

'The State of The Elastic Mind: A New Mindset For Old Barriers' confab set for Nov 20 to 29

# Nuqat marks 10 years of nurturing creativity

By Cintra Alvares  
Arab Times Staff

Nuqat, Kuwait's foremost non-governmental organization for cultural development, marks ten years of nurturing creativity and empowering the creative community through much needed cultural programming and networking opportunities.

What started as a small consortium teaching typography design in 2009, transformed into an internationally-recognized, pan-Arab non-profit for cultural development that has helped support and sustain a collaborative community. Now supported by a robust regional network, it primarily focuses on knowledge exchange through its regional conferences and exploration sessions, works on capacity building – through workshops and creative learning programs – and bench-marking development through creating social responsibility and cultural vibrancy indexes.

Over the years, its flagship conference that includes interactive talks, discussion panels, roundtable sessions, workshops, live performances and other activities, has become one of the most highly awaited events in the cultural calendar of the country, attracting participants from across the region to discuss relevant issues of creativity.

With Nuqat Regional 2019 highlighting the pertinent topic of 'The State of The Elastic Mind – New Mindset for Old Barriers', the Arab Times sat down with members of the Nuqat team – Wakim Zeidan, Yasmena Al Mulla, Abdulaziz Al Mutawa and Dana Al Ghusain, to discuss the upcoming conference and understand the state of the creative economy in the Middle East.

**Arab Times:** As you look back at the past decade, what were the key milestones for Nuqat?

**WZ:** Every year had a milestone of its own because it had its own set of challenges. In 2009, we first kicked off with the idea of Nuqat, which was very new at the time. Then, 2012 was an instrumental year for us when we held the conference in Dubai as well. It was the first time we went out of our safe zone and we realized how hard it is to be out of your own country and your own network. But we learned from the experience and we understood that we needed some time to establish ourselves before we started moving towards a more regional presence. The next milestone came in 2015 when we added a musical concert to our cultural programme. It was the first one of its kind in Kuwait so it broke a taboo at the time. 2015 is also special because we ourselves expanded and hired a team to work with us.

Leading up to 2016, we decided on a strategic move – that the conference would no longer be an annual event but something that is going to happen every 2-3 years and on a regional level. What we learned in 2012, was crucial in preparing us for going outside of Kuwait in 2016. This was the right time for us because we had a team in place and we had established a good name, and had enough credibility. Also, the theme of the Creative Economy was an ideal point of discussion to lead us into different cities. The upcoming Nuqat Regional conference is a culmination of a three-year research tour in exploring questions regarding the creativity economy of the region.

**AT:** What have been challenges of running a non-profit in Kuwait?

**WZ:** The challenges are many, and not just for a non-profit but for a business in general. The first challenge was the perception of the people on the Arab world towards non-profits in general – that they are always used as a front for different agendas. But we were very much an independent organization and that is why we waited for



Wakim Zeidan



Chris Wan



Abdulwahab Al-Essa



Bibi Al-Abdulmohsen



Nasser Al-Mujaibel

the right laws to come out and issue a license for a non-profit company. This has helped us to establish ourselves very independently with good credibility but the challenge of perception was still there.

The second challenge was funding. People believe that if you're a non-profit, you're not supposed to get paid but we need financial stability like any other business.

The third challenge was finding good talent in our domain i.e. culture. There's not a single university graduate who specializes in culture. Creating content, communication, community management are some of the specializations that we need to formulate a team. Luckily, we have members who even though are not of that background, are very capable of taking on those roles.

**AT:** Tell us about the upcoming conference. What's in store?

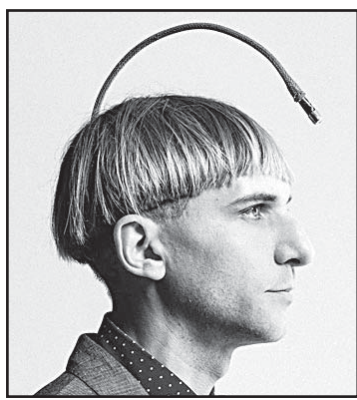
**YM:** The conference this year is being held from Nov 20th to 29th, a ten-day celebration of our ten-year anniversary. From Nov 21-23, we hold our talks at the Dar Al Athar Al Islamiyah's Amricani Cultural Centre. It will be live streamed to so people all around the region can engage with the content of the talks.

