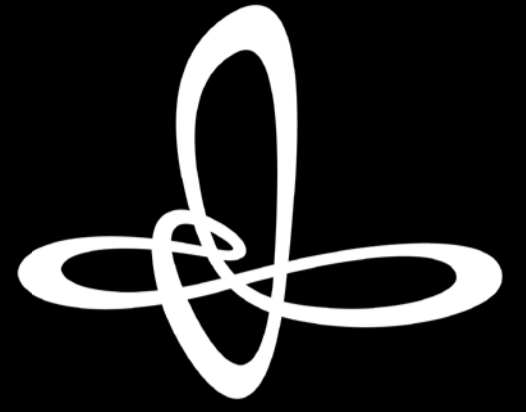


ISSUE NO. 005



ithra
by aramco



Artist: Ali Al-Shareef

ithraeyat magazine

August 2020

Welcome to **Ithraeyat**, a monthly Cultural Magazine produced by The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra). Created to **inspire minds** and **enrich hearts**, this Saudi inspired platform with an expansive international outlook will capture the art scene and the culture of art by bringing together a mosaic of stories collected from across the Kingdom, the region and beyond.



Behind the scenes

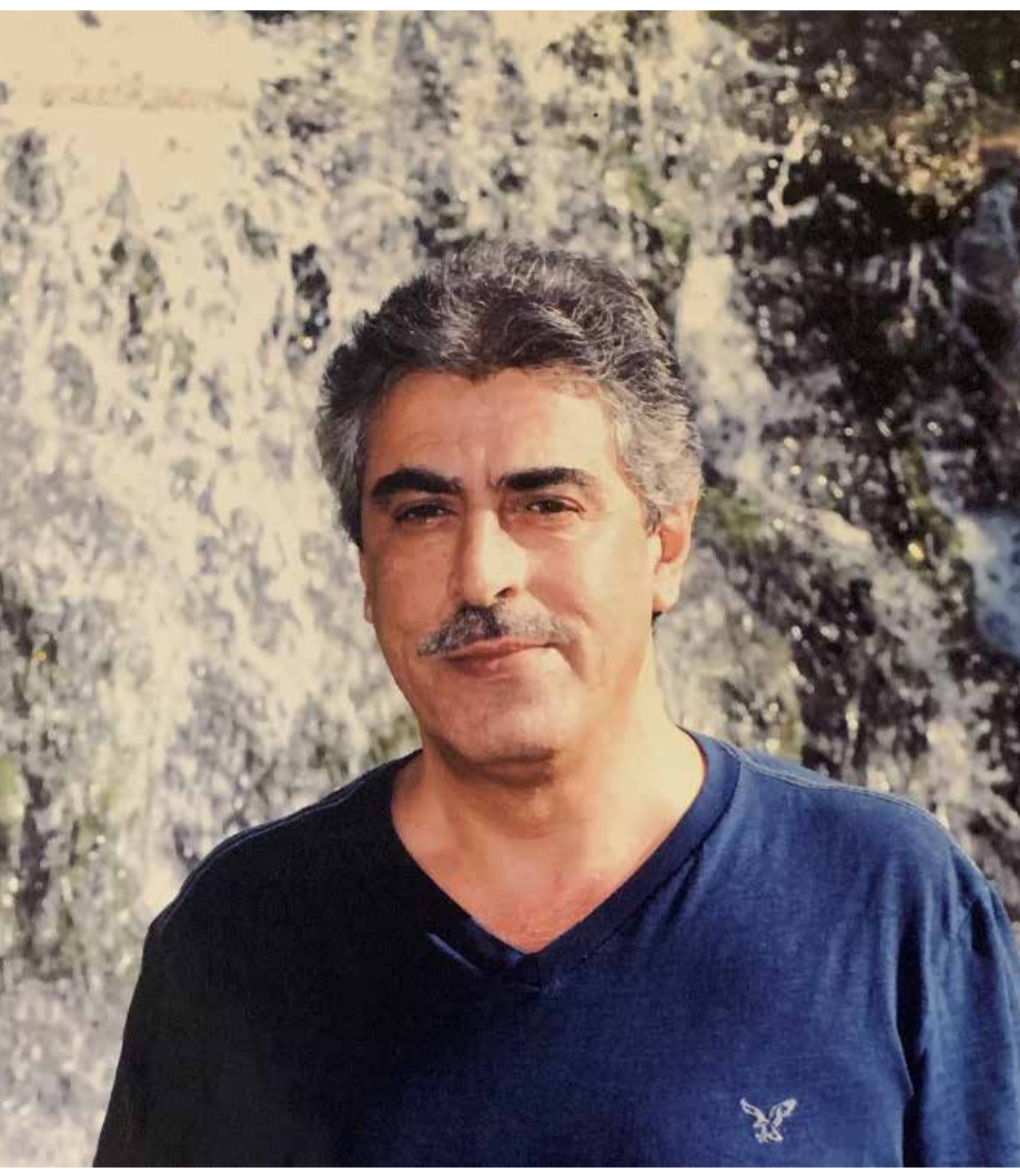
Ithraeyat is the plural of Ithra (enrichment). Magazine has its origins in the Arabic word makhzan, a storehouse. And therefore, Ithraeyat magazine is a storehouse of unique, enriching stories.

Table of contents:

Portrait: Ali Al-Shareef— ‘theme-special’ featured Saudi artist. Feature: The art of legends, includes an interview with Ali Al-Shareef and Seema Mohammed.	4
Guest columnist: Dr. Lamia Baeshen reflects over Saudi legends and myths and the importance of preserving them for future generations.	6
Guest columnist: A love-crazed poet, a queen and a gifted musician—Ghada Al-Muhanna remembers legendary figures from Arabia.	8
Special feature: Sheikha Al-Dosary interviews Dr. Maha Al-Senan and takes us on a tour of five legends from different parts of Saudi Arabia.	9
Special feature: The Wall of Legends—an interview with art enthusiast Abdullah Al-Rasheed and graffiti artist ‘Klakh.’	11
Guest columnist: Mona Khashoggi’s homage to a golden legend: Umm Kulthum.	13
Spotlight: Saudi artists who pay homage to legendary symbols, locations and ideas.	14
Spotlight: Legendary threads: The Madinah bridal dress.	17
Arabic Treasures: The lost city of Ubar—Atlantis of the sands.	18
Ithra Curiosities: Source of light.	19
Add to your bucket list: Prince of generosity—Hatim Al-Tai of Hail.	20
Bridges: Legendary fables: A duck pecking at the moon’s reflection in the water from the Aga Khan Museum.	21
From the Vault: Legendary figures and stories.	23
From the Archives: Pioneers and legendary determination to go where no others went before.	25
From the World Wide Web: Art stories to browse through.	27

A

“I am passionate about capturing the untold stories and legends of Saudi Arabia and presenting them to the world through my art...”



Meet our ‘theme-special’ featured Saudi artist, **Ali Al-Shareef**, whose artistic dedication to past mysterious civilizations has earned him the nickname of ‘the Indiana Jones of rock art.’

R

Mysterious queens and kings. A goddess of motherhood. Warrior women riding lions. These are just a few of the stories forever carved on timeless rock art throughout Saudi Arabia.

