

Issue 021

ithra   
by aramco

# Ithraeyat Magazine

Summer 2023

SPREAD

Artist  
Maysaloun Faraj





Welcome to **lthraeyat**, a cultural magazine produced by The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra). Created to inspire hearts and enrich minds, this Saudi inspired platform with an expansive international outlook captures 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 Art of Food,' by Rym Al-Ghazal	05
-------------------------------------	----

## Cover Artist:

'Home through the eyes of Maysaloun Faraj,' an interview by Manar Al-Mutairi.	08
---	----

## Special Guest Artists:

'The Art of Our Natural World,' an interview with Alonsa Guevara, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	10
'A Feast of Colors,' an interview with Amal Al Balooshi, by Manar Al-Mutairi.	12
'Culture Through Digital Art,' an interview with artist Ahmed Al-Refaie, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	13
'An Artistic Fiesta: Life Served in a Dish,' an interview with artist Leila Malallah, by Fatma Theyab.	14
'Putting a 'Sparkle' on what we take for granted,' an interview with Sara Shakeel, by Nora Al-Taha.	15
'Around the Table,' an interview with artist Abdullah Al-Azzaz, by Nourah Aldaej.	16
'A Canvas of Toast,' an interview with artist SASAMANA, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	17
'The Recipe for Hyperrealistic Art,' An interview with Varuna Sridhar, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	18
'A Sweet Slice of Crystal Clear Cakes,' an interview with Tomei, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	20
'Interwoven Spiced Worlds,' an interview with artist Paola Anziche, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	21

## Special Guest Columnist:

'A Multiverse of an Umami-layered Happiness,' by Hussain AlMoosawi, Editor-in-Chief of National Geographic AlArabiya.	22
---	----

## Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

'An Accident Befalls the Date-picker,' By Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, Director and CEO at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto.	23
---	----

## Exclusive Conversations:

'The Renaissance of Saudi Art,' an interview with Yousif Al-Harbi, Director of the Culture and Arts Association in Dammam, by Rym Al-Ghazal.	25
'Albaik and the Culture of Food,' an interview with Rami Abu Ghazaleh, CEO of Albaik, by Nourah Aldaej and Hassan Albather.	27
'Nurturing Art and Creativity,' an interview with Lisa Ball-Lechgar, Deputy Director of Tashkeel.	28
'Tables of the Past,' an interview with Salma Serry, by Manar Al-Mutairi.	29

## Special Features:

'A Taste of History,' an interview with scholar Daniel Newman, by Zahra Shikara.	31
'Our Minds, Our Moods, Our Meals,' an interview with Raoum Alsuhaibani, by Nora Al-Taha.	34
'The Art of Potato,' by Rym Al-Ghazal.	35
'Eat with Your Eyes First,' an interview with Chef Bri Baker, by Nora Al-Taha.	37
'How Moutabal Changed A Professor's Life,' an interview with Professor Peter Heine, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	39

## Arabic Treasures:

'Theater of Famine - An Ode to the Soul,' by Fatma Theyab and Hassan Al-Bather.	40
---	----

## From the Vault:

'The Art of Eating,' from the collection of the Barjeel Art Foundation, by Rym Al-Ghazal.	42
---	----

## Qumara - Art of Photography:

'Capturing' the things we love,' an interview with Abdullah Al-Shaikh, by The Ithraeyat Editorial Team.	44
---	----

## From the Archives:

'The Cake of Life,' by Rym Al-Ghazal.	45
'A Nostalgic Treasure - The Aramco cake,' by Abeer Al-Nemari.	47





'Call of the Pomegranate,' by Alonsa Guevara. Courtesy of Tashkeel.

We all need to protect and thank all the creatures, like the bees, for keeping us, and the planet thriving and alive.

## Letter from the Editor: The Art of Food

By Rym Al-Ghazal

*“Al tamr masameer al rukba” – Dates are the nails of the knee.*

Food is life, and life is food. This old Arabian saying about the benefits of dates for joints is just one of many we hear about the impact of different food types on our lives. Food is a whole philosophy on its own, a way of life and the source of life.

When someone asks you, **what is your favorite dish?** A lot of reflection goes into answering that, from nostalgic memories of certain plates and the cultural connections to the delicious flavors that leave a lasting impression.







Given its universality and its diversity, we pay homage to this theme of food in our 21st edition, titled the **'Spread'**. It's an artistic, cultural, and philosophical take on the concept of food and flavors. People gather around a spread, be it on a table or on the floor, to eat, drink, study, read, draw, converse, decorate, personalize, and form connections and memories.

There are many studies that show how food "made with love" at home helps the body to reach an equilibrium, and just sitting at a dining table and

smelling the food for a few minutes can help the digestive system to work properly.

So many of us, especially those with demanding jobs, rarely eat food that we've cooked ourselves, or even eat at a dining table except on special occasions. We order food as we work at our desks, and when we get home we all eat in front of the TV instead of sitting down around a spread enjoying a wholesome meal seasoned with conversations, and just taking the time to savor every bite.

Numerous studies show that children who are used to eating with their families have better social skills and fewer behavioral problems, and the overall family dynamics are healthier because a lot of issues are resolved around the dining table.

There is no underestimating the importance of food experiences in our lives, our creativity, and our well-being.

