

THE KULTURSTIFTUNG BASEL H.GEIGER PRESENTS

Evaporating Suns

Contemporary Myths from the Arabian Gulf

12 May – 16 July 2023

An exhibition of contemporary works of artists from the Arabian Gulf.

Opening May 2023, *Evaporating Suns* will be the first institutional exhibition in Switzerland to explore contemporary art from the Arabian Gulf. The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G will bring together the work of some of the region's most interesting multidisciplinary artists.

Curated by **Munira Al Sayegh**, with Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, Abu Dhabi in collaboration with Austrian curator **Verena Formanek**, *Evaporating Suns* will look at the breadth of inherited myths from the Arabian Gulf, their preservation over generations and their purpose into the contemporary realm.

The thirteen artists whose works are presented in the exhibition are **Farah Al Qasimi, Mashael Alsaie, Alaa Edris, Bu Yousef, Abdullah AlOthman, Moza Al Matrooshi, Maitha Abdalla, Saif Mhaisen, Fatima Uzdenova, Asma Belhamar, Mays Albaik, Fatema Al Fardan, and Zuhoor Al Sayegh**. All the works on show have been commissioned by KBH.G for this exhibition except the first feature-length film by Farah Al Qasimi and the photograph by Saif Mhaisen, which will be shown in Switzerland for the very first time.

The exhibition considers an approach of corresponding positions that highlights the spectrum between myth and fact. The spectrum is introduced via the stories that have been passed through oral histories between generations. The Arabian Sea defines the geographical boundaries of the Arabian Gulf and points to various cultural nuances that are shared across the peninsula. The title and the exhibition aim to introduce an unorthodox landscape, a new composition created through modification and fusion of the surrounding realities, highlighting the pull between myth and fact. Its manifestation has been presented in the exhibition through expressions of local natural and built environments, social arrangements and structures and perspective negotiations. Fact becomes the framework that dissolves and demystifies. Myth plays a formative role in understanding the law of time and the changes marked through its passing in relation to place.

About the artworks presented:

Rakkaza

Mays Albaik and Asma Belhamar

Commissioned by KBH.G

Referencing a "Recipe for Making A Human" by the eighth-century Muslim polymath Jabir Ibn Hayyan, the artists Asma Belhamar and Mays Albaik explore the connection between creation and place by studying and recording planetary relationships to the Sun and the repetition of the rotations around it. The artists reflect on the idea of place being a significant marker of personhood, in a time when physical mobility is being confronted with digital mobility, and the latter's presence is becoming second nature.

Barren Spring

Mashaal Alsaie

Commissioned by KBH.G

The garden-like installation of *Baren Spring* reflects on the spring in Adhari, Bahrain and the myth and tears of the Adhari woman recorded through frankincense and glass, analyzes the way in which myths and landscapes are tied together, and considers the motivations behind pairing such a tragic story with such a stunning natural landscape.

Alkursi (the chair)

Alaa Edris

Commissioned by KBH.G

The work is a continuation of Edris' *Kharareef* series, which documents the oral history of mythical characters from the United Arab Emirates in visual form. Moving away from direct personification, Edris focuses on one object, the throne, with its historical impact and symbolic power, authority, and status. The carvings and their references begin to map out a cartographical understanding of the natural landscape of the United Arab Emirates.

Um Al Khathar wa Al Leaf

Fatema Al Fardan and Zuhoor Al Sayegh

Commissioned by KBH.G

Um Al Khathar wa Al Leaf translates roughly to "the mother of the trunk and the fronds of a date palm". The installation takes its name from a myth originating in the Arabian Peninsula, which is often employed by mothers to scare their children into good behaviour. Al Fardan and Al Sayegh question why being old, unmarried, childless, and possessing magical powers must be equated with ill intentions. The palm tree cannot produce dates without human intervention. On the other hand, humans relieve the palm by cutting down the dates, the weight of which would otherwise break the tree. Through the installation, the question arises: are humans one half of a codependent relationship, or simply the subjugators of the palm tree?

