

Issue 013



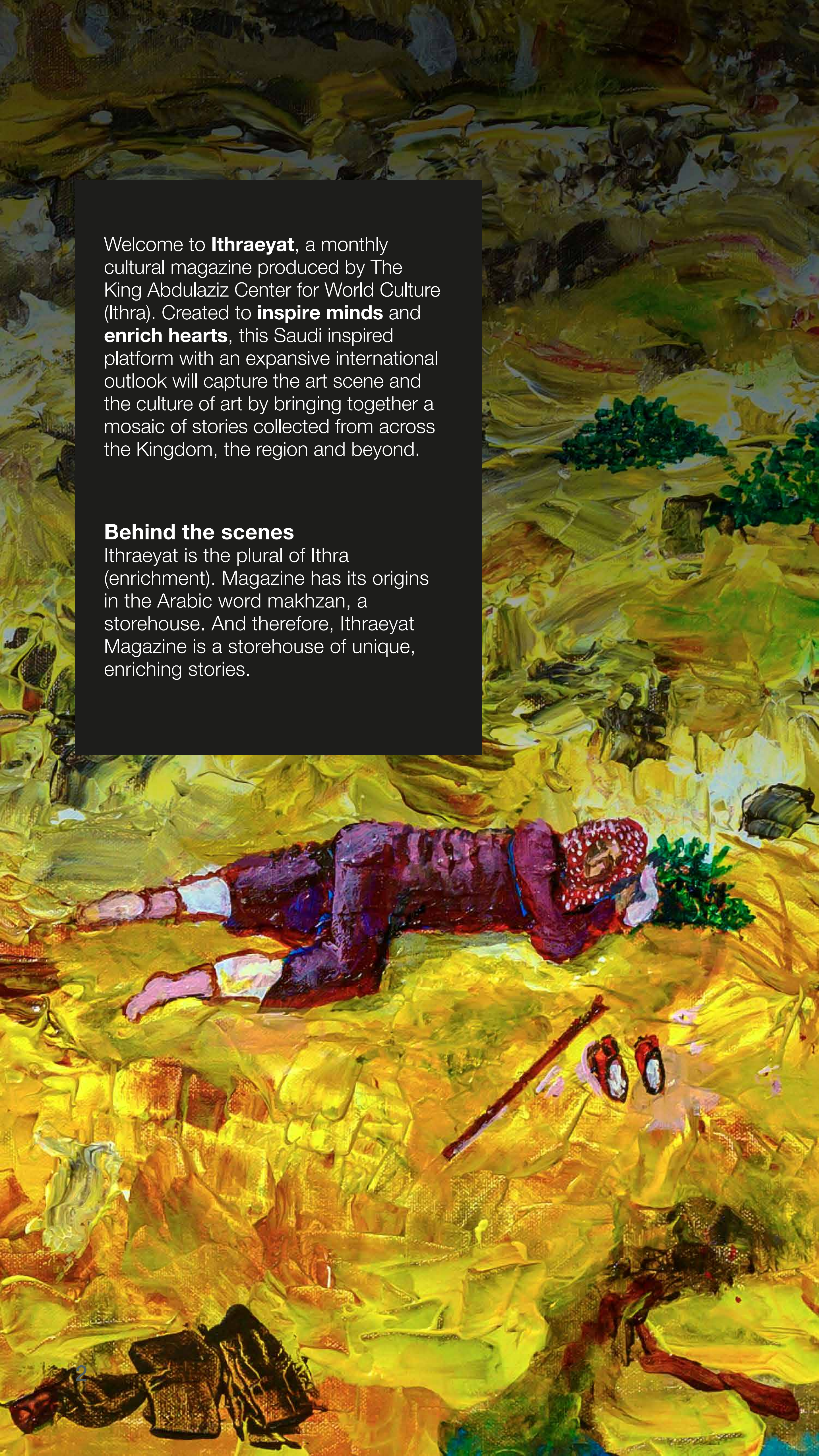
ithra
by aramco

Desert

Prince Badr bin Abdulmohsin

Ithraeyat Magazine

Sep - Oct 2021



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 cover art for the 'Desert' issue by HRH **Prince Badr Bin Abdulmohsin**. Courtesy of Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Cultural Foundation.

Letter from the Editor:

The Music of the Desert

Most of us take the desert and its sands for granted. We see the sand as just part of a scenic background and fall under its spell. But then the sandstorms come, and soon we are reminded of where we are and where we came from. In this special issue themed the **Desert**, we pay homage to a world of poetry, art, creativity and contemplation, rising from within the mirage of bareness of the sands. We had a conversation with the 'Shakespeare of the Desert,' HRH Prince Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Al-Saud and discover his other artistic side, one as colorful and dynamic as his poetry. The cover art piece is His Royal Highness's homage to the many faces of the desert, and the peace one discovers in it as one takes a respite amongst its

sands. Many stories are buried in the desert. So, the next time you visit the desert, search for a particularly tall and deep dune, and as you descend down with your car, listen to 'za'eeq al raml' (singing or shouting sands). An orchestra of deep booming and groaning sounds will come alive, as the pressure of the vehicle's wheels force the sand beneath to sing out its hidden song. An ancient myth says the sound is that of the Jinn waking, while the 13th century traveller Marco Polo described it as "the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments." There is perhaps a less romantic explanation, but for now, let us just enjoy the magic of the desert.

لیدر بن عبدالمحسن



Meet our ‘theme-special’ featured Saudi artist, HRH Prince **Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Al-Saud**, an iconic poet who is known for his mastery of words, and as captured in this issue, is also a dynamic master of the brush and colors.



“Art is everywhere...You can’t stop art,
it will find its way to express itself...”

Prince Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Al-Saud



Portrait:

‘Theme-special’ featured Saudi artist,
‘Shakespeare of the Desert’

— an exclusive interview with Prince Badr bin Abdulmohsin Al-Saud
by Rym Tina Al-Ghazal

Famous for his words, words that touch the hearts of generations of poetry lovers, words known across the north, south, east and west of Saudi Arabia and beyond, words immortalized through poetic verses, songs and iconic sayings, Prince Badr Bin Abdulmohsin in many ways is the poet of the people. They turn to his words to capture their feelings, whether they are praising loved ones like a mother on Mother’s Day, paying homage to a nation on National Day or simply wanting to get lost in the depth of his poetry and the timeless sentiments and memories they inspire. “I paint with my words,” said Prince Badr in an exclusive interview with Ithraeyat’s Editor in Chief Rym Tina Al-Ghazal at his home in Riyadh.

“But poetry is more than just a painting, it is more like a sculpture, multidimensional, where at different angles you see something else, something unique.” Instead of classic Arabic, the Saudi prince uses Nabati, the local dialect, where his poetic creations capture various layers of heritage, romanticism, pride, culture and the spirit of a nation. His poems —and passionate songs using his words— feel close to the hearts and imagination of its listeners and readers. His words feel like home. Prince Badr’s wealth of poetry spans decades, and his journey and words have inspired many other poets, artists and writers to create various art forms. In 2019, on the occasion of World Poetry Day, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)





honored the prince for the artistic contributions he has made over the past 40 years.

"Every form of poetry is unique, but each reflects the universal of the human experience, the aspiration for creativity that crosses all boundaries and borders of time, as well as space in the constant affirmation of humanity as a single family. That's the power of poetry!" UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay said at the occasion. Each art form is a window into the uniqueness of a culture, its traditions, and its people. Besides his legacy as a modern poetry pioneer in the Arabian Peninsula, many of Prince Badr's admirers are unaware of his other creative side as a painter. Each of his paintings has its own style and story. "I like to always experiment," he said. **"Like poetry, once you start a painting, it opens unexpected doors and horizons**

for you." From impressionism to the surreal, portraits, sketches, illustrations and landscapes— the different moods and thoughts of Prince Badr come alive in his art pieces.

Recurring themes include painting various interpretations of his late father, an artistic figure in his own right. Prince Badr is the son of one of the Kingdom's leading poets and former Madinah governor, Prince Abdulmohsin bin Abdulaziz. Other themes include the desert, the glorious Arabian horse, traditional symbols and various abstract elements open to perceptions and analysis. "My art has different styles, so one cannot say, 'aha! this is Prince Badr's art.' But my poetry, while I have written in different ways, people can say, aha! yes, this is him, this is the distinct style of Prince Badr," he said.



Art pieces & poetry courtesy of Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Cultural Foundation

Born in 1949 in Riyadh, Prince Badr studied in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as Britain and the US. He was the founding president of the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts, he curated and produced many important national ceremonies and songs, and has provided a leading supporting role across entities in the cultural fields, such as being on the board of the Saudi Music Commission. He is the Chairman of the Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Cultural Foundation, a foundation that produces and presents Saudi Arabian arts and cultural initiatives, while mentoring and supporting the development of the next wave of artists.

His Royal Highness has been around the world, but it is his beloved desert that holds a special place in his memory and heart. **“I am from this land. My mother is the desert, who embraced me with her sands, who quenched my thirst with her purity, who fed me her fruits, and who covered me with her shade...”**

Here are a few of Prince Badr’s famous (translated) widely quoted lines. Known as ‘The Shakespeare of the Desert’ and ‘The architect of the word’ for his beautifully crafted prose, when the Prince Poet was asked about the desert, he answered poetically with these words: “The desert is like a woman, harsh and strict during winter, but gentle and kind during the fall and spring. Moods of the desert is like that of a woman, deep and powerful.”

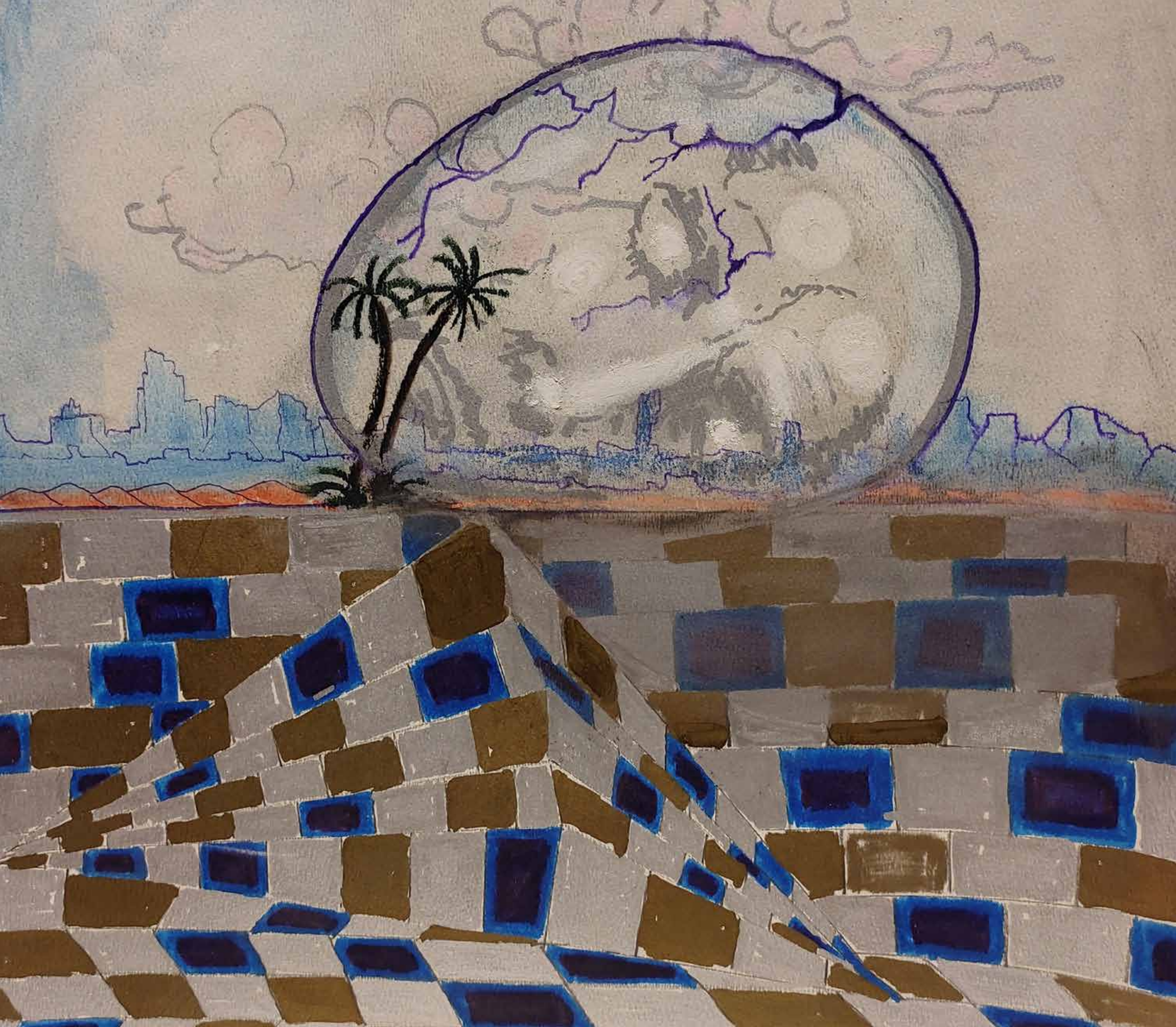
On the cover of this issue of Ithraeyat, themed Desert, is Prince Badr’s piece, that captures the various moods and colors inside the desert, contradicting the stereotypical image of a desert being a barren landscape. “In the midst of it, is a typical person, someone who would have been an ancestor, who would be taking a rest (Qaylula), with his stick nearby. It was safe, it was simple. This painting captures the vibrant life in a desert, from its rocks to its plants to its various sand colors, and the



Art pieces & poetry/courtesy of Badr Bin Abdulmohsin Cultural Foundation

stories it must have been a witness to over the decades, over the centuries,” said Prince Badr as he overlooked his painting. **“The desert is full of life.”** He smiled as he paused, reflecting over his own fond memories of time spent in the desert. “The desert’s complex story can be captured through its palm trees and its camels. The nomads that traveled across its terrain were more “wataniyoun” (nationalistic) and tied to their homeland more than anyone else. They knew their homeland so well, every rock and tree. They were attached to the land.”

