

ISSUE NO. 007



# Gardens

Artist: Nawal Musali

**ithraeyat** magazine

October 2020



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

## Behind the scenes

Ithraeyat is the plural of Ithra (enrichment). Magazine has its origins in the Arabic word makhzan, a storehouse. And therefore, Ithraeyat magazine is a storehouse of unique, enriching stories.





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# Gardens

**“A book is a garden carried in the pocket,” says an Arabian proverb.**

Since the beginning of time, gardens have held a special place in our hearts. They are our vision of paradise and where we can find peace, wisdom, beauty and inspiration. Whether they are small or big, part of humble homes or famous palaces, in public parks or roundabouts, they bring life to a place, and leave lasting perfumed impressions.

They make an appearance in poems, philosophical impressions and ideas. They are nature’s artistic canvas, an endless expression of the boundless artistic skills of our mother nature. We pay homage to **Gardens** in this issue of Ithraeyat, for

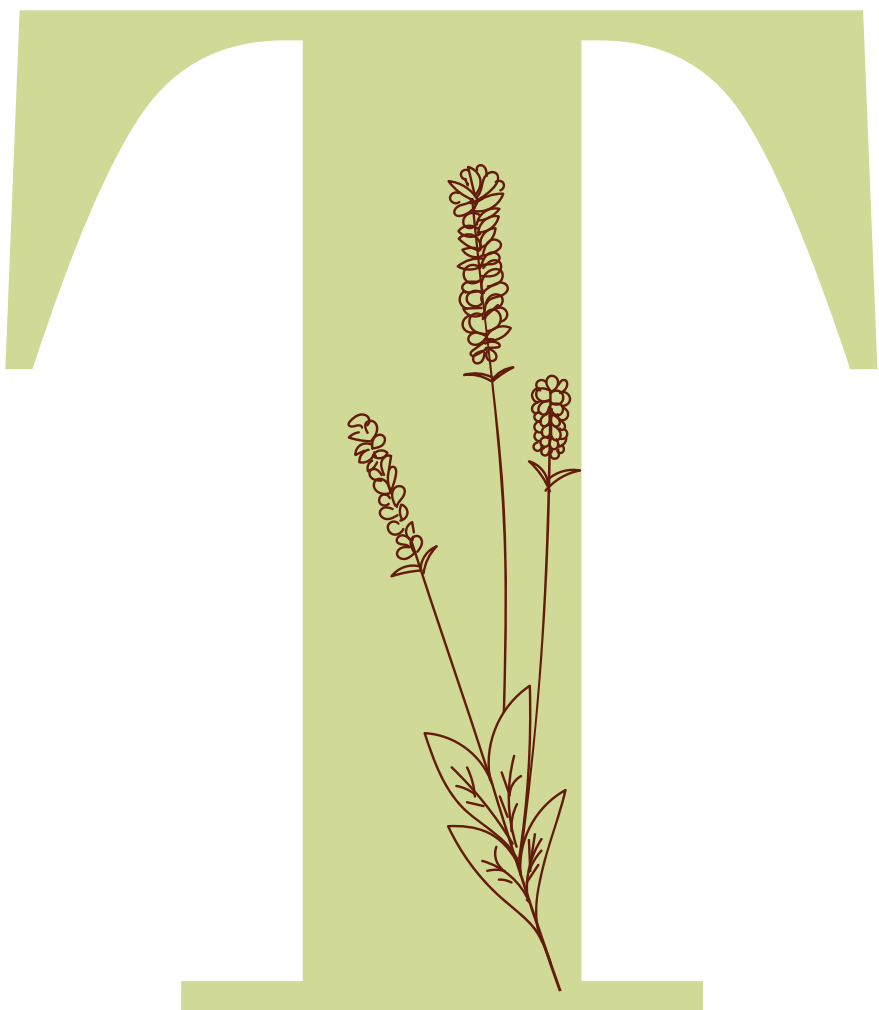
a garden has brought many a sense of peace and purpose in the COVID-19 era of isolation and anxiety. We meet the bold and vibrant art of Saudi artist Nawal Musali, featured on the cover, that captures the lushness of gardens. This piece, is part of a collection of four colors, from ‘Rabou Beladi’ (across my country) series.

This piece is part of the “green” stage that captures the wealth of greenery of the south of Saudi Arabia, and its landscape. We hope you enjoy your stroll through our mini-gardens featured here, and those that may cross your path.





Meet our ‘theme-special’ featured renowned Saudi artist, **Nawal Musali**, who reinterprets the beauty of nature and captures its many colorful stories through her brushes.







