

# GREY TIMES

20.1 / 24.7 / 2021



Photo by Saida Al-Khulaifi

## INTRODUCTION

The exhibition marking the end of the Artist in Residence programme this year comes at an exceptional time due to the impact of Covid-19. The emergency forced communities around the world to make drastic changes to their lives as they went into lockdown; people became isolated, their behaviours characterised by fear and worry.

The initial plan for the residency was to focus on the relationship between visual arts and literature. The pandemic, however, forced artists, as well as curators, to revisit this concept as they adapted to the urgently unfolding situation, without access to their studios and materials. The enforced confinement pushed many to begin a process of discovery, leading to two major inquiries into concepts of 'the self' and 'the other', both of which are on uncertain ground in these Grey Times.

In the first section, **A Look Outside**, artists present their observations about their changing surroundings and experience of the other during this difficult period. Through multimedia projects addressing a variety of subjects, they explore the relationships between identity, political issues, environmental degradation and technological development, asking viewers to confront themselves, their attitudes and their behaviours in this challenging era.

In the second section of the exhibition, **A Look Inside**, artists turn inwards, raising questions about their experiences during the lockdown and exploring issues of identity, memory and nostalgia. Reflecting on their personal concerns, they present works that not only seek to alleviate their own anxieties but also confront the audience, who in turn are challenged by questions about selfhood and the passing of time.

Curator: Dr Bahaa Abudaya  
Associate Curator: Saida Al-Khulaifi  
Artwork images by Ali Al-Anssari





**Amena Al-Yousef**

I have a continuous interest in the subject of human interaction with nature. As technology starts to dominate our lives, it can feel like we are constantly looking at a processed version of nature, filtered to suit the lens of humanity. My current work explores natural pigments. I experiment with different methods of pigment extraction from organic sources like desert rocks, plant roots and fruit skins. To me, the process has become increasingly more valuable than

the extracted product — exploring, studying, appreciating the landscape for what it gives has become the priority.

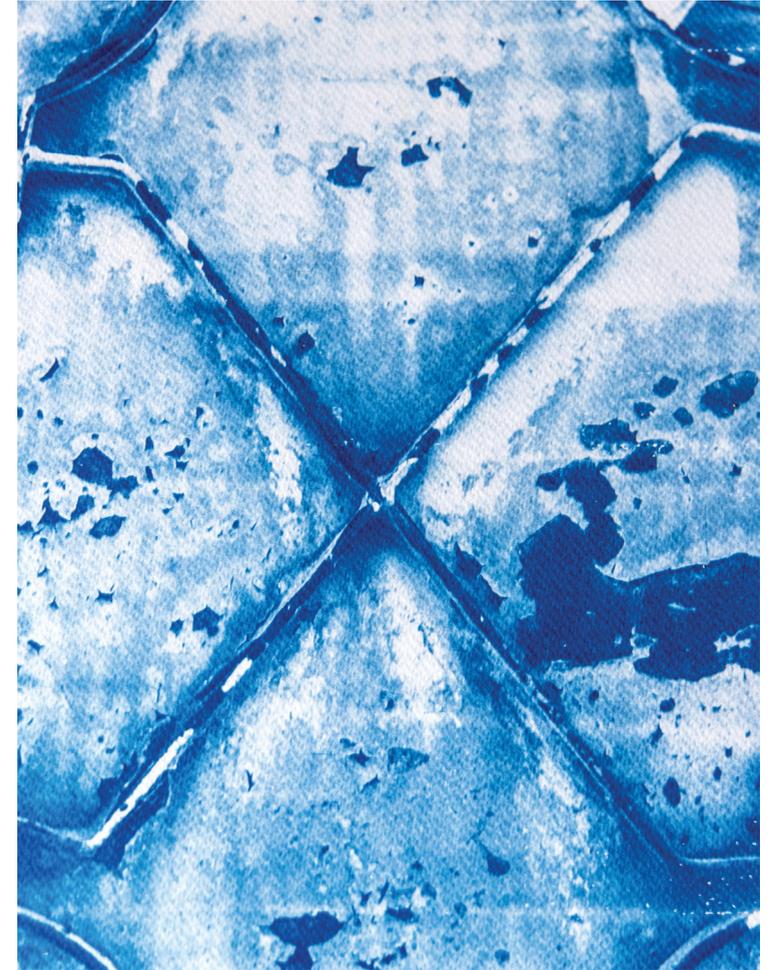
*Amena Al-Yousef is an interdisciplinary artist whose work examines the human interaction with nature.*

