition is organized for the sake of unity.

The Arab and Amazigh tribes celebrate rituals and traditions to sustain the harmony in their Tawayeet Festival.





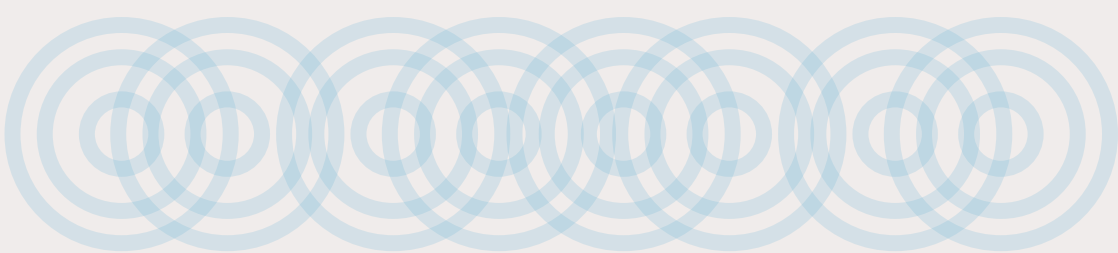
My grandmother, Sheikha Sabha bint Mohammed shared so many stories with us about Bedouin life. When they used to move every three months and uprooted their tents and belongings, members of the tribe were serious about tidying their area of settlement before vacating to another place, weary of arousing any fault to their reputation. This very notion upheld by them benefited the people and nature equally.

Ibn Miskawayh, the 10th century Neoplatonist philosopher, viewed modesty as a praised reaction to negative matters or issues. Times have changed, but will older virtues transpose by these changes? Traditions which are purely behavioral deal with human nature. Neither old nor new, they are just part of our nature because conscious behaviors refine our actions in a community.

Assuming we all plan to be permanent members of society, it will consist of positive social activities in our daily life. Other than communal prayer and family gatherings and entertainment; games also succeed in engaging the public.

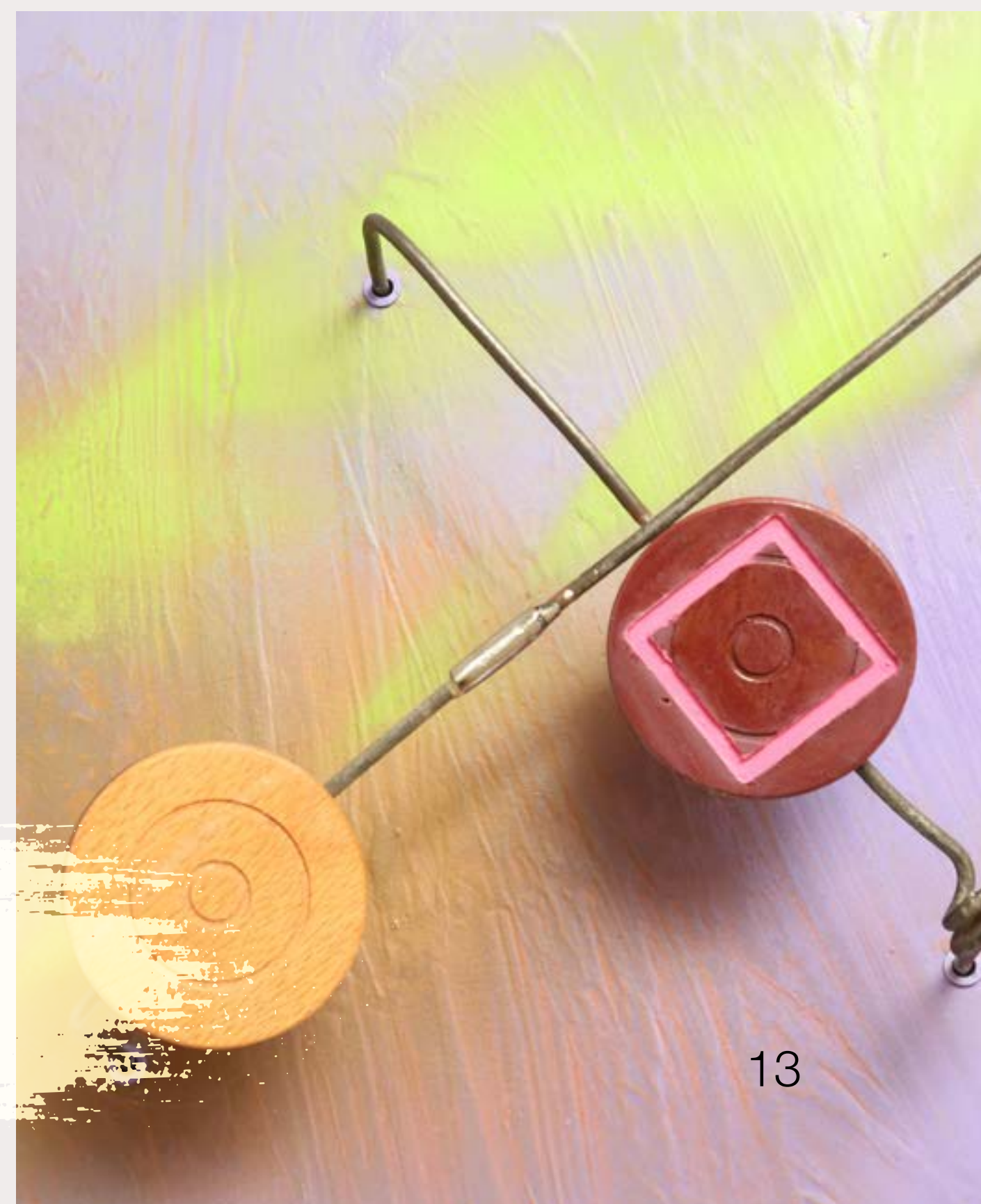
This year another familiar artifact was unearthed by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in the Qumayrah Valley in Oman. The find is a four-thousand-year-old stone board-game with grids and holes, probably played by using small stones.

Plenty types of multiplayer games have been around as early as civilizations have existed. The carrom board found throughout Asia engages people of all ages. A basic activity of striking wooden disks on a wooden board, this game represents a lifetime of memories spent with friends, family, and neighbors ages 9 to 99.



The painted backdrop of the enlarged disks has faint arrows to express the importance of interactive practices. Some forms of interaction outwardly seem unnecessary though subtly achieve needed stability. The topic of social sustainability is sustaining the necessities without bypassing the unnecessary.

Things of active culture and art wear diverse colors and bear authentic values. In being socially sustainable, linking people with their values by using games and tradition, we will ensure the furtherance of a better future in all aspects of life in a habitual and playful way.





‘The art of coffee,’ by Reem Al-Sadoun.

Guest Columnist:

‘Lessons from our Elders: What Traditional Practices Can Teach Us About Sustainability,’ by Reem Al-Sadoun, Editor-in-Chief of SandRose Magazine.

Growing up, I remember playing in the garden with my cousins at my grandfather’s house, watching the adults engage in deep discussions around a cup of Turkish coffee. The adults and children then dispersed as the sun began to set, and nothing remained in the coffee saucer except for the thick tar-like coffee sediment.

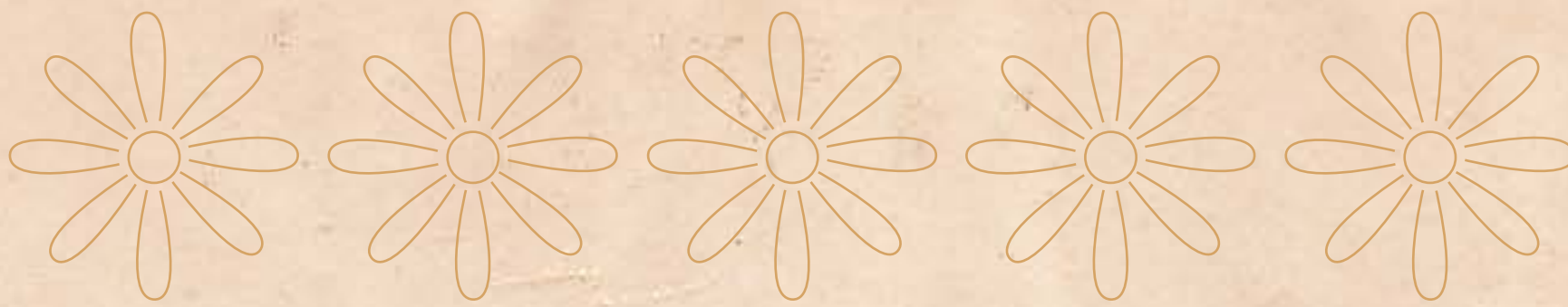
I would then observe my grandmother dump the leftover Turkish coffee with excess water from the kitchen and later sprinkle it onto the soil surrounding the many plants that composed her garden. Years later, I would witness the same action in my own home, as my mother tenderly watered her plants with the diluted coffee grounds.

This time, I pressed my mother for answers. She explained that this is a practice she grew up observing her mother and her grandmother do before her, and that what we deemed as “waste” is actually rich in nutrients that allow plants to thrive.

After further investigation, I discovered that this is indeed true; not only do coffee grounds contain nitrogen, calcium, potassium, iron, and many more key minerals that are essential for plant growth, but they also repel pests and other harmful insects. This simple interaction prompted me to reflect on the many habits which promote sustainable practice, which have been passed down to us from our elders.

Since the dawn of the Anthropocene, humans have developed an intimate understanding of their environment, cultivating this relationship to survive and thrive and even give back to the environment, thus creating a healthy and interconnected ecosystem. However, carbon emissions have increased to 1.5x the CO2 concentration of pre-industrial levels since the Industrial Revolution.

The increase of CO2 levels has significant implications on our environment, causing increases in average global surface temperatures leading to a loss in biodiversity, rise in sea levels, and more frequent heatwaves and other climate-related catastrophes. To mitigate this, in 2015, over 195 countries came together to sign the Paris Agreement, an international treaty on climate change to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 °C and achieve net-zero by 2050.



