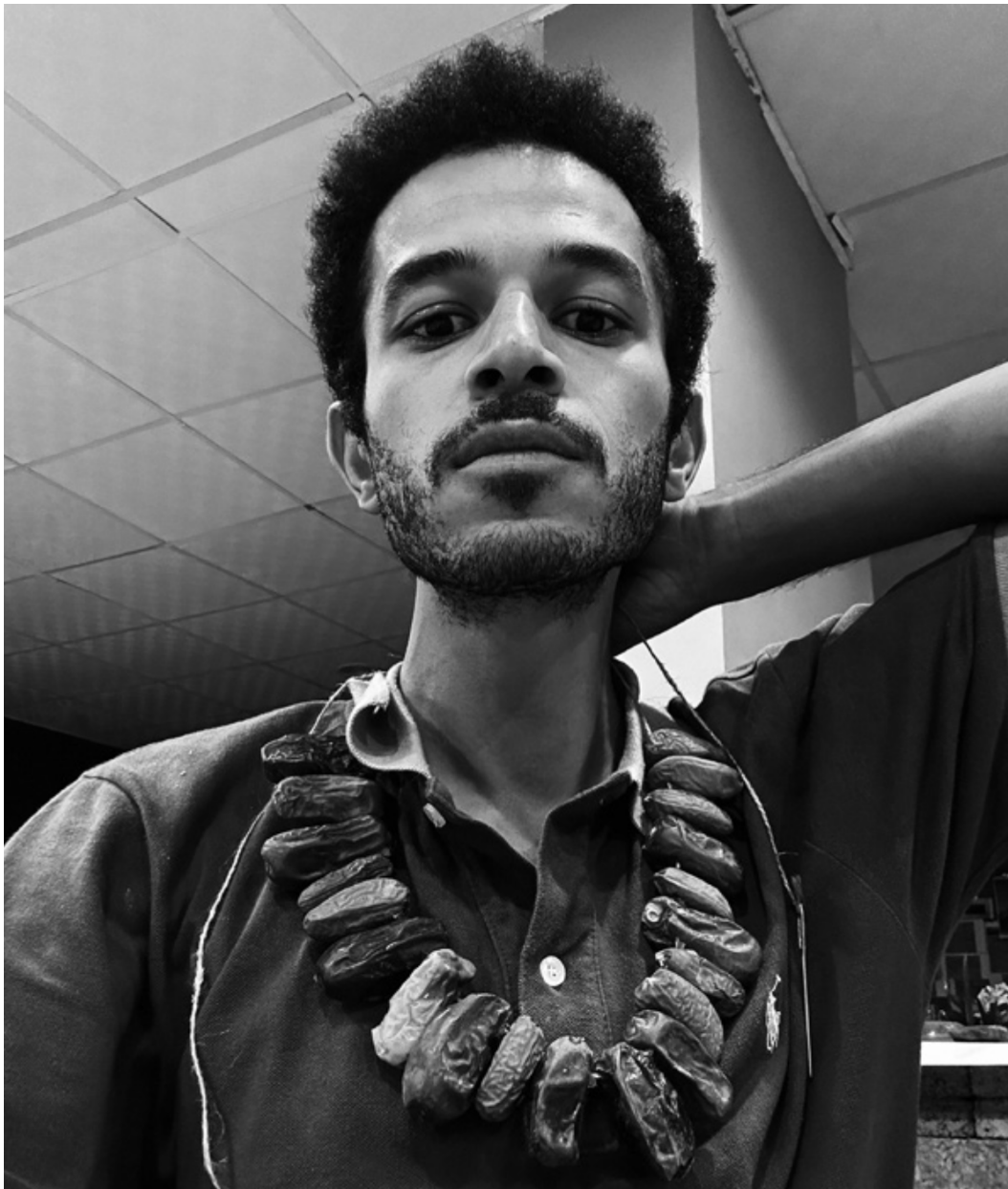


MENNOUR

# MOHAMMAD ALFARAJ

PORTFOLIO 2023



## STATEMENT

Né en 1993 en Arabie saoudite, Mohammad AlFaraj vit et travaille à Al-Ahsa, en Arabie saoudite. Artiste, réalisateur et écrivain, il explore les relations complexes qui unissent les humains, les animaux et les créatures fantastiques.

Sensible aux traditions orales et aux légendes qui peuplent l'imaginaire collectif de son pays natal, AlFaraj s'inspire des pratiques sociales et des architectures, urbaines ou rurales, de la vie quotidienne. Intéressé par la relation entre forme et concept, il crée des oeuvres multimédias à partir de sources fictives et non fictives pour évoquer les enjeux sociaux et environnementaux contemporains.

