

ithra

by aramco

ISSUE NO. 002



Artist: Lulwah Al Homoud

# ithraeyat magazine

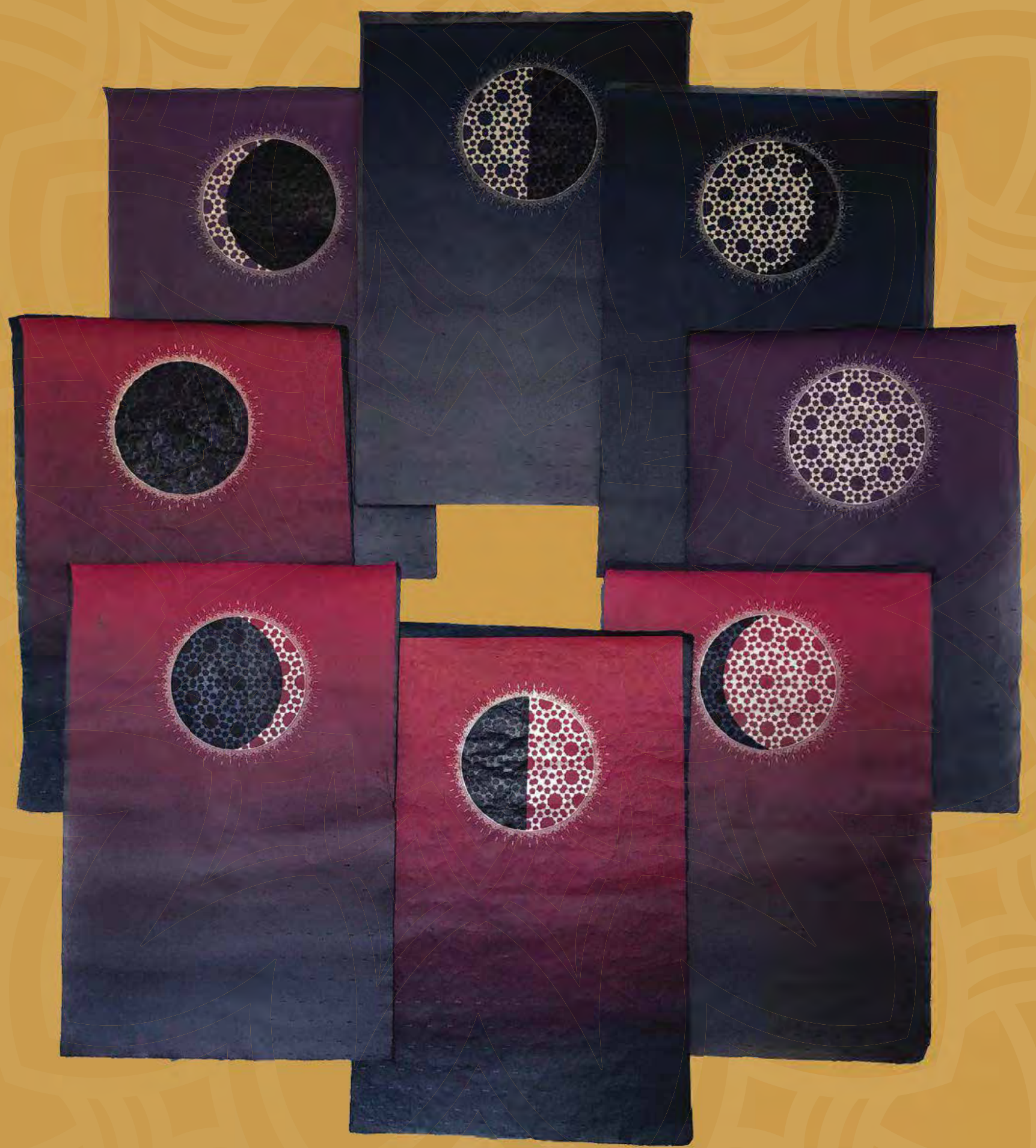
May 2020



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.



‘Moon and Tides,’ by Saudi Artist Basmah Felemban.  
Courtesy **Basmah Felemban** and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

**“The Festival, the Festival is come!  
The Eid is here and celestial blessing come! Strike  
up the drum and sound the cry: There! A brightness  
waxing. The moon is come!”**

— 13th century poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi

We welcomed a different Eid Al-Fitr in 2020. Smaller in scale, with a cap on the number of people allowed to meet and celebrate together, this year’s ‘festival of the breaking of the fast’ reminds us to count our blessings during one of humanity’s toughest chapters. The world welcomed seeing the crescent moon again, a beloved tradition of anticipation as the end of Ramadan is declared.

Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) said: **“Do not fast until you see the crescent moon and do not break your fast until you see it, so if it is obscured from your vision, then calculate it.”**

The Islamic calendar is based on lunar cycles, as opposed to the Gregorian calendar which is based on the solar cycle. New months start and end with each **new moon ‘born.’** The average new moon appears every **29.53** days, so the lunar months are a bit shorter compared to the Gregorian months, which usually last **30 or 31** days. There are special formulas that can be used to calculate the birth of a new moon, but most opt for the traditional way of going out and trying to see it.



Eid is celebrated for three days, with a special Eid prayer on the first day. Everyone donning new clothes, some traditional, some contemporary. Children are given a ‘Eidiya’ (a gift of money), so they can go and shop for something special.

As we pray for better days, we welcome this Eid with one of its most cheerful anthems from the 1980s, sang by the iconic Egyptian singer, Safaa Abou El Seoud: **“Ahlan ahlan bel Eid/Marhab marhab bel Eid”**

(Welcome, oh welcome Eid/  
Greetings, oh greetings to Eid)  
followed by the happy hooray that everyone knows by heart **“He he heey/ He he he, heey”**.

Across generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, this Eid song is remembered and shared as joyous proof of a more innocent time, one we hope to have again.

# Eid Mubarak Everyone.





‘Badr Al Badoor,’ by pioneer Kuwaiti artist **Thuraya Al-Baqsami** .Courtesy **Barjeel Art Foundation**

# A Eid Gift

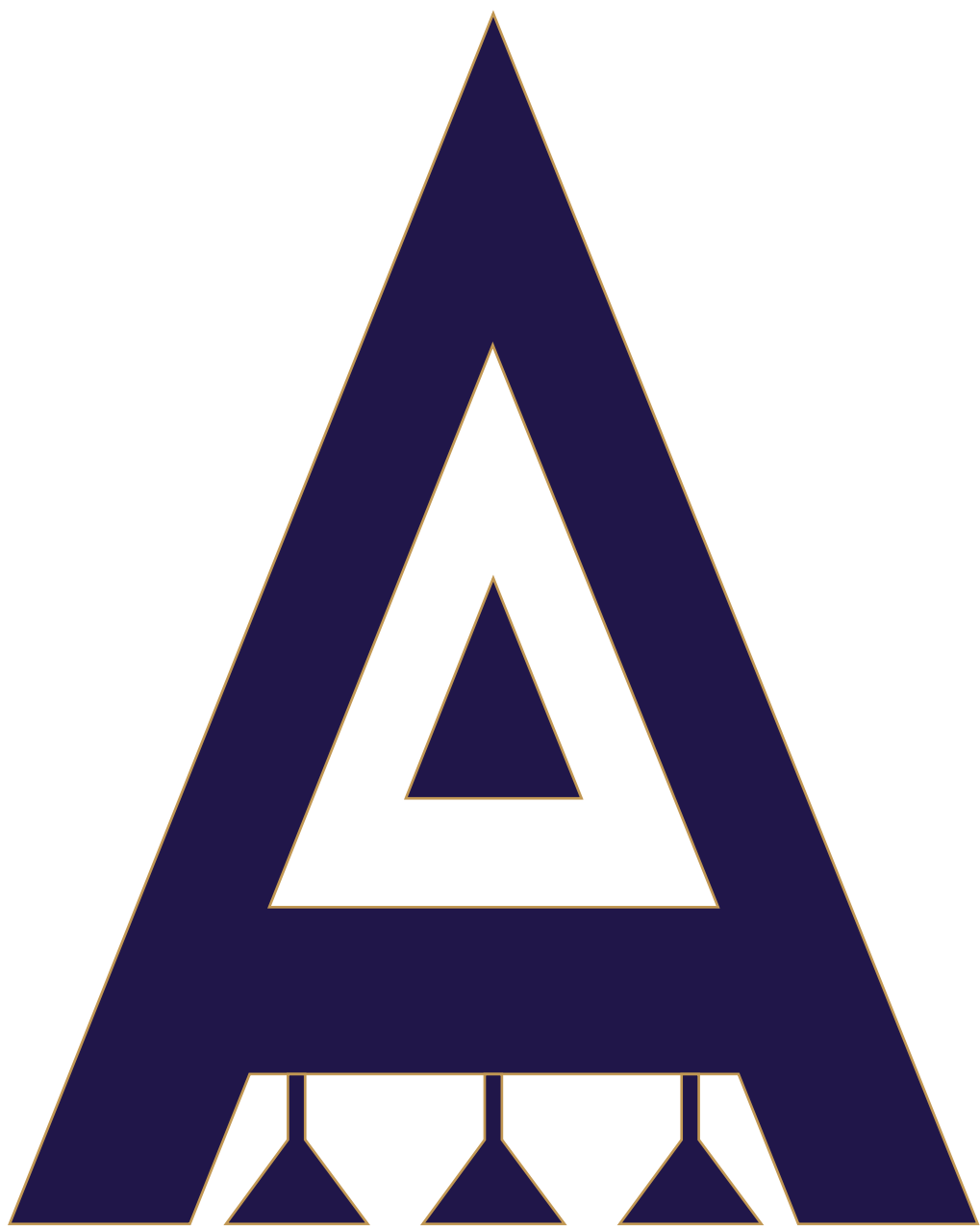
Try your hand at coloring some of the great Middle Eastern masterpieces, such as this festive Badr Al-Badoor here, by **downloading** your copy of a coloring activity booklet, courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation.



