



ithra
by **aramco**



Artist: Abdulhman Al-Faiz

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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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“Arabic calligraphy is music for the eyes...”

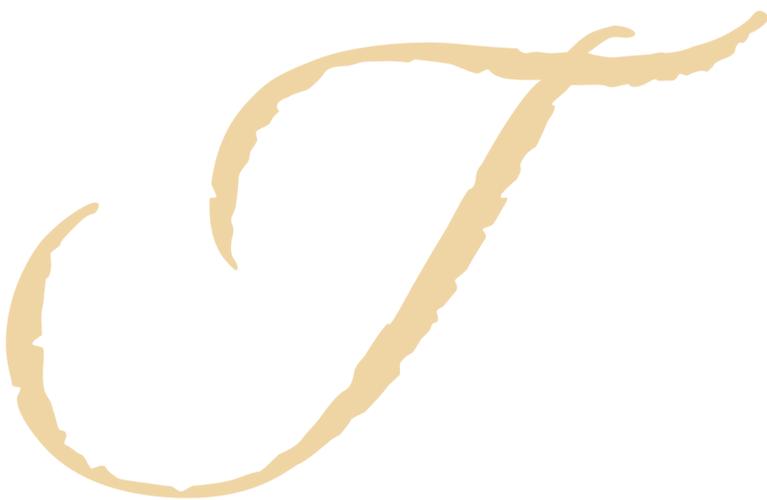


Meet our ‘theme-special’ featured Saudi artist, **Abdulrhman Al-Faiz**, a calligrapher reviving rare scripts and stories.



For the past 15 years, Abdulrhman Al-Faiz has been capturing and recapturing the beauty of the past and present, the classic and the contemporary, in one of the Arab world’s most divine arts: calligraphy.

“How someone expresses themselves in calligraphy tells me a lot about their personality and psychology,” he said. “In some ways, calligraphy is a mirror of the soul.”





Joy

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) said: “The four pillars of happiness are: a righteous wife, a spacious dwelling, righteous neighbors and a good steed.” So at the core, good relations, a comfortable home and means of getting around are important to attaining joy and happiness.

The Prophet and his companions often discussed the ways of attaining happiness and the importance of staying content and patient when facing problems and obstacles. But this pursuit of happiness is not limited to a single place or time, it has long been at the core of human goals – across cultures and civilizations.

There are many degrees of joy, and it means different things to different people. In Arabic, there are far more words than in English that capture this colorful emotion of joy.

In this issue we pay homage to **Joy** and explore its creative expression and forms. With lockdowns lifted and some travel allowed, there are reasons to celebrate as the world still struggles with COVID-19. On the cover, is the exquisite exclusive calligraphic art by **Abdulrhman Al-Faiz** of the word ‘Falyafrehou’ [Let them rejoice] from a verse in the Holy Qur’an. He chose a rare Kufic form, an ornamental one, often found in the divider section of the Qur’an to celebrate the word and the concept of joy.



Titled “Mother & Daughter” by **Shaikha Hala Al Khalifa**. This photographic artwork captures how the white fabric binds Shaikha Hala’s hands with the people she loves. The photos capture how the bond gets stronger, hands get closer, until the grip of love and joy is realized. Photo Credits: Zain Al Shaker.

Guest Columnist: Shaikha Hala bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa

The joy of love and relationships

“The joy of counting blessings especially in hard times is a vital key to survival. Allowing appreciation to be the real savior.

We all can make a difference, if we focus on our sources of joy, and with joy comes strength...”

My project featured here started with a humble piece of white fabric.

There is an unspoken connection between myself and any white surface.

The first stroke of any step is always the hardest, it’s that first stroke that defines the start of something true and meaningful to me. Whether it’s a white smooth canvas, or a paper, or a piece of cloth: the whiteness always has a great deal of presence and grandness. And with that first stroke, the story begins.



Jeddah port by **Princess Reem Al-Faisal** where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. A renowned photographer, She is also the granddaughter of the late King Faisal Al-Saud.