When asked about the earlier, difficult days of COVID-19, with lockdowns and curfews, when people found themselves isolated, Prince Badr said he found it difficult to create. “I thought, finally, I have all the time to write and paint, to focus without interruptions, but I just couldn't. I lost that connection, and **art needs connection.** It needs its public and audience. It needs to be debated, discussed and created,” he said. For every completed piece of art and poetry, there are many unfinished pieces. His Royal Highness has a special affinity for the “unfinished,” where he calls on the creatives to keep their



unfinished works, as the “open-ended” pieces can inspire so many endings and possibilities. “Sometimes you don’t want something to end, because the subject is more beautiful than the conclusion,” he said. As for the many completed works, Prince Badr shares how he approaches them. “I must see and imagine the end result when I write and paint,” he said. “If I don’t see the end first, then often it ends up being an unfinished piece. I believe this is the case for many artists, that they need to see the final destination.” Prince Badr then reflects over the decades, and picks out threads that are meaningful to him along this personal memory lane, which in some ways are reflective of the changes to his home and country.

1960s: “It was a simple life. Your worries were just your own and your next door neighbor’s. Now, our worries include international worries and countries

beyond our own borders. People then would rent film projectors, and would have their own personal cinema at home and watch the Egyptian movies that were popular at the time,” he said.

“Before, you traveled 10 kilometers and you were in the bosom of the desert. Now you have to drive over a 100 kilometers, if not more, to reach the heart of the desert.

This is quite telling about how far away we have gone from what defines us, and our core.”

1970s: “Here the year 1973 comes to mind. A historic event of October was the war between the Arabs and Israelis. In many ways it changed our Arab world,” he said. “I had traveled and returned to Saudi Arabia and had my big break with a song written for the Saudi singer Mohammed Abdu, called ‘La Trudi Al Rasel’ (you don’t answer my

letters),” he said. “The 1970s and 1980s saw the slow growth of individual efforts. With fewer things being organized by the Ministry of Information, artists themselves took the initiative. You can't stop art. It finds its way to express itself.”

1980s and 1990s: “I was at my peak here. I hit stardom. I traveled and held poetic evenings across the region. Stardom is a dangerous stage in any celebrity's life. You lose your place as an artist, as a poet, and you have to be that performer. I am not a circus performer but they treat you like that. They would say things like, ‘sit like this, wear this, write us this or that.’ It is a very delicate balance, you have to strive to not to be carried away with your own fame,” he said. “Do not lose yourself and what makes you special. If you are a poet, be a poet, a sincere one. I realized quickly I didn't want to be derailed from my true purpose.” Besides Mohammed Abdu, Prince Badr's musical journey includes many prominent Arab singers such as Talal Maddah, Abadi Al-Johar, Abdul Majeed Abdullah, Ahlam, Hussain Al-Jassmi and Kadim Al-Saher as well as composers, such as Siraj Omar, Mohamed Shafiq, Sami Ihsan, and Abd El-Rab Idris.

2000s: “The year 2000 was distinct, and I wanted something special for that, like perhaps winning the Nobel Prize in Literature.

It is important that the wealth of oral culture and poetry of the Arabian Peninsula be recognized internationally... My goal was a local one, to conquer the local space. And I believe I have achieved that. But that doesn't mean I should stop having high ambitions.” With plans for his full collection of poetry to be published by the Ministry of Culture, and new

pieces created for artists and special occasions, Prince Badr is constantly creating and dedicatedly working. As for the poet within us all, Prince Badr advises that for poetry to really excel, the piece created must “challenge” existing poetry. “If you love Zainab, don't use poetry written for a Salwa. Write unique, true words for Zainab, ones that are only for Zainab,” he said. Another important point he mentions is avoiding artistic extremism, whether it is towards a poetry school or a certain type of art. “I, personally, reject all types of extremism,” he said. “Don't just copy and repeat.

You should surpass your ideal, which is the only way to form your own identity and leave a legacy... always challenge yourself.”





Poetic Pauses

Here is a selection of Prince Badr bin Abdulmohsin
Al-Saud poems translated into English to discover.
Enjoy the wonderful journey of words.

COAL

A scorching coal: I hold it in my palm
Grip it tightly
Pursuing warmth, seeking calm,
And glow for the night
I'm cold, and I'd burn to be warm
For your eyes, longing; and in your eyes, exile
I come from the isle
The isle of the storm
My eyelids hold rain
And the fire
Brings pain
A scorching coal
By God, desertion is cold
And betrayal is icy cold
Roses never grow on a forgotten date
My proud love, your warmth is a feeling that is always late
Restore the moon to its light
And to its sweetest night,
I'm cold, and I'd burn to be warm
I saw you once, my first love
My sweetest love, I adored you once
And offered you a heart whole
In return you gave me a scorching coal
Since that day, exile
And the stormy isle
Harsh and long, the winter nights
With a door and two cruel knights:
The cold and the clouds



ABOVE THE PEAK OF THE CLOUDS

You rise above the clouds
Although you are earth
You rise above the stars
Oh precious earth
Your great glories are behind you
And greater glories are yet to come
In this world there is none like you
He who walked barefoot on the scorching sand long ago
Is worthy of you
He who watered your soil with his sweat, tears and blood
Is worthy of you
He whose camels and sheep have grazed your arid deserts
Is worthy of you
Oh our land
We are yours in frost and flame
We are yours and your bounty is plenty
He who called to God and ruled by his law
Is worthy of you
He who lifted you above all others
Is worthy of you
He who defended you with sword and pen
Is worthy of you
We who deserve you, are your clan
We carry you in our eyes, people and King
You remain above the peak of clouds
Although you are but earth




SWINGS

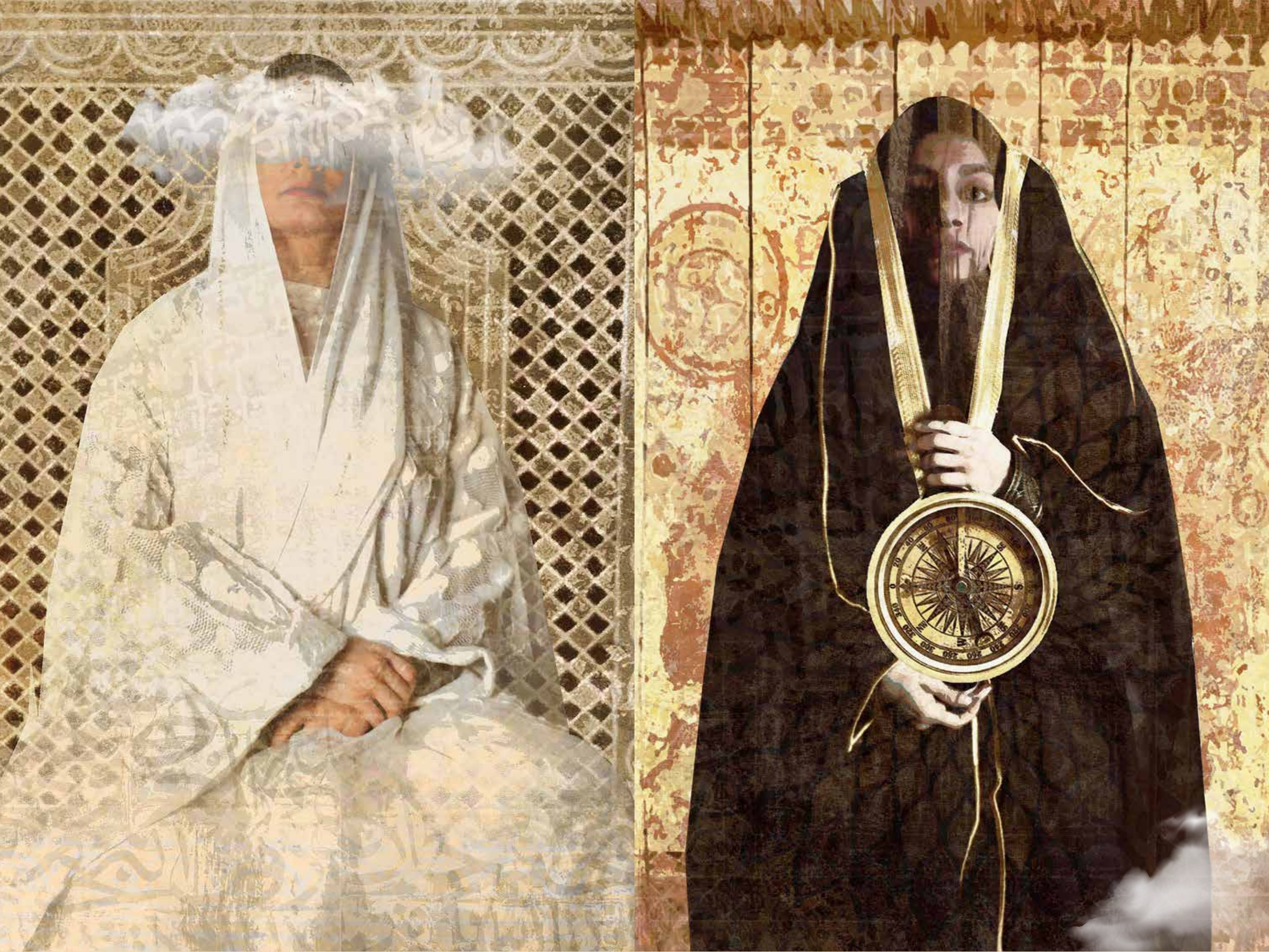
Swings carried children
To the setting sun
Their pockets filled with fear and delight
That is all I recall of them
The passing wind
Folded the gown and veil of a mother
Whose dark eyes held the swings
And whose hands were a heart pulling the strings
That is all I recall of her
The sun, a fleeing horse
Towards the night, towards the mountains
The world is empty but for a child
A child and a woman
A child, a woman, and a man
A family
That is all we should recall

ON THE BROOK

On the brook reflected; was the sky
Thirst casts my face into it
On the brook: my face and the sky
Till your face appears
On the brook: my face, your face, and the sky
The first to fill their hands

Drinks the features of the other
If only clouds shade the pale horizon
And three birds fly by
Between light and darkness
Trees and grass grow
And a child selling flowers is born
Branches become a chair
We sit together there
Before the shadows fall
At the edge of the picture
On the brook: my face, your face, and the sky
The first to fill their hands
Drinks the features of the other





Guest Artist:

‘Women of the Desert’ by Hafsa Al-Khudairi

“Art is Life...”

In a busy gallery, **Fatimah Al-Nemer** stands amongst her works representing the amazing women of Saudi Arabia, specifically of Najd. The Saudi artist is going around describing the artworks to those around her and greeting her fellow artists and guests. Admirers and art enthusiasts alike are milling around the space and fluttering from one piece to another. However, the experience does not start in the showroom, it starts with the climb up the stairs. On a plain white wall, Fatimah’s name and the title “Najdi Features” (Malameh Najdiah) greet the visitor who is then transported into another universe. Naila Gallery stands as a veritable tribute to the women who have earned their place in history. Whether they are actually from our history books or from a more

contemporary time, these women have changed the way women are viewed in Saudi Arabia. The power of these great women recreated in art form is present in the room and you feel them looking upon the viewer and encouraging them, including the artist. Fatimah defines herself as an artist from Qatif who has created a new way of using different materials and acids. The creative way she presents her work is through material processing and transforming silk into a carpet. She uses mixed media to create, including acrylics, chemicals, wood, collage, and others that will be documented in full in a book currently under development. Also, she is not inspired by any singular artist, but rather by her own experiences artistically or spiritually. She uses art as a conduit of her experiences to create a story and a message, and to embody a thesis to explore and give truth to her declaration: “art is life.”

Fatimah's work isn't just an expression of her inspirations. Her soul is lit up by stories of women throughout time and has always been curious about the women who surrounded her and made Saudi what it is today. Her art is a way to document the lives of these women and hopes her pieces will endure, keeping their stories alive. She connects her research and deep understanding of the figures, including the environment and the historical context the women existed in, and wants to ensure that their lives and their souls have become tangible. Furthermore, she explores the concept of these women through her own image and her own understanding of representing herself in the narrative as well as the women of Saudi and the environment they exist within. Fatimah's journey for her Qatif collection began by exploring the women in her hometown and trying to understand them better.

She sat with them and explored their stories for three years. She included her loved ones, like her grandmother and her teacher as part of the series to show the importance of those around each person and the memories they preserve within themselves. She gave them life within herself and her imagination until they were transferred onto the canvas. She felt a connection with the women she drew and tried to imbue their aura into the work and let it travel through to her audience. Her first collection, which was showcased internationally, touched many people's hearts. On the other hand, Fatima's latest collection was born out of love and awe, inspired by the stories from the book *Prominent Women from Central Arabia* by Dalal Alharbi, unlike her Qatif collection which was born out of familiarity. She chose women from Najd whose stories lit the flame of creativity in her soul. She used multiple resources to ensure the authenticity of the work including experts like Laila Bassam and books or studies like *Norah bint Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al Saud* by Dalal Alharbi. She also lived the dream of their existence and then eternalized them. She embodied different symbolism into

her pieces including the compass and the desert, as well as shackles, carpets, doors and more, all the different pieces that make these women who they are and what they mean to history. Even the colors are representations of the desert, the love and the warmth that exists within their surroundings, producing an aura and an effect on the audience. They encompass their kindness, goodness and strength that exceeds that of men to the extent that the men would prove their worth by referencing themselves as their brothers.



'AlAnoud 2020 by **Fatimah Al-Nemer**. From the Najdi Features (Malameh Najdieh) collection.

Exploring the idea of the desert further in the artworks, according to the artist, it is the warmth, the gold, the source of kindness, the light, the depth of which Najd is represented. The desert is the source of culture, beauty, strength and development within these lands. In this instance, in Naila Gallery, Fatimah even created an experience when entering the space. The visitor is greeted with light energy and she hopes the presence of the pieces will inspire people into exploring who these women were and their importance to Saudi history. She hopes the stories will highlight these amazing women and that visitors can dream of becoming eternalized in the same way. Nora bint Abdulrahman Al Saud, Modi

Albassam and Dr. Fawzia Abo Khaled have multiple pieces dedicated to them. Starting with Nora, she is the bright light and the warrior that stood beside her brother, King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman. He honored her and himself by referring to himself as Nora's brother and even the kings that succeeded him honored her memory with a university named after her. Fatimah created multiple pieces about her: Noor, Albosalah, Alabaah, and Nora. The first and most impactful piece is Nora which is made of 49 square pieces of different materials, including wood, silk, acrylic, and others. When combined like a mosaic, the pieces show the beauty that is Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman, produced with elements of the desert and Najd. The greatest detail is that her abaya has "Akhoo Nora" (Nora's Brother) repeated on it.

