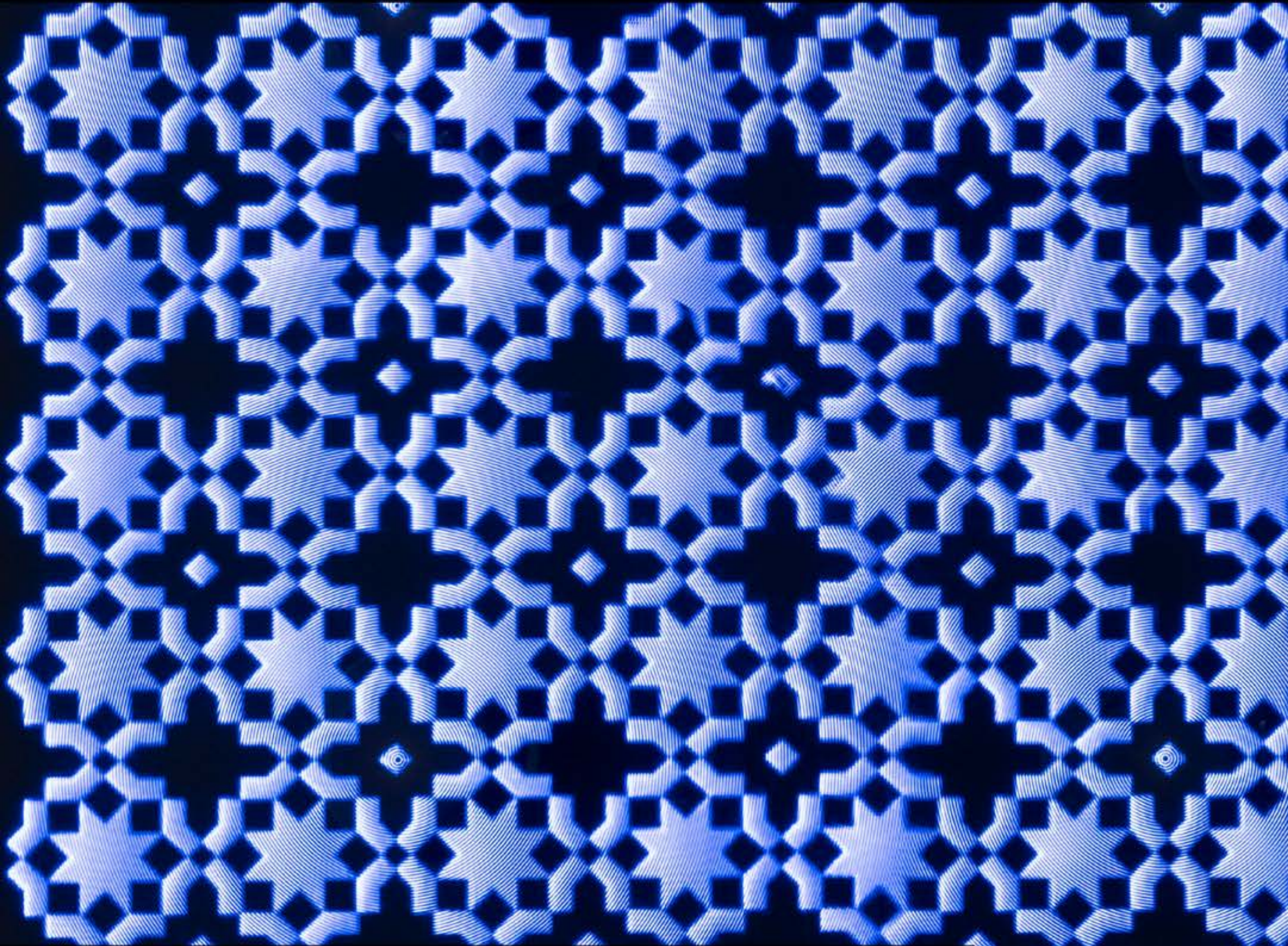


L O N T



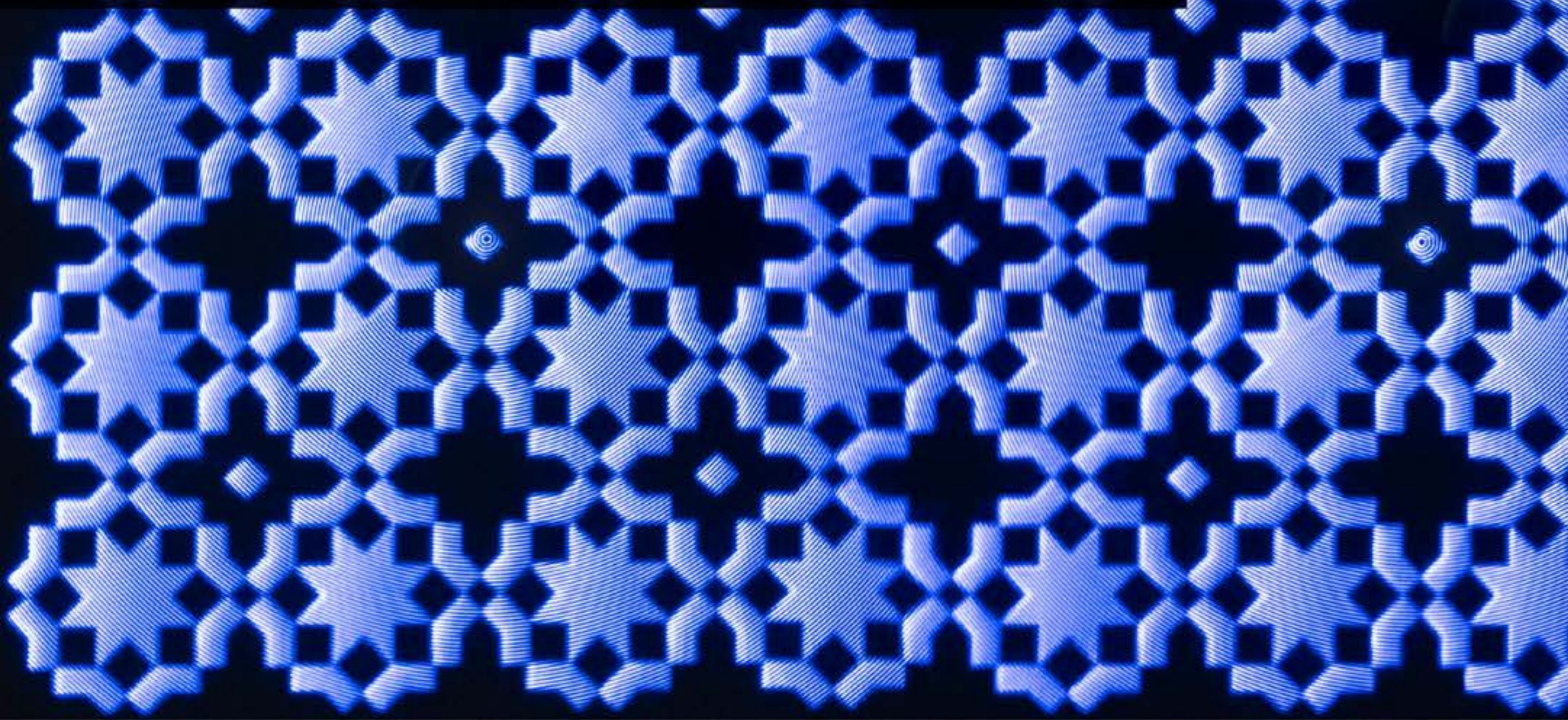
Artist: **Walaa Fadul**



Ithraeyat Magazine

November | December 2021

Issue **014** | Light



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.

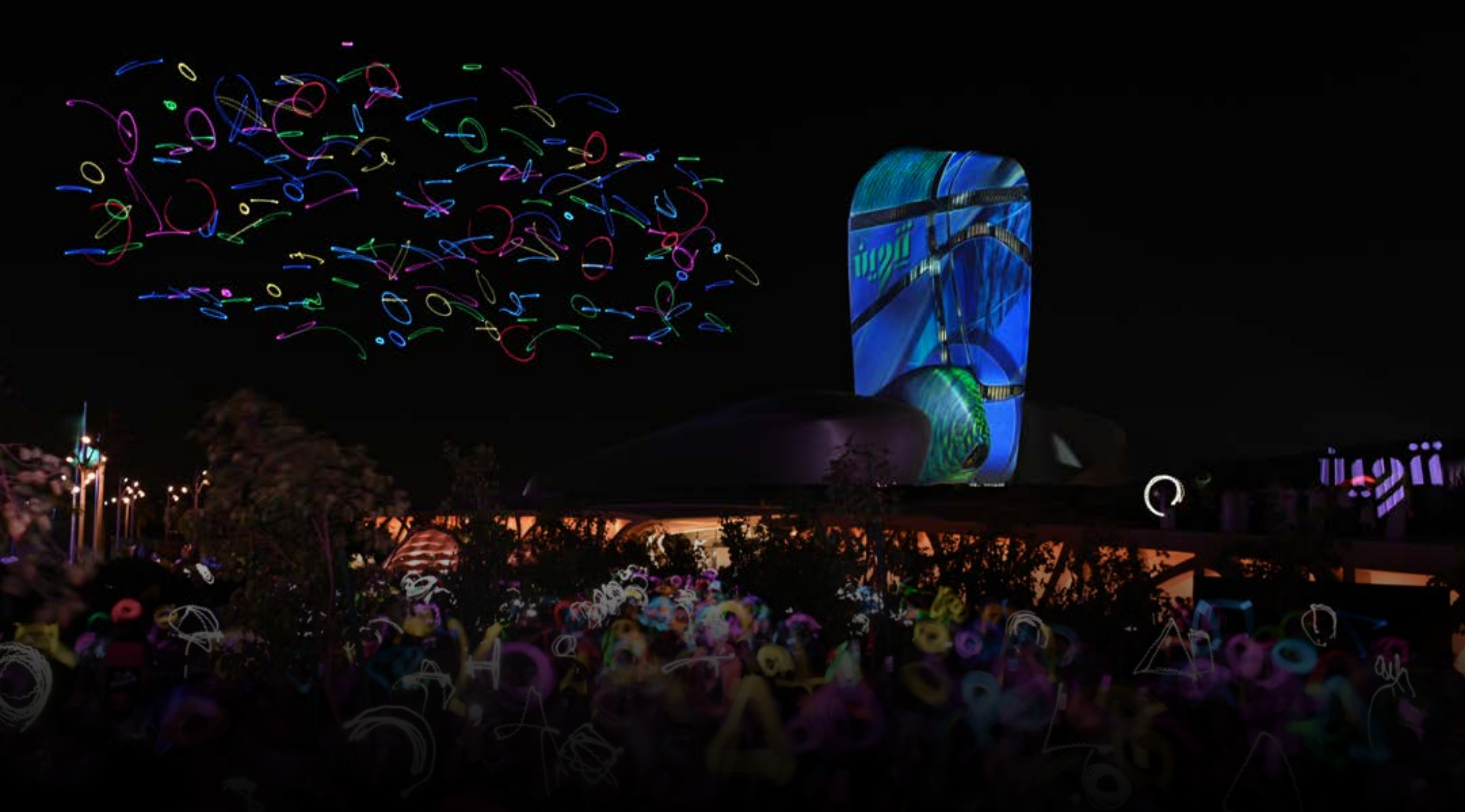
And therefore, Ithraeyat Magazine is a storehouse of unique, enriching stories.

Table of Contents:

Letter from the Editor — The light in life and art.	05
Portrait: 'Theme-special' featured Saudi artist Walaa Fadul, an interview by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.	07
Special Feature: 'The art of light, innovation and traditional Islamic art', an exclusive interview with H.E. Noura Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth by Rym Al-Ghazal.	10
Special Feature: 'The Kaleidoscopic light in Islamic art and life' - an interview with Dr. Sami Angawi by Rym Al-Ghazal.	17
Guest Columnist: 'Treasures of light' from the National Museum collection by Laila Al-Faddagh, Director of National Museum in Riyadh.	20
Guest Columnists: 'Transcendence —The Journey to Finding Light,' by Manar and Sharifah Al-Hinai, co-founders of Khaleeji Art Museum.	21
Guest Columnist: 'The curation of light,' by Eiman Al-Gibreen Curator of Noor Riyadh Art Festival.	24
Guest Artist: 'Light Within and Light Without'- an interview with Nasser Al Salem by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.	26
Guest Artist: 'I contemplate the cosmos of the moon,' an interview with Abdullah AlOthman by Aljohara Al-Athel.	29
Guest Artist: 'Conceptualizing light' -an interview with Rashed Al-Shashai by Ghadeer Sadeq	32
Special Feature: 'The Light of Wisdom,' by Ghada Al-Muhanna.	35
Special Feature: 'The Bright Lights in the Sky Direct Us Back Home,' by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.	37
Spotlight: 'Between glimpses of the past and the rays of the future: A look at the Unique Architectural Styles of Saudi Arabia,' by Somaya Badr, CEO of The Art of Heritage.	40

Table of Contents:

Arabic Treasures: 'Star Lore of the Past,' by Ahmad Dialdin.	43
Ithra Curiosities: The Art of Light —from Ithra Art Collection.	45
More Ithra Curiosities: Light in Islamic treasures.	47
Add to your Bucket List: 'Places of Light,' by Ahmad Dialdin.	49
Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations 'Divine Light,' by Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director and CEO at the Aga Khan Museum.	51
Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations 'Rising stars and the importance of the art,' an interview with the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Dieter Lamlé.	52
Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations 'The Rain of Light' —A reflection on light, shade and gold by Louvre Abu Dhabi.	55
From the Vault: Stories of light —A collection from Barjeel Art Foundation.	57
From the Archives: 'The life of photography,' by Rym Al-Ghazal.	59



An art of digital, human and drones.
Tanween's Big Moment, 2021.
Courtesy Ithra.

Letter from the Editor

The light in life and art

“And let the stars whisper in your presence
and say: This, here, is the Moon...”

Nizar Qabbani, the 'poet of love' (1923-1998)

From the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, to the light of a lamp and even the lightness we feel in our hearts, light is a theme with many positive connotations and links. In art, light is one of the foundations of creation, where thanks to the light of a candle and the play of shadows, many timeless masterpieces were born.

“Shadow is diminution of light. Darkness is absence of light,” noted the Renaissance master Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) who researched shadows, and his artworks captured the different intensities of light and darkness.

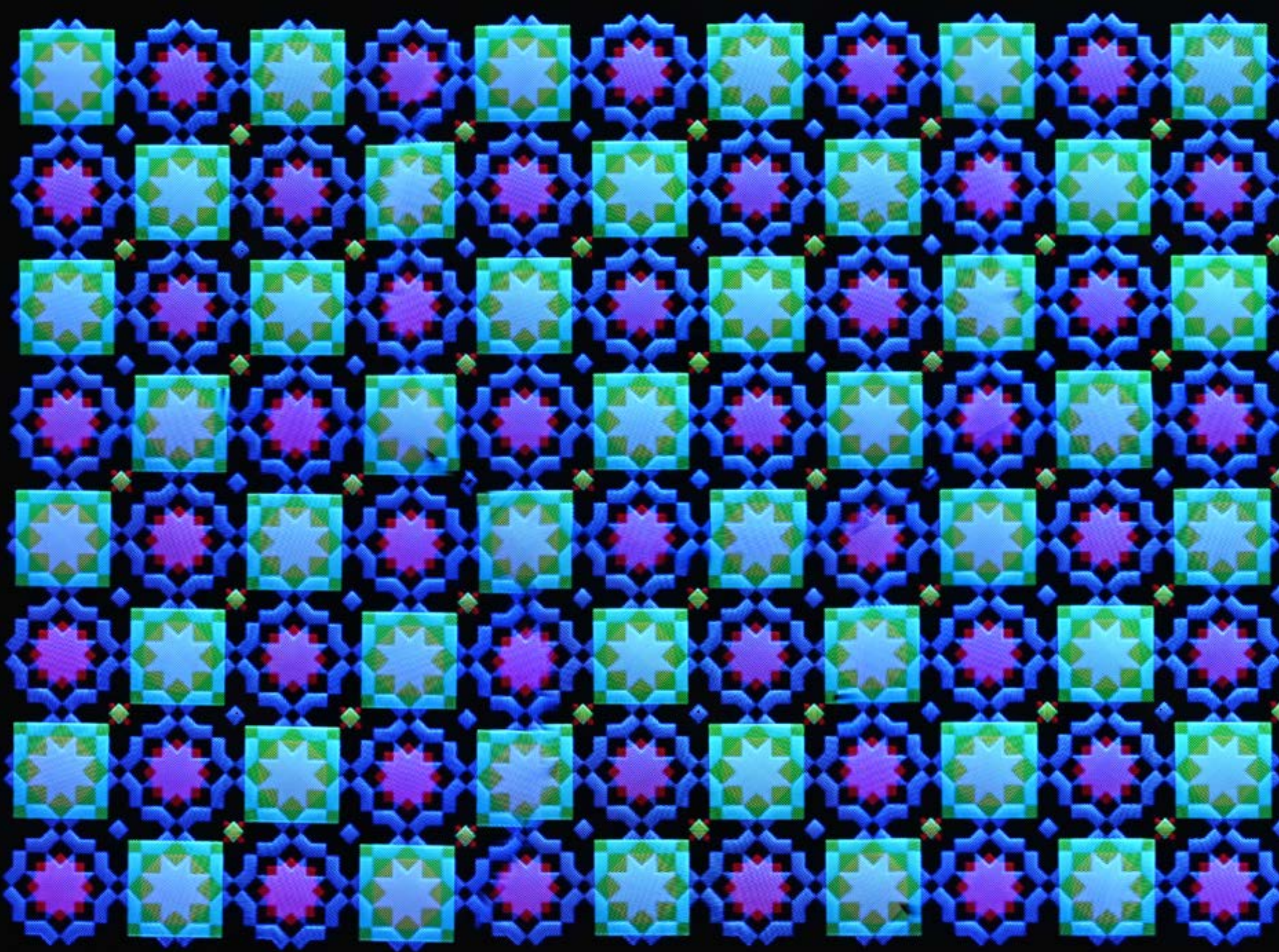
From candles to lamps to X-rays to natural light, all forms of light have manifested themselves in the art world, with the latest trend of projections along structures like Ithra's building, turning into canvases of art and creation.

In this special issue of Ithraeyat, we pay homage to Light (Al-Noor), and reflect over its many forms in art and life, and how we often take it for granted how light is life, as gifted by the sun, and we finally take notice of light, in its absence.

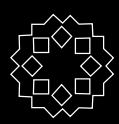
ART



Meet our 'theme-special' featured Saudi artist, Walaah Fadul, an emerging Saudi artist combining philosophy with art, with a touch of digital and the manifestation of unique creations.



Light Upon Light, by Walaa Fadul. 2021. Part of the **Seeing and Perceiving** exhibition at Ithra.



Portrait:

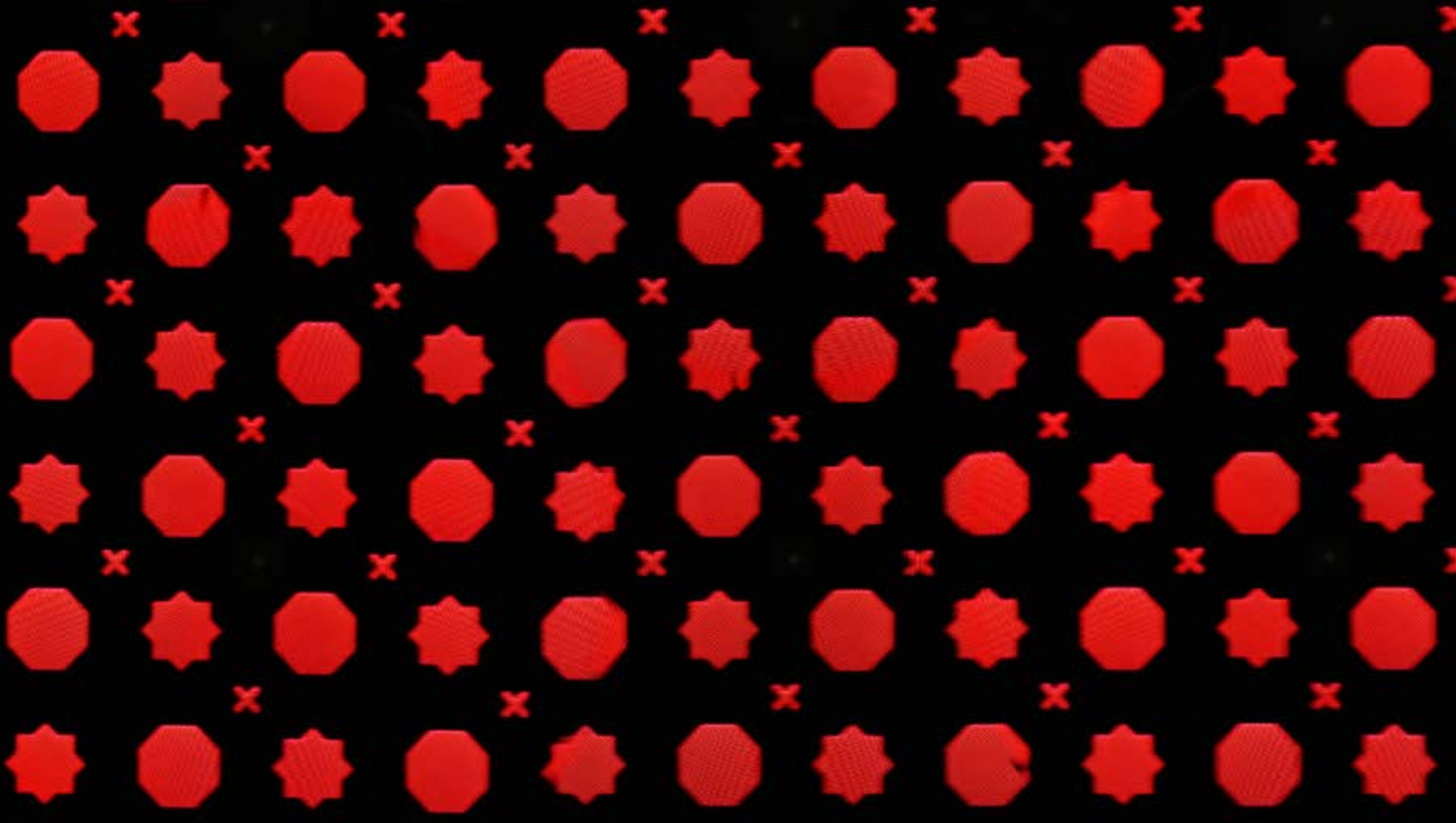
‘Theme-special’ featured Saudi artist Walaa Fadul, an interview by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.

“Light is Everything,
without it there is Nothing...”

