

Unveiling Artists: Saudi Female Artists Life Stories

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إهداء لوالديّ، نورة وإبراهيم، وإبني فارس.

Dedicated to my parents, Norah and Ibrahim, and my son Faris.

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Abstract

This study tells the life stories of four Saudi female artists. Using life story narrative approach, I focused on the following research questions: How are Saudi female artists fulfilling their aspirations as artists in the conservative Saudi society? What are the common and divergent themes in the life stories of the Saudi women artists, namely Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan? The artists were interviewed using open-ended questions and asked to discuss their artwork. The postmodern feminism and social construction theories were used to understand their life experiences and how they came to be “successful artists” in the conservative Saudi society. The findings showed that family and formal education played an important role in these women’s life journeys as artists. The Saudi society was also a major influence, sometimes supporting them, at other times obstructing them. These artists share many personality features such as being persistent, believing in themselves, taking risks, facing challenges, being independent, being responsible as artists and as part of society, and being honest in their artwork. This study contributes to the art education curriculum in Saudi schools and universities. Globally, it contributes to women’s studies and to social and cultural studies in shedding light on the Saudi society, especially as it is experienced by women.

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Chapter One

An Introduction

When circumstances ready us for change, we turn to others who have lived through one, become open to new trends and new ways of looking at ourselves in the world. (Bruner, 2002, p. 84)

Research has for me always been about finding answers to questions about how things work, about how and why issues develop—and then benefitting as many people as possible with the answers. Creswell (2002) defined research as “a process of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue” (p. 3). I have always understood research to be a process that gives us a new view of the world around us, but I never thought it would also give me a new view of myself. Before conducting this research, I thought I had always known myself and what I wanted very well. However, this study changed not only my views of the world, but it opened my eyes and made me realize things I never knew about myself.

When a person moves through life, there is no manual to follow on how to live life at each stage. Some people follow the steps of others around them as these offer a familiar path; some simply let life’s circumstances take them to the next stage; others still have particular dreams that they pursue. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail” (as cited in Nguyen, 2015,

p. 349). Ambition can make people, instead of surrendering to life and its circumstances, create new paths and struggle until they reach their dreams. As the reader will see, these are the issues, I have explored in this thesis, thus creating its purpose.

Purpose of the Study

Researching the researcher. I was raised in a house where knowledge and education were essential for a better future. From an early age, my parents exposed my siblings and me to various sources and forms of knowledge. We had a library at home, we travelled and visited museums and exhibitions in Europe, and we had the best education offered at that time. Our family entertainment included thinking games such as chess, which I believe developed my creativity, planning, and problem-solving skills as a child and thus prepared me for my future career as an artist and researcher.

When it was time to select a major to apply to university, I did not hesitate to choose arts education. I wanted to study a field of interest that could help me find a decent job. I enrolled in the Faculty of Education, Arts Education Department, at King Saud University. The program is intended to prepare art education teachers, so I learned about most types of visual art in addition to art history. I became highly committed to the field and was filled with ambition because, through visual arts, I found myself. Although my schedule was tight, I took advantage of any extra time I had to take additional workshops and short courses in museum education and visual arts, such as drawing, water colour, and wall painting.

When I graduated in 2005, I immediately started looking for work. My first job was teaching ninth and tenth grades at one of the largest and best private girls' schools in Riyadh. I applied to that school in particular because it seemed to have an appreciation for the arts, as it

had specialised art studios, a big theatre, and had taught music in the past. Although I did not stay there long, the experience was an epiphany. I realised that most of Saudi society had no appreciation for the visual arts, including that school, its students, and its staff. This was disappointing for me, as I expect it would have been for any newly graduated student with high ambitions and an appreciation for art.

Art in all its forms is an opportunity for people to release their tensions, express themselves, their emotions and feelings and be creative (Eisner, 2005). For me personally, creating art has given me the chance to observe the beautiful side of the world, to build creativity, and to have a hopeful and optimistic outlook on life. Unfortunately, art education was still neglected in schools in Saudi Arabia (Alageel, 2005). The Saudi education system provides a mandatory art education curriculum prepared by experts in the field. Some of the objectives of this explicit curriculum are to encourage students to express their feelings and to teach them how to observe and see things around them (Alharby, 2004). As a teacher, I was free to add to the curriculum, so I tried during my time there, when interacting with the parents and the school staff, to help them realize the value of visual arts as I experienced it, but mostly my efforts were to no avail.

At that same time, I attempted to follow up with the visual arts movement and the arts community in Saudi Arabia interact with people who understood and appreciated my perspective on visual arts. It wasn't easy at that time to follow up with the visual arts community in Saudi Arabia, even in Riyadh. They were not yet active online venue and there were no specialized magazines or journals. I used to read the visual arts section in the daily newspaper, check for new books at the library, and during my workshops and short courses I would chat and ask about the latest developments. I used to submit my artwork to exhibitions,

but my work was often rejected with no clear reason given. This was one of the issues for which I didn't have an answer.

At the same period of time, I learned about the Saudi female artist Safeya Binzagr, who is one of this study's participants. Interestingly, at the same period when New York women artists were protesting against the discrimination they faced in art galleries in the late 1960s (Zangara, 2002), Saudi women artists were starting to make their mark in Saudi history.

Binzagr was one of the Saudi female artists of early renown and became, in 1986, one of the first female artists in the Kingdom to exhibit her artwork publicly (Alharbi, 2003).

Unfortunately, this great artist is not very famous within Saudi society at large. Although I studied the arts at university I had never heard of her name, achievements, artwork, or how she became successful while I was studying. At that time of my life, when hearing about such successful Saudi female artists the first question that came to my mind was "what is her recipe?" in other words, how was she able to succeed? From my own experience, being educated in Riyadh and having studied arts education for both my bachelor's and master's degrees, the history of Saudi visual arts was never formed a part of our curricula. Not even when I worked as an art education schoolteacher or as a part-time professor at King Saud University was I asked to teach the history of Saudi visual arts, nor did I then come across the names and achievements of Saudi female artists.

Art education curricula. According to Alhugail (2011), curricula in Saudi Arabia are established top-down by the High Committee of Education Policy, which makes decisions on all educational matters and educators are obliged to abide. That is, the school curricula in all subjects and all grades are mandatory and set by the Ministry of Education, although it is permitted to add additional curricula.

Curriculum theorist Elliot Eisner (2001) discusses three types of curricula: explicit, implicit, and null. He defines a null curriculum as one that is absent, or not taught in schools, in spite of being directly related to the students' lives. He believes that "ignoring is not simply a neutral void, it has important effects on the kinds of options one is able to consider, the alternatives that one can examine, and perspectives from which one can view a situation or problem" (p. 97). Learning from others' experiences in any field gives us a clearer view of what to expect in our own. Art education curricula in Saudi Arabia do not include any information about the history of visual arts in Saudi Arabia or about female Saudi artists, either in schools or in university.

Fida Alhussan is another female artist and one of this study's participants who comes from a younger generation. Like any other Saudi woman, she has faced social challenges that influence her beliefs and her artwork. When she was asked about the topics and symbols in her work she responded:

The reason why I include the abaya (long loose black dress that covers the whole body) and niqab (veil) in my art is that I wear them, and the women around me wear them, and we are proud of it. Also, I am trying to explain to people around me and the women who wear them that we are the same. The things that make us different are the languages we speak, the clothes we wear, and the religions we believe in...I see myself as similar to that model in her freedom to show her body but I have my own freedom and that is the beautiful story that I want to tell everyone. (Fida Art, 2013)

Significantly, Alhussan's formal education was in Islamic studies and business administration, yet her interest in Pop Art stems, though later in life, from her realization of the

freedom she enjoys in her artistic expressions (as discussed in Nihal, 2013). In the quotation above, Alhussan shows her respect for her beliefs and indicates that *freedom* has a different meaning in her Saudi context. On the other hand, her artwork (see figure 1.1) contains expressions of power, traditions, and more. She is an example of a Saudi female artist at the beginning of her career, who is struggling to respect the value of her society and enjoys freedom through visual arts.



Figure 1.1: Alhussan, You Shoot Me Down (2013)



Figure 1.2: Alhussan, I Know I'm not the Only One (2014)

Problem Statement

After a few years of reading the literature related to my study, specifically about Saudi Arabia and the status of women there, a new motive for conducting this study developed. As a Saudi woman myself who lived happily my whole life, I wasn't satisfied with the way the dominant literature presented "us." I can't and I won't generalize my experience as a Saudi woman, but I found generalizations and exaggerations in most of the publications I have read. Sabbagh (1995) blames the press for the prevalent image of Muslim women as in their titles that choose to exaggerate the degree of control imposed upon women instead of depicting Arab

women's strength in context of their cultures. What I noticed about the authors and scholars of the publications was that they were either from a totally different culture, not even Arabs, or they were Saudis who had had negative personal experiences in Saudi Arabia and as a result had forged a very pessimistic point of view. It is a deep issue and an important one but it is not my main problem in this study. However, I believe the life stories of the four artists I have chosen to portray will reveal a great deal of the reality of the status of Saudi women that wasn't revealed before. I chose these artists for their great achievement in the Saudi visual arts field, for their different ages, and for their diverse backgrounds as they come from different regions in Saudi Arabia.

As a Saudi woman, art educator and artist, I attach a great deal of importance to the life journeys of these female artists, and to how they were able to emerge and become successful in Saudi Arabia. My focus on Saudi female artists comes about as a result of my own experience. It is urgent to include Saudi female artists' life stories in the larger societal narrative and to showcase their lives to students at the beginning of their art education and careers, so they can learn from these women's experiences. In her work, Heather Anderson (1992) suggests that the more female artists express themselves in issues related to individuality, justice, diversity, and wholeness, the more researchers and authors write about them and the more a broad image of art history becomes noticeable. It is my hope to have achieved precisely this, to have created an opportunity for Saudi female artists to talk about issues like gender, religion, and tradition, and how they address and express them in their artwork.

Research Question

The question to which I have sought an answer is:

How are Saudi female artists fulfilling their aspirations as artists in the conservative Saudi society?

In thinking about this research question and how to answer it I had in mind these probing questions as they are the front and the center of the research and I used them as protocol questions and entry points: How did they become artists? What role does family, formal education, traditions, society, and religion (Islam) play? How does gender affect their artistic life journey and production? What are the common and divergent themes in the life stories of the Saudi women artists examined here, namely Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan? What is unique about each one of them? What life and pedagogical lessons can be drawn from exploring these women's lives?



Figure 1.3: Safeya Binzagr



Figure 1.4: Maha Almalluh



Figure 1.5: Tagreed Albagshi



Figure 1.6: Fida Alhussan

In researching the status of women in Saudi Arabia, Lippman (2012) placed Saudi women into one of three categories: those who prefer to keep the status of women in the country as it is, those who understand the possibility of change and the demand for it but are cautious in moving forward; and finally those who aim to transform society and take advantage of every opportunity they can get. According to Almunajjed (1997) education is a determining factor for the views held by Saudi women. Education is a factor in the expectations of Saudi women (House, 2012).

Many studies have been conducted on the visual arts in Saudi Arabia, but most of them have focused on issues in arts education (Alzayer; 1993 Alharbi 2004; Muneer Adden 2007). Some have chosen DBAE (Discipline-Based Art Education) theory (Alamoud 2000; Alamoud, 2001; Aldowaihi, 2003) others on art therapy (Alyamy, 2002). Some studies and publications examined the history of visual art in Saudi Arabia in general (Alzayer, 1993; Aldowaihi, 2006). Some studies examined on Saudi women artists. Maha Alsenan (2007) has studied the influence of Saudi cultural heritage on Saudi female artists' work and the elements of the female artistic movement. Masodah Qurban's (2009) study focused on the important role women have played in the contemporary movement of visual arts in Saudi Arabia. A study by Haifa Alhababi (2012) titled "The Art of Women in the city of 'Asir" focused on women's artwork in the homes of the region of Asir. Eman Aljebreen (2015) has conducted a study of Binzagr's representations of women in her artwork. Included in the study was a discussion of the effects of societal norms such as gender segregation on her success. Many studies about women artists are historical, documenting their education, participations, places of birth, and where they grew up. In-depth examinations of Saudi women artists' life stories were, however, absent. Even background information included in a few publications (e.g. Assulaiman, 2012; Alrosayes, 2010) offered only glimpses into the artists' lives.

A postmodern feminist lens is critical to this research, which questions identity, knowledge, truth, and the role of society in female artists' lives. The postmodern discourses aim to problematize beliefs regarding truth, knowledge, power, self, and language that are, as Flax (1990) puts it, "taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture" (p. 41). Denzin and Lincoln (2002) describe the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research as "a broad, interpretive, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility" (p. x). Qualitative inquiry encompasses, among others, narrative research, which Mishler (1999) argues, is the best way to represent and understand human experience. For the purpose of my research, I am drawing upon a specific type of narrative research by adopting and adapting the life story approach, which is basically narrative. As Polkinghorne (1988) explains it, "narrative meaning consists of more than the events alone; it consists also of the significance these events have for the narrator in relation to a particular theme" (p. 160). Riessman (2008) describes meaning making as the connection between 'self' and events, adding that meaning making has different levels depending on the level of influence the events have had on the self. In other words, the levels of meaning in life story are both interpreted personally and shared collectively.

Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that one can give the meaning only when one realizes that "something is a part of some whole and that something is the cause of something else" (p. 6). The meaning that is created, according to Bruner (1990), "is a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbol system" (p. 69). In that sense, life stories are greatly influenced by the society. By talking about ourselves we humans/artists are likely to create a story about who we are, what we do, and why (Bruner, 2002). Tonkin (1995) believes that through life story we are in a position to learn how a person experiences and

comprehends his or her life over the years, and to identify connections among different life stories at certain stages of life. Atkinson (1998) suggests that the role of life story is,

Primarily to pull together the central element events and beliefs in a person's life, integrate them into a whole, make sense of them, learn from them, teach the younger generation and remind the rest of one's community what is most important in life. (p. 19)

Life stories are developed by the person him/herself in the cultural context where that person's life occurs and where meaning is made. These personal stories are samples of the wide ranging cultural canon of stories about how life goes on (Polkinghorne, 1988). Bruner (2002) indicates that narrative performance of self-making is strongly led by tacit cultural examples of what selfhood is supposed to be, what it could be, and what it shouldn't be. For McAdams (2001), life stories reflect the culture where they are developed and shared; also, stories develop, bloom, live, and eventually die depending on the standards, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society. He agrees with Thorne (2000) that family and friends conspire in 'self-making,' which means that life stories and self-making memories are socially created. Therefore, the concept of life story varies by culture and subculture (Linde, 1993), and as McAdams (2001) contends, this variation of cultural narratives and discourse creates a new example of the self. Bertaux (1981) sees each life story as a contribution to understanding a certain system of social relations. When we have a clear understanding of social relations it helps in the analysis of the data collected from a life story. Atkinson (1998) emphasized the importance of life stories in the present time,

Today because communities are breaking down or at least becoming more dispersed, separated, and mobile, it is even more important that life stories become a central piece of gerontological work. The life stories of elders can provide researchers much significant information about life course, the sequences of generations, our understanding of ageing, the role of stories across the life cycle, and determining ways to improve the quality of life. (p. 18)

When it comes to women, Nilsen (1996) contends that women's stories, "offer in-depth insight into the connections between the structural dimensions of society, and individuals' experiences within the boundaries of their time and place in the world." (p. 28). From my own experience, Saudi women's life stories in general are rarely published (see also Alsenan, 2007). This may be due to the Saudi Islamic traditions that encourage privacy (Graham 1991), especially for women, which, if anything, increases the demand for studies on these women's experiences.

For this study, I chose four Saudi women artists of different ages, five to twenty years apart. Those artists are Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan. They not only differ in age but in the regions they grew up in and their type of art, meaning digital, painting, installations, ...etc. Binzagr was born in Jeddah (western region of Saudi) and raised in Egypt; Almalluh was born and raised in Jeddah; Albagshi was born and raised in Alhasa (eastern region of Saudi); and Alhussan was born and raised in Riyadh (middle region of Saudi). I chose them particularly because they have all achieved recognition as artists in Saudi, making their particular experiences of interest to my research. To reach them I initially

emailed them, then followed up with telephone calls to start building trust and arrange for interviews.

Interviewing was my main data collection method. To arrange for the interview sessions with the artists I had to consider my limited time when visiting Saudi Arabia. I couldn't conduct all the sessions face to face so I arranged with the artists for online audio calls. However, I made sure to interview them in person at least once on their artwork. Rossman (2010) believes that some challenges the interviewer might face when dealing with elites are the difficulties of reaching them or scheduling a meeting because of their busy lives. Although I went twice to Saudi Arabia with the aim of collecting their stories, the artists' schedules were too busy to allow for more than one face-to-face session each. The interviews were transcribed, then translated from Arabic to English and validated by a specialist. The translated transcripts were then used to form the life story for each artist including their artwork.

This study includes some artwork of the artists on focus and they took part of a semiotic analysis. Semiotics "is concerned with meaning-making and representation in many forms" (Chandler, 2001, p.2). Therefore, visual analysis can certainly add valuable perspectives to the narrative and the narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). The life stories, for this study, hence include the artists' artwork together with their descriptions, the meaning that the pieces carry, and the viewer's opinions on them. Rose (2011) categorizes three foci for visual analysis: the story behind the image, the description of the image itself, and audiences' interpretations of the image. When read collectively, it is worth emphasizing, the artwork that is discussed in this thesis is not about Islamic art nor about the influence of Islam on the four artists whose work is focused on throughout the thesis. The influence of Islam on these artists clearly presents a future research project, but for now, 'some' elements of Islamic art and the influence of Islam on these artists can be seen in their artwork and will therefore be discussed.

To analyze the data, I used postmodern feminist theory, which I will discuss later in the thesis, and drew upon the literature. I explain and discuss the role of education, family, religious views, society, the transitions, and their epiphanies and turning points. Moghissi (1999) suggests specific postmodern ideas that are relevant for Muslim women, such as identity as choice, skepticism about power, and a realization that beliefs and knowledge are culturally constructed. As Riessman (1993) emphasized, it is important to consider the larger social context in the analysis, although scholars consider social context on many different levels. For example, considering meaning and social life in narrative analysis can support studies about people suffering from social marginalization and oppression (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), such as women, which is why I have found it important to consider the artists' life stories in the context of Saudi history, society, traditions, religion, etc. These are explored in different chapters of the thesis.

An Outline of the Chapters

In the following Chapter Two, I begin by describing the Saudi Arabian context in order to give the reader a better understanding of the culture and the society these Saudi women artists come from and live in. I introduce a brief history of Saudi Arabia and the role of Islam, I include a history of the status of women in the country. After this, I present the history and development of the visual arts and the role played by the economy, technology, religion, and government. I also present the history of art education, focusing particularly on girls' education. Finally, I introduce the available literature on women artists' life experiences in general and Saudi women artists in particular, discussing its relevance as well as the remaining gap in the field that my study proposes to address.

In Chapter Three I explain my rationale for choosing postmodern feminist theory as the lens through which I analyze the data of my study. I also explain the integration of postmodernism and feminism within the Arab/Muslim world and how these concepts helped me in my study.

Chapter Four focuses on methodology of this study. I discuss narrative and specifically life story, including how life stories as socially constructed. I also discuss interviewing as data collection by describing the process of reaching out to the participants, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the data. I also talk more about my interviewees. Chapter Five, Six, Seven, and Eight include the findings, which were in turn the life stories of the artists Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan. Each life story includes an exposé of the artwork of the artist in question.

In Chapter Nine, I discuss my findings through the lens of postmodern feminism, drawing upon the relevant literature. I answer the research question and discuss the emerging and common themes.

In the Conclusion, I offer my reflections on the study, the lessons learned and the study's limitations and discuss the possible contribution it makes.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Although research today has extended to cover a remarkably wide range of fields of study, works on female artists' life stories are limited (Herrera, 2002). In this section, I will first introduce the relevant studies on women artists and then discuss those that are relevant and available within the Saudi context. I present this literature from a historical perspective, with the findings and life stories listed chronologically. This historical context will support life story approach. Examining the history of women and visual arts in Saudi Arabia and discussing the influence of traditions, society, religion, and media in a historical context will relate to the chronological life events in the artists' life stories.

Slatkin (1992) examined in depth the work of women artists. In her book *The Voices of Women Artists* she presents short biographies of 30 women artists from the 19th and 20th centuries. The biographies include the artists' historical, cultural, and social contexts. Despite the fact that these artists suffered from sexism they displayed strength and persistence. In an article by Anderson (1992) titled "Making Women Artists Visible," Slatkin argues that women artists are ignored in traditional art history texts, as if they are unimportant. Adding women artists to texts on art history would present a bigger and more accurate picture. She argues that women artists who faced sexism and racism (and in my case, Arab/Islamophobia) all expressed themselves on many issues like equity and uniqueness, deserve to be visible. She recommends that books about women artists be included in educational studies and not only in art related courses like American art history or world art but in courses like women's studies. There are biographies on women artists like Herrera's work on Frida Khalo (Herrera, 2002), Mary Frank

(Herrera, 1990), and Joan Snyder (Herrera, 2005). There is also Petzinger et al.'s (2014) biography on the famous artist Eva Hesse. These artists have something unique about them and should be shared in many contexts.

In Linda Nochlin's (1988) discussions of the question "Why have there been no great female artists?" she answered that to life circumstances, seem to matter most,

The total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, by the art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast. (p. 232)

When it comes to art making, Nochlin focused on the role of the social structure. In order to likewise help me understand the life experiences of the Saudi women artists it is important to present the historical, social, and cultural context of Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian scholar Nawal El-Saadawi (1997) points out that some feminist critiques homogenize the experiences of Arab/Muslim women by viewing their oppression through a Western lens. This is problematic because it constitutes a further form of oppression. Sabbagh (1995) reminds us that all cultures have their own type of oppression so it is imperative to not judge one culture through the lens of another. She also reminds us that not all Muslim women see themselves as they are seen through Western lenses.

While the literature shows a general increase in female artists' biographies, there was nothing to be found on Arab/Muslim women artists, even less on Saudi female artists. The

studies that have been conducted on Saudi female artists are more focused on their production and artwork than on their lives. In the following I will start with a presentation of the Saudi context, covering all aspects related to the study. It will include a brief history of Saudi Arabia, the status of women, the history of visual arts, arts education, and religious influence on visual arts, and review the available literature on women artists in Saudi.

Saudi Arabia: Context and History

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located on the Arabian Peninsula in southwestern Asia. It is also located in the heart of the Middle East, and possesses 25 percent of the world's total oil supply (Ann, 2011). The seaport city of Jeddah, located on the Red Sea, is a major gateway to the outside world and as a result the city has been exposed to more different ethnicities than any other area of the Arabian Peninsula (Almunajjed, 1997).

The country was first founded in 1744 by Muhammad Ibn Saud (Zuhur 2012), with the support of Muhammad Abd Alwahhab, an Islamic scholar and the leader of the Wahhabism religious movement (Ann, 2011; House, 2012). However, according to Lacroix (2011), the state's leadership was in contention for long time as other Saudi families vied for power until Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud re-unified the Saudi state under the control of the Alsaud family in 1902. since then the Alsaud family has reigned. In 1932 it was formally united as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

According to the Saudi General Authority for statistics (2018) the population in Saudi Arabia is 32,552,336 million in which %62 percent are Saudis; the rest are expatriates. The gender statistics among Saudis is %50.94 male and %49.06. The household expenditure and

income survey conducted in 2013 indicated that the average monthly income for Saudi families is 13610 SR, which equals almost \$4670 CAN.

Islam in Saudi Arabia is not only a “creed,” it is the law, which is called “*Sharia*” (Lacroix, 2011). Having two of the holiest mosques in the world within its borders, in Mecca and Almadinah, is according to Zuhur (2012) an important factor in supporting Islam in the Kingdom. King Fahad Ibn Abdulaziz was the first to adopt the title “Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” in 1982 to assure the Islamic world of his role in controlling and protecting these two holy sites (Zuhur, 2012). These factors were significant not only politically but also socially. Yamani (2000) stated, “The symbolism of Islam combined with the unique heritage of Saudi Arabia based on the guardianship of Mecca and Medina continue to be central to Saudi identity and therefore to many Saudis’ sense of political and social stability” (p. 12).

Religion. Even aside from politics and law, Islam has had a strong influence on Saudi society. Moaddel (2006) affirms that Saudis’ Islamic identity is stronger than their national identity, a view shared by Ann (2011) based on his experience living there. This religious identity influences the Saudis’ lives, as Long (2005) notes that Saudis’ loyalty to their religion on decision-making by Islamic counsel is preferred in all matters, whether business or family. He says, “the belief is so central and so intensely ingrained in Saudi Arabia that it cannot be calculated by simply observing behaviour, whether pious or profane” (p. 18). However, according to Assaif (2014) people’s understanding of the meanings of the values and content of Islam are changing as a result of the increased discussions around that topic. He says,

The continued change in the norms and religious views and *Fatwa*, the advisory opinion, eventually results in different forms of the religion that share the same roots

but differ in the application and the philosophical foundation and priorities. This change is a forced reflection of the cultural and economical and other transformations that is occurring in the society (p. 51).

In his study, Yamani (2009) shows that even new generations, who grow up surrounded by media, technologies, and different cultural influences gained through travelling, believe that religion basically directs their lives and gives it purpose in life.

Influence of media and technology. The development of technology and specifically the use of the Internet has had a great and uncontrollable impact on Saudis. In 2013, the number of Saudis using the Internet reached 16.4 million (out of 32 million). Assaif (2014) argues that the importance of the Internet is increasing in contemporary life in Saudi Arabia in a way that could change the nature of trading. It may also change the way of living and parenting. The new generation is living this change; they are the ones who create(d) it, who benefit from it and who are changing because of it. Assaif explains that the differences between the younger and older generations are becoming greater and deeper because of technological development. It is providing youth with additional advantages, not least in gaining knowledge, and the ability to compare and devise solutions. Yamani (2000) also believes that access to the Internet has led to new insights that have led the younger generation to question the basis of gender roles and share these insights and doubts with older generation, resulting in further and ineluctable change. On the other hand, Assaif (2014) believes that the influence of schooling, TV, the Internet, friends, etc., on youth is temporary as their mental status and their identities keep changing depending on the source of influence and its impact on the surroundings. The older generation is more stable, relying on the stability of their values' sources, and consistency with the way they live.

Family and traditions. Assaif (2014) suggests that the safe solution to keep the social stability is to accommodate the new generations' demands and expectations. The way to do this is by accepting the idea of giving up some of the inherited traditions and norms that produce new traditions compatible with the new society' financial and cultural conditions. The stability of the older generation makes them a main reference point for the younger generation. Yamani (2000) found that despite the impact of education and media the family remains the main reference. In Saudi society, the family is also the main locus for shaping the social and moral structure.

Traditions play a key role in Saudi society, as Yamani (2000) explains, "The Saudi state since 1932 has not only used 'traditions' to legitimate itself, but through actively sponsoring cultural, religious and political unification has also created a new, distinctly national notion of tradition." (p. 14). According to Assaif (2014), half a century ago Saudi society steeped in traditions while today it carries limitations of modernity. The 70s and 80s economic development brought about a comprehensive change in jobs and the way people live.

The norms and traditions that were sacred, Assaif (2014) adds, that wouldn't be strong enough to withstand change. He adds societies that have undergone economic development have experienced great conflicts between those who would like to see the inherited traditions preserved and modernists who see these as an obstacle on the road to financial and cultural development. This conflict had become more serious by the end of the 21st century and it is getting ever more intense as the new generations are getting stronger and are bolder. Assaif believes that whether we count ourselves among the preservers of tradition or the advocates of modernism there is a reality we can't dismiss, which is that society is living a transformation in culture and value consistent with its financial transformation. Ignoring this reality, especially in the Saudi context, contributes to many of the conflicts that we are facing.

Women in Saudi Arabia. Throughout the years, women's status has changed relative to social, religious, and political factors. In the 1970s, the *ulama*, the Saudi Islamic Council of Senior Scholars, presented an image of 'Saudi women' as weak and lacking (Renard, 2014). However, according to Yamani (2000) in *Sharia* there is no distinction between a man and a woman; that they are equal from the legal age of sixteen in matters like ownership and power over their own money. According to Almunajjed (1994), women keep their last names after marriage and have the right to own and keep her property and money before and after marriage. Moreover, fathers, brothers, or husbands have a moral and religious obligation to take care financially of the women in their families.

According to Arebi (1994), in the past women were prevented from travelling without a male guardian or from running their own businesses without a male family member. However, women today run their own companies and are free to travel without a male guardian.

Saudi anthropologist and professor Salwa Alkhateeb says, "[a] woman is made to feel she cannot survive without a man" (as cited in House, 2012, p. 77). I find such a statement to be problematic because it both generalizes and exaggerates. Based on my personal experience, families from different communities in Saudi Arabia treat women differently. The social factor specially in traditions plays a great role the in social construction of the role of gender.

Another issue is sexual segregation, especially in public spaces. This creates a situation where Saudi women live a very private life. When it comes to work and education, religious conservatives, especially Salafists (one of the most conservative sects in Islam), want women to remain at home or argue for segregated workplaces (Almunajjed's, 1997; Zuhur, 2012). This issue of segregation has greatly changed in the last decade, yet some women have experienced mixed gender policies in the workplace but others found it an obstacle in finding jobs (Alrasheed, 2013). The arguments around the issue of segregation, as Assaif (2014) sees it, fall

under three dimensions: the first is jurisprudence, the second is human rights, and the last involves politics and the balance of social powers. These three dimensions show that the argument around segregation entails a wider argument over social roles and positions and the extent of external influence. He explains that it is a social power struggle between two conflicting groups, one drawing its strength from inherited traditions and stable norms and the other drawing its strength from variables that the society has more recently acknowledged through the cultural and economic modernity movement.

Some issues are still controversial like the right of a woman to drive a car or practice law. From my personal experience it is strongly influenced by the traditions, norms, and society's reluctance to accept change. Alrasheed (2013), a Saudi social anthropologist, blames *Wahhabiyya*, a branch of Sunni Islam that forms the basis of *Sharia* law in Saudi Arabia, as a 'religious nationalism' supported by the government, for why Saudi women, in her opinion, are behind compared to other women around the world. She defines religious nationalism "as a form of politicized collective representation, embedded in institutions, the purpose of which is to create a godly community" (p. 16). She believes that controlling women's position and status in the society is a symbolic move it is one of the main instruments that define Saudi Arabia as a country. Women, Alrasheed argues, have "become boundary markers that visibly and structurally distinguish this pious nation from other ungodly polities" (pp. 16–17). Thus, women's position in the Saudi society was/is best understood within the context of 'religious nationalism,' how religion and politics interweave with the status of Saudi women.

Similarly, Sabbagh (1995) argues that women's status not only reflects religious beliefs but also political views, how Saudi women are caught between religious conservatism and forces of modernization. Summing up this tension, Ann House (2012) asserts in her book, *On Saudi Arabia:*

Of the divisions in Saudi society, in none are lines more sharply drawn than on the matter of the status, role and future of women. The Prophet's first wife was a successful businesswoman, and his favorite wife led troops in battle, but today women themselves are the battleground. The intensifying clash over the role of women in Saudi society is about far more than whether women should be allowed to drive or, however well shrouded, mix with men in public places. It is not a war between the sexes, but rather a proxy war between modernizers and conservatives over what sort of Saudi Arabia both sexes will inhabit and over the role and relevance of the omnipresent religious establishment in Saudi society. (p. 72)

Clearly, this tension is not resolved. Almunajjed (1997) finds the conflict between the modern and the traditional to be a great challenge for women in Saudi Arabia. Economic change is greatly increasing women's opportunities for better education and jobs in modern life. In her study, Almunajjed concludes that "education has provided Saudi Arabia with knowledge, intellectual enlightenment, mental strength, culture, confidence and self-assurance" (p. 104). It has been a determining factor of social change for Saudi women, as educated Saudi women have more harmonious relationships with their spouses and children and hold better jobs. Unfortunately, she also found that schools still prepare female students to assume that they will be housewives and mothers.

In another more recent study by Thomas Lippman (2012), the level of educated Saudi women is reported to be equal to or higher than that of Saudi men. In recent years, 79 percent of Ph.D. scholarship grants have been awarded to women, and 40 percent of Saudi physicians are

women. This new reality shows how the education system has changed in women's favour. However, he argues that when it comes to jobs, even with their high level of education, women have fewer opportunities than men. This is reflected in the proportionately small percentage of women in the workforce. On this matter, it is worth mentioning that traditionally within Saudi norms, men are financially responsible for female family members. Lippman categorizes the Saudi outlook on women's status and rights into three groups: the first and largest group prefers to keep the status quo out of religious belief or social tradition; the second group, also important in size, understand the possibility of change and the demand for it but are cautious in moving forward; the last is the smallest but fastest rising group, and possibly the most influential. As its members are apt and able to use the Internet, attract media attention, and are resolved to transform the society. Women of this last group are, as Lippman (2012) puts it, increasingly "adept at running through whatever cracks they can find in the wall of resistance" (p. 159). This categorization is one of the few fair descriptions of Saudi women reported in the literature. As a result of higher education and the influence of the Internet and travelling, Ann House (2012) finds the younger generations of Saudi women to hold higher expectations as women than their mothers. More opportunities and choices are causing this increase in expectations—opportunities and choices that are more acceptable now than they were at the time of their mothers (see also Yamani, 2000).

There are not many female public figures in the Saudi society to serve as role model (Yamani, 2000). Some Saudi women are more outspoken than others in calling for change, including high achieving women and activists. One example is Dr. Maha Almuneef, a specialist in pediatric infectious diseases, who was one of ten women honoured for bravery by the US State Department. She is the executive director of Saudi Arabia's National Family Safety

program, the first organization in Saudi Arabia to campaign against domestic violence (Fayyaz, 2014) (figure 2.1).

King Abdullah, who passed away recently, played a great role in the development of the status of women. Although he was a traditionalist in many ways he was a huge supporter of women. Because of his support, women have been allowed to participate in the Consultative Council (figure 2.2) since 2011 and are able to vote in municipal elections (House, 2012; Renard, 2014).



Figure 2:1: Dr. Maha Almuneef and Barack Obama



Figure 2:2: The Consultative Council

Visual arts in Saudi Arabia. Attention to visual arts in Saudi Arabia began in the 1950s with the establishment of art studios were established and the teaching of arts in schools and universities began to take place (Zuhur, 2012; Alsenan, 2007). This awakening was linked to significant developments in education that took place in the same decade. Alharbi (2003) divides Saudi visual arts evolution into two phases: the first started in the 1960s when Saudi artist Abdulhalim Rad'awy was the first to hold his first art exhibition in 1964 (figure 2.3 & 2.4) and the second in the 1990s. Rad'awy studied visual arts in Rome, and living abroad and away from the Saudi society, exposed to new ideas which encouraged him to explore different forms of art

expressions. Soon after, in 1967, the “Arts Society” was founded to support artists and organize exhibitions (Zuhur, 2012). The increase of the price of oil during the early 1970s brought an extreme economic change (Almunajjed, 1997). The interest in the arts developed rapidly, especially in supporting public arts and in disseminating it throughout Saudi society (Long 2005; Buchele 2008). The government bought several sculptures that were placed in public spaces of the city of Jeddah including works by the famous artist Henry Moore (figures 2.5 & 2.6).

In the early 1970s scholarships were established for Saudi students to pursue their studies, which included fine arts (Alharbi, 2003). However, there was no mention in the literature of women artists being granted scholarships, meaning that they were excluded from this initiative.



Figure 2:3: Artist Rad'awy in one of his exhibitions



Figure 2:4: Rad'awy (1996)



Figure 2:5: Moore, Large Spindle Piece (1977) Figure 2:6: Moore, Oval with Points (1977)

Moreover, increase in income opened the door for Saudis to own and collect art pieces (Alharbi, 2003). According to Graham (1991), sometime in the 1980s a local art dealer sold some frames to a Saudi who had bought two Monet paintings in an auction in London, costing 50,000 pounds each. According to Graham, the Saudi owner asked someone to alter the artwork by painting over a religious sign. This story shows that Islam is a priority in Saudis' lives; but at the same time it shows that there was interest in arts. The increase of individuals' income had an unintended consequence also when it came to the materials and media artists used. As Alharbi suggests, it encouraged artists to move from following the classic art schools to experiment with different media in their work.

In the late 1980s, interest grew in 'art villages' created by the government beside numbers of annual visual art contests for artists of different ages, which such activities were funded by private foundations like Aramco and Saudi Airlines (Alsenan 2008; Alharbi 2003). When technology leapt forward in the 1990s, all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia were affected.

the development in communications helped connect Saudi Arabia with the outer world (Alharbi 2003).

Beside this general interest in the arts, Alyamy went further by introducing in 1995 the practice of art therapy in Saudi Arabia. He is considered the first Saudi art educator to practice art therapy in the country. This shows the increased attention to and the awareness of the role of arts in healing and rehabilitation.

Art education in Saudi Arabia. Art in all forms is an opportunity for people to express their tensions, their emotions and feelings and creativity (Eisner, 2001). Studies demonstrate that academic performance is positively affected by art, especially among lower-level students (Sadker & Sadker, 2005). Art education in particular gives students the chance to explore their personalities through colours, different media and materials (Joudi, 1997). For teenagers, it is an occasion to explore the world and become open and flexible. Alshehry (1992) put it poetically: “Art education is the tool by which we reach our children’s hearts, move their emotions and build their tastes and their values in this life” (p. 7).

Unfortunately, art education is still neglected in the schools of Saudi Arabia (Alageel, 2005) as it is in North America (Eisner, 2005). As Sadker and Sadker (2005) point out, it is “the last to be included and the first to be cut” (p. 223). Hewitt (2006) believes that all forms of art are not given the same degree of attention and resources that are given to science and mathematics in schools. Furthermore, Gehlbach (1990) claims that public schools do not give art education sufficient attention when compared to other subjects and for three reasons: 1) art, especially visual art, needs special materials and hence a budget, which schools cannot afford; 2) art teachers are not well prepared pedagogically (in terms of spending sufficient time learning how to teach it); and 3) the time allotted to the arts is not sufficient in comparison to other subjects. He suggests that

the solution is to enhance the art curriculum and give it the same attention that as other subject matter enjoys in school and in research.

In the early 1980s, a new theoretical approach called *Discipline-based Art Education* (DBAE) was developed by the J. Paul Getty Trust (as discussed in Dobbs, 1998). According to Dobbs this approach is based on four aspects: producing and creating artwork using different techniques and media; describing and criticizing artwork in order to raise the level of awareness of its value; reviewing art history for a better understanding of the human conditions that influenced art changes; and, finally, understanding aesthetics and what makes art different from other fields in order to be able to give fair judgments on artwork pieces. In Saudi Arabia, according to the official document of the art education textbook by the Ministry of Education in 2006, all art education textbooks should apply DBAE theory. Bajouda (n.d) indicates that the four DBAE aspects were clearly applied in the newly developed Saudi art education textbooks.

An interest in the DBAE theory has developed among Saudi researchers. Aldowaihi (2003) studied the DBAE theory looking at the viability of introducing it in the Saudi general education. Alamoud (2000) tracked the development of DBAE theory and its effect on art education in Saudi Arabia from an anthropological point of view. His study focuses on criticism of this theory, including his own cultural criticism. He argues that it is very important to consider the culture of the society when this theory is applied. In his conclusion, he reminds the reader that Arabs and Muslims should be cautious and concerned as art education and its theories is a Western based creation Arabic Muslim culture. He concluded the importance of respecting different cultures and learning from their positive experiences that don't conflict with Islamic cultures.



Figure 2.7: An elementary level students' artwork exhibition, 2012

Alshehry (2001) highlights in his study that an art education curriculum was first initiated in the early 1960s, at the primary and elementary level (first to ninth grade). However, this period was marked by a lack of teachers specialized in art education. Therefore, the Ministry of Education signed contracts with Egyptian specialists to teach and supervise teachers in schools and institutes. He indicates that at the same period, the Institute of Art Education, a specialized teacher training institute, was established as the first organization that prepared art education teachers. Focusing on the tertiary level, Alshehry (2001) traced the history of art education in the Kingdom. The first art education department was founded in 1974 at King Saud University in Riyadh. Other departments were then established at King Abdul-Aziz University in Jeddah and Omm Alqura University in Mecca. In 1982, 18 departments of art education were established at teacher training colleges. Thereafter, art education extended into universities across the Kingdom, and graduate programs were established.

In 2008, the Art Education and Home Economics departments at Prince Nourah University for girls in Riyadh were restructured to be the first university department of Fine

Arts and Design in Riyadh. It included six specializations: visual design and printing, sculpture, interior design, graphic design and innovation, product design, and fashion design and fabrics. The attention towards developing the visual arts in Saudi Arabia is clearly growing.

Religious influence on visual arts

Visual arts are no exception to the influence of religion. Many people in Saudi Arabia are still affected by the Islamic belief that drawing living objects or portraits is forbidden. This belief, however, is open to interpretation (Alatoom, 2007). As discussed earlier, Saudi society is strongly committed to the Islamic principles, which also influence the way arts are practiced as well. For example, having seen the abstractions and flower paintings hanging in some business lobbies and in liberal institutions, Buchele (2008) makes assumptions about the limitations on Saudi arts that have resulted.

I find this a very narrow way to describe Saudi art because it holds assumptions about what art is and where it can be found. Saudi artists are very creative in their work. Take Ahmed Mater for example who uses mixed media in his work creating unique pieces, some directly influenced by the Islamic religion and others by his work as a doctor (figures 2.8 & 2.9). Saudi art therapist Alyamy (1995) explains the reason behind avoiding representing living objects in Saudi arts saying, “the idea isn’t expression but appreciation of the perfection of Allah’s creation” (p. 202). Long (2005) supports this contention by arguing, “human forms are discouraged as profaning the power of God alone to create life.” (p. 67) On the other hand, Zuhur (2012) indicates that the prohibition on hanging drawings of living objects in mosques was simply a way to distinguish them from Catholic churches. In short, although religion influences some Saudi artists in their artwork, this is not the case with all of them.



Figure 2:8: Mater, Magnetism (2009)



Figure 2:9: Mater, Mehrab (2009)

Illumination.

Publications on the history of visual arts in Saudi Arabia do include women artists. Abdurahman Assulaiman (2012) collected his articles on the “The Visual Arts Journey in Saudi Arabia”, written by request of the Saudi General Presidency of Youth Welfare, discloses the early visual arts movement, the role of the governmental and private organizations in Saudi. A large part of the book offers the background for each including personal information, education, achievements, exhibitions, and artwork, the brevity of the background sketch depending on the artist’s role in the local visual arts movement, and the level of the artist’s openness. Although the book is recently published, Assulaiman chose to write about 161 artists, of which only 25 of whom are female. Noticeably, women artists are not given the attention they deserve in the Saudi art history publications.

In another work on Saudi visual arts history, Alrosayes (2010) lists Saudi artists by generation, which interestingly shows the percentage of female artists in each generation: in the first group of artists, born in the 1930s and 1940s, only 3 of 31 artists on the list are female; in the second group, born in the 1950s, 9 out of 91 artists on the list are female; however, in the third generation of artists, born in the 1960s, 12 out of 24 artists on the list are female; and finally, in

the fourth generation, born in the 1970s, 19 out of 24 artists listed are female. A fifth generation, those born in the 1980s, is not included, as Alrosayes claims they are still at the beginning of their careers. These lists show how the number of notable Saudi female artists has grown in Saudi Arabia and is now, remarkably, higher than the number of male artists.

Female artists. A study by Haifa Alhababi (2012) titled “The Art of Women in the city of ‘Asir” focuses on the art of decorating walls inside houses, as decoration is considered women’s work (while the building of houses is considered men’s work). She examines the process of the women’s artistic wall paintings of their houses, particularly the colours, patterns, and the history behind this artistry. When the women described their work, they were very subjective, and Alhababi attributed their subjectivity to their vocabulary in understanding their artistic practices, which was not elaborate or specialized. She concludes that these women inherited this practice as part of family tradition, and that they do not discuss the ideas of the patterns in these walls frequently. This study showcased the relation between culture and art in Saudi Arabia, and art as part of the Saudi heritage. It also showed that gender roles in this context are socially constructed as women are expected to do the artwork.

Working with the notion of cultural heritage, Maha Alsenan (2007) has studied the influence of Saudi cultural heritage on Saudi female artists’ work and elements of the female artistic movement. Her study focused on the role of Saudi women in supporting visual arts. It included a documentation of all the organizations and institutes that were sponsored by Saudi women and specialized in teaching women fine arts and event planning of exhibitions. The study analyzed fifteen Saudi female artists’ artworks as to style, topics, and inspirations. The aim was to ascertain the influence of Saudi cultural heritage on the female artist’s artwork and on her role in contemporary visual arts. Alsenan argued that the development of the Saudi female visual arts movement came late compared to that of male artists, as men had more

opportunities to develop as artists, including being granted scholarships to study either in Saudi Arabia or abroad. However, the author noted that recently female artists have been supported by organizations that focus on visual arts and activities and crafts exclusively for women. Alsenan concludes that studies and publications on female artists are still very limited, which is why Saudi female artists must put a lot of effort into sharing their artwork. Hence, the urgency and significance of my study. Alsenan's study also showed, however, the increase in the number of the Saudi women artists and the increase in the attention and support they are given.

A study by another Saudi researcher, Masodah Qurban (2009), focused on the importance of women's role in enriching the contemporary movement of visual arts in Saudi Arabia. Her research focused on the achievements of 'pioneer' women artists in from the 1960s through the 1990s in the area of visual arts and painting in particular. She concluded that Saudi women artists supported the contemporary visual arts movement by their growing participation in exhibitions nationally and internationally, by attending public presentations and lectures about visual arts, by making and attending workshops. Qurban also mentioned the role of Safeya Binzagr's museum in protecting part of the Saudi heritage, specifically women's traditional dresses, through visual arts.

Artist Safeya Binzagr (1999) published a book titled *A Three Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, in collaboration with other art educators and researchers. The book divided into four chapters discloses : briefly on how she became an artist; topics of her artwork and materials; the development of her museum; and of the mission and content of the museum. The book is descriptive and not critical in any way, and the artist does not mention if she faced any challenges or complications in her journey. Aljebreen (2014) focuses her study on Binzagr's representations of women, discussing the artwork she produced between 1968 and 2000. She argues that neither segregation nor the conservative norms of Saudi society affected Binzagr's

independence as she didn't have issues with these norms. The study showed the role of Binzager's family in building this sense of independence. Aljebreen aimed to explain that ambitious women can function and achieve their dreams even in a conservative society. However, her study didn't focus on the life story of Binzagr, nor on her journey as an artist.

Conclusion

The literature shows the change in how artists were perceived in Saudi society. In his study, Alshehri (2001) concludes that Saudi society does not respect artworks or appreciate artists as they do as engineers and doctors. Recently according to Alsenan (2007) female artists are supported through organizations that focus on visual arts and organize different activities and crafts exclusively for women. There is also an increase in the number of women artists in Saudi Arabia and the perception of the Saudi woman as an artist socially constructed and accepted. However, even with the growing number of Saudi women artists the number of publications about them and their achievements is limited. The literature lacks the life stories of Saudi women artists, which shows the importance of the current study.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

Seidman (1992) believes that *products of thought* are formed by people's gender, race, nationality, class, sexual orientation, and so on. He believes that feminists' epistemological stance against *disciplinary discourse*—and then against itself—proves that the epistemic claim of any social discourse is linked to an ongoing social force that form the sequence of history, which is the same reason that this circle repeats it self among African-Americans, Hispanics, and others. I begin this chapter with a discussion of feminism theory, and I briefly focus on the Arab/Muslim world. I then discuss postmodernism and the cooperation of these two theories. Next, I discuss postmodern feminism in the Arab/Muslim world. I relate these theories to the Saudi context throughout the chapter to validate my rationale for choosing postmodern feminism to analyse the study data.

Feminism

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women were considered unreasonable creatures; they did not have the right to vote, had only partial control over their own bodies and children, and could not own property after marriage (Beasley, 2005). At the time of women's rights movement, or what has since become known as first wave feminism, widespread support forward around the limited goal of obtaining the vote, was finally granted in the United States in 1920 and in Canada in 1918. The movement also encouraged women to pursue higher education. In the 1960s, a second wave of feminism arose arguing that men and women have different interests and that social change could cause political struggle (Osmond & Thorne,

1993). According to Beasley (2005), feminist theorists were more critical than before in terms of the liberal *universalizing* standard, as they did not ignore conditions in other nations. A more recent third wave of liberal feminism is sometimes called post-feminism. The main argument of this movement is that the 1960's and 1970's women's movement, and those that continue to follow its agenda, overestimated social barriers and were reluctant to appreciate women's subjectivity and accountability in their own lives. Located within the third wave of feminism, radical feminism strongly believes that systemic patriarchy is the main reason for women's oppression, and that male power is at the centre of the social construction of gender. It is clear, as Osmond and Thorne (1993) have argued, that when we talk about feminism, we are talking about feminisms in the plural.

hooks (2015) simply explains feminism as,

The struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into (p. 620).

hooks views feminism through a broad lens, but Osmond and Thorne (1993) suggest that the most suitable definition to begin the dialogue on the issue is that of Linda Gordon (1979), namely "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (p. 107). Osmond and Thorne (1993) outline the main themes of feminism: the importance of women and their experiences; the acknowledgment that women are subordinated

or oppressed under existing social actions; and the obligation to end that undeserved subordination. They added one more theme: namely the importance of gender and gender relations as basic to all social life. That is, women's subordination is historical and is therefore either struggled over and fought against. Women's acceptance of a subordinate status, as Beasley (1999) explains, was clearly presented in the social and political mainstream and appears to have been manifested in two ways: the first outlook includes a description of women as limited helpmates, and the second is the notion of women as different but also balancing. In that sense, feminists do not see it as their task to simply analyze *what is* as given, but take the point of view of *skepticism* questioning if "the world has to be this way?" (Beasley, 2005, p. 16).

The often cited quote by the very influential French feminist Simone De Beauvoir (2011) "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society" (p. 283) was a landmark idea in feminism thinking. Osmond and Thorne (1993) argue that she influenced the notion the social construction of gender that power is essential and that because of dominant constructions of power, men are commonly viewed as Subject and women as Objects or *the Other*. As De Beauvoir (2011) voiced it, "she is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (p. 6). Butler (2004), furthermore, suggests that gender is a modern way of shaping past and future cultural customs, as a person can situate him/herself in and through those customs. For Butler (1994), gender is a matter of choice in a world constituted by others, those around us, in culturally existing positions. For her, gender is a performance and the process of becoming a "gender," means understanding the reality of a culture full of and led by certain "gendered" authorizations and prohibitions. Noddings (2009) believes that gender is

socially constructed, and the idea of *difference* in the framework of gender always have been described as difference from the masculine standard. According to Osmond and Thorne (1993), feminism studies also focus on social change, as feminists aim to change the world and not only know about it. They note that feminist studies highlight the importance of studying gender relations within a sociocultural and historical framework. In this world we are always and repeatedly formed by others (Butler, 2004). Therefore, life stories must for example be seen as being at least partly socially constructed. As Hacking (1999) says, a person's life story is an explanation of how he/she is constructed by a social practice. In his work on social construction, Hacking suggests that when we study life stories as social construction we are changing the way we see relations rather than merely defining them.

Sexual difference is equally an important issue in feminism. Beasley (2005) suggests five main ways to approach sexual difference: the first uses a conception of *sameness*, based on a belief that men and women are much the same. The second, using a conception of *difference*, claim women and their cultural agenda to be different from men. According to Beasley, the idea of difference is often associated with (Western) European or *continental* feminism and it is connected most generally with radical, psychoanalytic and French feminisms. The third includes the notion of *power*. In the 1990s, feminist theorists focused on the association and influence of power, as articulated through a postmodern/poststructuralist argument. The fourth is based on the belief that women are superior to men. The fifth and final approach consists in the idea that men and women can be associated in allied struggles. Here, in order to stress the importance of possible agreements and the importance that multiple positions face oppression by systems of power, the question of sexual difference is viewed as one oppression-facing position among others. In this stance, sexual difference is associated with socialist and poststructuralist/postmodernist forms of feminism.