# Portrait:

## The Art of Gardens.

**“The gardens of Taif... and those I visited in my childhood changed how I see and paint the world around me...”**

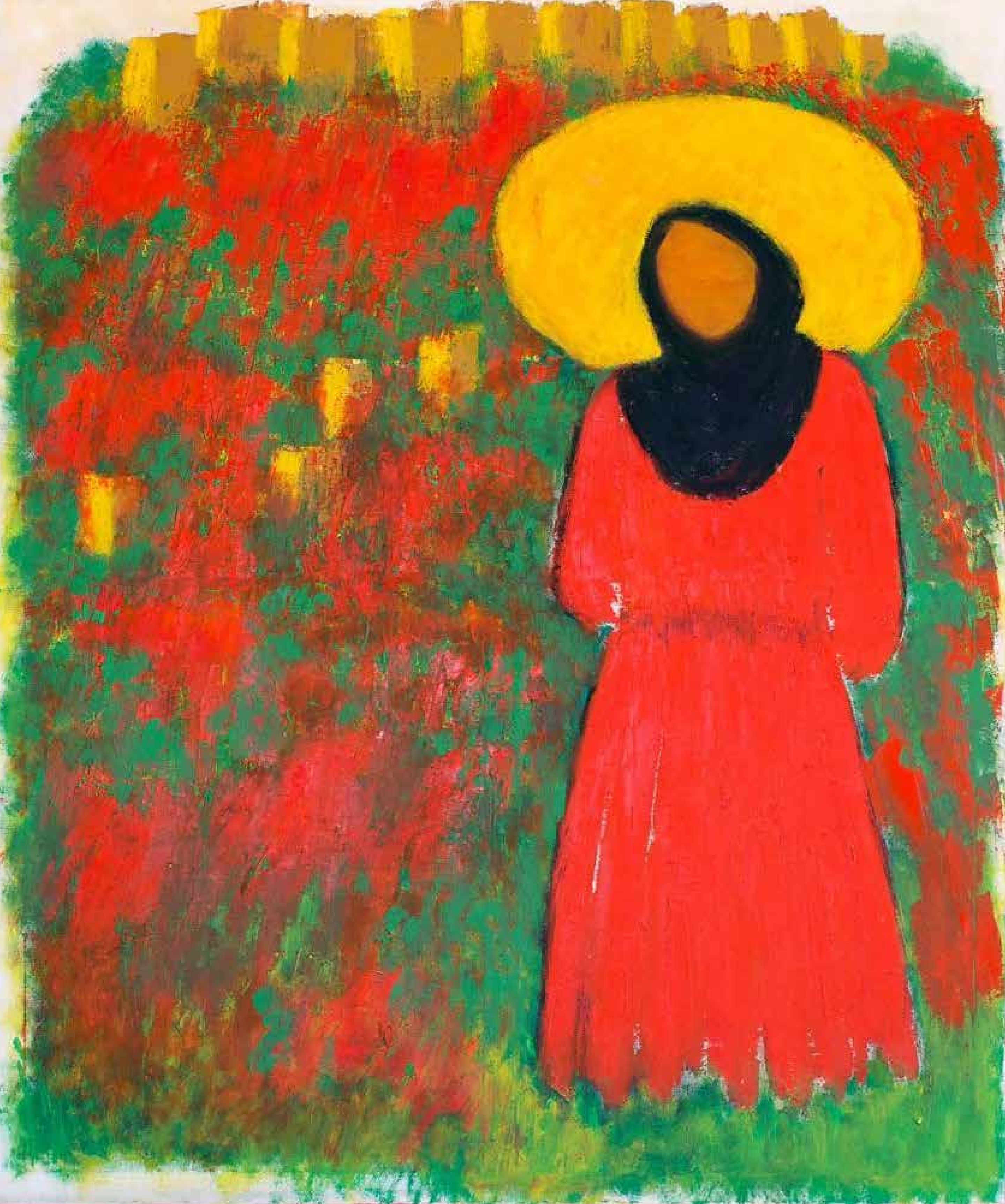
Nawal Mostafa Musali has for decades been capturing mother nature’s gifts to humanity. As one of the pioneers in the Saudi plastic art movement, Musali comes from a family of artists and diplomats. From the “barren yet striking” gardens of Africa to the “delicate yet vibrant’ gardens of Taif and the south of the Kingdom, Musali has been painting nature and gardens that came across her path as she traveled with her diplomatic family.

“We have close connections to the land we harvest and the gardens we plant,” she said in an interview with Ithraeyat. Inspired by the diversity of her country’s natural landscapes, she has been artistically documenting the

different relationships people have with a desert terrain verses the more mountainous and lush parts of the Kingdom. “Our deep long relationship with fields of palm trees and our love affairs with our native flowers, all this and more I like to capture through bold colors and a special style that allows the viewer to visit the places I am visiting.”

Participating in numerous exhibitions, the first one in 1984, the award winning artist will continue to capture the story of her country’s gardens, through her signature bold colors of red, green, yellow and brown. “These are the colors of nature, of the fields, the homes that are there, and my own home.”





**Nawal Musali's** bold colors and homage to nature and it's flowers are beautifully captured in the 'lady in red' art piece of a Bedouin woman from the south of Saudi Arabia.





‘Garden,’ by UAE artist **Ebtisam Abdulaziz**. Acrylic on paper, 110 x 80 cm, 2003. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

# Guest columnist:

## Ahmad Dialdin reflects on Paradise of Gardens

**“If, of thy mortal goods, thou art bereft,  
And from thy slender store two loaves  
alone to thee are left,  
Sell one & from the dole,  
Buy Hyacinths to feed the soul”**

—Muslihuddin Sadi - 13th Century Persian Poet

For a desert-dwelling people, you would assume we would have a hundred words for sand

just as the Inuits have for the snows of the North American Arctic, (or, as I recently learned, the Sami languages of Northern Europe have 180 to 300 snow/ice-related words).

Instead, we have at least a half a dozen words for gardens that includes hadiqah, riyad, janna, raudah, bustan and more.





In the Holy Qur'an, paradise is literally represented as gardens and uses the same word for it, and thus we end up with more than 150 mentions of janna (whether representing Paradise with a capital P or gardens in general). To that regard, we are a people that is shaped not by what is in this life, but by what is in the next.





A Flower boy from the south. Photos taken by **Ibrahim Sarhan**, whose photos are part of the **Kingdom of Cultures Exhibit at Ithra**.

# Spotlight:

## Flower men from the South

### “I would search for the perfect flower...”

Hadesh Ahmad Al-AIMaee remembers a childhood of running around in search of the perfect flower for his headpiece known as ‘Asaib Al-Tayyib.’ “We boys would compete on who would have the most colorful, the most fragrant, head crown,” said the mountainous tribal man now in his 60s.

Sometimes, he admits, with a laugh, he would ‘kidnap’ the flowers of a neighbor’s garden, to add that final unique floral touch. “Our whole neighborhood is a garden, we are very blessed.” He was one of the handful of “flower men” invited by the King Abdulaziz Center for World

Culture (Ithra) brought over from the southern provinces of Jizan and Asir in the south to Dhahran during Saudi National Day celebrations. It is part of a drive to promote home-grown culture. The reclusive fun-loving “flower men” danced, sang, and demonstrated to visitors of all ages the ancient art of creating intricate aromatic floral wreaths.

There are many legends surrounding this tradition of tribesmen wearing the colorful crowns. One story goes that they are used as camouflage to conceal the men from enemies. It is also there to protect the head and pay tribute to nature’s beauty, a tradition that goes back centuries.





# Spotlight:

## Palms & Pomegranates: The Saudi floral motifs

Within the vast Saudi Arabian heritage, flowers hold a special significance as decorative motifs in Bedouin costumes. They are represented in everyday clothes, and are reinterpreted on textiles and hand embroidered as a daily craft that decorates as it documents their surroundings inspired by nature.

The non-verbal language of flowers on fabrics speaks to us at multiple levels, where the needle work and raw materials speak of the geo-climatic conditions and nature as an expression of the habitats.

The floral motifs tell us of its legends, its myths, and their way of life and the aromatic trade links.