In this special edition, we meet artists and creatives at various stages of their lives, who explore aspects of food through their creativity and art.

We feature on our cover the intricate artwork by the legendary **Maysaloun Faraj**, a piece that embodies the warmth and universality of most homes. We all at some point, had a bowl of fruits, often replenished by a loved one at home.

There is something for everyone, whether you want to discover the art of 'toast' to the art of crystals, poems about hunger, food legends and myths, as well as the many ways ancient dishes have remained with us, with some food items, like the potato, holding a special place in people's memories and hearts.





We also need to pause and thank the smallest, but most important players in keeping us all fed and alive. For centuries **bees** have benefited people, plants and the planet. By carrying pollen from one flower to another, bees, as well as butterflies, birds, bats, and other animal pollinators, make food production possible — contributing to global food security and nutrition.

As if that wasn't enough, pollination also has a positive impact on the environment by helping to maintain biodiversity and the vibrant ecosystems upon which all living beings depend on.

Beautiful words about coffee were written in a manuscript titled (Summary of Umdat Al-Safwa in Dissolving Coffee) by Madian bin Abd al-Rahman al-Qusouni in 1213:

*"I am the dark lover  
I remain in cups  
The Indian aroma Oud is my perfume  
And My name is well known in China..."*



So, sit back with a cup of coffee or tea, and enjoy consuming this special edition. Whatever your taste in food, be it fast food, fine dining, special diets or a plant-based lifestyle, remember that our lives revolve around elements of food and drinks of all types.

I hope you enjoy our latest 'makhzan,' a storehouse of enriching stories.

Warmest regards,





Cover **Artist:**

# Home Through the Eyes of Maysaloun Faraj

By Manar Al-Mutairi



*“On this table, which is central to our living space, are the core elements that kept me sane throughout the treacherous pandemic lockdowns! Interpretation of why these scenes, including fruits, captivated my attention and imagination, came later....”*

— Renowned artist Maysaloun Faraj





'Farewell Dear Laila Shawa.' Oil on paper 50x50cm 2022. Courtesy of the **artist**.

From the Tigris River to London's Thames, **Maysaloun Faraj** has created art that doesn't know boundaries. Instead, it tells stories that inspire reflection and form connections that transcend differences.

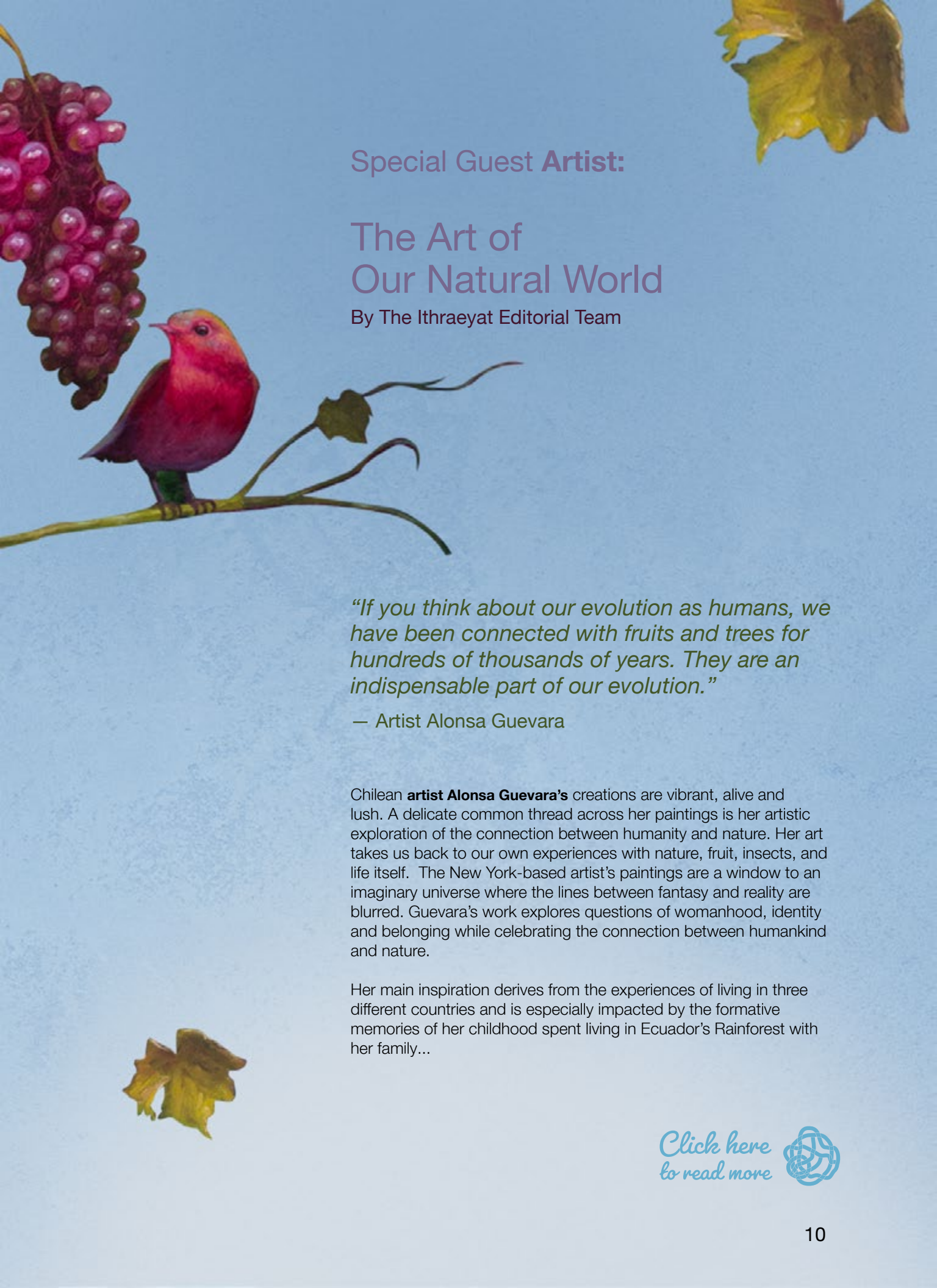
The London-based artist was born in the US to Iraqi parents and graduated with a BSc in Architecture from Baghdad University, then