And for the past 35 years while stationed around the country in military service, Ali Al-Shareef would capture these legendary stories while exploring mountains and caves in search of treasures.

“I would look for rock art and any archaeological gems that tell me something about Saudi Arabia and its vast and mostly unexplored history,” said the Saudi artist, who is originally from Makkah and lives in Riyadh with his family.

T



LEGENDS

The golden mask. The lost city in the desert. Women who rode lions, mysterious magical creatures and men who conquered Jinn. These are just a handful of legends from Arabia and later Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom is filled with mythical, mysterious legends and stories that have passed down through civilizations and generations. There are also living legends and figures from history who contributed to the foundation and development of a nation.

In this edition, we pay homage to legends in all its forms. Whether imagined or founded on truth, the Arab world is filled with legends that need to be celebrated more and revived

to remain sources of inspiration. Our special featured cover artist is **Ali Al-Shareef**, who is more than just a creator. Presented here for the first time to the public is an exclusive debut of 'Al Qatt Al-Thamudi' — traditional interior wall decoration of the Thamud Civilization—that took him over two years to study, document and revive. Human and bird-like symbols, different floral patterns, moon and sun related carvings related to religious rituals of the time are just some of the Thamud era heritage Al-Shareef hopes to popularize and enlist at UNESCO as part of an intangible heritage.

Guest Columnist: Dr. Lamia Baeshen



Looking towards the light. A mythical art piece by pioneer artist **Tagreed Al-Bagshi**.

❁ TIMELESS SAUDI FOLKTALES

In the tale of “Pearl, the Daughter of Coral,” which resembles the story of Rapunzel, the symbolic power of Lulwa’s long hair is equally matched by her sturdiness and power of mind. Just like a pearl that is hidden in a secured place, isolation makes her

stronger and she succeeds in her battle with the imprisoning witch. Similarly, the girl in “The Bone” tale fearlessly breaks out of the underground cell her father kept her in, preferring her freedom and independence to the safety of the shackles of her home.



Sometimes young women venture out on missions to save men from hardships, like the heroine of the tale "the Bird of Happiness". When many brave men seek that bird but fail to capture it, this young woman rises to the occasion and passes the test so brilliantly that she not only captures the bird, but also frees all the men who were turned into stones. In the tale of "the Gardener's Daughter", the gardener is challenged by the Sultan to solve a series of difficult riddles, he goes home to his daughter sad and distressed, for there seems to be no exit from his dilemma, but the smart girl surprises him with one answer after another, until the Sultan finally pardons him.

For thousands of years, imaginative tales embodied the beliefs, customs and rituals of communities, while they amused, enlightened and instructed their audiences. Oral narratives managed to strengthen communal ties, not only by banishing the monotonous drabness of everyday life, but also by mirroring the collective psyche of human culture. The rich metaphors of the folktales open the windows of the imagination and connect people to their surrounding world through group conformity and normative response.



Dated 1770, this profound folio depicts the legendary 'Layla visiting Majnun', the eternal Arabian Romeo and Juliet story of unrequited love. **Credit:** The Keir Collection of Islamic Art on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art.

Guest columnist: Ghada Al-Muhanna

☀ LEGENDARY FIGURES FROM ARABIA.

“I draw a picture of her in the dust / and cry, my heart in torment / I complain to her about her: for she left me / lovesick, badly stricken / I complain of all the passion I have / suffered, with a plaint toward the dust / Love makes me want to turn to Layla’s land / complaining of my passion and flames in me ...”
—Qays ibn Al Mullaawah ‘Majnun Layla’ from the late 7th century.

Arabia. Many do not know the history it beholds, nor have heard the stories that have been passed down. Most of what

is known is of its religious and recent history. But as Shakespeare once wrote “What’s past is prologue” – meaning all that had happened in the past is an introduction to the great story that will soon show itself.

But what is the story of Arabia? What are the legends and tales that have shaped the people? Of course, as with all stories, there are too many to count, for the diversity of Arabia is what makes these stories beautiful and impactful. It’s what allows us to reflect on who we are as a people – brave, kindhearted and loving, creative and inspirational...

Special feature:

Sheikha Al-Dosary interviews
Dr. Maha Al-Senan.



'Stories and legends' from Saudi Arabia's rock art. By renowned artist **Ali Al-Shareef**.

■ A TOUR OF FIVE LEGENDS FROM SAUDI ARABIA.

“A legend is a huge part of heritage... and heritage is a major factor in determining the identity of a nation,”

—Dr. Maha Al-Senan, a Saudi art historian and cultural advisor

Saudi Arabia has long been a crossroad of ancient civilizations — a place of deep history, that is forever evolving. It is home to one of the world's largest open-air rock art museums, unique carvings that capture history and legends, taking you back to different eras, as far back as the prehistoric times. Each region of the Kingdom has its own collection of rock art, ancient writings and legends from the past. From mischievous Jinn (the muses of the Arabs) to Al-Okhdood

(People of the Ditch) to the lost city of Gerhha and to the tomb of humanity's grandmother (Eve), these are just some of the legends to discover in this article. From different parts of Saudi Arabia, the legends are linked in one way or another to religious, historical, cultural and social beliefs that may have influenced the Kingdom's identity and the collective thinking over the years...



What legends, myths and stories can you see in this masterpiece by **Ali Al-Shareef**?



“The Arab Knight.” The legendary actor Omar Sharif from the legendary film ‘Lawrence of Arabia.’ By Saudi graffiti artist **Klakh**.

Special feature:

▮ THE WALL OF LEGENDS

How does one become a legend? Some would say it is a combination of charisma, mystery, originality, dedication, being impactful, being the first, and often the last of their kind, and perhaps just having that something “special” no one else has at that moment.

“It is a difficult question to answer and I doubt there is just one answer,” said **Abdullah Al-Rasheed**. The Saudi art enthusiast and collector, who is also known for his support of new Saudi artists, has a special dedicated wall to legendary figures in the cultural scene in the library of his home. He

commissioned the Syrian artist Monzer Al Sharabi in Jeddah to draw up figures that have earned the title of legend. From the Saudi cultural scene, the collection includes literary giant Ghazi Al-Gosaibi, poets Prince Badr bin Abdul Mohsin and Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, music icons Mohammed Abdo and Talal Al-Maddah and soccer player Majid Abdullah.

“I created the Wall of Legends as an artistic homage to the greats of our country and beyond,” said Al-Rasheed...

Mohammed Abdo



Talal Al-Maddah



Prince Badr bin Abdul Muhsin



Ghazi Al-Gosaibi



Majid Abdullah



Some of the Saudi legends from the 'Wall of Legends' by Jeddah-based artist **Monzer Charaby**.



Chant Avedissian, *You Are Love*, Gouache on cardboard. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah. A version of Umm Kulthum by this artist hangs at Saudi creative, patron of art, and cultural ambassador **Mona Khashoggi's** home.

🌸 Guest columnist:

Mona Khashoggi's homage to a golden legend: Umm Kulthum.

