

What's On

By Cinatra Fernandes
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The exhibition, "Harmony in the City", at Masaha 13 art gallery presents research and different points of view on the subject of modern urbanism in order to initiate conversations on urban issues at both the global and individual levels.

Pressing issues of food systems, human experience, transportation, climate change, energy and environmental depletion are tackled in holistic examination, bringing together seemingly disparate but interconnected ideas while facing the reality of a post oil metropolis.

Indian artist and curator Jasmine Singh, and Kuwaiti artist and curator Jassim Al Nashmi, in this interview with the Arab Times, discuss the art works of the exhibition while touching on pertinent issues and challenges to Kuwait's urban fabric.

Arab Times: Can you begin by explaining to our readers the title of your exhibition, 'Harmony in the City'?

Jassim: We were both inspired by visionaries such as William McDonough and his Cradle to Cradle concept, as well as the Garden City. Our interest lies in joining the movement of improving the cities in which we live, starting with raising awareness through art. Existing cities all have their problems whether they be social, environmental or economical, this is due to the original planning of the city. Our goal is to envision holistic cities that are in harmony between all human values rather than a select few.

Jasmine: As the exhibition title suggests, we are inspired by the desire to create harmony in the city. Quite often, the built environment gets shaped by economic criteria, while neglecting social and environmental well-being. This exhibition stems from our interest in exploring urban systems that justly balance economic, environmental and social prosperity.

We have been drawing inspiration from the pioneer landscape and ecological planner: Ian McHarg whose celebrated research and methodology proposed concepts that later developed into Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Others in this successive methodology that inspired us are: James Corner, Anuradha Mathur and DaCunha. We have also been interested in the Cradle-to-Cradle concept proposed by architect William McDonough who is interested in creating designs that mimic nature and are self-replenishing and resilient over time.

AT: When did you first start to work on this exhibition? What was the process other artists coming on board?

Jassim: We met in August 2016 after not seeing each other for 4 years, a few days after we met, Fatima AlSaffar called me and requested I do an exhibition about the city because she knew this was our shared interest. A few days later, Jasmine calls and suggests we do a project together about the city, so I told her I have an exhibition lined up!

The other artists came on board as we started to think about which artists locally have dealt with important issues related to economy, society or the environment. The one artist that was not living in Kuwait was Vivan Sundaram and we got in touch with him and he was interested to participate.

AT: Can you tell us about the background of the participating artists and the different modes of representation they employ in this exhibition?

Jassim: I am an architect, photographer and installation artist, this was the first time that photographs of the installation were artworks themselves as well as the installation. For the 'Oil Memorial' Series, I used a dye-sublimation printing technique which prints the photographs on aluminum.

Jasmine Singh is trained as an architect and creates mixed-media visual and installation art. She currently teaches Interior Design and 3D Design courses at the American University of Kuwait and Box Hill College. For this exhibition she created an installation with Roma Soni titled 'Oil Drops', a film on canvas and live painting installation with myself titled 'Happiness in the City' and a digital mapping photowork with Houssam I. Flayhan titled 'The Strawberry Project'.

Houssam I. Flayhan is an architect at PACE, a painter and graphic artist, he participated in the live painting titled "Happiness in the City" and produced a digital mapping print titled "@EKWTT".

Roma Soni is full-time Senior Lecturer at the Dept. of Art & Design at Box Hill College Kuwait. She is also a painter. She produced the installation "Oil Drops" with Jasmine and an acrylic on canvas painting titled "Bleeding on Coral".

Vivan Sundaram is an installation artist and his 'Trash' series is the oldest pair of artworks exhibited (digital prints) and the only artworks in the exhibition that has been shown before: Trash shown in Walsh Gallery, Chicago, 2008, Sepia International, New York, 2008, India: Art Now, Arken Museum of Art, Copenhagen, 2012, Paris, Delhi, Mumbai, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, 2011, Chalo India, Essel Museum, Vienna, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea, 2009, Theatre of Life: Contemporary Art from India Today, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2008, Revolutions-



'Oil Memorial' by Kuwaiti artist Jassim Al Nashmi.



'Metal Box' artwork by Vivan Sundaram.



'Bleeding on Coral' by Roma Soni examines the vulnerability of coral reefs.



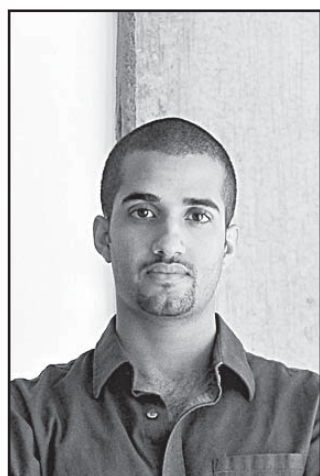
Curators of 'Harmony in the City' Jassim Al Nashmi (left), and Jasmine Singh (right), with US Ambassador Lawrence Silverman.



'Oil Drops' by Jasmine Singh and Roma Soni installation.

Artists bridge art and research

Harmony in the City



Jassim Al Nashmi

'Our goal is to envision holistic cities that are in harmony between all human values rather than a select few'. — Jassim

Jassim Al Nashmi

BArch at Iowa State University 2008-2013, Architect at Pace 2014-present.

Al Nashmi currently works as an architect in Kuwait and has contributed to various exhibitions as a fine art photographer and installation artist between the US, Brazil and Kuwait, all of which focus on light.