Walaa Fadul is a graphic designer by education but an artist by concept and implementation. There is a fine line between Design and Art, the former is more a problem-solving tool and the latter is a tool of exploration and expression. As Ms. Fadul, from Jeddah, pointed out: “Art is a lifestyle. There is art in every little thing that we interact with, even the things that we ignore as everyday items.”

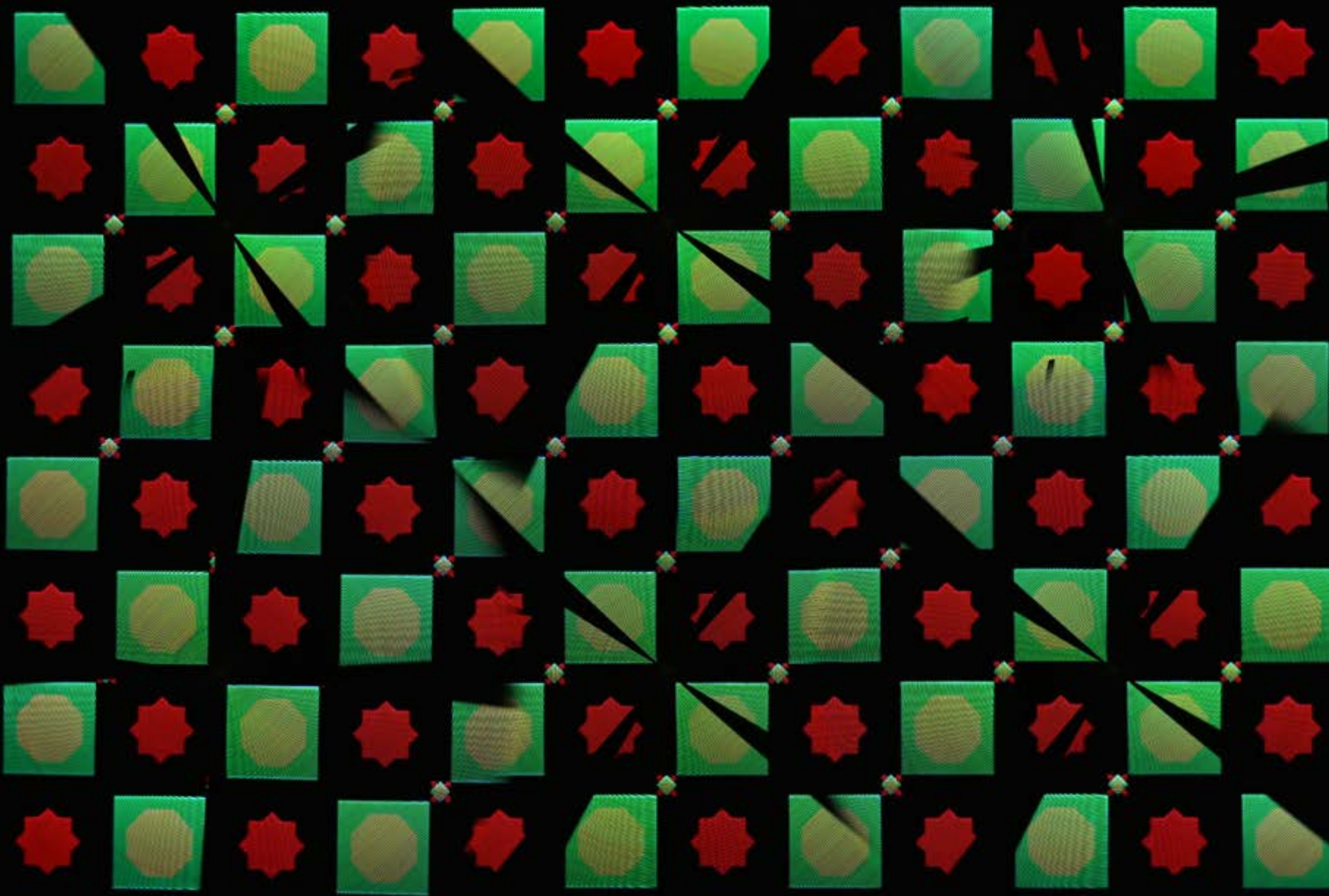
This invoked the image of a bottle of water and she expanded on how the functionality of a bottle doesn’t mean it is not artistic. The simplicity of her vision shows that people don’t need to be specialized in art to be able to understand art and her goal is to bridge that gap. In order to do so, she deep dives into the topic, creates a thesis, and researches in order to prove or disprove it. She isn’t afraid of being wrong and correcting the course of her concept and artwork.

Ms. Fadul’s biggest advice to anyone interested in creating art is “to be themselves and do what your heart tells you to do.” An artist needs to be convinced of the concept and the connection with the artwork for it to be a success. She was the winner of the Ithra open call for emerging Saudi artists where her proposal was selected to be realized and be exhibited at Ithra’s Seeing and Perceiving exhibit.



Her Light Upon Light (Noor Ala Noor) artwork was born out of that, and is the selected cover art for this edition of Ithraeyat. She had formed a special connection with the artwork that attempts to manifest the literal meaning of the verse. Light is the fundamental element that creates surrounding and therefore our consciousness, it reflects in a way that removes ambiguity and reveals something new to observe and understand.

She spent many months working on it and was helped by mentors from Ithra who helped develop and finalize the artwork. However, the moment she started working on the project with her own conviction and passion, it easily fell into place and her concept came to life. To her, "light was not a means to an end but the object of this artwork." It is what gives life and materiality to her art's experience.

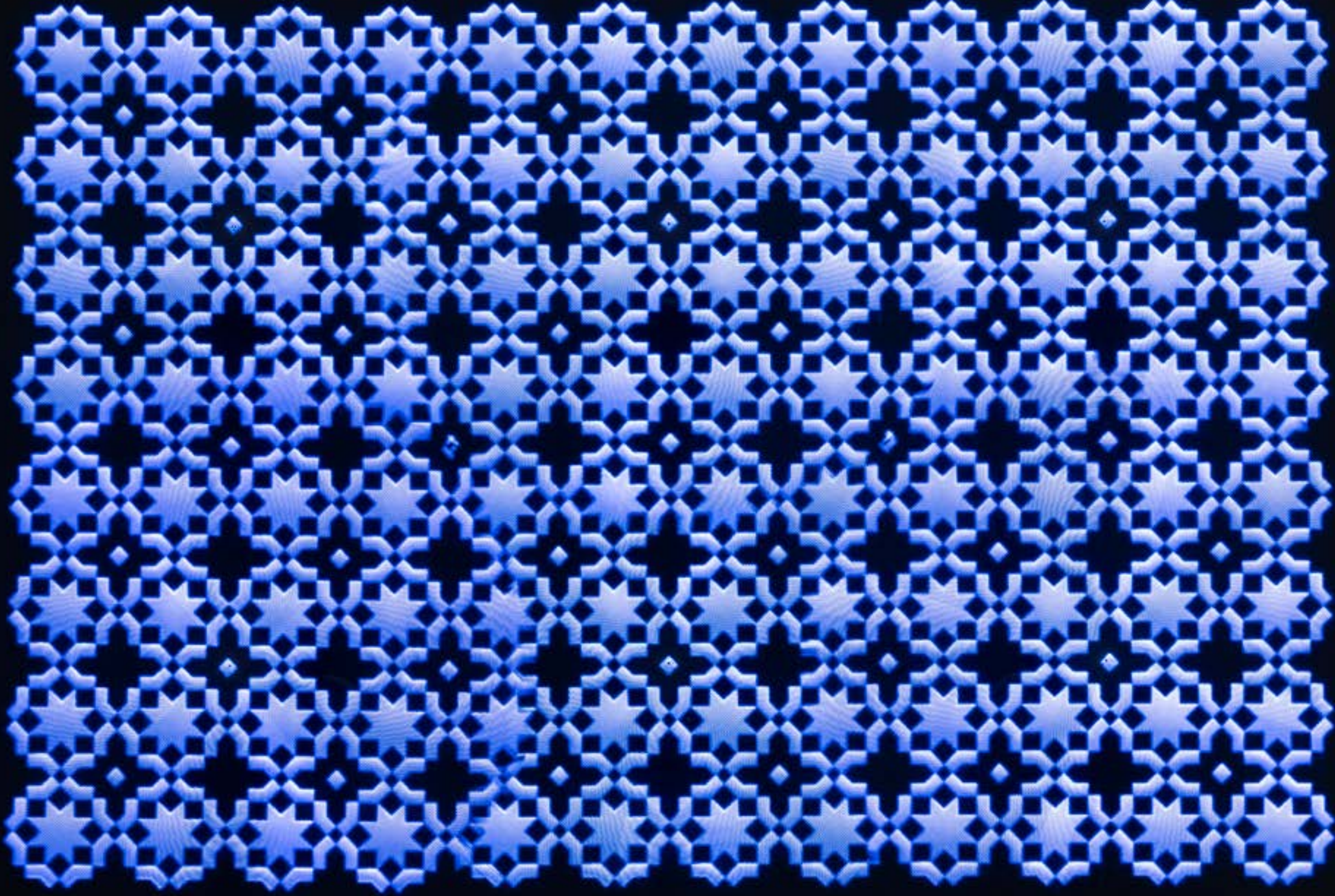


As she was inspired by Ayah (verse 35 of Surah Al Nur), She carefully designed a holographic geometric composition with an intricate proportion by using void as a surface and light as a medium. The composition itself is inspired from the tradition of sacred geometry; the artist uses them to create an introspect meaning that act as a form of thinking. When viewing, a traditional sacred geometry colored in seven colors will appear but it is actually three layers of light superimposed

upon each other produced using three colors only RGB (red, green, blue). These images are not static. They purposefully change based on the viewers' angle and their interactions with the piece.

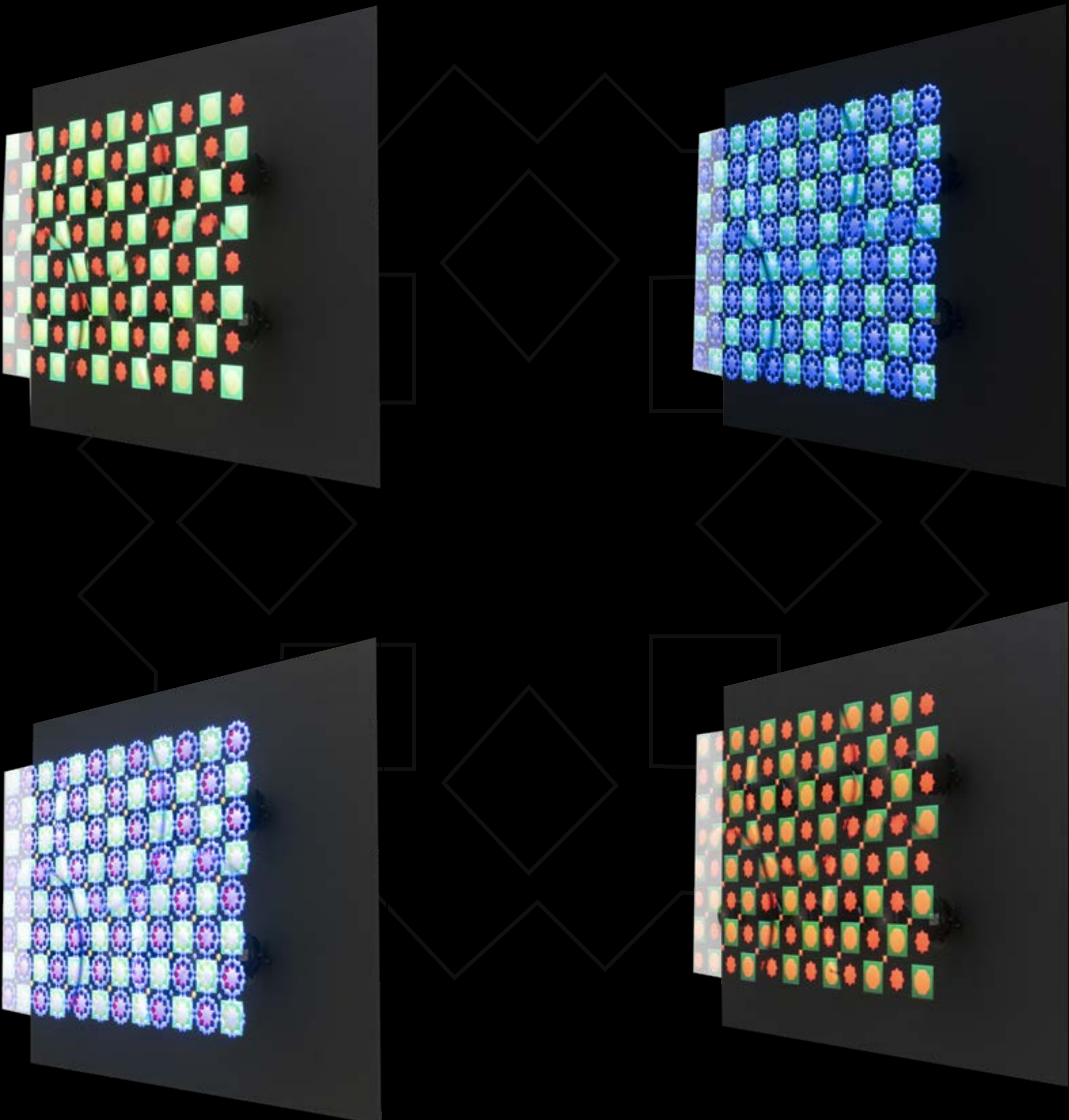
The installation attempts to take the viewer inside a misinterpreted experience, one that makes them think what is reality and what is not?

What once was assured can become uncertain.



The fact is that when the projector is turned off, there is no art. And so, without light, there is no life within this experience. Reflecting on that, Ms. Fadul pointed out that “light plays a huge role in how we exist in space.” If the light is bright, yellow,

spotted, or elongated, it affects how we react to content and what we feel in a space. This is what the artwork evokes. Light is part of how we exist and has a huge impact on our lives whether we interact with it passively or actively.





'The Guidance was born and all created things were illuminated / And the mouth of the ages (time) was all smiles and praise' by Sarmad Kazem Al Musawi, Iraq, 2011
Acrylic on Canvas. 180 x 180 cm. From the Collection of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth.
Courtesy of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth

Special Feature:

'The art of light, innovation and traditional Islamic art,'
an exclusive interview with **H.E. Noura Al-Kaabi**, UAE
Minister of Culture and Youth by Rym Al-Ghazal

"While you hone your craft and become better at it, don't shy away from showcasing it to the world, art is not personal, art should be shared with the world. It's a way of sharing, expressing and communicating, art sparks conversations and leads to dialogue...."

Her Excellency **Noura Al-Kaabi**, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth, shares her thoughts and views with the Editor in Chief of Ithraeyat, Rym Al-Ghazal on art, the importance of perseverance, and the ever evolving Islamic art and its depth. H.E. Al-Kaabi is one of UAE's most dynamic ministers, breaking new grounds and milestones as she leads various art and creative initiatives. One of the prestigious initiatives she oversees is the Al Burda Award.

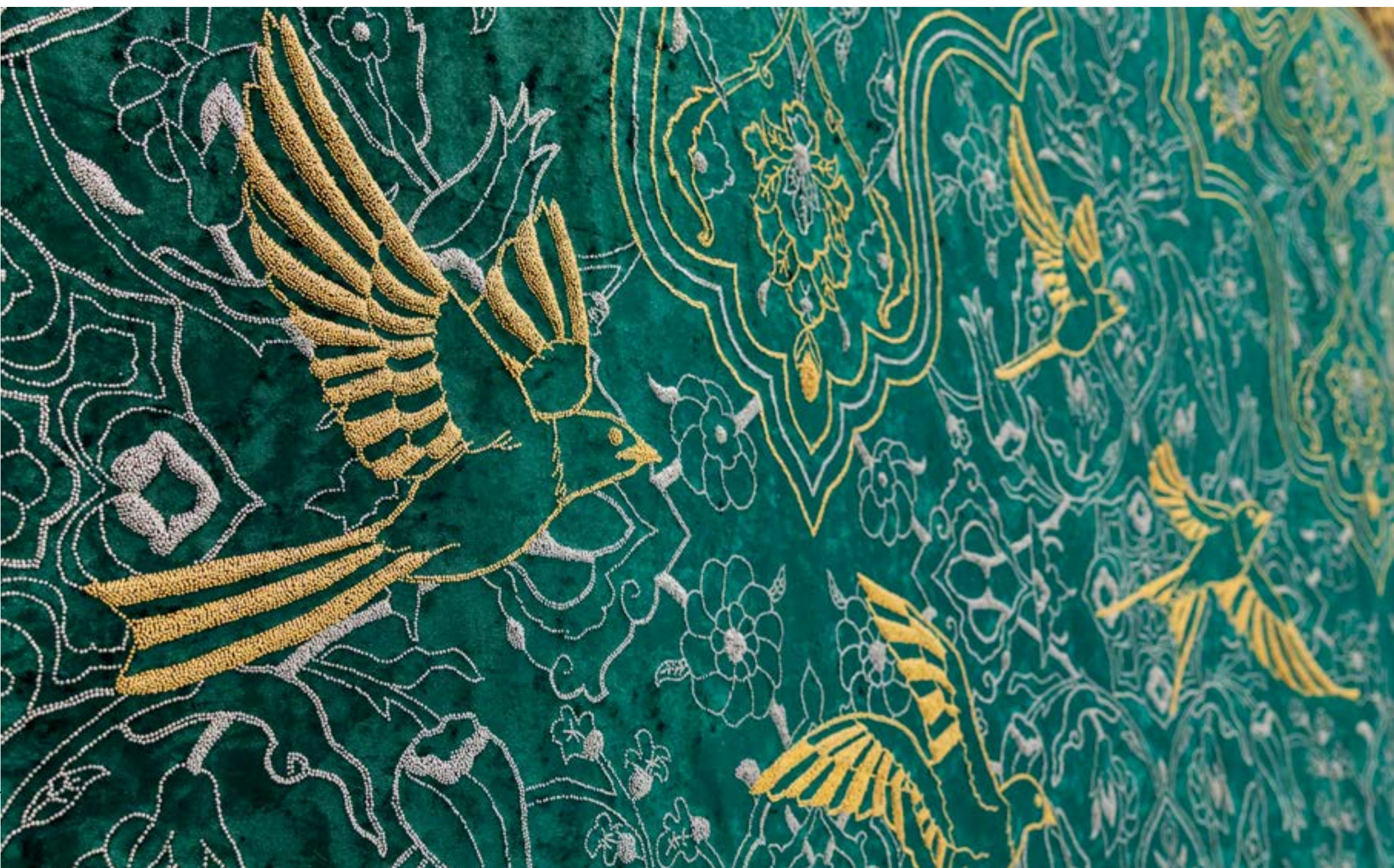
Al Burda Award is a global platform launched in 2004 in the UAE to commemorate the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad.
 “The name Al Burda comes from the thirteenth century poem by Imam Al Busiri, written in the praise of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH),” said H.E. Al-Kaabi.

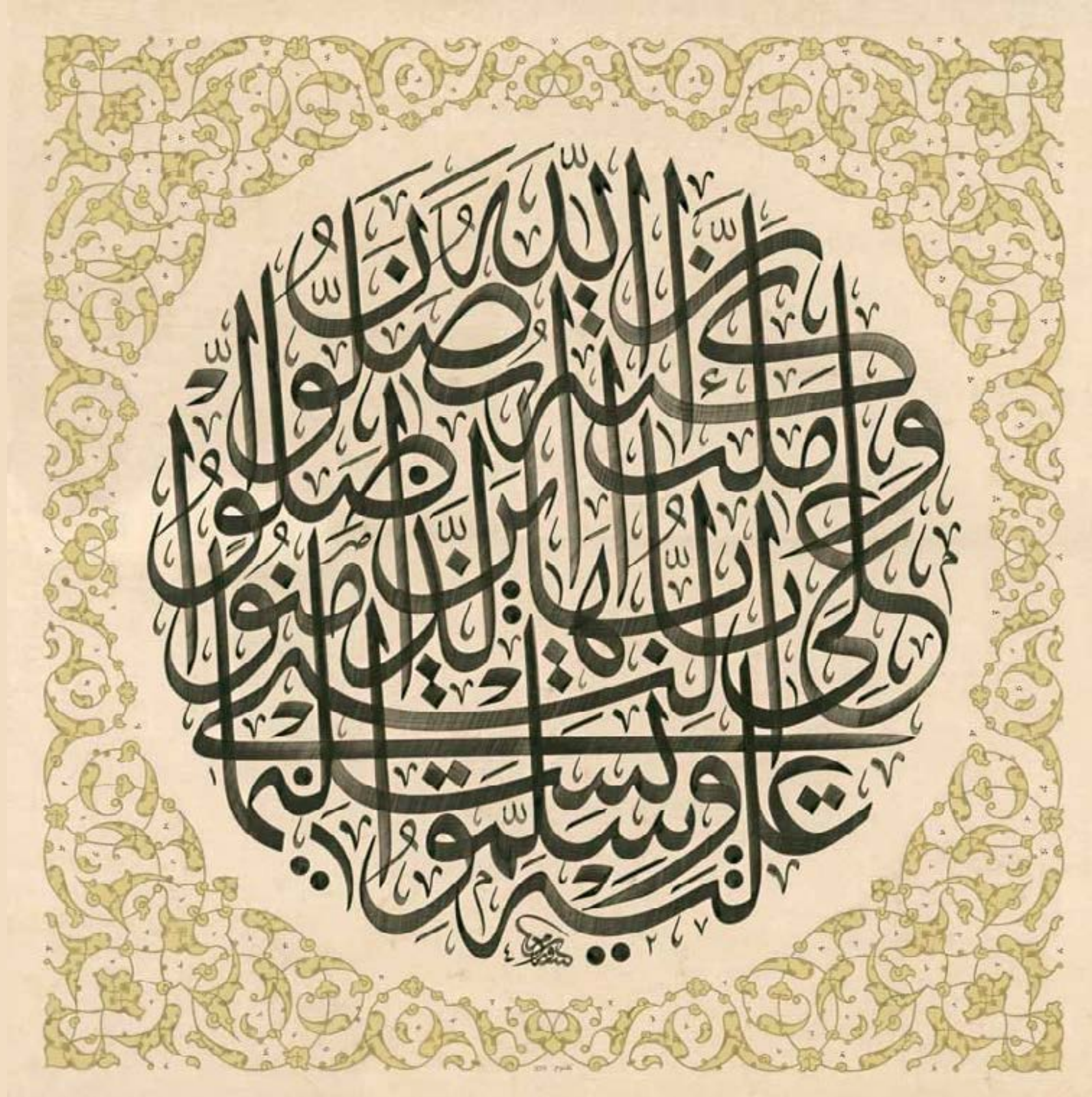


‘The Garden of Love is Green Without Limit,’ by Aisha Khalid from Pakistan. 2019
 Five paintings: gouache and gold leaf on paper board
 50.8 x 50.8 cm and 60.96 x 60.96 cm. From the Collection of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth. Courtesy of **UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth**

Quadriptych: Metal structure, fabric (velvet), steel pins and 24 - carat gold - plated steel pins 213.36 x 182.88 cm (each)
 In The Garden of Love is Green Without Limit, the shape of the overall structure, the Islamic geometric configurations within and the ornate patterning all recall the Holy Kaaba and its Kiswah (the cloth that covers the Kaaba), while the green of the tapestries in the work takes inspiration from the dome of the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina. The structure also draws on the concept of the lush garden as a celebration of nature, beauty and serenity. Each panel features whirling birds in flight,

as though in circumambulation around the tapestries. The panels differ both in the number and motion of the birds, and just as birds fly over the Holy Kaaba, so too they do here. The paintings, which also incorporate the same color scheme as the structure, recall the Islamic tradition of miniature painting and are presented to support the cube - like form. The spirituality within this piece is attributed to its actual assembly, the inclusion of a verse by the revered Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi and to the highly laborious, repetitive and meditative process involved in its creation - a spiritual act itself.





