

AHMED MATER:MECCA JOURNEYS

أحمد ماطر : رحلات مكة





# CREDITS

## EXHIBITION

*Ahmed Mater:  
Mecca Journeys*

## DATES

December 1, 2017—  
April 8, 2018

Brooklyn Museum

## CURATOR

Catherine J. Morris  
*Sackler Senior Curator for the  
Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for  
Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum*

## MUSEUM PARTNER

Brooklyn Museum  
*200 Eastern Pkwy  
Brooklyn, NY 11238  
brooklynmuseum.org*

## ORGANIZER

King Abdulaziz Center for  
World Culture (Ithra)  
*Ring Rd, Gharb Al Dhahran,  
Dhahran 34461, Saudi Arabia  
kingAbdulazizcenter.com*

## ★ CULTURUNNERS

## CULTURUNNERS

Director: Stephen Stapleton  
*culturunners.com*

## SPECIAL THANKS

pharan.studio  
Founder: Ahmed Mater  
Co-Founder: Arwa Al Neami

Athr Gallery

GALLERIA CONTINUA,  
San Gimignano / Beijing /  
Les Moulins / Habana

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Leo Porto  
*www.leoportocom*

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*Clock Tower (Mecca Time), 2015.*  
C-print, 49 x 72 in.  
(124.4 x 182.8 cm)

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Brooklyn Museum



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With *Ahmed Mater: Mecca Journeys*, the Brooklyn Museum furthers its commitment to creating inspiring encounters with art that expand the ways we see ourselves and the world. Along with its renowned collections ranging from masterpieces of ancient Egypt to major works of contemporary art, the Museum is also home to a distinguished collection of Islamic art. Now we are proud to present an exhibition devoted to the holy city of Mecca, in a contemporary context, through the interpretation of Saudi artist Ahmed Mater.

We are honored to have collaborated with Ahmed on this, his largest exhibition in the United States to date. We thank him for his thoughtful insights, in his statement in this book and in the personal, engaging wall texts prepared for the galleries.

I am grateful to Catherine J. Morris, Sackler Senior Curator of our Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, for championing Ahmed's work and leading this effort. Thanks to her vision and her collaboration with Ahmed, this exhibition grew in depth and scope. She was supported by the expertise of Curatorial Assistant Allie Rickard.

I also wish to give great thanks for our essential partnership with the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), who supported the developing scope of this important and timely exhibition.

Likewise, I extend most sincere thanks to Stephen Stapleton and his resourceful team at CULTURUNNERS, without whom this show would be impossible to imagine.

For the ongoing support of the Museum's Trustees, I extend special gratitude to Barbara M. Vogelstein, Chairman, and every member of our Board. Without the confidence and active engagement of our Trustees, it would not be possible to initiate and maintain the high level of exhibition and publication programming exemplified by *Ahmed Mater: Mecca Journeys*.

ANNE PASTERNAK  
Shelby White and Leon Levy Director,  
Brooklyn Museum

*Ahmed Mater: Mecca Journeys* takes Brooklyn Museum visitors through the holiest city in the Islamic world—the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and site of the *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage for millions of Muslims from around the world. The exhibition presents a compelling portrait of the massive urban redevelopment now under way and its effects on residents and on the pilgrims who travel there. Saudi artist Ahmed Mater has documented this unprecedented expansion for nearly a decade.

The exhibition is anchored by monumental and more traditionally scaled photographs from his project *Desert of Pharan: Unofficial Histories Behind the Mass Expansion of Mecca*, alongside six videos, and two sculptural works. In addition to documenting the waves of renovation, construction, and reconfiguration necessitated by the ever-swelling numbers of people who attend the *hajj*, as well as the influx of wealth that has fueled these changes, photographs range from remarkable images of the Ka'aba—the ancient and sacred building at the center of the Masjid al-Haram, or Great Mosque—to more intimate views detailing the lives of construction workers, the city's inhabitants, and visitors. Mater is clear about why the city compels his attention: "I need to be here, in the city of Mecca, experiencing, absorbing, and recording the many histories that are unfolding in this moment of transformation—after which things may never be the same again." Focusing on Mecca as both a symbolic site of worship and a contemporary urban center grappling with the social complexities that come with rapid, unremitting growth, he reveals the cultural dynamics at work in the city today.

Mater was born in 1979 in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia, and grew up in Abha, near the border with Yemen. He trained as a physician and practiced community medicine for a number of years before becoming an artist who has focused his inquiry, and lens, on the ancient city and the life of its present-day communities.

Through his exploration of the changing city of Mecca itself, Mater has also addressed the nature of urban life in expanding, furiously rebuilding cities, as well as questions of migration that shape urban conditions around the world today. His work could hardly be more timely.

—

Many individuals have contributed to successfully realizing this exhibition, including those graciously acknowledged in Anne Pasternak's Foreword. Among my Brooklyn Museum colleagues, I especially wish to thank Allie Rickard, Curatorial Assistant, for contributing art historical expertise and critical acuity. I also owe debts of gratitude to Erin Anderson, Assistant Objects Conservator; Lisa Bruno, Chief Objects Conservator; Jae-eun Chung, Director of Graphic Design; Dolores Farrell, Senior Manager of Exhibition Planning; J.A. Forde, Director of Corporate Relations; James Leggio, Head of Publications and Editorial Services; Lance Singletary, Senior Exhibition Designer; Katie Welty, Chief Registrar; Caitlin Wunderlich, Exhibitions Project Manager; and Matthew Yokobosky, Director of Exhibition Design.

