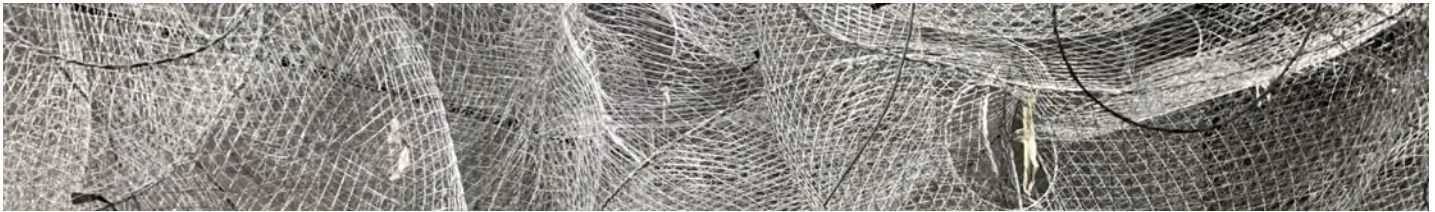


# Shaqayeq Arabi

Selected Press

signs and symbols

New York, New York | [www.signsandsymbols.art](http://www.signsandsymbols.art)



## An Exhibition of Fish Nets Floating in Space: Interview with Shaqayeq Arabi

June 8, 2022

By **Rawaa Talass**

The Iranian-born artist Shaqayeq Arabi has changed countries and continents a few times in her lifetime. Born in 1974, she has lived in Tehran, New York, Paris, and Dubai, her home for the past two decades.

In her art, she often uses found and recycled objects to engage in a dialogue with and about nature.

All throughout the summer, Arabi has a site-specific installation on view at the Farjam Foundation inside the Dubai International Financial Center. Titled "The Sea Was Far Away And The Sky Further," the installation consists of dozens of local fishing traps that are suspended from the ceiling above the visitor's head.

Arabi joined Kayhan Life for a conversation about her life and her latest creations.

**Tell us about growing up in Iran. Were you raised in an artistic environment?**

There was certainly creativity flowing in our home, although none of my family members were practicing as artists. The fact that they guided me to start my career at an early age is proof that the appreciation of art was there.



*Shaqayeq Arabi.*

I had my first painting training when I was 12, and from the first session, I had a sense of assurance that this was the place I belonged to. That was confirmed to me on many occasions, even during my university years in Tehran, when I was studying graphic design. I later moved to Paris and continued my art practice while studying fine art at the Sorbonne.

**What was it like studying in Paris? Did living in such a renowned cultural capital enable you to view art differently?**

Certainly, we are influenced and shaped and reshaped by our experiences. As an artist, everything I have ever seen, heard, or smelled has been influencing my art. My outcome is a reflection of my life: who I am, where I come from.

Paris was definitely a major step forward — immersing myself in a city entwined with art, and viewing art as part of daily life.



**What are some main themes that you explore in your work?**

I'm interested in working with found opportunities: whether it be found space, raw materials, or objects. I enjoy the freedom to take on a broader and more experimental approach to space and materials. Working with the found object is my immediate connection with the specific locality I'm in, whether in urban and city environments, or in nature.

It's also a question of practicality, since we have been so often on the move from one location to another, from the city to the countryside. This slowly integrated my practice, and even defined my perception of life.

Transforming these materials into something new, a new life reborn within my work, yet retaining something of their original identity relates to the cycle of life – birth, death, and rebirth.

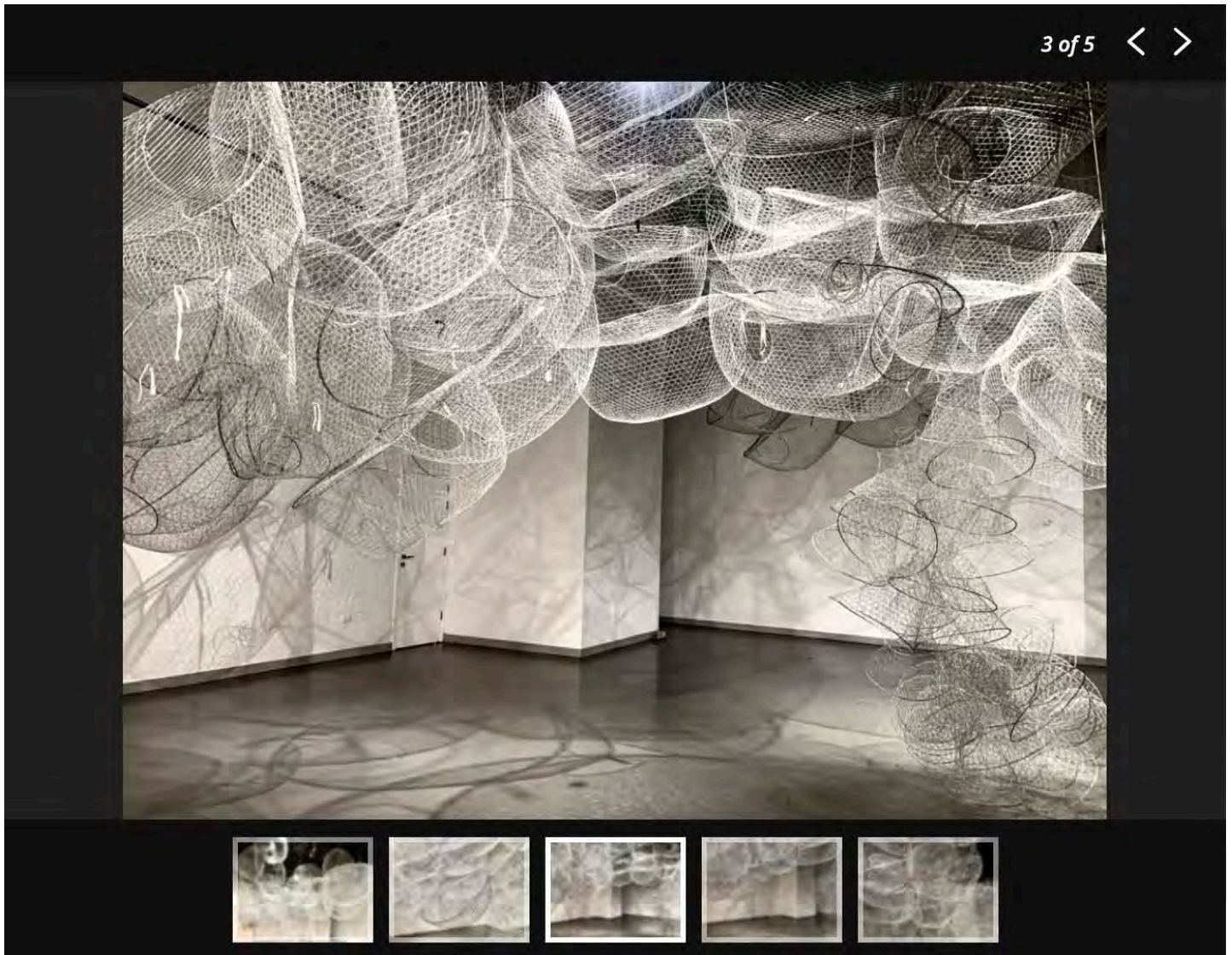


**Your art often interacts with nature. How did the interest in this subject come about, and is it linked with the fact that we are living in ecologically oriented times?**

Living in large cities always makes me feel the urge to reconnect with nature. There are twigs, branches, and leaves in many of my works, offsetting my urban life. They are also a reference to environmental issues: what is happening around us, the species which are going to be extinct, the connections which are going to be lost, the experiences which are going to be unknown, like playing in a tree's shade in a garden in Tehran.

**What was the inspiration behind your newest installation show, "The Sea Was Far Away And The Sky Further"?**

It's about the connection with the locality of Dubai: the sea, its culture, its people, its tradition. The inspiration came while revisiting the fishing ports, where the dhows are docked for fuel, food and water, with a huge pile of skillfully arranged fishing traps "gharaghir" — getting ready for a journey that sometimes lasts for days, far, far away, where there is nothing other than sea and sky.



**The installation feels like an experience, with the lighting, the shadows, and the soundtrack in the background. What do you hope visitors will take from it?**

To be immersed in the installation with all of their senses. The soundscape is intended to add another dimension and enhance that experience and disconnect you from the world outside.

# Wall Street International

## Shaqayeq Arabi. Dancing on Stilts

24 Jun — 12 Jul 2020 at the Signs and Symbols in New York, United States

27 JUNE 2020



Dancing on Stilts installed.

*Dancing on Stilts & traversing the soggy ground the blue sky is in the faraway horizon and the memories of that fertile land is running in my veins.*

*(Shaqayeq Arabi)*

signs and symbols is pleased to present Dancing on Stilts, a solo exhibition by artist Shaqayeq Arabi. The exhibition features a site-specific installation composed of found objects and natural, symbolic material, combining sculpture with painterly elements to allude to shifting relationships between representation and abstraction, memory and materiality, structure and sensation.

With Dancing on Stilts, Arabi continues an ongoing series of works entitled 'On Stilts', a series of precariously balanced structures that examine the tension between the discomfort of disequilibrium and the motivation to stand erect and independent, in circumstance otherwise wrought with uncertainty, precarity, and peril. To be in the world is to live immersed in a milieu of opposing forces within and around oneself; To accept these forces implies an acceptance of indeterminacy that both stems from and is a place of strength. Through her acts of the display of this precarity, Arabi not only accepts but embraces the conditions in which she lives. Natural materials, including sticks, bamboo, and twigs, have resonance for the artist, often serving as the artist's primary medium; each of these materials have innate qualities of flexibility and strength, without any a priori subservience to use value. The material's ability to adapt, change, and resist unyielding signification presents an image of strength not bound by restrictions or absolutes. This material polyvalence reveals the nature of this strength.

Although unencumbered by the determinants of use, Arabi's media, through her poetic practice of manipulation and transformation of such natural materials, nonetheless, erupts with evocative associations, replete with imagery, memory and emotion. Natural materials have a life span unto themselves; they possess internal and external existential references to the patterns of life and decay. With this installation, Arabi investigates the fragmentary nature of memory and its relationship to

actual objects in space. Her structures at once frame and highlight how we understand our physical surroundings: as built environments for the structure of memory, and as memory itself not a process of codification but rather of sensation. These sensations Arabi acknowledges, invites, and draws forth through her work.

Arabi's process is intuitive, spontaneous, and intimate. The installation is characteristic of Arabi's artistic process in its assemblage and transformation of found natural and industrial objects into architectural structures. Her materials are a bricolage of fragments and objects found throughout her daily life— including in this case a stalk of willow branches the artist discovered in an abandoned furniture shop--- cast away on the street or cast aside in her studio, before being reincarnated to assume another purpose. "I never ask myself why I have picked [the found objects] and what I am going to do with them. They eventually find their way into my work and suddenly I know the reason I have them in the studio, either because of their aesthetic or symbolic potency and most often for both reasons." Dancing on Stilts features the musical score "Soundscape," composed specifically for this installation by New York-based artist, filmmaker and musician Anthony Varalli.

**Shaqayeq Arabi** is a painter, sculptor and installation artist. She was born in Tehran and divides her time between her hometown, Dubai, and New York City. Arabi's work finds its point of departure in image, sound, and smell, as well as the sensitivity of the surrounding environment. In sketching, composing and connecting accumulated fragments together, Arabi traces her reminiscences, creating a tangible and touchable reality out of the emotions and sensations. She received her Bachelor in Graphic Design from Al-Zahra University, Tehran, a BFA from University of Valenciennes, France and an MFA from Sorbonne University, Paris. Arabi has had exhibitions in the Middle East, North America, and Europe – notably Roots, Total Arts, Dubai; Study of an Upturned Ziggurat, Dept. of Signs and Symbols, New York; and Bits And Pieces: Collages And Assemblages, Shirin Gallery, New York.

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## Signs and Symbols

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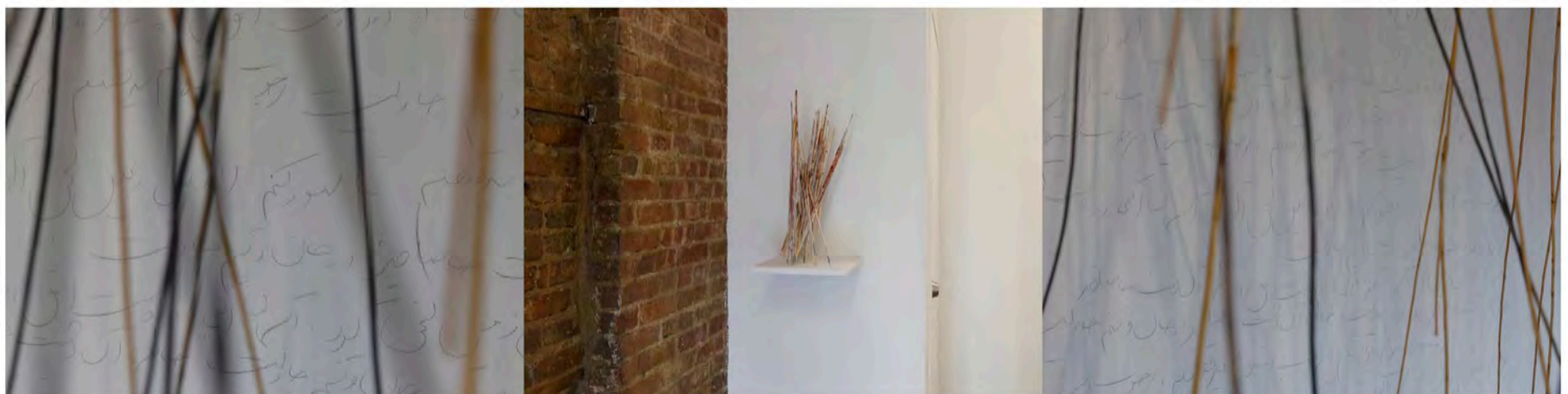
[Place profile](#)

Location

New York, United States

Founded in

2012



1. Dancing on Stilts installed.

2. Dancing on Stilts installed.

3. Dancing on Stilts installed.

## Shaqayeq Arabi's 'Upturned Ziggurat' Makes Its New York Debut in Brooklyn

She created the site-specific work from abandoned picture frames.

Amanda Thomas · October 6, 2015



Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols



Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols



“A lot of my work is about entering into dialogue with a particular city,” Iranian artist Shaqayeq Arabi told artnet News in an email.

Although she has shown her work extensively in the Middle East and in Europe, this is her first solo-show in New York. Her exhibition *Study of an Upturned Ziggurat* is currently on view at the Department of Signs and Symbols in Brooklyn.

The space was originally a studio but its function has expanded in recent years. It has just enough room to squeeze in pieces for an intimate viewing. Co-founder and curator Mitra Khorasheh explained to artnet News in an email, “What we do here is not just ‘selecting artworks’, its more commissioning an artist to create something in situ and developing ideas and concepts together.”

The large site-specific piece is made of abandoned picture frames and tree branches that Arabi found on nearby Brooklyn streets. The structure is lashed together with cloth and string, and light bulbs underneath cast shadows on nearby walls. The dimly lit room and the frames offer a skeletal shape of a tower, creating an immersive and meditative experience for viewers. Arabi said to artnet News in an email, “What interests me in site-specific work like this is the way in which it can engage all the senses.”

Arabi started creating site-specific installations ten years ago when she was given access to a larger studio. In 2009 Arabi and her husband, architect Dariush Zandi, used found objects from the site of a burned down fireworks warehouse in Al Quoz, Dubai, using melted safety pins and bits of the roof for pieces that they featured in their show *Scraps*. Her husband’s architectural background helped her expand her point of view.

Arabi told artnet News in an email, “He brings in that element of really looking at space.” The artist is following in the footsteps of assemblage artists, but she isn’t questioning the banality of the objects; instead, she is gesturing toward the organic qualities in natural and man-made objects and environments.