Embroidery created by the Bedouin women of the Najd region for instance, feature inspirations from the desert and its plants. It is an expression of the creativity of the women, who enrich their environment, their own lives and of their families by beautifying everyday objects with love and inspiration from nature.



# The Pomegranate fruit

**This fruit is one of the commonly featured motifs, one that grows in some of the Saudi gardens, such as in Taif.**

The pomegranate has long been known as an ancient symbol of positive healing, creativity, love, nurture, passion, self-empowerment and fertility. This positive symbol was not only used as a motif in dresses, but also used as a dye for textiles by Saudi women. From a philosophical perspective, by honoring the pomegranate in their creation, they are paying homage to the wisdom learned from this fragile yet strong fruit.

It teaches us to protect, respect, and honor our vulnerability; to discover our inner wisdom, to embrace beauty and power in the seemingly darkest moments of our lives, and to make use of these gifts externally by setting healthy boundaries, learning to express our emotions and creativity in safe ways, and feeling free in who we are.







Najdi Palm Tree Motifs. Darrah (19th century inner dress from Riyadh). Courtesy The Art of Heritage center.

# The Palm tree

The inhabitants of central Arabia were inspired by their surroundings and the beauty of palm trees around them. Palms are native to desert life and its fruit has been cultivated since the ancient times across the peninsula.

People were and remain in awe of the trees’ branches, firm in their beauty and majesty. They are the most common of motifs, and are national symbols. The floral motifs in textiles capture the

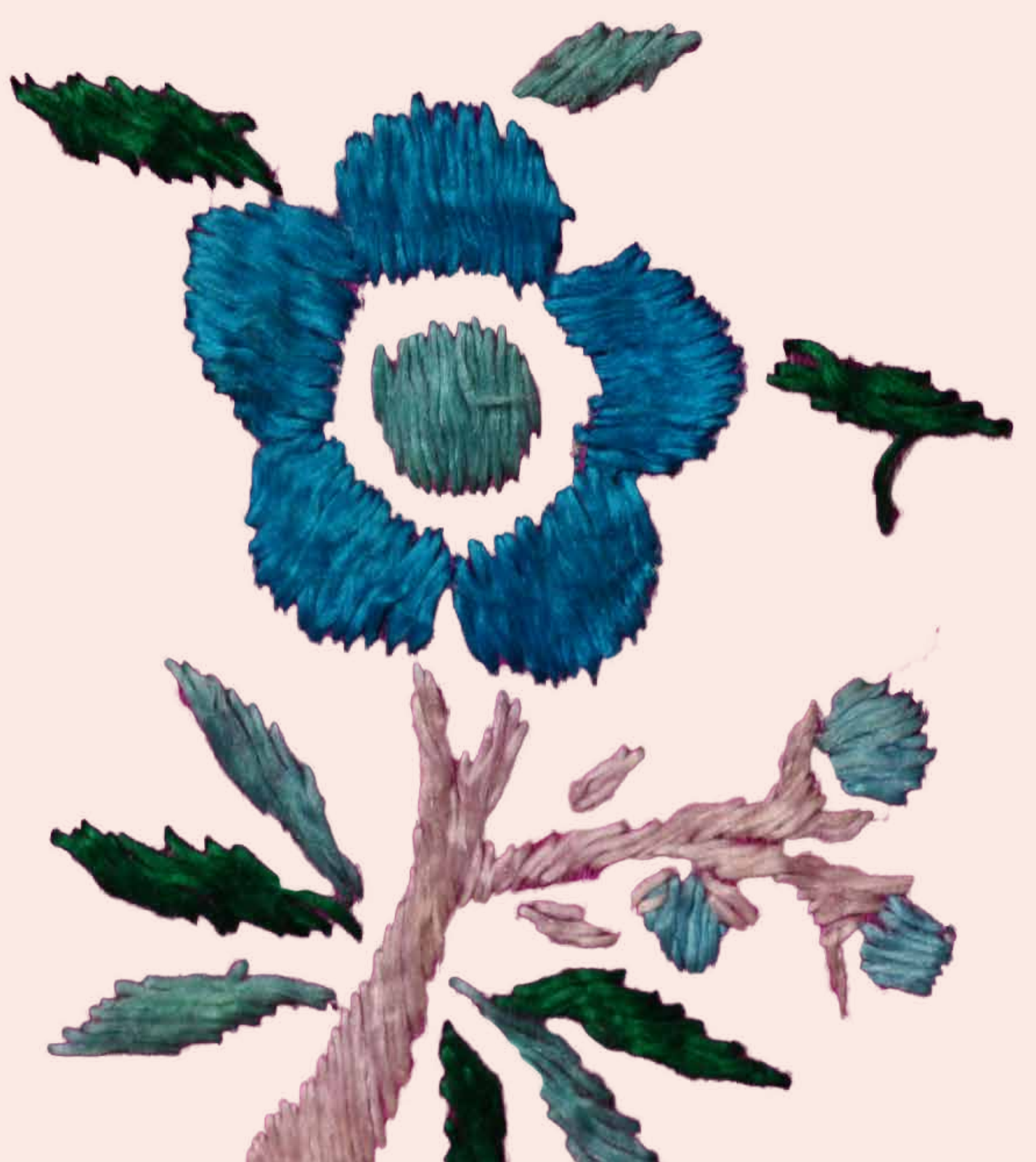
diversity of flowers in the Kingdom, flowers such as the Taif rose, the jasmine of Jazan, the lavenders of the north, and many more that decorate our hair, our heads and clothes, and leave a scent on our skins. Given all this—it is easy to see how the Saudi culture is in itself a big colorful garden.

Written by Special Contributor Somaya Badr, CEO of **Art of Heritage** and Art of Heritage Cultural Trust.





