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Sharjah Art Foundation brings together three distinctive new exhibitions

Three shows opened at Sharjah Art Foundation this weekend. As varied in content as their artists, here's what's in store at the exhibitions /seconds; Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarar: GCC: Achievements in Retrospective



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The exhibition /seconds is an onslaught of visuals that includes posters, installations and prints curated by Peter Lewis. Rebecca Rees for The National

Here's a look at the three very different exhibitions that are on show at Sharjah Art Foundation's Art Spaces.

Peter Lewis's /seconds

Peter Lewis's exhibition /seconds is a visual onslaught of chaos and collage. The walls are covered from ceiling to floor with poster-sized images, some newly produced for the show and some taken from his online archive. In the centre of the room are bizarre, seemingly unconnected installations, which vary from digitised woven images of scientists to a life-size model of an astronaut with an animal's skull round its neck.

After talking to the curator for some time, I become convinced that this is the physical version of the internet – this is what it would be like to walk through the myriad pages of content that we browse every day.

"It is a hyperchaotic exhibition with many thousands of entry points and perspectives," says Lewis. "I think that is why people understand it."

The show is made up of pieces of art from 130 artists who have contributed to Lewis's online magazine, also called /seconds. The artists have no other obvious connection – they are from all over the world and work in many different media.

We see sculptures from the UAE's Hassan Sharif and photographs from Mohammed Kazem's Directions series alongside strikingly odd images, including a microscopic form of an object that doesn't really exist, created by an Irish artist named Colm Lally.

As a viewer, you have to work hard to figure out who has created each individual item because they are only mentioned on a printed sheet at the entrance. It is, explains Lewis, not the first priority.

"This exhibition is not singular in any sense, which is why it is called /seconds – even its starting point is plural. The first priority is that this is a very beautiful space with an enormous amount of invention within. It is a collage, so the differences and antagonisms of each piece are supporting the whole concept rather than destroying it."

In that sense, then, it is really an interesting exhibition and although your eye flits from one thing to another and doesn't know where to land, the whole experience is somehow familiar.

The London-based Lewis is no stranger to this region. In fact, he can be credited with shaping the Sharjah Biennial into what it is today. In 2003, he co-curated the event with Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, who went on to found the Sharjah Art Foundation and is currently its president.

"The foundation has acquired an enormous international reputation since then," says Lewis. "The relation to the magazine is somehow in parallel with the growth of the foundation. It is like a biennial in itself, it is like a museum."

• **/seconds runs until December 10 at Sharjah Art Foundation's Art Spaces in Sharjah Heritage Area. Visit www.sharjahart.org**

Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarara

In Building F is a retrospective collection from the Palestinian revolutionary artist Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarara, who was born in 1933 and is based in Amman, Jordan. Zarara's work dates back to 1965, but is still highly relevant.

In sculptural paintings, made from sawdust cast in resin, Zarara documents the Palestinian struggle in politically charged, emotional pieces. In one, a woman and child cower, raising their hands to protect themselves from missiles. In another, a woman flanked by Palestinian flags and candles is armed with weapons.

There are more general pieces, too, with slogans carved into them, such as "They may kill the Revolutionist but never the Revolution".

Sheikha Hoor, who curated the show, says she was fascinated by Zarara's works and chose the pieces in the show after a visit to his studio. "The Palestinian cause has been with us since we were children, so it is something particularly close to my heart."

• **Abdul Hay Mosallam Zarara runs until January 10 at Sharjah Art Foundation's Art Spaces. Visit www.sharjahart.org**

GCC: Achievements in Retrospective

In Building J and Bait Habib Shalawan is the show by GCC, a collective of eight artistic thinkers (notably, not all of them are artists – there is also an architect, an industrial designer and a musician). Although the name suggests they are from all over the region, they are mostly Kuwaiti artists who have had an almost meteoric rise to success since forming only a year ago and are already enjoying a solo show in New York's MoMA PS1 this summer.

For their Sharjah show titled GCC: Achievements in Retrospective, they have created a ceiling installation reflecting on the subject of power and authority. This installation hangs, opulent and ominous, above the piece titled Micro Council that they created for the New York show. Micro Council is a miniature version of the actual GCC Senate meeting table and it sits in the centre of an otherwise empty room.

"We are interested in the aesthetics of power and the manifestation of that in the Gulf. We are also very interested in scale and post-oil spatial aspects in the Gulf," says one member, who insists the entire group is credited with the quote.

Their installation continues with a sound piece, which is a reading of a fictional charter that is composed to sound like the real GCC charter. It is broadcast from speakers in an open-air, floodlit space and has a hypnotic and entrancing effect. This is complemented with a collection of trophies called Congratulants, encased in pedestals.

"They are somehow ubiquitous in the Gulf, but there is a serious amount of pride in them, too, and we take that seriously, which is why we have exhibited them as such," they say.

The conversation the collective start about power in the first room continues into one that discusses how environments can shape group and individual experiences.

• **GCC: Achievements in Retrospective runs until December 10 at Sharjah Art Foundation's Art Spaces. Visit www.sharjahart.org**

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