

Sultan Bin Fahad

Portfolio 2025



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Sultan Bin Fahad

b. 1971, Riyadh, KSA,
where he lives and works

Sultan bin Fahad considers art as a journey between intangible memories and tangible cultures. Throughout his abstract drawings, paintings, sculptures and installations bin Fahad's central theme and object of concern are material cultures in his native Saudi Arabia and their evolution over time. Across his works bin Fahad reinterprets history, stories and poetics through an engagement with pieces of tangible culture; transposing tried and true narratives onto contemporary means so as to reassess them with a personal take on Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and the wider world. The themes intrinsic to his practice revolve on reimagining found objects, identities, and history towards new understandings of their ranged applicability and liminal impermanence. His paintings and installations grapple with new media techniques, subtleties and overtones, battling textures coalescing into harmony, towards jettisoning the niche and obscure to mainstream accessibility.

With projects ranging from investigations into the ghosts of a stately manor, the work and painstaking detail behind the scenes in deconstructed display, to a candy-coated take on the joys and nightmares of history, the multiplicity of Sultan bin Fahad's practices push against the tide of conventionality in the art sphere, as indelibly informed by his cultural heritage as it ever plays with what it means to create, connect, inspire and our methods of communicating and expressing that.

Connecting the past to present day, the core of his works lie in how they're able to evoke the multi-layered journey(s) between the latent relationship of what is remembered and that which remains in the after, silently contained within the corporeal, and tethering both to a painting, a space, a theme, a mood for all in which to partake and ponder.

Gulf War Prisoners of War, 2024

Jeddah, KSA

Sparks of action, wartime verve, children sent out for something beyond their years and come back aged and harried if at all. GwPOW is a look back at the Gulf War, its many iconographies, ironies, and consequences on the young soldiers it conscripted, using found objects and war photographs. I want to explore the cognitive confusion I faced at the time when I was in my late teens, looking at how children are forced by war into things they shouldn't have to experience by juxtaposing that childhood innocence with the brutality of conflict. The installation is to be based around a room that mixes the concepts of obstacle courses and arcade games, superheroes and candied beads, with scaffolding and blocks arranged in deliberate ways reminiscent of their aesthetics alongside paintings that emphasize the therapeutic process of working through the horrors of war. Paintings showcase sketched out soldiers wielding super-heroics and power ups to demonstrate the transient, transformative nature of life both during and after war, how perceptions transmute and change. The work constructs canvas collages to interrogate conflicts of identity, fighting and surviving at an age when you should be free to explore and play, contrasting the recreation of new media with its capacity for propagating harrowing events to that effect.

The exhibition's paintings (subcollected under the title: PowerUps) all place special importance on the sensibilities of the early 90s with their highly saturated pops of color and GI Joe inspired figures. A toyetic glee, juvenile and vivid, is clear in their inspirations, some taking a page out of comic book heroes and villains ("Omega", "Fist", "Laser") or reminding of the secret moves many an arcade player desperately maneuvered their fingers to execute ("Mental", "Magnet") while others like "Saber" reference particularly storied pieces of nerd-dom. These silly, spirited hues are rendered all the more jarring by the contrasting black obelisks and white splashes that snake in and out of the painting frames—sometimes spearing through photo-realistic images of Desert Storm artifacts like medals, pocketbooks, first aid kits, etc. In the disconnect of weathered canvases displaying pencil drawn soldiers with brightly fantastical weaponry is the central thesis of the overall exhibition, war and its various dreads poeticized as electrical spectacle as the costs incurred scurry just beneath.

Further paintings, "F1rst A1d" and "J3t S3t G0", "Galaga" and "Risk", also reinforce this theme in how they're arranged. The former ones draped in military tent coverings, the first two dappled with old style detergent stains, a first aid kit, a splintered off piece of an Iraqi jet. The latter dotted with toy soldiers and plane sketches in childish battle formations. This in turn serves to emphasize the innocent aspects of the work in literally embracing the dressings of the Gulf War with a youthful embrace of textures and detail. Similarly does this apply to the myriad found objects sourced for the exhibition, accumulating a bevy of toys, locker boxes, statuettes, colorful pillowcases, photographs, netting, and tools to display the relative mundanity of the wartime day to day, while other routine items have been transformed through brilliant beads and vibrant yarn wefts to emphasize the dissonance of joyful innocence and clinical battle sadly crisscrossing.



