

# Sara Abdu

Portfolio 2025



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# Sara Abdu

Yemeni, b. 1993, Jeddah, KSA

Lives and works in Jeddah, KSA

**Sara Abdu** captures sensorial and visceral traces through the meditative process of her work. By engaging with sensory mnemonic triggers and tangible objects as sites of memory, she uses the body as a locus to encapsulate where memory resides. This negotiation with memory seeks to uncover its inception. She frames temporality as a rational structure, emphasizing the transient nature of memory and forgetting as a way to reconcile with the world around us.

Abdu's exploration of the body as a psychogeographical site of memory—one that, when probed, seeks to uncover its origins. It brings to light the delicate balance between the ephemeral and the tangible. Memory fleets and is forgotten, yet through the act of tracing its emergence, she attempts to tether the fleeting to the concrete. By inscribing henna strokes and ink markings onto the *Anatomy of Remembrance*, or encapsulating a scent of the past, she challenges the impermanence of memory, allowing us to coexist with these memories in the present moment, and transforming the body into an archival terrain where the past resists erosion.

Abdu holds a Diploma in Graphic Design and Digital Art and a Bachelor of Arts in English Language & Literature. In 2017, Abdu was an artist in residence at La Cité internationale des Arts in Paris, France. In 2021, she was an artist in residence at Intermix in Riyadh.

Selected exhibitions include *Intimate Architectures of Belonging* (Forthcoming solo), ATHR Gallery, Al Ula, KSA, *The Desert has no Shadow*, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, Austria, 2025; *After Rain*, Diriyah Biennale, Riyadh, KSA, 2024; *Strangers in the Palace*, International Biennale of Contemporary Art of the South, Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Amakin*, curated by Ventia Porter, Ithra, Dammam, KSA, 2022; *Artissima Art*, Torino, Italy, 2021; *I Only Meant to Visit* (solo), Cromwell Place, London, UK; *I Only Meant To Visit* (solo), 21,39. ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA, 2021; *Zamakan*, Ithra, Damam, KSA, 2019; and *The Intangible Bonds in Our Existence* (solo), ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA, 2014. Abdu's work can be found in the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Abdul Latif Jameel Foundation, the BIC Collection, the Greenbox Museum and the Imago Mundi Collection.



*In Distance,  
You Bring Me Close, 2025*

Graphite transfer paper  
100 x 135 x 3.5 cm

## Shown in Abu Dhabi Art Fair, 2025

In this work, Sara Abdu continues her meditative exploration of presence, absence, and the space between. Through repetitive, deliberate strokes performed over carbon graphite sheets laid upon wooden panels, Abdu enacts a gesture both intimate and withheld. The graphite acts as a veil, introducing distance between hand and surface, so that what remains is not the mark itself, but its trace.

Each stroke becomes a record of time and memory, a humble act of discipline and renewed intent, absorbing the quiet shifts that repetition allows to surface. The work holds a quiet tension: delicate yet assertive, a whisper that also declares. What the viewer encounters is not what was given, but what remains, a presence that resists full possession.

'In distance, you bring me close' invites contemplation on the nature of offering and restraint, of what is held back and what is left behind. It is a space where absence becomes a form of closeness, and the trace becomes the truest record of touch.



*I Loved you:  
The Unveiled, 2024*

Human embroidered hair on fabric  
enclosed in a glass box frame



## Frieze London, 2024

Sara's practice has long fallen within a meditative intersection of poetry, aesthetics and memory. For Abdu, poetry is the language to contour interior spaces while experimenting and occupying these spaces with glimpses of hope to map out meanings towards otherworldly dimensions.

Just as hair holds traces of the past, these works represent time and our desire to outlive the material form. Trapping time within the paper began as a personal and cathartic exercise; an attempt of transferring memories harbored in objects and embodying them onto the plane. Her laborious and tedious process repeats itself with her new commissioned work for FRIEZE, *I Loved You Once: The Unveiled I & II*.

The work uses collected hair that Sara embroiders into a circle; exploring the cyclical, almost arithmetic nature of her process. Using naturally shed hair; Abdu's memories unveil themselves as she picks at fabrics in time. Weaving through her recollections as she uncovers versions of an everchanging self.



*Now That I've Lost You  
In My Dreams, Where Do  
We Meet? 2024*

Approx 3,500 soap bars stacked, three columns,  
English & Arabic words embossed on each bar.