AlFaraj a obtenu une licence en Ingénierie Mécanique à la King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) en 2017. Son travail a été présenté dans diverses expositions personnelles et collectives internationales, notamment à la Biennale des Arts Islamiques, 2023 ; 16e Biennale de Lyon, 2022 ; Jameel Arts Centre, 2022 ; 21,39 Jeddah Arts, 2020 ; Athr Gallery, Jeddah (2020, 2018) ; le Festival islamique de Sharjah, 2019 ; la Sharjah Art Foundation, 2019 ; Le Murate Pac, Florence, 2019 ; 21,39 Jeddah Arts, 2017 & 2019 ; Saudi Film Festival, Dammam, 2015 et le Dubai International Film Festival, 2014. Il a participé en 2019 à la Can Serrat – International Art Residency, à Barcelone, et plus récemment à la AlUla Art Residency en 2022.

Born in 1993 in Saudi Arabia, Mohammad AlFaraj lives and works in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. As an artist, film director and writer, he explores the complex relations that connect humans, animals and fantastic creatures together.

Sensitive to oral traditions and legends that populate his native country's collective imaginary, AlFaraj draws inspiration from the social practices and architectures, whether urban or rural, of everyday life. Interested in the relationship between form and concepts, he creates multimedia works from fictional and non-fictional sources that draw on contemporary social and environmental issues.

AlFaraj graduated with a BA in mechanical engineering from King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in 2017. His work has been shown in various international solo and group shows, including the Islamic Arts Biennale, 2023; 16th Biennale de Lyon, 2022; Jameel Arts Centre, 2022; 21,39 Jeddah Arts, 2020; Athr Gallery, Jeddah (2020, 2018); the Sharjah Islamic Festival, 2019; the Sharjah Art Foundation, 2019; Le Murate Pac, Florence, 2019; 21,39 Jeddah Arts, 2017 & 2019; Saudi Film Festival, Dammam, 2015 and Dubai International Film Festival, 2014. He participated in 2019 in the Can Serrat – International Art Residency, Barcelona, and more recently in the AlUla Art Residency in 2022.

# THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, 2023

Après une participation remarquée à la dernière Biennale de Lyon, Mohammad AlFaraj (né en 1993 à Al Hassa, Arabie Saoudite) se présente tel un conteur à l'occasion de sa première exposition personnelle en France, à la galerie Mennour.

Dans son film *The Date Fruit of Knowledge*, qui donne son titre à l'exposition, AlFaraj puise dans la tradition orale de son pays natal, pour raconter — en arabe puis en anglais, ses deux langues courantes — le voyage initiatique d'un jeune oiseau assoiffé de connaissances. C'est l'histoire d'un passereau — dont le corps est sculpté au sein d'une datte — ayant eu vent d'une légende par le léopard d'Arabie, désormais disparu, selon laquelle chaque palmier porte un fruit qui contiendrait tous les savoirs du monde. Insatiable, l'oiseau se met à dépouiller chaque arbre de ses dattes, qu'elles soient vertes ou trop mûres, interdisant à ses congénères de l'accompagner dans cet exploit gargantuesque. Alors que sa boulimie le conduit progressivement aux portes de la mort, il ingurgite un dernier fruit à l'allure étonnante. « Soudain, nous raconte AlFaraj, ses yeux deviennent blancs, son esprit s'illumine et toute connaissance lui vient comme une révélation ».

Certifier, nommer, situer, réciter, calculer... Rien ne lui est désormais inconnu. Il sait tout ce qui a été, tout ce qui est, tout ce qui adviendra. Détenteur d'un pouvoir immense, il fait toutefois l'expérience d'une solitude sans pareille et se retrouve en complète disharmonie avec toutes les autres espèces qui, elles, prennent plaisir à apprendre en se trompant. Tout ce qui est d'ordinaire sublime et passionnant lui devient familier, et ainsi terne, alors que dans l'entendement de toutes les horreurs et les souffrances du monde,

After winning acclaim at the last Lyon Biennale, Mohammad AlFaraj (born in 1993 in Al Hassa, Saudi Arabia) presents himself as a storyteller for his first solo exhibition in France, at Mennour gallery.

In his film *The Date Fruit of Knowledge*, which lends its title to the exhibition, AlFaraj draws on the oral tradition of his native country to tell the story — in Arabic then English, his two spoken languages — of the initiatory journey of a young bird thirsty for knowledge: the story of a bulbul — whose body is sculpted from a date — that hears of a legend by the extinct Arabian leopard which says that every palm tree bears a single fruit containing all the knowledge in the world. Insatiable, the bird sets out to strip each tree of its dates, whether green or overripe, forbidding fellow birds to indulge in this gargantuan feat. As his growing bulimia brings him to the brink of death, he ingests one last odd-looking fruit. "Suddenly," says AlFaraj, "his eyes turn white, his mind lights up and all knowledge comes to him like a revelation."