The overall theme of the conference is – 'The State of The Elastic Mind: A New Mindset For Old Barriers' but the talks are broken down to a theme per day. The first day focuses on the urgent need to critique and change our current mindsets. We will hear from psychiatrists, historians, architects, journalists, in this regard. Day Two is a day of imagination where we imagine how the future could look like if we do change our mindsets. This is the day where the word impossible doesn't exist and we will be listening to everyone from a specialist in block chain and Artificial Intelligence to architects, cyborgs and environmentalists, in trying to envision what are future could look like.

Finally, on the third day, we will listen to people who have come up with pragmatic approaches or who are in the development phase of solutions that are either a byproduct of changing their own mindsets or have shaped or changed other people's mindsets. Our talks will have around 40 speakers from all over world and from various disciplines. During the three days of talks we will also be having cultural entertainment at night and workshops.

**AM:** As the talks are heavy, people can flow in between discussions to see some cultural entertainment and engagement outside. We have music, a film screening, and photography exhibitions. Throughout the week, right after the talks, we will have a range of workshops organized by Nuqat and independently organized by collaborators. Participants who are inspired by the talks can eager to make a change can participate in a wide range of interests to choose from.

Apart from workshops being held in Kuwait, we have a number of regional activities taking place that are all connected to the idea of stretching our mindsets and practices, critiquing them and establishing our own expressions as breaking barriers.



Neil Harbisson



Ziad Abi Chaker

**WZ:** It is the first inter-border collaboration done between Arabs on a private, non-governmental scale and this is where the creative industry is taking the lead in creating a creative economy so that individuals with bright ideas are able to create a bridge between one city and the other. This completes the discussion on the creative economy, we need to be elastic in order to achieve it.

**AT:** After ten years of doing this, how hard is it to come up with a theme?

**YM:** We really put a lot of effort into thinking about the theme of the conference because we think that it is a very important. After our last conference in 2016, we went on a research tour of the region and visited eleven different Middle Eastern cities where we held round table discussions that focused on different topics.

Every city that we went to we kept the topic constant to gauge the similarities and differences and understand how certain cities are moving in the direction of the creative economy vs. others.

Throughout the tour no matter what city we went to, or who we talked to or what the topic was about, everyone said that we need to change our mindset. This statement kept coming up whether we were in Beirut, Doha, Dubai or Kuwait, "We need to change the way we think in order to develop and enhance and create a sustainable creative economy." That is where we got the theme for this year's creative conference because we saw that it was a frustration throughout the region and ties in well to the regional aspect of the conference.

**AT:** What according to you, is the elastic mind? What are the main barriers impeding people from changing their mindsets?

**DG:** The elastic mind is to think differently and not be weighed down by the barriers of status quo, social norms, structural barriers of government and social policies, etc. An important barrier we overlook is the one we place on ourselves by our insecurities and fears. Having an elastic mind is changing the way you think, adopting a new approach and perspective.

**AT:** Can elasticity be taught?

**YM:** I think you can definitely teach elasticity but it is something that happens long-term. It can definitely happen within the capacity of the classroom but also in society, I believe that dialogue is crucial; listening to different people and different points of views, opinions and perspectives can

really make society more responsive and elastic.

**WZ:** We are born with a really elastic mind but as we grow older, we put barriers for ourselves and create blocks for our brain. We don't really realize the extent to which we are boxed in by those barriers. But I think we can teach our minds to be more elastic.

We witnessed this firsthand at one of our workshops in Saudi Arabia where a participant who was asked to connect relevant words to a specific idea to come up with solutions. She faced a severe block and was unable to do so. We took her outside, asked her to imagine that her brain was an engine filled with sand, and she needed to step on it and get all of the sand out. We placed that metaphor in her head and worked with her initially. Soon, she was bursting with ideas and used three meters of a paper scroll to fill in words and she couldn't stop. That was a live example to us and we realized that elasticity can be taught but it needs time.