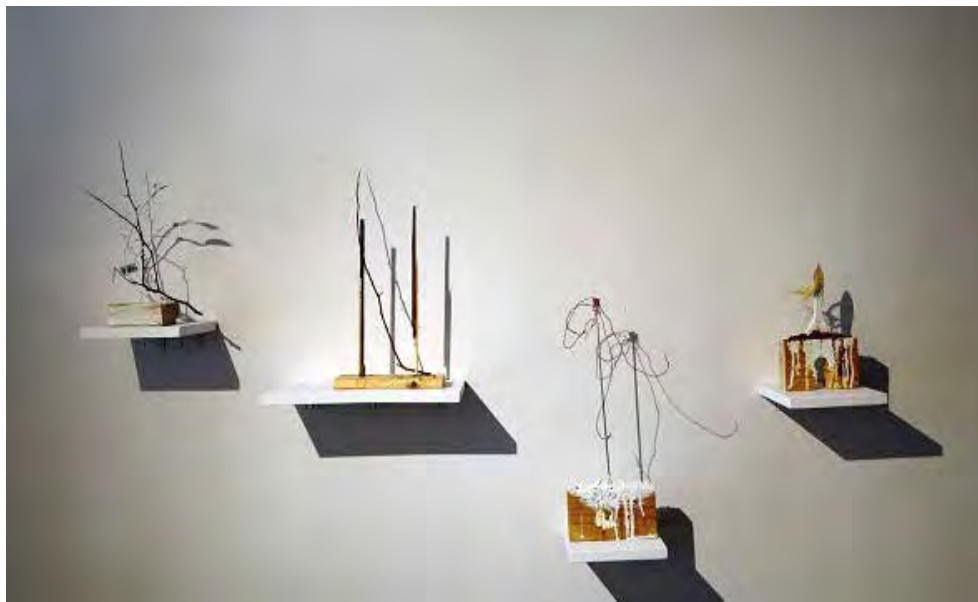


Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols

In a smaller room in the back there are other works to consider—six collages and four assemblages that are extensions of the upturned Ziggurat. The thin paper contrasts with the heavy branches used in the collage much like the wooden frames and branches contrasts with the shadows to create an anchored, yet open and inviting, space.

“What interests me the most about her work is the way in which she works; there is this organic process to her practice

where you never know what Shaqayeq will produce next.” Khorasheh told artnet News. “For me, its this mystery of never knowing what to expect that attracts me to her work.”



Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols

Study of an Upturned Ziggurat is on view at the Department of Signs and Symbols from October 3 – 30, 2015.



Shaqayeq Arabi.

# SHAQAYEQ ARABI AT DEPARTMENT OF SIGNS & SYMBOLS

Iranian artist Shaqayeq Arabi's first solo show in New York opened at the Department of Signs and Symbols in Brooklyn. The exhibition, entitled *Study of an Upturned Ziggurat*, ran from 3–30 October and featured a major site-specific installation consisting of picture frames, twigs and nets. Also on show were small-scale assemblage pieces and collage on paper works.

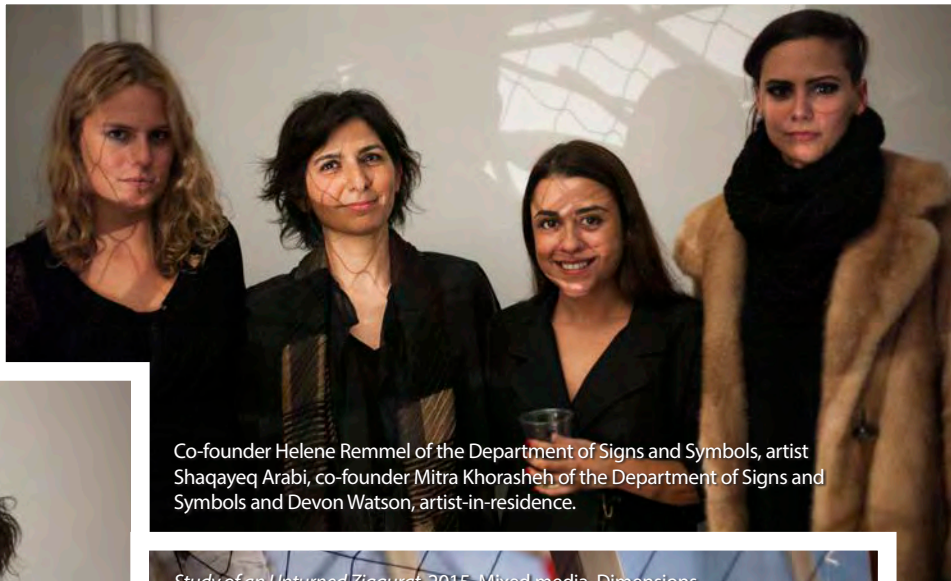


Auction Manager and curator Daneyal Mahmoud of the Watermill Centre, Strategic Director and art consultant Michelle Loh of Asia Contemporary Art Week, Shaqayeq Arabi, author Jane Ormerod, artist Serge Strosberg and art collector Peter Darrell.



Visitors at the opening.

Photography by Bridget Casey and Dariush Zandi. Images courtesy Department of Signs and Symbols.



Co-founder Helene Rimmel of the Department of Signs and Symbols, artist Shaqayeq Arabi, co-founder Mitra Khorasheh of the Department of Signs and Symbols and Devon Watson, artist-in-residence.



Daneyal Mahmoud, Dariush Zandi, founder of The Courtyard and Total Arts, Michelle Loh and Shaqayeq Arabi.



*Study of an Upturned Ziggurat*. 2015. Mixed media. Dimensions variable, site-specific installation.

## Shaqayeq Arabi. Study of an upturned ziggurat

3—30 Oct 2015 at the Signs and Symbols in New York, United States

Christian Viveros-Fauné · September 29, 2015



Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an upturned ziggurat. Courtesy of the artist.

The Dept. of Signs and Symbols is pleased to announce the exhibition: Study of an Upturned Ziggurat, Shaqayeq Arabi's first solo exhibition in New York. The exhibition will feature a site-specific installation made through an intuitive process of assembling urban and organic objects found and collected by the artist. The installation explores notions of transformation, intuition and the intersection of the urban and the natural. Study of an Upturned Ziggurat will be on view from October 3 through October 30, 2015. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, October 3 from 6 – 8 p.m.

Arabi's site-specific installation is emblematic of her work and her use of found natural and industrial objects. The structure consists of picture frames of various sizes that the artist collected on her first visit to the Dept. of Signs and Symbols. The artist builds upon the frames with tree branches, twigs and nets, assembling and tying the materials together using rope and cloth. The industrial and natural objects, both once essential to the existence of human life, maintain a past narrative while constructing a new continuum. The reference to an ancient ziggurat alludes to the story of the Tower of Babel, mythologized as a rectangular stepped tower. This allusion to mythical history weaves a line between architecture and sculpture, and their monumental essence. Yet the composition grounds the structure in the every day. The ephemerality and delicacy of nature destabilizes the installation creating a contrast to the imagery of the tall, strong, stone tower.

Describing the organic and intuitive nature of her process, Arabi states; "I enjoy journeys with no determined destination. I leave the idea to evolve to find its own shape and form, and the process to refine the concept and I'm part of the evolution." Her work is specific to the place and site of creation, with each sculpture or installation held together using only the found objects with no additional adhesive holding them in place. In her process of accumulating and assembling the

work, Arabi traces her reminiscences, creating a tangible reality out of her more personal sensations and associations. She and the work as a larger entity inform one another; the personal and the material interlock and are created simultaneously. The structure itself, built in situ, casts shadows on the walls, playing and interacting with its surroundings, presenting an interplay between Arabi's personal past, her memories and findings, and the actuality of the creation of the structure.

Shaqayeq Arabi is a painter, sculptor and installation artist living between Tehran, Dubai and New York City. Starting to paint and practice calligraphy in the early 1990s, she received her Masters in graphic design from Al-Zahra University Tehran, a BAF from University of Valenciennes, France and a MAF from Sorbonne University, Paris. Arabi's works are fundamentally abstract yet evoke a range of associations. For her, art is a form of spontaneous personal expression, as well as an exploration of her past and present memory. She finds her point of departure in image, sound and smell, as well as the sensitivity of the surrounding environment. Arabi has had exhibitions in the Middle East and Europe.

The Dept. of Signs and Symbols is a laboratory for innovative experimentation and expression. The curatorial program serves to nourish emerging artists, to disinhibit the ordinary and to incite the unexpected. Focused on interaction and visible process, the project space allows for critical exposure for the artists, as well as a fostering of curatorial voices and collaboration. Through this crossing of art and life, a constellation of people, ideas, backgrounds, intentions and dreams form. Open to the public and based within the distinctive neighborhood of Vinegar Hill, The Dept. of Signs and Symbols opened its door to the public in March 2015, with its inaugural exhibition presenting the work of Brooklyn-based artist Daniel Horowitz.

For more information or to make an appointment, please contact [info@deptofsignsandsymbols.org](mailto:info@deptofsignsandsymbols.org) or visit us at [www.deptof-signsandsymbols.org](http://www.deptof-signsandsymbols.org)



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[Place profile](#)

Location

**New York, United States**

Founded in

**2012**



Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an upturned ziggurat. Courtesy of the artist.



## Upturned Ziggurat

Study of an Upturned Ziggurat, Shaqayeq Arabi's first solo exhibition in New York.  
3—30 Oct 2015 at Department of Signs and Symbols

Amanda Thomas, October 16, 2015



Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an Upturned Ziggurat. Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols. Courtesy of the artist and artnet.

"A lot of my work is about entering into dialogue with a particular city," Iranian artist Shaqayeq Arabi told artnet News in an email.

Although she has shown her work extensively in the Middle East and in Europe, this is her first solo-show in New York. Her exhibition Study of an Upturned Ziggurat is currently on view at the Department of Signs and Symbols in Brooklyn.

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Arabi started creating site-specific installations ten years ago when she was given access to a larger studio. In 2009 Arabi and her husband, architect Dariush Zandi, used found objects from the site of a burned down fireworks warehouse in Al Quoz, Dubai, using melted safety pins and bits of the roof for pieces that they featured in their show Scrap. Her husband's architectural background helped her expand her point of view.

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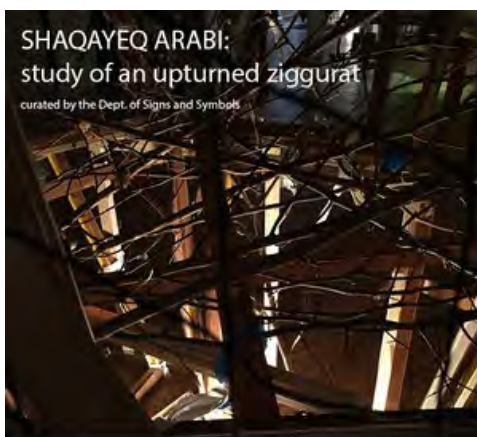


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*SHAQAYEQ ARABI: study of an upturned ziggurat*  
 October 3 – 30, 2015  
 Curated by The Dept. of Signs and Symbols  
 54 Hudson Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11201

October 3 – October 30 2015  
 Opening Reception: October 3, 6:00-8:00pm  
 DEPT. OF SIGNS & SYMBOLS  
 54 Hudson Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11201

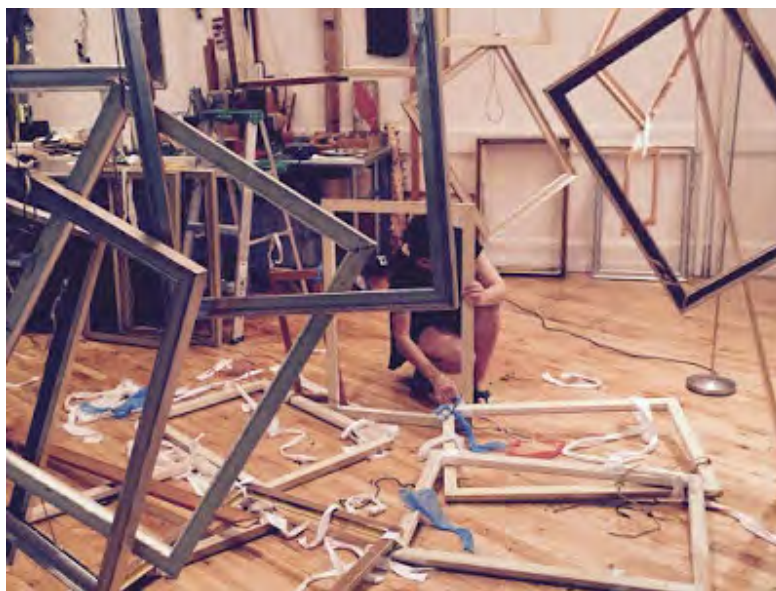
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Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an Upturned Ziggurat. Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols. Courtesy of the artist and Wall Street International.



Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an Upturned Ziggurat. Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols. Courtesy of the artist and Wall Street International.



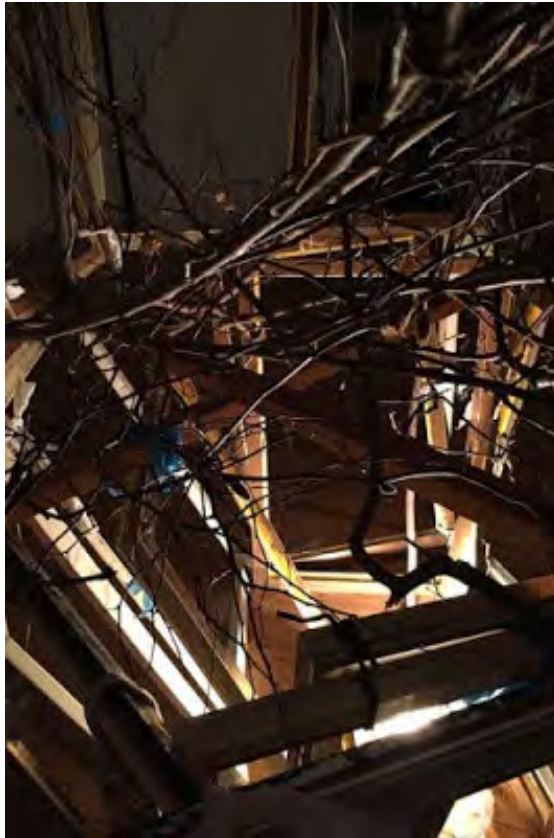
Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an Upturned Ziggurat. Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols. Courtesy of the artist and Wall Street International.



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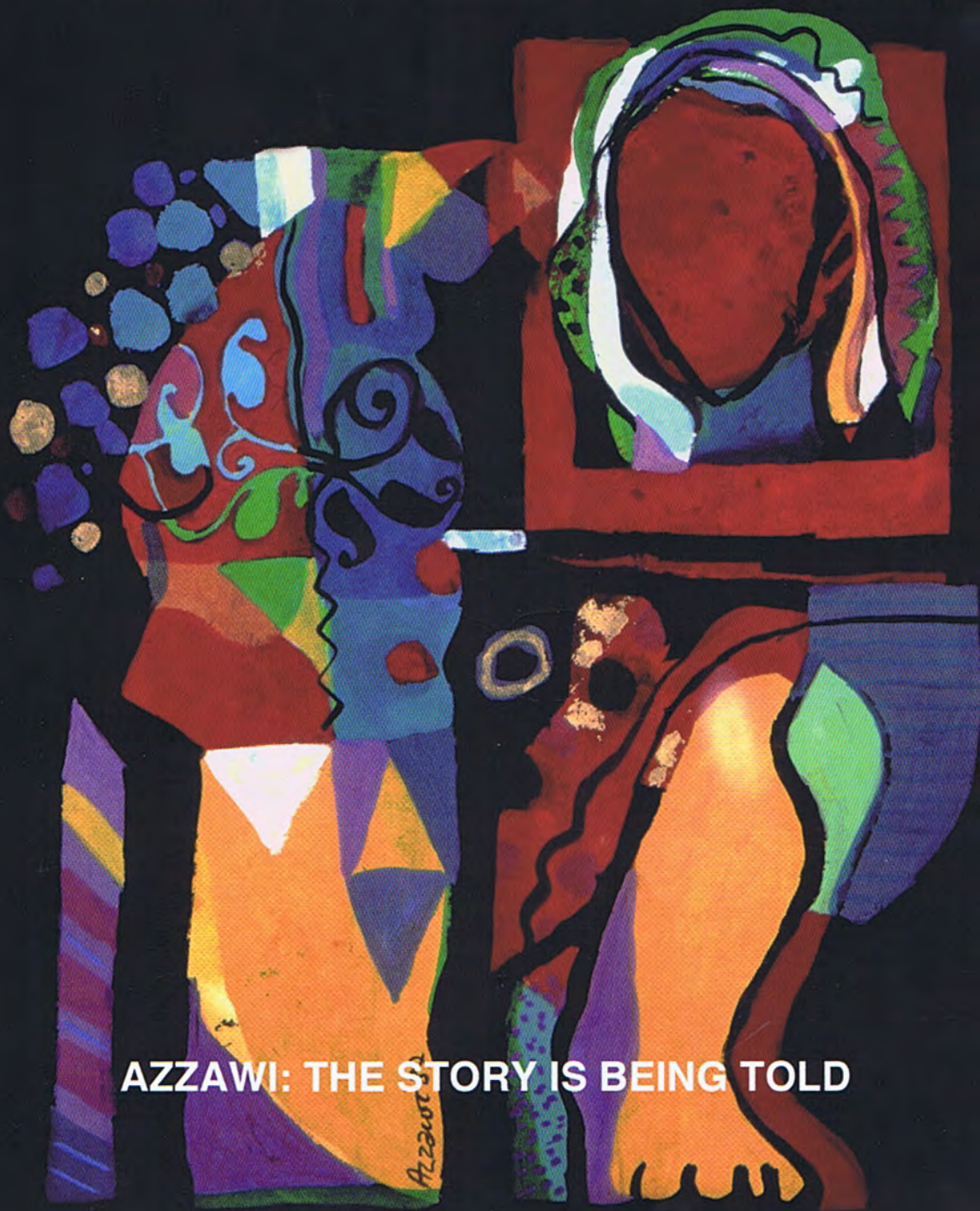
Shaqayeq Arabi, Study of an Upturned Ziggurat. Photo Credit: The Department of Signs and Symbols. Courtesy of the artist and Wall Street International.