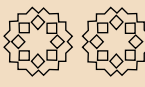
‘Allah and His angels send blessings to the Prophet. O you who believe, call for blessings on him, and for greetings of peace,’ by Wissam Shawkat, Iraq. 2006
Ink on Ahar Paper 60 x 60 cm . From the Collection of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth. Courtesy of **UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth**

Now in its 16th edition, it recognizes creativity and excellence in the practice of traditional Islamic disciplines, including Ornamentation, Classical and Modern Calligraphy, Nabati and Classical Arabic Poetry, and Arabic Typography - a new category added to the Award in a bid to encourage traditional expression by way of new technologies and interpretations.

“Al Burda conveys the values of Islamic aesthetics while upholding the virtues of tolerance and cultural harmony among people,” she said. “The award celebrates the diversity of Islamic culture and its artistic creativity and plays an important role in strengthening the UAE’s soft power. It shares the UAE’s cultural values and principles with the world while also strengthening its relations on a global level.” With a wide range of talents discovered and rediscovered, there is always something unique showcased as part of the award’s exhibition and programs. Since its inception, 300 winners have been awarded and recognized for their outstanding creativity. It’s heartening to see how the Award has achieved major successes in its past editions, giving a platform to talented creators and artists from the Arab and Islamic world while also welcoming talent from around the world,” said H.E. Al-Kaabi.

“We are very proud to say that it is one of the richest international awards in the field of art and culture. This goes to show the UAE’s commitment to the cause and its belief in this art form. A total value of about AED 1.3 million is distributed among the winners in the four main categories.”

We sit with Her Excellency and discuss interesting topics and hear her views.

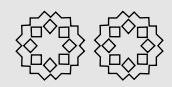
 **The theme for this issue is “Light” (Al Noor), can you tell us about the importance of light in Islamic art?**

According to the Qur’an, light represents the sanctity of God, and it was one of God’s very first creations, so light holds a special place in Islamic art.

Since Islamic art is nonrepresentational, light is used as a powerful element to communicate with the viewer. Even color in art is a depiction of the highly revered notion of light. In Islamic architecture as well, light plays a very significant role in designing the interiors of mosques and other buildings. It’s used very cleverly in architecture as a decorative medium and a way of expression.

What’s remarkable about Islamic art is its diversity. There are numerous regional and cultural influences on Islamic art which have enriched it over the years. For example, the artistic offerings from the Far East have their own individual characteristics and are not the same as those from the Arab region, yet there is an underlying theme that unites these styles under the Islamic Arts umbrella. Within the Arab region itself, Islamic art has been influenced by various cultural and social elements that have added several dimensions and layers to it.





What makes this year's Al Burda award and exhibition special?

This year's Al Burda is indeed special. It's the year of the 50th and this year's edition of Al Burda Festival and Award sums up the UAE's cultural and artistic journey in the past several decades. Among other artworks, the exhibition will host art based, on the year of the 50th as a tribute to the nation. Moreover, the Festival and Award coincide with Expo 2020 Dubai, the world's largest cultural event. The festival's juxtaposition against the Expo makes it a perfect amalgamation of the old and the new and symbolizes how the UAE has preserved its artistic heritage while making strides in the modern world.

This is not all, the Expo gives the participants an opportunity to showcase their craft in the form of traditional art, calligraphy, poetry and typography on a world platform by way of Al Burda and the Expo gives it a further impetus.

The Al Burda Award ceremony will be held in conjunction with the opening ceremony of the Arabic Language Summit, and welcome the Ministers of Culture from the 22 member states of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).



'Focal Illusion,' by Ebtisam Abdulaziz, from Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. 2019 Painted wood 144.78 7.62 × 172.8 × cm. From the Collection of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth. Courtesy of **UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth**

Focal Illusion seeks to engage with the audience by inviting them to physically move towards and away from it and explore side to side. This allows the work to offer alternative perspectives, both visually and conceptually. A departure from the artist's previous two - dimensional works, Focal Illusion employs themes of Islamic geometry in its use of multiple layers. Architecturally, it is constructed with the intention to manipulate our depth perception as well as concepts of light and dark, and visible versus invisible.

The organization and repetition of the various elements of the piece support principles of Islamic geometry, while the color scheme is representative of a moment of transition for the artist and one which has involved the move from one culture to another. Visually, it also calls to mind muqarnas, the honeycomb - like structures found in mosques. Carved and ornamented, they are highly mathematical structures, just as Focal Illusion is.

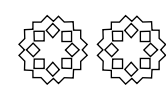


'What No Eye Has Seen,' by Nasser Al-Salem from Saudi Arabia. 2019. Wood, green paint, and vinyl 3 x 4 x 3.3 m. From the Collection of UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth. Courtesy of **UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth**

This installation's initial iteration began in 2015-2016, when, using white ink on white paper, Nasser Al Salem wrote out a hadith by the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in which he describes Paradise: "I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no danger to the human heart." However, feeling this version of the hadith did not inspire enough time for contemplation, the idea of a green room was born. At once calligraphic and sculptural, the work is fundamentally experiential. The space is devoid of any imagery, save for the written hadith glowing against a green background.

The experience is akin to the chroma studio or green screen used in film to project images: similarly, What No Eye Has Seen asks viewers to mentally cast their own images of Paradise.

A sense of infinity characterizes the space for it does not offer a tangible feel of scale, making it appear larger than it actually is. Forcing viewers to imagine, envision and walk around within it in a manner similar to circumambulation, it seeks to represent the hadith by offering a space for contemplation. Essentially, it answers the question "What does Paradise look like?" by confirming that the human imagination is finite: What no eye has seen.



Why was Saudi Arabia chosen as the guest of honor at this year's Al Burda Award ceremony?

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE share a strong cultural bond. Both countries embrace their brotherly ties and relationship that continues to grow stronger. The Kingdom's contribution to preserving Islamic art and culture is truly inspiring and sets an example for others to follow. Be it in the form of conserving calligraphy, Qur'an recitation, literature or art, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been leading the way in conserving traditional art forms. A variety of institutions have been established throughout the Kingdom to preserve Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage.

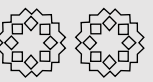
The decision to bestow the Guest of Honor status, is based on this legacy and the Kingdom's immense contribution to Islamic art. The Kingdom's role in supporting and disseminating Islamic arts and culture is noteworthy - particularly its concerted efforts to register Arabic calligraphy on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Kingdom is currently observing the Year of Arabic Calligraphy, an initiative that highlights the discipline as an art in its own right and spreads the culture of its use.



H.E. Noura Al-Kaabi with her adopted kitty, Burda, a famous resident of the Ministry of Culture and Youth.

 **Tell us about some of your favorite artists and art pieces?**

I like all forms of art but what intrigues me more is modern art, especially the work of regional artists. We have a lot of art from the region displayed in some of the galleries and museums in the UAE. It's heartening to see the ever evolving art scene burst with distinct shades of creativity. The international community is also taking notice of the burgeoning art movement in the region as more and more artists showcase their works on the global stage.

 **Tell us about your kitty Burda, that is allowed at the ministry. (I met Burda and the kitty brings joy to whoever visits the ministry).**

Burda is a special cat that has long resided on the ministry grounds and brought us joy over the years. He was rescued and adopted by me. As we were launching Al Burda's first iteration, the cat would respond to us when we called out Burda, hence the name. Burda indeed is there to welcome all who visit us at the ministry.

 **What motto do you live by and why?**

My motto evolves with the challenges at hand but what remains constant is the sense of duty and service that I have for my job, my nation and my community. Everything that I do stems from this sense of duty and service, and I try to never lose sight of it.

 **What advice do you give creatives and artists who are new to the cultural field?**

My advice is to continually strive to learn, research, respect substance over superficiality. Most importantly, be open and humble. Persevere and continue to learn. While you hone your craft and become better at it, don't shy away from showcasing it to the world, art is not personal, art should be shared with the world. It's a way of sharing, expressing and communicating, art sparks conversations and leads to dialogue. The social dimension of art is very strong. Therefore, it is important for young and upcoming artists to view art as a social phenomenon and bring about positive change in society and the world at large. Share your art, share your skill and showcase it. Go out there on world stage and promote your art. We as a nation are proud of what you create and we are here to support you.



What is the future of Islamic art in your opinion?

I strongly believe Islamic art has a great future. If we go by the number of entries we receive for Al Burda Award, it is growing each year, which goes to show that our efforts in the field are in the right direction. There is interest in the community to pursue traditional art forms, and this can be developed further by providing the right grounds and incentives for upcoming artists. It's a beautiful art form that needs to be showcased on world platforms.

Art and culture are deeply intertwined, and Islamic art is no exception. Like all other forms of art, Islamic art has cultural influences which makes it highly eclectic and diverse. A variety of local artistic traditions absorbed by Islam are the reason for a variety of styles united under the concept of Islamic art.

Can you share a memory about your first ever visit to an art exhibition, and what impression it left on you?

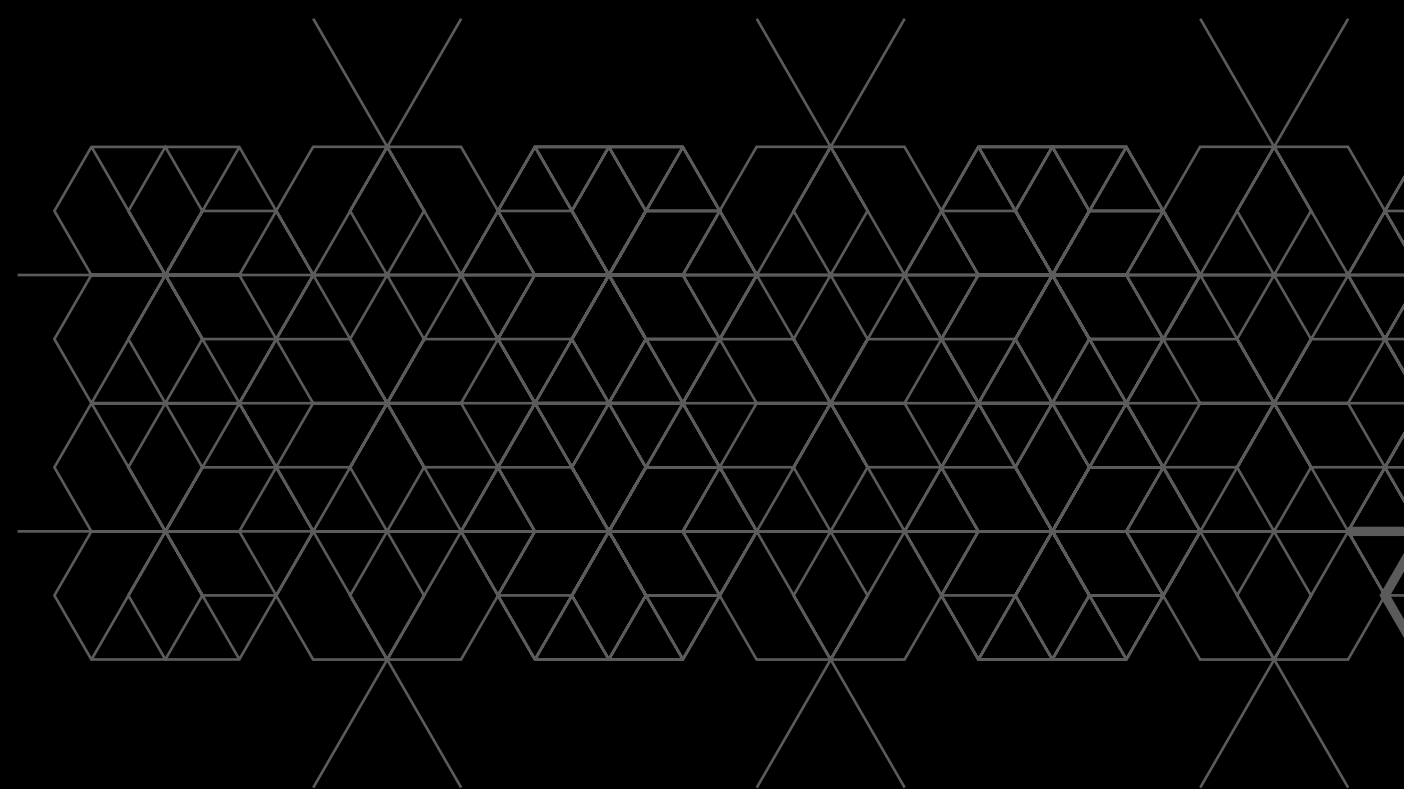
My first visit to the Louvre in Paris in the 1980's is etched on my mind. It evoked a sense of grandiose and beauty. I still remember how I was absolutely awestruck with the art I experienced there. It was an experience that's still vivid in my memory.

And lastly, why is art important?

As I said before art is a part of culture, it brings people together, it connects generations and adds a new dimension to life and makes it richer. Art has the ability to make connections and spark conversation and dialogue. An artist is not an isolated being he/she is connected with the world around.

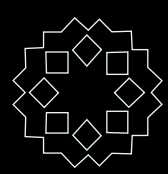
Art transcends boundaries and connects peoples, cultures and nations.

Art does not see any language or cultural barriers, which is why it has huge potential in bringing about change in the world.





The art and play of light inside Dr. Sami Angawi's home. Courtesy of the artist.



Special Feature:

The Kaleidoscopic light in Islamic art and life - an interview with Dr. Sami Angawi by Rym Al-Ghazal

“Light is forever changing... Throughout the day, light enters a room differently and shines a different perspective on the room, on the persons inside the room. The sun's rays give an overall different feeling of a place each time they shine and visit...”

Dr. Sami Angawi, a true legend in the field of Islamic and traditional architecture, shares his poetic and philosophical view in an exclusive interview with Ithraayat on the beauty and art of 'light' in traditional Islamic architecture and light's subtle yet important role in our lives.

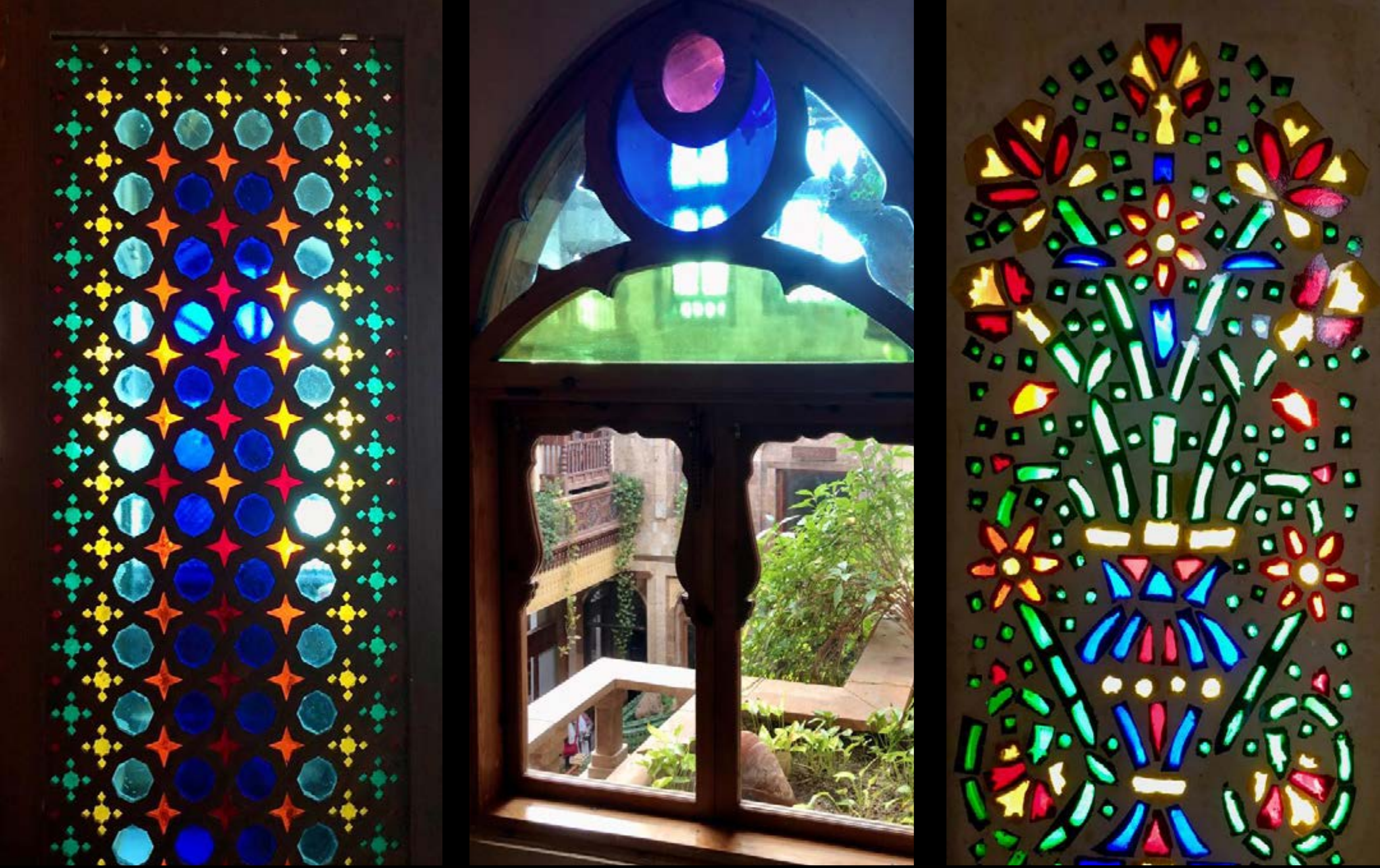
“There are important distinctions made between the different types of light in the Quranic verses, and there is a lot of depth and meaning in the concept of light,” he said.

“There is a difference in the concept of light in Arabic, Noor verses Duu, and in connection with the moon and the sun, where the Qur'an says 'And hath made the moon a light therein, and made the sun a lamp?' (Qur'an 71:16),” said Dr. Angawi. “You can find out a lot about concepts and traditional way of life if you go back to the roots of the Arabic words. I use the Arabic language, the Qur'an, the Hadith as my reference, for instance Wudu (ablution) is linked to Duu, where Wudu brings light into our life as we make our wudu before prayers,” he said. He pauses before adding: “Noor is closer to a feeling, and Duu is linked more to a touch.”

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a *lamp*. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things.”

(Qur'an 24:35)





The art and play of light inside Dr Sami Angawi's home. Courtesy of the artist.

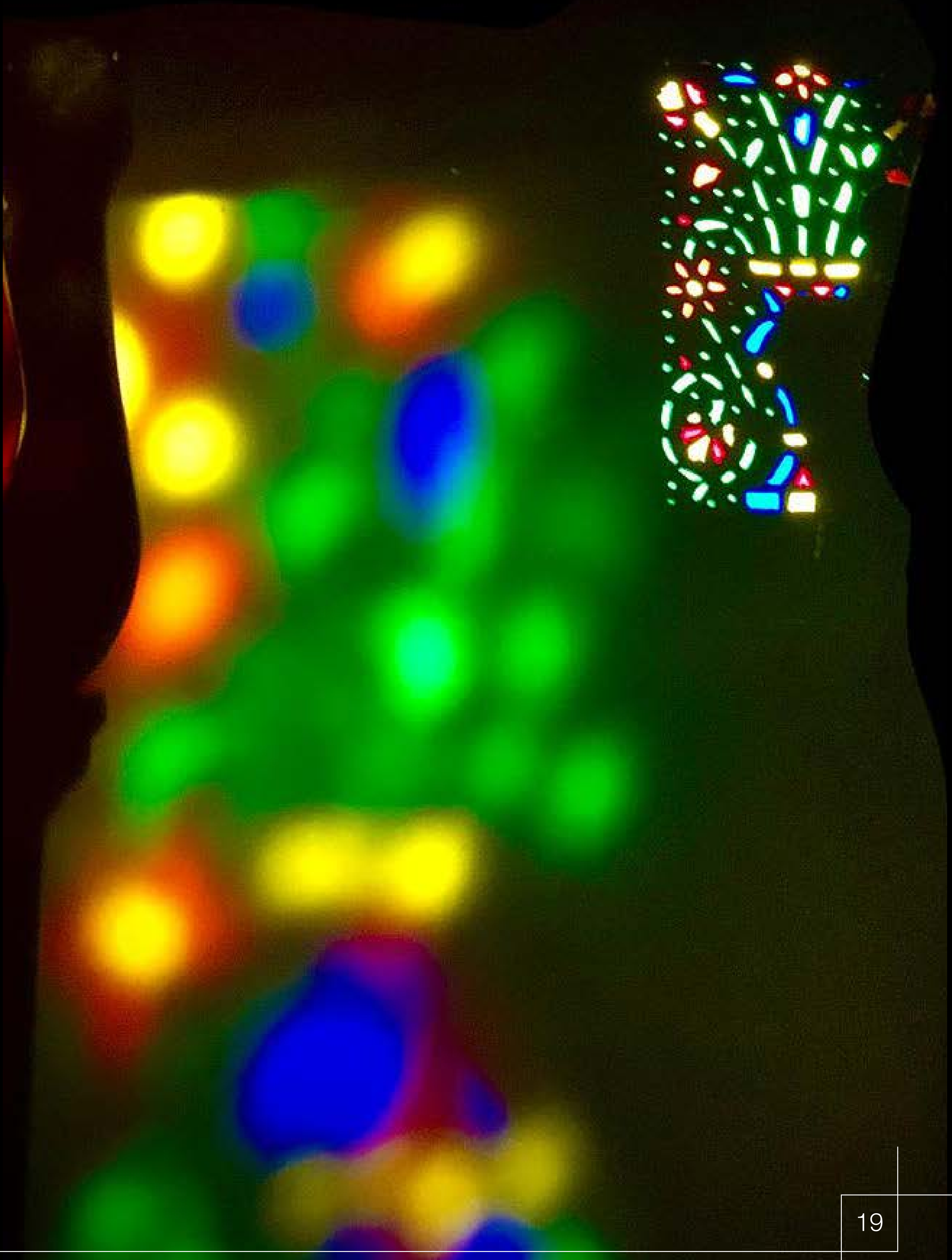
Dr. Angawi's home in Jeddah is a famous landmark — **'Dar Al Makkiah'**—a mansion of Islamic and Hejazi traditional architecture and an exquisite representation of a traditional Makkah house. Every corner tells a story, from radiant colors via stained glazed glass, rich patterns (geometric and flora), symmetrical silhouettes, and distinct windows covered with the traditional 'mashrabiya', a screen of beautifully carved wood latticework. The word "mashrabiya" is said to come from an Arabic root meaning the "place of drinking," which was adapted to accommodate the first function of the screen: "the place to cool the drinking water."