Radical feminism was founded by Shulamith Firestone in the late 1960s. According to Osmond and Thorne (1993), radical feminists strongly believe that systemic patriarchy is the main reason for women's oppression; they contend that male power is at the center of the social construction of gender. These authors identify two main branches of radical feminist theorizing: the first aims to change men's control over women's sexuality and reproduction. The second branch, sometimes called *cultural feminism*, celebrates women's cultural, spiritual, and sexual experiences. A goal of cultural feminism is to basically restructure society around principles like community and nurturance, which they believe are central to *woman culture*. bell hooks (2015) uses the absence of choice as a definition of oppression; she believes that the possibility of choice is the main difference between the oppressed and the oppressor. However, she argues that modern feminism declares that "all women are oppressed," implying that all women share the same issues such as class, race, religion, sexual preference, etc., and ignoring the importance of understanding women's experiences as diverse, and the extent to which gender discrimination operates as an *oppressive power* (p. 245).

Black feminists have a voice in both liberal and radical feminism. The work of theorists such as bell hooks has influenced the direction of discussions not only on race and equality, but also on family, community, and schooling (Noddings, 2009). hooks (2015) believes that Black women, with their unique and valuable contributions, occupy a strong position in the making of feminist theory. She believes that feminist leaders have for the most part not been able to communicate with other women's groups, especially working class and women of color. The crack that bell hooks and postcolonial and other feminists of color have opened, served as a site where feminism in the Arab/Muslim world was able to locate itself.

Feminism in the Arab/Muslim world. Many feminists believe that a problematic issue within mainstream Western social and political thought is that it acts falsely in its preference for generalizing men's experiences to exemplify what's common to all human beings (Beasley, 1999). In this, First World, North American and European feminists share the same demand for positive change with feminists in the Third World and the Middle East (Alhassan, 2007; Moghissi, 1999). In 1924, the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was established in response to the issue of having few male politicians who would listen to and act on women's demands (Graham-Brown, 2001). During the next twenty years, some demands of the EFU were met on to women's health issues, the legal minimum age of marriage, and less restricted and complicated access to education. Since then there has been more public awareness of women's issues.

It is important to understand how both men and women apply their religion's beliefs to understand how a religion affects women's lives (Lazreg, 1988). In 1981, the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR) declared that women and men are of equal human status. As Boden (2007) puts it, "In traditional Muslim thought, women and men are held to be equal in their 'transcendental purpose,' their quest to live a life of sufficient submission to Allah" (p. 51). In addition, the Quran emphasizes that men and women are created from one soul, and that women have a voice, evident in the many narratives that describe the leadership and independence of women (Arebi, 1994). Sabbagh (1995) explains that the official Islamic views on all things including gender are based on three sources: the holy Quran, 'the uncontested bedrock of Islam'; the hadith, which includes what prophet Mohammed said and did; and Sharia, which is "the body of Islamic law based primarily on the Quran and hadith" (p. 12). According to Moghissi (1999), Muslim feminist activists argue that Islamic policies are male-biased and a result of a culturally inaccurate reading of the Quran. These feminists also argue that the Qur'an did not declare for men to be *superior* to women. According to Yamani (2009), "the ideology of

Islamic feminism calls for the promotion of the inalienable rights of women voiced through the moral framework of the Quran and hadith, doctrines which call for the judicious treatment of women” (p. 122). Islamic feminists stay veiled to symbolise their unity and their commitment to Islam, which distinguish them from liberal feminists. They are well-educated and work in positions of leadership in the public system. They do not demand the right to vote or work since they already have these rights, but challenge the norms of male supremacy that present obstacles for them in their professions. Moghissi believes that, “Islam ists’ manipulative use of gender issues and feminist concepts has led to confusion for many secular intellectuals, including feminists who have raised debate over ‘Islamic feminism’ on the agenda, some embracing it with enthusiasm, others rejecting it with passion” (p. 133). Graham-Brown (2001) maintains that women are suffering from the consequences of men’s control, as this practice is inherited from one generation to another. Sabbagh’ (1993) note that cultural traditions and social practices are often erroneously branded as “Islamic” is an important one. That is why, as she also indicates, 200 million Arab-Muslim people living in 22 Arab countries with different Islamic views and socio-economic conditions deal with women’s rights differently.

The Egyptian scholar Nawal El-Saadawi (1997) speaks of critique on some liberal feminism, on how it homogenizes or essentialises the experiences of Muslim women and can make them an object of feminist critique by viewing their oppression through a Western lens. This is problematic, because it constitutes a further form of oppression. Sabbagh (1993) reminds us that all cultures have their own type of oppression so it is important to not judge one culture by the standards of another. She also reminds us that not all Muslim women see themselves through a Western lens. Sabbagh blames Western mainstream media for the prevailing image of Muslim women, as they choose to focus on and exaggerate the degree of suppression instead of raising Arab women’s strength within the parameters of their own

cultures. She argues that the motive behind these narratives is not to build a relationship between women across cultures, nor to help Arab women, but rather to emphasize the success of women in Western cultures.

Assaif (2014) explains that the issue of women's roles and status in Saudi Arabia has two main dimensions: the first is related to the women's actual current position in the society regardless of what others assert. The second is related to how non-Saudis deal with this issue no matter what their intentions are. We focus on the second more than the first and neglecting the first. So, we need to pay more attention to what we have and what we are than to what others have to say about us; hence the objectives of the current research.

Postmodernism

Fraser and Nicholson (1990) say that from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, feminist theory repeatedly presented ideas that reflected the views of White, middle-class women of North America and Western Europe. Feminists gradually realized that particular issues of women were being ignored and marginalized. As a response to this limitation, Fraser and Nicholson propose postmodernism as a partner that helps to develop the foundation for a more universalized feminist theory.

The term *postmodernism* emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, and gained recognition in the 1970s and 1980s, informed by Jean-Francois Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition* as well as in the architectural criticism of Charles Jencks (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990). Postmodernism proposes a radical break with modernism (Williams, 2004). A central focus of postmodernism is science and its increasing growth and influence over different aspects of life through modernity; it has been used as a justification to exercise power in different ways (Fraser &

Nicholson, 1990). In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard (1984) defines postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it” (p. 28). Postmodernist discourse asks questions about how social relations should be organized and lived, about the social possibilities of our age, and about the social views that should underwrite in the postmodern epoch. As Boyne and Rattansi (1990) indicate, “Postmodern knowledge is not only a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (p. 28).

Postmodern discourses aim to make people distrustful about beliefs regarding truth, knowledge, power, self, and language that are as Flax (1990) puts it, “taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture” (p. 41). Foucault (1980) suggests that the connection between knowledge and power occurs because the ‘claim to truth,’ which is the false idea that there is a universal truth, overpowers alternative and subjugated knowledge. Smith (1996) believes that postmodernism shifts the whole claim to truth with concepts such as Lyotard’s (2002) notion of society as a diversity of language games, each with its regulation and practices, none of which can state its principles over others.

Hekman (1990) suggests that the stress of the constitutive influence in postmodernism reminds feminists that women are made not born; both theories challenge the origins of the modern episteme, knowledge and understanding. Hekman sees Flax as a feminist theorist who elaborates on the link between postmodernism and feminism, showing how compatible feminism is with postmodern standards. When it comes to postmodern feminism, Flax’s ideas in general concern feminist contributions to postmodernism through gender sensitivity, and how postmodernism can change the essentialist trends of some feminist thought.

As Denzin (2005) explains, postmodernism, like the air we breathe, “is everywhere around us: in sprawling urban shopping malls, television soap operas, situation comedies, evening news, films like *Blue Velvet* and *The Morning After*, at the computer terminal and in the eye of the omnipresent camera” (p. 184). Less poetically, Denzin elaborates that postmodernism designates a series of historical moments from World War II to the present; it is a *unique* set of arranged practices that indicate the globalism form of late capitalism that has injected new cultural judgments and new systems of communication and representation into the cultural structures and the world economy (see also Denzin, 1994). What allows an extension of the term postmodernism to both the fine arts and trends within the disciplines of literary theory, philosophy, and the social sciences is that they share a common condition that Boyne and Rattansi (1990) would characterize as “a series of crises of representation” (p. 12). Dickens and Fontana (1994) also define postmodernism as “a crisis of representation or standards in the arts, sciences, and society” (p. 6). Postmodern reflections on the arts is one of the significant reasons for my interest in postmodern feminism as a lens through which to understand the artists’ life stories.

Postmodernism and Feminism in Cooperation

Postmodern and feminist perspectives share the common goal of developing concepts for social criticism that are not based on traditional philosophical foundations (Fraser & Nicholson, 1988). According to Hekman (1990), although Fraser and Nicholson (1988) support the theorists’ work, some is mentioned earlier in this chapter, on the cooperation between postmodernism and feminism mentioned earlier, they also believe that postmodernism should be politicized to serve feminism. However, they make a similar claim to Flax’s, that

postmodernism can be used to negotiate the essentialism hidden within the products of thought of many feminist theorists. As Hekman adds, postmodernism's support of feminism comes from its rejection of taken-for-granted scientific principles and truths, as this is in line with many feminists' opinions about nature, science, and women. These feminists question the very foundation of science and its language as patriarchal and masculinist, hence the birth of postmodernism with feminism.

Pushing these ideas further, Flax (1990) sees postmodernism as contributing to the death of man, of history, and of metaphysics. Sayla Benhabib (1995) explains 'the death of man' as being capable of acting on one's own beliefs; 'the death of history' as dismissing history's traditional lack of epistemic attention to suffering groups by rising their past; and 'the death of metaphysics' as being unable to criticize institutions and traditions, except through small narratives. Benhabib believes these three theses show that a certain version of postmodernism could imperil the opportunity of feminism to act as the theoretical voice of the emancipatory hopes of women. She adds that postmodernism challenges the feminist obligation to women's activity and practice, to the adoption of women's own history in the name of a liberated future and to the implementation of essential social criticism that reveals gender.

From Judith Butler's (1994) point of view, postmodernism appears to be centered around the following critical creation which includes the following: "if discourse is all there is, if everything is text, if the subject is dead, or if real bodies do not exist" (p. 153). Feminist postmodernism, as she puts it, to use Di Stefano's (1990) phrasing, is "an epistemology that justifies knowledge claims only insofar as they arise from enthusiastic violation of the founding taboos of Western humanism" (p. 193).

Postmodernism and feminism have many similarities. Fraser and Nicholson (1990) offer three points: first, both theories have proposed a profound critique of the foundation of

philosophy. Second, both have developed critical standpoints on the relativity of philosophy to the greater culture. Lastly, both have aimed to create new standards of social criticism that do not depend on a traditional philosophical foundation. Hekman (1990) agrees with these points and adds that both focus to have/aim to challenge the human-related definition of knowledge. Benhabib (1995) adds that feminism and postmodernism are key terms. Diamond and Quinby (1988) argue that Foucault's focus on the body, power, discourse, and subject can serve feminist research and support the study of the mechanism of gender. They claim that feminism and postmodernism are the only current theories that offer a profound criticism of modernism's Enlightenment legacy (see also Benhabib, 1995, and Flax, 1990), creating a strong and natural relationship between the two theories (Hekman, 1990). While positivist philosophical foundations in academic research refer to supposedly objective, linear ways of studying the world that privilege some groups to the exclusion of others. Postmodern feminist criticism aims to break with tradition and not be rooted in the same conceptual language as that which it seeks to critique. For the purpose of my research, I use postmodern feminism rather than postmodernism *or* feminism on their own because, as Flax (1999) contends, postmodern feminism uncovers Western ambiguity about the proper basis and methods for understanding human experience. Furthermore, feminist theory is criticized for generalizing the experience of Western, White, middle-class women, which can in itself be seen as a reproduction of gender oppression. For example, Minh-Ha (1989) is one of many non-Western feminists and scholars of color who have argued that Third World women lacked a voice in feminism and were doubly oppressed: by the Western feminist gaze as well as by patriarchal systems. Yamani (2000) explains that Muslim feminists reject the Western feminism as they believe that their cultural movement is developing a new agenda.

As a non-Western in a rich Third World country, these complexities within feminism are important in Saudi Arabia as it has a social structure where traditional gender roles remain prominent.

Postmodern feminism in the Arab/Muslim world. A key goal of feminism is social change, but in the Arab/Muslim world change is perceived differently. Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi asserts that *Arab identity* has been conceived in a way that regards change as threatening to the moral order, thus impeding the development of both democracy and the emancipation of women (Graham-Brown, 2001, p. 31). In Saudi Arabia, according to Assaif (2014), people want change, but they are afraid of it or afraid it would extend beyond what they want.

Walberg (2013) claims that “sophisticated postmodernists can be inspired by Islam...to see through the fog of our Enlightenment world” as Islamic believers need a postmodernist view to fully understand Islam and what he calls “the devilish dead end the West now faces” (p. 21). Aziz Alazmeh, a leading Arab political theorist and the author of *Arabic thought and Islamic societies* (2013) and *Islam and Modernities* (2009), suggests that imperialists have used Islamists to their political advantage to justify their economic and social order.

Moghissi (1999) suggests specific postmodern perspectives that are relevant for Muslim women, and hence for my research. These perspectives can be summarized as:

- 1) a dissatisfaction with the basis of modern social thought, Western modernity, and science;
- 2) a rejection of metanarratives, a challenging of the concepts of reason and truth, and a stressing of difference;
- 3) a focus on the image of the Other, and on the processes of the social relegation of others;

- 4) an interest in language and exploration of discourse as ways of communicating that show the influence of authority in society;
- 5) a questioning of gender and its historical construction;
- 6) identity as a choice;
- 7) a skepticism about power; and, finally,
- 8) a realization that beliefs and knowledge are culturally constructed.

Bringing all these contentions together, I used postmodern feminism as a lens through which I analyzed the Saudi female artists' life stories and find answers to my research question, especially this crucial question: given the overly patriarchal and masculinist society of Saudi Arabia, how were these female artists able to be creative and become well known artists in the Saudi society? putting in mind the "sharia" law, e.g., and their general situatedness as women in a man-dominated society, and how this affected their art and identity.

Conclusion

Nilsen (1996) suggests that life story narratives can help us understand women's lives within their societies. They share their worries, experiences, and personal explanations; thereby offering a close look at the connections of the social structure and, as Nilsen puts it, "individuals' experiences within the boundaries of their time and place in the world" (p. 28). Feminism, Rice (2009) argues, is the best basis for theorizing women's stories; and when combined with postmodernism it will give me a clear understanding of the context where the life stories of Saudi female artists developed their art. Alsaif (2014) discusses individuality within the Saudi context explaining that individuals understanding of their own world is in two ways: either as being influenced by their surroundings but nevertheless making their decisions

autonomously or as making their decisions in keeping with their surroundings. Either way, individuals are viewed as having a choice whether to act autonomously or not, and are expected to take sole responsibility for their actions. Both views are adopted by conflicting streams in Saudi society. Both directions presuppose free will. Alsaif adds that 'tradition' is the rod that keeps the members of the group closer. It determines what is considered good and what is considered bad and the role of individuals in the society. When it comes to Saudi women, Yamani (2000) argues that,

Women's definition of 'traditional' roles have changed. But their experiences of rapid social transformation of Saudi society are shaped by the search for an authentic identity coherent with traditional Muslim culture, yet consistent with their desire to capitalize on increased opportunities. (p. 99)

Finally, in forming a life story that focuses on the *self* and gives the individual's life meaning, a postmodern perspective can offer support through its focus on self-progress (McAdams, 2001). Questioning a discourse can challenge and characterize the meaning of the leading systems in ways that form our own situation, involvement and dependency (Lather, 1991). These are the reasons why I am using postmodern feminism as my theoretical framework and the reasons why I am focusing on life stories of these four female Saudi artists. From this perspective, I am not seeking generalization but a deeper understanding of how these women became artists within (and maybe in spite of) their society.

Chapter Four

Methodological Framework

Denzin and Lincoln (2002) describe the epistemological underpinnings of qualitative research as “a broad, interpretive, postmodern, feminist, and critical sensibility” (p. x). Qualitative inquiry encompasses narrative research which, Mishler (1999) argues, is the best way to represent and understand human experience. For the purpose of my research and to understand the Saudi women artists’ life experiences and how they were able to express themselves in Saudi society as artists overcoming barriers, I will draw upon a specific type of narrative research by adopting and adapting the life story approach.

In this Chapter, I discuss this methodological approach for my study as I explain why I chose narrative and life story in particular. Then, I discuss the social construction of life stories. After that I focus on the methods of the data collection explaining why I chose it and how I proceeded. I describe my study’s participants and the life story interview in which I clarify where it took place, how the procedure went. Finally, I explain how I presented my findings and analyzed the data including the artists’ artwork.

Narrative

Polkinghorne (1988) defined narrative as a kind of structural system articulated in story form. In his opinion, based on the context, narrative can refer to the process of making a story; that is to say, it refers to a fully finished story that can be narrated or told from beginning to end. Thinking of it as an academic discipline or a field, Creswell’s (2007) definition of narrative is more systematic: where narrative is a focus study of one individual or more, the

collecting of data from the stories they tell, the recording of their experience, and the ordering of their experiences' meanings chronologically through life stages. Others focus on the researcher's role in narrative. For example, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Mishler (1999) contend that narrative is the best way to represent and understand individual experience. They see it as a social setting collaboration between the narrator and the researcher over time which is located in one place or more. In a later study Clandinin et al. (2009) stress that narrative research is "relational research" (p. 599), which refers to, the type of collaboration between the researcher and the participant and the time they spend together (Coulter, 2009),

Through narrative, as Bruner (2002) puts it, "we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process" (p. 93). Narrative inquiry today is influenced by the mid-1960s resurgence of researchers' interest in studying lives (Polkinghorne, 1988). Langellier (2001) identified four reasons behind this narrative turn: 1) the new interest in the notion of identity; 2) the sudden attention to memoirs; 3) the social science positivist methods of inquiry and their pragmatist epistemology; and 4) the growing demand to investigate personal lives for therapy. An important element in narrative is plot. Mishler (1986) described a plot in an earlier publication: "plot is, in every sense of the word, the articulation of the skeleton of narrative" (p. 12). He also shared Scholes and Kellogg's (2006) definition of plot as the active chronological component in narrative writing. Polkinghorne (1988) describes plot as an arranged narrative discourse and verbal expression that makes meaning through chronological order and development. He explains that making past events meaningful requires the acceptance of their reality and their effect on the participant relating this effect to the study.

In her work on women's narratives, Nilsen (1996) indicates that their 'life-history' narratives help our understanding of their lives in their societies. Women express their worries

and explain their experiences, both the private and the personal. Their stories, Nilsen contends, “offer in-depth insight into the connections between the structural dimensions of society, and individuals’ experiences within the boundaries of their time and place in the world” (p. 28). Such depth of insight should help me interpret their life stories and in so doing find answers to my research question. There are some feminist critiques of how women’s autobiography has been ignored because of the extensive attention on male autobiographies (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 2001). In the Saudi women’s case, this might be the result of the high consideration of privacy. In Graham’s (1991) work about Saudi society, he notes that the Saudi male’s reputation is important so he prefers to keep his family life private as female members are part of it. This is supported by the Saudi Islamic traditions that encourage people’s privacy, making family homes sacrosanct.

Narratives create meaning and as Polkinghorne (1988) puts it, “narrative meaning consists of more than the events alone; it consists also of the significance these events have for the narrator in relation to a particular theme” (p. 160). He suggests that you can understand access meanings only when you realize that “something is a part of some whole and that something is the cause of something else” (p. 6). According to Bruner (1990), “meaning is a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends upon the prior existence of a shared symbol system” (p. 69). Riessman (2008) describes meaning making as the connection between ‘self’ and events, she adds that meaning making has different levels depending on the level of influence the events had on the ‘self’. It is possible that a narrative delivers the connection between a sense of self and a sense of others in one’s social life, which is a common point among the different types of narratives (Bruner, 1986). Stated another way, the levels of meaning in life story are both interpreted in a personal sense and shared in a collective sense.

Identities are developed within the framework of a particular culture rather than as a result of an individual's autonomous accomplishments (McAdams, 1996), and life story contains a defined set of temporally and thematically structured events and writings that, when combined, form identity (McAdams, 2001). Mishler (1999) believes that narratives are identity acts, as through the content of our stories and the way we tell them declare who we are and who we want to be. McAdams (2001) believes that in early adulthood, both men and women are encouraged under cultural stress to develop their identities, and identity takes the form of a story, including scenery, personality, conspiracy, and subject. In modern life, constructing one's own meaningful life story is a cultural imperative. As we move today into what some observers have deemed a postmodern world, the problem of fashioning an identity may become even more challenging. The postmodern concept of selfhood and the life story-supported goal of identity are both based on a concern for individuals' narratives. What is interesting in the Saudi case is that defining women is linked to defining history because they are both linked to modernization (Arebi, 1994). Narrative performances of self-making are mostly led by silent, hidden cultural examples of what selfhood is supposed to be, would be, and not supposed to be (Bruner, 2002). The influence of the Saudi culture on the female artists' identity and therefore on their life stories is very significant.

Life Story. Atkinson (1998) believes that as today's communities are more loosely connected and people's lives more separate, partly as a result of increased mobility, life stories play a highly valued role. This is because stories, specifically those of older generations, can provide researchers with valuable information about parts of the life cycle, and reminded of what truly matters in life. He suggests that the role of life story is,

Primarily to pull together the central elements, events and beliefs in a person's life, integrate them into a whole, make sense of them, learn from them, teach the younger

generation and remind the rest of one's community what is most important in life." (p. 19)

As one approach to narrative, life story is simply defined on the one hand by Knowles (2001) as an oral or written description of a whole life, or part of a life, as formed by a person. On the other hand, Linde (1993) defines it as,

All the stories and associated discourse units such as explanations and chronicles, and the connections between them, told by an individual during the course of his/her life time that satisfy the following two criteria: 1) The stories and associated discourse units contained in the life story have as their primary evaluation a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is, 2) The stories and associated discourse units have extended reputability; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time. (p. 21)

Linde (1993) emphasizes the importance of discourse in his definition of life stories, while Bruner (2002) stresses the notion of self. Bruner believes that by talking about ourselves we are likely to create a story about who we are, what we do, and why. He indicates that stories about ourselves grow and change over time as life and surroundings change. Stories are more about meaning than about documenting all the details of an event (McAdams 1993).

The Social Construction of Life Stories

Tonkin (1995) believes that through life story we are in a position to learn how a person experiences and comprehends his or her life over the years, and to identify connections among different life stories. A key tenet of the life story approach is to understand one's life as part of whole, like the community, and not only as one separate life (Atkinson, 1998). McAdams

(2001) suggests that people develop their life stories in early adulthood when they begin to chart their adult lives, thinking and reconstructing the past and predicting their future in order to give meaning and a sense of unity to their lives. By contrast Dunlop and Walker (2013) suggest that a life story can be developed as early as around the age of six since children can think about their past and wonder about the future. However, they agree that what is told in adolescence is qualitatively different from what is expressed at an earlier age.

McAdams agrees with Thorne (2000) that family and friends conspire in ‘self-making’, which means that life stories and self-making memories are socially created, and even if family and friends are not around, life stories may recall their characters. He adds that biographies are expected to start with family in order to enable related issues experienced at a later age to earlier struggles, and to integrate ‘epiphanies’ that signify life changes and progress. For McAdams (2001), life stories reflect the culture where they were developed and shared. He also believes that stories are born, develop, bloom, and eventually die depending on the standards, rules, and traditions that prevail in a given society. Therefore, in a way, we learn about a society through the life stories taking place there. They are developed by the person him-/herself but within the cultural context where that person’s life occurred created and made meaning. These personal stories are samples of the wide-ranging cultural canon of stories about how life moves on (Polkinghorne, 1988). The concept of life story is not universal; it varies by culture and subculture (Linde, 1993), and as McAdams says, this great variation of cultural narratives and discourse creates with it new examples of possible selfhood. Atkinson (1998) believes that life story narrative could be the best way to understand how the self develops over time. He defines the self as “an ongoing story, or creative interpretation” (p. 11). Relating it to the culture, Plath (1987), suggests that culture and cultural meanings are not external to the life and meaning of

the self but constitutive of it. When studying more than one life story we identify links and common themes, which was very interesting in the cases in my study given the differences.

Bruner (2002) suggests that culturally determined intellectual and verbal processes shape experience, organize memories, and present life events in a way that is purposeful. Bertaux (1981) sees in each life story a contribution to understanding a certain system of social relations. Inversely, when we have a clear understanding of the social relations it helps in the analysis of the data collected from a life story. Life stories are not a record of all the events in someone's life course, but each storyteller structures his/her self-image in her own way (Kohli 1981). Hacking (1999) indicates that a person's life story is an explanation of how he/she is constructed by a social practice. In his work on social construction, he suggests that when we study life stories within social constructionist perspective we are changing the way we see relations more than defining them. According to Hacking, constructionists believe that they have a perfect base for reality but after analysis they change their views.

Participants

My research participants are four elite Saudi female artists: Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan. Marshall and Rossman's (2010) work on interviewing 'elites', explains that elites are people in a position of power and influence who are usually well known in their society. These four influential female artists are from different regions of Saudi Arabia and come from different backgrounds. The methods, subjects and media of their artwork are also very different (figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4). Also, the four artists' journeys as artists were from different eras. I present more details in the following table:



Figure 4.1: Binzagr, Zabun(1969)



Figure 4.2: Almalluh, Abwab II (2012)



Figure 4.3: Alhussan, Still Funny (2012)



Figure 4.4: Albagshi, Untitled (2012)

Artist	Year of birth	Region	Type of art
Safeya Binzagr	1940	Born in Jeddah, and raised in Egypt.	Realistic drawing
Maha Almalluh	1959	Born and raised in Jeddah, western region of Saudi Arabia.	Vintage installations and other
Tagreed Albagshi	1975	Born and raised in Alhasa, eastern region of Saudi Arabia.	Abstract paintings and installations
Fida Alhussan	1980	Born and raised in Riyadh, central region of Saudi Arabia.	Pop Art paintings

Table 4.1: Table shows the artists' backgrounds, interests, etc.

I chose these four women primarily for their achievements in Saudi visual arts. Their age difference and differences in backgrounds allowed me to gather a richer data. I was touched by the artwork of these four great and inspiring artists and they attracted my attention at some point of my own life journey as an artist. I was left with many questions in my mind about their work and their experiences that I always hoped one day I would find answers. This study not only fulfilled my curiosity, but the findings surprised me even though I am Saudi and I am familiar with the four regions. Interviewing is my primary method of data collection; however, I also used my journals and the art work of the artists in which I will elaborate on more later in this chapter.

One of the most challenging stages of conducting this study was finding references. The harder it was for me to find references the more I realize the need of such a study. As a researcher working from Canada it was even more challenging because there is a great lack of publications on Saudi women, Saudi visual arts, and Saudi women artists that can be accessed online and in English. I had to travel to Saudi and search among Arabic references and even though I had hard time finding references on Saudi women or Saudi women artists, when I met with Binzagr she surprised me that more than a hundred researchers met with her before I did and told her they were conducting studies about her collections. However, I wasn't able to find any studies conducted about her but Aljebreen's (2014), whom she was very satisfied with her work. So, I started my research by creating three lists: arts education in general, feminism and art feminism, Middle East/Islam/Arab women artists. I did that through keyword research, such as 'art education,' 'feminism,' 'art,' 'art feminism,' 'Arab women,' 'Arab women artist,' etc. These lists are refined throughout my course work, comprehensive exam, proposal and eventually the thesis. Given the newness of my research, my list is still growing.

Methods of Data Collection

The life story interview. Janesick (2004) defines interviewing as a “meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic” (p. 72). In life story, the topic is the participant’s whole life and not only a part of it; it is an in-depth and detailed study of a person’s life (Atkinson, 1998). In telling their life story, participants tell it in their own way, choose what to say and how to say it. This is a very important point to consider, as researchers learn both from what interviewees say and how they say it (in terms of voice, words, expressions, and ideas) as it reflects their subjective understanding of their own life experience (Tonkin, 1995).

Preparing for the interviews. After I received ethics approval, I immediately started contacting the artists. Initially I first emailed them all, and then followed up with telephone calls so I could introduce myself and my research more clearly and to start building the necessary relationship of trust. I was able to speak to all but Binzagr in person; in Binzagr’s case I spoke instead with her assistant. Again, all but Binzagr agreed immediately to the interview. I will explain Binzagr’s hesitation later in this chapter. None of the other three artists was hesitant; on the contrary, they wanted to support me as a researcher and help me in any way they could. A common reaction I noticed was that they saw it as a way of supporting their Saudi sister in her graduate studies journey in Canada. We set the dates for the interview sessions over the phone and due to the limited time I was able to stay in Saudi Arabia, some of the sessions ended up being conducted through long-distance audio calls online.

The reason my stay in Saudi Arabia was limited had to do with my 6-year-old son being registered to attend school in Ottawa. Marshall and Rossman (2010) believe that some of the challenges the interviewer might face when dealing with elites are difficulties reaching them or scheduling a meeting because of their busy lives. Their busy schedules were one of the issues I faced as they are not only committed to their careers, but most of them also have families. As a Saudi myself, I was very understanding of how highly valued family commitments were for them. Generally, having the same language, gender, religion, interest, and nationality in common with the interviewees made me in many ways an insider. The privilege of being an insider and sharing the same culture is a help in understanding the artists' stories as they unfold (Herod, 1999).

Since I am a Saudi art educator, I was already familiar with the work of these artists; however, I familiarized myself more with their backgrounds, activities, and artwork in preparation for the interviews. Before the interview, Atkinson (1998) suggests preparing the participant for a summary of his/her life, drawing a timeline that illustrates 'key events', and creating a collage using different types of paper, newspapers, posters, and printed words. Before the first interview sessions I asked the participants to present the key events of their lives in a timeline. However, they were not interested. Marshall and Rossman (2010) stress the importance of researcher sensitivity when revealing the participant's personal information in order to ensure his/her level of comfort and to protect the participant's private life. It is important to remember that the concept of the "private" self is not universal, but defined differently depending on the culture (Bruner, 1986).

When it comes to the Saudi context, as I mentioned earlier, Islamic traditions encourage people's privacy (Graham, 1991), which was a challenge. In that sense, the preparation before the interview was an important part of the process, because it gave the interviewees the

opportunity to decide what personal information to reveal. In Bloom's (2002) experience as a researcher she found the hardest personal challenge when conducting narrative interviews was when she felt she was overstepping on the participants' privacy. A solution suggested by one of her participants was that they could in turn ask her questions about herself and her life. I decided to do the same thing. Before I started the first session I talked about myself, giving a short summary of my life story, mentioning the names of the institutions and connections, I had reason to believe would be familiar to them, in order to give them a sense of what kind of person they were about to reveal their personal information to.

Interview structure. Adopting Atkinson's (2007) suggestions, the life story interviews with the chosen Saudi female artists were originally planned to consist of three interview sessions, one to two hours each. I wanted the artists to take their time and not rush their answers. Since the four chosen participants are from different generations, the length of their life journey is obviously also different. I was expecting that the older the artist, the longer her interview would be. The opposite proved to be the case as the younger the artist the more open and unhesitating she was about what she wanted to say. At the beginning of each session I asked the participant to let me know when she needed a break or wished to end it for any reason. I made sure to make them feel that I was flexible as I didn't want to put them under any pressure.

During the audio sessions the participants stopped for some breaks, and Almalluh and Albagshi chose to end the first session before I finished asking the questions I planned for this session as they were tired. Although the planned structure for each session had to change, all the interview questions were covered during the sessions. Atkinson (1998) believes that even if interviewing is a systematic method, it is also an art because interviewers have their own ways of applying the method, including how they interpret responses. Atkinson offers a few tips for

getting the best out of a life story interview: taking a step back and carefully observing the participant, so you can predict the direction of the story and anticipate what question is most suitable to ask next, and trying to adjust and adapt to the interview settings.

The structure of the life story interview is different from one researcher to another. Atkinson (1998) suggests 200 broad and specific questions that can be used by any life story researcher such as: what was going on in your family, your community, and the world at the time of your birth? What do you see as the purpose of life? McAdams (1993) begins his interviews by asking the participants to talk about their life in chapters as if it is a book. This helps to organize the narrative structure. The interview then becomes more focused by asking about the eight 'key events': "peak experience, Nadir experience, that means the low point, turning point, earliest memory, important childhood memory, an important adolescent memory, an important adult memory, and other important memory" (p. 258). Finally, participants are asked about important people in their life, future plans, challenges and problems faced in life, personal beliefs and values, and finally, overall life theme.

In this section, I will describe the structure of the interview and the interview questions. Adapting McAdams's (1993) life story interview questions, my semi-structured interviews were divided into three sessions. The first session started with general questions about the participant's name, date of birth, and family, after which I asked her to show me some of her artworks and to talk about them, including her reasons for choosing these pieces in particular, and reports of any reactions from other people toward any or all of them. My hope was that after talking about her work in the first session she would have been made more comfortable and excited to tell me more. However, due to the long-distance audio sessions and the artists' busy schedules the first session with Almalluh and Albagshi did not go as planned and I had to change to interviewing them in person on the third session. After that I asked the participants

about their life's key events: "peak experience, Nadir experience, that means the low point, turning point or epiphanies, earliest memory, and important childhood memory, an important adolescent memory, an important adult memory, and other important memory" (p. 258). Denzin (1989) described epiphanies as "those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person" (p. 15).

The second session was more focused, participants were asked about important people in their lives, their future, challenges and problems faced in life, and finally their personal beliefs and values.

The third session focused more on the participant's life as an artist. I started by asking the artist when and how she realized she wanted to become an artist. Then, I asked her about what inspired her artwork and how she became part of the visual arts community. After that I asked about the role of the following on her life as an artist: family, society, traditions, religion, heritage, and education. Finally, I asked the participant if the fact that she is a woman affected her life as an artist and her art production (See appendix A for the interview questions).

Seidman (2013) stresses the importance of listening on at least three levels: concentrate to make sure that what the participant provides is thorough and complete; listen to the participant's inner voice; and listen carefully with awareness of the process. He believes that when asking about the past it is always better to ask participants to reconstruct their experiences by reforming it from their current point of view instead of remembering. Through narrative, as Bruner (2002) puts it, "we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process" (p. 93). In his view stories about ourselves grow over time and change as life and our surroundings change.

Procedure and Timeline

Stokrocki (1997) defines gaining access as a process of obtaining approval to conduct research, whether formally or informally. She adds that trust plays a central role in gaining access. However, when access is denied the efforts are still considered data according to one of Delamont's (2007) golden rules for access. Another rule is that as hard as it is to gain access, getting useful data once the researcher is in the field may prove a further challenge. Willing and Rogers (2008) also find closed settings more difficult to access than open public sittings and they encourage researchers to be ready for such challenges. Once the researcher successfully enters the field, this does not mean that the issues of access are solved. No matter what the researcher's background may be, it is very important to respect the rules of culturally appropriate behaviour (Hemmersley & Atkinson 2008).

In this section I will explain in detail how, where, and why the interview sessions were planned and conducted with each artist. Due to my life circumstances during the data collection stage I was unable initially to travel to Saudi Arabia to interview the artists face to face. To save time, I started with online audio interview sessions online. I conducted audio interviews with Almalluh and Albagshi in November 2015, then with Alhussan end of March 2016 after the face to face session. I postponed interviewing Binzagr via audio, hoping that I would have the time to interview her face to face when I travelled to Saudi Arabia. In March 2016, I did travel to Saudi Arabia, and I had the chance to meet and interview all four artists. At that time I thought I was done collecting the data, but after I started the analysis I realized I had to go back to the artists to ask some follow-up questions to clarify some of the information they had given me in the previous interviews. The following table describes the number and lengths of the interview sessions:

Artist	Number and type of session	Total time spent
Binzagr	Two face-to-face interview sessions in Jeddah.	Two hours and 32 minutes
Almalluh	Two audio interview sessions and one face-to-face session in Riyadh.	Two hours and 44 minutes
Albagshi	Two audio interview sessions and one face-to-face session in Alhassa.	Two hours and 58 minutes
Alhussan	One audio interview session and one face-to-face session in Riyadh.	One hour and 45 minutes

Table 4.2: The location and length of the interview sessions.

Consent forms were provided to the artists via email as soon as they agreed to participate in the study. Most of them did not sign the forms until after the interviews; they asked to take their time, and I did not pressure them as they assured me not to worry. Before the first session I emailed all the artists a consent form so they could take their time reading it. I had to translate it to Arabic as Albagshi preferred an Arabic version. Before I started the first session with each artist I talked about my life, education, and work experience, and asked the artists to ask me anything they wanted about myself.

Binzagr: To reach Binzagr I emailed the *Darah*, the museum, on the only email address I found on their website. I received a response from her assistant, Ms. Kawthar Alfarhan, who informed me that the artist apologized, but said she didn't want to participate; she wanted to give other artists the chance to be part of the study. Her reason was that another study had recently been conducted about her and she didn't want me to repeat herself. I appreciated her concern, but sent more information about my study and emphasized the importance of her participation. Eventually she agreed although at that time she wasn't totally convinced that my

study wouldn't be repetitious of other studies. Her assistant contacted me and we arranged for the sessions. Even though I had to travel by plane to the city of Jeddah to meet with Binzagr, I was fortunate to be able to have both sessions face to face with her. Both interviews took place in the *Darah*. Although the original plan was to conduct three interview sessions, with Binzagr two were sufficient as she kept her answers short with no elaboration. An unexpected thing that happened was that at one point during one of the two interview sessions she asked me to stop recording so she could talk to me more freely. I found it interesting that even though a great many researchers had interviewed her before me she hesitated to talk about certain topics. My father knew her late brother but even though I told her when I met her, it didn't seem to mean a lot to her or to build trust between us. It could be that she was used to people saying things like that to her, and since her brother passed away there was no way for her to confirm the information. I was honoured to meet with Binzagr, the leading female artist in the history of the visual arts movement in Saudi.

Almalluh: When I emailed Almalluh she responded immediately, but unfortunately she wasn't available at the time of my visit to Saudi Arabia. She asked me to call her to arrange for the sessions. Coincidentally I found out that my sister knew her through her in-laws so she was able to bring me her phone number. I found this connection an opportunity to start building trust with Almalluh. She was very kind and cooperative, and we arranged dates for the first two sessions as they were to be conducted through an online audio program. The third session was face to face at her residence and home studio in Riyadh during my next visit to Saudi Arabia. Like Binzagr, at one point Almalluh wasn't comfortable talking while the microphone was on.

Albagshi: Albagshi was very understanding as she was also working on her master's thesis. She sent me her phone number so we could arrange for the interview sessions. However, like Almalluh she wasn't available during the time of my stay in Saudi Arabia so we arranged

dates for two online audio sessions. The third interview was face to face and took place in her home studio in Alhasa during my next visit to Saudi Arabia.

Alhussan: Alhussan was the quickest to respond, both to accept to participate and in arranging for the sessions. She was the first artist that I interviewed; the interview was face to face in her home in Riyadh. The day after the first session she had to travel and then I had to return to Ottawa so the two other sessions were completed through an online audio program.

I noticed some differences between the face to face sessions and the sessions conducted through audio programs. The differences were not between the artists but, interestingly, between their attitudes and openness in the respective types of session. These differences were not consistent so I will explain the variance as it manifested itself with each artist. With Almalluh I noticed that during the audio sessions she was hesitant with her answers and very cautious about what she said. However, during the session that took place at her home she was more comfortable and less hesitant. This may be because before starting this session we had a friendly conversation, during which I talked about myself and my life. Albagshi, on the other hand, was very comfortable during the audio sessions as before we began she asked me about the weather that day in Canada and the time difference. At the end of the first session she told me that this felt like a therapeutic session as she seemed to enjoy expressing herself and to be heard. Interestingly when I met with her face to face she seemed shy and expressed herself and her views less than during the audio session and focused on describing the artwork more. Alhussan was very open during our first session which was at her home, however during the audio sessions I felt that she wasn't as comfortable. I couldn't understand why exactly but she didn't want to postpone as she didn't want to affect my schedule but she seemed preoccupied and not as comfortable as when we met face to face. It is important to keep in mind that due to the time difference the sessions took place during what was the evening for the artists, and

morning here in Ottawa. Almalluh, Albagshi, and Alhussan all have families and evening is usually when the family home gets busy. They were all distracted by their children on more than one occasion and had to take occasional breaks.

The data collected from the interviews was complemented by a personal reflective journal that I wrote after each interview and during the transcribing. These journals were written in Arabic and they included my thoughts, opinions, and observations.

Data Analysis

In Creswell and Ollerenshaw's (2002) article "Narrative research: A Comparison of two restorying data analysis approaches" they mention two approaches to narrative analysis. The first, originally proposed by Yussen and Ozcan (1996), is an analytic process that includes analyzing text data for five components of plot structure: "character, setting, problem, actions and resolution" (Creswell, 2007, p. 158) The second approach is Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'three-dimensional space' method, which includes analyzing data in three ways: "backward and forward, inward and outward, and locate them in space" (p. 54). Creswell (2007) explains these three dimensions as "interaction, continuity and situation" (p. 185) and illustrates how they are common features of narrative analysis: gathering personal stories from interviews and dialogue in field texts, retelling the stories formed on narrative, rewriting the stories into a chronological order and integrating the location or place of the person's experiences.

In the case of my interview material, the interviews were first transcribed in Arabic, as the interviews were conducted in Arabic. Copies of the transcripts were then sent to the

participants to gain their review, comments, and approval. Only Binzagr sent back comments asking me to remove some sections of the interview content.

Using the Arabic transcripts, I first rewrote the life stories into chronological narratives in which I was translating throughout the writing process. The translations were reviewed by a Saudi linguistics Ph.D. student at Carleton university. Marshall and Rossman (2010) believe that if someone other than the researcher translates the interviews it could cause issues with meaning and interpretations. This is why I only asked someone else for a revision. They also believe that the analysis starts with the translation as it invariably involves interpretation and construction of meaning.

After the translation, I analysed the data chronologically, examining the life stories of the artists from an early age up to their working careers. Themes emerged in the chronological achievements of the four life stories that I compared.

When narrating people use language to describe ‘deviations’ from ‘normal’ predictable cultural life settings (Bruner, 2002). Riessman (1993) stresses meaning interpretation in terms of Halliday’s (1973) three different language analysis functions: the ‘ideational’ function states the meaning content of what is told, the ‘interpersonal’ function focuses on the relationship between narrators, and the ‘textual’ function focuses on the structure of the text. As Riessman (1993) emphasizes, it is important to consider the larger social context when analyzing. Scholars consider social context on many different levels; for example, considering meaning and social life in narrative analysis can support studies about people who suffer from social marginalization and oppression (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), such as women.

Hence, I considered the Saudi social and historical cultural background throughout the analysis phase. I analyzed the findings through the lens of my theoretical frameworks, postmodern feminism and social construction. To stop myself from getting overwhelmed again,

I worked out a technique to deal with the amount of data. While writing my findings, theoretical framework, and literature review chapters, I came up with codes (A1, A2, etc.) to help me link things together from these chapters for the analysis. Each code was linked either to a research question or an emerging theme. After that I created tables linking the findings to the related theoretical framework and the literature review, which made the analysis less confusing and less overwhelming.

I presented my findings in life story narratives and in the discussion as each artist's life story narrative is in separate chapter then in a discussion chapter I focused on the role of some life aspects and the emerging themes (figure 1). At the end of each artist's life story I included a timeline of the main events in each of their lives to track their achievements. This clearly and simply illustrates the changes in the artists' activities and practices on a single page, which is also helpful for comparing between the artists.

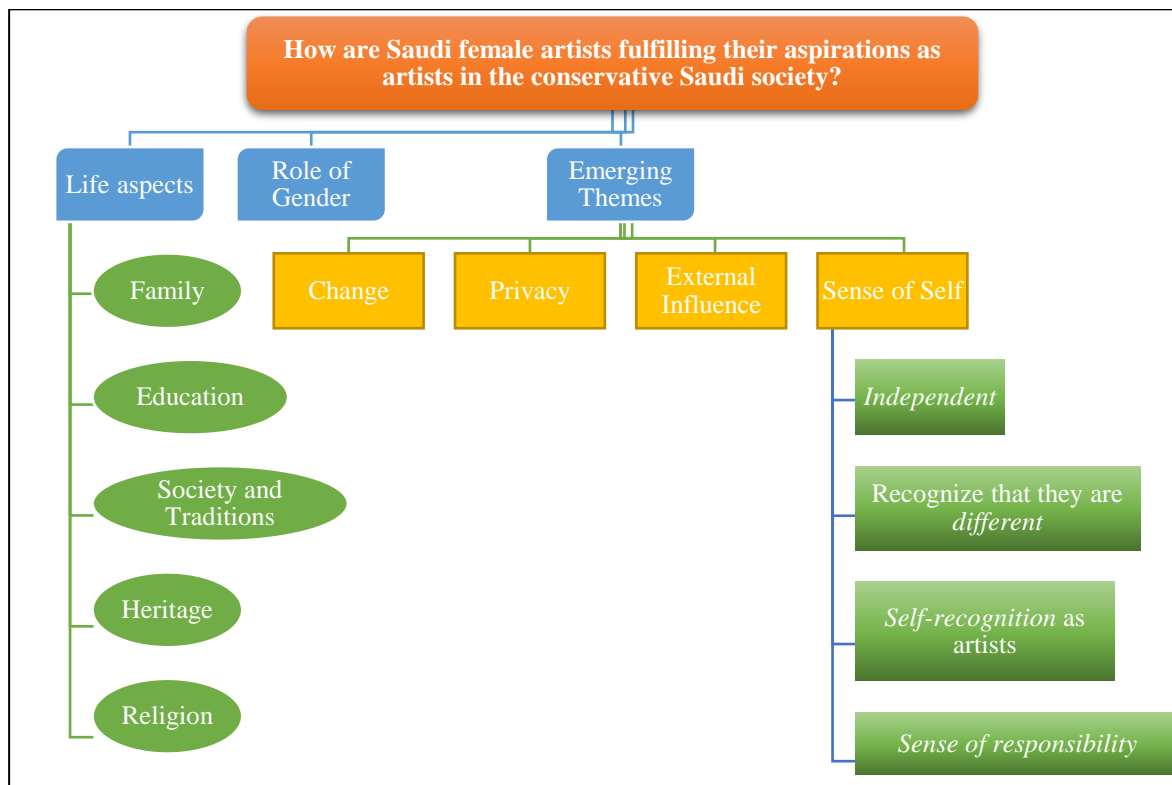


Diagram shows the main discussion points

Rigor and Credibility

I focused carefully on my choices of samples, and I ensured that the participating artists were a good representation of the era in which they worked. In addition, I took the time to do my homework before I contacted them to familiarize myself as much as possible. When I met with them, I wanted to learn how they approached becoming artists in a conservative life society. I tried to build trust with the artists early in our communications, briefly explaining my life story and the purpose of my research. I also found social or/and professional connections between us. For example, my father met with Binzagr's brother, who passed away, at many events, and she used to invite him to her early exhibitions. Other types of connections involved the institutions I studied and/or worked in, as they also were familiar with them.

I ensured that I had faithful transcriptions, which I sent to the artists for review and comments. After translating the Arabic transcripts into English, I asked someone else as I explained earlier for a revision.

Privacy

Given the sensitivity as the names and faces of the artists are involved so this is how I addressed the privacy issue. First, I prepared the artist on the idea of the interview asking them to prepare and recall key events from their lives. Then during the interviews, the artists were given the freedom to stop the recorder whenever they felt like it. Both Binzager and Almalluh asked me to stop the recorder at some point so they can talk freely. As a Saudi woman myself, I was very understanding when the artists decided to stop the recorder or when they gave me very short answer. I didn't want to push harder as I didn't want to lose our relationship and their trust. I wanted them to talk freely as much as possible to get richer data. They were reminded all the

time during the interview that they will get to see the transcripts before any of the words that they have said is used in the study. This fact I assume made them more relieved as they were talking during the interview. I also asked their permission to use their artwork.

Visual Analysis

Visual analysis certainly supplements the narrative and the narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). Rose (2011) categorizes three positions for visual analysis: the story behind the image, the description of the image itself, and audience interpretation of the image. Since I am interested in Saudi female artists, I will include their artwork to support their life story. Their artwork carries meaning that can be understood both from their point of view and Saudi society's point of view. The artists gave their permission to use the images in this study.

Chapter Five

Findings: Safeya Binzagr

I believe that life is not easy...that is life, but there was no obstacle that could've stopped me. (Safeya Binzagr, 2016)

To meet with Binzagr, I took a 1 hour and 45 minute flight from Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia where I mainly reside, to the city of Jeddah where Binzagr currently lives. She was kind enough to agree to meet during the Eid holiday which fell during my trip from Canada to Saudi Arabia to collect my



Figure 3: Safeya Binzagr (2016)

data. I went to see her at what she calls *Darat Safeya Binzag*, which is her museum that I will elaborate on in more detail later. When I entered the building, I felt as if I were entering a personal space even though it was open to the public. Binzagr's personal touches was in every corner. There were sounds of different types of birds, and an audio recording playing a Quran reader. I sat with Binzagr in the library where the interview took place over tea and biscuits. She seemed tired, but was very nice, calm and willing to help me in any way she could.

Binzagr has been interviewed extensively in the past. I was researcher number 146 to meet with her. Most of the researchers she spoke with were more focused on the traditional Saudi custom dresses, as Binzagr is a collector. Even though, according to Binzagr, most of the researchers who interviewed her promised to provide her with a copy of their work, they rarely

did so, and thus far no study has been published about Binzagr or her work except for that of Aljebreen (2015). She has the longest life and art career of the artists in my study. However, she was the most challenging when it came to providing information or details about her life story. She seemed very hesitant and conservative in her answers and even after the interview she asked me to eliminate some parts. It wasn't clear why, but as a Saudi woman I understood. Private life in Saudi society is really considered, especially that of a woman. Thus, I had to refer to other sources in this chapter to better understand some aspects of her life. In fact, she suggested and insisted that I refer to a study done by Eman Aljebreen (2015), a female Saudi scholar, who recently conducted a study on Binzagr entitled "Image Making: Representations of Women in the Art and Career of Binzagr from 1968 to 2000." It seemed that Binzagr was satisfied with the descriptions and accuracy of the details she provided in that study.

In this chapter I will start by outlining Binzagr's life journey, her family, education, and the places she has lived. Then I describe her journey as an artist, presenting her experiences and achievements, one of which is her museum. I will follow that up with an account of her personal views of visual arts in Saudi Arabia, including some of the barriers and obstacles. As I move to her artwork I will describe her subjects and techniques. Then, I will chart her journey as an artist through her work, incorporating what she had to say about some of the pieces. I then conclude the chapter with some of her thoughts about the future, and a timeline providing an overview of the most important milestones in her life.

Binzagr's Life and Education

Binzagr was born in 1940 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where she lived during her early childhood in a neighbourhood called *Harat Alsham*. In *Harat Alsham*, the architecture of the

buildings reflected a very traditional style. Houses were built close to each other with only two to four meters of space between them. Some of these houses were as high as seven stories and the windows were covered with wooden lattice screens called “mashrabiya” and “rowshanat” for extra shade and privacy (Kamal, 2014). The houses had a beautiful traditional design inspired by Islamic art. The upper levels of the buildings, the wooden lattice windows, and the main gates were designed with Islamic ornamental patterns. Binzagr spent the first few years of her life surrounded by such views, and they have inspired much of her artwork.



Figure 5:2: Baghdadi The Aramco Oil Company’s first office, Jeddah 1940

In 1947, she moved to Cairo, Egypt, where she started school. Binzagr’s parents believed in the importance of education, and according to Aljebreen (2015), her father, who was a businessman, stayed in Jeddah with his brother to manage the family business while the rest of the family lived in Cairo to complete education. Aljebreen adds that the Binzagr’s

business started with the grandfather who worked hard and made a name for himself and his family in Saudi society. The family bond seemed to be significant. Binzagr explained,

I relied on my uncle a lot because he is the eldest in the family, sharing responsibility with my father...my father and my uncle received the education that was available at that time, I mean since they were young they finished school and there were no universities at that time so they finished the highest level that existed at that time. My family was one of the families who at that time believed in educating their daughters, so we lived in Cairo for some time for education until I finished high school... Many parents sent their families to live abroad so their daughters would get educated, so it becomes the family's understanding.