What Remains, 2020, mixed media, 244 x 122 cm

**Mashaal Al-Hejazi**

My fascination with doors started in childhood. I felt nostalgic over the time spent at my grandparent's house in the traditional Musheireb neighbourhood, where many homes featured elaborate, wooden entrances. I planned to go back there every Friday morning to photograph the area with a group of friends. However, I was shocked at the drastic change. Only a few run-down doors were left. I decided to document those surviving doors by using cyanotype, one of the oldest photographic printing methods, to preserve both local heritage and my own youthful memories.

*Mashaal Al-Hejazi is a photographer working with alternative film development and printing processes to reflect local heritage.*



Marrar (Passer-by) (detail), 2020, cyanotype photography, wood and paper, 40 cm diameter (each)

## Muna Al-Bader

Mahmoud Darwish wrote: 'Resemblance is the sands; you belong to blue'. The colour blue is associated with nature. It fascinated people and wars erupted because of it. The value of blue pigment even reached the value of gold. Everyone wants to acquire the colour of the sky, but the word *azraq* (blue) is not mentioned across the ages. Until the 1930s our grandparents were exposed to the clear skies and blue sea. They had great survival skills, perhaps because of the colour blue in their lives. Since then, our world has changed. What survives is only familiar voices immortalising the sound of the *dom* and *tuck* and a blue sky resonating with the chants of sailors.

*Muna Al-Bader is a multidisciplinary artist focusing on traditional music and instruments, and the relationship between colours and emotions.*



Dom and Tuck, 2020, resin, variable dimensions



## Naila Al-Thani

This series of sculptural formations, composed of local materials and natural ingredients, is formed using moulds layered with sand collected from different locations around Qatar. The technique leaves behind some transferred sand grains on the surface, mimicking the natural formation process of a desert rose. Inspired by nature to create within a circular cycle, the sculptures are made of organic materials that can break down to

become part of the local environment again.

*Naila Al-Thani is a designer, researcher and educator focusing on themes of nature, biomimicry and future materiality.*