**AT:** Do you suppose that those interested in attending such a conference would naturally be more open to change and elastic in their outlook. Also, how do you reach out to those who fall outside of this reach?

**AM:** I think this question highlights people coming to conference thinking that they have an elastic mind but actually don't. Elasticity can be a very superficial thing, especially within ourselves. The conference aims to challenge people at the forefront of society that think they have very elastic ideas but could actually be held back by something that they didn't know they had as a barrier – either imposed on other people, on themselves, or imposed structurally. Through that, there should be a ripple effect or a domino effect of that shift that we hope will reach everyone. The hope is that the discussions outlive the physical three-day conference and ripple out after everything has ended. So I hope we can engage people in that way.

**AT:** Whose elastic mind do you most admire?

**WZ:** Steve Jobs. I think he is someone who had a very elastic mind. There are people who could look at problems from a totally different perspective, they can see what people need before they actually know it themselves. He was definitely one of them.

**Azi:** There is an urban planner called Jane Jacobs that I think is amazing. She advocated for urban planning and foresaw what urban planning and

the urban sprawl could do way before its effects.

**Dana:** I think someone who is really cool is Neil Harbisson. He has an antenna on his head. It is interesting to me because I would think of someone figuring out a way of just seeing colour, but he wanted to hear colour. So that is cool to me.

**YM:** She's been in the news a lot – Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old environmental activist. I think has a very elastic mind. From deciding to sail from Europe to America to getting away from school to advocate for the environment is something very elastic and exemplary.

**AT:** What positive changes have you seen in the cultural/creative space in recent years?

**YM:** I came back to Kuwait a year ago after studying abroad for five years. I think that in terms of the creative economy – there is more dialogue now. I feel that Nuqat was at the forefront of promoting dialogue and cross disciplinary conversations. I sense that people are now more open to discuss various topics regarding creativity, culture and art. You see the youth feeling through these discussions, empowered to go ahead and start their own initiatives and so forth.

**AM:** I'm happy that creatives are now making sure that their rights are protected and a lot of the freelance community is now ensuring that they have contracts and agreements. I see that there is a better literacy and understanding when it comes to things aren't structured like traditional jobs and how to go about it.

**DG:** I think there is more activity and opportunities today. If you really want to do something, you can. There might be less options but I know a lot of creatives who have found their niche or have found their place. I feel that within the region, Kuwait is very much on the forefront of creativity.

**WZ:** While there has been progress, creatives are still getting paid poorly. That is the whole point of our conversation – how can ideas become a product that we can export. We have nice pockets of creativity here and there but we are not harnessing that energy to its full economic potential. Hopefully after the conference, we will be putting more things into action and that helps.

**AT:** How would you rate the creativity in education in Kuwait today?

**DG:** Across the board, I'd rate it a 5 or 6 out of 10.

**YM:** I'd rate it the same, looking at creativity not necessarily only as art and culture but in the teaching methods. I think we are lagging seriously behind in that sense. We are stuck with old teaching methodologies of memorization, regurgitation, testing and grades, so we very rarely see students encouraged to go outside the box or do things differently. It's always 'follow the lines' and 'stay within the borders'.

**AM:** I think there is a dependency on people studying abroad or leaving Kuwait to get that experience. So it is something you put on hold until you leave Kuwait and come back, if you are able to leave at all. I would rate education at a 4 because we should be excelling with the research that we put out considering the wealth and re-

sources. I think Kuwait has the ability to allocate resources for the betterment of education not only in terms of creativity but in all other aspects.

**AT:** What is your hope for the conference?

**DG:** I hope that participants leave with a new mindset in that they start thinking differently having been inspired by people who have done so.

**AM:** I would love it if participants went back to their grandmothers and elders in the family and discussed what they heard and saw at the conference. I would love to hear that someone had that cross-generational dialogue casually at a dinner.

**YM:** I hope that the conference serves as a place for people from all walks of society in Kuwait or even from the region to meet and connect. It would be so great if the conference is able to facilitate an even larger umbrella of collaboration by being an intersection for people that would've never otherwise crossed paths, to have a conversation. I hope that Nuqat Regional serves as a ground for collaboration and dialogue.

