

Zahrah Al Ghamdi

Portfolio 2025



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Zahrah Al Ghamdi

Born in 1977 in Al Bahah, Saudi Arabia.
Lives and works in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Zahrah Alghamdi is an established interdisciplinary artist renowned for her site-specific installations that unfold across both natural landscapes and interior spaces. Her works are captivating demonstrations of craft and labor, as she studies and introspects a site before they're intricately realized.

Raised in Al Baha, Alghamdi's deep connection to the surrounding landscape informs her approach to sourcing, positioning her as an active agent with the materials she works with. Her work traverses feelings of loss and memory as she immerses herself in the natural material she works with. She extensively incorporates mud, dried branches, cotton and leather in her practice.

Alghamdi's work is a compelling proclamation of a return to craft. She viscerally scavenges, builds, layers, finishes, and seals organic materials, activating the senses in the process. The artist employs strategic and creative methods that emphasize the symbiotic relationship between the materials she chooses to work with.

More recently for Alghamdi, the figure has come to the fore. Rooted in figurative sketches she created, her latest body of work materializes these drawings into physical form. Alghamdi's practice transcends autobiography, as viewers recognize their personal experiences within these forms. The body becomes a universal symbol of shared experiences, feelings and resilience.

Alghamdi holds a PhD in Design and Visual Art from Coventry University, Coventry, UK, 2013; a Master of Arts in Contemporary Craft, Coventry University, Coventry, UK, 2009 and a Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Arts, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, KSA, 2003.

Recent selected exhibitions include *Between Memory and Matter* (solo), ATHR Gallery, Riyadh, KSA, 2025; *Arabfuturs*, Institute Du Monde Arabe, Paris, France, 2024; *Art Here*, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2023; *Coachella Desert X*, Coachella, USA, 2021; *Streams Move Oceans*, ATHR, Jeddah, KSA, 2019 (solo); *Second Hand*, Art Jameel Center, Dubai, UAE, 2019; *After Illusion*, Venice Biennale, Venezia, Italy, 2019 (solo) and *An Inanimate Village*, British Museum, London, UK, 2017 (solo).

In 2017 the artist attended the Artists in Labs residency in Zurich, Switzerland.

Alghamdi's work can be found in various collections including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; the British Museum, London, UK and Art Jameel Foundation, Dubai, UAE.



The Dead Land, 2023



Through her work *The Dead Land*, the artist offers a poetic reflection on the relationship between people and the earth, drawing attention to the quiet transformations it endures. The work gives voice to the land itself, calling on viewers to notice its condition. Once fertile, the earth appears dry and still, carrying traces of human presence that subtly reveal how our actions shape the environment around us

By combining natural materials with those shaped or consumed by people, the artist captures the dialogue between nature, humanity, and the forces that influence both. Using locally sourced, organic elements, she evokes the physical and emotional impact of climate change, allowing the form of the earth to appear altered yet deeply familiar. Rather than mirroring reality, *The Dead Land* conveys a universal concern about global warming through a language that is both poetic and contemplative.



Madrasat Addeera Editions, 2023

1st column is 165 cm in height, 2nd column is 155 cm height
3rd column is 145 cm in height



Madrasat Addeera Editions is a collectible design series by local and international designers and artisans, representing eight countries from across the world. The collection draws inspiration from the rich local culture and narratives from ALUla, blending traditional arts with modern innovative techniques and sustainable materials



Supplication, 2022

Mixed media installation
200 x 200 x 200 cm



A soliloquy is a figure of speech in which the speaker addresses an unidentified person. Typically, it begins with a summoning. I convey the fact that the world coexists with humans in the work, but I do so in a melancholic, lyrical manner in which the planet urges humanity to pay attention.



What Lies Behind the Wall, 2021

Sand and plaster



For Zahrah Alghamdi, material and memory are inextricably intertwined. Many of her works involve large accumulations of material that seemingly layer the histories and cultures of the places from which they come.