Materialised Formations, 2020, mixed media, variable dimensions



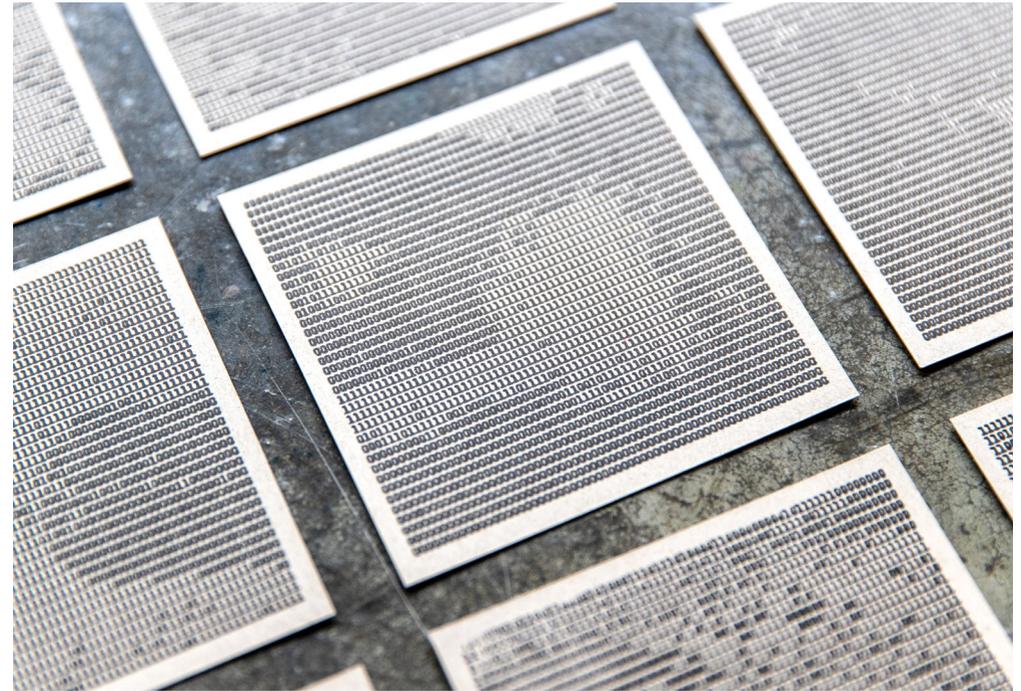
### Majdulin Nasrallah

Exploring the overlap of spatial design, political philosophy and human behaviour, my works span a variety of media such as textiles, digital illustration and large-scale interactive installations. I am interested in the dialogue between the human body and the built environment, tackling themes of displacement, alienation, instability, temporality and adaptation. My current projects reflect on the transitory nature of borders,

specifically those in occupied Palestine. I respond to an ever-changing urban fabric where barriers are subject to constant reconfiguration—they emerge, expand, shrink and disappear, contingent on a military agenda.

*Majdulin Nasrallah is a teacher at VCUArts Qatar whose work focuses on the intersection of spatial design, philosophy and the social sciences.*

Exile (detail), 2020, steel, 120 × 370 cm



### Hind Al Saad

This artwork uses a mechanical arm to plot computationally generated graphics onto recycled paper. It uses code to analyse two images of the same location from NASA's climate change database, taken months or years apart. The system then outputs graphics made up of 0s and 1s—the binary that computer programs fundamentally operate on—where the 1s represent environmental change. This piece allows the core element of

the climate crisis to emerge. The reality is that environmental change is happening on a planetary scale and demands a global, collective response.

*Hind Al Saad is a designer and creative coder exploring emergent graphical forms, both physical and digital, using procedural systems.*

Encoded Terrains of Change, 2020, plotter ink on recycled paper, 122.5 × 122.5 cm

## Maryam Al-Maadhadhi

Stamps in the early 1960s were printed with an image of the Queen of England and the name of the State of Qatar. There were no local designs for postage stamps because of the lack of artwork other than archaeological objects. To create postage stamps inspired by the historical aesthetics of the Gulf, I researched the colours and artistic themes that would resonate with local people: the sea, fishing, hunting, palm trees and the falcon. I also used the name 'Barr Qatar', the name of Qatar as referred to by native sailors in old books.

*Maryam Al-Maadhadhi is an artist whose work is rooted in visual storytelling of Qatari traditions and the region's cultural aesthetic.*



Mythical Tales 2, 2020.  
mixed media, 150 × 100 cm

## Mariam Rafehi

This interactive installation, combining mixed media, robotics and augmented reality, presents the Sufi poem 'The Guest House' by the Persian poet Rumi as a syncretic narrative in five distinct works. They all reflect the same lyrical text, but through time and diverse media channels, the poem is transformed to an 'in-between condition of *being both*'. The intention is neither to criticise nor celebrate this transformation, but to offer an empathetic observation of binary heterogeneity that celebrates Sufism, which is itself highly syncretic.

*Mariam Rafehi is an artist and designer who creates alternative worlds in virtual reality (VR) to expose audiences to unfamiliar experiences.*



Beyond Ideas of Wrongdoing & Rightdoing  
(detail), 2020, wood, 66 × 66 cm

## Noor Yousef

Becoming a mother changed the way I saw life; I started seeing everything through my daughter's eyes. As magical and beautiful as the journey was, it was also filled with pain and sorrow. Art was my refuge, an outlet to fully understand myself. I hang my feelings and emotions on a wall for everyone to observe; my work is the mess that happens inside my head, manifested as art.

