



EDGE OF ARABIA

05/06/09 - 02/08/09

PALAZZO CONTARINI DAL ZAFFO POLIGNAC, VENICE

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM SAUDI ARABIA

EXHIBITION GUIDE

canvas
ART AND DESIGN FROM THE WHOLE EAST AND MIDDLE EAST
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EDGE OF ARABIA

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM SAUDI ARABIA

CURATED BY:
STEPHEN A. STAPLETON

CO-CURATED BY:
**AHMED MATER ASEERI &
ABDULNASSER GHAREM**

EXHIBITION GUIDE TEXT BY:
HENRY HEMMING

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VENICE 2009

THIS UNIQUE EXHIBITION SHOWCASES THE WORK OF 8 SAUDI CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS, MALE AND FEMALE, BASED IN JEDDAH, MAKKAH, RIYADH, DHAHRAN, ABHA AND KHAMIS MUSHAIT. IN BRINGING THEM TO VENICE FOR THE FIRST TIME, **EDGE OF ARABIA** HERALDS A NEW CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN SAUDI ARABIA, THESE ARTISTS REPRESENT A PIONEERING CREATIVE MOVEMENT. THEIR WORK EXPLORES THE COMPLEX AND DIVERSE REALITY OF 21ST CENTURY LIFE IN SAUDI ARABIA, COMBINING INSTALLATION, PERFORMANCE AND A VARIETY OF OTHER MEDIA WITH A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO ARTISTIC PRACTICE. IN ITS OUTLOOK AND RANGE THE WORK IS AS MUCH PERSONAL OR DOMESTIC AS IT IS GEOPOLITICAL. THIS IS NOT AN EXPOSITION OF INTERNATIONAL MISCONCEPTIONS TO DO WITH SAUDI ARABIA BUT A SERIES OF REFLECTIONS ON LOCAL IDENTITY, THE ENVIRONMENT, INDIVIDUAL (RE) CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE PAST, AND A CRITICAL DIALOGUE WITH THE FUTURE.

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EDGE OF ARABIA
contemporary art from saudi arabia



'THE PRINCIPLE IS SIMPLE. IF SOMEONE HAS A GUN AND THEY POINT IT AT YOU, EITHER YOU STEAL THEIRS, OR YOU GET ONE YOURSELF. WITH THIS BODY OF WORK I BOUGHT A GUN.'



فيصل سامرة

FAISAL SAMRA

BAHRAIN



DISTORTED REALITY # 19 | 2007

Each triptych relates separate instants from a series of actions performed by Samra. In a formal sense they are reminiscent of Francis Bacon's legendary triptychs. Each performance is unscripted, with no contrived start or finish, and together they form part of Samra's polemic against what he calls the 'made-up images' of advertising and globalised news media. His desire throughout is to present the viewer with images that are, above all, rigorously unmediated.

DISTORTED REALITY # 43 | 2007

Distorted Reality records a succession of performances acted out by Samra, mostly with his face obscured. The artist intentionally constructs a warped reality every bit as unreal as the illusion fed to us each day via televisions, computers and posters. Samra explains, 'It's important for people to know that they're being hypnotised by these "made-up image-producers"... they look to beautify wherever possible. With *Distorted Reality* I do the opposite.'

أحمد ماطر
عسيري



**'A RELIGIOUS IDEA
REACHES US THROUGH
MANY WINDOWS.'**

AHMED MATER ASEERI

ABHA



ILLUMINATION I | 2008

In *Illumination I & II*, two matching X-Rays have been printed onto paper prepared with tea, pomegranate, coffee and other materials used traditionally to prepare the opening pages to a religious text. This gives each page a rare and extravagant luminosity. With the torsos facing each other Mater touches on notions of exteriority, or 'us' and 'them'. Though set up in opposition these mirrored segments complete each other as two halves of a whole – the Lion and Unicorn book-ending a coat of arms.