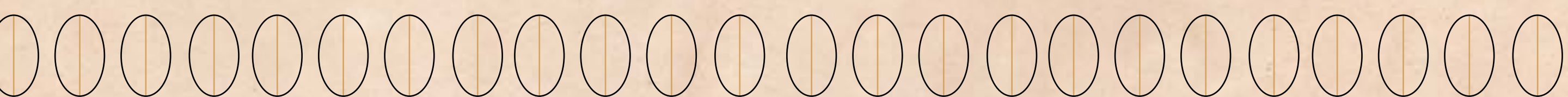
The agreement aims to curb carbon emissions by supporting technologies and policies that promote sustainable practices. In the context of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, sustainability is defined as meeting our present needs (environmental, social, and economic) without compromising future generations' access to natural resources. While many countries and organizations have developed revolutionary technologies such as carbon capture and storage and introduced policies promoting carbon trade and markets to curb emissions, indigenous communities have long observed sustainability practices that are in line with sustainable development goals.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is home to several terrestrial ecoregions from the arid desert environment in the central region of the Kingdom, the southwestern savannas and woodlands, to the rich marine life in the Red Sea. For a millennium, locals relied on their surroundings, even in the harshest conditions. Looking at the Eastern Province, in Al-Ahasa, home to the largest date-palm oasis, locals have found many uses and applications for palm trees beyond harvesting the date fruit as food. Dates are also used for medicinal purposes to treat gastrointestinal disorders, while pollen is also used for dietary supplements and infertility treatments. Dates and seeds are repurposed to create feed for livestock, and the wood from palm trees and their leaves are

employed in the construction of boats, roofing, and even in the creation of baskets and carpeting.

Additionally, leaf-sheaths from palm trees are also fashioned into clothing items and ropes. Essentially, from a single palm tree, locals found many ways to live on palm trees without compromising them. Mangrove trees, a feature of the Eastern Province shores, have also long been regarded and maintained by locals to protect shoreline from degradation and to make use of the abundant fishery products found in their ecosystems.

Looking at the western region of the Kingdom, gardening terraces are a common feature of the western mountains shaped by farmers from the edges of mountains for thousands of years. Terrace agriculture, while ancient, helps preserve soil and optimizes the collection of precipitated water and has proven to be at times more effective than some modern agricultural practices. In recent decades, the practice of terraced agriculture has become significantly scarcer due to increased urbanization. With that being said, many programs have been developed to revitalize this practice. By exploring the relationship our elders had with their environment and their daily practices, we learn that to live sustainably is to live in harmony with nature, and with care and cooperation with our environment.



Today, the world faces environmental challenges. While science affirms the need for global intervention, in addition to current policy and technological developments, perhaps the solution is also to look inward and benefit from the knowledge passed on to us from our elders on sustainable living honed over generations in unison with the environment. Integrating traditional knowledge and mitigation processes into climate action can play a significant role in addressing challenges such as food insecurity, preserving biodiversity, and improving resources management.





The Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale is the first of its kind in the land of Saudi Arabia and, as art lovers, we are so happy and proud that such a momentous event has become part of our tradition.

The art pieces vary from the disturbing to the beautiful, from the ethereal to the sublime, and from the technical to the technological. The concepts behind each piece are awe-inspiring to the extent that many people have returned again and again.

Not to mention the different cultural offerings like the Chef's Table, Public Programs, and Wadi Cinema.

In the spirit of this issues' theme, sustainability, we chose to highlight the art that has been repurposed from the environment we exist in: World Map from the "Food for Thought" (2021) by Maha Malluh; Manifesto: The Language & City (2021) by Abdullah Alothman; Desert Meeting (2021) by Dr.Ahmed Mater; and Dialectics (2000) by Mahdi Al Jeraibi.



World Map from the "Food for Thought" (2021) by Maha Malluh Placed in bread baking trays and arranged to create visuals and words, these cassettes are given another life. These tapes are from the 1980s with recording of different content. Words prescribed within the map of the world are also a reflection of the fear the pandemic has created connecting the whole world. It is a juxtaposition of hopefulness and despair in a colorful display.



Manifesto

The Language & City (2021)
by Abdullah Allothman

Nostalgia is the word that comes to mind when the viewer sees all the different signs from all over Riyadh. Each sign is a reflection of the mass understanding of calligraphy and marketing of the time in which it was produced. In rearranging the signs and giving them new life as an artwork, the artist gives them new meaning, reflecting the language of the contemporary.



DESERT MEETING

(2021) by Dr. Ahmed Mater

Made out of repurposed CRT Television sets, these semi-animated visuals of important historical events give new life to static moments in time. The art is a reflection of how contradictory life is in the 21st century and the economic post-oil boom in globalization and connectivity as well as technology.



Dialectics

(2000) by Mahdi Al Jeraibi

Part of the Al-Mansouria Foundation Collection, this artwork is a part of Al Jeraibi's exploration of collective memory. With students' graffiti adorning them, the desks have become artworks and an expression of how scratches on a table can be considered expressions of art, making the form irrelevant in response to the importance of the actual content.

The Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale was developed by a team of international curators led by Philip Tinari, including Wejdan Reda, Shixuan Luan, and Neil Zhang. Under the theme "Feel the Stones," the 2021-2 Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale

offers six sections, with works from national and international artists responding to a central theme and engaging visitors in a dialogue around contemporary art. The Biennale opened on December 11, 2021 and runs until March 11, 2022.





The Mayor, by **Ghadah Al-Rabee**.
Courtesy of the artist and **Athr Gallery**.

Special Feature:

‘The Art of Candy,’ an interview
with Ghadah Al Rabee by
Ghadeer Sadeq.

Total

\$37.89

“My philosophy is to constantly reconsider our lifestyles and think about what we see as waste and disposable and what we can achieve by recycling it and using it again. The world has become too crowded, and we need to find solutions as soon as possible...”

Ghadah Al-Rabee, from Madina, has mastered her own creations. She managed to turn disposed of candy wrappers into a work of art that reflects her local cultural symbols as she draws many portraits of Saudi people in their cultural attire. She also uses her art to create a unique spin on iconic artwork such as the American Gothic Painting by Grant Wood, and making it local by displaying a Saudi couple instead and naming it “Siti Saadeh and Sidi Saeed.”

Creating art through candy wrappers isn’t her only creative power. She also paints using oil and acrylic by creating circular-wave brush strokes on the canvas as she portrays scenes from her life and the Hijaz area cultural symbols where she grew up and lived.

Here she shares her views with Ithraeyat Magazine on various topics.



‘The old Grocery store,’ by **Ghadah Al-Rabee**. Courtesy of the artist and **Athr Gallery**.

Q1.
When did you start your journey as an artist, and why?

I started painting when I was in the fourth grade, and I entered the art scene through the Arts and Culture Association in Madina, and I started as a professional artist in 2013 with Athr Gallery.

Q2.
When were you first inspired to use candy wraps in your art?

The idea of using candy wrapping first came to me in 2009, after I visited Art Dubai. I remember that I was drinking tea with my husband and I was thinking about everything I saw there. I told him that it occurred to me to create a painting with the wrappings of KitKat and other sweets. Without hesitation, he told me that it was a beautiful idea and encouraged me to do it. I told him there may be losses, and it might fail. However, he asked me not to think about that. He said, “do it and I will support you.”

Q3.
How did you develop your artistic style?

I developed my method through constant experimentation, with some failings at the beginning because it was the exploration stage of a new raw material that was hard to deal with its varied kind. It could be tin, paper, nylon, plastic, cardboard, among others. Each material needed a different way of handling.

Q4.
How was the public reaction to your artwork?

At first I faced people’s mockery of my project, but I had this long-term view that this material was wasted, and we had to find a way to make use of it.



Q5.
Is it hard to find or collect materials for your artwork?

It is really hard to find the materials. In some works, I need raw paper of a certain color, and I find the color, but it's nylon or tin, so I need to search more. Sometimes, I travel to find what I'm looking for.

Q6.
Is sustainability a core theme in your practice as an artist?

It's absolutely fundamental because some of these wrappings are a major cause of pollution, and some of them are not biodegradable, and between these two problems, I try to use them to produce better works.

Q7.
What does your art mean to you?

My art is the air I breathe, the space of my freedom, and the language I speak so fluently.

Q8.
What artists do you admire as role models, and why?

Iadore the work of the pioneers of art such as Leonardo da Vinci, Van Gogh, Salvador Dali, Monet, Manet, Tamara de Lempicka, Rafael, Michelangelo and many others. What excites me most in their works is the spectacular theatrical manner in which they almost tell a story, and they leave the viewer to choose the end of it.





Special Feature:

‘Wood, Wooden, and the Natural,’ by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.

The subject of sustainability and climate change is an important concept in art for our day and age. We look at art not just as a piece of beautiful work by a professional or amateur artist. Art has always had a message, intentional or not, and with the effects we are having on our environment, it has become a subject of discussion.

Recycling, Reduce, Reusing
Natural, Local, Organic
Upcycle, Mend, Fix
Sustainable, Clean, Green

All these terminologies have become synonymous to how we deal with sustainable practices and art. They all mean the same thing in the end: to not waste the resources we have. In art, it means to ensure the artwork is sustainable from the conceptual phase all the way to its longevity past creation. Of course, this hasn’t always been true, hence the existence of art restoration and processes attached to it. Also, it isn’t true for all artists: every person has their own sense of responsibility, which relates to their practice and reaction to the topic.

In this three-part article, we will explore three artists and their different approaches or sense of connection with sustainability.

In Wood, Alif uses wood as the subject of his work and carves it into shapes and artworks. The idea is his art is made of wood and would not exist without the material’s interaction with the artist’s hands, creating a harmonious existence and a beautiful outcome.

In Wooden, Ahmed Angawi creates art with wood as the material recreating historical practices and preserving them for multiple generations. The sustainability of historical practices means understanding the materiality and engaging with perseveration techniques to ensure the longevity of the piece without waste.

In Natural, Sara Abu Abdallah reflects on the importance of nature and memory through the preservation of the space in which growth happens. She also reconnects to the same lands and its nature through multiple ways mindfully.



‘Huyam,’ by Alif. 2020, 5cm x 18cm x 5cm, local Olive wood. Huyam: (highest level of love) could be translated to adoration, yet it doesn't give the full meaning. This is part of a spoon collection that feeds the soul.

Wood With Alif

Q1.
When did Alif start working with wood and why?