*Noor Yousef is a multidisciplinary artist whose work reflects her emotions and is also inspired by Islamic patterns and symbols.*

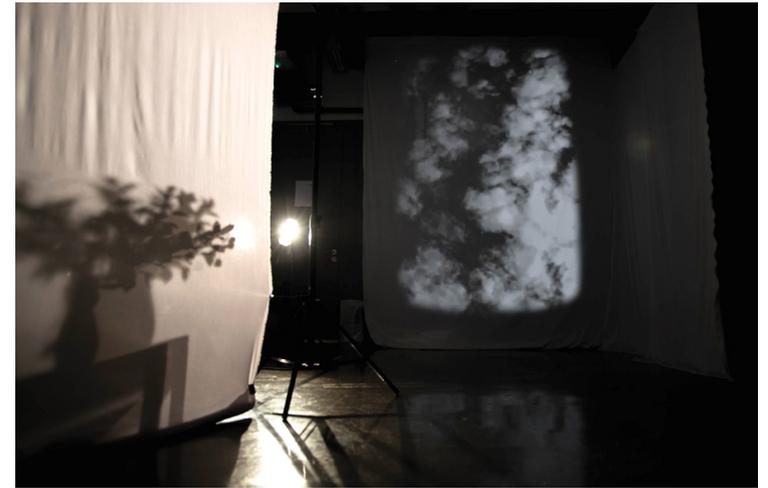


Pages, 2019–2020, ink on paper, acrylic, 123 × 123 cm

## Jaser Alagha

Curtains shelter our home and stand witness to our most intimate memories. The obscure reality recreated by *Ka Gherbal* mimics the experience of memory retrieval, which is as dynamic as the shapes taken by the artwork's drapes when we come close or move away. Our actions make this installation a unique, individual experience. The film projected onto the curtains brings light and shadow into a constant confrontation. It gives insight into the fragility of memories; uncertain truths that are ever-changing and fluid.

*Jaser Alagha is a filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist researching different artistic methods to create a new contemporary visual language.*



*Ka Gherbal* (Like a Sieve), 2020, mixed media, 300 × 180 cm. Sound by Kerem Mergen

## Latifa Al-Kuwari

In the late 1990s, an art and literature movement under the name of 'asemic' writing offered meaning by aesthetic intuition. Intentionally detaching and reconstructing the meaning of words and letterforms, new personal narratives emerged, placing the reader in a state between reading, viewing and deducing meaning from artworks. Their dynamic rhythms explored and challenged letterforms in a playful manner. In this piece, a set of illegible primal scripts, abstract letterforms and mark-making experiments are presented in a contemporary fabric print to express deconstructed narratives through personal timelines.

*Latifa Al-Kuwari is an artist and designer whose work explores emotions and time's complexity, to enhance an understanding of our reality as human beings.*



Stream of Consciousness, 2020,  
print on fabric, 700 × 120 cm

## Maysaa Almumin

I reject the bureaucracy of borders, passports and race. I redefine myself through heritage — in particular, through my grandmother's stories. She lived in a time of great change for women in Kuwait; her life was a precarious negotiation between independence and duty, joy and sorrow, hardship and bounty. A traditional seamstress, she spent long hours amongst mounds of fabric and bundles of thread. She kept herself — and me — entertained by recounting a blend of family histories, mythical stories and folk songs. As a child, I weaved my own identity by listening to her tales.