## Diriyah Biennale 2024

The installation *Now That I've Lost You in My Dreams, Where Do We Meet?* (2021) is inspired by dreams of people from Abdu's life who are no longer present.

An expression of her longing for moments of reunion, the installation became a place to examine these dreams as a space of reconciliation and acceptance; a space where new memories and encounters could be generated.

Consisting of handmade soap bars stacked into a wall-like structure inspired by the traditional soap factories of the Levant, each brick-shaped bar is inscribed with one word from the work's title. Made from natural ingredients including sidr powder and camphor crystals, the materiality of the work is the artist's ode to the Islamic rituals of washing the body of the deceased before burial. Forming an architecture of the title's repeating phrase, the stacked blocks form a tower which visitors can walk around and absorb the permeating scent of the soap.

By circulating the exhibition space, inhaling and re-inhaling, viewers absorb this scent associated with departure. For Abdu, memory, evoked by smell, is closely associated with healing. Open-ended and full of longing, the words of the title are repeated in an almost meditative pattern. Posing this unanswerable question—again and again—becomes a confrontation with finality and a simultaneous attempt to prolong the fleeting moment of farewell.



*To See the Infinite  
Within Me, 2022*

Mixed media installation



## Noor Riyadh 2022

Unpacking Sara's earlier practice reveals an interplay between form and language, between our inner and outer worlds, the conscious and the unconscious, the material and the immaterial. The text, or language, married into the form in a type of semiosis; as the language began to inform the process of the work. We can see this in *A Kingdom Where No One Dies*, 2019, in which Abdu not only pushes her landscape forms into more sculptural modes - effecting a more phenomenological relation with the body - but informs the sculpture through the language itself.

Through a process of translation, the language - a poetic verse - is first spoken, recorded, and its digital sonic forms are then cast in sand sculptures that submerge and rise from the floor of the space. This interplay between form and language in *A Kingdom Where No One Dies* reduces the spoken language to the rational, scientific building block of a soundwave, gesturing that it too could somehow have a transcendental effect.

In *To See The Infinite within me*, she uses the same method of translating poetry into a solid structure, only this time to create a meditative interactive piece that invites the viewer to explore some of the ways we navigate our inner territories, our inner reality. The work is inspired by the structure of labyrinth. An ancient tool used to draw people into meditation. Highly dependent on the orientation of the user, the work offers a space for contemplation and experiencing the passage of time.



## *The Infinite Now, 2022*

Henna on paper and sound composition  
30 cm x 215 cm

## Athr Gallery 2022

'Time is this ever-flowing force that moves all that is ephemeral towards death: both our lives and the memories we create.'

Sara Abdu 's work focuses on exploring themes of the self, memory, and home. As she describes it: 'My work explores strategies of embodiment, working into the plane temporal, spatial, emotive, and personal traces.' Across different media, she creates abstracted forms with paper and sound installations. For Sara, the makan is the world that is created by lovers.

The structure of her installation for Amakin is inspired by the idea of the mihrab, the niche placed in the direction of Makkah, that Muslims face when they pray. The work she has made is, as she describes, 'an invitation to experience this world temporarily outside of time through meditative acts.' The work is made up of a series of scrolls which, together, echo the curved structure of the mihrab. On the paper, the artist's presence is visible through traces that take the form of repeating lines that she leaves on the surface. For Sara, the line is an abstracted form of the word and, using Henna as her ink, each line creates a unique mark:

'I use it to reflect the fleeting nature of our lives and memories creating a realm where time and space don't apply. This is a world that is manifested through acts of repetition through which the line becomes a conscious act manifesting itself and concealing its exterior meaning. It reveals truths about this world, and the truths that resides within ourselves.'

The meaning of the work goes to another level by converting what is a private experience into a public one. She layers her mihrab with a soundscape that is a collaboration with Nasser Alshemimry (Desert!sh.) This sonic composition is the result of abstracting the sound of a poem by the artist inviting the viewer into a contemplative space. 'The work in its totality is a performance of memory that constructs this intimate world. It is a womb like space where new language, new meanings, and new memories are born. A space to float above the reality of mortality to celebrate the intrinsic connections in human existence.'



*The Unburened is not  
Untethered by What Is  
Not Him, 2021*

Animation Video  
6:28 minutes

# Athr Gallery 2021

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# *Anatomy of Rememberance, 2021*

Ink on paper  
Variable sizes



## Athr Gallery 2021

What does it mean to recall through smell?