As for Modi Al Bassam, she also has multiple pieces dedicated to her like Modi, Ama Modi, Alritab, and Aliz. According to the artist, King Abdulaziz has said that if you have a daughter, name her Modi because of her generosity, dignity, kindness and goodness. She was a Qassimi woman who had a date farm where she would collect the dates and give them to those in need, especially in the years of scarcity. Fatima created her with her eyes covered to symbolize how she would give without seeing, keeping her right hand open to giving and hiding her left hand. Modi is even shoeless to represent her humility. She was so kind that she turned one of her farms into a graveyard during the years of cholera, going as far as to shroud the dead. The stylistic design of the doors is representative of the Anezi style and her colorful gowns are signs of abundance that she would share with those around her. The only contemporary person within the pieces is Dr. Fawzia. She is a woman who consistently affects the artist in her writings beyond just her story. Fatimah, who calls Dr. Fawzia her spiritual inspiration, used her art to honor her and even held an event in Dr. Fawzia's honor and presented her with a gift. There are

many pieces that do not just relate to her as a person, but to her writings as well. She has the highest number of artworks, six in total, but the ones most representative of her are Alsail and Kalam Alsalam. The pieces are very noticeable because of the use of white as the primary color, unlike the other artworks in the space. Fatimah even gives these pieces a halo made of light, reinforcing the visitor's attention and experience of Dr. Fawzia. She fought for women her entire life and was handcuffed, but continued to write to free herself, especially in her 80s. Her story is present in the two main paintings, such as the painting with her interlocked hands and the cloud on her eyes. The other artworks related to Dr. Fawzia represent her poetry and use some elements like the apple and the dove to indicate the source of each piece, showing clearly how dearly Fatimah holds Dr. Fawzia and her works to her heart.

Of course, Fatimah Al Nemer has recreated many more women, from Hessa Alsudairi, the King's mother, to people who aren't as well-known like Hasna, who would sew clothes for those in need. All these women have played a role in ensuring the continuity of the nation and its people. Fatimah's work transcends our understanding of these women and immortalizes them and their stories within her art.



'Hajer' 2021 by **Fatimah Al-Nemer**. From the Najdi Features (Malameh Najdieh) collection.



'Reading the sand,'
By **Muhannad Shono**. Ink on print, 2021.0



Guest Columnist:

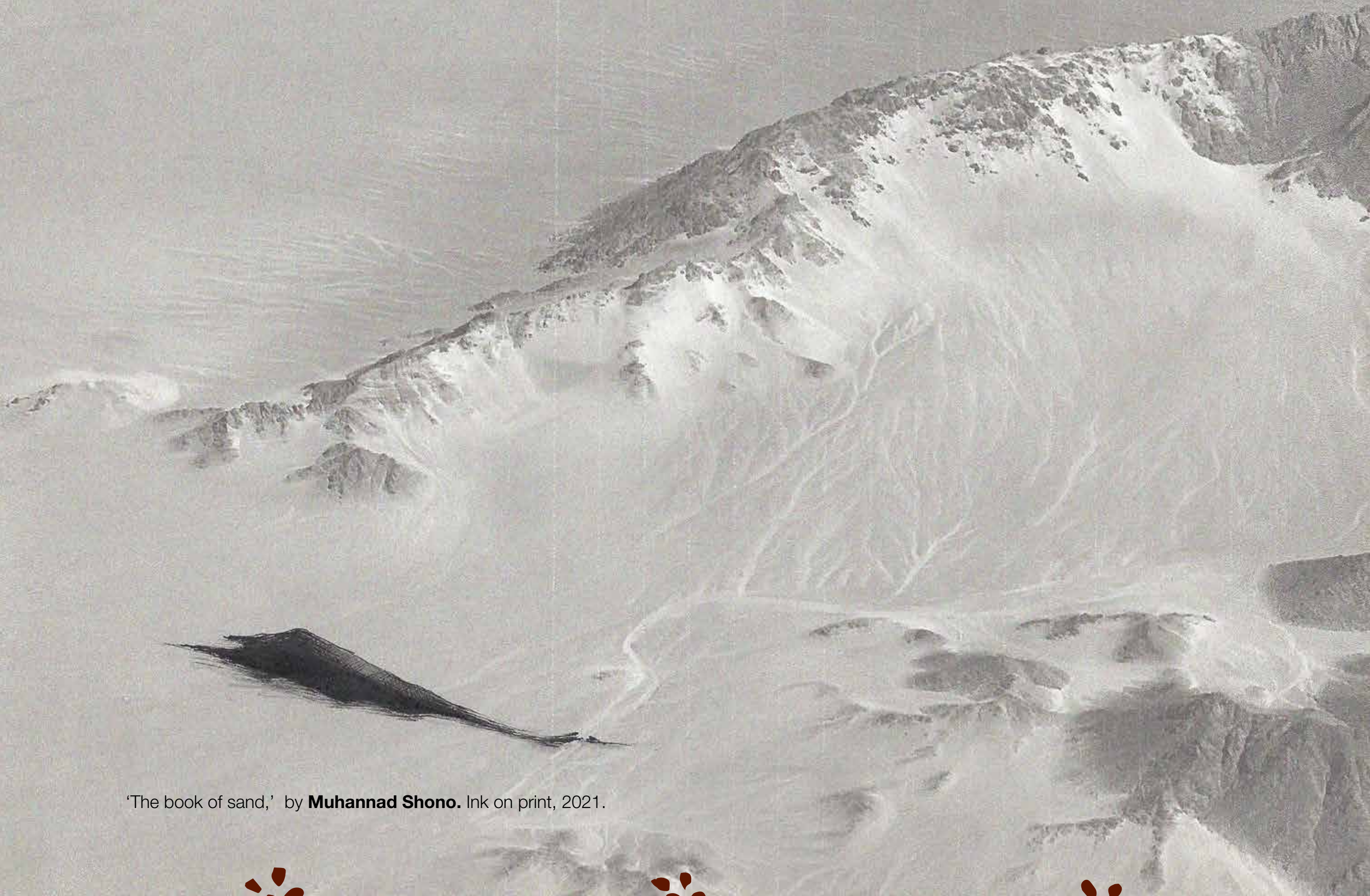
"Stories of Sand" by Muhannad Shono

I once heard a story of a fighter pilot who, while on a training mission above the Rub’ al Khali, reported seeing structures resting within the sea of dunes below.

But when he flew above those same coordinates the following day, the structures were gone, the sand had folded over them like the paper of a book reclaiming the narrative it held. I wonder what words - if any - he would have given to those structures he saw. The sand thus chooses what stories to tell and what secrets will remain a myth. A cycle of revelation then forgetting, reforming the future as it sweeps over the past. Whenever I try to imagine what structures that pilot must have seen, I find myself unable to give them a defined form.

I would instead imagine them constantly changing, shifting like the displacement of grains of sand. In 1932, Jack Philby — a British Arabist, explorer, writer, and colonial officer — was searching for a city named Ubar, that was said to be sunken beneath the dunes of the Empty Quarter. The city is mentioned in the Qur’an as ‘Iram of the pillars,’ which Philby transliterated to the city of Wabar. Philby had heard of a Bedouin legend of an area called Al Hadida (place of iron) where a piece of iron the size of a camel was found.

After a month’s journey, Philby arrived at an area about a half a square kilometer in size filled with chunks of black iron rock. It was only after bringing back samples to the UK that the site was identified as that of a meteorite impact.



‘The book of sand,’ by **Muhannad Shono**. Ink on print, 2021.



Philby wrote in 1933:

“A volcano in the midst of the Rub'al Khali! And below me, as I stood on that hill-top transfixed, lay the twin craters, whose black walls stood up gauntly above the encroaching sand like the battlements and bastions of some great castle. These craters were respectively about 100 and 50 yards in diameter, sunken in the middle but half choked with sand, while inside and outside their walls lay what I took to be lava in great circles where it seemed to have flowed out from the fiery furnace. Further examination revealed the fact that there were three similar craters close by, though these were surmounted by hills of sand and recognizable only by reason of the fringe of blackened slag round their edges.” Might this lost city of Iram, the city of pillars, once built by the descendants of Ad, be the lost city of Atlantis?

Not sunken beneath an ocean, but submerged as a result of a prehistoric meteor impact by a sea of sand. To read the sunken stories of the sand is to go beyond the archaeological definitions of temple and dwelling, tool

and pillar. A true reading is a reading of the shifting sand which has been embracing and giving shelter to those artifacts for centuries past, sand that reminds us of our unread stories, of who we are and where we shall return to. In archeology before the removal of discovered artifacts, the sand is swept aside, the objects are then dislodged from their natural context — rendering the historical landscape illegible — the sand that once held those narratives displaced. These volumes of swept away sand are our lost pages to forgotten books of sand. I find myself today constantly visited by grains of sand that have traveled across the dunes towards my urban dwelling, storm after storm, meteorite impact after impact, they gather around and within my studio in Riyadh carrying with them narratives from a place and time far away.

They have come to bring me stories I thought were lost. And I knew that in time they will, like those structures spotted by the pilot from the sky, sweep my space away.

Special Feature:

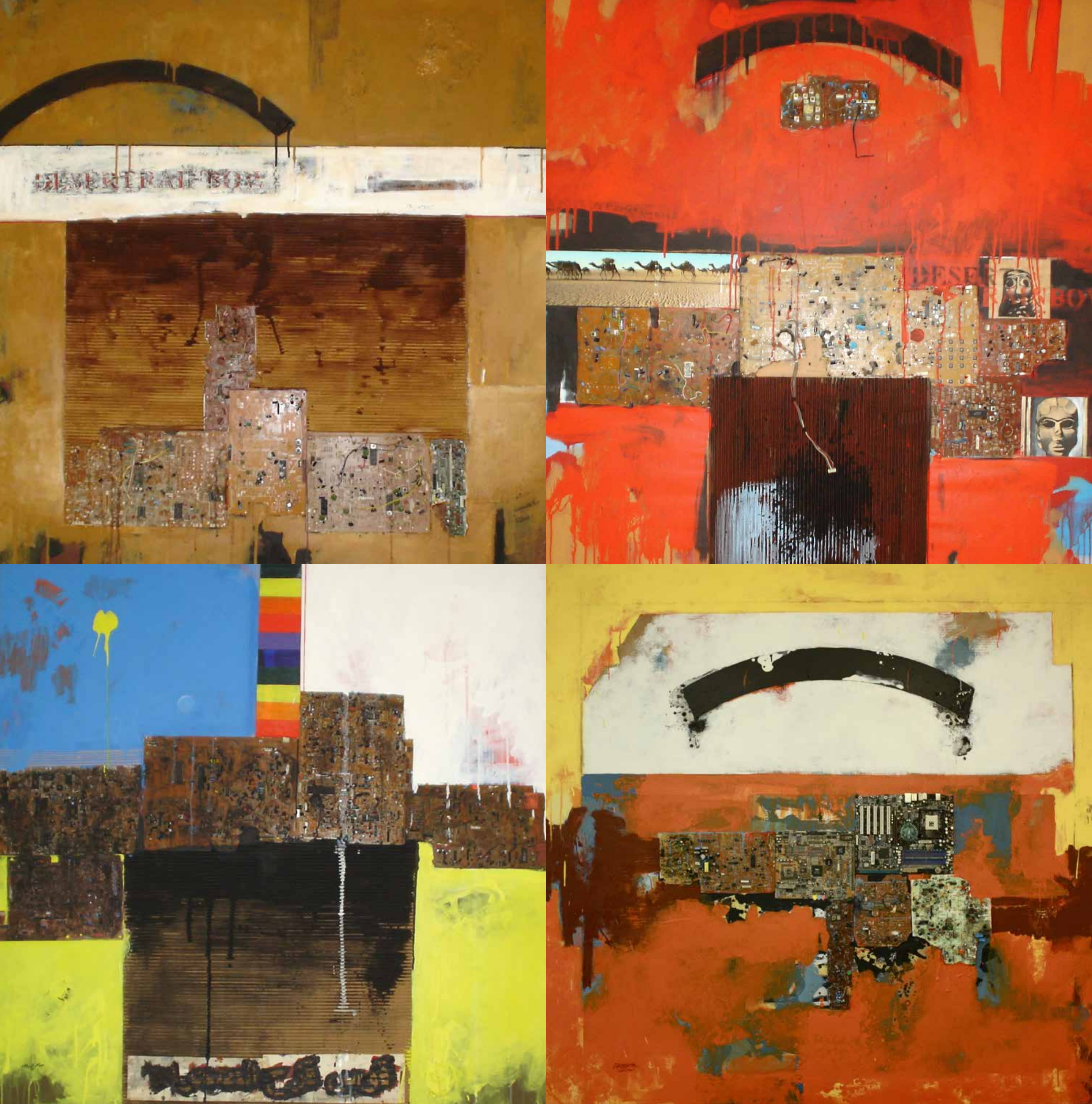
The Art at the End of the Desert Rainbow

By Ahmad Dialdin

From the 'Rainbow Desert' collection by Abdullah Al-Marzook.
Abstraction. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

Born, raised and living in Saihat, Abdullah Al-Marzook earned his fine arts degree from the Art Institute of Atlanta in 1975. He worked as a fine art director of youth welfare in Dammam and Qatif for more than 15 years, hosting a variety of courses in art techniques, including painting, pottery and print-making. Over the decades, he made a name for himself as one of the formative pioneers in Saudi abstract art. He tirelessly exhibited his art, as well as served as a jury member at countless competitions around the world, pushing the boundaries of Saudi art and earning

himself several prizes along the way. Drawing inspiration from traditional urban architecture, his first major series, "Arabian House," birthed his then-nascent style of having exteriors overlaid with mixed media pieces and figurative shapes. Still, it wasn't until his second series that he truly honed and perfected that approach. "When an artist first pulls out a canvas, he usually doesn't know which colors he'll use until he actually begins," said Al-Marzook, "but Desert Rainbow was different. I worked on that series for 14 years and it comes from a very personal and real space, inspired by