When Alghamdi, who grew up in the southwestern region of Saudi Arabia, visited Palm Springs, she was struck by the connection between the desert landscapes and architectures. For Desert X, she has created a sculpture that echoes and synthesizes the traditionally built forms from her country with the architectural organization she found in the Coachella Valley. The result takes the form of a monolithic wall comprised of stacked forms impregnated with cements, soils, and dyes specific to each region. It expresses a highly individualized language corresponding to feelings, emotions, and memories associated with place and time.



Birth of a Place, 2021

Sand and plaster



Birth of a Place (2021) is based on the historic town of Diriyah, located on the northwestern outskirts of Riyadh and the home of this biennial. The artwork was commissioned by the Diriyah Biennale Foundation. This site-specific installation serves as an elegy to the ancestral foundations of the town, which is now a hub of gentrification. Inspired by the area's stark contrasts between natural and artificial forms, the piece explores themes of heritage and impermanence. In preparation for the work, Alghamdi spent time strolling among Diriyah's deserted clay houses, contemplating their anachronistic, ghostly presence as well as a looming sense of impending destruction and rebirth.

The malleable clay forms of *Birth of a Place* bring to mind the rapid development of high-rise buildings symptomatic of urban development, with the artist describing the work's sharp vertical angles as "sky-high kicks of a fetus in a mother's womb." The imagery speaks to cycles of deterioration and rebirth, in particular Saudi Arabia's efforts to revive and restore architecture as part of its redevelopment efforts.



Moment, 2020

Polyester, black paint, and ceramic glue in black
500 x 100 x 400 cm



Over the last ten years, Zahrah Alghamdi has demonstrated unwavering passion to create arresting sensational site-specific installations. Always large in scale, ambitious in scope and astonishing in execution. Alghamdi's artistic practice, physical materiality and visual complexity powerfully captures universal human experiences with a rich, vibrant tactility. In *Moment*, 2021 Alghamdi highlights the experience of loss and pain through an intuitive and laborious process that is guided by the intimate interaction of the artist's hand and the material, through which the work emerges. Strips of polyester dipped in a mixture of black paint and ceramic glue arranged on the wall to abstractly mimic the moment before the heartbeats stops as represented by EKG (electrocardiogram). The soaked strips flood the floor with a stream of black water and small fragments that feel like the aftermath of colossal tide. Relational aesthetics stands at the core of *Moment*. Stepping closer to the work you get engulfed by its enormity and you become aware of your physical and corporal presence. Different scaling is applied in art when something needs to be emphasized. In here Zahra's own experience and emotion charge the work and gets accentuated and becomes a force that moves and envelops her viewer.

Knowing who Zahrah is to know her work and vice versa as the artist employs her personal history in all her work; they are all in a way an expressive act of self-portrait.



Glimpses of the Past, 2020

Tin, sand, and mirrors
80 m



Alghamdi's installation consists of approximately 6000 tin date containers of different sizes, laid out across 80 meters against the terrain of AlUla. The artwork is an ode to AlUla's agricultural wealth; its plentiful palm tree groves that have fueled the area's trade for generations and the springs of water that have sustained them.