moved to London to create some of the most extraordinary works in recent decades. She received widespread critical praise in the art world, with over 35 exhibitions in more than 10 countries. Her art is also part of many public collections, including the iconic British Museum, the National Museum For Women In The Arts, and Wereldmuseum, just to name a few...

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Special Guest **Artist:**

## The Art of Our Natural World

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*“If you think about our evolution as humans, we have been connected with fruits and trees for hundreds of thousands of years. They are an indispensable part of our evolution.”*

— Artist Alonsa Guevara

Chilean **artist Alonsa Guevara's** creations are vibrant, alive and lush. A delicate common thread across her paintings is her artistic exploration of the connection between humanity and nature. Her art takes us back to our own experiences with nature, fruit, insects, and life itself. The New York-based artist's paintings are a window to an imaginary universe where the lines between fantasy and reality are blurred. Guevara's work explores questions of womanhood, identity and belonging while celebrating the connection between humankind and nature.

Her main inspiration derives from the experiences of living in three different countries and is especially impacted by the formative memories of her childhood spent living in Ecuador's Rainforest with her family...

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‘The Meal,’ by the artist **Amal Al Balooshi**. Courtesy of the artist.

## Special Guest Artist: **A Feast of Colors**

By Manar Al-Mutairi

*“Art was and will always be my way to connect with myself. It’s letting my feelings create, and my hands translate.”*

— Artist Amal Al Balooshi

Amal Al Balooshi is a passionate Bahraini artist who is known for the colorful mural art she shares on her social media platforms. For Amal, art is more than just a hobby; it is part of her identity and a way to explore and express the unknown parts of herself.

The 28-year-old artist is considered to be one of the most unique emerging artists in the region. She studied interior design, worked in graphic design and management, and has a passion for furniture design. She creates murals in both public and private spaces, transforming white walls into spaces of creativity and beauty...



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'The Feast,' by Ahmed Al-Refaie, 2020.  
Courtesy of the artist.

Special Guest Artist:

## Culture Through Digital Art

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*"The series became an ode and appreciation for different professions like leather works, gem carving, tea making and pottery..."*

— Artist Ahmed Al-Refaie

Ahmed Al-Refaie is a Kuwait illustrator and graphic designer known for his unique art that illustrates the Arab and Kuwaiti cultures in a vibrant and modern style. His passion in art started from his early years as a child when he used to mimic the drawings of the characters from his favorite cartoons on TV. His hobby has since grown and developed through the years into a thriving business where he creates illustrations for local and international brands, including Google.

The passionate, self-taught artist uses his illustrations as a form of expression through which he comments on everyday issues from the Gulf and Arab society. His art also includes some of his favorite memories from his childhood depicted with the style of pixel art to achieve a retro 80s feel...



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'Prodigal,' by artist Leila Malallah. Courtesy of the artist.

Special Guest **Artist:**

## An Artistic Fiesta: Life Served in a Dish

By Fatma Theyab

*“Having lived abroad for years, I have always missed my mother’s cooking, especially of traditional dishes; and I tried to show that in my painting of Saluk.”*

— Artist Leila Malallah

**Leila Malallah** is an artist who was born into an Arab, Saudi and Qatifi environment. All of which have shaped her identity and character, but she always sought to understand the world around her and provide her own answers for the big questions, namely the meaning of life. Leila turns to various types of art to produce disrupting pieces that pat her soul in a gentle, yet unnerving manner.

When asked about the limitations of art, Malallah says that artists have been given a cognitive intuition that implores them to express themselves, interpret the world around them and share their imperfect view of it with their audience...

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‘The Great Supper.’ Courtesy of **Sara Shakeel** and NOW Gallery.

Special Guest **Artist:**

## Putting a ‘sparkle’ on what we take for granted

By Nora Al-Taha

*“We eat to fulfill our soul...”*

— Artist Sara Shakeel

Social media’s content can be overwhelming. However, scrolling through Instagram’s endless posts of lifestyles, memories, and meals, one artist stands out — or rather ‘shines’ — with her unique art. Sara Shakeel, one of the world’s original crystal artists, has been working with delicate, sparkling crystals, in both physical and digital forms, in her installations and Photoshop masterpieces, respectively.