CATHERINE J. MORRIS  
Sackler Senior Curator  
Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for  
Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum





Now is a crucial time for my project *Desert of Pharan: Unofficial Histories Behind the Mass Expansion of Mecca* to be shown on an international platform, in New York. The aims of the project, when it began almost a decade ago, were to recognise and record a multitude of histories that coalesce in the city. These aims make this an essential moment to invite more engagement and more exchange. Saudi Arabia is the symbolic and geographical epicenter of the Arab and Islamic Worlds. Its strategic location, connecting Africa, Asia and Europe, and the force of its religious significance, also makes it central to understanding and advancing international 21st-century cooperation. As shared geopolitical and environmental concerns see US-Saudi cooperation increase, understanding of the history and culture of the region becomes an essential foundation for constructive and sustainable exchange. Nowhere is this seen more than in Mecca, the symbolic heart of Islam. To understand the changes that take place in Mecca, the profusion of histories, is to have insight and understanding into the Muslim world. Restricted exclusively to Muslims alone, the symbolic might of the city may eclipse its realities. To present *Mecca Journeys* here, in New York, is to try to open a window into a place, into vying histories, and possible futures. It is also an attempt to open and further dialogues that can be a foundation for mutual cultural understanding.

More broadly, the work speaks about urban issues such as housing for soaring populations, both of residents and migrant groups, and the encroachment of private land development on public spaces. Mecca is not only a symbolic or holy city: it is a living city, subject to the same social and infrastructural forces facing every major urban center in the world. Because of its highly symbolic existence, however, in the holy city these municipal issues are intensified and cast in a special light.

Within my own culture, in a Muslim forum, this project acts as a celebration but also as a eulogy—for a place, a time, a way of living—a plurality of stories, and histories that are rapidly being lost. It is also an important record of a culture in transition. I hope that in twenty, thirty, or even a hundred years, work like mine will provide insight into how these changes happened, perhaps on levels impossible to gauge right now.

*Desert of Pharan* is not without some relevance to the nation where it is now being shown. The situation of migrant workers within Mecca brings to mind the debate about immigration in the United States. In both instances, we see how gridlock results from a lack of understanding and true empathetic regard for those different from the dominant national identity and point of view. I hope that my work helps bring forward questions about marginalized groups.

In addition, there is a parallel in what is sometimes called the “faith economies” or the financial aspect of religious institutions. The monetary

sums involved are vast, yet seldom acknowledged. A 2016 report found the faith economy to be worth 1.2 trillion dollars annually in the United States—more than the combined revenues of the ten biggest tech firms in America. We consider the world to be increasingly secularized but I believe the forces of organized religion (as opposed to the more personal considerations of “faith”) are vast and have a huge role to play shaping economies and geopolitics in the 21st century.

I’ve devoted a decade to *Desert of Pharan*, documenting the city and the histories that are played out there. The core project has spawned other projects and it feels more urgent today that when I started it—Saudi Arabia is in the midst of unprecedented social and cultural change, the histories of the country are essential, they must be enfolded into the present, they are the foundations of the future. Whether I continue to document Mecca itself, this investigation will continue as I mine history and observe and record the changes of the present. There is a responsive process here, set in motion by the unfolding changes I witness around me and around those I work with. The process began with a compulsion to document the unprecedented transformation I was seeing first-hand: histories being eradicated every day. The changes continue, and it feels important to mark and chart them, to preserve the past for the future, whatever format that might take in my future work.

