

QULTURA

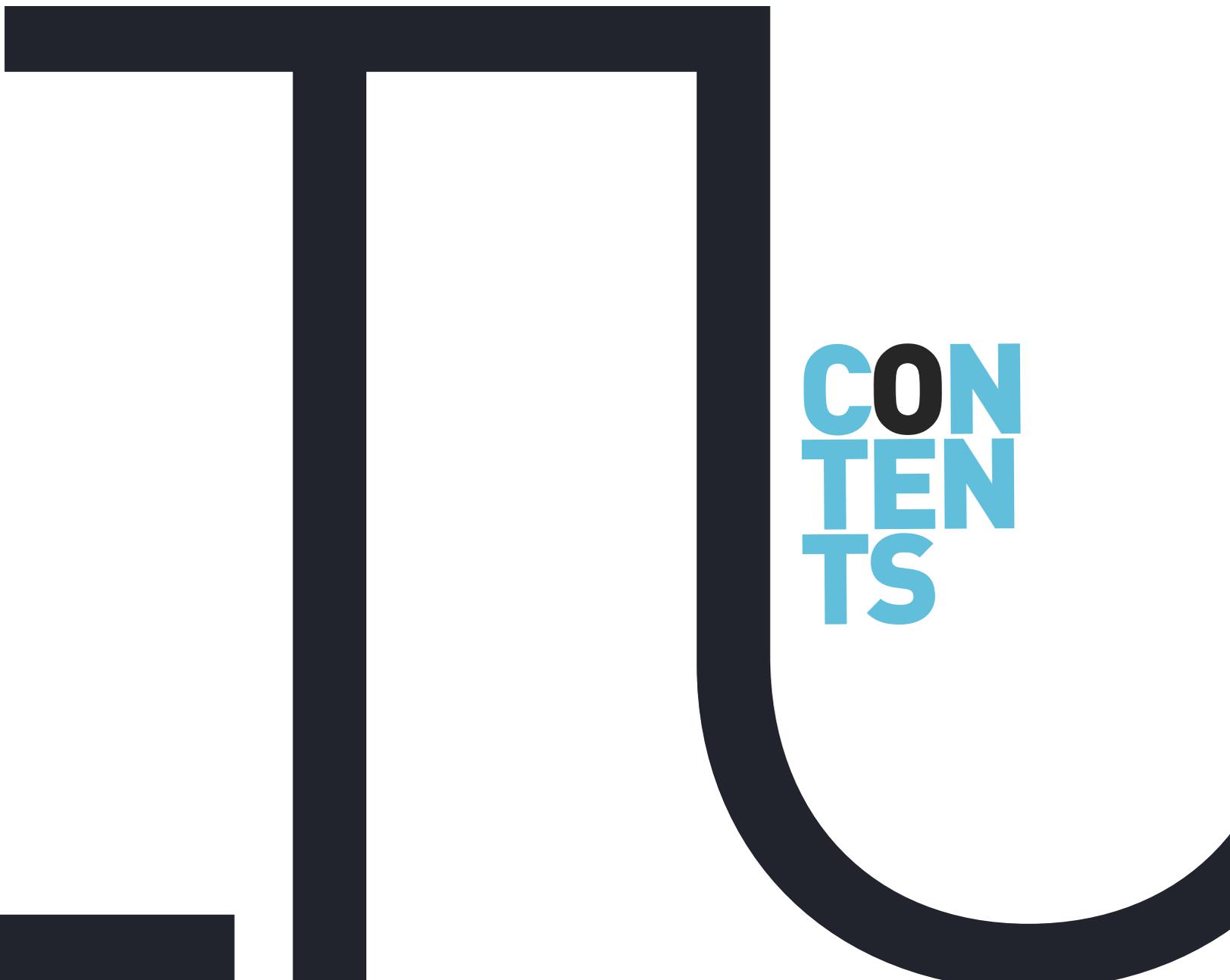
ARTS AND
CULTURE
IN QATAR
ISSUE 1 /
DECEMBER
2011



**HH SHEIKHA
MOZA BINT
NASSER** ON
THE ALLIANCE OF
CIVILIZATIONS
THEATRON THE
AMPHITHEATRE
AT KATARA IS
INAUGURATED
**THE MAKING OF
BLACK GOLD**
STORY OF AN
INTIMATE EPIC
YOUSEF AHMAD
THE NATURAL
ELEMENT
ZUBARAH THE
LEGACY THAT
SHAPED QATAR

**THE WORLD
OF ART
AND
CULTURE
ISSUE 1 /
DECEMBER
2011**



A large, dark blue, stylized letter 'T' graphic that spans most of the width of the page. The top bar of the 'T' is thick and horizontal, while the stem is a vertical bar that curves into a wide, shallow 'U' shape at the bottom right. The word 'CONTENTS' is positioned to the right of the stem, with the 'O' in 'CON' overlapping the stem.

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QULTURA

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↑ Anna Wallace-Thompson

A freelance journalist specialising in Middle Eastern art and culture, Anna Wallace-Thompson graduated in 2003 from Helsinki University with a Bachelor Degree in English Philology. She also studied at Sydney University, receiving her Master Degree in English Literature in 2005. Wallace-Thompson has written for *The Art Newspaper*, *Frieze* and *Canvas*, where she worked for five years as editor of www.canvasguide.com. Having recently moved to London after 16 years in Dubai, she has also lived in Germany, Singapore and Italy, and is currently working on a collection of short stories inspired by the Middle East.



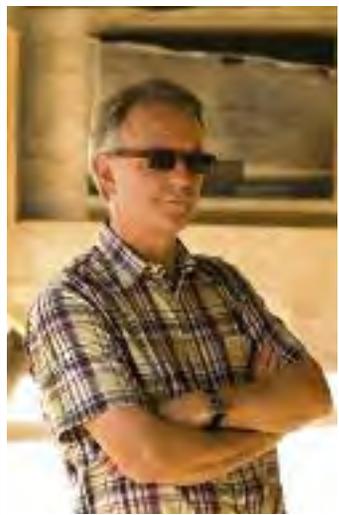
↑ Suzeinthecity

Suzeinthecity is a 29-year-old writer, editor, blogger and freelance journalist. Born and raised in Egypt, Suzee has lived in Cairo for the past ten years and developed a fascination for the city. Her blog was launched to document this fascination, but it inadvertently became a source about Cairo street art through her documentation of graffiti images and contact with some of Cairo's most prolific graffiti artists.



Justin Key

Based in the UK, Justin Key specialises in international affairs. He has travelled extensively throughout the Gulf region, including Qatar and has written for a range of newspapers and magazines such as *The Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. For this issue he draws on family connections to report on the origins of theatre: his brother Simon is a professor of Classical Archaeology.



↑ Alan Walmsley

A professor at the University of Copenhagen, Alan Walmsley's research and teaching centres on the archaeology, architecture, art, and numismatics of the Islamic World. Walmsley has worked in the Middle East for 35 years, during which time he has directed five major field projects. His current research focuses on the major site of Jarash, Jordan, and a heritage and archaeology project in the urban site of Al Zubarah (in partnership with the Qatar Museums Authority). In Copenhagen he heads a research cluster into Islamic visual culture under the label of MIRI: Materiality in Islam Research Initiative (see MIRI.ku.dk).

← Jorge Pozuelo

A native of León, Spain, Jorge Pozuelo discovered Doha for this issue of *Cultura*. He loved the *Blade Runner*-like skyline of the city, where he photographed a high jump by Qatari athlete Mutaz Essa Barshim; he is also interested in the silence of spaces and chose to impart this feeling to the Amphitheatre at Katara as well as to the city's museums and galleries. A photography teacher in Madrid, Pozuelo has held several exhibitions such as *BodyArt*, *TattooArt* and *The Walls of Silence*. His travel photos can be seen at www.jorgepozuelo.com

Creation is always exciting: to work towards an idea, visualise it, and see it taking shape through the talent of different people. *Qultura* was born out of the partnership between Vega Media and The Cultural Village Foundation Katara. As editors who had been reporting on Qatar, we had been exposed to the cultural scene there and found it vibrant and unique. World class museums of iconic architecture and hosting exquisite collections have sprung up in Doha; Katara itself, more than a village, is like a city within a city with its halls and streets for art, music, dance and film. Through all this, Qatar has not lost its own identity and this mixture of the cutting-edge with a strong heritage is all the more interesting.

Our first issue will coincide with the 4th UN Alliance of Civilizations Forum whose theme is intercultural dialogue. Qatar is a fitting place for this forum as a successful society open to the influence of other cultures. We are greatly honoured to feature an interview with Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, who is a tireless and active supporter of peace, culture, art and universal education. We follow the theme of the forum with Israeli-Argentinean maestro Daniel Barenboim who works towards the understanding between nations through music.

And then there are the talented Qataris who are increasing their country's renown. Yousef Ahmad, an ambassador for Qatari art for many years as well as one of the country's foremost painters, tells us about how making his own paper has changed his art; young athletes like Mutaz Essa Barshim are preparing to go for Olympic gold; and Fahad Al Kubaisi's beautiful voice heralds the beginning of the multi-million dollar epic saga of *Black Gold*.

As world-renowned sculptor Richard Serra unveils his latest work at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) Park this December, we are happy to launch the first issue of *Qultura*, knowing that there is much more to share about the ever fascinating world of art and culture.

Carmen Moura

Editor-in-Chief

AGENDA QATAR

From precious collections of baroque objects to the clean lines of steel sculptures, the approaching months in Doha are filled with exhibitions and installations that will challenge and surprise viewers

Until 31 December al markhiya gallery

Isharat: A Collection of 15 Artists Abdulrahman Katanani

Holding a diploma in painting and sculpture from the Lebanese University's Institute of Fine Arts, Abdulrahman Katanani nevertheless chooses to use barbed wire, metal bottle caps, corrugated tin and other recycled materials in his work.

If it were possible not to be familiar with the camps of Sabra and Shatila (where Katanani was born and continues to live), this might seem a strange choice, yet in these materials Katanani has found the perfect vehicle to reflect upon freedom and dignity.

Image: Courtesy of Agial Art Gallery, Beirut



Until 31 December al markhiya gallery

Isharat: A Collection of 15 Artists Munif Ajaj

Acclaimed Syrian artist Munif Ajaj paints the life of ordinary citizens in Damascus, often with a satirical eye. His latest work tips its hat to modern urban art and graffiti through the use of spray paint and by depicting the recent events in Syria. Influenced by internet, television and newspapers, Ajaj presents street portraits that are revolutionary in themselves. His work forms part of private and national collections including that of the British Museum. *Image: Courtesy of al markhiya gallery*



Until January 26, 2012 Museum of Islamic Art

The Dream of a King: Dresden's Green Vault

The renowned Green Vault of Dresden makes an appearance in Doha at the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). Considered one of Europe's richest collections, it showcases outstanding examples of Saxon treasury art as well as precious objects that characterised the Baroque period in Western Europe.

Pictured: Moor with emerald cluster. Grünes Gewölbe, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden Rüstkammer, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden



From 3 to 28 January 2012 al markhiya gallery

Jamal A. Rahim: Portrait

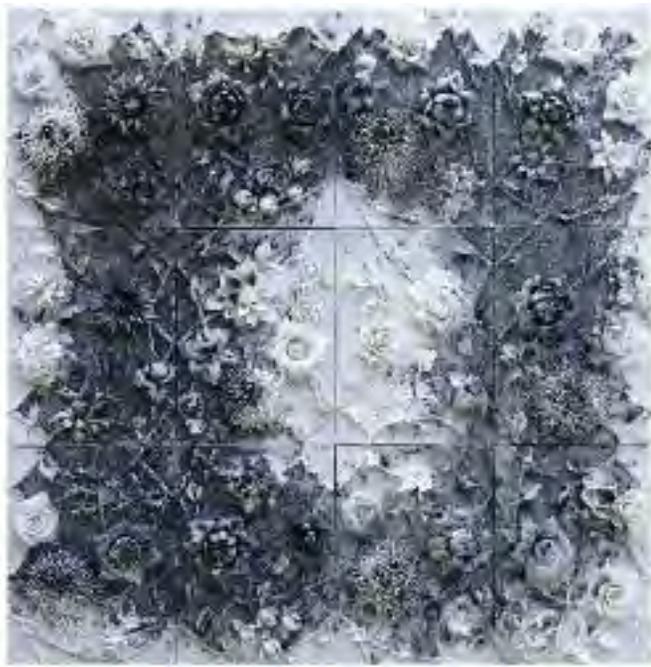
Born in Bahrain, Jamal A. Rahim abandoned a short career in fishing to become an artist, but learned a philosophy of patience from the sea. Watching the light shimmering on the surface of the water enriched his imagination and helped him form the first natural colours he would use in his works.

Inspired both by Middle Eastern culture and bold, contemporary styles, Jamal's work is unique and filled with humour. Pop figures of song or cinema are revisited by his irreverent brush, but the result at times is almost an homage.

Rahim has exhibited in many countries and sold at auction; this is a great opportunity to acquire one of his interesting pieces.

Image: Courtesy of al markhiya gallery





Until 26 May 2012
Mathaf:
Arab Museum of Modern Art
Cai Guo-Qiang: Saraab

The first solo show in the Middle East for Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, *Saraab* ("mirage") will display a diverse body of work, ranging from his signature gunpowder drawings to large-scale site-specific installations.

Drawing for Black Ceremony, 2011. Gunpowder on porcelain. Photo by Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio



From 20 Jan to 1 June 2012
QMA Gallery, Katara
Louise Bourgeois:
Conscious and
Unconscious

A contemporary art exhibition featuring one of France's greatest 20th century artists: Louise Bourgeois. The first of its kind in the region, the exhibition will give visitors the opportunity to experience Bourgeois' dynamic and emotive art through drawings, paintings and sculptures.

Pictured: Spider, 1997, was shown at the Pompidou art center in Paris in 2008. Photo: Stephane de Sakutin/AFP/Getty Images

From 9 Feb to 24 June 2012
Al Riwaq Exhibition Hall,
Museum of Islamic Art
Murakami-Ego



Takashi Murakami inaugurates his first solo exhibition in the Middle East in February 2011. *Murakami-Ego* will immerse visitors in a fantasy world conceived by the Japanese artist, capturing the way Murakami channels the ecstasy and anxiety of contemporary culture.

Photo: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images, 2009

Permanent sculpture
MIA Park
Richard Serra

On December 16th the new seafront Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) Park will be inaugurated and it will feature a vertical steel sculpture by American artist Richard Serra. Born in 1939, Serra is known for his site-specific installations frequently done in very large scale to challenge the viewers' perception of space. Serra drew on influences from his early life as a worker in a steel mill and his father's job at a San Francisco shipyard: "All the raw material that I needed is contained in the reserve of this memory which has become a reoccurring dream".

His exterior steel sculptures emphasise the weight and nature of the material. These large-scale structures have been commissioned by countries like the US, France, Spain and the UK.

Photo: Miguel Riopa/AFP/Getty Images



AGENDA INTERNATIONAL

Exhibitions from Beirut to cyberspace echo not only themes of uneasiness and despair when communication and solidarity break down, but also the way in which great art thrives through intercultural inspiration and exchange



Until 24 December 2011 Agial Art Gallery, Beirut Canticle of Death

"Green Parrot", "Blue Bunny", "Red Rose", "Green Flax", "Yellow Sun" are just some of the strangely cheerful and innocent names given to British nuclear weapon project disguised under the code name "Rainbow!". In his *Canticle of Death* exhibition Tagreed Darghouth (b. Lebanon, 1979) wonders: Why personify a weapon that destroys entire cities? Pictured: "Brighter than a thousand suns...", 2011 / 1



2

5



Until 22 January 2012 Istanbul Museum of Modern Art Uncanny Encounters

Uncanny Encounters features contemporary works by six women artists of Turkey's younger generation who explore the possibilities of photography to communicate an unsettling feeling evoked by something familiar yet foreign. Pictured is a work from Zeynep Kayan's *Torn* series. Kayan (b. 1986) reworks her photographs and videos to create new visual pieces from old ones and achieves this through a repetitive creative process based on the destruction/reconstruction of the image. / 2

Until 6 February 2012 Louvre Museum, Paris The Museum World

The museum's curator of honour this season is Nobel laureate Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio. Described as an "explorer of a humanity beyond and below the reigning civilisation," Clézio, for whom there is no hierarchy when it comes to art, interprets the theme "museums are worlds" by including mats from Vanuatu, paintings from Haiti, Ife heads from Nigeria, paintings on the French Revolution, and Mexican ex-votos. Pictured: Head of Ife woman, Nigeria. *Courtesy of the Louvre Museum.* / 3

Until 12 January 2012 The Third Line, Dubai Disconnected

Through this haunting yet moving photography exhibition inspired by the city of Karachi, Pakistani photographer Izdeyar Setna explores the imprint of the city's descent into anarchy on the collective psyche of its inhabitants. Taking a different approach to traditional portraiture, Setna strips each of his subjects by painting his or her face in monochrome and reducing the surroundings to a neutral background. Pictured: *In the Moment*, 2011. *Courtesy of The Third Line.* / 4

4



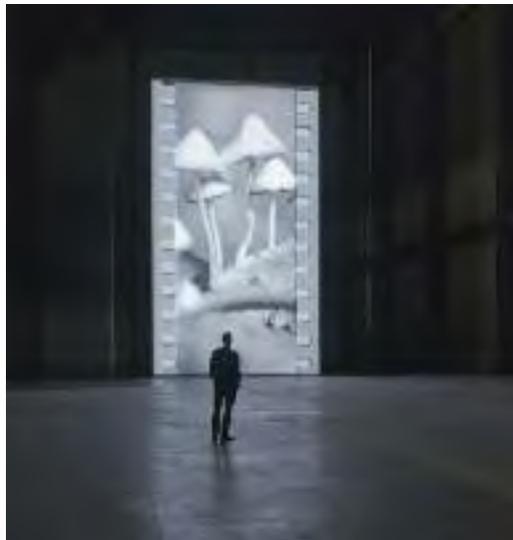
Until 15 April 2012
Guggenheim Bilbao
Brancusi-Serra

This exhibition explores the concepts of time and space for Constantin Brancusi and Richard Serra, two of the finest sculptors of the 20th century. Sculptures by Brancusi have been placed against, and in dialogue with, works by Serra. In both cases, the exhibition stresses the effects produced by the variety of materials used; Brancusi's marble, wood, cement, plaster, and bronze, and Serra's steel, rubber, lead, and even neon tubes. Serra's *Matter of Time*, 1994-2005 (pictured) is permanently installed at the museum.

Image: Erika Ede/Courtesy of Guggenheim Bilbao / 5

Until 11 March 2012
Tate Modern, London
The Unilever Series:
Tacita Dean/FILM

Tacita Dean's *FILM* is an 11-minute silent 35mm film projected onto a gigantic white monolith standing 13 metres tall at the end of a darkened Turbine Hall. Dean celebrates the techniques of analogue film-making as opposed to digital through what can be considered visual poems that include images from the natural world in a montage of black and white, colour, and hand-tinted film. The monolith itself is a reference to film, evoking the alien artefact from 2001, *A Space Odyssey*. /6



6

FILM 2011
 Courtesy the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris. Photo: Lucy Dawkins



3



8

Permanent Installation
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
New Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia

Since November 1, the reopening of a suite of 15 galleries took place at the Metropolitan. The greatly enlarged, freshly conceived, and completely renovated galleries will house the museum's renowned collection of Islamic art – one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of this material in the world. Design features within the new space will highlight both the diversity and the interconnectedness of the numerous cultures represented here.

Image: Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. / 7



7

Permanent and Virtual
The Basma Alsulaiman Museum of Contemporary Art (BASMOCA)

Born in Jeddah, Basma Alsulaiman has been acquiring art for 30 years. But when considering how to share a collection which encompasses names like Andy Warhol, Bridget Riley, Gerhard Richter, Abdunasser Gharem and Ai Weiwei, she was restrained by the traditions of her native Saudi Arabia. Her response was to launch an extraordinary project: she conceived the world's first virtual museum. Created with the latest technology of Metaverse and Second Life, the Basma Alsulaiman Museum of Contemporary Art (BASMOCA) requires a simple click, download and creating your own avatar to experience Basma's collection. Exhibitions such as *Breaking Barriers*, inspired by Basma's passion to unite East and West through art, are actually curated in this virtual museum that proves that art truly knows no boundaries. /8

HER HIGHNESS SHEIKHA MOZA BINT NASSER

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser is well known as a champion for education and for social and cultural progress. The Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, a UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education and a member of the High-Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, in this interview Her Highness speaks about the goals of the Alliance and the importance of intercultural dialogue for peace and development

PHOTOS: MAHER ATTAR/HHOPL

Your Highness, The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) was founded in 2005 with 20 members from 17 countries, primarily in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. Now it has 130 members from all over the world. What has changed and why?