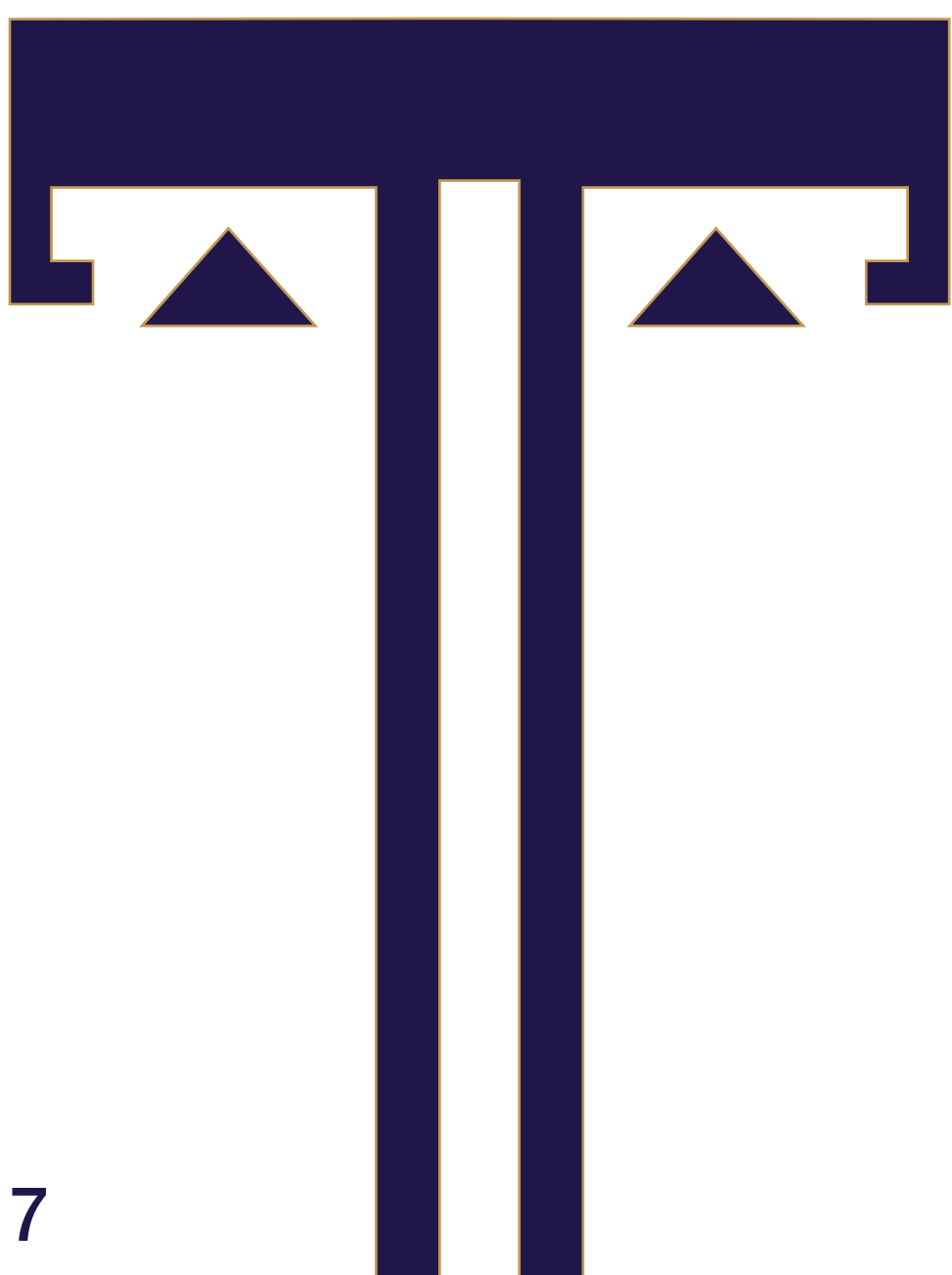
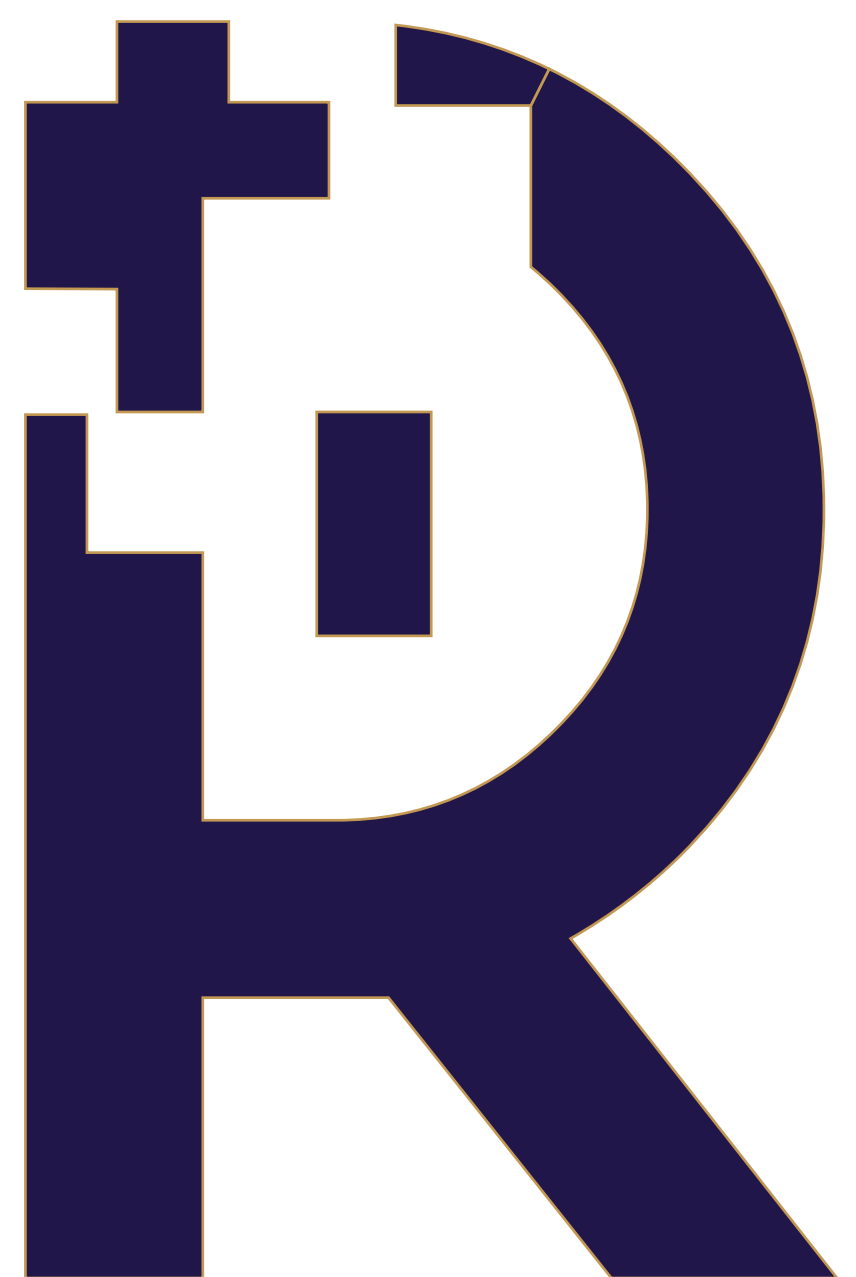
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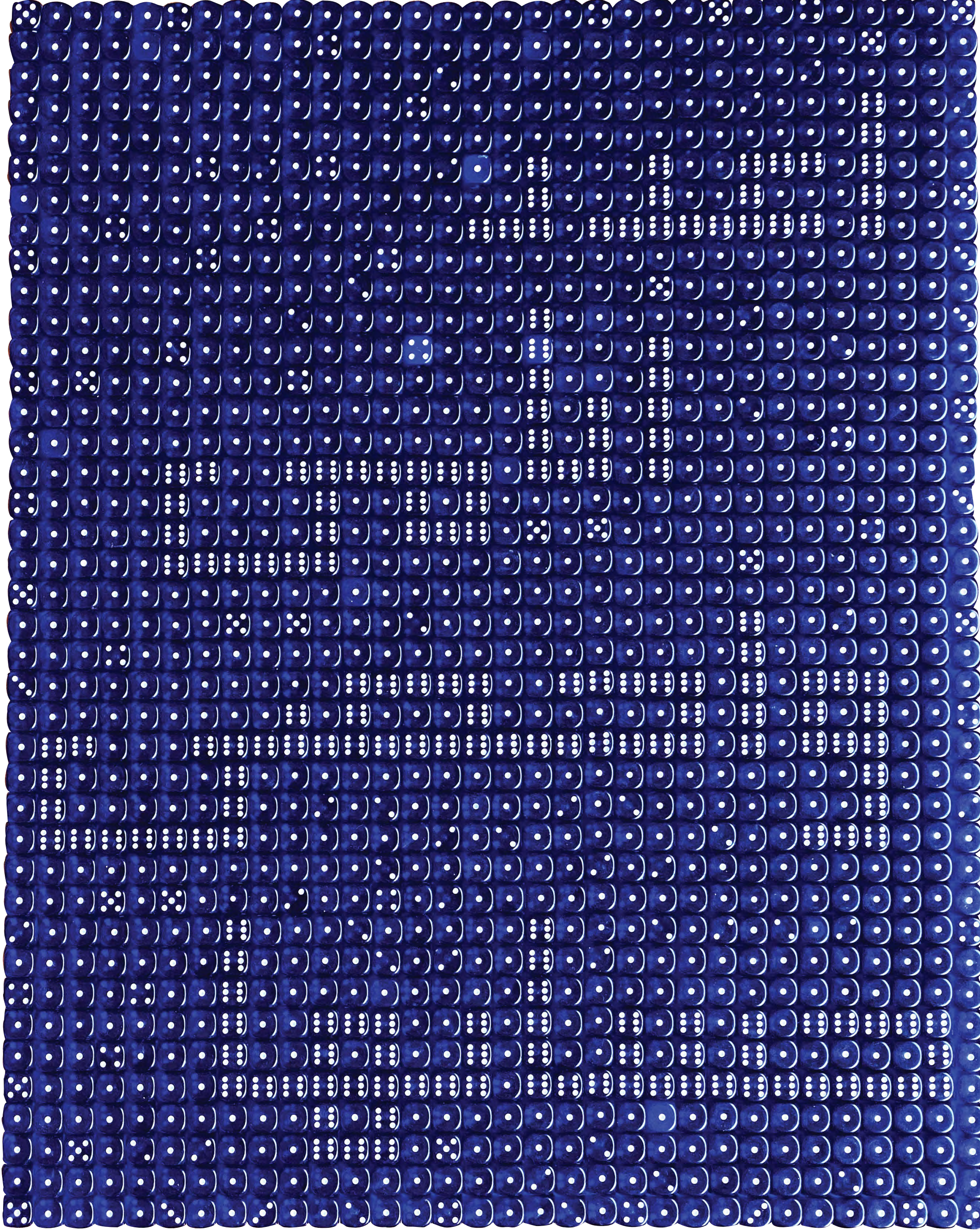