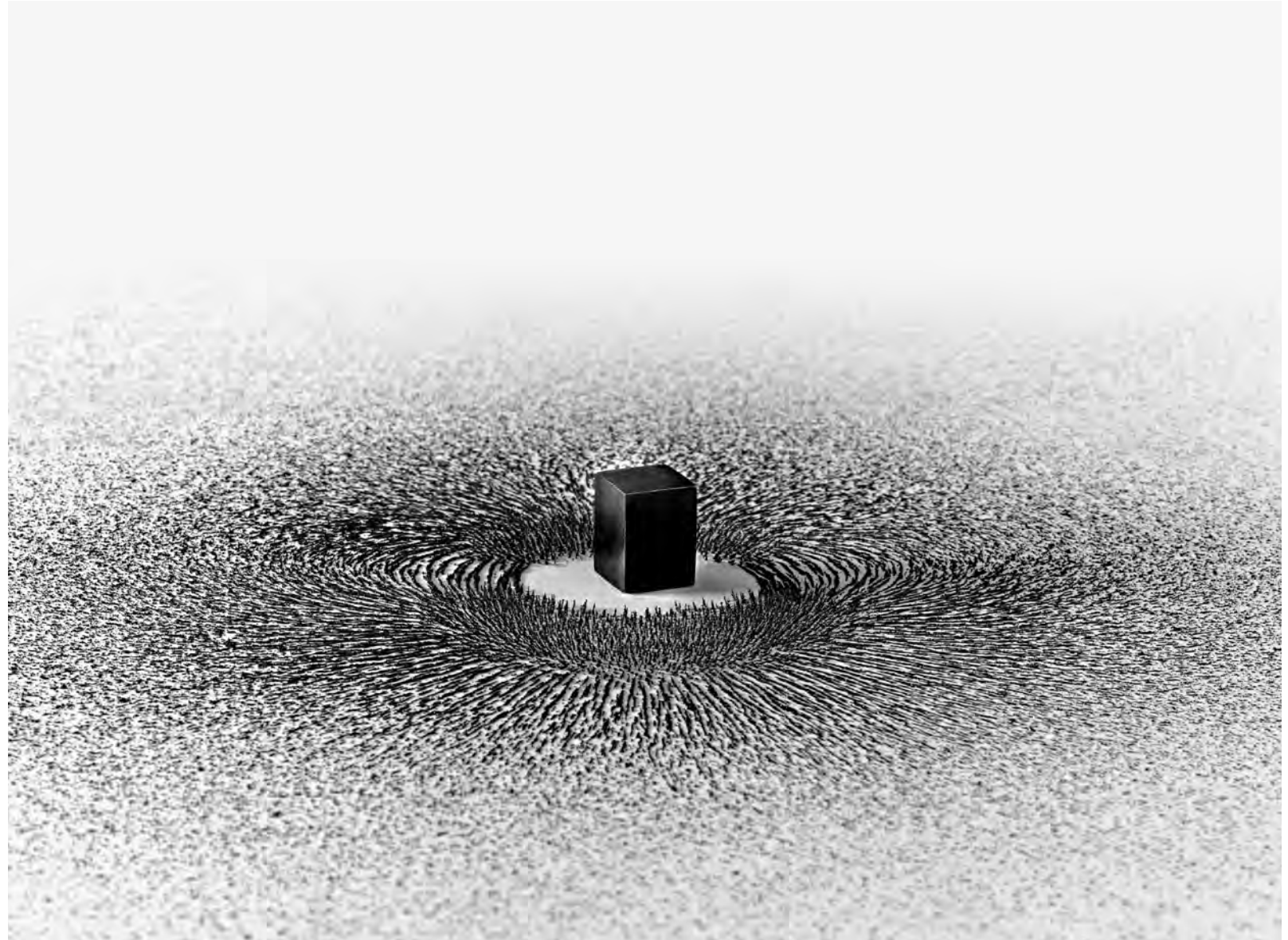
The intensity of this project and the long timeline of it—its different facets

and intricacies, and the smaller projects within the overarching subject—have affected the way I approach new ideas and the correlations I make within various other possible subjects I am now looking at. The key geopolitical shifts I have observed remain my preoccupations, especially how the built urban environment shapes lives, how the structures of religion articulate the topography of cities, and how private and public spaces intersect with and configure the human condition.

In Brooklyn, it is now time to bring the *Desert of Pharan* project together, under one roof, in one place. Presented in this comprehensive way, where photographs appear alongside historical artefacts, where films sound the timbre of the relentless cycles of construction and deconstruction, where a single stark sculpture synthesizes the immutable force and pull of that city, *Mecca Journeys* tells of the profusion of the city’s pasts, presents, and futures. Not only are there dialogues between the views presented onto the city, I hope the exhibition also instigates many dialogues between places and cultures. I look forward to seeing how my work is received by visitors to the Brooklyn Museum. It is a work of many narratives, of a plurality of histories, I hope that its presentation here, today, at this time of seismic global change, will give some sense of this prismatic, complex city, its connection to our rapidly shifting, complicated world. Most importantly, I hope it will bring about a profusion of diverse reactions—giving rise to new stories and new dialogues.

AHMED MATER





Mecca is a hallowed site revered by millions, a point of perpetual immigration and migration. In recent years, it has begun to be recast, reworked, and ultimately reconfigured. As a prismatic city of many layers and configurations, it is a place of physical and symbolic approaches. As it shifts and changes, the points of conceptual and geographical entry also alter. There is not one route to Mecca, but many roads: the road from Jeddah to Mecca taken by the many who perform *Umrah* and *Hajj*; the roads connecting the present to the past that are fast being lost under the rubble of deconstruction and construction; the roads hastily paved to ambitiously dreamt futures.



← 05  
*Road to Mecca,*  
2017 (Video Still)

→ 06  
*Stand in the Pathway*  
*and See,* 2012



“You will see the barefooted, scantily-clothed, destitute shepherds competing in constructing tall buildings.”

*Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)*, in response to being asked about the end times

The speed and breadth of transformation in Mecca introduces dependent concerns regarding the city’s social mechanics and the ongoing and symbiotic relationship between demolition and construction. Above all, it has concentrated the imaginative energy of Mecca’s inhabitants on what will remain once the work is complete. The landscape of the holy city teems with skyscrapers, with the current expansions immense, their ambitions are signaled by the frenetic movements of cranes and bulldozers. The cityscape evolves perpetually—even the Ka’aba is encroached upon, jostled among buildings that vie for space as the Clock Tower with its colossal crescent moon ascends.