# Contemporary

# Practices

VISUAL ARTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

VOLUME XVI: MAR 2015 - OCT 2015



AZZAWI: THE STORY IS BEING TOLD

## MIXING MEMORY AND DESIRE

By Anna Wallace-Thompson

*April is the cruellest month, breeding Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring Dull roots with spring rain. Winter kept us warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow, feeding A little life with dried tubers. T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland*

One enters by stepping around the bones of a wooden show displayed like a dinosaur skeleton under the shade of palm trees, before passing through a wide avenue, flanked by architectural facades of various lines, styles and sources. Upon entering the indoor space of the gallery, one walks into a strange, subterranean experience, in which the smells of earth and sand linger. Now imagine that smell, equally, the scent of underground. The slightly metallic scent of crumbly brown soil, the salty dust of a desert sand on your tongue as it rises in the air like a fine powder. Palm trees and shrubs in varying shades of brown and rust are placed around the concrete floors, either piled up like small corpses on a trolley, or suspended from the ceiling like some great pagan twig structure. It is human-like, a great scarecrow, flung above a sea of red desert sand. Around the walls, in stark contrast and even starker lines, are ink and paint drawings of winter roots, soft, smudged swathes of color in deep purples, greens and greys coming to rest within the gnarled and stringy crevices and sprouting ends of each root. A collaboration between Iranian artists Forough Aee and Shagayegh Arabi. Roots was an exhibition that was literally defined into the affects of subterranean, dormant power and the cycles and concentrations of energy found within it. For Arabi, Roots can be seen as a thematic continuation of previous shows - collaborations with her partner Dariush Zandi, Scraps (2009) and Sinking Ships (2012) both drew Arabi and Zandi's travels around the Emirates and their subsequent retrieval and preservation of items discarded and otherwise forgotten. The result of a fire at an industrial space in the gallery's neighbourhood of Al-Quoz. Scraps featured sculptures comprising melted and disfigured items from the warehouse's burnt remains - knife blades, generators, toothbrushes and bicycle pumps - all rusted and bent into philosophical new forms. Sinking Ships paid homage to discarded and often decaying traditional wooden show boats that had been dredged from waterside graveyards in Dubai's old Creek. Lovingly reassembled alongside photographs of old Dubai, they were a haunting memory of what once was and a tangible reminder of what had been forgotten in the wake of modern skyscrapers and rapid urban development. This third iteration then, Roots, featured sculptural objects created by Arabi from the desiccated remains of plant life that had been uprooted and subsequently collected by her from various sites in the region alongside Aee's depictions of winter roots. "I think that we approach the same subject from different points of view. Shagayegh has a gut instinct to protect that which has been uprooted whilst, I have observed, is something one notices amongst Iranians. Perhaps because we have both been uprooted and have then had down new roots in new countries," says Aee. Aee, in particular, suffered during the



Roots exhibition view | Shown in November 2020, in Dubai | United Arab Emirates. Courtesy of the artists.



Shagayegh Arabi, *Roots* • 1. Roots series, 2020, wood & glass. Courtesy of the artist.

Iranian Revolution, losing Zend Gallery, which he had co-founded. However to draw an analogy between Arabi and Aee as artists uprooted from their native Iran as solely forming the basis for Roots would not only be reductive, but would miss the point. Although both acknowledge the relevance of this observation, I do not think it is where the crux of their collaboration - nor the uniqueness of this exhibition - lies. Rather, in a desert environment such as Dubai, and one so characterized by the awareness of its urban landscape, we are presented with a complex and nuanced examination of the cyclical nature of life. Roots is both a promise of and elegy to verdant abundance and its effect on all life forms. The yin and yang nature of the primal life force is reflected in the complementary duality of Aee and Arabi as a man and woman, established and mid-career artists, two-dimensional ink drawings and paintings and three-dimensional sculptures and objects as well as the creative cycles of each artist: where one is returning to the simpler pleasures of pen and ink, the other is breaking away from classical painterly training to explore sculptural works and forms. Just as the confascation of Zend Gallery eventually led to Aee establishing what was to become the legendary D'Neen Street, so too did death herald a new beginning, where Aee's depictions of roots of fat, dormant, filled with the promise of a pregnant flourishing in spring Arabi's uprooted palm trees and shrubs are like tenderly tended patients, some embalmed in death, others suspended in a state of stasis, half alive, yet not yet dead. We are presented with the end and beginning of an endless cyclical process, one that goes back to the very foundations of time. In essence, we are invited to explore the memory of what once was, alongside the vision and desire for what could be. Aee's work too is cyclical, oscillating between the masculine and feminine, from *Rostam in the Dead* of *Winter* (2009), depicting that most macho of Iranian heroes, to his softer water color and ink paintings, featuring the bleeding shapes of dabbas and lips. "This series was interesting because I've never concentrated on the winter season as such," muses Aee. "*Rostam in the Dead* of *Winter* is in fact about spring for the whole idea is that there can only be rebirth if there is first death. There can only be a spring if winter first kills off what needs to be killed off, while life goes underground to wait for a time to come forth again." Indeed, in *Roots*, Aee has gone back to basics by creating a series of pen and ink drawings and paintings depicting the winter roots, which, as a seasonal artist, he found lying around his Paris kitchen. "This series was part of a holistic attitude towards the energy cycles that occur in the seasons in winter there is this feeling that it is getting dark, and a sense of lethargy as comes on as energy descends to consolidate and gestate. Creating these drawings was, in essence, to make myself feel good. I think art is a survival lifeline. I thought, OK, now that I've realized what this winter lethargy is all about, I am going to get moving and so I began concentrating and meditating on the whole idea and concept of roots," Aee explains. The finished product resembles in places the natural history drawings found reproduced as plates in old books: as carrots, beetroots, sweet potatoes and colerac are placed in rows, their gnarled and swollen shapes drawn in oil's lines. Other works, predominantly the paintings, resemble subterranean environments, with Aee's more familiar abstract brushstrokes making an appearance.

"Maybe the winter is a masculine season" muses Aue. "It doesn't give birth, but rather features the concentrated internal energy of seeds and roots waiting to come forth. The more you look at roots, the sexier they become. The more I worked with them, the more they started to do what your subconscious starts to do with a shape when you are respecting and reading it over and over." Hung on the walls around the gallery space, Aue's works presented these roots at eye level, giving the viewer the feeling of seeing them at ground level as if the entire space itself were partially submerged under the earth. Spread out over the gallery floor, encircled by these roots, lay Arabi's sculptural installations of dry, preserved and dormant palm trees and shrubs, where Aue observes Arabi has sought to preserve, collecting uprooted and dried flora during trips to the desert. Many come from dried out oases, while others have been collected around the urban environment of the UAE. Those living in the region may have observed the idiosyncratic approach to the vegetation soon in public spaces - much care, money and time is spent on planting and installing irrigation and watering systems. However, perhaps due to the extreme heat of the summer, many plants do not survive long and rather than nurture them, they are often simply pulled out and discarded for fresh replacements. "Seeing these uprooted plants fills me with great regret and shame, that we don't take care of things with the value and love they deserve. It is important to cherish life - trees, plants and soil, these are the very essence of nature. So much care and effort has gone into the nurture of these palm trees, and then they are left uprooted in the sand to die," explains Arabi. Where Aue's roots are dormant in winter, waiting for new life, Arabi's are in the winter of their life, making way for those roots, Arabi gathered, carried home, then gently cleaned, bathed and polished her rescued plants. This ritual of washing and cleansing can be likened to that of preparing a body for burial - and sadly, it is only in death that these plants are given the tender care they deserved in life. However, in doing so, it is as though in death these objects are also given new life. In Roots, viewers were presented with great palm trees suspended from metal chains from the ceiling or small palms, still partially alive when they had been uprooted, the last vestiges of green still clinging to their leaves, like feeble pulses on a heart monitor. They were carefully swaddled in cloth and sprayed with water, while elsewhere wax-coated shrubs were illuminated in a glass vitrine, adorned with colored string and beads, a cold, white light coming from below. The shrubs have been picked up out of their original context and have become precious, an object to be showcased behind glass. "You store different things in your heart and your head. I collect certain objects unconsciously without knowing why, or when I will use them. I put them on shelves in my studio as well as in my memory," says Arabi. What becomes uncomfortable is how human-like some of the figures are - both Aue and Arabi drive home the links that bind all living things together - the suspended palm tree very clearly has a head and limbs, while some of Aue's winter roots more than strongly resemble mandrakes. Themselves held to resemble human figures since Biblical times, it is a sobering thought that all living beings are so closely bound through their very fragility and dependence on the forces of nature and those of us who have an impact



Shaheryar Arabi, *Roots* series, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 100x100cm. Courtesy of the artist.



1. Shaheryar Arabi, *Winter roots* series, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 100x100cm. Courtesy of the artist.  
2. Shaheryar Arabi, *Winter roots* series, 2014, mixed media on paper, 100x100cm. Courtesy of the artist.  
3. Shaheryar Arabi, *Winter roots* series, 2014, mixed media on paper, 100x100cm. Courtesy of the artist.



on them. It reminds us that we are at once both masters and victims of our own desires.

"Crossroads present a space where things can come together and be seen by many different kinds of people who then leave, for whenever they are going to or coming from, because that's what crossroads are about - comings and goings" muses Aue.

"The phenomenon of uprootedness is something everybody has observed within this city, and so they had an immediate connection with the work. They were able to connect with it and speak of their own experiences. On the other hand, we are planning for the exhibition to travel to Tehran. Just outside of Tehran there is an orchard made up of pomegranate and fig trees, deserted for years, and all of the trees within it are dead. I begged the owners not to remove them. I think there could be a real chance to do something interesting with them within the Persian context if we are able to show a new version of this exhibition there" says Arabi.

Roots provided a new way to life around us. Indeed, in a cultural scene that is more often than not obsessed with proving its ability to push the conceptual envelope with the best of them, an exhibition that saw concept and execution in harmony with each other, with a subject matter rich and multilayered enough to stay with the viewer long after they had left. "There is a time for everything and everything in its time" concludes Aue.

#### About the Writer

Ana Wallace-Thompson currently handles communications at London-based Kasha Hidebrand Gallery on Fitzrovia's Eastcliffe Street. She is also a freelance journalist specialising in Middle Eastern art and culture. Graduating in 2003 from Helsinki University, with a BA in English Philology, she also studied at Suzhou University receiving her MA in English Literature in 2005. Wallace-Thompson has written for The Art Newspaper, Frieze, Harper's Bazaar Middle East, Shawa's, Vision magazine and Atef, among others. She is Sub-Editor of Sorbet and is London Correspondent for Canvas, where she was previously Assistant Editor and worked for five years before moving to London after 16 years based in Dubai. Something of a global nomad, she has also lived in Germany, Singapore and Italy and is currently working on a collection of short stories inspired by the Middle East as well as her first novel. Her creative writing has been published in the *Aesthetica Creative Writing Annual* and *Les Advers: Of Others*.



# Thoughts on nature

The destruction of our environment, and the cycle of energy and life are the themes that run through a joint exhibition by two Iranian artists



In *sync* Shaqayeq Arabi's installations and Fereydoun Ave's mixed-media paintings on show

By **JYOTI KALSI**  
Special to Weekend Review

**R**oots, a joint exhibition by Iranian artists Shaqayeq Arabi and Fereydoun Ave, is about the beauty of nature and about respecting mother Earth. The two artists, based in Dubai and Paris respectively, have explored different aspects of this theme in their own unique ways. Arabi has used found materials to create installations that speak of the destruction of our environment whereas Ave reflects on the cycle of energy and life in nature through his mixed-media paintings.

Arabi's studio is filled with a variety of materials that she picks up from the streets in Dubai. "I never know why I am attracted to these objects. But when I start working, these things find their place in my installations, and the reason I subconsciously picked them up becomes clear," she says.

The concept for this show was inspired by some uprooted bushes that she found living by the side of a road. She brought them to her studio, covered them with a layer of wax and is presenting them in an illuminated glass case. Objects such as rags, wires and rope can be seen entwined in the dead branches and roots. And the artist has added pieces of paper torn out from a book of poems by Pablo Neruda. "Uprooted plants, covered with all kinds of rubbish, are a common sight in urban areas where new construction is taking place. They speak of growing urbanisation, increasing pollution and our lack of regard for mother Earth. I used Neruda's poem *Memories within me* in this work because these bushes carry a lot of memories within them. Covering

the dead bushes with a layer of wax and putting them in a glass case expresses my desire to preserve nature, which is so precious," she says.

In other installations, Arabi has used palm saplings, and roots and trunks of palm trees that were uprooted to make way for new roads and buildings. The guarded roots are suspended from the ceiling as a stark reminder of their cruel separation from the Earth, and of the growing distance between human beings and nature. The installations compel viewers to appreciate the beauty of nature as well as to think deeply about our relationship with it.

Ave's series of mixed-media paintings on paper and canvas, titled *Winter Roots*, also contemplates our relationship with nature. It features realistic illustrations of various root vegetables. Many of the paintings are split into horizontal sections, with each individual canvas representing different strata of soil and the roots placed in the lower layers. "In winter we usually feel low in energy, and this can lead to depression. But I decided to use this in a creative way by making very realistic paintings of the different types of roots I was eating in winter. The process helped me to understand that energy cycles change with the seasons; and in winter energy becomes subterranean, and gets concentrated in the roots, cocooned deep inside the womb of the Earth, to burst forth once again in the spring," Ave says.

■ *Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.*

■ *Roots will run at The In Between Space at Courtyard until December 4.*

## King and the hearts



Yasmin Sinal is constantly looking for ways to make art simple and accessible to everybody. In her latest show, *Conference of the Birds* (above) the Dubai-based artist of Iranian and Hungarian origin has used recycled cardboard, a needle and thread to create beautiful sculptures of a variety of birds. Sinal is also conducting workshops to teach this technique to all art lovers.

The show is inspired by Persian poet Farid-uddin Attar's famous poem, *The Conference of the Birds*. The poem tells the story of all the birds in the world gathering to decide who should be their king. They decide to find the legendary Simorgh, a mythical Phoenix-like bird that lives on top of the Qaf mountain. Only 30 birds managed to complete the long and difficult journey. But all they found was a lake in which they saw their own reflections.

The story, which plays with the dual meaning of Simorgh — the legendary bird and si morph, which means 30 birds — is profoundly spiritual. Each bird in the story represents a human falling that prevents human beings from attaining enlightenment. And their journey involves crossing seven valleys that represent the different stages that, according to Sufi philosophy, one must traverse to realise the true nature of God. The 30 birds that completed this journey thus realised that the Simorgh or god resides within them and is reflected in the totality of existence.

"I have recently moved to Dubai and saw a hoopoe for the first time. I really liked this bird and it was the first one I made in this series. I was really excited to find out that in Attar's story, the hoopoe was the leader of the birds. I have made 15 of the 30 birds that completed the journey, and the remaining 15 will be made by my students in the workshops," Sinal says.

The birds include an owl, a rooster, a stork, playful parrots, a peacock and a Simorgh, depicted as a creature with a human head, body of a bird and a lion's feet. Instead of paint, Sinal has used coloured cardboard and paper to create the feathers, crests and tails of the birds; and rather than using glue, she has sewn together the cardboard pieces with coloured thread. The birds are all perched atop stacks of shoe-boxes that have been painted white and decorated with cut-outs of traditional decorations found in Persian mosques.

"I have tried to reflect the spiritual soul in these ordinary birds," Sinal says. "And the stitches on the sculptures represent all of us. In our lives we go through a lot of pain and sorrow, but we try to stitch ourselves together and carry on," she adds.

*Conference of the Birds* will run at Total Arts at Courtyard until December 4.



Fereydoun Ave, Winter Roots

## فریدون آو و شقایق عربی؛ ریشه‌هایی که بی‌ریشگی را نمایش می‌دهند

کیانوش فرید  
نقاش

18 نوامبر 2014 - 27 آبان 1393

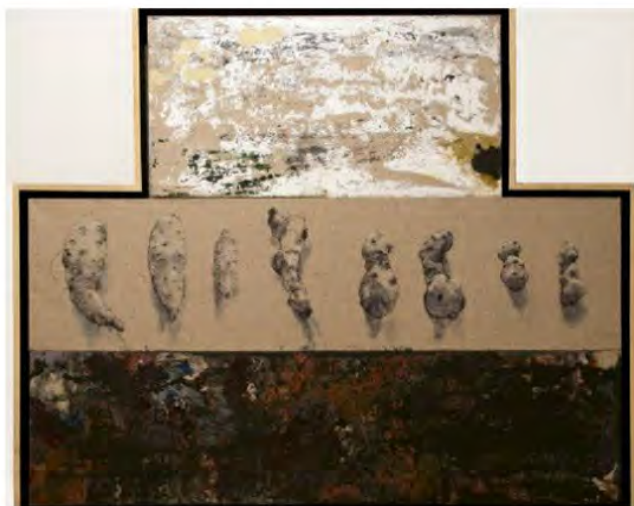
هم‌رسانی



نقاشی‌هایی از فریدون آو و چیدمان‌هایی از شقایق عربی با عنوان "ریشه‌ها" در نمایشگاه مشترکی در گالری توتال آرت دوبی برگزار شده است.