How to identify, name, locate, recite, calculate... Nothing is unknown to him. He is aware of everything that was, everything that is, everything that will be. Yet despite his immense power, he experiences extreme solitude: he is completely disconnected from all the other species, who take pleasure in learning by making mistakes. Everything that is beautiful and exciting becomes known to him, and therefore dull, while in the face of everything that is horrible and painful, he stands aware and powerless. Devastated, the bulbul decides to end it all. But his old friends recommend him to turn to fire, the master of oblivion. And so, throughout the night, the bird gives all his knowledge up to the flames. At dawn, he

il se tient impuissant et désespéré. Anéanti, le passereau projette de mettre un terme à ses jours mais ses anciens camarades lui conseillent, avant cela, de s'en remettre au feu – maître par excellence de l'oubli. Ainsi, toute une nuit durant, l'oiseau confie son savoir aux flammes et à l'aube, il a tout oublié. Désormais, il va s'agir pour lui d'apprendre à savourer la vie et la connaissance, datte par datte, jour par jour, entouré des siens.

Créé en 2022 dans le contexte d'une résidence d'artistes à AlUla, *The Date Fruit of Knowledge* utilise la technique du stop-motion, une première pour l'artiste. À partir d'une économie formelle de moyens, AlFaraj nous convie au sein d'un dispositif vidéographique immersif, qui s'inscrit à mi-chemin entre la performance live et son archive. Afin d'instaurer une mise en abyme, l'artiste superpose, dans la voûte de la galerie Mennour, la terre saoudienne — qui est celle de son atelier en plein air — à un lit de sable fin déposé sur la surface de projection. Non sans rappeler les techniques du cinéma haptique à travers lequel « les yeux fonctionnent comme des organes du toucher », AlFaraj crée les conditions d'un partage du moment présent. Hic et nunc.

Un parti pris que l'on retrouve également dans le film *Glimpses of Now*, débuté en 2015. Conçu comme une mosaïque ou base de données hybride, l'œuvre propose une série de scènes du quotidien filmées avec son téléphone. Mises bout-à-bout pour composer une architecture mobile, les séquences s'assemblent, s'entremêlent, s'additionnent. En perpétuelle évolution, le scénario poétique se voit remanié au jour le jour ; les plans segmentés, allongés, rognés, ou à contrario écartés, abandonnés, supprimés. « En positionnant deux images l'une à la suite de l'autre, je cherche, explique l'artiste, à faire émerger une troisième et nouvelle signification ».

AlFaraj participe à une production visuelle et narrative qui documente les changements et les tensions existant entre les environnements urbains et naturels, les fractures entre traditions et progrès,

has forgotten everything. From that moment on, he begins to savour life and knowledge to the full, date by date, day by day, in communion with his peers.

Created in 2022 in the context of an artist residency in AlUla, *The Date Fruit of Knowledge* marks the artist's first use of stop motion animation. Employing very few material elements, AlFaraj invites us into an immersive video device, halfway between a live performance and its archive. To establish a mise en abyme, the artist superimposes Saudi soil – taken from his open-air studio – on a bed of fine sand placed on the projection surface in the vault of Mennour gallery. Recalling the techniques of haptic cinema through which «the eyes function as organs of touch», AlFaraj seeks to create the conditions for sharing the present moment. Hic et nunc.

An approach that can also be found in the film *Glimpses of Now*, begun in 2015. Conceived as a mosaic or hybrid database, the work proposes a series of everyday scenes filmed with his telephone. Placed end-to-end to compose a mobile architecture, the sequences are assembled, intertwined, and added together. In perpetual evolution, the poetic scenario is reshaped on a day-to-day basis, the shots segmented, lengthened, trimmed, or else discarded, abandoned, deleted: «I'm looking for that third meaning that emerges when you put two images one after the other.»

AlFaraj takes part in a visual and narrative production that documents changes and tensions between urban and natural environments, fractures between tradition and progress, generational gaps, social claims, issues raised by the need for environmental preservation. The palm and its fruit are recurring in his pictorial, photographic and sculptural practice. The possibilities of coexistence between living species and nature are a constant source of inspiration.

His works are like a series of sensitive areas, bearing witness to the complexity of the relationships that make up a global landscape in constant mutation. In a post-Anthropocene era, the bird feeds on what it is



les écarts générationnels, les revendications citoyennes, les problématiques soulevées par la nécessaire préservation environnementale. On retrouve le palmier et son fruit aussi bien dans sa pratique picturale, photographique et sculpturale. Les possibilités de coexistence entre les espèces vivantes et la nature sont une source d'inspiration permanente.