Meet our ‘theme-special’ featured Saudi artist, **Lulwah Al-Homoud**, a pioneer in contemporary art.



“Geometry, as a visual aspect of math, changed my life and allowed me to perceive beauty in a new way....”



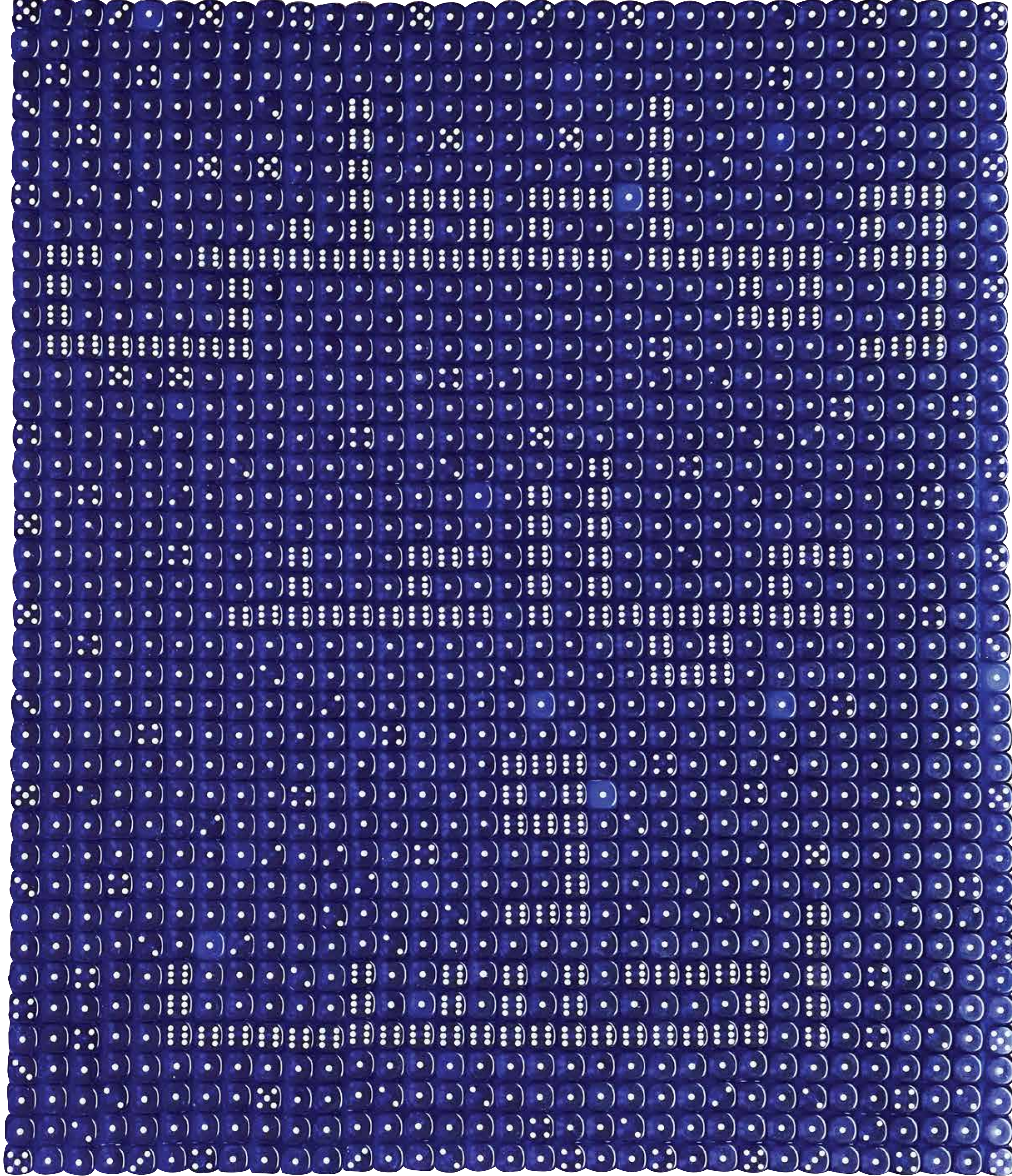


# Numbers

Number of cases of those infected with COVID19-. Curfew from this hour to that hour. The prices of this and that; the number of days things were closed or open; the distance that must be kept as part of social distancing; and the capacity allowed within public places. Numbers and figures dominate our lives in one form or another.

From the reported facts and statistics that impact our mobility today due to the global health crisis to the numbers found in our IDs, our phone numbers, grades at school and at work, our weight and height, our age, and numerous other ways. In this second issue of Ithraeyat, we pay homage to numbers and their place in our lives. **Numbers** are everywhere, in our architecture, in our cars, in our food, in our clothes, and even in our bodies.





The art on the cover is an exclusive debut piece by award-winning **Lulwah Al-Homoud**, who was influenced by the daily news of numbers and how – in some ways – our lives are impacted by the unpredictable outcome of a roll of dice.

The poem featured is by Abū I-’Atāhiyya (748-825/826), one of the earliest philosophical poets and a prolific poet of ascetics. He was also the first Arab poet of note to break with the conventions established by the pre-Islamic poets of the desert and to adopt a simpler and freer language in poetry.

The lines featured are roughly translated to: **“I am counting my days and trying to figure their sum  
Ignoring not what I am calculating...”**





‘Imagined Maps: In search of the lost Arabian City of the Sands...’ by **Sheikha Alyazia bint Nahyan Al-Nahyan**.