Fedayeen 2, 2024

GwPow Part 1

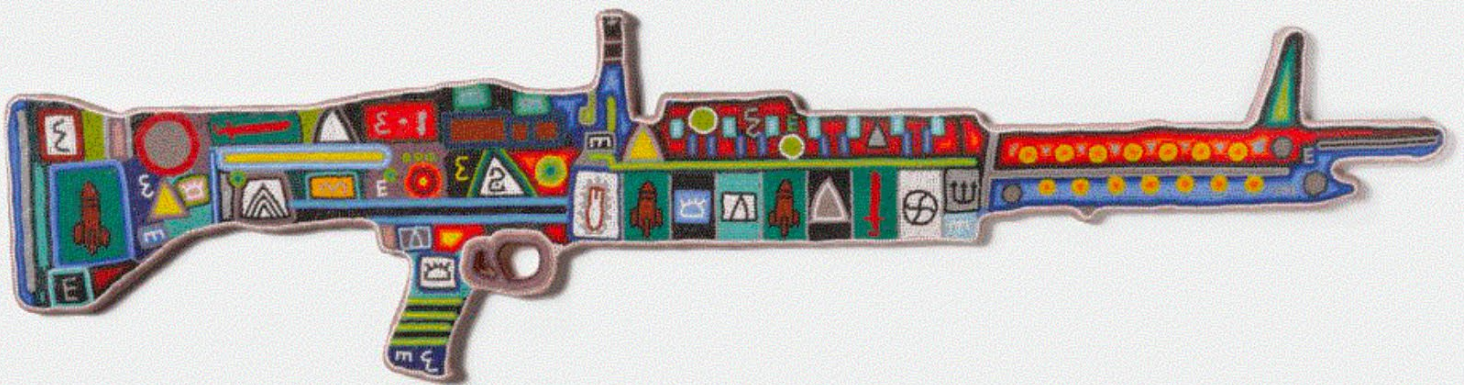
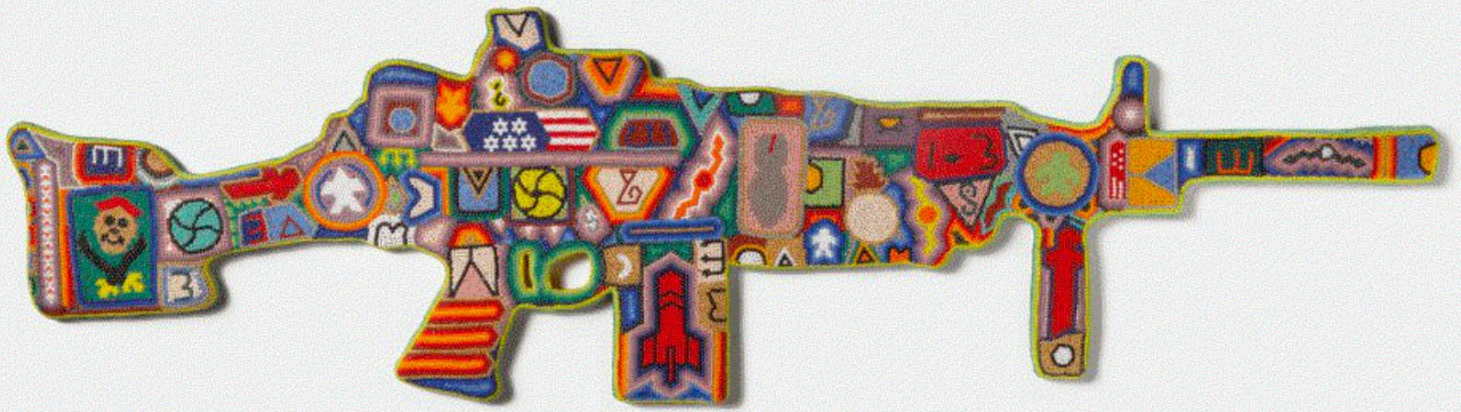
Mixed-media