Comme autant de zones sensibles, ses œuvres se font le témoin de la complexité des relations qui occupent un paysage mondial en constante mutation. Dans une ère post-anthropocène, l'oiseau se nourrit ainsi de ce qui le compose, et l'humain dominant n'est plus. Faisant écho aux écrits de Jean-Luc Nancy, AlFaraj célèbre l'interdépendance encore fertile des espèces. Comme l'oiseau migrateur réitère et répand, de vols en vols, son chant, l'artiste partage les légendes qu'il invente pour venir enrichir un imaginaire à vocation universelle.

– Megan Macnaughton

made of, and human domination is no more. Echoing the writings of Jean-Luc Nancy, AlFaraj celebrates the still fertile interdependence of species. Just as the migrating bird repeats and shares his song from flight to flight, the artist scatters the legends he invents, and thereby enriches a collective imaginary with a universal calling.

– Megan Macnaughton

# THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, 2023



EXHIBITION VIEW : "THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE", 5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, PARIS, 2023



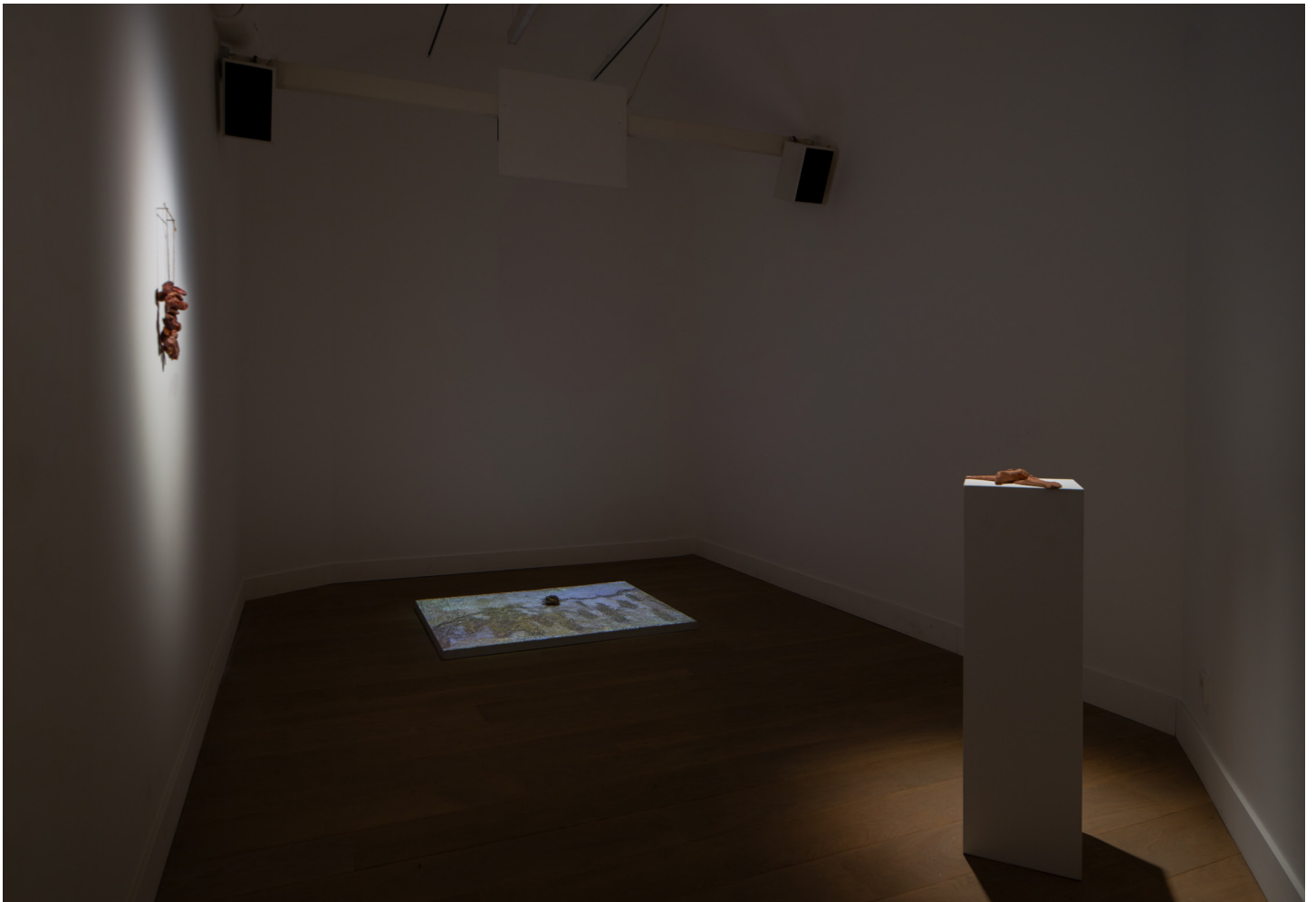
EXHIBITION VIEWS: "THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE", 5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, PARIS, 2023





EXHIBITION VIEWS: "THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE", 5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, PARIS, 2023





EXHIBITION VIEWS: "THE DATE FRUIT OF KNOWLEDGE", 5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, PARIS, 2023



# A BIRD THAT ESCAPED THE CAGE, DREAMING OF ITS NEST

2022



THIS SCULPTURE IS PART OF THE FOSSILS OF KNOWLEDGE SERIES.