Guest Interview: Princess Reem Al-Faisal

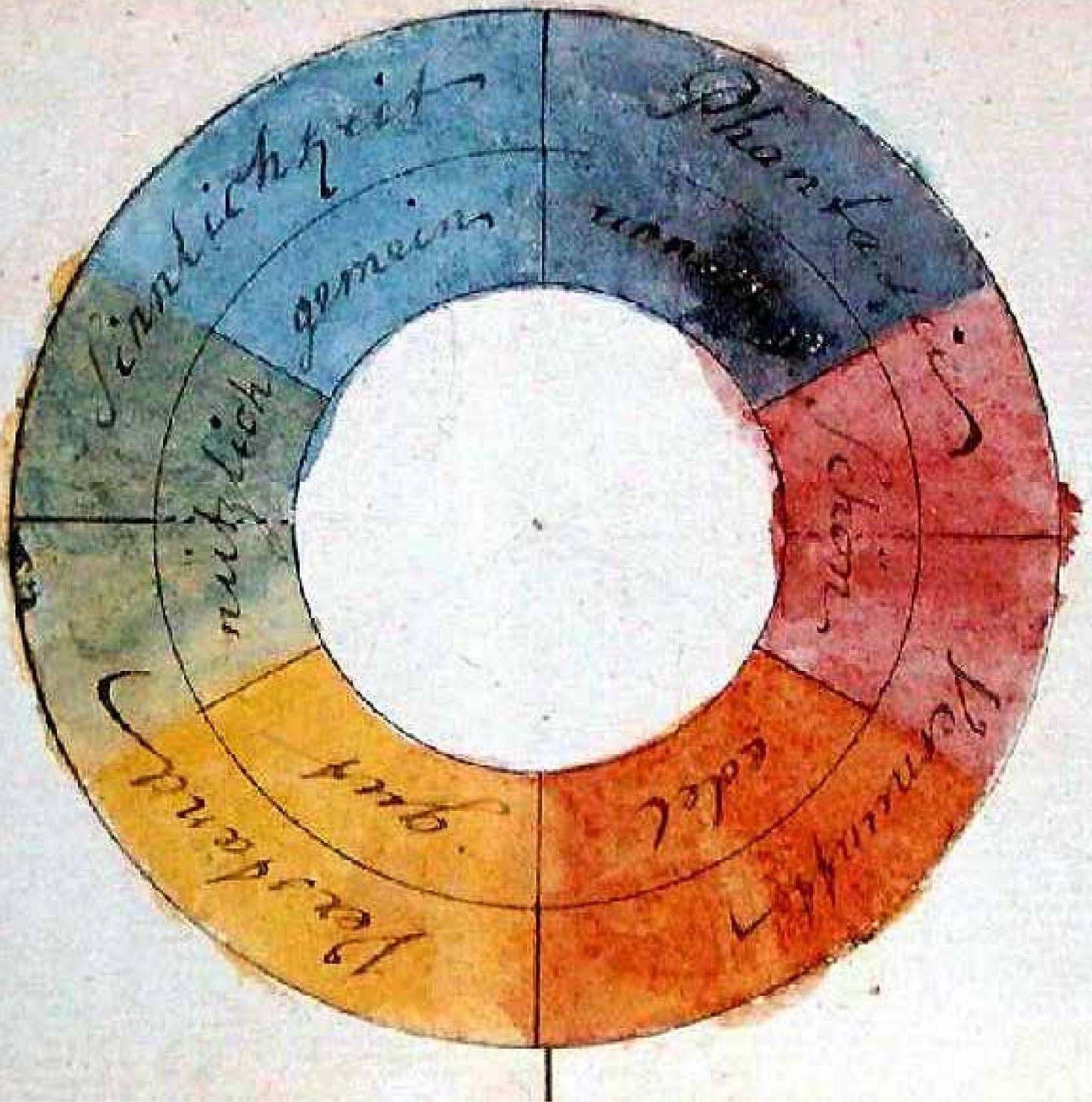
The art of joy in light and film

“I find joy in capturing the ordinary, the banal, the things we see every day, and making them special and discovering the hidden story and beauty in them...”

In my art I am seeking to show signs of the Divine in nature and in Man. For me, light is one of the many manifestations of God. Which He casts in our path through life to remind us of His constant presence in ourselves and in every place. Every photograph is a pattern

of light and shade. For me, my photography is a way to praise God’s glory in the universe...”

From wandering into the farthest corners of a desert, to climbing mountains, to standing completely still for that one perfect click, Princess Reem Al-Faisal has been capturing the world around her – and her personal world - for the past three decades, through her beloved companion: The camera.



“Colors are light’s suffering and joy...” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe marveled at color’s occurrences, their meanings and uncovering their secrets and impact on human reaction. His research marks the beginnings of modern understanding of color psychology. He poetically described each color, with yellow —considered by many the color of joy —being “the color nearest the light...In its highest purity it always carries with it the nature of brightness, and has a serene, gay, softly exciting character.”

Guest columnist:

Fareed Majari, Director of Goethe-Institut Gulf Region

An ode to colorful joy

“Joy is the mother of all virtues...”

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) legendary German literary figure, artist, scientist and statesman.

Bright spark of divinity

The bass is the first to sing the word, declaiming “Freude!” (Joy) from the ranks of the choir. Just this one word, not an entire fully-formed sentence, two syllables on two identical tones, and still somewhat tentatively. And then once again, this time more resolutely: “Freude!”

This optimistic sentiment as the

stipulated ideal, joy serving as a counterpoint to all the melancholy, doom and gloom that has been exuded by the instruments in the three preceding minor key phrases.

In the final movement of his ninth and last completed symphony, Ludwig van Beethoven, whose 250th birthday we commemorate this year, powerfully addressed a topic that had been on his mind for years...



Raccoon street art in Lisbon, Portugal, evokes a sense of joy, playfulness, and wonder. Photo by **Dr. Louise Lambert**.

Guest columnist:

Dr. Louise Lambert, PhD. Positive Psychologist.