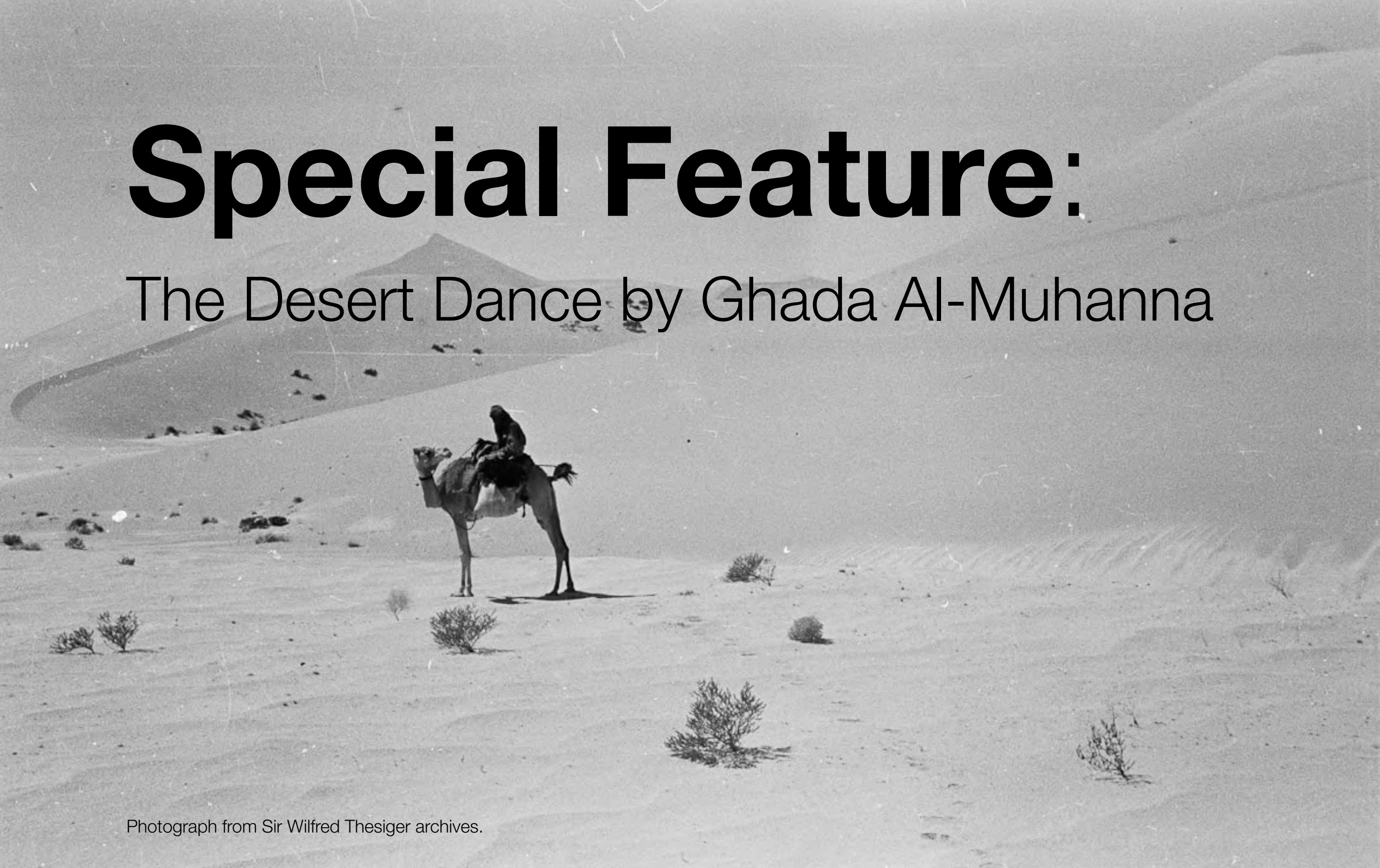
my love of desert colors.” Inspired by the vast depths of the desert and drawing from a creativity that’s as diverse and infinite as a rainbow, he merged the two into one of his most emblematic exhibitions, “Desert Rainbow.” In terms of mixed media, his painted canvases would feature an amazing assortment of cardboard, clippings, circuit boards, wiring and even sheet metal. “I used some particular techniques, including the utilization of found objects and recycling their purpose into art, meanwhile the repeating arcs throughout my pieces range in size and shape to symbolize space and time and humanity.” Al-Marzook continues, the clearest means of expression is through the use of black and white colors, and

you’ll notice that my black and white geometric shapes are prominently displayed in size, as well as symbolic and artistic content. These objects would never be placed haphazardly, though. Everything had its place and the art was arranged with an almost engineering-like precision. Through his mastery of abstract art, he combined the heritage, history and beauty of our lands with a personal outcry at the violence and destruction transpired from past wars in the region. Al Marzook was fond of using electronics and wiring as a form of expressing his dissatisfaction with what he considered the electronic revolution, “Have our electronic advancements been helpful or harmful to humanity?”



Special Feature:

The Desert Dance by Ghada Al-Muhanna



Photograph from Sir Wilfred Thesiger archives.

Heat. Sun. Sweat.
Deep breath in.

This. The faint scent - that of the arid desert. How it brought him comfort. For many years on end. Oh, how it brought him comfort. With squinted eyes, he placed his hand over his brows, gazing towards the dune-filled horizon while soft rays of light seeped their way through his fingers. There was no life in sight. Deep breath in. He had been alone for quite some time.

"Astaghfurallah! (I repent to God)," he thought to himself, "I am not alone." Raising his palms to the air, he exclaimed into the reddish and yellow hues of the landscape in front of him, "Ya Allah! (Oh God!) You have given me the dunes to climb on, the rains to quench my thirst, and your greatest gift in this camel. Ya Allah, you have blessed me. Alhamdulillah, hamdan katheera (Praise to God, indeed many praises)."

A sudden gust of wind came through – dragging the dust along the side of his body. Hastily, he grabbed the corner of the shemagh that sat atop of his head and wrapped it around his neck, covering his mouth so that the grains of sand wouldn't find a way in. Onwards he must go. Grabbing onto his camel's lead, he took the first step forward. An

immediate chilling sensation overcame his body. The heat that the desert held within herself always prickled his soles when he would walk.

Deep breath in.

With each bare step he took, he sunk a little into the warm sand. He felt as though the desert was trying to pull him in. This is where you belong, the wisps would whisper to him over and over again. But he knew, it was just a figment of his imagination. The heat can get to one's mind if they are not too careful, for this is the desert's greatest trick. Urgency fell upon him. He needed to keep moving. He knew there was no end to his journey, as there was no beginning. Straying aimlessly through the desert was what he was meant to do. He belonged to the desert, and she would not let him go.

Stay here. Rest.

She is his home. His freedom. His peace of mind. His family and tribe. She, the desert, is everything to him. He knew nothing else, nor did he want to know. She is the grandmother that doesn't speak, but knows of all that had happened throughout time, bearing witness to all that crossed her path.

Stay here. Don't leave.

The mother of all ancestors, she was here all along.

Deep breath in.

Up and down, he went through golden waves. Distance had no meaning. His feet became heavier as time passed; his knees were not able to carry his weight any longer. Signs of exertion showed on his garments -- damp, stuck to his skin. He raised his head to the sky, his eyes momentarily catching its blue hues, before he closed them in serenity and spoke, "Ya Rab, (My God) by your grace grant me the patience of my camel so that I may not succumb to the desert. Bless me with the strength I need to bear the heat of your sun. I am tired, and the desert wishes for me to lay rest. Ya Rab, I seek your help and guidance to direct me to the safest path, and if you have written for me death, then I am your servant, and to you I shall return."

Deep breath in.

Slowly opening his eyes, he pulled onto the lead of his camel to come closer to him and moved it to sit down. He brought a leg over and lifted himself onto the back of his friend. With a loud bellow, the camel heaved itself up with all its might and continued through the path they started.

Stay. You belong here.

His body swayed side to side with every step the majestic gift of God took. Oh, he wished for nothing more than rest. But he needed to move on, to survive as did all the people before him.

After some time had gone by, for which only Allah knew of, a soft breeze began to weave its way around him.



Art piece by German orientalist Carl Haag.

His muscles felt softer, his face a little cooler and overall he again felt alive. He survived the toughest part of this desert.

Patting the side of his friend in gratitude he said, "You have been good to me, so let us rest for a moment." Setting himself down, and having the camel provide some shelter, he looked ahead into the horizon like always.

"Oh desert," he chuckled softly, "It seems that you and I will continue to do this forever, as will my children and their children, God willing. If it is not written for them, I pray to God that He reminds them of your beauty and challenges, of all the lives that walked above you, of all the stories you have seen."

Deep breath in.

That scent. The faint smell of the arid desert. Oh, how it gave him comfort. Warmth. Sun. Comfort.

Special Feature:

Letter to Our Beloved Desert by Hafsa Al-Khudairi

My dearest desert,
I love you even if I don't visit you unless
it is winter.

Not everyone has been kind to you...
A lot of people portray you as a
dystopian or apocalyptic landscape
and your people as wild. "Repetitive
misrepresentation of Arab land by
Hollywood is an indication that this
practice not only serves to create
meaning but is also a willful attempt at
dehumanizing the people and the land.
The manipulation of Arab lands in such
a manner stresses the barbaric aspects
of both land and dweller," wrote Hania
Nastef in her paper 'Barbaric space:
Portrayal of Arab Lands in Hollywood
Films' in Popular Culture In The Middle
East And North Africa: A Postcolonial
Outlook.

Basically, instead of being praised,
the desert and its people are turned
into beings who survive on the idea
of 'kill or be killed.' The desert has
become a shorthand of adversity and
survival instincts. The idea that throwing
away all societal rules, values, and
expectations is associated with the
desert is heartbreaking when it is a
land of many people and many ideas.
However, to claim that only Hollywood
has misrepresented you is a disservice.
So many stories take place in the desert
that are violent and desolate. Setting
aside the differences in quality, we
have books like Dune or the Alchemist,

movies like Mad Max: Fury Road, TV
shows like Homeland and many others.
They portray you as a landscape that
must be survived and fought in order
to win or they would have to find a
mythological paradise outside of your
borders. They even show your dust
storms as a destructive force of evil
like in the animated Wall-E. You aren't
barbaric or savage nor are your people.
You don't inspire people to lose their
values and your sand isn't destructive.
They don't see you as we see you, as I
see you.

The truth is that your landscape is
gorgeous and there is so much hope
and life in it. Your people have not
only survived, but have thrived beyond
imagination. They are innovative, and
have cities and technologies. We now
live around and within you and visit the
vast expanse of your land recreationally.
Like your creatures, we burrow in our
houses in the summer and explore our
lands in the night and winter. You are
more than meets the eye since the life
you harbor is underneath your sand. Iris
seeds are protected under your surface
only to bloom with the first drop of water.
Your lands can turn into lakes. Your
animals are unique and gorgeous like
the Arabian leopard, sand cats, Saluki
dogs, and desert hedgehogs. Everything
within your land has adapted to your
harshness and even basks in it. You may
be a desert but you aren't deserted and
you will never be.

My dearest desert, we are reclaiming your land, your image, and your stories. We have admired you and loved you for centuries before you even were a desert. Moreover, we have seen you, appreciated you, built our tribes around you, and created stories, traditions, and heritage within you. We have shows like the Saudi Anime Future Folktales, poetry books like “Shairat min Al-Badiyah” by Abdallah Ibn Raddas (Desert Voices: Bedouin Women’s Poetry in Saudi Arabia), movies like Bunwirah, comics like Latifa, and artworks like Book of Sand by Mohannad Shono or Earthseed by Ayman Zeidani and so much more. Desert dwellers love your land and we have created odes to your beauty and land.

Exploring our odes, they come in so many different shapes and forms. They all include you in a direct or indirect manner. Some discuss how the future would look like in your lands, whether they explore it positively like in Saudi Folktales or Book Of Sand, apocalyptically like Latifa and Bunwirah, or with distress like Earthseed. Each of these pieces approach the desert in a different way.

Saudi Folktales is an inspirational piece about the future and a reflection of the past. It shows the beautifully developed idea of how we could have a future in this land and become a beacon of advancement. Book of Sand is a lovely exploration of the hidden treasures under the surface of the sand and how dust storms can be miracles that

reveal lost civilizations and stories. Despite portraying the apocalypse, Latifa returns to the basics of desert living and the harshest part of it are the mutant monsters, which could be a commentary on the savage orientalist interpretation of the people of the desert. Buniwirah, on the other hand, takes a mythical story about Jinn and brings it to life, showing how the desert can protect you as long as you know how to treat it well and understand its dangers. Finally, Earthseed is a great exploration of climate change fears in the Gulf region showcasing beautiful scenes of the desert with a narrator exploring a science fiction voice over. All these stories are ways we are reclaiming our narrative of the desert.

My dearest desert, we are taking back the narrative from those who have created a shorthand about you, deforming your image from what we know and what we recognize. I hope we continue to reclaim your land to show you how much we love you and care about you as you have cared and loved us. Despite your harshness and the time it took us to build full and healthy lives, you have always been in our hearts. Even when we had to migrate away from you in search of resources due to scarcity, you made up for it by providing us with the precious oil hidden within your depth that gave us the life and lifestyle we have now.

So, ignore their limited portrayals of your land and bask in the glory your people have dedicated to you. Our Desert is not Your Dystopia.

***All my love,
Your desert dweller***



This face veil is stiffened by embroidering it with alternating layers of thread, silver glass beads and mother of pearl buttons. The central ridge of the veil is folded and festooned with silver coins, buttons and metal bits. Black leather fringed tassels looped with metal beads hang down the two sides of the wearer's face and the back-cloth strap firmly anchors the veil over the head. An added fringe with metal ends weighs down the piece / preventing it from flying away.

Spotlight:

The Original Face Mask by Somaya Badr

The Arabian Peninsula has seen amazing transformations over the centuries. Arid deserts as far as the eye can see, but where once there were only the odd settlements and roving bedouin here and there, now there are cities and towns throughout the land. Development and modernization has had an impressive impact in our daily lives. The dynamic forces that have shaped the land played a great role in our expansion. If we looked at how people lived here just a hundred years ago, we would see how they adapted themselves to the harsh environment and gain a better understanding of where we were versus where we are now. As hard as

our predecessors' lives in this land were, they were endlessly creative in how they protected themselves from sandstorms and scorching sun. One of the tools our great grandmothers would use was the face veil. Veils across the Islamic world varied greatly in style, shape, material and purpose, but for Bedouin women the veils were effective protection against the desert. Still, that did not detract their efforts from being very detailed in their decorations. They embroidered, attached silver coins, applied layers and even used leather as a lining for extra protection. The Bedouin Burga was mainly embroidered and decorated with weighted tassels

which makes it heavy and keeps it in place, allowing them to do their day to day work.

For special occasions, elaborate veils could take months to make and decorate, adding beads, coins, buttons and various accessories. Meanwhile, some women in cities like Makkah would wear white minimalistic veils made out of very light materials and lightly decorated with silver threads or pearls.