In Umm Kulthum's last interview, after performing in Paris and before passing away on February 3, 1975, she said she had an invitation to come and sing in London and that she was looking forward to it. Now, after 45 years since her passing, I brought her back to life through a musical show I wrote and produced to perform in London, the city she hoped to perform in. **Umm Kulthum & The Golden Era** was the first English musical at the prestigious Palladium Theater about an Arab music legend, and it is my gift to her.

Umm Kulthum became a living legend capable of surviving not just shifts in musical taste, but also revolutions and changes in leadership. My love and respect for this woman who rose to international stardom from a humble background as the daughter of a village sheikh in the Egyptian Delta, is both

professional and personal. She was a friend of my father's, travelling with him to Paris and Vienna and when she died, my family grieved as though we had lost a family member. Like millions of others, her songs have been a source of comfort and passion throughout my life, connected to memories of the family home in Saudi as a child, on picnics in Lebanon as a teenager, as well as driving through the English countryside listening to her music as a mother.

Known by many terms of endearment, she was the Star of the Orient, the Peoples' Singer, the Darling of the East; a woman who demonstrated what is possible for anyone with ambition and strength. Despite her great fame, who she really was remains an enigma. She branded herself, and kept up an image. Perhaps, this element of mystery is what keeps great divas like Umm Kulthum a legend for the ages.

Spotlight:

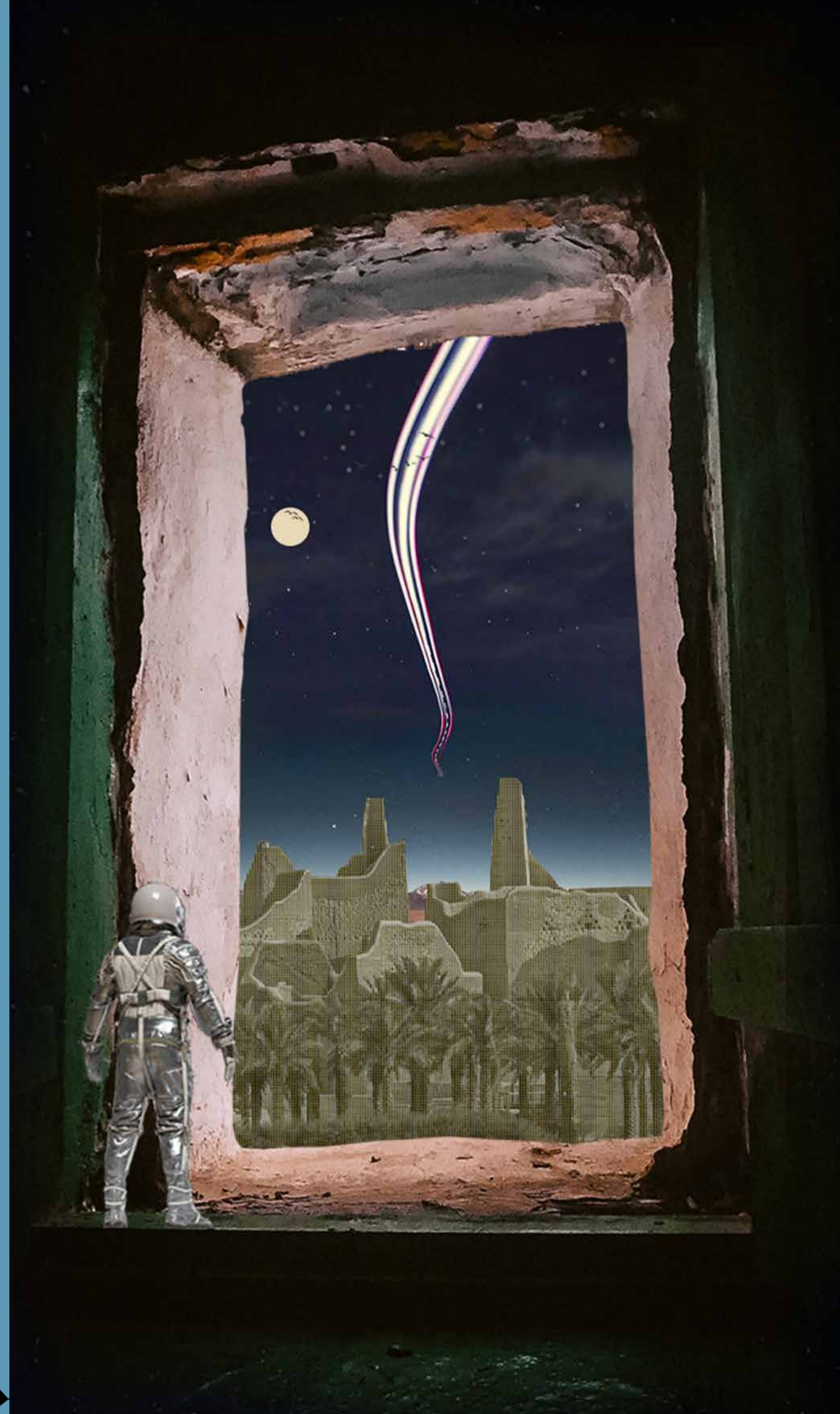
Saudi artists who pay homage to legendary symbols, locations and ideas.

Faya Al-Almay is a renowned artist who masters the art of oil and acrylic and takes heritage and Saudi stories to another level. Adding elements of mystique and mystery, he reimagined the legendary **Al Qatt Al Asiri** here while paying homage to the delicate touches a woman adds to any piece of art.



Najla Dowery is a young Saudi artist who does not add any comments to her pieces, leaving the interpretation to the imagination of the viewer. Here she is paying homage to legendary symbols, such as the “flowers of the Khaleej” and patterns of traditional textiles in the Kingdom.

Ad Diriyah: The future is looking on to the past and still connected with the legendary culture.



Al Masmak Fort: Urban Fabric: the relentlessly uniform grid that paradoxically supports a multiplicity of functions and desires between earth and space.

As an architect, **Faisal Al-Ohali** is distinct in his uses of collage digital art. His interest in architecture lays in the study and design of aerial movement and the interplay of open space and inhabited environments. He is quickly gaining popularity as he revisits legendary locations, giving them a futuristic look.



Osama Al-Kholaiwy who describes himself as a “digital nomad” and is specialized in Urban Design and Planning, combines his love of photography and graphic design to create new age art. Here he is revisiting the famous Elephant Rock in Al-Ula and bringing **it alive** with a mix of music, imagination and art magic.





◉ Spotlight:

Legendary threads: The Madinah bridal dress.

Every bride's greatest wish is to stand out, to be the most beautiful bride there is. It is no coincidence that the bridal dress is often the most important talked about element of any wedding. Wedding costumes reflect the highpoint in sartorial traditions. Cutting across socio-economic backgrounds, the attempt was always to present the bride in the best manner possible as she departs her parent's home.

One will recognize a clear change in style while traveling across the different regions of Saudi Arabia, with variations coming not just by way of color, cut, fabric and embroidery, but also in the vision of clearly evolved and distinct styles. Each form of wear tells a story, with textiles sourced from several communities that capture social indicators. What makes wedding garments unique is that they are a continuum of wedding costumes from the early decades of the 20th century to the present day. While some garments were used on the wedding day itself, others were used during associated

wedding rituals. The differences in the choice of materials reflect the wide range of communities and socio-economic groups. Featured here, is the bridal ensemble from the Western Province (Madinah) that is made from rayon, polyester, cotton, metallic thread and sequins. The great contrast in the use of colors across the western region of the Kingdom is seen in these wedding costumes from Madinah.

