



Adel Abidin's Michael. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi and the artist

Michael Jackson takes centre stage at Lawrie Shabibi gallery's summer show Unseen

[Anna Seaman](#)

August 6, 2016 Updated: August 6, 2016 04:19 PM

If there is one piece of art that you must see in the current show at Lawrie Shabibi gallery, it is Adel Abidin's Michael.

In what is almost a parody of our times, and a mocking criticism of the celebrity-obsessed world we live in, Abidin resurrects Michael Jackson in a 16-minute video. It imagines a reality in which the singer has been brought back from the dead and is interviewed on a talk show that is being live-streamed to an audience of screaming fans in Times Square, New York.

Jackson's answers appear surreal and evasive – but on closer examination, they are revealed to be a random compilation of lyrics from his songs.

It is an extraordinary and deeply perturbing work. Its comic overtones, which are typical of Abidin's style, redeem it and make it compelling viewing.

The piece was first shown last year in the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki where Abidin is based, but will be screened for the first time in Dubai as part of Unseen, the gallery's summer show.

All the works in the group show come from the gallery's roster of artists, but have not been shown here before, although the other works vary greatly in tone and substance.

Farhad Ahrarnia's creation explores the Khatam – an Iranian micro-mosaic used decoratively to embellish domestic objects. Gentle and delicate, the work concentrates on the geometry and balance of the traditional mosaic, and as such, fuses it with modernist traditions.

Also on display are pieces from Asad Faulwell's Les Femme D'Alger series, which the gallery introduced in 2013. The work is an homage to the forgotten Algerian women who fought alongside their male counterparts in the war of independence from French occupation between 1954 and 1962. They are elaborate collages, which are at once beautiful and macabre, and offer many layers of interpretation.

Although all the works are showing for the first time, some of them, such as the Faulwell pieces, are echoes of previous shows. Nathaniel Rackowe's light installation made of corrugated iron roofing sheets and Driss Ouadahi's paintings of urban environments are both strong, and share a similarity with the artworks exhibited in their solo shows over the last season. Shahpour Pouyan, who was one of the shortlisted entrants for the Jameel Prize and whose work is currently on show in Istanbul has been with the gallery for some years. His work in this show is a set of 39 drawings that explore the notion of memory.

Also part of the exhibition are Palestinian artists Larissa Sansour and Yazan Khalili, who explore the political conversation surrounding the nature of homeland. Both artists produce fascinating works – Khalili shows the urban landscape through photographs, while Sansour, through her a multi-piece project Nation Estate, imagines her homeland enclosed in a dystopian high-rise tower.

Unseen runs until September 10 at Lawrie Shabibi gallery. Visit www.lawrieshabibi.com

aseaman@thenational.ae