Although he still is a multidisciplinary artist exploring calligraphy and art in different forms, Alif used to be solely a calligraffiti artist until he discovered the joy of carving wood in 2018. “I have a love for cooking and feeding the people I love.

It’s a sacred practice where you create something without any expectation of return as it disappears as soon as you place it on a plate. In that spirit, I decided to carve a spoon, one of the main utensils used to share food and, in doing so, I discovered my love for the knife and it had become a passion.” This inspired his collection Soul Nutrition, carved spoons with Arabic calligraphy inspired by his own style. It explores words that signify love in Arabic.

Q3.
What motto or saying do you live by?

“I don’t have a specific motto that I live by because life is constantly changing. Humans are always looking for stability

but they don’t find it.” In his work he looks for love: “If there was no love between humans, or between God and his creations, or even between me and my pieces, there would be no connection.”

Q2.
What artists have you admired or been inspired by?

Artists are always inspired but they should never copy other artists, which is a distinction Alif shows in his work as he has a unique touch and sense of exploration of his work.

“Even if it was a product that I was producing, once it becomes very popular, I would stop producing in that style.” While he was giving a workshop, there was a couple that thoroughly enjoyed it and explained that they had attended multiple workshops including one by Giles Newman.

Alif was very flattered because “I have always found Giles Newman’s work inspiring and he was the one that inspired me to carve stylistic spoons.”

Q4.
What do you want the public to know about you?

“I am an artist who is insane to the point of sanity and sane to the point of insanity.”



‘Hawa,’ by Alif. 2020, 17cm x 5cm x 2.5cm, Sycamore wood
Hawa: another Arabic name of love which translates into: being into someone. Designing it, had in mind the hue that Hawa creates around us when we get near that special someone.

Q6.
What is the importance of wood to you?

As wood is a natural source, it has always existed, and people have been creating things with it for centuries. “It is one of the original items that humans have dealt with. Wood derives its strength and power from the earth the same way humans do by standing on the ground. It is the reason why people ensure there is wood in their home. There is a connection that is undeniable.” This connection is what helps Alif choose his piece because once he starts carving, there is no going back. “There is a saying in the woodworking world: there is no such thing as a mistake, only a smaller carving, which is similar to life. We must always build on what already exists.”

Q5.
Why the letter Alif as your name?

“I don’t have a specific motto that I live by because life is constantly changing. Humans are always looking for stability but they don’t find it.” In his work he looks for love: “If there was no love between humans, or between God and his creations, or even between me and my pieces, there would be no connection.”





‘As Salam,’ by Alif. 2021, 179cm x 53cm x 15cm, local Ficus (Berham) wood. As Salam (peace) is the first thing we need before all progress, before all joy, & before all art.

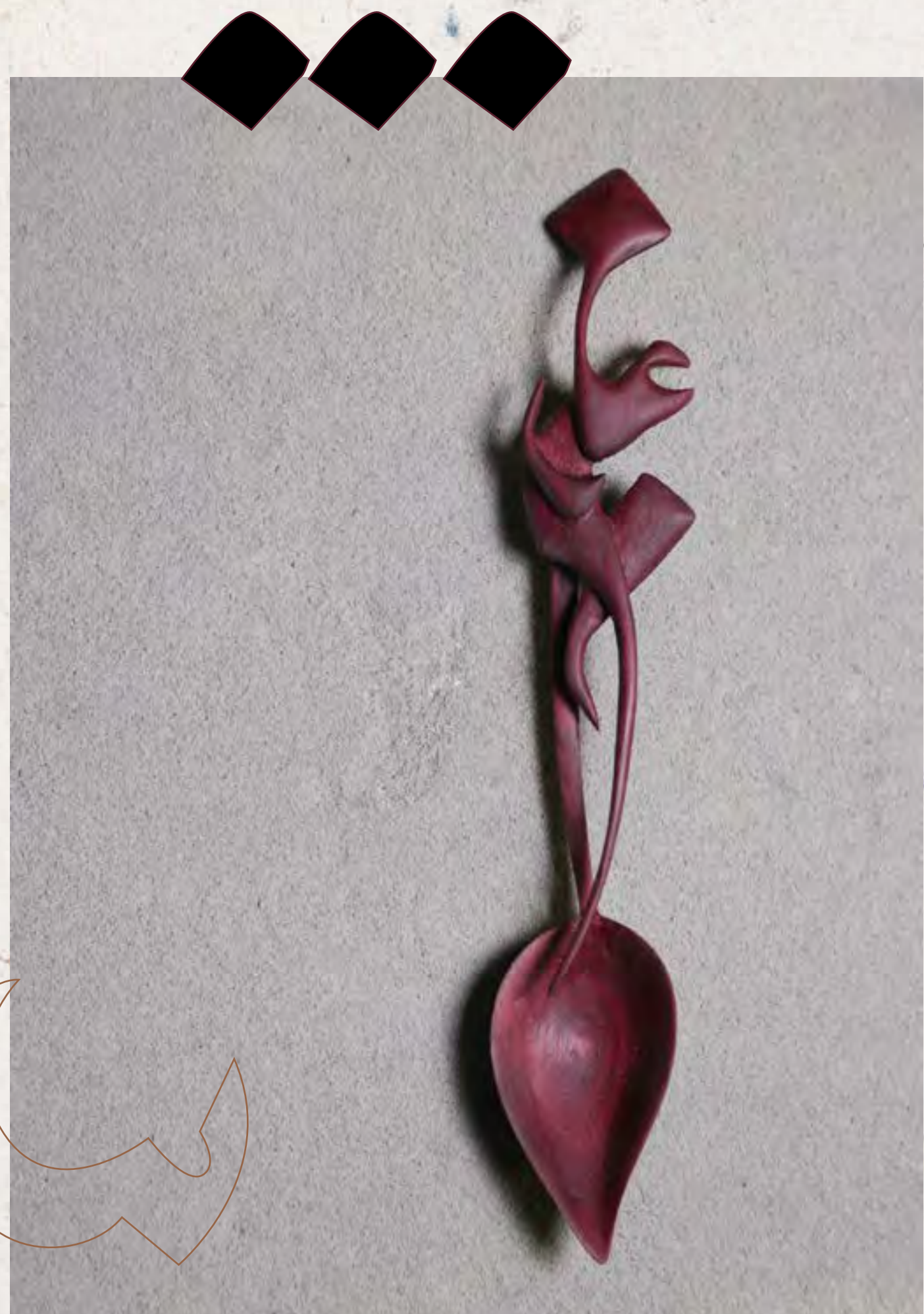


Q7.
Do you take sustainability and the environment into consideration in your artwork?

“Wood is a natural resource, so we need to ensure its longevity and its source. Even when already cut, we need to ensure that it isn’t part of a deforestation process. Also there are some trees that have history and so not every tree can become an artwork.” However, the creative work also takes into consideration where the piece is going to be placed and that it would go to ruin. “I choose pieces that are treated correctly and I take the placement into consideration so it can last and withstand all the elements like sunlight or rain. Also, I ensure that it has the correct finishing so that it would not be destroyed by insects or other natural processes.”

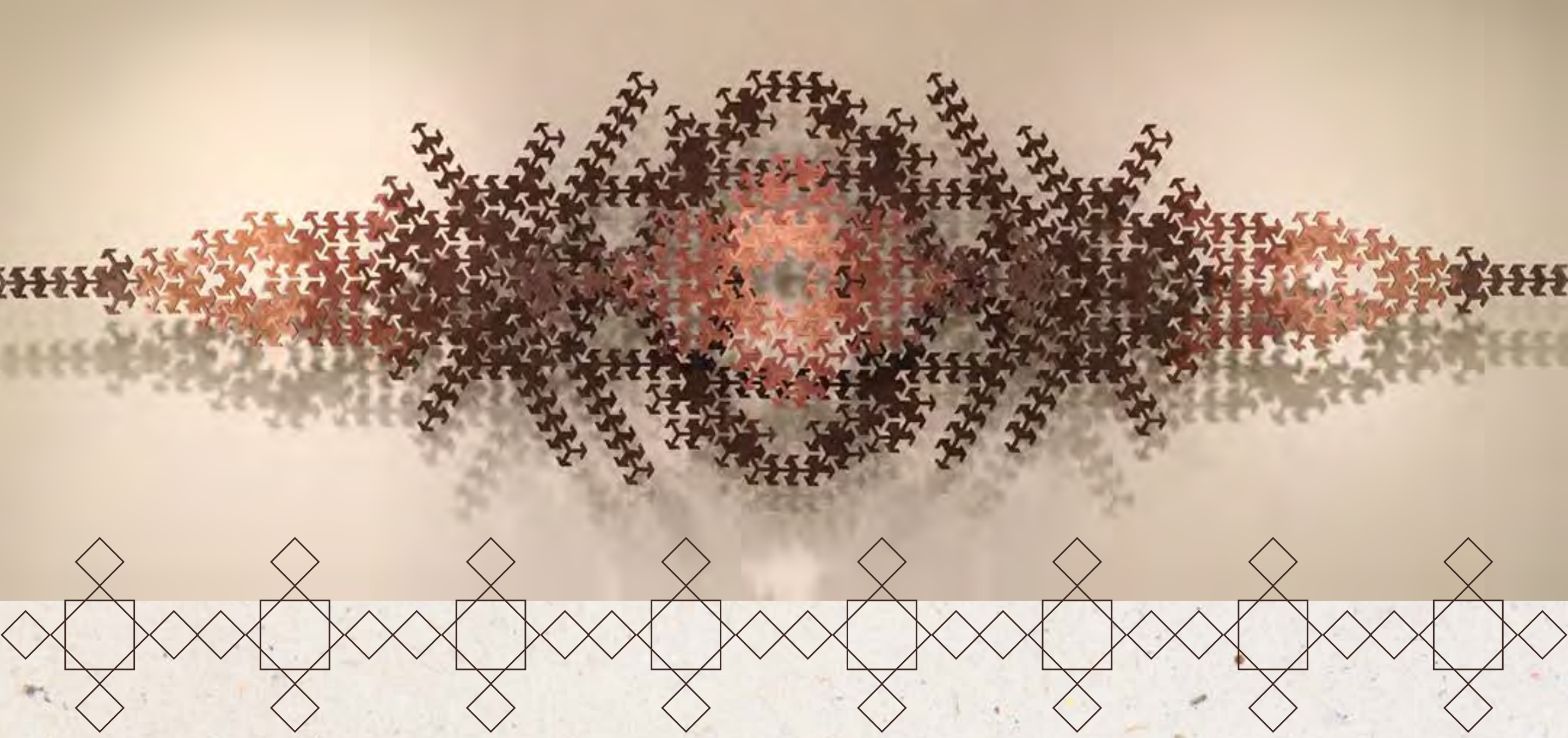
Q8.
What advice would you give artists just starting up?