Heaven Resort & Casino

Bu Yousuf

Commissioned by KBH.G

The installation consists of three slot machines that can be played for a chance to win a ticket to the Kingdom of Jannah, which is located in the clouds and which Bu Yousuf rules. In one sense, playing means you have already lost; once visitors fail at the slot machines, the orthodox entrance can no longer accept them. The installation is a glimpse into the expansive universe that Bu Yousuf occupies.

This installation questions whether the ends truly do justify the means. What would the Kingdom of Jannah be worth if it was gambled for?

The Blessing of the Rice

Moza Almatrooshi

Commissioned by KBH.G

The artwork is inspired by the perspective introduced in *Behind the Veil* by Eve Arnold that appropriates the documentation of a wedding by reordering and narrating it through baseless statements; using the same methodology, Almatrooshi expands on the rituals portrayed, while aiming to problematize truth and its place in storytelling. Almatrooshi's emphasis on the symbolism of food creates translations of alternative truths and rewritings of histories that further explore systems of homogenised religious and national identities to achieve particular agendas.

Pantheon: Setting the Table (Act I)

Fatima Uzdenova

Commissioned by KBH.G

This installation examines the role of the Crone in the feminine trinity of the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone, as well as its history and its present. This work stems from Uzdenova's "pantheon," which comprises the women that she has been subconsciously studying, following, and honouring throughout her life and artistic practice, readdressing, and rethinking the role of the Crone in patriarchal society.

The Legend of Zahwa

Abdullah AlOthman

Commissioned by KBH.G

AlOthman looks at the importance of emotion and storytelling as tools in building myths. He roots his research in a curiosity that attempts to understand how myths are created, particularly those that reinforce the behaviours defining the environment and history of a place. Alongside this he intends to understand the role of an individual's behaviour within this ecosystem.

Portrait 11 & 12

Saif Mhaisen

The artist introduces social arrangements pegged to ideas of righteousness and the act of presentation. The two characters introduced in the photograph belong to separate times and make similar proclamations of social correctness. Mhaisen frames an idea that questions the structure of a society as well as the self. Understanding multiplicity as an organic state of the human mind, he removes the subjects in his work from time and from space, giving all authority to both the figures depicted and leaving conviction up to the time viewer.

The Dancer's Skin

Maitha Abdalla

Commissioned by KBH.G

Maitha Abdalla explores shifts and pivots of the idea of human conditioning through the culture of storytelling. The work presented consists of sculptures and a painting that depict both a foreground and a background. Abdalla sets a stage of opposition, in an attempt to highlight ideas of vastness in relation to rigidity, continuously questioning how the final sway of what is deemed normal comes to be, and how a majority arrives at the culmination.

Um Al Naar

Farah Al Qasimi

The film work presented depicts a mockumentary-style reality television show produced by a fictional television network. The program follows the life and adventures of Um Al Naar, a fictional feared jinn, or spirit, based in Ras Al Khaimah. Through this character, Al Qasimi's film narrates the Gulf region's colonial history and its impacts on the present time. She pays close attention to these changes in their day-to-day iterations: the gendered pastimes of the country's youth, waning trust in traditional forms of spirituality and medicine, and the loss of history in an urgent push toward novelty.

The Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G has the aim to present current and socially relevant topics. «I am convinced of the importance of not only bringing people and culture together, but also people of different cultures. This is the only way to dissolve alleged differences between individual encounters." says Raphael Suter, Director of KBH.G, and adds: "While planning this exhibition, I was particularly impressed in the encounters with women artists from the Arabian Gulf, who clearly define and pursue their artistic and individual goals and are naturally connected to their homeland and culture. »

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EVAPORATING SUNS – Contemporary Myths from the Arabian Gulf

Daily (except Tuesday) 11am to 6pm

Admission and the catalogue are free

Notes to the Editor

About Munira Al Sayegh, Chief Curator Dirwaza (1989)

Munira Al Sayegh is an independent curator and cultural instigator based in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. She is the founder of Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, a curatorial incubator based in the United Arab Emirates. She is a published author and prominent public voice in the region emphasising the importance of grassroots initiatives, narrative reclamation, and non-institutional thinking in building regional art movements from the bottom up. Her contributions can be traced back to New York University Abu Dhabi's FIND project (2012) and she currently serves on the Advisory Board of the University's Art Gallery. As part of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi team, she curated the exhibition *The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence* (2017); her first curatorial project was *Bayn: The In-Between* (2017), the third edition of UAE Unlimited. She later curated the Art Talks program at Abu Dhabi Art. In parallel, she has joined and pioneered curatorial initiatives at Art Dubai since 2014, where she curated the Residents section (2019) and launched the Now series, in which she engaged with non-government funded creative platforms in the region. In 2020 she premiered *The Cup and The Saucer* on behalf of 421 (Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Foundation). In 2021, Al Sayegh curated her first non-regional exhibition *Between the Sky and Earth* organised and hosted by the Middle East Institute in association with NYUAD gallery. Since the start of Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, Al Sayegh has curated various exhibitions including *Leadership Pavilion Project* (Expo2020, Dubai, 2020), *Zemanna* (Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, 2022) and co-curated *Hair Mapping Body; Body Mapping Land* (ICD Brookfield, Dubai, 2021), she also curated *While the Coffee Grounds Settle: Stories from Women in the UAE* (Fathom Gallery, Washington D.C., 2022).

About Dirwaza Curatorial Lab

Dirwaza Curatorial Lab is an Abu Dhabi-based creative incubator and projects partner founded by curator Munira Al Sayegh. As a creative incubator, Dirwaza builds communities in the Gulf through non-profit mentorship for multidisciplinary research, archive building, critique, and artistic programming. As a project partner, Dirwaza advises institutions, decision-makers, collectors, and businesses. We specialise in cultural projects, manage collections, design exhibitions, and propose bespoke arts-driven programs. The organisation works with a growing network of artists, arts professionals, and institutions to participate in a dynamic environment with homegrown ideas. Dirwaza Curatorial Lab is composed of Munira Al Sayegh, Hessa Al Nuaimi, Dania Al Tamimi and Anita Shishani.

About Verena Formanek, Senior Curator (1954)

Verena Formanek graduated from the University of Applied Arts Vienna with an MA. In 1989 she came to the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna as curator for design and exhibitions. She installed the permanent collection in contexts designed by international artists such as Barbara Bloom, Jenny Holzer, Donald Judd and Heimo Zobernig and became Associate Director under Peter Noever in 1993. From 1996 to 2004 she was deputy artistic director of the Fondation Beyeler in Basel, Switzerland (which opened in 1997 in a new building designed by Renzo Piano) and worked closely with Ernst Beyeler. In 2002 she curated the Fondation's Claude Monet exhibition, which featured Olafur Eliasson's first site-specific installation. From 2006 to 2009 she was head of collections at the Design Museum – Museum für Gestaltung – in Zurich. She held research and teaching positions in Basel, Zurich and Linz and was responsible for numerous publications, including *Every Thing Design* (Hatje Cantz 2009), a volume designed by Irma Boom. She worked with Helmut Lang for many years and compiled his archive, which is now in the MAK, Vienna. In 2010 she joined the Culture Department of Tourism Development and Investment Company as Senior Project Manager for the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, designed by Frank Gehry and soon to open; she held the same position in the museum department of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism until 2016. Most recently she curated #mebody in Boisbuchet, France. verenaformanek.org | Instagram

About the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

The Basel H. Geiger | Cultural Foundation was founded KBH.G 2019 by the philanthropist Sibylle Geiger (1930-2020), who named the foundation after her grandfather, the Swiss pharmacist and entrepreneur Hermann Geiger (1870-1962). The foundation has the aim to provide a new type of forum for art and culture for the city of Basel and its residents and visitors. All activities of the Basel H. Geiger Cultural Foundation aim to add a new topic to the rich cultural offerings of the city of Basel. The foundation plans to carry out two to three artistically independent exhibition projects each year; Admission and the accompanying catalogue are both free of charge.

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PRESS

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