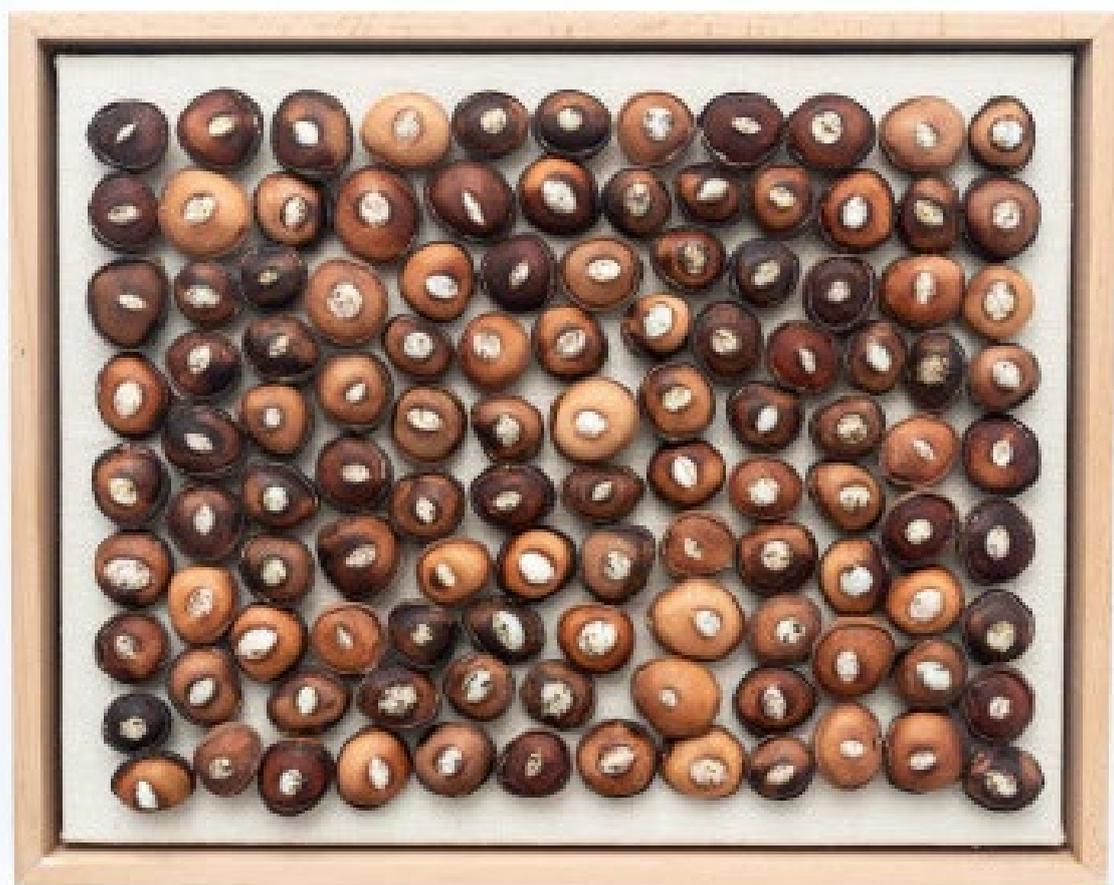
The artist has repurposed the containers, traditionally used for the storage and transport of dates, to create what resembles a sparkling, flowing river with multiple tributaries. Filled with five different shades of sand and mirrors, the work becomes a metaphorical representation of AlUla's significance in being a crossroads of civilizations in history and a cultural hub today attracting visitors from around the world.

The experience of the artwork transforms it to the point that it ceases to be about date farming at all and appears as an organic part of the landscape. It awakens a deep sense of nostalgia as the mountains and sky reflect off the shiny surfaces of the containers and mirrors within.



Ashjan Village, 2020

Zahrah Alghamdi's generation grew up between tradition and modernity. As the population boomed, rapid urbanization and the influence of globalization transformed life in the Kingdom. The distinctive architecture of her home in Al Baha, unique to the South West region of Saudi Arabia, gave way to urban settings shaped by international styles encouraging trade, commercial prowess, and "modern" ways of living. Ashjan Village draws on memory, using domestic architectural details and techniques as experienced by the artist in her childhood. Here the Al-Talh (Acacia) tree stands as both a building material and a poetic symbol of place and time, embodying conditions where Bedouin thrive. Signaling endurance and resilience, Al-Talh, like Bedouin communities, are often found in remote or difficult terrain, away from the apparent ease of homogenized cities. Capable of withstanding thirst and drought, the trees possess sophisticated adaptive mechanisms informed by a long and intimate connection with their environment. Embodied memory moves beyond a straight-forward record or account of the past. Here, the material, processes, and gestures enfold notions of patience, persistence, and cultural preservation. More than just restaging a disappearing heritage, the rendition draws together two remote times. Bringing the past into contact with the present shows that 'home' is not a concept that can easily be demolished, instead, existing as part of shared, collective memory. Nevertheless, these two ways of life, separated only by a matter of years and a distance of some kilometers, are becoming unmoored. These echoes sound a state of alienation, where a connection to identity and the land is threatened.