28.9x 31.0 x25.0 cm



Archival Mess, 2024

GwPow Part 1
Mixed media
Variable sizes



Bang Bang 1 & 2, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

23.0 x 80.0 cm & 26.0 x 96.0 cm



Boring Game, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

Variable sizes



Bubba Boom 1, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

Variable sizes



Call Me Back, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

46.0 x 62.0 x 26.0 cm



Dusty, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media, acrylic on canvas

137.0 x 137.0 cm



Fist, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media, acrylic on canvas

240 x 16.03 cm



Full Metal Beads 1, 2024

GwPow Part 1
Mixed media
15.0 x 18.0 cm



Glug Glug, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

Box: 26.0 x 28.0 x 10.0 cm Item: 20.0 x 12.0 x 6.0 cm



Ground Control, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

23.0 x 40.0 x 10.0 cm



Ground Control, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

23.0 x 40.0 x 10.0 cm



Punching Bag, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

215.0 x 62.0 x 24.0 cm



Smelled You Already, 2024

GwPow Part 1

Mixed media

Variable sizes

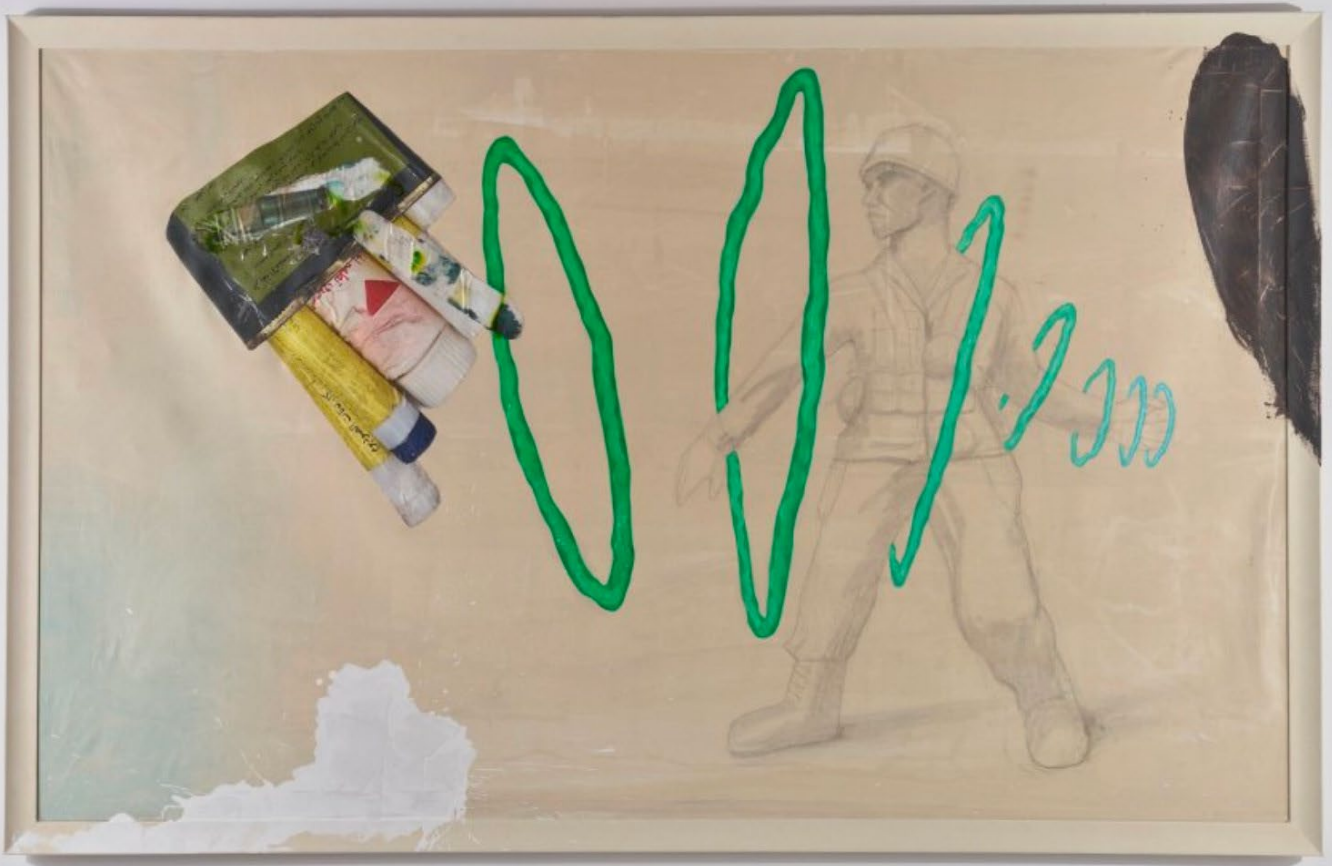


Untitled, 2024

GwPow Part 2

Digital print

90.0 x 115.5 x 4.0 cm



Magnet, 2024

GwPow Part 2

Mixed media, acrylic on canvas

163.0 x 256.0 cm



Holy Land, 2023

Mixed media installation, found objects
Various dimensions



Commissioned by Diriyah Biennale Foundation Sultan bin Fahad (b . 1971 , Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) is an artist who often works with found objects and memorabilia, re-imagining and reinterpreting them and the stories they tell In Holy Land , he celebrates the souvenirs and other wares that were once sold by merchants to pilgrims in the two holy cities of Makkah al - Mukarramah and Al - Madinah al Munawwarrah.

These thermos flasks, prayer mats, bottles, and tins , all decorated in the style of their countries of origin, represent vestiges of an economy now extinct. Bin Fahad has selected images found on them - minarets, palm trees, blooming roses, pomegranates, and figs - and transformed them into a garden of love and joy . Visitors must find their own path through this grove of gleaming treasures , in an otherworldly environment of mirror tiles and lights.