“Don’t compete” was the first sentence that popped out of Alif in reaction to the question. Competition could be healthy and amazing, however, “when you run, you won’t see the details, or you’ll fall, so take your time and you will achieve.”



‘Gharam,’ by Alif. 2020, 5cm x 17cm x 2cm, Purpleheart wood. An attempt to gather all that is related to the strong yet delicate emotion that the word gharam carries. I was satisfied when I added the strand of hair on her eye here.





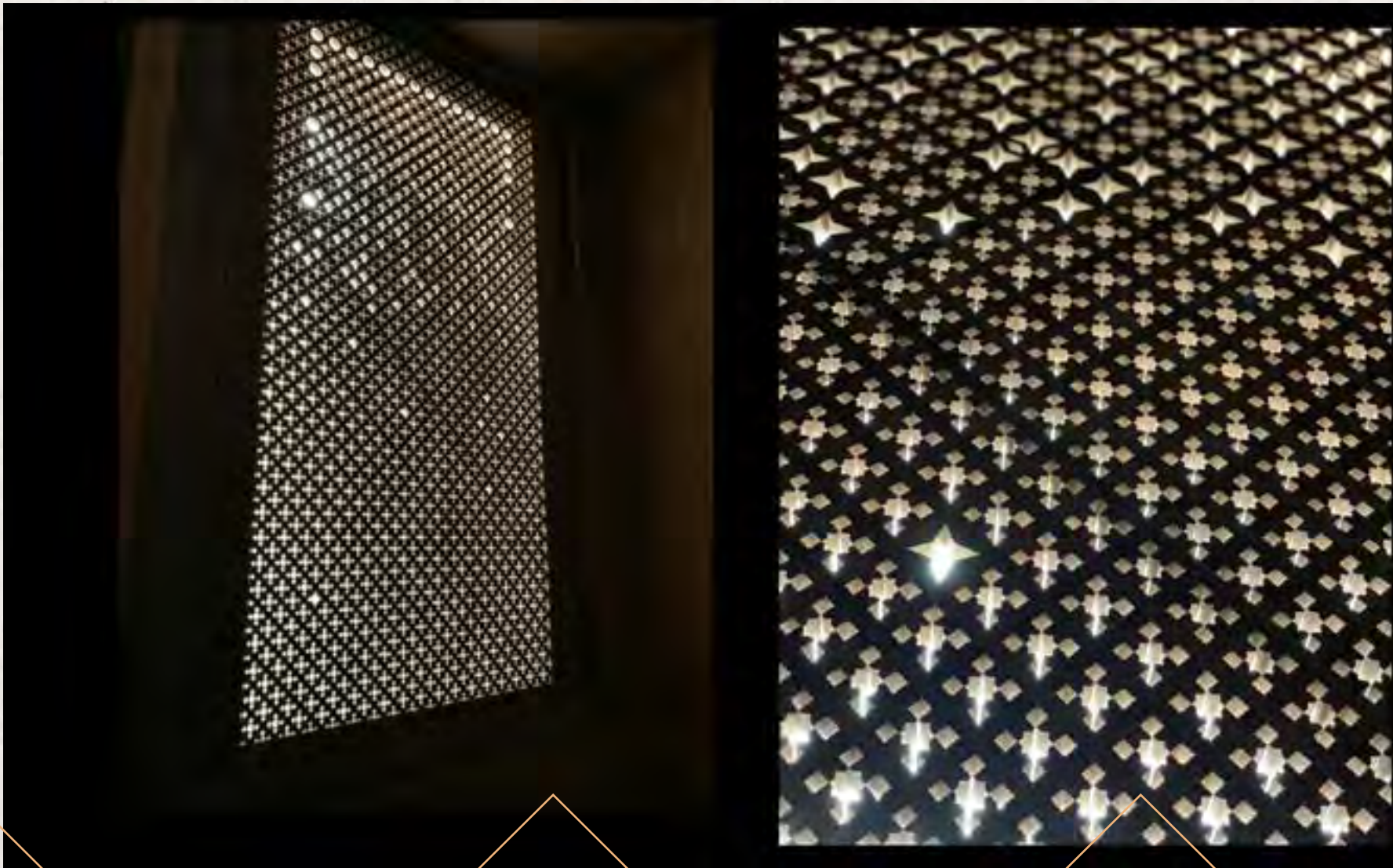
Wooden with Ahmed Angawi

Ahmad Angawi has been and always has been a champion of craftsmanship and the power of reviving traditional practices. He was exposed to art from the moment he opened his eyes, his father is an architect and his mother is an interior designer, and has been exposed to all aspects of culture. There were multiple influences including being surrounded by craftsmen and creatives in Beit Shafei in Al Balad (Jeddah Historical District) where Dr. Sami Angawi had his office and the process of his family home being built. It highlighted to him the importance of producing with your hands and eyes.

“I used to carve into my wooden school desk and creatively use my pens or broken pencils as tools. I still have these desks laying around”. This unique Saudi artist has always been fascinated with creating something with wood as the medium. He studied product design, which was between architecture and design. Crafts are one of the most natural processes, according to Angawi. “The culture of craftsmanship has disappeared” since he wasn’t interested in being part of a factory and wanted to create unique pieces, reviving “the essence of making”, which is why he did a tour of multiple countries around the Middle East to learn in the old cities where he lived and studied. When he came back, he felt inspired by Makkah and by the

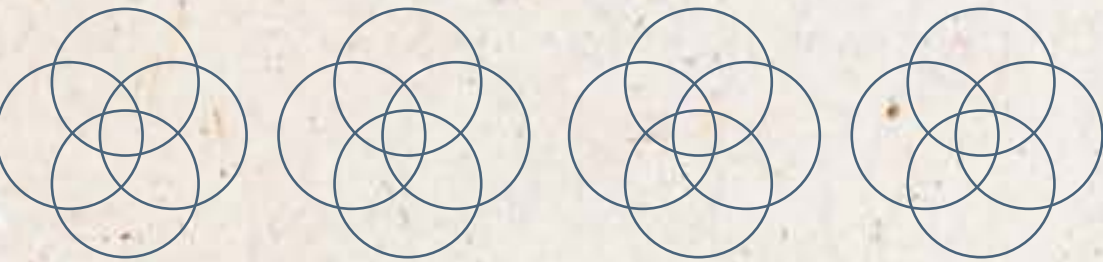
ideas of inhaling and exhaling, which is the act of absorbing cultures from all over the world and integrating them within the fabric of the city. So there is a collective and uniquely different cultural representation that truly enhances the spirit of Hijaz’s land: unity within diversity.

This spirit also exists in Islamic art. However, Angawi doesn’t stop there: he “documents, creates, then innovate”, which is considered part of the crafting tradition. So he learns from all the intangible heritage that exists then recreates it to ensure he understands the fundamentals and then innovates to ensure its longevity for future generations.



In a sense, Ahmad Angawi isn't influenced directly by any artist, but was impressed by the character of the maker with their multitudes. He is inspired by different disciplines. He found historically that people weren't singular in their pursuits, they were scientists, artists, calligraphers, inventors, craftsmen. He found people like Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī or Leonardo Da Vinci interesting because they weren't so singular. It is not surprising then that the label of artist can be somewhat limiting when compared to the actual effort he puts into his work. His work is a combination of multiple disciplines.

So how does he define himself? According to the artist, "it is an ongoing journey and I still want to discover and know. I know I am seeking something." The act of exploring is a part of who he is to the point that creating a singular definition for himself is difficult. He uses multiple labels including artist, designer, craftsman, maker. "I am just a person who enjoys making things" says Angawi. The thing can be defined as the creation unfolds itself.



Hence, when asked: What Motto do you live by? It is "Jack of all trades is a master of none", which reflects Angawi's understanding of how humans want to learn about everything. When told that there is a continuation of the saying, he was surprised. "Jack of all trades is a master of none, but often better than a master of one". It shows that being told that having one trade is more important than learning and branching out isn't actually correct and being multidisciplinary has served Angawi in his work and his exploration.



Also, he is inspired by his legendary father. "My father always talks about scales: There is no balance without imbalance. There is no stable state, always something you seek, especially with heritage and tradition. It is mentioned in a lot of scripture so it has a deep meaning". Since balance is a state we always seek, a tool we think with: "We need to balance a lot of aspects in our work including concepts like sustainability, the economy, ...etc. To balance all those things is to reach the ultimate state: equilibrium" and that is how Angawi approaches his work and life.

Why wood?

"Every person likes to choose their own weapon, aka tool". The choice of wood is a natural one for Ahmed Angawi, literally in this case. Wood is a "live material" and there needs to be a relationship between the creator and the material to really build something beautiful. "When you can form it and shape it, it has a tolerance, it isn't computerized, it is something natural", he pulls into humanity's love of wood, a part of our collective experience, including smell and feel. In turn, this connection with the

materiality of wood, especially qualitative ones, is what drives the design, informs how to shape the material, and inspires the work. It is also important to consider the local material and the need to have zero carbon footprint which is a historical practice; Nothing is wasted because of the scarcity of materials. Angawi reflects "this is also another way to ensure the sustainability of practices and that we keep our heritage and identity alive: using local materials and in the local way."



Sustainability is a key word for Angawi in his practice. Culturally and religiously, we believe that every material has its value and we shouldn't waste it. "What does it mean to be islamic? Is it the patterns? Or is there principles and values that must be practiced. I believe that islamic art is the values and principles that you use in the work, which includes no harm no foul". Most of Angawi's work is informed by the three sides of sustainability: heritage, longevity, and environment.