At its heart, the mission of the AOC is to build bridges between people of different cultures to foster peaceful co-existence and co-operation via intercultural dialogue. The AOC remit has broadened considerably since it was founded. In 2005 we were in the shadow of 9/11 and the Madrid bombings, and intercultural dialogue meant building a better understanding specifically between the Muslim world and the West. Now, while this remains a key objective, the AOC has become the United Nations' primary platform for intercultural dialogue everywhere.

In the 10 years since 11th September 2001, the world has become a smaller place, bringing people of different races, cultures and religions ever closer together. Nations and their governments are waking up to the reality that, as multiculturalism becomes the norm rather than the exception, we all have to become comfortable living with difference. And that concerted action has to be taken to help people overcome ethnic, religious and cultural divisions, especially where these threaten life, security, social harmony and – as is the case in so much of the developing world – sustainable development and economic growth. So the AOC's core mission hasn't changed. What has changed is that this mission is now truly global. →



→ **Qatar is bringing a new sense of urgency and pragmatism to the Alliance of Civilizations through the 4th AOC Forum this December which will be held in Doha. What do you believe would be a good outcome for this forum?**

The new sense of urgency and pragmatism has been brought about by the tumultuous changes the world is experiencing currently, such as the global financial crisis and the political transformations in the Arab world. It has also been brought about in anticipation of the tumultuous changes to come, as the world grapples with the demographic and environmental challenges of feeding its growing population, which as we know passed the seven billion mark in October. We have a choice in how we face these challenges. We can allow ethnic, religious and cultural divisions to become the fault lines of disintegration and conflict. Or by overcoming these divisions, we can create a basis for co-operation to tackle the challenges together.

Another reason for urgency and pragmatism is that time is running out for the United Nations to deliver the promise of its Millennium Declaration. Its objective is to bring about a peaceful, prosperous and just world for everyone, with a specific duty to include the most vulnerable – especially children – to whom the future belongs. The Declaration was distilled into eight specific Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. With only three years to go, now is the time for action, not words. And we must not make the current financial crisis an excuse for failure.

The AOC's emphasis on diversity, co-existence, respect for human rights and sustainable development means it is fully aligned with the core principles of the Millennium Declaration. After all, they both come from the UN. My personal belief is that the AOC can exert the 'soft' power of intercultural dialogue and reconciliation to help achieve the MDGs through joined-up thinking and joined-up action. By the same token, I believe that progress towards the goals of the AOC is progress towards the MDGs. This is why I am asking this year's forum to identify and build on synergies between these two UN initiatives.

It has long been evident to me that the achievement of MDG 2, universal primary education, is a cornerstone or point of leverage for achieving all eight MDGs. If you educate people, they can stand on their own two feet. This is why so much of my work is focused on education, especially where it is under threat, such as in conflict zones. So I am particularly keen to develop synergies between the AOC and the achievement of MDG 2.

The Doha Forum brings together government bodies, the private sector and civil society organisations to forge new partnerships, come up with new ideas and make new plans for swift

implementation. To remind us of why we're all here, we will be joined by a delegation of 300 young people from different parts of the world, bringing relevance, optimism and energy to our discussions.

The AOC has four pillars of action which interconnect the values of the AOC with the measurable pathway of the MDGs: education, youth, media and migration. I believe that these four pillars are not just relevant to intercultural dialogue, but also to creating the political, economic and social changes in the societies that need them most. For example, poor integration of migrants creates alienation and resentment, while well-integrated migrants demonstrate that diversity brings economic progress and social cohesion.

“The Doha Forum brings together government bodies, the private sector and civil society organisations to forge new partnerships, come up with new ideas and make new plans for swift implementation.”

So I am convinced that strengthening connections between the AOC and the MDGs will be a big step forward, one that will put intercultural dialogue at the heart of the world's development agenda. As a result, we expect the forum will achieve renewed political and financial thrust, with practical results and positive outcomes.

If, as you say, the forum aims to put intercultural dialogue at the heart of the world's development agenda, what attributes does Qatar offer that can actively contribute to this objective?

The young people currently transforming the Arab world, along with their peers across the globe, sense the need for change more than anyone and thereby are best placed to make it happen. So it is entirely appropriate that an Arab country is hosting the forum this year.

Mahatma Gandhi famously said that we must be the change that we want to see in the world and that is what we are doing in the development of Qatar itself. As a small country, almost every initiative we take in realising our National Vision 2030, which is essentially about transforming Qatar into a knowledge economy, involves dialogue and partnerships with people outside Qatar. We actively →



→ and happily engage with people of different nationalities, races and religions. Qatar is becoming known in the world as a place that thrives on diversity in almost every field: culture, education, the arts, economy and enterprise, healthcare, sport and so on. The Qatar way is to find the best the world has to offer and to bring it to our region, while finding the best our region has to offer and taking it to the world. Al Jazeera, Education City, Mathaf: The Arab Museum of Modern Art and Qatar Philharmonic are just four examples of hundreds of such initiatives.

A small example – but one which embodies so much of what we are trying to achieve with our youth in terms of early development of cross-cultural dialogue, leadership and critical thinking skills – is that of an event held by Qatar Foundation in association with THIMUN (The Hague International Model United Nations) in November. Over 1,000 young people from all over the world arrived here in

Doha to stage a young person’s version of the United Nations. Playing the role of UN diplomats, they debated resolutions on the key issues facing the world. What made it so special – and so relevant to this development of cross-cultural dialogue – is that each young person had to represent a different country than his or her own – and often one with which their own country was in a state of actual conflict or tension.

With regard to Qatar’s specific contribution to the AOC programme this year, we are planning to launch a yearly Cultural and Youth Festival in Doha to celebrate diversity and we are setting up a world observatory of intercultural policies relating to the four pillars (education, youth, media and migration). There will also be other initiatives arising from the work of the forum.



“The Qatar way is to find the best the world has to offer and to bring it to our region, while finding the best our region has to offer and taking it to the world.”

You are a great champion for education not only in your country but universally; even more importantly you have recognised that educated young people need jobs – thus setting up initiatives like Silatech. Do you believe such programmes will be fundamental to stem the “brain drain” in the Middle East and North Africa and help the region fulfil its human potential?

Silatech, which was launched at the Madrid AOC Forum in 2008, was indeed a recognition that we urgently need to tackle the challenge of unemployment in the Arab world. According to International Labour Organisation figures, the region has the highest unemployment rate in the world, averaging 10 per cent. Among the under-25s, this rises to 40%. Events since 2008 across the Arab world have confirmed that social discontent brought on largely by unemployment was one of the triggers of the upheavals across the region. The challenge that confronts us is daunting: we need to create up to 80 million jobs over the next decade. I believe the first step is to view our young people not as part of the problem but as part of the solution.

With this mind-set, everything becomes possible. The partnerships between the public, private and civil society sectors I mentioned earlier are critical, since to create jobs, we need to create an entrepreneurial culture, supported by appropriate infrastructures to nurture it. We also need to be much cleverer about ensuring that our young people are receiving an education which prepares them for the job market. Here the private sector has a major role to play as ultimate beneficiaries. Since 2008 Silatech has been endeavouring to build local, regional and global partnerships to achieve this entrepreneurial culture and shape education in support.

But there is another point that I need to make which is more fundamental than the ‘brain drain’ issue and that is the large number of children who are unable to obtain an education because it is too dangerous. Of the 70 million or so children who are out of school, more than half are in conflict zones. The attacks on schools and teachers that are carried out with impunity to international law must be stopped. As UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, I have and will continue to campaign to ensure that schools and places of education are protected together with teachers and students, and that in times of war and conflict, education is seen as a humanitarian necessity and not a luxury.

As young, modern rulers you and His Highness the Emir have opened the doors of Qatar to contemporary art, cutting-edge technology and media, and embraced many cultures in your own soil. How have you tempered that openness with the preservation of your own heritage?

Culture is not just what you do, but who you are. It is as much an expression of identity as it is of art. I do not believe that openness and preservation are necessarily in conflict. The key is to instil in our young people a strong sense of self-confidence in who they are, by allowing them to take pride in their heritage and culture. And, of course, take pride in their language, as Arabic is the key to both our culture and religion. Once again, education is the essential element. An educated person is able to appreciate and enjoy other cultures while always being centred on his or her own. Qatar is an Arab and Muslim country and is proud of its identity and culture, which form the links between our past and our future. It is this pride and confidence which allows our young people to participate in global cultural activities while preserving their rich and unique heritage.

But let me add another point here. When we speak about culture we need to be precise. On the one hand we should be aware of the need to create what I may call a ‘culture of culture’ and here Qatar – and I must mention Katara – is creating the appropriate atmosphere through the many museums, musical events, literary and artistic opportunities which flourish here. But on the other hand there is another type of culture of which we are equally aware and that is the culture that is relevant to the local Qatari. I mentioned before that culture is not just what you do but who you are. In this sense the local cultures of Qatar, the traditions that make Qatar what it is and not something else, need to be preserved and nourished. By preserved I do not mean in a quaint folkloric way but in an applicable and relevant manner which can strengthen and give depth to Qataris and affirm their sense of identity and confidence. □



A VISUAL GUIDE TO KATARA

The Cultural Village Foundation Katara was built to create a hub for arts and culture in Qatar. Through its different facilities, it has become the perfect environment for creative intellectual, artistic and even sports activities. Katara is a forum for artists and for many high-profile exhibitions and performances



1

Amphitheatre

Dominating the Katara Cultural Village is the massive Amphitheatre that can seat 5,000 people for major events. Built in marble, the Amphitheatre incorporates Greek, Roman and Islamic elements in its design. Its circular stage and elevated seating, with the sea and the scintillating Doha skyline as background, is perfect for operas, concerts and sports events. / 1

Opera House

Home to the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, the Opera House seats up to 470 people and has a VIP Hall for a more luxurious setting. Inspired by European opera houses, it hosts concerts and operas. / 2

Drama Theatre

The Drama Theatre can accommodate plays, musical spectacles or films. With hundreds of seats it can turn from spectacular to intimate, depending on the performance on stage. / 3



2

Mosque

The beautiful Mosque with its colourful mosaics is a haven of serenity on the streets of Katara. Though Islamic aspects are present throughout Katara's architecture, the Mosque reflects the strong spiritual heritage of Qatar. / 4



3

Societies in Katara

With separate management from Katara, these societies call the cultural village their home. Their busy agendas add to the bustle of Katara's streets and to the variety of activities that can be found in them

Doha Film Institute

Created only a year ago, the Doha Film Institute (DFI) is already making waves on the international level by organising the annual Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF) which brings global film stars and filmmakers to Qatar, but also by supporting the production of films in the country and the region.

Qatar Photographic Society

With 650 active members, the Qatar Photographic Society is busy organising exhibitions and competitions all year round. Membership is open to both Qataris and expats, and the society is dedicated to foment, teach and refine all aspects of photography. / 5

Fine Arts Society

The Fine Arts Society has the goal of enhancing the talent and the knowledge of art and artistic technique of their members; it also holds periodic exhibitions, events and produces publications.

Other organisations in Katara:

THE KATARA ARTS CENTRE is an integral part of the cultural village and has a long-term vision for the production and development of art and cultural events. It includes a gallery space, venues for art performance, workshop areas, and retail units incorporating different aspects of design. **THE QATAR MUSIC ACADEMY** prepares students in classical Arabic and Western music. **THE VISUAL ART CENTRE** offers courses on photography, oil painting, digital graphics and other art-related classes. **THE CHILDHOOD CULTURAL CENTRE** is the brainchild of HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser and promotes the education of children.



4



5

The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra

Founded by HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser in 2007, the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra is composed of 101 musicians chosen by a jury of international music professionals through auditions held in European and Arab countries. In September 2011 Michalis Economou became music director, succeeding Nader Abbassi. The Philharmonic has performed at the Syrian Opera House in Damascus, the Royal Albert Hall in London, La Scala in Milan, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Wiener Konzerthaus in Vienna and the Kennedy Center in Washington.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ORCHESTRA'S PROGRAMME THROUGH MARCH 2012:

MAAZEL CONDUCTS MAHLER'S FIRST

7 January 2012, 7:30 pm

OMAR KHAIRAT'S MUSIC

28 and 29 January 2012, 7:30 pm

Nader Abbassi, conductor / Omar Khairat, piano

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV'S SCHEHERAZADE

11 February 2012, 7:30 pm

Michalis Economou, music director / Felicitas Fuchs, soprano

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES:

SCHUBERT'S TROUT QUINTET

15 February 2012, 7:30 pm

MARCEL KHALIFÉ IN AN ARABIAN NIGHT

18-20 February 2012, 7:30 pm

Michalis Economou, music director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES:

TCHAIKOVSKY'S SERENADE FOR STRINGS

14 March 2012, 7:30 pm

Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra strings

STRAUSS IN ITALY

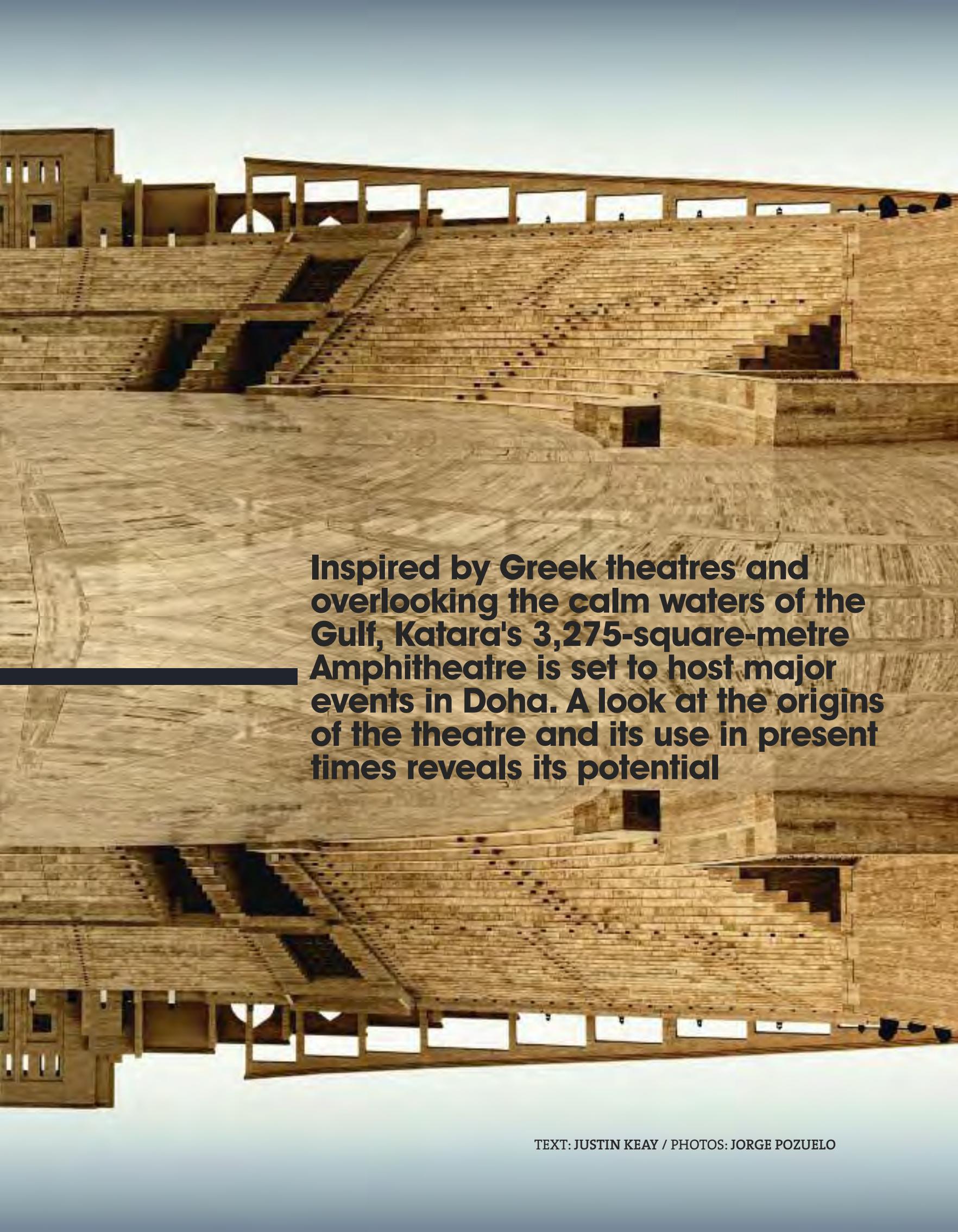
17 March 2012, 7:30 pm

Thomas Kalb, conductor / Omar Chen Guey, violin

For the full programme please visit:
www.qatarphilharmonicorchestra.org

Théātron



A wide-angle photograph of the Katara Amphitheatre in Doha, Qatar. The structure is built from light-colored stone or concrete, featuring a semi-circular tiered seating area and a large, flat stage area. The architecture is modern and minimalist, with clean lines and a focus on natural materials. The sky is a clear, pale blue, suggesting a bright day. The overall scene is one of grandeur and architectural elegance.

Inspired by Greek theatres and overlooking the calm waters of the Gulf, Katara's 3,275-square-metre Amphitheatre is set to host major events in Doha. A look at the origins of the theatre and its use in present times reveals its potential

Over the ages, mankind has proven adept at inventing forms of entertainment to fill the leisure hours. Among the most enduring venues for amusement have been theatres and amphitheatres, which for centuries have held plays, concerts and in more vigorous moments, gladiatorial fights and other spectator sports.

The impressive Amphitheatre which dominates Katara in Doha is the latest in a long line of such structures.

The building blends the classical Greek concept of the theatre (or *théatron*) with Islamic elements in a state-of-the-art auditorium that can comfortably seat up to 5,000 people.

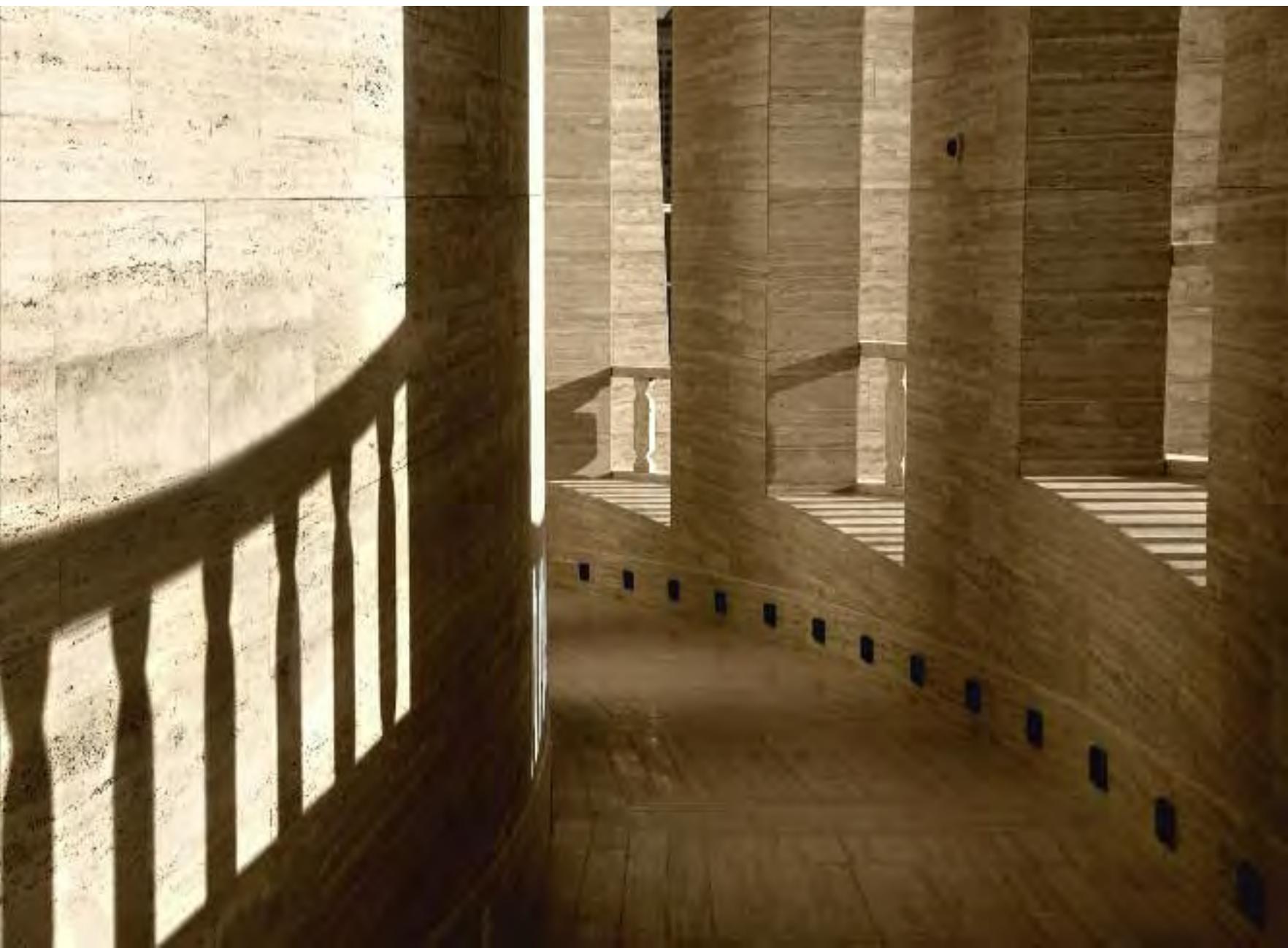
According to Simon Keay, senior professor of Classical Archaeology at Southampton University and research professor at the British School at Rome, theatres in ancient Greece were traditionally sited near temples and were thus closely associated with religious, edifying spectacles. Plays by authors such as Aeschylus or Euripides would provide moral instruction as well as catharsis or “emotional cleansing”. If the topography allowed, the structures were built into a hillside with gradually rising seats looking

onto a central orchestra area and a stage, on which performances were held.