With over one million followers, her ethereal collages are a sensation for the eyes. Her food-related pieces are an exceptional ‘treat’, turning basic dishes, like a bowl of fruit, into majestic art.

Shakeel first began posting her art on Instagram in 2016 and recalls when she received 23 likes. She had thought then, “I made it!” Little did she know that this step would be the beginning of a new chapter in her life...

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## Special Guest Artist: Around the Table

By Nourah Aldaej

The artist **Abdullah Al-Azzaz** transforms architectural blocks from the surface of the appearance to the depth of the building with luminous sculptures that make his art a 'way of life', which can be read in the smallest details of his work.

In this era of abundance of knowledge and its ease of access, I researched the spiritual and cultural dimensions of the history of the table and its impact on human lives and talked to the artificial intelligence "ChatGPT" about its mysteries. I then

realized that my role here is not to share with you definitions or a historical narration of it, as much as share the human perspective of field specialists and form together a living extension of the history of the table.

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to read more*



'The Stone Age Table,' designed by Abdullah Al-Azzaz. Courtesy of the artist.





## Special Guest Artist:



By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*"You are all artists, too..."*  
— Artist Sasamana

A crispy slice of toast with a sweet smear of jam, or a savory bite of avocado toast with peppery spice, or how about a serving of art on a slice of toast?

Japanese artist Sasamana is best known for her Art on Toast series which reached global recognition for her detailed artworks on toast — a basic food shared among most parts of the world. She refers to food as "quiet creatures", and she expresses how food lives quietly with us and for us.

When the world faced the onset of the pandemic, creativity emerged within the isolation. Just as Ithraeyat was born in isolation and continues to grow as an international arts and culture magazine, Sasamana shares how she found comfort and creativity during COVID. "I felt as if I had been left alone. At the market, which was my only outing, I felt peace when I walked through the racks of vegetable and fruit displays..."

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Special Guest Artist:

## The Recipe for Hyperrealistic Art

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*"Food is an emotion..."*

— Artist Varuna Sridhar

In South India, a very talented artist paints delicious dishes, serving a special fusion of food and art.

**Varuna Sridhar**, a young hyperrealism artist, went viral on Twitter for her painting of filter coffee. With exquisite detail, the painting was depicted in such a real way that people speculated it to be a photograph. She shares her art and dreams with Ithraeyat.

Sridhar is the daughter of an artist. "I was raised with art all around me," she shares. "Picking up a paintbrush at two years old has given me more than 19 years of experience in the art industry. I have held over 13 exhibitions by the time I was 13 years old." With a head start on her art career, she received awards at a young age and was certified as the Youngest Certified Corel Designer in the Asia Pacific Region when she was eight years old, and she still holds the title to this day...

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'Idly Sambar'. Courtesy of the artist.



Special Guest **Artist:**

## A Sweet Slice of Crystal Clear Cakes

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*“In a course meal, dessert comes last. But in life, have dessert first...”*

— Artist **Tomei**

**Tomei** is a Japanese artist who creates crystal clear desserts. With a delicate touch and an elegant feel, her luxurious desserts intrigue the mind and tickle the tastebuds.

“My name is Tomei,” she introduced herself, “and my title is ‘Transparent Enthusiast.’ You can call me by either name, whichever you prefer. ‘Transparency’ refers to appearance and embodies the idea of having a clear mind and living a

simple life. My approach to food follows the same philosophy.”

With a Scenography, Display, and Fashion Design degree from Musashino Art University, Tomei has graced social media with her exquisite cakes. Clouds and petals float gently in her jelly art, and her journey began with a simple question from a friend...

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Blue Sky Jelly Cake. Courtesy of the artist.



Special Guest **Artist:**

## Interwoven Spiced Worlds

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team



From the 'Entwined Matter' collection. Courtesy of the artist and Tashkeel.

*“By weaving spices and salt into the Loro Piana fibers, I wanted to pay homage to the ancient relationships and trading routes that the United Arab Emirates has always shared with its neighboring countries.”*

— Artist Paola Anziche

**Paola Anziche's** art is a universe of tactile and culturally-rich experiences. Usually hanging from the ceiling and consisting of natural materials, Anziche's artworks engage the minds, souls, and senses of viewers — urging them to interact and become one with her art. The contemporary Italian artist combines research into weaving techniques with craft and textile traditions to create soft, ecologically-sustainable sculptures.

Her captivating textile pieces beautifully interlace various fields together — from art and anthropology to history and ecology, among others. You can't help but be lured into studying their colors, feeling their textures, smelling their scents, and learning their stories...

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Special Guest Columnist

## ‘A Multiverse of an Umami-Layered Happiness’

By Hussain AlMoosawi

**“Hussain,** you need to have your own restaurant.” This is how people respond to having my home-cooked food for the first time. I find it hard to take this compliment, as I am aware that operating a commercial kitchen is a different story. I tend to reply by saying that having an eatery — that I would rather be more of an osteria — is more of a retirement project. People will always need to eat. Unless you are chasing trends or in it for just the money, I can see no urge to rush.

Deep down, my interest in food is not about the instagrammable end product, and I find it difficult to enjoy a dish without knowing its story. With time, I started to realize that my interest in food became highly influenced by another strong interest of mine—storytelling. The final dish is more of a headline. Most people are happy to skim through menus. A good dish, however, demands its story to be heard...