He understands that to do the Mangour, you have to understand its relationship with the Mashrabiya, created from the 'waste' of the **Mangour**, and how that informs the airflow in a building. These are all parts of the Hijazi architectural heritage but they all play a part in his relationship with his artworks. "We should celebrate technology but we are imbalanced" so we need sustainable practices to balance again. Part of that is to follow traditional practices, improve and innovate the creative process, recycle and reduce to produce more efficiently.

What advice would you give upcoming artists, designers, craftsman?

In the spirit of sustainability, Angawi also takes into consideration the environment of his work: "We are the inheritors of the earth and it was given to us to secure it and preserve it". He takes into consideration the materiality of the object from the conceptual stage and plans for how to reuse or recreate using the waste, the mistakes, and the random leftover pieces from his work. If it doesn't end up fitting his plans, he stores them or reworks their use.

For example, he uses the leftover coffee grounds in his maker space Zawiyah. He collects 'waste' from around the Balad and Jeddah, including "homeless furniture" (pieces left on the curb) and gives it a second life by up-cycling, reusing and re-working the pieces. "The environment is always affecting my work."

"Everyone has an inner designer/artist," he said. Creativity exists in all of us: constantly learning and developing is needed to create beautiful artworks. "Beauty is the goal and it is the closest thing on earth to perfection." It is important for any maker to understand what are they gaining from their practice and how their achieving that state of beauty. "We have to elevate three things through every process and experience: Body, Mind, and Soul. Your body is elevated from practice and the creation process. Mind is elevated when thinking, problem solving and creating new techniques. Souls can be elevated through meditation and believing in your work." This is a process of finding one's authentic self to be able to create something true and beautiful in yourself without the noise of social media and with the simplicity of existing.

"Leave a good mark for others to follow and sustain."



Natural with Sara Abu Abdallah



Sarah Abu Abdallah has always been interested in art as her mother Ghada Al-Hassan is an artist as well. She has been exposed to the art world from a young age, around 11 years old is when she feels is the official start, and has been a linear progression without much surprises all the way to getting her masters. So when did art start meaning something to her? “There was no Aha!

Moment. I always drew and always illustrated and planned to pursue painting but it felt too limiting then in college I got into video with layering and montaging as another way of narrating and telling stories. After university, I explored with Karam Natour arthouse cinema and video art where I explored more variety. Now I am back to painting in the same spirit as videos. It has become a cinematic painting, more dynamic, and everything goes and is meaningful”. Abu Abdallah’s narrative and creative outlet is linear in its progress yet her art shows a full exploration of context and the experience of being alive.

“Everything is a component of your experience and is meaningful to you. All the pieces of your life aren’t always translatable. Language doesn’t translate experience very well,” especially when looking at experiences that transcend the norm and expresses the nuances of cultural and practical narratives. “We experience life in fragments and they make up the whole picture, your existence is an extension of that and the whole concept is existentialist.”

Art can bridge the gap between these fragments and show us a version of our existence from a certain lens and Abu Abdallah’s artwork shows us that. In that sense, her art is a product of understanding that “everything matters and doesn’t at the same time”—the significant is as important and meaningful as the insignificant.

Being significant isn’t the goal. So, while Abu Abdallah may be known as an artist, she prefers making art for one person. “If the artwork connects with one person then it has done its job”. For the artist, the connection the viewer makes with her art is more important than her connection with the viewer, no matter what their experience or understanding.



What artists do you admire?

Sofia al Maria
Otobong Nkanga
Korakrit Arunanondchai

According to Abu Abdallah, the artists above have a sense of freedom in their art and don't stick to one. They aren't confined to one idea or medium and integrate their work seamlessly. "I like a lot of people and admire them but I actually think of these people's arts and creative output," she explains. There is no sense of urgency in their work and there is a level of authentic self expression that Abu Abdallah's work does reflect and you can see it indirectly informs her production and content.

What is the story of Trees Speaking to Each Other?

In the eastern region, there are specific tomatoes, which the artist discovered are called Heirloom Tomatoes, but were considered special ones in the region. People would save them, freeze them, gift them to each other.

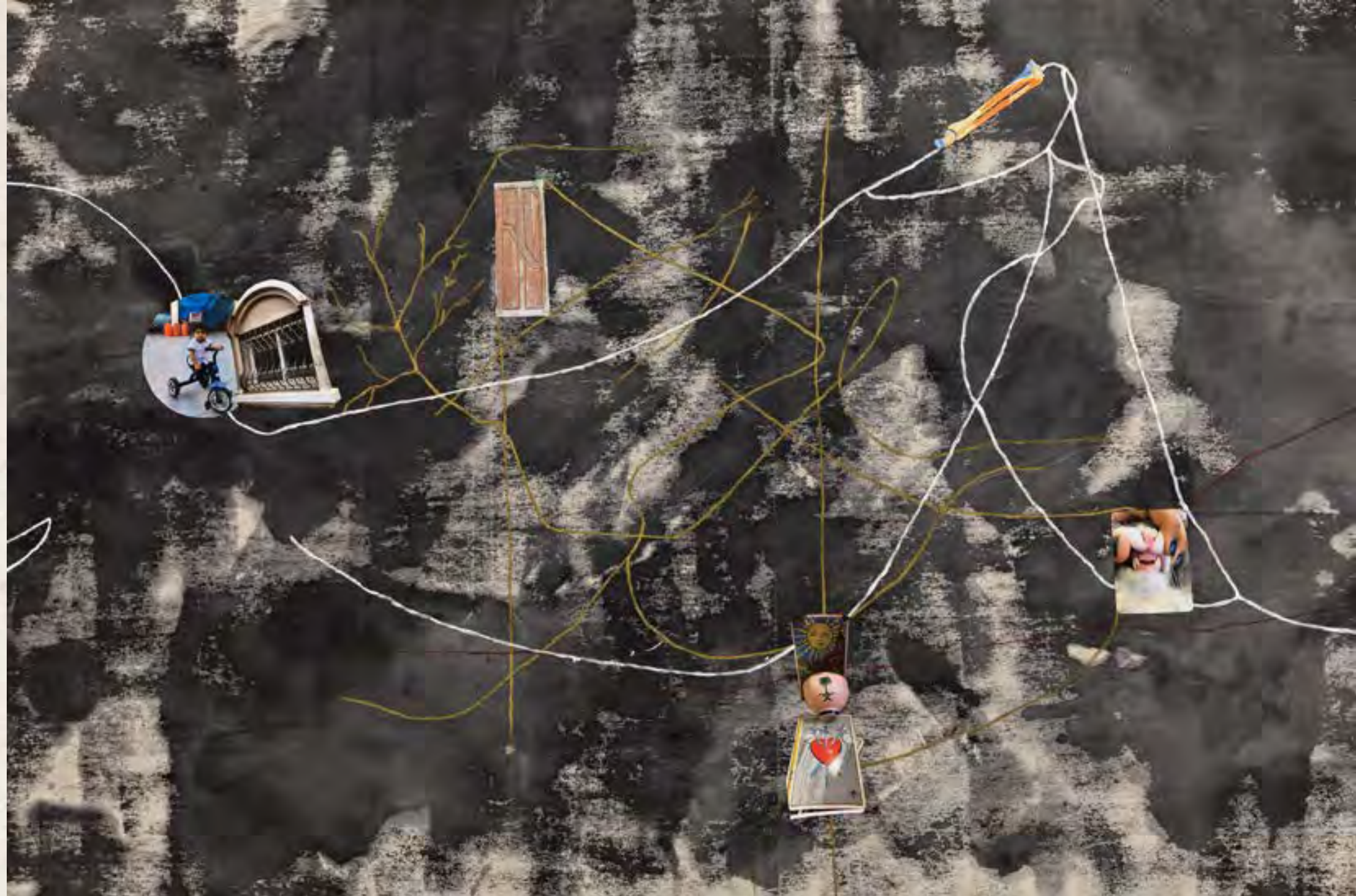
They are considered luxurious. The tomatoes have to come from the specific farms between the sea and an oasis so there is an urban myth that there are special minerals in the land that produced these tasty pieces. Hearing that the land was going to be developed, Abu Abdallah attempted to go and get some of the lands, but found the projects has already started and there was nothing left. She then attempted to get some seeds but the tomatoes sold out. "It was devastating to see the lands gone but no one cares about tomatoes" she commented.

Yet, she still had a show in Hamburg where she wanted to grow some tomatoes in a gallery space, so she tried to recreate the tomatoes. They weren't perfect but they did the job. In Noor Arriyadh, by coincidence, she found the tomatoes again. The farmers had moved to a new land and are producing it again. She was able to actually closed the cycle by planting the actual tomatoes.

In my hometown, a lot of the farms are moving outside of the city center, which makes sense economically as they would be able to earn more money. The landscape where Abu Abdallah grew up is changing and that produces "sadness and sorrow". This migration has been happening for decades. "People used to even burn down their farms so they can sell their lands and move."

This brings to question for the artist the clean aesthetics of cities and malls and how they are taking over the lands, reducing the green spaces within the city limits and increasing the feeling of nostalgia and heartbreak. Juxtaposingly, bringing the farm and the tomatoes into a clean and polished gallery space is an act of distorting the environment. Abu Abdallah decontextualized the tomatoes and the gallery, inducing a feeling of harmony as well as a jarring feeling of irony.

This is especially true with the new trend of having plants indoors as presented in TikTok and other social media channels. "I would sit with my family and we would discuss what to plant in the family garden from jahanamiyah to yasmine. I think maybe because people live in sterile industrial spaces, plants are a way to balance things out." She understands the importance of nature within our environment whether it is the sterile space or the more chaotic farm lands.



What do you think of sustainability?

“I have a dystopian image of the future and don’t trust individual effort in creating real change. We produce just a fraction of the waste that industries produce so there isn’t much that can be done. Yet we still try to be more conscious about our consumption.” The act of reusing and giving life again to what many consider trash isn’t an act of sustainability but an act of reviving fragments of one’s life. Abu Abdallah has used an old car, magazines, and other items in her art to express new life, turning waste into precious art pieces or fragments of art pieces. In 2011, she wanted to get “junk and give it value in a playful manner. Art is precious and is associated with value, money, and sacredness.”