During the time Binzagr lived in Egypt, she was exposed to different kinds of arts in museums and music theatres, on the sidewalks, and at school through music and drawing classes. Binzagr's parents gave their children the opportunity and freedom to participate in extracurricular activities they were interested in; so she took some drawing and piano classes. After she finished high school in Cairo, she moved to England with her siblings to pursue post-secondary education. She was enrolled in finishing schools for three years, where she learned languages, drawing, music, etc.

Her family returned to Jeddah in 1963. At that time she started writing articles on the visual arts for a local newspaper (Aljebreen, 2015). Binzagr's passion for visual arts motivated her to continue her studies. Thus, in 1965 she went back to Cairo with the aim of studying visual arts at the Leonardo da Vinci Institute. However, due to political situation in Cairo at that

time, she ended up instead taking private classes for safety reasons (Aljebreen, 2015). Binzagr was very determined and committed and finished the four-year program in only two years. During these years, she learned life drawing, sculpture, museum studies, and different art subjects. Her artistic foundation became very strong and solid. After finishing her studies in Cairo, Binzagr settled in Jeddah on the late sixties, where she started her journey as one of the first few Saudi female artists in the Kingdom. However, Binzagr's desire to learn more motivated her to travel again and learn more. In 1979 she went to London to attend a two-year advanced art program at Saint Martin's Art College.

When she was young, Binzagr used to visit the opera, attend ballets and plays in Cairo and in London, and play the piano, but she didn't keep up her piano practice as she explains,

It is only thing that I didn't continue because it needs a lot of practicing...when I moved from Cairo, the system was different and I told the instructor I don't have a musical ear but I wanted to learn because I loved classical music...to the point that I considered learning Italian in order to understand the opera.

Binzagr comes from a big family, which was common in Saudi society at that time. She was the middle child among four brothers and four sisters. The family bond and its support was and still is a very significant element in her life as an artist. As she puts it to me, "It is all about the family and their support." Her family stood beside her, especially her brothers and her father whose support from the very beginning of her career has been very important in the conservative male-dominated society. As a Saudi woman she didn't link the area she lived in with the way she lived her life but she did link it to the family. She explains,

Look, everything is about the family and depends on their way. It doesn't mean that my family spoiled me, but I respected the freedom that they gave me and I respected the limits of this freedom. In Hejaz it is like in Najd and there are open-minded families, the time has changed now, maybe I am living my own way but I can't say that women from my generation in my family were living the same way I can't because time is changing...everything changes with the small community, the large community changes...changes come from inside the small community, which is the family.

In other words, when your family gives you freedom and shows their trust in you, you should respect this trust by adopting Saudi values and traditions and the family name in everything you do. That is, you have to be worthy of that trust. Binzagr also relates the role of the family to changes in the community.

With the strong bonds within her family, losing members of the family such as her father and her uncle was the worst event she had to face on her life journey. Losing her brother Waheeb, she said, "shook me the most because he was the most encouraging and the most supportive family member." It is true that all her family members were and still are supportive of her, but for her, Waheeb was the closest, and worked tirelessly with her when she prepared for her exhibitions. Her brother Faisal, she explains, supervised the process of her museum, the building which became her museum. As for her sisters, Thuraya seems to have been the closest, as she helps with the research of any information that Binzagr needs for her art pieces. Thuraya is also very interested and very knowledgeable in visual arts. She used to plan and organize Binzagr's trips in Italy to visit museums and churches in Venice and Florence and see the work

of world famous artists like Fra Angelico. Binzagr repeatedly expressed the importance of her family in her life, emphasizing that they are the most important people in her life because they were and still are her main support system. From them she gained her strength, because of them she continued, and she leaned on them in the time of need and they were always there.

Apart from her family, Binzagr is inspired from helping others, especially the needy and the sick. She believes, “we are living in a time when there are more people who suffer from disease than before, which we hear about in the media, but,” she continues, “not all sick people are financially capable.” So helping others is one of her life missions, where, as she put it to me, “we must try as much as we can to share what we have with others who are in need.”

Binzagr The Artist

When she was young, Binzagr explained, “I loved drawing but never thought that one day I would be an artist.” She owes much of her artistic experiences to the education she received, the efforts she made to learn more, and the artwork that she observed in museums and galleries during her travels. She said,

I learned a lot by studying, it is not a question of talent...the most important thing is the artistic knowledge, its not enough that you know how to draw, but it is the source that you take from...that’s it and it was available for me. I mean most of us in my family, adults and children, learned music and learned drawing, but it wasn’t meant to be permanent practice, but it was in addition to the academic education.

Binzagr indicated that her career as an artist started as a hobby and developed by learning and practice. She explained,

When I was in Egypt the schools had drawing classes, music and everything and there were museums and these kinds of things so you didn't feel that anything was missing... Aesthetic things existed and were available in museums, statues, theatres, music and everything was available... also if anyone in our family wanted to learn they could, if anyone wanted to learn the piano or if anyone wanted to learn drawing we could as extracurricular activities... this presented an opportunity but it was only something that I loved to learn about, I never thought that one day I would be an artist, no such thing ever crossed my mind.

She believed that what developed her interest in visual arts is that she was exposed to the arts and had the opportunity to learn about it. Her artistic background and foundation was built and developed through reading and visiting museums and galleries during her travels. The strong aspect that molded her belief were classes in school, extra courses, books, museums, and the fact that she lived in an environment where she was surrounded by art. She used to read a lot about famous artists like Leonardo da Vinci and others and traveled with her uncle and sister in the sixties to see their work in museums and churches in Italy. She learned a lot from these trips,

I consider that most of what I know I've learned from visiting museums and from books. Since I was little I've had books and a library, this artistic knowledge can't be

learned in school it comes only from exploring and becoming aware. When I was in Cairo I used to commit a day every week to visiting all the galleries. When I travel, the places I visit the most are museums, even if I've seen them before, this is what builds your artistic knowledge and this is the most important thing. When you draw you have a talent in drawing, but you won't develop artistic knowledge without reading about and seeing other artists' artwork. I look at all the art movements because I will learn from anything, I will learn from those older and those younger than myself, from the modern and from the classic, this is my belief.

She emphasizes the significance of having different sources of knowledge, linking it to the possible range of artistic expression. She explains, "as an artist you have to remember how important it is to be aware of the visual art movements, past and present, and educate yourself, otherwise you will be confined within your own work." She believes that exploring and being in the field will help the artist develop their work instead of stagnating.

In addition to her education, what has had the most influence on her art career is the traditional and cultural atmosphere that she experienced during her early life in Jeddah. Although she admitted more than once to having a short memory her sister Thurayya used to tell stories about life in Jeddah when she visited her family in Egypt which both refreshed her memory and encouraged her to explore her own culture (Aljebreen 2015). When Binzagr returned to Jeddah in 1963 (figures 5:3 and 5:4) after having been away for more than a decade without returning to Saudi Arabia even once (Aljebreen 2015), she found the city to be expanding and changing. The traditional architecture and cultural customs were starting to

change and fade away. However, she was attached to and inspired by her original heritage and memory, as can be seen specifically in her early artwork, as reflected in Hejaz Heritage.



Figure 5:3: King Abdul-Aziz Street, Jeddah 1963



Figure 5:4: Ministry of Culture and Information,
airport road, Jeddah 1963

Her First Official Step in Saudi Visual Arts: A Turning Point

When Binzagr returned to Saudi Arabia in 1968 after studying in Egypt, she had an idea of making an exhibition together with a friend and fellow Saudi female artist to display their artwork, and they managed to do that the same year. Binzagr wanted to display the artwork she had been working on for nine months. It was one of the happiest and proudest moments of her life when she obtained the approval for the exhibition in 1986. She expressed,

My happiest moments were when my request to have an exhibition got accepted,
because I was prepared for all the possibilities: that it would be accepted or that it would

be rejected, and on the second day of the exhibition when the journalists wrote about the exhibition.

She never thought she would get the approval to display her work because it was something new for the society and the system. In her opinion this exhibition was significant because it officially confirmed an artistic movement in Saudi Arabia as it had an official grand opening by the Prince of the Western region. The exhibition took place in a private girls' school called Attarbiah Alhadethah in Jeddah, as there were no galleries at that time. The school principal, Jawaher bint Saud Alkabeer, was very cooperative and provided the two artists with all they needed to prepare for their exhibition. The classrooms were transformed into exhibition halls and appropriate lighting installed. Invitations and catalogues were printed (see figure 5:5) and not only relatives and friends were invited, but also many diplomats, the media, poets, and writers. It was also open to the general public. Following the social norms in Saudi Arabia the first day was for men only.



Figure 5:5 The brochure of her first exhibition in 1968 (Aljebreen, 2015)

The idea of holding the exhibition in a school and the fact that Binzagr and the other artist were the first female artists attracted a large number of attendees. All her family and relatives were present and were very supportive and proud of her achievement. She believed that if it were not for their support she would not have been able to do what she has done. This event was important in Binzagr's journey as an artist, which she considered an epiphany and a turning point in her career. It encouraged her to continue on this path. In the exhibition, Binzagr displayed paintings with traditional context like a Bedouin girl, an Arabic conversation, and a Saudi Najdi dance called 'arthah.'

When I asked her about how this exhibition affected her journey as an artist she answered,

The idea of drawing about the heritage came from the first exhibition. First, it is something I lack knowledge of because I didn't live with it; second, I found that people were interested in the topic because we were in a period when people started to move away from these little things in life and maybe they had beautiful memories of it so they wrote about it...I also wanted to know more so I started researching.

She believes that the strong effect this subject of heritage had on the audience was due to the change in lifestyle that was occurring at that time. Also her poor knowledge of Saudi heritage and traditions at that time as a result of her living abroad for a long time which made her more interested to learn about it. She was encouraged to continue her journey on this theme. The audience loved the subject matter and the major theme in her work because it represented things that were no longer around. She explained,

For the first exhibition the production was part of my school projects and the subjects were mostly general portraits and landscapes, but there was a section that included heritage pieces, this section was what attracted the audience the most, maybe it was nostalgia as you could hear them saying: oh, we used to sit this way and do that...this moved something inside of me and made me think why not go down this path, although the audience would sometimes forget that I am an artist and will focus on the context.

For younger generations, it was an opportunity to learn more about their own heritage and history, and for the older audience it was nostalgia as the subjects created conversations between members of the audience who reminisced about their past. Personally it was nostalgia for Binzagr. She explains that by the end of the fifties the society was going through a cultural shift. Everything was changing, including the way people lived and dressed. She suggested the reason might be the expansion of the cities and increased mobility as people move from one city to another for job opportunities or scholarships and bring new things to the culture of that place. In addition to that, she found in her chosen subject an opportunity to learn in a unique way, as she explained,

I learned about a lot of things, I learned about the traditions, customs, and architecture and many other things, maybe if I hadn't taken this direction I wouldn't have learned about it unless I read about it, but it is not the same as when I go and see.

The exhibition did not only affect Binzagr personally but it also paved the way to having and developing specialized art galleries in Saudi Arabia. In general, the reaction to the exhibition from the community was positive. The idea of having an exhibition was not rejected or dismissed because art education was part of the school curriculum at that time. In her opinion, anything new has its supporters and opponents, but opponents are usually few. The positive review in the newspapers two days later proved to Binzagr the community's acceptance, which was very encouraging. Although there were some negative social comments, no official rejections or reactions accrued that would obstruct her path as an artist. She commented,

There was no public rejection, maybe there were some questions that I considered silly through the phone or any other way, but not of the kind that would present an obstacle. At the beginning of my journey I didn't feel support, if it hadn't been for my family I would not have been able to go and make the exhibition...I found enjoyment in everything... I feel that it was from the beginning of the journey a beginning of joy.

For Binzagr the positive reaction and acceptance from society encouraged her to continue on and develop her passion. After her positive first experience in sharing her artwork with the public, Binzagr further developed her passion, participating in more exhibitions in Saudi Arabia and abroad with the support of her family. In 1973, she had her second solo and first international exhibition at Woodstock Gallery in London, England (figure 5:6). After this exhibition she decided to stop selling her artwork. She explained,

I stopped selling my work after my second solo exhibition because I thought if I want to document a topic, then sell it, all my effort will be gone so why would I do that, I decided one day to keep it all because Saudi researchers had started to visit me after my first exhibition... and sometimes I receive letters from journalists from foreign countries and foreign visitors, especially after my first book in the eighties and my exhibitions abroad in London, Paris, and Geneva.

Several schools also started to visit, including American and British schools, as did university students, researchers, and professors.

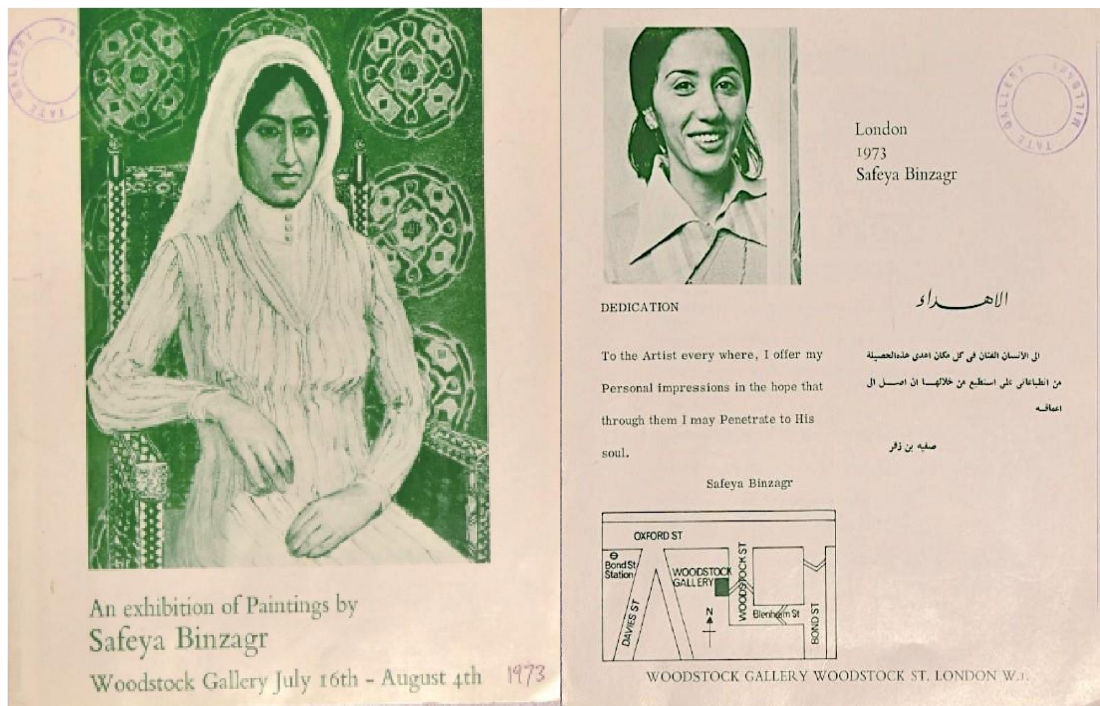


Figure 5:6: The brochure of her first solo London exhibition at Woodstock Gallery in London, England (Aljebreen, 2015)

In 1979 she went to London and enrolled in a two-year advanced program at Saint Martin's Art College, which provided her with the opportunity to learn more and meet with many artists from different countries. She took courses in life drawing, etching and graphic art. She described her experience,

Each student was provided with a personal studio to work in, I used to study life drawing and graphic arts, then when I loved graphic arts and etching I requested to finish another year in etching...I only stayed there two years.

At that time, she published her first book *Saudi Arabia: An Artist's View of the Past*, written in two languages, English and French, and is about the history of social life in Saudi Arabia and Binzagr's artwork, illustrating the lifestyle and architecture. The book was sold during her later international exhibitions. Then in 1980, she had three solo exhibitions at Patrick Seal Gallery in London (figures 5:7 and 5:8), Galerie Duron in Paris, and in Geneva (Darat Safeya Binzagr website, 2008). In 1999 she published her second book *A Three Decade Journey With Saudi Heritage. Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr* which is a collection of articles about her life, work, technique, and Darat Safeya Binzagr.

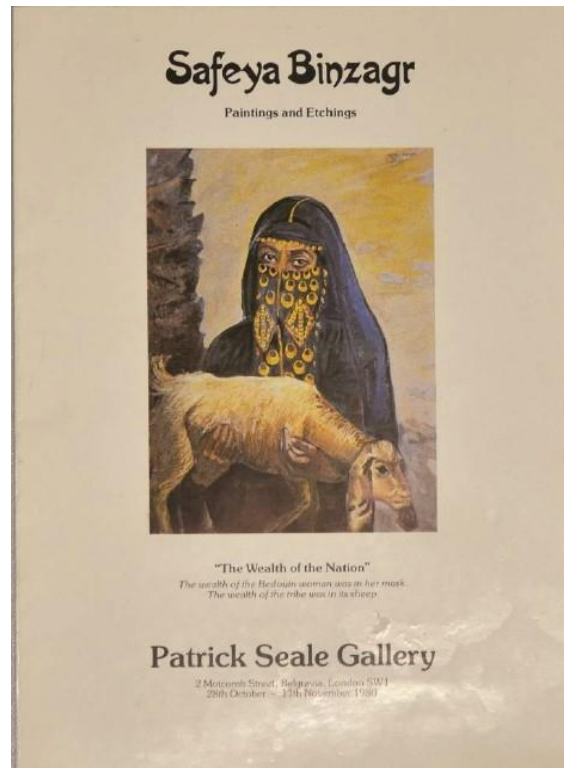


Figure 5:7: Brochure cover of Binzagr's solo exhibition at Patrick Seal Gallery in London in 1980 (Aljebreen, 2015)

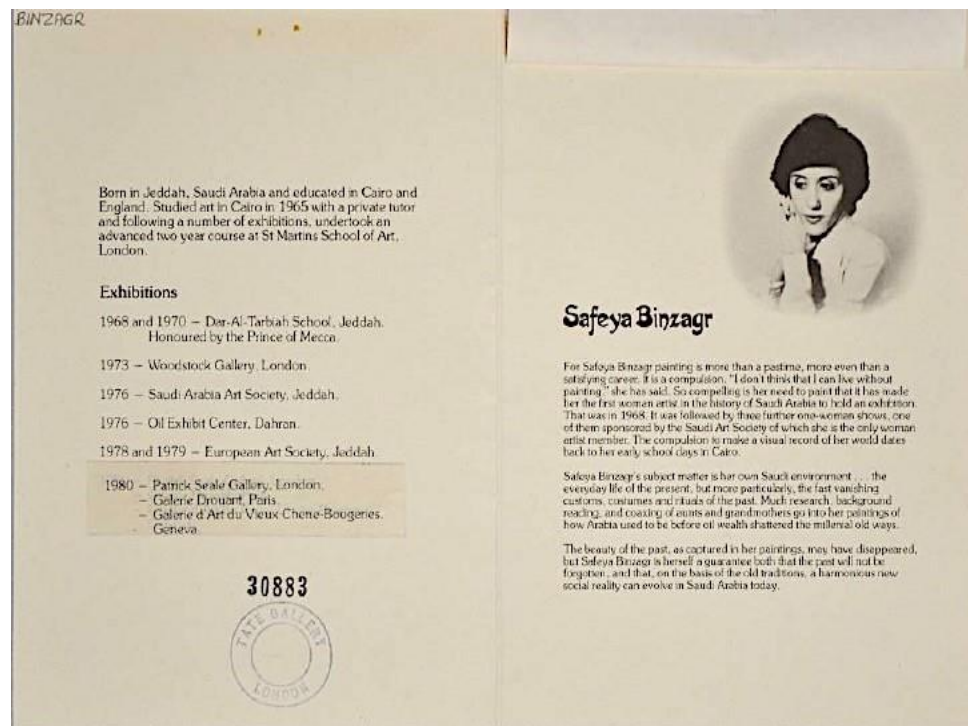


Figure 5:8: Brochure of Binzagr's solo exhibition at Patrick Seal Gallery in London in 1980 (Aljebreen, 2015)

At the start of her career, Binzagr wrote articles on visual arts for the local newspaper, and then she started to give lectures across the Kingdom in universities and cultural institutes (Darat Safeya Binzagr website, 2008). She has had her work exhibited in more than 25 solo, group, national, and international exhibitions, until the establishment of the museum. After that she would only exhibit with Al-Mansouria Foundation for Culture and Creativity, a Saudi-based organization established by Princess Jawaher Bint Majed Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to support creativity in Saudi. Since she joined the foundation, Binzagr has participated in an exhibition in Paris in 2005, wearing a full traditional Hejaz costume (see figure 5:9), and another in Bahrain in 2015, both organized by the foundation. Binzagr has received more than 30 awards from organizations in Saudi Arabia, Italy, Bahrain, and from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in recognition of her work for the protection of national heritage.



Figure 5:9: Binzagr's exhibition in Paris in 2005 with the former culture and information (The Al Mansouria Foundation, 2012)-

With time, her art production has decreased because of her health and as a result of increased activities in the museum, her collected artwork as exposed. When I asked Binzagr about the challenges she faced on her journey, especially at the beginning of her career, she said,

Look, everything new has supporters and opponents, but usually the opponents are fewer. For example, education for girls was available in the past before girls' schools were established, but their education was in the *alfageeha* system, a system in which families would bring teachers to their daughters at home so they would learn. After that, teaching in schools became offered for girls...there were opponents and made issues and the school was closed but even though... it didn't mean that women were illiterate in the previous generation, many women were educated, their families were educated and loved education and made sure to educate their daughters. Let us say there was also no art subject in schools, but the art was there, art has many branches.

Binzagr emphasized that although in Saudi Arabian art was not taught in schools when formal public education was established, art was everywhere, in the carved rocks, in embroidery, and in the painted interiors of houses, in different areas across the country. In her opinion art is actually a language. She expounded,

Since the Stone Age, art was the language...the caveman would write his words and draw on the rock to communicate. When a Bedouin woman embroiders, from where does she get her designs and draw them? This is art. Urban women also who embroider from where do they get their designs? Isn't this art? There is also in the southern area of

Saudi they have inherited an art the same as what you have in Canada and Australia. I mean these are all traditional arts, but they developed to become other kinds of arts as well...in the past artists were called craftsmen...the artist is a craftsman, either a calligrapher or someone who draws ornaments on the holy Koran, it was all there.

The establishment of the General Presidency of Youth Welfare, sponsored by the government, was a huge step in the support of Saudi visual artists, as this organization used to put on two exhibitions annually—one was general and the other was for collectibles. It also organized what were called “cultural weeks” abroad to share Saudi culture, giving Saudi artists the opportunity to expose their artwork internationally. Binzagr has been asked several times to send her artwork abroad to be presented during the cultural weeks, but she has always declined. She doesn’t allow her work to be presented at an exhibition without her presence. She also prefers to manage, transfer, and ship her art pieces herself whenever she does have an exhibition abroad.

Throughout her travels Binzagr noticed that visual arts were changing around the world as well as in her homeland. In her view, visual arts in Saudi Arabia changed with the development of technology, specifically the Internet, which helped new artists expand and enrich their knowledge and their perceptions of visual art. She stated,

Look, technology such as the Internet has expanded artists’ perceptions; even if they don’t travel, they learn about other artworks. Of course, currently everything that is unusual is popular, conceptual art, digital art, and construction art, modern things are what become the trend in everything, so in some cases people are creating art just for

the fun not for the art. I am not against this movement, I take in everything; when I travel I visit all the galleries, modern and others.

She is not against new art movements and in her opinion some artwork is well studied, however, she believes that sometimes it lacks beauty. She also indicated that some artists would copy other artists' artworks that had been posted on the Internet then present them as their own, an observation she made during her evaluation of some art pieces in a contest. For Binzagr, to be called an "artist" is not simple. It is not a matter of how many pieces you can make and present in an exhibition. It is not about the quantity but the quality of the artworks. She thinks that galleries should be stricter about what to accept for public exhibition, and that it is unfortunate that some people seem to use visual art for the purpose of gaining personal popularity or notoriety. Binzagr thinks that artists these days are not sponsored by organizations like before so it could be hard for them to be able to afford to display their work in art galleries in the first place.

Also for Binzagr there is a difference between artists and painters. She sees painters as people who make artwork for events, but artists as people who have a passion that expands their perceptions. When I asked her if she consider herself an artist or a painter she answered: "I wouldn't say anything; I leave it for other people to say." However, later in the same interview she admitted that she is not an event painter, and that she is more an artist than a researcher.

Obstacles and Barriers

People within the Saudi visual arts community have always treated her with due respect and considered her as an older sister. She respects the traditions and with the way she treats

others she enforced her respect by everyone, like when dealing with artists or journalists. Of course, she faced obstacles in her journey like any other artist anywhere in the world. She remembers that even in the eighties she met with French female artists who used to advertise for their exhibitions using only their last names in order for the show to succeed and attract critics.

When visitors and researchers have asked her about the difficulties she's faced throughout her career, she's explained that while life has not been easy, things are now less challenging for artists. There are more galleries, books, and supplies, things which were not available or easily accessible in the past when all supplies were imported from other countries. She used to get her books from Lebanon and Egypt. Binzagr repeated that pursuing this career was not easy,

I believe that life is not easy. Take as a simple example when you are walking and there are two rocks in your way, one is small and the other is large, you will pass the small rock, but you will stumble over the large one, and you may get up or you may not, that is life. But there was no obstacle that could've stopped me.

In other words, she strongly believes in perseverance. She indicated that artists in the past suffered because it was hard to earn a living as an artist. Their artwork was not easily sold. Nowadays, however, it is different as more people are willing to pay for art pieces and many organizations support artists. Today, many Saudi artists are encouraged and supported by the government and are given more opportunities to showcase their artwork not only nationally but also internationally. However, with this encouragement and support, more rules and restrictions

have been created in the process, which could be discouraging for many artists. For example, the process of organizing an exhibition abroad is very long and complicated and causes delays for many artists. Binzagr did not have to face this issue during her early exhibitions, as her international solo exhibitions took place before the new restrictions. In addition, she does not participate in group exhibitions abroad as she prefers to hold private exhibitions and control access to her work in person, which is not possible for many group exhibitions. She said, “maybe I lost many opportunities with my rejections at that time, but I gained myself.” She has her own rules, which she won’t readily change.

There were personal circumstances that had affected her, but not her artistic journey. She explained,

Death is the thing that most affects me, first my father’s and my uncle’s then my brother Waheeb’s...There are things that affect you yet pass. I think that whatever happens, at the end I reach what I have been aiming for. The only thing is that I used to travel more, but since the foundation of the *Darah* I haven’t been able to travel as much so I always say to myself, this was my choice, because sometimes there are responsibilities and I love to handle everything myself. In the past, before the *Darah* was established, I used to travel more and I still want to go to a lot of beautiful places...this is what I miss sometimes.

No matter what happens in her life she doesn’t believe that anything could stop her from pursuing her dreams and she always does achieve her goals.

The Focus of Her Work

When Binzagr gets an idea for an artwork it may stay in her mind for years before she actually begins work on the canvas, as she collects more information and confirms with other people the accuracy of the details of the information collected (see figures 5:10–5:11). As I mentioned earlier, she is not “an event artist” as she called it, meaning her work is not commissioned or made to order for a contest or exhibition. She prefers to be free and work on her project whenever she feels she wants to. Her artwork subjects are, as she said, “general, social, portraits, costume, it is like a study that records a social history as comprehensively as possible.” However, her focus is mostly on the area of Hejaz where she is originally from, but she also used to travel across the country to collect information about the heritage of other areas of Saudi like the Najd, which is the central area of Saudi Arabia. She also focuses on women’s lives in different situations, such as when they are at home, attending celebrations, or visiting the traditional market. She explained,

I have a love for history, but I’m not an author so I started to gather information and of course most of it must be collected verbally because there were no written references... what I wanted is that whoever wants to know about us, I mean if you want to know about a nation you need to know their art history. The artwork will show you how a nation lived... Abroad, whoever is interested can visit museums to learn about the country and its history, we don’t have that so I wanted to present the history in an easy way so whoever sees the paintings will be able to learn about the social life. To know a nation you need to know how its people live, so this was the journey that started. The work of gathering the information was harder than the painting of it.

She wanted the audience, nationally and internationally, to be able to know the social life from the content of her art pieces. Some of the themes of her collections were traditional wedding rituals, fishing, and traditional children's games.

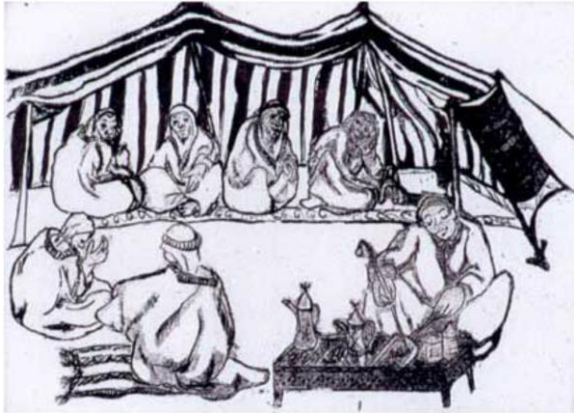


Figure 5:10: Sheikhs Tent (Study) (1980)



Figure 5:11: Sheikhs Tent (1995)

When she was asked why she wouldn't take her work in a more modern direction, she explained that she was not doing art for exhibitions or other specific reasons. She indicated that she draws for her own pleasure and that she chooses her subjects because of her attachment to history, so it is a more personal than social endeavour on her part. Binzagr is very passionate about history and traditions and loves to research about her culture and reflect it in her art. However, the work of collecting information is harder for her than the process of painting itself, because of the lack of documented information about the social and daily lives of Saudis. Most of her information comes from verbal narratives and descriptions from people she has met. Thus, it can take her years to finish one piece. For example, she wasn't able to take photos of Bedouin women, as they would refuse because of their traditions. However, she was able to study some photographs of Saudi Bedouin women taken by a French photographer. She would

write and take photos whenever she was allowed to. She would also borrow objects or artifacts in order to paint them. For Binzagr, it was not easy to obtain information because, as she puts it, “I’m not a real researcher.” What she means is that she did not really learn how to do research or follow a certain research method. For her, a matter of crucial importance is time: as older generations, who had the richest information about culture and traditions, were growing old and dying, memories were fading and vanishing.

Before using any information collected for an art project, she used to confirm it with six experts to make sure that it was true and accurate, especially with her traditional women’s dresses’ art pieces, as she stated, “Artists who paint heritage and costumes may only work on a painting, but I work on a painting and “write” history so I have to be honest with the information I give.” However, Binzagr does not like to limit her representation of tradition in her artwork to just the information or descriptions she has documented. She does not just copy, she explained,

For example I take photos and videos but I don’t copy the images, no, I make a new image. I have to form an image that includes the aesthetic principles of painting, but I don’t copy directly unless the subject is a building.

She relies on photos, objects, and what people tell her, and arranges the context by choosing her own composition and colors. Binzagr’s subjects are usually the traditional social life, old buildings, traditional costumes, and portraits. In fact, most researchers mostly seek her out for her knowledge of traditional costumes. Since one of the main subjects of her artworks is

social life, they contain a great many human figures. In Islam, it is debatable if reproducing living beings artistically is acceptable or not, but in her opinion,

I can't stop including human figures in my paintings because I paint life and the human being is life. If I stop painting human figures then I won't be able to paint these subjects, I would have to draw flowers and gardens and things like that, but I am documenting life and life is the human being. I also believe I am not painting anything wrong, I am not creating and not copying the creator...I paint what expresses the human being, such as his movement, his hand, and other things.

So when she wants to document the history of social life she has to include people. In her opinion she is not doing anything wrong, merely using a talent that God gave her. In addition, people in her works are not realistically rendered, but rather express what represents a person in her own view. Interestingly, no one has ever confronted her or objected to her work from a religious point of view. When asked about religion and its relation to her art, Binzagr used to state that "there are two things I never discuss in public: religion and politics because I am not an expert." According to Aljebreen (2015), Binzagr's style in her work was the reason why she didn't have issues religiously when she was drawing figures, as most of her work as mentioned is not realistic; she describes her style as naivistic. Throughout her life as an artist, many artists have inspired her in different ways. When it comes to her style, she was inspired by Cezanne and Gauguin in her early work. She's experimented with different kinds of media and techniques, such as pastels, oil colours, watercolours, and inks.

Darat Safeya Binzagr: A Museum

When Binzagr decided to stop selling her artworks she was storing them in her home, where she also used to meet her visitors, such as researchers and journalists. Then when her production started to grow, her dream of a place that could display all her artwork in one place grew as well. In the nineties she started to work seriously on the idea of establishing what she called “*Darat Safeya Binzagr*.” She said that people think that “Darat” means home, which she didn’t mind but she chose the name because in Arabic the word Darat means, as she puts it, “the space that contains something; I wanted a space to contain my work, and the most important thing is the continuity.” It is technically a museum and the first art museum in Saudi and the first museum to be built as a museum as well, meaning that it’s not a repurposed building (figure 5:12). She doesn’t like to call it a museum, as her goal was to establish a small cultural centre; with time her personal library was growing and she wanted to include a library would benefit others.



Figure 5:12: The entrance of “Darat Safeya Binzagr”

She started to look for the perfect location and chose one that links old Jeddah with the new Jeddah. She was in control of the planning and the construction following up on everything, making sure that the building lived up to her needs and aspirations. The building was ready in 1995 but the official grand opening by the prince of the area wasn't until 2000. The building is tall and combines modern walls, wooden lattice screens called *mashrabiyyat* and *rowshanat*, and other Islamic decorative elements (see figure 5:12). The design is inspired by the houses of the old city of Jeddah where Binzagr lived in her early childhood. Inside, the floor plan and the interior design are also inspired by the houses of the old city of Jeddah, which has a dome over a central atrium, connecting the second floor with the ground floor (see figures 5:13- 5:14). The ground floor has eight exhibit halls and a gift shop (Darat Safeya Binzagr website, 2008). On the second floor is Binzagr's personal studio, a library, two other studios for the courses offered there and a traditional Hejaz room.

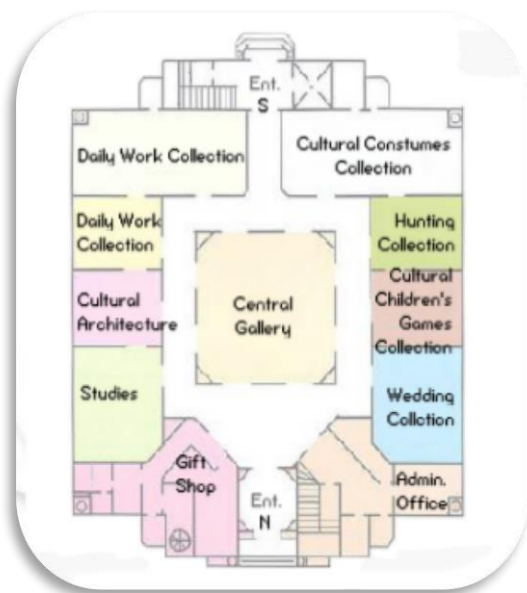


Figure 5:13 : Ground floor plan



Figure 5:14: Second floor plan

The exhibit halls include all of Binzagr's permanent collection, organized by theme, including a special hall for the traditional costumes and old jewellery. The central hall is for temporary displays, for which she hires a specialist to curate the show based on the theme and type of the work. Binzagr is a book lover who has collected works throughout her travels. Her library at the museum includes more than 5000 English and Arabic books in visual arts, embroidery, literature, and history, which are all made available to the public (figure 5:15). The library also includes studies on her, her work, or the museum. There is also a private collection of valuable books, which is kept locked, as well as her personal collection, which she keeps in her studio. She has even prepared a specialized library for children.



Figure 5:15: The library



Figure 5:16: One of the studios at the Darah



Figure 5:17: The entrance to Binzagr's personal studio..

Binzagr is a collector, and she has a special room in the museum called “Arabic traditional Majlis” where she keeps her collection of Saudi antiques, many from the Hejaz area (see figures 5:19- 5:21). Her personal studio is not really private as it has glass doors and is open to the public (see figure 5:17). Most of the rooms in the museum have two doors and most of them are glass, which, together with the domed open space at the center, gives one the feeling that it is all one open space.



Figure 5:18: The entrance hall on the second floor



Figure 5:19: The Arabic traditional Majlis



Figure 5:20: The Arabic traditional Majlis



Figure 5:21: The Arabic traditional Majlis

One of the main goals of Binzagr when she thought of establishing the museum was to make it a cultural centre for people of different ages. For children and youth the museum organizes different types of visual art courses. The instructors are usually female artists who are trained and supervised by Binzagr. She is proud that more than 500 students have taken classes at the museum and more than 146 researchers have conducted research about her or/and the museum.



Figure 5:22: Binzagr supervizing one of the contests

She always wanted others to benefit in any way possible. She has helped four students with their preparations for enrollment at universities abroad. She doesn't provide them with certificates but she gives them of her time, and offers a space and an instructor. They also organize contests for children and youth sponsored by other private companies, which run almost annually (see figure 5:22). Also, Binzagr has been organizing a monthly salon since 1995 called "The cultural meeting," which acts as a hub for personalities from the liberal and fine arts worlds (Darat Safeya Binzagr website, 2008).

The museum is open to the public and charges no admission fee, in spite of the fact that not many people visit. The main visits are organized, booked tours, especially school groups and companies like Aramco and Oracle. However, the former king of Spain, Juan Carlos, made a high-profile visit in 2008.

He had specifically asked to visit *Darat Safeya Binzagr* during his visit to Saudi Arabia. Binzagr personally gave him a tour explaining her work, and he also enjoyed sitting in the Arabic Majlis rooms. He commended his visit to the former king of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah, a compliment she is proud of, coming as it does from a person who lives in such an artistic country (see figure 5:23). When I asked Binzagr why other artists haven't followed in her footsteps in establishing museums she suggested that some do have their own space at home where they show their artwork.



Figure 5:23: Binzagr with the king of Spain and the former minister of culture and information

Binzagr's Artwork

In this section I will attempt an autobiographical reading of Binzagr's life through her artwork, presenting her achievements and successes by decade.

The 1960s. Most of her production and activities are dated after her return to Saudi Arabia from Cairo in 1968. Binzagr participated in two group exhibitions in Saudi during this period. Her artwork, specifically her production at the end of the 60s, started to show the influence of the Saudi Hejaz culture, although she was only just settling back Jeddah at that time. Her initial work also represented and focused on the figure of the Saudi woman as in “The Wealth of the Nations” (1969) and “Zabun” (1969) which became two of her masterpieces. When it comes to the media used in her work most of it, if not all, was oil on canvas.

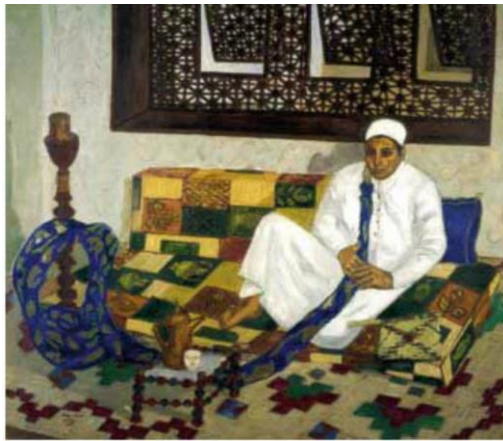


Figure 5:24: Meditation (1968)

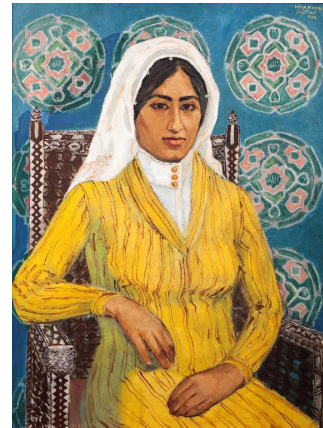


Figure 5:25: Zabun (1969)



Figure 5:26: The Wealth of the Nations (1969)



Figure 5:27: Wooden Slipper Carrier (1969)

The 1970s. Her production grew in the 70s as she participated in a group exhibitions and had three solo exhibitions, the first of which was held in 1970 in a private school in Jeddah and another her first international solo exhibition, which took place at Woodstock Gallery in London. In her paintings we can see that she was influenced by the importance of rituals in Saudi Arabia, such as wedding rituals or daily rituals at home. Her paintings are more alive and have more figures and movement. She also started to experiment with different techniques and media, such as etching in “The Roshan” (1978) (see figure 5:27).



Figure 5:28: The Roshan (1978).

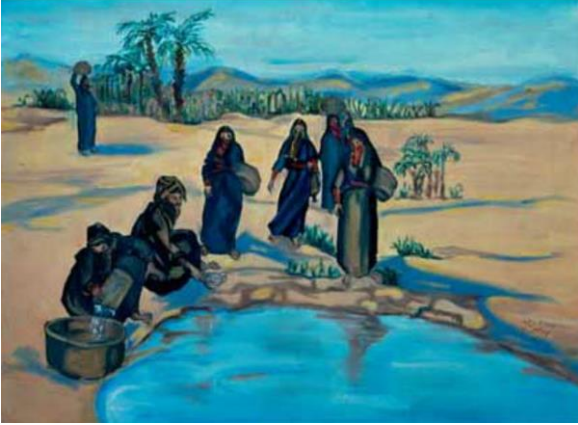


Figure 5:29: Bedouins at Well (1971)



Figure 5:30: The Trousseau (1972)

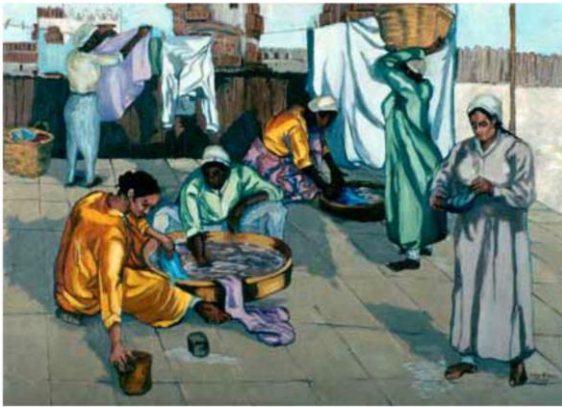


Figure 5:31: Wash Day (1972)



Figure 5:32: Shaving Ceremony (1973)



Figure 5:33: Facing Together (1975)



Figure 5:34: Tawalayt (1975)

The 1980s. Binzagr's career peaked in the 80s as her production increased. She had 15 solo exhibitions, three of at international exhibitions. This might be linked to her two years at Saint Martin's Art College in the late 70s. Through her artwork it is clear that Binzagr was exploring Saudi culture more, but this time it seems that she wanted to go out into the streets and the old neighbourhoods and explore life not only in her area but in different regions of Saudi Arabia. Her work shows traditional architecture, old neighbourhoods, craftsmen, children playing traditional games, and the fishing traditions. Binzagr also tries to pay more attention than before to the role of men in Saudi society. She continued working with other media and techniques while her etching production increased.



Figure 5: 35: Albasha Mosque (1980)



Figure 5: 36: Igal Maker (1980)



Figure 5: 37: Aldereya (Riyadh) (1980)



Figure 5: 38: Camel Study (1980)

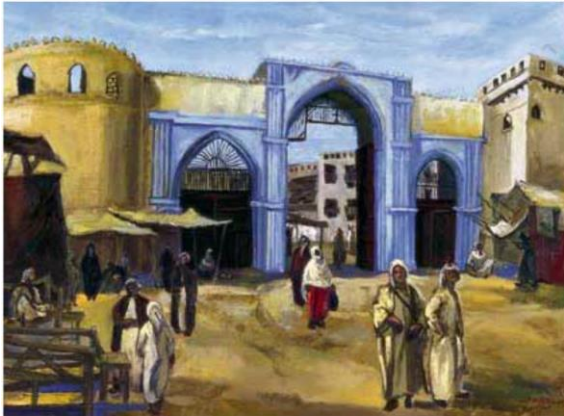


Figure 5:39: Meccah Gate (1980)



Figure 5:40: Rendezvous 1 (1980)



Figure 5:41: Mushat (1981)

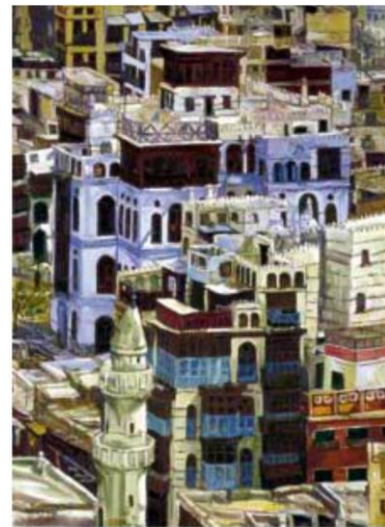


Figure 5:42: Alyaman District (1982)



Figure 5:43: Algees (1981)



Figure 5:44: Kitchen (1981)



Figure 5:45: Jeweller (1983)

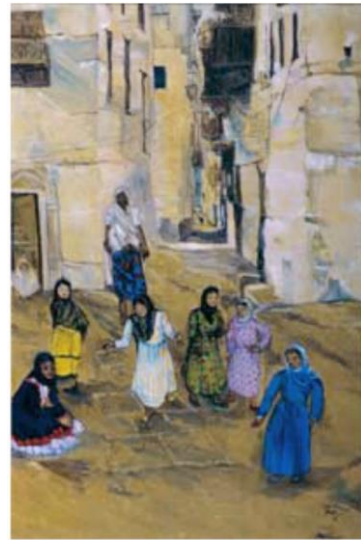


Figure 5:46: Al-Birbir (1984)



Figure 5:47: Al-Kubush (Joint Bones) (1985)



Figure 5:48: Fishermen (1985)

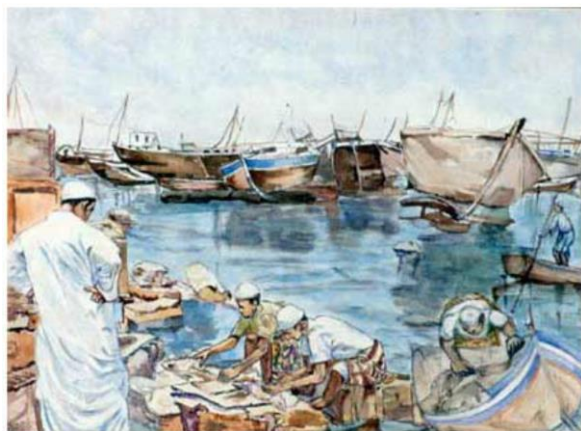


Figure 5:49: Boats (1987)



Figure 5:50: Falcons (1987)



Figure 5:51: Memories (1987)



Figure 5:52: Mecca Grand Mosque (1988)

The 1990s. Binzagr was busy planning and supervising the building of *Darat Safeya Binzagr* so her production was not like before and her participation in exhibitions much less frequent than before. However, in 1995 she started to expose her work in the museum. She used watercolour and pastel more in her work. The figures are also more realistic. The subjects are simple, scenes from family daily life. Her artwork shows her interest in embroidery in different ways as in “Altarah” (1990), “Mishlah Maker” (1991) and “Alminsaj” (1993).



Figure 5:53: Altarah(1990)

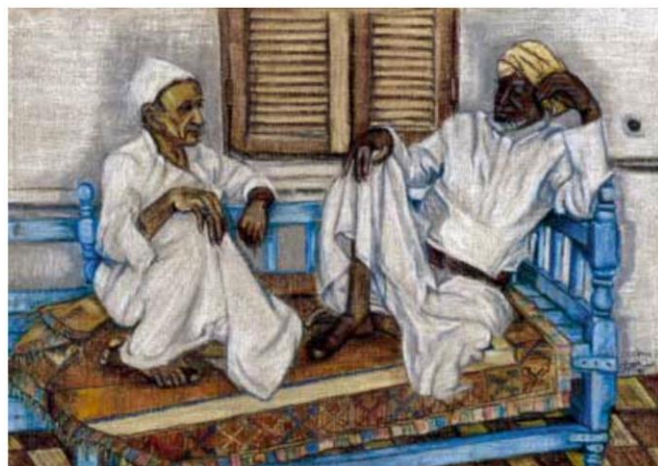


Figure 5:54: Conversation(1991)



Figure 5:55: Flag Holder (1991)



Figure 5:56: Mishlah Maker (1991)



Figure 5:57: Mother and Child (1991)



Figure 5:58: Nora Writing (1991)

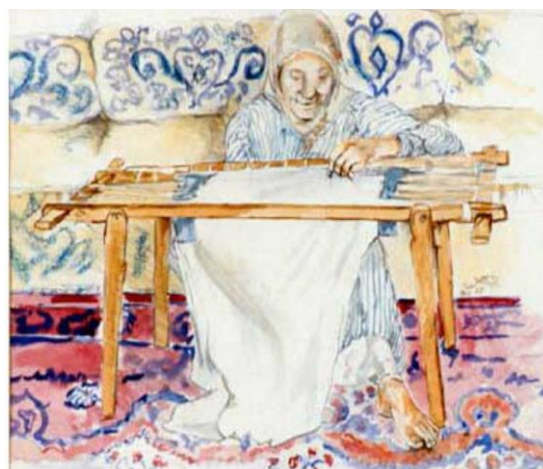


Figure 5:59: Alminsaj (1993)

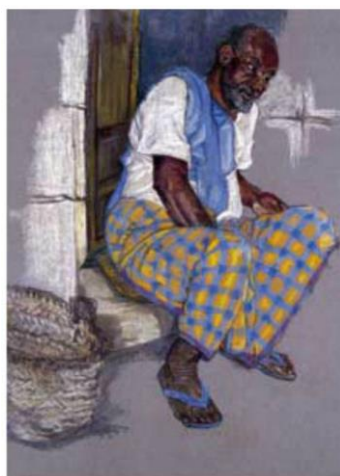


Figure 5:60: The Porter (1991)



Figure 5:61: Kunafa Maker (1993)



Figure 5:62: Alrebeia (1998)

After 2000. In 2008 she presented a temporary exhibition of Saudi traditional customs collection and she sold limited copies of her etchings. Then in 2009 she painted her largest piece to date “*Masajed Toshado Laha Arrehal*”.



Figure 5:63: *Masajed Toshado Laha Arrehal* (2009)



Figure 5:64: Saudi Traditional Costumes Collection (2008)

When I asked Binzagr which of her artworks she prefers to talk about, her response was very interesting. She said,

“when people ask me about my favourite piece I tell them that all my paintings are like my children, you cannot love one of your children more than the other, but sometimes one of them, like the “Zabun” painting, will impose itself.”

So in the following Binzagr has chosen three pieces of her art to describe in more detail.

The “Zabun” (1969)



Figure 5:65 Zabun (1969)

This masterpiece shows a Saudi woman from the Hejaz area dressed in a traditional costume called *Zabun*, which gave the name of the painting. Some people say that the *Zabun* costume comes in different designs and traces its origins to the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and that it was named after the person who designed it. The dress consists of two layers: the top layer is the long dress with long sleeves in yellow with brown stripes and lapels. This dress is close to the body from the shoulders to the waist. Underneath is a white turtleneck shirt with golden buttons, which are usually made of real gold. As part of the costume, the hair is styled with two layers of white scarfs called *mihramah wa mudawwarah*. The bottom layer is a cotton fabric that wraps the braided hair, which is covered with a second layer of fine delicate fabric with golden embroidered ends. The lady in the painting has dark hair, medium brown skin, black eyes, and is wearing eyeliner and lip colour. She looks calm and relaxed with a sharp look on her face, and is comfortably seated with her arm resting on the arm of the chair. The chair on is an antique wooden arabesque armchair designed with Islamic patterns. The blue wall in the background is decorated with Islamic patterns as well in blue, green, and pink. The audience had always considered “*Zabun*” to be a portrait, while Binzagr’s purpose with the painting was to present the Saudi woman in all her pride and glory as she believes that people in the West underestimate Saudi women. Binzagr’s aim was also to focus on presenting traditional costumes and the way women in the Hejaz area dressed as part of her overall theme of culture and traditions. This painting took longer to paint than any of her other paintings. To give a face to the model she used a photo of herself and her sister, and, as it happens, it ended up looking a lot like her sister. In fact, when she wanted to put the painting in her exhibition she had to seek her brother in-law’s consent to display it because of the resemblance between the woman in the

painting and his wife. At that time, displaying women's images in public was not common, following the traditional conservative norms of the society. She explained to him that once it was out there was no turning back, so when it was displayed it drew some comments as she expected.