Nearly five separate Fuchsia pink layers make up this elaborate costume and the use of extensive metal embroidery of floral elements native to the area (palm fronds and desert flowers) adds grandeur to a bride's appearance. The use of bejeweled accoutrements is a style intrinsic to Madinah and continues to this day with varied levels of elaborateness. A bride stepping out in this vibrant garment, will be the brightest and most legendary bride of that day.

Written by Special Contributor Somaya Badr, the founder and General Manager of **Art of Heritage** and Art of Heritage Cultural Trust.

🌀 Arabic Treasures: In search of a lost city



'Imagined Maps: In search of the lost Arabian City of the Sands...' by **Sheikha Alyazia bint Nahyan Al-Nahyan**.

“Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with ‘Aad - [With] Iram - who had lofty pillars, The likes of whom had never been created in the land? And [with] Thamud, who carved out the rocks in the valley? And [with] Pharaoh, owner of the stakes? - [All of] whom oppressed within the lands And increased therein the corruption. So your Lord poured upon them a scourge of punishment. Indeed, your Lord is in observation.”
(Qur’an, Surat Al-Fajr, The Dawn 89:6-14)

Mankind’s insatiable fascination to discover and search for the lost and unknown has led many travelers and explorers over the decades to venture into the desert of Rub Al-Khali—the Empty Quarter— in search of the legendary lost ‘Atlantis of the sands.’ This fabled City of Ubar, also known as Iram of the Pillars, was a wicked towered city destroyed by strong winds and sand. It is also a city of wealth, jewels, incense and gold, as retold in the timeless tales of 1,001 Nights.

Excavations and archaeological findings over the years have tied different locations to the legend of Ubar but it still remains a mystery.

In this special issue dedicated to legends, we hope to inspire this lost art of exploration of local treasures before they are forgotten forever.

▶ Ithra Curiosities: Source of Light.



Ithra's Source of Light sculpture.

At the heart of Ithra's Plaza is a monumental sculpture by Turin-based artist Giuseppe Penone, entitled "Source of Light," celebrating the history, creativity and energy that is at the core of Ithra's story.

This impressive sculpture connects the earth below to the sky above, forming a symbolic link between these two sources of life and energy. The 90-foot tall artwork consists of three towering bronze trees that "grow" from the base of "the Source" — the symbolic location of the 'Prosperity Well.' It was also known as Well No.7, Saudi Arabia's first commercial oil well.

The three parts of the tree are supported by the branches of a fourth larger tree, which is divided into hollow sections, forming a telescope-like viewing space that projects up towards the sky and appears to levitate above the pool at its base.

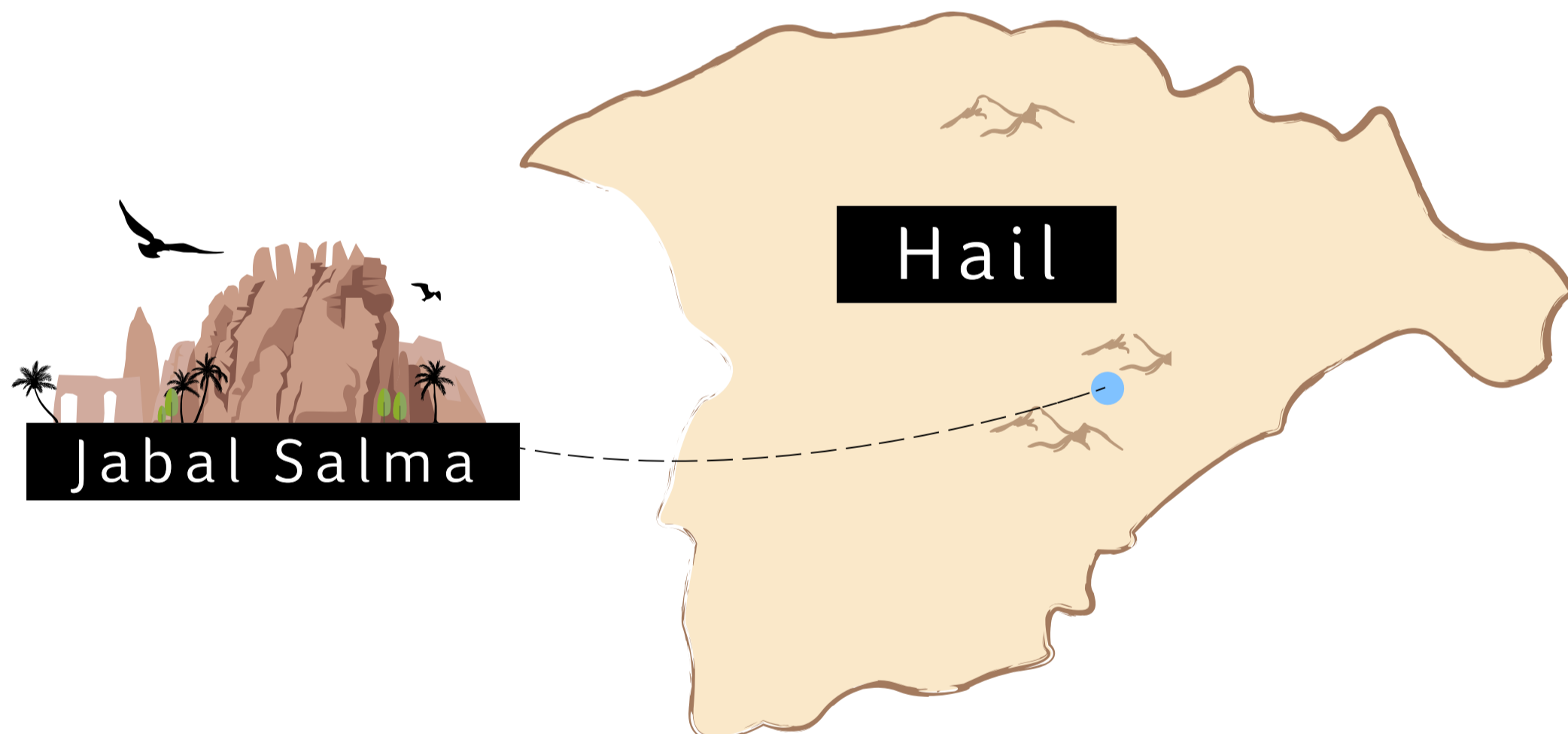
This central tree, made of stainless steel, creates an open interior space and golden shaft of light for visitors gazing upward. This masterpiece gives a whole new artistic meaning to the expression: look towards the light.



Hail mountains, close to the area where Hatim Al-Tai once lived. Photo by **Ziyad Alarfaj**.

Add to your bucket list:

PRINCE OF GENEROSITY —HATIM AL-TAI OF HAIL.