She used a car that another student had purchased for another project and painted in pink, giving it value as an art piece. When she was working on the Sharjah Biennale, she was asked to bring it back and the university threw it away. She went in search of the car in junkyards and when she found it, it was shipped to multiple art spaces all over the world. “It became this glorious art piece just through the act of adding paint when it really is nothing. There is a play on how the artist gives meaning to something and gives it value”. Art is as meaningful as the value it is given and Abu Abdallah has given many of her pieces new life and meaning through the simple act of interacting with it and adding some level of beauty.

Reflecting on her work, Abu Abdallah’s process has changed: “What I am making at the moment is not a series of conscious decisions, it is free expression. I sometimes take for granted the freedom associated with creation and acceptance of it as an art piece because I am an ‘artist’. Whatever we claim as art is art.” The space for exploration and development she has in a way reflects back to the artists who have inspired her.



What advice would you give upcoming artists?

“Everything starts with art.” It is important to develop the practice of art, your position, respond to open calls, ensure your integrity, and build the correct network. Before all that, focusing on developing the art and educating oneself is the most important part of developing yourself as an artist and improving your artwork. “Just make and the rest will follow”.



Spotlight:

‘Metal: The Art of Barrel,’
by Hind Fahad Al-Therman.

“Art is life and beauty...”

Hind Fahad Al-Therman is an artist who believes art is beyond paintings and the obvious. She finds beauty in the things discarded, re-interpreting them artistically into something deeper. “Art deepens our humanity because it stimulates a sense of life and inspires us with beauty, thoughts and deep human feelings that transcend daily routine,” she told Ithraeyat.

Art in all its forms, has been expressing itself across the different eras, from rock art to fine art to the latest digital art with “no need for an interpreter” for it to reach its viewer. Here she shares her views on her oil barrel art and the importance of sustainability.

Q1. What does sustainability mean to you? and why do you use it in your artworks?

Sustainability is a major issue in the world today. Caring for the environment is not something new in art. For instance, the climate change crisis and its challenges is a problem that threatens the future of humanity, and since artists are part of the local and global community, they explore these issues through their art and their deep understanding of the world around them. Today we live in a world overcrowded with waste, and we are accustomed to the consumer life-style, and in the last 100 years, we have

become accustomed to cramming everything that is in excess of our needs. The idea of recycling products is not only an economic and environmental idea, but also includes art. Recently, concepts of a circular economy that include recycling and re-use have begun to spread. Art can create new products of an aesthetic nature from waste, old and used materials in accordance with environmental standards. It must be pointed out here that some waste contains dangerous materials, so artists must deal with them carefully.





“Together we create life,” a collection turning oil barrels into art and living homes for plants, by **Hind Al-Therman**.

Q2.
Tell me about the oil barrel artworks?

Oil barrels, oil containers and petroleum products are used and recycled within their field. In the hands of an artist, they are turned into useful and aesthetic pieces of artworks that could have a financial and economic return. For example, using them as planting containers in a way that are appealing to the eyes.

An artist is good at thinking outside the box and gives the product a new look, a new life and a spirit of sustainability.

Another example: car tires. We see them neglected in landfills, and are a visual pollution in cities. I worked to recycle tires into beautiful pieces of furniture and used them as a storage for shoes. It does not take up space and is aesthetically beautiful by adding some fabrics to it and reformulating it with a movable cover.

Q3.
What motto do you live by?

I do not live by one slogan, I am open to ideas and several things. But if I had to choose one, it is to spread art in every form and spread beauty to the world. Art is a sublime message for generations and is considered one of the most important components of the soft power of states and societies.

With the Saudi vision of 2030 and the transformations that the Kingdom is going through and such as its greater support to the arts, as well as what pioneering cultural institutions such as Ithra are doing, Saudi society will be more sensitive to art and the sector will be more established with a tangible cultural and economic impact. This has a very positive impact on our country and our ability to be creative communities, producing marketable creations.





A shoe storage from recycled tires, a project by Hind Al-Therman.

Q4.
What themes do you like to feature in your art and why?

In the Kingdom, we have a rich and diverse cultural and environmental heritage. Developing this heritage is one of the topics that concern me, as do many artists. In the accelerated time in which we live, I am currently studying digital art. Perhaps there are ways to employ the local heritage and environmental elements in digital arts in a way that presents innovative and interesting forms, expressions and perceptions.





Special Feature:

‘Sustainable Architecture,’ an interview with Shahad Al-Azzaz by Ghadeer Sadeq.

The palm tree is a national symbol in Saudi culture and carries many layers of meaning for us and affects many ways in which we live as a nation.

During Dubai Design Week in 2019, under the patronage of Ithra, Azaz Architects created a public art installation using palm tree leaves weaving techniques to make a tent-like playful pavilion filled with white dune structures for visitors to interact with and learn more about the significance of palm trees to Saudi culture.

By using “Sa’af, سعف”, woven fronds from the palm tree, Shahad Al-Azzaz’s creation reflects the craftsmanship within her cultural heritage as she aims to revive a dying tradition and reintroduce

it to global audiences. In this work titled “Sa’af, 2019,” Shahad explains her goal to draw attention to one of the essential crafts in the Kingdom that is being threatened by extinction due to the rapid modernization and industrialization that swept our world.

The woven fronds is an ancient craft by people who inhabited the Arabian Peninsula to create many practical tools and objects such as baskets, food mats, food containers, and carpets. Shahad is very keen on reviving that traditional craft and making it contemporary while offering the artisans an opportunity to capitalize on their skill. Here she shares her thoughts with Ithraeyat.





Sa’af Pavilion at Ithra, (Tanween 2021). Photos by Yasir Al-Qunais. Visitors to Ithra can enjoy and learn more about this craft in an interactive and multi-sensory setting.

Q1.
When did you start your journey as an architect?

The day I decided to go to architectural design school for college was the first time I had thought about becoming an architect. Prior to that, I had always planned on attending medical school. Due to one fateful conversation with my sister, I was quickly convinced to pursue a design and architectural degree. After many challenges and opportunities, I think it was when I began working in Spain that I first felt like everything I had worked for finally brought me to somewhere that made sense to me.

Q2.
What was the inspiration behind Azaz Architects firm?

I greatly appreciated being in a beautiful city like Madrid working for a prestigious firm and being responsible for all Middle Eastern projects, but it felt like there was a piece of the puzzle missing. As my role grew, I moved further away from designing and was occupied with managing, which wasn’t something I enjoyed. That realization was the spark that ignited the thought of Azaz Architects.

Q3.
What is Azaz Architecture’s philosophy, and how do culture, sustainability, and preservation play a role in it?

When I decided to move back to Saudi and start my own firm, I quickly noticed my school of thought would fill a gap in the region. Architecture for me was about ideas and feelings. I want to create architecture that creates a feeling which eventually sparks conversation. Very often, we think about the end objective first, but we ask ourselves (sometimes the clients) what they want to feel like inside our design. We use architecture as a language to find the answer. That within itself is our own philosophy. Architecture is fluid as an idea, we are always chasing after its meaning in the most inclusive terminology.

Q4.
Is sustainability a core theme in your practice as an architect?

It has to be. Sustainability in our designs is sustainability for our business. More clients are becoming conscious about principals of sustainability. This presents an opportunity for us to add an extra dimension that could differentiate us from other designers.



Q5.
What inspired you to create Sa'af? What is the primary objective or goal you're trying to achieve out of this?

I made many visits to Alhasa in search for the talented artists that still practice palm frond weaving as their primary craft. I met a family, living on a farm, doing not much other than practicing this artistry. I was impressed by their resilience and their technical skills. When I first presented my concept, they were intimidated by the scale, but they eventually agreed to collaborate. Even though we often celebrate the advances of technology and machine manufacturing, I wanted this pavilion to be symbolic of their stand for their craft and resilience against the threat of machinery replacement.

Q6.
What are your hopes/aspirations for the future of Saudi art and architecture?

Given the attention that has been given to Saudi arts, design, and architecture in the past few years, I can only be optimistic for what's to come. We at Azaz Architects, along with other Saudi designers, are proving that we can deliver and compete with international firms.

Q7.
What motto do you live by?

Do it.





‘Untitled,’ by **Mohammed Al-Ghamdi**. 2014. Mixed media on wood 180 x 70cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Hafez Gallery.

Guest Columnist:

‘Cultural Sustainability,’ by Ghada Al-Muhanna.

Innovation in technology has helped the global society uplift itself from the hardships of every-day life by enhancing its overall quality. However, the present-day environmental crisis urges us to reflect on ourselves and possibly look into the past to gain insights on how to better take care of our environment and preserve it for generations to come.

Before the discovery of oil, most of Saudi Arabia’s economic structure was limited, and the majority of the population was engaged in herding and agricultural techniques unique to their local environment – a practice which has been performed for over thousands of years.

People of the past knew which areas to move towards when lands were bountiful each season, and had a special time to hunt and trap certain animals for food and clothing, as well as a time to pick and prepare medicines. In addition, they knew how to mend and fix broken items that they valued or viewed to be necessary.

For example, some local communities of the past devised ingenious ways to store their fruit and vegetables in the scorching heat of the desert by digging holes into the ground and burying their food. This aided in keeping their food fresh and cold. Another example is that they would tear off old, tattered clothes and sew them into newer fabrics to create newer clothes or fix torn patches.

Naturally, knowledge transfer occurred over centuries and both indigenous and local communities preserved it by continuing the practices that they have learned. These practices, unbeknownst to many, have been essential in maintaining the diversity of both landscapes and cultures. It is why cooperating with these communities and groups is important as they can provide valuable perspectives when considering the impact of certain decisions on the environment. This is where the idea of cultural sustainability comes into play. A modern concept, it seeks to combat the continuous belief that has existed since the 17th

century where domination over nature is based on a technological and economic world view that replaced an organic one. As such, nature and culture cannot be separated – for they meet and interact across several levels whether through values, beliefs or societal norms.

As it aids societies by providing solutions to environmental problems, ergo maintain cultural beliefs, practices, and the culture itself, it is therefore viable for any policymaker to consider local societies as a source for sustainability strategies. A sustainable future is truly achievable once one connects with local communities to understand their own challenges as well as gain a perspective of their solutions to it.

