

Saudi Arabia showcases contemporary art

Saudi Arabia's Art Council has created an exhibition, *Fast Forward*, to explore the history of the country's contemporary art since 1960.

The Gulf country has the region's largest number of active contemporary artists and the longest history of sending its artists overseas to study.

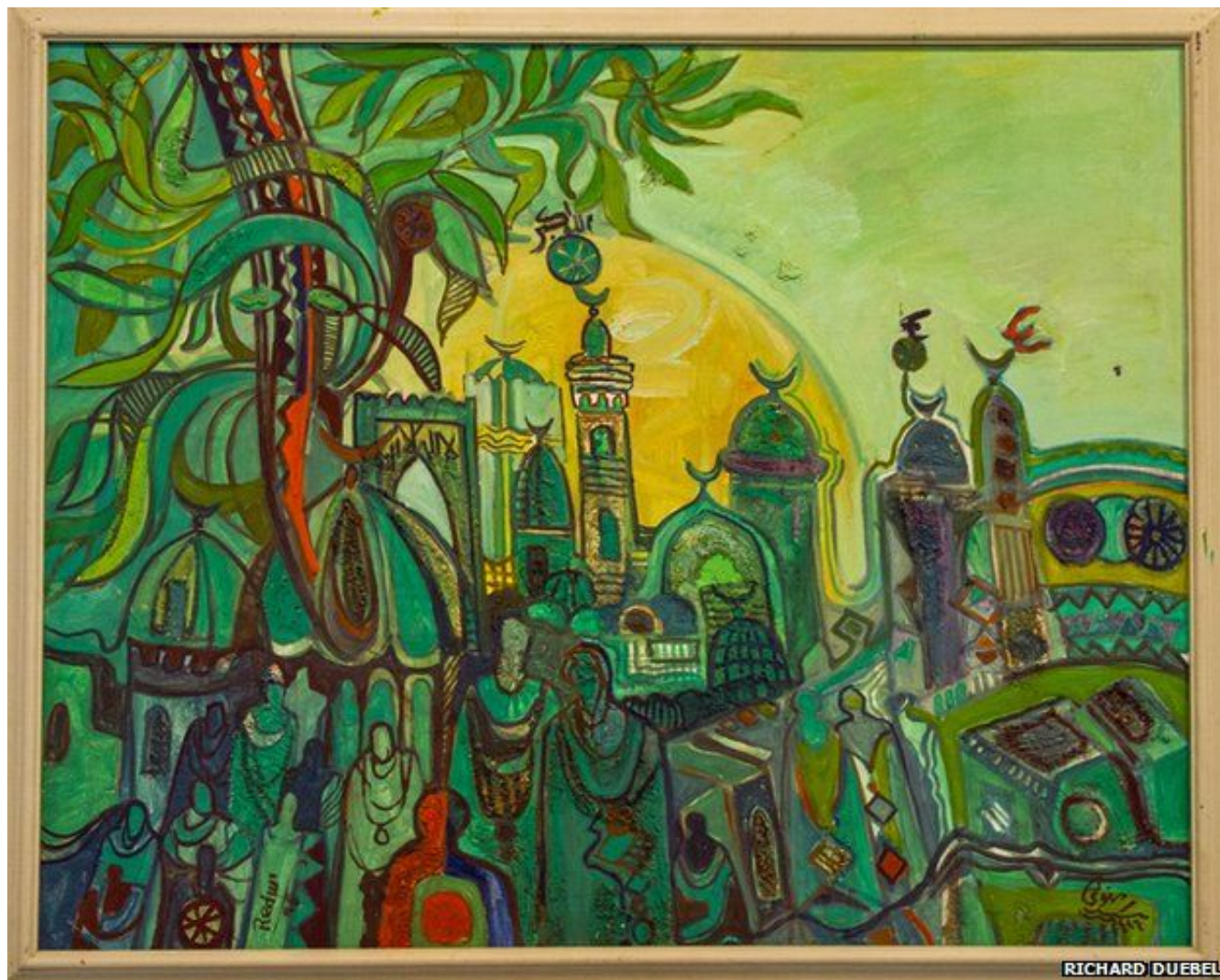
Curator Bashar Al Shroogi has created the exhibition, which is running at the Gold Moor Mall in Jeddah's Shatie District until 22 April. Here is a selection of the images on display.



Richard Duebel

Artist Dia Aziz Dia from Jeddah is one of the Saudi Arabia's early pioneers who was sent to Rome on a state-funded international scholarship to study art in the 1960s. Inspired by his encounter with surrealism his early portraits, including this untitled 1969 work, reflect its influence.

The artist also produced key public works including the relief on the Saudi Airlines building in Jeddah and a sculpture at the entrance to Mecca.



Richard Duebel

Abdulhalim Radwi is a Mecca-born artist who also studied art in Rome. Jeddah, Mecca and Medina are known for producing outstanding artists, partly due to the annual influx of pilgrims from around the world, introducing new cultural references.

Radwi concentrates on Saudi lifestyles and he encouraged fellow Saudi artists to keep an eye on their national identity. This artwork is called Almadina Almonawara.