The Arts: A recipe for joyful living

“Art, it has been said, is beauty, and a thing of beauty is a joy forever....” C.G. Jung (1875-1961) founder of analytical psychology

Most of us think of art as mere decorative elements on a wall or table; but the psychological benefits of varied art forms - be they spoken, written, painted, sculptured or otherwise - are being increasingly investigated and appreciated. Recognized as beneficial to the human condition by ancient philosophers, today's science is ascribing numbers to those benefits and has concluded: Art does evoke joy.

Art has played many roles across history; a measure of social status, a banker's investment, a reflection of the nouveau riche's ambitious ego, my mother's hobby, urban renewal, and many a struggling student's preoccupation. Art of all forms arouses emotion and thoughts, as well as mirrors the human condition, be it social or individual...

Spotlight:

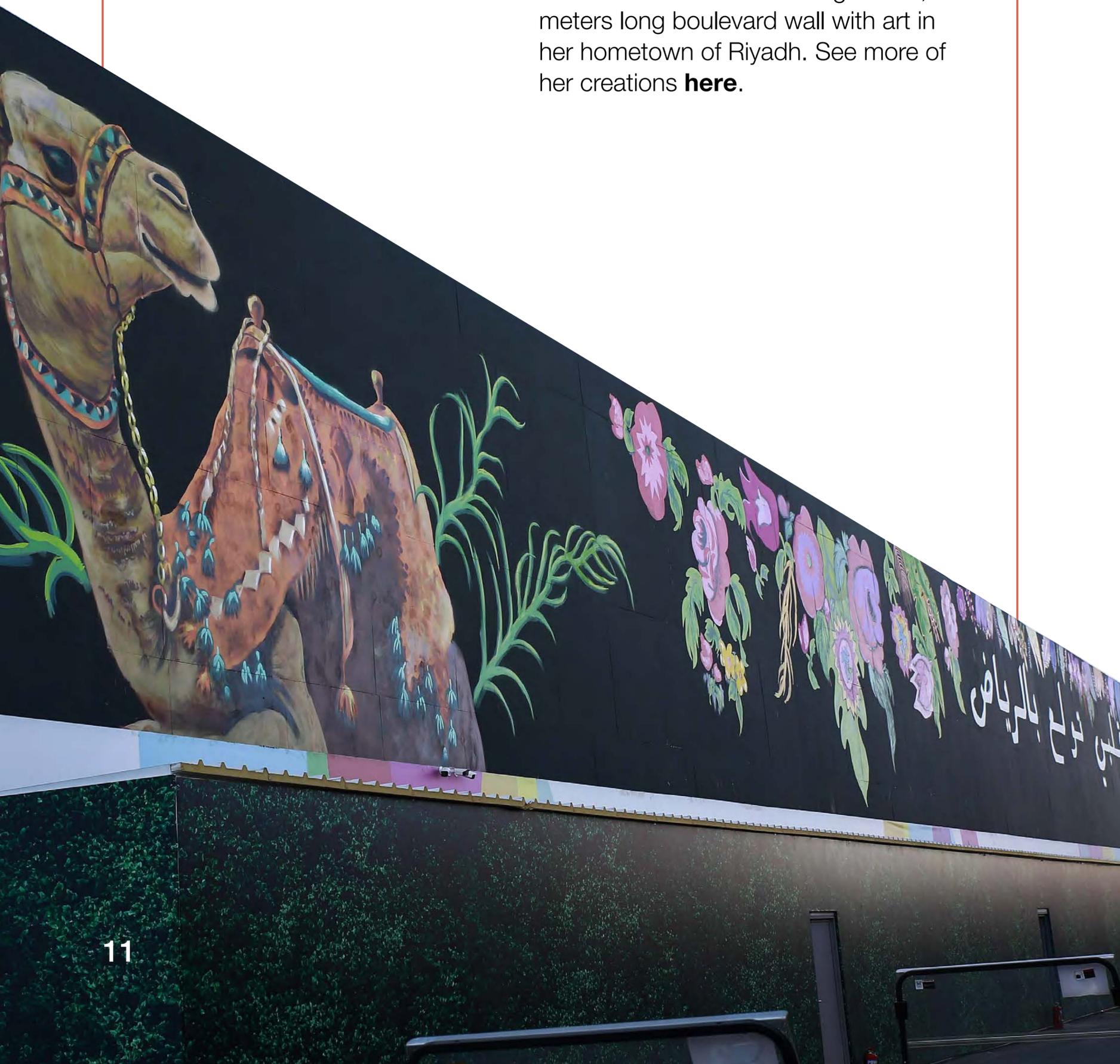
Discover Saudi artists creating 'joyful' art.



Quantum Portal to Eternal Optimism. This contemporary artwork by **Muotaz Abbas**, who is from Abha, was created to inspire its viewers to get lost in a soft dreamy life. Discover more of Muotaz's 'funky' multidisciplinary art that mixes 3D, architecture, photography and philosophy by clicking **here**.



Joyful containers: from dull to colorful. Using graffiti and her own style, **Noura Bin Saidan** has been adding color and beauty to public streets and spaces. Her other works include covering over 3,000 meters long boulevard wall with art in her hometown of Riyadh. See more of her creations [here](#).