Traditional Saudi Floral Motif. Courtesy of **Art of Heritage**







‘Cascade Series 2,’ by Daniah Al-Saleh. Watercolor and pencil, 104 x 170 cm, 2014. Art courtesy of the **artist** and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

# Arabic Treasures:

The scent of seeing—homage to nature

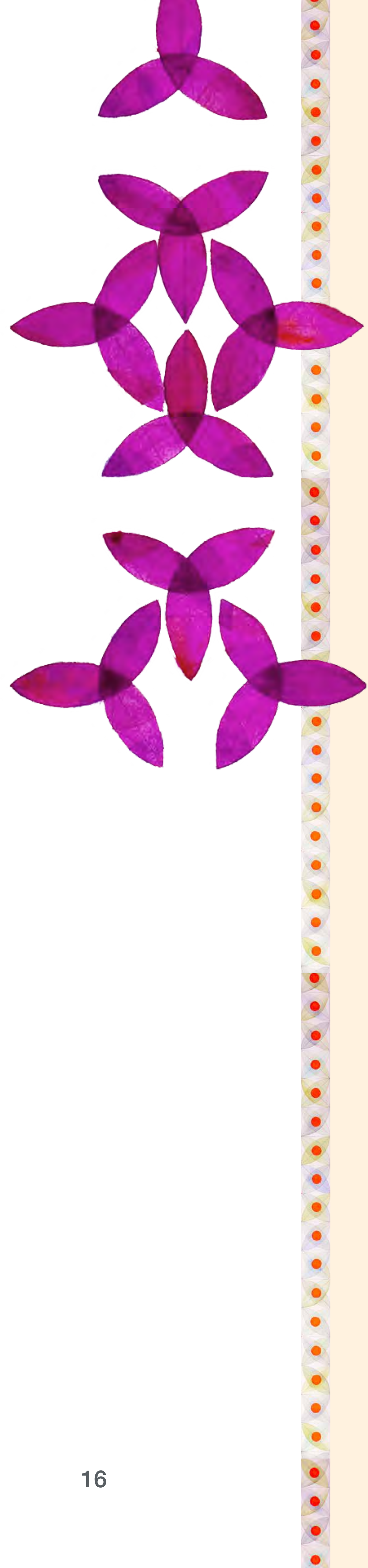
*‘Whence comes the perfume of the rose, and whence  
The spirit-larva which the body blights?  
Whence does the nettle get its bitter sting?  
Whence do the honey bees their honey bring?  
Whence our Companions, too—our Whence and Why?  
O Soul, I do not know a single thing!’*

It is said, that Abu Al-Ala Al-Ma’arri’s collection of poems such as these lines here, from Luzumiyat, original title Luzum ma la Yalzam — the Necessity of what is Unnecessary—are the kind of poems that should be read while resting under a tree in a garden.

The 10th century Syrian poet, writer and scholar, who was blinded at a young age due to smallpox, revered nature and all its creatures, becoming one of

the earliest known committed vegans, and an advocate for animal rights. In his famous poems titled **“I no longer steal from nature,”** he expresses great compassion and says: “Do not unjustly eat fish the water has given up / And do not desire as food the flesh of slaughtered animals / Or the white milk of mothers who intended its pure draught for their young, not noble ladies / And do not grieve the unsuspecting birds by taking eggs; for injustice is the worst of crimes...”

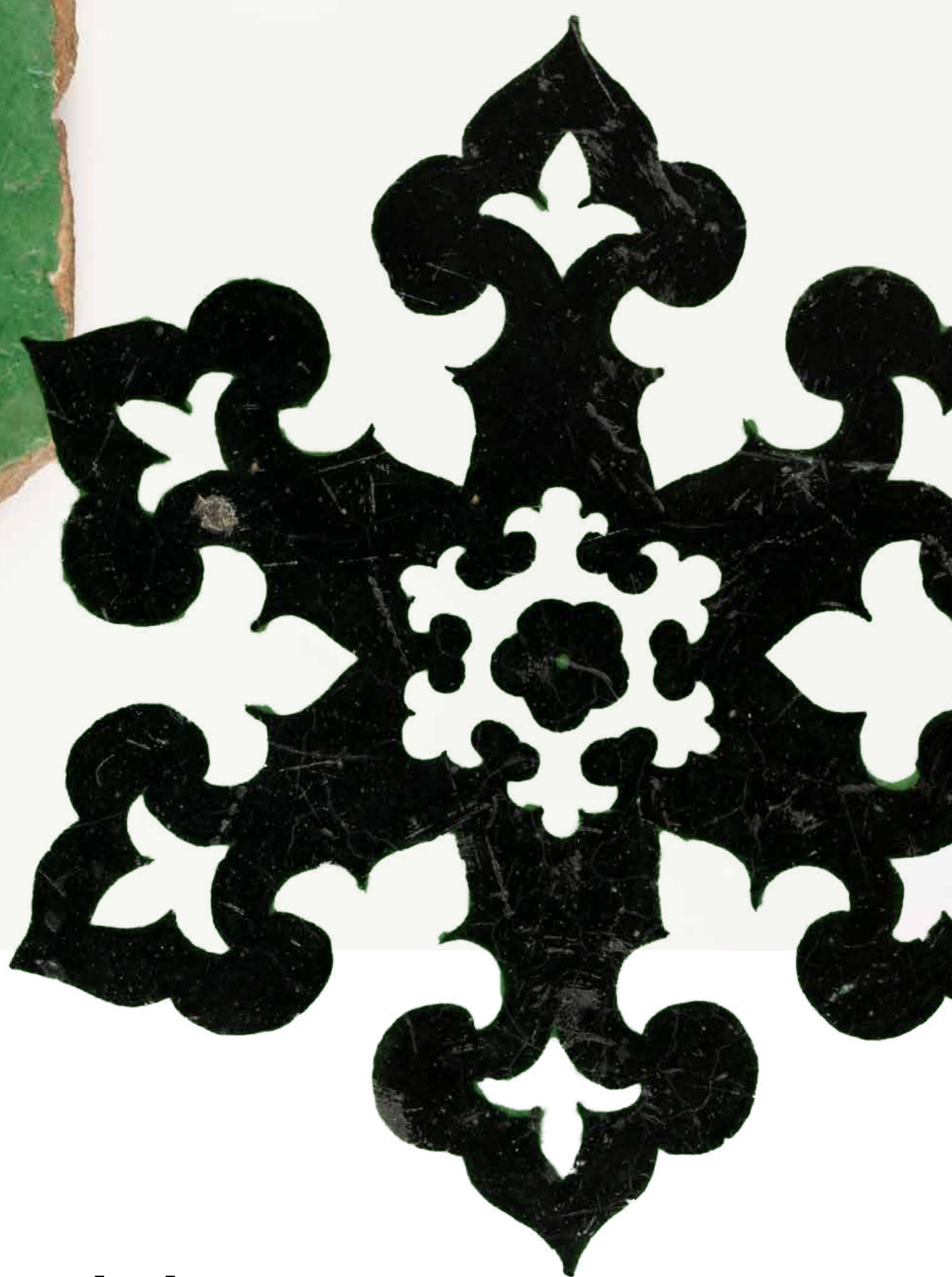




Known as the “the Voltaire of the East,” Al-Ma’arri’ poems were cynical and deep, often contemplating the meaning of life around him, garnering wisdom and lessons from mother nature. His pieces often feature trees, flowers, and the power of touch and scent, senses he must have relied on to understand the world around him.