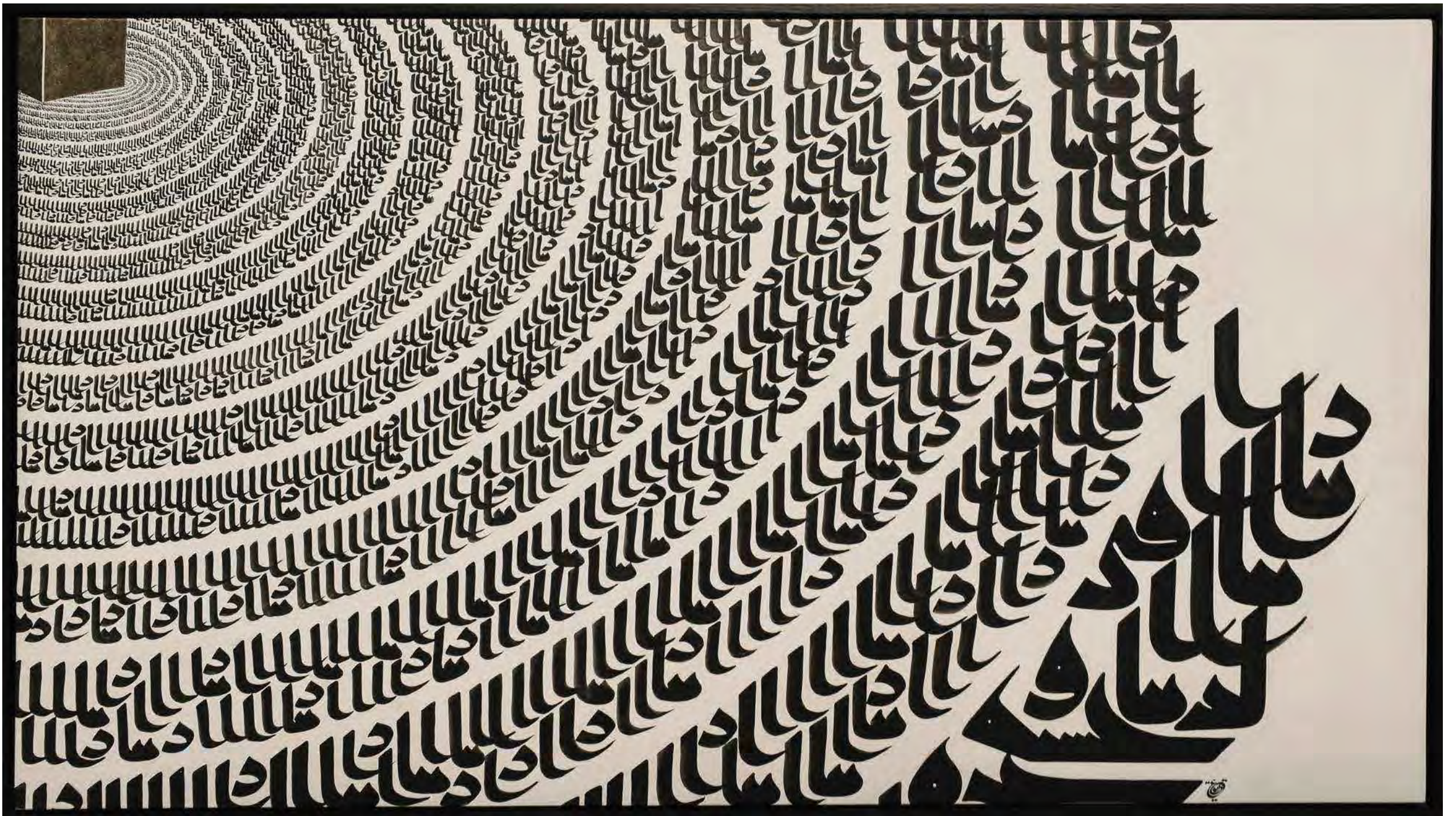
# Cultural Calculations

At the center of all travel routes and exploration is accurate numeration. Baghdad and Granada were the Arab capitals that boasted many celebrated travelers. One such traveler was Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217). He was educated in arithmetic, Qur’an studies and history, and set sail from Granada on his many famed journeys that included pilgrimage to Makkah.

In his detailed sketching (in 1185 AD) of cities and people, he wrote: “this island” Sicily... “is the length of seven days.” Time was used as a description, as it is used today with modern day flight plans. Trips range from a 30-minute flight to a 14-hour long haul.



# The Art of Numbers



‘Tawaf 1,’ by **Azra Aghighi Bakhshayeshi**. From Ithra’s art collection.

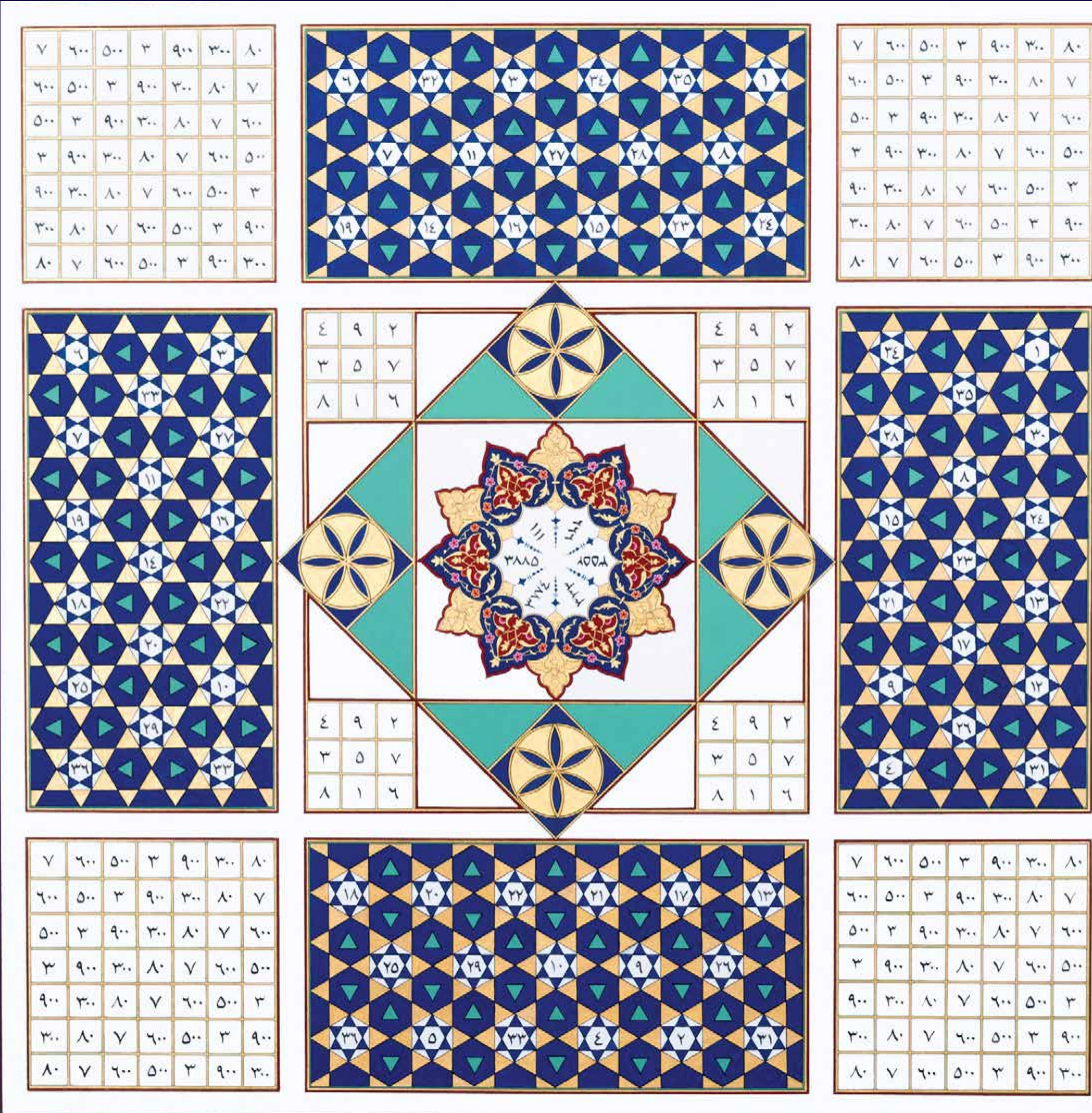
**“Mighty is geometry;  
joined with art, resistless,”** Euripides (Greek playwright and poet; c. 485 BCE–406 BCE)

We all have a favorite number. Certain numbers, like **number 7**, hold a universal special place in people’s hearts and beliefs. Seven was special long ago, even as far back as ancient Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations, which identified seven planets and framed seven days of the week around them. Until today, we still use seven days to represent a full week.

