



akim monet
SIDE BY SIDE GALLERY

ABDULNASSER GHAREM & AKIM MONET
In association with Edge of Arabia

“ AMEN ART FOUNDATION ”
Towards an art foundation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

OPENING: Thursday April 25, 2013 - 6 to 9 pm
EXHIBITION RUN: April 25 to July 13, 2013
LOCATION: Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet, Berlin

A very recent fortuitous encounter with Abdunasser Gharem and Stephen Stapleton in Sharjah (United Arab Emirates) made me realize that my conviction that the western education many inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula received during the last 50 years would have by now fostered a highly interesting group of individuals, in fact grossly underestimated the importance of the momentous grass-root artistic movement found in Saudi Arabia. In considering the deep cultural changes occurring in the Greater Middle East, with the establishment of Dubai as a major Asian hub and as a crossroad between east and west, and the very vibrant art-scene between Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul on the Levantine side, Teheran, further east, and Sharjah and Doha to the south, one cannot escape the fact that the Big Brother, the Uncle, the Father in some cases -is Saudi Arabia.

Until recently, there was a very limited art scene in Saudi Arabia. But between 2003-2004 a group of artists came together in Abha's Al-Meftaha Arts Village to create a new movement including the formation of Edge of Arabia and the groundbreaking 'Shattah' exhibition in Jeddah; this will remain in history as the breakthrough year: 'Shattah' means to be broken up or disembodied. This burgeoning movement is not a decade old, but its throb has already been felt in the art world: the Venice Biennale, the Sharjah Biennale, the Berlin Biennale, the Pinault Foundation, the Tokyo Mori Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the British and Victoria & Albert Museums, and of course the Institut du Monde Arabe have showcased the work –but only very recently.

The stunning work of these artists is coming-out, but what does this do for the next generation of artists in Saudi Arabia, asks one of their most ardent ambassadors, Abdunasser Gharem? There are a growing number of galleries now in Saudi Arabia –and they take their role very responsibly it seems, and owing to their very function, they are the conduits of art into the market. But does this suffice to nurture the infancy of the cultural fabric of the heavyweight of the Middle East: Saudi Arabia? Abdunasser Gharem is a fierce proponent of art education; he recently made history when his installation 'Message/Messenger' sold for a world record price at auction in Dubai, establishing him as the highest selling living artist from the Gulf. But in order to foster art education in his native country, he donated the proceeds of this sale to the arts initiative Edge of Arabia, an independent not for profit community interest company.

On the happy day of our meeting in Sharjah, Abdunasser, Stephen and I sat in the comfortable shaded embrace of Ernesto Neto's installation for the Biennale, and Abdunasser told me about his dream to establish an artist run foundation in Riyadh, the very conservative capital of Saudi Arabia. The vision for the Foundation, he explained, was inspired by an extraordinary new-generation of Saudi artists, film-makers, musicians and comedians, like for example the Riyadh based internet television network calling themselves Telfaz11; Telfaz is the Arabic word for television, and the number 11 is an homage to the year 2011, the year where great changes have occurred in the middle eastern region; changes that have transformed not only the way the world looks at Arabs, but also the way Arabs look at themselves. Since launching Telfaz11 have attracted over one million subscribers and over 150 million views throughout its network.

Measuring the importance of their commitment, I spontaneously offered Abdunasser to use my gallery as a laboratory, as a public workshop, as a forum to present the idea, but also as a platform through which to develop the project; I invited him to use my space to work out the necessary components to build a foundation, but also in which to invite the people who can make the invaluable contributions needed to create a meeting point between education and creativity in the heart of Saudi Arabia. This exhibition will of course feature some of Abdunasser Gharem's iconic pieces, but it will also be a 'work in progress' where visitors with a special skill or knowledge of the subject will be asked to contribute something. It is my intention that the headers I will present alongside Abdunasser's work will be populated, by the end of the exhibition, with ideas and contacts to assist him in this noble task.