# THE FRUIT OF THOUGHT AND HEART

2022



FILM WITH SOUND (3'), CHARCOAL AND PALM TREE DECOCTION ON PAPER, FIG TREE, 2022





FILM WITH SOUND (3'), CHARCOAL AND PALM TREE DECOCTION ON PAPER, FIG TREE, 2022



# LIMBS OF THE PAST, AN OFFERING FOR THE FUTURE

AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022

Alfaraj's artistic and life practices intersect and intertwine in many ways, nourished by many wells of inspiration, people and places, memories and dreams, language and nature, traditional and modern practices, and the complex relationship that connects it all to make our present complex, ugly and beautiful all at once. In his expressions, Alfaraj uses tools such as collaborating with nature, visual and acoustic experimentation, and reusing found objects and materials, with the aim of drawing people into a sensory and poetic experience, capable of making us feel and then think and change.

The work derives sanctity and spiritual significance through the use/reuse of natural and non-natural materials, and integrating them with drawings, words and shapes, as all of these elements carry within them the history and memory of those who touched, used and believed in them.



EXHIBITION VIEWS : "LIMBS OF THE PAST, AN OFFERING FOR THE FUTURE", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022





EXHIBITION VIEWS : "LIMBS OF THE PAST, AN OFFERING FOR THE FUTURE", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022

# THE SPEECH OF THE TREES

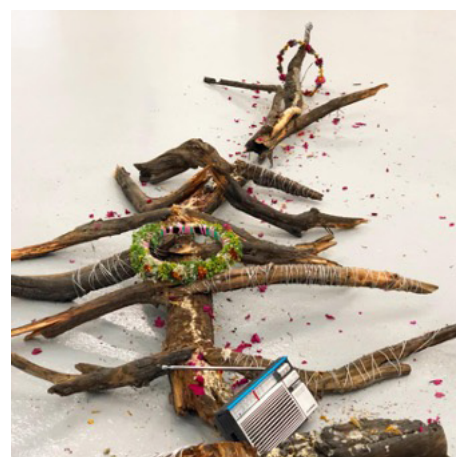
AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022

The installation evokes a poetic eulogy to the once magnificent primeval forests, assembling charcoal drawings, field recordings, and found wood arranged as the carcass of a mythological woodland beast.

The artist attempts to meditate on an act of embodied listening rather than speaking about or to the forest. Working collaboratively with local community members, Mohammed erects stands of paper that use found charcoal to trace the charred barks, creating poetic replicas of the damaged forests within the gallery space.

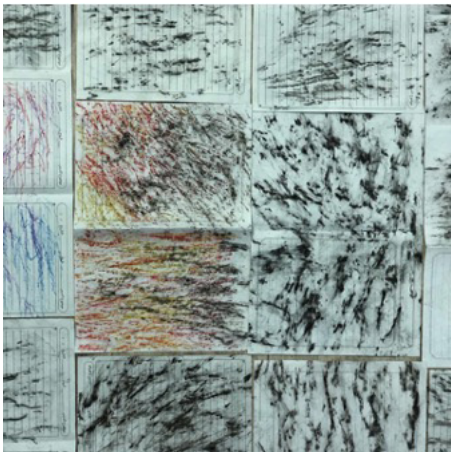
The skeletal form is embedded with sound recording of charcoal rubbing of the trees around Abha's landscape, creating sonic shadows of words. The installation make present a polyphony of contemporary and ancient narratives. In enacting a Pegan eulogy, Al Faraj make present a polyphony of contemporary and ancient narratives.





EXHIBITION VIEW : "THE SPEECH OF THE TREES", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022





EXHIBITION VIEWS : "THE SPEECH OF THE TREES", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022



# FOSSILS OF TIME, FOSSILS OF KNOWLEDGE, FOSSILS OF THE CITY

AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022

In continuing my multidisciplinary practice that intertwines different elements, stories and materials together, here I look at photography and the photograph as Fossils Of Time. A way of seeing and grasping a moment, in its spirituality and materiality. Tracing human life, dreams and struggles. Digging in Life, its symbols and language by experiencing it as a story archeologist, that collect those traces, symbols, elements and materials. To transform it from the photographic to the sculptural, a physical three dimensional fossil of our time on this earth.