In Islam, there are references to ‘seven heavens,’ and how during the rituals of pilgrimage, Hajj and Umrah, Muslims perform the tawaf, where they go around the Holy Kaaba in Makkah, seven times. The number seven is revisited across various Muslim and Arab cultural mediums such as art, architecture, folklore, and literature, “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad,” in the popular 1,001 Arabian Nights tales being a prime example.



# The Creative Numbers of Well-being.



‘Sun from the Heavenly Bodies series,’ by **Dana Awartani** Courtesy Dana Awartani and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

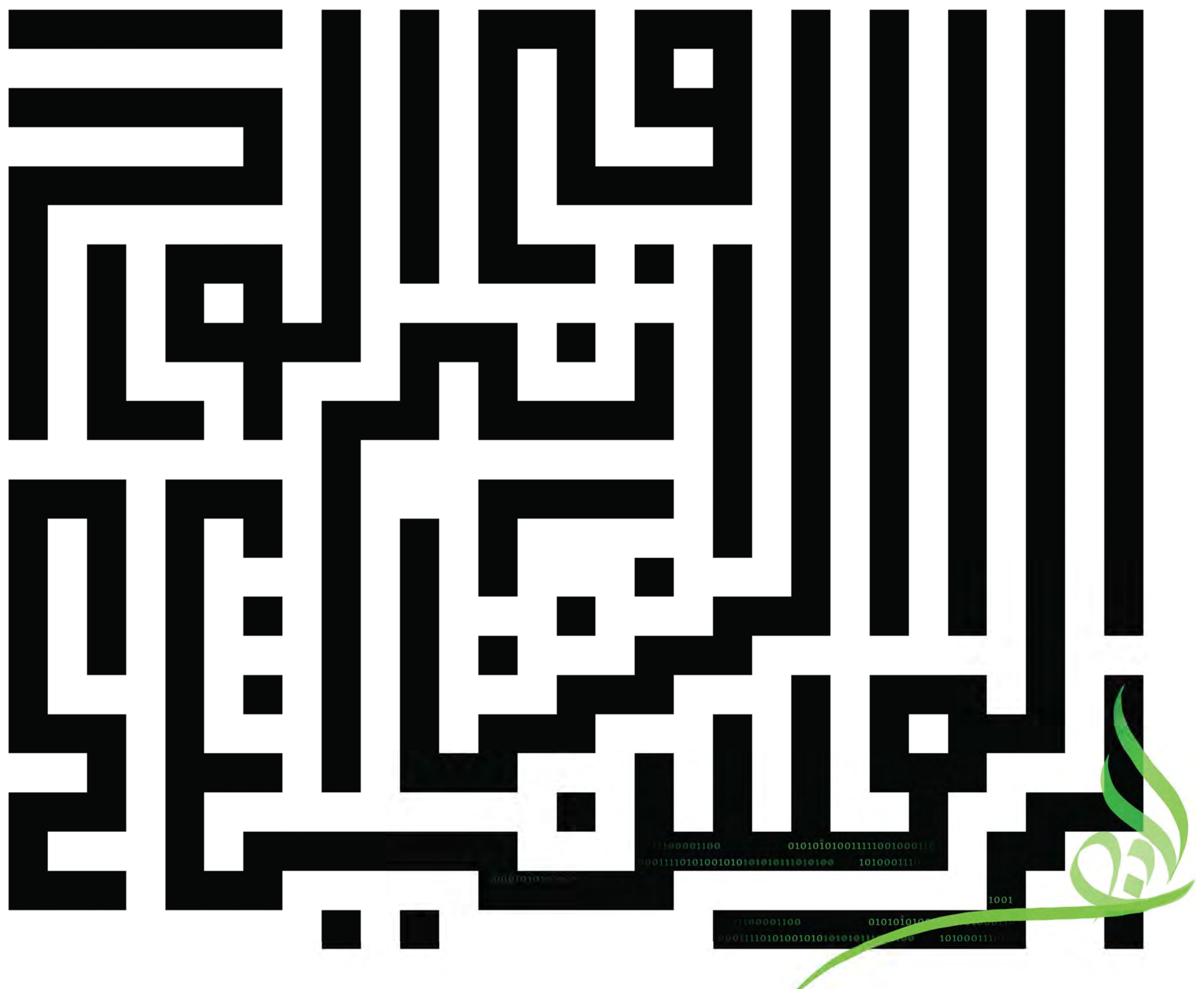
“If you tried to count Allah’s blessings, you would never be able to number them,” (16:18) Qur’an

Take one deep breathe. Take another. Hold, and then slowly count to **10** as you exhale. These ‘calming counts’ are one of the oldest and simplest ways to reduce anxiety and rebalance oneself. Counting brings about a soothing sense of relaxation through its familiarity, and helps us refocus our attention on the present moment.

We need numbers in our lives in more ways than **one**. The ever-changing social and global dynamics have raised the importance of overall wellness and well-being in everyday life.



# Arabic Treasures:



Exclusive calligraphic Kufic reinterpretation of poem. By Saudi artist [Hind Al Ghamdi](#)

**“A young soul in my ageing body plays,  
Though time's sharp blades my weary visage raze  
Hard bitter in a toothless mouth is she,  
The will may wane, but she a winner stays. ...”**

Poetically capturing the essence of our deep fears of getting old and losing to time, one of the Arab world’s greatest poets ironically died too young to really feel the words he so timelessly composed.

Abu At-Tayyib Ahmad ibn Al Husayn Al-Mutanabbi, known to the world simply as Al-Mutanabbi, was killed when he was around 50. A controversial figure in his own lifetime – he was murdered in 965 AD by those he insulted in his poetry. That is how seriously poetry was once taken.



# Ithra

## Curiosities:

### Visible numbers



Panel from a 15th century Spanish Ceiling (LACMA collection).

The renowned geometry scholar Professor Keith Critchlow, who passed away only last month, was famous for having revived the traditional practice of Islamic geometry both in the Islamic world and the West. His work moved many Saudi artists including Ahmad Angawi and Dana Awartani to explore the potential and application of traditional Islamic geometry

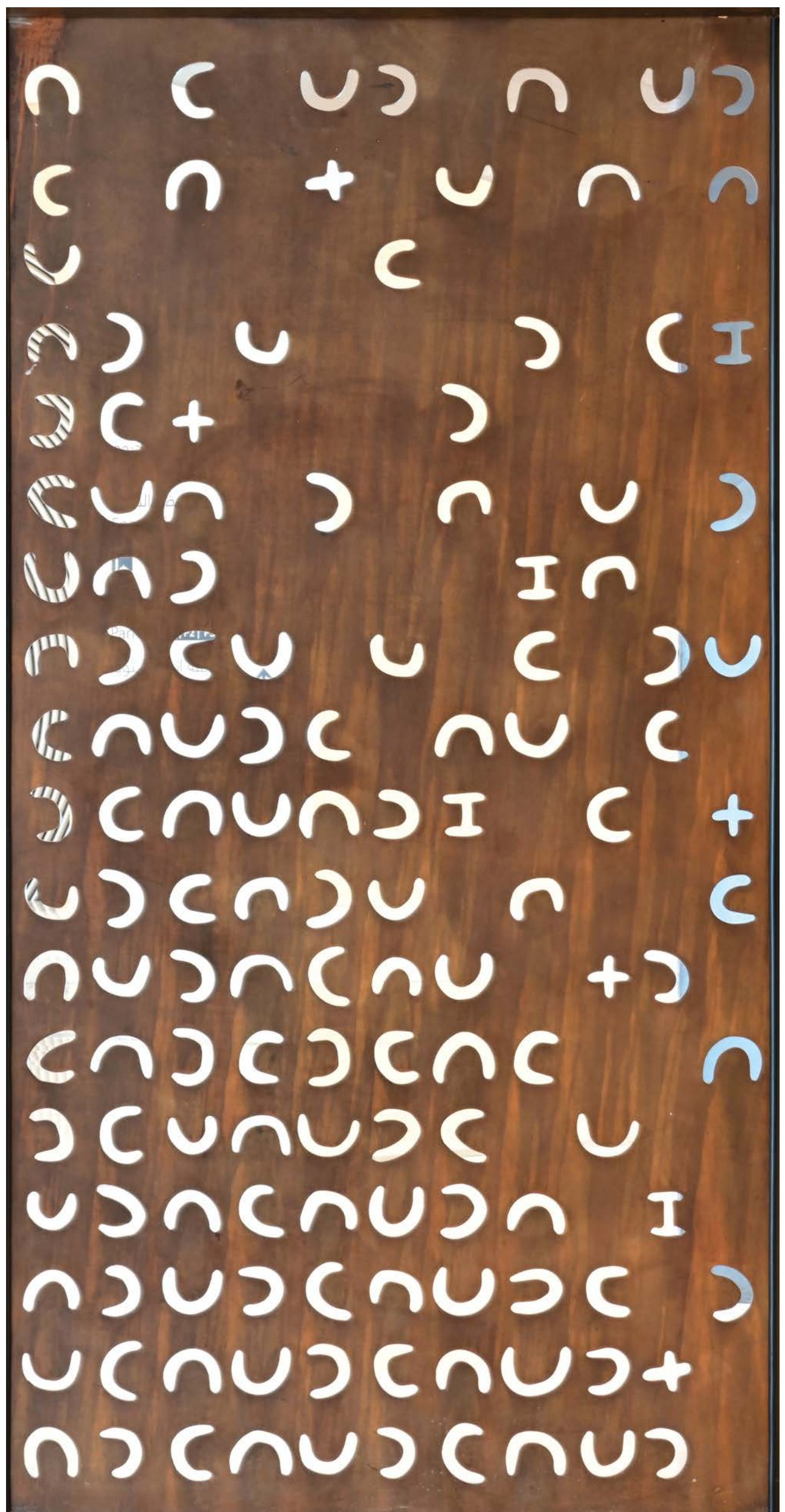
in contemporary art. Moreover, his work and guidance also led the eminent Saudi scholar Dr. Minwer Al-Meheid to painstakingly reconstruct the famous minbar (pulpit) of Saladin (which had burnt down in the 1960s) in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque using the traditional skills of Islamic geometry that had been lost until then.