→ 07  
Settlement,  
2015

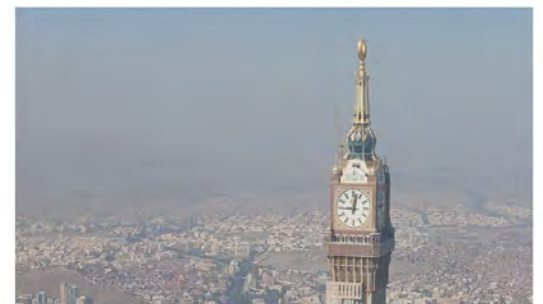
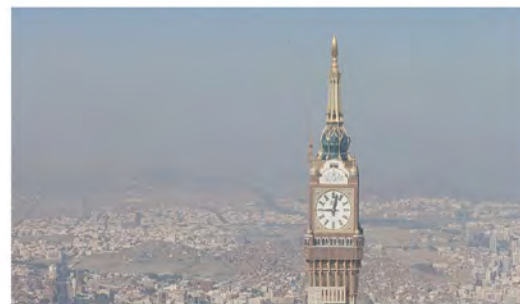
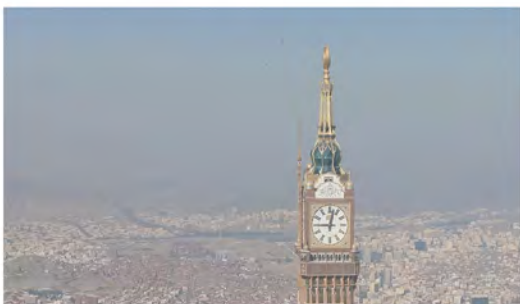
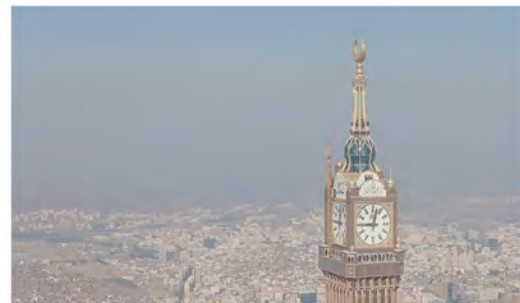
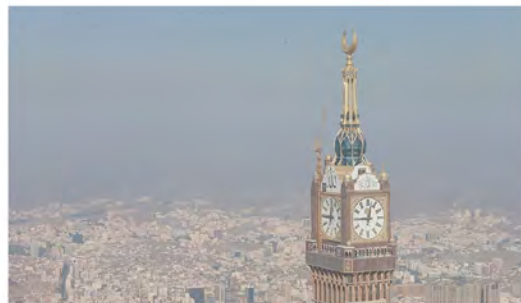
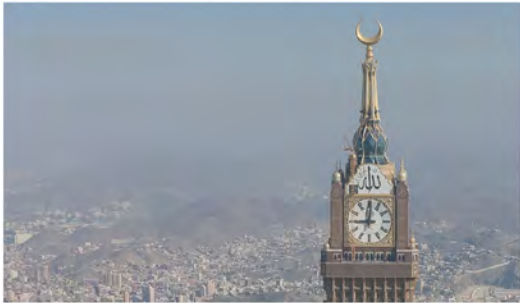
→ 08  
Foundation for  
the New Tower,  
2015

















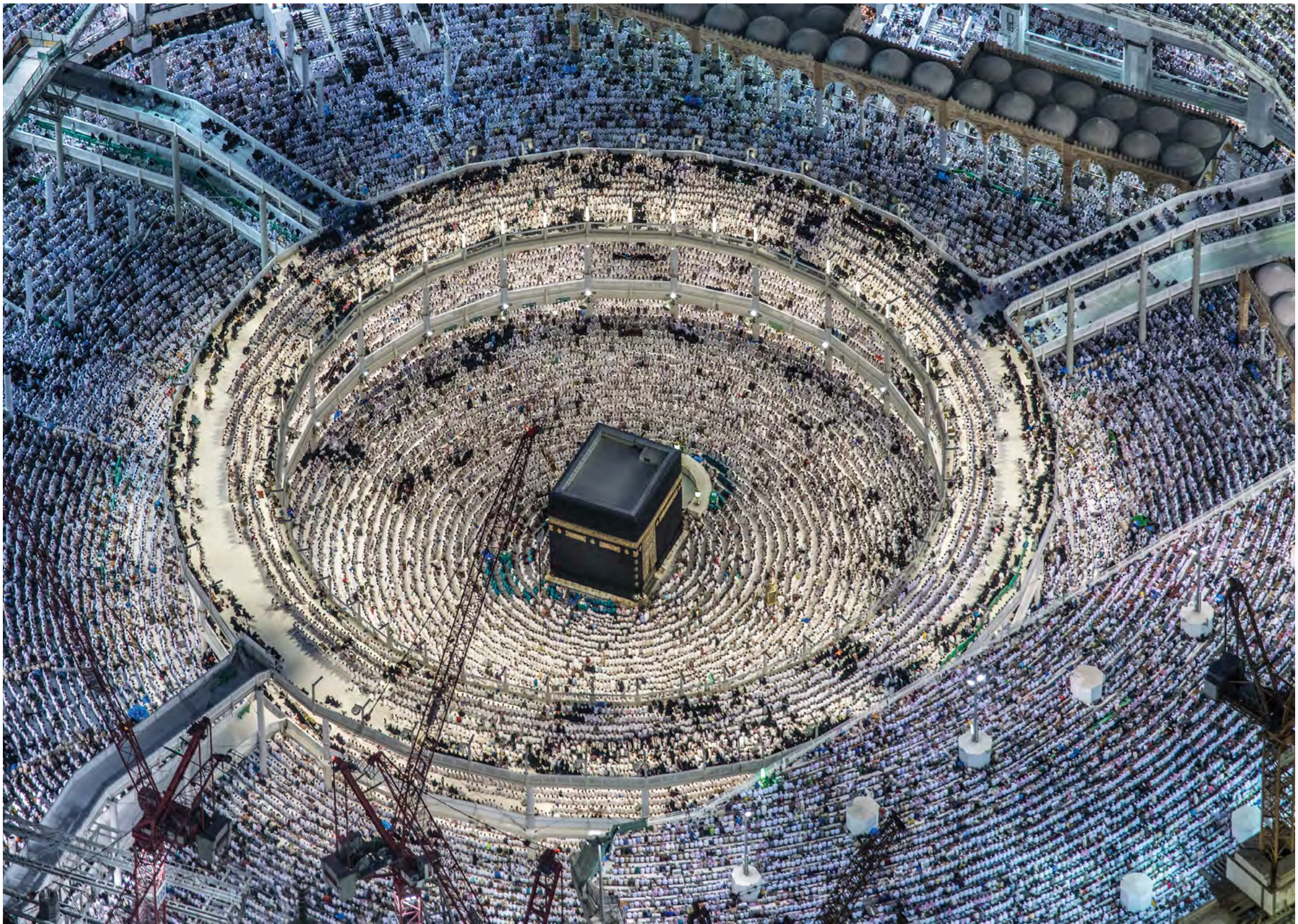
Like few other cities on earth, Mecca seems to buckle under the weight of its own dramatic symbolism. Mecca is rarely seen as a living city with its own inhabitants and historical development. Instead, it is almost exclusively seen as a site of pilgrimage, as a timeless, emblematic city. The redevelopments of recent years have exacerbated this tension between the living and the imagined. The denial of the real city is a denial of typical urban inconveniences like traffic, lack of public space, and the challenges of infrastructure. In this feat of signification, those who preside over the developments are freed from the burden of practicalities. In this conceptual space, they dream wildly, implementing plans for massive, unfathomable transformation. This grand vision is proclaimed from giant billboards, in whose shadows the unacknowledged life of the place continues to be played out.