MAGNETISM I | 2008

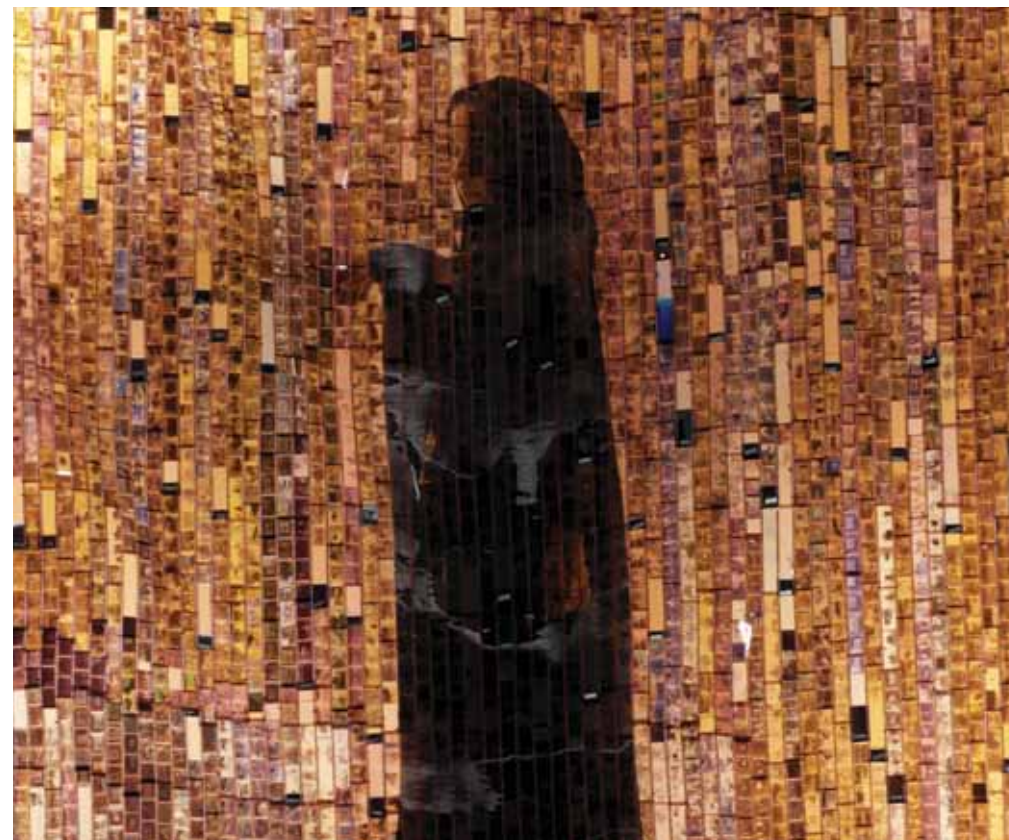
Here, Mater has positioned two magnets in opposition to each other: one is visible above the surface; the other is hidden below. Together, they both attract and repulse individual iron filings, however the effect is one of unity as if these two are working in tandem with each other.

'SOMETIMES THERE'S
A KIND OF PORTAL
THAT EXISTS BETWEEN
OUR MINDS.'



SHADIA & RAJA ALEM

JEDDAH



NEGATIVE NO MORE | 2008

Repeatedly in this piece, as with other work by Shadia & Raja Alem, the artists address issues relating to portraiture, concealment and the self-reflexive construction or indeed revelation of personal narrative. It is an attempt to move beyond a generic image of womanhood that is cast in negative, in black, silent beneath fabric. As Shadia has explained, 'I see us out, shedding this cocoon of negatives, the misconception and preconceptions cast upon us, coming under full light, for us to see us, and for you to recognize us as part of the human body.'

HER HAIR IN HEJAZ | 2008

This is a reflective, personal exploration of interiority, of experience witnessed only by the self and then stored in a safe, private place be it a personal computer or one's own fragmentary memory of routine. Presented like this, the act of combing just-washed hair becomes a rare, intimate gesture, one that is made more private and more charged by the subsequent covering of this craft, this handiwork, with a veil – which becomes equivalent to setting a password on a computer.

