

GALERIE KRINZINGER · SEILERSTÄTTE 16 · 1010 WIEN

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EDGE OF ARABIA: CONTEMPORARY ART FROM SAUDI ARABIA

With Hala Ali, Abdalnasser Gharem, Maha Malluh, Ahmet Mater and Saeed Salem, five representatives of the present art scene in Saudi Arabia are being presented for the first time by Galerie Krinzinger in Vienna. On the occasion of the opening the recent publication *Edge of Arabia: Contemporary Art from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* will be presented.

Opening with book presentation and performance by the text artist Hala Ali

Thursday, 21 June 2012, 7 p.m.

Exhibition duration

22 June 2012 – 07 July 2012

Location

Galerie Krinzinger

Seilerstätte 16, 1010 Vienna

Information

www.galerie-krinzinger.at

With the beginning revolutions in the Arabic world Saudi Arabia has also increasingly moved into the center of international politics. The country was considered to be one of the most strictly governed with regard to the religious rules of Islam and a hotbed of international Islamic movements. At the same time, enormous revenues from exports of petroleum – Saudi Arabia exports about 25% of the world's extracted oil – have enabled a remarkable technological and economic development.

Against the backdrop of these contrasts, an art scene has emerged in recent years - one that is young but also very interesting in terms of its formal repertory. This scene has yet to be fully appreciated by the international art. The project "Edge of Arabia", which was launched in 2008, has presented a number of these artists in very different compositions in exhibitions in Riyadh, Berlin, Istanbul, Dubai and twice at the Biennale in Venice.

"As already in 2008, with the exhibitions of Sudarshan Shetty and further young artists from the Indian art scene, Galerie Krinzinger is once again assuming a leading role in the first-time presentation of artists from an up and coming art scene but one that is still largely unknown in Vienna. After my first contact with the artists during the Art Dubai 2012 I decided to do an exhibition with five representatives of the current art scene in Saudi Arabia in Vienna. I am extremely delighted that we have succeeded in pulling off this project so quickly and that we will also be able to present the publication that has just come out in Vienna," as gallery owner Ursula Krinzinger said in reference to the exhibition. "I hope that this project can also make a contribution to informing the general public about the art scene in the Middle East. The gallery certainly intends to work together with artists from Saudi Arabia in the future as well by including them in the gallery's program."

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**EDGE OF ARABIA
ARTISTS**

HALA ALI

Thanks to her use of very different media such as templates, prints, photography, adhesive tape, cardboard and spray paint in very striking wall pieces, Hala Ali explores the concepts of contextual meaning as well as the traditional idea of abstract concepts such as text and image in her work. Hala Ali creates typographical pictures based on a harmonious use of language and text that call into question preconceived notions. Hala Ali was born in Saudi Arabia and studied in Great Britain. She then returned to the United Arab Emirates and is now attending the Fine Arts Program at the University of Sharjah. Ali's simple and argumentative works refer to ideas of female invisibility, militant positions and social dogmas.

ABDULNASSER GHAREM

Abdulnasser Gharem, whose artistic works have been shown in Europe, the Gulf states and the USA several times, is known for his use of the stamps of the Austrian company Trodat. Used as medium for his images, the small stamps symbolize bureaucracy, control and authority which he and his contemporaries have to struggle with day in, day out in Saudi Arabia. *"The company Trodat produces the objects of authority and bureaucracy that influence my country. I am now presenting these stamps in my own works, showing them to the public living in the country in which I made them." The 'bureaucratic processes' of progress, which exploded after 9/11 are having a negative impact on our society. I am now trying to use art to defuse these objects and to thus lay claim to a true path of progress. This is my mission,*" as Abdulnasser Gharem puts it. Abdulnasser Gharem was born in 1974 in the Saudi Arabic town of Khamis Mushait where he lives and works today. After graduating from the King Abdulaziz Academy in 1992, he then studied at the Leader-Institute in Riad in 1992 and at the renowned Al-Meftaha Arts Village in Abha in 2003. In 2004 Gharem, together with the Al-Meftaha artists, organized a group exhibition with the title *Shattah*, which called into question the existing forms of artistic practice in Saudi Arabia. Since then Gharem has organized exhibitions in Europe, the Gulf States and the USA. His work has also been shown at the Martin-Gropius building in Berlin and at the Biennials in Venice, Sharjah and Berlin. Recently Gharem wrote history when his installation *Message/Messenger* was sold for a world record price at an auction in Dubai. Abdulnasser Gharem's works are thus meanwhile among the most expensive ones in art market of the Gulf region. Gharem denoted the proceeds from this sale to "Edge of Arabia" to promote art education in his homeland. His first monograph titled *Abdulnasser Gharem: Art of Survival* was published in London in October 2011.