# More Ithra

## Curiosities:

### The Seven Gates



Installed in Ithra's Plaza area are seven history gates. The number seven represents Well No. 7, also known as Prosperity Well, which was the first well in Saudi Arabia to produce oil in commercial quantities. These gates were designed to reflect the history of the Arabian Peninsula through artistically engraved designs.

Gate One: Petroglyphs.

Some of the earliest evidence of human presence is through petroglyph rock carvings dating back 15,000 to 20,000 years. The artwork pattern on this gate is a contemporary interpretation of these Petroglyphs.



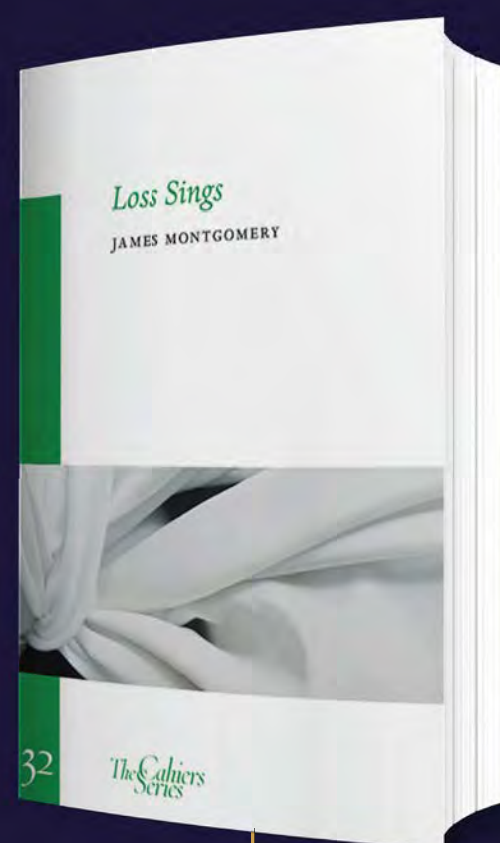
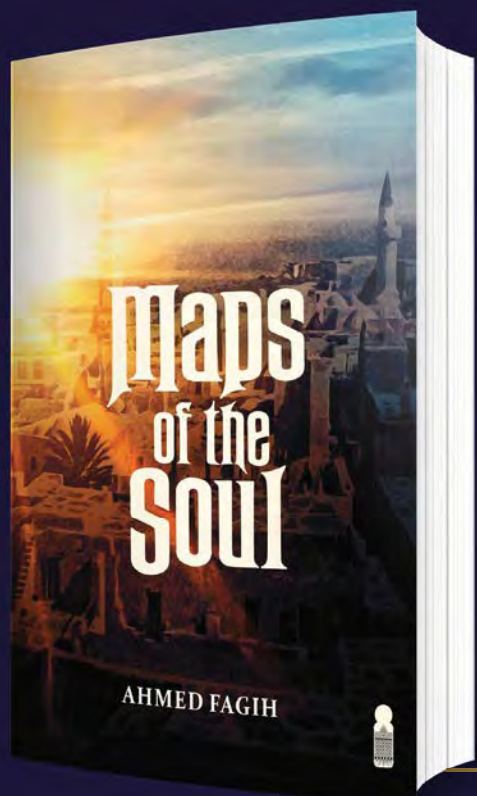
# From the Bookshelf

Numbers help us organize our books: by the Dewey Decimal, by best-seller rank or its review score, or by the year a book was first published. Numbers give them internal structure as well. Our beloved storyteller Sheherazade counted each of the nights she spent spinning tales for King Shahrayar, where one story nested inside the next until she reached the fabled 1,001 (Alf Laylah Wa Laylah). Here are five more English translated books from Arabic literature to discover, all of which are organized by numbers.

## Maps of the Soul

By Ahmed Fagih, translated by Thoraya Allam and Brian Loo

A contender for the “longest Arabic novel,” Ahmed Fagih’s *Maps of the Soul* appeared in **12** volumes. The action starts in the 1930s, with a man named Othman al-Sheikh leaving his small town in the Libyan Sahara and moving to Tripoli, which was then under the rule of Fascist Italy. Only the first three volumes are available in English, but they can stand alone, shaping a picture of mid-twentieth-century Libya.



## Loss Sings

By Al Khansa and James Montgomery

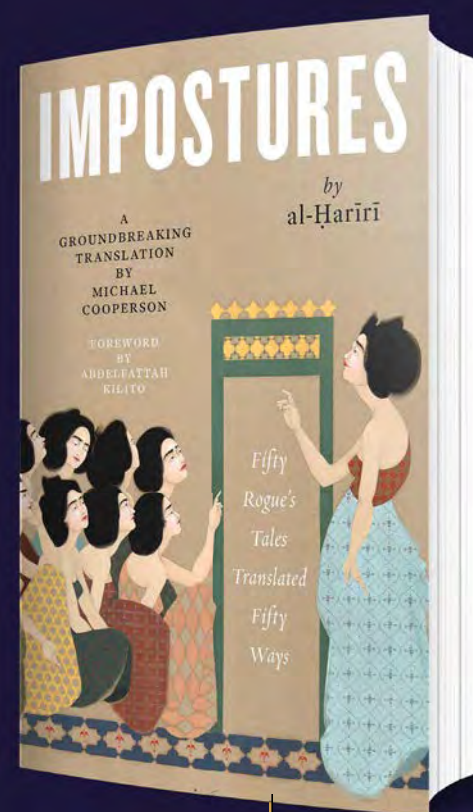
Al Khansa (645-575 CE) is our **#1**, and *Loss Sings* brings us the works of this Najdi poet by pairing her elegiac, grief-struck poems with Arabist James Montgomery’s own experience of death. Al Khansa was called “the finest poet among the jinn and the humans” (by al-Dhubyani) and “the greatest poet among those with breasts” (by al-Nabigha). An early convert to Islam, she was one of the first great Muslim poets.



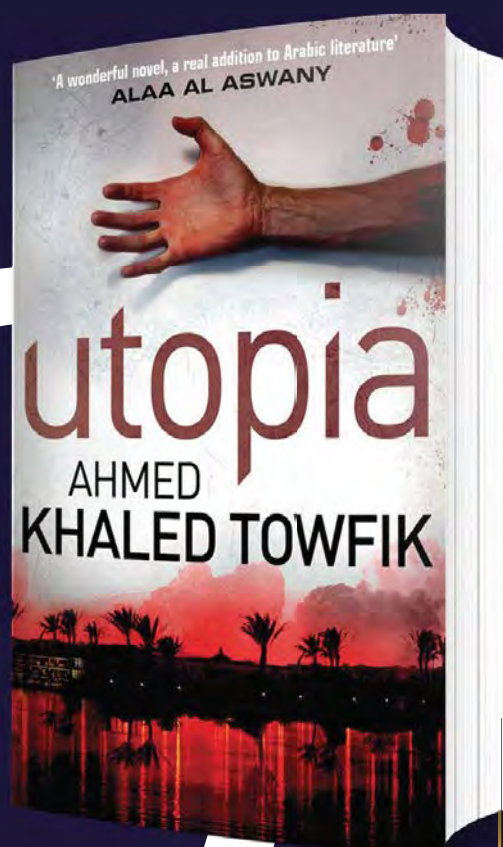
## Impostures

By al-Hariri, translated by Michael Cooperson

Basran poet-scholar al-Hariri (1122-1054) was a great composer of maqamat, and these works are often labelled “untranslatable.” Michael Cooperson has nonetheless brought the 50 playful tales of the Maqamat al-Hariri into 50 different English styles, from that of Sinclair Lewis to Virginia Woolf to English hymnists. Each translational method offers a fresh way of looking at the adventures of the tales’ roguish Abu Zayd.