Emerging from this fantastical space, we see the original objects in yet another new way , this time in the pristine environment of a museum showcase . These humble items have been transformed into precious keepsakes of the Hajj, manifesting the place of Makkah in the imagination of Muslims all over the world , and the love they hold for the city whether they have ever seen it.



Desert Kite, 2022

Superadobe and fiberglass
35 x 8.2 x 2.5 m



Desert kites are traditional constructions found in the northwest of Saudi Arabia that are created to trap game animals. They appear in deserts and ancient sites of heritage, including AlUla's landscapes. The Nabataeans used various symbols to decorate their monuments and to celebrate and protect their communities both in life and death. The protective symbols encompass a range of animal, human, and abstract designs. These included creatures such as eagles, sphinxes, lions and snakes; masks and faces including depictions of Medusa-style heads; and other symbols and patterns such as urns, crowstep designs, rosettes, and sun disks.

Through the combination of desert kites and protective symbols, the artist has built a structure in the shape of a desert kite (keyhole) using SuperAdobe—creating a monolithic form that both herds and collects, it functions here as a repository for memory and myth. The structure has an open-air circular chamber within which a clear urn is embossed and covered with a lid. The top of the urn is a tall spike, which can be seen from outside the structure. The urn is a trap of both mythological creatures, water and dreams. The chamber offers itself as a room for captivation, meditation, and silence, as it frames the sky, and the urn mirrors its tone of blue. This keyhole stands as an opening for the earth and the sky simultaneously. It also is the key for all the civilizations that have passed and will pass this place.



Dream Traveled, 2021

Diriyah Biennale
Tent, cloth, beads
3 x 3 x 5 m



If Stones Could Speak, 2020

16 marble domes, 3 marble stars,
6 square stone groves, with video projection
Variable dimensions



This collection of marbles of various shapes from Saudi's sacred areas, is illuminated and redesigned by the interaction with a video depicting men and women absorbed in moments of prayer.