*Maysaa Almumin is an assistant professor at VCUArts Qatar specialising in set and object design for film and performance.*



She Sits by the Water Combing Her Hair, 2020,  
mixed media, variable dimensions. Sound by  
Guillaume Rouseré and Maysaa Almumin

## Hadeer Omar

Dreams are a source of inspiration, but they cannot be controlled, leading us to question ourselves and our surroundings. In dreams, symbolism takes on an extensive part of the search for meaning. Our perceptions and interpretations guide us to resolutions that create an order to the boundless chaos. The experience is individually unique but universal in its elements. It is built using pictorial and oral fragments; emotions and memories; time and space. Students of Time Studio, VCUarts Qatar, contributed to the installation. See more at <http://www.hadeeromar.com/fragmented-realities-fs>

*Hadeer Omar is a time-based media artist, designer and educator whose work explores cultural identity, narratives of the self, and memories.*



Fragmented Realities, 2020, video projection with sound, 400 × 400 × 400 cm

## Suzana Joumaa

Art is a deep meditation that can heal the soul. After losing most of my artworks due to war, I wanted this collection to compensate for some of what I had lost. My cause is to fight the ugliness of war with art. My multidisciplinary works blend contemporary art, Surrealism and architectural concepts with sound. Each artwork uses a musical composition mixed with my singing voice. They induce a mental state influenced by both a visual and aural experience.

*Suzana Joumaa is a multidisciplinary artist and interior architect whose work explores the impact on the human subconscious of unresolved war trauma.*



On the Run, 2020, oil on canvas, audio recording, 113 × 68 cm (painting), 2 min, 30 sec (audio)

## Aisha Al-Muhannadi

As a photographer and filmmaker, I am inspired by human connection: conversations between strangers, friends or family members; intimate gatherings filled with anecdotes, wisdom, joy and even tragedy. I treasure these moments. The outbreak of COVID-19 has limited me as a visual storyteller. I planned to venture out and meet with people while capturing them on film. However, I managed to network with people from all around the world, feeling connection regardless of the physical distance.

*Aisha Al-Muhannadi is a visual artist using still and moving images to capture the truth of small moments in the world around her.*



Remote-less, 2020, mixed media, 23 × 31 cm



## Ebtesam Al-Hothi

The social psychology of motivation is often tied to life challenges. Many people struggle with a lack of motivation. They feel alone and isolated even from those closest to them. Connecting with others about the universality of these experiences may provide them with a sense of comfort and relief. This project invites the audience to view my interpretation of how to transform suffering into power, both for individuals and communities. A series of images

and objects are filtered through three different paradigms: 'Transmitted', 'Contagious' and 'Inherited'.

*Ebtesam Al-Hothi is a multidisciplinary artist working on narratives around childhood trauma through 3D modelling, collage, illustration and painting.*

Embracing the Power Underneath Each Scar, 2020, mixed media, 119 × 168 cm

## Ameera Al-Aji

My work has always been research-oriented and experiment-based, but currently I am exploring the concept of memory as an expression of something tangible, yet intimate and necessarily personal. My early childhood was spent at house number 10 in Al Garrafa, Qatar. It originally contained four families until a recent renovation increased the building's capacity to 15 families of workers. Through mapping the deconstruction of my childhood home, I consider romanticised memories as well as detachment and loss.

*Ameera Al-Aji is a multidisciplinary artist whose work investigates ideas of 'the home' through personal domestic memories and complex associated emotions.*