کارهای فریدون آو بر روی کاغذ و بوم با مداد و جوهر خلق شده‌اند و شقایق عربی در چیدمان‌هایش از ریشه‌های درختان و گیاهانی که از خاک بیرون زده‌اند، استفاده کرده است.

نقاشی‌های دو بعدی فریدون آو در کنار حجم‌های سه بعدی شقایق عربی برای القای مفهومی واحد، شکل‌هایی طبیعی را پدید آورده‌اند و مکمل هم شده‌اند.



شقایق عربی درباره این نمایشگاه می گوید که نمایشگاه ریشه ها حاصل دو نگاه مختلف، هم در ایده و هم در اجرا به یک موضوع مشترک است.

خانم عربی می گوید که ریشه های زمستانی آقای آو بیانی از انرژی ذخیره شده در زمین در طول زمستان است، درست مثل مادری که آماده است تا فرزندش را به دنیا بیاورد. این کارها نشان دهنده چرخه ای طبیعی است.

او در باره کارهای خودش هم می گوید: "من به طور غریزی چیزهایی را در اطرافم جمع می کنم. این بار هم شروع کردم به جمع کردن ریشه ها."



شقایق عربی ریشه هایی را به کار می برد که از زمین کنده شده و در واقع دیگر در جای اصلی خود نیستند. به این ترتیب او با این فرم نوعی از بی ریشه شدن را با خود ریشه ها نشان می دهد.



اما امیدوار است که این ریشه های ریشه کن شده، دوباره جان بگیرند و ریشه بدوانند. این ریشه های کنده شده، نشانی از همه دارای های ما و هویت ما هستند که در حال از دست رفتنند اما امید به نگه داشتن آنها هنوز با آدمی است.

خودش در این باره می گوید: "بعضی از این ریشه ها نخل هایی کوچکی بودند که زنده بودند و من در کارم خاک را کنار آنها گذاشتم. به آنها اسپری می زدم تا بعد بتونم دوباره آنها را بکارم و حفظشان کنم."

فریدون آو متولد ۱۳۲۴ در تهران و فارغ التحصیل رشته ی هنرهای کاربردی برای تئاتر از دانشگاه آریزونا و زیباشناسی فیلم از دانشگاه نیویورک است.

او پس از اتمام تحصیلاتش در دهه چهل به ایران باز می گردد و به عنوان طراح و مدیر هنری با انجمن فرهنگی ایران و آمریکا، کارگاه نمایش، جشن هنر شیراز و رادیو و تلویزیون ملی ایران کار می کند.

فریدون آو در سالهای گذشته بیشتر به نقاشی عکاسی و مجسمه سازی رو آورده و تعدادی از آثار در موزه های معتبر دنیا چون موزه بریتانیا، موزه هنرهای معاصر تهران، موزه متروپلیتن نیویورک و موزه ژرژ پمپیدو پاریس نگه داری می شود.



شقایق عربی متولد سال ۱۳۵۳ در تهران نقاشی را از آیدین آغداشلو آموخته است و در چند سال گذشته بیشتر به کارهای سه بعدی و چیدمان روی آورده است.



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# WEEKEND REVIEW

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## Resurrecting the past

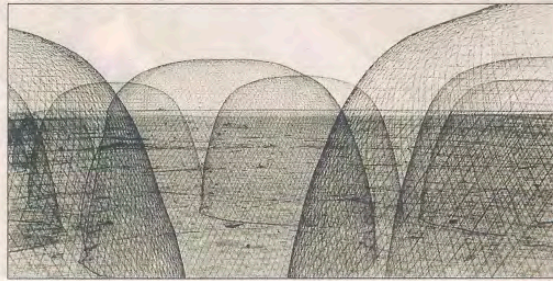
Two Dubai-based Iranian artists try to preserve the rich maritime heritage of the city

By JYOTI KALSI  
Special to Weekend Review

**D**ariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi's latest exhibition, titled *Sinking Ships*, is a nostalgic look at a way of life that is fast disappearing. The show, featuring a series of old photographs of Dubai and installations of a restored dhow and fishing nets, celebrates the close relationship that the people of the UAE have had with the sea, and highlights the need to preserve traditional culture and values for future generations. The two Dubai-based Iranian artists have recreated the past to explore notions of deterioration, fragility, vulnerability and changing cultural landscapes.

Zandi came to Dubai in 1978, and as an architect, town planner and urban designer, he has been directly involved in the development of the city. He has a passion for photography and has been documenting the city's changing landscape with his camera over the past three decades. He has also explored the desert and the wadis of the UAE and has shared his experiences and photographs through the *Off-Road in the Emirates* books. Arabi, who is a painter, sculptor and installation artist, shares Zandi's love for the outdoors, and the couple spends as much time as they can camping out in the desert and sailing in the creeks.

The photographs selected for the show were taken by Zandi 30 years ago. The black-and-white pictures offer a glimpse of the pristine beauty of the area around the Dubai Creek in those days. They include dramatic images of dhows casting their reflection on the water and traditional fishing



Above: A black-and-white shot taken by Dariush Zandi of dhow reflections on water  
Top: An image of an abandoned, sinking dhow

nets arranged on the shore like modern abstract compositions. Also seen are the boatyards by the creek, sunken dhows waiting to be repaired, the shacks where the fishermen wove their nets, and the birds and the greenery that abounded in the area.

"In those days, just a short walk from my home would take me to the creekside, which was like being in the wilderness. I loved to go there on Friday mornings and take pictures. A recent request from a friend for some of my photographs sparked the idea of exhibiting these pictures. These images are poignant because, today, the wooden dhows are being replaced by fibreglass boats, and most of the boatyards do not exist anymore. The shacks where the

fishing nets were woven by hand are also abandoned now," Zandi says.

The installation accompanying the photographs is an old dhow that the couple fished out of the creek and restored. The weather-beaten wooden boat, covered with barnacles, and with a huge chunk missing on the side, speaks volumes about the changing times. "During our excursions we have come across many abandoned dhows left to rot and fall apart in sandy graves, buried beneath the shifting tides in the creek. And it makes us sad to see this neglect. The dhow is an integral part of the history of the UAE. It played a key role in pearl diving, fishing and trade, which were the main sources of livelihood then. It was the sym-

bol of a seafaring nation. This installation is a reminder of the UAE's heritage and the need for preserving it," Arabi says.

Creating this installation proved more difficult than they had expected. "Last year we had seen hundreds of abandoned dhows in the Dubai Creek, but when we went looking for one this year, there were none. The thought that they had been disposed of made us even more keen to highlight this issue. We searched the creek in Umm Al Quwain and spotted this decaying dhow in the water. We had to wait till the tide was low enough to get to it, and it took us hours to salvage the pieces. After we brought it to the gallery, we had to figure out how to fit the pieces together, just like the original boat builders had done. We felt like archaeologists piecing together a moment from the past," Arabi says. They also found some abandoned fishing nets in the creek, which they have filled with pieces of coral to create another resurrection of the past.

"We all have to ensure that future generations do not forget the role of the dhow in the development of this country. We are happy that we have been invited by a school to work with the students on restoring another dhow. And we hope this show will inspire viewers to respect traditions," Zandi says. "We travel around the world and have seen that everywhere traditional ways of life are disappearing in the wake of modernisation. We know that modernisation is necessary and good, but, old traditions must be cherished and preserved."

Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.

Sinking Ships will run at Total Arts at the Courtyard until April 30.

## Shaqayeq Arabi: “Memories Within”

Von moneycab – 25. Oktober 2012 17:48

Eingestellt unter: [Art](#), [Lifestyle](#), [Style](#)



**Zürich – In ihrer Solo Ausstellung zeigt Shaqayeq Arabi Installationen und Malereien der Werkserie “Memories Within”. Inspirationsquelle für die iranische Künstlerin, war eine dürre, blasse Landschaft mit einem staubigen Horizont aus ausgetrockneten Palmen. Einige stehen noch, wie vernarbte, gedrehte griechische Säulen, andere, unter ihrem Gewicht zusammengesunken, liegen bereits auf dem Boden, verformt und verzogen in unterschiedlichen Ausformungen der Deformation. Von der einst üppigen, grünen Oase sind nur noch Skelette geblieben.**

Die Szenen des Verfalls regten Arabi an, wiederherzustellen was die Bäume einst waren – aus Mitgefühl sammelte sie ausgetrocknete Büsche und Pflanzen, dessen zerknitterte Wurzeln im trockenen Boden stecken blieben. Sie aufzubewahren bedeutet für Arabi ihr Leben zu verlängern, einen Moment einzufangen und ihre Erinnerungen wertzuschätzen, die Schönheit in ihrem Tod zu finden und sie dadurch auf ein Neues erblühen zu lassen.

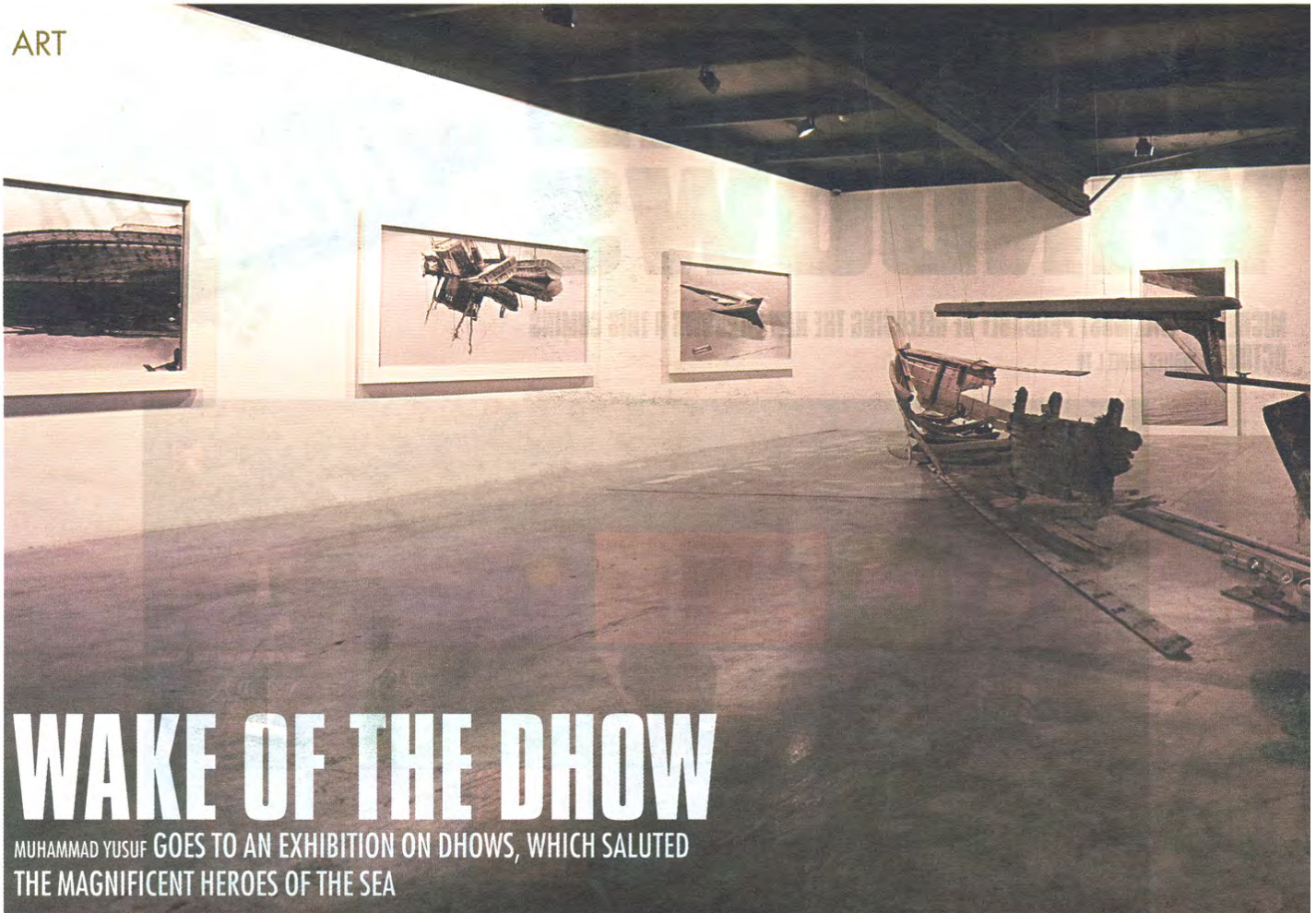
### **Traurige, merkwürdig schöne Landschaft**

Die Serie abstrakter Acryl auf Leinwand Gemälde “Memories Within”, fanden ihren Ausgangspunkt im Abbild, Klang und Geruch dieser Landschaften. Durch skizzieren, arrangieren und verbinden der einzelnen Elemente, folgte Arabi den Spuren der Erinnerung und kreierte eine tangible und fühlbare Realität aus dem Gefühl heraus und den Empfindungen, die durch die traurige, merkwürdig schöne Landschaft ausgelöst wurden. (AB/mc/hfu)

- [Weitere Informationen bei der AB Gallery](#)

**Schlagwörter:** [AB Gallery](#), [Arabi](#), [Ausstellung](#), [Kunst](#)

ART



## WAKE OF THE DHOW

MUHAMMAD YUSUF GOES TO AN EXHIBITION ON DHOWS, WHICH SALUTED THE MAGNIFICENT HEROES OF THE SEA

Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi



The recent exhibition of dramatic black and white photographs of dhows titled *Sinking Ships* by Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi of Total Arts, Dubai, was a nostalgic take on the past glory and current state of the sailing vessels. The photographers discovered that these traditional ships, once lovingly looked after by sailors and traders, feted by singers, written about by authors and admired for their prowess on the seas and used prolifically in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean region, are now lying discarded and abandoned along coastlines in the UAE and elsewhere in the area, forming the detritus of a marine tradition.

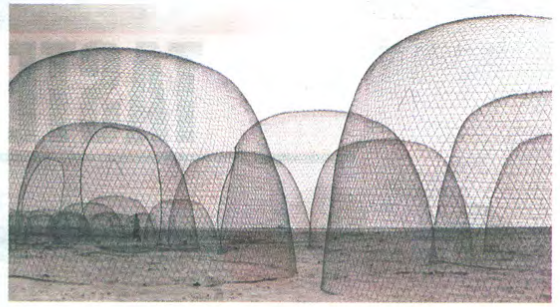
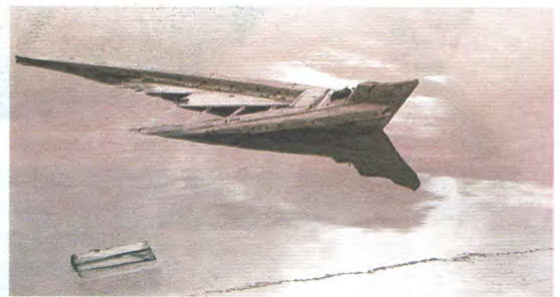
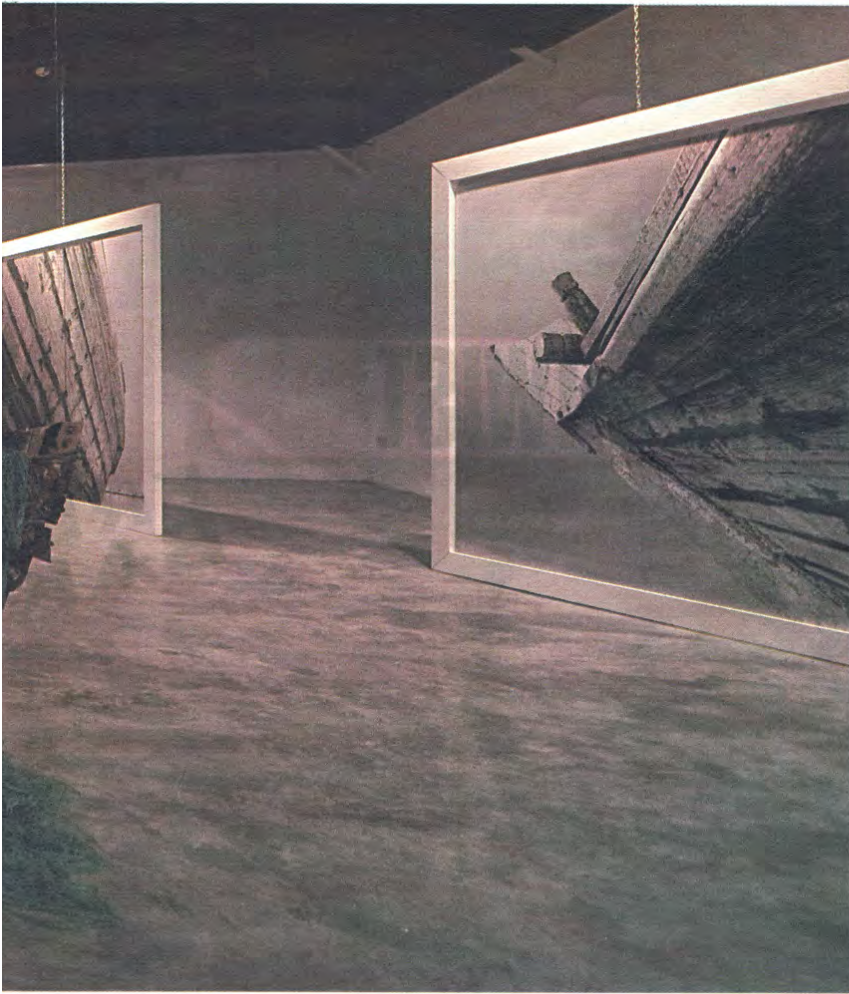
The photographs were taken thirty years ago, and presented the awesome spectacle of the calling of seafaring. The photographers are experienced heritage buffs. Recording vanishing traditions, exploring off road historical locations and documenting them through photographs and text, is second nature to them.