A Spiel of Joy. Constructed with 2020 plastic bags weaved together in a carpet, this piece captures the silver lining **Kumail Al-Musaly** experienced during the COVID-19 crisis. He created this 220cm x 190cm piece with the help of his children, and it is a reminder on the importance of saving the environment from plastics while cherishing the moments each bag is associated with. From Tarout Island, check out more of Kumail's art [here](#).



The joy of play: sustainable artistic expressions. **Mohammed Al-Faraj** from Al Hasa encourages playful art from our surroundings. From drawing with colorful chalks on floors to the exploration of palm trees and nature, the artist encourages using mediums and tools that do not harm the earth but contribute to its sustainability—keeping the curious child within alive. To check out more of his joyful art, please click [here](#).



Al-Sahbajia, 2016. Using candy wrappers on wood in her pieces, Saudi artist **Ghada Al-Rabea** details Saudi daily life, such as these featured musicians and musical instruments. Her technique gives her work a kitsch element that echoes the sweet innocence of a simple life. Courtesy **Ghada Al-Rabea** and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

Spotlight: The Joy of Music

“The Khaleeji [Gulf] song has taken a special place in the hearts of people who live in the Arab world and the diaspora.... The style may have sounded new to some ears, but if you look at it more closely, Khaliji music was born out of the music traditions from Egypt and the Sham [levant]. So it is also familiar at the same time.”— Mohammed Abdo, veteran Saudi singer known as ‘Fanan Al-Arab’ the Artist of the Arabs

When it comes to Saudi music, the topic is an enigma for many, which is astonishing for

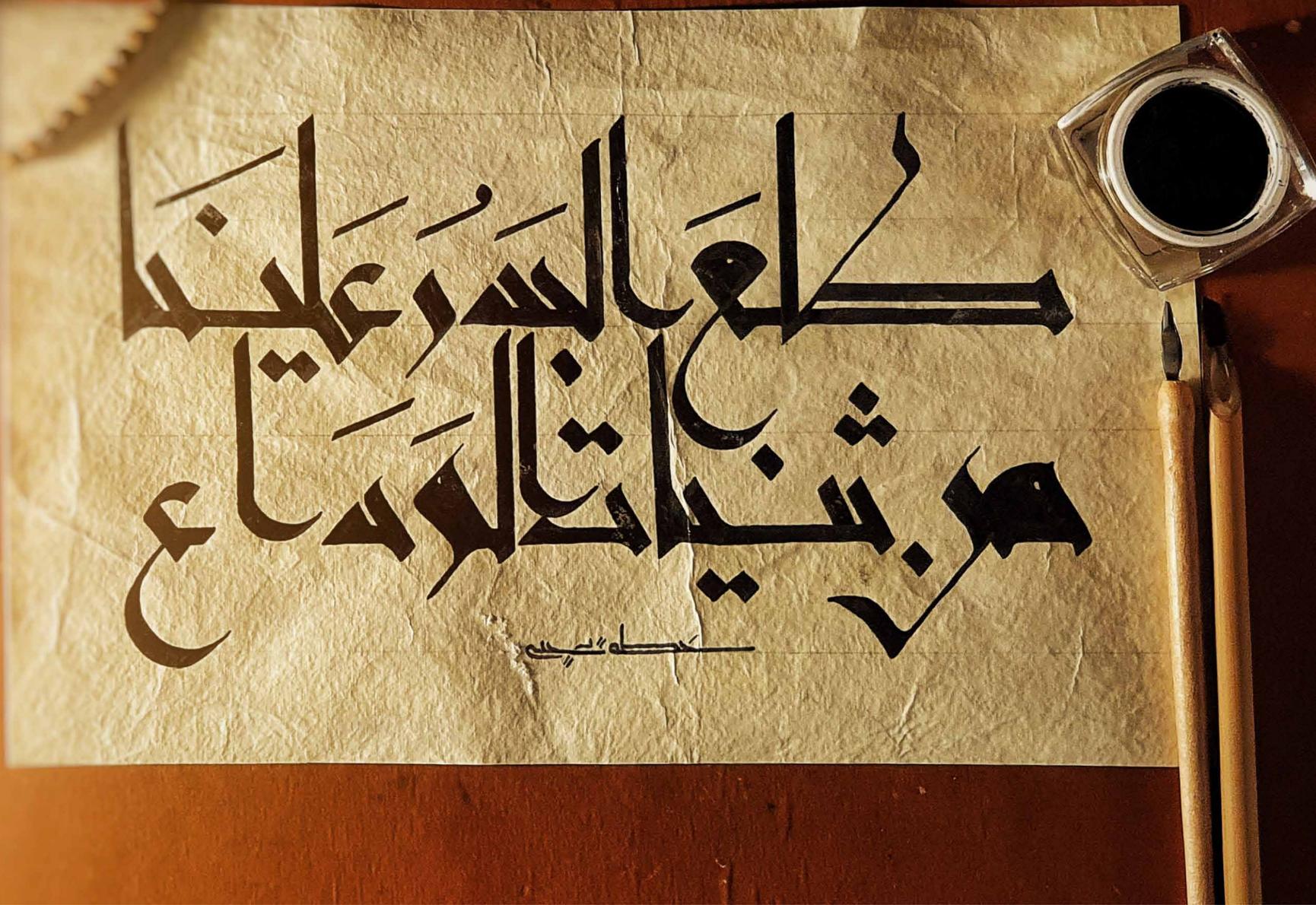
a music genre that has led the Khaleeji music scene to continue flourishing since the 1960s. The beat, the drums, the oud, the clapping and the mixture of the classical and the current, Khaleeji songs are a distinct genre hitting Arab music charts for decades. Until recently, Saudi male singers have dominated the scene, but now Saudi female singers are finally taking center stage, some virtually. Even during the age of COVID-19, these musical talents were on mission to bring joy and happiness to anxious listeners...