↖ 15  
*Neon Café,*  
2012

↗ 16  
*The Black Stone,*  
2014

← 17  
*Walkway to Mina,*  
2012



18 ←  
(previous page)  
Ka'aba, 2015

↙ 19  
On the Haramain  
Highway, 2014

→ 20  
Mountain of Light,  
2015

↘ 21  
Hajj Season,  
2015







← 22  
(previous page)  
*Neighborhood—Kids,*  
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→ 23  
*Neighborhood*  
*—Family, 2015*

↙ 24  
*Neighborhood*  
*—Girl on way to School,*  
2012

↓ 25  
*Neighborhood*  
*— Religion Class,*  
2015









← 29  
Pilgrims' Tent,  
2012

↓ 30  
Majlis, 2015

→ 31  
Neighborhood  
—Street Vendor,  
2015

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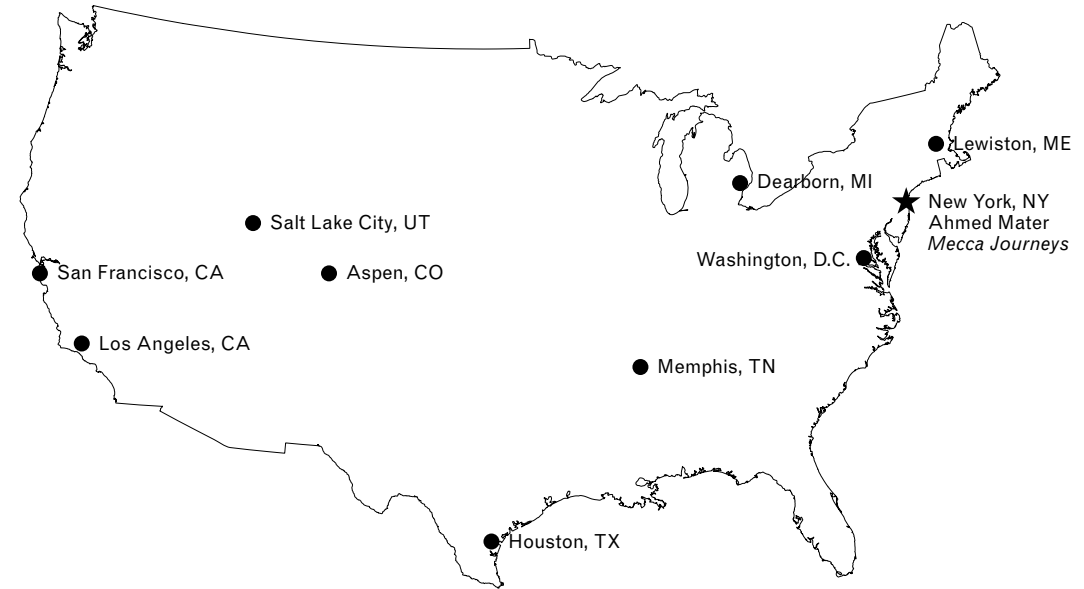












Since its launch in June 2016, a group of Saudi artists has been embarking on a multi-city tour of the United States to generate people-to-people dialogue and better understanding between the two nations.

Prior to this exhibition in New York, the tour began in Texas with a large-scale exhibition at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston before traveling to the Gonzo Gallery in Aspen, CO; Minnesota Street Project in San Francisco, CA; Bates College Museum of Art in Lewiston, ME; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), CA; the Arab American National Museum (AANM) in Dearborn, MI, the Utah Museum of Contemporary Art (UMOCA) in Salt Lake City, UT, and The Art Museum at the University of Memphis (AMUM) in Memphis, TN.