They were not happy to merely sigh over the fate of these one-

time behemoths of the sea. They wanted to show them in all their power and glory, and capture them as they looked when they were in the prime of their life.

So the photographs, despite the pathos, also brought out the fine details of the carving ingrained in the vessels, their enormous heft and the proud set of their prows. All of these, alas, now lie semi-submerged or rotting in some corner of a deserted coast, uncared for and unprepossessing. Sic transit gloria mundi.

The river is within us, the sea is all about us; The sea is the land's edge also, the granite Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses Its hints of earlier and other creation: The starfish, the horseshoe crab, the whale's backbone; The pools where it offers to our curiosity The more delicate algae and the sea anemone. It tosses up our losses, the torn seine, The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar



And the gear of foreign dead men.  
(The Dry Salvages, T S Eliot).

Total Arts never hosts an exhibition which feeds an impulse only to see and scoot. On the contrary, the gallery is a thinking man's art space. This time too, it did not fail to provoke the sense of thought. If one felt downcast at the tragedy displayed before him, he was also nudged fiercely to think about the time when the dhow held the pride of place on the seas and when its workplace was as wide as where the winds would take it.

In their heyday, dhows were the primary means of transport, used to carry items like fruit, fresh water or merchandise, along the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and East Africa. Even now, they make commercial journeys between the Arabian Gulf and East Africa, using sails as their only means of propulsion (though the diesel engine is not unknown). Their cargo is mostly dates and fish to East Africa and mangrove timber to the lands in the Arabian Gulf. They often sail south with the monsoon in winter

or early spring, and back again to Arabia in late spring or early summer.

Through the centuries, Hadhramis from Yemen, as well as Omanis, came to Beypore, Kerala, India, to build dhows. The reasons were the availability of good timber in the forests of Kerala, the availability of good coir rope and also the presence of skilled carpenters specialised in ship building (the sheathing planks of a dhow's hull were held together by coconut rope instead of nails). Beypore dhows are known as 'Uru' in Malayalam, the local language of Kerala (which is the mother tongue of yours truly). Yemenis are still active in the Uru business in Kerala.

The dhow-chroniclers of Total Arts were not content only to display their photographs. They embellished the show with fishing nets, coral and seashells, which added to the ambience. To enhance the feel, a salvaged dhow, mostly in one piece but whose missing lots could be imagined, was wreathed by a fishy smell, which the hosts had thoughtfully not scrubbed off. It

was a fine way of wafting in memories of the sea.

The dhow has played a unique and integral part in the history of the United Arab Emirates. As a diving boat, it carried pearl divers out to sea for months at a time; as a trade vessel it sailed far and wide, bridging the divide between various ports and exporting pearls and bringing back food, spices, textiles and other items from Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Africa and India. Unique in structure and design and designed to weather the wind and wave, it was the country's lifeblood, linking the many arteries of its trade routes together - a powerful symbol of a seafaring nation.

However, with the discovery of oil, the sea, and therefore the dhow, diminished in importance, and today many of these majestic boats are abandoned and derelict in the country, left prey to the elements until they fall apart. As the old generation passes on taking away a good part of seafaring history and modernity and progress take over, these great steeds of the sea now lie at the bottom of sandy

graves, covered by the rolling coastal dunes or buried beneath the shifting tides.

Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it; On a halcyon day it is merely a monument, In navigable weather it is always a seamarck To lay a course by: but in the sombre season Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

(The Dry Salvages, TS Eliot)

The fast-dying maritime history of the UAE that was the focus of the exhibition could not therefore have come a day too soon. The show was the pictorial presentation of a cultural landscape, in both literal and symbolic states of decay. Photography and installation had come together to create a nostalgic resurrection of the past and an exploration of notions of deterioration, fragility and vulnerability, with the subtexts being ethical and ideological displacement. But though tinged with melancholy, there was something inspiring and majestic about the silhouettes of the dhows. They re-emerge like the phoenix, through

efforts such as that of Total Arts'.

Artist, architect, town planner, photographer, author and off-roader, Iran-born Zandi has influenced the Dubai skyline over three decades. His love for the city began upon arrival in 1978. He established the first art gallery in Al Qouz, Total Arts at the Courtyard, for contemporary art and photography. Photography is Zandi's natural passion, having taken his first pictures as a boy. "My camera has been like a faithful companion on all my trips," he says.

Arabi is a painter, sculptor and installation artist with a career stretching back over twenty years. Tehran-born, she started painting and calligraphy in the early 1990s and then trained in graphic design in university. She later moved to Paris, where she studied Fine Arts, earning a Masters. She has a studio in Dubai and her paintings are resolutely abstract, but nonetheless animated. "They are a form of spontaneous personal expression, an inward journey, a response to my surroundings, to past and present memory," she says.

# گلستانه

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### مردن مؤلف

نگاهی به بوهای مجله شقایق عربی  
همايون عسكري سپريزي



۱. هر آن چیز که هستی نیافته است، هرگز از میان نپوش نخواهد رفت. در ویکی‌پدیا:تفاوت مونسیت

طرحی بی‌سراجام یا داستانی بی‌سراجام اگر گوشه انبیه نفاش مرده‌ای یا زیر آلودگی از دست‌نوشته‌های نخوانده نویسنده‌ای در گذشته باقی مانده باشد، ظنم آن که چیزی جز ناگهانی خلق آن نیست، چه بسا ارزشی فراتر از دیگر آثار به ظاهر نام و نام حلق آن دارد. فارغ از آن که متعلق به هنرمند یا نویسنده‌ای شهر باشد که پس از مرگ وی به پهلای گرفتار فروخته یا گردآوری شده و در قالب کتاب یا یک نمایشگاه عرضه گردد، شاید از آن رو که سندی است گواه بر تلاش‌های ذهنی و مرزهای مهران خلق خویش، هرچند که در نهایت نتوانسته است از عیب‌های افعال و واژگان با که از کشیدن و رنگ آمیزی چندباره طرحی بر بوم چیزی بیافریند شایسته عنوان هنر که مخاطب آن را با تنگ نظری یا گشاده دستی بر آن چه به او عرضه می‌شود تا ببیند و بخواند اطلاق می‌کند، نه آن که حتی از وجود آن بی‌خبر باشد. در گوشه انبیه‌ای متروک یا در کوهی از جملاتی خط خورده و مطروک «دست‌نوشته‌های آکنده از خط خورده‌گی‌های شاعر نیست که اگر چه گلابی شدن او با زبان و موسیقی واژگان را آشکار می‌سازد، اما سرانجام به سطرهای عاری از خط خورده‌گی بر صفحه‌ای از یک کتاب بدل شده است. با آلودگی‌های مدادی یک نفاش هم‌نیست که نهایتاً به طرحی پیراسته بر قامت یک بوم در آمده است. ناگهان با آن که می‌تواند الهام‌بخش خلق خود در فرایند خلق اثر دیگر باشد، اما ماهیت آن از نثرین و تجربه متمایز می‌نماید هم



در حوزه زبان، یا اثری که نام و هنرمندش را از یاد برده‌ام که دیواری است که نقاشی هزار ساعت به آن خیره مانده بود، از این دست‌اند نمونه جذاب دیگر، حکایت یک مایکروسرای زبانی است که بر آن بود در رقابتی با دیگر شاعران شعر برای کوکو بنویسد. در تمام شب کوکو می‌خواند، او می‌نوشت و خط می‌زد تا صبح سر رسید و آوای برنده خاموش شد. شاعر در نهایت عجز چنین نوشت: کوکو، کوکو، سرانجام سپیده دمید. جمله این اثر را آن‌که از نثرایی در نوشتن شعری با کشیدن یک نقاشی یا سخن گفتن از معنای مفهومی برآمده‌اند، اما مدعایی بر نثرایی شاعر با هنرمند در بیان چرایی و چگونه‌گی نثرایی خویش است، به سان کسی که از خستگی خود می‌گوید نه آن‌که از فرط خستگی او را بازی سخن گفتن نذر نماند. لیکن در خصوص ناامان‌ها، علت ناگهانی رزی سر به مهر است زیرا باره ناموجود از اثر همان که آن را ناگهان می‌گذارد همیشه در ذهن هنرمند و تنها از آن باقی می‌ماند. رازی است که ضرورتاً برایش متعالی ندارد از آن سبب که می‌تواند به سادگی نانی از ضعف میزبان خلق آن باشد، یا به هر دلیل بی‌اهمیت و با اهمیت دیگر، کند و کار در چرایی ناگهانی یک اثر همان اندازه بیهوده می‌نماید که کشش در خصوص نامیبت معنایی اثری کاتبی زیرا هر دو از مؤلف خویش در می‌گذرند، یکی هستی خود را در برابر مخاطب به مرگ مؤلف باز می‌دهد و دیگری تولمش صوما از بی مردن مؤلف خواهد بود.

ویژگی عجیب یک اثر ناگهان در همین صمیمه نهفته است. در بن‌فکته پریش‌های هستی شناختی از ماهیت اثر هنری، آیا هر آنچه ساخته و پرداخته هنرمند است، به صرف آن‌که بولاف خود آن را عرضه نکرده باشد، ناگهان می‌نماید؟ آیا فرزند خلق اثر تنها با عرضه آن است که به نهایت می‌رسد؟ اساساً ناگهانی یک اثر را چگونه می‌توان تعیین کرد؟ چه کسی بیان اثر را رقم می‌زند؟ پایان اثر هنری چه معنایی دارد؟

و چرا فکر می‌کنیم که فسر رماس ناگهان است، اگر کالکا در زمان حیات خویش آن را همان‌گونه که اکنون هست عرضه کرده بود، آن را انتقادی می‌دیدم در عرضه ادبیات نمی‌دانستیم! مگر اکنون که کالینجر در گذشته و ده‌ها داستان منتشر شده از خود بر جای گذاشته است، می‌توان مدعی شد که نامش‌های او ناگهان مقدس‌اند؟ یا اگر حویم‌های مجله شده‌ی شقایق عربی را در گوشه‌ای از اقبلاش می‌دیدیم آیا چیزی جز مشت‌ی بوم مجله شده به نظر می‌رسیدند؟ و حالا که آن‌ها را با دیوارهای «کتابی آن» دیدیم، آیا فقط مشت‌ی بوم مجله شده به نظر می‌رسند؟

اسلا مگر نگاه ما به چین و چروک‌های تودرتوی این بوم‌های مجله شده را به جایی می‌برد که چیزی به نظر برسد!

۲

کاش می‌دانستیم گناه کفایت موجب شد تا نفاش به کافر چارگوش حیوط کند؟ صفت نثر

واژه بوم دلیل عنوان اثر شقایق عربی با نام هر دو مجله شده «بازی شکست‌گرا» را با مخاطب آغاز می‌کند. او با هوشمندی و از سر تمدن آن‌ها را نقاشی نمی‌خواند و از طرفی با استفاده از همسنگی آشنای میان بوم با رنگ و نقاشی، نالی این اثر به مثابه مجسمه را کمتر می‌سازد. اطلاق عنوان نقاشی





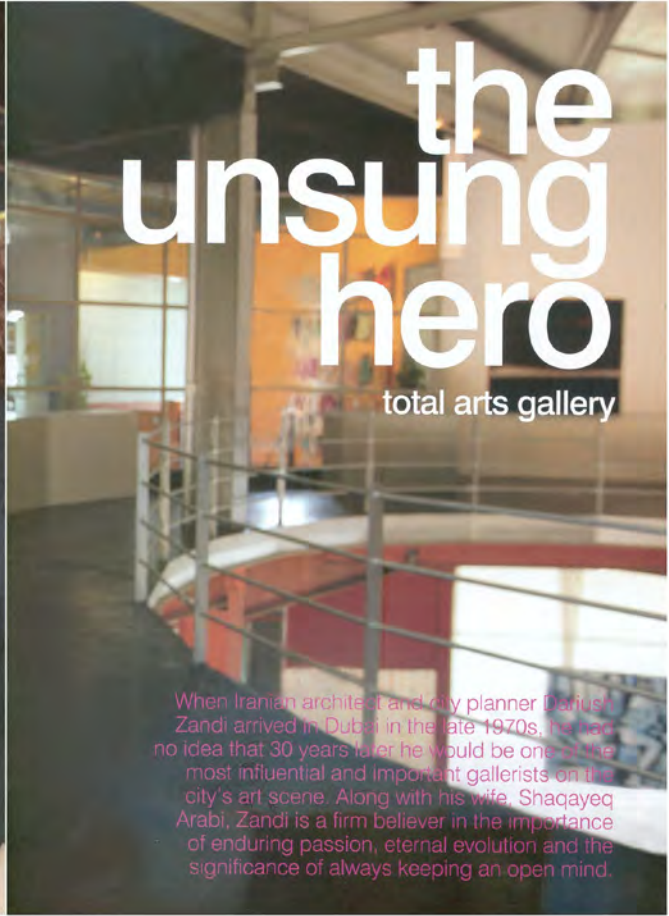
با جسمه با هر چیز دیگر به این اثر حضور به نظر می‌رسد و این حضور آن‌جا که ذهن عادت کرده من به طبقه بندی، از انتخاب رسته‌ای برای این اثر عاجز می‌ماند. دو چندان می‌شود. آثار او سر به مهرند، چه از نشان که از کشان نمی‌گوید. مگر هوم مجله شده که ظاهر اثر است و چه از مجله و چوکیدگی‌شان که هیچ ناشی را بر نمی‌آید. گویی هوم مدنی از نتایج دارد که آثار حضور در زمره مصالح کار باقی مانده است. نقاشی هم از حیث وجود مادی آن چیزی جز رنگ بر بوم و کاغذ در یک کار چوکوش نیست اما فراتر از عینیت مادی خود، محتوی صوری از ذهنیت تجسم یافته است که آن را از خطر فروگاشته شدن به رنگ و انتقال و طاب می‌رهاند. ولی در بوم‌های مجله شده شقایق عربی، ذهنیت هنرمند در هزارتویی رسوخ نابینا از انجماد رنگ در لایه‌ی چین و چوک‌های بوم پنهان مانده است و هم از این روست که این آثار چنین زنجیرهای نام و معنا و کادر چوکوش را گسسته‌اند. رمز الودگی آن‌ها در همین نکته رقم می‌خورد که چه بسا اساساً نه مفهومی در کار و نه ذهنیتی در پس آن بوده است که قائل به وجود آن در عمق این هزار توباشیم. اما آن چه شقایق در خصوص صدف و کباب وجود ذهنیتی در پس این آثار را به گلی ناسنگ می‌نماید، پرسش از ذهنیت هنرمند در به چالش کشیدن نامحبت و نامشایب این آثار است که اگر ناسنگند پس چرا عرضه شده‌اند؟ مگر نه آن که به مجرد برخورد نگاه مخاطب به اثر حکومت وی پایان می‌پذیرد. بهمانه که با واکنش آن به مخاطب، ادک اختیار مولف برای تمام کردن اثر در آینده نیز به کالی منتفی خواهد شد. پس بدین گونه اثری نامشام به مجرد عرضه (دینکام یا نظیر آن) به یکباره به نامحبت می‌رسد؟ آن هم بی هیچ دخالتی از جانب مولف آن؟ و اگر آن چه می‌بینیم اثری نام و نامشام چرا مولف آن‌ها را بوم و نه نقاشی می‌خواند؟

جدل بر سر یک نام نیست هر چند که نام‌ها بر هستی چیزها متقدمند، بحث بر سر مفهوم ویژه نامشایب است که کرچه خود تعین نابینا به نظر می‌رسد لیکن مفهوم نامحبت در مساحت هنر را سخت به سفره می‌گرد. مفهومی که شقایق عربی نه آن را یکسو به مخاطب خود و می‌دهد و نه از طرفی راه را بر مشارکت برسانده او می‌بندد. او بی‌وفای ستایش برنیکو میل زایش اثر در ذهنیت خود با تن خویش بر پا می‌کند همچون مازنی که در زهدان خود کودکی دارد و دیگران تنها به مجرد تولد کودک با هسته‌نگی او مواجه می‌شوند حال آن‌که این تنها مادر است که از سادت‌ها قبل به هستی کودک خود آگاه می‌شود حتی اگر در پایان زایشی بی‌سرانجام، کودکی مرده به دنیا آورد.