Riddled with colorful plants and vegetation, the rooms are well lit with the right amount of draft and light. "And natural light doesn't cost any money," joked Dr. Angawi. Balance, Al Mezan, a duality, is an important concept in Islamic tradition, architecture and life. The balance between modernity and tradition, between privacy and openness, stability and dynamism, and the right balance of light makes a great difference in the feel of a room and its function. Harmony is in the balance of things and ideas," said Dr. Angawi. "In the old mosques, they had a 'Mezwala' a sundial, a sun-shadow clock, so they can calculate prayer times. The light of the sun plays an important role in our Islamic tradition, with the sunrise and sunset defining our fasts and our prayers."



His past projects balanced concepts, like designing the International Medical Center Hospital in Jeddah that combined the origin of the word “Mostashfa” (originated from the word Shefa - healing) and Hospital, from hospitality. “So it became a place of healing and welcoming,” he said.

His latest project is focused on capturing the past, for the present and the future, a “Virtual Heritage” — a virtual museum— with a focus on the Two Holy Mosques of Makkah and Madinah. Through a lifetime of conducting research and compiling material on the history of Hajj, the two holy cities and the wider Hijaz region, Dr. Angawi holds one of the world’s largest archive collections on the subject. “For us to know where we are heading, we know to know our past, as the past is knowledge that lights our future.”





A sandstone cube, found in 1979 that is dated between the 5th - 4th century BC. Known as Al-Hamra cube was named after the palace of where it was found in Tayma, an oasis 220 km southeast of the city of Tabuk. Courtesy of **The National Museum of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh.**



Guest Columnist:

‘Ancient light and its stories’ — a treasure from the National Museum collection by Laila Al-Faddagh

Light, Noor, is an integral part of our everyday lives. In its most simplest definition, light is brightness that allows things to be seen. Throughout time light has been mentioned in science, poetry and religion. The Qur’an, has a Sura titled “Noor” and many verses and ayas that mention the word “Noor.”

Pre-dating Islam, light was seen to be so important, that sources of light such as the sun and moon were thought to be gods. There is a unique example of this at the National Museum of Saudi Arabia. A sandstone cube, found in 1979 that is dated between the 5th - 4th century BC. This cube, known as the Al-Hamra cube, was named after the palace of where it was found in Tayma, an oasis 220 km southeast of the city of Tabuk.

Looking closely at the cube, carved images start to appear. In the center of the cube on the left, an image of a bull can be seen with a round disk between its horns. A priest stands to the left of the bull, dressed in a long gown or tunic. Above the priest, another disk is found, this one is winged.

Disks in carvings such as these usually represent the sun or the moon and sometimes both. A source of light associated with gods. What makes this cube unique is that it is believed to represent the blend of religions that seems to have been a practice in Tayma.

The bull with the sun-disc closely resembles the Egyptian Apis bull, and the winged disc is usually associated with the god Valm. This cube is exceptional as it appears to represent two different civilizations — that of Egypt and Mesopotamia. A visit to the National Museum will shed light on the many civilizations and treasures that have existed in Arabia. Every corner of the museum has an object with a special story to discover.



Lady in the Dark, 2021. Maythaa Mohammed Al Shamsi, UAE
Photography. Courtesy of **Khaleeji Art Museum**.

Guest Columnists:

‘Transcendence — The Journey to
Finding Light.’

By Manar and Sharifah Al-Hinai, co-founders of
Khaleeji Art Museum

When we were younger, entering a tunnel on family road trips was always an exhilarating experience. As children, darkness was our worst enemy. What we imagined lingered in the crevices of the unknown sent shivers down our spines. That is why we slept with a nightlight on for much of our childhood; to keep the otherworldly creatures that we had drawn up in our minds away, hidden in the shadows, where they belonged. However, the darkness of tunnels, surprisingly, did not scare us. Instead, it made us jump with our siblings in excitement and joyfully let out an elongated “noooooor” (light) as we literally approached the light at the end of the tunnel.

The sight of us shouting together in glee in the backseat never failed to put a smile on our parents’ faces.

We have been revisiting this memory since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, perhaps because it is an escape to happier times, when the world was okay, or perhaps because it reminds us of a reassuring truth: That there is, in fact,

a light at the end of every tunnel, no matter how far away it seems, and that only by having faith in eventually reaching it and trusting others to help us reach it, will we be able to overcome darkness of any kind.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the world has been enveloped in gloom. We are all afraid of the monstrous virus that lingers in the shadows that has kept us away from our loved ones. But what has kept us going is our inherited knowledge that this crisis, like health crises before it, will eventually pass, and that the world will regain its color.

What has kept us going is our faith in fellow man, after Allah, to carry us through this crisis, whether it is by inventing a vaccine, or by practicing caution that will result in a healing butterfly effect, or by simply being there for us in this dark time, and guiding us through it, until we reach the light. We now know why we were not afraid of the darkness in the tunnel, it was because we had people with us that we loved, trusted and had faith in; people like our parents and siblings.

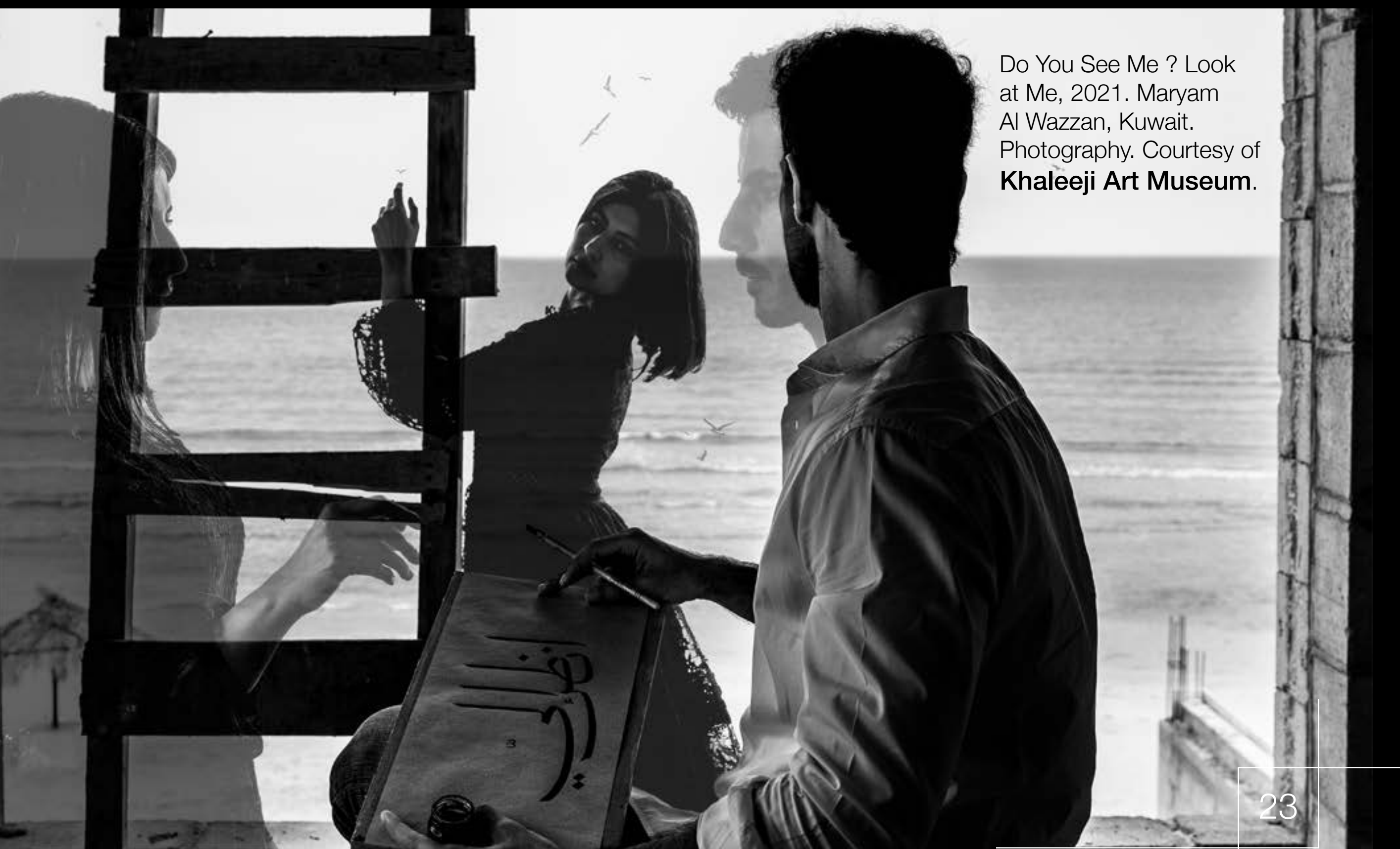


Untitled by Kawthar Smaren and Suliman Hilal, 2021. Saudi Arabia Acrylic paint on convex mirror. Courtesy of **Khaleeji Art Museum**.

Human connections, whether they are experienced from a distance or not, during the last two years, have emerged as essential to the survival of this crisis. Their intrinsic value has been depicted in works by Gulf artists that were created during the pandemic. In the Khaleeji Art Museum's latest group art exhibition **Transcendence**, the need for this connection is highlighted. Emirati artist Maythaa Al Shamsi's *Lady in the Dark*, for example, depicts the internal struggles that is born out of going through challenging experiences, like COVID-19, alone. Saudi artists Kawthar Smaren and Suliman Hilal's *Untitled*, which is a convex mirror that carries a statement in Arabic that reads, "souls are farther than you think they are,"

emphasizes the physical distance the COVID-19 crisis has enforced on us, and raises the question of which soul has become closest to you during the crisis. *Do You See Me? Look at Me* by Maryam Alwazzan from Kuwait, is a photography series that revolves around learning to communicate with others without being in the same space as they are in. The work expresses the following, "I am here, do you see me? Close your eyes and let your heart look at me."

In the end, this global experience, as these works exhibited in the *Transcendence* showcase, has taught us an important lesson: Only we can see each other through the darkness of this crisis.



Do You See Me ? Look at Me, 2021. Maryam Al Wazzan, Kuwait. Photography. Courtesy of **Khaleeji Art Museum.**



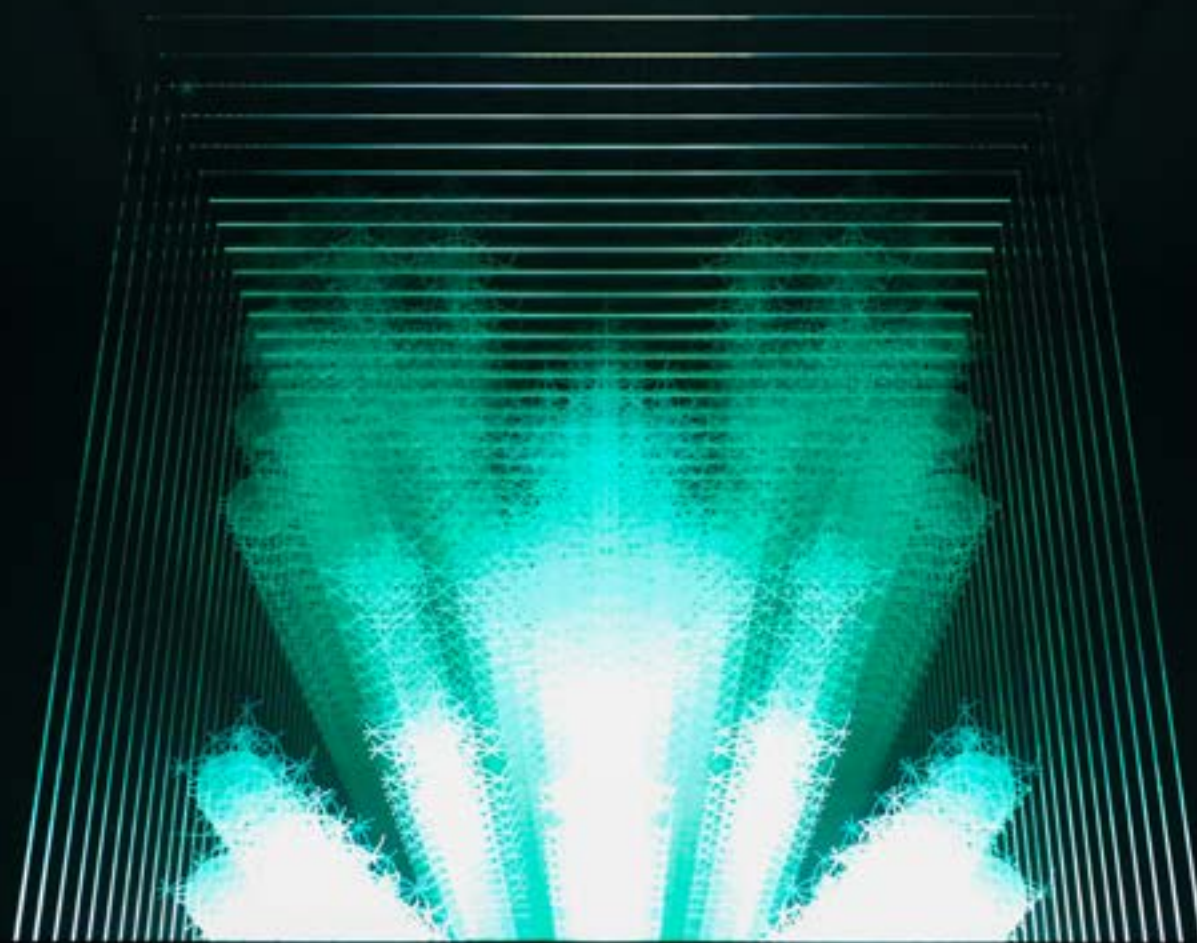
Ali Alruzaiza Tribute to Ali Alruzaiza, 2021 Video projection Video design by Sara Caliumi and Carlo Camorali Courtesy the artist Photo © Riyadh Art

Guest Columnist:

‘The curation of light.’ By Eiman Al-Gibreen,
Curator of Noor Riyadh Art Festival

The Riyadh Art Festival is the first event of the Riyadh Art project, the first national public art initiative in Saudi Arabia. Riyadh Art intended to transform the city of Riyadh into a gallery without walls and a creative powerhouse for the digital age. The idea of organizing a light art festival was part of the plan; however, after the lockdown and the many health protocols of Covid-19, it seemed more realistic to launch the project with the light festival. The light resembles hope and healing. It washes the darkness, transcends borders, and literally defines our days and nights. Therefore, the theme chosen for the first edition of the Noor Riyadh festival was “Under One Sky.”

The festival is planned to be an annual international event in Riyadh, consisting of three main components: citywide installations, an exhibition, and a rich educational program. Sponsored by the Royal Commission of Riyadh City (RCRC), the first edition started with 13 citywide locations and three curators working together. Pam Toonen and Vincenzo de Bellis were responsible for the international artwork, and I was responsible for the local art installation. Each one of us had our unique challenges, but it came together beautifully thanks to the amazingly talented artists we had and the rest of the team. The first edition’s success drove the officials of the Riyadh Art project to raise the budget for the second edition four times over. The plan is to allow more artists to participate and shed light on many more beautiful locations of Riyadh.



Proportion of Light by Ahmad Angawi. 2021. Wood and engraved glass 230 x 80 cm
Courtesy the artist Photo © Riyadh Art 2021

One of the most significant challenges I faced in this project was encouraging Saudi artists to experiment with light and produce something that still looks like it. Light was never sought as a medium by Saudi artists. Add to that the challenge of creating an entirely new installation during the lockdown. However, I went for artists Riyadh influenced personally to use this affinity as a driving force for their inspiration when they plan their site-specific installation.

The entire process brought us so many emotions, even during the final stages. One of my most fond memories was driving with the artists very late at night to do the testing.

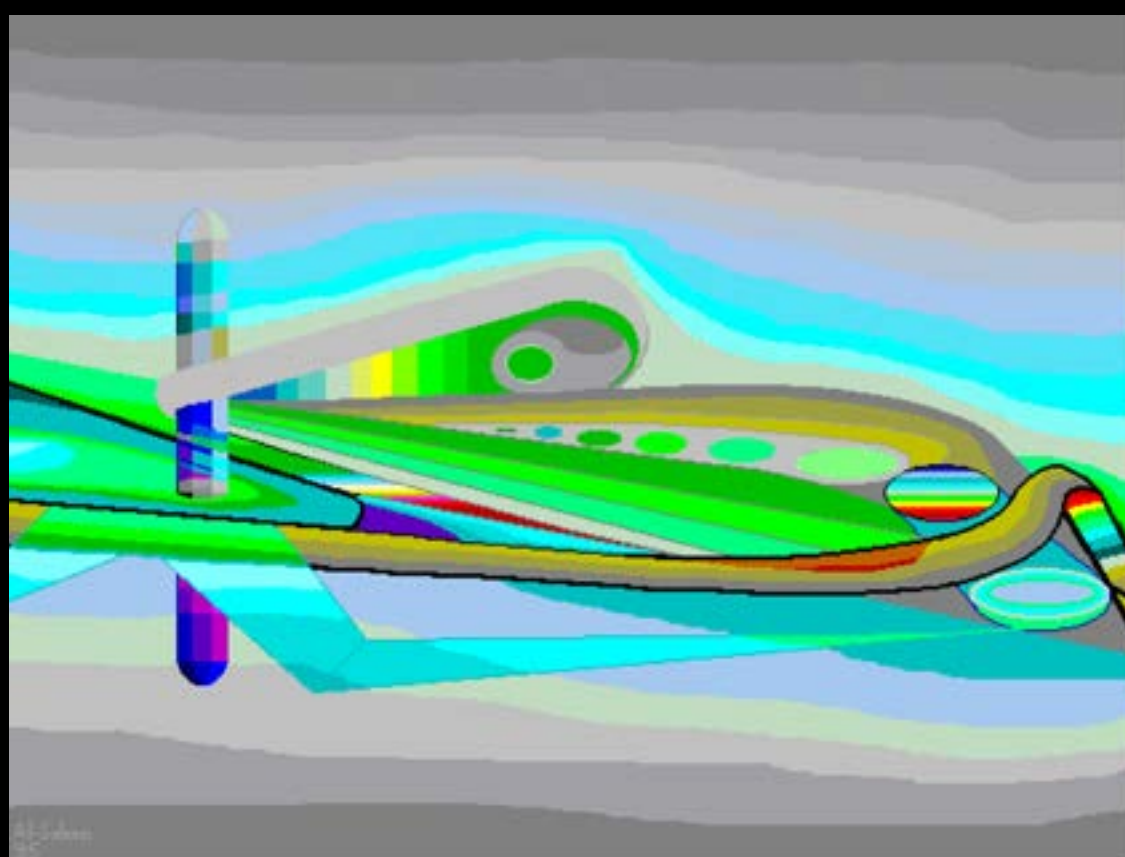
For us, as lifelong residents of Riyadh, it was exciting to visit a place like King Fahad's National Library, or Al-Masmak Fort, at a time when it was usually closed. We felt like we owned Riyadh. The night we tested the final cut for Al-Ruzaiza's tribute, I invited his entire family, including his grandchildren, to celebrate this moment with us. It was very late on a school day, yet they all came and made it a magical moment.

Another historical moment we lived during the process was when we discovered the work we used for Al-Saleem's tribute.

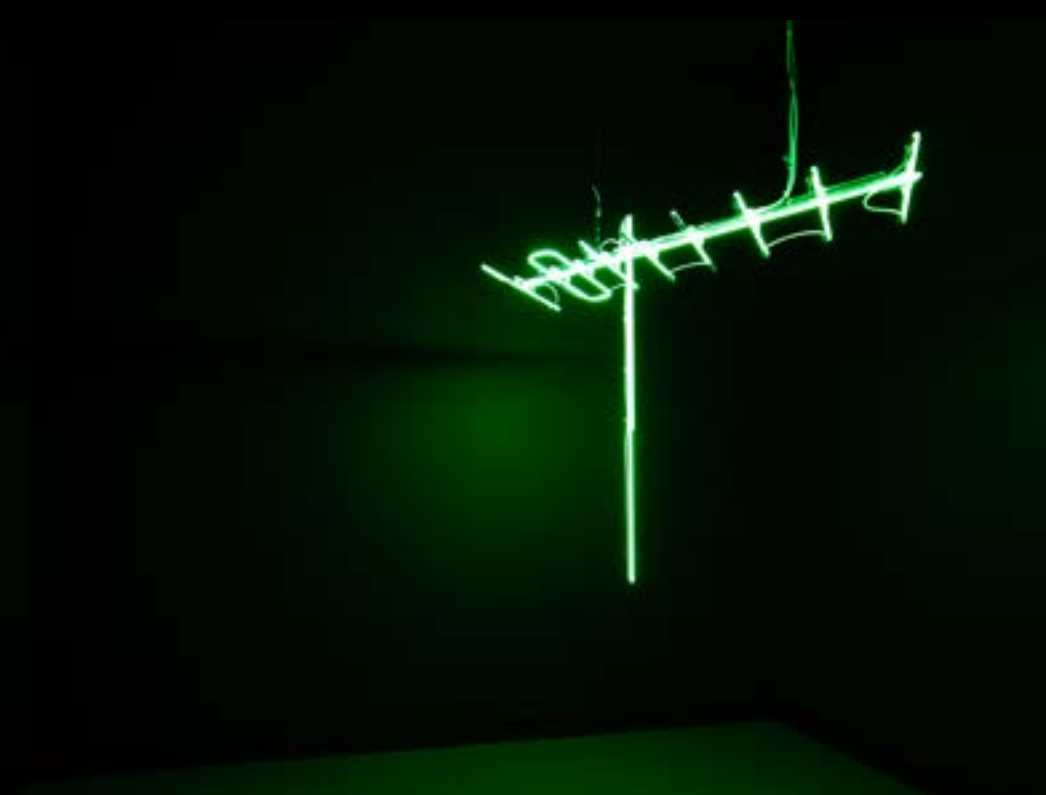
It was a computer graphic made with Windows' Paint program. For me, this was a "painting with light"; seeing all the pixels in the tiny BMP file that fits perfectly with this festival and reminds the audience that this Riyadh-based pioneer was already exploring digital media's capacity to make new works of art.