“Zabun” is Binzagr's most popular art piece. It was presented in her exhibitions in London and Paris, and it featured on the exhibitions' posters where a journalist called it the “Saudi Mona Lisa.” Since then it was titled as the Saudi Mona Lisa and people attended the exhibition with the express purpose of seeing it. It became Binzagr's artistic landmark, the painting that she is known for. It was also used in Saudi Pop Art recently. According to Binzagr, a lot of people have tried to make a copy of it but failed. She said, “my personality is in all my painting, so even if someone copies any of them it will not be the same. There is something about me in the paintings, more than a signature...” which is true. Her work and style are unique.

“The Wealth of the Nations” (1969). This painting shows a Bedouin woman wearing a wide, black dress and a black head covering with a veil, are both embroidered with different sizes and shapes of golden coins in a specific design. The woman is fully covered but for her eyes and her hands. The darker skin colour visible around her eyes and hands reflect her long exposure to the sun. The Bedouin woman in the painting is standing beside a palm tree, carrying a goat, which represents value.



Figure 5:66: The Wealth of the Nations (1969)

When Binzagr decided to paint “The Wealth of the Nations” her purpose was to show Saudi Bedouin women as another face of Saudi womanhood compared to the urban woman in “Zabun.” She also wanted metaphorically to show that women carry the wealth of the tribe and the family. She wanted to show the value of women within her tribe. To make this painting, she stayed for five nights in a tent with a tribe called *Thahban* in the desert. She wanted to experience, observe, and document their lives in order to be able to display it in her work. While this piece was very famous and as significant as “Zabun,” it was unfortunately destroyed in a fire at Binzagr’s brother’s house. However, it seems that it lives on, not least through attempts to copy it. In fact, an American woman has recently contacted Binzagr claiming that she has the original, but after a closer examination it was proven to be forgery.



Figure 5:67: Three Mosques Worth Traveling To (2009)

“Masajed Toshado Laha Arrehal” (2009). This painting, which its title means three mosques worth traveling to, shows the three holy mosques (from right to left): Al-Aqsa mosque in the old city of Jerusalem, the sacred mosque in Mecca, and the Prophet’s mosque in Medina. They are painted in the same picture plane, as if they were in the same place. The artist chose to focus on certain parts of the mosques that are, in her view, the most prominent landmarks. That is, she highlighted the Al-Qibili chapel in Al-Aqsa mosque, the Kaaba in the sacred mosque of Mecca, and the prophet Mohammed’s mausoleum in Medina with its green dome and metal gate. The painting also shows a crowd of people walking, emphasizing that mosques are alive because of their stream of visitors. At each mosque, people are dressed differently. At the sacred mosque in Mecca and the Prophet’s mosque in Medina, most are wearing the Saudi costume but some wear costumes from other Islamic countries. The people at the Al-Aqsa mosque, however, are all dressed in the Levant area costume. Interestingly, the bottom part of the painting shows a caravan with camels carrying baggage and led by male pilgrims wearing old Arabic costume, as it displays a different period of time.

Because of the size of the painting Binzagr worked on three separate canvases, which she then attached for the presentation.

The inspiration for this painting came after she was invited in 2006 to participate in a contest. This contest was for artists across the Islamic world and was to feature the three holy mosques. She did not participate in the contest because, as she explained before, she does not work for events and is not comfortable working towards a deadline. However, because she was interested in the topic she later decided to work on this project and it was one of her largest paintings.

Conclusion

For Binzagr visual arts was different in the past. As she puts it,

We lived in another beautiful time. Visual arts should develop, but develop through the technique, the concept, and the context to produce good art. We want to go abroad, and we want to show the best of what we have.

It seems that she is not very satisfied with the current art movements not only in Saudi Arabia but around the world. She hopes for the old schools to be appreciated again. When it comes to her own future plans she said, “there are a lot of things I would like to do, God willing, may God sustain health and age, but I shouldn’t be greedy, I have achieved the thing I wanted most, which is this place.” Her main hope for the future is that the younger generation in the family will take care of the museum and will carry on with what she achieved. In spite of all of life’s challenges she has always focused on the bright sight,

Life in general doesn't only move in a straight line, at some point it has to move in a different direction. It is true that sometimes things bother you, but when it's over you see the audience's reaction and it makes you forget.

Binzagr's efforts and strength have paved the way for other Saudi female visual artists. She made her mark not only in the history of visual arts but also in the history of Saudi women, and hopefully *Darat Safeya Binzagr* will always be there to preserve this important history.

Timeline

Year	Event
1940	Date of birth in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
1947	Cairo, Egypt: received her school education and learned to draw and play the piano.
1960	London, England: attended a finishing school for three years.
1963	Back to Saudi Arabia, worked as a teacher
1965	Cairo, Egypt: attended the Leonardo da Vinci institute for two years
1968	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia: started her career as an artist
	First exhibition
60s	Two group exhibitions
1973	Second solo and first international exhibition at Woodstock Gallery in London
1979	London, England: attended Saint Martin's Art College for two years
	Published her first book " <i>Saudi Arabia: An Artist's View of the Past</i> "
70s	Three solo exhibitions (one of them international) One group exhibition
1980	Three solo exhibitions at Patrick Seal Gallery in London, Galarie Duron in Paris, and in Geneva
1981	Settled in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
80's	15 solo exhibitions (three international) Three group exhibitions
1995	Darat Safeya Binzagr was founded.
1999	Published her second book " <i>A Three Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage</i> "
90s	One solo exhibition
2000	Official grand opening of <i>Darat Safeya Binzagr</i> by the prince of the area
2005	Solo exhibition in Paris
2015	Solo exhibition in Bahrain

Table 5.1: Binzagr's life timeline

Chapter Six

Findings: Maha Almalluh

When an object can no longer operate as it was originally intended, a new function through adaptive reuse may be the only way to preserve the heritage of its significance as in the installation *Food for Thought*. (Maha Almalluh, 2015)



Figure 6:1: Maha Almalluh

I met with Maha Almalluh for the first time in 1999 in a painting class, a single session of which I attended as an auditor. It was an advanced painting course offered by the Almanahil centre in Riyadh, and I was just a beginner in the field. It was the first time I'd heard of Almalluh and she caught my attention as she had a very friendly personality and a smile on her face which made you feel how much she enjoyed what she was doing, as well as a unique style in her work. Since then I've been following her progress.

The only way I could reach Almalluh for the purpose of this research was to get her phone number through a mutual relative. As a matter of fact I believe that this connection helped in building trust between us, as she was very receptive when I asked if she could be part of my study and very cooperative in arranging the interview sessions. My interview with her consisted of three sessions; the first two were through an online audio program and the last one was at her home studio in Riyadh. During the online sessions Almalluh tended to be more hesitant about what she should and should not say than when I met with her face to face at her home where she seemed more comfortable. She was very welcoming and generous and gave me all the time I needed. She also gave me a tour of her breathtaking, unique house and as a result of which I will include a section specifically about this place. In fact, I will begin by describing her house. After that I will talk about her life story from her childhood to the present, followed by her journey as an artist including her education, exhibitions, and artwork. After that, I will address the role of society in her work and her journey in general. Finally, I will present an autobiographical reading of her work before a conclusion to the life story.

Her Home: A Personal Gallery

When I arrived at Almalluh's house and before we started the interview, which took place in one of her studios, she gave me a tour around her house. The main reason for this tour was not to show me the house itself but to show me her artwork, which was in almost every room of the house, and not only indoors but also outdoors. At the front entrance, there was a sculpture (figure 6:2). When I asked her about it she simply said, "I love to make something out of anything." Another of her artworks, "Oil Candies", which she has had displayed in

exhibitions internationally (figure 6:3), and which consists of six compressed oil barrels, was in the same area.



Figure 6:2: Untitled



Figure 6:3: Oil Candies

Much of Almalluh's artwork displayed at home was inspired by her husband's architecture practice and the family construction company he used to manage. Almalluh herself studied the history of architecture in the US so these studies and her husband's work have together influenced both the design of her house and her displayed artwork (figures 6:4 - 6:7). The house has high ceilings, large windows, glass walls inside the house and glass doors to the backyard, creating an open space with natural sunlight during the day.



Figure 6:4: Untitled



Figure 6:5: Untitled



Figure 6:6: Untitled



Figure 6:7: Untitled

Almalluh's interior design of her house is unique with an eclectic style combining modern and traditional styles. The materials used for the inside finishing of the house are mostly natural like concrete walls, marble and wood floors, and hidden wooden doors, which create a simplicity to the space and bring the artwork displayed into focus (figures 6:8- 6:11). Almost every piece of artwork in the house has a meaning for her or a story.



Figure 6:8: Untitled



Figure 6:9: Untitled



Figure 6:10: Untitled



Figure 6:11: Untitled

One of her sculptures in the backyard was an old bus without seats and wheels. The front and the back are open to allow people, especially children, to walk through (figure 6:12). She used the back part of the bus as an outdoor bench (figure 6:13).



Figure 6:12: Untitled



Figure 6:13: Untitled

Almalluh has two studios, one on the first floor (figure 6:14) open to the living room, which she shares with the rest of the family, especially her daughter Nora Alissa who is also an artist. The second studio, which is more than three times bigger, is in the basement, and it is there that the interview took place (figures 6:15- 6:17)



Figure 6:14: Untitled



Figure 6:15: Almalluh's studio



Figure 6:16: Almalluh's studio



Figure 6:17: Almalluh's studio

Visiting Almalluh at her home left me in a state of mind for several days memorable. The first thing that came to my mind when I left her house was that people don't know what they are missing. I was thinking about how lucky I was to meet her, to have had an opportunity to see her work and listen to her talk about it, to understand how she works, and for agreeing to be part of my study.

Her Life Journey

Maha Mohammed Almalluh was born in 1959 in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. She comes from a big family, with six sisters and two brothers, and she has 11 half-siblings on her father's side. Almalluh was a happy child, as she described it,

Thank God I had a happy childhood. We were a large group of seven girls, everything that reminds me of the past is related to my sisters, you know when we were little we were seven girls and our ages were close so we used to play and never got bored, you know in the past we didn't have the idea of making friends like nowadays, we were at home all the time together and my sisters were my friends.

She and her sisters used to play with everything, as she explained it, because the only kind of toys that were available at that time were dolls. Her brothers would bring toys like Lego from Beirut, Lebanon, but even so they used to play with things like boxes and cups. Almalluh remembers many more details of these games than her sisters tend to and she believes that such experiences are significant for children. Her family encouraged education and tried to foster a

love of books and reading in their children from a very young age. These practices were affective because now most of her siblings are in academia. She explained,

My mother used to take us to the bookstore, we were four little girls and three older ones and the two boys were in the middle age-wise, we all used to go together to the bookstore to buy a story so my sister Mo'dy who was the oldest could read it for us, this was before we learned how to read. This is one of the events that I never forgot in my life...we had books at home and we used to read and there was education, my mother can read and my grandmother, may she rest in peace, was able to read, my mother now reads the newspaper every day...one thing we learned at our home was that education is more important than money, this is what my father, may he rest in peace, and my mother taught us, that education and certificates are a good thing and staying at home is not and taught us that you should do something in your life and always have a passion, and that belief played an important role in my life.

Almalluh's family has always been the most important, encouraging, and influential people in her life. Unfortunately, when she was a teenager her father fell ill and was not able to recognize even his family. It was the worst event in Almalluh's life as she felt like she lost her father although he passed away twenty years later. Losing loved ones has always been what has shaken and affected Almalluh the most, but the family's strong bond and their support has helped her and kept her strong.

After she finished high school, Almalluh married in 1978 to an architect and travelled with him to the US for two years and six months. Then then lived in Paris for a year. Being

away from the city of Jeddah, especially in the US first and then Paris, were two of the major turning points in Almalluh's life. During her travels, she took some fine arts courses like art history and painting. However, she didn't have the chance to finish a degree. Then, in 1980, they settled in the capital city of Riyadh, which was new to both of them as her husband had also lived in Jeddah all his life, excepting the years abroad. In Jeddah both the society and the traditions are different from those in Riyadh. She said after being away for three years she returned to find a big change in the Saudi society, particularly a (more conservative) religious change. As mentioned, education had been always an important element in Almalluh's family so a few years after settling in Riyadh she enrolled at King Saud University in 1988 to study English literature.

As part of getting familiar with the new city and as part of Almalluh's interest in learning about the culture she used to go out and explore and meet people, she said,

I love to go everywhere in the whole city of Riyadh to get to know the market and people, I mean I wanted to know the city very well, so I was at the same time collecting things...of course whoever goes everywhere like that learns about people's problems...as you know art is all about society, and what the artist can provide society with.

Almalluh feels "alive" when she goes to areas like the old city and the busy traditional market and she shares her trips across the city with her social media followers (figures 6:18 – 6:21).

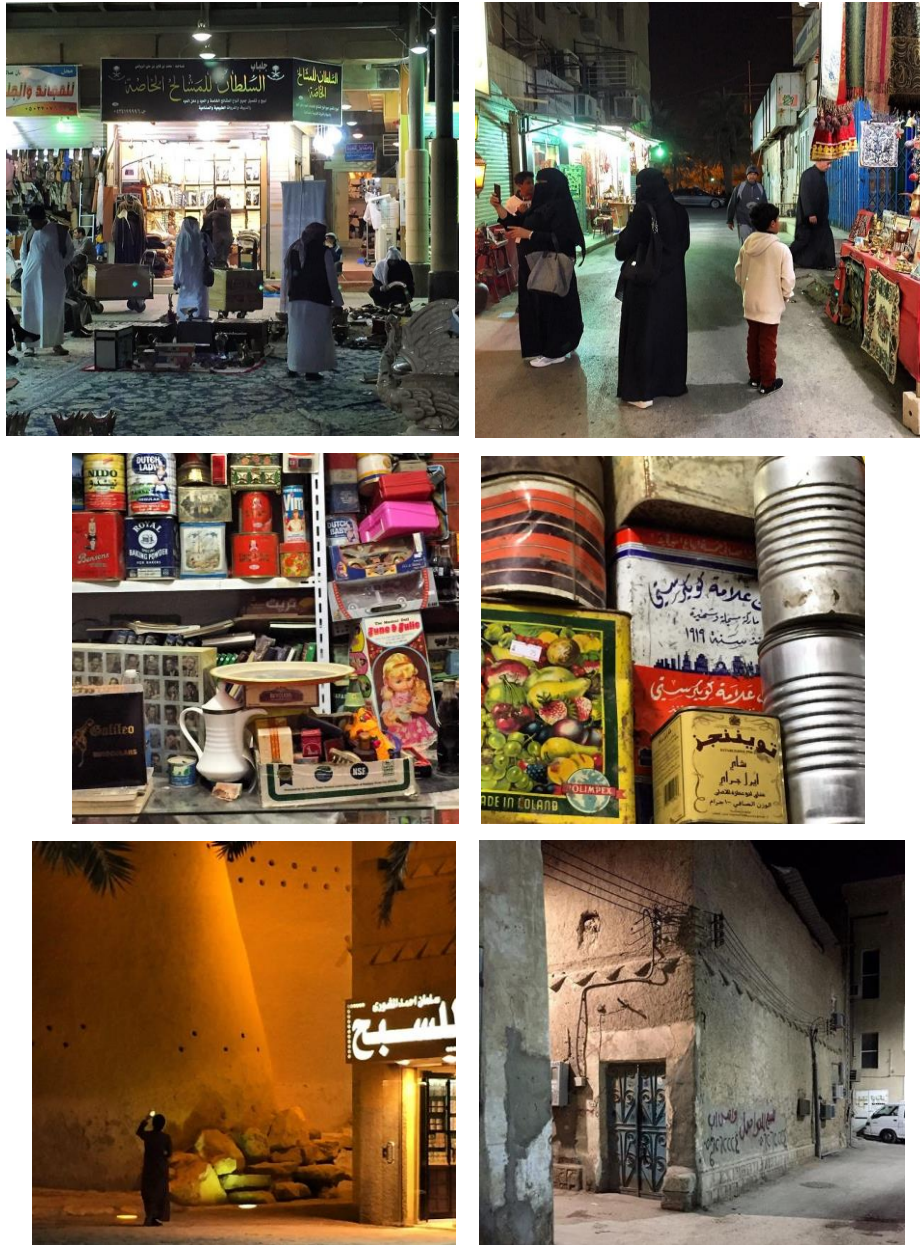


Figure 6:18: photographs taken by the artist (2015)

Becoming a mother was the happiest moment of her life. It was another turning point in her life journey. Her love for her children and the feelings of responsibility she had towards them made her sacrifice her career to be with them. She explained,

At that time I was a mother of two sons and two daughters so I decided to take time off to raise my children because I believe that even if art is important since I chose to have children they are the most important thing in my life, I mean, if I continued to focus on my art and left my children I wouldn't be happy, so I decided to stay with them and raise them and at the same time educate myself, read, research, and take workshops and courses when I travel or even in town. I take any chance I can get to stay updated with the visual arts around the world.

Her sacrifice, love, and effort for her children resulted in great support from them later on. Her children and her husband always accompany her to exhibitions, and grand openings and they are very encouraging. Almalluh's family is growing as she has been a grandmother for almost ten years. For Almalluh, a bedrock for keeping her family together is honesty. "If a person is honest," she said, "he won't be unfaithful in any field of life; if a person is honest in his work and in his love he will succeed; if he is honest in serving his country he will succeed without betraying his country. I believe honesty is the most important thing." Clearly, her belief in honesty was in her work and in how she talked about it.

Maha Almalluh the Artist: Paving Her Way to Success

Since Almalluh was had a creative bent, exploring and playing with everything and fantasizing her work. She also used to scribble a lot, as she puts it, "ever since I can remember and since I held a pen I've been scribbling, since I was very little." When she was young she used to draw and paint all the time and her family were very proud and encouraging. She explained,

They always called me the artist and I used to get mad. I used to get shy when they said artist when I myself used to consider that I hadn't done anything yet. You know how the family are, when their children do something they see it as a big deal and encourage it, but I didn't see it that way, all I knew is that I love what I'm doing and I can't stop, but I wasn't seeing myself as an artist as they used to say.

She wanted to do more and, although she was young she was aware that she was still at the beginning of the road. Almalluh was and still is strong, persistent, and not afraid to take risks. She believes that her mother inspired her as she (her mother) loves the unfamiliar and was always the kind of person who was willing to take risks. Although only some of her siblings have an interest in visual arts, all of them have always encouraged Almalluh in her passion. Her older brothers used to buy her supplies and introduce her to foreign artists in Jeddah and bring her instructors who would teach her something new and develop her talent. She explained,

Every artist I met with introduced me to a new medium, one of them for example taught me about acrylic...one of my brothers asked an American artist to come and teach me and she taught me how to use acrylic. I mean honestly my family paid a lot of attention to me, when my brothers used to travel they would buy me books, I have a lot of books that I didn't buy, until now whoever from my family finds a book about visual arts they would get it for me.

They also encouraged her to participate in exhibitions. When she was in high school she was invited by a group of foreign artists to join them and co-exhibit with them. She contributed some paintings, which were all sold to Saudis. She explained,

Of course Saudis at that time had rarely seen a work of art by a Saudi female artist so they bought it, which is good, the fact that someone appreciated my work encouraged me to continue...this is one of the events that I will never forget.

When she participated in this exhibition, there were only a very few female artists in Saudi Arabia such as Safeya Binzagr, Munerah Moosly, and Nawal Musally. Social norms at that time did not value visual arts much, but the General Presidency of Youth Fairs were supportive and encouraging. She participated in exhibitions under their arrangement, and her work always sold. However, she eventually stopped exhibiting with them as she didn't feel it was leading anywhere. She said,

I didn't care about participating, I cared more about getting feedback. We don't have critics and we don't have anyone who can instruct artists, they always exaggerate and talk about my work as great work and since I know that my work is not like that, I feel ridiculous when I participate...I imagine they say these things because they don't have enough experience in visual arts. I don't blame them; everyone here praises everyone because society doesn't accept criticism.

She also wasn't comfortable with the way the General Presidency of Youth Fairs managed its exhibitions at that time, such as requesting certain subjects and giving very tight deadlines. However, she was not discouraged, and has actively been exhibiting her work internationally since 1976.

After she married, she received the support and encouragement of her husband in addition to that of her birth family. When they travelled to the US in 1978 she enrolled in the School of Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. However, her focus was not on getting a degree but simply on studying what she was interested in. She took courses in visual arts for two years. When the couple went to Paris for a year where she took some workshops to develop her skills. When they settled in Riyadh, she didn't feel that she was yet ready to produce artwork, as she wanted to finish her studies and gain more knowledge in the field. In 1988, she enrolled at King Saud University to study English literature as it was the only subject that she found helpful in that it introduced her to books on art criticism and fine art, meaning it helped her to read about fine arts and art criticism, but in the end it wasn't enough for her to read about the arts. She wanted to have a degree in fine arts. She went to check out the department of arts education, which was newly established and the only department related to fine arts in Riyadh. Interestingly, the director of the department encouraged her to stay in the English literature department, saying "we will not help you as an artist." In the opinion of the director the arts education department was not right for Almalluh as the main goal of the art education department is to prepare art education teachers, not artists. When Almalluh attended their exhibition, she understood what the director of the department meant. She said, "the display was on teaching aids and that is not fine art." So, she continued to study English literature, which also helped her as an artist, "literature was very good for art and

as an artist learning literature was very helpful,” she said. It also developed her English skills and helped her read on art criticism.

In 1998 Almalluh enrolled in a design and photography program run by De Anza College in California but located in Riyadh. The program lasted more than two years, as she took courses in both photography and graphic design. She wanted to study graphic design because, as she said,

I believe the artist’s work should be integrated, for example at that time there was no professional graphic designer here who could design a business card or a brochure so I decided to study graphic design myself so I would be able to design my catalogue the way I like to represent me.

She was motivated by her love for learning and a search for authenticity and realism. She also studied photography both in Saudi Arabia and in the US but she emphasized the importance of practicing what she learned in photography and still wants to take more courses in photography if she gets the chance. Almalluh doesn’t like to limit herself when it comes to visual arts and as I mentioned earlier she believes that any artist should learn about everything in the field. However, the sources in Saudi Arabia were limited in the past when it came to learning about different artistic techniques and media, so Almalluh believed it was her responsibility to learn them on her own and she tried her best. In her opinion because learning about the wide variety of visual arts is important for any artist, as she explained,

It is beneficial; the artist would reach a stage when he needs to express his ideas in painting, photography, or some other way. Now in my work I can express my ideas and views in different ways, I express myself through photograms, sometimes through photography, painting, and sculpture so this is an important thing, I believe: in order to keep improving, the artist shouldn't limit himself to a certain technique or a certain art school.

She believes in continuous learning because things change and she believes in the importance of enriching the knowledge of the artist. Interestingly, she doesn't consider herself an artist yet, or maybe not the artist she hoped to be yet. She said,

I imagine if I saw myself as an artist my talent wouldn't develop anymore. An artist would never feel that he has reached what he wanted yet. I still want to do more; there are things that I want to do and haven't done yet, I want to reach them, but not now, maybe if I felt that I reached them I might stop, I don't think any successful artist who feels he reached something would keep going. Maybe someone who feels that they reached what they wanted would stop or fail because in my view art is all about experimenting and experiments are endless.

This is how Almalluh sees and enjoys visual arts. She loves to experiment and to try new media until she finds the right medium and technique with which to express ideas and feelings.

When her children were young she wanted to focus more on raising them and less on producing art, but at the same time kept learning and enriching her knowledge in the field. “Art is my passion. I can’t stop; even if I wasn’t participating in exhibitions I practice it in my life,” Almalluh said. During that time she also worked for short periods in charity work teaching visual arts. She followed the visual arts movements around the world and whenever she travelled she spent most of her time visiting art galleries and museums with her children and taking workshops whenever she got the chance. She said, “I wanted to keep up with the visual arts movements, then when my children became older—I think Sarah, my eldest daughter, was in high school at that time—I returned to be more active in the field.” Her family, husband and children, supported her all, especially after they grew up, attending her exhibitions and the grand openings of other exhibitions and travelling with her. She said “their support played a great role, even though I would have kept going even if no one had encouraged me, but they were always there.” Almalhas always enjoyed a strong family bond and got support and encouragement before marriage from her parents and siblings and after marriage also from her husband and children.

When Almalluh decided that it was time to return and become more active as an artist she had main goals in mind, as she put it,

My main concern was that I wanted to do my best, and when I participate abroad to participate at a level that honours the Saudi woman and honours my country. When people abroad meet with me they wonder why they hear different things so I wanted to improve the image of the Saudi woman and of course to express myself, this was my ambition.

After years of discovering at the field from a distance she returned with clear goals as she knew what she wanted as she moved forward. She participated in a few exhibitions; in 2003 in an exhibition in Holland called SDCG, and in 2006 in the International Conference on Tourism and Handicrafts in Riyadh.

Solo exhibition. After taking photography courses and learning about photograms Almalluh worked on her first photograms series. The Oxford dictionary (2017) defines photogram thus, “a picture produced with photographic materials, such as light-sensitive paper, but without a camera.” Almalluh described the process thus, “it shows you the exposure on paper, meaning you put the objects this way (showing me on the device) then you expose it to light and print it... I put the things that I collect under the device to express my feeling and my point.” She would bring objects into the darkroom (figure 6:19) and put them in layers under a special device (figure 6:20). She explained further,

You cannot see it, you have to imagine it, for example, for my first series I used to totally turn the lights off so I wouldn't know where the objects were, then I gathered them and decided at that moment where to put each object... and I used some transparent things as they gave an interesting effect and depth to the image, then I processed it. I used to send my work to Europe for someone to make bigger prints out of it, photograms usually come in only one copy.



Figure 6:19: Almalluh's lap



Figure 6:20: Almaluh's lap

At the beginning, Almalluh used to work with objects from around the house and specifically she used her children's old toys and other memorial objects (figure 6:21), partly to preserve the memories in case the original objects got lost, 60 images. Almalluh loved the results and decided to work on more photograms and make a solo exhibition in Riyadh . She wanted the exhibition to have a motto because she wanted it to carry a meaning. The statement was, as she put it, "how the simple things in our lives are priceless and mean much to us." Her target audience was the younger generation.



Figure 6:21: Memorials objects

The idea of photograms was novel so none of Almalluh’s friends encouraged her to display her work in public because they had never seen photograms in an exhibition before. However, Almalluh was persistent. She said, “I am the type of person who takes risks; I don’t usually worry” and regardless of what they said she started looking for a space. She wanted to exhibit her work the right way, as she put it, “I wanted to follow the right way in my work, I don’t have much experience but I travel and I see and I try to learn, so I contacted the Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Art and they told me that it would take a year to get approved, funny thing I only called to check” so she had to keep looking and in 2007 her friend Ohod Alnajran, who was in the twelfth year of running the *Gallery Ohod* in Riyadh, invited her to display her artwork in her gallery. Almalluh said,

Of course, I loved the idea. It is nice to do it in a gallery and follow the right way; I didn’t want to rent a space in the lobby of a hotel to display my work. She gave me the

freedom to change the colour of the walls and I changed it so it would go well with the photograms as they were black and white.

She had the photograms printed abroad because of the limited resources in the country for such an unusual project. Also, they both agreed to sell the artwork at reasonable prices. Almalluh explained, “first, we wanted the young to be able to own an piece of art, and we also wanted other artists to understand that artwork shouldn’t be sold for 30 or 40 thousand.” Almalluh printed brochures and 1000 invitations for her exhibition, which she named “Capturing Light” and distributed them with Ohod Alnajran to family and friends. She said, “I invited all the children in my family and the adults, little ones and teenagers. People told me no one would come and I said no they will and they came, thank God. And artists came...some artists used to come daily to enjoy the exhibition.”



Figure 6:22: Almallhu giving a lecture

People received the invitations and came to the grand opening and some of them ended up attending the exhibition daily. She displayed 20 prints and the reproduction of the originals

and most of them were sold. Almalluh also printed the images on bags of different sizes and on book covers at very reasonable prices, lower than that of the original artworks, and they all sold (figures 6:23- 6:28). She said, “they bought my work. Instead of buying brands they bought art, this was encouraging.” Almalluh wanted to do something unusual which was to stand with the gallery owner and explain the statement of her artwork (figure 6:22),

It wasn't easy, you know, as a Saudi to stand and explain to men and women and girls, but I decided to stand in the exhibition and explain my statement...as artists we exhibit our work but no one sees us...of course I expected a reaction, but there was no reaction and on the contrary artists used to come every day and at the grand opening a lot of people came, even my male relatives and brothers, and no one objected to the idea...everyone thought it was a good one.

Almalluh took risks by displaying a type of art unusual for Saudi Arabia and by making a presentation about her art to the audience. However, it was a greatly successful event, which open many opportunities for Almalluh, including to exhibit her work abroad. She received invitations from galleries abroad asking to represent her and her work and she agreed to work with some of them. Since then, Almalluh has continued to receive invitations from galleries around the world, but she prefers to focus and not to expand.

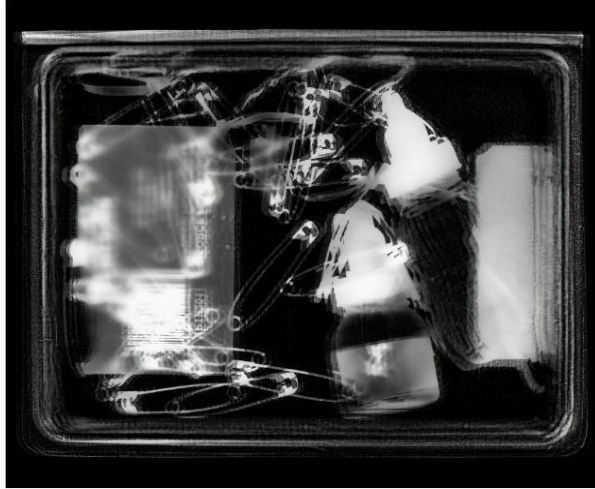


Figure 6:23: Pins & Bottles (2007)

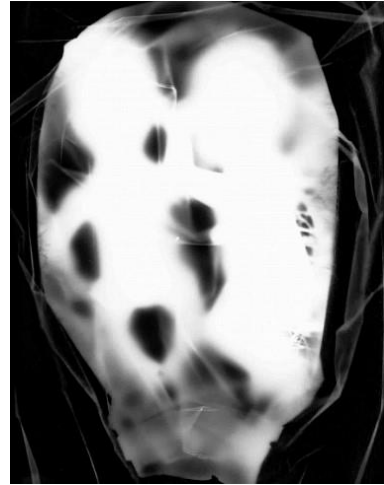


Figure 6:24: Twins (2007)



Figure 6:25: Over Population (2007)



Figure 6:26: Baby Bank (2007)



Figure 6:27: Broken Finger (2007)

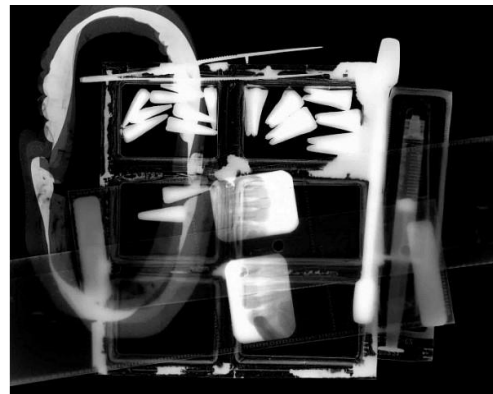


Figure 6:28: Extractions (2007)

Moving forward internationally. After the 2007 “Capturing Light” exhibition, Almalluh received an invitation from Edge of Arabia, a foundation interested in Middle Eastern visual art, founded by a British artist and two Saudi artists. The foundation aimed to introduce Middle Eastern artists to the rest of the world through exhibitions in different countries. Almalluh accepted their invitation and participated for the first time in 2008 at the Brunei Gallery in London. Almalluh described the experience,

The reaction was very good. You know the most important thing for an artist is the response, and the response was very good. The British Museum said they wanted my work and the critics said things...for me the media is not important nor is it important to be famous, but I care about my artwork being well presented, so for each Edge of Arabia exhibition I made a new series of images, and it was a success.

Almalluh participated in eight Edge of Arabia exhibitions—in London, Dubai, Istanbul, Berlin, Venice, Riyadh, and Jeddah—between 2008 and 2012. For each exhibition she introduced a new idea and put together a new series. She became highly active internationally and her name and type of work caught the attention of critics and museums. In 2011 the British Museum became the first museum to buy one of her works. They bought “The Road to Mecca” 2010 (figure 6:29), which Almalluh describes as one of the major turning points in her career. She said,

It became a bigger responsibility for me, as if I just began my journey as an artist...for someone like me a museum is considered, as they say, the hall of fame. If your work is

in a museum that's it, your work has entered history. It is being displayed and preserved in a museum for ever! You know! It's not like when a private individual buys your work.

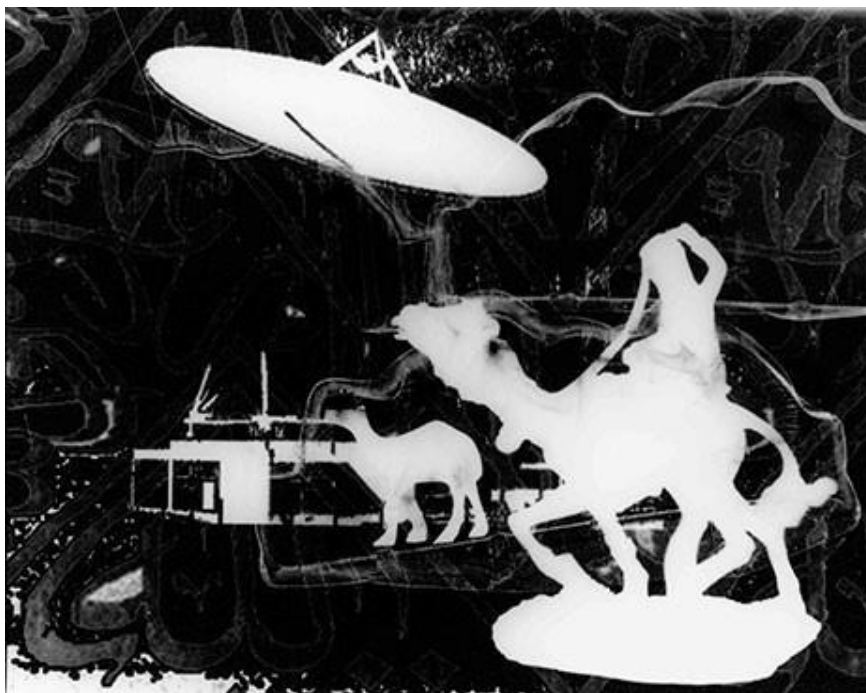


Figure 6:29: The Road to Mecca (2010)

When Almalluh began participating in exhibitions she never thought that one of her art pieces would one day be in a museum; all she aimed for was to do her best and to be honest in her work. She never intended to be popular, but as she said,

I used to participate and make an effort and there were some people who were watching. Those curators, they are watching without making the artists feel it; you don't need to put your name in the newspapers. Since I started with Edge of Arabia my name hasn't been in the newspapers...nor was my work displayed in the best spot. I never used to say

anything; I don't like this kind of politics...I don't like to fight; I believe my fight is that I kept going. No one could've broken me.

Her strength and persistence and the support of her family she kept working and participating and after each exhibition she received good feedback. She became represented by international galleries like the Selma Feriani Gallery based in London and Galerie Krinzinger based in Vienna. The following table tracks her activity since 2003:

Year	City		Sold her work to
	Solo exhibition	Group exhibition	
2003		Amsterdam	
2006	Riyadh		
2007	Riyadh		
2008		London	
2009		Venice	
2010		Riyadh Dubai Berlin Shanghai Istanbul	
2011		Dubai (twice) London Marrakesh Beirut	The British Museum, London

2012	London	Kuwait Jeddah London Dubai Vienna Paris	Tate Modern, London
2013		Singapore Dubai London	
2014	Jeddah	Houston Paris Berlin	
		Jeddah	
2015	Vienna Basel Paris	London Dubai Riyadh Jeddah	Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Greenbox Museum, Amsterdam. Saatchi Gallery, London.
2016		London Abu Dhabi	Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar.

Table 6.1: Table tracks Almallu's activity since 2003.

Most of the people who used to contact her were academics or curators which she found very encouraging as that was what she was looking for. She believes that they were interested because her work showed honesty and originality, she explained,

Art must be honest in order for it to touch people, to make them understand it and be affected by it. I worked without caring about publicity or about having my name appear in the newspaper, good art will succeed. I want my work to speak, not me.

When asked for an interview at the beginning of her career, Almalluh used to refuse because she felt she would ridicule herself since she hadn't achieved much at that time. Now she is more open to the idea, but even now she sets limits, e.g. she's never attended press conferences as she isn't comfortable with her photos being posted in the newspaper. She explained,

I don't like it because, as I told you, I love to respect the traditions and customs. It is not that anyone would object—neither my husband nor any of my family—but I don't want my photo to be in every newspaper. You have to be a good role model for society, for the younger girls. It's okay for one photo to be out and when it is out of my hand it doesn't matter (figure 6:30) but not in many newspapers. The press have used images of my work instead of photos of me. It's good—if they like my work they can put that in; let my work speak for me.

She doesn't think it is shameful that a photo of her was posted or could be posted again, but she wasn't, and still isn't, used to it. It is important for Almalluh to preserve traditions and customs. She was raised with them and she wants to raise her children with them as well. She said, "I am traditional in my life; I don't like to do things that are outside of society's norms." Some of her admirers abroad have told her that they like her because she is conservative (i.e., holding on to



Figure 6.30

traditions) and she preserves the heritage. Almalluh has found understanding and appreciation for her point of view abroad. Audience abroad understand how important heritage is. In her opinion a lot of Saudis think that heritage is Arabic coffee, dates, and *shalki*, which is a traditional type of fabric. She explained,

There is a material heritage of course, but heritage is bigger and deeper than that...what is more important is our traditions and customs, within the family, even in gathering and generosity. Unfortunately people see it as different of development, but development doesn't mean giving up your traditions. Why give them up? Honestly, I love to preserve my heritage.

Part of her efforts to preserve Saudi heritage lies in collecting traditional objects, especially when exploring the city. She used to find things like old used cookware, doors, or audio cassettes on the sidewalk people had thrown them away. She explained what motivated her,

When I go to a museum and see things that relate to the pharaohs or the Greeks, I learn about them through the things they left, but what are we going to leave? I used to go to Adderah, and Alowis and bin Dayl souq (traditional markets) and ask myself: is this what we are going to leave for tomorrow?...These things that we could leave behind are made in China, and cheap, and not going to last long. This made me start to collect these traditional objects and only later to arrange them. I did it for love and not with the intention of doing anything in particular.

Since settling in Riyadh Almalluh loves going to traditional markets like Adderah, Alowis, and bin Dayel souq regularly. Such places sell used and new traditional objects and antiques. Visits to these has revealed a cultural change, so she started to collect objects because, as she said, “I felt that our identity was starting to fade away, especially that the younger generations didn’t know anything about our generation, so I decided to keep these objects and make something out of them one day.” She felt that Saudis don’t have domestic production of wares because art is neglected in their lives, their society, and their country. Almalluh wanted to do something for the visual arts, her society, and her heritage, so when she was working with these valuable objects she had to be creative. She commented,

They say the artist—although I don’t consider myself one, but I have feelings, there are certain things that I feel, maybe everybody can feel them, but an artist can show it more than others and make others feel it—people used to say to me, “oh yes, we remember these from the old days” because I had reminded them of what they’d forgotten. It’s about how you remind people of their culture...when you want to present art successfully there are many ideas...but the way you deliver an idea to people so that it affects them, that is what you need to think about.

Almalluh believes that through art you deliver a point of view to society in a way that generates discussion. She said “the artist doesn’t suggest solutions; the artist attracts people’s attention to an idea or an issue in society.”

Almalluh's Artwork

Almalluh is inspired by her daily life. She said, “everything inspires me: my life, my society, my country.” She loves to explore the city and to know everything about the culture. This is how she feels alive and the source of her inspiration. However, she’s worked with objects in almost all her artwork as it is objects that inspire her the most. She said, “In all my work I am moved by an object, which is why I create artwork out of objects. This art should remind us of our humanity so we can live.” The objects she works with always have a meaning or a story, but in general her focus is on the heritage values they represent. She explained,

After the discovery of oil and with the amount of money coming into the country there has been a lot of investment in the development of Saudi Arabian infrastructure, changing of the way the country looks, and our experience of it...this is a continuous thread that runs throughout my work and is especially obvious in my latest creations.

Clearly, things that time passed by have always moved Almalluh and attracted her more than new things do. We see this especially in her interest for black gloves, a common scene in Saudi Arabia as part of the practice of women covering their bodies.

Sky Clouds (2009). In the *Sky Clouds* (figure 6:31) installation, we see Almalluh’s interest in black polyester gloves. “As I told you,” she confided during our interview, “I am interested in objects, material culture, like the black gloves.” Growing up she was taught that women in Islam were forbidden from wearing black gloves and a *niqab*, face veil, because it would be hard to discover if a man was under the cover. However, when Almalluh attended

university in the eighties she found posters with the new advisory that women ought to wear black gloves because it became more familiar and popular. Almalluh was not convinced, but she was interested in the topic. The black gloves were very popular at that time and Almalluh used to receive comments from strange women because she didn't wear them. So Almalluh started collecting them. She filled the inside of each black polyester glove with polyester fiber so it would fill it out in the shape of a hand and arm and sand at the base so they could stand. She also added a cuff made out of prayer rugs that she had extras of at home.



Figure 6:31: *Sky Clouds* (2009)

In 2013 Almalluh displayed this artwork as “700 Pairs of Black Gloves” at Galerie Krinzinger in Vienna. Before the doors opened to the public she sprayed the black gloves with *oud* scent spray, which made a nice surprise for members of the audience, especially the Arab

ones. The “*Sky Cloud*” generated serious discussion among members of the audience during the exhibition.

Food for Thought—The Cassettes (2012). During Almalluh’s exploration trips across the city she used to find big sacks of religious lecture cassettes dumped in the garbage. People used to keep them until there was an advisory that throwing them away did not present a problem. They had different colours depending on the time of their production, starting in the eighties. According to Almalluh, religious lectures used to be recorded over cassettes of old songs and they used mark over the writings on it (figure 6:32). After that the lectures were recorded on their own original cassettes of different pastel colours. Almalluh found the contrast between the serious subjects of the cassettes and the childish colours interesting (figure 6:33). A little later the colours of the cassettes became brighter and stronger (figure 6:34).



Figure 6:32: Food for Thought 11100 (2013)

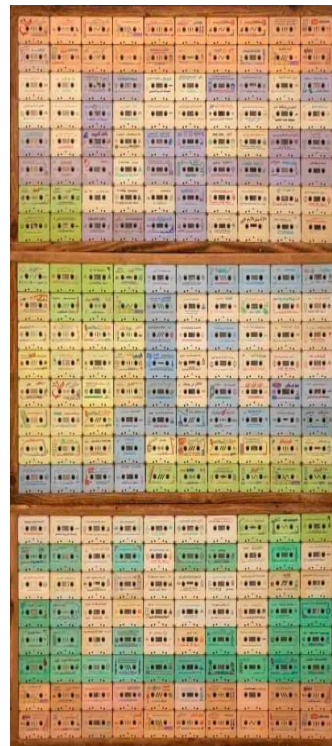


Figure 6:33: Food for Thought 11200 (2013)



Figure 6:34: Food for Thought 11300-2 (2013)

She didn't think it was a good idea to just throw them away as she felt they were part of Saudi history. As she explained,

We went through this period! I lived in this period! So I wanted to present it in a way that would benefit the coming generations who don't have personal recollections of the cassettes! They need to know that things change through time. Our society is against change but this will teach them that everything changes in our lives, objects, even our customs and traditions, and that our generation is compatible, Islam is compatible with all times, it is not for a certain time only.

So Almalluh brought the cassettes home, categorized them based on the colour and epoch and started thinking.

Since she loves using what is available and loves to experiment she tried to arrange the cassettes on a big bread tray she had at home, like the one used in bakeries (figure 6:35). She found that a tray would fit 80 cassettes perfectly

and loved how it looked. So, she decided to look for trays as old as the cassettes, which took time and effort because she couldn't rely on people to get her exactly what she wanted so she had to look for the trays herself. When Almalluh wanted to trade the bakeries new trays for their old ones, it wasn't easy as they couldn't understand why she was doing it. Almalluh elaborated,

To display them in a good way that suits religion I thought of looking for trays that were 30 years old, the same age as the tapes... I arrived at the idea that these tapes are like the bread that we were fed over the last thirty years and I called it "food for thought."

This task of looking for the perfect trays was productive for as she found trays as old as 40 years, and it was also an opportunity for her to explore the different types of breads those bakeries sell. It was another way of exploring the culture. Almalluh arranged the cassettes according to the period they were produced and using the cassettes she wrote words taken from



Figure 6:35: A bakery in Riyadh



Figure 6:36 project in process

what was written on them. She indicated that these words affected the way people used to think. These art pieces may seem simple, but Almalluh said, “the cassettes take time to think about and work on, and they are highly requested” (figure 6:36).

When Almalluh displayed the “Food for Thought” series in “We Need to Talk,” an exhibition arranged by Edge of Arabia in Jeddah, it resulted in a lot of discussion among members of the audience, especially the ones who had been influenced by the content of these tapes. Not everyone understood the message of the artwork, Almalluh explained,

Art is just like that—everyone understands it in their own way. You know, it’s not a fact, it’s art. Everyone understands it based on the way they see it, this is as it should be, you don’t have to make a straight forward point.

Internationally it also received much attention and was bought by Centre Georges Pompidou museum in Paris in 2015 (figures 6:32 - 6:34). Almalluh saw that audiences abroad understood the meaning behind the “Food for Thought” series better than people in Saudi Arabia did. Almalluh explained more about the content of the tapes and their effect on people,

Thank God I was raised in a home where my family had awareness and were educated, my grandfather was *sheikh* (someone who had received religious education) and his brother was also *sheikh* and a judge. Religion was clear for us so in this regard...the religion is lenient and we were raised believing that it is lenient. We only saw our grandfathers and our *sheikhs* and all of them had lenient attitudes, unlike the religion I

see among people now. Religion is not hypocrisy...religion is a way of life. You even find that some foreigners follow Islam without knowing it; Islam is honesty.

Almalluh's awareness and her strong foundation in Islam has always helped her not to be easily affected by any religious movement. In her view, some people do not have an awareness of religion, so they accepted what was on the tapes e.g., which shaped some mistaken ideas. She believes that people were not aware of what was happening then and although some people are better educated now, there is still unawareness and hypocrisy. However, in her opinion, with social media things are changing now and people are becoming more aware.

***Abwab* (2012).** The name *Abwab* is an Arabic word that means “doors”—the main component of the artworks in this series. One day Almalluh passed by a big storage area where old, used doors were displayed for sale. She liked some of the doors so she bought them and kept them in her storage because she thought an artwork would one day come out of them. The way Almalluh worked on these doors was inspired by quilting, a craft she is interested in but has never pursued. Many members of the audience loved and were moved by the “Abwab” series, Almalluh said,

You can feel that the work moved many of the young Saudis; some of them said that it reminded them of their family house in the city of Altaif, and that it kindled a beautiful feeling in them, which is how it is supposed to be.

Almalluh herself is attached to this series as she has three pieces displayed in different spots at home, one of which is the family entrance (figure 6:37).



Figure 6:37: Abwab (2012)

Food for Thought—Serving Bowls (2012). In this series Almalluh used traditional Saudi enamel bowls called *ghadar* of different shapes and colours to create towers. The shapes of the towers are based on the shape of the bowls. Almalluh explained how she came up with the idea,

My mother knows that I love these things so she gave me all her enamel bowls. They remind me of when we were little and they used to cook *matazeez* (a traditional Saudi dish) and other dishes, so it used to mean something to me and it still does, so I

collected them and kept them in the storage of our farm in Alamaria (an area close to Riyadh) and every time I went to the *souq* (traditional market) I would find some of these enamel plates, some had holes and some were rusted and couldn't be used so I collected them instead. I wanted to make an artwork out of them, at that time no one liked them, people in the old days got bored of the typical because it wasn't developing, so I took them and experimented with how I would display them.

Almalluh's memory of what dish was served in such bowls shows how much they meant to her. During the process of thinking and working on these installations her guests would offer comments on what they loved and hated about these bowls. For example, people used to comment on how they hated certain colours of the inner part of the bowl so she decided to hide the colour of the inside of the bowl. However, there was also a deeper meaning to the choice of how to display them, she explained,

The Towering Dishes series is a critical commentary on how the future desperately needs to be built on tradition rather than relegating the past into the recess of memory. Towering structures being built today are often foreign to their surroundings, aggressively cutting off the chord with tradition and heritage. Reconnecting with the old, with things past, is an important theme in my work.



Figure 6:38: Food for Thought IV (2013)

These bowls were used when people gathered over a meal and share stories; they document the history including the places and the times they were used. Almalluh believes that these bowls are a tangible celebration of Arab generosity. One artwork in this series was bought by the Tate after it was displayed in 2012 at the Edge of Arabia's exhibition in Jeddah (figure 6:38).

Food for Thought “Abraj” (2015).

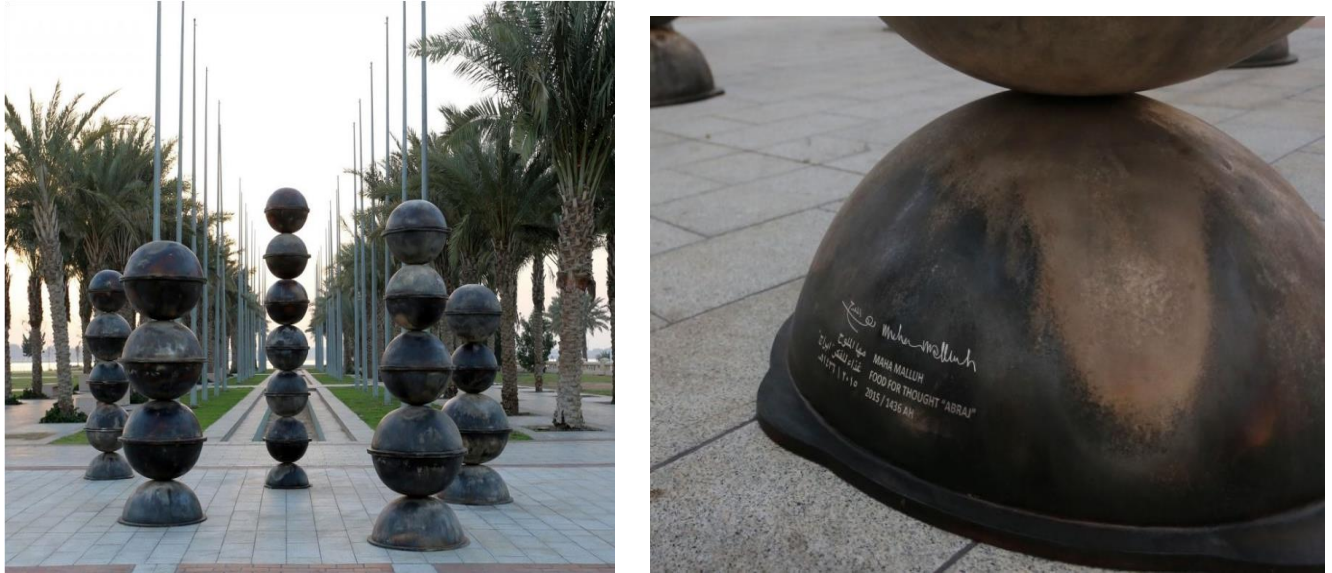


Figure 6:39: Abraj (2015)

“These sculptures and installations developed as a result of my interest in recycling material, especially from deserted construction sites, the souk, and other places scattered around in the desert and the city,” Almalluh said, in describing the sculpture. “Abraj” is her largest sculpture so far, located in the city of Jeddah at the Jeddah sculpture museum. The design is a recreation of the “Food for Thought” enamel bowls sculpture. This sculpture is made of Grade 316 Stainless Steel and with measurements of 10.3m x 6.6m x 3.38m. It was manufactured under direction of Akim Monet by Kunstgiesserei St. Gallen AG (Switzerland). This sculpture is very special to Almalluh because, as she said,

It has a special effect on me because Jeddah is my home town. I was raised there and it gave me a lot during the most important stages of my life, as a child and a teenager.