کسی به گرم ابروشم بروفته ابریشم نمی‌گوید، حتی پس از آن که به دور خود بپزد می‌تند باید منتظر ماند.  
بوم‌های مجله شقایق عربی با آن فرجهای پنهانوار و رنگارنگشان این چنین‌اند. ■

نمبر ۱۸ ترکیب مواد روی بوم مجله ۱۳۵۱ ۷۰ X ۹۴ X ۵ سانتیمتر (نخستی از اثر)  
نمبر ۳ ترکیب مواد روی بوم مجله ۱۳۵۱ ۱۱۴ X ۴ سانتیمتر (نخستی از اثر)  
نمبر ۳ ترکیب مواد روی بوم مجله ۱۳۵۱ ۱۱۰ X ۱۵ سانتیمتر  
نمبر ۳ ترکیب مواد روی بوم مجله ۱۳۵۱ ۲۱ X ۲۵ X ۲ سانتیمتر

# canvas



## the unsung hero

total arts gallery

When Iranian architect and city planner Dariusz Zandi arrived in Dubai in the late 1970s, he had no idea that 30 years later he would be one of the most influential and important gallerists on the city's art scene. Along with his wife, Shaqayeq Arabi, Zandi is a firm believer in the importance of enduring passion, eternal evolution and the significance of always keeping an open mind.

### gallery

Opening spread: Dariusz Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi at Total Arts Gallery.  
 Facing page: Shaqayeq Arabi. Credit: 2006. Mixed media on canvas.  
 100 x 100 cm.

TEXT BY ANNA WALLACE-THOMPSON  
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW LAZARIUS AND  
 COURTESY OF TOTAL ARTS GALLERY

In 1978 a young Iranian architect landed in the Emirate of Dubai, fresh from a stint in New York and ready for a six-month project working for Dubai Municipality on an urban design project along Dubai Creek. When Dariusz Zandi got off that plane and walked across the tarmac, surrounded by low-lying buildings and acres of sand, Dubai was a world away from the heaving metropolis of today. Little did he know that some three decades later, not only would the city be his home base and a vibrant international business centre, but it would also be the birthplace of one of the Emirate's most influential and long-standing arts institutions: Total Arts Gallery.

"There was simply nothing here," recalls Zandi. "Where the gallery is now [the industrial area of Al Quoz], was the middle of nowhere." Moving permanently to Dubai in 1980, Zandi immediately became involved with the local arts scene. "Before Dubai, I was in New York, where I was involved in art projects and was a member of nearly all the major museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art and The Met. My friends and colleagues were all architects, artists and photographers, and even the area in which I lived – SoHo – was like an art colony." Settling in Dubai, Zandi found something lacking. "This sense of communal living, it stays with you," he explains. "Once you move yourself away from it, you find yourself in a vacuum, a gap." Add to that the embryonic arts scene of Dubai in the early 1980s, and the stage was set for the birth of Total Arts Gallery.

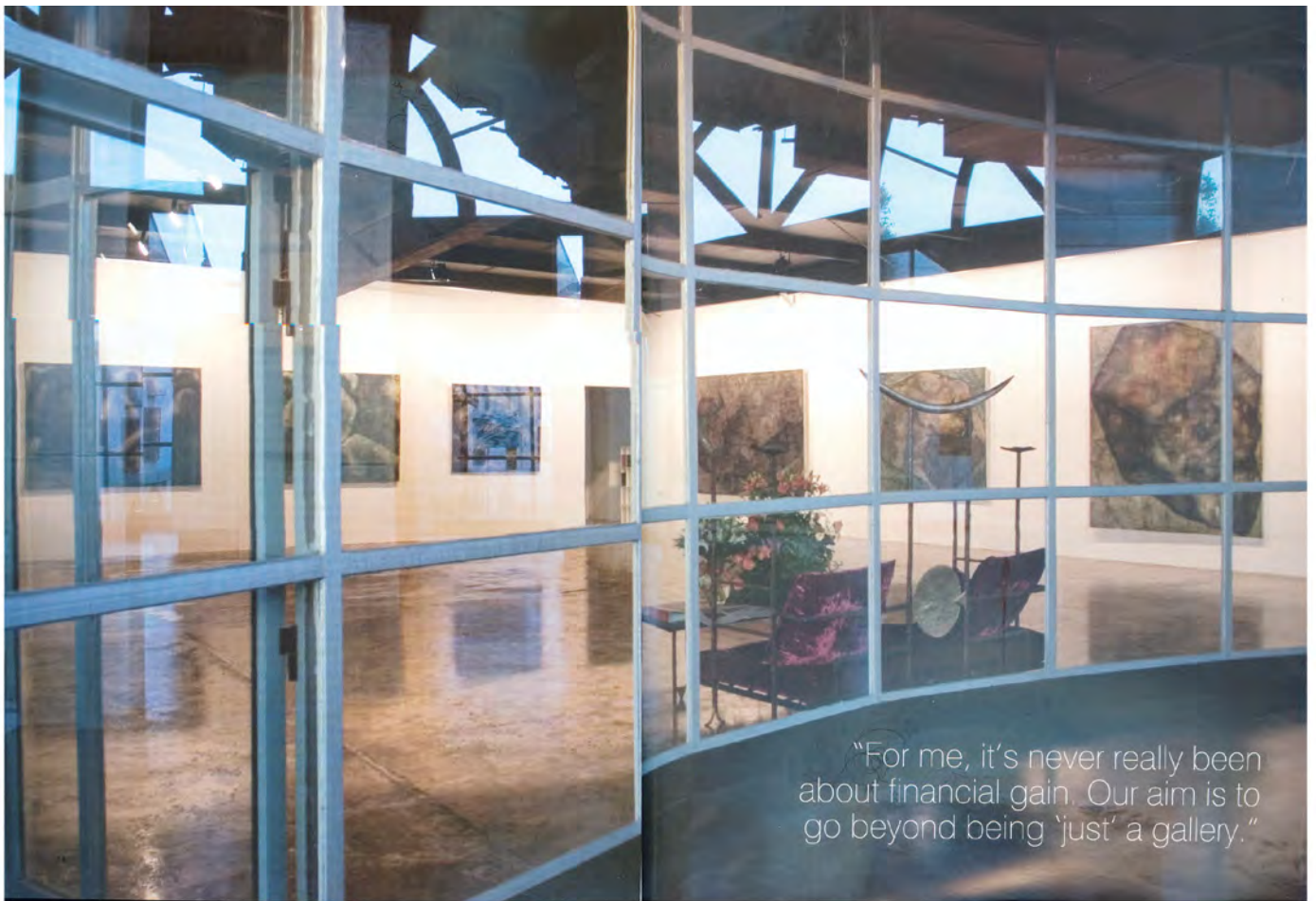
#### Humble Beginnings

With a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Zandi – the man behind two urban design plans for Dubai, projects such as the restoration of Dubai Museum, and author of the hugely popular *Off-Road* books exploring

the UAE – could be credited as one of the Dubai art scene's founding fathers. "Dubai was a port, a trading area. Of course the last thing anybody thought of then was art and creativity – they were too busy setting up the infrastructure of the city. And I missed that, right from the beginning," Zandi teamed up with some friends who had already established the Dubai Arts Centre (DAC). "I immediately joined them and started teaching there after my normal work," he says. "We had exhibitions, field trips and other basic activities. The art of those days was quite simple; I would say 'raw'. The works were visually strong and full of wind towers, camels, dhows and the like. Their function was more as mementos that you would take back home with you, rather than to be fine art." Zandi adds, "I remember hardly any local artists actively involved with us in the 1980s, and very few Middle Eastern ones. There were no professional artists residing here, and many were expatriate housewives who had some extra time on their hands and loved art and so were associated with DAC." Zandi became chairman of the centre's photography group and ran courses in photography and printing. He also taught interior design and architecture. "It was my outlet," he says in his soft, steady voice, "a way for me to be associated with art."

Zandi jumped at the opportunity to start his own gallery. Organising exhibitions from 1981 onwards with DAC, Dubai Municipality and various hotels, he first rented a space in Deira City Centre, the city's largest shopping mall at the time. "We were right near Carrefour," he laughs, "so I had this huge hypermarket and then there was my gallery!" As the Dubai arts scene started to evolve, so Zandi's plans became more ambitious and he started work on The Courtyard – a large, enclosed structure in which Total Arts Gallery, along with others shops and galleries, is located today. The Courtyard





"For me, it's never really been about financial gain. Our aim is to go beyond being 'just' a gallery."



"I remember hardly any local artists actively involved with us in the 1980s, and very few Middle Eastern ones."

## gallery



comprises architectural influences from around the Middle East, including Egyptian tombs, Emirati wind tower houses and a Persian garden (incorporating quirky details such as old maritime toilet seats from dhows used as pot plant holders and window sills) and began life as 'SoHo'. "Coming from SoHo in New York, I wanted to be surrounded by the same atmosphere in which I used to live," says Zandi. "Yet, I also wanted to create something tied to the region, to draw on that atmosphere of ethnic tradition from Dubai. It was odd, as we were the only gallery outside the city centre," he recalls, "but it had to do with where I could get land. I needed space for an arts centre, a photography studio for myself, and space for artists to live, work and exhibit."

### Keeping with the times

The inaugural show was a success, that brought European Fine Art in conjunction with other members of The Courtyard's outlets (including works by Picasso and Miró, possibly for the first time in Dubai). The focus of the gallery has since shifted to encompass international and Middle Eastern Contemporary art. In particular, Total Arts has introduced and fostered several up-and-coming Iranian artists onto the international scene. "My passion for this has lasted all these years. People come and go, some grow with us and we try to grow with others as

new blood, allowing us to try different and new ideas." Zandi's wife, Shaqayeq Arabi – an artist with a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Sorbonne – has also joined him at the gallery. Avid globe-trotters, the couple find no lack of new ideas and directions to follow. But Zandi is quick to point out: "For me, it's never really been about financial gain. Our aim is to go beyond being 'just' a gallery, which is why we have several events all year round, including architectural and historical lectures and events with the Middle Eastern Professional Photographers association." Meanwhile, he is always aware of the need to keep on one's toes; "As time goes by and the need arises, you have to change, not for others, but for yourself. You have to continuously evolve, otherwise you die."

Together with the Gallery Manager Bettina Klein, Arabi and Zandi continuously develop the gallery in terms of layout, artworks and renovations. Particularly significant was their recent exhibition, *Scraps*. Objects found in the district remaining from fires in Al-Quoz – melted, fused and scorched knives, toys and the like – were sourced by Arabi and Zandi and brought together in a show the like of which had not been

Previous spread: Total Arts gallery during Christina Monro's 2007 exhibition, *Scrap*.  
Facing page: Shaqayeq Arabi, *Recollections*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 150 cm.  
Above: Shaqayeq Arabi and Derwish Zandi, *Scrap*, 2006. Steel, 20 x 30 cm each.



"I feel things have actually gotten better [with the recession]. The art that wasn't sustainable has been corrected, those here for a quick financial turnaround are gone, and those who are serious have stayed. Things are very bright and more realistic in terms of prices and the value of an artist's work now."

"Everything is connected. Everything comes full circle, and once you leave your eyes and mind open, without restricting yourself, only then can you feel how these connections are made. From people, to their homes, to their surroundings and to their art, once you understand that things are interconnected only then can you get a perspective of what's really going on in a country's art scene."

seen in Dubai before. *Scraps* garnered wide attention in the local media, as well as the general public. "It was something of a breakthrough for us," says Zandi. "People found it very unusual, and we were told by many that it was 'like Europe' or 'like New York'. But these fires happened in our neighbourhood and we were glad to be able to do something with them, and it just sort of grew into what it is. It showed us that people are now ready to see something that is beyond the traditional; they are thirsty to see what's happening here, not what can be imported."

**A Never-ending Project**

The future looks bright for Total Arts, with the intention to seek new angles and continue with educational projects, lectures and travel. "We will continue doing what we've been doing," says Zandi, "and we are lucky to be involved in projects of a very large scale, with top artists. We also want the young generation to learn about art and culture from day one: you have to foster the roots of something in order for it to grow." Even the

economic downturn has left the gallery fairly untouched. "I feel things have actually gotten better," he says incredulously, "the art that wasn't sustainable has been corrected, those here for a quick financial turnaround are gone, and those who are serious have stayed. Things are very bright and more realistic in terms of prices and the value of an artist's work now."

Zandi stretches his hands out in front of him and leans across the table and looks over the top of his glasses, raising his eyebrows as he cracks into a grin. "The thing is," he says conspiratorially, "there is no one thing that needs to be done. Everything is connected. Everything comes full circle, and once you leave your eyes and mind open, without restricting yourself, only then can you feel how these connections are made. From people, to their homes, to their surroundings and to their art, once you understand that things are interconnected only then can you get a perspective of what's really going on in a country's art scene." ■■■

For more information visit [www.courtyard-uae.com](http://www.courtyard-uae.com)

Facing page:  
Abdulla Zandi,  
2008, 2009,  
140 x 100cm.

Contemporary

Practices

VISUAL ARTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

2009

VOLUME V

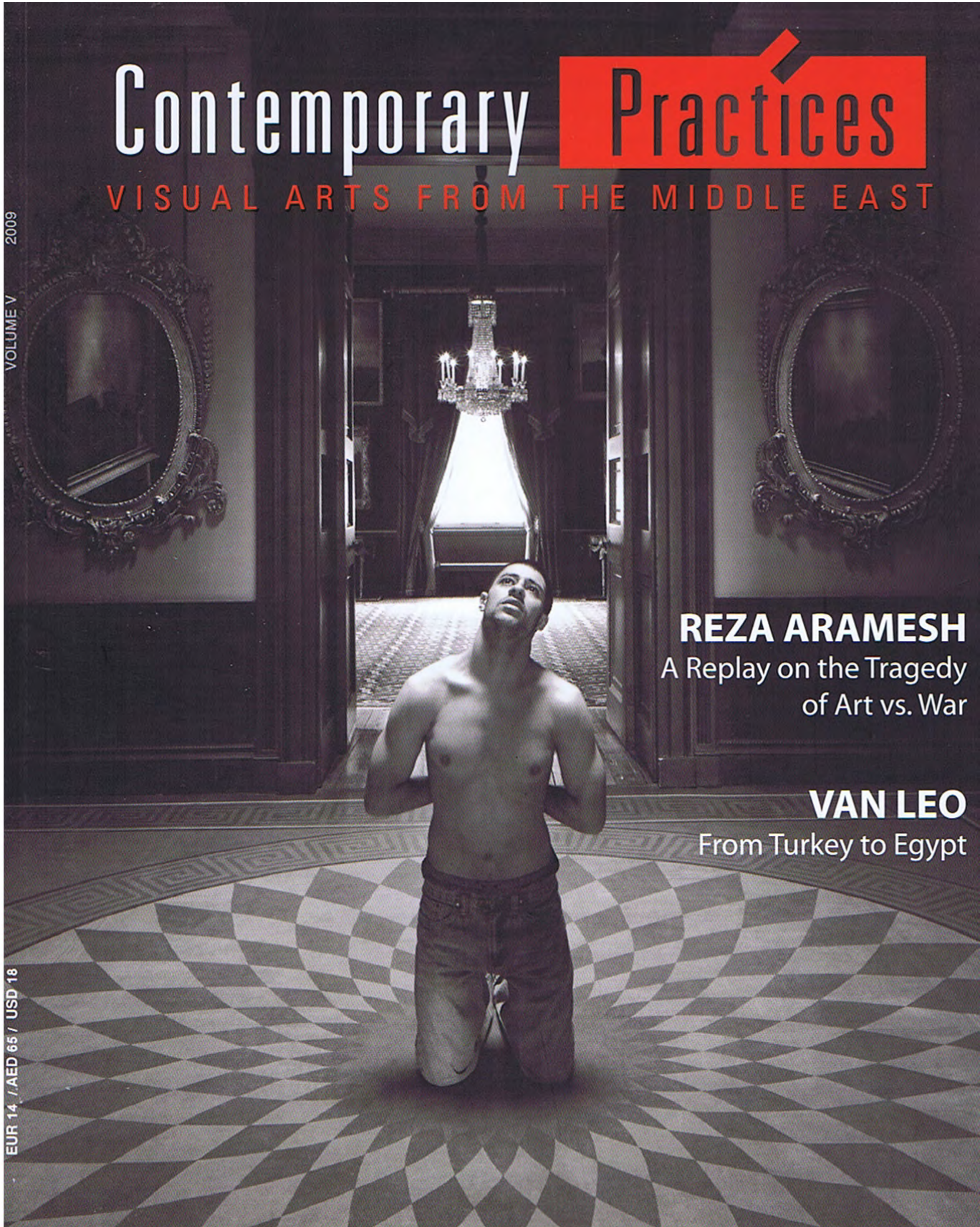
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A Replay on the Tragedy  
of Art vs. War

**VAN LEO**

From Turkey to Egypt



# Scraps

By Stephanie Sykes



*Like most exhibitions, Scraps at Dubai's Total Arts Gallery has a dual identity: one premised upon its physical presence and the other based on context. While Scraps' geographical framework plays an important role when shown in Dubai, architect Dariush Zandi and artist Shaqayeq Arabi, the husband-wife duo behind Scraps, have proposed the show's capacity to function independently from its context, relying chiefly on formal attributes to propel its content.*

*With Zandi and Arabi's proposition in mind, this article offers two readings of the show. The first account examines Scraps on a formal level, examining its strength when decontextualized from its relationship to site. The second*

*illustrates the story behind the exhibition and evaluates the ways its geo-social context intermingles with its aesthetics.*

## I.

Scraps welcomes visitors with an aural disruption, a bass rumble that reverberates through the gallery like a muted explosion. The thundering, blatantly evocative of active destruction, guides the senses to the exhibition space in which the typically stark walls and bright track lighting of Total Arts yield to a theatrical darkness punctuated by an array of sculpture and installation. The curve of the gallery's large glass wall is obscured by sheets of uniformly ridged cardboard, allowing only narrow slivers of light to trespass into the darkness.