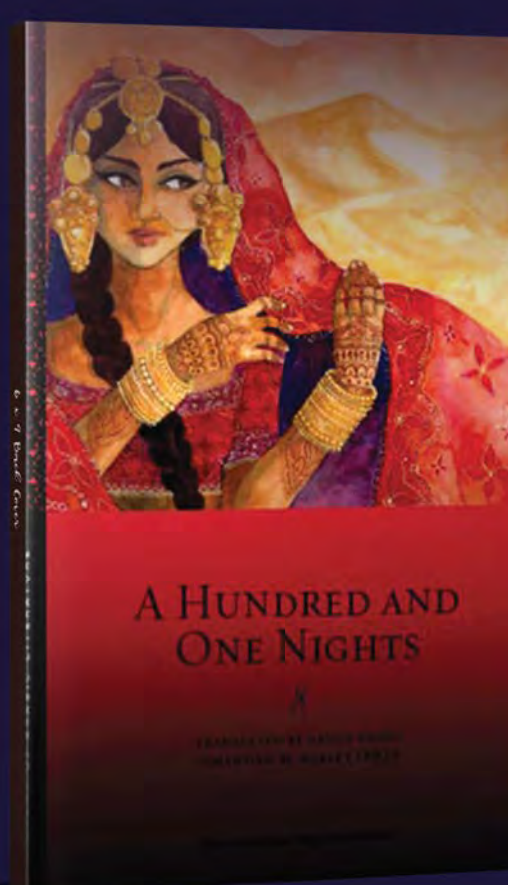
50



## Utopia

By Ahmed Khaled Towfik, translated by Chip Rossetti

Ahmed Khaled Towfik— Egypt’s “pop culture godfather”— wrote more than 200 novels in a variety of genres before his death in 2014. He set a new standard in Arabic genre work from science fiction to Young Adult to horror, and his Paranormal books are currently being made into a Netflix series. His compelling dystopic Utopia is set in Egypt in the year **2023**, in a dystopic future where the country is starkly divided along class lines.



## A Hundred and One Nights

Anonymous, translated by Bruce Fudge

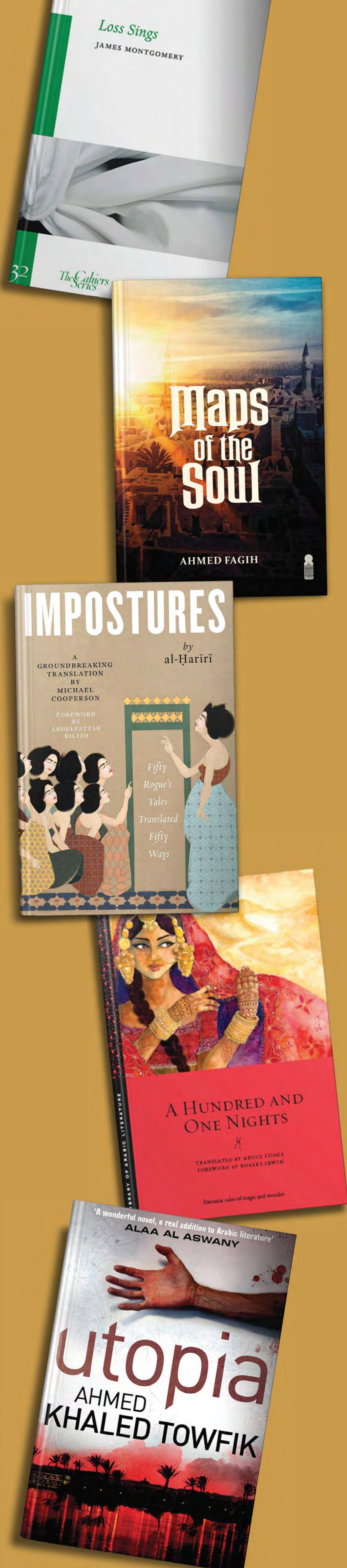
The 1,001 was not the only collection of fast-paced Arabic stories making the rounds of homes and libraries in the medieval period. There was also the **101**, recently translated to English for the first time. If you want an English edition of the 1,001 Nights, wait for Yasmine Seale’s new translation and follow her “Nights Bot” on Twitter at @the\_small\_hours. Until then, enjoy the tales in the 101.

101



## Guest contributor

**M Lynx Qualey** is the editor-in-chief of the ArabLit cooperative and founder of **ArabLit.org** a website that brings together translators, authors, publishers, critics, academics and readers around discussions of Arabic literature in translation.





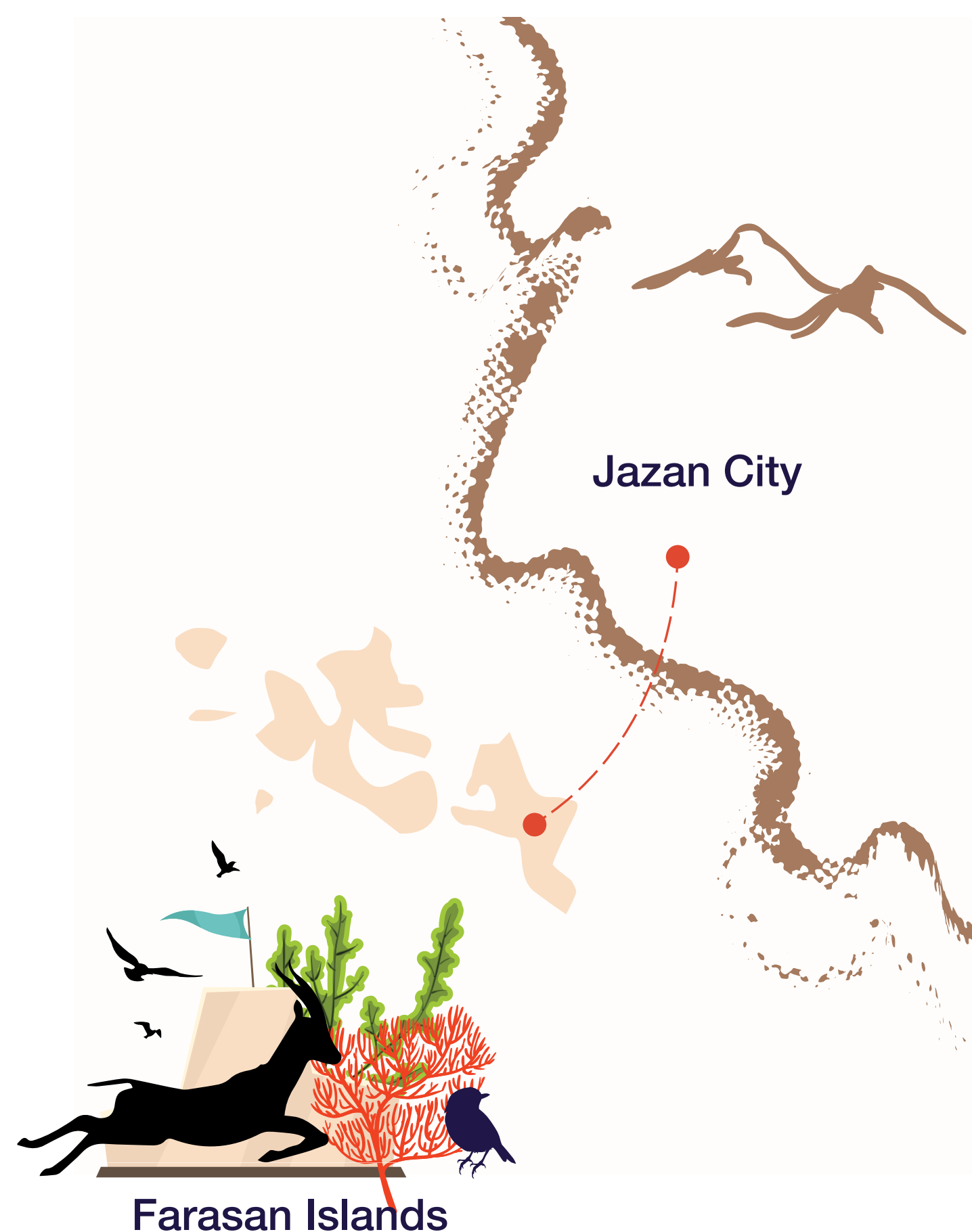
# Add to your bucket list:

## The Paradise Islands of Farasan



Many islands, many species. A true jewel of natural beauty and biodiversity, the Farasan Islands in the Red Sea have more than **230 fish** species and **50 species** of coral. They are a large archipelago of over 170 islands and islets of uplifted coral reef lying -40 90 kilometers offshore from the city of Jazan on the south-eastern coast of Saudi Arabia. Filed to Unesco in 2019 as a natural treasure, and currently on its tentative list.