This artwork is a gift to the city that I love and feel nostalgia for, and to have it there makes me happy and makes me feel that part of me is now there.

Almalluh shows her honest feelings in her artwork for the city she will never forget, which embodies the beautiful memories on which she depends to create her art.

Almuallaqat (2015). During one of Almalluh's trips to the flea market in Riyadh she found some big old used aluminium cooking pots that had knife marks and burns at the bottom. These pots reminded her of her childhood and they used to use this kind of pot. She bought the pots and thought they would look nice for her plants. When she moved to a new house she turned them over and found out that the bottoms of these pots were the best part. In the past, people didn't only use them for cooking but the bottom of the pots had also been used as a cutting base and showed the marks of the knives. The resultant texture made them unique in Almalluh's opinion. She started hanging them and she kept buying more, and hanging more. and noticed her guests' positive reactions to them.



Figure 6:40: *Almuallaqat* (2015)

The pots come in different sizes. The first set of “Almuallaqat” was displayed in Basel in 2015 (figure 6:40) and was sold in the first hour to the Greenbox Museum in Amsterdam. Other museums were asking Almuallaqat for one of her “Almuallaqat” series, she said,

I can’t repeat the work this is the issue, it’s too good to be true, if it was for a collector that would be fine, but when it’s for a museum I must think of something...like when Saatchi asked me for the big pots and I couldn’t repeat the work, so I combined all the small ones instead. (figure 6:41)



Figure 6:41: An article about *Almuallaqat* (2015)

Working on “Almuallaqat” was not as easy as it might look and to keep it more unique Almalluh didn’t like to repeat it unless she was requested by a private collector. The “Almuallaqat” series became very popular internationally.

Society: Inspirational, Supportive, and More

Society played a great role in Almalluh’s journey as an artist. In many ways. She was inspired and encouraged but above all felt obliged as an artist to connect society to the visual arts, so it was a key motivation. She had always thought about the responsibility of the artist and what she could offer society. She was inspired by the issues and conflicts in society and made them the subjects of some of her work as in the photogram series (figure 6:42). Since one of her main motives as an artist was to connect the Saudi audience with the artwork, she had always taken into consideration what people said about her work either during the process of the art making or after it was displayed.

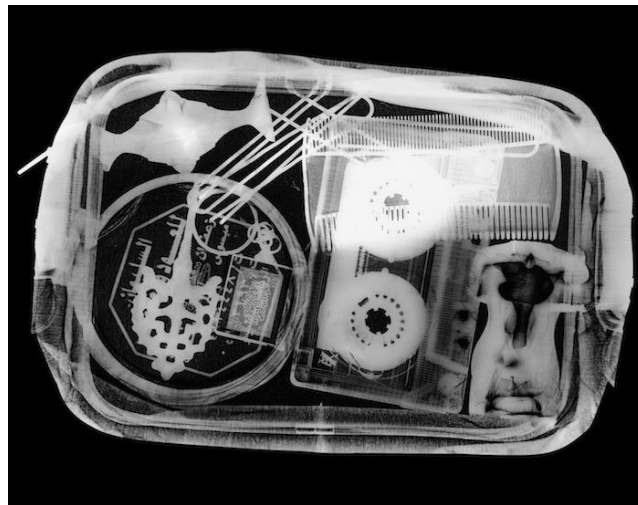


Figure 6:43: Screened (2010)

Friends and family supported Almalluh and encouraged her in her career although she would occasionally receive comments such as “when are you going to leave the weird things you do.” Other people were not as encouraging but she doesn’t blame them for not understanding what she does or having a sense of the value of arts in general. In her opinion it’s a global issue but Saudi people in particular are not used to seeing artwork, as there are no fine art schools, she elaborated,

When I tell people that my work was bought by [Centre Georges] Pompidou, no one knows what Pompidou is, only a few know, but I don’t blame society for not knowing and I don’t expect them to know. When it comes to encouragement, honestly, no one encouraged me until I had an exhibition but I haven’t had many exhibitions here.

During the “Capturing Light” exhibition most of the encouragement came from young people as they not only attend but bought her work. When she displayed the big cooking pots and serving bowls people enjoyed the work and, “this is the only way that you can affect society, through honest art,” Almalluh said. She believes it is the responsibility of artists to educate society about art. When she displayed the cooking pots in “Food for Thought” people interacted and were touched. She said,

This is art, you get moved by it, and when people get moved society starts to appreciate art. When I displayed the installations of the cooking pots and the serving pots my mother loved them, everyone was moved by them, the curators from India and from

Australia were moved by them...when art moves people society starts to change...art has a great role to play in changing society.

Almalluh believes that society needs to interact more with visual arts in general and that city life could be an opportunity to introduce art into the daily lives of people, in her view there is unfortunately a lack of city life. She suggested that there should be somewhere for the youth to interact with and see art in each district, that this is how you deliver art to the people.

Almalluh feels that there is a gap between people and not art itself but the concept of art. In her opinion, Saudi people perceive art as interior design and as something you do in your free time, when in fact it is a culture and in everything in our lives. She elaborated,

Art is in your daily life, in the coffee you drink, in what you wear, in the space you sit in, in the house you built...art is the meaning you invest in things that are from your culture and how you preserve your identity—we don't have anything! The single biggest issue that I faced since forever, since I grew up and got married and came to Riyadh and had my own house, was that when I wanted to buy something that we needed to use in our daily life I would find that it had nothing to do with us! We hadn't designed it or manufactured it...we didn't make anything.

When Almalluh first came to Riyadh she used to find traditional household items, designed and made by the older generations were in the *souk*. As time went by these designs were disappearing. With the changing economy, new items with different designs were imported and the new generation has no knowledge of what past generations used to use. This

is an issue Almalluh can't ignore, she said, "this is an issue I'm facing but which I feel, that most people are not paying attention to, and our identity will fade away if we are not careful." In her opinion a solution could be that each generation leaves a creative productivity for the generation that comes after and preserve the identity, "material culture" in designing furniture and in developing and upgrading designs. She feels that it is very unfortunate that the people who design and manufacture the available items were from different cultures and had never even been in the country. She elaborated,

This is something I see and face every day in my life since coming to Riyadh, how life has changed since we were little until now, how neighbourhoods were demolished and new neighbourhoods built...unfortunately when we demolish houses we replace them with worse houses, this is something I see every day, when I visit people in their houses I see it, and I feel that unfortunately we can't preserve our identity except with art and culture.

She believes that culture can be used to fight these issues. In her opinion, Saudis have a very rich heritage such as the different folk dances from the different regions of the Kingdom, so she suggests that we establish centres to teach and develop these dances for the young, create chances, job opportunities, discover talents, and establish venues for these dances. She further said,

We are now fighting terrorism but fighting is not done only with weapons. We don't have cultural arts organizations for youth. Many of the youth in the country have talents,

we have talented youth with degrees from universities abroad as well as from here. This generation wants culture and art. It's a generation that wants to do something, but there is nowhere to do it...we have a problem and we need to face it and solve it.

She suggested that investing in the youth's energy in cultural matters is better than if they do something else. Although Almalluh admitted that there were issues in Saudi society, they were not to the point of making her suffer as a person and as an artist, she explained,

Some people say the artist should suffer. I don't believe that an artist should suffer to produce art...I believe the continuity always makes you achieve, if a person is aware of his society and his life he will be able to make circumstances work in his favour and not say I can't because this is my society. I am the kind of person that if I face a problem I don't lose hope; there is always a way to solve it.

It is hard for female artists to interact with male artists in Saudi Arabia and she believes that as an artist you need to interact with other artists, but she didn't experience this as a serious barrier. This is, according to Almalluh, the only issue she has faced as a woman in her art career. On the other hand, the way Saudi society perceives art is one of the reasons she believes women don't face many issues as artists. Saudis see visual arts as a luxury and something you do in your free time, because they look down on visual art. However, the fact that she is a woman has never affected her career. Recently Almalluh was invited to participate in a Saatchi (London, England) exhibition, an event for women artists only from around the world, organized with the intent of exploring whether women could break the glass ceiling in visual

arts. Almalluh was proud to be invited to such an event and she thought it a good thing for Saudi women artists in general. She said,

When they consider me on their level while at the same time considering us a backward society and against women, this is a good thing for us as Saudis... this means that while they consider that women here or there couldn't break the glass ceiling, I think I did because the people who bought my work for the British Museum told me you exhibited with us and you broke the glass ceiling.

Her success has proved that female artists can achieve as much as and maybe even more than male artists in Saudi Arabia since her work has been bought by several international museums. In her opinion, and from what she's observed abroad, women elsewhere haven't yet been able to break the glass ceiling in visual arts.

Tracking the Development of Her Artwork

It is important to remember that Almalluh collected the objects she used for her artwork long before she made something out of them. In this collection of object below, which is a visual tracking of Almalluh's artwork. As we could see, her art pieces expand the gamut of visual art spectrum, from photograms to cooking pot display to traditional door collection.

Photograms (2005–2010).

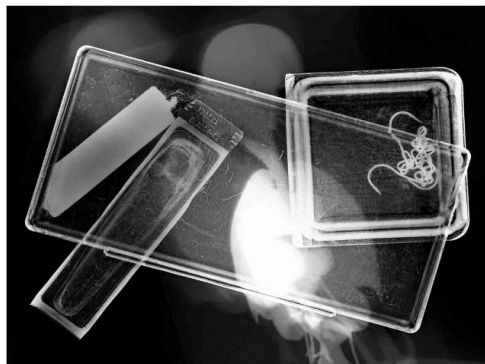


Figure 6:43: Bronchitis (2005)



Figure 6:44: Medication (2005)



Figure 6:45: Broken Finger (2007)

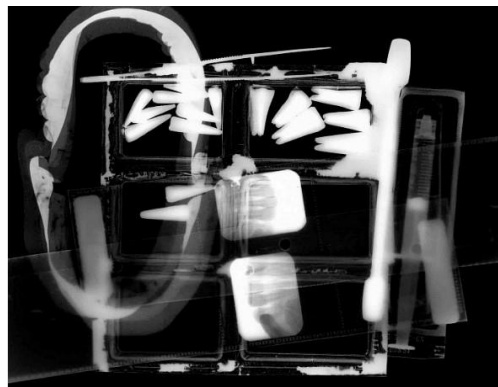


Figure 6:46: Extractions (2007)



Figure 6:47: Reflection 47 (2010)



Figure 6:48: Head to Head (2010)

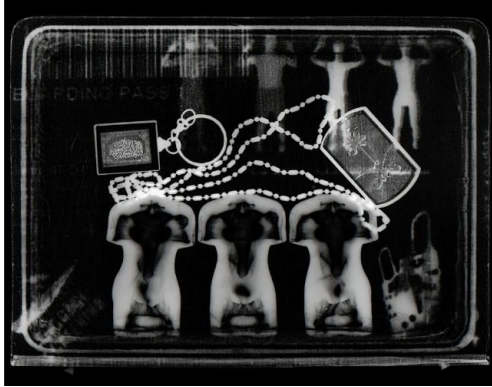


Figure 6:49: Barcoding II (2010)

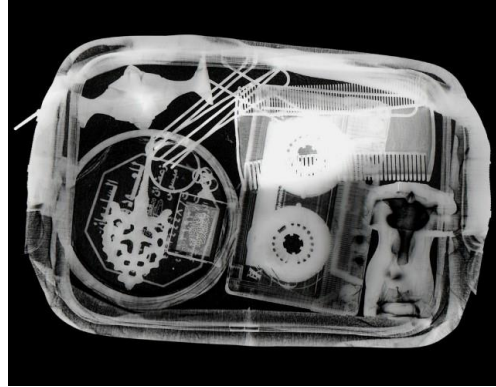


Figure 6:50: Screened (2010)

Sky Cloud (2009).



Figure 6:51: Sky Cloud (2009)

X-rayed (2011).

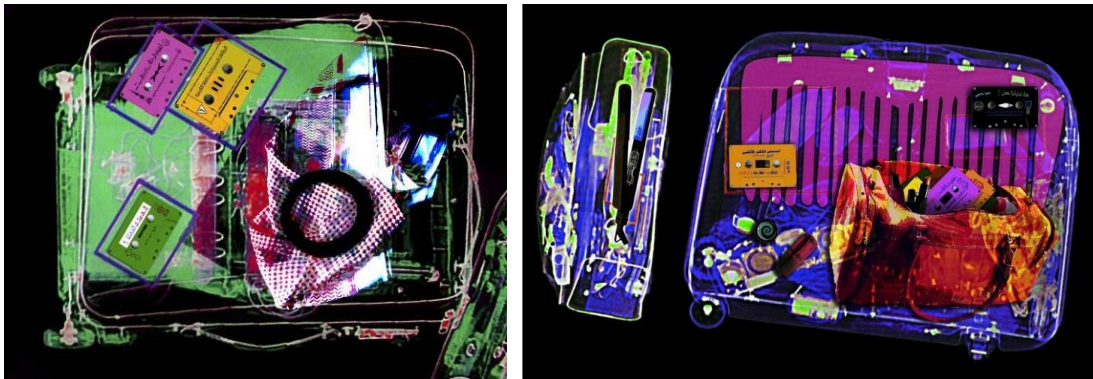


Figure 6:52: X-rayed 1 (2011)



Figure 6:53: X-rayed 6 (2011)

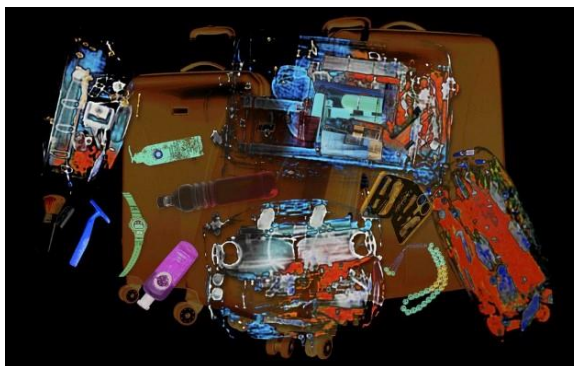


Figure 6:54: X-rayed 3 (2011)

Figure 6:55: X-rayed 5 (2011)

Food for Thought—The Cassettes Series (2012–2015).



Figure 6:56: Food for Thought 9000 (2012)

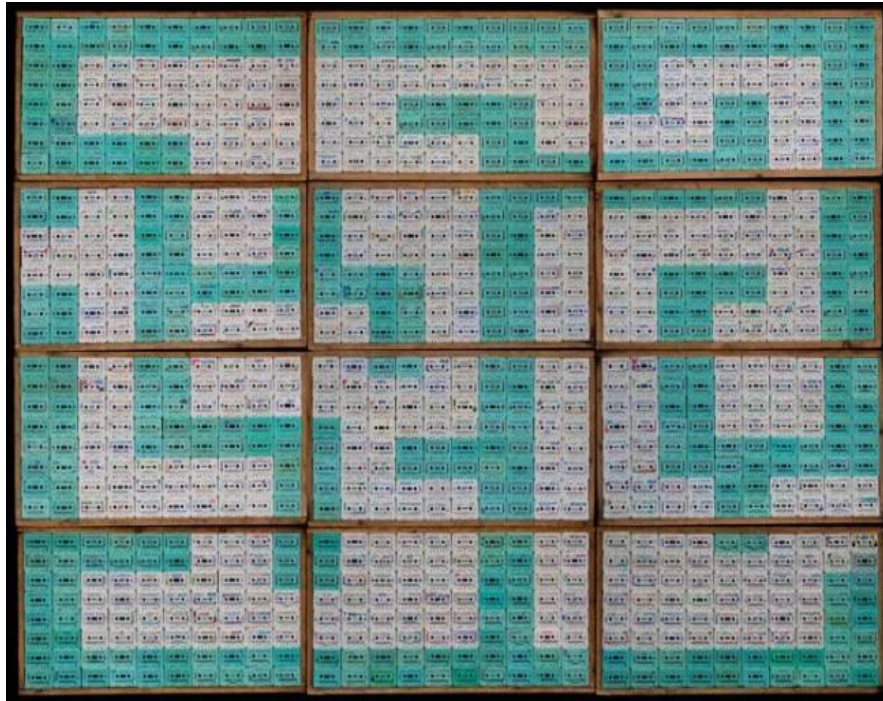


Figure 6:57: Food for Thought—Assabeel (2012)

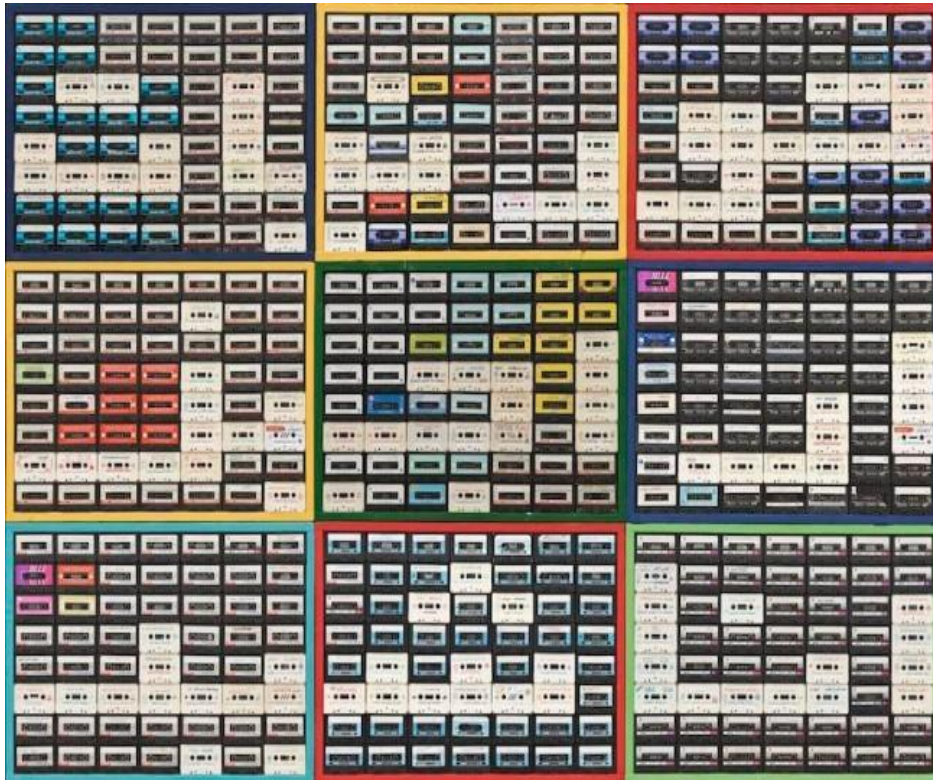


Figure 6:58: Food for Thought 13000 (2013)

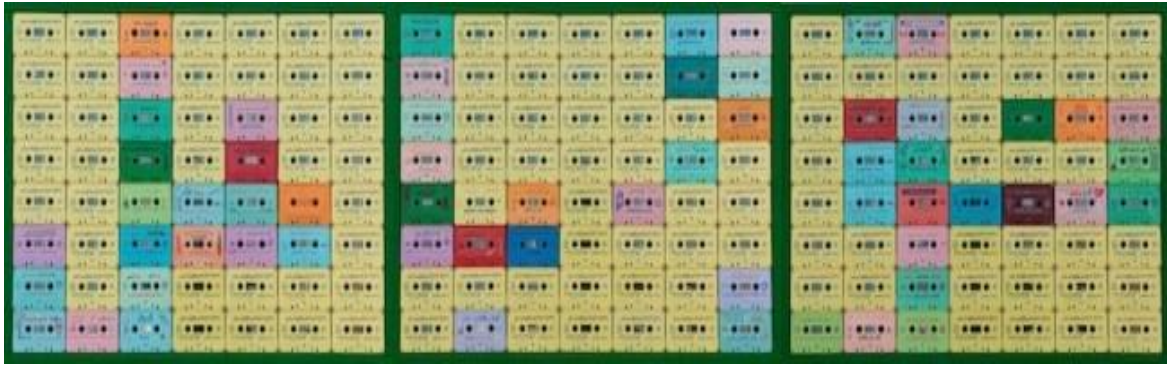


Figure 6:59: Food for Thought 3000 (2013)



Figure 6:60: Food for Thought—Aeeb & Haram (2014)



Figure 6:61: Food for Thought—Haram 2 (2014)

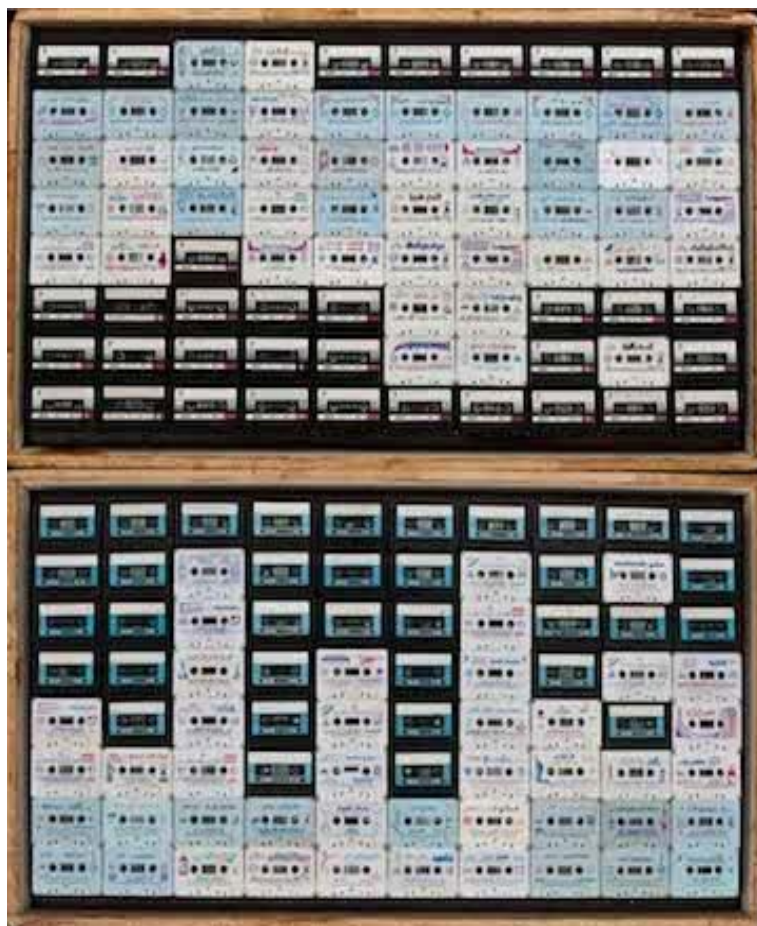


Figure 6:62: Food for Thought—Jehad & Thalal (2015)

Abwab series (2012).



Figure 6:63: Abwab II (2012)



Figure 6:64: Abwab III (2012)

Food for Thought—Enamelled Traditional Serving Pots (2012).



Figure 6:65: Food for Thought (2012)



Figure 6:66: Food for Thought II (2012)



Figure 6:67: Food for Thought III (2013)



Figure 6:68: Food for Thought VI (2015)

Oil Candies (2012).



Figure 6:69: Oil Candies (2012)



Figure 6:70: Oil Candies III (2013)



Figure 6:71: Oil Candy I (2015)

Food for Thought—Almuallaqat (2014–2016).



Figure 6:72: Food for Thought—Almuallaqat 3 (2014)



Figure 6:73: Food for Thought—Almuallaqat 3 (2014)



Figure 6:74: Untitled (“Food for Thought” series) (2016) 233 burnt pots

Keep Cool (2016).



Figure 6:75: Keep Cool (2016)

Conclusion

Almalluh's passion for visual art is very strong and she will continue learning and exploring new and different techniques. She will keep making art not only because she loves what she does but because she believes that she has a responsibility as an artist towards society. She considers the younger generation when she thinks about society, change, and the future, "we have to do something so the coming generation can benefit from the experiences we went through." In this regard, she is working on a future project plan that will serve Saudi society and Saudi culture.

Timeline

year	Event
1959	She was born in the city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
1976	First time she participated in exhibitions with her work internationally.
High school	She was invited to participate with a group of foreigner artists in an exhibition in Saudi and all her work was sold.
1978	She got married and went to the united states. She enrolled in the school of arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas
1980	She settled in the city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
1988	She enrolled in King Saud University to study English literature
1998	enrolled in a design and photography program afforded De Anza College in California but located in Riyadh
2000-2006	Participated in two group exhibitions one was nationally and one was internationally.
2007	Her first solo exhibition “Capturing Light” in the city of Riyadh.
2007-2010	Participated in six group exhibitions internationally, one group exhibition nationally, and one solo exhibition.
2010-2016	Five solo exhibitions one nationally and four internationally. More than 23 group exhibitions internationally and three group exhibitions nationally. Her work was bought by seven museums and some collectors.
2011	The British Museum was the first museum to buy any of her work “The road to Mecca” 2010

Table 6.2: Almalluh’s life timeline.

Chapter Seven

Findings: Tagreed Albagshi

I love that I am a woman and that I am strong. I always say that the Saudi woman is the strongest woman on the face of the earth. Why? Because we have traditions and customs and many restrictions. (Albagshi, 2016)



Figure 7:1: Tagreed Albagshi (2015)

In 2007 I was invited to attend a grand opening for an art exhibition at the Arts and Skills Institute in Riyadh. The exhibited work was that of a young talented Saudi female artist from the area of Alhasa, which is in the eastern region of the Saudi Kingdom and known for its

oases and beautiful nature. At that time, most of the artwork I had seen from artists from that area was related to nature and heritage. However, this artwork astonished me as it was totally different, as the artist was marching to the beat of her own drum, using uncommon techniques and colours. Her name is Tagreed Albagshi; neither her name nor her artwork is easy to forget. Every time I have seen her artwork since, I have become more and more curious about her.

When I contacted Albagshi to request her participation in this study she was very open to the idea. At that time, she was working on her Master's dissertation in Art Education Curriculums so she expressed her understanding and appreciation. We arranged for three interview sessions, two via an online audio program because of the long distance, being in Canada, and the third at her home studio in the city of Alhasa. During the audio sessions Albagshi was very open and very comfortable talking with me; at one point during one of the sessions she said it felt like a therapeutic session. Even her daughters were beside her for parts of the interview, enjoying listening to their mother talk about her life journey.

To meet her in person, my father had to drive me all the way to Alhasa, which is 300km from Riyadh where I live. I arrived at her house which was part of her husband's family compound and she took me to her studio on the third floor where the interview session took place. Her studio consisted of two areas, the first a combined study and seating area where she hangs works of art, both her own and that of others (figure 7:2), and the second is the main area where she works on her art pieces (figure 7:3). She was very welcoming and generous and made sure to make me comfortable. The place was full of the sounds of water fountains and Arabic Iraqi music, which made the place feel alive. Albagshi has a unique personality and amazed me, as we shall see, with the way she thinks and perceives the world. She was very friendly, positive, and a very good speaker.



Figure 7:2: Albagshi's study and seating area



Figure 7:3: Albagshi's studio

Her Life

Family. Tagreed Hasan Albagshi was born in April 1975 in the Alhasa area. She was the oldest daughter in her family, among five sisters and three brothers. Her mother was very young when she had her so her aunt who didn't have children at that time helped take care of her until she was six years old. As a result, Albagshi got very attached to her aunt,

I consider this a blessing...I love them both [my mom and aunt] so much and whenever there's an occasion I get them both gifts...I hope God helps me to be loyal to them and to take care of them as much as I can.

She was the first grandchild in the family and was very spoiled by everyone who took care of her. She used to accompany her grandparents when they travelled, the memories of which prompt her to remark, "it is beautiful to learn about the world from different point of views." She moved between her parents' house and her grandparents' until, the age of six,

settled with her parents. As a child, she was very quiet and tended to absorb what people did and what was happening around her. She remembers the first day of school when she was five years old and more interested in absorbing the new place, classmates, and teacher than chatting and making friends. It was an image she would never forget. When she was around nine years old she used to stand by the window in her room,

Look, there is something I always remember in my room: when I was living at my parents' house there was a window and I used to pull up a chair, stand on it, open the window, and look at the view and the skyline, at what was outside the window! I used to think about what would be coming tomorrow—I was very young, nine or eight years old—I always remember this view. I considered it the window of the future. Since I was little I have been thinking of all sorts of things.

The view out of that window showed a huge space before other houses and buildings were built in that area.

Albagshi finds the older a memory is the longer lasting. In adolescence, she started to be interested in poetry and started to write,

There was a program on the radio that used to air after I came home from school and I loved listening to it, it used to talk about beautiful things. In the past there was no social media and there was no one else my age who used a radio or listened to radio programs. I used to follow that program because I heard it once in the car and it caught my

attention so I started to keep up with it. As soon as I arrived home from school I used to turn on the radio and hear it.

At that time Albagshi started to express herself in Arabic prose and she still does. She believes it is important to give and express our inner energy. It is not surprising for a child raised by two very intelligent parents to be this wise. Her parents were both teachers who kept adding to their substantial library. Her father is currently in the process of writing a book. As a result, the children inherited their parents' love of reading and literature.

Then in 1990, at the age of fifteen when she had finished ninth grade, Albagshi, like other girls her age, began a new chapter of her life: she got married. Very soon after that she had her first child. She elaborated,

Here in Alhasa there is the belief that a girl should get married early, especially if she is beautiful. You could see how many men would propose to her constantly. I used to feel as if it was a game and get very happy every time someone proposed to marry me, and get excited and count them. My husband is a relative and we are nine years apart, but thank God the level of Tagreed's inelegance was able to connect with him there was no issue. Maybe at the beginning one needs some time to understand the other, but with the smart tactics of the woman that make her able to know the keys and continue to live, the boat will stabilize and won't sink.

Albagshi seemed very comfortable and confident when talking about her marriage and the cultural reality of Alhasa where she was born and raised, and where marriage took place at a

very young age. During her marriage, she finished school and enrolled at university, but it was challenging. When her first child was born, she was in high school and there was a lot of pressure to handle the new life of marriage and motherhood, so she took a year off before finishing high school. Family is very important and plays a great role in Albagshi's life. She said,

Look, the support always comes from the home, for example when my husband and I agree on the things that I do and they are right and nothing is wrong with them there is no issue; this supports me. If anyone from the outside says anything about anything I'm doing I tell them that my husband is okay with it and that it doesn't concern anyone else.

Her husband years has been a great source of support in this 25 years marriage. He supported her ambition to work, to learn, and to become the artist she is today. Albagshi has two sons and two daughters with whom she has a relationship she describes as leaning towards friendship. She relates that to the fact that she had them when she was herself very young,

The most important people in my whole life are my children. I consider our relationship a friendship, they are close to my age...I consider a relationship between a person and their loved ones to never be a waste because no matter how much you give them you will see it in the future, even if I'm not waiting for a return either from them or from anyone else, but the only people you can give unconditionally and with love is to your

children... especially because you are with them all the way from childhood to adulthood.

Albagshi would never put anything before her family and would never sacrifice them for anything in this life. The support of her extended family has had a great positive impact on her journey and success. Albagshi's family hold an annual event to honour the talented individuals among them. She is greatly appreciated and honoured by her extended family and it has always made her proud, especially that they are always there at all her events, showing their encouragement and support. She said, "there is pride in the family's support, the society is beautiful and stands beside you and you honour that, but the family's support is what's real, trusted, and what lasts." It is no wonder that Albagshi values her family when they show her such appreciation.



figures 7:4 & 7:5: Albagshi with members of her family at her exhibitions

Education. During the last year of high school, she was pregnant with her second child but even with the challenges she graduated with honours. The second day after the birth of her second child, while still wearing the hospital tag, she went to the university for an interview. She was accepted to study at the English department. Twenty-one months later she was blessed with

her third child, but the pressure in her life was growing, especially since all her children had asthma, which runs in the family. What made things worse was the air quality, as the first year of her marriage coincided with the beginning of the Gulf war and the air was polluted because of the petroleum explosions that occurred in Kuwait during the war. Studying English was taking most of Albagshi's daily time so she agreed with her husband that she should defer her studies for one semester for the sake of the children. After a while she decided to go back to university. She convinced her husband and returned to university, but to a different department. She didn't want to return to studying English as all her friends had moved to an advanced level and she didn't want to feel left behind, so she decided to study home economics instead. She graduated in 1999 as the female student with the second highest grades in her class.

After she graduated from university in 2000 she was hired to teach at the Professional Institute in Alhasa. She taught general cooking, traditional cooking, flower arranging, crafts, and party planning. She suffered from the pressure especially of teaching cooking to the point that she hated to cook at home, she said, "it was repulsive for me, I was trying to find Tagreed the artist, not Tagreed the chef." At that time, she was already active as an artist participating in many exhibitions and taking short courses in visual arts. She explained,

I started to become famous in the area—the visual artist Tagreed Albagshi. I prepared a résumé, listing the exhibitions I had participated in, and my achievements in general, and I asked my husband to take this document and meet with the director of education in Alhasa and tell him that this is an artist, and she is at such and such a place, and feels that she has more energy to give in the field of education, more than is required at this

place, that she wants to work as a supervisor of education, art education supervision, but there was great resistance from the supervision department.

The reason for this resistance was that Albagshi didn't have any experience teaching art education. A year after that the circumstances changed: the Professional Institute was going to close for good. Therefore, she was given the chance to move but only on condition that she taught grade seven to high school for two years, which she did and enjoyed very much. She moved to the Department of Educational Supervision and the same year she received an acceptance to the Master's program, in the Arts Education curriculums department. Albagshi had been applying to the Master's program almost every year at King Faisal university close to where she was living, but it was very complicated, so finally she applied to the King Saud University in Riyadh instead. However, she couldn't apply to the Arts Education program because of her educational background. They told her, "your special field is home economics, it's impossible for you to be accepted in the art education program." She tried every way possible, but in the end she had to choose Art Education Curriculum, which was as close as she could get to arts education. Albagshi was very determined to improve her skills and study visual arts in any way possible, irrespective of the obstacles she faced.

In 2009, she was accepted to the master's program in the Department of Art Education Curriculums at King Saud University in Riyadh. It was the happiest moment in her life when she received the acceptance,

For me it was a dream, I mean you can't imagine, I am a very ambitious person and I really love challenges, also nothing has been easy in my life from the beginning until

this day, I mean nothing I want comes easily, I must work hard for it. I believe if everything was available I wouldn't want to continue—Glory be to Allah—I mean the human being loves what he puts effort into...and maybe this is part of my personality. Another reason [for my happiness] is that I love learning more than working, I would prefer to study forever rather than work.

This period of studying for her Master's has been very special for her. First, she has had to travel to Riyadh back and forth every week by train as she had to stay in Riyadh three days a week to attend her classes. She said,

The beautiful thing is that I used to live “Tagreed” throughout those three years, something I never did before in my whole life, being independent and being my own person, so when I travelled to Riyadh, there were the girls' dorms and it was a very beautiful experience. Maybe I never experienced this kind of thing before because I got married at 15, so I didn't experience real friendships, or have the independence to go and live with other students...or take responsibility for myself.

At that time, her children were older and leaving them with their father for three days at a time wasn't an issue. However, the youngest was in first grade and Albagshi was very concerned about leaving her. So she used to prepare everything for her family before she left for Riyadh. For example, she used to cook meals for three days so they wouldn't need to buy take-out food and she would help her children with their three days' of homework in advance. She wanted them to be as little affected as possible. Even with everything she did she would

feel guilty so she used to buy them gifts on her way back to Alhasa. Her husband supported her the most in these circumstances, although when she applied he never thought that she would be accepted because of the number of times she had applied and was rejected by. Albagshi's husband and the rest of her family are very conservative to the point that she would never leave the house without a *mahram*, who is a close male family member like a father, brother, husband, uncle, or son. So, he suggested that she take her oldest son who was in seventh grade at that time, but it wouldn't work because of his school. She found another solution, which was to travel with girls who were related to her and who live in the same dorm. While her husband was supportive, her parents felt that her home and family should be her only priority and that pursuing her Master's would not lead anywhere. She said,

They don't understand that there is ambition... but in my opinion self-fulfilment is very important for the human being, [it is important that] not everything is only for the family. Even though, thank God, I have balanced [my responsibilities] as much as I could, always satisfying people is impossible whatever you do, but inside of you, when you've tried to balance things, you know that you've done your best.

She took a sabbatical for three years to finish the courses before returning to work at the Department of Educational Supervision. She wrote her thesis while she was working, producing artwork and participating in exhibitions, so it took her longer to finish. She successfully defended her thesis in 2016. Clearly, Albagshi loves her educational experience. She put it thus:

Education is a beautiful thing and I love it and love science. If you ask me to study my whole life I'll tell you I accept and I love it... the education process is that the person is able to find the field of study that suits him. I mean books are available, I love reading so much, I was raised in a house in which I needed to climb the library shelves to be able to read, and no one forced me to read. I am stubborn so if someone had asked me to go and read I would never have done it, but in my parents' house they had, and still have, a huge library, from which I used to go and pick what was available, and devour the books.

She created her own world and her field of knowledge when she was little. She used to buy different series of children's stories and read them all. She believes that she was able to do this because at that time there were not a lot of electronics to distract you, She said, "you had a lot of time, unlike these days when it can be hard to find the time to read even one page." Her reading developed in time and when she was a teenager she started to read novels. Once she finished 50 novels on a road trip with her family. As she got older her reading tastes developed and matured, and she started to read philosophy, like Nietzsche's work, and poetry, especially Gibran Khalil Gibran. Recently she has been reading about parapsychology and the science of power. She explained,

I love to learn about this marvellous creature which is the human being, of course—"of knowledge, you have been given only a little" (Quranic proverb)—God provided us with partial knowledge, not full. Researching in sciences is very beautiful, of course I hate math, but I love to learn about the human being so much... reading enriches you

and makes you think deep and see further, you see, it is true that we think differently but even though reading is very important.

Reading a great number and variety of books influenced her development as a writer. She has been able to combine her love of writing and making art to arrive at a unique way of expressing herself.

Personality

The Most Important Human Value. Albagshi has come to believe, through experiences in her own life, that the most important human value is justice. She hates seeing people who can't fight for their rights or who are unfair are. Referring a generic 'he,' she said, "with his values and the way he thinks he imagines himself to be right, but he is not; did the values become relative? Does each person have his own values based on his behaviours or the way he thinks?" Another important human value is honesty and being clear with others. She elaborated,

God gave me the ability to know if a person is being honest or dishonest, and it hurts when you discover dishonesty around you. It's like when you read a book and the cover is the opposite of the inside, you read the inside more than the cover...[dishonesty] is exhausting and makes you draw limits with the inappropriate people in your life.

In Albagshi's view, when a person is honest in her/his life all aspects become clearer than they are for troubled, conflicted personalities. Her life wasn't easy, she said, "I wasn't born with a golden spoon in my mouth." Whatever she wanted to do took time and effort. Living in a

conservative society meant she always had to persist and work harder. She would be under a lot of stress when she wanted to do something and didn't get the chance. She also said that being under that type of stress when aiming for something is healthy because it pushes her to achieve her goals. Her beliefs, have helped her overcome the obstacles on her life journey. She explained,

Thank God, I have a belief since I was little that any hard time will pass. At every stage of life we have the option to move on or stay there, and if we stay it will affect us negatively and take us backwards. This is the biggest mistake, when you stay at a stage and hurt yourself there, because no one deserves that.

Albagshi has read a lot about the science of power thinking and about how thinking positively can help so she has always dealt with hard circumstances and obstacles positively. She also encourages herself to try not to think about her history of challenges and hard times, and eventually forget or work through them.

Religion. A shedding light as explained in the following quote,

When religion develops qualities like love for others in me it is a positive thing, look, I always look at things from a certain point of view so I can cope and move on...if I see it as an obstacle it will be an obstacle, but I feel that religion is love and morals and beautiful concepts...it depends on how you interpret things, how you translate them, your interpretation of things can make you harmonious.

It is obvious that Albagshi values religion because it is her belief that it is important for a human being to have something restorative to turn to. She also believes that everyone needs a God or something to believe in because relationships between humans have limits,

At some point, you need something spiritual inside of you to make you feel stable, this thing is God, he is there to support you, to stand beside you, and you lean and depend on him in everything because people won't be there forever even if they were close to you in some way like a son, a husband, or a friend.

Believing in God, for Albagshi, is part of "our human nature and something we are born with," she argued. Interestingly, however, she differentiated between religion and religious beliefs as in her opinion the later includes human behaviour and societal norms. She said,

There is lightness and darkness, and the lightness is bright and clear, but my personality respects others. I respect their beliefs and I respect anything in their way of thinking.

As a result of her reading and her life experiences her religious beliefs have evolved. She said,

Sometimes in life one starts thinking a lot about particular ideas, such as religious matters e.g. when you're looking for inner stability and peace...and then you reach a level when your vision is mature and you realize things more clearly... It is very important that I am fully convinced about what I believe in, especially in religious

matters. I think this is the right thing because the human being go through circumstances and events through time and they reveal the reality of things especially if it was in a stage of thinking.

For Albagshi, social media has played an important role in making all matters clearer. In her opinion it is unfortunate that some artists use religion in their work to become famous in the West. In her view, those artists lack moral fibre and do not embody religion either in their beliefs or goals.

Society: Her First Audience

“If it wasn’t for society there would be no Tagreed,” Albagshi argues, “society is the real, present, and continued gallery that interacts with Tagreed’s work.” Albagshi believes that society’s appreciation of her artwork has been a very important element in her success. She has always observed the audiences at her exhibitions and she can feel when the artwork affects a viewer. This is very important for her. She is also aware that some viewers don’t understand her work and, as she puts it, are “against” it, which doesn’t bother her as she understands that people are not the same. She does feel that some people intentionally try to make her feel that she’s a failure. She explained how she deals with such experience,

This doesn’t mean that you, Tagreed, have been on the wrong track for 15 or 17 years and that they are right, because when you build a home or an entity and you love it then those “against” or unsupportive of it don’t matter and this is very important. In one instance, someone was against my work so the rest of the group thought I would be

irritated or get mad, but I just smiled. Why? Because these are different views. Since there are things I don't like, why would I judge others.

She takes such things in stride and always reminds herself that “stones and sticks are only thrown at the fruit-bearing tree.” This way of dealing with negative criticism helps her to move on and focus on the support and encouragement she receives for her artwork and effort. Albagshi believes that one important factor in her success is that her artwork is honest. Women make up the larger part of her audience and most of the people who've bought her art have also been women, she explained,

I think it is because I am a woman, like when you read a poem and you feel that it says what you wanted to say, I think this is what happens with the viewers when they find themselves in the artwork.

Almost all her paintings are of women; there are a few that include men and interestingly those few have been the first to get sold. One of the few paintings that includes men is titled “Smile so the Photo Will Look Better” (2013), it shows a group of Saudis having their photo taken, but the women are off to the side, aloof and shy (figure 7:6).



Figure 7:6: Smile so the Photo Will Look Better (2013)

When asked about that she said,

The men are in all the paintings even the ones where they aren't visually present. Life doesn't move on without a man, for me or anyone else, he is the father, the husband, the lover, the brother, and the son. He exists.

In one of her paintings called "Eleven Planets" (2010) (figure 7:7), eleven women are in the middle of a discussion about their issues with men. The man is present in all her paintings, but he is visually hidden, as we see in Figure 7:7.



Figure 7:7: Albagshi with her painting “Eleven Planets” (2010)

Albagshi is proud to be a woman,

I love that I am a woman and that I am strong, I always say that the Saudi woman is the strongest woman on the face of the earth. Why? Because we have traditions and customs and many restrictions and things, so when we want to achieve a goal look at how many things we must do...this is how you become strong, from the things that you face.

Traditions and customs play an important role in Saudi society, which Albagshi respects, but when she doesn't believe in a particular aspect of it, she will just ignore it as she doesn't like the idea of committing to traditions that don't make sense in her opinion. She also

emphasized the importance of planning for any future steps especially for matters that would relate to the community to optimize the chance of achieving one's goals. She said,

I always try to find smart solutions that won't affect me negatively, as I like to make peace, I have a peaceful personality, I don't like for example to make society mad at me or angry.

One of the events that Albagshi will never forget is when she first posted a photo of herself. She thought that there was nothing wrong with that as she is the face behind the paintings that people know, but she was shy at first as she knew that society wouldn't accept it because, as she put it, "we are a conservative society, from my home and family to the community." As she expected, the idea was not accepted at all in the beginning, but now "it is almost 80% accepted" in her estimation. She explained further,

We can change, changing the concepts is our job as human beings...when a person is on the face of the cannon, a Saudi colloquial, I mean that I was the first to do it, and after that others will come and do the same, but by then it will be normal, so a person should start by changing himself, this will lead to change in others. The surrounding environment will follow gradually.

Tagreed the Artist

Albagshi started drawing at a very young age. She used to ask her parents for colours, materials, and tools and they used to buy what she wanted to encourage and support her. She used to work on her art randomly without anyone to guide her,

I used to draw randomly without any kind of guidance. Why? Because at that time in schools there were no specialist teachers or anyone to instruct you, there was no attention paid to if you were a talented child or loved to draw, so it was a personal effort on my part.

Although there was no guidance, she loved drawing and painting and never stopped. When she returned to university after suspending her studies to look after her children she decided to change her field of study. However, as there was no fine arts department or department of arts education at the university at the time she decided to study home economics, as it was the subject most related to her area of interest. She explained, “The home economics department was the window of opportunity for me. Why? Because each semester there was one subject that related to fine arts...I was grasping at straws, as they say.” Albagshi wanted to study fine arts in any way possible and home economics was her only chance,

It was hard at that time for me to travel to Riyadh or to enroll in any other course of study outside the city. I mean it was very hard because you know committing to traditions and customs few years ago were not like now, now girls travel to study and the parents are fine with it...unlike 20 years ago.

However, since her graduation she has been trying to find ways to improve herself and to fill the gaps on her own and learn the skills she needs that were not taught at the university. She took her first short course in 1999 in the city of Dammam which is more than 150 km away from Almubarraz where she lived. She persevered with her request to get someone to drive her twice a week to the house of Zahrah Bu Ali, the artist who was teaching her at that time. The course of study had been prepared specially for Albagshi because of her life circumstances. Then she took another short course with another artist, Suhair Johari, in the city of Alqatif which was even further from her home than Dammam. She kept learning new things as she wanted to learn as much as possible about visual arts, and she always felt she didn't know enough, she said, "I felt I still needed so much more." So, during the summer vacations of 2000 and 2001 she travelled to Damascus, Syria, to learn more about visual arts. The first summer she took a short course at the University of Damascus, which was designed to help students applying for to a art program. The curriculum was more academic than the short courses she had taken in the past as the instructors were university professors. The second year Albagshi did some research and found an artist named Jumanah Jaber who is also a professor.

Dr. Jumanah is an amazing human being in all respects. You know how the real artist loves art, is immersed in art, and lives it—I was like that for a whole month. I went to her studio every day and learned in an academic way as well. At the end of the short course I told her that I didn't want to draw in an academic way anymore. I felt I had inner energy and I wanted to draw something I loved, not the things she put in front of me for me to study. She asked me why and told me that these were the basics of visual

arts, but I insisted that I had had enough of the basics and needed to start to find myself, so she said okay, go ahead.

Jaber encouraged Albagshi to draw and paint freely. The pieces she produced at that time were and still are very precious to Albagshi and she's never sold them because they represent an important stage of her life. After this short course with Jaber in 2001 Albagshi started to search for her own style. Albagshi considered this stage of her journey an academic stage.

Albagshi considered the end of this stage a turning point as she found her own style, "After that there was a turning point from the academic to the point where I found Tagreed's style, that when you see an artwork you'll say this is Tagreed Albagshi. This I consider a turning point." after her return from Syria in 2001. She was asked by the Riyadh Bank in Alhasa if they could sponsor her and display her artwork. At that time, she was just starting and all her works of art were experiments associated with academic stage, but she loved the idea and accepted. "The concept of a solo exhibition was not clear to me yet and Alhasa was only starting to have visual arts activities." So, she would go to Bahrain, which was close to where she lived, to attend exhibitions, as visual arts were more developed than Alhasa.

In 2002, she won first place in the second round of the Saudi female artists' exhibition contest in Riyadh, and in 2004 she won second place in the same contest. She was at that time exhibiting paintings in a unique at style,

These two exhibitions motivated me to say to myself "Tagreed, go ahead!" Of course at that time people in Saudi Arabia didn't know who Tagreed was yet, and social media

was very new, so Tagreed became popular not for her look, but for her artwork and her paintings, and this was important for me, that the technique I was working with was, as it was said, strong, that's why it continued.

It was the beginning of her successes, which she believes were the result of her affective personal style and opening a new path. When it comes to subjects, Albagshi wasn't interested in landscape or heritage, she said, "Heritage is a beautiful thing, but the curriculums made it look ugly. It is very beautiful, but we can't dispense it." The way heritage was represented in the mandatory Saudi art education curriculum when Albagshi was young did not attract her. She said, "I don't find myself in subjects like landscape and heritage...I love what has a soul and feelings and emotions." The most sold of her artworks are the pieces that show emotions and feelings. She interprets this trend to people's reticence in expressing their feelings and emotions, especially positive feelings like admiration and love.

Her new style consisted of painting abstract characters with no hair or jewellery (figures 7:8, 7:9), which gradually developed with each new series and subject.

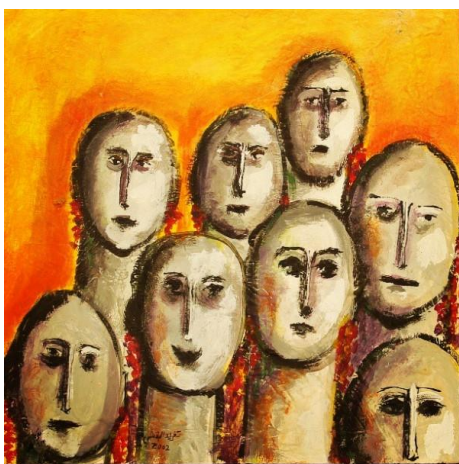


Figure 7:8: Untitled (2002)



figure 7:9: Untitled (2003)

Albagshi started to love the idea of solo exhibitions and presented a new theme or in each solo exhibition. In 2004, she had a solo exhibition in the Culture and Arts Association exhibition hall in Alhasa. The exhibition which was called “Light from the Inside” (figure 7:10), included more than 45 new paintings. The grand opening was well attended although it was for men only; the second day the exhibition opened for women. However, Albagshi was disappointed that almost no one visited the exhibition the days following. She believes that was because of the lack of understanding and appreciation for the visual arts and visiting exhibitions by the general public. In 2005, the same exhibition took place in Riyadh, where the impact and the feedback was stronger, and in Jeddah at the Jeddah Atelier for Visual Arts. In 2007, she had the honour of winning second place in the ambassadorial contest for visual arts and one of her works was sent to be displayed at the Saudi Arabian embassy in Berlin (figure 7:7).

The same year she was also invited by Princess Adwa bin Yazeed, owner of the Arts and Skills institute in Riyadh, to exhibit her artwork. Her solo exhibition that she called “Whiteness” (figure 7:11) as she considered it the start of a new chapter of her artistic journey. In 2010, she represented Saudi Arabia in the Biennale of Women and Arts in Sharjah Art Museum in the United Arab Emirates. The same year she had a solo exhibition at the Opera House at the Arts Palace in Egypt.