We ordered a floppy disc reader specifically to investigate what was inside this disc that was left in his bedroom in Italy when he died. We were amazed by the highly detailed and colorful graphics, and, to our surprise, the file information showed that it was saved barely two hours after the birth of his second granddaughter. A storm of emotions hit us all as we were unveiling this together, and we started to scream and laugh and tear up. I was lucky I captured that moment on film.

Later, a family member remembered that Al-Saleem designed this graphic for his other daughter's wedding. He was waiting for Najla to give birth to assign a date for her sister's wedding after she recovered. This information was the last piece of the puzzle. The Noor Festival allowed us to share with the world a piece of rare information on Al-Saleem. It was the first time that the public learned that he dabbled with technology.

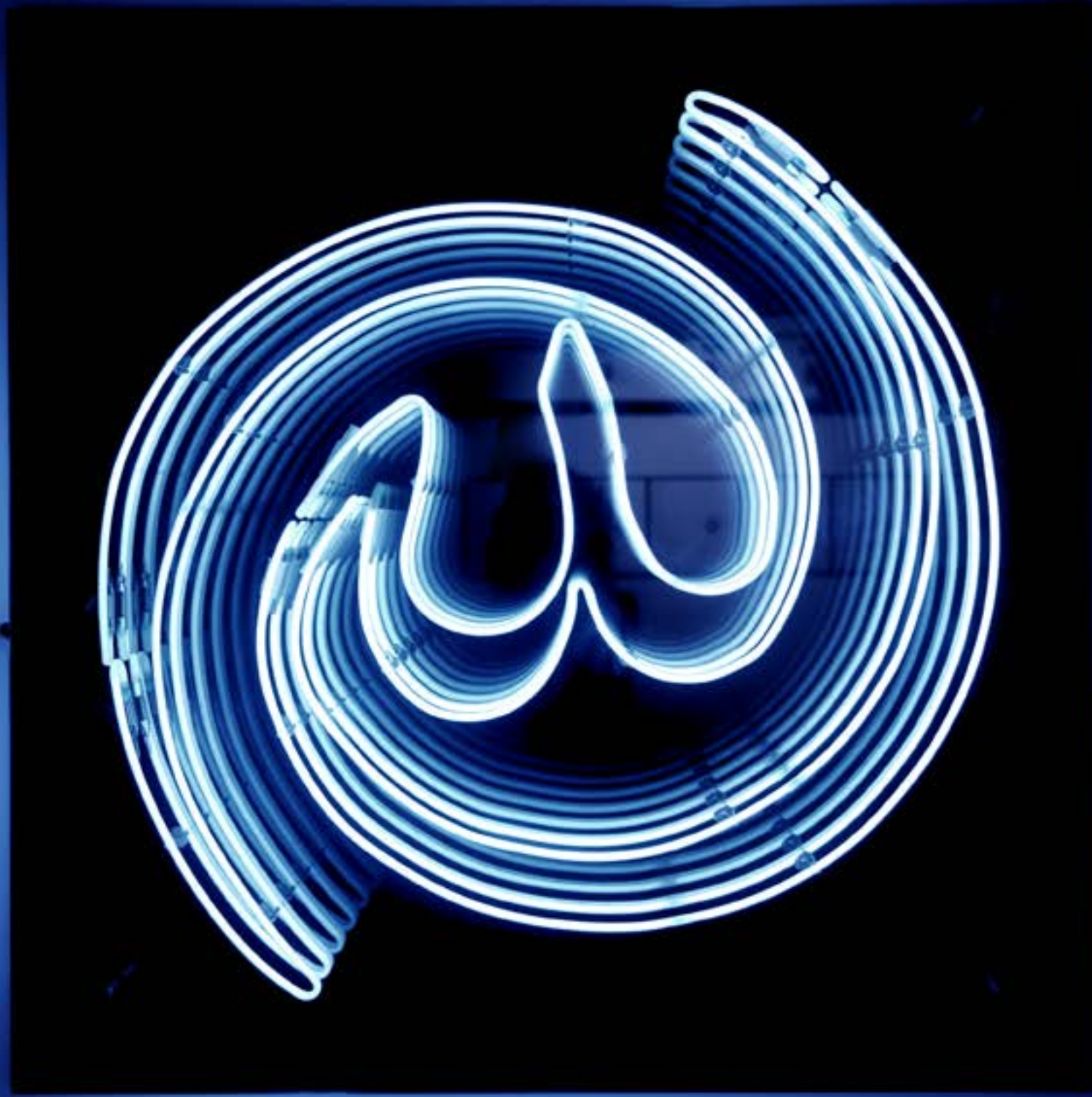


Mohammed Al-Saleem's digital art from 1995 discovered in a floppy disc by daughter Najla. Courtesy of Eiman El-Gibreen



Antenna (Green), by Ahmed Mater. 2010. From the series Antenna. 150 x 150 x 50 cm. Courtesy of a private collection. Photo © Riyadh Art 2021.

At this unique festival of light and art, many stories came to life, becoming timeless and elusive like light itself.



God Is Alive, He Shall Not Die (Blue) by Nasser Al-Salem. 2012.
Neon light on mirror 120x120cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Guest Artist:

‘Light Within and Light Without’ - an interview
with Nasser Al-Salem by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.

Nasser Al-Salem is an artist in Arabic calligraphy. He describes himself as “a person who lives and strives to give life to calligraphy in the contemporary world.” His passion existed before he even could develop his masterful skill, practicing with whatever samples he could find until he was able to attend classes with masters like Ibrahim Alarafi.

Eventually, Nasser saw “the potential of experimenting and contemporizing calligraphy.” He used the rules of art and broke them to explore the potential of calligraphy.

At Art Dubai in 2009, he started questioning the classism of calligraphy and the connection to Islamic art and realized that he had more to give: “Historically, experimentation was the norm.

Contemporarily, the limitation of the conceptual narrative and of the creativity surrounding calligraphy was an area of contention, which may cause the art to die off as there is no experimentation or expansion.”

Nasser’s creative output changed after that, starting with Zamzam and continuing to pieces like God is Alive, He shall not Die and Curfew, Risk of Transformation. His work is no longer limited by rules, materiality, or expectations, nor does he get inspiration from a singular source. According to his experience, “the sentence leads the creative process and dictates the materials and the concept.” This includes light. To Nasser, “light is one of the most important mediums to explore concepts in art because we all need light to live, grow, and exist. This includes all life forms.”

الله حي لا يموت

God is Alive, He Shall Not Die

What is light but a reflection of who we are and how we exist in the world. It was Nasser's first time using neon and a mirror to create this artwork. Created in 2012, it is the work with which he challenged himself.

"Being able to write Allah in thulth in the correct and nearly perfect way is the ultimate proof of one's ability as a calligrapher." When dealing with the word, Nasser wanted to express his unique relationship with

the word and his intimate relationship with God. "God is light, he is named light, he has created light, and he exists infinitely." Nasser explained that the use of a mirror creates a recurrence that never ends.

"Creating the feeling of infinity of the seen and unseen using reflection is the best medium for this process because whichever angle you stand on you'll see the word repeating and you know the word will continue to do so even past what can be seen."



حظر تجول - خطر تحول

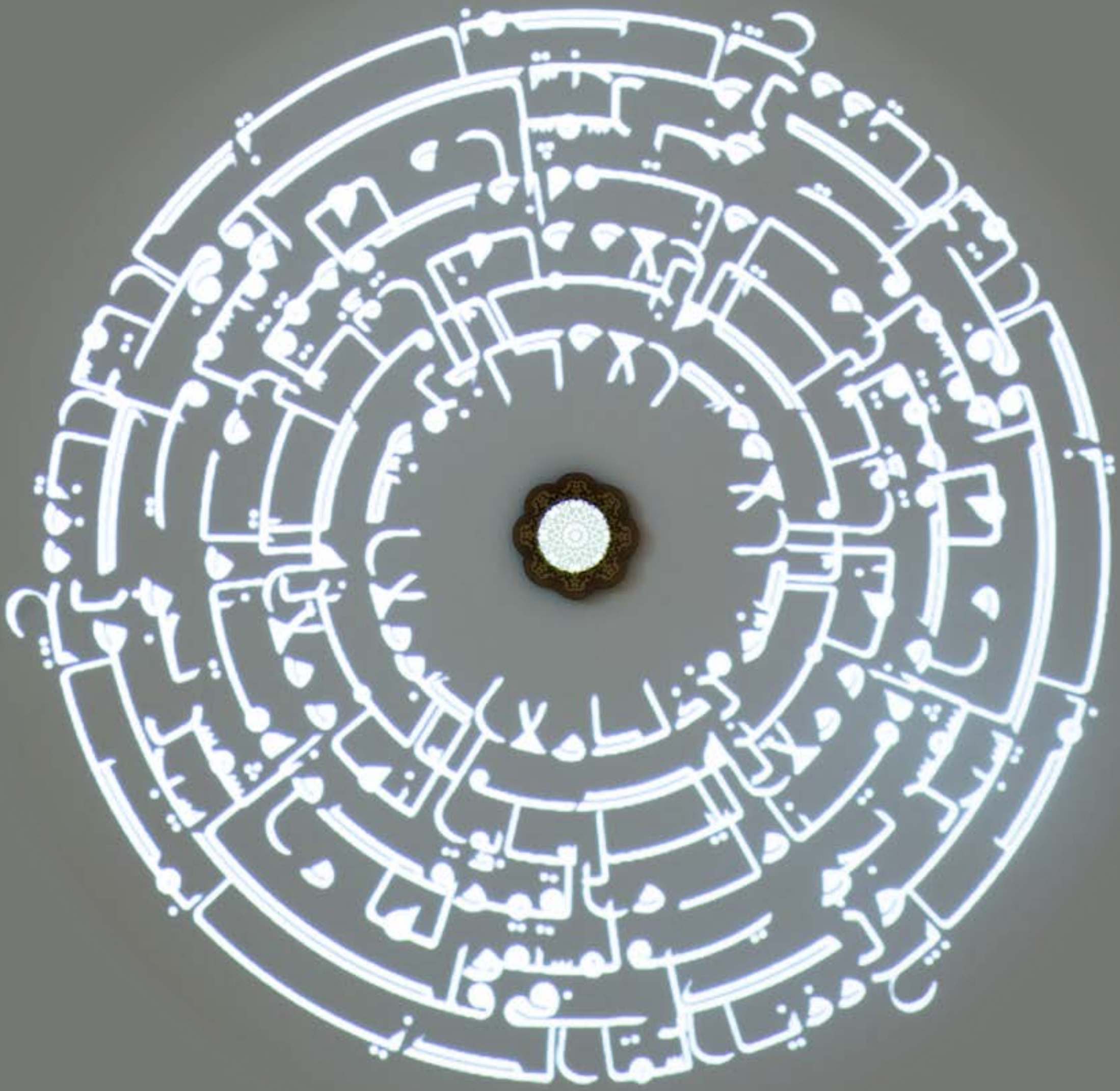
Curfew- Risk of Transformation

The pandemic affected how we interact with the world and this neon sign reminds us of the experience of when the whole world experienced extreme change. "Of course, many people wished for a return to normality, but things have truly changed, like the introduction of virtual meetings as a norm."

Although it is reminiscent of his work Arabi/Gharbi, the use of flickering light shows a different word depending on the position of the dot on the words. With a flick of a switch, he created an artwork that

represents the fragility of our state during that year. This switch changes the meaning of the words from Curfew to Risk of Transformation. It raises the question: what are the risks of transformation from the curfew and, in extension, the pandemic?

Nasser's advice to anyone who wishes to become an artist is to "love what you do and practice what you love, develop it further, and work through successes and failures." Art is the space where you find yourself and discover yourself and the people around you.



'An Adornment of Stars,' by Nasser Al-Salem from Saudi Arabia. 2014. Video projection. Part of the Ithra Art Collection and was on display at WASL-Beyond the Pen exhibit at Ithra.

An Adornment of Stars.

The artwork reflects on the cyclical nature of spiritual pursuit and the balance of the universe.

These seven rotating circles, each containing an extract from a Qur'anic verse in Kufic script, celebrate the wonder of the universe. Nasser Al-Salem chose the number seven to reflect both the famous pre-islamic poems known as Al Mu'allaqat —believed to have been hung

on Makkah's Kaaba — and number of tawaf [circumambulation] performed during Hajj.

The artist reflects over the circular motion of tawaf like the earth's rotation, the moon's orbit around the earth and the path of both around the sun. He said:

"All I can do is what I always do during times of confusion or uncertainty; I look to the Qur'an for answers."



Casino AlRiyadh by Abdullah AlOthman, 2021. Various neon and LED lights and steel.

Guest Artist:

“I contemplate the cosmos of the moon,”
an interview with Abdullah Al-Othman by Aljohara Al-Athel

In the words of the iconic American artist, James Turrell: “Light is not so much something that reveals, as it is itself the revelation.”

This statement prompted me to go on a journey of exploration revolving around the relationship between art and light.

Abdullah Al-Othman, a Saudi Arabian artist, has been a presence in the local art scene since 2013.

In his works, most recent of which is titled “In Riyadh’s Casino, I contemplate the cosmos of the moon,” he plays with art and light in a way which delves into the themes of revelation that Turrell spoke of.

During our **interview** Al-Othman further expanded upon the vital part light plays within art, both thematically and symbolically, and spoke a bit about his experiences as an artist.

“Tell me about yourself. When did you start your journey as an artist? And what was it that urged you to pursue art?”

My artistic experience started with language, writing and poetry. In 2010, I published my first collection of poetry titled “A Late Memory, 10 seconds,” and then “This Void May Occur Twice” came about in 2012.

This journey into literature, and poetry specifically, helped inform my artistic experience and develop my creativity. It also helped me research, read and explore various forms of artistic expression, ultimately leading up to my participation in the *Mostly Visible* exhibition in 2013 with more to come.

These experiences made me examine the very definition of art and its importance when it comes to expression, identity, culture and language. Even now my love for the artistic experience is still growing and will continue leading me to new creative possibilities.

Because in the end, art, to me, is about searching for answers to life’s questions, whether it’s through testing ideas or living new experiences, and examining the external and internal outcomes.

“Tell me about your latest work involving light. What was the source of inspiration? What were the meanings or themes and how did you use light to convey them?”

Light has always existed and defined the artistic realm. For example, the presence or absence of it changes the composition, the meaning and even the beauty of artworks completely.

Light is a leading factor enhancing art both aesthetically and technically— it’s the secret of beauty and drawing attention to it, whether it’s in the form of a place, an idea or even a sentence. All of this is why light is a big part of my art.

For example, when it comes to *Suspended*, aluminum foil was used to play with how light reflects in the folds of the foil to give the building a feeling of width and infinite space within the neighborhood.

In another one of my latest works involving light, *Casino AlRiyadh*, I contemplate the cosmos of the moon, which was part of the *Noor Riyadh* exhibit, I set out to explore cities through language and architecture.

Throughout my journey, I discovered an abundance of lit up signs that guide the way and create endless possibilities for me in the city. So, I kept following these possibilities, imagining the stories of each sign and thinking of how various types of lights, for example neon or light boxes, affect the language of the visual story. Language is a way to preserve the history of the place and the existence of these once lit-up signs is proof. So, a building might cease to exist, but the sign is a reminder of what it once was.

This moved me and spurred me to explore the creative possibilities when language and light intersect to tell the story of a city. I started to collect old signs and worked to create poetry through neon lights. In this piece, there were several individual signs, from different eras going back all the way to the 1960s, which I put together to build a poetic story about Riyadh’s history.

“What do you feel is the importance of light within art? Both technical and symbolic.”

In some art pieces, light plays a principal role, while in others light, itself, is the art piece. Light will always be interwoven with artistic experiences. This is evident when you go back to the basics of traditional art, the use of light and shadows is essential in creating depth and realism in a drawing or painting.

And now more than ever before, light has become even more integral to the conception of artworks, especially with the introduction of new tools, technology, videography and AI. The element of light is a vital element in creating an interactive, viewer-friendly experience with art.

As for the symbolic importance, light, or the lack of it, can be used by the artist in an effective way to tell a story and elicit feelings. So, artists should definitely keep all of that in mind when it comes to both public art and gallery art.



Light Grating by Abdullah AlOthman, 2019.
20,000 cheese graters. 4m x 4m.
Courtesy of the artist.

“Which artists do you admire and draw inspiration from?”

I always get this question and come up with a different answer each time. I’m always inspired by talented people and their stories, whether they are athletes, actors, singers or even architects. It’s these people and the moments I experience with them that spark my creativity.

“What medium do you most identify with?”

When it comes to my art, it’s all about stories, whether it’s by revealing them or hiding them. So, I believe my chosen medium is flexible and changes to serve the purposes of each story. The medium should always serve the artwork.



The Tin Farm by Abdullah AlOthman, 2019.
Tin foil on 22 Sidder trees.
Courtesy of the artist.

“What is your artistic process?”

Research. I research and read a lot about topics that interest me, without a clear direction or plan, until I reach a point where I’m bursting with information. Once I have the idea for my next project, I begin building upon it. So, I’ll sketch, play with different mediums, experiment with space and see where the process takes me. Sometimes, I have to go back to the drawing board and simplify things until I reach my final piece.

“Which one of your artworks is your favorite and why?”

For each phase in my life, I have a favorite. Some artworks touch your heart for one reason or another, some validate your artistic endeavors, and some take your career to new heights. So, I have multiple favorites.

“What role does an artist have in society?”

If an artist recognizes their own role in their personal, creative journey, they will have a valuable role and reach in society.

“What motto do you live by?”

Art is a way to live better.

“If you had to pick just one of these artworks, from any phase in your life, that resonated with you the most, which one would it be? And why?”

The No-Touch Torture. It moved me and completely changed who I am as a person.

“What is the best piece of advice you can give a budding artist?”

I don’t feel like I’m one to give advice, however, if I were to give one single piece of advice it would be to: Research, create and persevere.

This conversation with Al-Othman only helped reinforce Turrell’s words and confirm the importance of light in the creative process. For, in the end, light not only reveals many stories and human experiences, it truly is the revelation itself.



Rashed AlShahai's Searching for Darkness, 2021. Kinetic sculpture Variable dimensions Courtesy of the artist and Hafez Gallery Photo © Noor Riyadh Art 2021

Guest Artist:

“Conceptualizing light” - an interview with Rashed Al-Shashai
by Ghadeer Sadeq

“In terms of expressing myself, there is something that holds me back and only art is the way to do it.”

Artist **Rashed Al-Shashai** was born in Al Baha, Saudi Arabia, in 1977 and holds a Master of Visual Arts degree. A prominent figure in the contemporary Saudi art scene, Al Shashai is a conceptual artist, an arts educator, and a founding member of both the Saudi Arabia Fine Arts Society and the Art Education Society. In 2009, he established the Tasami Centre for Visual Arts, an independent organization that supports cutting-edge, contemporary art in the Kingdom.

Al-Shashai is equally active in the contemporary movements within the local art scene as an artist, as well as a patron and collector.

Al Shashai has received several awards throughout his artistic career, such as first prize at the Media Art show in Riyadh in 2011, and has actively displayed his work in local and international venues. He is known for his distinctive style that employs found objects and utilizes imagery as a conceptual tool to deliver a creative commentary on daily life and socio-political issues. Through creating what he describes as a ‘semantic field’ through his artistic medium, Al-Shashai thus poses philosophical questions that probe the existential human experience and how society shapes that existence. Though Al-Shashai uses a colorful and playful approach, he nevertheless explores

serious topics - such as the ubiquitousness of global media, the global cultural decay into superficiality, and the growing lack of apathy that has come to define modern society - to engage the viewer in thought-provoking conversation.

Al-Shashai once said in an interview, “The strength of contemporary art comes from the multiple experiments carried out by professional artists.” His experiment is to create a space in which his art can transcend being a mere object into a means to facilitate dialogue and to provoke the positive change deeply needed in society.

We met with artist Rashed Al-Shashai for an exclusive interview to learn more about his artistic journey and what influenced him the most throughout his career. Read on for his responses to our questions.



Q: When did you start your journey as an artist, and why?

I developed an interest in art at an early age. Growing up under the roof of an art educator father who introduced me to art gave me the opportunity to often design objects in the house. Due to this upbringing, I pursued an academic path in art, obtained my art degrees in Makkah and taught art for more than 20 years, along with experimenting and practicing art myself.

Q: What artists do you admire as role models, and why? What motto do you live by?

I'm pretty lucky to be alive in this era that is witnessing so many incredible artists while still having access to the legacy of past generations of artists who shaped the base of contemporary art. I don't have any one role model; I find inspiration in my surroundings and especially nature, but above all from God who created us and gave us this incredible world full of aesthetical inspirations.

Q: What do you want people/the public to know about you?

I use art as a medium of reflection, expression, and knowledge. Through it I find a way to embody the issues that affect our daily lives.

Q: What advice would you give people entering the field?

To have patience. Having patience might seem the simplest advice ever but it is still the most important thing for a sustainable career in art. I believe that success in such a field requires a lot of work, resilience, passion, and constant learning.

Q: What is the importance of light in art?

I believe that light has a filtering agency in the process of creating stories, hence I use it either as a medium on its own or as a component in my varied-medium artworks, not solely for its physical function but rather for the expressive power it adds to the art.

Q: Who are /what are your biggest influences?

My biggest influence is my local society and culture. I address the contemporary social issues dominating my community as well as the heritage that surrounds us.

Q: Tell us about your participation in the Noor AlRiyadh Festival?

I participated in the Noor AlRiyadh Festival with an artwork titled “Searching for Darkness,” which consists of seven vertical spirals of light that move constantly in a spiral manner at fluctuating speeds in a darkened room. The

work is an attempt to represent the human need for light and is related to the spiral nature of our galaxy. The resulting dancing lights spurred joy and smiles among the audience.