The marble installation is composed in a random, non-geometric way. Rhythmic and profound gestures that are thus recounted and mirrored in this installation, that with a sensitive play of lights takes the viewer back to a timeless space. Here it is almost possible to physically touch and enter the place of worship told by Bin Fahad where each of us relates to our feelings.

Crossing the installation room, our shadow is drawn on the back walls and the vision becomes reality, becoming the same as an infinite moment. The stones and marbles then become the only precious and silent witnesses of man in search of their spirituality.



The Verse of the Throne, 2020

Installation shot



Six bowls in a rhythmic sequence placed on illuminated pedestals come into visual and metaphorical contact with the projection of “The Verse of the Throne”, a precious and powerful verse of the Islamic scriptures. In contact with water this writing transforms the element into a means of purification and vivification. The man, during the long journey on this earth in search of the spirit, comes into contact with his frequency by drinking and wetting his body with water. Water is the connective material of multiple cultures, used in all religions to cleanse, purify, warm up.

The projections of water and of the Arabic writings physically want to lead the visitor to imagine being immersed in it and cause a feeling of disorientation, just like the sensation resulting from the purification process itself.



Possession, 2020

Installation shot



Sultan finds himself in a sacred place and almost by chance, from a privileged perspective, he stops to observe what happens beyond a luminescent partition placed to contain and give order to the visitors. The result is a magical moment which Sultan records with his mobile phone.

Moments reported in this vibrant installation. Hundreds of hands, faces, noses and gestures crowd, crawl and crush against this wall that has almost become the materialization of the spirit. Everyone tries, after a long journey, to get in touch with Him. Each immersed in himself in search of his own answer, animated only by his own questions.

All together with the load of gestures and humanity that make this moment universal. Hands in search of God, are the hands of visitors, in which the visitor can identify: a journey at the same time abstract and concrete towards the divine.

The Red Palace, 2019

Riyadh, Jeddah, Abudhabi

In this solo exhibition presents the artwork of Sultan bin Fahad, which is a series of critical material investigations of the region. The show title takes the premise of its namesake the Red Palace in Riyadh, as a site of inspiration and allegory, at the height of the country's modernization. The Palace was completed in 1944 for then Crown Prince Saud bin Abdulaziz (reign from 1953– 1964) and became his royal residence for many years, where he greeted many heads of states, such as Jawaher Nehru, Jamal Abdul Nasser and Shukri Al Quwatli.

After King Saud's move to Al-Nasriya Palace, in 1953, The Red Palace became the Saudi Council of Ministers office and subsequently the Board of Grievances until 1987. From the grandeur history, the site lays in ruins awaiting renovation plans. The exhibition marks the first use of the building, at this scale, since its abandonment in the late 80's. Sultan's recent practice takes on many forms, including videos, sculptures, photograms and installations. He has been invested in collecting memorabilia, historical relics and discarded objects from various sites across Saudi Arabia. The artist then creates sculptures and installations that look into the transformative critical latency of the ruin. In his art practice, he focuses on pivotal personal moments that are synonymous with the social metamorphosis of the country. The artist is invested in the act and concept of translatability, particularly of the intangible, such as evident in language, to reinterpret histories and narratives. He attempts to capture the intangible in material culture to demonstrate and embody its inherent social and collective potential.

The Red Palace foregrounds Sultan's current research and uses it as a common denominator of the various works that are exhibited. The exhibition is divided into 14 rooms seen through seven chapters; The Red Palace, 1979, Labor, Gulf War, Holy Economy, Dinner at the Palace, and Prayer Room. The works in these chapters are framed within the historical and political events that took place during the palace's operation. The artist has created a series of video installations that look at the recreation of a palace dinner taking place in the various abandoned rooms of the palace mainly highlighting the role of labor. Additionally, on view are an extended body of works from the "Holy Economy" and "Desert Storm" series that respectively explore the commodification of the holy sites and the war calamities of the Gulf War, through installations and found objects.