Madinah Burga



Makkah Burga



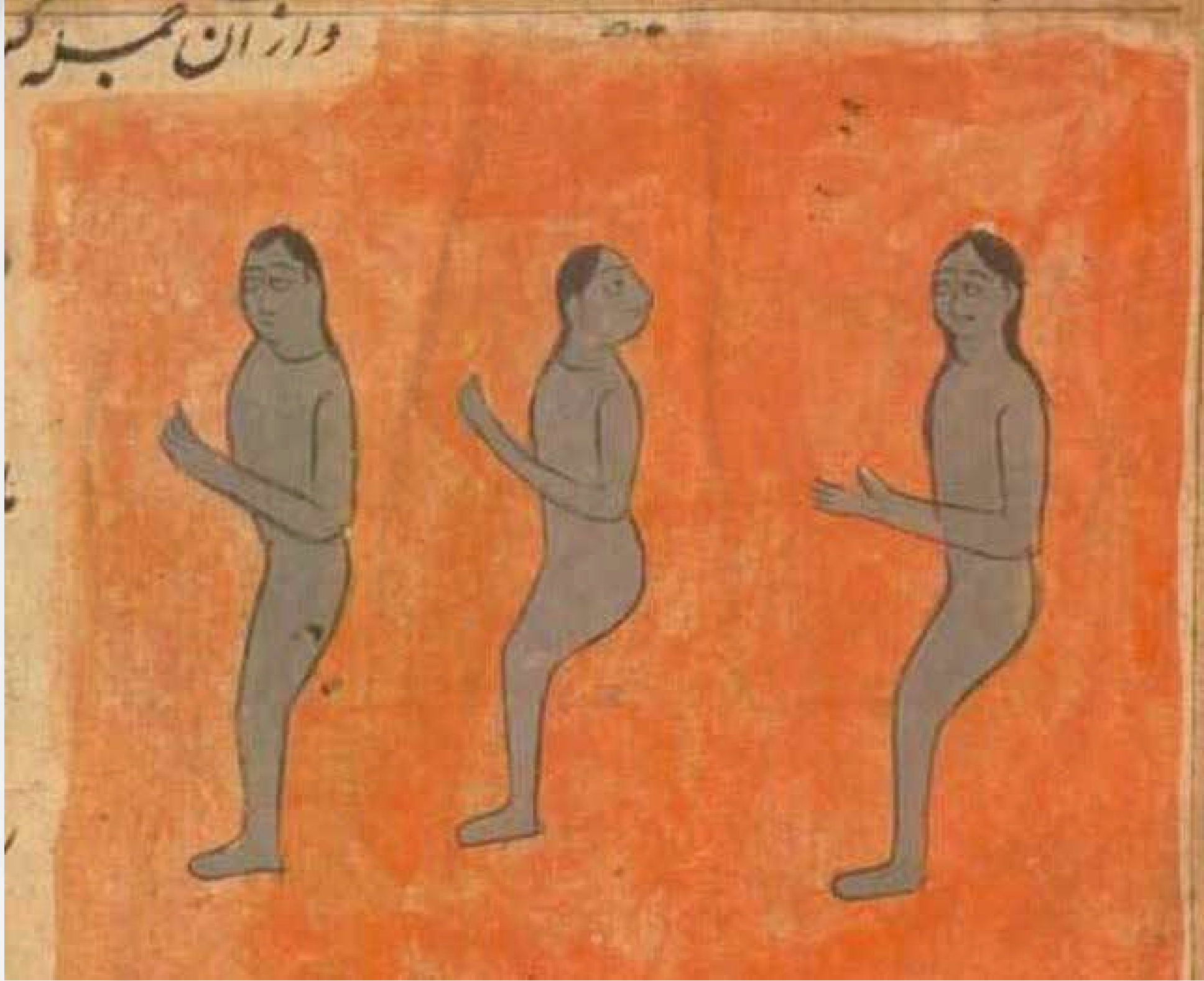
Arabic Treasures:

Denizens of the Desert — Nasnas by Ahmad Dialdin

“The jinn are three kinds: one has wings and flies, serpents and dogs are another, and the third keeps roaming.” — Prophetic tradition/hadith

Mythology is an imperfect art, in that there will always be half a dozen versions of the truth, but in that grayness lies the beauty of imagination and storytelling. While our deserts may be sparse in life and vegetation, the sights and sounds in the vast emptiness of our oceans

of sand would engender their own fantastical creations. Pre-Islamic Bedouin saw jinn as the virtual owners of the land. Travelers would camp in places around the vastness by putting themselves under the protection of the jinn there. It would be no surprise then that legends say jinn took possession of the land where once the ill-fated city of pillars Iram had been. Strange jinn-like creatures called the Nasnas started to roam the land. With only half a head, one eye, one hand and one leg, some would



say that the Nasnas were actually the former citizens of Iram, punished and transformed into these strange beings. No one would dare to enter the area and the Nasnas destroyed anything that had previously grown there. Several old Arabic tomes talk about the Nasnas, but most recently Edward Lane discussed them in his notes for his translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*. He relayed how the Nasnas are potentially the offspring of a shiqq demon (known to prey on travelers) and a human, resulting in the half being that, even with just one leg, can hop “with much agility.” He also mentioned that sometimes the half-face would be embedded in their chest and have the

tail of a sheep. Other countries boast their own versions of the Nasnas. The Greeks have the monopod (or skiapod), a dwarf-like creature with a single, large foot extending from a leg centered in the middle of their bodies. But the Scottish version bears a closer resemblance to ours, which is described as having a single eye in the middle of its face, a single hand protruding from its chest instead of arms and a single leg emerging from its central axis. When one stands under the sun in the harsh mirage-riddled terrain, it is no wonder one’s imagination may wander and just perhaps, a strange creature or two would appear out of nowhere.

Ithra Curiosities

The Desert Rose by Nora Al-Taha



In deserts, we can find wild animals scurrying in the sand and unique plants growing in the vastness beneath the sunlight. With different flowers blooming in the barren lands, a certain rose with a unique structure blossoms. Amongst these beautiful attributes to the wilderness, petal-like folds of crystal create the fascinating ‘desert rose.’ Formed by winds and erosion in wet sand, this eccentric flower—made entirely of crystallized clusters of gypsum or barite—is the largest piece in Ithra’s museum collections. This Saudi desert

rose was donated on January 16, 2012. On the coast of the Eastern Province, south of Dhahran, salt flats called ‘sabkhas’ are home to these sand roses. They are found buried under the sand; one must dig one to three feet below the surface to extract them. Desert roses bask in their full form as they shape themselves into unique single rosettes or large clusters, shading in hues of light grey to dark grey and brown. As deserts offer mysterious new splendors, the desert rose is one of the desert's exclusive treasured gifts.

From the Shelves:

5 Desert-related Books to discover by M. Lynx Qualey

The earliest Arabic poetry is filled with the sights and sounds of the desert. Dune-filled wilderness is a prominent force in the mu'allaqat, a collection of poems by the sixth century's most famous Arab poets. Fifteen hundred years later, the poems' muscular lines remain a part of our living literary imagination, just as the desert remains a rich site for poetic imagination. While the desert sometimes evokes barrenness, alienation, hardship, and loss, it is also a place for spiritual transcendence and breathtaking natural beauty. Libyan novelist Ibrahim al-Koni, who puts the desert at the heart of his literary work, says that what he means by desert is "the immense emptiness that stretches endlessly away to the horizon, where it meets that eternally clear sky which equals it in its nakedness. Together they make up one continuous body, the secret of whose intimate embrace I am in fact still seeking."

The Mu'allaqat for Millennials

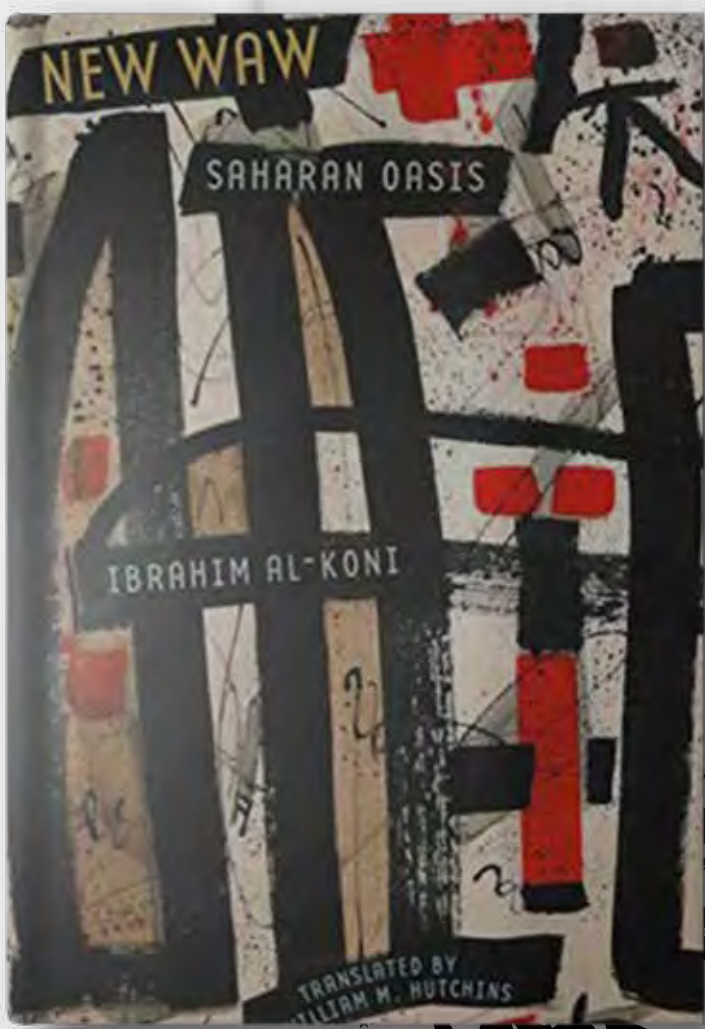
Poetry by Labid ibn Rabi'ah, translated by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych.

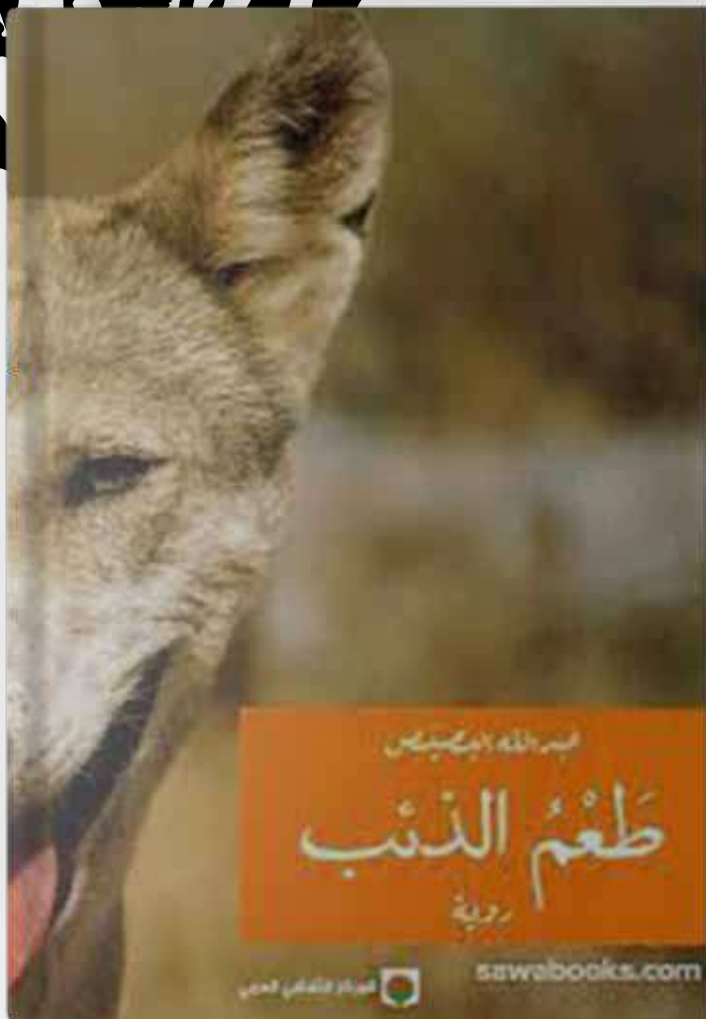
Labid is one of the seven poets whose work makes up the core of the mu'allaqat. His verse begins with an abandoned campsite, one of the defining metaphors of early Arabic poetry. The poem's narrator then goes on a desert journey on his tireless camel. Even across 1,500 years, the poem evokes a great trek on a beloved companion: "Even when her flesh has dwindled/ and she is exhausted. /And, after great fatigue, her leather shoe straps are cut through, // Still she is as nimble in the rein / as if she were a rose-hued cloud, / Rain-emptied, running with the south wind, sprightly."

The New Waw

by Libyan novelist Ibrahim al-Koni, translated by William Hutchins.

Al-Koni is one of the great desert novelists of our time. His dozens of novels are full of vivid depictions of life in the Hammada desert, a northern stretch of the Libyan Sahara. His novel *The New Waw* examines the tension between desert nomadism and sedentary existence. But humans are not the sole focus of the novel. One of al-Koni's gifts is that he inhabits the animals, plants, wind, and sand on the landscape as much as he does the people.





A Taste of the Wolf

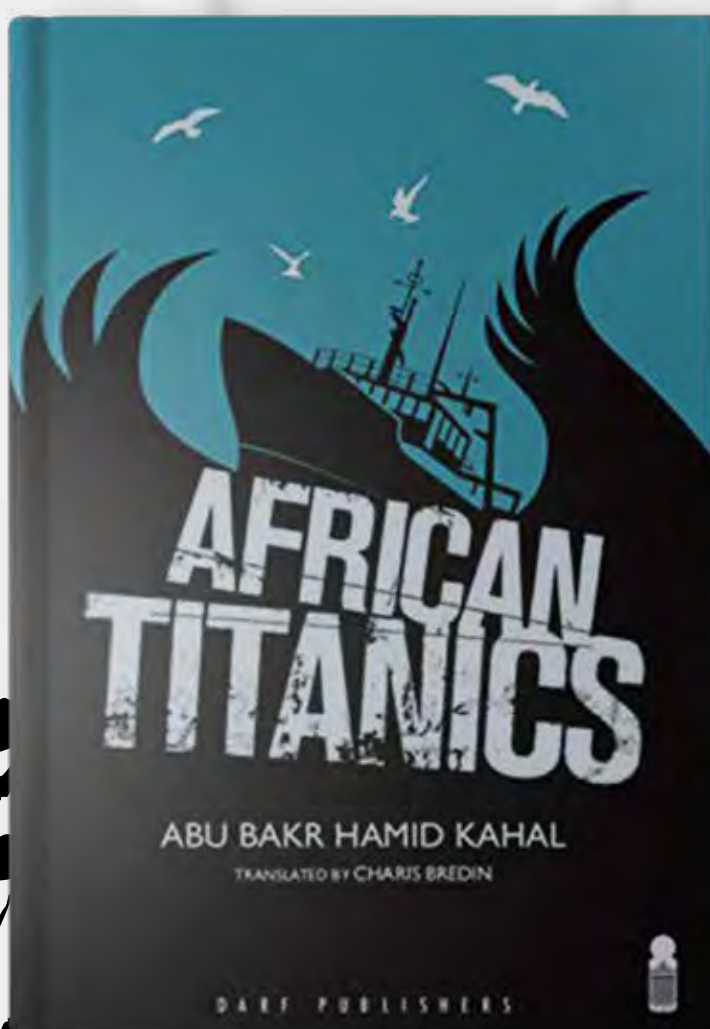
by Kuwaiti novelist Abdullah al-Busais.