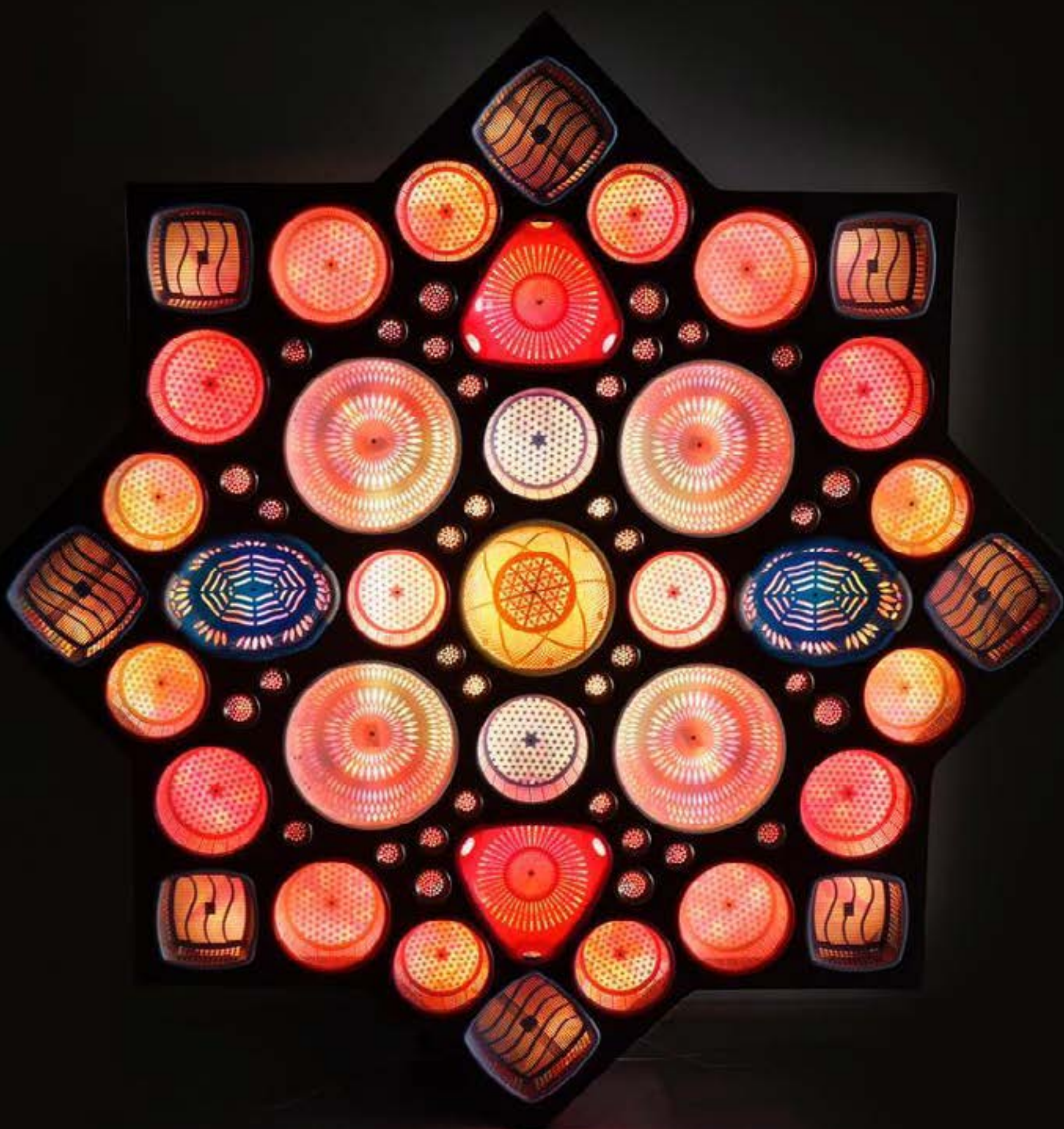
Q: How was your experience displaying your artwork in a mega-urban city like Riyadh?

I developed a huge interest towards the aesthetics, heritage, and politics of Riyadh as the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I am constantly researching to create large-scale artworks related to this amazing city that continues to grow in influence and stature. Being able to be part of events taking place in Riyadh is a very important experience that affords me ample opportunities to interact with our local audience and explore the city’s ever-growing urban scene.

Q: What does your art mean to you?

I consider art as my voice that helps me express myself. I have the ability to represent anything with all media, even sound. In terms of expressing myself personally, though, there is something that holds me back and art is my only outlet.

Artists like Rashed Al-Shashai are part of a generation of rising, influential voices in contemporary art that are changing the cultural face of the Kingdom. Using his art as a medium to freely express his views on society’s changes and evolutions, Al Shashai sheds a different light on its cultural motifs by presenting them in a fresh, contemporary lens.





A map drawn by Abu Abdllah Al-Idrisi (1100-1165) and it is the first world map known to the world.

Special Feature

The Light of Wisdom by Ghada Al-Muhanna.



Knowledge is light.



From the dawn of time, humanity has chased after this light, trying to understand the world it was given by its creator. Once harnessed, the torch of knowledge began to be handed down from one civilization to another, growing more luminous as time passed.

Preserving such a light can be a precarious task, however, as darkness and ignorance try to seep through the fabric of knowledge. But when that light is sustained, it shines its enlightenment on those who tend to it, gifting them with a perception beyond their imagination and pushing the boundaries of their minds.

This brings us to the story of the Islamic Golden Age, a period of cultural, economic and scientific flourishing in the history of Islam. A time when people began to preserve the minds of others while also creating an environment allowing for cross pollination of thought to occur between those with different cultural backgrounds.

Valuing knowledge is embedded deep within the Islamic faith and the importance to expand on it is highly emphasized – it is essentially a form of devotion to Allah's gift of the mind.



Makamat -- the house of wisdom (Bait Al Hikma).

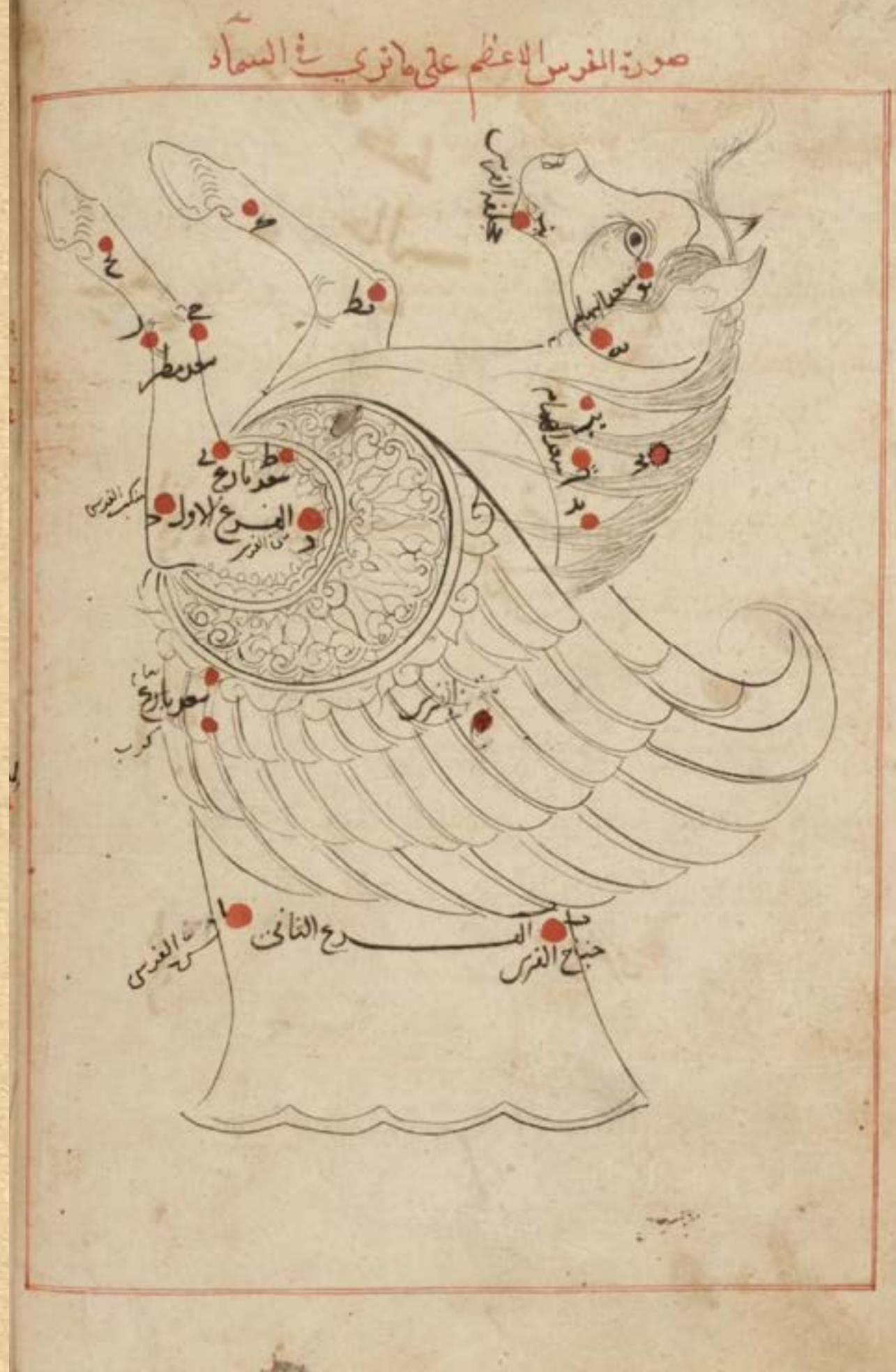
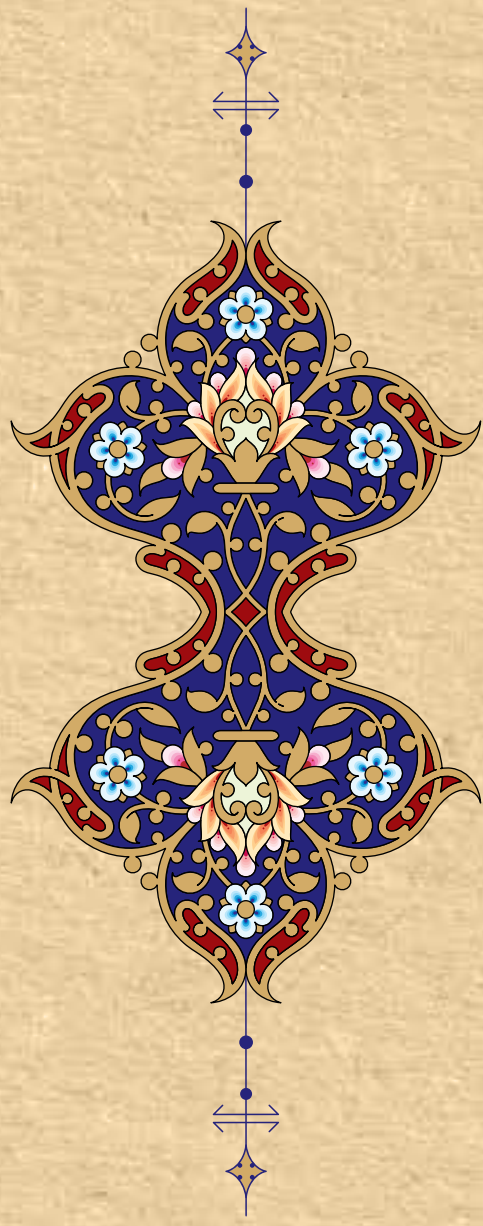
During the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258) the rise of this period began, specifically when Caliphate al-Mansur moved the capital to Baghdad in 762. Years after, Harun al-Rashid established the famous 'Bayt Al-Hikma' (House of Wisdom), a dedicated space for scholarship. And it was during al-Ma'um's time, Harun al-Rashid's son, when he made an effort to recruit the most famous scholars from across the globe to come to the House of Wisdom. It did not matter what their background or belief was, as long as they bestowed their knowledge and passed it on to the next generations.

Chinese, Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Phoenician, Persian and Roman civilizations all had their stories and information that they had amassed over time preserved in the library and used it as a stepping stone into the unknown. Discoveries in various fields were made, and mankind was working together to further push their limits. Because the spread and expansion of such

information was important, no expense was spared when it came to translation. Some say that the Caliphate had retained an army of translators who cost as much as many state budgets of today.

Between the 8th and 14th centuries, the light kept growing to unfathomable limits until it unfortunately began to flicker and fade away due to the Mongol invasions, which saw the destruction of the House of Wisdom and its contents during the Siege of Baghdad in 1258. All that was attained was lost and, for the next few centuries, mankind would struggle to harness that light once more.

Luckily, we are now again at a time when mankind is amassing and exchanging information. Essentially, our House of Wisdom has become virtual, and as such the light of knowledge has never shone so bright. Hopefully it will be a light that is heavily guarded and protected for future generations to come.



'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Umar al-Sufi and Qazwīnī, Zakariyā ibn Muḥammad, Kitāb ṣuwar al-kawākib (Book of the constellations of the fixed stars) and Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt (The wonders of creation), 1300–1700, National Library of France.

Special Feature:

'The Bright Lights in the Sky Direct Us Back Home'
by Hafsa Al-Khudairi.

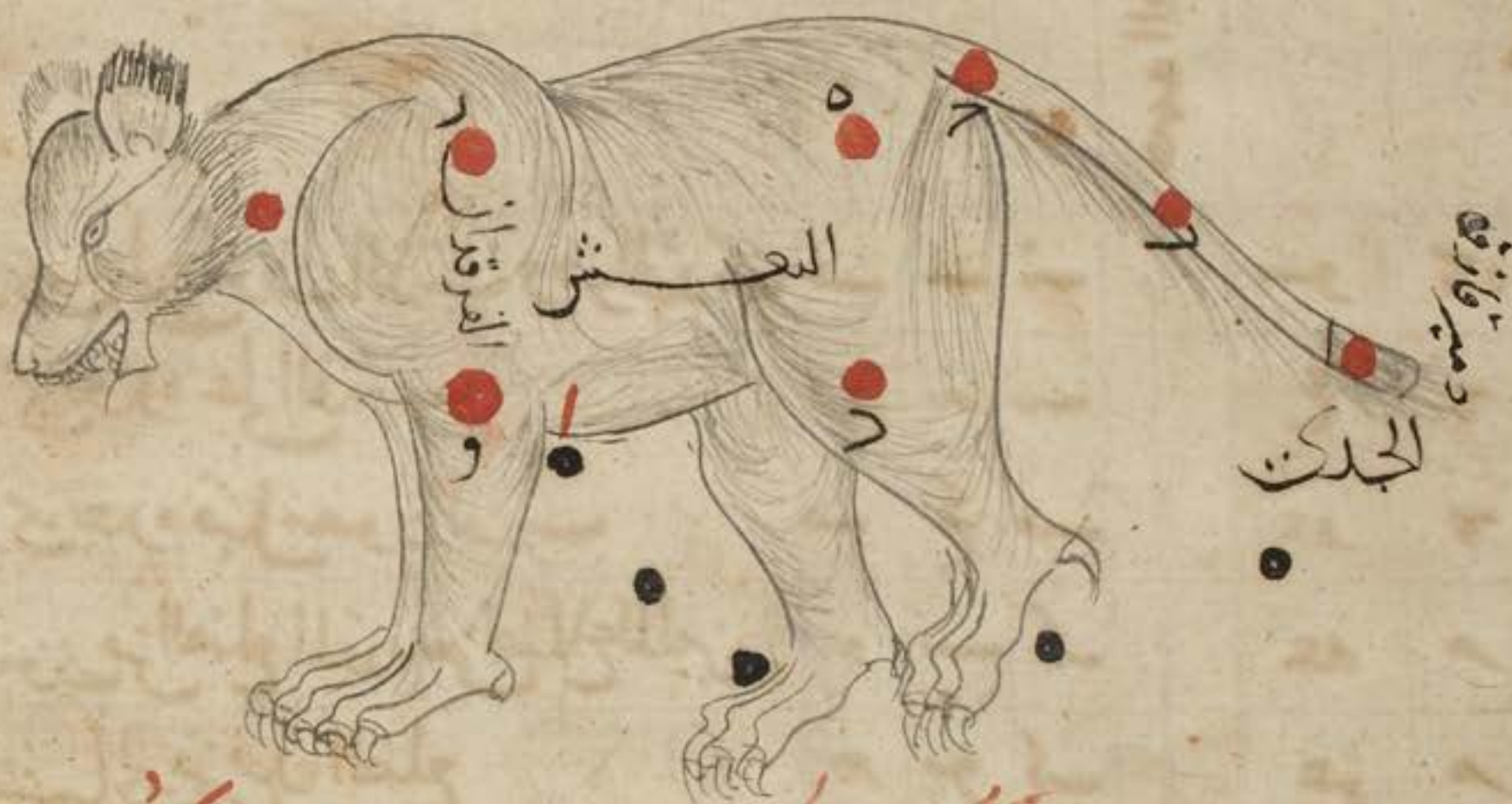
Who am I but another Arab in a long line of Arabs who looks up at the night sky and sees the beauty of lights? Our ancestors include Al-Khwarizmi, Omar Khayyām, Al-Farghani, and other Arabs or Muslim astronomers who paved the way for contemporary science. I felt that connection in AlUla where you can see the night lights in such clarity. Some parts of Saudi have ideal typography to reduce light pollution and allow the stars to shine clear and gorgeous. As a student of those that came before me, I wanted to learn more.

Although ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians used their mythologies to map out the stars and their movements relating it to their belief systems and preferences, the story of astronomy in the Arab world starts with Bedouins, the ingenious experts of travel in the desert. The days are hot, especially in the summer, so they depended on the position of the stars to guide them. However, the stars aren't always in the same position every night. The travelers learned to calculate the movement of the stars and their shifts as well as their trajectories.

Remembering the stars would've been extremely difficult without giving them names, stories, objectives, and life. Of course, there are other uses like knowing the seasons, as lights that clear their paths, and using them to share stories and sayings. It's thanks to the Book of Fixed Stars written by the Muslim astronomer Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi that we have any knowledge of the names of the stars in Arabic, which is still in use today.

The interconnectedness of the stories is truly fascinating. The story goes that Suhail (Lambda Velorum) had a wife, the brightest star in ultraviolet Adhara (aka the virgin or the nymph), whom he killed. In fear of Adhara's brothers' revenge, he ran south. He also killed Naash, whose daughters also want revenge. Naash's daughters are the same constellations that make up the Ursa Major and Minor constellations. In their grief, they swore they wouldn't bury their father's body until they exacted their revenge and so they carry around their father's body.

صُورَةُ الدَّبِّ الْأَصْفَرِ عَلَى مَا تَرَى فِي السَّمَاءِ



صُورَةُ الدَّبِّ الْأَصْفَرِ عَلَى مَا تَرَى فِي الْكُرَّةِ

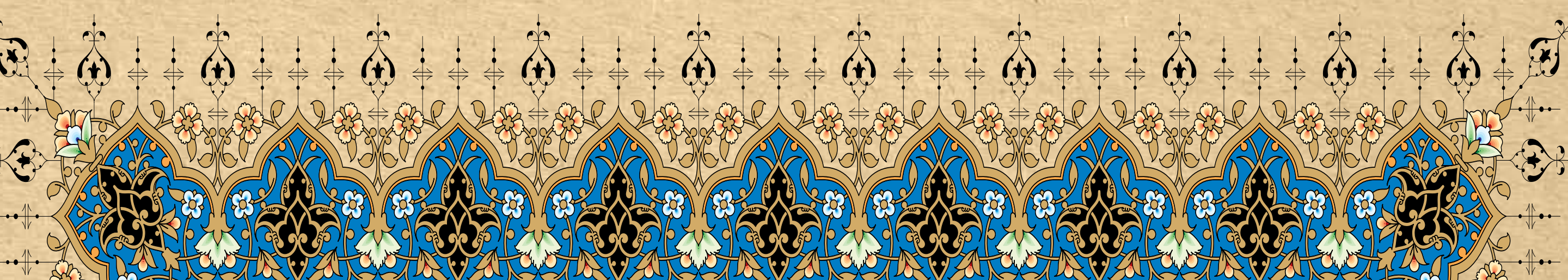


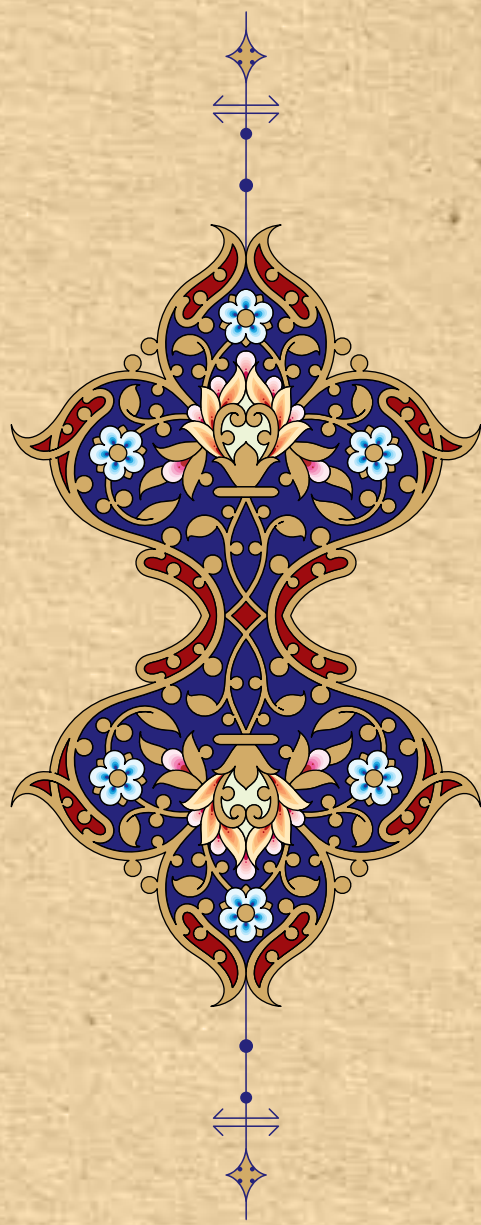
المنقوشة بالجمرة الصخرية
 المنقوشة بالسوا المعمل للشمس
 وهي أيضا جزء الصور التي بالاعلام هي التي لم يذكرها طلميحي

'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Umar al-Sufi and Qazwīnī, Zakarīyā ibn Muḥammad, Kitāb ṣuwar al-kawākib (Book of the constellations of the fixed stars) and Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt (The wonders of creation), 1300–1700, National Library of France.