Richard Duebel

The giant-size poster for this year's Jeddah Arts event, called 21,39, is mounted on a wall outside the shopping precinct where the main exhibition is being held.

It is designed by Basma Kholief, one of a growing number of women working in the culture industry in Saudi Arabia. The poster shows shipping containers entering the country through Jeddah, the kingdom's conduit for the Two Holy Cities and the kingdom's most ethnically diverse city.

The young graphic designer uses the image to suggest that the city is as open to new artistic ideas as to the manufactured products that flow in daily.

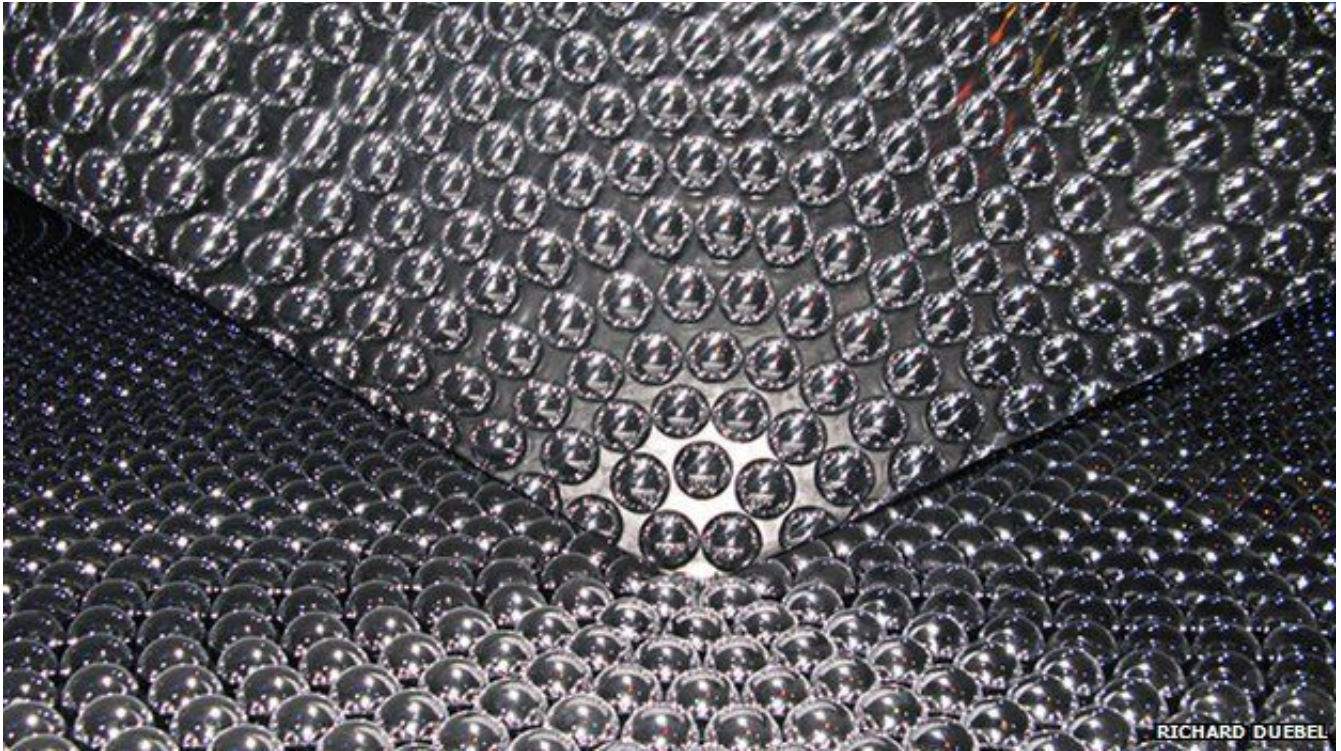


Richard Duebel

The Capitol Dome, a work by Abdul Nasser Gharem, resembling both mosque and the US capitol and supported by a statue depicting freedom, raises questions that are reflected in the oil slick below.

Gharem, a soldier in the Saudi Arabian army, is now one of the most prominent contemporary Saudi artists.

He also set up international art collaboration Edge of Arabia, along with distinguished artist Ahmed Mater (who is also a medical doctor) and Stephen Stapleton, a British art entrepreneur. The art body has allowed Saudi artists to show abroad for the first time.



Richard Duebel

The first official Saudi participation in the Venice Biennale in 2011 featured a single work entitled *The Black Arch* by Saudi sisters, Shadia and Raja Alem. They have long been encouraged by the Al Mansouria Foundation, one of the first and most important private Saudi arts organisations which published art books, mounts exhibitions, collects Saudi works and offers advice to artists.



Richard Duebel

Twisted red hands by Saddok Wassil is a recycled scrap metal sculpture by this Mecca-born and based artist whose medium-sized works are now in collections in Europe and the United States.

With ancestors from Central Asia who came to the Holy City on pilgrimage and stayed, Wassil learned welding from his father who has a garage. He collects old car wrecks abandoned on the fringes of Mecca from which he creates stark, hand crafted symbols of Saudi history and current political realities.