Light Over Shadows II, 2012, by Moataz Nasr. Ink on leather and plexiglass, he uses the blue and white ink on leather to write the words “light upon light” from the Holy Qur’an (24:35). From Ithra’s art collection.

Arabic Treasures: The Moon Song.

“O the White Moon rose over us
From the Valley of Wada’
And we owe it to show gratefulness
Where the call is to Allah
O you who were raised amongst us
coming with a work to be obeyed
You have brought to this city nobleness
Welcome! best call to God’s way...”



Calligraphic creation by artist **Yusuf Yahya**

“Tala’ al-Badru ‘alayna,” The full moon chant, is believed by many to be the first song or ‘nasheed’ of the Muslim tradition which was sung in Arabic with great joy and celebration as the Prophet Muhammad entered into Madinah. It is said the people of Madinah waited for the Prophet’s arrival, who was seeking refuge from danger, and upon seeing him on his camel, they began to cheer and started singing this now very famous chant.

The moon is an important symbol of purity, hope and light in the darkness of life and night. It also governs the Islamic calendar, setting the timings of fasts and feasts, with new moon sightings bringing new joys.

Ithra Curiosities:

The soldier and the flower.



Iznik dish: Collection of Walter Bareiss, Munich, Germany (dates unknown); Nicholas Shaw Fine Art Ltd., London (until 2005); acquired by Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2005. Purchased with funds provided by Camilla Chandler Frost in honor of the museum's 40th anniversary, M.2005.185.

“Stop and smell the roses.”

In this particular case, we are encouraged to stop and smell the tulip. While the origins of the phrase are still debated, this line poetically captures the importance of pausing and taking a moment to enjoy the small things in life, sometimes something as simple and delicate as enjoying the beauty and the scent of a flower.

This fritware underglaze-painted Iznik dish from Turkey, dating to the first half of the 17th century, is distinctive for its

depiction of a member of the Janissary corps, shown in a full uniform, consisting of a robe, boots, and characteristic tall hat. The Janissaries were elite infantry units that formed the Ottoman Sultan's household troops and which were the first modern standing army in Europe. While the Janissaries were known for their ferocity in battle, this warrior is portrayed in a moment of joy, serenity and contemplation, holding a red tulip and enjoying the landscape.

From the Shelves:

Books on joy from the Middle East.

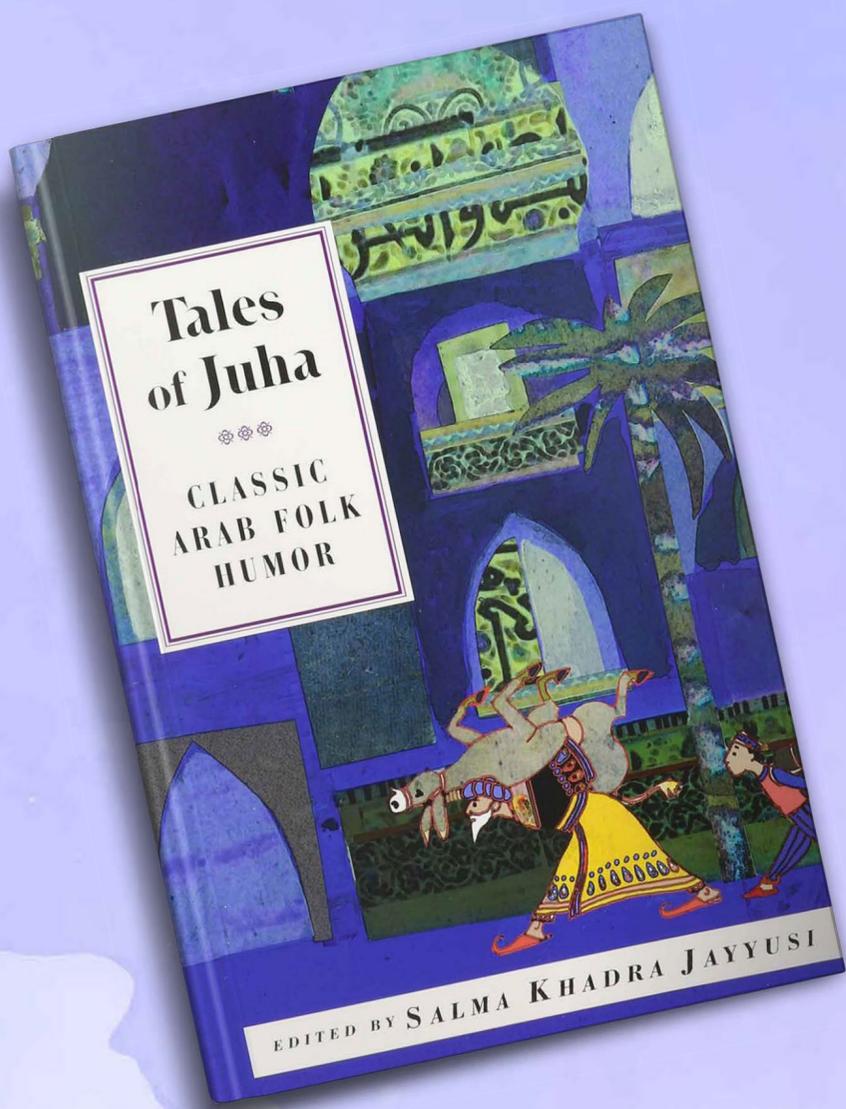
“A book is like a garden carried in the pocket,” says an old Arabian proverb. And what better time than the hot, slow summer to take this “garden” out of your pocket and lose yourself in an imaginary world filled with funny lines, inspirational characters and enriching ideas. Here we share three books from the Middle East related to joy.