Suhail also had two sisters, the two brightest stars, Yemeni (aka Sirius) and Shami (aka Procyon), who wanted to follow their brother. Yemeni ran after her brother and passed the sea in the sky into Yemeni's side. Meanwhile, Shami

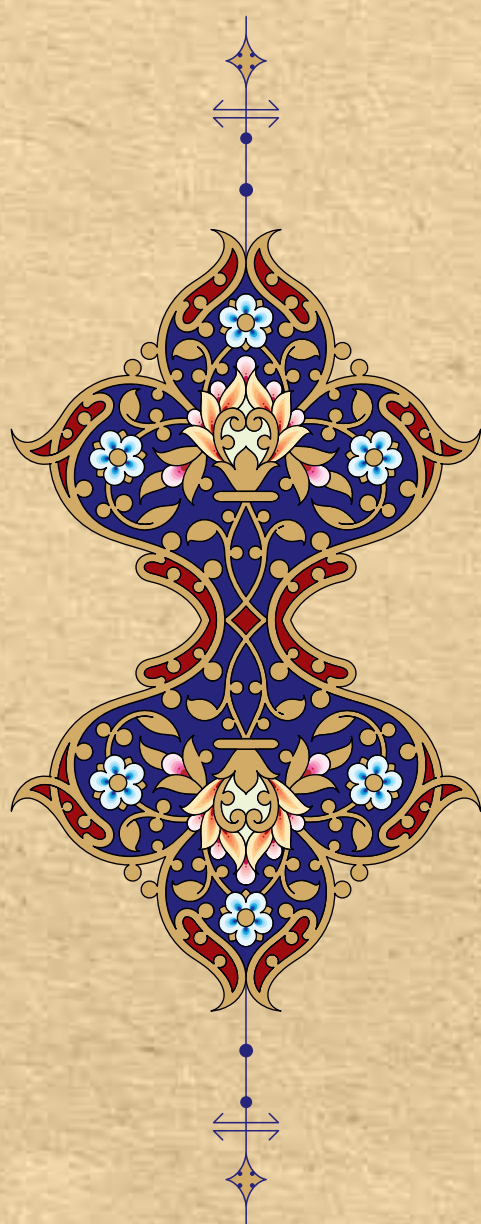
was not able to do so as she was the frailer of the sisters and so she stayed by the river crying over her distance from her siblings until her eyes became clammy (or Ghamas in Arabic), hence why she is also known as Alghamaissaa.





Another story related to Suhail is the story of the star Thuraya (the Pleiades or the seven sisters). Known for its beauty, all the stars were in love with her, especially Aldeberan (Alpha Tauri), but she only had eyes for Suhail. So, she refused all those who proposed in hopes that Suhail might love her back. Even when the Moon tried to appeal to her, she refused Aldeberan for being too simple despite him offering all his sheep to her. Thuraya became hopeful when Suhail killed his wife but was once again disappointed when he fled to the south and still Aldeberan never gave up on her. Thuraya's story inspired the saying "More loyal than Aldebaran and more treacherous than Al-Thuraya." Although the saying is unfair to Thuraya

(she's just not into him), she was remembered and immortalized. These stories helped travelers through the ages remember the position of the bright lights in the sky and which areas they fell into. This is how our ancestors traveled, using varying lights to know where different areas lay. The question is why do we rely so heavily on Greek or Roman narratives and why aren't ours as familiar to us? I will leave the answer to those who keep looking towards the lights of the skies, the twinkling little stars, and keep asking them for their secrets that may inform us of our heritage, the astronomical understanding of the universe, and the beauty of reflection and connection.





Old Jeddah, undated showing Mashrabiya along windows. Courtesy of Aramco Archives

Spotlight

‘Between glimpses of the past and the rays of the future: A look at the Unique Architectural Styles of Saudi Arabia’
by Somaya Badr

Old homes capture our old stories. Natural daylight in traditional homes was an important aspect of the design. The gentle interaction between daylight and architectural design has helped create a peaceful artistic environment inside our homes. The diversity of Saudi

architectural styles reflects the different ideologies of the past civilizations and variation depending on the region, customs and the harsh climate. Here we reflect over two regions and their unique elements in relation to light.

Al Hijaz

The Western region of the Kingdom is well known for its ‘Mashrabiya’ – which is a decorated wooden panel that allows the entry of sunlight inside the house with the reflection of the wooden art work. Almost all windows were once covered with it, a projection over the window that serves as both an aesthetic and functional purpose where it reduces the amount of direct sunlight coming in.

The Strong remnants of vernacular architecture can be seen all over Makkah, Madinah, Jeddah, and Taif.

In addition, the rectilinear form of the building with multi-story buildings, were distinguished by their functions, the ground floor is for either commercial or public guest area whereas the second floor is used for residential purposes. The roof level was always used as an extra living space that families would spend time in, and sleep on the roof in summer time to enjoy the cooler air. Buildings were heavily ornamented with geometrical patterns and Arabic calligraphy as well as abstract plant forms. Doors were beautifully decorated as they were the first thing a visitor would be greeted with.



Old Jeddah, Undated, showing Mashrabiya along windows. Courtesy of Aramco Archives



Old homes in Riyadh (1989).
Courtesy of Aramco Archives.



The roof tops of Riyadh city, 1949. Courtesy of Aramco Archives

Najd

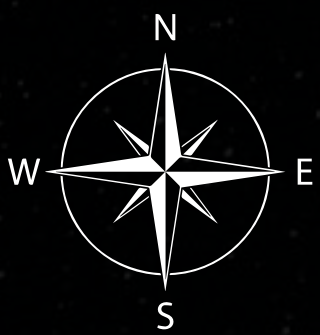
The Central region is well known for the distinct design of its old mud houses with an open center (courtyard) where air and sun interact all day long, inspiring a sense of lightness and joy.

The triangular shaped clusters on the wall help reflect natural light as it comes through. In this region, towns and villages were extended alongside valleys and water sources to create a livable habitat for its people. Back then, the architecture was greatly influenced by the hot and dry climatic conditions, as well as social-cultural heritage traditions.

The houses were separated by narrow roads; to make sure that no strong direct sunlight hits those walking. The urban planning of Al Najd region was a compact, windowless facades, little exposure to any solar heat or rays as well as an emphasis on the visibility of the sky.



Astrolabe lunar mansions.



Arabic Treasures:

'Star Lore of the Past' by Ahmad Dialdin.

One of pre-Islamic Arabia's greatest treasures that guided their daily lives was anwa', the rich astronomical system that was used by Bedouin in the Arabian Peninsula.

Anwa' (a term associated with the rains) referred to stars and collections of stars whose rising and setting marked specific certain periods of time throughout the year. They eventually numbered twenty-eight individual stars and small

constellations as the primary signifiers of a robust calendar and meteorological system that enabled them to predict the weather and dictated what they did.

Anwa' aided in everything, including marking rain periods, wind directions, ideal times for planting crops and fishing seasons, as well as organizing their pastoral activities and grazing locales.



Celestial globe

According to Ibn Qutaybah, a 9th Century Islamic scholar, who wrote an entire book dedicated to anwa':

"The journey to fresh pasture, when the Arabs leave their permanent dwellings temporarily to look for water and grass for their animals, begins with the rising of Suhayl (Canopus) in the morning. The star appears in the Hijaz on the fourteenth night of Abb (August), and in Iraq on the twenty-sixth night of Abb. Whoever moves at this time will have some rain. Then the people follow one another until the setting of al-Fargh al-Muakhkhar (Andromeda), which takes place on the twenty-second night of Ailul (September). This is the

beginning of the rainy season, and the people stay at their temporary pasture until the rising of al-Sharatan (Aries) early in the morning after sixteen nights have passed in the month of Nisan (April). Then they begin returning until the rising of al-Thurayyah (Pleiades) on the thirteenth night of Ayyar (May), and they continue on their way home until the rising of al-Haqah (Orion) on the ninth night of Huzayran (June). By this time, the waters have dried up and moisture has disappeared."

Much Bedouin star-lore has been preserved in descriptive proverbs such as the select few below:

When Al-Jawza (Gemini) rises, the hard rocks grow hot, the deer seek shelter from the heat, and the chameleon remains still among the branches.

When Al-Jabhah (Leo) rises, the palm tree becomes colored [with fruit].

When Al-Zubana (Libra) rises, the mouth feels cold, and you should store food for your family.

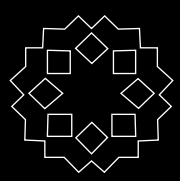
When Al-Aqrab (Scorpio) rises, the water channels freeze, the grasshoppers die, and the frost appears.

When Sad Al-Suud (Capricorn/Aquarius) rises, all frozen objects thaw, the trees turn green, and all hibernating animals move around.

When Al-Dalwu (Aquarius) rises, spring arrives and people go in search of pasture.



'Shrapnel V,' by Iván Navarro from Chile. 2020 LED, glass paint, wood, sand blasted mirror, one-way mirror and electric energy. 122 x 122 x 15.25 cm. Unique in a series of five. Part of the Ithra Art Collection and on display at **Seeing and Perceiving** exhibit.



Ithra Curiosities:

Light is a concept we see and understand, yet remains elusive and mysterious in many ways. Here we share a few gems from Ithra's vault of treasures, such as Ivan Navarro's piece in the

current unique **Seeing and Perceiving** exhibit and artworks exhibited earlier in WASL-Beyond the Pen exhibit at Ithra in 2018 in collaboration with the British Museum in London.

Shrapnel V.

Made from the optical repetition of a painted mirror, reflected on another mirror and LED lights, Shrapnel is Navarro's newest electric sculpture. He probes with his work the ambiguities of language and the evocative power of light. While the title Shrapnel references artillery munitions used during World War I, it also accounts

nowadays for the lethal metal fragments caused by the explosion of bombs. Navarro here plays on the ambiguity between the title's military reference and the joyfulness of the work; and equally on the discrepancy between the explosive weapons and the painted shrapnel he created.

Nur (light).

Light is projected onto an entanglement of cables, resulting in a vibrant silhouette of the powerful word nur on the wall.

Rashad Alakbarov creates groundbreaking calligraphic shadow work using recovered and found objects from abandoned warehouses and storerooms. His work is a play of opposite forces, light vs shadow, where one cannot exist without the other.



'Nur (light)', by Rashad Alakbarov from Azerbaijan. 2014. Electric cable and spotlight. 72 x 80 x 94cm. Part of the Ithra Art Collection and was on display at WASL-Beyond the Pen exhibit at Ithra.



Illumination Floral.

This artwork combines two key aspects of **Ahmed Mater's** life, his interest in traditional Islamic floral patterns, and his former profession as a medical doctor, here visible through the X-ray. Mater said: "I want to use this piece to illuminate. Many of the world's religions share the idea of illumination, and the importance of light over darkness. It is a concept that has reached mankind through many different conduits."

'Illumination Floral,' by Ahmed Mater from Saudi Arabia. 2017. Gold leaf, paper tea, pomegranate, Dupont Chinese ink and offset X-ray film on paper. 152 x 102cm. Part of the Ithra Art Collection and was on display at WASL-Beyond the Pen exhibit at Ithra.

More Ithra Curiosities:

Exquisite Mosque lamps give more just light, they carry legacies and embody intricate stories. The lamps at the **Shatr AlMasjid: The Art of Orientation** at Ithra symbolise the aesthetic vision of the Arab-Islamic civilization, which focuses on combining beauty with function. Lamps are just one of many treasures that be viewed and studied

at this major exhibition that explores the historical meaning, evolution and function of mosques, their interiors and their artifacts.

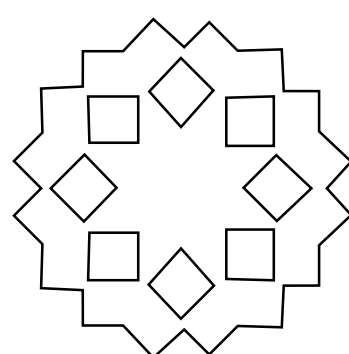
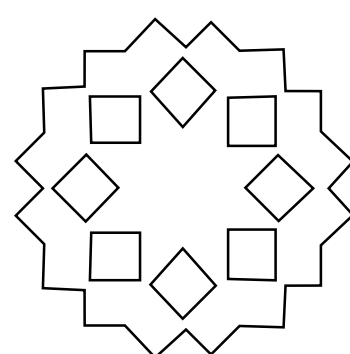
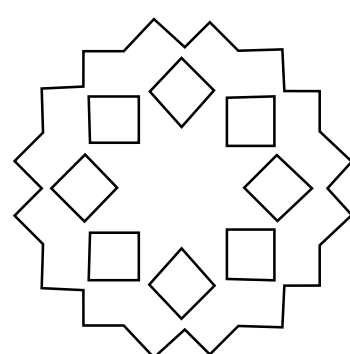
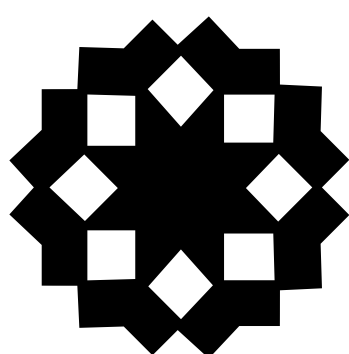
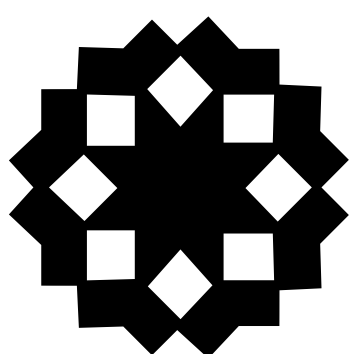
The exhibition runs through 2022.

Here are just a few sneak peeks from the largest collection of Islamic masterworks ever displayed in Saudi Arabia.



Sultan al-Nasr Muahmmad ibn Qalawun Mosque Lamp Written in Thulth script, the name of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun is inscribed alongside verse 35 of Surah 24 of the Holy Qur'an: "Allah is the Light of heavens and the earth." This mosque lamp originally hung somewhere in the Qalawun complex in Cairo.

Egypt or Syria, 1304
Glass, gilded and enameled
Height: 34 cm, Depth: 20 cm
Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo 313
Image courtesy of Ithra.





Ostrich Egg

Ostrich eggs are placed atop minarets in West Africa. They were also brought back from Makkah as Hajj souvenirs. This ottoman example, decorated with Qur'anic inscriptions, was originally suspended above a mosque lamp to prevent rodents from consuming oil placed inside.

Egypt, 19th century

Ostrich egg and paint

Length: 17 cm, Width: 13 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo 1/393

Image courtesy of Ithra

Stained-Glass Window

Originally placed in a mosque or madrasa, this colored glass window depicts a mosque flanked by two cypress trees and is surrounded with the inscription: "inform the believers" from Sura 61:13 of the Holy Qur'an.

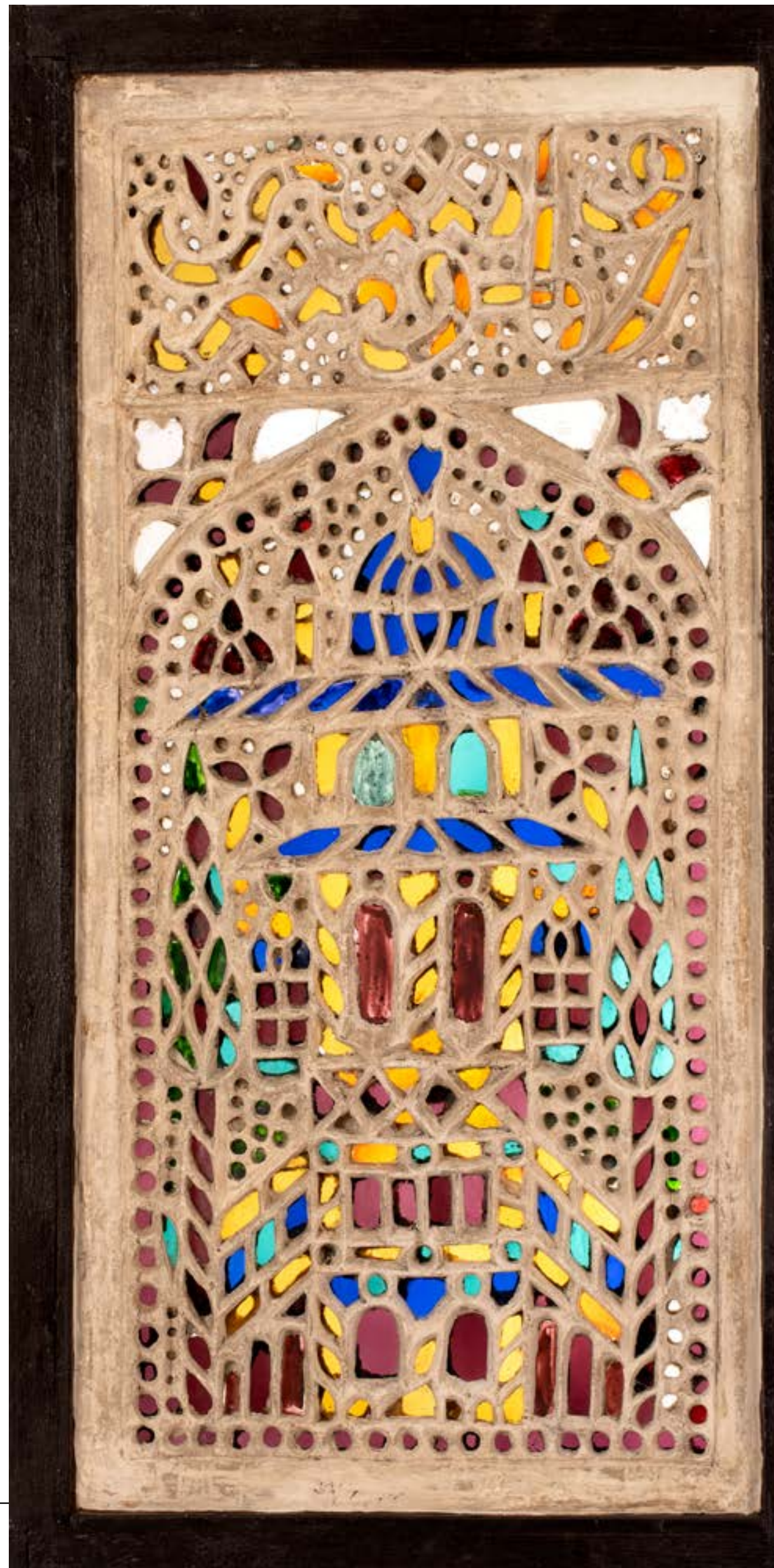
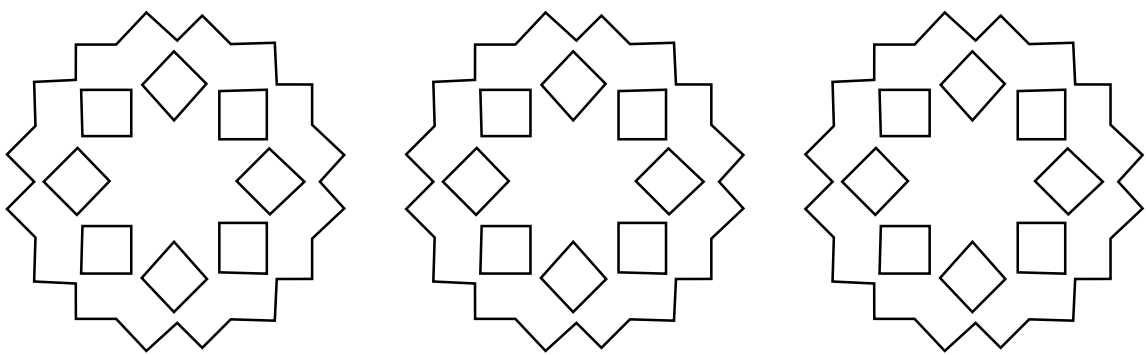
Egypt, late 17th or early 18th century

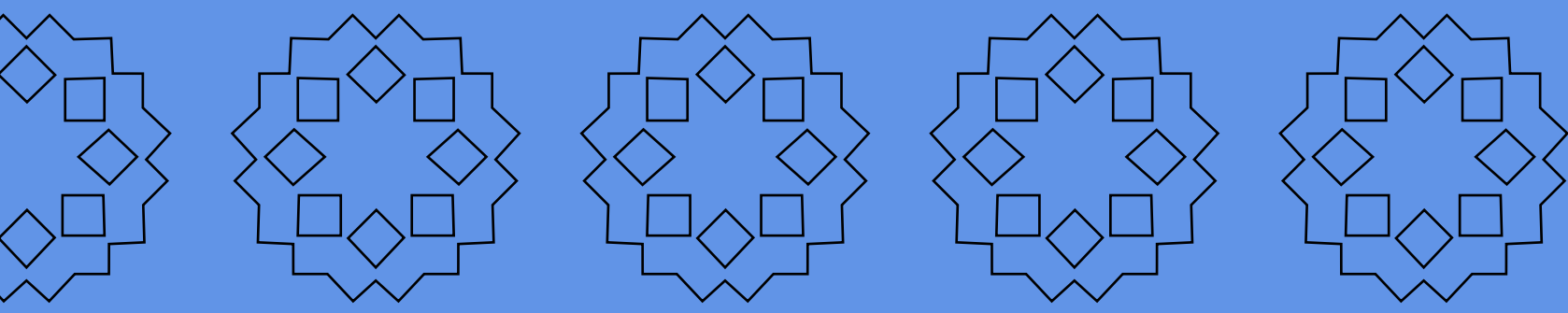
Stucco and stained glass

Height 131 cm, width: 65 cm

Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo 1/386

Image courtesy of Ithra





Add to **Your** Bucket List:

Places of Light by Ahmad Dialdin.

With the Arabian Peninsula being primarily desert, we would be hard pressed to find a location that is not inundated with an abundance of natural

light. However, let us take a look at a few different interpretations of light as our focus for this month's Bucket List.

The Metaphor: **Jabal Noor**

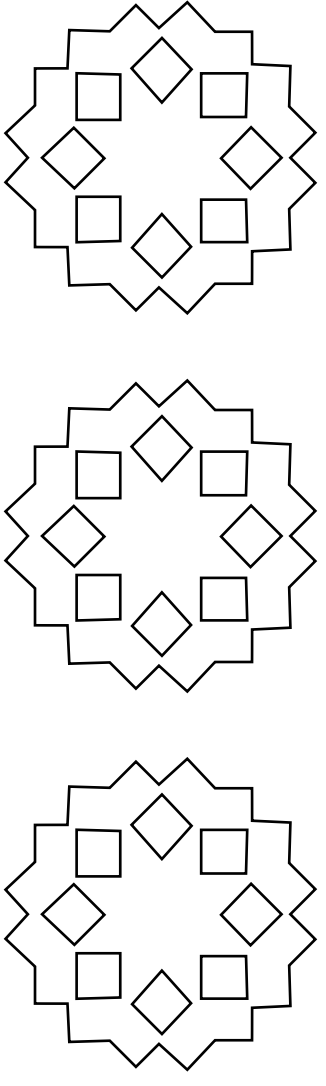
Metaphorically, there is one location that is on everyone's lips when they consider somewhere related to light that is also historically and culturally significant: Jabal Noor (The Mountain of Light/Enlightenment).

Atop this mountain, in a small little cave known as Hira Cave, Prophet Muhammad would regularly spend long bouts of time (sometimes a month in length) in meditation. Around 610 CE during the month of Ramadan, Archangel Gabriel came to

Muhammad and commanded him to recite the first verse of the Quran, "Read! In the name of your Lord who has created." From there, the course of history is forever changed.

