

FOLLOWING MANAL

Taking art outside the walls of the fair this year, director Dyala Nusseibeh has commissioned three artists – Magdi Mustafa, Nasser Al Salem and Manal Al Dawayan – to create large-scale sculptures and installations that respond to Manarat Al Saadiyat and the heritage site of Al Ain.

November 8-9, 2017



Magdi Mostafa. *Surface of Spectral Scattering*, Abu Dhabi Edition. 2017. 700 x 450 x 300 cm (size variable).
Photography by Magdi Mostafa. Image courtesy of Galerie Brigitte Schenk

Closest to the fairground is Cairo-based Magdi Mustafa's installation on Saadiyat, where he revisited an older work, *Surface of Spectral Scattering*: a site-specific, multi-channel sound and light installation. "The Abu Dhabi Art edition of this work is based on the

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artist's acoustic research around Saadiyat Island and also the wider city of Abu Dhabi," explains Dyala Nusseibeh. "Magdi's field recordings in these locations have been mixed with electronically generated frequencies, visually inspired by the fast-growing structure of the city." The Egyptian artist works primarily with research-driven sound projects, multimedia installations and experimental music.

Saudi artist and calligrapher Nasser Al Salem was commissioned to make a work for the Jahili Fort, which is an 1891 military building in Al Ain. The installation deals with the fraught relationship between the creation and erasure of language, questioning the very meaning and symbolism of the written word. "For this, he has designed a four-armed mechanical structure, three arms of which draw out the letters y,h,b on the ground to make the word "love" (yuheb in Arabic) in the present continuous tense," Nusseibeh explains. "The fourth arm then erases them and these arms continually rotate in a circle, forming the word and then erasing its trace in the sand. The work explores the cyclical nature of war and the driver behind it, which is Love – whether love of money, power or land."



You are from me and I am from you by Manal Al Dowsayan.
Image courtesy of the artist

A well-known and highly regarded figure in Saudi contemporary art, Manal Al Dowsayan focused on the oasis of Al Ain for her commission. "I decided to work with the invisible world of that location. As an artist, you often realise that your eyes and ears are limited in time and space and I wanted to look at the trees in this 3,000-year old UNESCO heritage

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protected site,” Al Dowayan says. “The space comprises privately owned gardens and groves, so I opened one up and encouraged people to interact with it. This is an experiential artwork.”

You are from me and I am from you takes the form of a journey through walls of fabric, which are scans of the roots of the palm trees, taken with ground-penetrating ultrasound scanners. “The roots actually look like intertwining dreadlocks,” explains Al Dowayan, “and they are interdependent. It makes me think of how individualism doesn’t make sense in face of this collective energy and that we can only survive if we protect our environment.”

Through this work she is attempting to activate the site by connecting the visitor with a parallel universe, leading them to the ‘other side’. As an artist who is often concerned with issues of collective memory and the representation of women, it is interesting that it was the women in her family who led her to this project. “They talk to their palm trees. These are intelligent, sane, religious women that I am talking about. Both my grandmothers, all of my aunts, and my mother have been having casual chats with their palm trees for as long as I can remember,” she said in her artist statement. “The conversations would mostly revolve around polite subjects like health and the weather, but there were times when more personal topics were discussed, like love and death. Obviously, it was always a one-sided conversation, with the assumption that the palm was more of listener than a talker.

I never spoke to the palms when I was young, but now I do. My scepticism of my mother’s friendship with the tree in our garden was challenged a while ago, when I learned that palm trees do actually communicate, via smell, taste and electrical impulses, according to research. The women in my family somehow knew, by instinct, to recognise the hidden language of the world around them.” (ed)

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