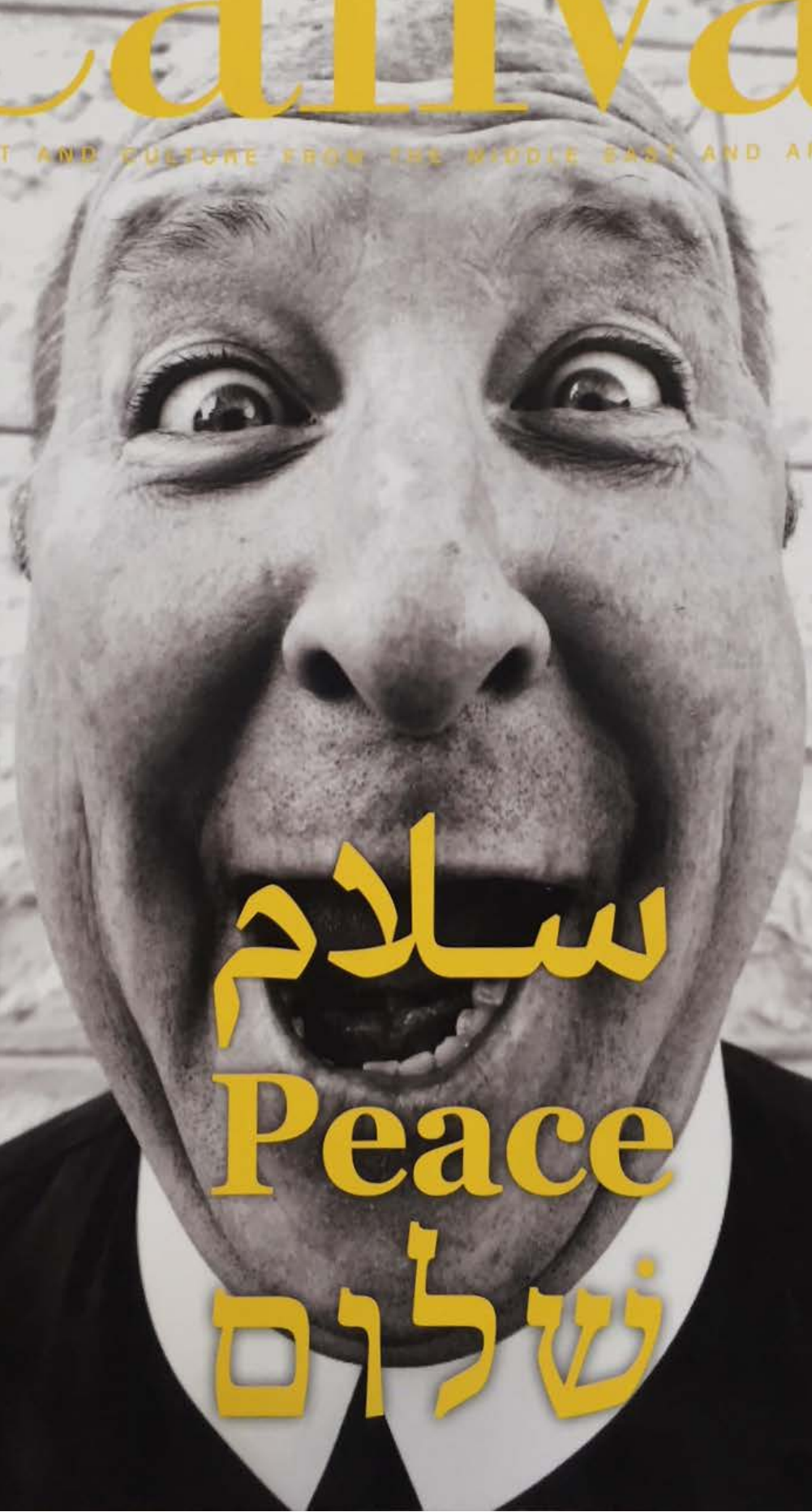


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ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD



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Zak Ové at his exhibition *Star Liner*, Lawrie Shabibi. © Canvas

# ZAK OVÉ AND AFROFUTURISM

Zak Ové is a London-based visual artist of Irish and Trinidadian descent. In his first Middle Eastern solo, *Star Liner* (which ran until 7 May at Lawrie Shabibi), he merged artisanal traditions of crochet and sculpture-making with concepts of Afrofuturism, using found objects such as old car parts from junkyards. **Nadine Khalil** meets the artist to learn more about what inspires him.



Installation view of Zak Ové's solo exhibition *Star Liner* at Lawrie Shabibi. Image courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi. Photography by Ismail Noor

**Nadine Khalil: Why did you call the exhibition *Star Liner*?**

Zak Ové: The name comes from Marcus Garvey's "Black Star Line," which operated between New York and Africa in the 1920s. It was a shipping line set up by a black community in the United States to repatriate Africans who had been incarcerated as slaves. With this show, I was interested in building something that felt very much like a journey into space and back. What I've been trying to explore was a more futurist version, where we decide what our future is for ourselves.

**NK: How do you plan your artistic process?**

ZO: I begin working with central themes, but in a way, what I'm fabricating feels a bit like a coral reef – it's about how to create an abstract that feels rhythmical and still has a sense of balance, like hyperbolic pattern-making. Or how you put together something that feels very broken up, but at the same time has a clear linear sense. I usually start with the grid, and then abstract from that and just work freely.

**NK: Why did you start working with crochet?**

ZO: I was commissioned by the British Museum [in 2015] to make two sculptures of *Moko Jumbies* [stilt walkers], which was a West African tradition revitalised in the Caribbean. For the headpieces I used doilies, and realised that they are a dynamic form of expression I could explore further. In Caribbean homes, for example, we present brightly coloured doilies to impress important guests and the masquerade itself is extremely

powerful in terms of colour. So I've tried to find things that amplify that experience, as a carnival abstract, if you like.

**NK: How come you are so fascinated by the Trinidadian carnival?**

ZO: The carnival ran side by side with the independence movement in Trinidad. It was a Spanish festival, given to us by our colonial masters, but we were able to turn that on its head and use their masquerade and costumes as a means to emancipate ourselves. Here was a performance festival that was used to liberate its people – who knew that they couldn't reach independence with guns – in an experience of exultation and transfiguration. One of the things I try to really push through all of this work is that it's a positive journey. We don't only have to suffer, we can be triumphant and exonerate... For me, it is very important that this work feels like a victory.

**NK: What was the rationale behind merging industrial objects with traditional African sculptures?**

ZO: I'm interested in how to use new art materials to create a new dialogue, to give life back to old world mythologies, so that in this millennium certain traditions don't have to die. I was interested in African mask making and how one might explore these traditions beyond the original processes. I've been trolling junkyards to find interesting objects that I can use, like old car parts, to make these kind of expressions, or 1960s fairground rides that felt emblematic of space travel in some way. [E]