Statement 01 – On Remembering (House Number 10), 2020, mixed media, 130 × 260 cm



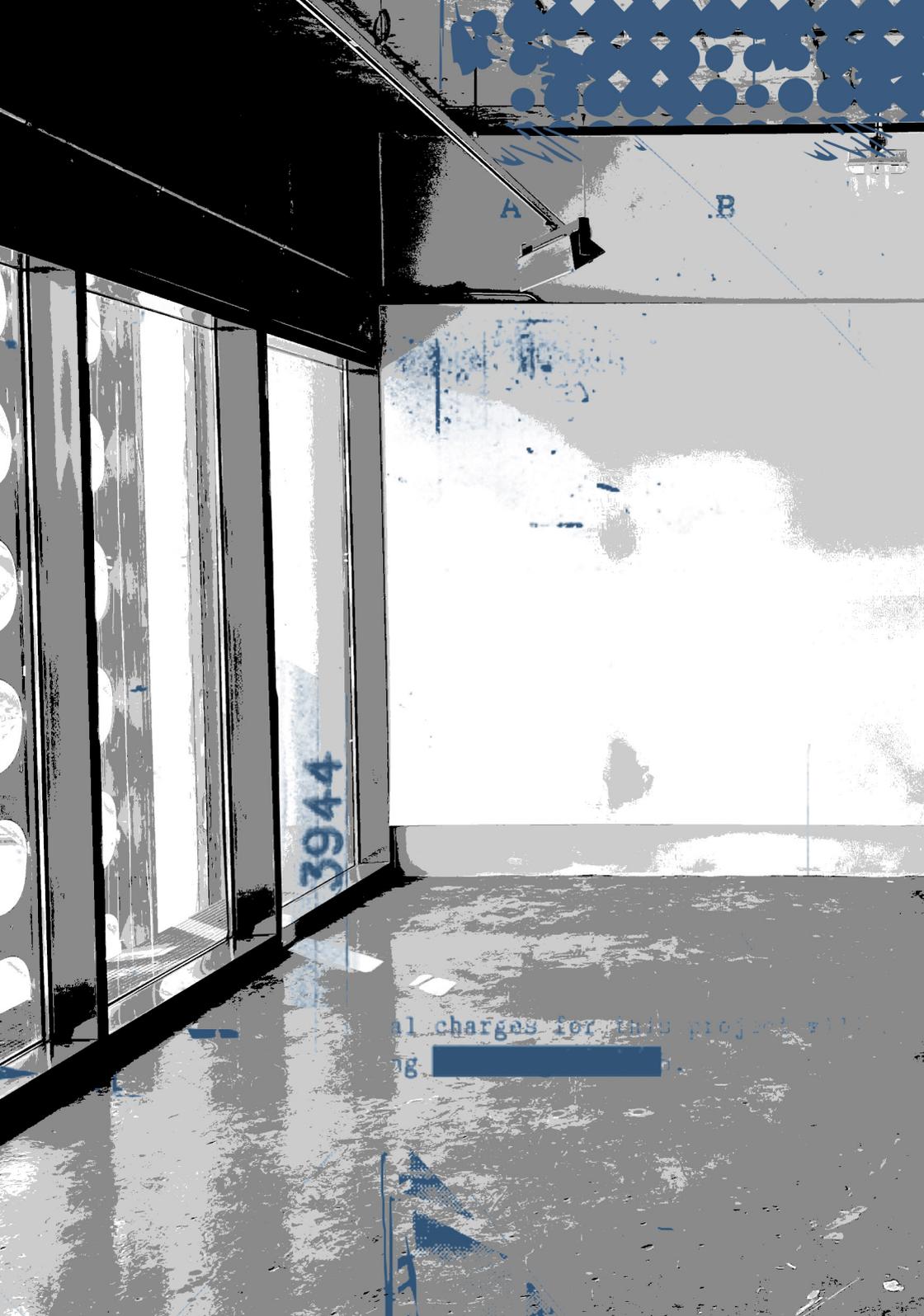
## Haytham Sharrouf

I am interested in surveying the effect of architecture on humanity by observing its influence on the space between people and implementing certain architectural concepts, lines and forms on human association. A Venezuelan by birth, my experiences in multiple countries have shaped my practice. Qatar itself has inspired me to embark on a multidisciplinary series of artworks that attempt to capture the hidden souls of the people, deepening

my grasp of the local culture. At a later stage, I upgraded my visual research to that of understanding Doha's urban landscape.

*Haytham Sharrouf is an interior architect, designer and visual artist who mixes concepts, disciplines, mediums, and styles to produce unique compositions.*

Form Follows Fiction Manifesto, 2020, ultraviolet on aluminium coated with nickel, 165 × 165 cm



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