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## Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

# An Accident Befalls the Date-picker

By Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis



Who does not love food? Food is not only a basic necessity to keep our bodies fueled, but it can give us endless pleasure and even serve as therapy, especially when shared with those we love. And yet, often we enjoy our food just that little bit too much, that little bit too often — with adverse consequences, not only for our bodies and our health, but ultimately even for our planet. This delicate painting visualizes

a moralistic story that warns of the dangers of being that 'little too' obsessed with food. It comes from Sa'di's Bستان (Orchard), a famous part of his Collected Works written entirely in verse and consisting of colorful, yet thought-provoking anecdotes designed to remind Muslims of the need for justice, tolerance, modesty, and contentment...

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An Accident Befalls the Date-picker  
Folio from the manuscript of *Kulliyat* (Collected works)  
by Sa'di (ca. 1200 - 1292)  
India, Agra, ca. 1604  
Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper  
41.8 x 26.2 cm  
The Aga Khan Museum, AKM284.11



# Exclusive Conversations:

## The Renaissance of Saudi Art

By Rym Al-Ghazal

*“Art is our image with which we  
present our reality, emulate our  
past, and anticipate our future...”*

— **Yousif Al-Harbi**, Director of the  
Culture and Arts Association in Dammam

Half a century of artistic experience has enriched the cultural life in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, establishing the artistic foundations of an experience that has its own identity and privacy, nurturing generations of creators, and providing them with hubs of creativity and discovery. There have been great and pioneering efforts made by decision-makers in support of ambitious aspirations, which we see today as a global presence that attracts the interest of artists and workers in the artistic fields and urges new generations to be more creative.

In this **special interview**, we explore these horizons with Yousif Al-Harbi, the Director of the Culture and Arts Association in Dammam, who is also an artist and an educator who is contributing to the continuous renaissance of Saudi art.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الجمعية العربية السعودية  
الثقافية والفنية والفنون

للمشافة والفنون  
عمر الدمام

## شهادة

تشهد جمعية المشافة والفنون بأن

قد أتم الدورة التمهيدية في

بنجاح خلال الفترة من

حتى

لذا منحه هذه الشهادة

رقم الشهادة

شاريخها

مدير فرع الجمعية بالرياض



بالتوفيق في حياتهم .

- تلا ذلك كلمة خريجي دورة المسرح القاها بالنيابة عنهم الدارس عبد الله الشريد ، شكر فيها الفرع على اتاحة الفرصة امام الشباب لصقل مواهبهم وتعريف الجمهور بهم من خلال اشراكهم في الاعمال المسرحية القادمة .

- اما خريجو دورة الموسيقى بالفرع فقد القى الدارس صالح محمد ملاوي كلمة نيابة عن زملائه الدارسين شكر فيها الجمعية على هذه المبادرة في تنظيم مثل هذه الدورات التي بلا شك عادت عليهم بالنفع وكسب مزيد من الثقافة الموسيقية الى جانب هوايتهم .

- تلا ذلك مقطوعة موسيقية من أغنية السيدة ام كلثوم بعنوان «أنساك» للفرقة الموسيقية بالجمعية بقيادة الفنان عبد الكريم سالم .

بعدها شدا الدارس بالدورة الموسيقية مطر القرني أغنية من الفلكلور الينبعاوي القديم «يا بحر النيل» .

- ثم قدم الدارس علي سعيد الشبير من طلبة الدورة الموسيقية وصلتين غنائيتين الأولى على آلة السمسمية وأخرى على آلة «العود» .

- بعدها قدم الممثل راشد الورثان احد خريجي الدورة المسرحية مسرحية ملودرامية





## Exclusive Conversations:

# ALBAIK - Food of the People

By Nourah Aldaej and Hassan Al-Bather

*"Every dish has its own story, and our values should drive everything we develop and offer."*

— Rami Abu Ghazaleh

How does a simple idea, a simple food place, turn into a cultural icon?

Whenever we eat one of their meals and feel how it is suffused with love, we wonder about the secret behind the ALBAIK Mission - "Available To All" - and how it resonated with the public. Today, we reflect upon one of the projects that captured the hearts of people from various backgrounds, as one of its founders shares and enlightens us with its history, its mission, and its vision.

Eng. Rami Shakour Abu Ghazaleh opens up to Ithraayat magazine and shares the story behind ALBAIK, from the people and the heart behind it, as well as the various turning points that shaped this 50-year-old Saudi story and the values that drove it. From pilgrims to residents to visitors to the country, a visit to ALBAIK, and the highly guarded ingredients of its famous garlic sauce is one of those cherished memories of a culinary type. Peppered with light humor and charm, Mr. Abu Ghazaleh, throughout the interview, would reference his dedicated working team for the lasting success of the business.