It is said if one was looking for Al-Ma’arri’, then look inside a garden. He died as he lived, when in the spring of 1055/57 he was buried in his favorite spot: his beloved garden.





# Ithra Curiosities:

## Inspirations from a garden.

The Dome of the Rock is one of the world's most iconic structures, and within it and along its walls, are precious pieces of art, that embody the serenity and beauty of the place. Among Ithra's collection are two exquisite rare hexagonal tiles from Jerusalem with floral designs.

The tiles are underglaze-painted with black, six-pointed stars surrounding central rosettes on a green ground. They would have formed part of a greater geometric pattern of wall tiles, aligned diagonally with triangular tiles of a different color set in between.

Tiles of this type can be found adorning the walls of the Dome of the Rock, built in the late 7th century under the order of Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan. This Islamic shrine was modified several times over the centuries, and it was during the 16th century when the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman I restored the exterior that tiles such as these (16 centimeters in diameters) were added to the walls.

Both **Ithra curiosities** items will be part of the exhibition '**Shatr Almasjid: the Art of Orientation**' at Ithra from January 2021 to October 2022.



# More Ithra Curiosities:



## Sacred Gardens.

Places of worship and meditation take their inspiration from nature's greatest artist, the garden. Here, part of Ithra's collection, is a beautiful carpet fragment — with intricately weaved carnations, tulips, roses, rising cherry blossoms and a lantern — that would have originally formed part of the central upper tier of a communal multiple niche prayer rug, or Saf. It was quite possibly made and designed for the magnificent Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, the center of the Ottoman Empire at the time of

construction (1569 and 1575), which was commissioned by Sultan Selim II (1524 -1574) and the masterwork of Mimar Sinan (circa 1490-1588). The Saf is believed to have been removed from the Mosque in 1914. The featured 'Ushak Row Carpet' from Ushak, Turkey, dates to c. 1560, and is made of wool pile and measures at 145cm x 74cm. This type of design of the Saf would have reflected the splendor of the Mosque's interior.





## More Ithra **Curiosities:** Ithra's colorful gardens

With over 350 plants, and two gardens and three oases of different sizes, colors and species, Ithra is a lush oasis of vegetation in the midst of a barren landscape.

Some of its most common trees include the nation's pride— the date palm, and the symbolic olive tree, known by the botanical name *Olea europaea*, meaning 'European olive,' found traditionally in the Mediterranean Basin.

The sandy grounds are cloaked with sporadic flowers, such as the exquisite

'*Vinca rosea*', also known as 'bright eyes' that are varied in colors from white to dark pink. Other common plants are *Opuntia ficus-indica*, or the prickly pear, a species of cactus known for its ability to grow in tough dry areas, and the distinct *Yucca Gloriosa*, recognized for their pointy, sword-shaped leaves.

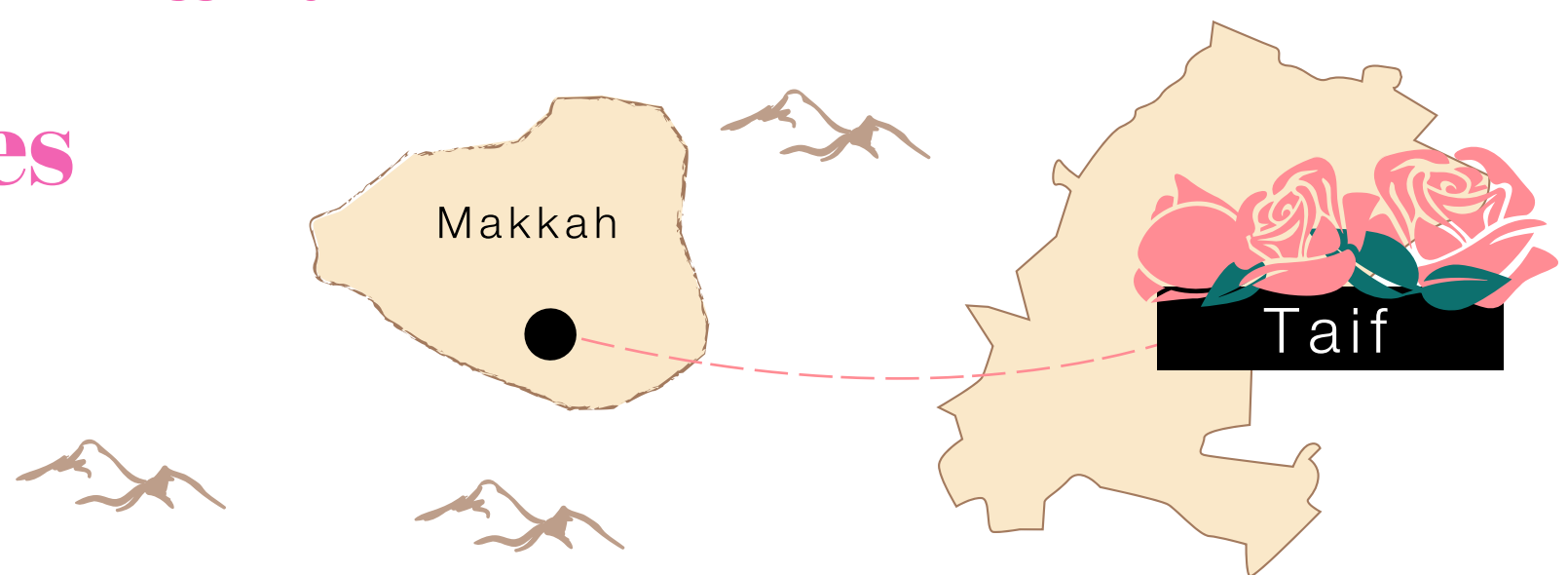
Together with the desert shrub of *Encelia farinosa*, also known as brittlebush, the Ithra gardens are a wonderful stroll, filled with a special aroma of sandy sweetness and sturdiness.