Al-Busais's protagonist must cross the desert on his own. Daiban has been shunned by his community and must make his way across the desert to Kuwait, all while being stalked by a wolf. The trip is grueling, maddening, and mystical, like an existential "Ironman" marathon run by a poet with a singing wolf at his heels.

African Titanics

by Eritrean novelist Abu Bakr Hamid Kahal, translated by Charis Bredon.

Kahal's novel layers together folktale, myth, history, and anecdote as it follows Abdar, an Eritrean man traveling north through the desert in search of a new life. He spends more than two weeks traveling through the Sahara in a cruelly distorted echo of Labid's journey 1,500 years before. Even after he survives the Sahara, Abdar must travel through the metaphorical deserts of exile and the sea. Yet throughout, the novel is elevated by its searing detail and musical sensibilities.



The Route Through Purgatory

**By Sudanese writer Omayma Abdullah,
translated by Nassir al-Sayed al-Nour.**

This short story tells of a desert journey that comes to a halt when a 15 year old girl goes into labor. Her community's journey, spurred by need, stands in for a greater cultural and climatological loss. As one character says: "My son, most of the sand you see was once spanned by villages. Hundreds of families flourished here." He sighed deeply and continued, "Now they've dissolved into nothing, forever a part of the desert."



Add to your Bucket List:

The Life, Art and Engineering of the Nafud Desert by Ahmad Dialdin

While it may be tempting to focus on the Rub' Al Khali when discussing Saudi deserts, there is a surprisingly rich amount of history, heritage and wonder to be discovered in our second largest body of sand, the Nafud Desert. At a tenth of the size of Rub' Al Khali, the Nafud Desert fills the north-central section of Saudi Arabia with large crescent-shaped dunes and reddish sands which almost reach the oasis

towns of Tayma in the west, Al Jawf and Sakakah in the north and Hail in the south. It is home to two primary oases that have been settled off and on for a very long time: Tayma and Jubbah. The biggest supporting factor to their longevity has been water, be it deep reserves of groundwater or the more surprising presence of lakes and rivers during different periods of time dubbed as the "Green Arabia" periods.

Green Arabia

Although we have mostly looked at the region's history over the past few thousand years, recent archeological evidence has shown that we have had settlements as far back as at least 100,000 years ago, especially during migrations from Africa through to Asia. The Arabian Peninsula wasn't always so arid and throughout the ages, it has gone through phases of wet, humid and lush environment, akin to an African savannah. Our most recent "Green Arabia" period happened around six to ten thousand years ago, where there was more rainfall, more lakes and a wide network of rivers throughout the land. Oases became the favored type of settlement, vegetation was no longer rare, and people practiced an interesting combination of pastoral and hunting lifestyles. Prolific aquifers, a high groundwater table and the ability to move to different areas which had received rainfall provided the means for these groups to survive challenging and varying conditions.

Settlements and Life

The most direct archeological proof of humans being around in the area is the discovery of an 85,000-year-old fossilized human finger in the Nafud back in 2016. Less direct but no less compelling, just last year in 2020 archeologists found fossilized footprints of humans, dating back to nearly 120,000 years ago, alongside tracks made by a variety of animals including wild donkey, giant buffalos, elephants, and camels. Other animals that have visited our lands include ostriches, hippos, oryx, ibex, lions, horses, gazelles and dogs. The dogs are an interesting find in and of themselves. At Nafud sites such as Jubbah (which is on an ancient lake) and Shuwaymis, ancient rock art depicts a very close bond between humans and dogs. The engravings likely date back more than 8,000 years, making them one of the earliest depictions of dogs. Lines are drawn between the dogs and the humans, likely indicating leashes and suggesting that these humans had trained and bonded with the dogs. You can read more about Jubbah's rock art in our article last year: **The Art of Legends**. Meanwhile, on the far west boundary of the Nafud, the oasis of Tayma has a long history of settlement dating back more than 6,000 years. It is also an archeological treasure trove of sites, castles and stone inscriptions, including the inscription of Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses III, making it the first confirmed find of a hieroglyphic inscription in Saudi Arabia.



Stone Structures

A particularly fascinating subject throughout the Nafud Desert is the wide variety of stone structures scattered throughout that were constructed, revisited and rebuilt over the past thousands of years. Recently archeologists came across more than 100 large stone structures that have been dubbed mustatils (due to their rectangular shape) in the southern part of the Nafud Desert. Dating back to at least 5,000 BCE, these structures typically consist of two large platforms, connected by parallel long walls that average 100-200 meters in length (but can extend up to 600 meters), and 15 to 30 meters in width, and a height of generally less than a half meter high. The stone platforms at the ends can be around 30 meters long by 10 meters in width and over a meter high. Often these mustatils are the oldest stone structures around, with younger structures nearby such as cairns, stone circles and the like, many of which are built using stones from the mustatils themselves.

Considering how often they were built in batches, and how they sometimes had painted rocks facing the inside, the thought is that they were there for a couple of ritual purposes, one for ritual behaviors carried out within them, and another in the actual process of their construction. Not to be outdone by massive but simple rectangles, the Nafud boasts a more complex form of stone structure known as kites. These mega-constructions are named as such due to their kite-like shape when seen from above, and they consist of two long walls (the kite tail) funneling into a walled enclosure shaped like circles, triangles or even stars (the kite itself). Their length is usually a few hundred meters but can reach several kilometers, while their height again remains below half a meter. The kites appear to be a common way to gather animals into the enclosure and, thanks to pit traps dotted around the walls, ease the hunting of mass groups of animals. In conclusion, it may not be the largest desert in the land, but the Nafud definitely has a lot to offer for anyone willing to dig a little and explore the depths of history it has to offer.



Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) Prays for Rain for the Muslims before the Battle of Badr. Folio from the manuscript of Siyer-i Nebi (The Life of the Prophet), by Mustafa b. Yusuf al-Erzerumi. Turkey, Istanbul, 1003H/1594-95. Opaque watercolour, ink, and gold on paper. H. 37.7 cm x W. 26.6 cm. **The Aga Khan Museum**, AKM221

Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

A Prayer in the Desert by Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis

The deserts of the Arabian Peninsula have always played a pivotal part in Arab life, history and spirituality. One of the harshest environments on earth, they still witness human activity, travel, and encounters to this day, many of them of profound historical significance. One such encounter is captured in this beautiful and yet dramatic 16th century Ottoman miniature painting from a six-part manuscript of the Siyer-i Nebi ("The Life of the Prophet"), executed in Istanbul in 1003H/1594-95 CE by the calligrapher Mustafa ibn Vali and an artistic workshop

supervised by Lutfi 'Abdallah for the Ottoman Sultan Murad III. The Siyer-i Nebi is a 14th century Turkish epic based on an Arabic original version by Al-Waqidi, devoted to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his followers, and the pivotal events during their lifetime. The scene – which has to be 'read' as a visualization of the spiritual and literary ideals evoked in the text – shows a desert encampment with tents, resting camels and covered storage jars, demarcated by three towering date palms. A veiled, haloed figure representing the Prophet

(pbuh) on the left leads his followers in prayer. It is the month of Ramadan and the night before the famous battle of Badr in 2H/623-4 CE. The Muslims have run out of water. Thirsty and desperate, the prayer is for rain, a custom that still prevails in many areas of the Arabian Peninsula today as well as large parts of the Muslim world. Thankfully, as Muslim

tradition tells us, the prayer is answered. The rain comes not only to quench the Muslims' thirst, but to also give them a crucial advantage in their forthcoming, and ultimately victorious battle against the Quraish the next day. To this day, rain in the desert is indeed a great blessing from God, and whenever it falls, it brings renewed life, hope, and vigor.



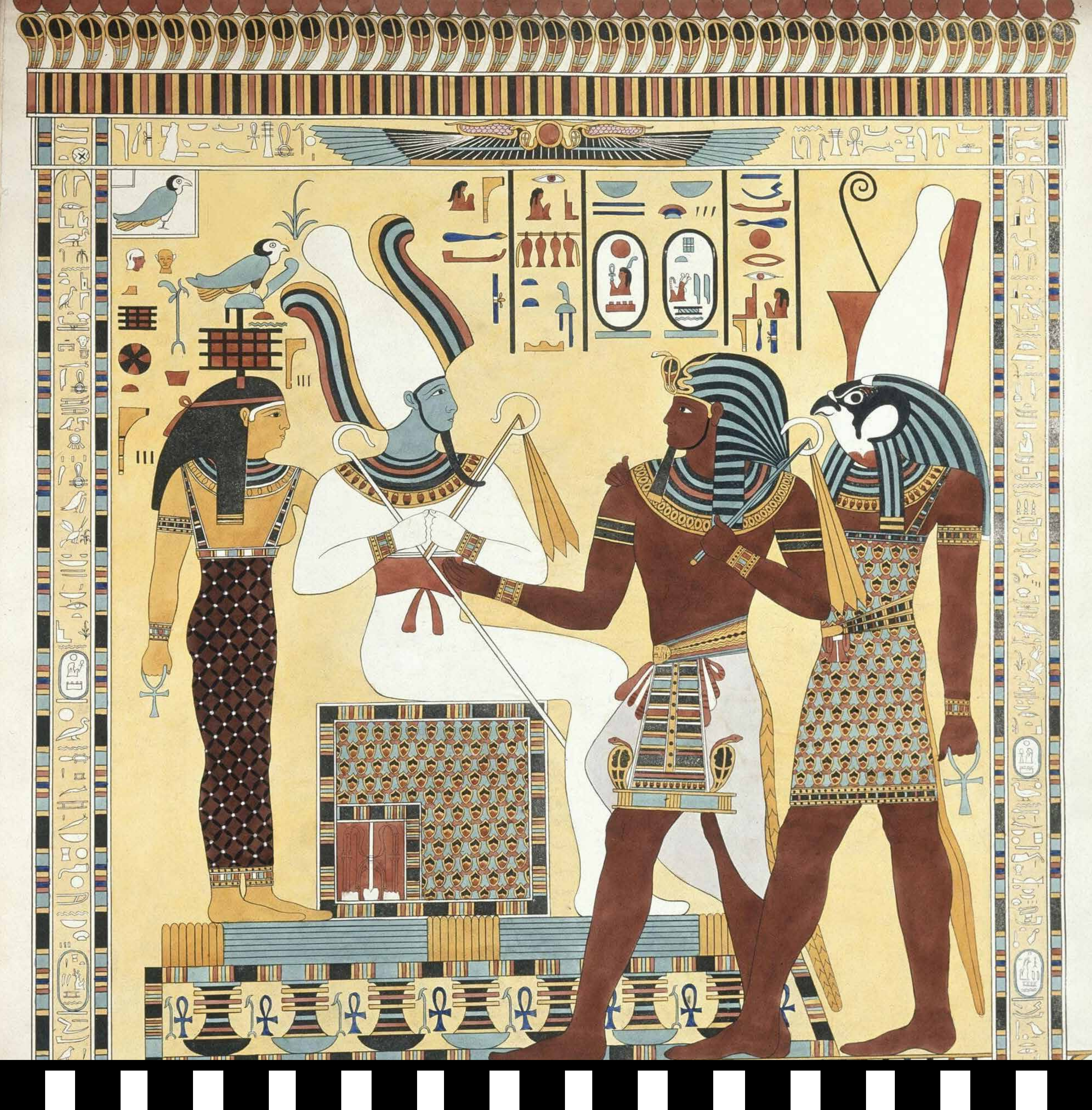
Portrait of Giovanni Baptista Belzoni. Published by C. Hullmandel, 19th c. Harry Beard Collection. Courtesy of **Victoria and Albert Museum, London.**

Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

The Great Belzoni and the Discovery of the Tomb of Seti I
by Dr. Christopher Turner

In 1817, the Great Belzoni, a six-foot-seven circus strongman and engineer from Padua, entered Seti I's tomb, the most elaborately decorated in the Valley of the Kings. The pharaoh had built the Great Hypostyle Hall in the temple of Karnak, one of Egypt's architectural glories, and his tomb was no less resplendent. Belzoni discovered the entrance in an opening in the hillside and descended 400 feet, where he found ten chambers painted in vivid colors and decorated with tens of thousands of hieroglyphs. "The tomb appeared as if just finished the day we entered it," wrote Belzoni in his diary, having

used a battering ram to destroy the sealed door. "The paintings were more perfect as we advanced farther into the interior," Belzoni continued. "They retain their gloss, or a kind of varnish over the colors which had a beautiful effect." The brushes used to paint the lapis lazuli ceiling were scattered on the floor. He named one chamber the "Room of Beauties." However, as a London-based tomb raider, who had already brought back the huge seven-ton bust of Rameses II to the British Museum, Belzoni, a charismatic orientalist who liked to wear a turban, so that he resembled an Ottoman



Print entitled 'From The Tombs Of The Kings At Thebes, Discovered By G. Belzoni', from 'Plates Illustrative Of The Researches And Operations Of G. Belzoni In Egypt And Nubia' published by John Murray. Volume of plates (44) on 34 sheets, with descriptive text. Great Britain, 1820. Courtesy of **Victoria and Albert Museum, London**.