To provide a better idea, indigenous or local designs are rooted in sustainability whether it’s contemporary or traditional work. Therefore, when a Saudi brand chooses to have work that represents the heritage of the Kingdom, they will be benefiting local communities more than ever by providing goods and services that are originally from the region. This would not only enrich the lives of these communities, but also further protect the environment from pollution.

So how are should one encourage more people to look at cultural sustainability? Participation in events related to folk culture is one method. By doing so, engagement with practices based on cultural heritage occurs. An understanding of how our ancestors lived their lives moves to the forefront, promoting future sustainability by embedding sustainable practices into current and future culture.

There are many Saudis today showing their intent on learning more about their impact on the environment, and what they can do to live a more sustainable lifestyle. Exploration into the past and looking at the lessons provided can allow for new innovative approaches towards living a more sustainable life, while being appreciative of cultural norms.



An example of sustainable clothes: a rice sack was used as a dress lining due to limited resources.

Spotlight

‘Sustainable Heritage,’ by
Somaya Badr, CEO of The Art
of Heritage.

“Gourds were used as milk and butter containers in the south. Another example of sustainable traditional practices.”

The Art of Heritage Trust’s collection of artefacts was established in 1986 as a cultural trust and has since grown to encompass a wide group of varied objects that reflect the material culture and history of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The collection of nearly 60,000 objects ranges over several distinct categories and is currently being prepared to be housed at a purpose-built facility. It includes jewelry, textiles and garments, carpets, rugs and furnishings, ethnographic material, everyday objects, wooden doors, books and manuscripts, maps, photographic materials, audio and video recordings and printed ephemera.

The Trust aims to promote research and study, alongside fostering the revival of Saudi arts, crafts and culture amongst newer generations. The collection continues to expand under the guidance of its board led by HRH Princess Sara Al-Faisal Bin Abdulaziz, HRH Princess Moudi Bint Khalid Bin Abdulaziz, HRH Princess Haifa Al Faisal Bin Abdulaziz and HRH Princess Bassma Bint Majid Bin Abdulaziz.

Throughout the years we were able to look into the collection and try to build our knowledge, information and archive that will allow us to understand more about our cultural heritage.



There is an impressive wide range of design vocabularies across the Kingdom. The richness and the diversity enabled us to demonstrate changes and continuities in design composition and intercultural influences. The wide range of styles and techniques demonstrate the numbers of possibilities that could inspire designers and creatives.

The artifacts of the material culture do not only tell us about the transformation of the language of design across space and time, but can also enrich our understanding of geopolitical contexts, changes in trade and technology, as well as the construction of our identities and social habits. When we look to the embellished

textiles worn by nomadic Bedouins, they help us understand how the physical demands of daily life shaped their choices, and how the limited resources helped them sustain what they had.

It is interesting to see the skill and creativity of local craftsmen as they preserve traditional design elements and techniques, while incorporating new concepts and materials from a diverse range of external influences.

Our cultural heritage allows us to think of design as a language that travelled along the same routes as incense and spices. Design languages were exchanged, developed, and remain a part of conversations among different cultures.



Saudi Arabia Ministry of Culture.

Arabic Treasures:

‘Bayt Al-Sha‘ar,’ by Ghofran Al-Khalaqi

The concept of sustainability isn’t new for Arabs, rather, it is a notion that is deeply connected and meaningful to them. Since ancient times, Arabs have used materials that can be extracted from the cattle they care for and nurture, and a lot of other natural materials.

The house of hair (bayt Al sha‘ar) comes as one of the many examples that can be used as significant evidence of their belief in sustainability and preservation of abundant natural resources. The house of hair is the tent that is used as a house for nomads as protection from the sun’s heat during the day and the cold weather at night, in addition to rain and sandstorms.

By time, the house of hair acquired its name due to the use of the camel and goat hair and white sheep’s wool in making the textiles. This process is called “Sadu knitting,” because it is only knitted and sewn horizontally and the thread pulled longitudinally is called “Sada.” It is known for its strength, smoothness, and harmony that is caused by the great pressure it is exposed to during the knitting and weaving process, unlike the vertically extended thread, which is called “Weft.”

The house of hair is distinctive for its bright, vibrant colors that vary between black, white, brown, beige, and red. The hairs and spun wools acquire these colors by being dyed with plant extracts found across Arab lands, such as turmeric, henna,

saffron, aloe vera, and indigo. It was a custom of Bedouin women to learn dying and weaving from an early age. The house of hairs is knitted and woven using a loom made of palm or jujube wood by small groups of women who pass the time weaving by exchanging news, singing songs, and reciting poetry.

It’s important, while learning about the houses of hair, to know that they have numerous names based on the number of poles used according to the size of the house. There are, for example: Al-Mdouble, Al-Muqarn, Al-Muthluth, Al-Morabba‘, Al-Mukhummus, and Al-Masuba‘.

Arabs, despite their different geographical areas and cultural diversities, have built houses of hair. Despite these differences, they didn’t influence the fundamentals of building the hair houses or their names. However, there are some symbols and inscriptions that hold significances inspired by the lifestyle of the Bedouins, their values, and sometimes, the tribe markings or the seasons. One of the most famous traditional inscriptions of “Sadu” are: the eye, the rib, the molars of the horse, the awirjan, the cache, the tree, and the number. The molars of horses are categorized as the only ones that have a protrusion in one of the faces



Ithra Curiosities:

Rakhm ‘incubation’

Fahad bin Naif, a Saudi-based architect, artist and urban designer who creates architecturally-conscious art projects, was the winner of the third edition of Ithra Art Prize. His installation — Rakhm which means ‘incubation’ in Arabic — aims to conceptually preserve a nursery as both an urban typology and its ‘incubatees’ as an environmental micro-economy.

The title of the artwork mirrors the sensitive and the urgency of the content, the goal of which is to safely nurture an intelligent green infrastructure.

The artwork is an illuminated polytunnel that mimics existing urban nurseries in the region with xeriscaping and endemic drought-resistant plants instead of the stale foreign foliage.

The installation can only be experienced externally, reflecting the lack of interaction between local human inhabitants and homegrown vegetation.

Rakhm challenges the current reality by re-altering the narrative that our environmental economy should give back more than it takes.

More Ithra Curiosities:

Mini Plastic Factory



Creative creations at Tanween, Ithra. 2021.

Less than 10% of all the plastic trash ever produced has been recycled. We see plastic pollution in trees, on beaches, in animals, and even in our food and water. Public awareness and industrial recycling exist, yet the equipment is inaccessible because of its high cost and the lack of knowledge.

Changes in the industry are indefinite and slow, as it keeps on producing plastic as single-use and disposable. The solution requires a daily basis action. Ithra is one of many communities that joined Precious Plastic; an open-source platform for everyone that aims to tackle plastic pollution by turning plastic waste into valuable materials and encouraging more people to take action.



Pearl Oyster Shell
India, 17th-18th century
Diameter: 14.5 cm
Shell, incised
The Aga Khan Museum,
AKM665

Bridges:

Cross-Cultural Conversations

‘The Pearl Oyster,’ by Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis

In our fast-paced, restless world, we sense an increasing need and urgency to reconsider and heal humanity’s relationship with nature. In fact, our very survival depends on returning to a more respectful, humble mindset that acknowledges the fact that all life forms on this planet are not only interconnected but interdependent parts of God’s infinite universe.

In traditional Muslim cultures, many contemplated the timeless beauty of nature and its significance as both a marker and a conduit of God’s blessings. Take this beautiful pearl oyster shell for example. It was collected some 400 years ago and yet, it still inspires our awe with its colorful, iridescent surface – a natural phenomenon of mesmerizing, meditative beauty.

Looking closer, the shell is inscribed with the most exquisite and intricate Qur’anic verses (Suras 109, 112-114, 17: verse 81, 68: verses 51-52, and the beginning of Sura 48) and prayers in eight concentric circles, evoking God’s blessing and protection. Enhancing the shell, which is shaped like a shallow cup, in this way makes a beautiful point about the interdependency of all creation: the inscriptions transform the shell into a conduit for God’s grace as the owner imbibes water blessed by the holy verses from its well.

Written by Special Guest Contributor
Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director and CEO at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto.

In each issue, we feature a special treasure from the **Aga Khan Museum**, one that tells a story, captures a moment and inspires conversation.



‘Al-Qawareer (the bottles),’ by Ahlam AlShedoukhy. One of the EU Ambassador’s favorite artworks.

Bridges:

Cross-Cultural Conversations

‘The era of sustainability,’ an interview with H.E. Patrick Simonnet, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman.

“Art is indispensable to my life, it helps me to find a sense to it...”

In this special issue of Ithraeyat, we feature an exclusive interview with H.E. Patrick Simonnet, the Ambassador of the European Union Delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of

Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman, where he shares his insights and views on sustainability, art, present and future initiatives.

Q1.
What does art mean to you?

A lot, art means a lot for my family and myself. My mother after being a nurse became an historian of art and graduated from the Ecole du Louvre and worked in many galleries in Paris. She really emancipated herself through art. My sister and myself have been brought by her to so many museums that I can hardly remember all of them. But it infused a lot in our minds and my sister is still today an artist (sculptor and painter) and I myself have spent part of my youth painting and drawing, on anything even on the grounds and walls of Paris. I have transmitted that passion to my children who are mini artists...even if they don't like it so much to go to museums. Art is indispensable to my life, it helps me to find a sense to it!

Q2.
What is sustainability, and what are some of the EU's most important sustainability related projects, current and future ones?

Sustainability has become an imperative. People of my generation have all lived without conscience of the "finiteness" of our world and its resources. This is not possible anymore and we need to sharply aware of what entails sustainability. I think that the European Green Deal is the most important initiative of the EU in this regard. In short, it is a set of policy initiatives by the European Commission with the overarching aim of making the European Union climate neutral in 2050.

With this, the EU is taking decisive action to achieve its net emission reduction target of at least 55% by 2030 and be on track towards climate neutrality by 2050 – both these objectives are now legal obligations enshrined in the EU climate law. But this plan has no chance of success if we don't work together with our partners.

The European Green Deal offers a great opportunity to engage more strategically with our partners in the Gulf in these endeavors. And the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a very ambitious agenda, under the leadership of HRH the Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman, as we saw with the announcement of Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives in October last year.

