



**SUMAC SPACE AN INITIATIVE DEVOTED TO CONTEMPORARY ART PRACTICES OF THE MIDDLE EAST, SHOWS ITS SIXTH DIGITAL EXHIBITION *Garden of e-arthly Delights*.**

THE EXHIBITION IS ON-VIEW AT [WWW.SUMAC.SPACE](http://WWW.SUMAC.SPACE) FROM SEPTEMBER 6<sup>th</sup> TO NOVEMBER 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021; Curated by Ruba Al-Sweel.



AHAAD AL AMOUDI, BASMAH FELEMBAN, CHRISTOPHER JOSHUA BENTON, FATEMEH KAZEMI, GULFGRAPHIXX,  
NADIM CHOUFI, PERSIA BEHESHTI, SHAMIRAN ISTIFAN \*\*\* \*\*

\*\*\* \*\* CURATED BY RUBA AL-SWEEL

Through video compilation, digital archival material and moving images, *Garden of e-arthly Delights* forays into the dark forest of the web to look at what's budding underneath the surface. From viral videos and memelords churning out digital arte povera to new forces that impact market dynamics and political trends, this fertile ground incubates and accelerates fringe movements and a new class of ideologues that together, test what we know.

Showcasing eight artists from, based in or around the GCC, whose works deal with memes as subject and medium, the exhibition explores wider expressions of gathering, ritual and community to discover a new visual communicational landscape that maps out an alternative social terrain, varying definitions of being public and the terms of visibility and power.

The dark forest is a term borrowed from science fiction writer Liu Cixin and repurposed to refer to alternative spaces of consensus reality, in the wake of Web 2.0, where rigorous discourse takes place and overflows to the public in digestible formats -- predominantly memes. It looks at the mushrooming of communities and the sprouting of a wide network across pockets online and out of sight, where relationships and connectivity that would otherwise take place in public, now play out in private.

Here, **Gulfgraphixx** draws from the pool of retro Gulf memes and comment section culture wars to bring into sharp relief what is otherwise bubbling in the gut brain of the Khaleeji subconscious. **Ahaad Alamoudi** imagines a future where language is banned and replaced by a universal lingua franca that facilitates state surveillance. **Basma Felemban** looks at world-building using game engine to create a whole fictional universe where unity is not the underlying order in everything, rather duality and extreme paradoxes. Mythical creatures called 'Jirri' create home out of a continuous stream of collaborative practices — playing, singing, and simply being together. **Christopher Joshua Benton** zeroes in on the exploitation of viral videos to foreground the invisible free labor of cultural production and the vectors that govern this market. **Nadim Choufi** overlays found footage with archived chats from LGBTQ+ chat forums, brought to life through Apple's standard Arabic text-to-speech, unfolding the unrealized love of two people who never meet. **Persia Beheshti** presents an ethereal stage composed of compiled stock images, visual effects and Tweets sourced from "*angelicism*" clone accounts on Twitter and Tumblr to recreate the "angelcore" aesthetic permeating these platforms. **Fatemeh Kazemi** collaborates with Chicago-based artist **Maryam Faridani** to take us into the secret worlds of female-only gatherings, the mirth of which is reflected on the screens of handhelds and documented in 10-second intervals on Instagram Stories. **Shamiran Istifan** brings together original footage and sourced imagery to spotlight the free association of posting patterns online through a fluid trickle of profound ruminations on space and theology, punctuated with altered verses from German rap culture.

Individually, these artists look at what has fallen in the crevices of the web to create dialogue trapped between the shifting policies of big tech and an institutional rejection and art market failure to invite and absorb them.

## PARTICIPANT ARTISTS

**Ahaad Alamoudi**, b.1991, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Alamoudi is a multidisciplinary artist whose works involve ethnographic studies that trace the intersection between past and contemporary history of Saudi Arabia. Her work examines how one's nationality conflicts with a sense of belonging, especially when divided between two countries. Constantly moving between both Saudi Arabia and London, Ahaad is interested in how communities measure and preserve heritage

through archiving and how different historical narratives weave throughout families and communities.

**Persia Beheshti**, b.1992, UAE. Beheshti is a multi-media artist working with installations and moving images to investigate elemental forces that shape the order of things. In her work, she creates an interplay between metaphysics and mysticism to explore otherworldly and ethereal subject matter, constructing an allegorical domain of alternate realms and realities.

**Christopher Joshua Benton**, b. 1988. Lives and works between Boston, MA and Dubai, UAE. Benton operates across sculpture, photography, and film. He works closely with communities and within neighborhoods to instigate collaboration while sharing stories of power, labor, and hope. His practice explores how the working-class uses culture and innovation to stage resistance to postcolonial and neoliberal forces.

**Nadim Choufi**, b. 1994, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Lives and works in Beirut, Lebanon. Choufi primarily works with video, 3D animation, and sculpture. His work spins around scientific progress and its non-neutrality, often focusing on the materiality of designed organisms, language, products, and bodies. His videos and installations draw upon various fields among them science fiction, synthetic biology, and economics to trace the influences behind the presumed objectivity of scientific progress and its soft and hard realities.

**Basmah Felemban**, b. 1993, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Felemban is a self-taught graphic designer who worked in various fields during and after graduating high school in 2011. She has recently graduated with an MA in Islamic and Traditional Art from the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London, UK in 2017. Driven by her experience as a young creative in Saudi, she puts supporting the local creative scene as a priority, from working in small startups to giving talks, workshops and her social media platforms.

**GulfGraphixx**, b. 1997, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. GulfGraphixx is the admin of the eponymous and infamous Instagram account. She is a keen observer of khaleeji pop culture both past and present. GulfGraphixx started out as a project to archive images relevant to underground subcultures of the khaleeji, which quickly encompassed much of khaleeji post-internet existence. GulfGraphixx is both the project and the artist behind the project.

**Shamiran Istifan** is a visual artist based in Zurich, Switzerland. Her work tells stories drawn from her upbringing in a cultural enclave where a two-world system was formed for her and her generation. Istifan's practice focuses on the different layers of social dynamics, motivated by her personal experience on collectivism, social class, religion, gender roles, relationships, power and politics. By the intimate aesthetics that permeate her work, she highlights the symbolism in daily life.

**Fatemeh Kazemi**, b. 1992, is a Tehran-Based multidisciplinary artist whose approach to art is focused on the process and context of creation, to spotlight the very period during which the work was built. She employs an amalgamation of

media such as video, installation, writing and performance that serve as research into themes of ritual, subculture and archival memory. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Painting at the University of Tehran and currently co-runs Rosva Magazine, a digital platform that focuses on varying subcultures in the Middle East.

## CURATOR

**Ruba Al-Sweel** is an arts and culture writer and researcher from the Middle East with words in Art Asia Pacific, Vogue, VICE, The Brooklyn Rail, MOUSSE Magazine, among others. She holds a master's degree in media and creative industries from SciencesPo, Paris, and takes particular interest in the emergence of internet subcultures. Al-Sweel also manages strategic, integrated and global communications at Art Jameel, an independent organisation that supports artists and creative communities.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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