“More generous than Hatim,” says an old Arab proverb, referring to the great legendary generosity of poet Hatim Al-Tai who once lived in Hail. Sometimes mentioned as a prince and a tribal chief of the Tayy tribe, he is believed to have lived in the 6th century CE in the northwestern area of Saudi Arabia known today as Hail. He is said to have inherited his generosity from his mother Gonayya bint Afif Taiya. According to one legend, while pregnant with him, his

mother dreamt that she was given the choice between ten average sons or one with exceptional generosity; she chose the latter, and thus Hatim was born predestined to be exceptionally munificent. He was said to have given away everything he had, and no one who visited him would leave empty handed. There are signs to his home and tomb, in Towaren of Hail. His tomb also became a legend...

Bridges: Cross-Cultural Conversations

📌 A DUCK PECKS AT THE MOON



From a manuscript of Anvar-i Suhayli (The Lights of Canopus). Copied by Na'im Muhammad al-Husayni al-Tabrizi. Paintings attributed to Sadiqi Beg (d. 1612), Qazvin, Iran, dated 13 Safar 1002/November 8, 1593. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper. Page: 30.3 x 20.6 cm. Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, AKM289

Myths, legends and stories are dear to Muslim cultures across time and space. Their popularity lies in their timeless insights, their wisdom, and their educational value. Take the Anvar-i Suhayli (Lights of Canopus) for example, a Persian collection of animal fables derived from the well-known Kalila wa Dimnah stories, represented here by a miniature painting from a manuscript in the Aga Khan Museum, created in Qazvin, Iran, in 1593.

These fables of the Anvar-i Suhayli ultimately originated in ancient India, but became popular largely through the Arabic translation of Ibn al-Muqaffa' in the 8th century before being translated into Persian and other languages in the centuries to come. The collection is named after a ruler of the Timurid dynasty, Nizam al-Din Shaykh-Ahmad Suhayli, to whom this work is dedicated to by the author. The title is a clever play on words, as it also refers to the lights of Canopus, the brightest star in the southern constellation of Carina.



The painting here shows a duck pecking at the moon's reflection in the water. The legendary story goes as follows: one day a duck sees the reflection of the moon in the water and thinks it is a fish. Trying to catch it, the duck pecks at it repeatedly but without success. Hungry and despondent, it decides from that night onwards never to make the same mistake again. Thereafter, whenever it spots a fish in the water, the duck dismisses it as a trick of the moonlight and ignores it, becoming all the more hungry as a result.

What is the moral of this fable? Don't let one bad experience influence all subsequent attitudes or behaviors – keep an open mind and try again, each time taking into consideration the differences and peculiarities of a situation or an opportunity that may present itself in life. While written down hundreds of years ago, this story remains relevant, and a truly befitting message for our times today.

Written by Special Guest Contributor Dr. Ulrike Al-Khamis, PhD, the Director of Collections and Public Programs at the Aga Khan Museum. In each issue, we will feature a special treasure from the **Aga Khan Museum**, one that tells a story, captures a moment and inspires conversation.



From the Vault:

Legendary figures and stories.

“The secrets of the sun are yours, but you Content yourself with motes trapped in its beams...” —Farid al-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*. Celebrities that still inspire the imagination, leaders that continue to intrigue, humble symbols that became powerful statements of courage, and timeless poems with pearls of wisdom— still relevant today—in this special collection of artworks courtesy of **Barjeel Art Foundation**, Sharjah, we discover the many faces and facets of legends.

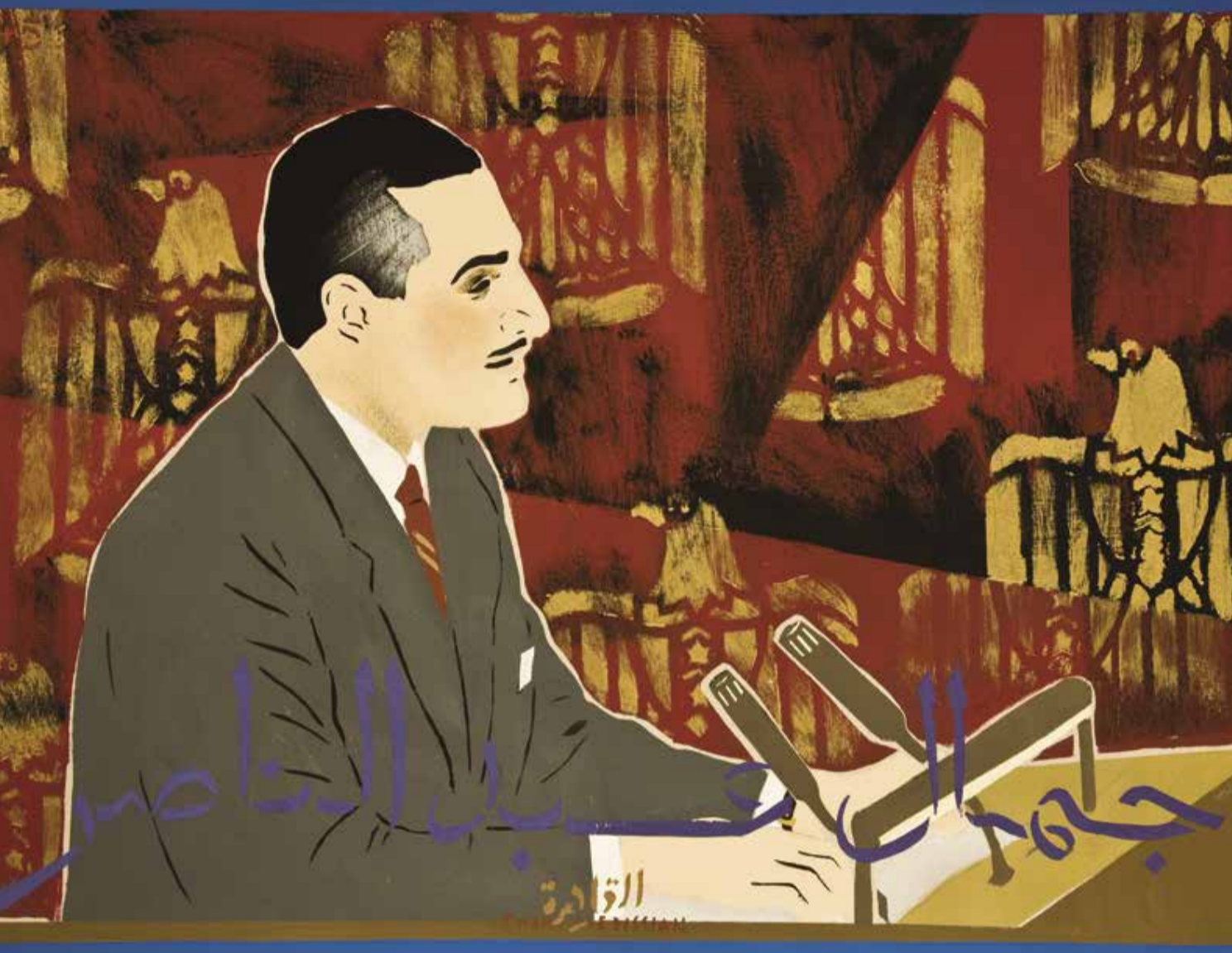


Farah Behbehani, *The Story of the Peacock*, Serigraph on paper, 38.2 x 93 cm, 2008. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