Grand Vizier, was disappointed not to find the treasures he'd hoped for. Apart from small wood and faience mummified figures, the only object he could pillage was a huge, translucent, alabaster sarcophagus, which was empty, fragments of the lid scattered nearby (the pharaoh's body had been taken to another royal tomb, where it was discovered in 1881). Belzoni would bring this sarcophagus, finely carved with hieroglyphs from the Book of Gates, back to London, where he sold it to Sir John Soane. Belzoni also made wax casts and impressions of the walls of the tomb, damaging them in the process. He also commissioned plaster casts of its bas-reliefs, no doubt

also to be found on Soane's crowded walls. In 1820, the Great Belzoni published an account of his adventures, including his drawings of the tomb of Seti I. The following year he opened an exhibition of his objects and replicas in Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, one of the first buildings constructed in the Egyptian style and also home to displays of magic and the circus arts Belzoni practiced. Nineteen hundred visitors came on the opening day, all paying 2 shillings and 6 pence for admission. The show was a sensation, making Belzoni extremely wealthy. However the sarcophagus was missing, having already been bought by Soane for the princely sum of £2,000. The British Museum had turned it down,



Print entitled 'View Of The Interior Of The Temple At Ybsambul In Nubia. Opened by G. Belzoni, 1818', from 'Plates Illustrative Of The Researches And Operations Of G. Belzoni In Egypt And Nubia' published by John Murray. Volume of plates (44) on 34 sheets, with descriptive text. Great Britain, 1820. Courtesy of **Victoria and Albert Museum, London**.

and Soane snapped it up – “his greatest coup as a collector,” he said – and he demolished an exterior wall to get it into his house. Belzoni died two years later, taken ill in the Kingdom of Benin. He was only 45. Now on display in the Sir John Soane’s Museum, it is one of the finest Egyptian antiquities in Britain. The sarcophagus was a symbolic foundation stone for Soane’s aesthetic principles. He intended his house as a memorial, and the empty tomb, which his bust looks down upon, places him right at the heart of his collection. In May 2016, Adam Lowe, the founder of the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation in Madrid, began scanning the tomb of Seti I (still sometimes known as Belzoni’s

tomb). He intends to build a \$20 million reconstruction; funded by his work by creating contemporary sculptures for the Soane’s new neighbor, Anish Kapoor. Working with The Supreme Council of Antiquities, and using a Lucida 3D scanner, he has already recreated a perfect, high-resolution facsimile of the tomb of Tutankhamen, the site famously discovered by Howard Carter – who thought Belzoni “one of the most remarkable characters in the whole history of Egyptology.” Uncanny in their exactitude, they are contemporary versions of Belzoni and Soane’s casts. However, unlike these earlier models, which stripped classical statuary of their color, the taking of these reproductions causes no damage.

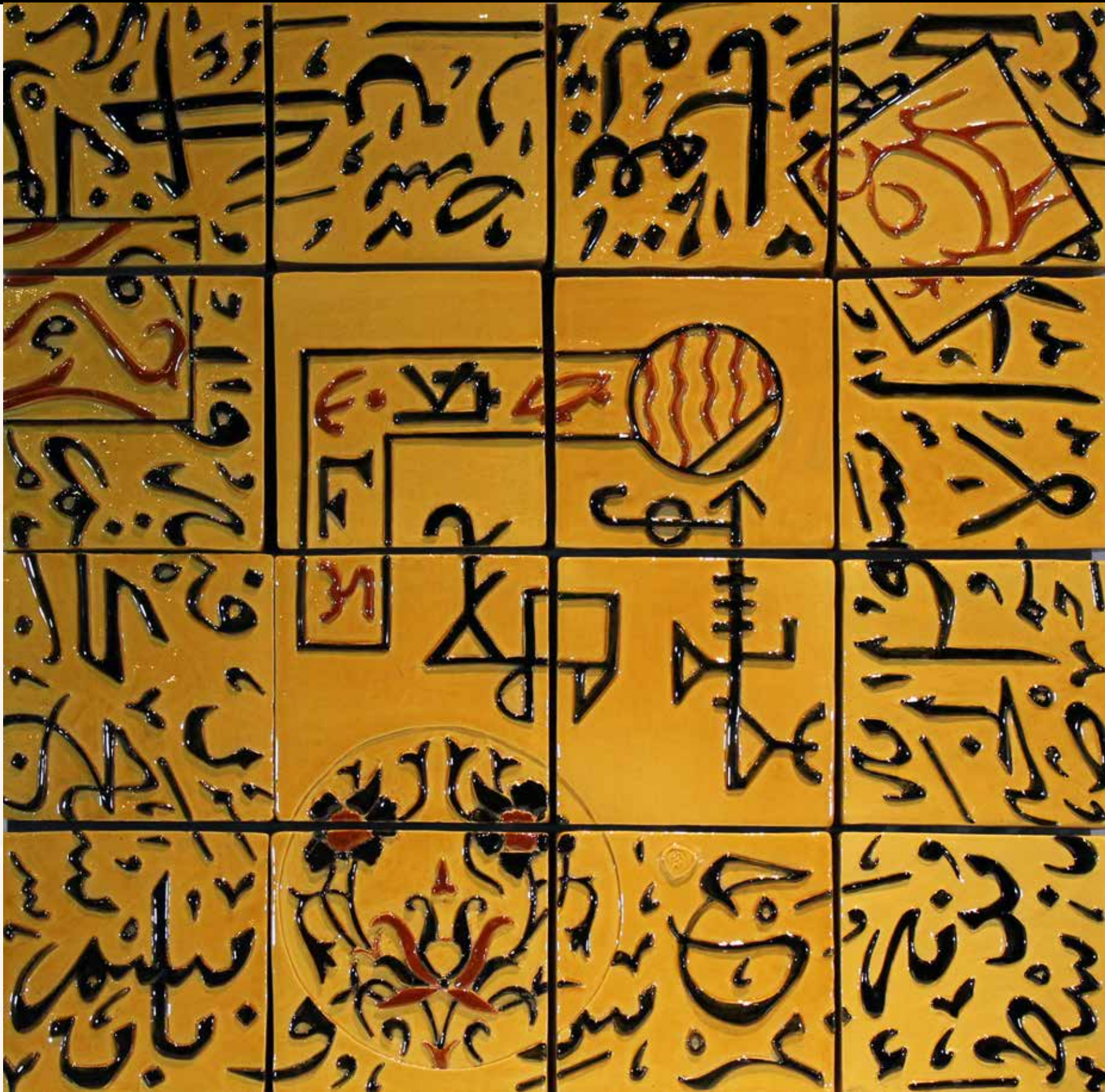
From the Vault:

The Many Faces of the Desert

by Rym Tina Al-Ghazal

An old Arab proverb tells us to “**write the bad things that are done to you in sand, but write the good things that happen to you on a piece of marble.**”

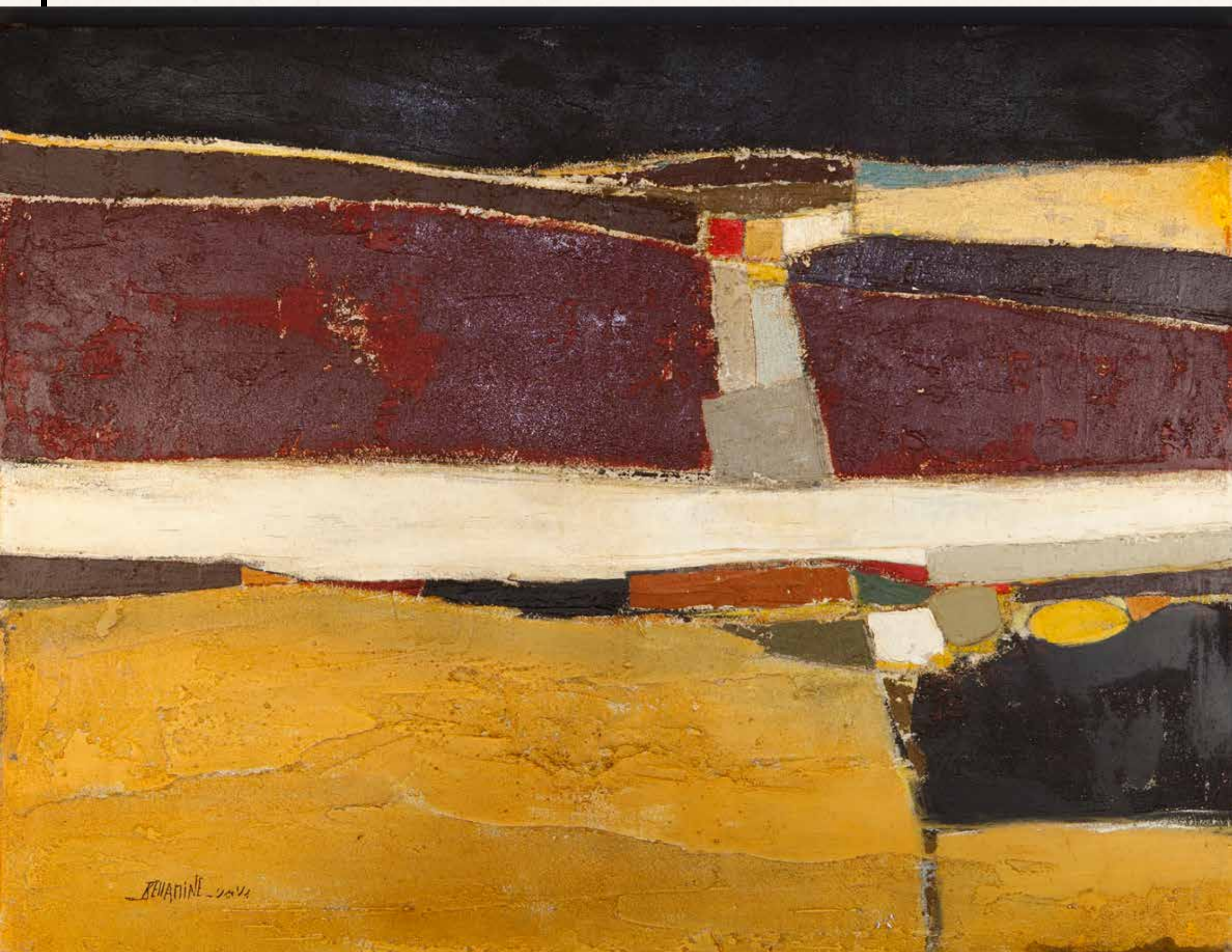
Moments are written and erased along the silky sands of the desert, and their elusiveness and dominance continue to inspire artists across the decades, with new artists every generation falling under its spell. Here we take a moment to reflect over the creativity born out of a desert theme via a special collection from the **Barjeel Art Foundation**.



‘Desert Design,’ by **Hazem Al Zubi**. 2005. Ceramic, 77.5 x 77.5 x 6.5 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Camp at the Edge of the Desert,’ **Dia Azzawi**. 2007. Oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Untitled (Abstract),’ by **Fouad Bellamine**. 1973, Mixed media on panel, 72 x 97 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Lumière du Sud (Southern Light),’ by **Abdallah Benanteur**. 1960. Oil on cardboard, mounted on wood, 98 × 78 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Variations of the Horizon no.5,’ by **Rafa Al Nasiri**. 1979. Acrylic on canvas, 130 x 109 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Oral Tradition,’ by **Lateefa Bint Maktoum**. 2014. Photography, 100 x 62 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



‘Observers of Change III,’ by **Lateefa Bint Maktoum**. 2011. Photography, 184 x 220 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

From the Archives:

Life in the Desert



Rarities from the Aramco Archives.

There is something wholesome and romantic about the desert and the lives of the people it once embraced. The kind of clothes, homes and rituals it once witnessed has faded to the occasional visit and adventure into its terrain. Here we travel back in time, and see the romantic desert, and its rougher side.

1948

Al-Hofuf

A bedouin tent



1953

Riyadh, Near Al-Hofuf

Gene tournville lyford productions, set for filming of "Jazirat Al Arab": scene depicting sa'ud's warriors in a war dance before their attack on Riyadh.



1959

April 19

Al-Murrah tribesmen and their guests enjoy a feast during the annual Al-Murrah assembly. (King Sa'ud and Mr F.Davies meeting).



404360

1975

Northern Arabia

Bedouin family.



1974

Country, People and tent.