An interest in locating memory within our own body underpins Sara's large drawings in *Anatomy of Remembrance* that translate olfactory regions of her brain into durational abstract forms.

Her interest in exploring the indexical mnemonic qualities of smell and its immediacy in conjuring not only a mental image of the past, but an emotional representation of our memories, resulted in suspended psychogeographic cartographies. Abdu employs technologies as medium to facilitate the place or 'loci' of memory within us and conjures a particular ambiance when confronting these past topographies.

Abdu's fleeting infinitesimal markings attempt to preserve and memorialize the captured but unsolicited or involuntary past memory, gesturing to a method of recall to our emotional selves. Her markings trap the memory within the form, transcending time, and collapsing the past and present in an infinite now.



# *See You Forever, 2021*

Mixed Media installation work



## Athr Gallery 2021

Objects have particular cultural and personal associations with memory, and they play a direct role in the formation of one's identity. As commuters of histories, they are heavily impregnated with memory and enable social meanings. In *See You, Forever* Abdu explores, through a process of reduction, the limits of memory, gesturing to fictional biographies through autobiographical materials.

5 tiles, 4 pieces of wood, and field recordings from in and around her home in Aden make the unprecedented journey to Jeddah and undergo a process of listening and obliteration. For Abdu, psychological traces can be found in the sensory perception that underpin the material of the object.

This is to say that sounds of the past could be harbored in the material of objects and environments in which they were produced. The artist attempts to illicit these sounds through tapping and rubbing the materials together; pulling out the sounds to construct a *mise-en-scène* of past events that embody psychological as well as physical traces of the past.



*You See, Certainty  
Doesn't Stutter, 2021*

Yarn and acrylic paint on canvas  
200 x 500 cm



## Athr Gallery 2021

In a 5m tapestry, the artist loosely stitches meandering thick lines of black yarn reminiscent of branches or nerves that wind across the surface of the work. On one side, the branches blend into the painted black surface, obscuring the branches, making them indistinguishable and flat; whilst on the other side, the same black yarn fringes out from the canvas, creating a soft textural medium. The yarn is sewed lightly into the surface of the canvas; its fragile state threatening its own undoing.

The unstable state becomes metaphor for the tensions produced by the ambivalence of memory, as memory occupies thresholds or liminal positions between subjectivity and objectivity, inner and outer work, self and society. The totality of the work bonds the in between of forgetting and remembering as marginal territories and offer a mode of contemplation within its temporality.



*For the Love  
of the Unknown, 2021*

Installation shots



## Athr Gallery 2021

For Abdu, her works often begin and end with her hands. Her hand maps the passage of time with infinite miniscule markings, folding the past into the present, and stretching it long into the future. It is the portal through which she maps her inner worlds and processes of becoming. A device to signal realms beyond what can be seen or anticipated, and a means to confront the unknown.

In *For the Love of the Unknown*, the artist invites the viewer into a choreography between her hand and their body. The interactive work responds to the viewer's proximity to the video through sensors, drawing them into a push and pull between their physical worlds and that which lays beyond.

The position of her hand in the video places the viewer in the space of the artist themselves and reveals a beckoning of the self to the self. The work gestures to a gentle surrendering and accepting as a process through which to connect with both the outer and inner world.



*And Sometimes  
We Are Reminded  
of What Remains, 2021*

Installation shots



## Artissima Art Fair 2021

Through a laborious process of collecting, burning and grinding date seeds, the 'And sometimes we are reminded of what remains' was produced. The seeds were then placed on a large sieve only to endure yet another form of abstraction. Through this integral process, the work draws attention to the idea of human traces on the surface of things, objects as bearers of human memories and one's extended existence. It explores themes of mortality and immortality. Acts of preserving the traces we leave behind against the passing of time questioning the reality of temporality.