We will present a blueprint for the “AMEN ART FOUNDATION, RIYADH” at the end of the show. **AM**

Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet GmbH
Potsdamer Strasse 81b - 10785 Berlin - Germany
T: +49-30-25 46 09 44 www.sidebysidegallery.com

BIOGRAPHY OF ABDULNASSER GHAREM

Abdulnasser Gharem was born in 1973 in the Saudi Arabian city of Khamis Mushait. In 1992 Gharem graduated from the King Abdulaziz Academy before attending The Leader Institute in Riyadh. In 2003 he studied at the influential Al- Meftaha Arts Village in Abha and in 2004 Gharem and the Al-Meftaha artists staged a group exhibition, Shattah, which challenged existing modes of art practice in Saudi Arabia. Abdulnasser Gharem co-founded the Edge of Arabia project (with Stephen Stapleton and Ahmed Mater) as a platform to support Saudi contemporary artist to reach an international audience.

Gharem has exhibited in Europe, the Gulf and the USA, including at the Victoria & Albert and British Museums, Martin Gropius-Bau, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Palazzo Grassi (Francois Pinault Foundation) and at the Venice, Sharjah & Berlin Biennales. He recently made history when his installation Message/Messenger sold for a world record price at auction in Dubai, establishing Gharem as the highest selling living Gulf artist. Gharem donated the proceeds of this sale to foster art education in his native country. His first monograph 'Abdulnasser Gharem: Art of Survival' was published in London in October 2011.

Abdulnasser Gharem currently lives and works in Riyadh.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST (in progress)

- 1 painting
- 2 sculptures
- 3 limited edition prints
- 1 film (to be determined)

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN



www.edgeofarabia.com

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Abdul Latif Jameel
Community Initiatives

www.aljci.com

Telfaz 11

www.telfaz11.tv

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1 PAINTING



NO MORE TEARS (SPRINGTIME II), N.D.

Industrial lacquer paint on rubber stamps on 9mm Indonesian plywood
210 cm x 170 cm x 20 cm weight 112 kg

Throughout his work Gharem questions our relationship and trust in the structures and materials that surround us. In the past he has made work concerning our understanding of, and relationship to, concrete. He has addressed bureaucracy and the authority of its accoutrements – in this case, rubber-stamps.



DETAIL

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2 SCULPTURES



THE STAMP (INSHALLAH), 2011

Wood and rubber

APPROX.120 cm x 130 cm x 120 cm

The Stamp at the Biennale di Venezia

Abdulnasser Gharem's best works impact with a striking clarity and minimalism, and while originating from an intensely local context, catch on to universal realities. One of these is a work called *Stamp*, a metaphor for bureaucratic stalemate, one of the many roadblocks blocking the way towards change in Saudi Arabia. It consists of a giant wooden sculpture of a stamp reclining on the floor, and a seal with a text on a plastic disc on the floor. The seal reads 'Have a bit of commitment, please' and of course, 'Amen'. This irony between the size of seal and the size of the 'commitment' required and the note of vague and indefinite deferral is common in diplomatic procedures in Saudi Arabia, and short of pulling one hair's out, dealing with it using a tongue-in-cheek attitude is pretty much the only option that remains open to a thinking man. "In Saudi Arabia as in most developing countries, infrastructure-wise, a lot of things are completely state-of-the-art in the cosmetic manner of Dubai glossies, but the procedural complication of systems is still several decades behind. People should understand that their progress as nations is directly proportionate to the perfection and simplification of systems. The effectiveness of systems determines the fate of nations." *Naima Rashid*



CONCRETE BLOCK V, 2013

Rubber stamps and industrial lacquer paint on wooden sculpture
120 cm x 100 cm x 80 cm