We want to work together. The EU could share its expertise and know-how to accompany and fast track the transition to low-emissions and circular economies as enablers of economic diversification, with a particular emphasis on sustainable investments and green growth. And the Gulf countries have shown particular interest in this kind of cooperation. We also count on the Gulf and KSA in particular as a future source of imports of renewable energies for Europe, green and blue hydrogen in particular.

So we follow with great interest the major developments in Saudi Arabia as concerns hydrogen, the important concept of Circular Carbon Economy as well as flagship projects such the city of NEOM project. We look also forward to the implementation of all the aspects of the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives. These are very promising initiatives and through our dialogue we are keen to explore synergies and ways to reinforce cooperation between EU and Saudi Arabia.

Q3.
Are there any EU-KSA current and upcoming initiatives? Any related to culture and art?

We are following with great enthusiasm and excitement the developments of the cultural scene in Saudi Arabia with extremely interesting professionals from different fields of arts showcasing their creativity and talent. I have also had the pleasure to attend different events such as the MISK Art Week or the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale and hope to be able to experience even more of the cultural scene in Saudi Arabia. Those are top class events! We are all impressed.

As many Saudis know, culture is historically, socially and economically important in Europe and we are eager to introduce European culture to the people and facilitate cultural exchanges between Europeans and Saudis in various fields, be it music, film or education. These come in addition to the activities already undertaken by the Embassies of the 20 EU Member States present in Riyadh. We are also eager to facilitate capacity-building/sharing of expertise. In this regard, we have the ability to bring in European expertise in various fields, in case this could be of use for Saudi counterparts.

In terms of concrete events, we are preparing currently the 1st European Film Festival to take place in Saudi Arabia. Cinematography is a universal art, which explains our idea of facilitating cultural exchange through such a Festival. There will be films from many different European countries but besides showcasing films, we are also looking into bringing some European movie professionals to Riyadh to engage with the Saudi counterparts. We would also like to host a European Food Festival this year in Riyadh, as we know the Saudi love for food, which we very much share.



Q4.

What are some of the misconceptions people here, in KSA, have about the EU?

I would say that while people know a lot about Europe and European countries, not many know a lot about the European Union as such. Hence, our challenge is to make the EU more known among the Saudi public. Despite the lack of knowledge, our ties go very deep in a wide variety of areas, including political relations, economic and trade cooperation, energy, climate change, cultural and security cooperation. We are also proud to be Saudi Arabia's second biggest trading partner in the world.

In terms of overcoming the misconceptions or knowledge gaps, we are hoping to engage further in cultural exchange as a bridge-builder to create mutual understanding. Earlier in February, we organized together with the Prince Saud Al Faisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies an intense one week training for 35 Saudi, Omani and Bahraini diplomats on EU affairs to help prepare them for representing their countries in various European capitals.

Q5.

What motto do you live by?

There are many mottos I could go with... but one I like is from this movie by Francois Truffaut "Jules et Jim", when one of the characters say that he wants to be "curious by profession"...I like that being curious of people, things, nature....my interest for art stems from this curiosity. And if you are curious, you tend to live great adventures and you learn to respect people, their traditions and beliefs.

Q6.

Can you show us some of your favorite art (either hanging at delegation/ or home) and tell us about it and why you like it?

The painting I have chosen is "Al Kawareer" ("The Bottles") by Ahlam Alshedoukhy, a Saudi artist. The painting portrays Saudi women – the backbone of the Kingdom's society, and every society around the world for that matter.

I like how the artist herself refers to her paintings depicting women, saying that they are both soft and unyielding. Anywhere in the world, women have to learn to be resilient and strong, to win their independence and to break the glass ceiling (of the bottles). Saudi Arabia is doing very well in empowering women and opening up the labor market to them. 33% of the labor force being female workers is a real breakthrough and the EU is very supportive of that.

But coming back to that painting, I just like it because it is simply beautiful.



'Untitled,' by Mohammed Al-Ghamdi. 2014. Mixed media on wood. 109 x 152cm. Courtesy of the artist and **Hafez Gallery**.

Q7.

Where have you visited in Saudi Arabia, and share with us one of the most memorable visits and why?

I have visited several regions all around the Kingdom, such as Jeddah, Al Ula, Dammam, Qassim, Abha; and I plan to discover inshallah more of the country's richness in 2022. If I need to single out one of those visits, I would say that my trip to Hail was particularly memorable both for its people (so nice and hospitable) and its heritage sites. I had the opportunity to visit Jabal Raat and Al Manjoor, two treasures of Saudi history and heritage.

The rock art left behind by Thamudics and Nabatean civilizations testifies to the long history of the country, inhabited some 10000 years ago. It was very impressive to see such old engravings, it reminded me of the importance of preserving our planet and human heritage for the next generations. Saudi Arabia has a variety of historical sites and a rich potential of becoming a major touristic destination to all history, art and culture lovers

Q8.

Anything else you would like to add that I may have missed to ask?

Many have forgotten it but medieval Muslim scholars, men of arts, science and technology have brought for many centuries their knowledge to Europe and have fed our culture and civilization. More recently, Europe has also brought a lot to the Muslim World and the Gulf, in terms of innovations, new ways of life, new models of solidarity and economic development (and recently vaccines). This formidable exchange will continue I am convinced of it also because it is underpinned by a strong interest for each other's culture and history. That is what is driving my work in KSA.



Bridges:

Cross-Cultural Conversations ‘Singing Trees,’ by Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Louvre Abu Dhabi and Théâtre du Châtelet, with the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies launched the world premiere of Singing Trees in 2020, an interactive traveling installation created by award-winning digital artists from London, Umbrellium, in collaboration with Paris’ Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music and independent producer, Katherine Jewkes.

Combining innovative technology, music and an interactive visitor experience, Singing Trees offered a unique opportunity to engage with, and appreciate, nature. Activating the outdoor landscape of Louvre Abu Dhabi, Umbrellium gave a voice to the palm trees around the museum’s entrance using non-invasive, electronic belts attached to each tree. These belts enabled the

trees to sing together as a choir changed in response to the audiences’ interaction with the work. As visitors moved closer to the trees, the choir became louder and more in sync. Visitors were then invited to hug the tree to amplify the volume of the choir.

The trees sing a combination of songs in English, Arabic and French. In each country that exhibits the installation, new songs are commissioned for the trees to sing. The featured musical pieces for Singing Trees at Louvre Abu Dhabi included Ayyala, a traditional Arabic song that reflects the artistic heritage of the UAE; “Greensleeves,” a traditional English folk song from the late 16th century and the French Medieval choir song “L’Amour de Moy.”

From the Vault:

‘Stories of Re-use’ —
from the collection of Barjeel Art Foundation.

Almost anything and everything can be turned into a piece of art. Reusing elements instead of simply discarding them is a creative act that both inspires and helps the world around us.

Here we reflect over three unique artworks from Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah, each with its own unique story.



‘Abstract, Figurative, Abstract and Figurative,’ by **Hanaa Malallah**. 2010. Layers of burnt canvas and string on canvas, 200 x 400 cm. Art courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah**.



‘Composition,’ by Saleh Al Jumaie. 1980. Oil and pressed zinc, multi plates, 99 x 99 cm. Art courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah**.



‘Ras Al Jamal (Head of a Camel),’ by Khazaaal Awad Qaffas. 1999. Bronze, 25 x 68 x 28 cm. Art courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah**.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

‘SIMPLER, MORE SUSTAINABLE TIMES.’

The thermos shared, cleaned and reused. The clothes and household items passed down generations. The close connection to nature through picnics, camping and stargazing. Perhaps it was lack of digital options in the past that helped us appreciate the natural

world around us, taking more care of the small things to last longer.

Here we reflect over a simpler time, a time of outings, turning the desert into farms, and recycling to reduce waste.

1947 | Al-Kharj
An agricultural mission.



Rarities from the Aramco Archives.



1950 | Saudi and western farmers inspecting an onions field.

1950 | Al-Kharj

Saudi and western farmers inspect melons field.



1993 |

Faisal I. Al-Dossary assists children in garbage segregation as a part of waste management program.



1991 | Jeddah

Compressed aluminum tin cans for recycling as part of waste management.



From the Field:

A ‘golden’ glimpse from Desert X Al-Ula

‘Gold Falls.’

By Serge Attukwei Clottey. 2022.

A crucial starting point for his ‘Afrogallonism’ projects are yellow plastic gallon containers, ubiquitous in Accra, which Clottey incorporates into his sculptural practice in order to raise awareness of the water access crisis and to call local communities into action. The containers, historically used to import cooking oil and frequently repurposed as vessels for water storage, are cut into small tiles and bound with copper wire.



Through cutting, drilling, stitching, and melting materials, Clotey creates sculptural installations that are bold assemblages and that act as a means of inquiry into global consumption, climate change, and the languages of form and abstraction. Clotey's newly commissioned installation, *Gold Falls* (2022), expounds on a through line in his practice, using the yellow plastic Kufuor gallons to create an aurulent mirage draped along the desert rock surfaces in the canyon valleys of AlUla.

It appears as a waterfall unfolding and cascading on the rocks, both in mimicry and dissonance. Its golden yellow shining on these cliffs is simultaneously representative of the wealth and the lack of it within this bereft yet naturally resplendent place. Installation view courtesy of the artist and Desert X Al-Ula 2022. Photo taken by Lance Gerber.

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About Ithra

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) is one of Saudi Arabia's most influential cultural destinations, a destination for the curious, creatives, seekers of knowledge, and more. Through a compelling series of programs, performances, exhibitions, events and initiatives, Ithra creates world-class experiences across its interactive public spaces that bring together culture, innovation and knowledge that are designed to appeal to everyone.

Connecting creatives, challenging perspectives and transforming ideas, Ithra is graduating its own leaders in the cultural field. Ithra is **Saudi Aramco's** flagship CSR initiative and the largest cultural contribution to the Kingdom. Ithra's components include the Idea Lab, Library, Cinema, Theater, Museum, Energy Exhibit, Great Hall, Children's Museum and Knowledge Tower. For more information, please visit: www.ithra.com

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