# Add to your bucket list:

## La Vie en Rose— Taif: the City of Roses



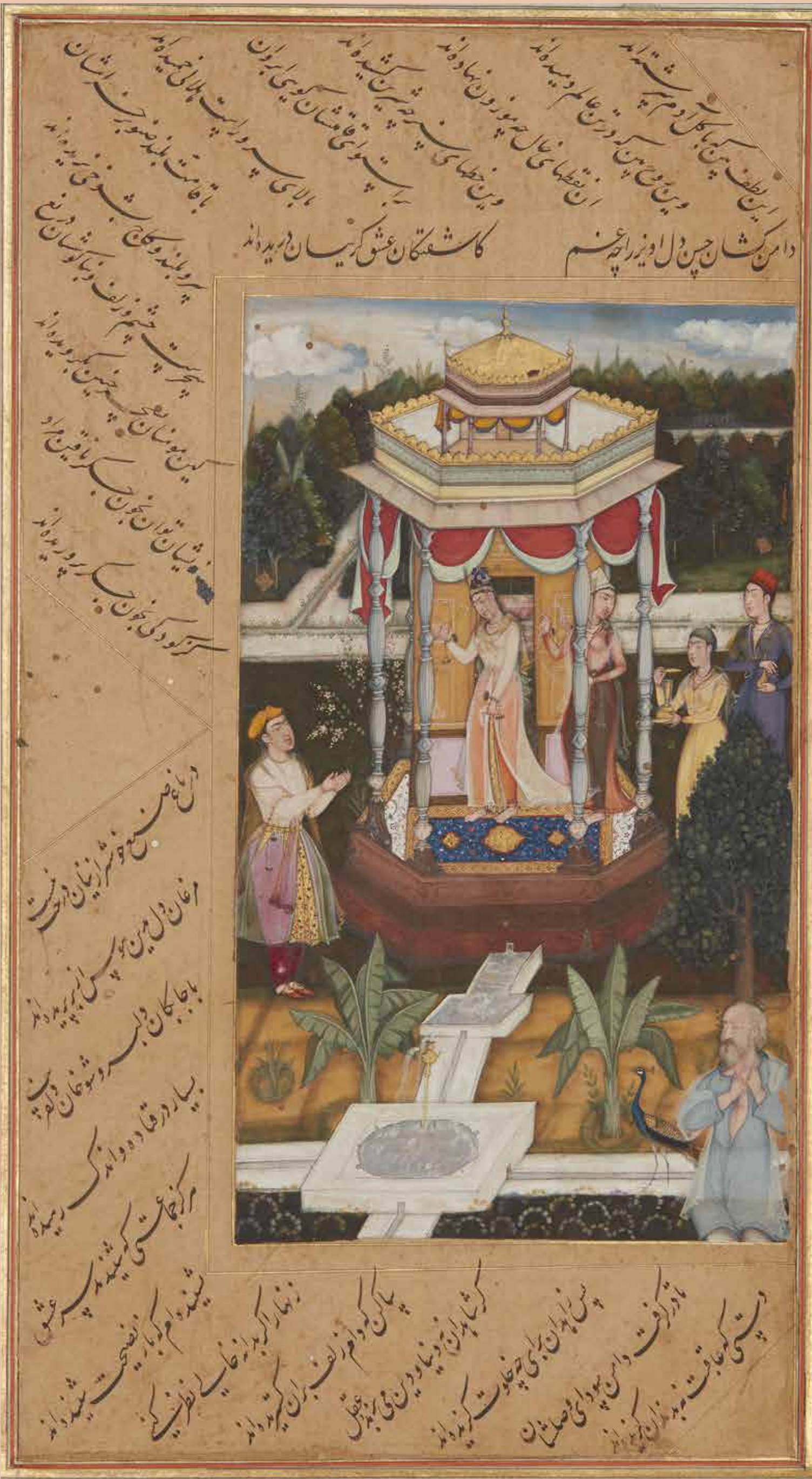
In the mountainous city of Taif, Saudi Arabia, the phrase 'La Vie en Rose' befits the charms that grow there. The expression “Life in pink” or “Life seen through happy lenses” suit the blankets of exquisite roses that cover hundreds of farms. Each spring, around April, the blossoming fields turn a rosy hue with the 30-petal wardh Taifi—the rose of Taif. Taif is a weather haven, far from the

heavy humid air and dry titanic desert sands. There in the mountains, the cool winds flow with fragrances picked up from wondrous fields of flowers and fruit orchards. Sweet produce like figs, pomegranates and grapes grow, along with honey. In the escape to Taif’s beauty, roses of every color, specifically a precious pink shade, come alive in spring...



# Bridges:

## Cross-Cultural Conversations



Folio from the Manuscript of Kulliyat, (Collected Works) of Sa'di (d. 1292)  
India, Agra, ca. 1604. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper.  
H.41.8 x W.26.2 cm. © The Aga Khan Museum, AKM284.21.