'I DON'T WANT ANYTHING I
MAKE TO BE STILL. MY OBJECTS
MUST NOT DIE. INSTEAD I WANT
TO KEEP THEM PERMANENTLY IN
A STATE BETWEEN BEING BORN
AND DYING.'

Core could not
ever hate.

لا يحب بعدق
لا يمكنه ان يك
أتمت من ال
التوفيق في
أحارب بين
لذو

يا اهلوة يا مو شعرنازل على القضا
تعالي مجايا نقدر في جهه دنا
هبيني واخليه وفي قلبي لخواهي
دنا قلبي عود فذهب بيخولك

أنا أول
أنا المارة
من العذارى
بها مخرج
بها مخرج
بها مخرج

ايمن يوسري

AYMAN YOSSRI DAYDBAN

JEDDAH



MAHAREM (TISSUES) | 2008

On the surface of each tissue box is a poster advertising a well-known, much-loved Arabic film made during the middle of the twentieth century. Most nights Yossri returns to this fictional, black-and-white world of film in which nothing changes. Often he weeps. As he does so he will reach for the nearest tissue-box. In Arabic the word 'maharem' means tissues, but it can also refer to your close family; both form an emotional blanket against the world outside.

FLAG | 2002

Dangling from the vertical base of this piece is a chord and handle. If pulled – visitors are welcome to do so – it will play a lullaby. The work is made from a salvaged metal road-sign that Yossri has fashioned into the shape of a Palestinian flag. The material here is that of the roofs, walls and doors found in refugee camps all over the world, including those in Jordan and Syria built to house Palestinians displaced from their homes during the twentieth century.

'I'M NOT AT ALL
INTERESTED IN THE
CULT OF ME.'