*Communing With the Self,  
as I Commune With Him, 2018*

Black ink on paper  
150 x 332 cm

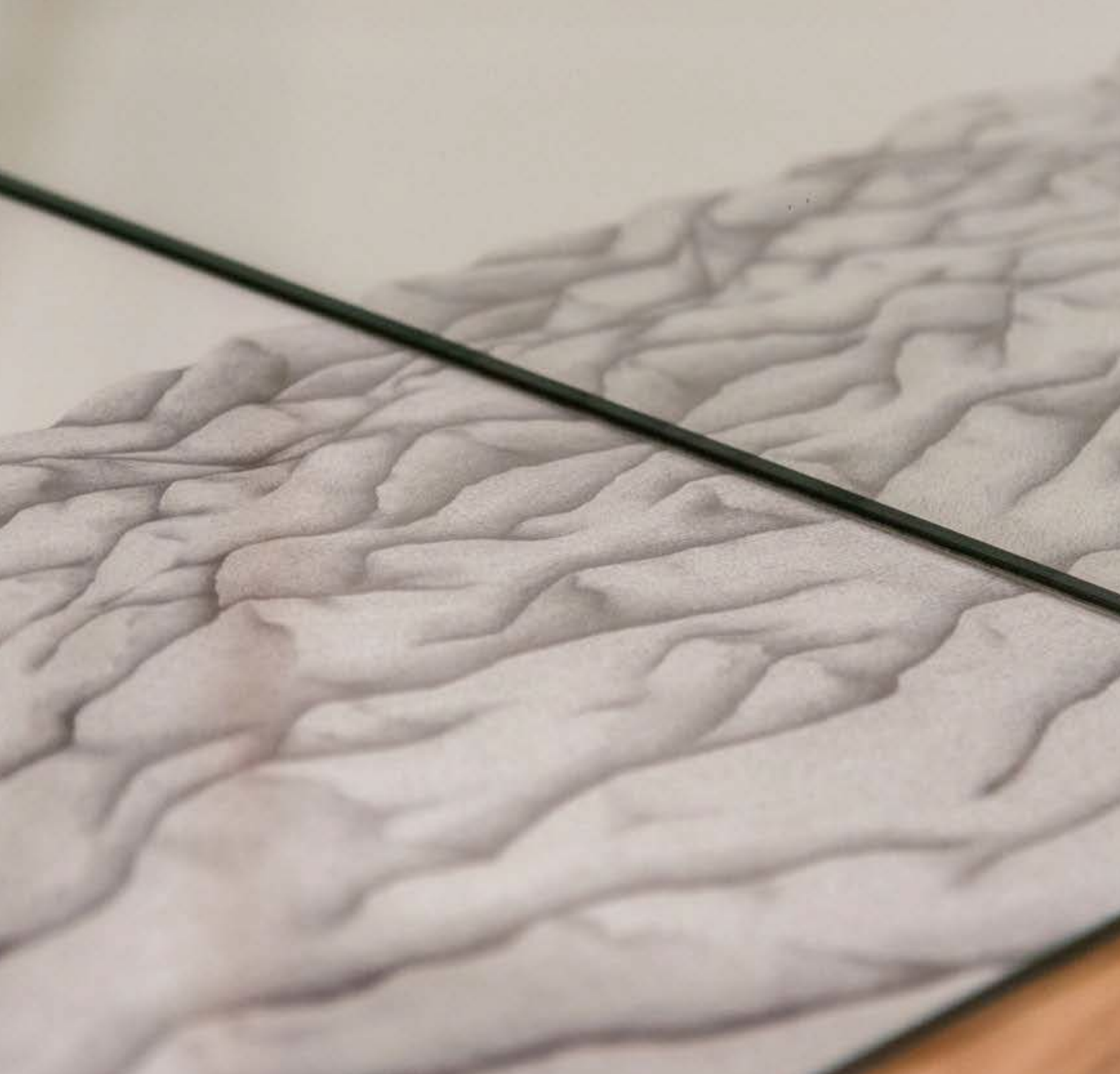


## Athr Gallery, 2018

This work is based on the repetitive movement of the artist's hand drawing a shape she has always incorporated in her previous work. The shape is meaningless beyond being the output of the artist's unconscious hand movement while immersed in her inner world. In its entirety, the work is a testament to the journey the artist experiences in executing her drawing. The stages she passes through are documented in the irregularity of the shape, its imprint on the paper and the shade of the ink.

This is a personal journey the artist embarked on. The source for the project was a prayer mat she inherited from a dear uncle who passed away. This mat has been a companion on multiple trips and bore witness to a lifetime of memories the artist is eager to be the gate keeper even if not the code breaker. She translates the years of ownership into the size her drawing will end up be, as if drawing a parallel timeline of replicated experiences.

Can transcendence through repetition allow her to reach that inner state of true self, abstracted from external intrusions? Can reaching this state build a thrusting energy to allow her inner self to shine pure and absolute? If so, who would we become?