These exhibitions present an authentic insight into contemporary life and culture in Saudi Arabia through the works of leading and emerging artists from the Kingdom. This program will culminate with a cross-cultural symposium in Washington D.C. before the end of 2017.

The initiative is spearheaded by the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), Saudi's recently opened hub for arts, culture and education, and produced in collaboration with CULTURUNNERS, an international platform for traveling artists.

Exhibitions and educational programming are being produced in partnership with cultural institutions and universities across the USA, and a reciprocal program of events and artistic projects is taking place with American artists and institutions across Saudi Arabia.

## THE KING ABDULAZIZ CENTER FOR WORLD CULTURE



The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), is a one-of-a-kind institution that brings together multiple offerings under one roof. From arts and culture to science and innovation, this bold initiative by Saudi Aramco promises a continuous journey of enrichment designed to energize the next knowledge economy of Saudi Arabia.

We aim to make a positive and tangible impact on the cultural scene by focusing on building local talents in the knowledge and creative industries. Blending iconic architectural design with advanced technology, and unique learning methods with enriching programs, the Center is an infinitely inspiring platform for explorers, learners, creators, and leaders—a thriving hub of knowledge, creativity and cross-cultural engagement.

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strives to achieve its ambitious national development goals to transition to a knowledge-based economy, the Center acts as a bridge connecting cultures and cultivating a creative and innovative community.

At The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, we believe in the power of people and ideas to unlock new possibilities: the future is what we make of it.

↗  
Exterior of the Brooklyn Museum. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.  
(photo: Justin Van Soest)

## BROOKLYN MUSEUM



The Brooklyn Museum is one of the oldest and largest art museums in the United States and among of the cultural treasures of New York City. It is housed in a landmark Beaux-Arts building designed by the celebrated architects McKim, Mead & White in 1893, and at 560,000 square feet is one of the most expansive museum buildings in the nation. Located at the corner of Eastern Parkway and Washington Avenue in central Brooklyn, the Museum is set amid an imposing complex of parks and gardens, conceived in the nineteenth century, that is also home to Prospect Park, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, the Prospect Park Zoo, and the Central Library of the Brooklyn Public Library System, along with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch that has

stood at Grand Army Plaza since 1892. Particular strengths of the Museum's encyclopedic collections include unsurpassed holdings in American art and ancient Egyptian artifacts. Among its other distinguished collections are Asian art, art of the Middle East, African art, Oceanic art, Native American and pre-Columbian art, and the decorative arts. The Brooklyn Museum is among the foremost institutions presenting contemporary art in new and dynamic ways to a diverse audience, and it is recognized for connecting today's art to the rich artistic heritage of the past. The Museum is widely known for its advances in visitor-friendly technology, notably its proprietary "ASK Brooklyn Museum" app.

Ahmed Mater (born 1979, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia) is a multidisciplinary artist who creates work that investigates Islamic culture at the intersection of consumerism and religion. Mater grew up in Abha in the capital of Aseer, a region in southwest Saudi Arabia, near the Yemeni border. Trained as a physician, Mater studied at King Khalid University in Abha. In an artistic practice that combines interests in photography, film, performance, and sculpture, Mater creates work at once aesthetically masterly and politically engaged, utilizing scientific methodologies learned in his medical training to blend conceptual practices with Islamic subjects, themes, and aesthetics. He is also a manager and director of projects on international and regional platforms and, in 2017, was appointed Executive Manager, MiSK Art Institute—part of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Foundation. Mater lives and works between Riyadh, Jeddah, and Abha, Saudi Arabia.

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- 01 Ahmed Mater. *Jibreel (Gabriel)*, 2012. Dye sublimation print, 96 x 127 ¼ in. (243.8 x 324.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

Many of the workers in Mecca come from Afghanistan or India to fulfill challenging roles, such as guiding the top of the Clock Tower into place. They are driven to do these dangerous jobs by a desire to serve Beit Allah (the house of God).

- 02 Ahmed Mater. *Clock Tower (Mecca Time)*, 2015. C-print, 49 x 72 in. (124.4 x 182.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

Helicopter view of the new hotel and residential/commercial complex built near to the Masjid al-Haram (Great Mosque). The Abraj al Bait complex consists of seven towers and adjacent structures, making it the building with the world's largest floor space. The hotel tower is, at more than 1900 feet (600 meters), the second highest building in the world and includes a mall that covers twenty floors. Built by the Saudi Binladin Group, the complex is situated on the former location of the old Turkish fort known as Jiyad fort, overlooking the Masjid al-Haram.

- 03 Ahmed Mater. *Magnetism*, 2012. Iron filings, two magnets. 35-½" x 35-½" x 42" (base) Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

In *Magnetism* iron filings whorl and whirl around a black cube, an emanation of attraction that evokes a congregation of pilgrims thronging the Ka'aba. The unseen and immutable pull of Islam's holiest site is made manifest in this corolla, a moment of absolute equilibrium. The elusive pull is faith driven, suggestive of the deeply spiritual force of attraction felt by the millions who pray in its direction five times a day, as well as those who circumnambulate during tawaf (literally meaning 'circling', this ritual of pilgrimage sees Muslims circle the Ka'aba seven times in an anti-clockwise direction).

- 04 Ahmed Mater. *Road to Mecca*, 2017. Two-channel video, color, sound, 3 min. Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

Entry to the sacred city is exclusively granted to the followers of Islam. This road sign on the highway to Mecca states that one direction

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is for "Muslims Only" while another direction is obligatory for "Non-Muslims." Religious police are stationed beyond the turnoff on the main road to prevent non-Muslims from proceeding into Mecca.