Figure: 7:10 : Untitled (2004)



Figure 7:11: Untitled (2007)

The Return of the Cats (2012).



Figure 7:12: Albagshi at “The Return of the Cats” exhibition

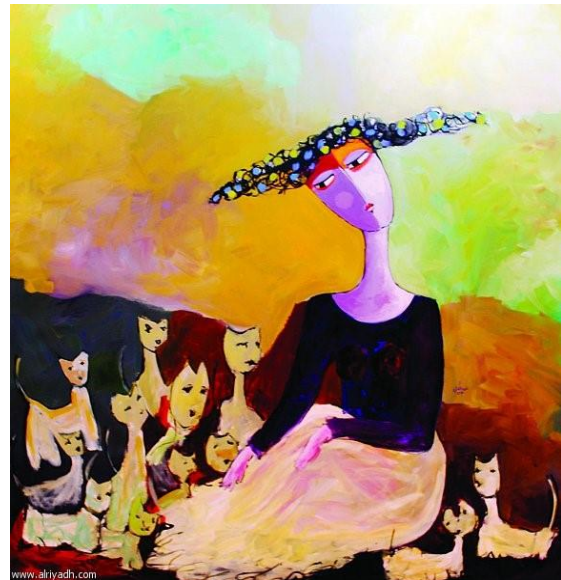


Figure 7:13: Untitled (2012)

The more experience she gained the deeper meaning her exhibitions' subjects and themes had. In 2012 Albagshi chose a new philosophical theme by the name "The Return of the Cats," which addresses the cat as symbol. Although the theme is cats Albagshi was never fond of cats. However, she was inspired by the significance of cats in ancient Egypt. It also suggested the relationship between men and women, that when a man doesn't find what he wants in a woman he will move to the next and so on. She elaborated,

The cat symbolizes many things. I mean, here the cat is everywhere, in the streets, everywhere. In the past maybe it symbolized woman, that she is like the cat, clinging until she gets what she wants; and sometimes [it symbolizes man, such as] when a man doesn't find food in his house and he goes to another, the important thing for him being to get what he needs. Also, sometimes fat cat symbolizes the governor, meaning the chair and the position. I mean, it has had many social, political, and economical meanings, symbolizing everything. I mean, for example I have autonomy in the way I think about everything, I am the queen of myself.

The crown in some of the paintings in this collection (figure 7:12), represents the idea that she has power over herself. Since she was young Albagshi had been thinking about how to own herself and protect her individuality. Whenever there is more than one person in a painting of hers you can see that they are close in a group,

Our society is a group society, not an individual society. We can't live individually, but always in groups and a decision is made based on the group not the individual. Even a personal decision affects everyone...ultimately, our lives are all completely linked.

This way of living is not easy on Albagshi as people in the community have different personalities and to get along she has had to change herself for them, something she is not comfortable with. These groups in Albagshi's paintings are usually women.

We were raised relying on others in everything, we were not raised to be independent. In the past you couldn't do anything and they wouldn't allow a woman to live the way she wanted or to think for herself, no, they would think for her, because they didn't trust her ability and what she would do. I discovered that when I travelled to Riyadh and was studying for my Master's, the most beautiful thing is that I discovered that Tagreed can do everything on her own...we have an issue: they always believe that they should control you, even your thinking, they must think for you and if you think on your own, that's wrong.

Each painting represents a stage of Albagshi's life.

It's a Moon, Not an Orange (2014). In 2014 Albagshi created a new thematic collection of paintings for the exhibition

“It’s a Moon, Not an Orange,” about different interpretations of things and words. This exhibition consisted of five projects: the coffee project, the bag project women’s rights and driving, a little stories project, and a book project.



Figure 7:14: The exhibition invitation

The idea behind the exhibition’s name is that every person sees things from his own perspective, which might differ from one person to another, thereby suggesting different interpretations. She was inspired by the Quran as there are words repeated in different contexts and each time they hold different meanings. In this exhibition, she chose the title “It’s A Moon, Not An Orange” a message to the audience that we chose how to see things and we see them and interpret them differently. The projects in the exhibition have different ideas and forms. The coffee project (figure 7:15) consisted of photography and installations depicting Turkish coffee at its different stages of preparation, as Albagshi is a Turkish-coffee lover herself. She described the boiling of the Turkish coffee expressing to the world boiling. The bag project’s idea came after Albagshi lost her luggage when travelling and felt she had lost her life (figure 7:16). She said,

The idea is that when you travel, in your luggage are [objects that represent] your thoughts, your traditions, and customs, and you move the bag from one place to another place and when you return, you return with other things in your bag, this was the concept.

On her social media account, she asked her followers to share photos of their luggage and location with her. Interaction between her and her followers on social media were displayed as photos creatively using different techniques. Then there was the Little stories project (figure 7:17), which entailed the idea of giving worldwide masterpieces a Saudi identity. Albagshi explained, “the costume and the clothes do not represent a person’s identity; the way you think is your identity.” The fourth project was about women’s rights issues arising at that time, such as driving (figures 7:18, 7:19). Her final piece was a book project in which she made a book using silk screen technique (figures 7:20, 7:21).



Figure 7.15: The coffee project



Figure 16: The Bag Project

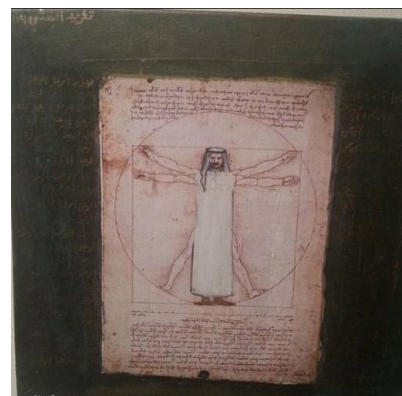


Figure 7:17 : Little stories project



Figure 7:18: سوق 111 (2014)



Figure 7:19: There Is no Empty Seat for Driving (2014)



Figures 7:20 & 7:21: The book project

According to Albagshi having that many projects in one exhibition was a lot for the audience to take in. Her view now is that since these different projects all have deep meanings, it was too much to present them all at once. A lesson learned for future projects.



Figure 7.22: At the entrance to the “Levitation” exhibition

***Levitation* (2015).** This exhibition included paintings, artwork, and an art book. The artwork consisted of sketches using resin, coffee, and ink, then covered in transparent hard plastic. Albagshi explained, “I wanted the permanence and protection [of the plastic] and to make it different” (figure 7:23). The art book was made from wooken pages tied together.



Figure 7:23: Sketches (2015)

Albagshi's idea of calling the exhibition "Levitation" came from a psychological state she'd experienced once,

The artist always loves his personal space, a world that is familiar to him. I am the kind of person who always gets affected by my surroundings, be it people or the place. At the same time I don't like heights that don't have oxygen.

The exhibition was about how an artist, or any person, creates their own space, not on this busy earth nor in the suffocating sky, but a space that is familiar to them. Albagshi expressed her belief that you can only create this space for yourself; no one else can create it for you. This space, or this world, will contain only the specific things and people that you love.

She continued, “the other thing is that I am very inspired by the utopia Plato... but it never existed and will never exist, which is something I’ve always wondered about.” Albagshi believes it is very important for us all to create this space to be able to face life’s challenges and achieve one’s goals, this experience leads to self-appreciation, which is more important in her view than the appreciation of others.

She also included a neon light fixture in the form of her handwriting of the following sentence, “I float above everything and see myself” (figure 7:24).

She explained that she had always listened to her own inner voice, but at the same time she was not easy on herself. Another message Albagshi wanted to share with to the audience of this exhibition was the idea of the transparent soul. She explained,

The soul is transparent, everything is clear on it, so the accumulations of each phase affect the next one, this is the philosophy which the artwork was based on, and I really took into consideration these accumulations as they all affect the soul. As you know, the body without the soul would become very different, it would become a dead body, the



Figure 7:24: “I float above everything and see myself” in neon light.



Figure 7:25: Ablution (2015)

body and the soul when they are united become something like miracle.

She also presented the idea of ablution, but not only for the body but also for the mind (figure 7:25). Albagshi herself believes it is important to clear the mind throughout life's circumstances, an experience of liberation. as she feels liberated from everything.

Albagshi added one more large (15cm high and 270cm wide) painting she named "Women's Village." It depicts a group of women from the Alhasa area (figures 7:26 & 27) between palm trees at sunset. She described them, "As if they were waiting for something coming from the outside. The way they were standing suggests waiting." They wore head scarfs and golden jewellery as Albagshi considered these part of the culture. The audience were stunned by this piece (figure 7:28).



Figures 7:26 & 7:27: Alwosaibie (2009)



Figure 7:28: Women's Village (2015)

Albagshi participated in two silent auctions, one was organized by the Almansouria foundation in Jeddah in 2015 (figures 7:29 & 7:30). The second was organized by the Saudi Art Council in 2016 in Jeddah (figures 7:31 & 7:32).



Figure 7:29: Don't Go without Me (2015)



Figure 7:30: Almansouria silent auction



Figure 7:31: Paradise (2016)



Figure 7:32: Saudi Art Council silent auction

Her artwork have been chosen for novel covers (figure 33).

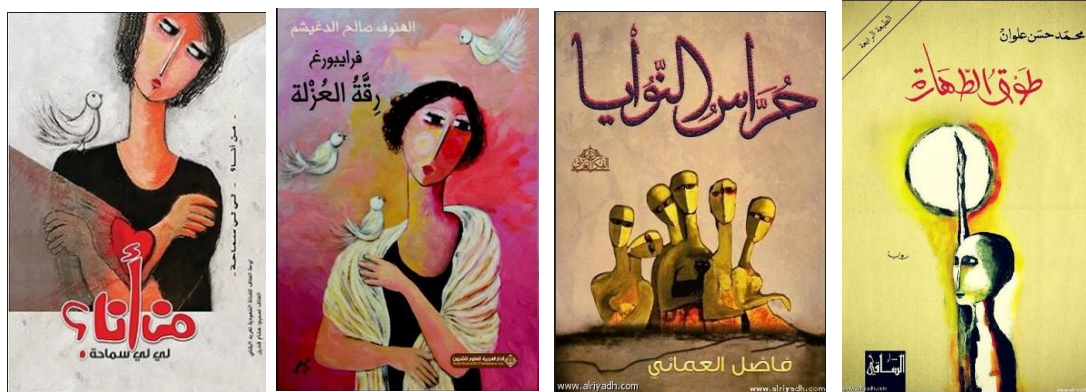


figure 7:33

Issues and Obstacles

One of the obstacles that Albagshi has faced is the rigid system at her workplace,

The confining things at work kill me, they put me under so much pressure... I mean, I don't like to be in a place I can't change. Of course I keep trying, I am eager for change, but unfortunately in education change is a very slow and difficult process. With the pressure that I face I don't find anyone else in this environment who suffers from the desire for change as I do, I feel that I am alone, they are all different from me. I don't mean I have ego, not at all.

Albagshi is not comfortable dealing with people at her workplace as she thinks they have hidden agendas and are dishonest. Whenever she has attempted to work with colleagues obstacles appeared. For example, in a discussion about including the genre of caricature

drawing in the art education curricula there was a conflict of opinion. Some professionals thought students shouldn't be taught the drawing of living beings because it was forbidden, another group responded with evidence from religious sources proving that there is no issue with drawing living beings. However, in Albagshi's experience it is hard to change people's mentality,

When you want to change the mentality of many, maybe it takes a hundred years...it is like when a person doesn't want to change his name, they don't want to change this concept that we don't want to teach students to draw living objects because it is forbidden, but the same person who says that allows his children to watch television, don't they watch cartoons? Cartoons are drawings...there is an odd contradiction between their own behaviours and the opinions that they force on others.

She believes that the current art education curriculum doesn't represent visual arts well. In an event at the King Abdul-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue. she indicated clearly that the art education curriculum doesn't foster artists. So, she suggested,

Build the curriculum all over again, don't say edit or develop, no I don't want that, the whole thing needs to be rebuilt. This is the time to cancel all the current curricula and rebuild them on a correct foundation.

She also believes that it is very important to benefit from the experience of other countries such as France, by consulting with their experts, when developing a new curriculum.

The curriculum is a very important element of the education system especially when it is mandatory across the country. Teaching is another important element, and it is part of her job to supervise and evaluate art education teachers. To her great disappointment teachers still follow the traditional methods of teaching arts education and she believes one of the reasons is the mandatory curriculum. Because of this, students' produce very little, she said,

Let students in first, second, and third grade draw freely. There is no freedom, no, the production is confined, and I hate that. This issue should be argued and studied, but not only in writing. It is an issue that everything has been dealt with only in writing, the Master's and Ph.D. studies, the great issue that we have is that we conduct research and we make recommendations, but how and when are they implemented? This feedback that we benefit from, have we applied it? Not at all. This is not good, and we will not develop if we continue in this way.

In Albagshi's opinion the outcomes of any research conducted in this area should be taken into consideration and not be left on the shelves. The conflict of perspectives in her workplace has made it necessary for her to separate dealing with visual arts at work from her own practice as an artist,

Of course, this issue has made me separate the visual arts of Tagreed Albagshi from my job. Can you imagine that it reached this point! Why? Because Tagreed Albagshi's artwork is not appreciated where I work, based on the perspective that drawing living objects is forbidden.

To be judged based on such a perspective is not easy for Albagshi, even though she is starting to be known not only nationally but internationally. Her talent is appreciated internationally more than in her workplace. However, Albagshi's positive way of thinking and dealing with things and her love of facing challenges has helped her to become stronger and more persistent. She said, "Anything that becomes an obstacle I enjoy overcoming."

What's Next?

Although Albagshi has lived through challenging experiences she has not stopped her dreaming. Her strength, persistence, and love of a challenge make her always hopeful and not one to give up on her dreams easily. She doesn't only dream, but she builds a foundation for them, as she put it, "Of course, the first dreams and goals are based on the role of change." When a dream comes true she moves to the next and so on, even if it wasn't easy to accomplish. However, there are always obstacles,

The obstacle, let me say, is society and the routine and mechanism for achieving goals. You would expect things to be easy and possible to accomplish, okay predict the percentage of what will be achieved and what won't, but now circumstances are getting harder especially with what is happening around us financially, economically, and socially.

Although Albagshi respects society's perspective to an extent, she also appreciates her individuality, "I don't care to look better in the eyes of others because gaining other people's

satisfaction is impossible. When your goal is to satisfy others, you won't be yourself, you will be them, this is very important." Since her youth she has wondered about the ideal city of Plato and where to find it, but she's decided to live it in her own mind, within her own personal limits, for her own self-satisfaction. She puts great emphasis on how important it is for an individual to appreciate and value themselves first before thinking about what others think of them.

One of Albagshi's dreams is to establish her own institution and there provide the knowledge that she appreciates to others who are interested. This includes visual arts, the science of power, and yoga. She said,

The other kind of dream doesn't have any kind of limit...to have a studio under my name, Tagreed Albagshi, I dream of having a visual arts academy I teach in, not myself but based on a curriculum I build so that a new generation will learn in the right way...following an untraditional method of teaching.

This way she would be able, with no limits or obstacles, to apply all her suggestions to the teaching methods in her own institute. She continued,

I wish also to have a yoga centre and deliver the science of power...and self-awareness, these things. I really wish to have a centre in which the healing comes from the inside of the person, where he won't wait for someone else to cure him, but does it himself.

In Albagshi's belief people need to improve their self-awareness. This way they can recognize if they have any kind of psychological issues and work on them on their own. One of the reasons behind these issues could be because, as she has noticed, people don't read the Quran as a remedy, "people don't read the Quran any more, don't say prayers, they even pray less, meaning the five daily prayers." She links this negative development in peoples' religious acts to an incorrect understanding of the concept of religion, as a mechanical act rather than as something done out of belief and love. In her opinion whatever a person does with love becomes beautiful,

I pray because I love God, I pray because I feel that when I pray God talks to me and I feel relief, when I don't feel well I will read the Quran and I will feel a relief. There is something that comes from the inside of me when I apply such practices, practicing meditation is very important, breathing exercise, we don't breathe!... there is a lack of these kinds of practices that help us to live well.

Albagshi believes in the role of religious practises, but also emphasizes the significance of understanding their concepts to gain a more beneficial outcome. She also believes in the importance of learning such practises and in improving self-awareness, because they help people deal with life's circumstances. She elaborated,

The individual must understand himself and know how to protect the self, how to live well even when he goes through rough times. We all go through hard circumstances and we overcome them, it's the overcoming that's important, to know how to move from the

exhausting phase to the gray phase, then to the pink phase... I believe when the person goes through circumstances, these circumstances are not the important thing so much as how he gets up and moves on to a more comfortable place.

Reaching the point of satisfaction is important for Albagshi as she links it strongly to the meaning of happiness, which is what everyone is trying to reach and feel. Her concept of happiness includes satisfaction and acceptance but not with materialistic things, which is why she focuses on the psychological aspect. Albagshi feels obliged as an artist to offer such concepts and understanding to society in any way possible, such as through her interesting exhibitions.

Tracing Albagshi's Artwork (2003–2017)

Albagshi's artwork production went through different phases of changes in her personality, knowledge, education, life circumstances... etc. At the beginning of her artistic journey in 2003 the faces of the figures in her paintings had realistic features although the bodies didn't have any details. Moving forward in 2007, she started to apply less details to the faces and showing larger features focusing more on the colors and the touches of the paint brush. She created her own special figures and with each new theme and new exhibition she made new small changes to these figures. The colors of her paintings changed from neutral colors to stronger and brighter colors as with each new theme she applied new combinations. The topics in her artwork gradually changed from simple human figure in a painting to deeper meanings with more social contexts and more figures and objects. In 2010, her paintings started to present issues that are related to the Saudi society like relationships, gatherings, and women's

driving. After that in 2015 the topics started to take new path with deeper meaning like in the “Levitation” (figure 7.57) theme.

Albagshi’s art production increased with time and with her creativity in her style and topics she leaves the audience looking forward to her new art production.



Figures 7:34, 7:35, 7:36: Untitled (2003)



Figure 7:37: Untitled (2004)



Figures 7:38 & 7:39: From Witness collection (2007)



Figure 7:40: Eleven Planets (2010)



Figure 7:41: Untitled (2010)



Figure 7:42: Untitled (2012)

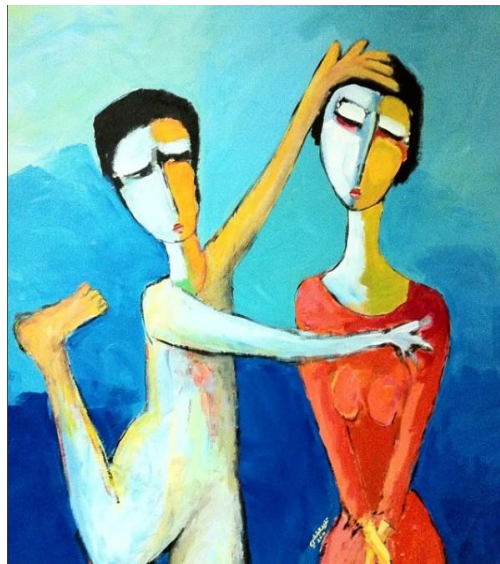


Figure 7:43: Untitled (2012)



Figure 7:44: Untitled (2012)



Figure 7:45: Untitled (2012)



Figure 7:46: Ladies' Conversation (2012)

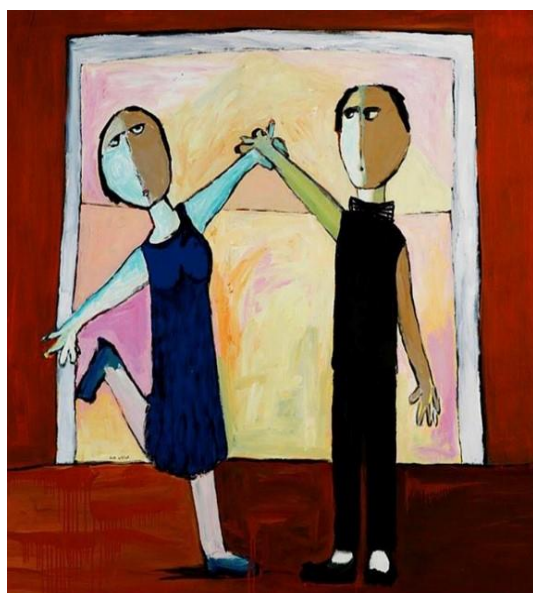


Figure 7:47: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:48: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:49: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:50: I Waited for You but You Never Came (2013)



Figure 7:51: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:52: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:53: Untitled (2013)



Figure 7:54: سوق (2014)



Figure 7:55: Untitled (2014)



Figure 7:56: It's a Moon, Not an Orange (2014)



Figure 7:57: From *Levitation theme* (2015)



Figure 7:58: From *Levitation theme* (2015)



Figure 7:59: From *Levitation theme*(2015)



Figure 7:60: From *Levitation theme* (2015)



Figure 7:61: I Am a Reflection of You (2015)



Figure 7:62: Untitled (2015)



Figure 7:63: Untitled (2015)



Figure 7:64: She (2015).

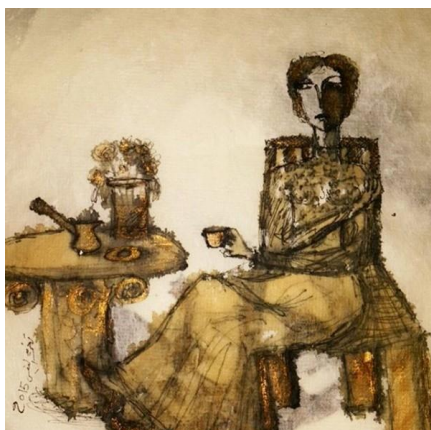


Figure 7:65: Untitled (2015)



Figure 7:66: Untitled (2015)

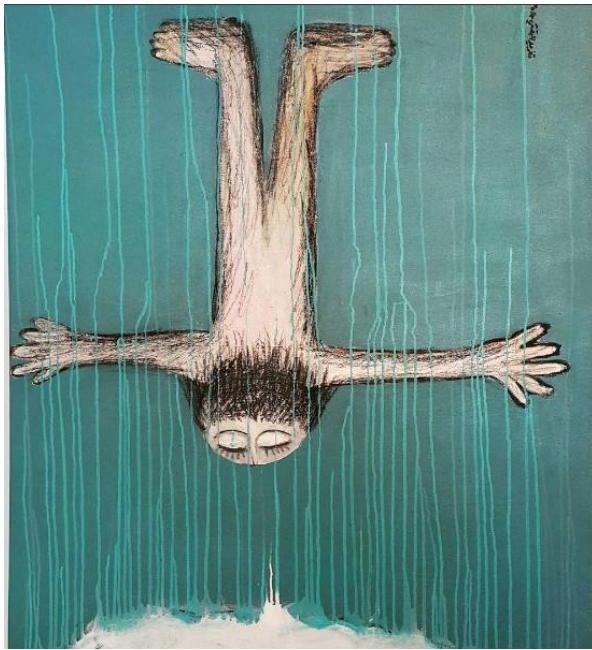


Figure 7:67: And I Fade (2015)



Figure 7:68: Me and You (2015)



Figure 7:69: Untitled (2015)



Figure 7:70: Untitled (2016)



Figure 7:71: Revelation (2016)



Figure 7:72: Letters not for Anyone 8 (2016)



Figure 7:73: Untitled (2016)



Figure 7:74: Do You Love Me (2016)



Figure 7:75: Untitled (2016)

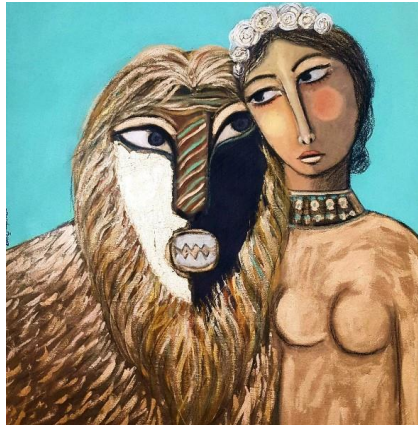


Figure 7:76: Beauty and the Beast (2016)

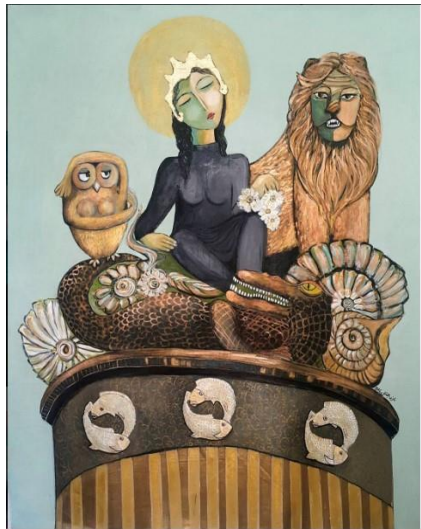


Figure 7:77: Variable Mythologies (2016)



Figure 7:78: Assaq arrouh (2016)

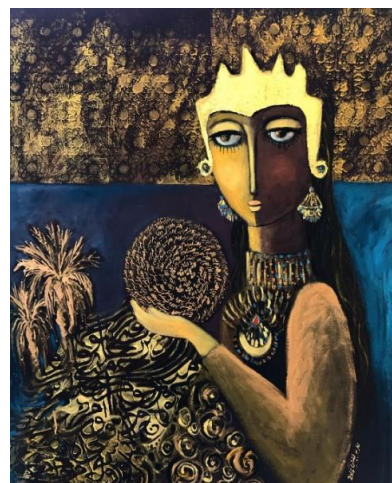


Figure 7:79: It's Love (2016)



Figure 7:80: Sketch (2016)



Figure 7:81: Untitled (2016)



Figure 7:82: Untitled (2017)

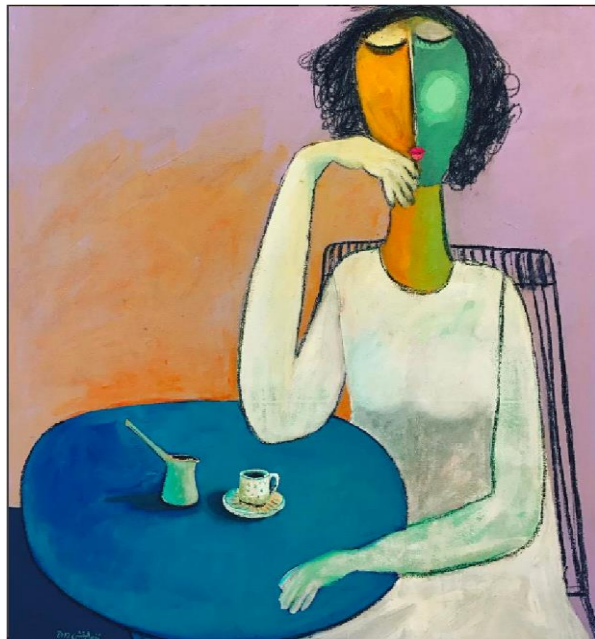


Figure 7:83: My World (2017)

Timeline

Date	Event
1975	Date of birth.
1990	She married and had her first child.
1999	Graduated from King Faisal University.
2000	– Was hired to teach at the Professional Institute in Alhasa. – Went to Syria to take some courses at the University of Damascus.
2001	– Took a course with the artist Jumana Jaber, who is also a professor at the University of Damascus. – Two solo exhibitions “The Light of Colours.”
2002	– Won first place in the Saudi female artists’ exhibition contest in Riyadh. – Solo exhibition “Paint Brush Blues.”
2004	– Won second place – Solo exhibition at Alhasa. – The “Light from the Inside” series.
2005	– Two solo exhibitions in Jeddah and Riyadh.
2007	– The “Whiteness” series. – Two solo exhibitions.
2009	Started her Master’s program.
2012	– “The Return of the Cats” series. – Solo exhibition in Kuwait.
2014	– “It’s a Moon, Not an Orange” series. – Solo exhibition in Khobar, Saudi Arabia.
2015	– “Levitation” series. – Solo exhibition in Bahrain.
2016	Graduated with a Master’s degree from King Saud University in Riyadh.

Table 7.1: Albagshi’s life timeline.

Chapter Eight

Findings: Fida Alhussan

We all carry a tiny thing on our hands, our finger prints, which teach us that we will never be like anyone else, we are different in our taste, mood, and personality, and that we have the right to be different. We have the right to be ourselves so we can live a comfortable life. (Fida Alhussan 2016)



Figure 8:1: Fida Alhussan during her TEDx talk in 2016.

A few years ago, while I was browsing online and checking the new events on my Instagram account I noticed that people were posting artwork more than ever. It was unusual to see people be amazed by an artwork and encourage each other to buy artworks. What I found interesting was that the type of artwork shared was novel for the Saudi society and yet it seemed to be well accepted. I was interested to know the artist who was able to attract the attention of society the way she did (figure 8:2). I'd never seen Saudis, especially the young, showing as much interest in visual arts as they did in her artwork. She was the Saudi female artist Fida

Alhussan, whom I found to be a simple and active person interacting with people through her account. Since then I've been following her work and decided to involve her as one of the participants in my study.



Figure 8:2: People's posts on Instagram featuring Alhussan's art.

I contacted Alhussan to ask her if she would agree to be one of my participants and she did. She was very respectful and very friendly. The interview consisted of three sessions, the first at her home during one of my visits in Riyadh, the others using online audio programs. I told her that the interview could take place in a be comfortable space and she generously invited me to her home. Alhussan is a very simple and forthcoming person and made me feel very comfortable at her place. She gave me all the time I needed and wasn't hesitant to answer any of my questions.

The Good Little Girl

Fida Fahad Alhussan was born in 1980 in Saudi Arabia where she was also raised. She is the oldest of her siblings as she has two younger sisters and one brother. Both her parents worked when she was growing up; her mother was a teacher and her father owned a marketing and advertising company. When her parents went to work she would stay with her paternal grandmother. She was the youngest grandchild at that time so her grandmother would spoil her, and when anyone tried to punish her she would run to her for protection. She said, "As children

we want to be loved, be taken care of, and feel accepted.” She always wanted to be the “good girl” whom everyone loved (Alhussan, 2016). Alhussan described her grandmother,

She was an open-minded person different from other senior ladies, she liked to listen to music, laugh, she was not the kind of person who would criticize, she used to cut her hair very short and say that’s okay it’s under the scarf, I used to cut it for her and help her. She was different from other grandmothers who were always giving orders...My father is not very conservative and acts like himself, not conservative but loves to respect the society and doesn’t like to be rude and cause friction in society. My grandmother and father shared the same blood, so were similar.

Older women in Saudi were, and still are, usually conservative and always wear scarfs. In some rare cases, like Alhussan’s grandmother, they are different and more open-minded.

Alhussan learned a lot from her grandmother’s stories. Her grandmother was a good story teller, describing things like the human body and where food goes in a cartoonish way for children to imagine, and she was very good at it. Alhussan was also influenced by her grandmother’s religious beliefs as she was very convincing talking about heaven and hell and at the same time she wasn’t religiously strict but used to see life in a very simple and positive way. Her death had a great impact on Alhussan. Although she passed away more than a decade ago Alhussan shed tears when talking about her.

When three years old she loved to be in her own space, like sitting on the highest peak of their house. She loved to find her own space where she could have her privacy and enjoy her own time either on the highest point of their house or her father’s old satellite dish. She would take her stereo and listen to music or just simply lie down, the most important thing for her is to find her

own space. As a teenager, she loved hip-hop. Once while she was at the family farm she painted a mural of an African American with afro hair and sunglasses and signed it. She also loved to amaze people and to attract their attention. She used to take the position of the leader when playing with her cousins although some of them were older, but she was good at convincing them. Her relationship with her cousins during her childhood and the amount of time they spent together created a strong bond. growing up she started to love the feeling of belonging. She said,

To belong to the group of my female cousins and to follow their common opinion, whenever I was asked anything I would check first with them to see what they chose and then follow their example. I felt comfortable being like everyone else in what I wore, and even with regard to future goals. It was like a template that I forced myself into just to be like others because what made me comfortable is that there is guaranteed success in this path and clear goal. (Alhussan 2016).

She started to enjoy grownups' company more than that of her relatives who were her age. They used to treat her with respect as if they were the same age although they were 15 years older. She believes that her relationship with her relatives from childhood until her marriage, especially with her grandmother, had a great impact on her life. However, this strong bond changed, as she explained in her TEDx talk in 2016,

At one point, I started to get bored. I started to feel that I am different, "I am special." I felt the urge to let it out so I decided to be stubborn and do the opposite of everything "others" do and disagree with it, which led me to be isolated.

It wasn't what she was aiming for, but this isolation made her find herself and it helped her form an identity and become independent and responsible for her own decisions, not afraid to say no, or to have a different opinion. But then she explained,

I started to feel suffocated. I felt like I was in a room full of clothes which did not really represent me and I lost the taste for life. so, I decided to take all of these "clothes" and not throw them away but put them in storage, and deal with everything in my life with very simple questions: do you like it or not? Are you comfortable or not?" even if it was dealing with people.

Alhussan started to focus on her own needs and individuality by extending her respect towards others. She decided to take up a natural position, she explained, "my difference made me respect the difference of others and their views. I became open to other cultures and other religions. I was trying to find myself." Alhussan shared a sensitive but repeated scenario in the Saudi community, especially among women, which no one had shared or realized before. When her daughter asked her once whom am I like, she told her, "we all carry a tiny thing on our hands that teaches us that we will never be like anyone else, we are different in our taste, mood, and personality, and we have the right to be different. We have the right to be ourselves so we can live a comfortable life."

During Alhussan's childhood the country was going through the Gulf war. The news was filled with photos of dead bodies which have stuck in Alhussan's memory and made the idea of destabilizing the country a major concern especially after she became a mother. The whole situation of the Gulf war created Traumatophobia, a fear of war with which she lived until recently. And with what is now happening in Syria, she said,

I've always had the feeling that we are entering war. People keep saying we are living a blessed life but not for much longer—this is the feeling I get from the news and society—we are feeding ourselves this idea that we are living in wealth which will end, that we are living in luxury which will end.

She reached a point where she decided to not have any more children and stayed at home most of the time praying and worrying. In 2009 after a lot of thinking about whether we are in a war or only living with a feeling of war, she reached the conviction that a person should acclimatize to life's circumstances even when they frighten him. She realized that this miserable life she was living was never a solution as it was affecting her social life and activities. However, the worst moments of her life were when her younger sister who was recently separated fell ill. She was close to her and comforted her as best she could through the illness. Although these circumstances made her depressed she learned that a person should think of himself and try to be happy and develop himself instead of relying on others and clinging to a life that could change in seconds.

Education and Career

After graduating from high school Alhussan enrolled at the arts education department of King Saud University but she abandoned this program after than one semester. She wasn't comfortable and felt the institutions was very strict and different from what she expected. Then she enrolled at Prince Sultan Private university, which was new at that time, to study business management. After three years, she decided to drop out as she was failing. She partially blamed

the fact that the university was new and not yet established. She then enrolled in Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic University to study Islamic studies. At that period, Alhussan was starting to become religious herself and she felt that she wanted to understand Islam better. Interestingly, she graduated with a Bachelor's degree after four enjoyable but challenging years.

The professors were frustrating and I used to argue with them a lot, in each case project I worked on I had disagreements with them. I had a goal of achieving change...but they marginalized other opinions.

She had conflicts with her professors but she loved challenge, believed in herself and had a goal. Alhussan is a strong believer in God and it is something that played a great part on her journey. She used to link everything that happened to her with her prayers; if it was good she was grateful and if not she would take a step back and think about what it was that she was doing wrong. Her strong belief in God made her see life positively and at one point she was thinking of becoming a religious agitator (or promoter). Alhussan wasn't satisfied with the way Islam was presented. Her education at Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic University made her belief in God even stronger as she studied the holy Quran and the life of prophet Mohammed closely. She said, "there is a clear reality everyone should know, [Islam] is not a political religion that we are all driven to...the religion is about morality and justice." After her graduation, she lost the urge to become an Islamic agitator and decided not to get involved with others and focus on herself. She could see and understand the difference between her views and those of others in her environs and decided to deal with it respectfully.

Alhussan took many short courses in computer skills, business management, visual arts, and self-development. Even with what she believed was unstable educational journey she was passionate and dreamed of running her own business.

During her last semester at the university, in 2005, she married and very soon after that had her first daughter. During that time, she was working with her mother's women's boutique. However, she got too preoccupied with motherhood and social life to continue working with her mother. In 2007, she started working with her brother and father for his advertising company. She was proficient in Photoshop so she used to create the digital advertising work for the company. She was happy with the job and the income, but nevertheless got bored in 2009 and decided to resign, as she was also expecting another child.

Her Life as An Artist

Alhussan grew up taking great joy in watching her uncle, a calligrapher who had studied in Iraq, and two of her aunts, artists both, one of whom had a degree in arts education. However, she felt that they didn't seem to enjoy what they were doing and seemed competitive and moody. She didn't feel that they valued and embraced their talent, which made her unsure if she wanted to be an "artist." She thought that the reason might be because her grandfather was very religious and didn't like the idea of visual arts, so maybe that was why they were not showing a lot of appreciation of their work of others.

For Alhussan visual arts was a "relaxation zone", so whenever she felt she needed her space and wanted to retreat from reality she enjoyed the beauty of visual arts. When she started, she was working on digital arts and working on programs like Photoshop, which she learned and became proficient in on her own at a very young age. She used to create e- cards and logos. In

2010, after she settled with her second daughter, she decided to develop her visual art skills so she took private lessons with a university professor and enrolled at an institute to learn drawing, portrait painting, and oil painting. In these workshops Alhussan learned more about the materials than about techniques, which she learned about from YouTube. However, even with Alhussan's creativity, talent, and experience she didn't feel that she could be considered an artist. She thought artists worked and studied very hard and learned certain rules and techniques. When she watched her friends who were studying arts education at the university having a hard time with their professors and their work not satisfying the professors easily. She said,

My technique would let me down when I drew. I would try once, then twice, and if it wasn't perfect I would get mad. I am not patient, but I have been gifted with imagination...the many times I worked on interior design for other people, I would finish very quickly... graphic design made me enjoy visual arts without madness, no more papers to throw away. It became my means of expressing myself.

When she works, she combines painting with photography and digital painting, depending on the idea (figures 8:3 & 8:4).



Figure 8:3: You and I (2013)

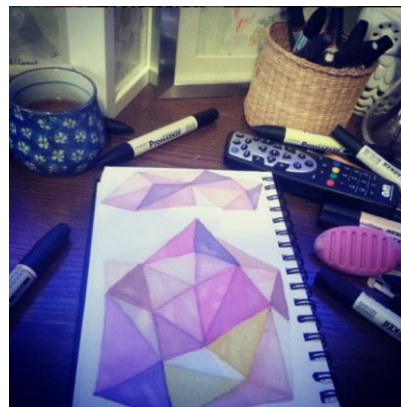


Figure 8:4: Some of Alhussan's sketches (2013)

Alhussan is an expert when it comes to software graphic design programs such as Photoshop. She also loves working with different kinds of media. When she wants to use a photo of a model she contacts the agency to get the necessary permission to use it. Other times she works with photographers, makeup artists, and models on certain types of projects (figure 8:5). When Alhussan works on a new project she



Figure 8:5: One of Alhussan's projects (2013)

rarely plans it in advance, instead she lets her feelings lead her in that moment. She enjoys the freedom visual arts gives her to express herself the way she wants.

Beauty, feelings, and culture are the three essential inspirational sources of Alhussan's artwork. Although there is a great deal of obvious Saudi cultural influence, her work clearly reflects her openness to other cultures. Heritage in general has a great impact on Alhussan and her artwork. She admires and finds inspiration in heritage irrespective of culture. She finds joy in learning about how a certain culture developed through history and how it was reflected in their colours, patterns, artwork, customs, etc. It makes her think about the coming generations and legacy. She explained,

I want to create something for my children to see in the future. I mean, my goal is for my children to see and learn about my history, and see what my generation provided, what we used to wear, what kind of art we made...I want us to have an identity.

She feels a responsibility as an artist to create something to leave behind for the coming generations.

In the beginning, Alhussan used to work on her art, not thinking about showing her work. The idea to do so came after she had been looking for different and new types of paintings, other than what was either trending or traditional, and she couldn't find anything that attracted her attention in the stores or the art galleries. She started creating and she found joy while working on her paintings. Sometimes she would express certain feelings through her work, but not always. Unfortunately, when she tried to participate in group exhibitions she was rejected because people were not familiar with her type of work, which is Pop Art, and which was not seen as a proper visual art at that time. She was disappointed as many people, especially artists, wouldn't accept her type of work. However, she persevered, believing that visual arts don't have limits or rules and that every innovated artist new faced a lack of acceptance and understanding at the beginning, so why should she stop doing what she did to satisfy others who in her opinion were not being reasonable. On her Instagram account, she shared some of the sayings she believed in, such as, "To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong".



Figure 8:6: The photo and quote that changed Alhussan's life

Alhussan has always been passionate, with a great sense of ambition, and has always looked up to pioneers in creativity. However, she wasn't confident enough to move forward with her new type of artwork until one day she came across a photo on social media (figure 8:6). She explained,

One time I saw a photo with a motto, which I clearly remember. It changed my life and made me achieve a lot of things. A person was jumping off a cliff and the message was

that you won't really feel alive as long as you are sitting in your comfort zone. I immediately decided to put all my artwork out into the public realm, I bought a new iPhone, downloaded Instagram (because it only worked on iPhone at that time), created an account and decided to post my work and wait and see.

No one around her knew what she was planning. Her account wasn't in her full name; she posted under the name "FidaArt" and she posted all her work at the same time. The reactions of her followers were very encouraging, more than she'd expected so she decided to participate in the 2013 annual Saudi Art and Fashion Exhibition. To be able to participate in the exhibition, she needed more than \$5,000 to rent a booth and more to print her artwork. Although her husband and her family would've supported her financially she didn't want to take the risk with someone else's money so she sold her watch and spent all her money on the exhibition. When she participated, she wasn't aware that she was creating "art," she said, "I didn't realize and I didn't see it as art... okay, I express myself through it and there is a philosophy behind it, but I didn't think that people would ask me about it." Although she believed in herself and was confident enough to display her work in public, she was still not sure how the Saudi society would perceive it at this event, especially after the many rejections in the past (figure 8:7). However, she was very proud telling me that all her 45 paintings and their 32 copies sold. Her participation was a great success and she was honoured with the award for the event's best graphic designer.



Figure 8:7: Alhussan's contribution to the Saudi Art and Fashion Exhibition (2013)

Ever since, Alhussan's life has been far from boring, she said,

I was shocked at the unexpected changes in my life since then, like people's requests, companies calling me and giving me offers, even from Mexico, and the many emails I receive...I didn't have any knowledge or experience of how to manage my career. Some people wanted to partner with me, others wanted to represent me and sell my work...this all had a great effect on me.

When she participated, her goal was to sell her work and make a profit. However, the audience didn't perceive her work as she expected. They appreciated her work and encouraged her, although many artists in the Saudi community didn't consider digital art as real visual art, just as Pop Art was not familiar yet. In the same year of 2013, she was invited to participate in the Oasis Magazine Pop Up Shop in Riyadh celebrating the magazine's fifth anniversary. The event showcased regional artists, and the theme was the celebration of contemporary Arabic heritage (figure 8:8).



Figure 8:8: Alhussan's contribution to the Oasis Magazine Pop Up Shop (2013)

A year later, in 2014, Alhussan was rising as an artist as she became more popular and active. She created a painting specially for the TEDx Radwa, Theme: Ideas Worth Spreading, an event that took place in Yanbu, Saudi Arabia (figures 8:9 & 8:10).



Figure 8:9: Alhussan's painting for the TEDx event (2014). Figure 8:10: Alhussan's painting for the TEDx event in context(2014)

In the same year, one of her paintings was on the cover of the July issue of "re-volt," a monthly online magazine devoted to Arabic hip-hop culture (figure 8:11).

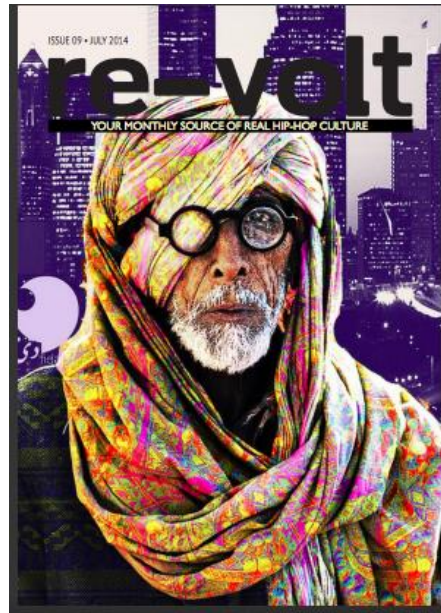


Figure 8:11: Alhussan’s painting on the cover of “re-volt” magazine (2014)

Alhussan also collaborated with another new, young, female artist, Norah Albarak, in an exhibition which they named “A Painting and a Chair.” Albarak worked with chairs very creatively and in this collaboration, she used Alhussan’s paintings in her designs (figure 8:12). The audience were very interested and many of them shared their experience of the exhibition on social media.



Figure 8:12: Alhussan’s work on chairs designed by Albarak

Alhussan also participated in a group exhibition at Alfaisal University and had her first solo exhibition at the Embassy of Finland (figures 8:13 & 8:14). This exhibition, in particular, was very special for Alhussan as during it she lived through the happiest moments of her life, feeling proud of her work and very satisfied. She received many compliments from diplomatic officials who visited the exhibitions, including the Canadian ambassador, the Korean ambassador, the American ambassador, and others. While Alhussan's past educational and career experience had not been satisfying for her, she feels she achieved success with this exhibition and finally felt satisfied. She said,

There was a silent moment between me and myself, not happiness, but there was a feeling of satisfaction. I was overwhelmed with all of this beautiful appreciation I was receiving for doing something I love. This was actually the happiest moment of my life.

Even though she was in this exhibition with only few of her friends, she was confident and believed in herself and her artwork.

Alhussan was very active and creative in the ways she developed and used her talent. In 2014 she started working as an art director for a Saudi high ranked comedy show on YouTube called *aish elly!* (figures 8:15, 8:16 & 8:17). Her collaboration lasted successfully for two years.



Figure 8:13: Part of Alhussan's exhibition at the embassy of Finland (2013)



Figure 8:14: Part of Alhussan's exhibition at the embassy of Finland (2013)

Figure 8:15: *Aish elly!* program (2014)Figure 8:16: *Aish elly!* program (2015)Figure 8:17: *Aish elly!* Program (2016)

In 2015 Alhussan's tenure as an art director took place simultaneously with two other projects. She worked with the Saudi singer Ayed (2016) for a music video of his song "*Ta'al kellek*" (figure 8:18) and in 2016 she worked with another Saudi director, Majed Alesa, on his music video "*Hawajees*" focusing on traditions and hip-hop (figures 8:19 & 8:20).

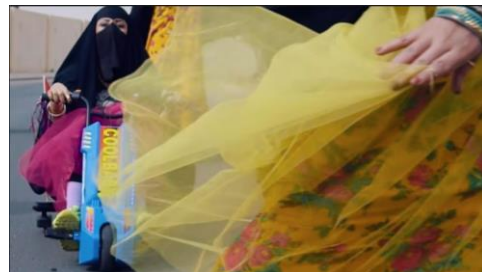
Figure 8:18: Stills from Ayed's music video "*Ta'al kellek*" (2016)Figure 8:19: Stills from Alesa's music video "*Hawajees*" (2016)



Figure 8:20: Stills from Alesa's music video "Hawajees" (2016)

Alhussan pursued other avenues, searching for more and more ways and opportunities to enjoy her art and expand. In 2015 her artwork was printed on clothes, pillows, calendars, and cellphone cases (figure 8:21).

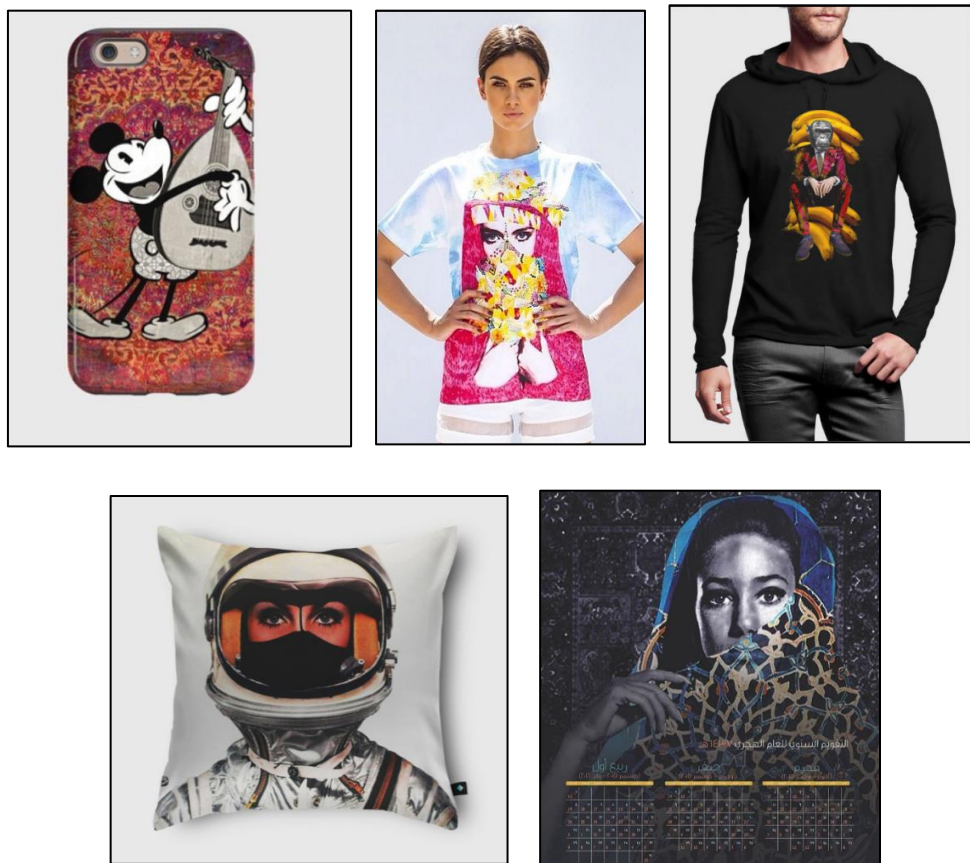


Figure 8:21: Alhussan's work prints

Also in 2015 she had the opportunity to work with the Coca-Cola company. She was invited with other young artists from the Middle East to create a design for a limited edition of the Coca-Cola Light can. In her design for Coca-Cola she wanted to deliver the message that even with our cultural and religious differences we can all agree in our appreciation of beauty, love, and humanity (figure 8:22).



Figure 8:22 Limited edition of the Coca-Cola Light can design by Alhussan

In 2016, she was one of the speakers at the TEDx KSAUHS event, which took place at King Saud University in Riyadh (figure 8:23). Alhussan's presentation had the title "Be Like the Others" and she talked about her experience not as an artist, but as an independent thinker. She shared how she saw the world and others at different stages of her life right up until the present. Her work was displayed in the halls of King Saud University as part of the TEDx event (figure 8:24).



Figure 8:23: Alhussan at the TEDx KSAUHS (2016)



Figure 8:24: Alhussan's exhibition at the TEDx KSAUHS event

Nothing is Perfect

Although Alhussan has always respected the customs and traditions of her own society, she lived many obstacles in her journey as an artist. When she was living the life of a housewife, busy with her family and everything she needed was provided for her, she wasn't an advocate of Saudi women's rights activists in the past. However, when her life objectives changed and she started her career journey she realized the complications of life. She elaborated,

In the past, I used to say women can get their rights on their own and move on if they are persistent, but the reality is that because I love my society, my mother, my husband, and I love the life I'm surrounded by, I don't want to confuse them and I don't want to bring them something new. It will cause stress. I am moving from each step to another with ten approvals...I am suffering because I want to do a lot of things, but I also want to consider and respect the people I love and am committed to.