Growth, 2019

Genuine leather
50 x 50 cm





What Lies Behind the Sun, 2019

Dried branches on sponge and wood
300 x 300 cm



Used as a symbol of space and time, Al-Talh also represents the desert. With its intertwined branches and their extended shadows, this glorious and lofty tree demonstrates an ability to endure the harshest of weather. With time Al-Talh loses its leaves while remaining resilient with its thorns emerging as signs of strength. This tree has been historically closely associated with the desert's heritage and the life of nomads regarding the environment that Bedouins thrive in. Zahrah Al-Ghamdi is interested in highlighting the impact that social and economic developments of the human species has had on the climate and the loss of habitat that so many other species are encountering including Al-Talh.



Streams Move Oceans, 2019

Clay, mud, and cloth



Alghamdi examines love, fragility and the complex and opposing duality of relationships as the basis of social living. Be it a connection between people or elements, ties are created to form an exchange of diverse associations and pace resulting in intricate knots. To the unsuspecting eye, the picture looks uniform and clear, what lies beneath however is infinite connections and layers of complexity and possibilities that which create our rich existential heritage. Each movement of these weaves and ties carry its risks and hopes of building or breaking the bearings of our social structures. Every one of these microscopic links represents a relation between elements, individuals, brushing off surfaces and forming new and sometimes improbable perspectives. It is in these trivial looking streams that the energy establishes the mass and backbone of all living structures surrounding us.

Using mud and clay, Alghamdi fuses opposing elements of liquid and solid giving ground for attachment and form. Textiles are dipped in plaster and knotted together to make a large relic like piece, telling of a rich and latent meaning. The effect that it leaves us with is one of a deeply rooted history of craft which the artist sprucely draws from in her practice to convey elaborate concepts and ideas. Manipulating earthly matter, the artist creates a site-specific installation where the gallery becomes a witness of the phenomenon of interconnectedness from the simplest gestures to an elegy and portrait on the ancestral foundation of our living. Here Alghamdi makes a plea calling for the acknowledgement of our co-existence proposing her perspective on the essential elements that construct and give meaning and life to it all.



Mycelium Running II, 2018

Leather

96 x 238 cm





Cinders And Embers, 2016

Cotton cloth and black plaster
153 x 589 cm



Alghamdi's installation attempts to embody a visceral impression of mankind's relationship with nature. Layers of gauze are unremittingly wrapped, stretched and bound, to further be soaked in black paint alluding to the seemingly incessant relationship of conflict with natural environments.

Alghamdi's installation engages the whole body in its production, through the cyclical, repetitive and extremely physical motions of its production. The artist masters a deeply stringent process of hanging the fibers, yet once the black paint soaks the gauze, an utterly organic process begins to take over, not only in the marks splattered across the wall, but in the streams that start to trace around the floor, provoking scenes of pollution.

When faced with such an overwhelmingly dark installation, one's initial inclination would be towards a scorched, dead, burnt matter, yet it is the very scorched remnants of ash that provide the most fertile grounds for life to imbue, adding room for hope of resilience and hope.



Cell of The Earth, 2016

Cotton and sand
500 x 120 cm



Earth is a simple word with a few letters, but it carries great and countless meanings. It is our identity, our warm refuge that gathers us all. Zahra realized it as a blessing with a beating heart...a soul...a life.

Her artwork (*Cell of Earth*) is a collection of samples taken from earth that represent a mixture of deep concepts forming earth's core. Her work is a symbolic depiction of these cells as they are analyzed by viewers' naked eyes... in hope of understanding what earth really is... in their own perspective... is earth made of rocks.. Some swamps ...mountains... sand... homes... feelings... an embrace... a miracle... or does it have some other concept... can we describe Earth based on what we see with our eyes?