- 05 Ahmed Mater. *Road to Mecca*, 2017. Two-channel video, color, sound, 3 min. Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

Heading southeast out of Mecca, Mater took these images of ceremonial drummers at a traditional wedding he came across. Following the ebb and flow of one drummer's trance-like state, it brought to the fore the ominous tales of jinn, the restless spirits that live in the desert near "the dead city of Jahura... midway between the borders of Hejaz and Oman. There the sounds of drumming and moaning are regularly heard at night by passing travelers, by whom they are of course attributed to jinns or ghosts, persons of weak intellect having even been known to lose their reason." (Harry St. John Philby, *Heart of Arabia: A Record of Travel & Exploration*, 1922)

- 06 Ahmed Mater. *Stand in the Pathway and See*, 2012. C-print, 94 ½ x 71 in. (238.8 x 180.3 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

Most of Mecca is taken up by unregulated development and informal settlements, where sanitation conditions range from bad to catastrophic. During *hajj* and Ramadan, these areas are even more crowded than at other times of year. Property ownership in these quarters seems to be unclear but markers of state ownership can be found nearer to the city's valley floor, where real estate prices are higher.

This is an image taken before the settlements were demolished to clear the way for the expansion of the mosque and the construction of new hotels. This is one of the earlier photos from the collection, a root to the narrative history of these neighborhoods that no longer exist.

- 07 Ahmed Mater. *Settlement*, 2015. C-print, 60 x 90 in (152.4 x 228.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

Slums have extended over a variety of locations. Some slums have emerged within mountain enclaves away from state oversight. Other slums have emerged at strategic locations in proximity to major

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roads. Others have developed on the western side of Mecca, which is one of the main entryways into the city and the only route to the nearest airport. Many of these areas are home to members of the Burmese community, who have been living in the Kingdom for the last seventy years. The Burmese population in Saudi is around half a million, most of whom are second or third generation. In 2015, the Burmese community were issued iqamas (residence permits). This status will make many aspects of the lives of Burmese immigrants (often referred to as Burmawi's) easier, including everyday rights, education, and healthcare.

- 08 Ahmed Mater. *Foundation for the New Tower*, 2015. C-print, 48 x 72 in. (122 x 182.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

A mountain being demolished to make way for a new tower.

- 09 Ahmed Mater. *Metropolis*, 2013. Diasec mounted Latex jet print on Kodak Premier Paper, 118 x 882/3 in. (300 x 225 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

Aerial view over the construction taking place at the Masjid al-Haram. The fourth extension began in 2007 and is anticipated to last until 2020. There are practical motivators as well as more elevated, aspirational purposes for this latest expansion. Simply put, more space is needed and it is estimated that the current works will increase the mosque's capacity to two million. The mosque area will be expanded from its current 3,830,000 square feet (356,000 square meters) to 4,300,000 square feet (400,000 square meters), and the total number of minarets will increase to eleven.

- 10 Ahmed Mater. *Disarm Surveil*, 2013. Video, color, sound. Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

Footage shot from a military helicopter as it travels over the holy city.

- 11 Ahmed Mater. *King Kong*, 2013. Video, color, sound. 1 min. 30 seconds. Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

Circling the Clock Tower in a helicopter.

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- 12 Ahmed Mater. *Gas Station Leadlight*, 2013. C-print, 60 x 90 in. (152.4 x 228.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

The gasoline at this station is raised into being a celebrity, like an advertisement you can see it from far away. This is a stop that the artist often makes a point of using.

- 13 Ahmed Mater. *Leaves Fall in All Seasons*, 2013. Video, color, sound, 19 min. 57 sec. Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

In this scene from the video *Leaves Fall in All Seasons*—Mater's vision of Mecca through the eyes of immigrant construction workers—a lone figure perches on the golden crescent that will crown the Clock Tower. In Mater's story, the worker precariously "sits between reality and the impossible cityscapes of the future." The worker's mundane task becomes spectacular, as he glides through the air "like an angel bringing a warning." The tower is to date the third tallest building and the fifth tallest freestanding structure in the world. It is also the tallest hotel with the largest clock face in the world. In the crescent is a prayer room overlooking the Ka'aba.

- 14 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Stairway*, 2015. C-print, 106 x 71 in. (269.3 x 180.3 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater

A street in the Burmawi district. Mecca's slum settlements share a lot of similarities with other slums around the world in terms of the social and economic conditions of their inhabitants. Most of the slums in Mecca have no basic infrastructure, such as sewers, electricity, or paved roads. All illegal buildings will soon be destroyed as part of the new expansion project, and their inhabitants will most likely find themselves homeless. Besides social and economic problems, the safety situation in slums is a critical issue. Many of Mecca's illegal inhabitants on low incomes are involved in crime and the drug trade. This has caused local authorities to classify Mecca's slums as "dangerous neighborhoods."