MAHA MALLUH

Maha Malluh who lived a long time in in Riyadh has been exhibiting her work in international group and single shows since 1979. After completing her bachelor's degree in English literature at the Riyadh King Saud University in 1993, she was awarded a certificate in design and photography in 2000 at the De Anza College in California. Maha Malluh uses symbolic and real imagery in her work, which began with collages and then developed into photograms. She uses them to express her views of life in Saudi Arabia.

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AHMET MATER

Ahmet Mater, born in Adha in 1979, is seen today as one of the most influential artists of the region of Saudi Arabia. Moreover he is, as himself says, a man of many faces. In addition to his artistic profession, Mater is also a qualified general practitioner, landscape photographer and the face of one of the region's largest mobile phone companies. Born and raised in Abha, the capital of Asser (a region in the south of Saudi Arabia), Mater has remained rooted in the Asseri local identity. As a member of the leading young artists' collective "Ibn Aseer" (son of Aseer), Ahmet Mater is also an integral part of the latest history of "Abha Miftaha Arts Village", and associated with the King Fahad Cultural Centre. Mater's work was already featured in various exhibitions in the Middle East and in Europe and can be found in exhibitions of the British Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His training and his life as a doctor as well as his traditional religious upbringing in Saudi culture have left a strong imprint on him. His work, which encompasses photography, calligraphy, painting, installation and video, deals with both the narrative and the aesthetics of Islamic culture in the age of globalization, consumerism and dramatic changes. An international edition of the monograph on Ahmed Mater's life and work was published by Booth-Clibborn Editions in 2010.

SAEED SALEM

Born in 1984 in Jeddah, Salem is of Yeminite background. After completing his studies in advertising at the Limkokwing University in Malaysia in 2006, he completed a marketing studies program at Curtin University in Perth, Australia in 2007. After having worked at several established photography and design studios, Salem founded his own photo studio "181 Degrees" in 2009. Saeed Salem presented his first big piece of contemporary art *Neonland* – a series of iconic images that captured the essence of the cosmopolitan city of Jeddah – in the exhibition *We Need to Talk*, which was organized by the art initiative "Edge of Arabia" in Jeddah.

BOOK PRESENTATION

EDGE OF ARABIA: CONTEMPORARY ART FROM THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

The richly illustrated publication examines the exceptional contemporary art and culture of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. With contributions by art historians, curators, gallery owners, collectors and sponsors, the book presents a group of seminal, yet still relatively unknown artists from the Islamic world. Apart from the artistic works, the book also documents exhibitions of the art initiative "Edge of Arabia" in London, Venice, Berlin, Istanbul, Dubai and Jeddah, as well providing an incentive for this year's "return home" to Saudi Arabia.

Edge of Arabia: Contemporary Art from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was published by Booth-Clibborn Editions international. Other catalogues in this series are *Ahmed Mater* (2010) and *Abdulnasser Ghareem: Art of Survival* (2011).

ART INITIATIVE

EDGE OF ARABIA

"Edge of Arabia" is an independent art initiative that aims at helping Arab art and culture gain the recognition it deserves, with a special focus on Saudi Arabia. As a social project "Edge of Arabia" seeks to reach new target groups and to enhance understanding – by tours, non-commercial and free exhibitions, publications and educational programs for

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schools and universities. Since it was launched in London in 2008 presentations have taken place in Riyadh, Berlin, Istanbul, Dubai, Venice, and most recently in Jeddah where the largest exhibition of art from Saudi Arabia in the Kingdom to date has taken place. In 2012 "Edge of Arabia" will travel to London and Beirut, and for 2013 an exhibition tour is planned through the USA. www.edgeofarabia.com

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