منا الدويان

MANAL AL-DOWAYAN

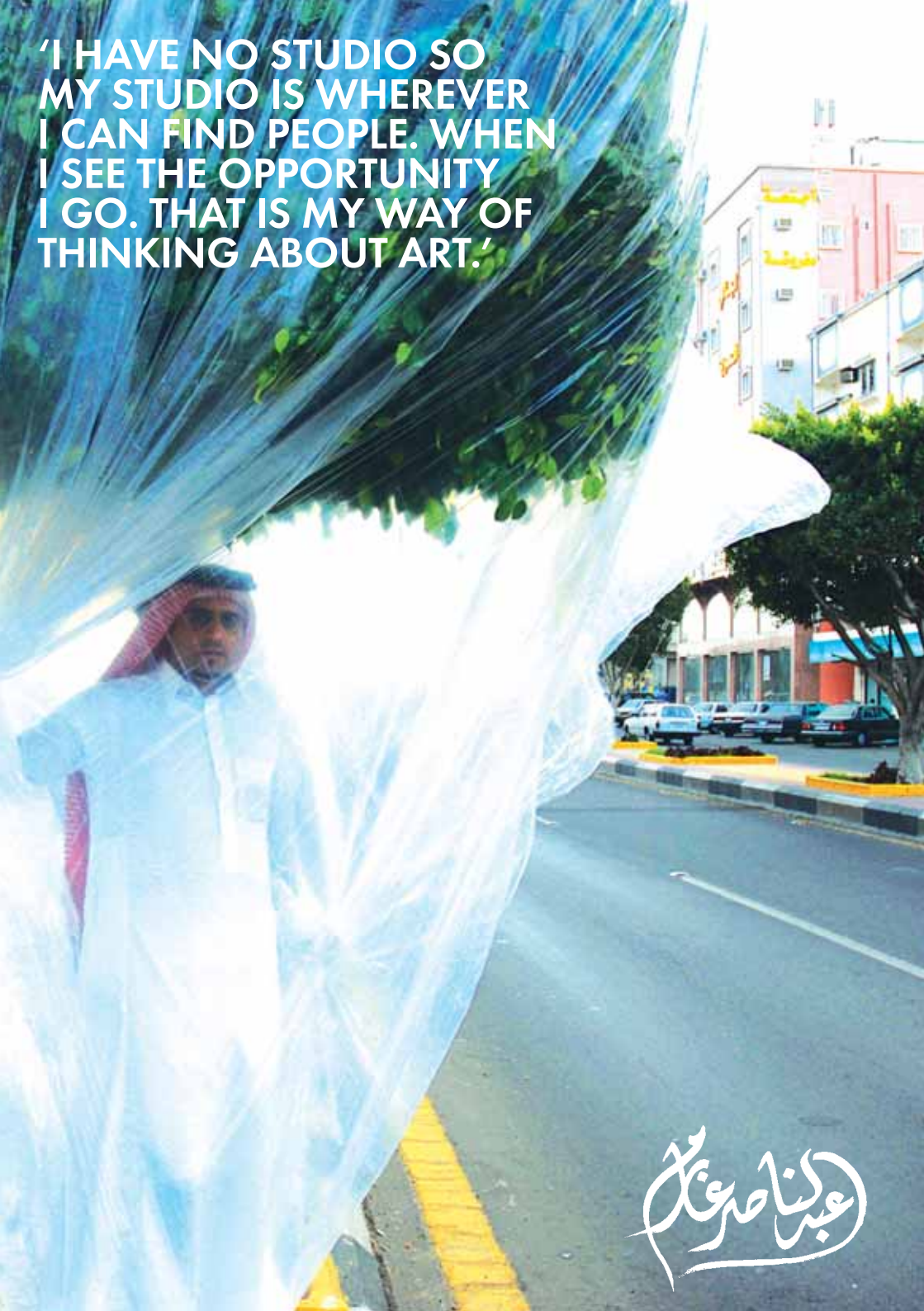
DHAHRAN



THE CHOICE | 2005-7

In these photographs women from the Eastern Province, where Al-Dowayan lives, are shown veiled and heavily made-up next to the individual paraphernalia of different male professions. With no studio Al-Dowayan erects temporary studios in the homes of her subjects, thus inhabiting a typically male profession herself.

'I HAVE NO STUDIO SO MY STUDIO IS WHEREVER I CAN FIND PEOPLE. WHEN I SEE THE OPPORTUNITY I GO. THAT IS MY WAY OF THINKING ABOUT ART.'



عبدناصر غريم

ABDULNASSER GHAREM

KHAMIS MUSHAIT



CONCRETE II | 2008

Throughout his work Ghareem questions our relationship and trust in the structures and materials that surround us. In the past he has made work concerning our understanding of, and relationship to, concrete. He has addressed bureaucracy and the authority of its accoutrements – in this case, rubber-stamps. Like most countries that have experienced terrorist attacks in recent years, prominent government buildings in parts of the Middle East are surrounded by low concrete barriers. Concrete in this context denotes safety and immovability. The yellow lines in this piece are identical in colour and proportion to those you find edging the roads that spiderweb Saudi Arabia.