Many fine theatres have survived since their construction in classical times. Outstanding examples – made all the more interesting because they have remained largely unaltered – can be found at Epidavros in Greece, at Taormina in Sicily and at Aspendos in modern day Turkey, some 25 miles from the port city of Antalya.

These last two were designed and built by Greek architects in Roman times, and as with all theatres acoustics, enable the human voice to be carried effortlessly to all parts of the arena. Thanks to their near perfect design there were no restricted views for the 7,000 or so spectators, but seating reflected rank, with the highest born accorded the best positions.

Contrary to popular belief, the word amphitheatre actually refers to structures that were closed, with the prefix *amphi* meaning “around” or “on both sides”. Amphitheatres were oval or round-shaped structures with an arena in the centre. The earliest came into being in the days of the Roman republic, although it was only in imperial times that the amphitheatre as we know it came into being. Altogether around 230





The building blends the classical Greek concept of the theatre with Islamic elements in a state-of-the-art auditorium that can comfortably seat up to 5,000 people

amphitheatres have been discovered, scattered around most parts of the western Roman Empire. Many were located on the outskirts of towns, close to main roads, to enable easy access. Some of the largest could accommodate 50,000 people. All were seated hierarchically, with noblemen closest to the action in the arena and women up at the back.

“Like theatres in Classical Greece, amphitheatres had some interesting things to say about Roman society: as well as providing entertainment to the masses, they were a form of social control, providing leaders with the opportunity for gauging the mood of the people,” says Prof Keay.

They also provided lucrative employment for the empire’s best architects, engineers and builders, which is why many have endured for so long and are amongst

the most outstanding structures from ancient times.

The most famous amphitheatre of all is the Flavian Amphitheatre, better known as the Colosseum. Construction on this began in the first century, during the rule of the notoriously frugal Emperor Vespasian, with the structure opened by his son, the Emperor Domitian. Able to seat some 70,000 people, its location in central Rome – on the site of Nero’s grossly indulgent Golden House – was quite deliberate. Rome’s rulers were in essence saying that the days of self-centred imperial excess were over and that the focus was to be on projects that benefited everybody. This huge structure remains undiminished in the heart of modern Rome, despite having been abused over the ages – particularly during the Renaissance era – as a free →

→ stone-yard. Described by scholars Keith Hopkins and Mary Beard in their book *The Colosseum* as one of the most audacious buildings in the empire, it was a marvel of design. The sand-covered wooden floor below the arena hid a veritable labyrinth of passageways and storage areas for the gladiators, animals and scenery. Remarkably, all the spectators could leave their marble benches in the *cavea* (or seating area) and exit the building via one of 76 marked entrances within five minutes flat.

The Colosseum is rarely used for public performances (in part because of damage to the original seating) unlike some of the other amphitheatres and theatres of the ancient world which are still in use today. Amongst amphitheatres, one of the most famous to hold regular performances is the Arena di Verona, in the northern Italian town made famous by *Romeo and Juliet*. The greatest opera divas, such as Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi, have sung there and increasingly elaborate and daring performances make use of the ancient arena as either a complement or a contrast to the art direction and design of each production.

The arenas at the southern French cities of Nimes and nearby Arles hold bull-fights in spite of rising popular protest against the sport in Europe. The externally perfectly preserved amphitheatre at Pula, in Istria (Croatia) has been the setting of the 1999 film *Titus*, based on the Shakespeare play *Titus Andronicus*.

As far as ancient theatres go, the Teatro de Merida and the Theatre Antique at Orange, southern France, still hold important



ABOVE:
Francesco Micheli's
2011 production of
Gounod's *Roméo et*
***Juliette* drew rave**
reviews at the Arena
di Verona

Photo:
 Courtesy of Ennevi Foto

BELOW:
Possibly the most
famous amphitheatre
still holding
performances today,
the Arena
di Verona in Italy is
seen here during a
production
of *Madame Butterfly*

Photo: Eyes Wide
 Open/Getty Images

performances. Les Chorégies d'Orange (Orange Opera Festival) is celebrating its 40th anniversary and the stage with its impressive backdrop of carved stone has been transformed into ancient Egypt for *Aida* or Japan for *Madame Butterfly*. The Teatro de Merida – a well-preserved Roman structure in Extremadura, western Spain – has been holding summer festivals for the past 57 years; next year's schedule will reportedly focus on old Graeco-Roman plays, which will be staged at night in the open air theatre.

A curious example of modernity borrowing from the ancient world is the Greek-inspired Minack Theatre in Cornwall, England. It was built from scratch between the 1930s and 1980s through the determination of one woman, Rowena Cade, and volunteers whom she gathered. Today, a performance of Shakespeare in this setting which overlooks the sea is a glorious example of what an outdoor theatre should be.

So how will the new structure at Katara compare to these older theatres and amphitheatres? Designed by Cansult Maunsell LTD and Architectural Consulting Group UAE, using Italian Travertine marble, the Katara Amphitheatre was completed in 2008. Audiences look onto a circular central stage behind which can be seen the calm blue waters of the Gulf with the sparkling skyline of downtown Doha in the distance.

It is one of the capital's most impressive architectural landmarks, and further proof of its emergence as a cultural hub. ▣



Charles Roubaud and the *Aida*

Katara's Amphitheatre, with its architecture inspired by antiquity and the sea as backdrop, is the perfect stage for Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*. Director Charles Roubaud, a master of making the grandiose seem intimate, talks about the plans for bringing *Aida* to Qatar

TEXT: JOSEPH PINKER / IMAGES: COURTESY OF CHARLES ROUBAUD

It's not surprising to discover that Charles Roubaud studied graphic arts. In every single one of his productions he seems to employ a great amount of attention to details and how they relate to the whole, in order to create not simply a beautiful effect, but a powerful one.

Though he started out in advertising, he quickly moved to opera and made his debut with Massenet's *Don Quichotte* in Marseille. He worked on French repertoire, particularly *Manon*, Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites* and Debussy's *Pélleas et Mélisande*. However, he soon felt artistically compelled to embrace compositions by Strauss, Rossini, Janáček, Borodin, Puccini, Donizetti, Mozart and especially Verdi.

The steady success of his productions in France led him to be invited to direct in other

countries such as the US and major opera houses in Europe including La Fenice (Venice), Covent Garden (London) and the Mariinsky Theatre (Saint Petersburg).

Very early in his career he was able to tackle opera's specific requirements in open air productions. Since 1995 he has been present at the Chorégies d'Orange, France's most famous opera festival, directing acclaimed productions of *Aida*, *Turandot*, *Il Trovatore*, *Norma* and *Don Carlo*. His success at Orange was such that the world's most famous open air opera festival, Arena di Verona, called him to stage *Rigoletto*.

It's in large-scale productions that Roubaud particularly shows his mastery, sensibility and depth. The beauty of his productions is never an empty one. Sometimes using impressive projections combined with carefully placed light effects to replace built sets, he allows the operas he stages to gain great flexibility: he is able to

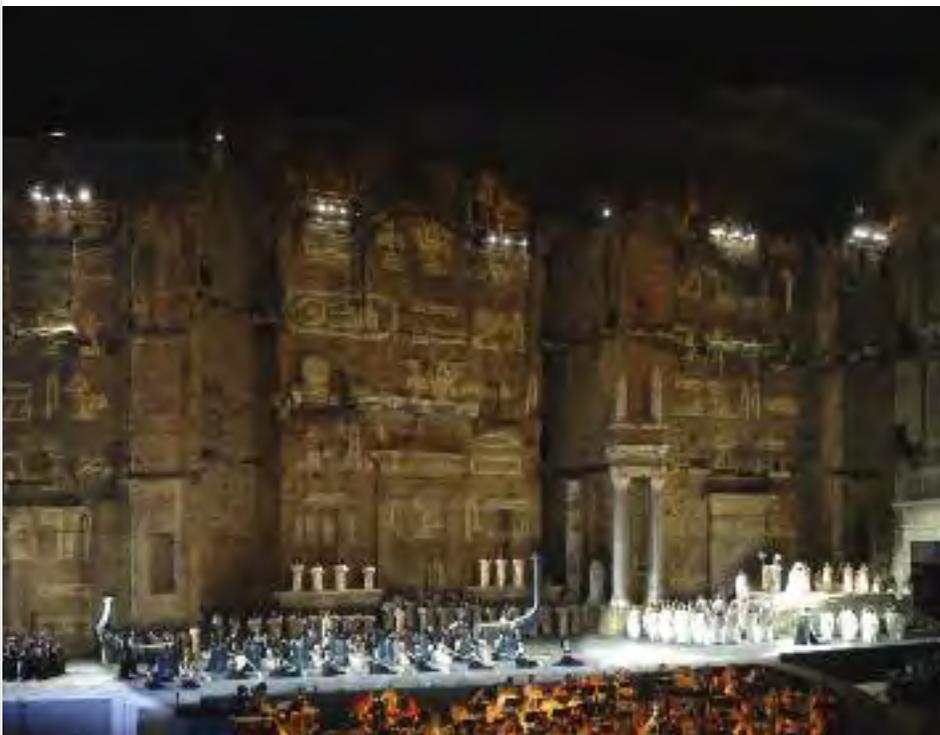
change the atmosphere of a grandiloquent group scene into something intimate in a question of seconds. The projections also allow him to transform the microcosmic, such as the candles in his production of *Turandot*, into something that pervades the whole stage, creating an intense atmosphere to draw in the audience.

Speaking of the possibility of a production of *Aida* in Katara, Roubaud said: "When I discovered the superb Amphitheatre at Katara for the project of *Aida*, I immediately thought that it was very important to keep the architectural beauty of the place intact. So I imagined wrapping it with ancient Egyptian finery to preserve the elegance and harmony of its forms and proportions. My direction would be a subtle blend of intimate situations and *Aida*'s specific spectacular scenes, highlighted by beautiful costumes and stunning video projections in order to create a production with a unique atmosphere in Katara."



RIGHT:
Roubaud's 2008 production of *Aida*
at the Opéra de Marseille

BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT:
Grandiose scenes from the Chorégies
d'Orange production of 2006



Daniel

BARRENBOIM

Music and dialogue





Whether appearing as conductor or pianist, Daniel Barenboim is one of the world's best-loved and feted musicians. In this interview, he speaks about his pride in the creation of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, composed of musicians from Palestine, Israel and other countries, which he brought to Qatar this year

The name Daniel Barenboim guarantees full concert halls the world over. Born in Buenos Aires in 1942 to parents of Jewish-Russian descent, Daniel Barenboim first performed in public at the age of seven. In 1952 his family moved to Israel, and he made his international debut as a pianist the same year. While still in his twenties, he secured his place among the world's leading solo artists.

Although he continues to perform as a pianist, Barenboim has focused mainly on conducting since the 1970s, taking to the podium with the world's greatest orchestras. From 1991 to 2006 he was chief conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Currently he is chief conductor for life of the Berlin Staatskapelle and artistic director and general music director of the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin. He has also just taken up the post of music director at La Scala, Milan.

Forty years ago Barenboim and his late wife Jacqueline du Pré played for Israeli troops during the Six-Day War. Today he is a tireless campaigner for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and his criticism of Israeli government policies have made him a controversial figure in that country. In 2008 he was granted honorary Palestinian citizenship. →



“Qatar has the opportunity to continuously try and provide a variety of forums for dialogue and thus create an atmosphere of cultural exchange which will ultimately pave the way for political reconciliation, too.”

→ Barenboim has written extensively on the contribution that music can make towards promoting dialogue and a culture of tolerance. This idea has found its most concrete expression in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which he founded in 1999 with the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said.

The orchestra, which unites young musicians from the Middle East and Israel, has won international recognition. In 2005 it performed in the West Bank city of Ramallah, but it is yet to be invited to do so in Israel. This year the orchestra received a standing ovation when it gave its second performance in Qatar at the Doha Festival for Music and Dialogue at the Katara Opera House.

In May Barenboim staged a "peace concert" in Gaza with an orchestra made up of musicians from five European orchestras – the first performance in the coastal territory by an international classical ensemble. Declaring that the destinies of Israelis and the Palestinians are inextricably linked, Barenboim believes that music can help each side find a way to listen to the narrative of the other. "Music, unlike any other art or discipline, requires the ability to express oneself with absolute commitment and passion while listening carefully and sensitively to another voice which may even contradict one's own statement," he says.

You have many different citizenships: Argentinean, Spanish, Israeli and Palestinian. Do you believe that being embraced by so many nations, even Palestine, shows that music is a truly universal language?

I do believe that music is a universal language yes, and I have personally experienced that it is possible to transition between seemingly different cultures and still find that music has a similar impact on people wherever I go, regardless of nationalities or ethnicities.

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (WEDO) is an inspirational achievement which began in 1999. Some of the members of WEDO were children when they joined the orchestra and must now be entering adulthood. What was your proudest moment when dealing with these young musicians?

When we founded the WEDO in 1999, my late friend Edward Said and I could not foresee the incredible development that this orchestra would undergo. It makes me very proud to see the musical as well as human achievements of these young people. Our proudest moment will come, however, when we can finally and freely perform in the countries from which the musicians originate.

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra tours for six weeks a year under Barenboim's baton. Palestinians and Israelis, together with other nationalities, literally rub shoulders to play some of the world's greatest music



Qatar is one of the few Arab countries where WEDO has played, during this year's Festival for Music and Dialogue at Katara. As a stable country in the Middle East, what role do you think Qatar can play in this effort to use culture and art to open lines of dialogue?

I think the importance of Qatar cannot be underestimated. Qatar is in a unique position because it has functional bilateral relations with virtually all important players in the Middle East. Qatar therefore has the opportunity to continuously try and provide a variety of forums for dialogue and thus create an atmosphere of cultural exchange which will ultimately pave the way for political reconciliation, too.

You have said that one of your most important goals is that WEDO should play in all the countries it represents. With a solution for Israel and Palestine seeming even more complicated lately, what can be done for you to keep progressing towards this goal?

We are independent of any government in the regions, we are not representatives of the different countries, but we are representatives of the people of these countries. We will continue doing what we do and this is not politically motivated.

Beethoven seems to recur in WEDO's concerts and recordings, culminating with a recording of his nine symphonies. Is there a particular reason why the composer is dear to the orchestra?

From the beginning, we worked on one of the symphonies at least once a year. I believe that Beethoven is the best education, both musically and technically for all the instruments of the orchestra. It also helps them with their solo and chamber music work. □



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

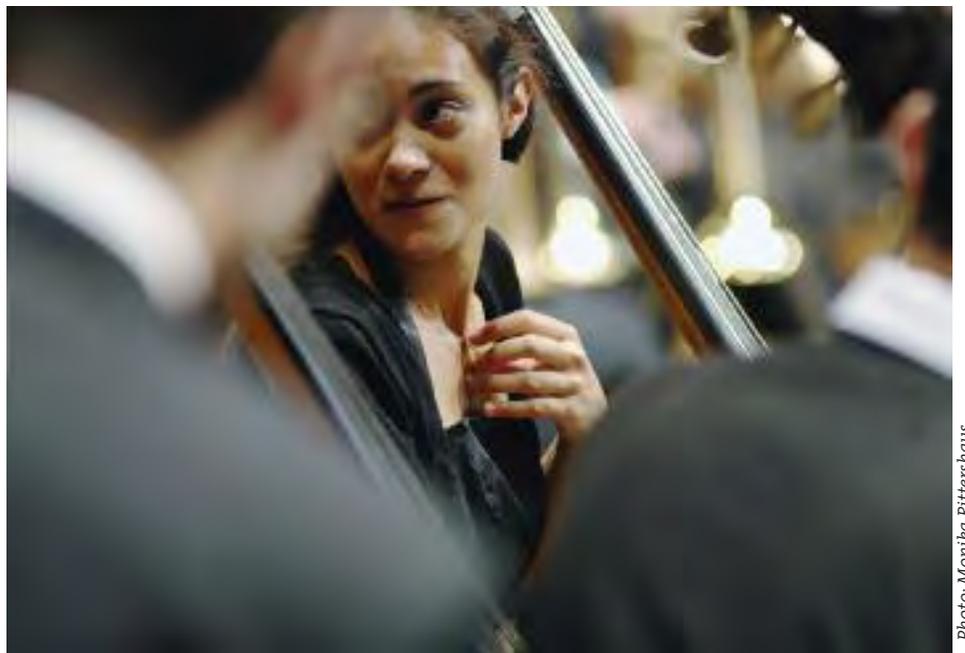


Photo: Monika Rittershaus

FILM



THE MAKING OF BLACKGOLD

**7,000 costumes,
700 saddles, 400 guns,
250 swords,
20,000 extras, 10,000
camels and over
2,000 horses would
certainly help any film
qualify as an epic.
But the first international
co-production of the
Doha Film Institute,
Black Gold, is actually
about noble
human ideals**

Mention the word “epic” to the creators and actors of *Black Gold* and they will retort with “intimate”.

Indeed, though the desert acquires an epic scale in this \$55 million production, it is the human stories, at times almost whispered, that gain real dimension.

Having held its world premiere at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival in October, *Black Gold* is set in the Arabian peninsula in the 1930s. It tells the story of two emirs who make a truce to respect a no man’s land between their kingdoms called the Yellow Belt. However, after oil is discovered, war erupts again between the cunning Nesib of Hobeika (Antonio Banderas) and the honourable Amar of Salmaah (Mark Strong): one thirsts after the wealth oil will bring while the other wants to avoid the corruption that comes with greed. The tale of the battle between two kings, *Black Gold* is also a tale about the opposing

ideals of breakneck progress and tradition. “In my heart I saw a film that was asking how to deal with modernity,” says director Jean-Jacques Annaud. “This is a theme that is universal.”

Thirty-five years ago, producer Tarek Ben Ammar of Quinta Communications bought the rights to the novel *The Great Thirst* upon which *Black Gold* is based. He never let go of the idea of making the film. During the course of time, he found the perfect director in Annaud, who had proven he could put difficult books such as *The Name of the Rose* and *The Lover* on screen.

He also found a co-producer in the Doha Film Institute (DFI). Chaired by HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the DFI thought it →



Photo: Brigitte Lacombe

→ important for its first international co-production to support a film that enhanced the positive and romantic aspects of Arab culture and that dealt with Islam in a sensitive and delicate way.

“*Black Gold* came to us as a script,” says DFI’s Executive Director Amanda Palmer. “Young people here still hear from their grandparents about the monumental shift that happened in the 1930s, how many families had their lives transformed, and the questions that were raised around those changes. I don’t think that at the time it was as simple as saying ‘here is money and wealth’. The film does convey that these questions were incredibly important.”



Qatar not only provided funding, but also the right support and the right locations for some of the most spectacular scenes in the film, a chase and a battle that take place in the desert. Ben Ammar had scouted locations in Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, but until he saw Mesaeid in Qatar he could not find the great dunes leading into the sea that were needed for a crucial turning point in the story. “The desert in Qatar is special. It’s like the end of the world and leads directly to the sea. It’s absolutely pure,” said Franco-Algerian actor Tahar Rahim who plays the young protagonist Auda.