EXHIBITION VIEWS : "FOSSILS OF TIME , FOSSILS OF KNOWLEDGE, FOSSILS OF THE CITY", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022





EXHIBITION VIEWS: "FOSSILS OF TIME , FOSSILS OF KNOWLEDGE, FOSSILS OF THE CITY", AL SERKAL, DUBAI, 2022



## JASB AL AYESH

HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH, 2021



MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION AT HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH  
VIDEO ON WOOD, PRINTS, CARDBOARD SCULPTURES



MULTIMEDIA INSTALLATION AT HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH  
VIDEO ON WOOD, PRINTS, CARDBOARD SCULPTURES



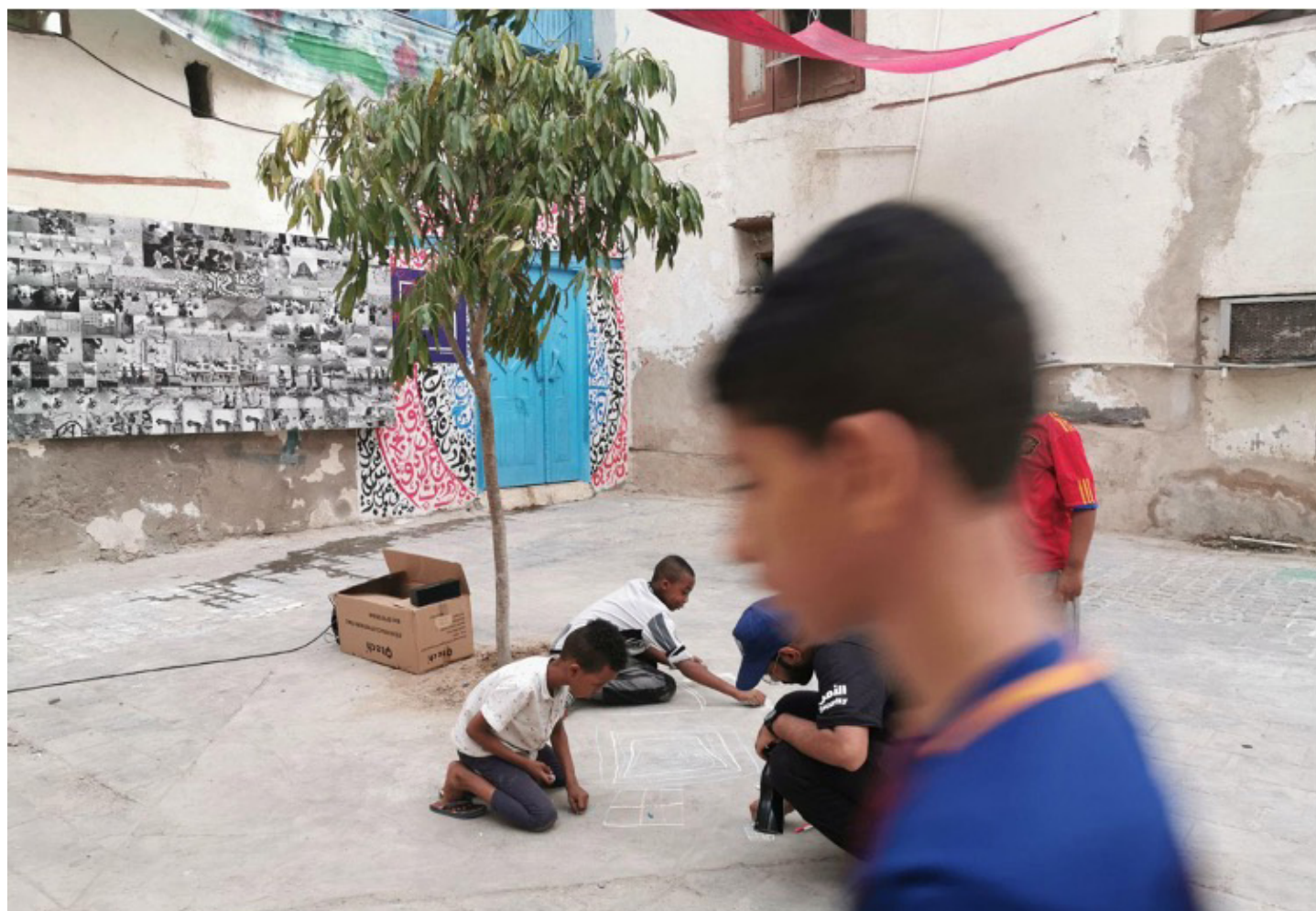
## JASB AL AYESH

HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH, 2021

“Here, in this space, you are standing in the midst of a visual essay. Various collaborative works come together as an outcome of guided art experiences facilitated by Mohammad Alfaraj in collaboration with the children of Al Balad in Jeddah. Using public space, and taking ownership of the streets, children practice their creative, technical, and solution based thinking.”