From Kuwait, the artist Farah Behbehani explores *The Conference of the Birds*, a 12th-century mystical epic by the Persian poet Farid Al-Din Attar. A pinnacle of Sufism, the enchanting poem narrates the allegorical journey of a group of birds and the moral learning they encounter along their way. It begins with a meeting of all of the world’s birds to decide who will be their sovereign, because, at the moment,

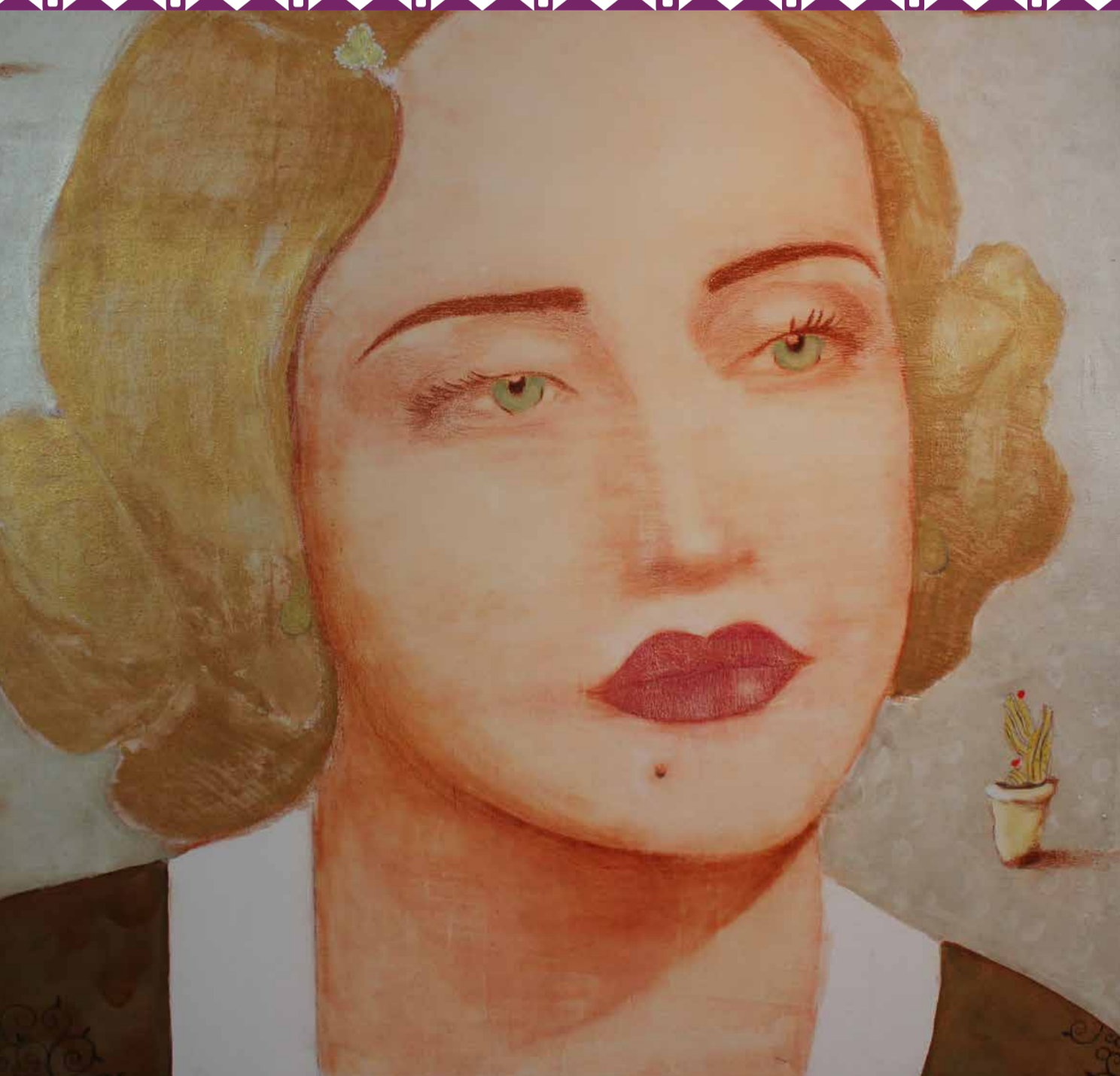
they’re without a leader. The hoopoe, a solitary, territorial bird, and the wisest of all, proposes finding the simurgh (a mythical, benevolent bird related to the Phoenix) to resolve the dilemma. The hoopoe will then guide all the other birds where each of the birds represents a different human type – such as a coward and a lover—symbolic representations of the human vices which keep people away from enlightenment.

LEGENDARY ARAB ICONS



Chant Avedissian, Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egyptian president), Gouache on cardboard, 49 x 69 cm, 2008. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Dia Azzawi, Handala, Bronze sculpture, 2011, 29 x 17 x 10 cm. The character of the 'refugee boy' is a personification of the Palestinian people and was created in 1969 by political cartoonist Naji al-Ali. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.



Adel El Siwi, Asmahan (Syrian singer and Druze princess), Mixed media on canvas, 140 x 170 cm, 2008. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

From the Archives:

Legends from the desert.



RARITIES FROM THE ARAMCO ARCHIVES.

1935

To go where no one has gone before. We pay homage to the legendary resilience, dedication and ambition of pioneer figures and the Aramco team to explore, discover and deliver change and prosperity to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Dated October of 1967, we witness the courage to drive through difficult harsh terrain of the Rub Al-Khali (Empty Quarter) desert.