The production had already seen a real clash of ideals when in December 2010, the cast and crew found themselves in the middle of the uprisings in Tunisia. “We saw how Tunisia changed in front of our eyes,” says Banderas. “It was an unbelievable experience to be part of that.”

In January 2011, production moved to Qatar where the largest film crew ever to assemble in the country was put in place, employing over 200 residents and locals from Doha who served various roles behind and in front of the camera. The battle scenes shot in Qatar required tanks, horses and period weapons that were painstakingly reproduced. “We knew that it was going to be a challenge because no film of this scale had ever been shot in Qatar,” says Palmer. “I don’t think you could find a harder script, with the battle scenes in the desert, to shoot in an untested environment.”

Both Annaud and Ben Ammar think that the way the Arab characters were represented in the film is important to change perceptions about the Arab world

The characters



Amar, Ruler of Salmaah (Mark Strong)

The principled Amar believes that possessions should only be won with love or blood, never money. He is devout and loves the desert, believing that the wealth that oil brings will destroy his way of life. When he loses the battle against Nesib he leaves his two sons behind as a guarantee that war will end. But the respect and love that he earns from his young boys will not fade with time.



Nesib, Emir of Hobeika (Antonio Banderas)

Tired of feasting on the leftovers of the West, Nesib would like to become powerful and modernise his kingdom. He rejoices at the discovery of oil and immediately begins to conceive schemes to get a hold of the Yellow Belt which he had declared a no man’s land between his kingdom and Amar’s. More cunning than the foreigners who come after the black gold, his machinations will earn him an ambiguous reward at the end.

internationally and to open the doors to Arab film-making. "It is a film with noble feelings, portraying lofty ambitions," said Ben Ammar at the press conference that took place in October during the film's premiere at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival. Mark Strong agreed, saying: "The film is about dignity, integrity, honesty, and being a good father, all of which cross cultural boundaries."

Annaud concluded by saying that "*Black Gold* is not just a film about the Arab world. At the heart of the film is an open discussion about what the future will hold, which every civilisation in the world has had to deal with."

Black Gold will soon be at a theatre near you, wherever you are. □



Photo: Brigitte Lacombe

The voice

FAHAD AL KUBAISI WAS ALREADY KNOWN IN THE REGION FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL VOICE WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SING THE OPENING TRACK FOR *BLACK GOLD* WAS OFFERED TO HIM BY MUSIC LEGEND JAMES HORNER

Even before the first image of *Black Gold* appears on the screen, a voice rings out in song.

The voice, which beautifully sets the tone for the epic story of gold discovery in the Arabian Peninsula, belongs to applauded vocalist Fahad Al Kubaisi.

The Doha Film Institute (DFI) connected Al Kubaisi to film-music legend James Horner of *Titanic* and *Avatar* fame. The original idea was that

his vocals would contribute to the soundtrack, but upon hearing him sing Horner offered him the poignant opening track.

The track was recorded at London's famed Abbey Road Studios. Another of the film's tracks, a traditional Bedouin song, was recorded by Al Kubaisi with Qatari composer Abdulla Al Mannai.

"To record with James Horner was a great privilege for me and I would like to thank Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa and the Doha Film Institute for providing me with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Al Kubaisi. "It has allowed me to learn so much about the international industry and explore world music with a person who has made immense contributions to the global music scene."

He added: "But the biggest honour for me is



Photo: Brigitte Lacombe

the fact that I will be able to introduce the world to the sounds, voices and rhythms from this region. Also it's a matter of great pride for people in Qatar to come together and celebrate a film which will bring our story, art and culture to the world."



Prince Auda (Tahar Rahim)

The gentle Auda is more obsessed with books than with war, politics or even freedom. But when his more fiery brother Prince Saleeh is killed, Auda is squarely pushed to the centre of the action. Once he resolves the conflict that is tearing the land apart, he appears as a synthesis between the traditional and the modern, showing promise of becoming a great leader.



Princess Leyla (Freida Pinto)

The daughter of Nesib, Leyla has been locked away in the palace since girlhood, but she has not forgotten her playmate Auda. She watches him for years through her carved wooden shutters. Longing for the world outside, but respectful of the traditions that bind her, Leyla will nevertheless make a trusted and wise wife to Auda.

DAYS OF FESTIVAL

The third edition of the Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF) attracted global stars and once more showed the importance of supporting talented Arab filmmakers

TEXT: VERA HILL

In the weeks leading up to the third edition of the Doha Tribeca Film Festival (DTFF), “street art” took a completely different meaning.

Huge billboards with evocative black and white portraits of film stars and filmmakers changed the landscape of Doha in a silent but eloquent reminder that one of the year’s greatest cultural events was about to take place.

As usual, the festival met the expectations of Doha residents and visitors alike. The cultural village, Katara, was decked out in blue lights with temporary cinemas, the Opera House and the huge open air theatre set up for the viewing of a diverse selection of films from the Middle East and 35 countries around the world. Some 1,100 volunteers ensured smooth sailing for an audience that descended in droves upon the festival.

Between the 25th and the 29th of October screen legends from the world over strolled in the streets of Katara: Omar Sharif, Antonio Banderas, Salma Hayek, Robert De Niro, Freida Pinto, Rob Lowe, Luc Besson, Jean-Jacques Annaud, Nadine Labaki and jury members Mohammad Malas, Robin Wright and Nick Broomfield.

Foremost on the minds of some who were present was the world premiere of Doha Film Institute’s first major international co-production, *Black Gold*, on October 25th. The film’s stars Freida Pinto, Tahar Rahim and Mark Strong walked the red carpet before the event to the applause of hundreds of fans.

The festival stayed true to its vocation of bringing Arab films to international attention by awarding Best Arab Narrative Film to *Normal*, which portrays a filmmaker



The cast of *Black Gold* during the world premiere. From left: Faisal Al Kubaisi, Tahar Rahim, Akin Gazi, Freida Pinto, James Horner and Jan Uddin

in Tunisia looking for an alternative ending to a documentary about the disillusionment of youth as the uprisings begin. *Normal* director Merzak Allouache said: “The DTFF helped us to complete this film, and without their assistance, the film would be stuck in a box. I hope the film can be screened in Algeria and that it can help to change the way things are expressed there.”

Best Arab Documentary Film went to Namir Abdel Nessah’s *The Virgin, The Copts*

and *Me*: it follows a skeptical Frenchman of Egyptian origin who wants to make a film about the supposed apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Egypt. Mohamad Rezwan Al Islam and Jassim Al Romaihi took home the prize for the Made in Qatar segment with *A Falcon, A Revolution*.

Best Narrative Film Audience Award went to Nadine Labaki’s *Where Do We Go Now?* The film is about a group of women who take the reins at a small village in

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:
Where do We go Now? got Best Narrative Film Audience Award, playing to packed houses; Amanda Palmer, Executive Director of the DFI, and Nadine Labaki; Merzack Allouache’s *Normal* got the prize for Best Arab Narrative Film

OPPOSITE PAGE:
Antonio Banderas walked the red carpet for the showing of *Puss in Boots*; Omar Sharif represented the film *An Egyptian Citizen* at the festival



Photo: Rudy Bou Chebel



Photo: DFI



Lebanon to stop a sectarian conflict by exchanging religions and confounding the men. Hugely popular during the festival, Labaki's film is obtaining theatrical release in Qatar in December thanks to the help of the DFI.

Other programmes during the festival included a live *In Conversation* session with Antonio Banderas, a *Masterclass* with Luc Besson whose film *The Lady* closed the festival and a panel moderated by Qatari filmmaker Ahmed Al Baker called *Authentic Kaleeji Storytelling* about how talented filmmakers in the region can develop their own voices.

Katara has gone back to normal and the billboards are being taken down, but the feeling remains that Doha is hosting a yearly event that is of consequence to cinema not only in the region, but in the world. ▣

DFI's executive director Amanda Palmer talks film

ESTABLISHED IN 2010 BY HE SHEIKHA AL MAYASSA BINT HAMAD BIN KHALIFA AL THANI, THE DOHA FILM INSTITUTE (DFI) HAS TAKEN GREAT STRIDES IN SPITE OF ITS YOUTH. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AMANDA PALMER DISCUSSES THE DFI'S DEDICATION TO BUILD A FILM INDUSTRY IN QATAR WHILE SUPPORTING GOOD FILMS EVERYWHERE

On the importance of supporting Arab films at the Doha Tribeca Film Festival:

Festivals in many ways are platforms, incredibly important platforms. We have the responsibility to promote Arab cinema. For an Arab filmmaker to come to the festival and to know that some very important people of international cinema have flown in to watch his or her film is a really strong message to send. One of the important roles the DFI plays is supporting Arab films outside of the Arab world too, and I think this is very timely now. Nowadays people want to hear the authentic Arab voice. That's the way to represent this part of the world in a way that's not a few seconds in the news or on mainstream TV. There is definitely a hunger and an appetite to learn more about the Arab world.

On DFI's international co-productions:

We are interested in producing films that raise global questions. We are financing another film right now, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* which is being directed by Mira Nair and is based on the novel by Mohsin Hamid. It stars Kiefer Sutherland, Liev Schreiber, Kate Hudson and Riz Ahmed. It's an incredibly compelling story about a Pakistani Muslim who is accused of being a terrorist and how that affects his life and the lives of people around him. It's a story that will really make people think and remind us that even 10 years after the September 11 attacks, the impact of what happened is still felt by people throughout the world. These issues are definitely not gone and we need to confront them.

BELOW:
Amanda Palmer on the set of *Black Gold*

On financing films:

It's tough to get money to make films and it's even tougher now with the economic landscape of the major economies. It doesn't stop people from wanting to make their films and we are in a great position at the DFI to be able to cherry pick some really exciting projects and be part of them from the development stage whether they are international or from the MENA region. We are going to be able to help form a bridge of talent between the world of independent films and the major international productions; we are able to say that we've discovered this or that talented filmmaker because they've just made a film in the Middle East.

On the Qatari film industry:

The Gulf Film Festival saw eight Qatari productions this year, five of which had been funded by the DFI. But we are realistic about our goals. We are not saying we are making a big production that is 100 per cent Qatari because we are not there yet, but I am hoping that in the next three to four years we will work on projects that are Qatari-led and that will develop the talents and skills for Qataris to export their culture. In 2012 we are going to focus even more on Qatari projects that will help us tell the stories from here. I don't know any local industry in the world that has grown up quickly and that has not had to import the skills and knowledge of the best in the world to work alongside home grown talent. There is a deep desire here to learn how to make films or refine scripts or deal with budgets while insisting on telling Qatari stories. There is a young population here that wants to do great things and we want to develop their talent and continue to promote film culture.



Photo: DFI

ART RISING

Qatar has been steadily but surely building up its credentials in the art world. Prominent museums with exquisite collections, cutting-edge exhibitions and growing support for artists are all coming together to create an interesting and vibrant panorama for the arts

TEXT: ANNA WALLACE-THOMPSON

PHOTOS: JORGE POZUELO (unless otherwise stated)



It was in December 2010 that Doha made a splash on the international art scene. Not that things hadn't been happening in the Qatari capital before then: Both the Emir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, and his wife, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser are active patrons of the arts as well as avid collectors of contemporary art. Their daughter,

Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), is also a collector and the driving force behind the expansion of museums and cultural activities. Furthermore, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, His Excellency Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari has been working to increase the visibility of arts and culture within Qatar, and on the preservation of its heritage. There was the opening of the I.M. Pei-designed Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in 2008, and the creation of the Qatar Foundation over a decade before that, with Qatar

gaining a reputation on the international art market as a buyer of some clout as it sought to fill its museum collections with some of the world's top works.

A year ago the official opening of the much-anticipated Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art cemented what some had thought for a long time – that Qatar had been behind some of the biggest purchases in recent auction history, seeking to place the best of the best in its collections. Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani, Vice Chairman of the QMA and founder of Mathaf, was also quietly collecting for over three decades; the works he has amassed now form the bulk of the museum, including pieces such as the record-breaking *Les Chadoufs* by Egyptian modernist painter Mahmoud Said, which sold for \$2.43 million (a world record not just for Said, but for any work by an Arab artist ever).

While much information on Qatar's art buying remains private, a report in *The Art Newspaper* recently revealed that cultural exports to the country exceeded \$428 million in the five years leading up to 2011. Qatar has found itself in the headlines with purchases such as the Rockefeller Rothko, *White Centre (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)* for a staggering \$72.8 million at a Sotheby's 2007 auction (also a new world record), as well as Damien Hirst's *Lullaby Spring*, an iconic pill cabinet piece acquired for \$16 million in the same year. Such acquisitions reflect the reputation that Qatar has gained as an entity on the

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LEFT:
The Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), conceived by I.M. Pei, is one of Doha's most iconic buildings

RIGHT:
The faceted dome of the MIA features an oculus that reflects the sunlight





→ international art arena with great interest and serious purchasing power.

The QMA plays a pivotal role in Qatar's artistic expansion, and, under the directorship of the formidable Roger Mandle, is custodian of collections of both Islamic and contemporary art as well as photography, arms, textiles and even natural history and fossils. Much of this is destined for eventual display in a network of museums, including Jean Nouvel's eco-friendly National Museum of Qatar slated to open in 2014. A work of art in itself, the structure will comprise a series of overlapping discs inspired by desert culture, incorporating the climate and landscape of Qatar into its design.

While the nearby United Arab Emirates has announced a delay in construction of its Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, a cornerstone of the Emirate's ambitious Saadiyat Island project, Qatar has so far kept an even keel, taking what collector and patron of the arts Tariq Al Jaidah calls "small, yet steady steps." So far, this approach has paid off, and the MIA is a testament to what careful conservation and curatorship can achieve. Situated on the Doha corniche, the resplendent building is home to one of the most complete collections of Islamic artefacts of its kind. Coaxed out of retirement, Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei, now in his 90s, spent six months travelling around the Middle East to find inspiration for the museum. One of MIA's primary objectives is to

'build relationships and partnerships with museums and cultural institutes around the world', a mantra that seems to encapsulate Qatar's ambitions as a whole. Exhibitions such as *The Golden Age of Dutch Painting: Masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam* (March–June 2011), heralded the start of a long-term partnership between the two museums and is testament to the QMA's willingness to open the world to Qatar, and vice versa. Similarly, the generous loaning out of works to exhibitions both home and abroad from the as-yet unopened Qatar Orientalist Museum (whose 900-strong collection is also one of the largest of its kind) marks the extent of the international network that the QMA is keen to build. This December will also mark the unveiling of Richard Serra's first commission in the Middle East, set to stand on the grounds of the MIA in its newly developed park, something the American sculptor hopes will act as "both a public place and a private space for people to gather." →



ABOVE:
Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and Sheikh Moza bint Nasser Al Missned by Yan Pei-ming, 2010. Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art

RIGHT:
The Guardian of the Nile Crescent by Ismail Fattah, executed by Ali Nouri, 2010

OVERLEAF:
The exterior of Mathaf with Adam Henein's *Al Safina* on the foreground



Mathaf marked a turning point for Qatar: Its collection proudly displays the strength of artistic wealth from the Middle East, while simultaneously speaking to an international audience

HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA), is a tireless supporter of the arts

Photo: Karim Jaafar/
AFP/Getty Images

→ However, in all of this, Mathaf marked a turning point, for here is an institution that actively seeks to become transnational and serve as a museum for the Arab world at large. Crucially, Mathaf's collection proudly displays the strength of artistic wealth from the Middle East itself, while simultaneously speaking to both regional and international audiences. It presents a collection that the Middle East can be proud of, and which can also act as an ambassador for regional art overseas. "Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art was a tremendous cultural advance within the Middle Eastern art world, as well as internationally," explains Tarané Ali Khan, communications specialist at t h r e e PR, which handled Mathaf's inauguration. "The

launch of this museum not only elevated Qatari appreciation towards the arts, but also implemented additional importance towards the growth of artistic representation and cultural programming in the region." Its three inaugural exhibitions, *Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art*, *Interventions* and *Told/Untold/Retold*, presented an ever-unfolding tapestry of Middle Eastern history, told by older voices as well as contemporary ones. Most recently, *Swalif*, on display from August-October 2011, showcased over four decades of work by some of Qatar's most important artists.

Qatar also has a history as a safe haven for artists. Over two decades ago, the country provided residencies for Iraqi artists hindered by the sanctions



The National Museum, conceived by Jean Nouvel, is a work of art in itself

in their home country, and granted the late exiled Indian master MF Husain Qatari citizenship in 2010. Qatar has also produced prominent artists who stand their own in the roster of contemporary Middle Eastern art, as evidenced in *Swalif*. Names such as Yousef Ahmad, Ali Hassan, Faraj Daham and Salman Al Malik appear regularly in international auctions, with Ahmad considered by many as one of the founding fathers of the contemporary art movement in Qatar. Famously using the cooled embers from his mother's kitchen to draw on the side of the house's whitewashed wall, he has become symbolic of a generation. "Ahmad's story is beautiful," remarks al markhiya gallery's Heather Al-nuweiri. "I think it shows where we started and how

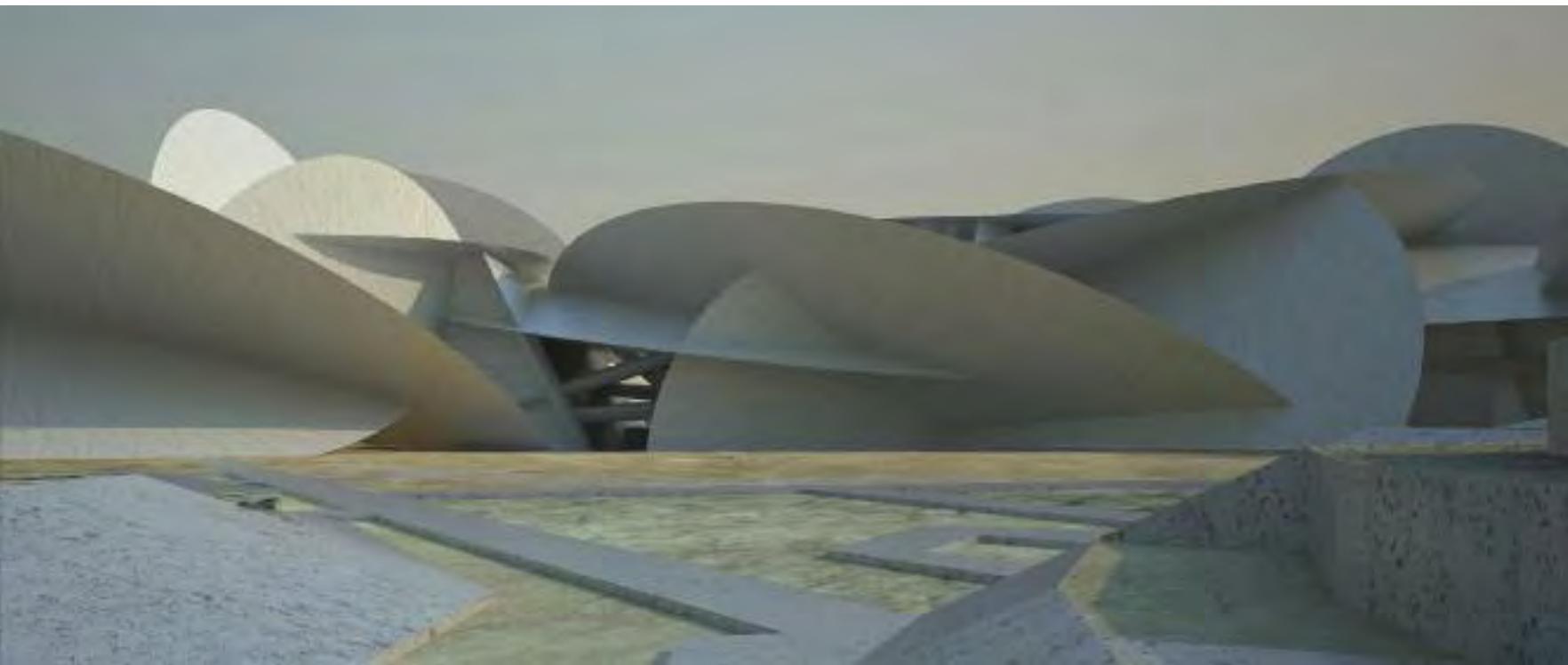
far we have come with the new generation – today's students at [Doha's] Virginia Commonwealth University have the latest and greatest of absolutely everything. I think it will be Ahmad's daughter's generation who will really come into its own and I'm hoping there will be people to fill the very large shoes of these really prominent artists."