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Spotlight:

## Tashkeel — Nurturing Art and Creativity

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*“One of the key phrases embedded in the spirit of Tashkeel is ‘Why not?’ We aim to create the right conditions and circumstances for artists and designers to push themselves beyond the boundaries of convention and experiment with mediums and materials. The process is everything, it is the path along which we explore, discover and learn...”*

— **Lisa Ball-Lechgar**, Deputy Director of Tashkeel

Established in Dubai in 2008 by Sheikha Lateefa bint Maktoum, Tashkeel has been nurturing an environment for the growth of contemporary art and design practice rooted in the UAE. Through multi-disciplinary studios, workspaces, and

galleries located in both Nad Al Sheba and Al Fahidi, it enables creative practice, experimentation, and dialogue among practitioners and the wider community...

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Tashkeel is an influential art center in Dubai.



# Spotlight:

## TABLES OF THE PAST

By Manar Al-Mutairi

*"I hope to be able to grow more and more curiosity around the endless ways in which food connects us, but at the same time, also tell how our stories are unique and different..."*

— Food history researcher Salma Serry

Food is one of the most evocative and relatable ways of expressing culture. It is through food that nations can tell their stories, and through it, we can better understand their history, traditions, and social and economic development.

**Salma Serry** is an Egyptian food history researcher and filmmaker dedicated to documenting 100 years of forgotten South West Asian and North African culinary ephemera. Her passion in food started in her childhood with her fondest memories being of her grandmother in the kitchen making delicious dishes inspired by 60s cooking booklets...


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## Special Feature:

### A Taste of History

By Zahra Shikara

*“Pleasures may be divided into seven classes: wit, food, drink, clothes, procreation, scent, and sound. Of these, the noblest and most consequential is food: for food is the body’s stay, and the means of preserving life...”*

—wrote Mohammed Al Katib Al Baghdad



Although written more than a thousand years ago,  
I have to agree with him: food is one of the great  
pleasures of life.



Food is essential to all human cultures, but recipe writing first appeared in Mesopotamia around 1700 BCE. A collection of cuneiform tablets features 35 recipes, ranging from simple stews to complex bird pies. Composed in Akkadian in the middle of the Old Babylonian period, it's the world's oldest cookbook.

"There's one recipe from this collection that to my mind is obviously a tharid," says **Daniel Newman**, Chair of Arabic Studies at the University of Durham (UK) and author of *The Sultan's Feast*...

*Click here  
to read more*





لَا يَشْتَبِي الطَّعَامَ أَوْ مَنْ كَانَتْ قُوَّتُهُ خُلِّلًا وَصِفَتُهُ عَاهِدًا الصَّفَافَ



ومن ما اخرجوه

وَمِنْهَا الْيَعُونَةُ وَتُؤْخَذُ مِنَ الْعَسَلِ جُرٌّ وَفُحْطُونُهُ بِالْعَسَلِ وَيَطْحُونَهُ عَلَى الصَّفَةِ إِلَى الثَّغِيرِ  
الْمَيْتِنِ ثُمَّ يَرْفَعُونَهُ ه ه ه وَقَدْ يُسْتَحْتَرَبُ

قَالَ لَهُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ بِفِعْلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ الشَّجَرَةَ الْكَلْبَةَ الْغَوِيَّةَ لِيُتَمَرَّقَ الْبَارِئُ مِنَ الْإِنْسَانِ وَأَوْرَثَهُ مَا تَدْرِي عَلَيْهِ كَيْفَ يَسْتَعْمَلُ الْبَارِئُ أَتَمَرَّقُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنَ رَبِّهِمْ إِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَتَرَىٰ الْأَعْيُنَ عَنْ رِجْلَيْ رَبِّكَ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَعََلِيمُ الْغُيُوبِ





Vegan Qeshta. Courtesy of Raoum Alsuhaibani

## Special Feature:

# Our Minds, Our Moods, Our Meals

By Nora Al-Taha

Refreshing fruits, hearty vegetables, leafy greens, and protein-packed legumes are all part of a well-balanced diet. When we talk about food, some people will find it challenging to have a meal without a piece of juicy meat to cut into. For others, cutting out the meat from all meals of the day is a way of life.

*"In the past, people were poor and meat was a luxury. So, many of our traditional foods don't have meat or chicken unless it's for a special occasion. Foods like Jareesh and Saleeq don't traditionally have meat, and it's easy to substitute cow's milk for plant-based milk. Kabsa can be cooked with lentils and veggies."*

—Raoum Alsuhaibani from Sukkari Life

Raoum Alsuhaibani is a digital content creator who has more than 100,000 followers on her **Sukkari Life** account, where she shares her vegan meals online. She drizzles golden honey on breakfast bowls, creates protein and fiber-dense meals with tahini and copious amounts of nuts, and utilizes Saudi cuisine at every turn...

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to read more*







Special Feature:

# THE ART OF POTATO

By Rym Al-Ghazal





'The Potato Eaters,' by Vincent van Gogh (1853 - 1890), Nuenen, April 1885.  
lithograph on paper, 31.2 cm x 39.6 cm  
Credits: **Van Gogh Museum**, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

*"The three most beautiful sights: a potato garden in bloom, a ship under sail, and a woman after the birth of a child..."*

— Irish proverb

What is it about the potato that inspires art, anticipation, and essays of study and philosophy? There are various important artists and artworks that contemplated and featured this unassuming vegetable, with Vincent van Gogh's 'The Potato Eaters' being one of the most iconic ones.