1955

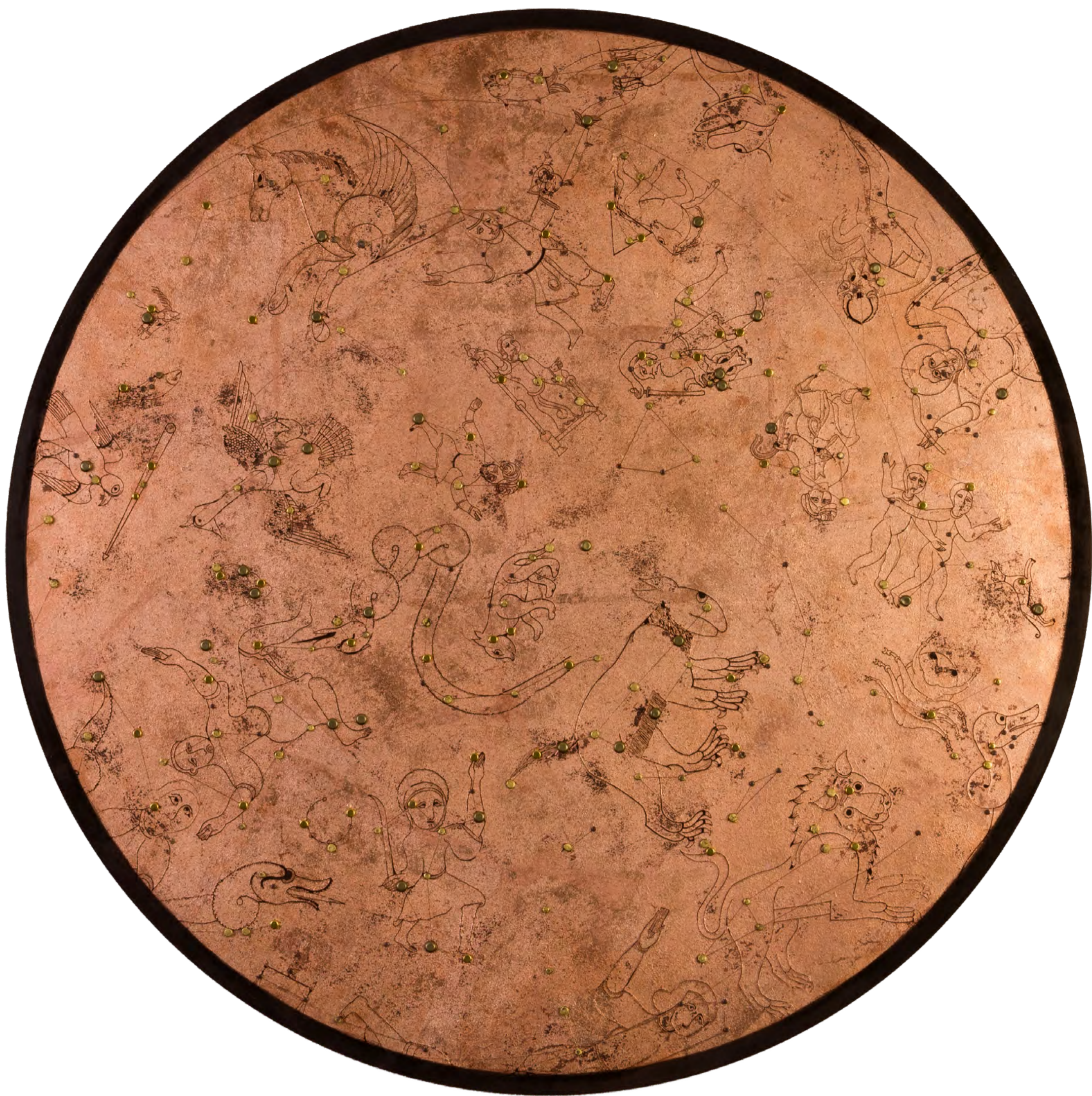


1967

We salute the skill and the knowledge of two legends of the country's oil history: In March of 1938, the Saudi tracker and intuitive geographer Khamis bin Rimthan, who understood the desert and used the stars for navigation, helped the American chief geologist Max Steineke find the legendary Well No.7, now known as the 'Prosperity Well.' Rimthan's skill was well known in the 1930s, and he was chosen to be the official guide for American geologists when the oil company asked then Emir of the Eastern Province, Abdullah Bin Jalawi, to provide them with a skilled

desert guide. At the time, Rimthan was living with his tribe in the Al-Dahna desert. He became known as **"the guide of guides."**

An oilfield was named after Rimthan in 1974 in recognition of his efforts, while a building in the Aramco complex is named after Steineke in recognition of his role. Here we see Steineke take a moment to rest on sand dunes in a photo dated 1935, while this iconic photo from 1955 captures Rimthan trying his hand at using the Alidade, a sighting device that allows one to see a distant object and use the line of sight to perform a task.



“The journey in God by God,” 2017 (by God, in that the spiritual traveler leaves his or her own existence and ascribes his journey to God). By Saudi Artist **Basmah Felemban**. Courtesy Basmah Felemban and **Athr Gallery**. Details: Laser engraved on coppered plywood with gilded embellishments and a rotating mechanism. 65 x 65 cm. It is a map of the constellations using ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi’s work titled “Book of the Constellations of the Fixed Stars”, it resembles the second journey, and one of the maps or tools that a traveler would need on his journey to transcend from one realm to another.

From the World Wide Web: Art stories to browse through

- ↘ A special issue celebrating Arab art
- ↘ Obituary: The legendary Saudi playwright Ibrahim Al-Qadi, father of Indian Theater
- ↘ Sudanese artists join forces to preserve the country’s cultural past, present and future
- ↘ The cultural scene of Lebanon impacted by explosion and what can be done



Cassettes of Arab legends: Lebanon's iconic singer Fairouz, Egypt's diva Umm Kulthum and the romantic crooner Abdul Halim Hafez dubbed 'Al-Andaleeb Al-Asmar' — the Dark-skinned or Tan Nightingale — and Syrian-Egyptian composer and singer Farid Al-Atrash. Artwork by Saudi artist Bassem Al Sharqi.

Next issue: Nation

We look forward to sharing our 'makhzan' of stories with you every month.



To celebrate the Saudi National Day with us in the next issue of Ithraeyat, send us a **"postcard"** of what that day means to you. It can be a digital artwork or painting. (minimum size of image sent 1MB). The winning postcards will be exhibited in the magazine as pieces of art for the world to view. please email: ithraeyat@ithra.com

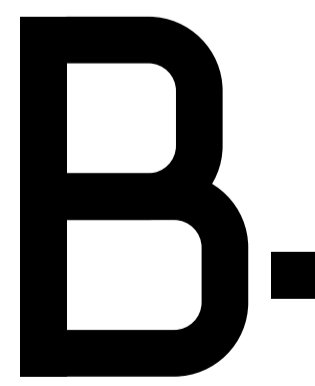
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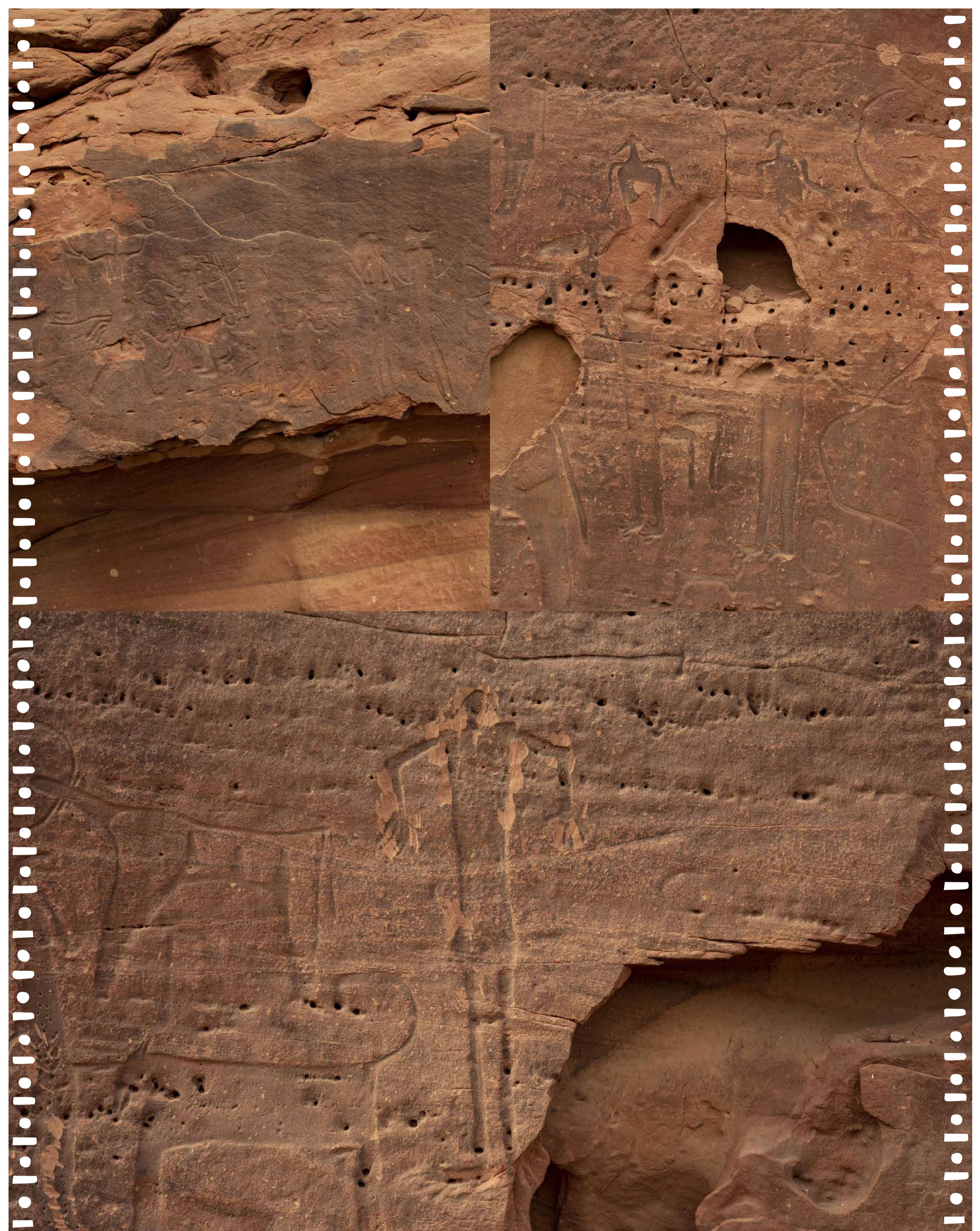