One also cannot deny the role that the auction houses Sotheby's and Christie's have played in the promotion of these artists to international audiences. In addition to providing documentation on some of them for the first time, the auction houses have also shown younger artists that art is a viable career. After all, "success stories inevitably encourage others,"

→

The new National Museum (*below*), slated to open in 2014. Architect Jean Nouvel says that he was inspired by the sand roses that form on the surface of the desert

Image: Courtesy of Ateliers Jean Nouvel





ABOVE:
The Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage HE Dr Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al Kuwari meets acclaimed photographer Sebastião Salgado during the latter's 2010 exhibition *Africa in Katara*
Photo: Hatem Salman Abu Tareya

→ points out Al Jaidah. Sotheby's 2010 inaugural sale – *Hurouf: The Art of the World* – in Qatar right before the opening of Mathaf, was the first sale of its kind dedicated to calligraphic works and saw a world record in Egyptian artist Ahmed Moustafa's *The Night Journey and Ascension*, going under the hammer for \$842,500. Robin Woodhead, chairman of Sotheby's International, remarked at the time that “these results further indicate the cultural dynamism of Qatar, and its pivotal position in the rapidly expanding art scene of the MENA region.”

The flourishing of the arts in Doha propelled it to become the 2010 Arab Capital of Culture. “Doha’s vibrancy was witnessed by everyone [during this occasion],” says HE Dr Al Kuwari. “Motivated by the vision of His Highness the Emir, our ambition after this success is to remain the permanent capital of Arab culture, a capital of the convergence of cultures and their interaction. The cooperation and coordination among our cultural institutions has not only led Doha to be a recognised capital of culture, but also made it an international centre for significant, continuous and attractive events.”

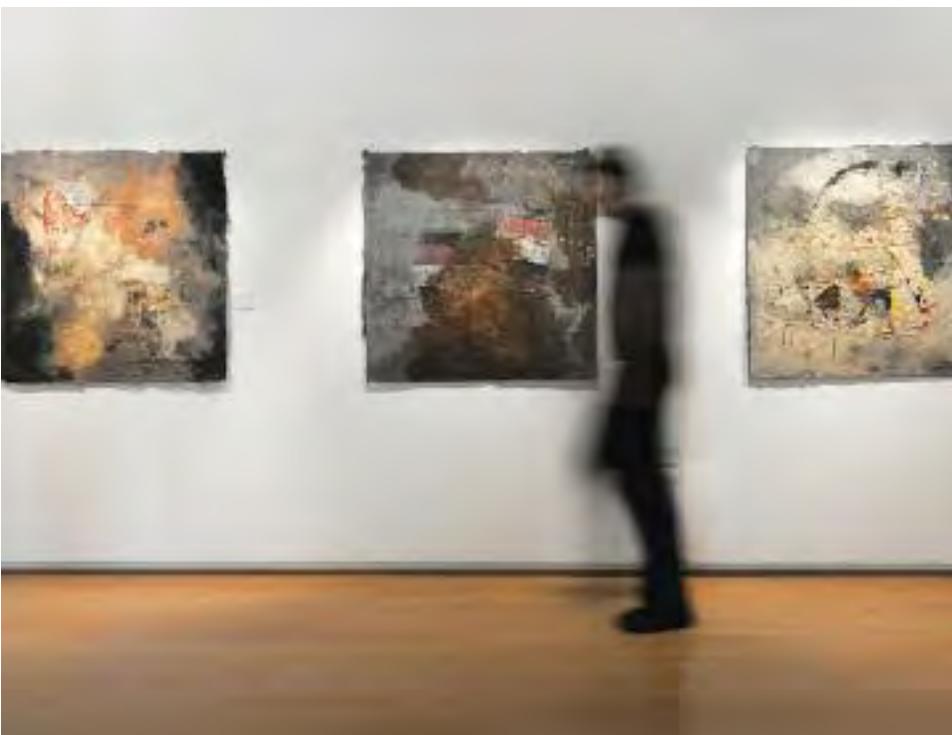
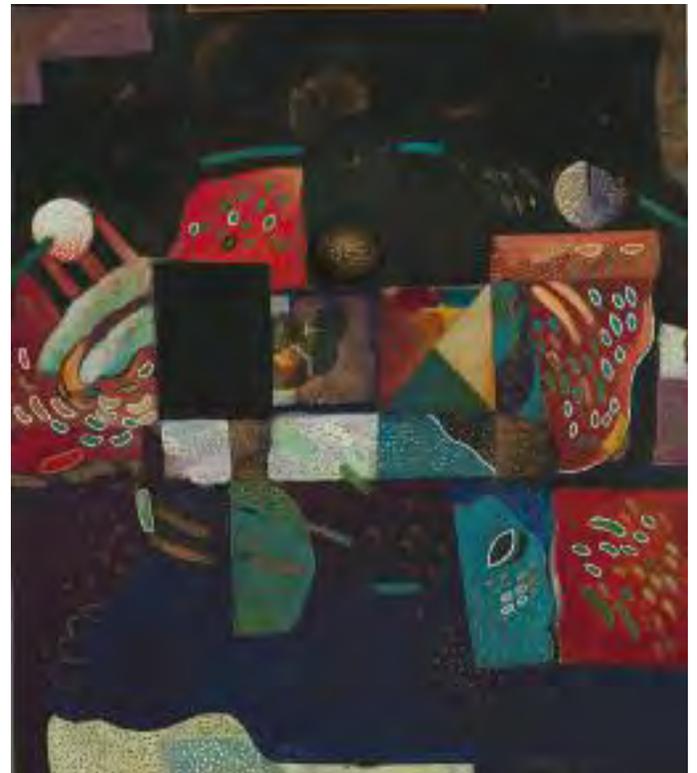
The gallery scene in Qatar, however, is still in its fledgling stages, with three-year-old al markhiya holding the torch as the city’s main art gallery. The space is nestled in the eclectic Souq Waqif, which has also hosted Al Jaidah’s Waqif Art Centre (which closed in 2009) and Dubai’s The Third Line gallery’s Doha-branch (2009–10), acting as something of an arts hub in this sense. “The art scene is a circle that contains museums, galleries, artists and art lovers,” explains Al Jaidah, “and there was a part of this circle missing – until the galleries opened in Waqif Art Centre there weren’t many dedicated spaces to show art and many important Qatari artists started off by exhibiting their work in hotels or what have you. I think the Centre, at least for a little while, played a humble role in completing this circle.” With the coming of Katara, a cultural village boasting exhibition halls, theatres and even an opera house, it remains to be seen where a gallery hub will develop, but the opening of Al Jaidah’s new Katara Art Centre within the village is promising.

al markhiya is active in encouraging younger artists through its *40 Minus* programme (which seeks out artists under the age of 40). “You have cities with



Names such as Yousef Ahmad, Ali Hassan, Faraj Daham and Salman Al Malik appear regularly in international auctions

long traditions in the arts and then there are places such as Qatar, where the arts catch on," says Al-nuweiri. "Because the government is such a strong supporter of the arts scene I think there are real possibilities here and I hope that the local population takes advantage of what the government has started doing. I do hope it encourages people to open up more galleries, foster a great interest in art and invest in it." □



TOP LEFT:
Holes,
Yousef Ahmad,
1999
Mixed media on
canvas

LEFT:
al markhiya, in the
Souq Waqif, is Doha's
main gallery and
exhibits contemporary
artists from Qatar, the
region and beyond

Mathaf has recently held an
exhibition commemorating
four decades of Qatari art.

ABOVE TOP:
Women and Space,
Salman Al Malik, 2001
Acrylic on canvas

BOTTOM:
Silent Image,
Faraj Daham, 1999
Mixed media on paper
Courtesy: Mathaf

Yousef Ahmad



The Natural Element

Celebrated painter Yousef Ahmad has unlocked the secret of making paper from the elements surrounding him, such as palm leaves. He shows through his art that the desert of his native Qatar is more alive and more inspiring than anyone would imagine



Talk of the Soul II, 2011
Handmade palm leaf paper floating
within a box frame 100 x 200 cm

“I have been an artist my whole life, but since I learned how to make my own paper I feel like I entered a new dimension,” says Yousef Ahmad, one of Qatar’s most renowned painters.

Standing in front of one of his latest works, a large canvas fabricated out of countless layers of hand-made paper from palm tree leaves, Ahmad is eager to explain a technique that took him a year of serious study to fully master. “For centuries paper making in China was a heavily guarded secret and it reached Europe only around the 14th century via the Silk Road,” he says. “It is a very complicated process to end up with this final product and I was lucky to discover this marvellous material that is palm leaves. It was right under my feet,” he continues, laughing.

Once dried for months under the scorching sun of the Qatari summer, the palm leaves are baked for eight hours in high-temperature ovens, giving life to an organic material that has replaced the traditional canvas in his artistic universe.

Going through the process of paper making, Ahmad speaks with the enthusiasm of a novice, even though he has been navigating Qatar’s artistic movements for decades. “Sometimes I find myself in bed counting the minutes till the sun finally rises, so that I can run down to my studio to paint,” he says.

Ahmad’s creative energy has translated into an impressive volume of work over the years, leading to several solo exhibitions and awards, in Qatar as well as abroad. His own private gallery in Doha is also a testimony of his creative drive, as paintings from his latest production cover every inch of the available walls and floor.

Hues of brown, grey and of course yellow as the sand from the surrounding desert, are the dominant colours of his work. “To a foreign eye all the countries in the Gulf may look the same, but in fact each one has its own peculiarities,” he explains. “The constant haze that fills the air in Qatar for example has been one of the main inspirations for my work and so are the sky, the sea and the desert. For me these elements contain huge and varied potential in their colours and characteristics.” →



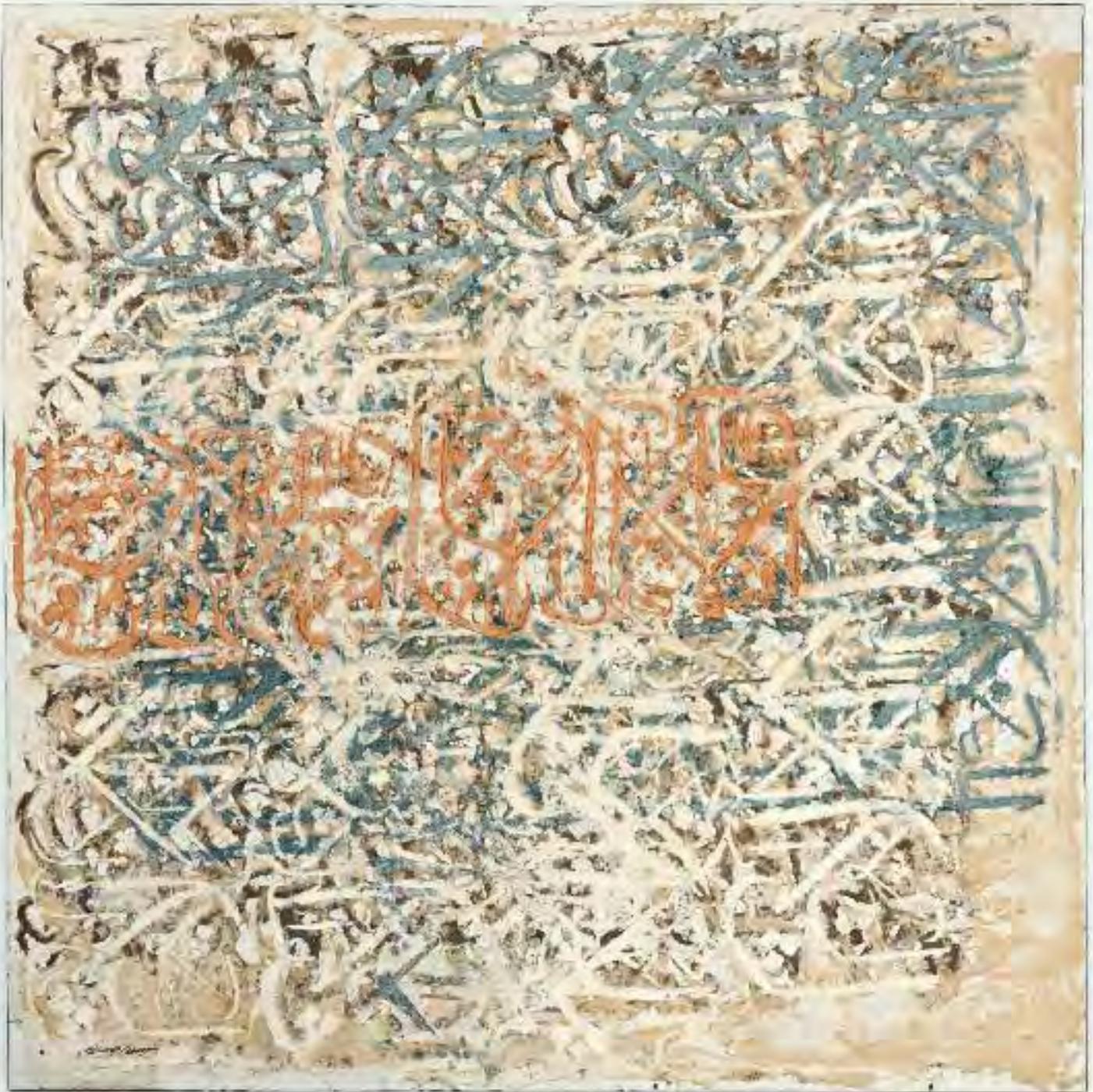
OVERLEAF, TOP:
Arabesque 1
2011
Handmade palm
leaf paper
200 x 100 cm

OVERLEAF, BOTTOM:
The Other
2008
Mixed media on
canvas
220 x 720 cm

BELOW:
*Language of the
Desert III*
2010
Handmade palm leaf
paper on canvas
175 x 175 cm

**Once dried for months
under the scorching sun of
the Qatari summer,
the palm leaves are baked
for eight hours in a
high-temperature oven**





→ Born in Doha in 1955, Ahmad grew up in Al Jessra, a quiet area of the capital, which then was nothing like the bustling metropolis that is Doha today. “Al Jessra neighbourhood – where I grew up – is a group of old mud bricks houses built one next to the other with open doors to the neighbours and no barriers or fences; therefore, the neighbourhood houses seem like a large house for one big family,” he writes on his website.

Clearly this sense of community life has marked his personality for good, as Ahmad communicates with innate openness to explain his art.

As a child Ahmad used the coal from his mother’s fireplace to draw on the house’s walls, or on empty bags of cloth. That spontaneity is still evident today in his most recent work, where classic calligraphy often takes an abstract turn, conveying deep-rooted features of Qatari culture in a contemporary form. “It’s like a work of composing and decomposing a symbol in countless possible ways to obtain the final result,” explains Ahmad, making the most of the unique flexibility of form in Arabic letters.

After his early start in Qatar, Ahmad obtained a Bachelor Degree in Arts and Edu-

cation from Helwan University in Cairo and he completed his Master Degree in Fine Arts from California University in 1982. In the US he was exposed to international art movements, a new world that put no obstacles to the representation of the human form. He also got acquainted with lithography and typography, which eventually motivated him to explore Arabic calligraphy in the following years. These experiences abroad, followed by several exhibitions in Washington and Baghdad, among other cities, contributed to the universal language of Ahmad’s work, but the decision to come

back to Qatar was never in question.

“During the 80s I started teaching at the College of Fine Arts in Qatar, and it was among the most enriching experiences in my artistic journey, as it gave me the chance to know many talented students,” he says. Among them was HE Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani, who became over the years one of the most active collectors and patrons of the arts in Qatar.

Doha is a city that has changed dramatically since Ahmad’s youth: skyscrapers have inexorably replaced traditional mud houses and the style of life associated to them. Living in vertical constructions though, has not changed his perception and Ahmad still looks for simple elements as an inspiration for his art, such as palm leaves or natural pigments used to reproduce the tonalities of the surrounding landscape.

“Painting for me is very similar to cooking,” he concludes, “you have to go down to buy your fresh products and mix them all up in the most creative way to put together a pleasant meal.”

Ahmad suddenly turns silent as he stares at the horizon from one of the windows of the gallery. A warm yellow light bounces off his face and it’s clear that the time has come for him to get back to work. □



OVERLEAF:
Untitled
2011

Handmade palm
leaf paper and
mixed media
on canvas
180 x 180 cm

RIGHT:

Hymns II
2009

Mixed media
on canvas
180 x 180 cm



**Ahmad's
experiences
abroad
contributed
to the
language of
his work, but
his eventual
return to
Qatar was
never in
question**

THE BEAUTY OF GUNPOWDER



Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang brings an exciting spontaneous element to the already exploding art sphere of Qatar with his gunpowder drawings. Featuring a series of new works created in front of an audience in Doha, Cai's exhibition is on display at Mathaf until May 2012

TEXT: RICHARD MURPHEY / PHOTOS: JORGE POZUELO *(unless otherwise stated)*

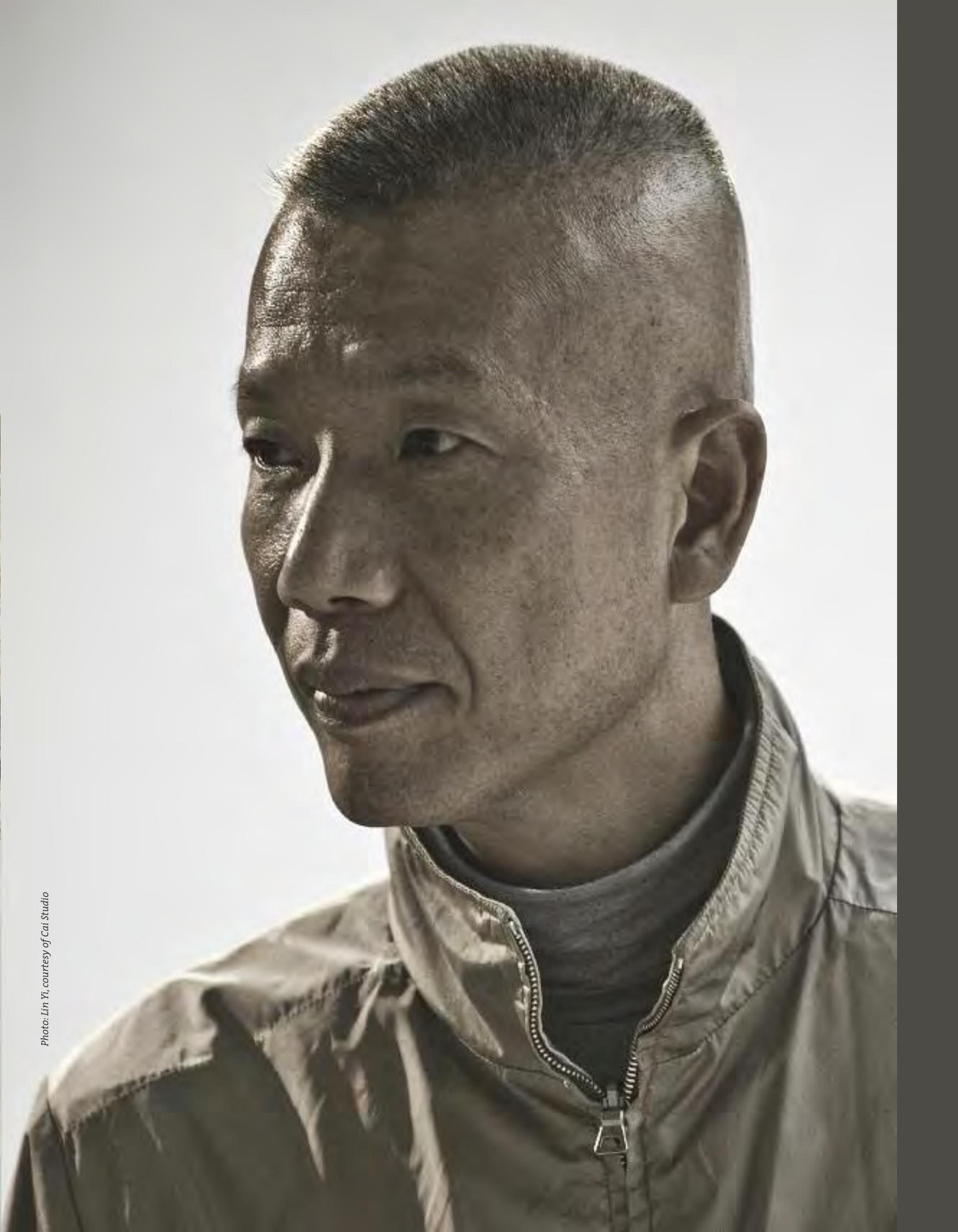


Photo: Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio



Photo: Lin Yi, courtesy of Cai Studio

If there is an artist who defies the idea of the lonely and troubled genius, only capable of creating in utter solitude, that would be Cai Guo-Qiang.