"Painting peasant life is a serious thing, and I for one, would blame myself if I didn't try to make paintings such that they give people who think seriously about art and about life serious things to think about," wrote van Gogh in a letter to his brother Theo, dated April 30th, 1885...

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to read more* 





Watermelon Radish Salad. Courtesy of Chef Bri Baker.

# Special Feature:

## Eat with your Eyes First

By Nora Al-Taha

*“Food is a cultural experience...”*

— Chef Bri Baker

What if your canvas was a plate? **Chef Bri Baker** showed the world how creative and fun plating food can be. She mastered her presentation skills on Masterchef and continues to share what art on a plate looks like.

On the thrilling cooking competition, Masterchef, Baker — who appeared in seasons 10 and 12 — has coveted the prestigious nickname ‘Plating Queen’ for her aesthetic and beautifully presented dishes. Baker makes any mundane food look magnificent — a swipe of mint green cream, a

vibrant purple, a soft and creamy drizzle... her social media feed is a feast for the eyes. As a private chef and digital creator, she spoke to Ithraeyat about her journey. She shared her expert tips on the fine art of plating.

When Baker appeared on season 10, the judges — Gordon Ramsay, Aarón Sánchez, and Joe Bastianich — were impressed by not only her remarkable cooking talent but also her perfected signature finesse on presentation...

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Lobster and Trout Roe Tartlet. Courtesy of Bri Baker.





## Special Feature:

# How Moutabal Changed A Professor's Life

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*"For the national identity of countries, cooking is important. At the beginning, when the first modern cookbooks came, they were for young women who had not learned how to cook by their mothers..."*

— Professor and author Peter Heine

In the 1960s, Peter Heine was 18 years old and visited Afghanistan for the first time. "It was an important trip," he says. Since the first time he stepped into the Middle East, he never turned away from it. He devoted his life to learning more about Islam, Arab culture, and Middle Eastern food.

Heine had already started to learn Arabic at the time when he took a trip to Baghdad. His Arabic

tutor taught him a word that was the gateway to new experiences and, specifically, flavors. The word was 'badhnjan'.

"What does that mean?" he asked his tutor, who advised him to go to a local restaurant and order it and eat it. "The German word was aubergine," he says, "and I had never seen this vegetable before..."

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Arabic Treasures:

## Theater of Famine – An Ode to the Soul

By Fatma Theyab and Hassan Al-Bather



'We journey towards a home not of our flesh. Its  
chestnut trees are not of our bones.  
Its rocks are not like goats in the mountain hymn.  
The pebbles' eyes are not lilies.  
We journey towards a home that does not halo our  
heads with a special sun.  
Mythical women applaud us. A sea for us, a sea  
against us.  
When water and wheat are not at hand, eat our  
love and drink our tears...  
There are mourning scarves for poets. A row of  
marble statues will lift our voice...'

Pure sustenance, the quality of life – the food of  
which man was made to taste and savor – found  
its purpose in hunger and thrives on the whims of  
desire. The legendary poet **Mahmoud Darwish**  
starts his verse with the bereavement of seeking  
refuge without the luck of finding one and then  
moves to describe the pains of famine, saying:  
"When water and wheat are not at hand, eat our  
love and drink our tears...".

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From the **Vault:**  
**The Art of Eating**  
By Rym Al-Ghazal



In today's rushed world, we rarely sit around a table to just be together and have deep conversations. Often, the mobile phone is the more commanding guest at any table, with every little beep drawing attention more so than an intimate, honest, and open dialogue. The art of eating is getting lost, with the slow appreciative savoring of the dishes and drinks overshadowed by rushed conversations, distractions — digital and internal — and some calorie counts by a few of the attendees.



There simply isn't enough time to enjoy a meal, its scent, its texture, and reflect on its ingredients and preparations. We either eat too fast, drink too fast, or talk or listen too fast.

These artworks from **the Barjeel Art Foundation** help us appreciate the sentiments of simply sitting at a cafe or restaurant, as well as the love and hard work behind the scenes in the kitchens.

We meet several important artists, including the renowned Faisal Laibi Sahi whose coffee shop pieces often depict a variety of influential figures within Iraqi culture and its society, which sometimes contain political references...

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**Faisal Laibi Sahi**, Coffee Shop #4, Acrylic on canvas, 177 x 150 cm.  
Image courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation**, Sharjah.





Saram A- Tumoor (reaping dates), Al Ahsa, 2022, photographed by Abdullah Al-Shaikh.

## Qumara - Art of Photography: ‘Capturing’ the things we love

By The Ithraeyat Editorial Team

*“If I say that everything in Al Ahsa is beautiful, I am not exaggerating! One should not be ashamed when he describes his beloved, and Al Ahsa and its oasis are my beloved...”*

— photographer **Abdullah Al-Shaikh**

Reflect and think of your favorite places, people, and memories that are dear to your heart. Consider the magic of their presence and the sensations and feelings they evoke in you. What if there was some way to immortalize these things?

This is what the art of photography offers us, a medium through which we can preserve things and

situations that mean a lot to us and pause time to take pictures of them in all their splendor. This art not only gives us the opportunity to immortalize those things that are dear to us, but also allows us to see them from a new and beautiful perspective...