# *Unforbidden Lands, 2017*

Installation shots



## The Bic Collection Exhibition, Paris, 2018

Abdu uses black Bic ink on paper, which has helped her develop through the years a technique that is therapeutic and cathartic. Her work derives either from a personal experience or set of contemplations, and she is always seeking to reconnect with the inner universe. Abdu aims to question humanity's free will, whether we are free agents, or controlled and bound by an inevitable fate. She is equally interested in exploring the mechanisms by which our identities are formed.

These questions led Abdu to make Unforbidden Lands, where she creates spaces inspired by nature (landscapes), which represent the human condition and the journeys through which we go in life. Abdu intentionally left some of these pieces unfinished, and added a mirror in some of them to lend viewers the feeling that they can construct a reality of their own. This internal reality, she would add, might at times be better than the external world in which we live. Abdu believes that this is the case, especially when we create realities that are informed by the inner light residing within us. For Abdu, this inner light is intuition, which is arguably connected to a higher level of the universe.

The project is also inspired by landscapes and organic elements in our world, the common qualities between humans and nature, and how solid and fragile both are. Her goal is to manifest thoughts and lucid dreams into a physical form, to be in a reality that the mind creates, to develop languages for better communication, and to be in a state of spiritual stillness.



*The Intangible Bonds  
in Our Existence, 2017*

Installation shots



## Athr Gallery, 2014

Sara Abdu's work uses an 'Ugly/Beautiful' approach that is thematic in all her work. The philosophy she applies to her work essentially challenges the notion of what is perceived as "beautiful" or lack there of. Although her characters evoke a heavy sense of melancholy and deliberate irony, they also articulate on a multitude of issues both personal and social in her journey of self-exploration and discovery.

In her first solo show titled *The Intangible Bonds In Our Existence*, Sara realizes the bonds that exist between humans and their surroundings; bonds that link any human to their emotions, realities and dreams; bonds that play an integral role that shape and affect us. She realizes these bonds as a co-existent consciousness within our own existence.

# Education

- 2017 B.A in English Language & Literature, The Arab Open University, Jeddah, KSA  
2012 Graphic Design Diploma, Future Institution of Higher Education and Training, Jeddah, KSA

# Sarah

# Abu Abdullah

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

Portfolio 2025

- 2026 Intimate Architectures of Belonging, ATHR Gallery, Alula, KSA  
2021 I Only Meant To Visit, 21,39. ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA.  
2014 The Intangible Bonds in Our Existence, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA.

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2025 The Desert has no Shadow, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna, Austria  
The Saudi Pavillion at EXPO, EXPO 2025 OSAKA, Kansai, Japan  
2024 Feeling the Stones, Diriyah Biennale Foundation, Riyadh, KSA  
Common Grounds, Curated by Jumana Gouth, Mega Studia, Riyadh  
2023 Strangers in the Palace, International Biennale of Contemporary Art of the South,  
National Museum of Decorative Arts, Buenos Aires, Argentina.  
ATHR's Collector's Circle (2nd Edition), ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA  
Blur of the Wells, ATHR Gallery, Al Ula, KSA  
2022 Amakin, Curated by Ventia Porter, Ithra, Dammam, KSA.  
Amakin, Curated by Ventia Porter, 21,39 Jeddah Arts 9th Edition, Jeddah, KSA.  
Artist Showcase, ATHR Gallery, Al Ula, KSA  
2019 Zamakan, Ithra, Damam, KSA  
Out of Place, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA  
2018 The Clocks Striking Thirteen, curated By Maya El-Khalil ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA  
Opening Remarks, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA  
2017 Letters, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA. Safar, 21,39, Jeddah, KSA.

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# Art Fairs

- 2025** FRIEZE, London, UK
- 2024** Abu Dhabi Art Fair  
FRIEZE, London, UK  
Art Basel, Paris, France
- 2023** Abu Dhabi Art Fair, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2021** Cromwell Place, UK  
Artissima Art, Torino, Italy  
Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE  
Shara Art Fair, Saudi Arts Council, Jeddah, KSA
- 2018** Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE  
Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2017** Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE  
Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2016** Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE  
Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2014** START Art Fair, London, UK  
Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2013** Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE

# Collections

Abdul Latif Jameel Foundation  
The BIC Collection Exhibition at The Centquatre-Paris  
The Greenbox Museum  
Imago Mundi Collection

# Residencies

- 2022** Intermix, Riyadh, KSA
- 2017** La Cite Internationale des arts Paris France

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