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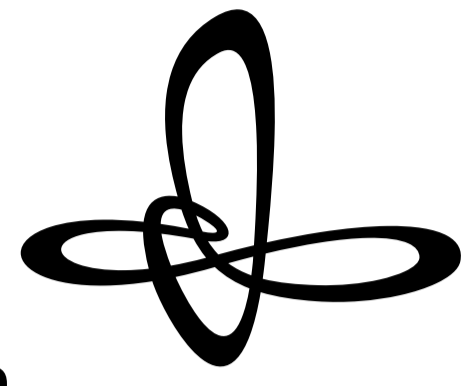
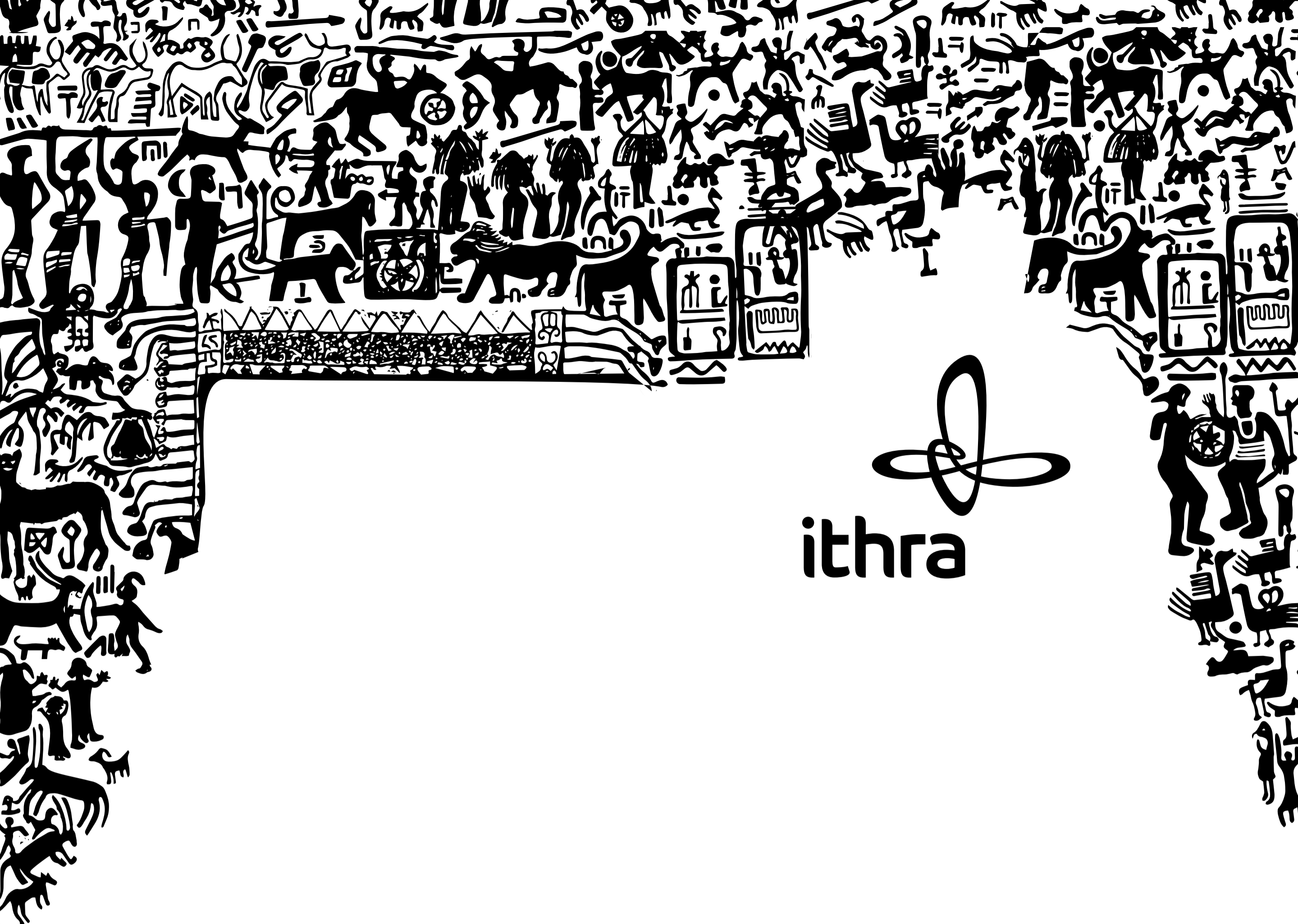


AGA KHAN MUSEUM

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The Scene. The Family. I am One. From the 2019 project by Saudi artist and photographer **Moath Al-Ofi**. Saudi carvings that are over 9,000 years old. From Ithra's art collection.



ithra

To engage with Ithra's wide range of virtual programs and activities, please check **Ithra Connect**.

About Ithra

The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture is one of Saudi Arabia's most influential cultural destinations, a destination for the curious, creatives, seekers of knowledge, and more.

Through a compelling series of programs, performances, exhibitions, events and initiatives, Ithra creates world-class experiences across its interactive public spaces that bring together culture, innovation and knowledge that are designed to appeal to everyone.

Connecting creatives, challenging perspectives and transforming ideas, Ithra is graduating its own leaders in the cultural field.

Ithra is **Saudi Aramco's** flagship CSR initiative and the largest cultural contribution to the Kingdom.

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