To Dust, 2019

The Red Palace

Crystal, brass, copper, steel, and mirror

Dimensions variable



1979, 2019

The Red Palace

Carpet, plastic water containers, brass rails, stereoscope, & photos

Dimensions variable



Window, 2019

The Red Palace
Glass, wood and led lights
Dimensions variable



Prayer Room, 2019

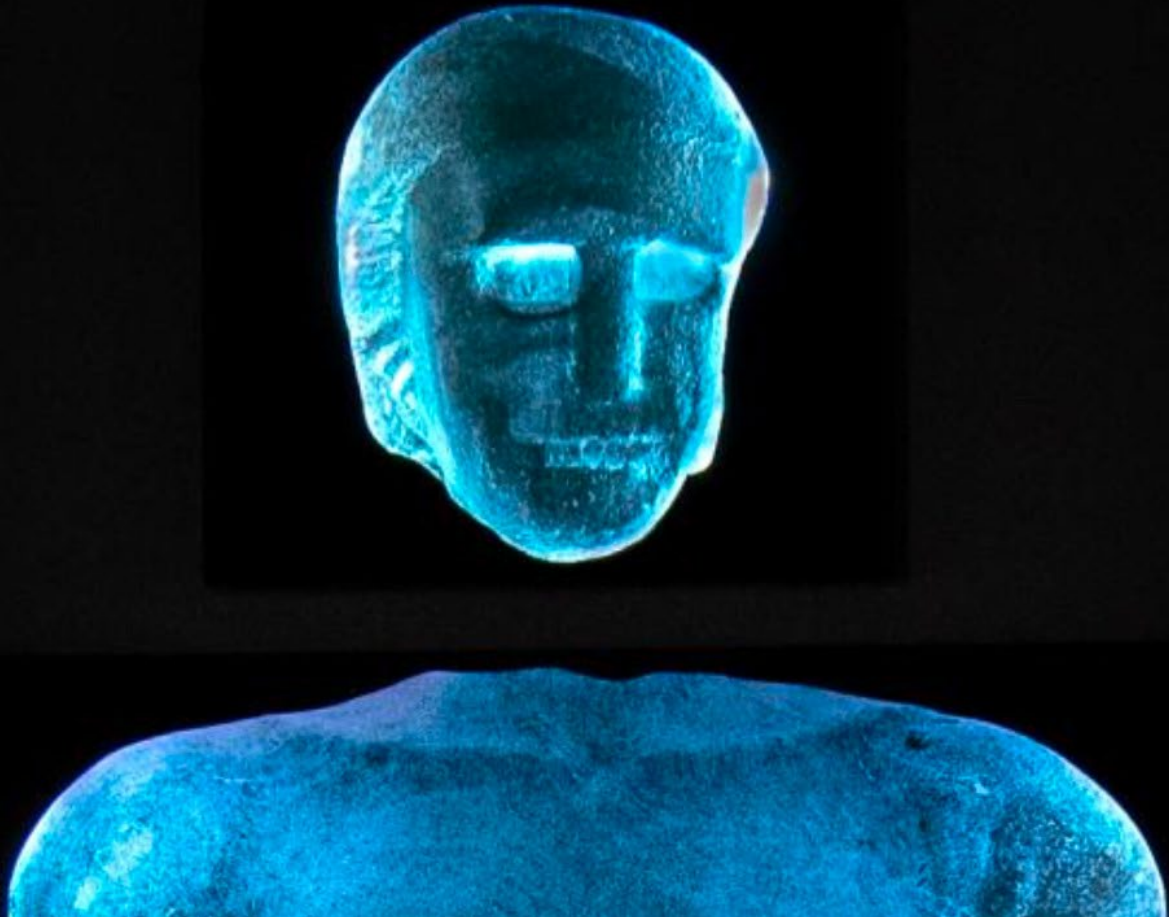
The Red Palace
Rugs and neon
400 x 975 cm