To participate in one of Cai's signature "explosion events", is in fact an exercise where everyone belongs to the creative process, from his assistants to the large group of local volunteers and the audience that surrounds it all.

This invisible channel of communication is exactly what Cai achieved during his

October gunpowder drawing making process in Doha, where he created a series of monumental works and an ambitious porcelain mural featuring 480 individual panels. Part of *Saraab* ("mirage"), his first solo exhibition in the Middle East, these works will be exhibited at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art from 5 December 2011 to 26 May 2012.

From the audience's perspective, what's most peculiar about Cai's approach is that he never seems to impart direct orders to the people around him. Armed with a wooden

→



Inspired by an image, Cai Guo Qiang lays down a large sheet of paper with the help of volunteers on which he creates the first drawing of the horses. The volunteers cut out the stencils from this drawing. Another sheet of Japanese paper is laid down and the stencils are placed on top. Cai mixes gunpowder and pigments and places them on the stencils. Finally he is ready to light the gunpowder. Fire gives way to smoke and the volunteers rush to put it out. Cai examines the final result



ABOVE:
Ninety-Nine Horses
2011
Gunpowder on
paper
400 x 1,800 cm
Photo by Hiro Ihara,
courtesy Cai Studio



→ stick that allows him to draw while towering over large sheets of paper stretched on the ground, for several days in Doha Cai floated imperceptibly over his work, surrounded by assistants who were able to turn his whispers and smiles into immediate action.

This apparently tranquil way of working conceals a carefully planned operation where Cai achieves dream-like landscapes and still life images with the help of stencils, layers of gunpowder and a final explosion that adds an unpredictable element to an otherwise controlled work of art.

But as many people in Doha were asking during the creation of these works, what is behind Cai's creative process and why the



use of gunpowder? “It is the uncontrollable aspect and the spontaneity of gunpowder which build anxiety and expectation,” says Cai, during a break from the making of *Ninety-Nine Horses*, the largest work produced during the sessions in Qatar. “The beauty and the effect gunpowder creates cannot be replaced,” Cai adds.

According to Cai, each country’s specific climate and landscape affects his final work in a unique way: “Because of the hot weather of the desert, here in Qatar I have noticed shades of yellow and brown which I had never observed before,” he says.

Cai was born in the city of Quanzhou, once China’s greatest port and considered the starting point of the Silk Road via the

sea. There he grew up surrounded by historical and cultural influences from faraway places, including the Arabian Gulf. “Art is about drawing the world that lives in your consciousness,” he says. “I learned that from my father, who was also a painter.”

In Qatar, Cai, whose work is constantly changing, was inspired by the ocean and the country’s heritage: “When I saw the ancient rock carvings still preserved in Qatar, they reminded me of the Islamic inscriptions on the Muslim tombstones of Quanzhou that date back to 1,000 years ago,” he says. “Essentially the exhibition in Mathaf is a way for me to contemplate my relationship with Arab culture.”

An artist who is difficult to define,

having explored mediums as different as drawing, painting, installations, video and performance, Cai will exhibit over one hundred different works in Mathaf, including 16 newly commissioned pieces, over 50 recent ones and 11 documentary videos.

Each blast of gunpowder ignited in Qatar has created a series of intricate images, blurring the line between destruction and construction. On the opening day of his exhibition, Cai will create a large-scale daytime “explosion event”, entitled *Black Ceremony*.

Bringing art outside traditional spaces has been one of Cai’s most interesting achievements and Doha will be part of a select list of cities that will have had the opportunity to see him creating “live”. ■



"In this photo you can see Doha rising out of the stones of the desert; this contrast is what I was looking for."

Maher Attar

THE FREEDOM OF LOMO



In the world of digital photography where images are consumed like fast food, Maher Attar shuns instant gratification in favour of Lomography, a technique that makes the most of inexpensively built cameras, expired films and the courage to click away with no control over the final result

"Here I captured these men stopping their car to look at the sea. What I liked about it was their capacity to just take in the moment."

TEXT: MARCO VENDITTI



“Don’t think, just shoot” is the motto proudly endorsed by a website on Lomography, an encouragement towards spontaneity at the cost of technical precision. However, contrary to what people may think, it takes more than pure chance to produce an interesting image using these old fashioned cameras. It requires instinct and confidence, attributes which perfectly fit Maher Attar’s attitude towards photography.

“Lomography, or simply Lomo, became a sort of buzzword in recent years, but not many people know exactly what it’s all about,” says Attar.

The name Lomo in fact derives from the former

state-run optic manufacturer LOMO PLC of Saint Petersburg, Russia, a company that in the 1980s created the enigmatic Lomo LC-A Compact Automat camera. This simple apparatus that offered virtually no manual controls, but produced quirky over saturated colours with vignettes that framed the shots, was picked up by two Austrian students in the 1990s, and turned into a worldwide phenomenon.

But what is it about Lomo that inspires photographers as seasoned as Attar? With nearly 30 years experience at international photo agencies and with his work exhibited at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, among other major international venues, Attar has an

“I had already taken a photo of the horse race with my panoramic camera and then I decided to shoot with the Lomo. I didn’t know what was going to come out.”



“I liked these boats lying there forgotten, close to the desert. It reminded me of how Qatar is made of the sea and of the desert.”

intriguing answer: “It’s the freedom of the medium and its capacity to create timeless images where past and present overlap each other.”

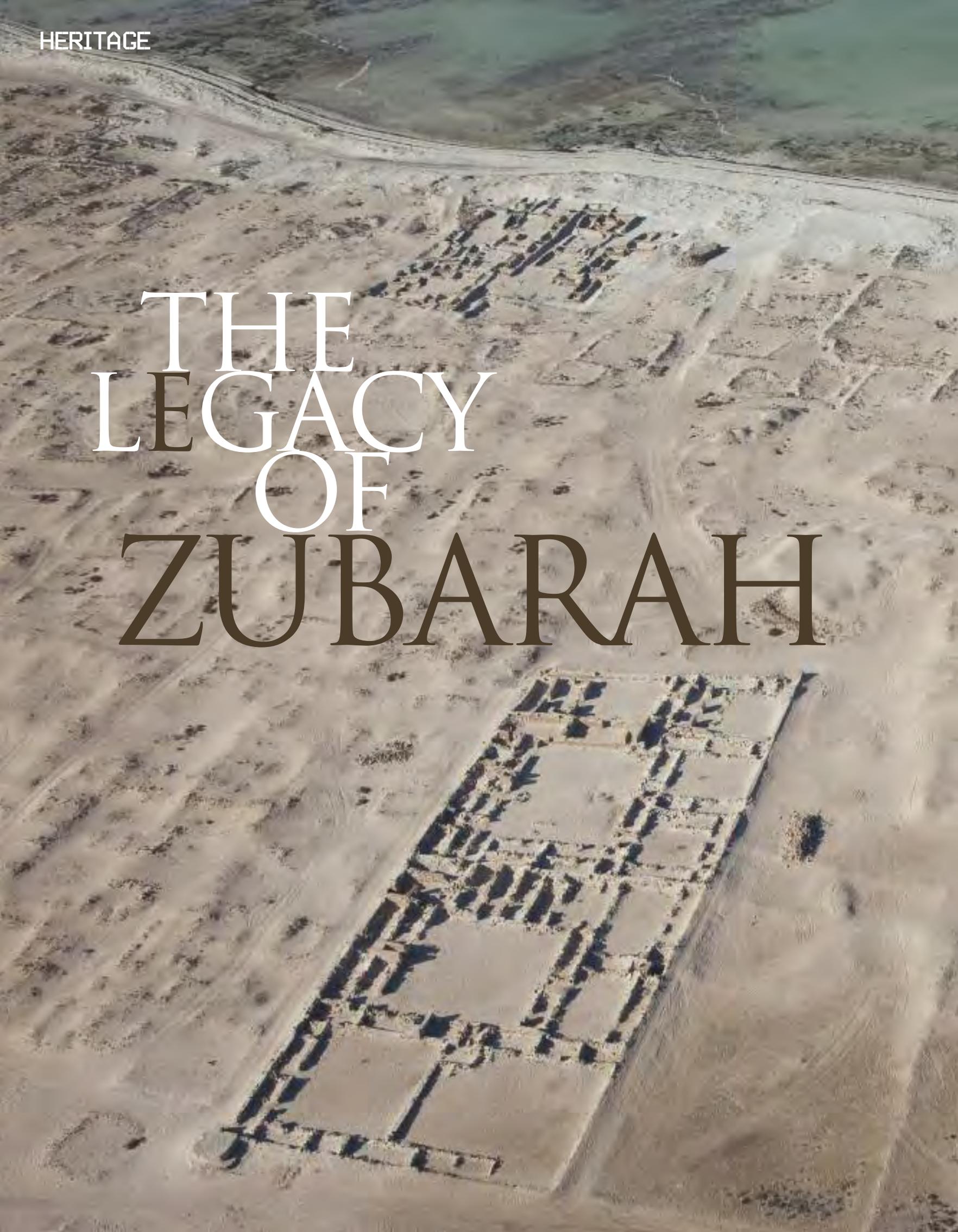
A native of Lebanon, Attar has resided in France since 1990 and has more recently been living in Doha, where apart from serving as the director of the photo library of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, he has been capturing the ever-changing landscape of Qatar and its people on film. Some of the resulting photographs have been shown in a book followed by an exhibition called ‘DOHArma’.

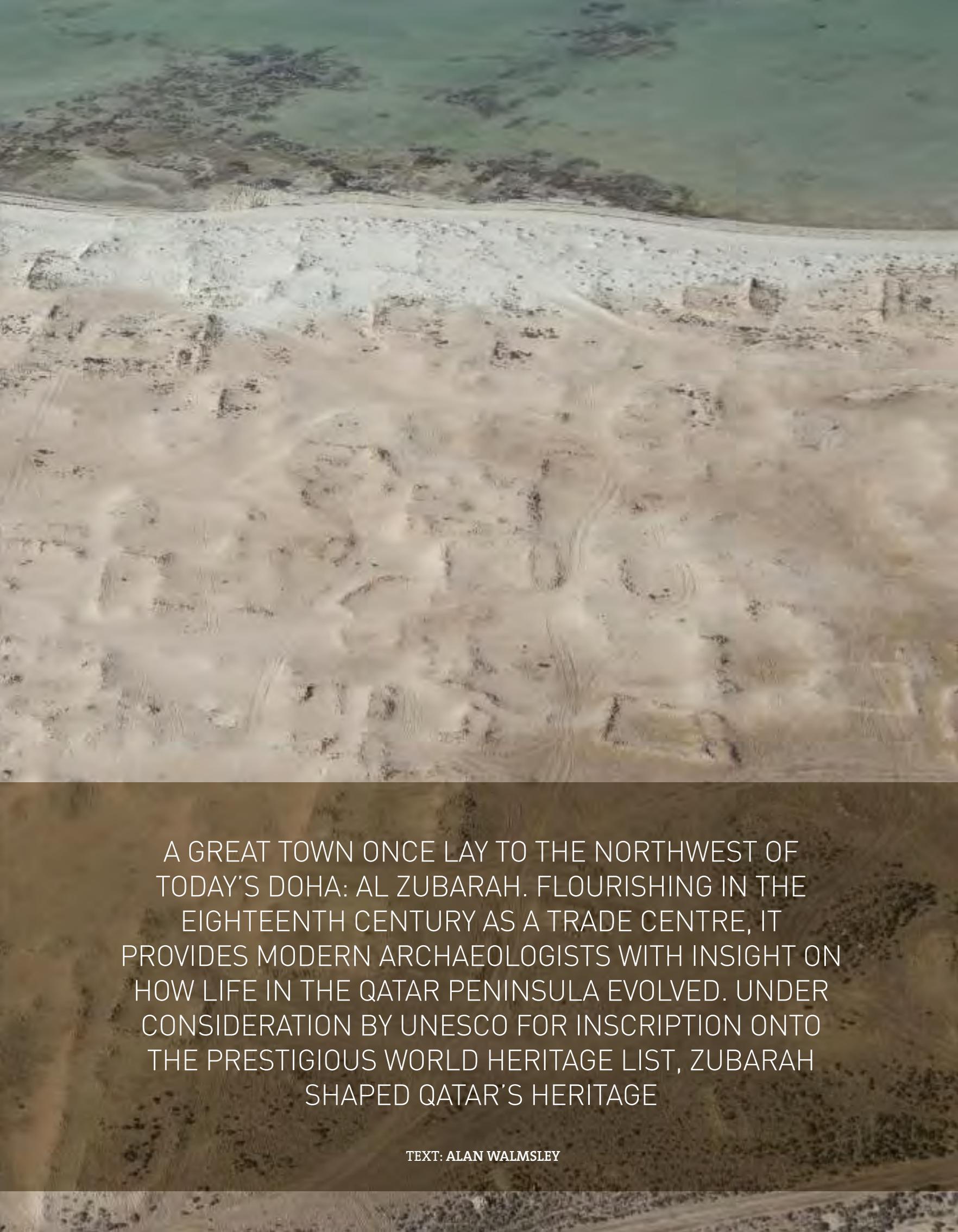
Since Attar feels he is living a cultural revolution in Qatar, he wanted to document his journey in the

country: “With Lomography I found the way of transmitting my idea of Qatar,” he says. “Lomo photography allowed me to create a sort of ‘fake past’ in the images. You photograph something modern but it looks like it’s history.” Attar describes it as a risky and “intellectual” type of photography. Part of the charm – or despair – of shooting Lomo photos is that the film needs to be sent away, in this case to Paris, to be developed. “You forget what you did, and then you discover it again,” says Attar. At times the result is a set of overexposed or underexposed images that cannot be used. But sometimes, as is shown in Attar’s Lomo photographs of Qatar, the result is art. ▣

HERITAGE

THE LEGACY OF ZUBARAH



An aerial photograph showing a wide, sandy beach in the foreground, transitioning into a shallow, turquoise sea. The water's color deepens as it extends into the distance. The beach is marked with some faint tracks and small, dark patches of vegetation or debris. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

A GREAT TOWN ONCE LAY TO THE NORTHWEST OF TODAY'S DOHA: AL ZUBARAH. FLOURISHING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AS A TRADE CENTRE, IT PROVIDES MODERN ARCHAEOLOGISTS WITH INSIGHT ON HOW LIFE IN THE QATAR PENINSULA EVOLVED. UNDER CONSIDERATION BY UNESCO FOR INSCRIPTION ONTO THE PRESTIGIOUS WORLD HERITAGE LIST, ZUBARAH SHAPED QATAR'S HERITAGE

TEXT: ALAN WALMSLEY

Before oil and gas, the seas around Qatar produced another prized resource greatly esteemed for its natural beauty and scarcity. This most-cherished commodity was the pearl, so desired that the silky, lustrous specimens from the Arabian Gulf fanned out to distant lands, reached only after weeks of difficult and dangerous travel over sea and land. There, in the royal courts and prestigious markets, the stunning pearls in tints of cream, cream rose, and gold ornamented jewellery and costume in flagrant social displays of extreme wealth and absolute power.

The insatiable demand for pearls brought ongoing wealth and influence to the Qatar Peninsula reaching, most recently, a decisive peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth century CE on the back of demand-driven high prices. Wishing to exert direct control over the prolific pearl beds around Qatar, and encouraged by the collapse of Safavid influence in the Gulf, tribal groups from Basra and Kuwait moved to the northwest coast of the Qatar Peninsula and there, on a rocky knoll overlooking the protected waters of an expansive bay, a new and shimmering town of stone walls coated with thick gypsum plaster was swiftly built. Covering an expansive area of over 60 hectares, this place – called Al Zubarah – was destined to shape Qatar’s history in the lead-up to the twentieth century.

Given its strategic location in the middle of the Gulf, and its economic domination of the pearl beds around the peninsula, Zubarah grew, prospered, and decisively changed Qatar’s place in history. This once



bypassed peninsula now engaged with, and greatly influenced, a wide-ranging cultural and economic network that reached out from Arabia to China and the Far East, the Indian subcontinent, Persia to the north, and westwards to East Africa, Turkey and Europe. For over half a century, Qatar played a leading role on the international stage and, in so doing, was brought into contact with the rapidly changing world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Zubarah was in fact the major commercial town on the Gulf from 1780 to 1811, and the main port of call for trading ships en route from Basra to India and Africa. This can be attributed to the movement of large numbers of Gulf traders and scholars who settled in the town, a fact which is known from manuscripts and letters drafted at the time. These scholars and traders formed a cultural and academic environment within Zubarah. Some people can trace their

Zubarah represents the only complete plan of an Arabian merchant town still extant, preserved under gently undulating mounds of building rubble and wind-blown sand



OVERLEAF TOP:
Geometric patterns in carved plaster are based on mathematical principles, central to Islamic scholarship
Photo: A. Pantos

OVERLEAF BOTTOM:
Aerial view of a courtyard building at Zubarah, with interconnecting rooms, a covered veranda and L-shaped entrance from the street to ensure privacy
Photo: A. Pantos

BELOW CENTRE:
Meticulous archaeological work is restoring Qatar's legacy as a merchant and trading hub
Photo: M. House

BELOW RIGHT:
Rooms facing out onto a courtyard in a palace, with a corner tower strengthened to support a small canon; *Madbasat* (date presses) for the production of date syrup are a common discovery in Zubarah
Photo: A. Pantos

names to Zubarah, and it is spoken of in British documents of the period and in a number of manuscripts including *Sabaik Al-Asjad* and *Luma Al-Shihab*.

Historical sources offer a chronological and political outline but provide next to no understanding of everyday life in Zubarah. Modern archaeology offers a proven alternative with which to approach the past, one where new evidence can be uncovered to reveal the now forgotten cultural norms of a time long gone, and the lives of the town's former inhabitants fleshed out in captivating detail.

There are many interesting and informative questions yet to be answered about Zubarah as it was two and a half centuries ago: levels of urban planning; architectural traditions and the division of space; the mosque and society; the symbolic role of the home; aesthetical appreciation; defence and armaments; resources, trade, and mercantilism; personal adornment and social presentation; food procurement and preparation; and waste disposal. From the lofty to the everyday, archaeological research can build up a full and detailed account of a largely forgotten way of life, thereby granting the people of Qatar, the region, and beyond, a visual and tangible encounter with an important cultural past. Two major initiatives of the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) will offer the perfect venues for this cultural experience: a new museum for the twenty-first century, the stunning National Museum of Qatar, designed by the celebrated architect Jean Nouvel; and the remarkably pristine

and deeply evocative archaeological site of Zubarah itself, currently under consideration by UNESCO for inscription onto the prestigious World Heritage List.

In a bold new project initiated by HE Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani (Chairperson) and HE Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed bin Ali Al Thani (Vice Chairman), the QMA has partnered with the University of Copenhagen to literally dig deep into Zubarah's past so as to reveal its numerous cultural treasures, tangible and intangible.

One important point stressed in the UNESCO nomination is the site's unique contribution to understanding the merchant and pearl trading tradition of the Arabian Gulf during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to its exceptional level of preservation. Zubarah represents the only complete plan of an Arabian merchant town still extant, preserving under gently undulating mounds of building rubble and wind-blown sand an exceptional arrangement of neighbourhoods, mosques, palaces, markets, and defensive systems, only explored in a preliminary way by archaeology. Between its 2.5 kilometre-long outer circuit wall on the east and the white-sanded beachfront on the bay, a network of streets were laid out in a radiating pattern to connect the beach to the wall, thereby creating building blocks further subdivided by cross-streets to produce an ordered town plan. Slotted into the resultant grid were the various public and private buildings that made up the living town of Zubarah, which in its heyday stretched some

→





→ 1.5 kilometres from north to south and 500 metres from east to west and may have supported a permanent population of 4,000-4,500 souls and, during the pearling season, a transient population of many more. Scholarship in the West has often dismissed Middle Eastern cities as historically unplanned and disorganised: Zubarah shows categorically how misinformed such interpretations are.

The exceptional level of planning that went into the creation of eighteenth century Zubarah, perhaps built over a considerably smaller settlement of an earlier date, can be further seen in the organisation of space around the walled town. Situated on a low coastal hillock, Zubarah lacked one of the most precious resources needed to sustain human life: fresh water. This was even more critical in a hot and arid

In all areas, the excavations have produced a rich assemblage of objects that capture in a deeply individual way the lives of the inhabitants at Zubarah



climate typical of Arabia. To exploit and control access to water, a fort and settlement called Murayr was built 1.8 kilometres east of Zubarah on the edge of the desert scarp, where wells could tap a shallow lens of fresh water that lay over the brackish, saline ground water of Qatar. Provisioning of the Murayr fort was facilitated by a long and broad sea canal, sliced with great effort through slippery mud flats and tough bedrock for some two kilometres inland, a remarkable testimony to the ingenuity, resourcefulness, and commitment of the town's inhabitants. To protect the land link between Zubarah and Murayr over boggy ground, two long screening walls with engaged towers were erected, which with the stout town walls of Zubarah reveal a constant concern about security, eventually an important factor in the eclipse of the town. Taken together, the walled town of Zubarah, the fort at Murayr, the conjoining screening walls, and the remarkable sea canal betray a high level of social organisation and communality at Zubarah, in which new settlers sought to negotiate between a harsh, arid, and unsustainable desert setting and the bountiful, yet always dangerous, possibilities of the sea. Fifty years of prosperity and more indicates their success at striking a deal that balanced environment and society.