Scraps contains an assortment of sculptural formations composed of everyday materials now altered into semi-recognizable shapes. The work has clearly been wrought by extreme heat, tarnished with rust, and the subtly toxic smell of melted plastic and chemicals suggest the incident from which they were produced is in the recent past. Each piece visually recalls its original state of being while simultaneously finding itself warped into alien forms with unpredictable contours. In contrast to the physical presence of the installations, each work is framed by a richly toned spotlight that streaks long shadows across the floors and walls and creates sculptural forms within the negative space.

The works, which have been rescued from the remains of a damaged building, are for the most part formally unaltered by Zandi and Arabi. A crippled bicycle sits in the shadows of a draped sheet of corrugated metal that creates a suspended corridor for visitors to negotiate. An extraordinary mass of scissors welded together, reminiscent of Arman's accumulations, sits adjacent to a mammoth steel rod dressed with swathes of ostensibly delicate steel while a pile of scorched paint can reveal stubborn flecks of brightly toned pigment surfacing through the ash.

The lonely positioning of each installation, accentuated by the spotlights, brings to mind Martin Heidegger's notion of things and their corresponding "thingliness." This concept denies the human inclination to impose visual associations upon the partially decipherable forms. By classifying each object's "thinginess" as an aesthetic value in its own right, Heidegger discourages the projection of a greater meaning into the pieces and deems their ontological value sufficient to

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carry them as artwork. The importance of a piece's "thinginess" fuels Heidegger's related concept of *technomatology*, wherein archeology can be perceived as artwork because of its ontological representation, which aptly highlights the show's successful elements. Other than photography-based exhibitions, there have been very few attempts in Dubai to straddle the boundary between documentation and artwork. Scraps is a courageous attempt to engage sculptural work in a fresh discourse, using a phenomenological methodology to propose quotidian objects in a different light.

However, the exhibition does bare symptoms of conceptual incongruity.

A cluster of pieces in one corner of the gallery has been experimentally manipulated by Zandi and Arabi. Here, knives pattern themselves onto a steel plate while another metal slab features forks that systematically puncture their way into the surface, emphasizing the tension between their violent organization and the delicacy by which they are suspended. Above these makeshift canvases, three eerily cheerful bottles shaped like hippos and ducklings—equipped with gruesome muzzes protruding from their partially melted heads—are situated alongside countless paper clips resembling charred clumps of shredded wheat. Amidst a dead plant, a stack of charred newspapers and a rusted spring, two blackened tongue-in-cheek fire extinguishers sit impotently on the ground. As a whole, the assemblage resembles an altar, perhaps to Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades or Arte Povera's nod to the elemental dynamism of raw materials, investigating the properties of the man-made by engaging viewers in the polemics of aesthetics and meaning.

On an opposite wall, metal debris is suspended from the ceiling and transitions into depth-producing shadows against a projected backdrop of an empty warehouse. While this installation boasts strong artistic merit, the careful choreography of the flying scraps coupled with the inclusion of photography is inconsistent with the rest of the show, detracting from the value of objects as simply objects.

These two installations reveal confusion about the exhibition's voice. The curatorial hand becomes directive, thus disabling the concept of *technomatology*. Instead of allowing the objects to function through their own aesthetics, the visible curating points the works into a dialogue that does not exist throughout the rest of the show. As a result, the installations work more as assemblages whereby each piece is visually reliant on the others surrounding it rather than its own autonomous value.



Perhaps the weakest aspect of Scraps is a rotation of projected photographs depicting the site from which the objects were excavated. This reel unintentionally categorizes the show as a documentary display and spoon-feeds a social context to viewers, consequently reducing the pieces from archeology-as-artwork to archeology-as-document, from artwork to artifact. If this show were on display at the Dubai Museum or another historically inclined venue, photography could have a comfortable role; however, given the rest of the exhibition's ambitious ontological agenda, this photographic inclusion disallows the proposition of formally decontextualizing the works.

## II.

At 7 AM on March 26, 2008, a colorful blast ignited by illegally stored fireworks roared through a compound of warehouses in Al Quoz, Dubai's most central industrial zone. Over 70 warehouses, many of which operated as storage units for a broad spectrum of commercial manufacturers, fell victim

to the violent sparks, emitting a distress signal to the rest of the city by way of an ominous cloud hovering over the Al Quoz and Al Barsha neighborhoods.

Such was the catalyst for the dramatic tone of Scraps.

Like many others in the Al Quoz community, Zandi and Arabi initially visited the fire site out of curiosity. Here, they encountered a singed landscape of mangled shapes, pocked with blisters, adhered together in thrillingly unrecognizable ways—in ways that, according to Arabi (whose own artistic practice often addresses ideas of distortion), "artists work an entire lifetime to create but can never quite achieve." Zandi and Arabi returned to the site driven by an archeological fascination, intent on excavating the relics of deformed (or more accurately, re-formed) objects. By now, all useable items had been removed by the hundreds of scavengers who scoured the site shortly after the explosion. All that remained were the scraps.

It is this passage—the process of discovery—that sets the visual character of Scraps and alludes to a greater public significance. The journey is indicative of the role Al Quoz plays in Dubai: the place where dust and culture meet. The area, with its sand-lined roads and vast single-story structures, is home to the bulk of Dubai's most established and experimental art galleries. While the area has no official sanctioning from the local government, it is recognized as the center for contemporary art culture by Dubai's small but stalwart art community. It is appropriate that Al Quoz, an area notably lacking in Dubai's infamous Junkspace architecture, is home to the grassroots initiative of galleries as the humble growth of the area reflects the initially organic growth of the art community. If, as social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai claims, the social value of objects shifts each time the objects change context, exhibiting these pieces in Dubai—more specifically in Al Quoz—suggests that the objects' primary value resides in their relationship to geography.

In many ways, it is impossible to ignore the central role Al Quoz plays in Scraps as it demonstrates an appropriation of the physical community into the art community. Calling upon artist Robert Rauschenberg's musings about monuments, and treating this exhibition as the carefully selected detritus of a fallen monument wherein the installations pay tribute to a specific site, we see that each object is "charged with the rush of time even though it is static." This "rush of time" suggests that the works are inevitably infused with memory and the specific conditions of time and place, thus countering Heidegger's uninterpretable model of perceiving the exhibition.



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Scrap's strength clearly reveals itself in its connection to the temporal trajectory of Al Quoz, which is implied through the cycle of destruction and rebirth that naturally occurs with the passage of time. In a city like Dubai, where the cycles of man-made topography unravel at an unprecedented rate, it is critical to find ways of encapsulating moments of history without these histories becoming instantly obsolete. By giving these objects a new life with revised social values, Zandi and Anabi have successfully used Scrap as platform in which the tools of contemporary art propose an exciting new approach to archiving Dubai.

- 1 Heidegger, Martin. (2002) [1960] "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Off the Beaten Track*, Edited and translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2002) [1960]
- 2 Appadurai, Arjun. "Commodities and the Politics of Value", *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988
- 3 Smithson, Robert. "A Sedimentation of the Mind. Early Projects", *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Edited by Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996



*Stephanie Sykes is a writer and curator based in Dubai. She has worked for a number of cultural organizations, including Art Dubai, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Her curatorial practice focuses on publications and can be seen in *A Fine Red Line: A Curatorial Miscellany* (2008), *Global Art Forum Transcripts: 2* (2008) and *Global Art Forum Transcripts: 1* (2007). She holds an MFA Curating from Goldsmiths College, University of London and a BEd from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.*

All images are courtesy of Total Arts Gallery 2009



## Things we found in the fire



**Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi** found sculptures in the wreckage of last year's Al Quoz fire. *Chris Lord* picks his way through the debris

As the final stalls were packed away at Art Dubai 2008, a heavy plume of smoke appeared on the skyline. It hovered ominously over Al Quoz, as the smoke bellowed from an old warehouse that had been illegally storing fireworks. A fire steadily tore its way through the warehouses. It reduced whole buildings to a collapsed heap of twisted plastic. It blackened metal and fused debris into new and terrifying shapes. Two people were killed in the blaze. And, all the while, the scene was punctuated with the bangs of fireworks, which caught light and flung themselves around in the chaos.

Artists Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi went in just as things were starting to cool down. They began sifting through the debris and collecting the strange creations that had been formed in this great kiln of plastic and metal. They found a batch of scissors, permanently fused

together into a mass of compressed metal. They discovered, in a drawer, thousands of safety pins condensed into a solid brick. They even took the roof of the warehouse, which had melted around the building's structure into a soft and malleable rag.

*Scraps* is the semi-permanent exhibition the artists have created to display their finds. There's a smell like earth as you pass through the black curtain that separates the show from the rest of Total Art at the Courtyard. A lingering odour of burning wafts over the items. They've recreated a collapsed steel girder that they found swathed in detritus. They've even projected a photograph of the warehouse onto one of the walls of the gallery and enacted, with more found materials, the apocalyptic scene of exposed wiring and hanging metal that they stumbled into.

But you can't escape the burning smell. For all the metal and plastic, Zandi and Arabi seem to have selected these sculptures for their organic appearance, and the woody smell only adds to this. The mass of scissors, the most impressive item they have recovered, has the density and rigidity of coral, while the melted tin roof, when photographed with the blue sky in the background and projected onto the gallery wall, looks almost like a

terraced mountain, or a dry riverbed.

There is also a fascination with the act of destruction itself. The sound of intermittent fireworks has been piped into the gallery, and the dark space, with its sweep of rusty browns and blackened sheen, has a sense of containment and internal obliteration much like the heart of a volcano.

Among the items, there are Singer sewing machines and old cash registers gutted and fossilised by the fire. Turned on their side, as they were found, the objects no longer resemble anything of their original form. Exposed mechanisms, burned a deep orange, take on a bark-like or sinewy appearance. It's as if Zandi and Arabi are marvelling at the creative senselessness we can find in destruction. Both are exuberant about the shapes that have emerged, but also about the nihilistic effect of the fire, the way that destruction can literally transform an object, scrap its meaning and make it a useless thing, evocative

of nature. There's no doubt that a number of the objects in here, with the right lighting, have something organic about them – but it's also as if the artists are suggesting that if you remove the use of an object, through destruction, if necessary, an aesthetic transformation takes place. There's something elemental in this process, in terms of creation arising from destruction, of course, but it is also

**Perhaps *Scraps* is a response to a city that fails to acknowledge its decay**

evident in the way we interpret these objects, because our instinct is to equate them with pureness, baseness. Simply put, when we cannot make sense of something – when it's been mauled beyond comprehension – we can only turn to examples from the natural world to understand it.

A year on, you would never know that the fire had happened. But *Scraps* stands as a chaotic memento to the event. Al Quoz is Dubai's dusty anomaly, it's also, oddly, its creative hub – not in terms of the galleries that have moved in, but the materials, the manufacturing, even the cement that fixes this city together all comes out of this shabby nook. In the

aftermath of the fire, the clean-up was predictably swift.

Perhaps *Scraps* is a response to a city that fails to acknowledge decay. Aged areas are pulled down, all things old are thrown away – in a relentless bid for newness, only Al Quoz remains, a somewhat forgotten and indecorous mass on the edge of all that glamour. Al Quoz, both artists seem to suggest, is itself a found object, if we can only take the time to really look at its incongruity in this city.

*Total Art at the Courtyard (04 347 5050). Until June 30*



ART



## SCRAPS

by **Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi**  
**Marcelo Guimarães Lima**

SCRAPS is a collaborative installation with found objects, sculptural works and photographs by Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi. The couple has lived and worked in Dubai for many years as artists and also directing Total Arts Gallery. This is the first public show of their artistic collaboration.

The project started with a "chance encounter" with the site of a man made disaster: the explosion and fire of an Al Quoz warehouse. Al Quoz is an industrial and commercial area in the city of Dubai, and is also the place where Total Arts is located, as well as other contemporary art galleries. The Al Quoz district presents today an interesting amalgam of disparate activities that reflect the rapid pace of development of the city and the not uncommon process by which the planned development of urban spaces is revised and transformed, beyond original directives and intentions, by the many everyday decisions of different urban actors. A visit to the neighboring remains of the burnt warehouse by the two artists started a process that would lead to the present exhibition.

At first, it was simply the fascination with the site and the remains of objects and materials transformed by explosions and fire, out of which emerged distorted metallic structures, amalgamated and fused objects of plastic, paper, aluminum, everyday objects such as toothbrushes, safety pins, plastic bottles and containers fused together into sculptural shapes. Traces and scraps of common objects, together with structural remains and materials, had been mixed and refashioned by a spontaneous process of estrangement by fire.

Photographing the destruction and the space that resulted, and collecting the materials, led to the development of a more conscious aesthetic interest and aesthetic relation to the found site, to the materials and objects from which emerged the concept of the present installation. Dariush Zandi is a practicing architect and a photographer; Shaqayeq Arabi is a painter, sculptor and installation artist. Both their specific and their common experiences and competences in the visual arts are brought together in the present exhibition.

Entering the penumbra of the gallery space, with lights focusing on forms and objects hanging from the ceiling, displayed on the walls, standing on the floor or on platforms and pedestals, with photographic projections crossing the space and crossing within and among sculptural bodies and metal structures, one is first struck by the "theatrical" atmosphere and dramatic impact of the work. Forms, as well as colors and surfaces produced by fire and smoke transposed in to the gallery space, acquire a distinctive aesthetic quality, or rather, one could say, have their immanent aesthetic qualities recognized and enhanced by a simple transfer of place, a change of

environment from the everyday world into the space of art. Art does not imitate life in this case, but it simply "frames" it.

Indeed, a common understanding of what an "objet trouvé" (found art object) is states that it is, in fact, "merely" the unreflected transit of things, a direct communication or transposition from life into art. If that is the case, we can observe that the aestheticization of the banal in contemporary art could be considered as simply the counterpart of the banalization of art, or the banalization of the artistic gesture.

Since Duchamp and the Surrealists in the early part of the 20th century, the ready made and the objet trouvé (analogous but not identical concepts and art practices) have been recognized as established artistic forms. And with the recognition of the ready made as a kind of artistic "genre" in itself, comes also the risks and challenges inherent in the repetition of "inaugural gestures". Considered however as components of the conceptual vocabulary of contemporary artists, the found object is one element in a contemporary artistic discourse that interrogates the world itself; it interrogates our time, and, contrary to popular beliefs about the nature of aesthetic experience, it is not simply content to "color" reality with subjective "points of view".



Accordingly, we can observe that SCRAPS propose to the viewers both an immersive and a contemplative or reflective experience. Its initial "dramatic" effect is counterbalanced by the finely designed arrangements of spatial structures, sculptural forms, combined or isolated objects. Including the remains of a bicycle. Displayed in the gallery space, it inevitably reminds us, not without a hint of irony, of Duchamp's ready made- construction "The Bicycle Wheel" (a bicycle wheel fastened to a kitchen stool) originally created in 1913.