“JASB AL AYESH”, HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH, 2021



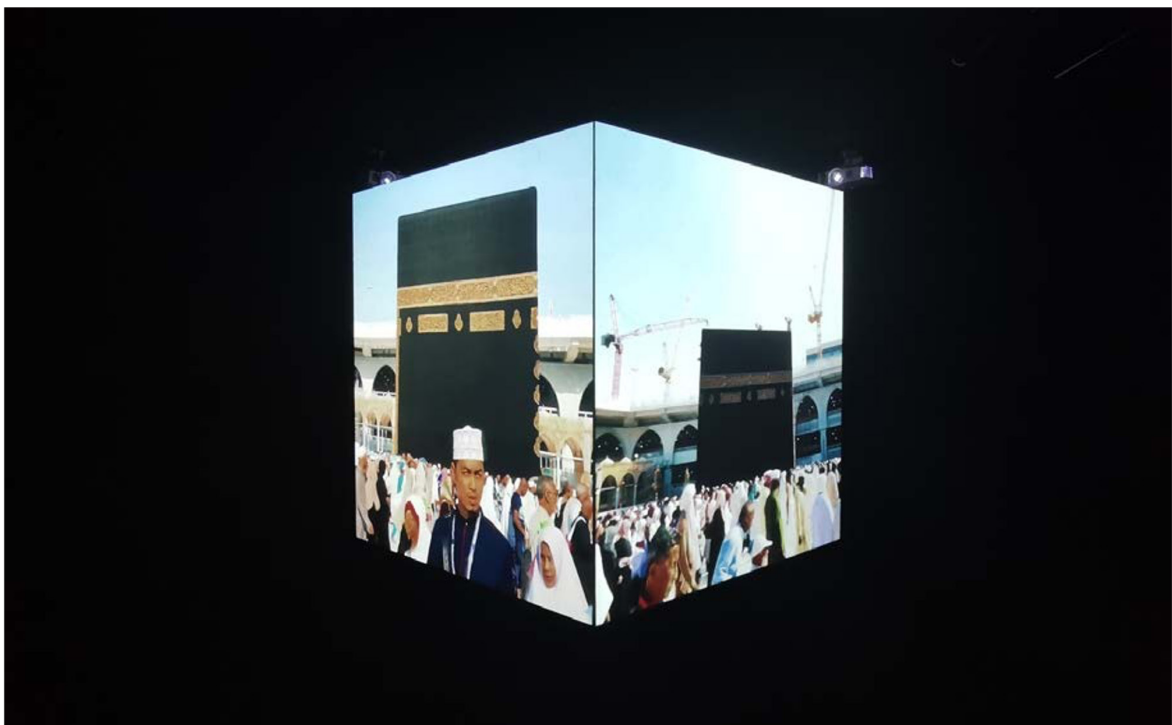


“JASB AL AYESH”, HAYY JAMEEL, JEDDAH, 2021



# OUTSIDE THE SQUARE / INSIDE THE CIRCLE

2019



A cube-shaped installation displays on its four sides interconnected films, recording the movement and voices of pilgrims, visitors and living beings in the Prophet's Mosque and the Holy Mosque in Makkah as a basic engine for transmission of the emotional and spiritual experience that at its height takes us out of the square and within a wide circle.

Through Outside the square / Inside the circle, Alfaraj tries to answer several questions to find a technical and aesthetic form that complements and is parallel to "Al-Mada", which was the theme of the Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival in which the work was presented for the first time, especially since the word has endless possibilities in its meanings and implications. The artist found his answer in a continuous circular movement, where the circle is considered an infinite number of points, and without a specific beginning nor end, as a kinetic and realistic form, undefined by a culture, nationality, color or shape but rather determined by one movement, such as a gear or wheel Move the world.

# SOPHIA

2018

This digital installation sets up a configuration of screens into a 3-Dimensional box, onto which 3 distinct narratives are diffused. The work sets to blur the lines between factual footage and fiction in a bid to raise questions around our absorption of information through channels that we are exposed to on a daily basis. The use of visual material, audio, space, colour and light all contribute to the experiential dynamic of this body of work.

The 3 films will be presented in a sort of factual gradient, from factually correct, to partly fictional and finally a cinematic montage of images interlaced with presumed narratives.

The first segment, titled Sofia, sets the scene of a contemporary TV program around recent news regarding a robot called Sofia who was granted Saudi citizenship. This footage is then juxtaposed with real life footage of a stateless people.

