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### **Karen Dabrowska**

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# The Arab Weekly <sup>(L)</sup>

## London exhibition showcases Qatari contemporary art

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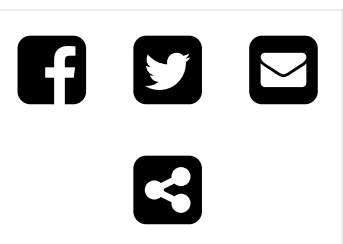
A photograph by Qatari artist Aref Ammari dedicated to the art of falconry is featured at the Reconnecting Arts exhibition in London. (P21 Gallery)

London - A group of established and emerging Qatari artists has come together for its first international exhibition reflecting on the ways the members connect with their identities, cultures and surroundings in an era in which their country is constantly shifting.


Reconnecting: Contemporary Art from Qatar featured 18 artists and six film-makers at London's P21 Gallery in



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an event organised by London-based Reconnecting Arts  
with the aim of supporting emerging Middle Eastern  
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creative talent.

"It is being held to allow the emerging artists of Qatar who we see rarely exhibiting internationally a chance to showcase their own perspective on their ever-changing society," explained curator Sara Foryame, who is also a visual artist.

The exhibition created a framework for the artists to explore their individual and collective vision of the local culture and its interaction with the rest of the world.

Many of the artists chose to document the swift progress and concern about their country's rapid growth through various media spanning painting, installation, photography and moving image.

Some of the artists connected with the past using handmade Qatari leaf palm and old photographs as references. Others were connecting with the present through exploration of the city and the way in which technology has been affecting the current generation.


Hessa Ali Batta portrays Qatari daily life through playing cards. She stays faithful to the traditional characters on the cards but gives them a local perspective.

The joker is the unique Al Muqannaa (The Masked One), featuring Ahmed Mohammad Al Jaber, a local icon who decorates cars and drives around Qatar playing patriotic music.

"The relationship between the old and new is a recurring theme," Foryame said. "Qatar is changing so drastically. We see some artists exploring this theme through film where overlapping of desert and the city





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contrast against each other. The artists hope that culture is not buried under the concrete and glass. An illustration by Khalid al-Fahad of two elderly characters taking a 'selfie' with the 'selfie' stick explores technology and modernism impacting on the older generations." "Qatar is changing in the blink of an eye. I think with any country that is changing, nostalgia for the past is always present but equally unease about the future is also present. There can also be at times tension between the past and future. The artists all explore their own thoughts on the country, the landscape and their personal views about the change that has taken place," Foryame said.

The exhibition featured the work of Ali Hassan and Yousef Ahmed, the most well-known artists in Qatar and the Gulf region. Hassan, a calligrapher, produced a wooden sculpture of a horse dedicated to the people of Qatar. The desert horse, used by Bedouins, captures the spirit of travel and the flow of movement.

Ahmed, a pioneer of Qatar's modern art movement, was inspired by the flat desert of Qatar's landscape and creates textured abstractions overlaid with Arabic calligraphy. Ahmed recalled as a child drawing on outside walls with coal leftover from the stove. Today, his drawings depict the natural environment through his choice of colour, texture and materials, which he often makes himself.

The photographs of Aref al-Ammari are dedicated to the art of falconry where families come together for a weekend and the younger generation learns about traditions and skills from the older generation. There



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was also a film about falconry revealing the close relationship between man and birds as the falconer talks lovingly about his creatures. Ahmed al-Sai's series of portrait photographs feature porters who moved to Qatar to earn money to send home to their families. Each face tells a story of a life.

Hayfa al-Saada's painting on aluminium metal features a woman dressed in traditional fabric. The aluminium echoes the curves and ripples of the fabric representing an intertwining of strength and beauty. Her Qatari Matryoshka consists of a number of wooden dolls in traditional Qatari costumes inspired by traditional Russian nesting dolls. She aims to introduce Qatari culture to the younger generation who may not be familiar with the costumes.

Foryame said she was delighted that emerging artists have been given the chance to show their work alongside that of Qatar's famous artists.

"The main reason for doing this exhibition was to encourage emerging artists to believe in themselves and their work. And it has been great to see some of the established artists so supportive of this," she said.

"One thing many artists have said is that it is easy to get your work shown if you are a traditional artist or photographer; however contemporary work is still finding its niche in Qatar. We are seeing more independent exhibition spaces."

It is a thought-provoking exhibition which encouraged visitors to reflect on their own identity and how they are connecting with the past.



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