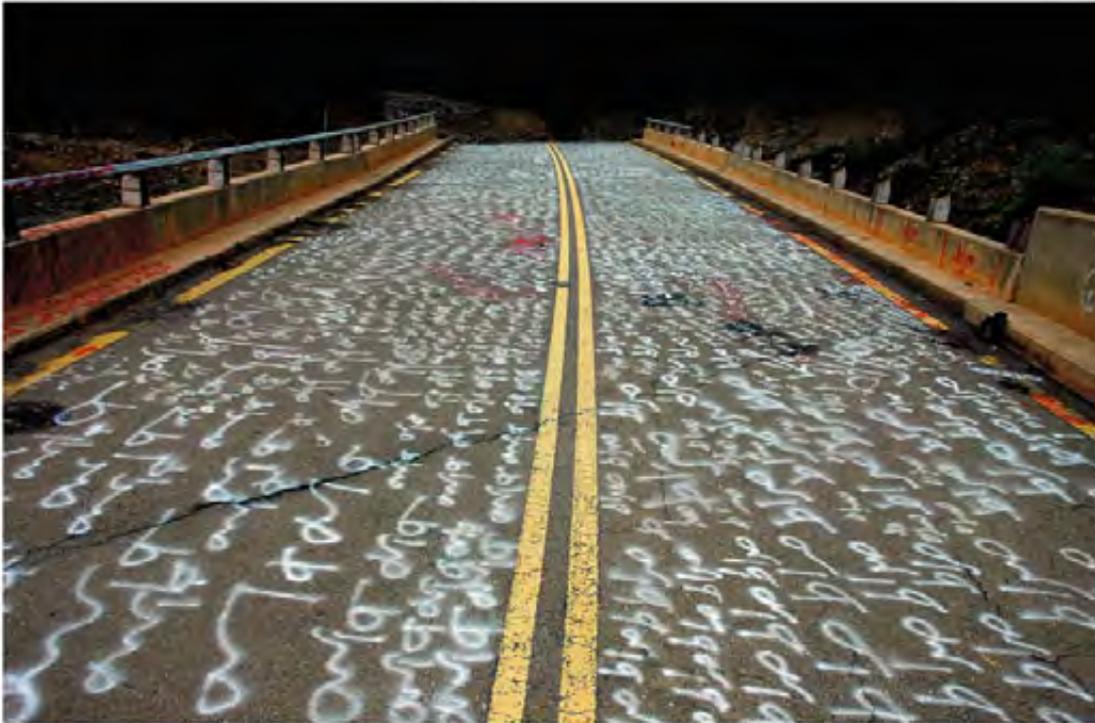
The work of **Abdulnasser Ghareem** reflects his career as a lieutenant colonel in the Saudi army, and includes 'Concrete Blocks'. *"They were put around embassies after 9/11. I thought, come on, do you think this is going to protect you against an ideology?" ANG*



Concrete Block: surface detail (rubber stamps and industrial lacquer paint)

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3 LIMITED EDITION PRINTS



AL-SIRAAT (THE PATH), 2011

Silk-screen print signed and numbered by the artist

Printed with 16 colors on 400GSM Somerset Tub paper

180 x 129.6 cm

In 1982, in a village near Khamis Mushait in southern Saudi, one day word spread following heavy rain that a flash-flood was about to sweep down the valley. So the villagers near this bridge decided to shelter on the concrete bridge hoping it would be the safest place to protect them. They put their faith in concrete. They gathered there with their vehicles and livestock and waited. The flood came, yet it washed away both the bridge and the people on it. Many years later I have covered the remains of this bridge with one word: Al Siraat.



THE STAMP (AMEN), 2011

Silk-screen print signed and numbered by the artist
Printed with 16 colors on 400GSM Somerset Tub paper
127 x 101,6 cm



THE STAMP (INSHALLAH), 2011

Silk-screen print signed and numbered by the artist
Printed with 16 colors on 400GSM Somerset Tub paper
127 x 101,6 cm

The Stamp series began in 2008 when the work The Path was 'censored' and removed from the first Edge of Arabia show in London. With only two weeks to produce a new work, Gharem created The Stamp. An oversized wooden stamp with the declaration 'Have a bit of Commitment: Amen'. With The Stamp I declare Have a Bit of Commitment: have a bit more intellectual rigor, more bravery, more faith in your convictions. In committing to this action, I become my own authority, and the controller of my own destiny.