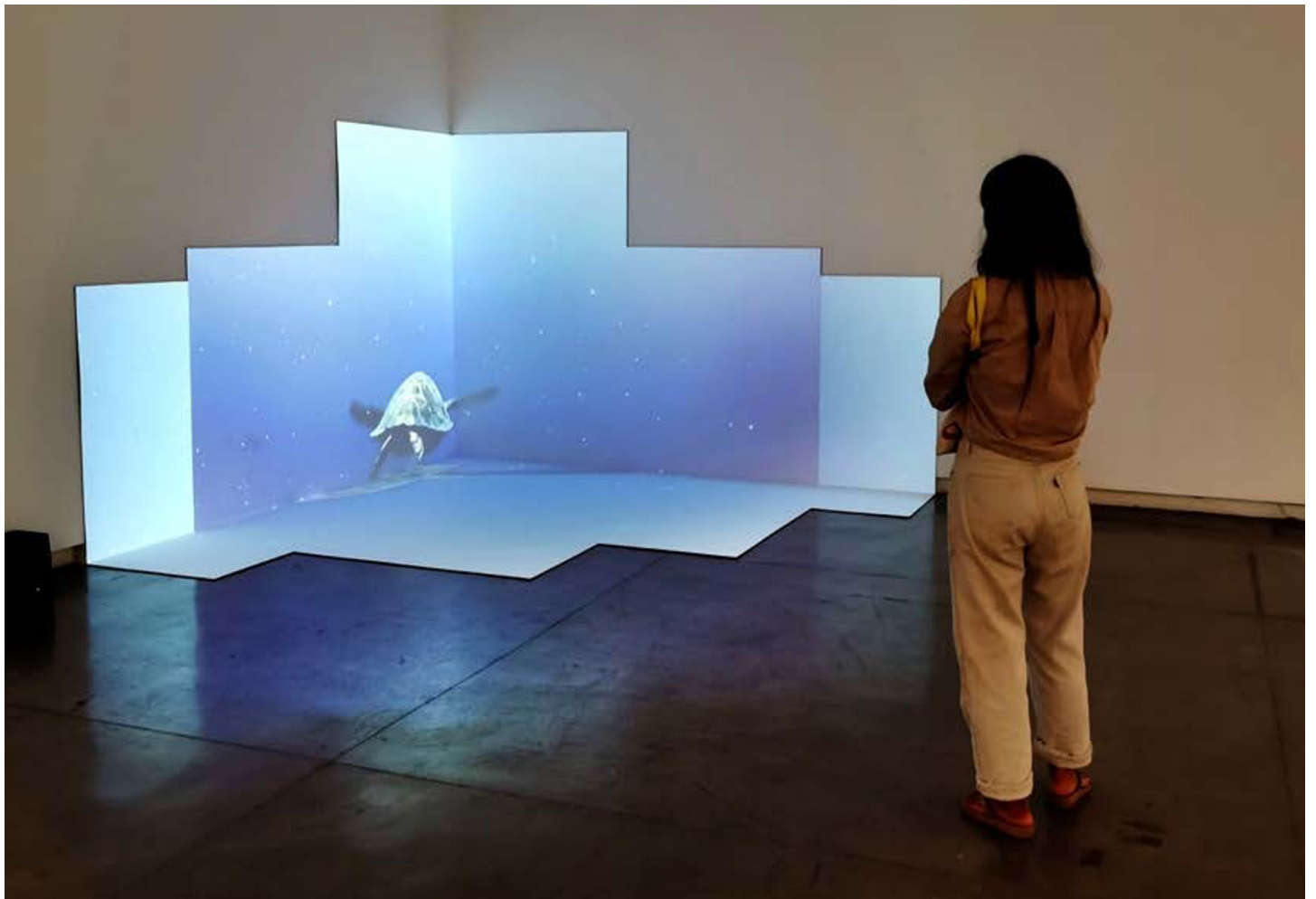
The second segment, titled The Turtle, looks back at 1980's footage of a hundred year-old turtle being released into open waters. The incredibly moving scene is later juxtaposed with the ruthless slaughter of an elderly turtle by Saudi men in a bid to eat it. The turtle moves across the screens, whimsically floating through space.

“What were your inspirations for the video installation showcased at the Surface Tension exhibition?” :

I think what really drove the idea into becoming this work was mainly seeing the robot Sophia being awarded the Saudi citizenship on TV, in contrast to my experience in trying to make a film about a group of displaced undocumented people in southern Saudi Arabia. So TV in opposite to film, robots in opposite to humans and then to animals and nature to complete the ecological circle. It was also my first attempt into balancing between the form and the content, make both influence each other in the work, three chapters unfold in a sculpture of screens that's built and designed on three planes. So in general what draws me really is when the dots are connected, when the stitched fragments make sense and look like a mosaic of some sort: Sophia and humans and nature, TV and film, form and content.

This body of work pivots on notions of perspective, both literal and metaphorical, where the fragmentation of the image echoes a wider statement about the diffusion and reliability of news and information we have grown so reliant on.





INSTALLATION VIEW : "SOPHIA", 2018



# THE SUN, AGAIN

2017



"THE SUN, AGAIN", FILM (6'), 2017



# MOHAMMAD ALFARAJ

PORTFOLIO 2023

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