OVERLEAF TOP:

Prayer hall of an old mosque with a multi-domed roof in a style typical at Zubarah. Earlier reconstructions of buildings presage the importance of the Zubarah archaeological site in its bid for UNESCO World Heritage listing

BOTTOM:

Objects from Zubarah offer insights into work and everyday life: A clay pipe bowl for tobacco smoking, a clay oil lamp and diving weights used in fishing for pearl molluscs

Photo: A. Pantos

BELOW:

A merchant's *dhow*, etched into the wall plaster of a room. The image reveals the intimate relationship of Zubarians with the economic potential of the sea

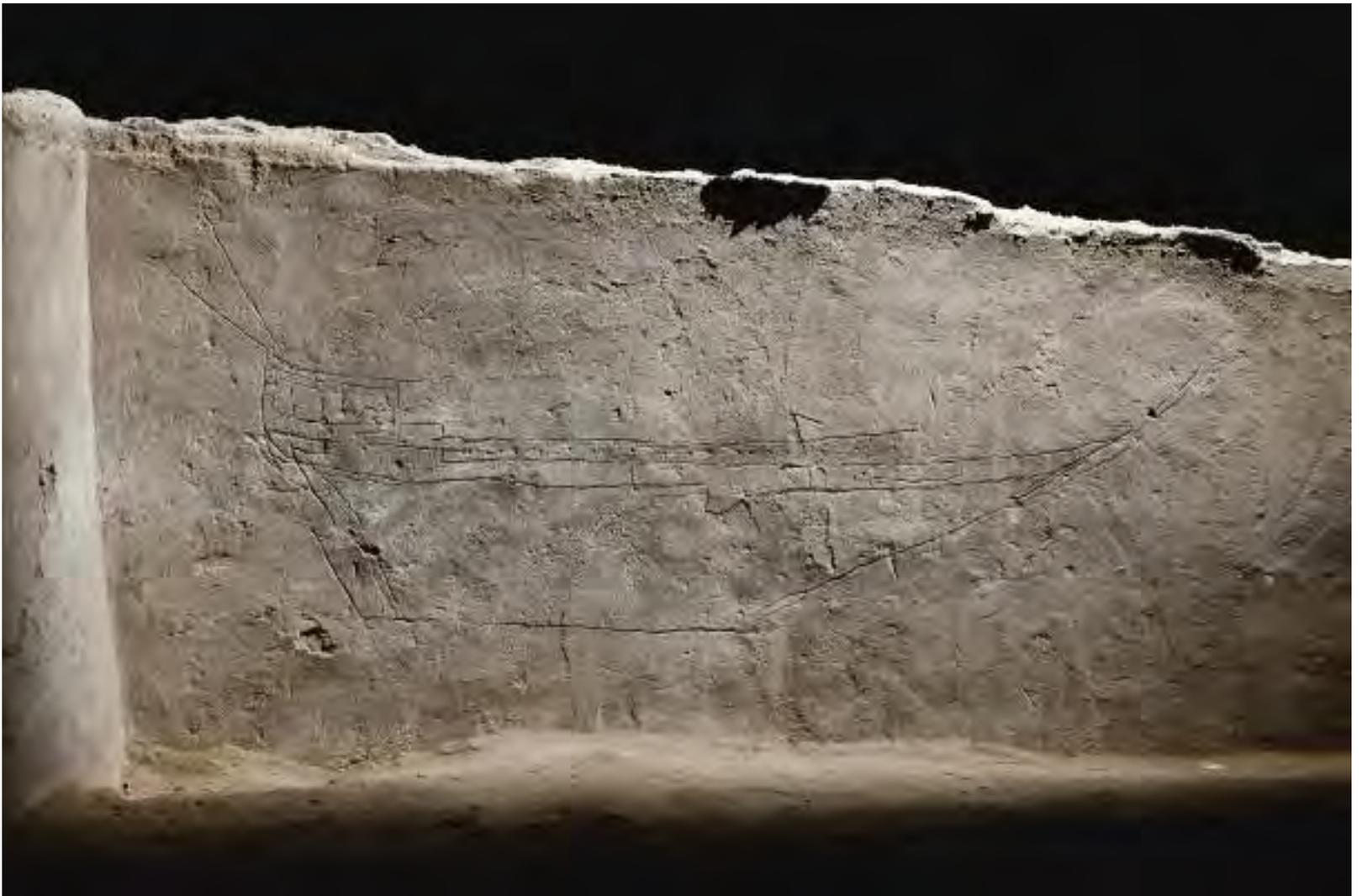
Photo: A. Pantos

Our task as archaeologists is to document and explain the symbiotic relationship that existed between people and their surroundings, a relationship that was created and sustained by social and cultural practices. At Zubarah, this is being done by undertaking excavations in a number of carefully selected areas, each chosen because of the answers to specific questions we hope they may provide. The work, while still in its infancy, has already vastly broadened our conceptualisation of daily life in eighteenth and nineteenth century Zubarah. To date, six targeted areas in different parts of the site have been chosen for opening up. From these, fresh insights have emerged on social and cultural conditions in Zubarah during and after its heyday.

Protection of the town – its people, resources and wealth – was a clear priority, and the 2.5 kilometre main circuit wall of Zubarah testifies to extraordinarily high levels of social planning, community organisation, and resource management. The mid-eighteenth century was politically fluid in the Gulf, and as Zubarah was vulnerable to attack by land and sea the provision of adequate defences was the concern of the whole community. For a long time it has been known that Zubarah had a second and smaller inner wall, also towered, which often was seen as belonging to a supposed original nucleus of the settlement. Detailed excavation during 2009 in one central area of the inner wall has revealed that, on the contrary, this wall was

put up directly over an earlier block of houses, demonstrating that a significant reduction in the size of the settlement occurred. The discovery of the thick destruction level characterised by burning and collapse in many excavated areas suggests that a historically-known attack on Zubarah in 1811, the culmination of many years of dispute over the town, may have been a major cause in the shrinkage of the site represented by the inner wall. Intriguing was the style of towers chosen: circular with an external spiral staircase (an architectural form stretching from eighth-century Iraq to twentieth-century Doha), seemingly more for observation and possible sniping than concerted defence.

Central to both the eighteenth and nineteenth-century settlements was the harbour beach front and, built right next to it, the main markets (or *souq*) of the town. The *souq* served a primary role in any town, as it was a place where commerce, politics, and social interaction all occurred. Excavations have revealed a wide range of activities, including the redistribution of commodities and artisanal enterprises. The floors of some shops were littered with potsherds in their hundreds, remnants of containers for goods sold in the market. These include local wares as well as ceramics imported from across the Gulf, such as pots from Khunj in Iran. Noticeable is the continuity of commercial activity in this one spot on either side of the 1811 attack, with the excavations revealing two →





LEFT:
Archaeologists have been able to find complete examples of ceramic objects, such as this large storage jar typical of many households
Photo: A. Pantos



BELOW LEFT:
Drawing a barnacled jar recovered from the sea near Zubarah.
Photo: A. Pantos/C. Hebron

RIGHT:
The sea formed an essential part of life in Zubarah

activity of hospitality could be carried out without compromising the privacy of the family. As an important entry point, the architectural features of both the entrance corridor and reception room was often elaborately adorned with carved gypsum in repeating abstract designs, a decorative regime of great age found throughout the region. The rooms facing out onto the internal courtyard served many functions. An *iwan* (columned recess) provided a shady resting area, one or more kitchens could be easily recognised through their superimposed *tannurs* and layered food waste, wind towers introduced cooling air into the building, and wash rooms to meet strict hygiene requirements, were standard features of each building. In one building, the thick gypsum plaster of an inner room was boldly engraved with a depiction of a sea-going *dhow*, the ship of the Arabian Gulf, of such realism and perfection that it bespeaks loudly the maritime life of building's inhabitants.

Zubarah contains two distinct palatial compounds, which are common urban structures in Gulf towns. The largest is situated on the southern edge of the town, and is defined by almost square perimeter walls of 110 by 100 metres with solid circular towers at each corner. The very solid nature of one excavated tower suggests they were topped with small cannons. Inside, covering an area of just over one hectare, the palace was subdivided into nine large rectangular courtyard units. Excavations since 2010 have uncovered the rooms around one of these courtyards. One room housed a well-preserved *madbasa*, a press used in the production of date syrup, while other rooms have been identified as kitchen and storage areas, as well as essential wash rooms. In a rare, direct, connection with past humanity, a footprint of a person was found beautifully preserved in the soft earth floor of a room. Back in the courtyard, the existence of staircases indicates that the building once supported a second storey, at least. The absolute size, lofty walls, cannon-

→building phases, one above the other, of shop rows facing out onto a street.

The 2009 plan of the site and subsequent excavations have revealed many details about positioning and layout of residential structures within distinct residential blocks created by the street system of the town. Each block, usually rectangular in shape, was made up of adjacent courtyard buildings in gypsum-coated stone, or groups of two or three larger complexes with multiple courtyards, which suggests close relations between block inhabitants along familial, clan or tribal lines. Many units appear to have combined domestic and commercial functions in one place. The relative unity of plan over a large area implies that many blocks were constructed in a single comprehensive development of the urban structure, and reveals an advanced degree of town planning and social cooperation in its execution. The excavation of individual courtyard units has thrown up enormous detail about life in the town. Rooms serving a variety of purposes were built around a central open courtyard, accessed by an entrance and corridor from the street. A reception room for guests was often located to one side of the corridor, with screens inhibiting accidental viewing into the private quarters of the building from the corridor. Hence the important social



Scholarship in the West has often dismissed Middle Eastern cities as historically unplanned and disorganised: Zubarah shows categorically how misinformed such interpretations are

equipped towers, and dominant position of the palace in the urban landscape would have spoken decisively of the owner's status in Zubaran society, revealing the existence of a clear social stratification accommodated within an overarching tribal order.

A further clue as to the elevated social status of the occupants of the palace building came from the excavation of a rubbish heap, or midden, dumped outside the south wall of the building. The midden at the palace turned up many of the expected finds: a vast array of broken pottery and porcelains, discarded metal fittings, broken glass vessels and above all numerous coloured bracelets and anklets, bones from meals of sheep, goat, birds, and fish – but also the unusual: evidence for hunted game specifically gazelle, often seen as indicative of princely behaviour built around extended leisure time, the chase, and communal feasting. In this light the high position held – or at least aspired to – by the inhabitants of the south palatial compound finds confirmation in the garbage they discarded outside the compound wall.

In all areas, the excavations have produced a rich assemblage of objects that capture in a deeply individual way the lives of the inhabitants at Zubarah. Of

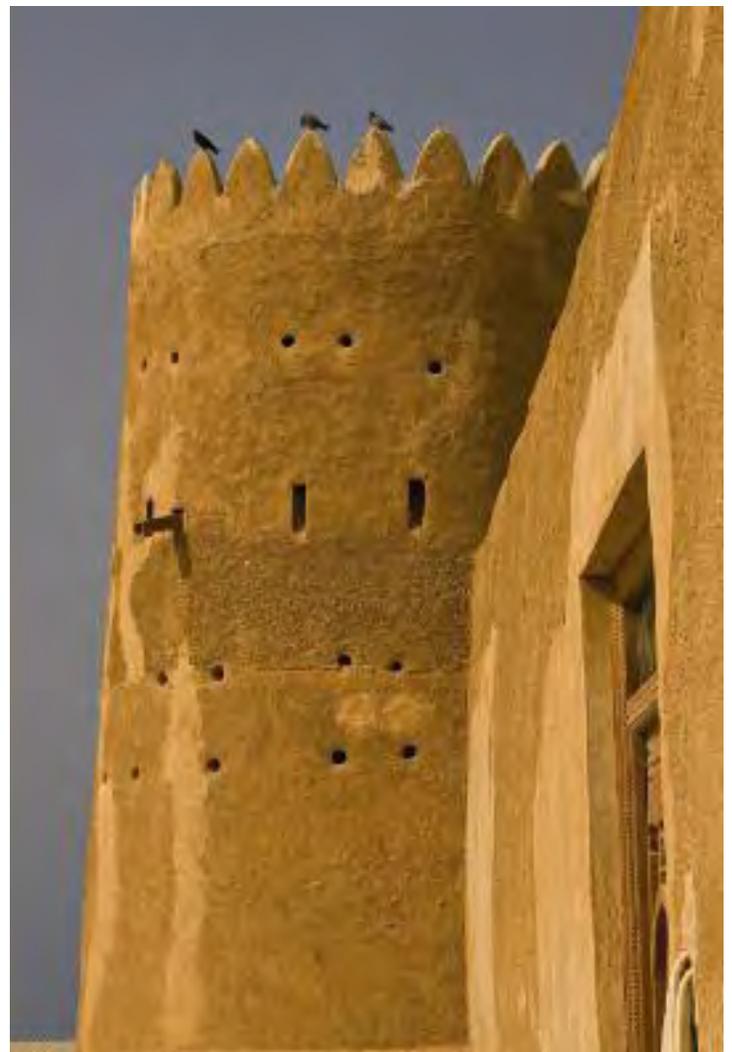
BELOW:
Although in time replaced by Doha as the chief town of Qatar, Zubarah's relevance has never ceased, as exemplified by the iconic Zubarah Fort on the desert scarp overlooking the town, constructed in 1938 by HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Qassim Al Thani



particular note was the discovery of ten intact diving weights and pieces of others in a room of a courtyard building near the *souq*. Made from a heavy, dark stone, the weights were teardrop in shape with a bored hole – to take the diving rope – at the tapered end. These weights accelerated the dive of the pearl fishers, who could then discard the weight for a quick return to the surface with the harvested molluscs. The weight, however, was too valuable to be left on the sea floor so, by way of a rope tied through the hole, the boat crew could pull up the diver's aid for use again and again. The many ceramic pieces recovered by the excavations express the wide reach of Zubarah's trade and cultural activities. Most of the coarse, everyday wares used for cooking and storage are locally or regionally sourced, but more appealing are the fine (and not-so-fine) porcelains arriving from places as far away as China and Japan, notably the eighteenth-century blue-and-white ware; European (especially Dutch) transfer-decorated 'china', mostly later nineteenth to

early twentieth century in date; and various Iranian glazed wares and imitations. Also revealing is the appearance of ceramic tobacco pipe bowls by the nineteenth century, indicative of the growing – although not total – social acceptance of smoking in the Gulf and Iran at that time.

Concealed by mounds of sand and rubble, Zubarah is finally beginning to reveal a hidden cultural past. The unfolding story from the trowel of the archaeologist is one that tells of local endeavour on a large scale and an outlook that spanned continents. Yet this work is only the beginning of a much more ambitious cultural journey: to bring to the people of Qatar, the region, and the world a fresh, relevant, and dynamic engagement with the past through eye-catching museum displays and an innovative visitor experience to a world-class cultural site. In the wake of the archaeological work comes the responsibility of protecting, conserving, presenting, and managing the cultural heritage of a historic site. Once dug, the exposed buildings of Zubarah require preservation in compliance with strict guidelines, while the whole site is to be made accessible and understandable to the visitor through a comprehensive management plan, involving a visitors' centre, walkways, points of interest, and cutting-edge information technologies. For the formative cultural traditions of Zubarah in Qatar are not only for discovering, but also for broadcasting widely to a world audience. ■



SAILING THE SEAS



This November Doha saw traditional sailboats, or *dhow*s, gracefully crossing its waters in what seemed like a vision from the past. The *First Traditional Dhow Exhibition* held at Katara showcased the importance of the sea to the lives of Qatar's people

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MARCO VENDITTI (*unless otherwise stated*)

If a single item had to be chosen to represent the history of Qatar and the Gulf region, it might just be a dhow. Not only have these vessels been the traditional form of transportation across the shores of the Arabian Gulf for the last 13 centuries, they have also provided the livelihood of its people as well.

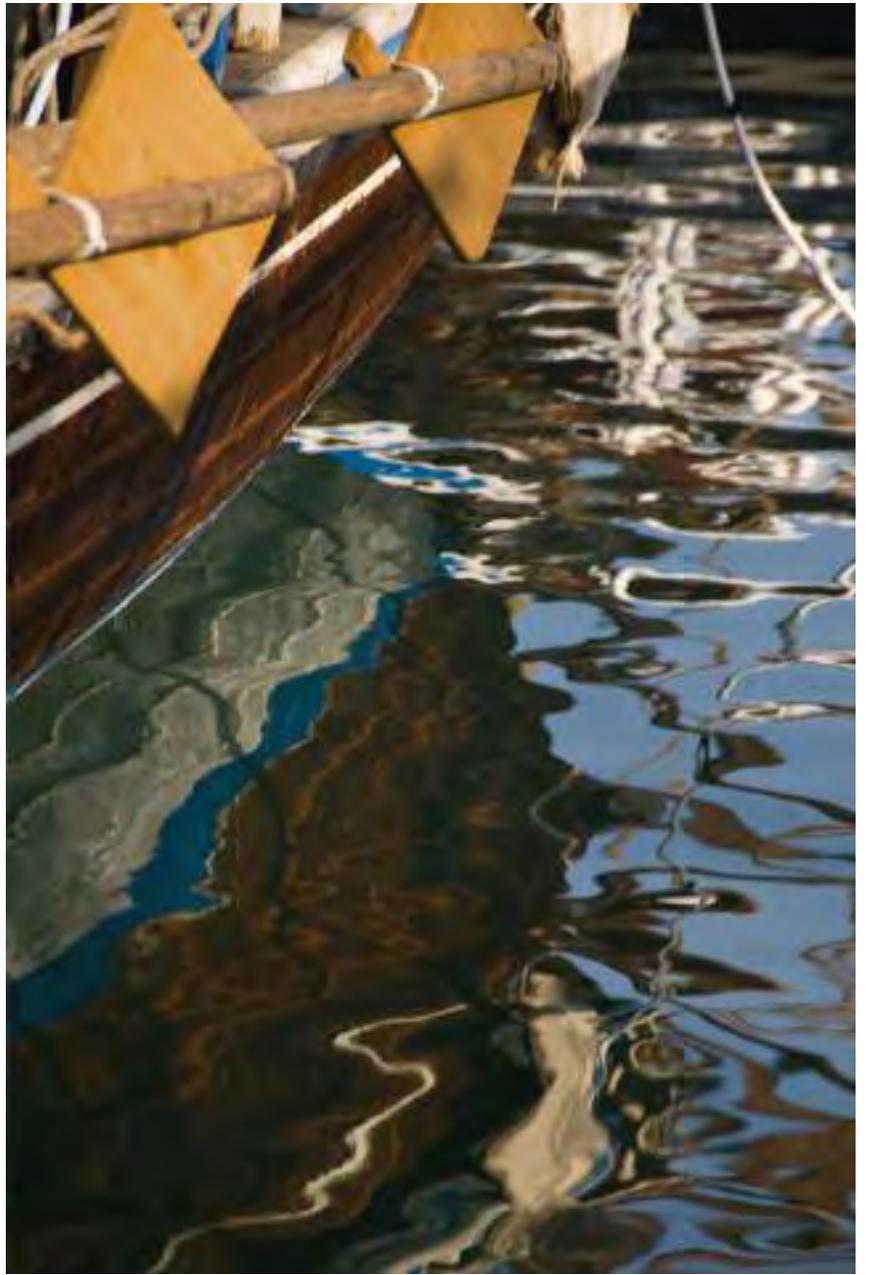
Using the wind as their only means of propulsion, dhows sailed south with the monsoon in winter, reaching India and East Africa with their cargo of pearls and dates, and back again to the Arabian peninsula in early summer. These voyages that could easily last several months brought back

not only the much needed timber, rice and tea, but also tales and legends that became the raw material for literature, songs and traditional dances across the region.

In fact, less than two generations ago, nearly every family in the Gulf had a stake in sea life either as shipbuilders, sailors, merchants or pearl divers.