Once Was A Ruler, 2017

Light boxes

Variable dimensions



The seminal exhibit "Roads of Arabia: Archaeological Treasures of Saudi Arabia", which traveled to 13 museums throughout Asia, Europe and United States from 2010–2018, presented over 400 rare archeological finds unearthed throughout Saudi Arabia, highlighting the Arabian Peninsula's ancient past and early civilization. The objects in the exhibit ranged from excavated stone tools from the Paleolithic Period (one million BC) found in the northern regions of Ha'il and Tabuk, and 17th century gilded doors that once graced the entrance to Ka'ba-Islam's holiest city, to early 20th century photographs of Mecca, Medina, and Riyadh. The exhibit also featured several monumental male statues from 4th and 3rd centuries BC, representing monarchs from the north Arabian kingdom of Lihyan. These imposing, figurative sculptures, often misperceived as God-like statues of worship, became the inspiration for artist Sultan bin Fahad's series *Once Was a Ruler*, a complex and contemporary portrait of ancient Arabian kings. Bin Fahad began documenting the ancient sculptures in the Roads of Arabia exhibit by photographing them or gathering photographs taken by the museums. He then layers multiple photographs of each sculpture with medical x-rays (often his own due to recent injuries), altering the figurative God-like sculptures with distinct human-like features such as teeth and bones from the x-rays. The final images are then printed on translucent paper. The resulting portraits, illuminated in light-boxes, capture the human-spirit of these ancient kings who once ruled the Arabian Peninsula.

Education

- 1994** Bachelor Degree in Business Administration Management, King Saud University, Riyadh, KSA
- 1997** Masters in Business Administration, University of San Francisco, USA

Solo Exhibitions

- 2026** Thresholds, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
- 2025** CNCAVE, Leila Heller Gallery, New York
- 2024** GwPow!, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
- 2020** Frequency, Rhinoceros Gallery, Rome Italy
- 2020** The Red Palace, curated by Reem Fadda, the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2019** Gabriel, Fondazione Fendi, Rome, UAE
- 2016** The Red Palace, curated by Reem Fadda, The Red Palace, Riyadh, KSA
Qunoot, Alaan gallery, Riyadh, KSA

Group Exhibitions

- 2025** World Expo, Saudi Pavilion, Osaka, JP
- 2025** Symbolic Gestures, Al Ula, KSA
- 2025** Naseej: Threads of Hope at BEEAH Headquarters, Sharjah, KSA
- 2024** Between Two Cultures, Riyadh, KSA
- 2023** Islamic Biennale, Jeddah, KSA
- 2021** Desert X, Al Ula, KSA
- 2021** Diriyah Biennale, Feeling the Stones, Riyadh, KSA
- 2020** Light Upon Light, group exhibition at KAFD, Riyadh
- 2019** Bahrain Annual Fine Arts ExhibiBon, The Arena Manama, Bahrain
- 2018** Contemporary Art 014, Madina Art Center, Madina, KSA
- 2018** Mnwr, Hafiz Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
- 2018** Shara art show, Jeddah, KSA
- 2018** Vantage Point 6, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE
- 2018** London Arabia Art & Fashion Week, Jumeirah Carlton Tower Hotel, London, UK
- 2018** Mujard, Mono gallery, Riyadh, KSA
- 2018** Contemporary photography from the Arab world, American University Museum, Katzen Art Center, Washington DC, USA
- 2017** JERUSALEM LIVES, curated by Reem Fadda, The Palestinian Museum, Birzeit, Palestine Tadafuq
- 2017** Flow, Hafez Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
- 2016** Dreams and Memory, Athr Gallery, Jeddah, KSA

Public Collections

The Palestinian Museum, Birzeit, Palestine

Publications

Sultan bin Fahad and Osama Esid: Sukoon, profile, Tribe Photomagazine issue 6, p.194, April 2018,
https://issuu.com/tribephotomagazine/docs/tribe_06

Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival kicks off with vibrant masterpieces,
Ahar Abdullah, December 19, 2018, Khaleej Times
<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/nalon/sharjah/sharjah-islamic-art-festival-kicks-off-with-vibrant-masterpieces>

A Garden of Possibilities at the Palestinian Museum, Hrag Vartanian, September 2017, Hyperallergic
<https://hyperallergic.com/397840/palestinian-museum-opens/>

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