Juha: The joy of laughter

A.

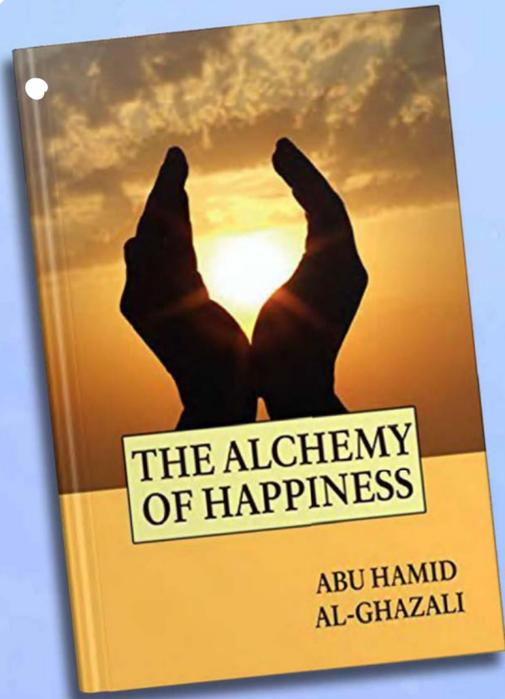
A punctilious person asked Juha what was the best position to take in a funeral procession. Was it ahead of the coffin or behind it? “As long as you’re not in the coffin,” Juha said, “you can walk wherever you like.” An excerpt from *Tales of Juha: Classic Arab Folk Humor* by Salma Khadra Jayyusi

Meet Juha, the “wise fool” of Arabic folklore, who offers a playful escape from reality, while also giving us some timeless pearls of wisdom. His popularity spread beyond the Middle East and North Africa, with versions of his characters and his stories of wit and humor found in Turkish, Persian and European folktales.



The formula for Happiness

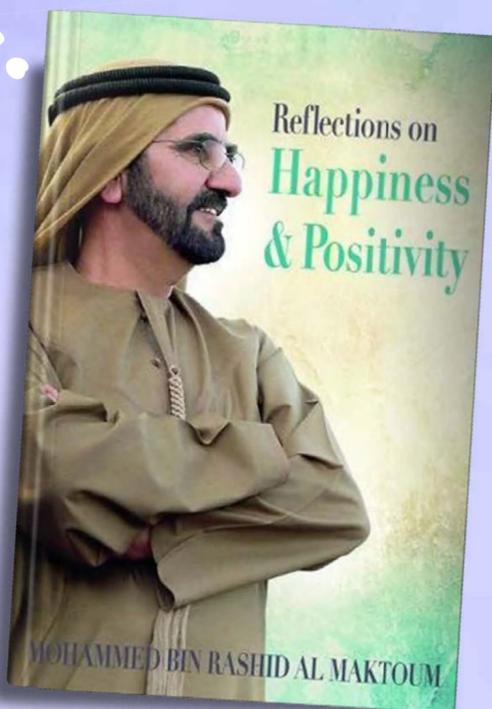
B.



In his book **The Alchemy of Happiness**, originally titled *Kimiya-yi Sa'adat* (499 AH/1105) Muslim theologian and philosopher Abu Hamid Al Ghazali coins the phrase “He who knows himself is truly happy.” This concept is repeatedly revisited today in self-help books about the power of focusing one’s attention on the inner heart and soul rather than on the things around us to find real joy in life. Another pearl of wisdom by Al Ghazali, which is often mistakenly attributed to others: “To get what you love, you must first be patient with what you hate.”

Reflections on Happiness & Positivity

C.



Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum’s book on happiness is one of a kind, and includes lessons, examples and stories based on a different life philosophy: Positivity as a perspective, and happiness of people as a goal and a lifestyle. “We Arabs have tested many theories, ideas and approaches. There is no harm in trying to be positive for some time,” said Sheikh Mohammed.