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July, 1954. Un-named persons are cutting a graduation cake during a buffet supper given by the Girl Scout Council in Dhahran. Courtesy of The Aramco Archives.

nives:  
Life

From the **Archives:**  
The Cake of Life

By Rym Al-Ghazal

From  
Th





‘What is your favorite dish?’

We all have nostalgic relationships with certain dishes and drinks. The scent, the texture, the taste, and the memories.

Often made with love by our parents, grandparents, or that favorite aunt; whether devoured inside our homes, or favorite restaurants or cafes, certain dishes just leave a mark on us.

Anyone with a connection to Aramco will tell you there is one item that they all grew up on and holds a special place in their heart — **the famous Aramco cake.**

Every single birthday, personal or official event, had the dependable sugary presence of the delicious Aramco cake. From chocolate to vanilla to strawberry, it had different flavors, but it was essentially baked the same way using ‘American Flour’.

\*Editorial Note: Read our next article in this very issue about how you can get or make this nostalgic cake today...

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to read more*





From the **Archives:**  
A nostalgic treasure —  
The Aramco cake

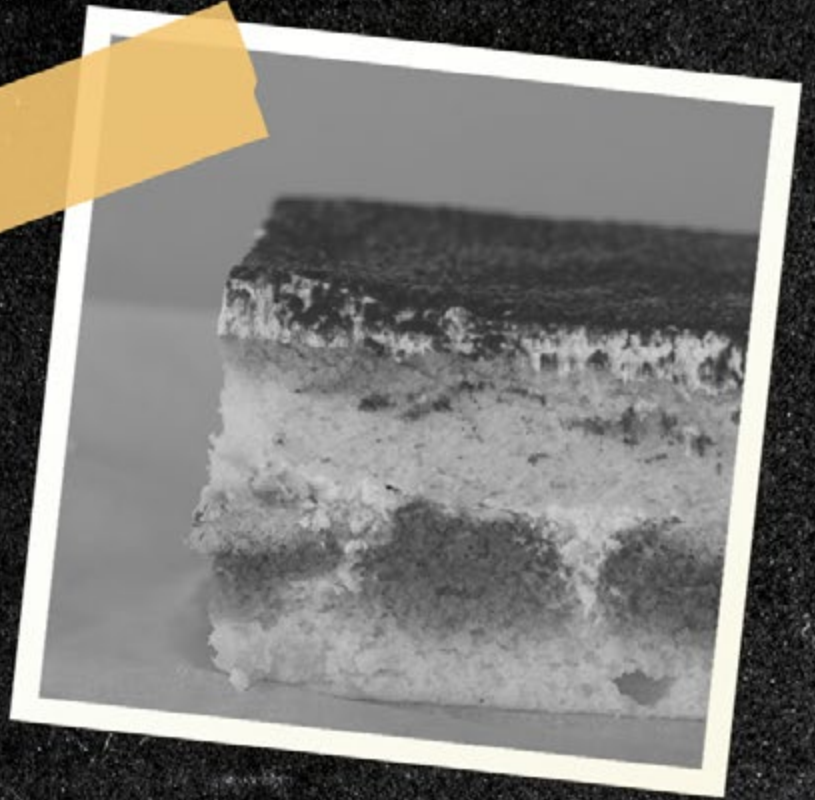
By Abeer Al-Nemari

To many of us who grew up in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia a few decades ago, the Aramco cake represents a beloved memory. A simple yet delicious cake, it rose to popularity at a time when sweets and desserts didn't have the variety that they have plenty of today. Simple enough to bake, the main ingredient of the cake is a flour mix imported from the U.S. — known as a 'white cake mix', and informally known as the Aramco flour mix.

We loved it, not because it looked unique or fancy — as it's a regular cake — but because of the joy it brought and the gatherings it helped sweeten. And perhaps because of its unbelievably soft and fluffy taste that helped it stand out from the rest... Ithraeyat asked Haniyya Nashaat, a cooking enthusiast from Khobar, to describe the 'secret' of making it, and here is what she shared in terms of ingredients and directions. They are as simple as the cake looks...







## Ingredients:

7 cups of the white cake mix, or the 'Aramco flour mix' — which you can find at Al Baraka and Al Janoub mills in Khobar

2 ¼ cups of water

## Directions:

Mix the ingredients together into a bowl

Pour the mix into a pan and bake it at 180 degrees C for 25-30 minutes

Or you could try her other recipe, where instead of combining just the flour mix and water, she also adds 2 ¼ cups of milk, two eggs, 1 small tablespoon of vanilla powder, and a ½ cup of oil (or ¼ cup of melted butter). Mix together for one minute, then pour into a pan and bake at 180 degrees C for 35-40 minutes.

## Enjoy your cake!

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# ABOUT ITHRA

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

Through a compelling series of programs, performances, exhibitions, events and initiatives, Ithra creates world-class experiences across its interactive public spaces that bring together culture, innovation and knowledge that are designed to appeal to everyone. Connecting creatives, challenging perspectives and transforming ideas, Ithra is graduating its own leaders in the cultural field.

Ithra is **Saudi Aramco's** flagship CSR initiative and the largest cultural contribution to the Kingdom. Ithra's components include the Idea Lab, Library, Cinema, Theater, Museum, Energy Exhibit, Great Hall, Children's Museum and Ithra Tower. For more information, please visit:  
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