This fascination with a maritime past was on display during the *First Traditional Dhow Exhibition* held at Katara this past November. As many as 60 types of traditional dhows, some as old as 120 years, were brought to the shores of Katara hailing from Qatar and other nations of the Gulf. The event →

Photo: Hanadi Al Mutawaa





→ was completed with a real diving competition for pearls and educational activities that appealed to children and grownups, such as the sale of books and lectures on marine life in the Gulf, as well as concerts and dances.

“The traditional dhow exhibition contributed to Katara’s long term vision to educate, entertain and demonstrate the importance of cultural exchange,” said Abdulrahman Al Khulaifi, President of Katara, who saw the event as a great opportunity to promote Qatari history while sharing the country’s legacy with the younger generation.

Although the beaches of Katara are now surrounded by high-rise buildings, when the traditional dhows entered the bay with their sails up against the blue sky, it wasn’t difficult to imagine the not-so-distant past of Qatar.

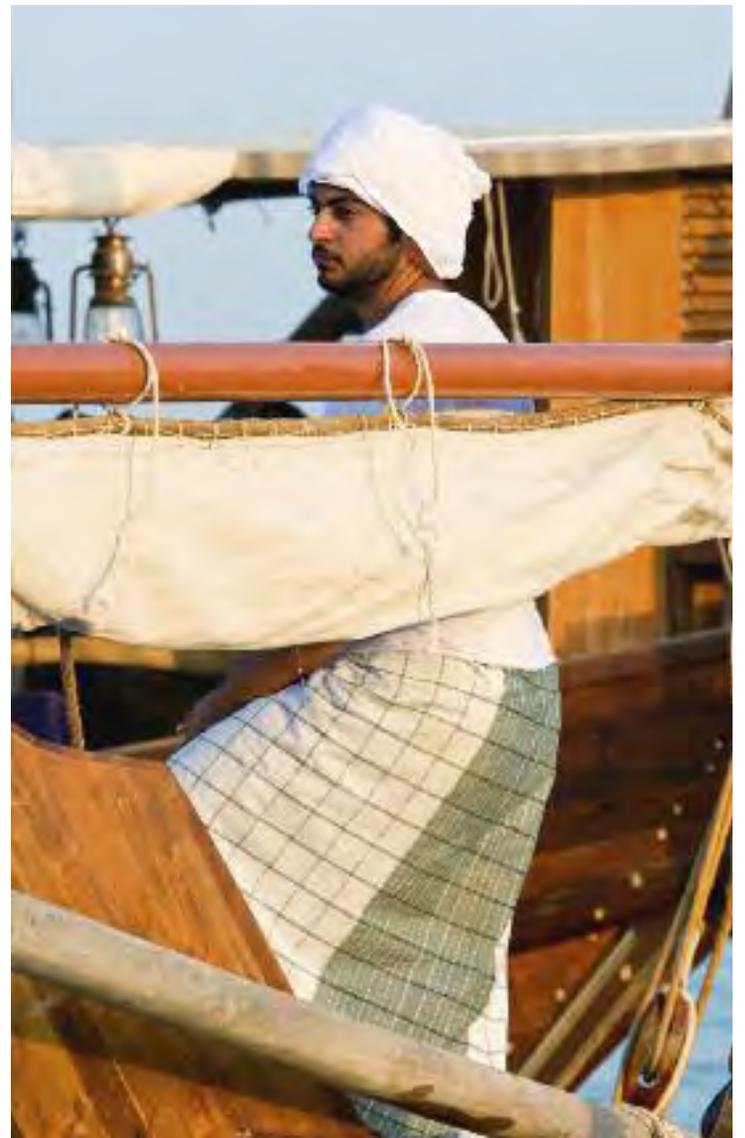
As the seamen stepped off their dhows onto the sand, women and children greeted them with dances, songs and games, just as their ancestors were welcomed back from a long journey.

The ease and joy with which the exhibition was performed made it clear that the sea helped define the people of the Gulf, and that this link is still alive today under the layers of modernity of their great cities. ▣





The *dhow*s made their way to the beach at Katara, where women and children awaited the sailors and greeted them with music and dancing, as they would have greeted their ancestors in the past





THE SIXTH SET

Gérard Ruffin's portraits of tennis superstars catch them in their most unguarded moments at post-match press conferences

TEXT: VICTORIA SCOTT

Professional tennis players know that a match isn't over once the final point has been called. Once they've acknowledged the spectators and lugged their kit back to the dressing room, they have another battle ahead: the post-match press conference. It's an event that can generate its own drama. Those present at Rafael Nadal's press conference at the US Open this year will never forget the moment he collapsed in pain in front of the world's media, for example.

It is this chance to see tennis' biggest stars at potentially their most vulnerable that has drawn French photographer Gérard Ruffin to shoot what he calls the "sixth set", a player's compulsory encounter with the media. His series of portraits, both in colour and in blown-up black and white contact sheets, show a different close-up of the top players of the world. "I



ABOVE LEFT:
Caroline Wozniacki

ABOVE RIGHT:
Roger Federer

BELOW:
Self portrait of
G rard Ruffin



wanted to shoot something closer to the work of the old portrait masters, and often expressionless,” says Ruffin.

The images first went on display to the public as *The Sixth Set* at the Roland Garros museum in 2007, and later at the Hotel De Ville in Paris. Now, there are plans to bring them to Doha, to be exhibited at Katara.

Ruffin’s career has followed an unconventional path. Although photography caught his imagination at an early age, he chose to study physics at university, not art. His first job was with the French car manufacturer Citro n, working for a new team carrying out the company’s first crash tests. Even there he pursued photography, using high-speed cameras to examine metal distortion on damaged vehicles. Whilst continuing with his day job, Ruffin’s passion for rock music led him to take his camera along to concerts in the evening, some of which he sold to record companies and maga-

zines. Buoyed up by his success, he eventually resigned from Citro n and became a partner in a graphic design studio. His career since has largely been in the advertising industry, working for such giants as Renault, Volkswagen, IBM and Mars. He has also branched out into making television commercials and documentaries.

The Sixth Set taps into Qatar’s sporting zeitgeist. Doha of course plays hosts to the Qatar Open, an annual event that attracts some of the biggest names in tennis, and this exhibition is a chance to see some of these sporting giants immortalised on photographic paper. The collection includes superstars like Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer, Caroline Wozniacki, Novak Djokovic, Petra Kvitov  and Serena Williams, all battling with tricky questions in the press debrief. For those fascinated by tennis superstars both on and off the court, the exhibition will be a hot ticket. ■

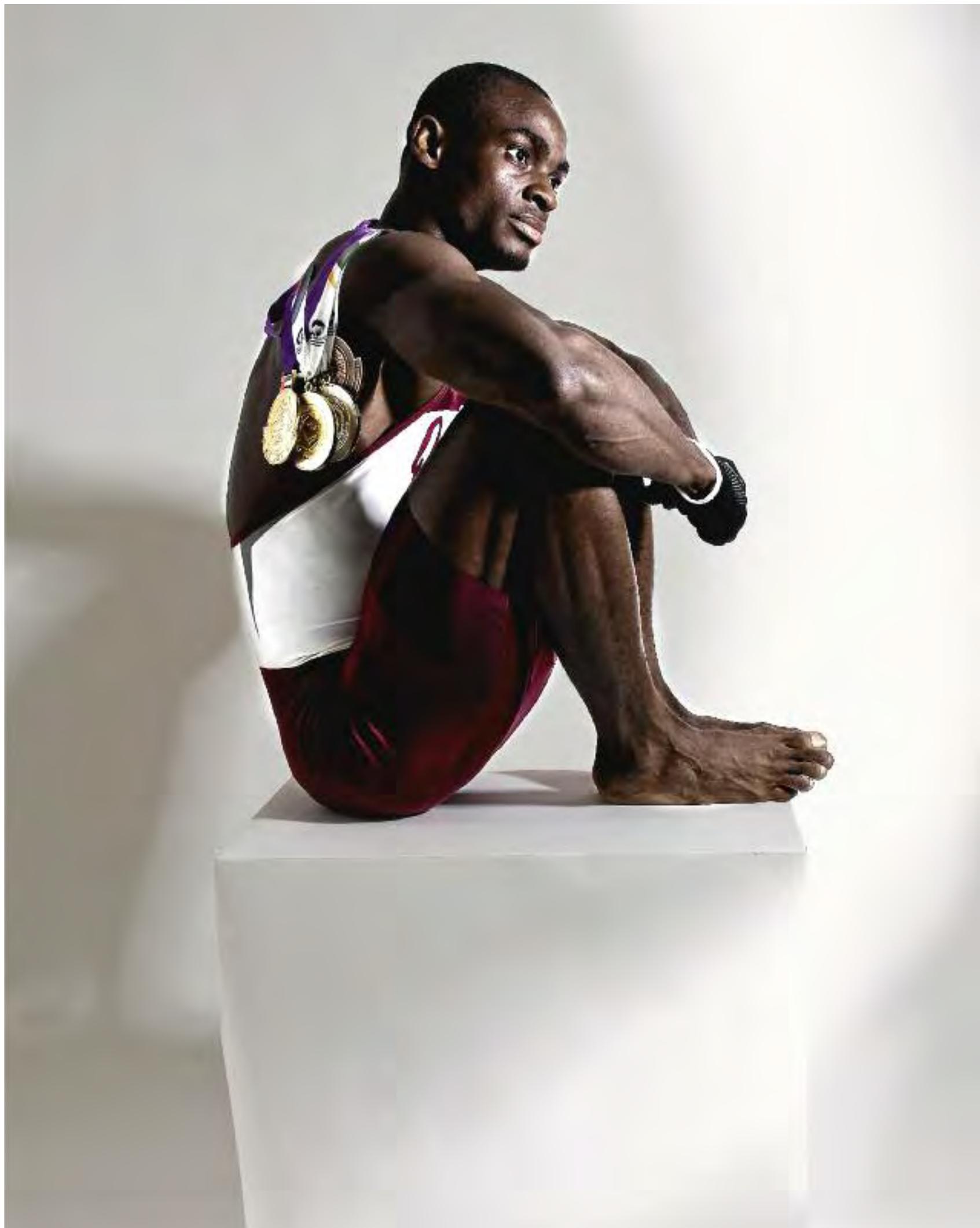


CHAMPIONS



The rising stars of the sports world in Qatar are going straight for gold

TEXT: MARCO VENDITTI
PHOTOS: JORGE POZUELO AND MARCO VENDITTI



FEMI OGUNODE

or the “the flying bird” as he is known in Qatar, is one of the fastest men on earth and the second athlete to have won two gold medals in the 200m and 400m dashes at the Asian Games.

That happened in Guangzhou, China, in 2010, but Ogunode is looking way beyond that already.

“I want to become a legend,” he says, “and Qatar is the best place to achieve precisely that, especially in my field.”

Born in Nigeria in 1991, Ogunode moved to Qatar in 2009 and since then he has been wearing the colours of his adoptive nation. “My father was a boxer and my mother a track and field athlete,” he says, “so I had no choice but to become an athlete myself.”

A versatile sprinter, Ogunode has a personal record of 10:07 seconds in the 100m dash; 20:30 in the 200m and 45:12 in the 400m.

“I give the best of myself in the last 50 metres of every competition,” says Ogunode; so in case you see him taking his time at the starting block, don’t take for granted that he won’t arrive first.

F A S T

HIGH

MUTAZ ESSA BARSHIM

“My best attribute?” Definitely my mental strength,” says high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim.

Although this may sound odd coming from a 20-year-old athlete, concentration and self esteem are what it takes to succeed in a discipline where every centimetre upward means a world of preparation.

“Perhaps I had to sacrifice some of the fun that an average teenager enjoys growing up,” he says, “but the happiness of having set a personal record and one for my country compensates for years of hard work”.

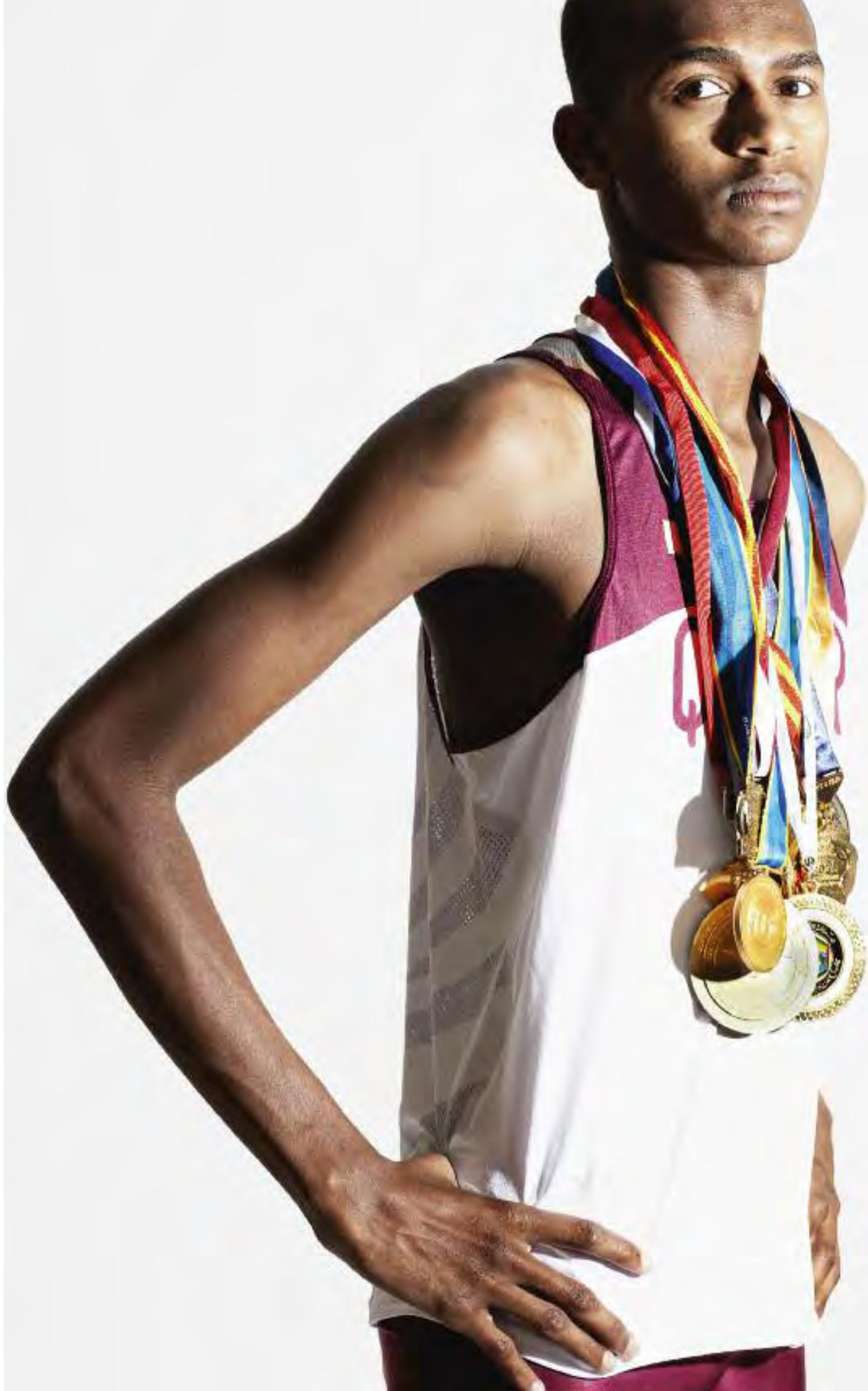
Born in Qatar to a Sudanese family, Barshim won

the 2010 World Junior Championships in Mocton, Canada, and he hit prominence on the international stage at the 2011 Asian Athletics Championship in Kobe, Japan, where he won the gold medal and set a new record for the event at 2.35 metres.

“I have trained many champions during my career,” says Barshim’s coach Stanislaw Szczykba, “but none had his talent. He is like a pure uncut diamond and I have no doubt that one day he will be a world record holder.”

A few centimetres more will mean a lot of concentration and hard work for Barshim ahead of the next Olympic Games in London, but Qatar may well be nurturing its first homegrown athlete on the way to Olympic gold.







ASHRAF AND AHMED ELSEIFY

STRONG

10/10/10 is the date when Ashraf Elseify met Russian coach Alexei Malucov, but it is also the score he gets on strength, agility and coordination, the essential characteristics for the hard discipline of hammer throwing.

“I have never seen a talent as pure as Ashraf,” says Malucov, “he has all it takes to become a number one, including the mental strength and determination that define champions.”

Born in Cairo, Egypt, and now a Qatari citizen, 17-year-old Ashraf holds in fact the world youth record, with a toss of 85.26m, using a hammer that is slightly lighter than the senior competition weight.

“When I saw Ashraf throwing for the first time in 2010, I had no doubt that in one year he would be reaching the 80m mark, but he has even exceeded my expectations, going well beyond that,” says Malucov.

Talent obviously runs in the family as Ashraf’s younger brother, Ahmed, is also in line for great achievements. At 16, his record is only a few metres behind Ashraf’s, and together they are among the most promising young Qatari athletes set to take to the world by storm.

Armed with paint

TEXT AND PHOTO: SUZEEINTHECITY

There's something universal about street art that transcends borders and languages. Regardless of where it's made, graffiti is always the same – a raw art form free from rules or boundaries, fluid in its ability to appear on any space: walls, pavements, street lamps, buses or chairs. Often made at night anonymously at the risk of getting caught and arrested, graffiti thrives on adrenaline, but it only survives by being seen and causing a reaction.

Western graffiti has long been an essential component of urban pop culture and is often closely tied to the hip-hop or video gaming culture, with many artists like Banksy, Blek Le Rat and Shepard Fairey gaining international fame and inspiring thousands of imitators as well as trends in fashion, advertising and music videos.

Here in the Arab world, street art has recently flourished, gaining its own identity in the midst of the uprisings this year.

Although street art did exist in Arab cities like Beirut and Cairo before the revolutions, the scene was always underground, inconspicuous and made by a small circle of anonymous artists. When the January 25th revolution broke out in Egypt's cities, protesters took to the streets – and graffiti artists took to the walls. Since then, the graffiti scene has been closely tied to the country's political sphere: Cairo graffiti is often a mouthpiece used to react to the Egyptian authorities or to make social commentary, but it has also become a form of commemoration.

Moved by the fact that over 700 Egyptians had died during the revolution, Egyptian graphic artist Ganzeer launched a project through which walls around Cairo would be made into murals dedicated to the memory of each of the Egyptian martyrs. Through this street art, their faces would be seen by everyone, and remembered. So far, three murals have been made, and though the project is currently on hold, Ganzeer is content with the possibility that this endeavour may take years to be completed.

This act of commemoration was equally reflected in Tunisia, where Franco-Algerian graffiti artist Zoo Project went to honour the hundreds of people who had died during the recent revolution: the artist painted murals as well as forty life-sized, cut-out figures of the dead, which he placed on the main streets and sidewalks of Tunis. Pedestrians walked past the figures, mingled with them, stood by them, inadvertently bringing them back to life, blurring the line between reality and graffiti.

In Libya, a country till recently repressed under the cruel Gaddafi regime, the walls of Benghazi, Tripoli, and many other liberated cities are bursting with words and colour since the fall of the regime. Once confined to displaying Gaddafi propaganda, now most walls are filled with graffiti condemning or mocking the country's despot, acts that were once unthinkable. Yet other walls have murals of hope, pride and fierce love for the new Libya. This graffiti may be amateurish and basic compared to sophisticated Western

graffiti, but it is unprecedented to see the walls of Libya transformed into a free public art space.

Arab street art has very much been a mirror reflection of the revolutions: reading the walls of Cairo, Tunis, Benghazi and Tripoli is like reading the minds and messages of the people. But that doesn't mean that street art is only protest graffiti.

Many Egyptian graffiti artists prefer



It is presumed that a student at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo made this mural, which interprets the revolution through various symbols. In the centre, *r7ya* spells *horreya*, or "freedom". This mural was recently painted over

to remain anonymous, hiding behind enigmatic, almost cartoon-like alter-egos. Keizer, one of the most prolific artists on the scene, hides behind a hoodie and his stencilled signature. Sad Panda feels uncomfortable with the limelight, preferring the focus to be on his stencils of forlorn, solitary pandas and the political and social commentary they make.

To many Egyptian artists, it's the graffiti that matters, not the artist behind it. And even if their artwork is painted over – which is usually the case with graffiti around the world; even Banksy's most famous artworks haven't been spared – the artists keep coming back. Graffiti is a reactionary art form; there is no way of preventing it from proliferating. Even if you paint over graffiti, you've just created a fresh new wall, a whole new canvas for another artist to paint on. And that's the beauty of it. ▣



PRVA

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AT THE HEART OF CIVILISATION