An Inanimate Village, 2013

Performative installation



An Inanimate Village, read in relation to the absence of a specific kind of architecture, the reference suggests a resonance of nostalgia and community through the use of the term 'village'. The structure of the piece does, however, suggest a kind of 'informal' planning—as seen in the kind of structures that emerge through their lived relations (favelas, shanty towns), rather than through planned form. This suggests perhaps a more 'Third World' reading of the erased space, evoking discourses of globalization and formalization through the allusions of its form.

The main significance of the work, however, is as a trace of architectural structure, rather than any specific architectural references, creating an effect of melancholy and loss. There is also the sense of the work as a 'trace' of something that existed or exists elsewhere, suggesting perhaps that we can never have access to the full presence of meaning. What remains of the installations are fields that possess a ghostly quality, haunting any attempt to completely erase and forget them.

Education

- 2003** BA in Islamic Arts, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, KSA
- 2009** MA in Contemporary Craft, Coventry University, UK Coventry
- 2013** P.H.D in Design and Visual Art, Coventry University, UK Coventry

Solo Exhibitions

- 2025** Forthcoming, ATHR Gallery, Riyadh, KSA
- 2021** Moment, ATHR, Jeddah, KSA
- 2019** Streams Move Oceans, ATHR, Jeddah, KSA
- 2017** An Inanimate Village, British Museum, London, UK
- 2015** An Inanimate Village, ATHR, Jeddah
- 2016** An Intimate Village, AlSerkal, Dubai, UAE

Group Exhibitions

- 2025** Misk Art Week, Misk Art Institute, Riyadh, KSA
- 2024** Arabofuturs, Institute monde araba, Paris, France
Transparencies, The Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2023** The Bright Side of the Desert Moon, Noor Riyadh, Riyadh, KSA
In/Visible; Objects in The Mirror, ATHR, Jeddah, KSA
Echo of the Past, Bienalsur, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil.
Net Zero, King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture (Ithra), Dammam, KSA
- 2022** We Dream of New Horizons, Noor Riyadh, Riyadh, KSA
Re-appearing Imaginaries, Prince Faisal bin Fahd Fine Arts Hall, Riyadh, KSA
- 2021** Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, Diriyah Biennale Foundation KSA.
Moment, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
Desert X Coachella Valley CA, Desert X, California, CA
- 2020** Desert X Al-Ula Royal Commission, Desert X, AlUla, KSA
I love you Urgently, 21, 39 (Saudi art council), Jeddah, KSA
- 2019** Walking through Walls, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Gropius-Bau, Berlin
Second Hand, Jameel Center, Dubai, UAE
National Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 58th International Art Exhibition,
La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy
Zamakan, Ithra, King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, Dammam, KSA
- 2018** Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival, Sharjah Museum, Sharjah, UAE.
The Clocks are Striking Thirteen, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah.
- 2017** Letters to a Young Muslim, ATHR Gallery, Jeddah, KSA
Safar, 21, 39, Jeddah, KSA
Shift, the Mosaic Rooms, London, UK

Biennales

- 2026** Fragile Alliance: 2nd edition of the Commagene Land and River Art Biennial, Kahta, Turkey
- 2019** National pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 58th International Art, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy

Art Fairs

- 2025** Abu Dhabi Art, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2022** Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2019** Art Berlin, Berlin, Belgium
- 2018** Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2016** Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE

Commissions

- 2024** Hayy Jameel Façade Commission, Jeddah, KSA
- 2023** Gharmeel, Madrasat Addeera , The Royal commission for Alula Arts, AlUla, KSA
- 2022** Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia / Ithra Museum 2022.0009
- 2018** Mycelium Running, Al-Ula Royal Commission, KSA
- 2017** An Inanimate Village, The British Museum, London, UK
- 2016** Cell of the City, Alserkal, Dubai, UAE

Residencies

- 2017** Artists in Labs, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology EAWAG, Zurich, Switzerland.

Collections

Art Jameel
Centre Pompidou

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