THE PATH | 2007

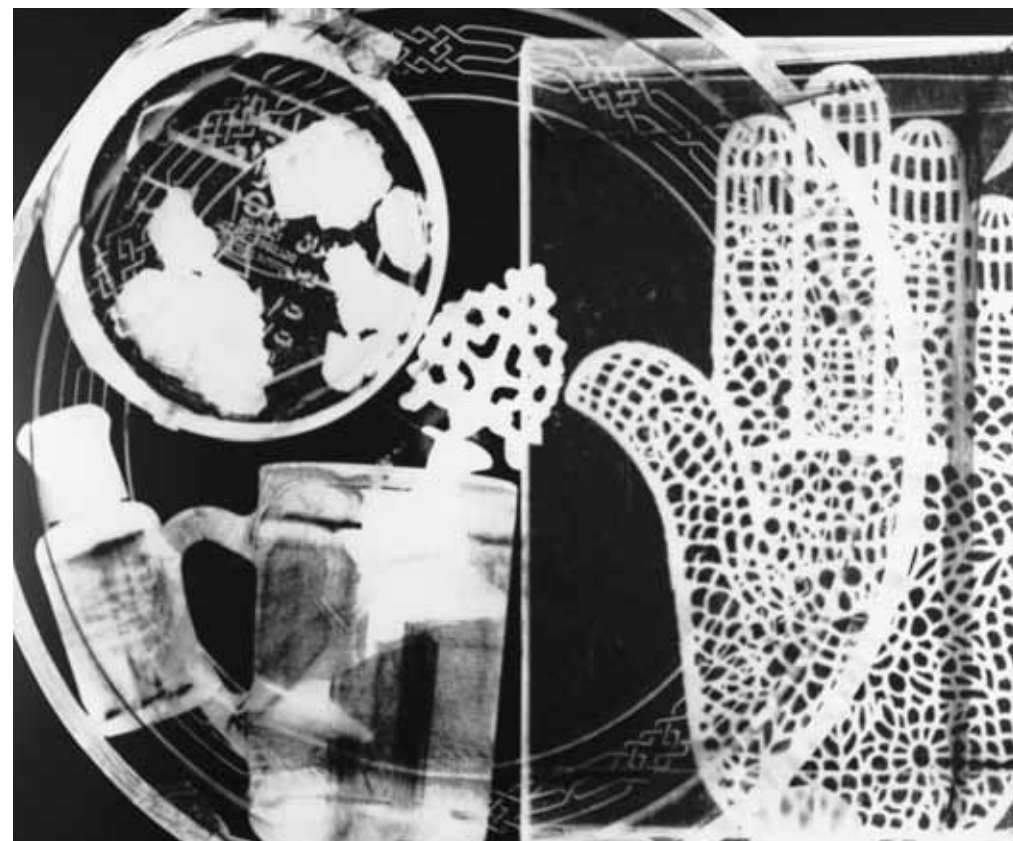
One day in 1982, following heavy rain to the north, word spread down a remote valley in south-western Saudi Arabia that a flash-flood was on its way. Those living in one of the villages about to be hit sought shelter on a recently built concrete bridge. They put their faith in concrete. These men and women took with them their vehicles and livestock. They waited. The flood came, washing away both bridge and those who were on it. Twenty-five years later Ghareem covered the remains of this bridge that jut like a gangplank over the rocky Aseeri landscape with the word 'Al Siraat'. In Arabic this means 'the path', or 'the way', in the spiritual sense of each word. It is about the choices you make in life, whether you follow the straight path, the winding path, or whether you trust in the idea of a path at all. This word can also be used to refer to the bridge you face on death that connects this world and the next.

'MY INSPIRATION FOR ART
COMES FROM MY COUNTRY,
A LAND OF CONTRASTING
IMAGES AND IDEAS.'










MAHA MALLUH

RIYADH



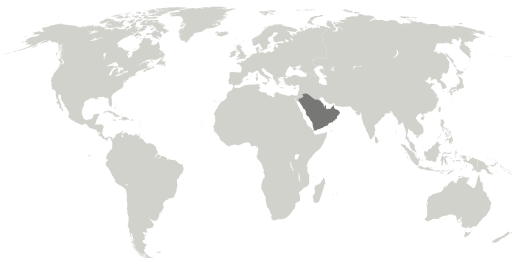
MERWED | 2008

Much of Malluh's recent work has utilized photograms, one of the oldest forms of photography. This involves neither camera nor negative, just photographic paper exposed directly to a light source. In these works she uses objects from her studio and home. Each is identifiable only by its outline and its degree of translucence. In trying to decipher these objects the viewer assumes the role of an airport security guard. Intimate belongings are scanned to identify and then gauge the threat they appear to pose, or what may be hidden within.

-  **FAISAL SAMRA**, BAHRAIN
-  **AHMED MATER ASEERI**, ABHA
-  **SHADIA & RAJA ALEM**, JEDDAH
-  **AYMAN YOSSRI DAYDBAN**, JEDDAH
-  **MANAL AL-DOWAYAN**, DHAHRAN
-  **ABDULNASSER GHAREM**, KHAMIS MUSHAIT
-  **MAHA MALLUH**, RIYADH



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE ARTISTS, VISIT:
www.edgeofarabia.com



Detail from Concrete II, 2009 by Abdunasser Gharem



PALAZZO CONTARINI DAL ZAFFO
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GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM)

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