

PROJECT  AMEN ART FOUNDATION

Abdulnasser Gharem in conversation with Anna Somers-Cocks about The Amen Art Foundation he is starting in Saudi Arabia, aimed at supporting the next generation of Saudi artists, which will debut at the 55th Venice Biennale.

Anna Somers Cocks: Tell me about this Amen Foundation you are creating. Why do you call it that? And what does “Amen” mean? In Christian service it means, “So be it.”

Abdulnasser Gharem: The good thing about the word “Amen” is that you find it in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, even in Buddhism. When Muslims agree they will do something good, they say “Amen,” which means they will commit to what they just agreed on.

ASC: Why create a foundation to help young artists?

ANG: I want the young artists not to suffer. When I was young, it was difficult just to get an art book or any information because the whole of society was resistant to being an artist, even my family. They thought it would be a disaster for me because they had never seen a museum, or any example of Saudi artist that they could look at and say, oh yeah, I want my son to be like that.

ASC: Where will your foundation be based?

ANG: Most people say, go to Jeddah, it’s more open. But Riyadh is the capital. I should go where the power is, where the ideology is coming from. But again, it’s a dialogue. I will show them what I’ve made in this foundation. They will see the young artists. I want to offer this young generation the best art environment they can find. They will find the library; but I will not put *any* library. No, it will be a well-curated library....

ASC: How will it work?

ANG: Right now I’m trying to build the systems, and the structure, and the programs of the foundation. I’ve read a lot of books about how to start a foundation, but we want fresh ideas from the people, from artists, engineers, financials, gallerists, museums. We would like to build from the ground up, so that when the young artists come, they’ll find the foundation. It will educate even their parents. It will help the whole of society. It will affect the artists, and it will encourage the people to search for a new platform, for a new salon, for a new idea. People will see the artist as negotiating their issues. People will be

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involved. They will not just come to watch. No, they want to come and be involved by helping, by negotiation, by some idea, but at least have a position. They will position themselves: 'where do we stand? Where are we?'

ASC: Yes, yes, I do rather agree with you. So when will you have this foundation up and running?

ANG: On the 29th we will introduce TelFaz11, at the Venice biennale. These young people came to my studio, these young guys, and now they are the most powerful, you know, artists on the Internet. Can you believe it?

ASC: Abdalnasser, my absolutely very best wishes for this. How do you say, "Mabrook?"

ANG: Thank you, yes.