**WZ:** I would like for the conference to tap into the inner self of participants to first recognise their willingness and readiness to change their mindset as many might still prefer not to. That is why as people sign up, we are doing a survey to understand where they stand and how they perceive a change in mindset. Apart from that initial survey participants will also have a post-event survey as well as polling questions during the talks for us to measure if people, after watching those talks, do they really change their mindset.

**AT:** What will the next ten years of Nuqat look like?

**YM:** In the next ten years, I would like to see Nuqat conduct more research to understand where the creative economy sits in the region and how it can be enhanced. There is always a chance to learn more and understand what is happening. Just as Nuqat took up the idea of the creativity economy, I hope that Nuqat will continue in its spirit of investigation and find topics that nobody is talking about and break new grounds within that realm.

**DG:** We hope that we can play a significant part in strengthening the creative economy in Kuwait and the region so that creatives are more respected and they can make a good living. Also, it would be great to tap into more categories within culture and be more involved in education.

**WZ:** We want to maintain Nuqat as a platform that facilitates knowledge exchange but as we progress we need more data and more knowledge to support what we are trying to say. This is the first conference that is supported by three years of research and we hope to continue that aspect of it. With research and data, knowledge and analysis, we will be able to develop programmes that are capable of developing our communities in a way where they will be healthier economically, be more culturally vibrant, and lead a more productive life.



For more information, visit [www.nuqat.me](http://www.nuqat.me)



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### News in Brief

**Mol removes security fences:** The Ministry of Interior has removed the security fences around Erada Square, reports Al-Qabas daily quoting a security source. According to the source, the Capital Security Directorate received instructions to remove the fences at Erada Square. A team of security forces were deployed to the area to carry out the directive; thereby, opening Erada Square after closing it for one day.

**Issue of unlicensed commercial tents:** Member of the Municipal Council Misha' al Al-Hamdan requested for discussion of the issue on setting up unlicensed commercial tents in cooperative societies during the main session of the council recently, reports Al-Rai daily. He affirmed there is a regulation on temporary exhibitions, indicating that setting up unlicensed commercial tents. He said this violation deprives the State of its right to collect fees for such purposes and it is considered wastage of public funds.



**KJA okays appointment:** The Board of Directors of Kuwait Journalists Association (KJA) approved during its meeting on Sept 30 the appointment of General Assembly members Attorney Bader Mohamad Al-Aloosh and Attorney Azraa Al-Rifaei as legal consultants of the association, reports Al-Rai daily. The board took the decision after endorsing the minutes of its last meeting. The two lawyers affirmed their readiness to defend any member of KJA in media cases referred to local courts.

**Al-Rashidi to perform tasks of Al-Subaei:** Minister of Social Affairs Saad Al-Kharaz has assigned the Assistant Undersecretary for Corporate Affairs Salem Al-Rashidi to perform the tasks of Assistant Undersecretary for Legal Affairs Musallam Al-Subaei who is currently on an official mission, reports Al-Rai daily. Also, Al-Kharaz assigned the Assistant Undersecretary for Planning and Administrative Development Abdul-Aziz Sari Al-Mutairi to perform the tasks of Assistant Undersecretary for Social Care, in addition to his regular duty.

### Control & Consumer Protection Sector

#### VEHICLES RECALL

**Defect** This campaign recalls for Mazda-3 Vehicles manufactured during a specific period of time, where there is a defect in front wipers computer system.

**Vehicles Included In Recall** Mazda vehicles manufactured during a certain period of time, including Mazda-3 Models.

**Necessary Repairs** Check all vehicles included in the campaign and the front wiper computer system shall be replaced by original Mazda spare parts in repairing processes without incurring any expenses by the customer.

**Contact** Contact customer service to determine an appointment by calling: 66279604, and bring the vehicle during working hours: Saturday - Thursday 09:00 am to 04:00 pm.

This recall is organized as per Articles Nos. (42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47) of Ministerial Resolution No. 27/2015 in issuing its Executive Regulation related to Law No. 39/2014 on customer protection.

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