The mountain is located a few kilometers northeast of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. It's a little over 600 meters tall, but climbing can still be a challenging couple of hours, leading you to Hira Cave that can just about fit five or so people in it.





The Physical: Mashrabiya

Mashrabiya are an incredible feat of architectural design, serving as window to the outside as well as privacy curtain, shade and rudimentary air conditioner and refrigerator all at once. Paired with porous clay pots of water, the open latticework allowed for a constant air current to cool people as well as the pots, while providing enough shade from the strong desert sun.

It's interesting to note that many Arabic countries each have their own term for this design element. Some refer to it as a Rashwan, while in Iraq it's called a shanasheel, and in Yemen it's a takrima.

While difficult to pinpoint the origins of this prototypically Arabic and Islamic architectural element, we know that mashrabiya hit their popularity during the Abbasid and Ottoman eras. Jeddah, consequently, is our prime example of a city with beautiful representations of mashrabiya. Roaming around and exploring Jeddah's Balad District is the best way to get exposed to the varied details and workmanship of mashrabiya, but if you needed to start somewhere, check out Nasseef House, a 140-year-old historical building that currently operates as a popular museum and cultural center.



The Astronomical: Stargazing

Stars play a pivotal part throughout our cultural history, going back to pre-Islamic Bedouins who relied on our celestial spotlights to guide them both in time (as a calendar system) and space (as a navigation tool).

As a quick list of highlights, prime spots for stargazing include AlUla, Moon Mountain (an hour

north of Jeddah), AlWahbah Crater (couple of hours drive north of Taif), and Nairyah (two hours and a half north of Khobar).

When in doubt, deserts and mountains are a stargazer's best friend for places with low light pollution and clear skies.

Panel
Syria, probably Damascus, ca. 1575
Fritware, underglaze-painted
H. 123 cm, W. 62 cm
The Aga Khan Museum, AKM585

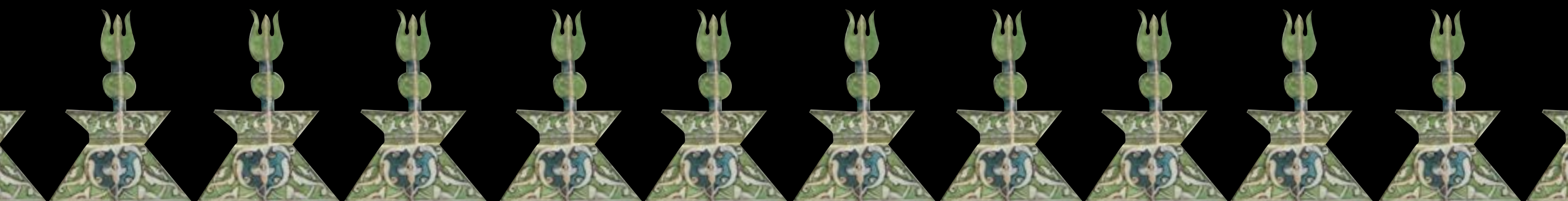


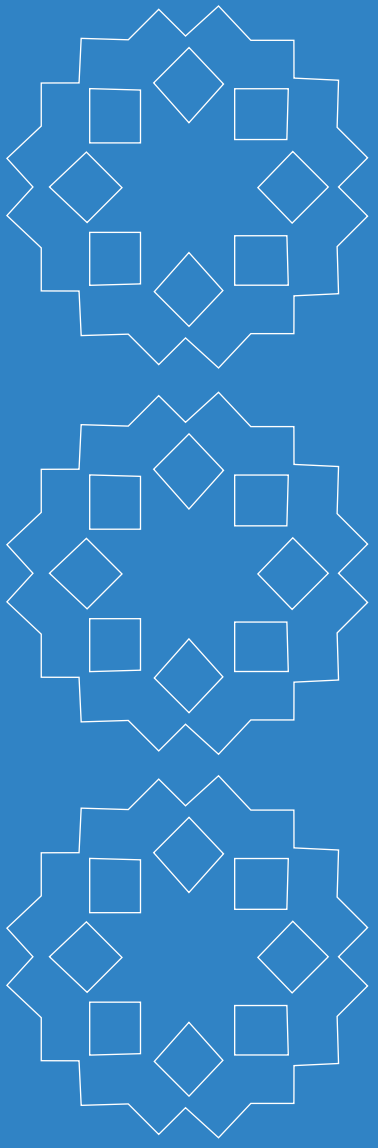
Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

Divine **Light** by Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis

The light of the Divine is often evoked in the arts and architecture of the Muslim world past and present. On this beautiful, 16th-century tile panel, assumed to once have adorned a religious building in Damascus, Syria, a whole host of symbolic references come together to celebrate this theme while reminding believers of the very core of their Islamic faith. Suspended by chains within a tall arch supported by columns, a majestic blue lamp first catches our attention. Often found as an actual lighting device in mosques and even mihrabs or prayer niches, here the lamp clearly alludes to the famous light verse in the Holy Qur'an, the ayat al-nur (Q24:35), which states that "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light may be compared to a niche that enshrines a lamp." To further strengthen its symbolic connection to God Himself and the faith, the lamp bears the

shahada or Islamic profession of faith in bold white calligraphy: 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'. Beneath the lamp, the close connection between Allah and his prophet (peace be upon him) is further emphasized through the presence of a set of symbolic footprints, the qadam sharif or na'layn sharif, popular as a motif across the Muslim world since the 16th century to remind believers of the prophet's (peace be upon him) preeminent, timeless role and ideal example as imam and leader of the Muslim community. Below, two candlesticks with their candles lit, again reinforce the presence and all-pervasiveness of light in this spiritual context, while perhaps also subtly hinting at the need for human enlightenment in wholeheartedly contemplating God's will and living in accordance with the tenants of the faith.





The beauty of the mind of the Bedouin culture inspired by the great art of Vincent Van Gogh. 2021. Artist **Khalid Al-Enzi**. Courtesy of The Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

‘Rising stars and the importance of the arts,’ an interview with the **Ambassador** of the Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Dieter Lamlé

“The light within art is not only a physical ray reflected on a texture of colors by a source of light in the room, but a sentimental visionary reflected by the artist...”

In an interview with Ithraeyat’s Editor in Chief Rym Al-Ghazal, H.E. Dieter Lamlé shares his views on the importance of light in art, and Germany’s cultural presence in Saudi Arabia, and the country’s latest project that supports Saudi artists and inspires important cultural dialogue.

“It is the first time for us to create such a project,” said H.E. Lamlé, referring to the “Tales of Stars” Exhibition with young emerging Saudi Artists; a project launched by the Cultural department at the embassy.

When asked about **the importance of “light” (Al Noor) in art, the theme of this edition** he said: “Naturally, the eye of the beholder is capable of appreciating art through light just like how

“I believe that arts are a perfect bridge to bring closer the spirits of German and Saudi Culture. Supporting young local, emerging talents is at the heart of our cultural mission in the Kingdom and we are planning for more projects in various fields of art to achieve this mission”.

List of participating artists include: Mohammad bin Fahad, Aisha Almadani, Alanoud Madloul, Saleh Alqarni, Atheer Alshlgan, Mohammed Alnogedan, Ali Alotaibi, Yasser Alshehri, Omar Alqarni, Mansour Alotaibi, Khaled Al-Enezi and Najlaa Alqahtani.

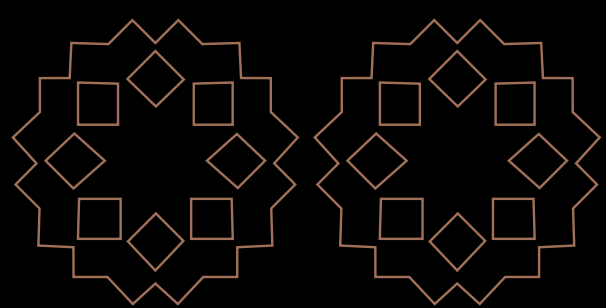
it is able to see through a reflection of light on surrounding objects...The human eye sees the world with no color unless there is light and only light unless there is art.”

Why was the stars theme chosen for this exhibition?

We wanted a theme everybody could relate to and at the same time find a common denominator in German and Arab history. Stars have been used for navigation by both our ancestors, and a lot of storytelling revolves around stars. As an inspiration we gave the artists the ending of a poem by the German writer Karl May as well as the legend of the Star Suhail. This is one of the most popular stars for the ancient Arabia and remains so until this very day. Suhail is the brightest star in the sky and people love this star as it is mentioned in many ancient poems and modern day songs. The star brings hope and is a good omen that the heat is almost over, the weather is cooling and the deserts will bloom again. The poem we gave the artists reads:

Nur einer? Only one? **نورٌ واحدٌ؟**

“Millions shine here
all in the same heavenly light
and in the same love down on you
but your eye does not see it.”



The painting speaks of how the earth and sky unite us as peoples through awareness, knowledge and the blessings available to all of us. The rose in the girl's hands is the centaurea flower and is known in German culture, which is used in several medical uses, including resistance to scorpion poison spread in the deserts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 2021. Artist **Atheer Al-Shalqan**. Courtesy of The Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

When did this cultural initiative start and why?

During the past summer, the new culture team at the German Embassy saw a beautiful painting at a coffee shop painted by an emerging artist and decided to contact her. The team learned that there is actually a group of artists who paint together at a creative space in Riyadh, called beehive. Amazed by the vibe of the enthusiastic group, they gave the emerging artists a theme for their new paintings – tales of stars. Thus the hashtag #emergingartistsksa and the title of the program ‘Tales of Stars.’

The artists were asked to get as creative as they can and to try to link their artwork to either the German or Saudi culture. Starting in September, each week one or two an artist was promoted on the embassy's social media



Looking for the Suhail star in Germany's skies. “I painted the desert sands and the beauty of the kingdom with a German sky, which is characterized by its color gradation, unlike the sky of the Arabian Peninsula which is dark in color with many stars.” Artist **Najla Al-Qahtani**. Courtesy of The Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



accounts @Germanyinksa to help them gain a greater reach. When all 12 participating artists were done drawing, their works were exhibited at the German embassy at an opening reception. We were especially proud to be able to show the paintings to Dina Amin, CEO of the Visual Arts Commission and Her Royal Highness Princess Lamia bint Majed Al-Saud. The exhibition was then moved to WRD gallery in downtown Riyadh for a week.

The rich Saudi culture and heritage has been embraced at the heart of the tremendous changes in Saudi Arabia. It is part of our mission in the kingdom to support this change in many fields, especially the cultural cooperation.

The painting reflects the coldness and beauty of the atmosphere of the beginning of the entry of Suhail star, shown in the painting on the right, the cold and rainy weather with a sky full of clouds, the sakura flower was added for the beauty of its colors and to break the black background and highlight its beauty. Artist **AlAnoud Al-Madloul**. Courtesy of The Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Any upcoming Germany Saudi Arabia cultural events?

We will continue the program #emergingartistsksa but shift our focus from visual arts to musicians. We will from now on have regular concerts by emerging artists. From January onwards we will have a world-wide travelled, German exhibition in Riyadh, accompanied by workshops designed to foster German-Saudi cooperation. And of course, we'll continue our regular movie nights and participate in joint projects with our European colleagues.

Currently we are looking forward to the EU film festival in February 2022. But most important: the Goethe-Institut Saudi Arabia, the German cultural institute, that offers German language courses

started their cultural program this year. The institute operates in the whole Kingdom and enhances the exchange and collaboration between the culture and creative sectors in Saudi Arabia and Germany. In November and December a hackathon on urbanity and sustainable development in cooperation with EU partners and AlMashtal will take place in Riyadh, a joint project on hospitality and sound is being launched in cooperation with Hayy Jameel in Jeddah, Potsa Lotsa, a jazz band from Germany, will perform in both cities and there will be a workshop on creating an art book by a renown German artist and professor. And this only to name a few events in the upcoming weeks.

Turki Al-Romaih's piece of graffiti on a replica of the Berlin wall. Courtesy of The Federal republic of Germany to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Any past & ongoing cultural cooperations between the two countries?

The collaboration between Saudi and German artists has existed for many years, as the German-Saudi agreement on cultural cooperation from 1986 proves. German artists enjoy cooperation with Saudi artists, for example Abdunnasser Gharem exhibits his work in Germany on a regular basis. The Museum of Islamic Art has hosted Saudi-Arabia related exhibitions for years and has a generous collaboration with Al Waleed

Philanthropies, set out for the upcoming decade. There are numerous German-Saudi cooperation projects worth mentioning: the Saudi-German jazz fusion at King Fahad Cultural Center, Turki Al-Romaih's piece of graffiti on a replica of the Berlin wall, the exhibition "images of Science" at the Al Faisal University or a fashion workshop by Ben Weide for young Saudi designers.



LOUVRE ABU DHABI'S DOME – A FLOATING DOME OF LIGHT AND SHADE

The centre piece of Jean Nouvel is a huge silvery dome that appears to float above the museum-city. Despite its apparent weightlessness, the dome weighs around 7,500 tonnes (similar to the Eiffel Tower in Paris). Inspired by the cupola, a distinctive feature in Arabic architecture, Nouvel's dome is a complex, geometric structure of 7,850 stars. These stars are repeated at various sizes and angles in eight different layers. As the sun passes above, its light filters through the perforations in the dome to create an enchanting effect within the museum, known as the 'rain of light'. This tribute to nature is inspired by the palm trees of Abu Dhabi. Their leaves filter and soften the bright sunlight from above to project a dappled pattern on the ground. Image: Rain of Light' ©Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi.

Bridges:

Cross-Cultural Conversations

'The Rain of Light' — a reflection on light, shade and gold
by Louvre Abu Dhabi

Associated with prophecy and spirituality, light has been regarded since Antiquity as a visible manifestation of invisible powers. This universal metaphor is shared by the great philosophies and religions, which place it at the centre of sacred space, where it is perceived as a physical phenomenon endowed with an infinite spectrum of metaphorical religious images. In the culture of ancient Egypt, light was considered to accompany the original cosmic dawn. Light was therefore life

and countered the darkness of death. These elements are captured in Wing 2, Gallery 4 – The Universal Religions at the **Louvre Abu Dhabi**. At the origins of Hinduism, the Indian theology of the Rigveda regarded the divine creator Prajapati as a primordial sound exploding into countless gleams of light, creatures of harmony, while the founder of Buddhism was given the sacred title of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.



Page of the “Blue Quran” North Africa c. 900 H. 29.8, W. 34.6 cm; gold on dyed parchment
©Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi. Photo by APF. Courtesy of AD Louvre Museum

Divine Light

Unlike the pantheistic civilisations, which identify light with divinity itself, the Abrahamic religions see light as a symbol of the revelation and transcendence of God. In the biblical Old Testament, the first act of creation is the separation of light and darkness (Genesis, 1:3). In different ways, this metaphysical bond with light has informed the choice of new architectural designs, techniques and materials.

A direct and impalpable expression of the divine in Islam, light is sanctified in the Al-Nur surah of the Quran (24:35), while in the West, the pursuit of large spaces, combined with the use of various metals, gave birth to the transparent chromatic art of stained glass. Particular importance is attached to light (al-Nur) in the Islamic world as one of the ninety-nine names of Allah and the subject of surah 24 of the Quran. Before he was chosen as the messenger of God, the prophet Muhammad was in the habit of seeking seclusion and meditation on Jabal Al-Nur, the mountain of light, near Mecca, where he received his first revelation from God through the Archangel Gabriel in Hira cave.

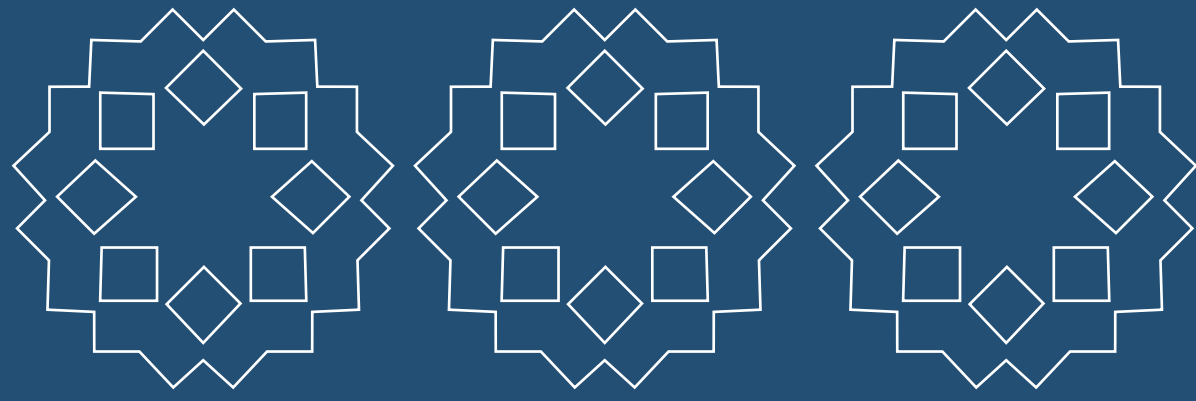
“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. A parable of His light is a niche wherein is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star,” (Qur’an 24:35). This verse from the Quran is frequently inscribed calligraphically on mosque lamps, where form is transcended by the word. In Christian theology, the vertical perception of light had a crucial influence on religious art and architecture, the basic principle of which associates the divine with natural light as opposed to darkness.

This was expressed, in particular, through the new architectural techniques of the Gothic period, which made it possible to transform places of worship into authentic cathedrals of light, like the Basilica of Saint-Denis near Paris, conceived in the 12th century by Abbot Sugar as an earthly representation of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The stained-glass windows incorporated in the facades of cathedrals transform physical light into divine radiance, flooding the interior and shining on the congregation. The art of stained glass reached its peak in the 13th and 14th centuries with the windows of such places as the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and the cathedrals of Reims and Regensburg.

One object that captures the essence of light, beauty and great depth is a page of the famous ‘Blue Quran.’ This page is from the one of the most sumptuous ancient copies of the Quran to have survived to the present day. Consisting of seven volumes, it was probably produced in Kairouan, Tunisia, in the 9th or 10th century.

The apparent simplicity of kufic calligraphy and the balance of the composition make it a work of great purity cadenced by the contrast between the gold and the midnight-blue background coloured with indigo. The idea of colouring was borrowed from the Byzantine imperial codices. The dark blue symbolises the celestial universe and the gilded letters the divine light spread by the word of God.



From the Vault:

Stories of light —
A collection from Barjeel Art Foundation

When we close our eyes, the concept of light comes to life and we must look within to find light. The theme light, Noor, inspires different ideas when mentioned, and here, through a special collaboration with the prestigious **Barjeel Art Foundation**, we take a stroll through four different interpretations of light and its manifestation as art.

'Untitled,'
by **Mohammed Al Qassab**.
1987. Oil on canvas, 76
x 51 cm. Image courtesy
of Barjeel Art Foundation,
Sharjah.





'Source of Light,'
by **Ziad Dalloul**. 2011. Oil
on canvas, 130 x 195 cm.
Image courtesy of Barjeel Art
Foundation, Sharjah.



'Les Sycamores du Vieux Caire
(Old Cairo & Sycamore Trees),' by
Georges Hanna Sabbagh. 1929,
Oil on canvas, 54 x 81.5 cm.
Image courtesy of Barjeel Art
Foundation, Sharjah.



'Paysage Géodésique,' by
Nadia Saikali. 1972. Mixed
media, 55 x 40 cm.
Image courtesy of Barjeel Art
Foundation, Sharjah.





From the Archives:

The life of photography by Rym Al-Ghazal

Rarities from the Aramco Archives

Light is key in any photo, where it not only determines brightness and darkness, but also tone, mood, and atmosphere. With the right play of light, it focuses on a special element in a photograph and captures its emotion. Origin of the word photography is derived from the ancient Greek words phot-, “light,” and graph-, “writing,” which were combined to create the word for taking pictures — “light writing.” It was first used in the 1830s and has been evolving ever since.

Here we share some wonderful rare photographs from Aramco Archives, each capturing light in its own special way. From the traditional architecture that welcomes natural light, to the shadows cast along the shifting sands of the desert—each photo is a memory, now timeless thanks to the existence of light.



1933 | Al-Hofuf

The carved gypsum walls of the CASOC headquarters built by the Al Gosaibi brothers.



April
1963 | Hayil
Door watcher at the amirate of Hayil.



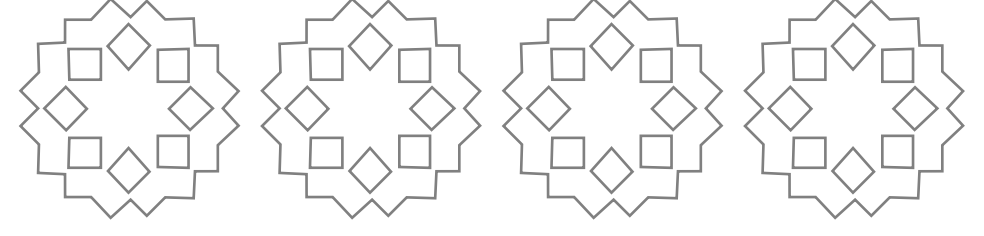
December
1959 | Rub Al-Khali
The play of shadows along the sand dunes in Southeast Rub Al-Khali.



1951 | Syria

Indoor view of the Krak des Chevaliers castle or Crac des Chevaliers, also called Ḥiṣn al-Akrād. Talkalakh District of Homs.

Editorial team:



Communication and Partnerships

Director:

Yousef Al-Mutairi

Head of Communications:

Hadeel Al-Eisa

Editor in Chief & Creative Director:

Rym Tina Al-Ghazal

Editor in Chief of Arabic Version:

Hadeel Al-Eisa

Cover Designer & Graphic Designer:

Fatma Magdy, MADAR Studio

Senior Editors:

Mona Hassan & Ahmad Dialdin.

Contributing Writers:

Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Laila Al-Faddagh, Somaya Badr, Manar & Sharifah Al-Hinai, Ghada Al-Muhanna, Hafsa Al-Khudairi, Aljohara Al-Athel and Ghadeer Sadeq

Special thanks for contributing artists & art:

Aga Khan Museum
Barjeel Art Foundation
Louvre Abu Dhabi
National Museum of Saudi Arabia
Art of Heritage
V & A





'Play of light' by Mohammad Al Faraj, a playful photographic project, where light captures joy.

About Ithra

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) is one of Saudi Arabia's most influential cultural destinations, a destination for the curious, creatives, seekers of knowledge, and more.

Through a compelling series of programs, performances, exhibitions, events and initiatives, Ithra creates world-class experiences across its interactive public spaces that bring together culture, innovation and knowledge that are designed to appeal to everyone.

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

Follow Ithra on social media:

