

1979 | Ahmed Mater is born in Tabuk, a largely military city in the north-west of Saudi Arabia on the Jordanian border. This is a year of seismic social, political and religious upheaval in Saudi Arabia and across the region: Saddam Hussein becomes president of Iraq, revolution grips Iran, and a group of up to 500 religious extremists, led by Juhayman al-Otaybi, seize the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

Ahmed is the first child of Mater Ahmed al-Ziad, a Sergeant in the Saudi Arabian army, and Fatimah Hassan Abdullah Asiri, a calligrapher and painter of traditional Asiri houses. Ahmed will eventually have two brothers, Bandar and Mohammed, and four sisters, Aisha, Jawaher, Jamila and Reem.

1981 | Ahmed and his family move to Rijal Almaa, his father's village in the mountainous Asir region of south-western Saudi Arabia, near the border with Yemen. They live in a small, traditional stone house perched on a steep, terraced hillside. The interior is decorated by Ahmed's mother in vividly-coloured geometric designs, which she paints in the traditional Asiri style. Ahmed's daily life is dominated by his compulsory Quran study group, helping his parents on the farm, and traditional village activities.

1985 | The first photograph of Ahmed - and almost the only one he has of himself as a young child - was for his primary school enrolment. He later reflected: "I don't have many pictures of myself as a child nor of my parents. Nothing that can remind me of my childhood. To take a picture was considered haram - anti-religious and forbidden."

1994 | Ahmed and his family move to a modern house in Abha, the regional capital of Asir, where Ahmed completes his school studies. This move from the village to the city has a substantial impact on Ahmed's view of the world, and he begins to question the traditional beliefs of his childhood.

1998 | Ahmed enrolls as a medical student at King Saud University, Abha College of Medicine, to study medicine and surgery.

1999 | Ahmed joins the al-Meftaha Arts Village, part of the King Fahd Cultural Centre, under the patronage of HRH Prince Khalid al-Faisal. Prince Khalid offers Ahmed a studio and supports all the artists working there by providing materials, workshops in photography and painting, and helping to organise their first exhibitions.

Ahmed studies under a number of teachers, including pioneering Saudi artists Abdulhalim Radwi and Hassan Obaid, as well as Ahmed Bager from Bahrain, Rashid Diab from Sudan and Mustafa Abdel-Moti from Egypt.

2000-2002 | Ahmed participates in a series of traditional and contemporary painting exhibitions including 'Landing on the Earth's Surface' at Al-Maseef Cultural Club in Abha. He wins several prizes

including the Abha Cultural Prize for Fine Art and Photography.

In 2000, he meets HRH The Prince of Wales, who is in residence at al-Meftaha, painting watercolours of the surrounding landscape. His studio at no. 9 is opposite Ahmed's at no. 7.

2003 | Ahmed creates and exhibits his first X-ray paintings at al-Meftaha. They are chosen for the 6th Saudi Malwan Contest and exhibited in Jeddah, Beirut, Sidon and Manama. Ahmed meets British artist Stephen Stapleton in Abha and they begin a friendship and creative collaboration which will eventually lead to the founding of Edge of Arabia.

2004 | Ahmed shows his X-ray paintings at a radical exhibition in Jeddah, organised by the newly formed Shatta group, of which he is a founder-member. The exhibition challenges existing parameters of art practice in the Kingdom and is widely discussed and reported in the media. Ahmed exhibits increasingly conceptual work and performances including 'The End', 'Chewing', 'Standing in Front of You', and 'So Far You Are From the Earth'.

2005 | Ahmed works in the emergency room of Asir Central Hospital throughout the final year of his medical training.

Group exhibitions include the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial (UAE), the 3rd Shatta group exhibition (Jeddah) and a Saudi Arts Delegation to Tunisia.

Ahmed wins the al-Meftaha Photography Prize for *Asir from the Air*, a book of aerial photographs of the Asir region commissioned by Prince Khalid al-Faisal. Venetia Porter, Curator of Islamic and Middle Eastern Art at the British Museum, sees 'X-Ray 2003' for the first time.

2006 | Ahmed graduates with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (M.B.B.S) from King Khalid University, Abha College of Medicine, and works as a resident doctor at Asir Central Hospital.

His 'X-Ray 2003' painting is bought by the British Museum and included in *Word into Art*, the most comprehensive survey exhibition of contemporary Middle Eastern artists ever held in Europe. Ahmed travels to London for the opening and is invited by the Saudi Ambassador to exhibit paintings and photographs at the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.

On the back of Mater's inclusion in *Word into Art* comes a burst of publicity. Upon his return to Saudi, HRH King Abdullah flies to Abha to meet the artists of al-Meftaha.

While there, he publicly praises Ahmed as an important cultural role model for young Saudis. Ahmed also takes part in a delegation of Saudi photographers to Japan and Singapore and founds Ibn Asir ('Son of Asir'), a collective of Abha-based artists and designers.

2007 | Ahmed is invited by the US State Department to take part in the International Visitor Leadership Program in Washington DC. The programme takes him across America and includes courses on politics, the media, education, and the arts. 'X-Ray 2003' is exhibited in Word into Art in Dubai, and Ahmed is invited to present his 'Yellow Cow' project for the first time at the 8th Sharjah Biennale which is called *Still Life; Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change*. He meets pioneering Emirati artists Hassan Sharif and Mohammed Kazem, who have a major influence on his conceptual approach.

Ahmed becomes the face of Mobily, Saudi's largest mobile phone company, appearing in a TV commercial celebrating his life as an artist and doctor living in Asir.

2008 | Ahmed co-curates and exhibits new works in *Edge of Arabia: Contemporary Art from Saudi Arabia*, at the SOAS Brunei Gallery in London. The show coincides with the launch of an accompanying book and website, the first ever comprehensive guides to contemporary art from the Kingdom. Ahmed exhibits his first 'Illumination Diptych' and 'Talismanic Illumination' and his work is widely discussed in the British and Arabic media.

'Illumination I' is used to promote Edge of Arabia in a city-wide, London Underground advertising campaign, and he gives a talk about his work at the University of London alongside Venetia Porter, Dr Geoffrey King and Peter Sanders. Ahmed exhibits 'Evolution of Man' for the first time at the 11th Cairo Biennale. Back in Saudi Arabia, he continues to work as a GP and marries fellow artist Arwa Yahya al-Neami. He moves out of his family's home and leaves the al-Meftaha Arts Village. For the first time, he has his own house and studio.

2009 | Ahmed is invited by French curator Catherine David to participate in the 53rd Venice Biennale as part of the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) Platform for Visual Arts. David presents an interview with Ahmed in a historic exhibition at the Arsenale, the first ever presentation of Gulf artists at the official Venice Biennale. Ahmed also co-curates Edge of Arabia as a collateral event in the Palazzo Polignac on the Grand Canal, where he exhibits 'Magnetism' for the first time. He has his first solo show, *Illuminations*, at ArtSpace Gallery in Dubai, and is voted number 62 in the 'Power 100' ranking of the world's most influential Arabs by *Arabian Business* magazine.

2010 | In January Ahmed gives a keynote lecture about his life and work at the Louvre in Paris, as part of Catherine David's Gulf Artists' Programme.

He spends much of the first part of the year working with the World Health Organization (WHO) on the militarised border between Yemen and Saudi, treating injured soldiers from both sides of the conflict. In June, he

presents 'Evolution of Man' and new works, 'Antenna' and 'CCTV', at *Grey Borders/Grey Frontiers*, the new Edge of Arabia show in Berlin, curated by Rami Farook. Ahmed speaks in conversation with Greenbox Museum Founder Aarnout Helb at a Symposium on Saudi Art at the Berlin Akademie der Künste, and features on the cover of several German newspapers holding his hand to his head like a gun in front of 'Evolution of Man'. In October, he presents his first major solo show and launches his monograph at the Vinyl Factory Gallery in Soho.

2011 | Ahmed becomes the subject of an online campaign in Saudi Arabia after his work 'Evolution of Man' is included by a private collector in an exhibition entitled *West End* in Jerusalem's Museum on the Seam. A petition against Ahmed is presented to the Saudi Arabian Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Association of Fine Arts, and ultimately HRH King Faisal. Ahmed participates in *The Future of a Promise*, the largest Pan-Arab show of contemporary art ever held at the Venice Biennale, bringing together 25 recent works by some of the most influential artists from the Arab world.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) acquires Ahmed's 'Illumination Diptych' ('Ottoman Waqf'), the first acquisition by an American museum of an artwork by a Saudi Arabian artist.

2012 | Ahmed begins his monumental *Desert of Pharan* project, documenting the changes reconfiguring the holy city of Mecca. He spends time living among the different communities, photographing every facet of their lives as the city is transformed around them.

*Hajj: Journey to the heart of Islam*, curated by Venetia Porter, becomes the first major exhibition dedicated to the Hajj. Ahmed's work 'Magnetism' is included as part of the exhibition's contemporary section.

In collaboration with curator Robert Kluijver, Ahmed participates in the Kochi-Muziris Biennale with five photographs from his *Desert of Pharan* series, documenting the movements of crowds and individual experiences during the 2012 Hajj pilgrimage. In February, Ahmed is part of a radical exhibition in Jeddah, entitled *We Need to Talk* - curated by Mohammed Hafiz and Edge of Arabia.

2013 | Ahmed shows photographs from the ongoing *Desert of Pharan* series at the Sharjah Biennale 11. In parallel, Athr Gallery presents photographs from the series at Art Dubai. In October, Ahmed's film 'Leaves Fall in All Seasons' (2013) is featured at the Architecture Film Festival Rotterdam.

Ahmed founds Pharan Studio in Jeddah as a 'cultural mining project' and collective space. It becomes a meeting and working place for artists in the city.

2014 | Ahmed is part of a seminal exhibition at the New Museum, New York, of contemporary art from the Arab world entitled *Here and Elsewhere*. A solo exhibition at the Sharjah Art Foundation, *100 Found Objects*, opens, presenting a rich archive of materials and conversations that draw on the wider political and familiar histories of communities that once lived in Mecca's proximity.

In December, *Hyperallergic* rates *100 Found Objects* number eight in their annual top ten of global exhibitions.

In September, Ahmed's work is included in *Never Never Land*, curated by Amal Khalaf and Stephen Stapleton at the Edge of Arabia Projects Gallery in London.

Ahmed's 'Magnetism' is included as part of the FotoFest 2014 Biennial in Houston, Texas.

Ahmed's specially commissioned 'Mecca journey' film is screened on the façade of the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas on 21 September (United National International Day of Peace) to mark the launch of CULTURUNNERS multi-year artist's road trip across the United States.

Ahmed's friend, the artist, curator and poet Ashraf Fayadh, a co-founder of the Shatta collective and a key member of Edge of Arabia, is arrested for violating the anti-cybercrime law, accused of taking and storing photos of women on his mobile phone.

2015 | Ahmed shows his work in an exhibition at Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna entitled *Too Early Too Late: Middle East and Modernity*.

He sues Swatch Company for plagiarising his iconic work 'Magnetism', using the image's likeness in an advertisement. The artist files the infringement suit in Paris's civil Grand Instance Court against the Swatch Group, parent company to Omega watches, for violation of intellectual property. Ahmed also participates in *Parasophia: Kyoto International Festival of Contemporary Culture 2015* (March - May) in Kyoto, Japan.

Ashraf Fayadh is sentenced to death for renouncing Islam. Ahmed is vocal in his support of his friend, becoming active in the case through his media and art networks, inspiring many to speak out against the case.

2016 | Ahmed becomes the first Saudi Arabian artist to hold a solo exhibition in the United States, with *Symbolic Cities* at the Smithsonian's Sackler Gallery. In the charged environment of the US elections, the exhibition offers unique perspectives on Saudi Arabia's political, economic, and social transformations.

In January, hundreds of writers take part in a worldwide reading of selected poems and texts in support of Ashraf Fayadh; the international literature Festival Berlin calls on the US and UK governments to intervene

on Ashraf's behalf and demand that the UN suspend Saudi Arabia from the Human Rights Council until their record on upholding civil liberties improves. In March 2016, a court in Abha reduces the sentence to eight years in prison and 800 lashes. Fayadh was released from prison on August 23, 2022, after serving over eight years.

Ahmed is featured in *But a Storm is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition highlights a broad cross-section of leading artists from the region.

In September, Ahmed travels to China with Mohammed Bin Salman. His work 'Silk Road', an evolution of the early 'Illuminations' series, is gifted to President Xi Jinping. During the trip, Ahmed outlines a long-held dream of an institute for Saudi art, one that would support education through programmes and advanced facilities.

He works on *Desert of Pharan* with Catherine David, supported by his gallery Athr and their director Maya El-Khalil, and the publisher Lars Müller. The book brings together over five years of work documenting the changing landscape of Islam's holiest city.

2017 | Ahmed's book *Desert of Pharan: Unofficial Histories Behind the Mass Expansion of Mecca* is launched with a special exhibition at Alserkal Avenue during Dubai Art Week. He addresses audiences at Art Dubai's Global Art Forum

In May, Ahmed presents his work to audiences at the UNESCO NGO Forum in Riyadh.

The new Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman appoints Ahmed as the Director of his newly inaugurated Misk Art Institute, providing an opportunity to realise a vision for a robust contemporary art programme in the Kingdom. The appointment is the first in a series of wide-ranging cultural reforms.

In September, Ahmed's first solo exhibition with his new gallery opens. *Mitochondria: Powerhouses* runs at Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, throughout the autumn, showcasing a survey of Ahmed's practice to date, alongside ambitious new works.

In December, a major solo presentation of his work documenting the transformations reconfiguring Mecca opens in New York. The exhibition *Ahmed Mater: Mecca Journeys*, is extended and runs for six months at the Brooklyn Museum.

2018 | Ahmed moves his studio to Riyadh. He holds his first solo exhibition in the Kingdom for a decade, at King Abdullah Economic City. *Drumroll, Please* is curated by Jumanah Ghouth and opens during 21,39 Jeddah Arts.

2019 | Ahmed completes his two-year tenure as Founder-Director of Misk Art Institute and returns to his art practice full time. In the institute's inaugural years, he oversees the commissioning of the first Saudi National Pavilion at the Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale; participates in Al Burda Festival, UAE; leads a major panel on public art in Abu Dhabi; and expands Riyadh's first major contemporary art event, Misk Art Week. He also takes on a role as a cultural advisor and commentator on the rapidly evolving Saudi contemporary art scene.

He begins work on his next book, *Prognosis*.

2020 | Ahmed establishes the Kingdom's most comprehensive print facility at his studio in Riyadh, acquiring traditional presses from around the world. As an artist-doctor, he is engaged with the global dialogue around the Covid-19 pandemic, participating in many online discussions including the *Medicine Men* UN75 Dialogue with the World Health Organisation. At the Middle East Mediterranean Summer Summit, he discusses the challenges for art and culture in the region.

The first ever public sale of the installation 'Magnetism' launches.

The Future is Unwritten's Healing Arts Auction series, an initiative by CULTURUNNERS and the World Council of Peoples for the United Nations. This major collaboration between the WHO Foundation, UN75 and Christie's aims to increase awareness and raise critical funds to mobilise artists and health professionals in support of communities around the world that have the weakest healthcare systems and are most at risk.

2021 | Ahmed moves to his new studio in JAX district, a community in Diriyah, Riyadh centred around the arts and culture. He takes part in the first edition of Noor Riyadh (the world's largest light festival) and *Feeling the Stones* - the first contemporary art Biennale in Diriyah. He also holds a solo exhibition with Athr Gallery for Frieze in London and his first solo exhibition in Riyadh with Lakum Artspace.

2022 | Ahmed reveals his extensive land art project for Wadi AlFann in AlUla, the desert region of north-west Saudi Arabia. Entitled *Ashab Al-Lal* (mirage), it is an impressive engineering feat that the artist has been developing for over four years.

2023 | Mater participates in the first edition of the Islamic Arts Biennale in Jeddah, entitled *Awwal Bait* (First House). He travels through various cities with the artist Armin Linke for a documentary project that will culminate in a publication and a series of exhibitions.

2024 | Christie's auction house holds a mid-career retrospective of Ahmed's work at their headquarters in London from 17 July to 22 August. Entitled *Ahmed Mater: Chronicles*, the exhibition features more than 100

paintings, drawings, photographic works, sculpture, video and installations from his artistic career to date.

Curated by Dr Ridha Moumni, Chairman of Christie's Middle East and Africa, the exhibition highlights the major milestones of Ahmed's career, from unseen early abstract paintings to the celebrated *Illumination* series, as well as pivotal works from the *Desert of Pharan* project. The site-specific commission for Wadi AlFann, AlUla takes centre stage, with sculptures and studies related to the *Ashab Al-Lal* project, alongside new works such as 'Magnetism Book', presented to the public for the first time.

2025 | *Prognosis*, an unprecedented and visionary portrait of modern Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, is to be released later in the year. Drawing on four decades of the artist's personal and historical archives, the book takes us on a remarkable journey, from the year of Ahmed's birth in 1979 to the major social transformations taking place in the Kingdom today - a period shaped by religion, oil, geopolitics and regional conflict. Through Ahmed's life and art, *Prognosis* provides unique insight into one of the most talked-about, yet least understood, societies on earth.