- 15 Ahmed Mater. *Neon Café*, 2012. C-print, 60 x 90 in. (152.4 x 228.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater

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- Outdoor café in Mecca. Most outdoor cafés and restaurants, in Saudi serve sheesha as well as food. Like all restaurants these cafés are segregated, with single men (men alone) in one area and families in another.
- 16 Ahmed Mater. *The Black Stone*, 2014. C-print, 20 x 30 in (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- This is the access point to the Black Stone. One belief is that the Black Stone was brought from a nearby mountain by the Archangel Gabriel and was originally white but has turned black by absorbing the sins of man. Since ancient times it has been regarded as possessing miraculous properties. When the Prophet Muhammad cleared the Ka'aba of its hundreds of idols, he allowed the Black Stone to remain, and it has in effect become a cornerstone of the Islamic faith.
- 17 Ahmed Mater. *Walkway to Mina*, 2012. C-print, 60 x 90 in. (152.4 x 228.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Bridge of passage to Mina where the concluding rites of the pilgrimage take place, the stoning of the Jamarat. Three million people walk from Muzdalifah to Mina in two-and-a-half to three hours.
- 18 Ahmed Mater. *Ka'aba*, 2015. C-print, 71 x 106 in. (180.3 x 270.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- The homogenous multitude of nearly three million souls praying around the Ka'aba, reciting their invocations to Allah. The supreme supplication "Labbaika-Allahumma, Labbaik!" (Here I am, O God, at Thy Command, Here I am) is cried out in one voice as the dense crowd sweeps in an undulating wave around the Ka'aba.
- 19 Ahmed Mater. *On the Haramain Highway*, 2014. C-print, 20 x 30 in (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- On the Haramain expressway fifteen kilometers outside the city center of Mecca is an archway of reinforced concrete that supports a sculpture of the Holy Qur'an. Artist Dia Aziz Dia completed the sculpture in 1975. The monumental sculpture stands about five miles (five kilometers) beyond the Shumeisi checkpoint, where Muslims are separated from non-Muslims.

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- 20 Ahmed Mater. *Mountain of Light*, 2015. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Jabal Al-Noor (Mountain of Light) is located to the northeast of Mecca. It rises to an elevation of 2,106 feet (642 meters) above sea level and has steep slopes in all directions. On the peak of Ghar Hira is a cave where the Prophet Muhammad used to meditate. It was in this cave that he received the first message of the revelation. These revelations continued for the rest of his life, and their compilation became known as the Qur'an.
- 21 Ahmed Mater. *Hajj Season*, 2015. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Hajj* season is the busiest time of the year and when the commercial stores facing the main entrance of the Masjid al-Haram make the majority of their earnings.
- 22 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Kids*, 2015. C-print, 60 x 90 in. (152.4 x 228.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- The Saudi emblem re-interpreted with two guns instead of two swords positioned under the palm tree and a crown placed at the top.
- 23 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Family*, 2015. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- Slums in Mecca that will soon be demolished as part of the new expansion.
- 24 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Girl on way to School*, 2012. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- A girl on her way to school.
- 25 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Religion Class*, 2015. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- Children going to religion class in the mosque.

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- 26 Ahmed Mater. *Workers' Camp, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Saudi Binladin Group workers' camps in Mecca.
- 27 Ahmed Mater. *Public Transit, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- Public transportation used by pilgrims to get around during the rituals of *hajj*.
- 28 Ahmed Mater. *Throwing Stones at the Devil, 2012*. Video, color, sound, 2 min. Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- The murmur of crowds and the continuous rhythm of pebbles striking a wall gently draw us into Mecca, one of the most restricted yet highly visited cities in the world. At several different points during the *hajj*, pilgrims perform this stone-throwing ritual, symbolizing stoning the devil or casting away temptations.
- 29 Ahmed Mater. *Pilgrims' Tent, 2012*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Pilgrims inside a tent on Mount Arafat.
- 30 Ahmed Mater. *Majlis, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- In most homes, there is a majlis for men and one for women. They are used for various types of special gatherings, which can be administrative, social or religious. It is most commonly used to receive and entertain guests. This photo is of the Al Fassi family majlis.
- 31 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Street Vendor, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- Typical scenes of shops and street merchants close to Masjid al-Haram.

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- 32 Ahmed Mater. *The New King, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Waiting for the King to come.
- 33 Ahmed Mater. *Neighborhood—Television, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana. © Ahmed Mater
- Sitting out on a "dakkah" (bench)—a popular way of meeting and entertaining friends.
- 34 Ahmed Mater. *Workers' Camp, 2015*. C-print, 20 x 30 in. (50.8 x 76.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- The development of the holy city requires an incredible number of workers. They come from all over the Muslim world, attracted by the promise not only of work but also the unique, deep honor of working and living in Islam's holiest city. Most work for the Saudi Binladden Group, living in the company's compound and designated buildings.
- 35 Ahmed Mater. *Mecca Windows, 2013-ongoing*. Installation, dimensions vary. Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- Collected from demolished buildings these windows are portals to the past, the city that has disappeared. Mater harvested them from the rubble of the old city as a kind of homage to what was there before.
- 36 Ahmed Mater. *Room with a View, 2013*. C-print, 60 x 80 in. (152.4 x 203.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist. © Ahmed Mater
- With the growing religious tourism industry, hotel rooms in the Royal Clock Tower complex have come to dominate the skyline above Masjid al-Haram's main sanctuary. Here, inside the quiet luxury of a private room, Mater's framing becomes a subtle commentary on how political and spatial changes are reinventing the center of the Islamic world.



Brooklyn Museum

Ithra  
Abdullah Al Abdullah  
Abdullah Al Eyaf  
Abdullah Al Rashid  
Ali Al Mutairi  
Noor Al Daham  
Wadha Al Nafjan

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Rachel Bennett

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