Northern Arabia

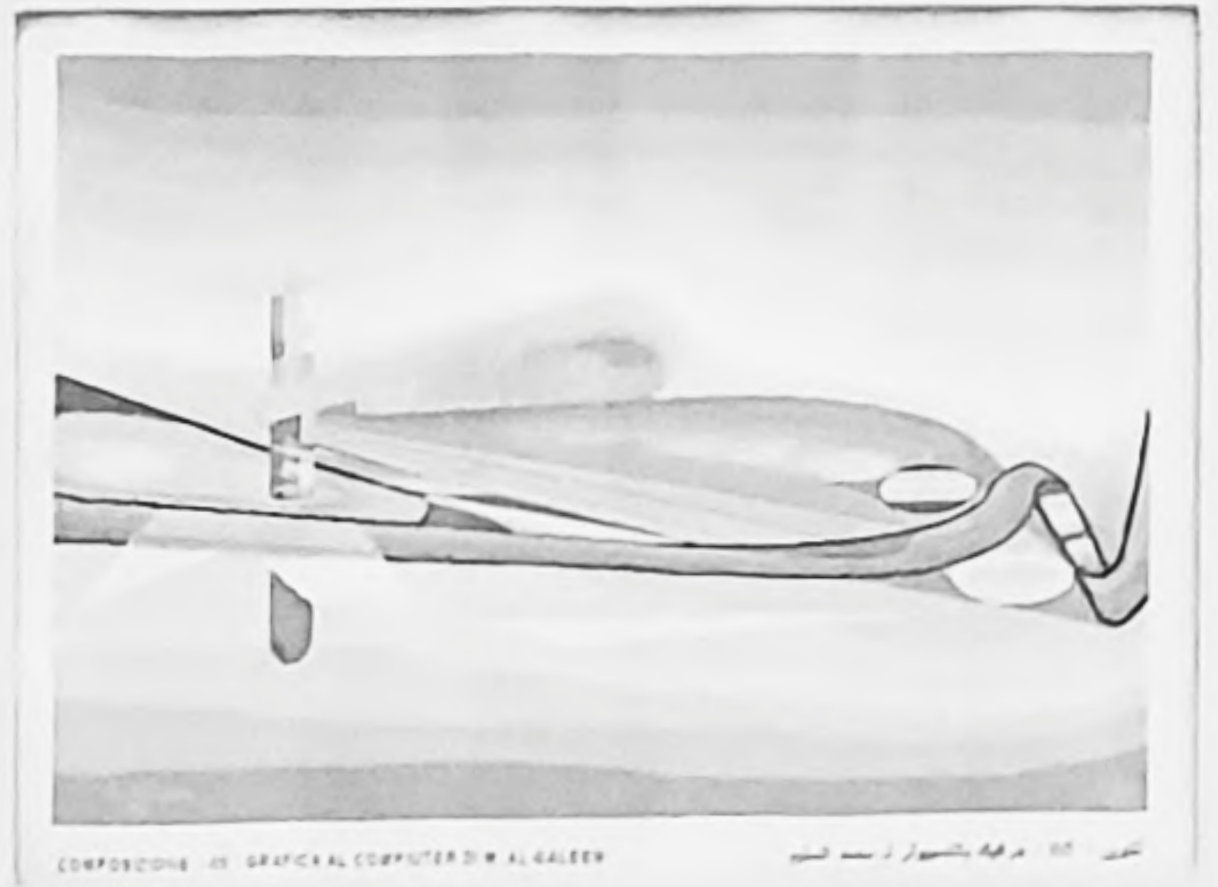
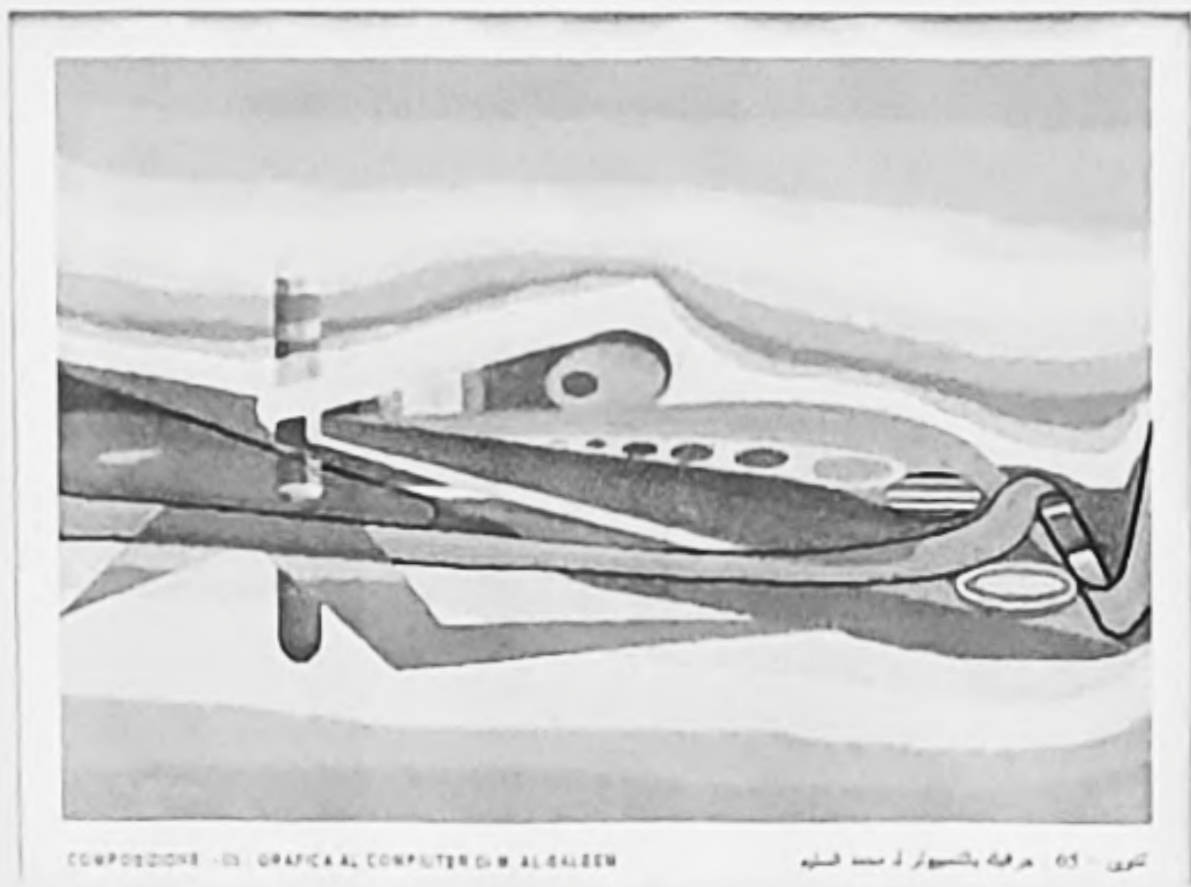


1959

April 19

The flourish of swords and gund accompanied the stamp of warriors' feet...while a cacophony of drums established the beat. (King Sa'ud and Mr. Davies meeting).

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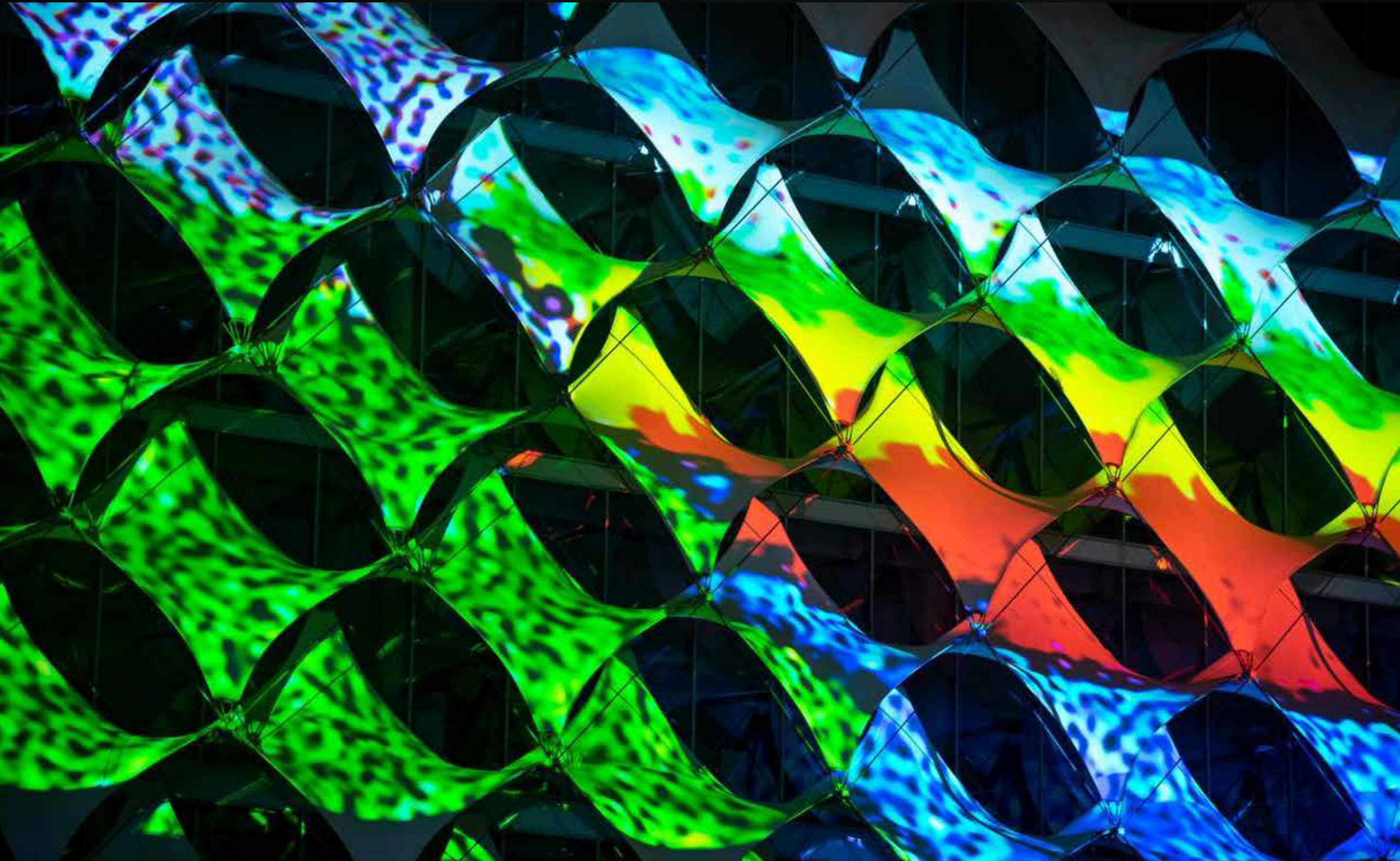
The Art of Digital:

Homage — One of the first Saudi digital art creations by Mohammed Al-Saleem, as remembered by the late artist's daughter, the renowned Saudi artist Najla Al-Saleem

Light and Love

When the Noor Riyadh festival organizers first approached me with the idea of paying tribute to my late father by including his artwork in the program, I could not decide which piece would best represent him. Mohammed Al-Saleem was an art pioneer several times over. Not only was he the first person to hold an exhibition in Riyadh way back in 1967, but he was also a digital artist at a time when that was rare if not

unheard of in Saudi Arabia. To that end, and considering how Noor Riyadh is a modern festival of light and art, we could not just use something from his oil color collection. It had to be modern and special. Composition No. 5 is a piece my sister and I own which has never been seen by the public and it felt like the most fitting entry into the festival.



It was easier said than done to actually “get” to the piece itself, since the original files were on a very old and worn-out floppy disk. Thankfully, through perseverance and technological ingenuity, we were able to finally access the files. It was especially moving to realize that the painting file was dated on the same date as my daughter’s birthday. It felt as if this day was like a rebirth of this artwork as well, brought back to life and into the light as fitting tribute to a man who pioneered Saudi digital art. We worked tirelessly with the festival teams

to figure out the best method to display his work, how best to design it, choose the shades of light colors, figure out the motions and make it all fit into the theme of his work. On March 15, my sister, my daughters and I went to see the display for final adjustments and approval. As we watched it shine on for the first time in front of us, we were overwhelmed with the warm, loving feeling of my father’s soul looking down on us with contentment and pride.



Ithraeyat is evolving into a new digital platform soon to be launched.
For now, **click here** and enjoy this sneak peek into what tomorrow will bring.

We look forward to sharing our ‘makhzan’ of stories with you every month. To subscribe and contact the editorial team, please email: **ithraeyat@ithra.com**

Editorial team:

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Head of Communications: Hadeel Al-Eisa

Editor in Chief: Rym Tina Al-Ghazal

Editor in Chief of Arabic Version: Ghannam Al-Ghannam

Cover Design & Graphic Designer: Dhay Al-Mindeel

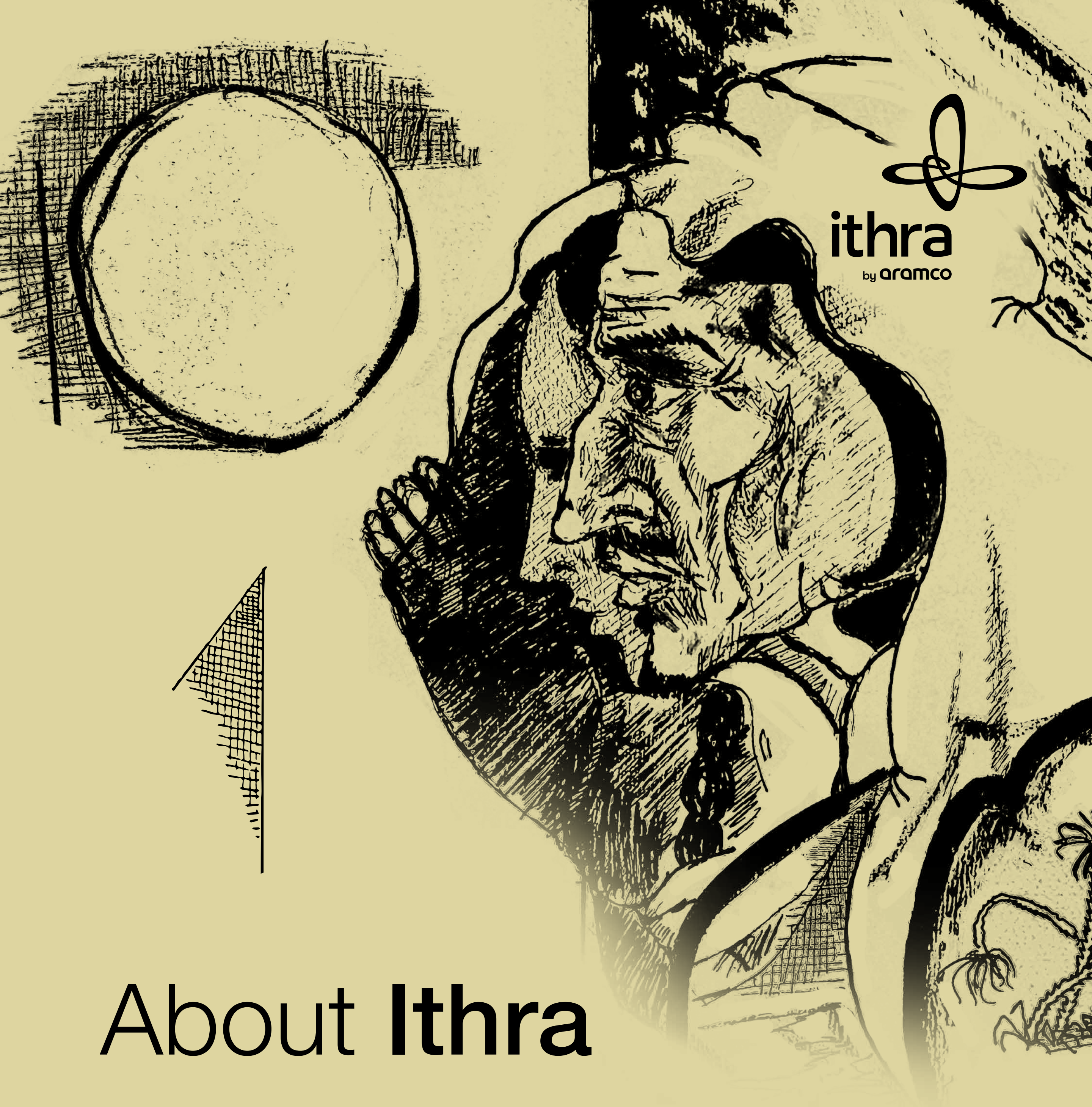
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Contributing Writers: Ghada Al-Muhanna, Hafsa Al-Khudairi, Ahmad Dialdin, Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Dr Christopher Turner, Najla Al-Saleem, M. Lynx Qualey, Somaya Badr & Nora Al-Taha.

Special thanks for contributing artists & art:





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