Tarout Island gems to discover, photos by **Mohammed Al-Kharari**, from Tarout Island.

Add to your bucket list:

Tarout Island, your joyful Terra Incognita

**“Tarout goomy telly [Tarut get up take a look]
Shoofy elfarah wa elnas [see the joy and people]
Shoofy me’resna Hussain [see our groom Hussain]
Marfoo’a fog elras [held up on the head]”**
— A traditional celebratory song chanted by people
behind the groom as he leaves the wedding hall.



Just off the coast of Qatif in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province, is an island of many legends and small joys: Tarout Island. Over 70 square kilometers in size, and one of the longest islands in the Arabian Gulf, it is believed to be one of the oldest sites inhabited by humans on the Arabian Peninsula. The island is also believed to have taken its name from a Mesopotamian goddess, Ashtar or Eshtarut —the goddess of love and war.

Linked to the ancient civilization of ‘Eshtarut,’ this island was once the heart of The Dilmun Kingdom, a civilization that ruled Arabia’s trade routes more than 4,000 years ago. As someone born and raised on this historic island, I take great pride and pleasure in strolling throughout the island’s natural gems and rediscovering its deep and wealthy past...



Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

Ceremonial belt: The Hizam of Kiswa

The Eid tradition in the Muslim world is a festive and joyous time, marked by various rituals and traditions, including Muslims donning new clothes.

It is also the tradition for Islam's holiest site, the Ka'ba—Bait Allah or the House of God— positioned inside Makkah's Masjid al-Haram, to be draped in a new ceremonial cover.

The Holy Ka'ba receives a new woven drape of black silk, embroidered with gold and silver thread every year during the pilgrimage season. When the former kiswa is taken down, it is divided, and either gifted to dignitaries or sold to raise money for charity.

Featured here is one of the most prominent kiswa ornaments, the hizam (belt), that traditionally runs the length of the Holy Ka'ba's upper perimeter.

This eight and a half meter long black silk fragment, decorated with red silk appliqué and embroideries of silver and silver gilt wire over cotton and silk thread padding, once belonged to a 47-meter long belt (hizam), embroidered with Qur'anic verses.



Part of a hisam belonging to a kiswa. Cairo, dating to the late 19th-early 20th century.
Black silk with red silk appliqué, embroidered in silver and silver gilt wire over cotton and silk thread padding, AKM823.

The inscription on this fragment contains verses 27-29 from chapter 22 (Al-Hajj) of the Holy Qur'an:

“And proclaim to mankind the hajj. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, they will come from every deep and distant mountain highway. That they may witness things that are of benefit to them, and mention the name of Allah on appointed days, over the beast of cattle that He has provided for them. Then eat thereof and feed therewith the poor who have a very hard time.

Then let them complete their prescribed duties and perform their vows, and circumambulate the Ancient House.”
(Qur'an 22:27-29)

The roundels contain further Qur'anic references that mention 'God the Eternal' as well as the Prophet Muhammad (PbuH).

The joy of placing such an exquisite and meticulous new cover, including all its ornaments like the hisam, is a true labor of love and is symbolic of thanking the time that has passed and welcoming a new chapter.

Written by Special Guest Contributor:

Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, PhD, the Director of Collections and Public Programs at the Aga Khan Museum. In each issue, we will feature a special treasure from the **Aga Khan Museum**, one that tells a story, captures a moment and inspires conversation.