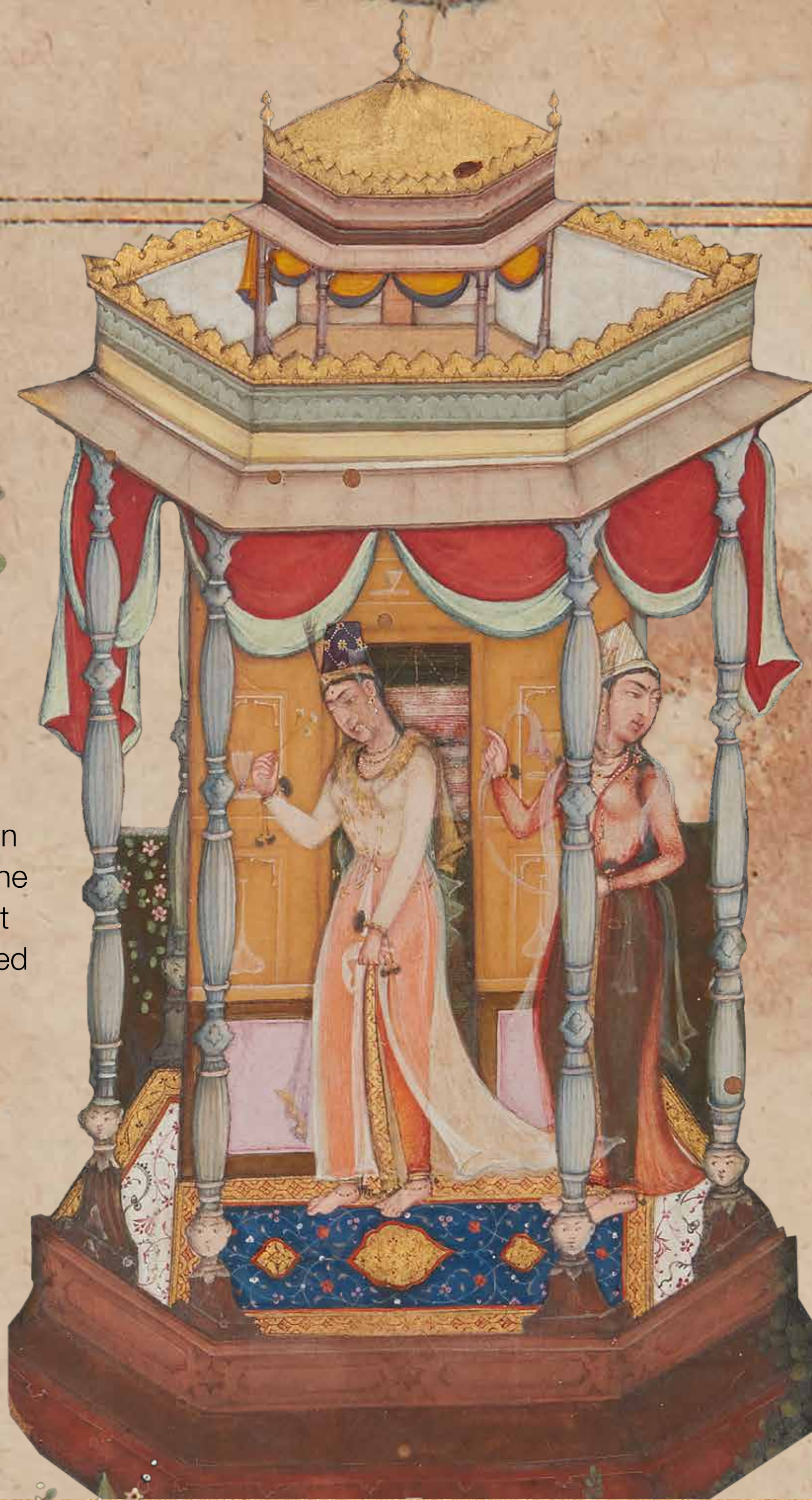
## A Prince and his Beloved

Gardens and floral imagery are enduring themes in Islamic art, poetry, and literature, and a continuous source of inspiration for artists and poets. They have been present throughout Islamic art not only for their decorative aspect but also as a means to prompt spiritual reflection and to convey various human emotions. This folio featured here comes from a

manuscript of the Kulliyat—collected works of verse and prose— of the celebrated 13th century Persian poet Sa'di. It was made around 1604, at the Mughal court of India, where more than one hundred artists from many different religious and ethnic backgrounds were employed in the courtly manuscript workshop.



The painting on this folio represents a prince and his beloved who is waiting in a garden pavilion. The poetry around the painting includes several examples that liken the physical features of the beloved to nature-inspired elements, such as the cypress tree, commonly used as a metaphor for an elegant stature.



Beside the artistry evident in the poetry, its calligraphic rendering, and its intricate design, this painting also talks about another area for spectacular creativity: the art of the garden and horticulture. The type of garden shown here is known as Chaharbagh (meaning four gardens), an ancient Persian design concept traditionally symbolizing order and beauty. Its layout is based on right angles and geometric proportions. Its symmetry, which also includes creative and innovative water management, is further enhanced by the careful arrangement of flowers and plants. All combine to evoke an earthly representation of the Paradise gardens anticipated in the afterlife.

In many Muslim cultures, the ancient Chaharbagh concept merged with Qur'anic ideas of the four gardens of Paradise mentioned in Surah 55, Al-Rahman ("The Merciful"): "But for those that fear the majesty of their Lord there are two gardens." (Q55: 46) "And beside these there shall be two other gardens." (Q55: 62).

Written by Special Guest Contributor Bitá Pourvash, Assistant Curator at the Aga Khan Museum. In each issue, we feature a special treasure from the **Aga Khan Museum**, one that tells a story, captures a moment and inspires conversation.



# From **the Vault:** The Gardens Within.

Gardens and their depictions symbolize many themes, such as the beginning of life with the Garden of Eden to philosophy of serenity and color. Here we meet artists from a special collection by Barjeel Art Foundation who reinterpret the art of gardens in their own way.



‘Garden 4’ by legendary Emirati artist **Hassan Sharif**. Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, 2007. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.





‘Flower in the Garden’  
by Emirati artist **Maitha Demithan**. Scanography on  
paper, 178 x 143 cm, 2010.  
Image courtesy of Barjeel Art  
Foundation, Sharjah.

‘The Palm,’ by renowned Kuwaiti  
artist **Abdul Rida Baqer**. Oil  
on canvas, 104 x 79 cm, 2006.  
Image courtesy of **Barjeel Art  
Foundation**, Sharjah





# From the Archives:

## Celebrating our gardens



Rarities from the Aramco Archives.

Dhahran.  
July, 1954

Gardens are more than just beautiful additions to a home, they are the place where nature plays out its art of life, and connections are made between each other. We feature here how gardens are a home for many wonderful beings, such as this beautiful bird house in the midst of a garden that gives birds shade and shelter, and how a gathering of a flock of geese, between three to four hundred, can feed and relax in the cultivated fields of date palms.