Alhussan's goals and interests have become broad compared to the conservative traditional society she lives in. That is why when she makes a decision that results in the breaking of a norm this can be hard for her family and loved ones. She was not comfortable anymore with the process she had to go through with each decision in her life, she explained,

You are in a society that tries to be involved in all of your decisions, like marriage, divorce, where to have your wedding, what to serve for dinner, what to wear, every decision in my life. I suffered because I had to get everyone's approval, otherwise they would be mad. They would make me feel that I would regret my own decision and that I

am stubborn. It was like a war in my head, but we should trust our own instincts, it is okay to consult, but not to let others think for you. This I see as the challenge: to insist on your own decision.

Alhussan believes that if she must consider the opinions of others every time she wants to do something she will fall behind on her life's journey. Part of the customs and traditions' issue that she face had to do with the fact that she is a woman. When she started sharing her work on social media she used only her first name so no one knew who she was or wher she was from. Her followers really encouraged her to keep going. Once she started sharing the work she was displaying in exhibitions she started using her full name, Fida Alhussan. She became popular as a "Saudi female artist" in a very short time and she was targeted by companies owned by Saudi investors who were looking to support Saudi female artists. There is no doubt that such initiatives are appreciated, but Alhussan wanted her work to be promoted, not herself. Because she is a woman and wary of being taken advantage of she had to be very careful with every step she took in her career. She believes that seeing other female artists' success encouraged her as did her 45,000 social media followers worldwide.

In 2016, on Alhussan's Twitter account, she mentioned that she was asked repeatedly by international magazines about her experience as a Saudi female artist in regards to her freedom. She wasn't sure if this question arose out of curiosity or the desire to attract attention. However, in her opinion, Saudi women have a different life and different circumstances that make their experience more challenging. She adds "obstacles will face anyone no matter where he is and for each geographical political social location there will be a certain method and path to succeed." She believes that to succeed a person must like and accept her society's contradictions.

Although Alhussan was excited to leave the more uneventful stage of her life behind, she is having a hard time adjusting to her new career. This new life comes with new opportunities that she wants to take advantage of, including socializing and meeting new people, which reduces the time she has for her artwork. She said,

My production reduced when my circle of friends expanded and the [number of] activities I attend [increased]. The art I create is a result of personal feeling and inner desire, but what is happening in my life now is resulting in a social pressure that would suit a political official or someone who wants to be famous.

She is conflicted about having to choose between taking advantage of the opportunities and being herself, living her own calm, quiet life. So, she's decided to focus on her main goal, which is to work on her art and enjoy expressing herself and her feelings and to try to balance the various aspects of life as much as she can without putting any pressure on herself.

Conclusion

Alhussan is a happy artists. She said, "I feel at my happiest when I put my daughters to bed and I realize that we are safe and that I have a career that I love. There is no moment that would beat these moments, when I am satisfied, relieved, fulfilled in my work and see my daughters, especially after a successful achievement." She aims to carry on doing what she loves, benefitting from it financially, but not at the expense of putting pressure on her family. Alhussan believes that for any young creative artist, in any field and of any gender, strive to not hold back, but to share their work with the world.

Alhussan's Artwork

In this section I will first present the three paintings by Alhussan that she chose to talk about during the interview. After that I will present a sample of her artwork in her career.



Figure 8:25: NASA (2012)

In this painting (figure 8:25) Alhussan chose to work with a photo of the former model Jean Shrimpton taken by the famous late fashion photographer Richard Avedon (figure 8:26). Alhussan's work on this project was very simple, but deeply meaningful. She added the veil, which is one of the items of clothing women in Saudi Arabia wear when they are in public. She wanted to affirm



Figure 8:26 Avedon (1965)

the message that, “I will reach the moon even with this veil, and I am happy and proud.”

Interestingly, people interpreted it very differently, and somehow negatively, that even if the Bedouin woman went to the moon she would still wear the veil. This specific work generated more comments and discussions among members of the audience than any of her other pieces of Alhussan’s exhibition in the Embassy Finland in 2014.



Figure 8:27: Still Funny (2012)

This painting (figure 8:27) shows a woman covered from head to toe in a Saudi traditional costume that some Saudi women wear in public. She used a photo of a model and using Photoshop covered her up with a black *abaya* and a yellow bow tie. The message here is,

There are a lot of covered up women who have a beautiful side to them, which no one knows...you don't know who this woman is and you don't know how funny she might be or how kind, but you judged her because she is covered. Maybe her family forced her, or the society.

From Moghissi's (1999) postmodern feminist perspective a dissatisfaction Western modernity. Interestingly, Alhussan has never worn a veil or covered her face, but she hates how people, especially those from a different culture, judge women who do.



Figure 8:28: Bad News (2012)

In this painting (figure 8:28) Alhussan chose a traditional, albeit non-Saudi, pattern for the background. She used a photo of a model whose face is overlaid with vintage newspaper text,

specifically headlines about the war with Yemen from the local Riyadh newspaper. At the bottom of the page, on part of the model's body, she added images of hands applied with henna the way women from Riyadh used to apply it in the past. She explained, "this is the way my grandmothers applied henna; without ornament." Alhussan's intention was to, "I belong here in Riyadh and that these old newspaper's headlines are today's news headlines, and that the news and media is putting us under a lot of pressure." It became popular, especially with people from Riyadh, for its beauty, sadness, tradition, and culture.

Sample of Alhussan's Art Work

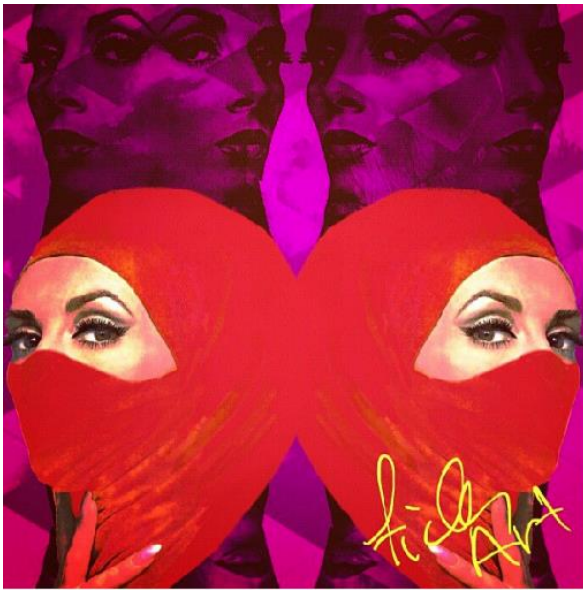


Figure 8:29: Suspiciousness (2013)



Figure 8:30: One Step Closer (2013)



Figure 8:31: Najd (2013)



Figure 8:32: Let Me Think about It (2013)



Figure 8:33: I Left the Keys (2013)



Figure 8:34: Bad News Poisoning (2013)

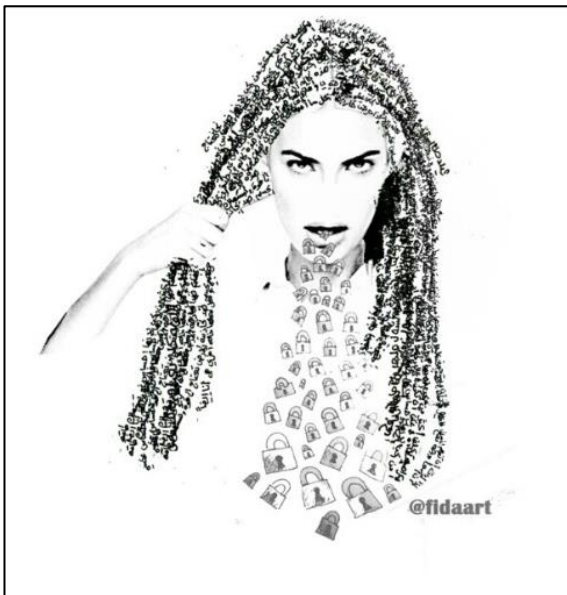


Figure 8:35: A Good Friend Keeps Your Secrets for You (2013)

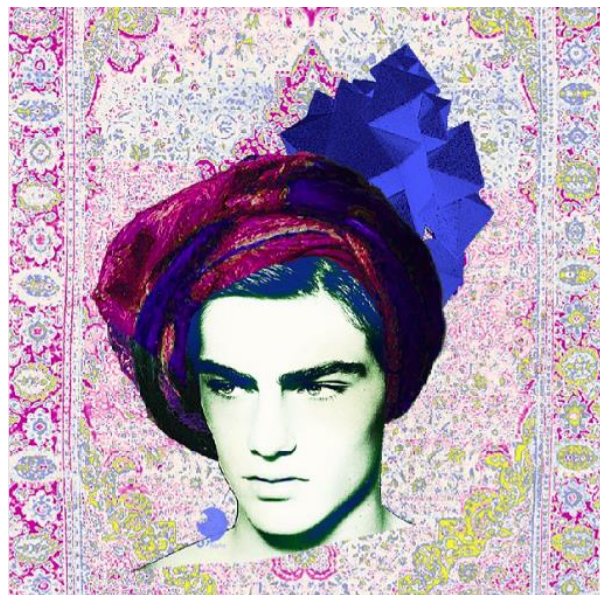


Figure 8:36: Try to Catch Me (2013)



Figure 8:37: When You Think, You Open It (2013)



Figure 8:38: You Shoot Me Down (2013)

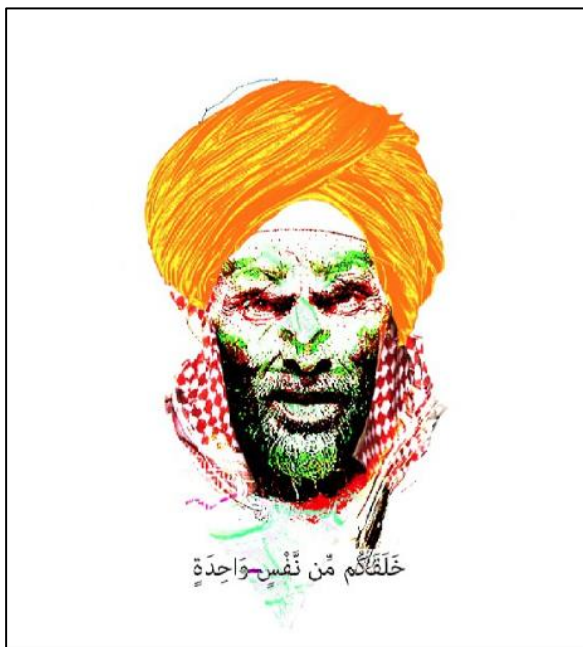


Figure 8:39: He Created You from One Soul (2013)

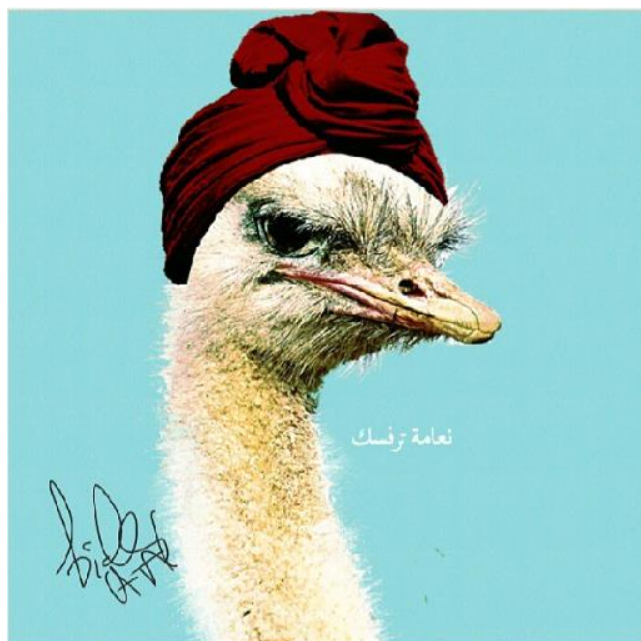


Figure 8:40: Miss Ostrich Kicks You (2013)



Figure 8:41: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:42: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:43: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:44: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:45: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:46: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:47: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:48: Untitled (2013)



Figure 8:49: Oh My God, I See You Clearly Now (2014)



Figure 8:50: I Feel Different (2014)



Figure 8:51: Don't Wake Me up (2014)

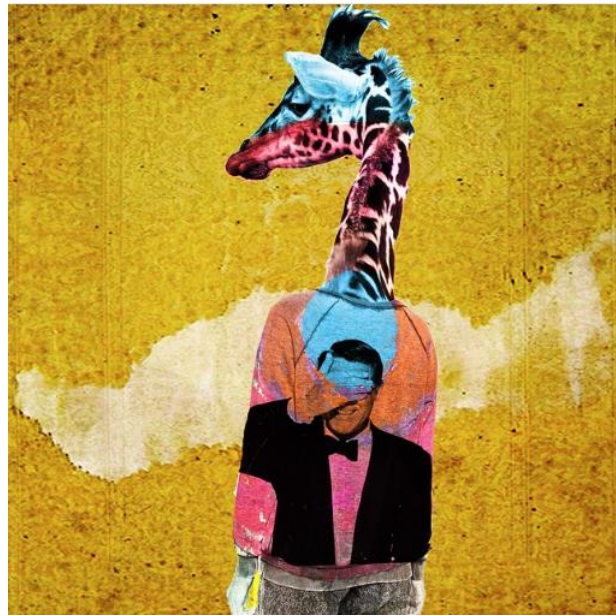


Figure 8:52: Same Old Game, Same Old Thing (2014)

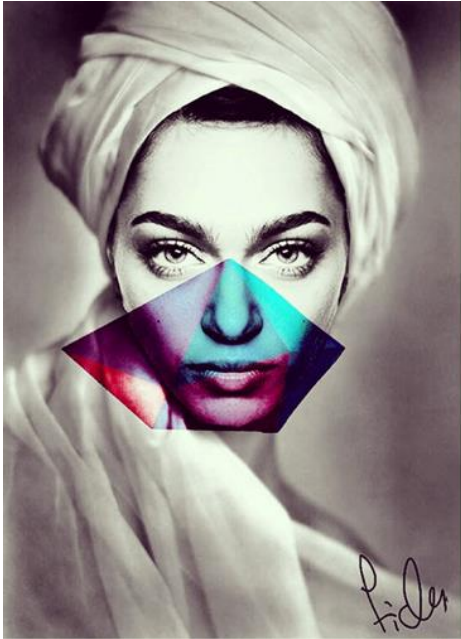


Figure 8:53: Play Cool (2014)



Figure 8:54: Open Decision (2014)

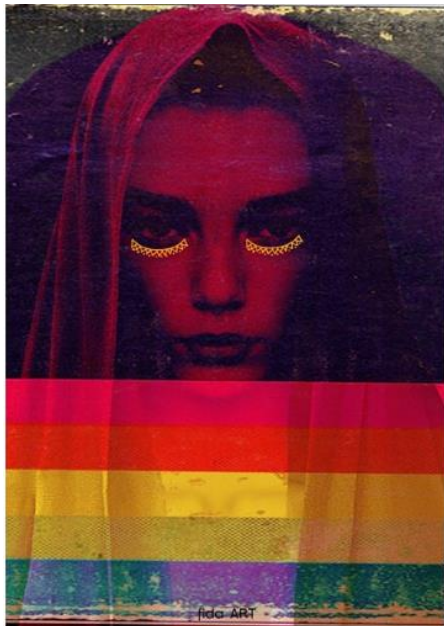


Figure 8:55: Keep Your Head (2014)



Figure 8:56: I'm Trying Hard not to Let It Show (2014)



Figure 8:57: I Know I'm not the Only One (2014)

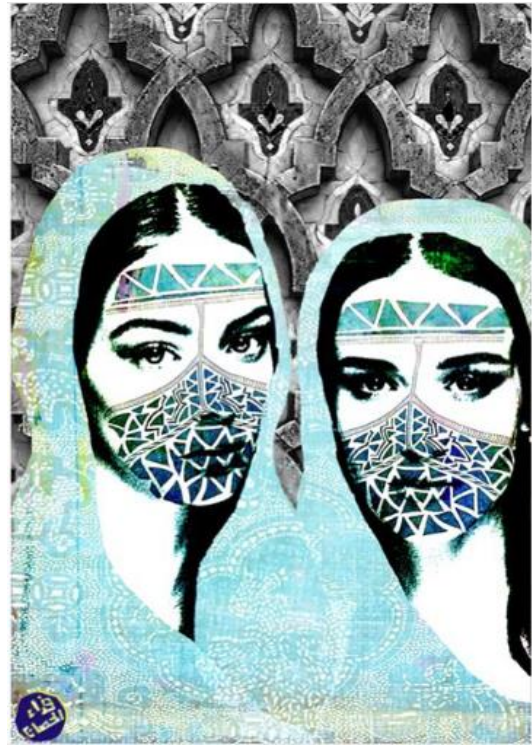


Figure 8:58: Soul Sisters (2014)



Figure 8:59: Fida Micky Mouse (2014)

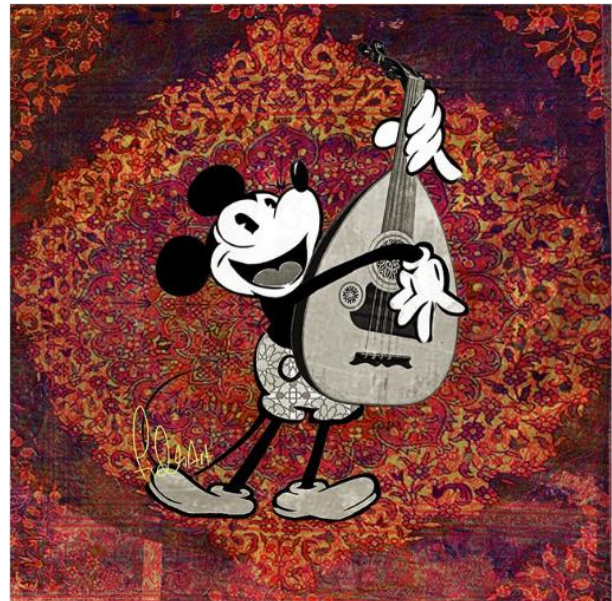


Figure 8:60: Oud (2014)



Figure 8:61: Good News (2015)



Figure 8:62: The Story Always Changes (2015)



Figure 8:63: Revolution (2015)



Figure 8:64: Trying (2015)

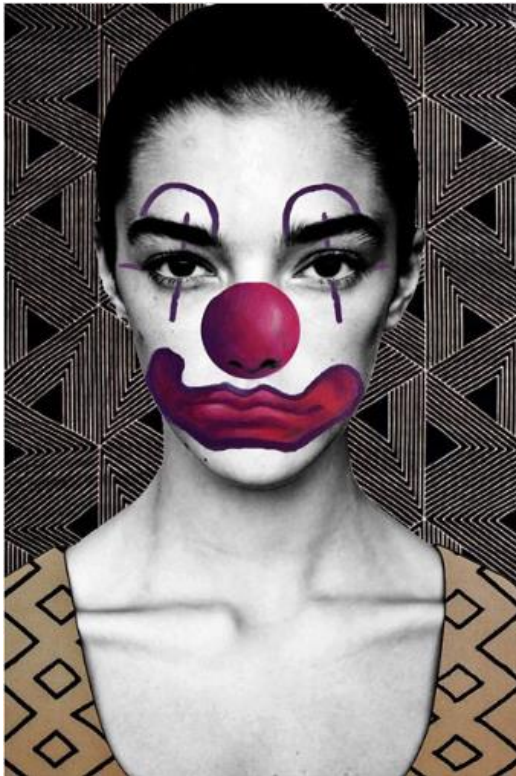


Figure 8:65: Strange (2015)



Figure 8:66: Cold War (2015)



Figure 8:67: Face It (2015)



Figure 8:68: Life Secrets (2015)



Figure 8:69: Not Worth the Pain (2015)



Figure 8:70: Guilt (2015)



Figure 8:71: Mixed Emotions (2015)

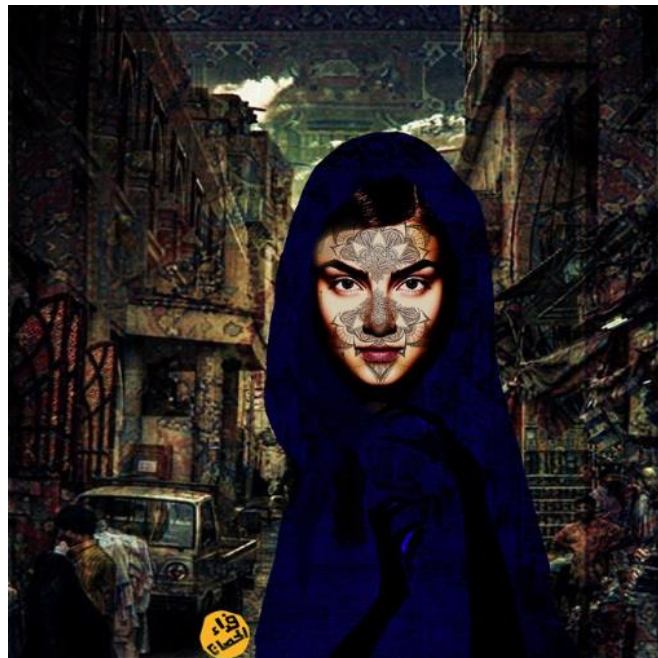


Figure 8:72: I'm the World (2015)



Figure 8:73: Jealousy (2016)

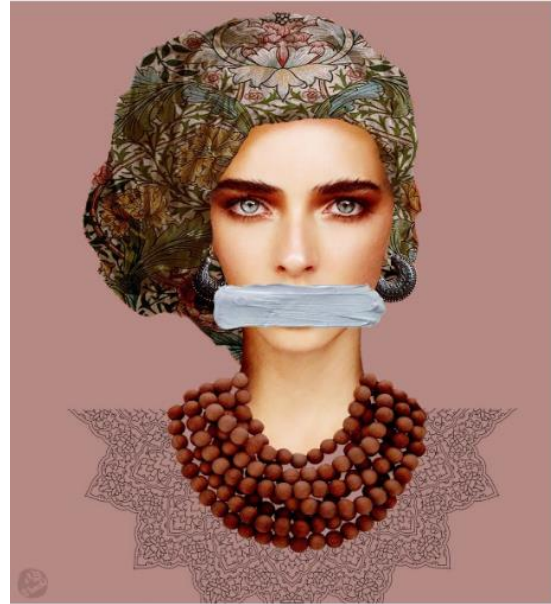


Figure 8:74: Untitled (2016)



Figure 8:75: Undestroyable (2017)



Figure 8:76: So Close (2017)

Timeline

Date	Event
1980	Born in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
2005	She married.
2006	Graduated from Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic university.
2006–2009	Worked with her parents in fashion and advertisement.
2010	Started developing her art skills.
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Started sharing her work on social media. – Participated in the Saudi Art and Fashion Exhibition. – Participated in the Oasis Magazine Pop Up Shop.
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Created a painting specially for the TEDx Radwa. – Her painting was on the cover of the online magazine “re-volt.” – “APainting and a Chair” exhibition. – Her first solo exhibition at the Embassy of Finland. – Group exhibition at Alfaisal University. – Started working as an art director with a Saudi comedy show.
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Worked as art director with the Saudi singer Ayed. – Worked art director with the Saudi director, Majed Alesa. – Her artwork was printed on clothes, pillows, calendars, and cellphone cases. – Her collaboration with the Coca-Cola company.
2016	– A speaker on TEDx KSAUHS.

Table 8.1: Alhussan’s life timeline.

Chapter Nine

Discussion

To study the life stories of these female artists, and explore each one's personal journey into visual arts, I had to understand their culture. As a Saudi female researcher, I have approached and understood the culture and woman's status in Saudi Arabia from two perspectives, my own experience and the available literature. Keeping the artists' backgrounds in mind and applying both postmodern feminist theory and theories of social construction to their life stories, in what follows, I will discuss my findings in sum. Earlier in this thesis I discussed some of Moghissi's (1999) suggestions regarding the specific postmodern perspectives that are relevant for Muslim women. These perspectives include dissatisfaction with the foundation of modern social thought, Western modernity, and science; a rejection of metanarratives, a challenging of the concepts of reason and truth, and a stressing of differences; a focus on the image of the Other and on the processes of the social relegation of others; an interest in language and the exploration of discourse as ways of communicating that show the influence of authority in society; a questioning of gender and its historical construction; identity as a choice; a skepticism about power; and finally, a realisation that beliefs and knowledge are culturally constructed. Although not all of these perspectives were clearly evident in my findings, some were highly influential in my analysis. I will explain and provide examples throughout this chapter. Following this, I offer my reflections on the study.

To understand how the Saudi women artists Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan fulfilled their aspirations to become successful artists in Saudi

Arabia, I will in this chapter answer the following research question and discussing other probing questions.

How are Saudi female artists fulfilling their aspirations as artists in the conservative Saudi society?

Thinking about the research question and how to answer it I had in mind the following probing questions that I used as protocol questions and entry points: How did they become artists? What role does family, education, traditions, society, and religion (Islam) play? How does gender affect their artistic life journey and production? What are the common and divergent themes in the life stories of the Saudi women artists examined here, namely Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan? What is unique about each one of them? What life and pedagogical lessons can be drawn from exploring these women's lives?

How They Became Artists

To find out how each one of them became the artist they are today, I used the life story approach, as seen in the previous chapters of each artist. These four artists have some common aspects of their lives as artists, especially their journeys in becoming artists. When they were young, they were all interested in arts, particularly visual arts, but they engaged in their practices differently as a result of their different life circumstances and experiences. Binzagr took professional visual arts classes, Almalluh took private visual arts lessons, Albagshi bought material and worked individually on her art at home, and Alhussan painted graffiti and worked on graphic design programs. They continued to improve their visual arts skills, each of them according to their interests, life circumstances, and the available opportunities. They all agreed that as artists they can't stop practicing. For example, Almalluh believes that she is on a journey

of exploration by experimenting in new media. Albagshi is on another journey, that of exploring herself through her artwork. Persistence and continuity were other significant factors. Their strong passion for the visual arts made them face and overcome obstacles. I discuss these aspects and factors next.

The Role of Specific Life Aspects

Family. In this section I will discuss the role of their families—their parents, siblings, husbands, and children. Binzagr’s parents believed in the importance of education for their children. Since girls’ education wasn’t formally available in Saudi Arabia until the late 1950s (Alrasheed, 2013), her father had to send the children with their mother to Cairo, Egypt, while he stayed on in Saudi Arabia to run the family business. As Binzagr said, “my family was one of the families who at that time believed in educating their daughters.” From the time she was young, her parents always gave her the freedom to choose her interests and supported her choices. During her visual arts studies in Egypt and England, Binzagr’s family gave her their full moral and financial support. They stood beside her throughout her journey as an artist, especially her father and brothers, whose support was critical in such a conservative, male-dominated society. Her brothers helped her with her exhibitions and the *Darah*, and they were always there to share both the good times and hard times with her. The family bond and support was, and still is, a very significant element in her life as an artist.

As she puts it,

It is all about the family and their support...Look, everything is about the family and depends on their way. It doesn't mean that my family spoiled me, but I respected the freedom that they gave me and I respected the limits of this freedom.

Binzagr repeatedly expressed the importance of her family in her life, emphasizing that they are the most important people in her life because they were, and still are, her main support system. From them, she gains her strength, because of them she continues, and she's leaned on them in times of need as they have always been there.

Almalluh's parents also encouraged her to educate herself. They taught her that education is more important than money and to always have a passion. When she was young, her parents and siblings supported her artistic talent as well, and considered her the artist of the family. Her brothers, who are older than she is, used to buy her supplies, introduce her to artists from abroad in Jeddah, and bring her instructors, who would teach her something new and develop her talent. "They always call me the artist, and I used to get mad, I used to get shy when they said "artist," when I still had so much more to achieve" she said. Once married, she also received the support and encouragement of her husband. When Almalluh became a mother, it was the happiest moment of her life, she said, "I felt that since I chose to have children they are the most important investment in my life." She chose to focus on raising her children above anything else. Her family, husband and children, have, in turn, been very supportive of her work, attending all her exhibitions, especially her grand openings of other artist's exhibitions and accompanying her when she has needed to travel. She said, "their support played a great role even though I would keep going even if no one encouraged me, but they were always there." Almalluh has a strong bond with her family and enjoyed the support and encouragement of her parents and siblings before marriage, and of her husband and children after that.

Albagshi was raised by her parents and was also very close to her older aunt and grandparents. She was much loved and very spoiled as a child, with everyone taking care of her since she was her grandparents' first grandchild. Her parents were intellectuals who instilled in her a love of reading and writing. She married and had children very early, and her husband has been a great source of support for her for more than 25 years of marriage. He has supported her ambition to work, learn, and to become the artist she has become today. When people criticize her for things considered out of the norm she tells them, "my husband doesn't mind, and it doesn't concern anyone else." When she was accepted to the master's program at King Saud University in Riyadh, her parents felt that her family, her husband and children, should be her priority, but her husband supported her decision to take up these studies. Even though she was feeling guilty for being away from her children for several days each week, she managed with her husband's support, and eventually her parents came on board, too. Albagshi would never put anything before her family or sacrifice them for anything in this life. She loves her children and values her relationship with them, she said, "a relationship between a person and those they love is never a waste, because no matter how much you give them you will see it in the future". Albagshi's strong family bond is not limited to her immediate family, but she is also greatly appreciated and honoured by her relatives and extended family. They always make her proud as they are always present at all her events, showing their encouragement and support. She said, "there is pride in the family's support, the close society is beautiful and stands beside you and you honour that, but the family's support is what's real, trusted, and what lasts."

When Alhussan was little she was the youngest grandchild, and she was spoiled by her grandmother. She used to spend a lot of time with her when her parents were working, which allowed her to build a strong relationship with her that lasted until her grandmother passed away. Alhussan learned about religion from her and was inspired by her personality and imagination.

When she became older, her parents supported her educational choices morally and financially, and later offered her job opportunities. They were always there, having her back even after she married. Her husband also never stood in the way of her career, and she's always taken him and her family into consideration at each step. She explained,

I love my society, my mother, my husband, and I love the life I'm surrounded by. I don't want to confuse them and I don't want to bring them something new. It will cause stress. I am moving from each step to another with ten approvals...I am suffering because I want to do a lot of things, but I also want to consider and respect the people I love and am committed to.

That is why when she is about to make a decision that results in the breaking of a norm, which would be hard for her family and loved ones to process easily, she thinks twice. When she thinks about the future, she says any decision she thinks of taking would never be at the expense of her family.

The artists' life stories show that there is a clear family bond and a great value placed on this relationship in each case. Based on Almunajjed's (1997) study, educated Saudi women have more harmonious relationships with their spouses and children than non-educated ones. All the artists in focus had a strong family bond both before and after marriage. The family circle included grandparents, which shows the multi-generational aspect of Saudi family structure.

What is significant here is the support these artists received from the men in their lives, their fathers, brothers, and husbands. Although some feminists in the Arab/Muslim world maintain that women are suffering from the consequences of men's control, contending that it is inherited from one generation to another (Graham-Brown, 2001). This didn't seem to be the case

with these artists, even though they were of different generations and different regions with different traditions. These artists' life stories and the perspectives and roles of the male members in their families proves that feminism can be supported by conservative and traditional males. This indicates that feminism is a concept that goes beyond gender, religion, and culture. Having interviewed and studied the artwork of these four artists, one may cautiously argue: the example of these artists actually contradicts Graham-Brown's contention that the Saudi man holds his reputation so high that he prefers to keep his family's life altogether private. Families conspire in 'self-making,' it seems, and even if family is not around, life stories may recall their life characters (McAdams, 2001; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). This was the case with Alhussan remembering her grandmother and Binzagr her brother, both of whom had passed away. These four Saudi female artists' life stories indicate the great value placed on the family and not least its male members' role as a source of moral and financial support. Their careers would never have been the same without this support.

Education. Reading from a very young age was one of the most significant things the four artists had in common. Binzagr has a public library in her *Darat* that includes visual arts books in English and Arabic, as well as Arabic literature. Reading was likewise a big part of the childhood of Almalluh and her sisters. In adulthood, she became open to reading works of art criticism in English. When it comes to Albagshi, reading was more than an interest, it was a passion that fed her soul. She became interested in reading philosophy and sciences that focus on self-awareness. In my opinion, reading helped the above artists to form and construct solid concepts for the themes of their artwork, like Albagshi's levitation concept and Almalluh's "Food for Thought" series.

All four artists are not only well educated, but their education included a variety of different fields of knowledge. As shown in the table below, they studied arts, especially visual arts, either in private classes or at university, as well as education, business, and English literature among other subjects. (Table 9:1).

Artist	Institution	Location	Degree
Binzagr	Attended a finishing school for three years.	London, England	Certificate
	Attended the Leonardo da Vinci institute for two years.	Cairo, Egypt	
	Studied at Saint Martin's Art College for two years.	London, England	Certificate
Almalluh	Studied at the school of arts at Southern Methodist University for two years.	Dallas, Texas	
	Attended King Saud University to study English literature for four years.	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	BA
	Enrolled in a design and photography program offered through De Anza College in California, but located in Riyadh.	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.	Certificate
Albagshi	Studied home economics at King Faisal University for 4 years.	Alhasa, Saudi Arabia	BA
	Graduate studies in Teaching and Curriculums at King Saud University for seven years.	Riyadh Saudi Arabia	MA

Alhussan	Enrolled at Prince Sultan private university to study business management for 3 years.	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	
	Attended Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic University for 4 years.	Riyadh, Saudi Arabia	BA

Table 9:1: Table shows the artists' education experience.

They all believe that learning is a continuous process and that self-educating is very important. Based on that, I agree with House's (2012) finding that educated Saudi women have high expectations for their future. This is evident in the life stories of the four artists as they had very high expectations and hopes for their futures.

Society and Traditions. It should be noted that the artists grew up and lived in different regions of Saudi Arabia and from different social environments with different traditions. social environments played a major role in these artists' life stories, as they are all very involved with and inspired by their social environments, and have a sense of responsibility towards them. Hacking (1999) indicates that a person's life story is an explanation of how he/she is constructed by a social practice. Almalluh admitted that there were issues in the society, but not to the point that would make her suffer. She explained,

If a person is aware of his social environment and his life he will be able to make circumstances work in his favour and not say I can't because this is my society. I am the kind of person that if I face a problem I don't lose hope; there is always a way to solve

it...whoever goes everywhere learns about people's problems, and as you know art is all about society, and what the artist can provide society.

For Almalluh, societies cannot imagine what they do not know, so she defended society's lack of awareness of visual arts saying, "you don't blame society; they do not know about visual arts and I don't expect them to."

Albagshi on the other hand emphasizes the role of society in her success, explaining, "If it wasn't for society there would be no Tagreed; society is the real, present, and continued gallery that interacts with Tagreed's work." However, she also indicated that the social context a person lives in could be an obstacle in how goals can be achieved. With the financial, economical, and social changes life circumstances are also getting harder. These contradictions could arise because she wasn't specific about which society she was talking about. I believe that the obstacle she referred to was her social context. Albagshi respects the perspective of the society she lives in to an extent, as she mentioned earlier about being respectful of different views; however, she also appreciates her individuality and wants to pursue her dreams, "I am the queen of myself" she has the freedom in the way she thinks. Alhussan expressed the importance of accepting society's conflicts, she said, "obstacles will face anyone no matter where he is and for each geographical, political, and social location there will be a certain method and path to succeed." She believes that to succeed a person must accept their society's conflicts. She shares with Albagshi a respect for her individuality, though,

Our Saudi society is a group society not an individualized society. We can't live individually, but always in groups, and a decision is made based on the group not the

individual. Even a personal decision affects everyone...ultimately our lives are all completely linked.

The idea of consensual decision making, which involves the community and preferred in Islam in all matters, whether business or family Part of Saudis' loyalty to their religion (Long, 2005). Saudi society is omnipresent, although Almalluh and Binzagr who are older did not seem as bothered by this as the younger artists were, either because of their age or because they never experienced the same issues in their own societies. It is significant that Almalluh's and Binzagr's families are originally from Jeddah, that sea port on the Red Sea and the main departure point to Mecca. This means that it has been always rich with different cultures from around the world.

None of the four artists have been able to predict the reaction of their community to any of their actions and arts. Binzagr thought her first exhibition proposal would be rejected, the first exhibition for a women artist in Saudi, but it was accepted. Almalluh expected the idea of her standing to talk about her artwork during her first solo exhibition to be considered unacceptable by Saudi society, but everyone loved it. Albagshi expected that society wouldn't accept the idea of her photo being posted online or in a newspaper, but some were okay with the idea. Finally, Alhussan expected her type of artwork, Pop Art, to not be accepted but it created a new movement in Saudi visual arts. Albagshi emphasized the importance of planning and setting the stage for any new step, especially for matters linked to society in order to maximize the chances of achieving goals. She likes to make peace with her society.

Although they prepared themselves for the worst, they were surprised by society's good reactions. During Binzagr's first exhibition she received very positive feedback and the acceptance of society was very encouraging for her and she continued to develop her passion. Almalluh and Alhussan were also surprised by society's positive reactions to their work and were

and like Binzagr, motivated by it. All the artists valued society's interaction with their artwork, both during their exhibitions and during the process of the art making itself. Interestingly, society has played a great role in these artists' careers. However, society could be a double-edged sword, as the life stories show that it could act as both obstacle and support.

One important factor the artists have in common, which could help explain how and why they have won their society's support, is the honesty embedded in their art. "This is the only way that you can affect society, through honest art," Almalluh said. They believe that as artists they have a role in society, as Almalluh explained, "the artist doesn't suggest solutions, the artist attracts people's attentions to an idea or an issue in society." In that sense, society is inspirational as well, she added, "everything inspires me; my life, my society, my country." Another thing their artwork has in common is that their subjects all relate to society (figures 9:1, 9:2, 9:3, 9:4).



Figure 9:1: Alhussan, Bad News Poisoning (2013)



Figure 9:2: Almalluh, Head to Head (2010)



Figure 9:3: Binzagr, Kitchen (1981)



Figure 9:4: Albagshi, سوق (2014)

The older the artist is, the more responsibility she seems to feel towards society. Binzagr offers many short courses and workshops in her *Darat* and her artwork is available to the public for free. Almalluh has many concerns about the youth, and many suggestions of how to support them through the arts. She also feels responsible as an artist for getting people closer to the visual arts and making them more aware of the concept. She explained, “This is art, you get moved by it, and when people get moved, society starts to appreciate art... when art moves people, society starts to change...art has a great role to play in changing society.” All these artists’ plans for their futures are aimed at benefitting society. Almalluh had one small issue with the societal norms, regarding interacting and networking with other artists, namely the issue of segregation (Almunajjed,1997; Zuhur, 2012). But this too is changing. As figure 9:5 shows, which was posted in Albagshi’s Instagram account, both genders were intermingling at the Almansouria silent auction in Jeddah. Indeed, building from my experiential knowledge and from everything I am seeing around me, Saudi Arabi is changing faster than the literature can keep up with.



Figure 9:5: At the Almansouria silent auction

The role of tradition in the artists' life stories varied. All four artists respect and understand the value of society's traditions even if some of them don't personally agree with some of the traditions. It should be noted that traditions differ from region to region within Saudi Arabia, and what is considered normal in one region, could be considered abnormal in another. As much as Alhussan and Albagshi felt traditions made their journey as artists harder, Binzagr, on the contrary, found traditions to be a major influence on her artwork. She sees traditions as an important part of Saudi Arabian history that is fading away and deserves to be documented and preserved. Although Binzagr grew up away from the Saudi traditions, she respects the traditions for the sake of her family, "when your family gives you your freedom and shows their trust in you, you should respect this trust by considering the Saudi values and traditions and the family name in everything you do." On her part, like Binzagr, Almalluh also highly respects traditions, she said,

I am traditional in my life. I don't like to do things that are outside of society's norms... unfortunately, people distinguish all of that from development, but development doesn't mean you have to give up your traditions. Why give them up? Honestly, I love to preserve my heritage.

Her hope is to pass on the traditions on to her children, and the upcoming generations. Alhussan and Albagshi, on the other hand, both consider traditions an obstacle. Albagshi said, "I always say that the Saudi woman is the strongest woman on the face of earth. Why? Because we have traditions and customs and many restrictions." She didn't elaborate or give examples but she said encountering such obstacles made her stronger. Meaning given the strong affect of traditions and the system on women's lives it is considered a great achievement. However, their strong personalities have helped them take risks and face challenges because they believe in change, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

McAdams (2001) believes that stories are born, develop, bloom, and eventually die depending on the standards, rules, and traditions that prevail in each society. Although Saudi traditions posed challenges for some of the artists, they overcame them and achieved great things. For McAdams, life stories reflect the culture where they were developed and shared. These life stories show that the Saudi culture is rich and varied in its traditions and norms. The artists' life stories proved that society has played a great role in their lives as artists one way or another. They are trying to balance their passion as artists with their societies' expectations.

Heritage. Although traditions are part of heritage, in this section I focus on material heritage. It seems that heritage influenced these artists to varying degrees and for different reasons. Important factors to note are the different eras they've lived in and their age differences.

Binzagr is a collector. She has a room in the *Darat* called “Majlis” that includes her collection of antiques (figure 9:6) and Saudi Arabian costumes from the different regions (figure 9:7). Her love for heritage influenced the design of the *Darat* from the floor plan to the window design. It has also influenced her artwork such as “Igal Maker” (figure 9:8), which features a craftsman making *igal*, a piece of the Saudi male head dress. In another painting, “Aldereya” (figure 9:9), she depicted the architecture of Aldereya, the old part of the city of Riyadh, and the oldest area in the Najd province.



Figure 9:6: The Arabic traditional Majlis



Figure 9:7: Traditional Saudi costumes



Figure 9:8: Binzagr, Igal Maker (1980)



Figure 9:9: Binzagr, Aldereya (Riyadh) (1980)

Almalluh is a collector in a different way. She collects things like old pots and metal gates, which are part of the heritage that she believes is neglected, but which has meaning for her. She said, “this is an issue I’m facing, but which I feel that most people are not paying attention to, and our identity will fade away if we are not careful...we can’t preserve our identity except with art and culture.” To that end, to preserve this identity, she’s made unique and prized art out of these objects (figures 9:10, 9:11).

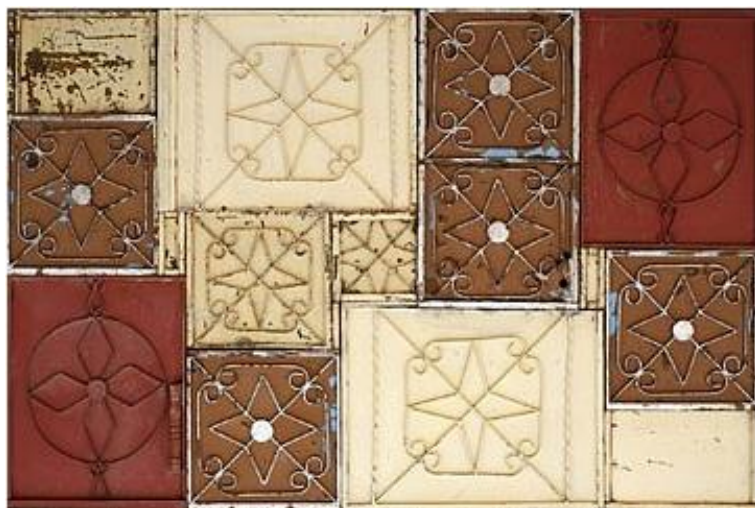


Figure 9:10: Almalluh, Abwab II (2012)



Figure 9:11: Antique chests at Almalluh’s home

Albagshi and Alhussan are not as attached to Saudi heritage as Binzagr and Almalluh. I believe the age difference is one reason. In Albagshi’s case, she finds heritage a beautiful thing, but she didn’t learn about it in a way that made her appreciate it or be influenced by it. On the other hand, Alhussan loves heritage as a subject and in general. Her artwork is influenced by the Saudi heritage (figures 9:12, 9:13, 9:14). Even though she is merely interested and doesn’t have the feeling of responsibility that Almalluh and Binzagr have about preserving the heritage as part of the Saudi identity it has inspired her work.



Figure 9:12: Alhussan, Untitled (2013). Figure 9:13: Alhussan, Untitled (2013)

Figure 9:14: Alhussan, Najd (2013)

Religion. From a postmodern feminist lens, there is a realization that belief and knowledge are culturally constructed is manifest. This applies on how religion was taught to these women. As Lazerg (1988) suggests, it is important to understand how women deal with their underlying religious beliefs in order to understand how it affects their lives. Therefore, and as seen in previous chapters of the artists' life stories, they were all asked about their religious beliefs, and each one responded differently

Binzagr was not comfortable talking about her religious beliefs. She stated clearly and directly, “there are two things I never discuss in public: religion and politics, because I am not an expert.” For Almalluh, learning about Islam was part of her upbringing, as her grandfather was a religious man, she said, “The religion was clear for us so in this regard ...the religion is lenient, and we were raised to believe that it is lenient... Religion is not hypocrisy... religion is a way of life You would even find that some foreigners follow Islam without knowing it; Islam is honesty.”

Almalluh's awareness and the strong Islamic foundation she received early on in her life helped her stay committed despite the exposure to the deferent Islamic movements' influences. Albagshi, with her optimistic view of the world, sees the positive impact of religion, she said,

When religion develops qualities like love for others in me it is a positive thing. Look, I always look at things from a certain perspective so I can cope and move on...if I see it as an obstacle it will be an obstacle, but I feel that religion is love and morals and beautiful concepts...it depends on how you interpret things, how you translate them, your interpretation of things can make you balanced.

Albagshi values believing in a "religion" in general. In her belief, it is important for the human being to have something to resort to, and everyone needs a God or something to believe in since relationships between humans have limits. She believes that believing in God is part of our nature, and something we are born with. She differentiated between religion and religious beliefs as, in her opinion, the second includes human behaviour and societal norms.

Alhussan, who is a strong believer in God, used to link everything that happened to her with her prayers. If it was good she would be grateful, and if not she would take a step back and think about what she was doing wrong. Her strong belief in God made her see life positively and at one point she was thinking of becoming a religious agitator (or promoter). Alhussan wasn't satisfied with the way the Islamic religion was represented, and she believed there are many more positives about it than the version the "Zionist conspiracy" is pushing. Her education at Imam Muhammed ibn Saud Islamic university made her belief in God even stronger, as she studied the holy Quran closely and the life of prophet Mohammed. She said, "there is a clear reality everyone should know, [Islam] is not a political religion that we are all driven to... Religion is

about morality and justice.” From the artists’ responses to my question about their religion, their views seem to confirm Moaddel (2006) and Yamani’s (2009) observation of the Saudis’ strong Islamic identity. Nonetheless, as we shall see, what Almalluh, Albagshi, and Alhussan share is an independent view of religion as they are fully aware that their views are different from those of others around them.

As Saudi artists, religion has had an effect one way or another on their work. In Binzagr’s case, since the subjects of her artwork are mainly scenes of social life it features many human figures, but in her opinion,

I can’t stop painting human figures in all my paintings because I paint life and life is the human being. If I stop depicting human figures then I can’t paint these subjects...I am documenting life and life is the human being. Because I also believe I am not painting something wrong, I am not creating and not copying the creator... I portray what expresses the human being, like his movement, hand, and other things.

Binzagr is challenging the concept of reason and truth, which Moghissi’s (1999) suggestions for the postmodern feminism perspectives. As mentioned, many people in Saudi Arabia are still affected by the prohibition of depicting living being or portraits, influenced by their Islamic belief; however, this belief is open to different interpretations (Alatoom, 2007). A Saudi art therapist Awad Alyamy (1995) explains the reason behind avoiding representing living objects in Saudi arts, as, “the idea isn’t expression but appreciation of the perfection of Allah’s creation” (p. 202). According to Aljebreen (2015), Binzagr’s style in her work was the reason why she didn’t have issues religiously when she was depicting figures, as most of her work, as mentioned, is not realistic. She describes her style as naivistic (figure 9:15).



Figure 9:15: Binzagr, Shaving Ceremony (1973)

In Almalluh's case, she was inspired by the religious movement in Saudi Arabia that began in the 1980s. In her art, she used the black gloves that women were encouraged to wear by the Islamic promoters in the 80s (figure 9:16) as well as religious lecture tapes in her series "Food for Thought" (figure 9:17).



Figure 9:16: Almalluh, Sky Cloud (2009)



Figure 9:17: Almalluh, Food for Thought—*Jehad & Thalal* (2015)

Albagshi's artwork has not been appreciated at her place of work. She believes that is because of the traditional Islamic notion that drawing living objects is forbidden. Such criticism,

however, hasn't affected either Albagshi's beliefs or her artwork. Interestingly, her artwork was inspired by the Holy Quran. For example, "Eleven Planets" (2010), one of Albagshi's paintings, was influenced by a word in the Holy Quran "*ahada 'ashara kawkaban*" which means Eleven planets and illustrates eleven women in the middle of a discussion about their issues with men (figure 9:18).



Figure 9:18: Albagshi, Eleven Planets (2010)

The exhibition "It is a Moon and not an Orange" (2014) is yet another example of the Holy Quran's influence on Albagshi's artwork. The idea behind the title is the notion that human beings have their own perceptions and interpretations of things, which might differ from one person to another. She was inspired by the Holy Quran as there are words repeated in different contexts, each time with different meanings. One of Alhussan's art pieces was inspired by the misconceptions surrounding women who wear the Saudi veil, which is a black outfit that consists of three pieces which cover the whole body. Almunajjed (1997) explains the reason for wearing it, "decent dress forms important manners for Muslims" (p. 47). Alhussan expresses through her painting "Still Funny" (figure 9:19) that under this cover there might be a beautiful, kind, and

funny woman, but people might misjudge her because of her cover. She doesn't like how people, especially those who are from a different culture, judge women who wear it. I believe Alhussan means describing them as weak and sad when they don't know what they really feel.



Figure 9:19: Alhussan, Still Funny (2012),

When it comes to the effect of religion on the artists' life journeys, Alrasheed (2013) blames the culture and ways of being and practicing Islam in Saudi Arabic – also known as Wahhabism - for Saudi women being behind compared to other women around the world. Based on the findings of my research, however, none of the artists mentioned that religion was a major obstacle on their journey. On the contrary, religion was an inspiration for these artists more than it was a wall that cannot be penetrated. It was a lived entity to be interpreted from their respective locations as female artists, nonetheless and more than a dead book to be simply memorized.

Role of Gender

From the artists' life stories, traditions seem to impact their gender role. Not only has each artist faced different issues as a woman, but their varying ages have led to their experiencing equally various dilemmas. Being a woman was challenging for Alhussan in the light of customs and traditions. Therefore, she had to be very careful with every step she took in her career, as she

was wary of being taken advantage of. However, the bright side of being a woman is that she has received offers she wouldn't otherwise have received, as some people and organizations specifically target and support Saudi women. Albagshi has also struggled through her career because of gender issues, but it has never made her hate being a woman, "I love that I am a woman and that I am strong. I always say that the Saudi women are the strongest women on the face of the earth. Why? Because we have traditions and customs and many restrictions." She believes that in the past, women were raised to be dependent, she explained, "we have an issue: they always believe that they should control you, even your thinking. They must think for you and if you think on your own, that's wrong." A skepticism about power as referred by postmodern feminist perspective which Moghissi (1999) suggested as well. This is also what Salwa Alkhateeb has said, "[a] woman is made to feel she cannot survive without a man" (as cited in House, 2012, p. 77). Albagshi raised this matter because she believes in her independence and ability, which I will elaborate on later in this chapter.

As for the visual arts field, Alsenan (2007) argues that the development of the Saudi female visual arts movement came late compared to that of male artists, as men had more opportunities to develop as artists and were offered scholarships to study either in the country or abroad. None of the four artists mentioned opportunities being given to male artists in lieu of being offered to them. According to Alrosayes (2010) out of Saudi artists born in the 1970s' list, 19 out of 24 on the are females. These lists show how the number of Saudi female artists has grown.

