

CULTURE &amp; LIFESTYLE

# 5 Middle Eastern Artists You Need To Know

Prominent Emirati multimedia artist Zeinab Al Hashemi spotlights the contemporary creatives currently on her radar

By Aisha Zaman

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Inspired by an ancient Arabic poem, *After Illusion* by Zahrah Al Ghamdi, for the Saudi Arabia Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia 2022. Photo: Italo Rondinella

The Middle East is [home to some of the world's leading art institutions](#), including the Louvre Abu Dhabi, Sharjah Art Foundation, Qatar Museums, Jameel Art Center in Dubai and Hayy Jameel in Jeddah. These institutions are elevating the region's artists who draw on centuries of tradition and knowledge, to create artworks that not only reflect their rich culture but also offer thought provoking contemporary pieces that transcend regional boundaries.



Zeinab Al Hashemi

Amongst them is [Zeinab Al Hashemi](#), an Emirati conceptual artist specialising in site-specific and experimental installations, and public art. Like many artists of her generation she has been inspired by the dynamic change in the region. Al Hashemi's subject matter mostly stems from the cultural traditions of the UAE, with a particular focus on Emirati crafts. Collaborating with local artisans, she transforms their know-how into unique industrial-esque art.





Al Hashemi's site-specific camel hide installation, Camouflage 2.0, at Desert X AIUla 2022. Photo: Lance Gerber

"Today, Middle Eastern art is at the intersection of different cultures, languages, and religions," says Al Hashemi. "That creates a very diverse and dynamic art scene. Our artists are presenting new perspectives of our region and building a rich new body of work that should definitely be on the radar of art lovers from around the world."

Recently nominated for the Richard Mille Art Prize, and with a number of collaborative installations with luxury brands like Hermès, Swarovski and Tiffany & Co under her belt, she is definitely a cultural authority in the region. She has been creating waves within the art world, by participating in numerous group exhibitions, art fairs and festivals from Shanghai to London and Washington DC. Here, Al Hashemi shares the creatives she is following.

### Shaikha Al Mazrou

UAE-born [Shaikha Al Mazrou](#) is considered to be among the most innovative and promising artists of her generation. Her sculptural experiments and installations are expressions of materiality – symbolising the tension and interplay between form and content. Shaikha received her MFA in 2014 from the Chelsea College of Fine Art, University of the Arts London. Prior to that, she studied at the College of Fine Arts and Design, University of Sharjah where she is currently a Sculpture Lecturer.



Shaikha Al Mazrou's 'Measuring the Physicality of Void' at Desert X AIUla 2022 presented a group of pillow-like inflated metal sculptures that blended into the desert. Photo: Lance Gerber

She is renowned for pushing boundaries and evolving ideas from contemporary artistic movements similarly fascinated with formal and material elements, from colour theory to geometric abstraction. It is no surprise that Al Mazrou's work has been collected by esteemed institutions such as The Dubai Collection, The Farjam Foundation, and The Pizzuti Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art, among others. Meanwhile her recent participation in the Desert X - AIUla exhibition and nomination for the Richard Mille Art Prize at the Louvre Abu Dhabi are further testament to her impactful and dynamic approach to art.

## Zahrah Al Ghamdi

Saudi artist, [Zahrah Al Ghamdi](#) is known for creating site-specific installations that seamlessly blend with the natural landscape and architectural structures. She is inspired by Jeddah, where she lives and works, and the history of Saudi Arabia. Her artistic expression involves exploring traditional architecture and memory to highlight important issues of cultural identity and loss.



Soliloquy (2022) made from Acacia tree thorns. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Alghamdi's site-specific installations showcase her meticulous attention to detail, where bits of soil, clay, pebbles, leather, and water are all carefully assembled to create a masterpiece. Recognised as one of the leading women artists in Saudi Arabia, her work has been exhibited in esteemed art galleries such as the Desert X Coachella USA, Venice Biennale, and the British Museum UK. Alghamdi holds a PhD in Design and Visual Art from Coventry University UK, where she serves as a visiting professor. Her work is part of the permanent collections of institutions across the world, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the British Museum, London, and Art Jameel Foundation, Dubai.

## M'hammed Kilito

M'hammed Kilito is a Moroccan documentary photographer and a National Geographic Explorer based in Casablanca. His practice delves into the complex relationship between individuals and/or groups and the environment they inhabit. He is passionate about capturing narratives that illustrate the nature of these complex relationships. Largely focusing on themes such as cultural identity, the sociology of work, and climate change.



From the artist's 'Before It's Gone' series that was among the shortlisted projects for the Leica Oskar Barnack Award photo competition 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist

Kilito's thoughtful photographs have been exhibited at numerous festivals and institutions worldwide, including the Leica Ernst Leitz Museum in Germany, Sharjah Art Foundation in UAE, 1:54 Art Fair in France and the Tate Modern in UK. His work offers a unique perspective on the world around us and provides important insights into the human experience.

## Mohammed Al Faraj

Mohammed Al Faraj is a Saudi artist and filmmaker who bridges heritage, culture and craftsmanship in his work. His practice often reflects a collaborative ethos that moves effortlessly across various platforms, which include photography, television, visual art institutions and social media. His inspiration is deeply rooted in his hometown, Al Hassa, an oasis situated within a harsh desert environment. He focuses on the essential connection between humanity and nature, often incorporating natural materials native to the region, like dirt, palm fronds, and dates, into his artwork.



Exploring concepts of water and air in the desert, Guardians of the Well, Mohammed Al Faraj's fossil-like installation at the Forever is Now 2022 showcase by the Pyramids of Giza. Photo: MO4 Network, courtesy of Art D'Egypte

Al Faraj's practice shifts between fiction and non-fiction subjects, investigating and navigating the line between them. By juxtaposing news clips from sources of varying

integrity with original footage, he reveals glaring hypocrisies and injustices within public perceptions of topics like ecological conservation and citizenship, and the role of media in desensitising audiences to these contradictions. Al Faraj's work has been shown at the Sharjah Art Foundation, Le Murate PAC Florence, Athr Gallery Jeddah, Saudi Film Festival, and Dubai International Film Festival.

## Alymamah Rashed

[Alymamah Rashed](#) is a Kuwaiti visual artist who explores topics of identity and the natural environment through the discourse of her own body, fluctuating between perspectives of the East and West. Her work negotiates her female subjectivity in relation to regional folklore, the banal objects she encounters everyday, and her local botanical finds. Rashed's paintings are not just a visual documentation of her personal life, but also a collective reflection of what many women, Muslims, and Arabs experience. She tackles difficult subjects expertly, as her work is not overtly political, yet addresses issues of Islamophobia, gender equality, racism, reclaiming one's spirituality and femininity, and challenging social norms.



'Hold My Fronds and Talk to My Flesh In Whispers', a 2022 work by Alymamah Rashed. Photo courtesy of the artist

Alymamah received her MFA in Fine Arts at Parsons School of Design in 2019 and her BFA in Fine Arts at The School of Visual Arts in 2016. She has participated in various exhibitions in New York City including the Czech Center, Parsol Projects, and The New School. She is a recipient of the Masters Scholarship and the Merit Scholarship program by the Kuwait Ministry of Higher Education.

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