The industrial forms and mass objects transformed by fire, suggest fossilized organic forms and by that an affinity to the surrealists' "objet trouvé", that is, natural objects, "naturalized" artificial objects, strange natural formations, etc., associated with the surrealist "encounter" with the "supra-real" (sur-réel) dimension of reality. If not directly related to the aesthetics of Surrealism, the present works can be indirectly related to the poetics of the surrealists, that is, their artistic productive strategies. Transformed by fire, these objects of human work, the products of human industry, return to dust, to nature. These products of a society of unlimited consumption return to the condition and the form of the inorganic in nature.

But not only Duchamp has been "remade" in the burning furnace of an exploding warehouse in Al Quoz. Scissors sculpturally fused together into a compact and yet finally articulated metal bloc, remake the "accumulations" and serial sculptural works of French-American artist Arman. Arman created art from the serialized mass objects that populate our world. The precise and clean forms of industrially produced objects were rearranged into elegant sculptural forms.

Dariusz Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi perform in SCRAPS the role of "archaeologists of the future", excavating the remains of life systems in the soil of a destroyed industrial deposit in modern Dubai, and extricating from the ashes of our present condition the artistic layers of visions and forms that are part of our understanding of the world.

Indeed, one important part of Dariusz Zandi's professional expertise and practice is architectural restoration of buildings and sites. In his own original architectural works, the recycling of materials of previous constructions goes together with the post-modern "recycling" of forms and appropriations or quotations of a diversity of concepts and styles. His artistic practice includes photography as a central discipline. Given also the fact that photography itself is a kind of "found object", that is, in one way or the other, the photographic object is a the result of an encounter with reality, that is, a vision born out the material imprint of light on a sensitive surface, we can point out here the sources and concepts of SCRAPS from the artist's previous experiences.



The very notion of "scraps", making art of discarded materials brings to mind the frenzy of construction that so far has been the mark of modern Dubai with its accelerated pace of development. A frenzy of construction that creates material and perhaps also human refuse, exhausted, discarded, used and unusable elements.

Making art out of refuse, waste, garbage was also the strategy of ARTE POVERA, the Italian art movement of the late 1960s. The richly sensuous elements, the unusually transformed materials and the dramatic dimension of SCRAPS are certainly at odds with the rather "minimalist", that is, muted and restrained, aims and methods of ARTE POVERA. In contrast, we can say that SCRAPS does not appear to fear a certain "excess" of the dramatic or refrain from the spectacular. These are however conscious ways of highlighting the "artificial", the constructed nature of the artwork itself. It is because the artist can produce and master a significant relationship with reality that contemporary art is able to open itself to things as they are, that is as they present themselves, and as they become.

Marcelo Guimarães Lima is the editor of Panoptikon: On Contemporary Visual Culture

# Art



SCRAPS, THE ONGOING ART EXHIBITION AT THE TOTAL ARTS GALLERY DUBAI, IS A SALVAGED FROM A MASSIVE FIRE THAT BROKE OUT IN AL QUOZ LAST YEAR

Entering the exhibition space, one is struck by the theatrical ambience and the mood created by the artwork. You are instantly transposed to a world of devastation. Dimly lit and exuding a faint smell of smoke, the exhibition area is strewn around with burnt and corrugated metal sheets, hanging wires, twisted steel frames, a clump of forks and knives stuck together. Aptly named *Scraps*, the exhibition is a collection of objects that Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi collected at the aftermath of a massive fire that broke out in Al Quoz last year.



COLLECTION OF OBJECTS AND MATERIALS

It also features photographs of that very tragic event. A visit to the remains of the burnt warehouse by the husband and wife team started a process that led to the present exhibition at the Total Arts Gallery. Zandi, a photographer and architect, and Arabi, an artist, say *Scraps* commemorates the moment of shock that was created by this massive explosion that took place last March

PANORAMA, APRIL 24, 2009

# ART FROM SCRAPPS

by Indrani Mishra

Photos by Nisham A Manaf

and destroyed 83 warehouses.

Zandi and Arabi who live nearby visited the site out of curiosity. They were part of the mob, which visited the site just to have a closer look at the place and pick up things that would be of some interest to them. The endeavour initially started as a Friday afternoon activity. They started collecting the remains of objects and materials left behind by the aftermath of the explosion and fire. What attracted them was the morbid beauty of the objects. As they realised the aesthetic value of the things that they were collecting, they put them together to form *Scraps*.

Arabi explains: "We never thought of putting up an installation when we first visited the site. But as we visited it more often, we developed an aesthetic relation to the site and also to the materials and objects that we collected."

The scale of the event and the impact it had on their life startled the artists. "The incident affected us personally because it happened just a few hundred yards away from our gallery. We could see smoke billowing out and the whole area was filled with a very strong burning smell and pungent odour of burning plastic and metal," says Arabi.

*Scraps* portrays the ferocity of the fire and sense of tragedy. Talking about the experience, Zandi

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explains: "This was an unique experience. During our trips to the site, we discovered that amongst the massive devastation, something new had started rising from the ruins. We could see the rebirth of things." The couple has given a new meaning to many of the things that they had collected during their four-month long excursion to the site.

Set into the context of the gallery, the retrieved objects received a new dimension — not just material-wise, but also in meaning and value. There were everyday objects such as toothbrushes, spoons and forks, scissors, safety pins — all fused together to form sculptured forms. A burnt generator resembled a birdcage. At another corner, there was a heap of rusted cans of paint, with a bright orange colour oozing out of them — a very realistic representation of what could have happened at the explosion site.

With the sound of explosions in the background and a projector showing pictures of the burnt site, the duo has effectively illustrated a slice of history. Bright amber light is used to create the hues of the burning warehouses. Sheets of perforated cardboards illustrate broken walls with sunlight filtering through.

But how logical is it to portray a tragedy? On this note, Zandi and Arabi make it apparent that the exhibition is an immersive, contemplative and reflective experience for the residents of the city. "This is the first 'art installation' in the region made entirely out of scrap salvaged from a local accident. The installation was done to recre-



Dariush Zandi



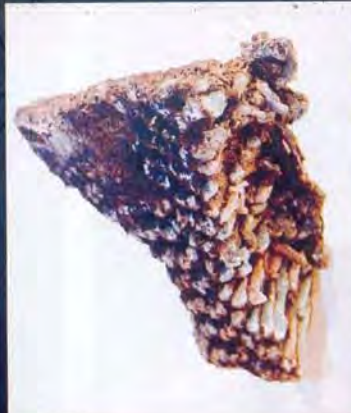
Shaqayeq Arabi

ate an event that people of Dubai can relate to. The event affected many people who lived in the vicinity. *Scraps* was an effort to show how an event or accident can transform the very form of life — not just its morphology but also its value and usage."

The artistic duo emphatically points out that they are in no way exploiting the tragedy or are being insensitive towards it. "We have just recognised the innate aesthetic qualities in all these objects and have enhanced them to a piece of art by a simple transfer of place and a change of environment, from the everyday world into the space of art."

Arabi and Zandi have proved that *objet trouvé* — found art objects — is a very striking component of the conceptual vocabulary of contemporary artists. The artists have taken a very definitive step in the concept of re-use and metamorphosis of objects, portraying the aesthetics of the clichéd and common things in contemporary art.

PANORAMA, APRIL 24, 2009



The massive fire that broke out in Al Quoz last March destroying 83 warehouses has already faded from the collective consciousness of Dubai. Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi joined the macabre mob which visited the site out of curiosity, for catharsis, for souvenirs or to scavenge anything useful they could lay their hands on.

What they salvaged has now been transformed into *Scraps*, an exhibition at Total Arts, a gallery, which they run. When the husband and wife team — he is an architect and photographer and she is a painter — went on Friday afternoons ‘bounty hunting’, they didn’t immediately realise the aesthetic value of what they were collecting. The concept of an exhibition evolved as the morbid beauty of the objects struck them. For Arabi the explosions were like part of lived history. “I grew up in Tehran through the Iran-Iraq war where we saw neighbourhoods being blown up,” she says.

“The incident affected us personally because it happened a few hundred yards from the gallery. We saw the billowing smoke and breathed the acrid stench,” says Zandi. It’s this reality that the exhibition sets into stark relief: strewn around the dimly lit exhibition area are twisted steel frames, hanging wires, bent corrugated metal sheets, a clump of forks, knives stuck together. They still exude a faint smell of smoke. It’s history bizarrely frozen in time against the barely audible sound of explosions playing in the background. Ironically, there are a couple of charred fire extinguishers too. A mound of rusted cans of paint with flecks of bright orange colour congealed in the very act of oozing out.

“But for us, it’s not recreation of a tragedy, it’s a kind of celebration,” says Zandi. “It shows life does go on.”

“We went to the site a week after the accident because we wanted to know what the place looked like. When we saw the strange assortment of charred objects, the way they were juxtaposed struck us. There were plastic wallets with the US flag and images of Osama Bin Laden and Ronaldinho strangely fused together. And there were bunches of rusted safety pins that had been entangled artistically. No artist could have shaped them



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**Twisted metal frames are strewn around the dimly lit exhibition area. Hanging wires and clumps of wires stick together still exuding a faint smell of smoke**

thus even if he had tried. A natural element like fire had made sheets of metal flow like folds of fabric."

"Objects like sewing machines and scissors had gained an aesthetic dimension. We realised that nothing gets destroyed. They get metamorphosed. That's what the exhibition celebrates," says Arabi.

Undoubtedly there's poignancy too. There's a bicycle which was not part of the objects in the warehouse. "It obviously belonged to someone working there. Though we cannot confirm this, we were told the man died in the accident," says Zandi.

But then, is it wholesome to showcase these horrors? Zandi and Arabi deny that they are being insensitive or are exploiting a tragic accident. "We are not selling these objects; we are merely exhibiting them," they say. "We have put them together by ourselves. We

believe this is the first 'art installation' in the region made entirely out of scrap salvaged from a local accident. We hope the authorities put the exhibition in a museum as part of the archive of a city growing."

Growth can often imply destruction. Another facet of this can be seen in the complementary exhibition being held at the gallery. They are a series of photographs by UAE photographer Mohammed Al Murr. Called *The Neighbourhood is Gone*, it captures old buildings being demolished to make room for new ones — for gentrification.

"In the process of change neighbourhoods vanish quickly, along with memories and dreams. This is what happened to a neighbourhood near my house," says Murr.

"Both exhibitions capture destruction, one by nature and the other by man," says Arabi. But then, even the fire that destroyed the warehouses was caused by greed. It was sparked by firecrackers smuggled into the country and kept illegally in the warehouse. But Zandi and Arabi don't want the subtext to be a parable.

"We want people to experience it," they say. "It'll be interesting to see what the objects will look like in 20 years time and if anyone will remember the incident," says Zandi.

*Scraps runs until April 23 at Total Arts Gallery, Al Quoz. (04-3475050)*

## 'Reality is what we can and cannot see'

Abstract painter Shaqayeq Arabi says translating reality into forms is difficult as forms could mean different things to different people



Shaqayeq with one of her exhibits

**AMBILY MADHU MENON**  
Staff Reporter

As a child, she painted like any other child would. But unlike the rest, she kept coming back to painting with renewed attachment. That was the beginning of the journey for Iranian painter Shaqayeq Arabi who has been pursuing her passion for the past fifteen years. The lady who has made Dubai her home for the last two years, is exhibiting her works at the Total Arts Gallery at Courtyard till March 26. **City Times** talks to the painter about her passion and inspirations.

### What attracted you to abstract painting?

It was a natural process for me; I was drawn slowly into the non-figurative style of painting. I didn't decide to paint abstract on my own, however when it happened, I was pleased because I didn't need anything else to express myself.

### Do you think you have been successful in conveying the message of your painting to the audience?

I think so, but we can't deny that most people prefer to see the things that are known to them because each image works as a common code between people and carry special meaning. For me abstract painting is like communicating in another language without using words. My painting is not meant to tell any story, however they are the translation of the things that exist and happen around and within me. However if someone finds representations of images, forms, and any especial meanings, I don't mind that since everyone has his own way of inter-

preting whatever is around them.

### Frankly when I saw your paintings, I found that there are no solid forms in it. It is largely a play of colour and shapelessness. Why so?

I don't know what you mean by solid forms. If you mean the forms are not strong in the composition, I tried my best but things are not always perfect. If you think they are not solid because of no defined edges, I agree. But it's done for a purpose. But if you mean that there is no form at all I don't agree.

### You have been painting for 15 years now. How has your style evolved over these years?

I started painting realistic paintings and slowly I felt moving away towards simpler forms and shapes, movement of colours and lines and

### REAL UNREAL

finally to a pure abstract. This change was also reflected in the development of the media that I used.

### What is the theme of your current exhibition?

In my paintings there is no story. Visually the relation between forms (two or three dimensional) and the space and the surfaces are my main theme. They could be anything in any surroundings.

### What inspires you to paint?

Every thing that has some kind of effect on me and moves me. From a very small event in my daily life to big occasions.

### Do you have plans to branch into something else since you've studied graphic art?

Not really. I do some photography,

sculpture and work with furniture. But still my main work revolves around painting.

### Your initial works were strongly realistic and later it faded away. Tell us what is reality for you?

If I use "realistic" I mean the realistic style in the painting, which is an imitation of what is real and what you can see. For me reality is what we can and cannot see.

### Do you agree that abstract is also an extension of reality? If so then why have you done away with shapes/objects/human forms in your paintings?

Yes, I agree but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to use pre-defined shapes and forms to show reality. Who can say what is the best shape to translate your happiness, sadness that are also reality?

### What is the source of inspiration for your present work?

My surrounding, the things that I see and I feel. It could be nature or a garbage bin with all the colourful bottles and packages, could be a row of goodies in a grocery store or an elegant piece of jewellery designed by a famous designer or an artwork.

### What do you do when you are not painting, or thinking about what to paint?

Living a normal life, updating myself by either reading, observing and going to other art galleries and travelling.

### What is life's most precious lesson that you cherish?

Do your best and don't worry about the response (you will get it).



OMAN  DAILY  
**Observer**

## Omani Students Work With Young Iranian Painter

By Dr Patricia Groves

**D**ROP by at the Omani Society for Fine Arts most any evening and you will see artists at work, but last week there was a special workshop with Iranian painter, Shaghayeyh Arabi.

In one of the studios, a dozen or more young Omani women were concentrating on their technique in abstract painting. All were working with canvas on easel. Some of the canvasses were still white with pencil sketching of shapes or designs. Others were partly painted; and, all about the room, was the excitement of eager young artists watching their creations unfold under the guidance of Shaghayeyh.

Shaghayeyh Arabi, a young Iranian painter who had the opportunity to study Fine Arts at the Sorbonne in Paris where she recently completed her Masters, is as enthusiastic as her students. She stresses the importance of personal research in the work of painting. Shaghayeyh sees the successful components as 'good knowledge, good ideas and good technique'. With only four days to work with her Omani students, Shaghayeyh felt it important to concentrate on the ideas underlying a piece of work and its meaning for the artist.

"Beginning painters can learn technique anywhere. My objective is to get them thinking about painting - why they do it, how they can express their feelings and sensations, new experiences. I push them to paint their feelings, not the subject. I encourage them to find their own way of painting".

Shaghayeyh's path to painting started at the age twelve when her mother noticed her talent and enrolled her in a painting course in their native Iran.

"I started painting like any child would, but slowly I became more serious. I did study graphic art and experimented with sculpture in plastic, but always I wanted to become a painter. I started with academic painting and my first paintings were very strongly realistic. As I continued painting, slowly the background started to disappear, and eventually my work became live colour and form.

While she works with ideas, Shaghayeyh is a highly intuitive painter, moving ahead by sensing the inner trend of her work and always self-reflexive. For a long period she was involved with the idea of 'the void'. She began to notice 'spaces' appearing in her painting - an area of white canvas that remained unpainted as the work progressed. "I kept looking at this large space and asking what is the source of this? This led me to examine the concept of the void. Though the new global culture is creating universal perspectives, traditionally, there have been very different perceptions of the void in Eastern and Western culture.

While in Western culture, the tendency has been to see the void as a negative concept, an absence of something; in eastern Culture the void is seen in a positive way. In Chinese painting for instance, there is a lot of white space, understood not as a visible reality, but as a philosophical void related to an entire cosmology. This space can permit you to discover anything -

The Omani Society for Fine Arts sponsored a workshop with Iranian painter, Shaghayeyh Arabi, in which young Omani women worked on their technique in abstract painting.

all the imagination can fill this empty space. It can be considered as a pure visual element, as a space for my eyes, as a resting place."

Shaghayeyh Arabi believes that the most important thing in the process of art is change and her exploration of the void has evolved into what are for her further reaches of Abstract Expressionism in the fully filled canvases you see illustrated here.

Though Shaghayeyh has returned to her current home in Dubai, her inspiration remains with several young Omani women, some of whom are likely to go on to become good painters, each in her unique way.



Shaghayeyh Arabi talking to her Omani students about the importance of ideas



The artist, Shaghayeyh Arabi (left), is interviewed