Binzagr, Almalluh, and Alhussan were not satisfied with the image of Saudi women in the Western world and were hoping to change it. It became a motivation for them, and each one has dealt with it differently. Binzagr and Alhussan through their art, and Almalluh through her participations abroad. Almalluh said,

My main concern was that I wanted to do my best, and when I participate abroad to participate at a level that honours the Saudi woman and honours my country. When people abroad meet with me they wonder why they hear different things so I only wanted to improve the image of the Saudi woman and of course to express myself, this was my ambition.

Almalluh was invited to participate at the Saatchi exhibition in London, which was an event for women artists only from around the world. She said, “When they consider me to be at their own level and at the same time consider us a backward society and against women, this is a good thing for us as Saudis.” Alhussan and Binzagr used their artwork to deliver their messages to Western societies. Binzagr painted “Zabun” (1969) (figure 9:20) to present the Saudi woman in all her pride and glory. She also painted “The Wealth of the Nations” (1969) (figure 9:21) as she wanted to portray the value of women within their tribes.

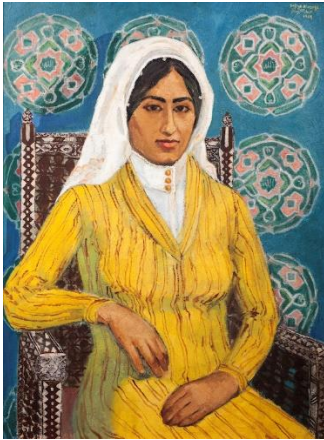


Figure 9:20: Binzagr, Zabun (1969)



Figure 9:21: Binzagr, The Wealth of the Nations (1969)

Alhussan delivers her messages differently, raising questions and discussions through her paintings. She elaborated on her NASA (2013) (figure 9:22) painting, explaining that it means “I

will reach the moon even with this veil, and I am happy and proud”. Also about her painting “Still Funny” (2013) (figure 9:19), she said,

There are a lot of covered women who have a beautiful side to them which no one knows... you don’t know who this woman is and you don’t know how funny she might be and kind, but you judged her because she is covered.

Clearly, these artists wanted to open the West’ eyes to the real or the fair image of the Saudi woman.



Figure 9:22: Alhussan, NASA (2012)

Albagshi also addresses the issue of gender in her artwork. All her artwork includes women, and so presents issues related to gender and traditions directly and indirectly. One of the few paintings of hers that includes men named “Smile so the Photo Will Look Better” (2013) (figure 9:23), which showed a group of Saudi Arabian men and women having their photo taken. The women are off to the side, distant and shy. She wanted to show the reality of how men and women interact in public.



Figure 23: Albagshi, Smile so the Photo Will Look Better (2013)

Ironically, Almalluh believes Saudi society's perception of art is one of the reasons women don't face many issues as artists. In her opinion, society sees the visual arts as a luxury, and something you do in your free time, since they underestimate visual arts. In Alhababi's (2012) study, the women of Asir believed that it was their job to decorate and paint the walls after men finished building the house. The French feminist Simone De Beauvoir (2012) believed that in the social construction of gender power is essential, and in the dominant social construction men are the Subject and women are the Object or the Other. The role of these women is clearly socially constructed as it is inherited from one generation to another. This perspective of women could be one of the reasons women don't face overwhelming obstacles as artists in Saudi Arabia. Ultimately, these artists are aware of their position as women in the society. They understand where their limitations are, how far they can push forward, and take advantage of the opportunities they encounter. As House (2012) puts it, "It is not a war between the sexes, but rather a proxy war between modernizers and conservatives over what sort of Saudi Arabia both sexes will inhabit" (p. 72).

Emerging Themes

Life story narratives of Saudi female artists, as Nilsen (1996) suggested, helped form an understanding of the status of women within the Saudi society, whatever the periods and places the artists lived in. They share their worries, experiences, and personal explanations through their stories, and offer a close look at the connections of the social structure. The following themes emerged, some of which the four artists have in common and some not. I also discuss the artists' sense of self.

Change. Focusing on four Saudi artists of different ages and from different regions of Saudi Arabia has resulted in a certain diversity of views. However, these female artists nevertheless have many things in common, the most outstanding being their motive to change their society's view of arts in general and visual arts in particular. Feminists in the Third World and Middle East share the same demands with First World, North American, and European feminists, which is positive change. These four women are well educated and, as seen in Almunajjed's study, education has been a determining factor of social change for Saudi women. Lippman's (2012) categorization of women in Saudi Arabia includes two groups which apply to the studied artists: a group which understands the possibility of change and a demand for it, but cautious in moving forward, which applies to Binzagr and Almalluh, and the smallest, but fastest rising, and possibly the most influential group (as its members are apt and able to use the Internet, attract media attention, and actively aim to transform society), which applies to Alhussan. I would place Albagshi in between these two groups as she is careful in her approach yet very active on social media and takes advantage of any chance she can get. As Albagshi's commented about her experience at work, change is as hard for her colleagues as changing their own name. Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi asserts that Arab identity has been constructed

in a way that regards change as threatening to the moral order, and this perception impedes both the development of democracy and the emancipation of women (Graham-Brown, 2001, p. 31).

Talking about this notion, Binzagr said,

the time has changed now, maybe I am living my own way but I can't say that women from my generation in my family were living the same way. I can't because time is changing...everything changes with the small community, the large community changes... changes come from inside the small community, which is the family.

As an artist interested in antiques and vintage, Almalluh sees change through objects. She sees the Saudi society being against change so for her showcasing her artwork which are objects that have changes throughout time as a lesson to the society that change occurs in our lives either we like it or not. She also wanted to emphasize that religion should never be an obstacle for change and on the contrary it is compatible with all times. Interestingly, all these four artists brought something new or unfamiliar into their art and I believe it was one of the reasons for their success.

Privacy. The attitude to privacy differed among the artists; the older the artist was the more private she was, but in different ways. As I mentioned earlier the concept of the “private” self is not universal, but defined differently depending on the culture (Bruner, 1986) and in Saudi Arabia Islamic traditions encourage privacy (Graham, 1991). Binzagr was the most private of the four participating artists. She wasn't comfortable at the beginning talking about her family and at one point she asked me to stop recording. When she received a copy of the interview she also asked me to delete some sections. When I asked her about the obstacles she's faced she only

talked about how she overcame them and she was overall very diplomatic in her responses.

Almalluh was less private, but she also at one point asked me to stop recording. Concerns about privacy, or a desire to respect the societal norms, were also evident when she talked about not wanting to have her photo published in the press. Albagshi was more open about herself than Almalluh, but she respected the privacy of her family. Lastly, Alhussan was very direct, very clear, and unhesitant when talking about her life experience. I argue that family reputation is one of the main factors for Binzagr's privacy concerns as she comes from a large, well-known family in Jeddah. Also, she might be trying to be diplomatic to preserve her position in society.

Almalluh also comes from a big family and has her own position in society, as a mother and a wife, and nationally and internationally as an artist, so she is also careful about what she says. In addition to that, Almalluh and Binzagr have had more life experience and can imagine what the consequences would be if they revealed something they would later regret. Both Binzagr and Almalluh respect traditions, and privacy is one of the Saudi traditions (Graham, 1991). Albagshi and Alhussan who are only five years of age different are more eager to prove themselves and proud of what they've become, what they've accomplished and how. It is worth mentioning that Albagshi and Alhussan come from more conservative families, who has strong commitments to traditions and some resistance to modernism, than Binzagr and Almalluh. However, that hasn't influenced them to become more private.

External Influence. All four artists' life stories indicated international influence, each in a different form. Binzagr was raised in Egypt, studied in England and travelled in Europe.

Almalluh, took private lessons from foreign art teachers, and lived and studied abroad for three years. She has also read many books in visual arts written in English by European and North American authors. Albagshi learned visual arts from foreign artists in Saudi Arabia and abroad, and has read many translated works of philosophy. Finally, Alhussan, who is the youngest, grew

up closer to other cultures through satellite TV channels and the Internet, became interested in hip-hop and is open to other cultures. The younger the artist is, one may conclude, the more active she is online and more influenced by non-Saudi cultures.

Sense of Self. These artists are aware of what they are capable of and what they aspire. When they talk about themselves and about sensitive issues, the younger the artist is the more she reveals about her feelings and the changes in her personality. For example, Alhussan didn't hesitate to share her feelings on certain events in her life, saying,

There was a silent moment between me and my self, not happiness, but there was a feeling of satisfaction. I was overwhelmed with all this beautiful appreciation I was receiving for doing something I love, this was actually the happiest moment of my life.

Binzagr, Albagshi, and Alhussan indicated that they are capable of being *independent*. Binzagr insisted on her independence, saying, "sometimes there are responsibilities and I love to handle everything myself... maybe I lost many opportunities with my rejections at that time, but I gained myself." Albagshi also said, "when I travelled to Riyadh when I was studying for my Master's, the most beautiful thing was that I discovered that Tagreed can do everything on her own."

The postmodern perspective is stressed in the differences. They all recognize that they are *different* from others around them. Although Binzagr was the most private of the four artists she wanted to emphasize the fact that not all women of her generation in her family were like her, "maybe I am living my own way, but I can't say that women from my generation in my family were living the same way." Almalluh is aware that since she was little she saw things differently and even when remembering things, she remembered details that others wouldn't. When

Albagshi talked about her workplace and the issues she was facing she explained how she feels different than others around her. that she feels she appreciated being different and being herself no matter what others think, “I don’t care to look better in the eyes of others because gaining other people’s satisfaction is impossible, I mean when your goal is to satisfy others, you won’t be yourself, you will be them, this is very important.” Alhussan explained how she used to perceive herself when she was younger and how she realized she was different from others,

I felt comfortable being like everyone else even with what I wore, with my future goals, it was like a template that I forced myself into just to be like others. At one point, I started to get bored, I started to feel that I am different, “I am special.” I felt the urge to let it out so I decided to be stubborn and do the opposite of everything others did and disagree with it.

She believes that this stubbornness made her have her own space to find herself and figure out who she is and what she wants in life. She even raised her children to believe in their individuality. She said, “we have the right to be different, we have the right to be ourselves so we can live a comfortable life.”

When it came to *self-recognition* as artists, it differed from one artist to another. Starting with Binzagr, the first recognized female artist in the history of Saudi Arabia, she was modest when it came to calling herself an “artist.” In telling her life story, she mentioned that she stopped selling her artwork after her second solo exhibition. She said,

Being the first Saudi women artist to officially hold an exhibition she used to be interviewed by researchers and journalist. She values her efforts, and is aware of the value of her artwork, and has high expectations for her future. Almalluh on the other hand, doesn’t consider

herself an artist because she feels that she is not there yet. She has more to do, in her opinion, and since she was young she's never liked it when she's been called an artist, "I didn't see it that way, all I knew is that I love what I'm doing and I can't stop, but I wasn't seeing myself as an artist as they used to say." Even though she admitted, "As far as I can remember and since I held a pen I've been scribbling, since I was very little." Today, although her work is in several museums in Europe, she modestly declined calling herself an artist. Albagshi was totally different, she is fully aware of her talent and proudly calls herself an artist. "I started to become famous in the area...I found Tagreed's style." she is self-aware and made a series of paintings around the concept "I float above everything and see myself." What she shares with Alhussan is the idea of finding oneself. She said, "I need to find myself in order to start". Both artists emphasized the importance of their individuality in their societies.

Interestingly, Alhussan shared the same idea as with Almalluh that is loving what she does no matter what it's called. Both artists use new material in their artwork which makes their artwork new and different. Alhussan said, "I didn't realize and I didn't see it as art... okay I express myself through it and there is a philosophy behind it, but I didn't think that people would ask me about it." She underestimated herself and was surprised at the Saudi audience's reaction.

They are all *persistent*, determined, and not afraid of taking risks. For example, when Almalluh decided to display her photograms, she said, "I am the type of person who takes risks, I don't usually worry." Another example is when Alhussan sold her watch to participate in an exhibition. They love to face challenges but are smart with their choices when it comes to their families and societies. They understand their priorities and limits. Slatkin (1993) made a profound study of women artists. These artists suffered from sexism but had proven themselves through their strength and persistence.

All manifested a *sense of responsibility*, toward their families, society, education, and most importantly, as artists. Almalluh even thought about the younger generation, “you must be a good role model for younger girls.” The older the artist, the more she knew what she wanted and planned well for it. Also, because the older the artist is the more experienced in life and her profession she gets.

Privilege. Throughout the interviews none of the artists expressed personal financial difficulties. It could be either for privacy reasons or that it wasn't an issue throughout their artistic life journeys. Only Alhussan talked about one event when she didn't want to involve her family financially when she wanted to participate to showcase her artwork in an event. She wanted to be solely financially responsible and decided to take the risk by selling her own piece of jewelry to use the money to be able to participate. She didn't want to involve any one else in case things didn't work out as she had hoped. It is important to put in mind that one of the most common traditions in the Saudi family is that male members, mostly the father or the husband, are financially responsible for the rest of the family. Knowing this, however, all four artists were not open about the subject of the financial support. It was clear that some of these artists were privileged more than others which could be for better financial states, good connections, or social position. For example, Binzagr built her own museum and as she mentioned she was financially supported by her family. Her family is also known across the Kingdom for their mercantile affairs which supports her social position. This shows that having such advantages and privileges can support their artistic careers.

The Artists' Uniqueness

Since each artist lived in different places, this makes her life story different. Each one of these artists' life stories is unique which also could be a strong factor for the artist's success. Starting with Binzagr, the fact that she was one of the very few female artists in the history of Saudi Arabia is a great factor but she was also very smart about how she used her position to advantage. She didn't make art for art's sake, but rather used visual arts to preserve traditions that she believed were fading. It became a documentation of the history of the culture in a very beautiful way. Moreover, she is fully aware of her position as one of the first female artists in Saudi Arabia and the value of the context of her artwork, so she established a museum that would both preserve her artwork and at the same time support the community.

Almalluh has a solid foundation of knowledge in visual arts and art criticism. She is very creative and understands the value of an object in itself. Her type of work is very new to the Saudi society so it has created discussions, which is what she was aiming for. Saudis are now more open and when it comes to art they are more interested than before, especially the younger generations.

Albagshi has an abstract painting style and while some of her paintings might seem simple they carry deep meanings. Her style is different and has its own personality, which makes her art pieces since the beginning of her career link to each other as if they are all related. She is confident, proud, strong and smart in spite of the conservative society she lives in.

When it comes to Alhussan she is the closest to society. Her Pop Art wasn't seen as "art" either by her or by the society because of the simple and smart way she introduced her art to the society, her work featuring on people's cellphone covers, shirts, pillows, etc. She is also active on social media, which is the fastest way of reaching the largest number of people in the Saudi society.

Alhussan was enjoying herself and not expecting the attention she got, but the subjects of some of her art pieces ended up generating discussion among Saudis and Non-Saudis.

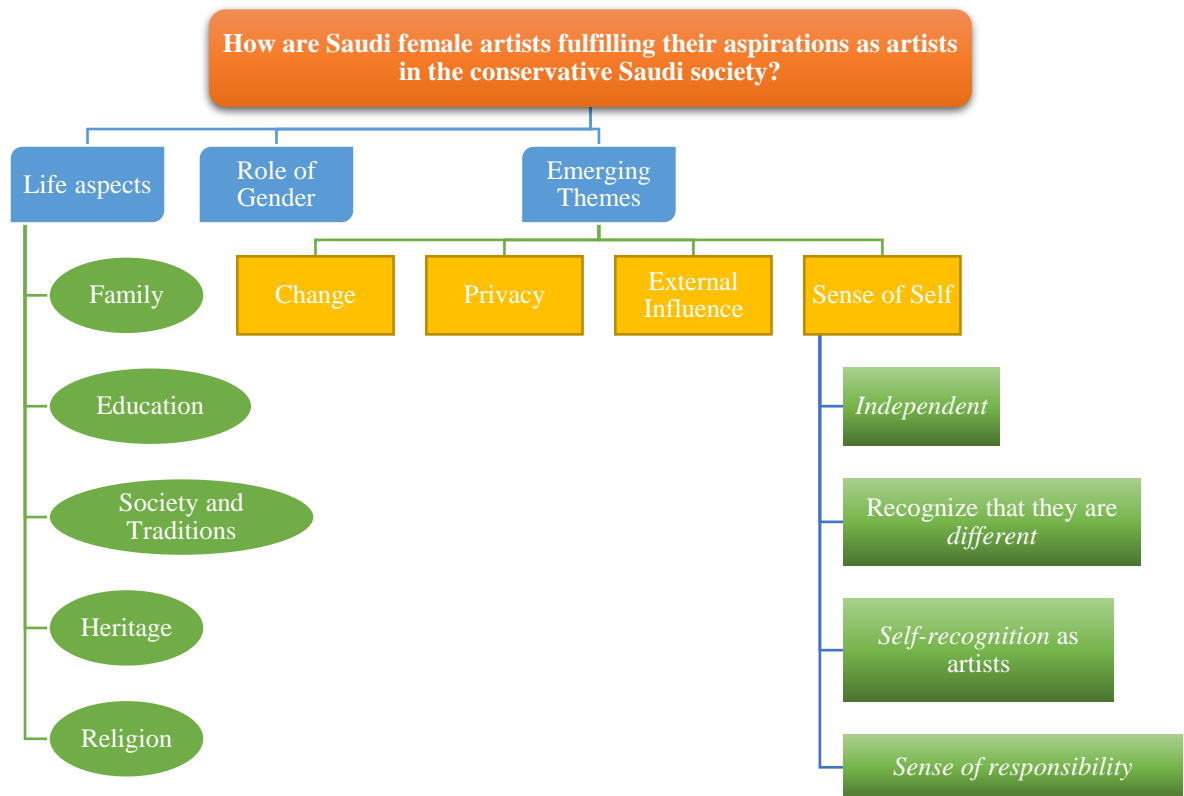


Diagram shows the main discussion points

In this chapter, I discussed how Saudi women artists were able to fulfill their aspirations (see the above diagram). I discussed the role of family, education, society, heritage, and religion and how all of these life aspects had an affect on their lives on a personal level and as artists. I also discussed the impact of the role of gender in their journey then I presented the emerging themes from the artists' life stories. These artists have their own uniqueness in their stories, artworks, experiences... etc. and this uniqueness supported their success as artists in their societies. I will discuss my reflections more thoroughly in the next and last chapter.

Chapter 10

Reflections, Limitations, and Contributions: A Conclusion

In this thesis, I explored Saudi female artists' life stories. I focused on the life stories of four artists, namely, Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan. My aim was to understand how these women artists succeeded in Saudi Arabia where women face many life challenges. In addition to the role gender may have played in their lives as artists, I also aimed to understand the role played by family, formal education, society, traditions, heritage, and religion. I believe the literature in the field of Saudi visual arts is missing a great deal of women artists' experiences and I believe ignoring it in education, as Eisner (2001) explained in terms curriculums, is limiting and affecting the choices that young Saudi women artists consider for their futures.

Through the life story narrative approach, we are in a position to learn how a person experiences and comprehends his or her life over the years, and to identify connections among different life stories and certain stages of life (Tonkin, 1995). I first interviewed these four Saudi women artists. These interviews took place online and at the artists' homes. The questions were divided into three sections. The first was on general background, key life events, and about their artwork. The second section was about the most important people in their lives, their future, life challenges, and personal ideology. The third section was about the artists' life experiences, including their journeys to become artists and the role of family, education, society, traditions, heritage, and religion.

To present the findings I followed the life story narrative approach. Then for the discussion and understanding of these life stories, I drew on the literature and used postmodern

feminist theory and social construction as lenses for my analysis. I answered the research question and followed a coding system to identify the emerging and common themes.

In this chapter, I present a conclusion for the thesis, which includes my personal reflections on the main findings, the methodology, and theoretical framework. I also discuss the limitations of the study and finally I end with pedagogical implications and contributions.

Reflections

Reflections on the Main Findings. Although the artists have many things in common as discussed in the previous chapter, they also have differences. For starter, the level of flexibility during the interviews was different. Generally, the younger the artist the more flexible and less private she was. They had different background, they grew up in different areas and were raised by parents with different life experiences. For an example, Binzagr's father was a merchant but Albagshi's was a teacher. When it came to the artists focus in their artwork they were different as well. Binzager aimed to document the Saudi heritage. Almalluh was delivering her messages to the society through preserving heritage and presenting it in an artistic way. Albagshi, was in self-explorations and leant on personal expressions. Finally, Alhussan artwork included indirect messages about the Saudi society giving the audience the chance to interpret them from their own perspectives. These artists have their own uniqueness so in this section I discuss the answer to the main question: *How are Saudi female artists fulfilling their aspirations as artists in the conservative Saudi society?* To answer this question, I will take one artist at a time.

Safeya Binzagr. Binzagr was one of the first women artists to have an exhibition with a grand opening attended by the prince of the region at that time. Binzagr wanted to make her mark, so she organized this event and took taking a risk because she wasn't sure what the reaction would be. This turned into a responsibility as she became a "source" for researchers and

journalists from around the world. Her family was fully supportive of her throughout her journey, giving her both moral and financial support. I say financial because since she stopped selling her artwork early on in her career there must have been another source of income as she wasn't working. Her family supported her education abroad and the building of the Darat I argue that although Binzagr repeated many times during the interview that she never thought that she would be where she is today, she stopped selling her artwork so her visitors would be able to see it. She also mentioned that she didn't want to sell them because she feels that all her efforts would then have been wasted, which wasn't what she'd had in mind. I assume that documenting the Saudi social traditions and everyday life through her artwork was a motive that developed after her experiences abroad. She noticed that people didn't know much about Saudi traditions and even less about Saudi women and regularly underestimated them. She wanted to deliver a message, which was, as she put it: "we are here, we have a beautiful culture and women have pride and are respected." So, she worked hard and was very cautious with the credibility of the information collected and then presented in her artwork. She wanted to deliver faithful, well researched and detailed information about events and circumstances. After that she preserved her artwork to give as many people as possible, including researchers and journalists, the chance to learn from it, rather than to view it as art. She also had her work published in books in English and French and sold them abroad. She preserved her work in Darat Safeya Binzagr and made it free to the public. Even though it is a museum, the name she chose for it and preferred to use is "Darat" which is an Arabic name, simple and traditional to make it closer to the society and more familiar. I believe the subject of her artwork was one of the main factors for her success, as the younger Saudi generation and non-Saudis learned about aspects of the history of Saudi culture, while the older generations and who remembered these times felt nostalgic. The fact that her

artwork related closely to Saudi society and was seen as being not only acceptable but precious and played a great role in her success.

Binzagr was the oldest of the four artists, which means that she has faced many challenges with all the social and economic changes in Saudi Arabia. Although she was very reticent mentioning the obstacles she's overcome, they were obvious from what she did say and from the fact that she was such a strong woman. She was determined to move forward with the encouragement of society and the support and trust of her family. She has created and preserved her reputation and her position in society respecting others and being respected by them in turn.

Maha Almalluh. Almalluh preferred to delay being active as an artist in Saudi visual arts community until she felt ready and more focused. Almalluh liked to be focused and when she did something she wanted to do it right. When she became active again, she did so with a solid foundation in visual arts and a readiness to take risks. Although she said, "I never thought that my artwork would be in museums one day" I argue that from her experience of travelling, visiting museums, following up with the visual art movements globally, and reading works of art criticism, she developed knowledge of what is demanded and appreciated as art. She uses her experience and knowledge to display valuable objects that carry meaning and cultural and social history in a creative way. Almalluh had another way than Binzagr of documenting parts of the Saudi history, namely, by using existing objects. She was very creative and open to new materials and techniques which made her keep looking for a new experience. I believe that her creativity was one of the main factors of her success. By sharing such new materials and subjects with society she created a new understanding of the concept of art.

Her motive was to preserve parts of history for the upcoming generations, to learn about and what better place for an artwork to be preserved than in a museum. I believe that, like Binzagr,

throughout her travels she noticed that the Saudi culture needed to be acknowledged. Her artwork had always created discussions during her exhibitions, both in Saudi Arabia among Saudis and abroad among non-Saudis.

Although Almalluh took risks when it came to sharing her artwork, she was very cautious when it came to taking steps and moving forward. She was supported by her family and her art practice was encouraged by society. She is determined, passionate and believed in herself, which helped her throughout her long journey.

Tagreed Albagshi. Albagshi was given important responsibilities at a very early age and went through important milestones like marriage and motherhood while she was still going to school. She never gave up and I believe that her self-awareness and appreciation of herself partially developed through her love of reading. She was determined to develop her skills even with her busy life commitments and even though her support system didn't seem to share her views on visual arts. She was smart about knowing how to achieve her goals without creating conflicts. She worked hard to prove herself and the value of her passion. I assume that her interest was not taken seriously by her family and colleagues so she became determined prove herself and to gain respect and success as an artist.

Albagshi was determined to find a personal. She was on a quest to find her voice through visual arts. Through her artwork, she is in dialogue with her own self as well as thinking of the social issues that surround her. Although her style is simple it always carries deep meaning she tries to combine it with her writings. Through her artwork she can deliver not only her voice but her emotions for the audience to feel. The simplicity of the style of her paintings makes you stand still for a long time in front of them. It makes you think deeply rather than discuss loudly. She expressed that she suffered from traditions and from the collective way of life as she wants to

express her individuality. I argue that her struggle was a factor in developing her motive to work harder to achieve more and succeed. I believe her success was a result of the combination of her style, which Saudi society was not used to, and the deep meanings her artworks carry. Add to that her friendly personality and her willingness to share with the audience the process of her art making, making them feel part of it. Finally, there's her smart way of dealing with society to achieve her goals, which also require hard work which she is willing for.

Fida Alhussan. The time it took to reach the point of success varied among the four artists in focus. For Alhussan it was short. Like Albagshi, Alhussan was on a journey to find herself and her voice through art and I believe she was still in this phase. She struggled with this earlier in her life but, as she said, when she stepped out of her comfort zone she started to find herself. She became more determined. Although some of her relatives were artists, she was looking for people who would “understand her language.” This wasn't a language of words but of art, which she didn't deal with as art but as freedom and “fun.” She was very creative in her artwork and in the way she displayed and shared it. She was very active on social media from the beginning, then increasingly active regarding self-promotion. Social media, especially Instagram, plays an important role in Saudi society, and for artists like Alhussan it was an opportunity in two ways. The first was that she found those who spoke her language and appreciated her artwork, which encouraged her to exhibit her work. Second, it was a good way of marketing her work, exhibitions, and activities. She was/is very active on Instagram, sharing not only her artwork, but her opinions and interests, with her followers.

When she first shared her work with Saudi society, Pop Art was new for the audience. But the way she entered the Saudi visual art community wasn't as an artist who wanted to share her philosophy, but as an artist who simply wanted to add beauty to their living spaces and everyday

lives. Whether she did this intentionally or not it worked and her work became popular. This way she simplified the concept of visual arts in Saudi society.

I would say that she dealt with visual arts in two ways: first, deep down she understood that visual arts carry meaning, a philosophy, but her goal was not to preserve it and display it in exhibitions. Second, she commercialized art, created artwork that is influenced by our cultures and attracts viewers, especially the younger generations. The subjects of some of her artwork show how profound she can go and how creative she is, but she has chosen to simplify the subject matter in most of her artwork, and focus on beauty, meaning her artwork contains many beautiful patterns from different cultures, beautiful women, beautiful colours, etc. which would attract young people to own either an artwork or an object that features a print of one of her art works.

Summary. From the life stories of the participating four Saudi female artists I see that Saudi female artists fulfilled their aspirations based on the circumstances and traditions of their immediate environment. Sometimes it could be complicated and there were obstacles in the way, but they seem to have overcome them with persistence and strength. They all love their societies and their families and consider them when working. It seems that not all the artists' immediate environs are conservative and in the cases where they are, the artists were wise and careful not to create conflict in their societies. Society's approval and support is a big part of their success so they need to keep it. They all grew up practicing visual arts since they were little. Then they developed their skills and established a foundation learning from other artists' experiences. After that they displayed their work in public and received good feedback.

Family played a great role in these artist's journeys, supporting them, appreciating their talents, and respecting their passions. Also, education was important, education in general as well

as education as artists to develop their skills. The society, as we saw throughout this thesis, is a key to success. It is true that the society inspired the artist in their artwork but more than that and what is very important is how they could develop a connection between the society and their artwork. The artists in question did so by using topics inspired by society and also by generating conversations and interactions around their art. Traditions are linked to the society, and as traditions differ from one region to another the role of traditions for the artists would be contingent upon the immediate environs of each artist. Traditions were inspirational but also sometimes created obstacles for the artists. Even though they overcame these obstacles their experiences were sometimes made harder.

Although religion didn't seem to be a comfortable topic for them to discuss, as far as I could tell, religion (Islam) appears to have had the least impact on these artists compared to the other factors discussed. It was sometimes inspirational, as reflected in their artwork. As women, each participating artist had a different experience—some saw their gender as a benefit and others as a drawback, as discussed in the previous chapters. Their artwork reflects their femininity and their interest in women's social issues and traditions.

As seen, the four artists share many factors underlying their successes, such as being educated, enjoying family support since they were little, and respecting society's norms and traditions while being eager for change. They also had personality features in common, such as persistence, belief in themselves, risk-taking, independence, honesty, and a sense of responsibility as artists and as members of society.

Reflection on the Methodology. The life story approach helped me understand the four Saudi female artists' life experiences as artists. Although they revealed a great deal of information about their lives, they were not totally open, especially with regard to their personal

histories and families. I believe that there was much that wasn't revealed by the artists—to some of my questions that they didn't want to answer they would respond diplomatically things along the lines of “I don't remember” or “I have a bad memory.” I heard these sentences from all four artists.

As a Saudi woman myself, I totally understand the importance of privacy so I didn't push them further. I believe that they accepted meeting with me and participating in this study based on the fact that they were chosen and because they are artists. Therefore, maybe they assumed all the questions would be about their experience as artists. I say that because I noticed when I asked them about their life's key events they would try to find a link between these events and visual arts. It could be unintentional, but it could also be another friendly way of telling me that “this is the reason why you are here today and this is why we accepted this study, because we are artists.” Although they were remarkably forthcoming in telling me their life stories, which I greatly appreciate, I understand that this kind of interview is not what they were used to. The life story narrative approach is challenging and would in this case have needed further preparation, e.g. explaining the approach in more detail to the respondents and taking more time to build trust in order to gain more detailed information.

Personal Lessons Learned

Throughout this study, I have learned many lessons both personally—about myself as an artist, educator, Saudi woman, and as a researcher.

As an artist, looking back at my own experience in the light of the four women artist's life stories, I learned two lessons: that I hadn't been determined enough—this was maybe because I am not as passionate as they are—and that I had focused more on the technique than on content

and meaning. However, I have learned from these artists that it is important for an artwork, no matter how simple it is or from what material it is made, to carry a meaning and the closer this meaning or message reflect the concerns of society the more effective it seems.

I also learned that success as an artist does not come at a certain time or stage in life, nor in a certain place. It comes as a result of believing in yourself and your talent and working hard. I had been focused on exploring the opportunities around me, not thinking about exploring myself.

As an art educator, I believe that teaching the life stories of artists is important. For a student to learn what artists in the past have experienced and what challenges artists in the present time face would develop a higher appreciation for arts and artists. As a Saudi educator focusing on women artists' experiences, I believe it is particularly important for these to be part of the curriculum. Students will learn about visual arts, understand the value of its role in society, and develop an appreciation for it at an early age. Another important point is that from the way these artists talked about visual arts and the role of the artists it was clear that their knowledge is socially constructed.

As a Saudi woman, I have learned that there is rapid change in the status of women in the country and that *change* is still in progress. Also that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in regards to studies and research about Saudi women.

From a researcher's point of view, studying these Saudi women artists' life stories—from interviewing to reading and retelling their stories and exploring the way they think and work—was a beautiful experience that I enjoyed. At the introduction of this dissertation I explained that conducting this study affected me personally, as it changed the way I see myself and my understanding of what I'm passionate about. In researching other women's life stories, unintentionally I have come to learn and know my own story as a person, as an artist, as a woman and as a mother. Research, it seems, affects in ways that go beyond that which is articulated in

writing, and certainly has limitations and pedagogical implications, the last two sections of the thesis.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on four female Saudi artists from different generations and different regions. These four don't represent all Saudi women artists either of their generations or from their regions. Nor do they represent Saudi women in general.

A significant issue this research had to deal with (and I believe subsequent research) was privacy. Had it not being for the issue of privacy in Saudi society, I believe these female artists could have given me more details about their life histories. The fact that I have the same background as the artists could have played a role in building trust, but maybe it rather caused them not to explain certain crucial points because they believed that I already knew and understood the situation. During the interview they repeatedly said, "you know."

The stories behind their art pieces are part of the data, but analysis of the artwork isn't. Sharing the life stories of female artists in Saudi Arabia, for me, will open doors for young women artists to pursue their ambitions as artists and researchers. Simply put, in conclusion, when they share their challenges, these artists will be better understood by society and may be more appreciated both as artists and as women.

Research Contributions and Pedagogical Implications

Thinking of the postmodern feminist framework and how this study can contribute to it, I believe that it can contribute to the development of a new Arab/Muslim postmodern feminist perspective. Aziz Azmeh (2009) suggests that imperialists have used Islamists to their political

advantage to justify their economic and social order. I believe it is important to acknowledge, from the ground-up, that with time, systems change for many reasons and that change in economy, politics, etc. leads to social change. The life stories discussed in this thesis provide a sample of women's status in Saudi. Generalizations when it comes to the Arab/Muslim world should be discouraged. As we can see from this study, even within the Saudi society, the role of gender and the status of women vary among the communities based on many factors, like social status, income, family, traditions of the community and education. El-Saadawi (1997) believes that feminist theories tend to homogenize the experiences of Muslim women and can make them the object of feminist critique by viewing their oppression through a Western lens. It is important to consider how women see themselves in such societies and understand their reasons for accepting the way they are living before judging them.

Postmodernism claims that knowledge is socially constructed. Applied to this case we can see that words like conservative, limits, and subordination are also socially constructed. To clarify, it has always been known that the Saudi society is a "conservative" society, but within the Saudi society, we, as Saudis, believe that there are levels of conservativeness and that Saudi society is now a complex mixture of the conservative, the liberal, the secular, etc. Also when it comes to "limits" the extent of limits women have in Saudi Arabia varies on the by laws, society, family, etc. and if these limits do not affect an individual woman's life, she does not consider them. Most Saudi women today have more control over their choices than they did previously. I believe that the status of women in Saudi Arabia is a rich and complex issue, which needs to be studied further.

Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi asserts that *Arab identity* has been conceived in a way that change is seen as threatening to the moral order, impeding both the development of democracy and the emancipation of women (as discussed in Graham-Brown, 2001, p. 31). On the

other hand, this study shows how these women are eager for change. Also, that part of their success can be attributed to their artwork being different and creative in spite of which society did not only view it as acceptable, but encouraged it.

When it comes to feminism, life in Saudi Arabia is different from any other Middle Eastern or Islamic country, therefore women in Saudi Arabia are also different and face different challenges. Most Islamic feminists discuss women's issues in countries like Iran, Egypt, and other countries (see for example El-Saadawi, 1997), but there is less discussion in the literature about Saudi women whose Islamic identity and traditional influence is strong. This study touched on the role of women in Saudi society. It showed how and when she could affect the society and how and when she could be affected by it.

A study such as this will hopefully help raise women's voices in their own society, leading to the issues they face being more considered. Their artwork will be understood and their effort will be more appreciated. Saudi women artists are exhibiting their work internationally, where their stories, combined with their work may help interpret many of the subjects expressed and may increase the appreciation of their work. The amount of work conducted on the topic of Saudi women's lives is increasing, however a significant aspect of this study is that it is conducted by a Saudi woman artist about Saudi women artists. Such a study is a contribution to the Saudi literature, I hope, that can be used in the educational system, as part of the curricula in schools and universities. This study will also contribute to the arts education literature in general. Anderson (1992) recommends that books about women artists should be used in education and not only in art-related courses such as American art history or world art, but also in the field of women's studies. Therefore, this study could be a reference for cultural and social studies as well as Saudi art history studies. Through life stories we can come to understand relations in a specific social system (Bertaux, 1981). We also change the way we see relations in a society as

we define them, and how a person is constructed by a social practice (Hacking, 1999). My ultimate hope – my pedagogical hope – in and through this study is to witness a day in Saudi schools where names like Safeya Binzagr, Maha Almalluh, Tagreed Albagshi, and Fida Alhussan become known and studied from primary schools to university classes. Only then can we talk about liberated (Saudi) women, which is not impossible but its journey has begun.

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Appendix A: Interview Question

The interview will be divided into three sessions, each session lasting one to two hours.

First session:

Tell me about yourself: a) your full name; b) year of birth; c) parents; d) if you have any brothers or/and sisters; e) marital status; f) if you have any children; g) occupation; h) level of education; i) place of residence.

- Choose some of your art pieces, then answer the following:
 - What is the story of this piece?
 - Describe the piece.
 - How did the audience read it?

- Describe in great detail your key life events or moments (as described below):
For each event, describe in detail what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling during the event. Also, try to convey the impact this key event has had on your life story and what this event says about who you are or were as a person. Did this event change you in any way? Please be very specific here.

1. Peak experience: a high point in the life story; the most wonderful moment in your life.
2. Nadir experience: a low point in the life story; the worst moment in your life.
3. Turning points: epiphanies.
4. Earliest memory: one of the earliest memories you have of an event, it doesn't have to seem like an especially important memory.
5. An important childhood memory: any memory from your childhood, positive or negative, that stands out today.
6. An important adolescent memory: any memory from your teenage years that stands out today. Again, it can be either positive or negative.
7. An important adult memory: a memory from age 21 onward, positive or negative, that stands out.
8. Other important memories: one other particular event from your past that stands out. It may be from long ago or recent time. It may be positive or negative.

Second Session:

- Can you describe the most important people in your life story? At least one of these should be a person to whom you are not related. It is up to you if you want them to be anonymous.
- Can you describe your overall plan, outline, your goals, or dream for your own future?
- Can you describe areas of your life where at present you are experiencing any of the following: significant stress, a major conflict, or a difficult problem or challenge that must be addressed?

And Why?

- Personal ideology: a) Please describe briefly your Islamic beliefs; b) In what ways, if any, are your beliefs different from those held by most of the people you know? c) Please describe how your religious beliefs have changed over time. Have you experienced any periods of rapid change in your religious beliefs? Explain.; d) What is the most important value in living?

Explain.

Third Session:

- When did you realize that you wanted to be an artist?
- What inspires your artwork?
- How did you make your way to the Saudi visual art community?
- Does the fact that you are a woman affect your life journey as an artist and your art production?
- What are the roles of the following on your life as an artist:
 - Family
 - Society
 - Traditions
 - Religion
 - Heritage
 - Education.

Appendix B: Invitation for Participants (English version)

Dear (artist name),

I would like to invite you to participate in a study that will take place in 2015 -2016 as part of my PhD research. The purpose of the research is to understand how Saudi female artists live their journey, and how they have come to find success in a relatively homogenous conservative country, where women continue to face challenges. As an artist, art teacher, and researcher, I believe there is great value in the stories and experiences that shape women's art and artistic motivations. Your work has been inspirational to me, and it will help inspire young female artists as they learn, and plan their future as artists.

Participating will include one to three interviews in which we will talk about key moments in your life that have had an impact on your journey as an artist. The interviews would last approximately one hour each. Before the interviews, we will talk about the kinds of topics and questions I will ask in order to ensure that you are comfortable and do not feel pressured to share any information that you feel is personal. In addition to the interviews, I would also ask you to share some of your artwork, maximum six pieces, and talk about them.

This research will add an important dimension to the literature on the history of Saudi women artists and women artists globally. I believe it is an opportunity to recognize the talent and the work of Saudi female artists and to help make a path for more female artists in the future.

I hope you will consider this opportunity and contact me if you have any questions or inquires. If you have any further concerns, you may always refer to my thesis supervisor Dr. Awad Ibrahim [REDACTED] or the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (ethics@uottawa.ca | 613- 562-5387).

Sincerely,
Maha alkhudair
PhD Candidate

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Appendix C
Consent Forms



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Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Consent Form

Title of the study: Veiled Artists: Saudi Female Artists Life Stories

Maha Alkhudair
PhD Candidate
Supervisor: Awad Ibrahim
Lamoureux Hall, 420
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
75 Laurier Ave E.
Ottawa, On, Canada
K1N 6N5

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Maha Alkhudair as part of her PhD thesis, under the supervision of professor Ibrahim, and funded by King Saud University.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand how Saudi female artists live their journey, and how they've come to find success in a relatively homogenous, conservative country, where women continue to face challenges.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of one, two or three interviews, one hour each, during which I will share my life story. The interviews have been scheduled starting from March 2nd 2016 at 11 am at the *Darah*. I will also be asked to share some of my artwork. The interview will include use of audio-recording and photos will be taken. I will also receive a copy of the transcripts to review before the researcher can use it in her research.

Risks: My participation in this study on Saudi female artist life stories will entail that I reveal personal information and this may cause me to expose some aspects of my private life and may make cause me to feel uncomfortable. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For example, I will share only the information that I see necessary and which will not put me at risk. The researcher has assured me that I will be able to approve any text prior to it being used in the thesis.

Benefits: My participation in this study will add an important dimension to the literature on the history of Saudi woman artist and woman artist globally. It is an opportunity to recognize the talent and the work of Saudi female artists and to help make a path for more female artists in the future.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will be used with my permission and only when approved by me. I understand, if I choose, my real name will be used. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of understanding how Saudi female artists live their journey.

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Anonymity will not be protected for the need of the study. I will also share some of my artwork, which I will choose. I understand that my identity will be also revealed in publications.

Conservation of data: The interview recordings and the hard copy documents, including consent forms, transcripts and field notes, will be kept in a secure manner in the supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa campus during the full period of retention. The data will be kept on a computer that is password protected.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, Safeya Binzagr, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Maha Alkhudair from the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Professor Awad Ibrahim.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

21/3/2016

Researcher's signature:

Date:

21/3/2016



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Consent Form

Title of the study: Veiled Artists: Saudi Female Artists Life Stories

Maha Alkhudair

PhD Candidate

Supervisor: Awad Ibrahim

Lamoureux Hall, 420

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

75 Laurier Ave E.

Ottawa, On, Canada

K1N 6N5

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Maha Alkhudair as part of her PhD thesis, under the supervision of professor Ibrahim, and funded by King Saud University.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand how Saudi female artists live their journey, and how they've come to find success in a relatively homogenous, conservative country, where women continue to face challenges.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of one, two or three interviews, one hour each, during which I will share my life story. The interviews have been scheduled starting from December the 1st at 5:30 pm at the local time of Saudi Arabia. The interviews will be online via Facetime program and in my home studio. I will also be asked to share some of my artwork. The interview will include use of audio-recording and photos will be taken. I will also receive a copy of the transcripts to review before the researcher can use it in her research.

Risks: My participation in this study on Saudi female artist life stories will entail that I reveal personal information and this may cause me to expose some aspects of my private life and may make cause me to feel uncomfortable. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For example, I will share only the information that I see necessary and which will not put me at risk. The researcher has assured me that I will be able to approve any text prior to it being used in the thesis.

Benefits: My participation in this study will add an important dimension to the literature on the history of Saudi woman artist and woman artist globally. It is an opportunity to recognize the talent and the work of Saudi female artists and to help make a path for more female artists in the future.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will be used with my permission and only when approved by me. I understand, if I choose, my real name will be used. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of understanding how Saudi female artists live their journey.

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Anonymity will not be protected for the need of the study. I will also share some of my artwork, which I will choose. I understand that my identity will be also revealed in publications.

Conservation of data: The interview recordings and the hard copy documents, including consent forms, transcripts and field notes, will be kept in a secure manner in the supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa campus during the full period of retention. The data will be kept on a computer that is password protected.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, Maha Malluh, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Maha Alkudair from the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Professor Awad Ibrahim.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

14.03.2016

Researcher's signature:

Date:

12-03-2016



uOttawa

استمارة قبول المشاركة في البحث

عنوان البحث: فنانات من وراء الحجاب: قصص من حياة فنانات سعوديات

مها الخضير

طالبة مرشحة لنيل درجة الدكتوراه

المشرف: د. عوض إبراهيم

مبنى لامورو، ٤٢٠

كلية التربية، جامعة أوتاوا

٧٥ شارع لوريز شرق

أوتاوا، أونتاريو، كندا

K1N6N5

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Educationجامعة أوتاوا
كلية التربية

دعوة للمشاركة: لقد تم توجيه الدعوة لي للمشاركة في البحث المذكور أعلاه و الذي ستقوم به الباحثة مها الخضير كجزء من متطلبات أطروحة الدكتوراه تحت إشراف الدكتور عوض إبراهيم و الدعم المادي من قبل جامعة الملك سعود.

الهدف من الدراسة: تهدف الدراسة إلى فهم مسيرة الحياة الفنية لمجموعة من الفنانات السعوديات وسبل تحقيقهن للنجاح في مجتمع محافظ يتمتع بخصوصية تفرض على المرأة الكثير من التحديات.

المشاركة: تتضمن مشاركتي إجراء مقابلة، أو مقابلتين، أو ثلاث مقابلات، بمدة ساعة لكل مقابلة، حيث سأقوم بالتحدث عن تجربتي الشخصية. و ستبدأ المقابلات من تاريخ ٣٠ نوفمبر في الساعة السادسة مساءً بتوقيت المملكة العربية السعودية. و سيتم إجراء المقابلات عبر الإيصال عن بعد من خلال برنامج IMO من ورشة عملي الخاصة. و سوف أقوم أيضا بمشاركة بعض أعمالتي الفنية. و سيتم تسجيل المقابلة صوتيا مع التقاط بعض الصور. كما سيتم الحصول على نسخة من النص المكتوب من أجل الاطلاع عليه قبل أن تقوم الباحثة باستخدامه في بحثها.

المخاطر: يترتب على مشاركتي في هذا البحث حول سيرة مجموعة من الفنانات السعوديات الموافقة على نشر المعلومات التي أدلي بها خلال البحث والتي قد تؤدي إلى إظهار بعض جوانب حياتي الشخصية التي قد تكون حساسة بعض الشيء.

ولقد أكدت الباحثة أنها ستقوم بما يلزم من أجل تفادي ما قد يسبب أي مشاكل من خلال هذه المعلومات. على سبيل المثال، سأقوم بالإدلاء بالمعلومات الضرورية لهذا فقط والتي لا تسبب لي أي مشاكل في المستقبل. و لقد أكدت لي الباحثة بأنه سيكون لدي الفرصة للاطلاع والموافقة على الصيغة النهائية للنص الذي يحتوي على المعلومات التي تخصني قبل إضافته إلى الأطروحة.

الفوائد: أمل من خلال مشاركتي في هذا البحث المساهمة في دعم الأبحاث العلمية حول تاريخ الفنانات السعوديات والفنون النسائية حول العالم. وستكون هذه الدراسة بمثابة فرصة لي للمساهمة في إبراز أعمال ومواهب بعض الفنانات السعوديات والمساعدة في فتح المجال أمام الفنانات الأخريات في المستقبل.

السرية والإفصاح عن هوية المشاركات في البحث: لقد أكدت الباحثة على عدم نشر أي معلومات حول مساهمتي في البحث بدون إذن مسبق مني. و أنا على دراية و فهم بأنه سيتم الكشف عن اسمي الحقيقي لذا اخترت ذلك. و أنا على اطلاع أنه سيتم استخدام المحتوى من أجل فهم المسيرة الفنية للفنانات السعوديات في المجتمع السعودي فقط.

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وقد يتم الكشف عن هوية الأشخاص المشاركين في البحث إذا تطلبت الدراسة ذلك. وسأقوم بالمشاركة ببعض أعمالني الفنية التي سأختارها بنفسني. وأنا على علم بأنه سيتم الكشف عن معلوماتني الشخصية عند نشر الأطروحة.

حفظ البيانات: سيتم حفظ التسجيلات والمستندات المتعلقة بالمقابلة واستمارة الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث، والملاحظات والملاحظات المسجلة أثناء البحث في مكان آمن في مكتب الدكتور المشرف على البحث والذي يقع في مقر جامعة أوتوا خلال كامل الفترة المحددة لحفظ البيانات.

المشاركة الطوعية: أنا على إطلاع بأنني غير ملزمة بالمشاركة في البحث وأنه لدي خيار الانسحاب من البحث في أي وقت، كما أن لدي الخيار بعدم الرد على الأسئلة التي لا أرغب في الإجابة عليها، وفي حال اختيار الانسحاب من الدراسة، سيتم إتلاف أي معلومات تخصني تم جمعها منذ بدء مشاركتني في البحث وحتى لحظة انسحابي منه.

الموافقة: أنا، المدعوة تفريد البقشي، أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه والتي ستقوم بها الباحثة مها الخضير من كلية التربية في جامعة أوتوا تحت إشراف الدكتور عوض إبراهيم.

وفي حال وجود أي أسئلة حول الدراسة، فيإمكانني التواصل مع الباحثة أو الدكتور المشرف على الدراسة.

وفي حال وجود أي أسئلة حول الجانب الأخلاقي لهذه الدراسة، فيإمكانني التواصل مع الموظف المختص في مجلس أخلاقيات البحث العلمي في جامعة أوتوا على العنوان التالي:

تتوفر نسختين عن هذه الاستمارة، واحدة منها تبقى بحوزة المشاركة في البحث.

توقيع المشاركة في البحث:

التاريخ:

٢٠١٦ / ٣ / ٥

توقيع الباحثة:

التاريخ:

7-12-2015



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté d'éducation

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education

Consent Form

Title of the study: Veiled Artists: Saudi Female Artists Life Stories

Maha Alkudair
PhD Candidate
Supervisor: Awad Ibrahim
Lamoureux Hall, 420
Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
75 Laurier Ave E.
Ottawa, On, Canada
K1N 6N5

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Maha Alkudair as part of her PhD thesis, under the supervision of professor Ibrahim, and funded by King Saud University.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to understand how Saudi female artists live their journey, and how they've come to find success in a relatively homogenous, conservative country, where women continue to face challenges.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of one, two or three interviews, one hour each, during which I will share my life story. The interviews have been scheduled for the 23rd and the 24th of November 2015 at 1 pm online. I will also be asked to share some of my artwork. The interview will include use of audio-recording and photos will be taken. I will also receive a copy of the transcripts to review before the researcher can use it in her research.

Risks: My participation in this study on Saudi female artist life stories will entail that I reveal personal information and this may cause me to expose some aspects of my private life and may make cause me to feel uncomfortable. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks. For example, I will share only the information that I see necessary and which will not put me at risk. The researcher has assured me that I will be able to approve any text prior to it being used in the thesis.

Benefits: My participation in this study will add an important dimension to the literature on the history of Saudi woman artist and woman artist globally. It is an opportunity to recognize the talent and the work of Saudi female artists and to help make a path for more female artists in the future.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will be used with my permission and only when approved by me. I understand, if I choose, my real name will be used. I understand that the contents will be used only for the purpose of understanding how Saudi female artists live their journey.

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Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada
www.uOttawa.ca

Anonymity will not be protected for the need of the study. I will also share some of my artwork, which I will choose. I understand that my identity will be also revealed in publications.

Conservation of data: The interview recordings and the hard copy documents, including consent forms, transcripts and field notes, will be kept in a secure manner in the supervisor's office at the University of Ottawa campus during the full period of retention. The data will be kept on a computer that is password protected.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, Fida Alhussan, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Maha Alkhudair from the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, whose research is under the supervision of Professor Awad Ibrahim.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Date:

27-Oct 2016

Researcher's signature:

Date:

27-10-2016

Appendix D: Ethics Approval Notice



File Number: 09-15-12

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/17/2015

Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice
Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Awad	Ibrahim	Education / Education	Supervisor
Maha	Alkhudair	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 09-15-12**Type of Project:** PhD Thesis**Title:** Unveiling Artists: Saudi Female Artists Life Stories

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
11/17/2015	11/16/2016	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)**Special Conditions / Comments:**

N/A



File Number: 09-15-12

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/17/2015

Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Hoda Shawki

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research

For Barbara Graves, Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

2 550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada
(613) 562-5387 • Téléc./Fax (613) 562-5338

www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie/ www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/

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