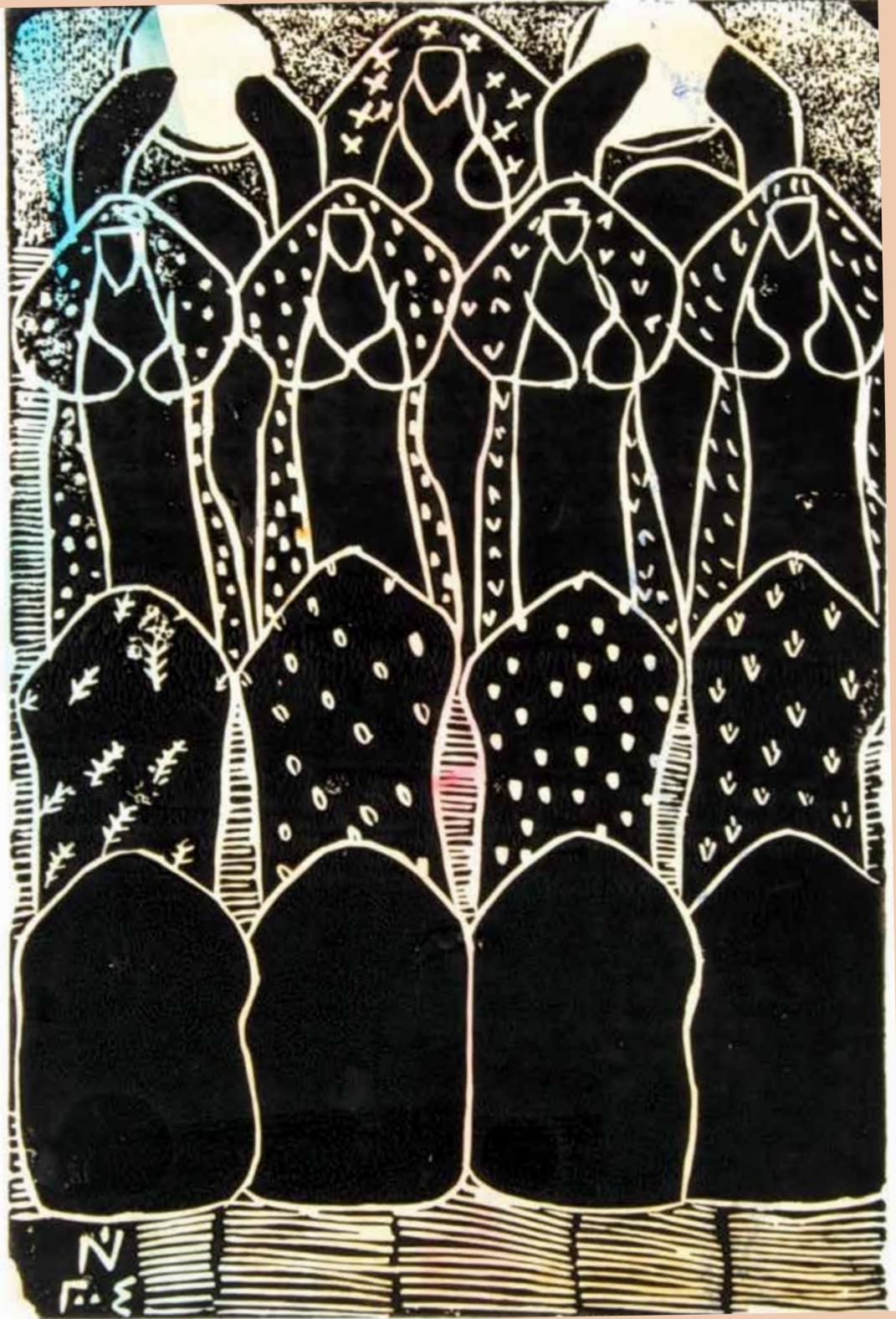
From **the Vault:**

The joy of colors, of dance, the song of birds and gardens of life.



Nouri Al Rawi, Radiance of Joy, 1957, Oil on canvas.

In this issue, we celebrate the colorful joys of life. From rainbows to the art of dance, enjoying the small things in life such as feeding birds and greeting plants. The pieces featured are courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation**, Sharjah



Nasser Al Yousif, *Dance of Joy*, 2004, Linocut print.



Mahmoud Sabri, *Water*, 1970, Oil on canvas.

A gift of coloring:



Baya, Woman with Two Peacocks and Aquarium, 1968, Watercolor and gouache on paper, 66 x 92 cm.

Baya (Mahieddine) from Algeria, born Fatima Haddad, was a self-taught artist who held her first exhibition in Paris at the age of 16. Her colorful work is celebrated for its folkloric depiction of women, birds, butterflies, musical instruments, and tales of childhood. Learn more about her [here](#).

Courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, [download this coloring book](#) and try your hand at coloring Baya's masterpiece and other beautiful artworks.

Two works from Barjeel Art Foundation, one by **Iraqi Hafidh Droubi** and another by **Moroccan Mohammed Melehi** are included in the **Google Arts & Culture Art Coloring Book**, alongside other artworks from around the world that can be colored online.

From the Archives:

The Joy of Play



Rarities from the Aramco Archives.

March 11
1959.

With Al-Khobar pier and the waters of the Arabian Gulf in the background, Khalid, Waheed and Abdul-Wahab Barahim whirl their Hula Hoop in unison to see which one of the cousins can keep his hoop spinning the longest. The Hula Hoop gained international popularity in the late 1950s, and people around the world were seen swirling and whirling their hoops with great joy.



Al Balad XX (2012) by **Aya Haidar**. Part of a body of work merging modern-day printed digital photography on linen with the more traditional practice of hand stitched craft. Bridging the gap between the historical and the contemporary, the hand carved wooden facades that enrich the district are embellished and revived with the use of brightly colored embroidery thread. The choice of color of thread is deeply rooted in Saudi Bedouin culture and encapsulates Jeddah's soul. Courtesy **Aya Haidar** and **Athr Gallery**, Jeddah.

From the World Wide Web: Art stories to browse through

[+ Saudi Arabia's changing cultural landscape](#)

[+ Work commences on Diriyah Gate in Saudi Arabia](#)

[+ Ragaa Al Geddawy: Homage to the late star](#)

[+ Where art and activism collide](#)

[+ What Does the Public Want From Art in a Post-COVID World? A study](#)

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

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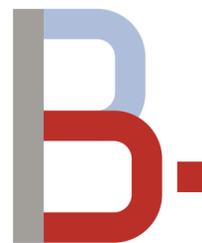
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Guest artist: Princess Reem Al-Faisal
Guest artist: Abdulrhman Al-Faiz
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To engage with Ithra's wide range of virtual programs and activities, please check **Ithra Connect**.

About Ithra

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture 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.

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