Selected shows include: USA/ Oblique Curiosities, ISU King Pavilion '11. Fallow, Black's Heritage Farm '13. Kuwaiti Sami Mohammad: A Retrospective, CAP '15. Al Khayal In Haka, The Cube '15. What's Your Location?, CAP '15. Islamopolitan, CAP, '15. Brazil | What's Your Location? CCEV Porto Alegre '15. Sharjah, UAE | Selected Works, Maraya Art Centre

Al Nashmi's design work includes a modular partition wall that is now part of the permanent collection at Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah. Al Nashmi is generally curious about the idea of perfection, and where it lies in the spectrum of chaos and order and has recently been developing an interest in light's relationship with photographic film and the perception of blurred imagery in relation to the urban planning of cities.

Jasmine Singh

Jasmine Singh holds a B.

Architecture, Minor in Design Studies [2012] and MS. Architecture [2015] from Iowa State University, USA with full ride scholarship. She has taught foundation design and architecture based courses at Iowa State University, USA and Kuwait University, Kuwait. She now teaches 3D Design at the American University, Kuwait.

Jasmine's teaching preeminence has earned her the Graduate Teaching Award from Iowa State University and her student projects have been exhibited at the 2015 National Conference on the beginning Design Student [NCBDS], USA and 2016 Red Bull Art of Can competition, Kuwait.

Alongside teaching, Jasmine's research explores the role of design thinking in developing holistic urban systems and experiences that are socially and environmentally fulfilling, along with being economically viable. Her thesis exposes the externalized costs of the industrial food system and highlights benefits in designing resilient and self-replenishing local food systems. Due to the layered complexity in her research topics, Jasmine's mode of visual communication engages a range of techniques, such as hybrid manual and digital collages, photography, video stills, statistics, quotes and materiality.

The design of our cities has wide-ranging implications for the health of its people and the environment.
— Jasmine



Jasmine Singh

-Forms that Turn, Sydney Biennale, 2008, Samtidigt, Kulturhaust, Stockholm, 2010.

AT: What urban issues, in your opinion, does Kuwait most struggle with today?

Jassim: Traffic congestion, air pollution, climate control, desalination, obesity, diabetes, corruption, education, urban planning, cultural identity, economic independence plan.

Jasmine: The design of our cities has wide-ranging implications for the health of its people and the environment. To name a few urban issues and their consequences that we attempted to highlight in the exhibition: Lack of local food system infrastructure requiring food imports, rampant energy consumption in transportation, residential, commercial sectors; excessive waste that becomes the urban underbelly and lack of empathy towards human experience in public spaces.

AT: Jassim, your artwork is an Oil Memorial. What does a post-oil Kuwait look like to you?

Jassim: It all depends but both are quite positive. Either Kuwait will push for finding financial income alternatives to oil as well alternative energy sources, which is ideal but very challenging because it would require an environmentally and economically aware, conscious and intelligent society all around as this change must be nation-wide. If the society is aware and intelligent then the post-oil Kuwait would be similar to Amsterdam, London or Japan, where the city is compact with high density buildings and infrastructure, the people are conscious of the environment and are competitive. If Kuwait does not prepare for the end of oil era, then it will go through an economic and resource crisis, it might not even be able to desalinate the water and will need to outsource water from the Middle East or Africa, more importantly, the ratio of lower to middle to upper class will change drastically and it will be similar to India where there are very few super rich and the majority are poor, this will humble society and the local Kuwaitis will take on low income jobs, the immigrants will leave, and the Pre-Oil tough and hard-working patriotic Kuwaiti man and woman will come back to life with the advantage of contemporary knowledge and skill.

AT: Can you tell us about your strawberry project. How did you go about tracing the two varieties of strawberries? What were the challenges you faced? What insights did you get into our food system?

Jasmine: The Strawberry Project is a comparative analysis of two strawberries consumed in Kuwait. These strawberries route from either the industrial berry corporation 'Driscolls' in the USA, or a small and local 'Yasmin farm' in Kuwait. Through mapping the route we have analyzed and compared the environmental, economic and social factors in the journey of the two strawberries.

We went about getting all the data we could find through field trips both in Yasmin Farms Kuwait and in Watsonville, California, and tracked them through the check-points in their journey from production field to where they are sold, such as Al-Forda, Lulu Hyper, Sultan Center, Geant. We tried to bridge art and research to communicate our finds: through annotated maps, images, info graphics and text. Where applicable, we tried to raise awareness towards invisible or externalized environmental and social costs we have to pay to for food, such as pesticide/chemical exposure in farm workers, carbon emissions, food waste etc.

Our main challenge was getting information from the Driscolls corporation. They refused to give us the requested information.

The most interesting research find was that it takes 415,920,573 Kcal to transport a strawberry from California to Kuwait, in contrast to only 700,633 Kcal to transport a strawberry locally.

AT: Let's talk about the live painting that went on at the opening and the artists involved. Why did you decide to incorporate this into the exhibition?

Jasmine: The live painting was the show-stopping attraction of the exhibition. A black and white video by filmmaker Mohammed AlNashmi capturing vacant venues of urban happiness and ceremonies of human experience were projected on an empty white canvas. 4 artists: Clark Stoeckley, Houssam I. Flayhan, Jawaher Al-Badr and William Andersen painted in their expressions of urban happiness. The participatory nature of this artwork was to record individual and collective input, which is fundamental in identifying the diverse range of criteria that gives rise of a happy, inclusive and just city.

AT: What change, in your opinion, is most necessary in our urban system?

Jassim: Creative education, polymath critical thinking, sustainable infrastructure, intellectual traditions, empathy towards the environment and the neighbor.

AT: What responsibilities does the audience have going forward?

Jassim: To employ this thinking of holistic living, that every action has three reactions (economic, social and environmental) and implement this concept into their field of practice.