Al-Kharj.  
July, 1956



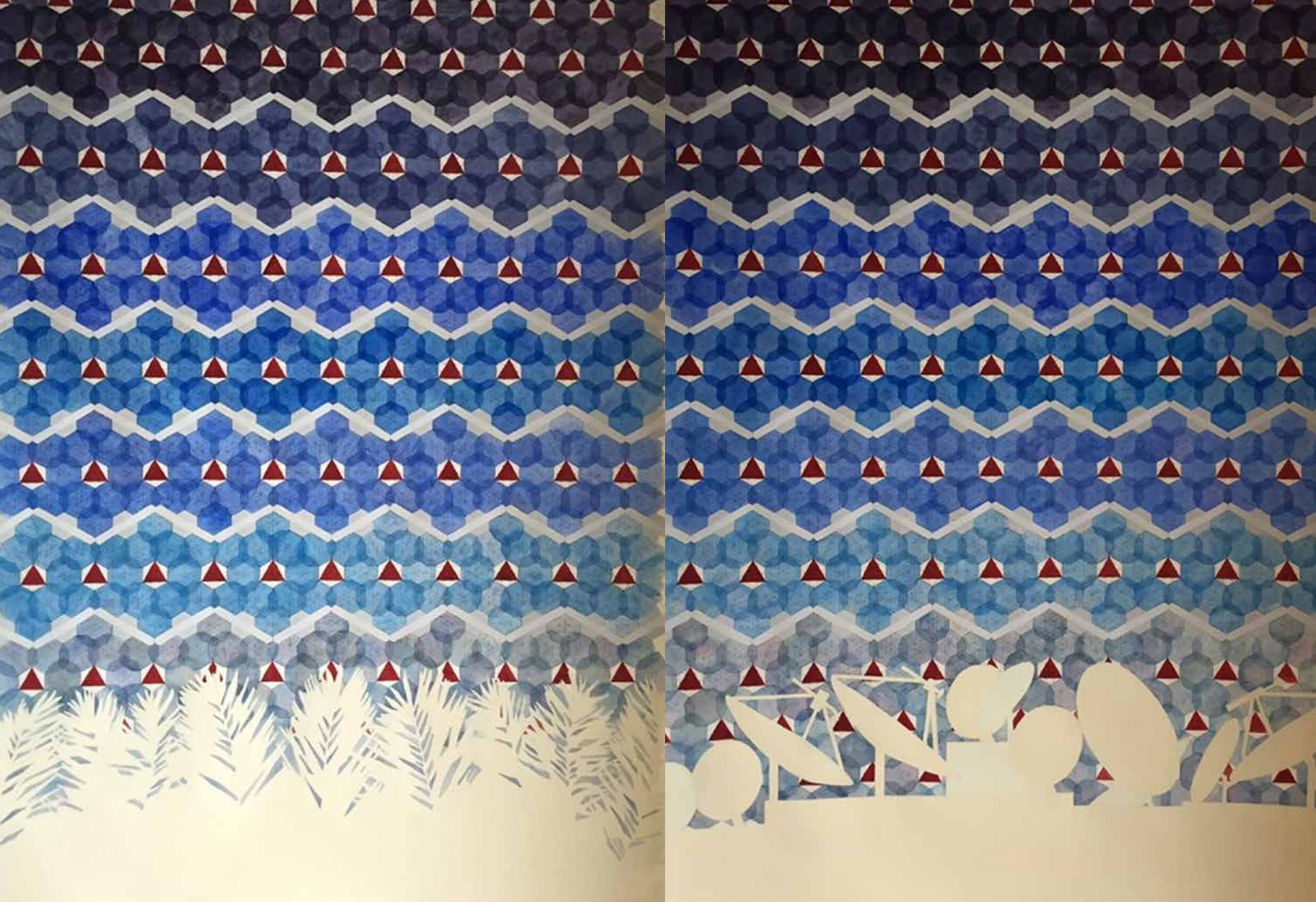
Dhahran.  
March, 1954.



Jeddah,  
1950.

A different kind of lushness, where we see a fruit garden at the back of a government house, and a gathering of friends and committee members (Mrs. R.L. Lebkicher, Mrs. Tom Garrity, Mrs. J.C. Stirton) who look over the final plans for an upcoming flower show.





‘Window with a View,’ by Saudi artist **Daniah Al-Saleh**. Watercolor, Gouache and pencil diptych, 127 x 85 cm each, 2015. The piece is about the division in social class. Daniah used two typical views, one of rooftops and their haphazard TV dishes, while the other is of a garden. Each ‘View’ represents one social class. The higher one is on the social ladder, the better their view is. But people have more things in common than not. We focus on eye level pleasures, but forget to look up and see how we all share one sky, one heaven. The sky is represented symbolically by the seven heavens, seven divisions of different blues. The red triangles encourage the viewer to look up instead of downwards. Red being the color of all people, the color of blood. Art courtesy of the **artist** and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

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# From the World Wide Web: Art stories to browse through

- + Google Arts & Culture ‘Art Filter’ now lets you become works of art using AR
- + Jeddah center of Japan’s TeamLab promises an inspiring art space for Saudis
- + Saudi artists beautify Riyadh with Arabic calligraphy
- + Louvre Abu Dhabi museum symposium to tackle issues of pandemic and race





Photo taken by Saudi photographer **Abdullah Al-Sheikh**.

# A ‘green month.’

Saudi Arabia’s Al-Hasa Oasis has entered the Guinness World Records as **the largest self-contained oasis** in the world, with more than 2.5 million palm trees in the oasis, which is fed from a huge underground aquifer, which allows agriculture all year round in a region that is otherwise sand desert.

The Al-Hasa Oasis has also been recognized as a **UNESCO World Heritage site** under the Cultural Heritage category. Saudi Arabia also launched this month the ‘Let’s Make it Green’ campaign to reduce desertification in the Kingdom and help develop natural habitats by planting 10 million trees by the end of April 2021.





'Untitled' by Hakim Al-Akel. Acrylic on canvas, 80 by 100 cm, 2017. Courtesy the **artist** and **Hafez Gallery**



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

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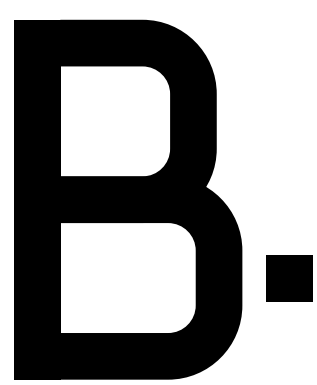
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**Special thanks for contributing artists & art:**



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# About Ithra

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

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

Connecting creatives, challenging perspectives and transforming ideas, Ithra is graduating its own leaders in the cultural field.

Ithra is **Saudi Aramco's** flagship CSR initiative and the largest cultural contribution to the Kingdom.

Ithra's components include the Idea Lab, Library, Cinema, Theater, Museum, Archive, Energy Exhibit, Great Hall, Children's Museum and Knowledge Tower.

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

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