The islands were originally inhabited by fisherman and pearl divers, but are now a protected area that serves as a natural reserve for Idmi gazelles, the greater flamingo, pink-backed pelican, Eurasian spoonbill, osprey, the snake Sarso island racer, sooty falcon, crab-plover, white-eyed gull, lesser crested tern, white-cheeked tern and Red Sea (brown) noddy. Its sea visitors include dugongs, whales and dolphins, green and hawksbill turtles, and manta rays.





# Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

## Gestures with meanings

We communicate in many ways. One of those ways is through ‘nonverbal communication.’ That refers to our gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact (or lack thereof), body language, posture and other ways we can communicate without using language. One of the most common ways of expressing oneself is through hand gestures. What fingers you hold up, and how you move your hands, mean different things in different cultures. Here are just a few.

**“Nonverbal communication forms a social language that is in many ways richer and more fundamental than our words,”** — Leonard Mlodinow, American theoretical physicist and author

## Hand gestures

**In the United States:** Okay, Excellent.

**In Russia:** Zero, Worthless.

**In Japan:** Money.

**In most of the Middle East:** “Ya waylak” (male) “Ya waylek” (female)  
You are in trouble.



**In Italy:** What do you want?  
What are you saying?

**In Turkey:** Someone is beautiful.

**In Morocco:** Be quiet.

**In most of the Middle East:**  
Slowdown or be patient.





**In the United States:** A pinky swear or promise.

**In China:** Same as the thumbs down sign, indicating you are not happy.

**In Spain:** You are skinny.

**In most of the Middle East:** Similar to Spain, it refers to someone being thin or petite.

## Head Movement

Nodding and shaking your head across the **Arab world and many parts of the world:** A nod means ‘yes,’ and a head shake means ‘no’.

**But in some parts of the world,** such as **Bulgaria and Armenia**, it’s the other way around; where a nod means ‘no’ and a head shake means ‘yes’.



## Eye Contact



**In Western cultures:** Eye contact is considered an essential part of a conversation.

**In the United States:** Americans deem someone who does not look into your eyes as shifty or as someone not telling the truth.

**In Brazil:** Eye contact should be prolonged. People see each other through the eyes to determine the sincerity of the person they are speaking with.

**In most African and Asian countries:** Prolonged eye contact is considered rude.

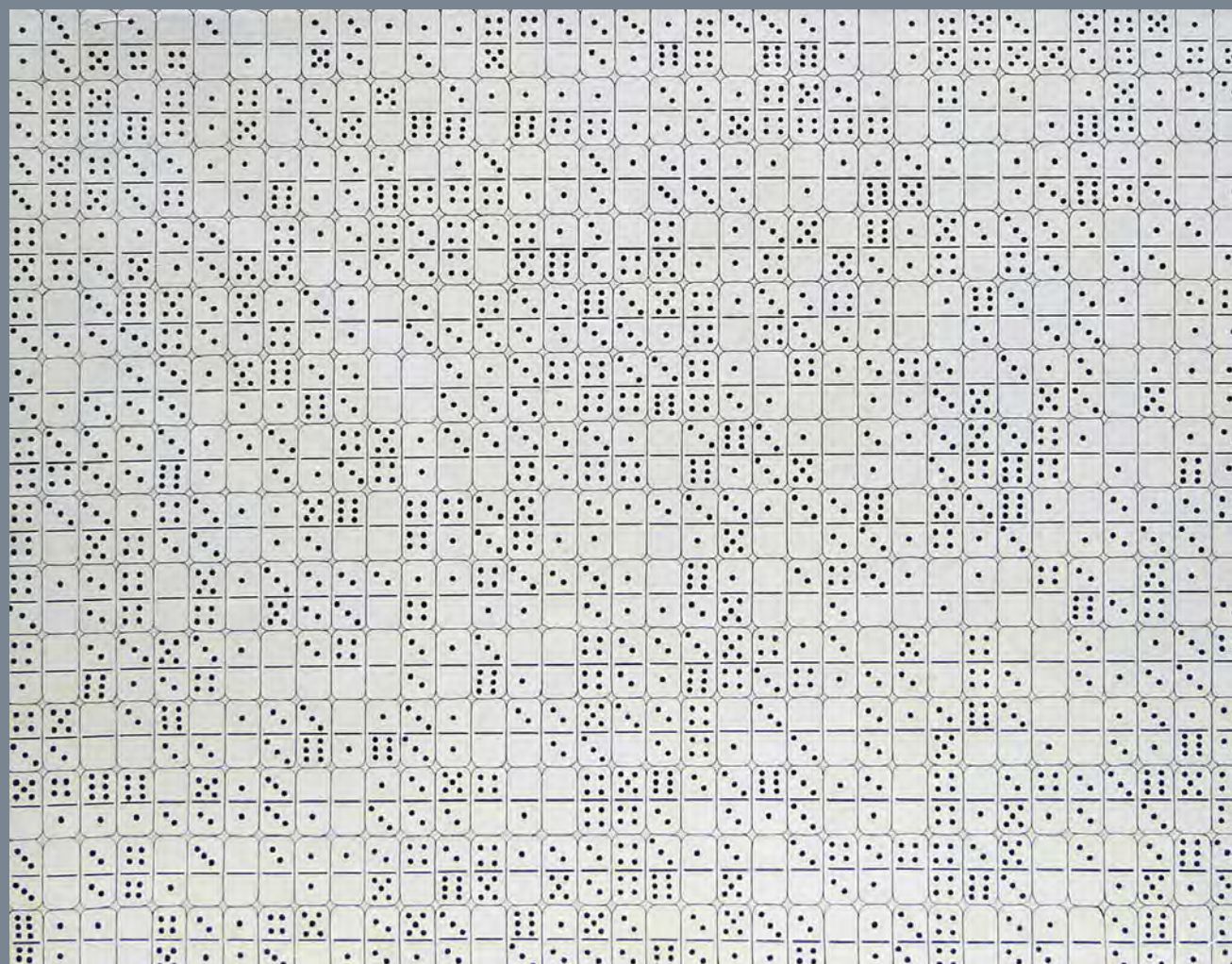
**In Japan:** You can have slight eye contact, but the rest of the conversation should be done with minimal to no eye contact at all. You can look at the neck or other parts close to the eyes.



# From the Vault:

## Creative with numbers.

In this issue, we take out from The Vault creations that capture the theme of numbers, and how numbers connect and disconnect us.



From the UAE: Ebtisam Abdulaziz



From Saudi Arabia: Princess Reem Al Faisal Al Saud



# From the Archives:



Rarities from the Aramco Archives.

MAY  
1965.

Many phones, many numbers: Abdullah Mohammed, a Saudi employee receives production information by radio and telephone at Abqaiq Oil Dispatching Center. Abqaiq, May 1965.



# From the World Wide Web:

## Art stories to browse through

- + A virtual 'Art of Isolation' exhibition in Saudi Arabia
- + Ancient Cave Art Found in Egypt
- + A trove of Russian Avant-Garde Treasures found in Museum Basement
- + Resurgence of Ben Enwonwu, Africa's greatest contemporary artist
- + Art of Japan and the richness of Culture

We look forward to sharing our 'makhzan' of stories with you every month.

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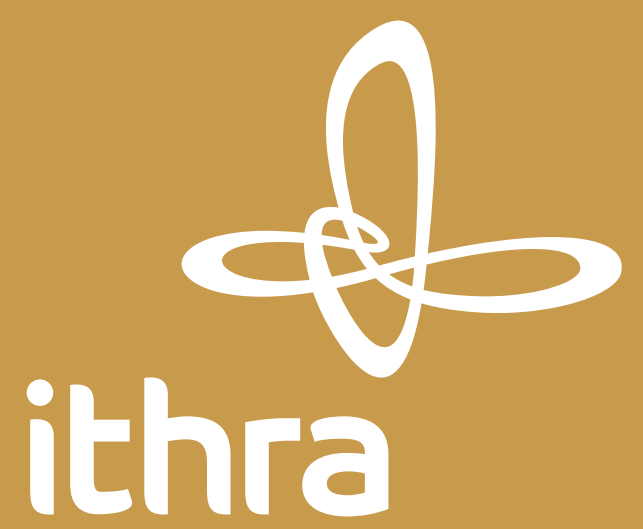
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Special thanks for contributing  
artists & art:







To engage with Ithra's wide range of virtual programs and activities, please check Ithra Connect.

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# About Ithra

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture is one of Saudi Arabia's most influential cultural destination, a destination for the creatives, the curious, and the 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, Archive, Energy Exhibit, Art Gallery, Children's Museum and Knowledge Tower.

For more information, please visit: [www.ithra.com](http://www.ithra.com)

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