

A selection of the 31 female artists exhibiting as part of *I Am* at London's St Martin-in-the-Fields. From left: Afsoon, Lulwa Al-Khalifa, Rawan Al Adwan, Azadeh Ghotbi, Zena Assi, Ahaad Alamoudi, Nermine Hammam and Soheila Sokhanvari



LONDON EYES

Middle Eastern female artists take centre stage in the UK's vibrant art scene this summer



Ghamar, Afsoon

Afsoon, 55
British-Iranian,
collage artist

How does the Middle East affect your art?

I see myself as an artist but my Middle Eastern roots feed my art. I use stories from the East along with family photographs and memories.

Why do you

make art?

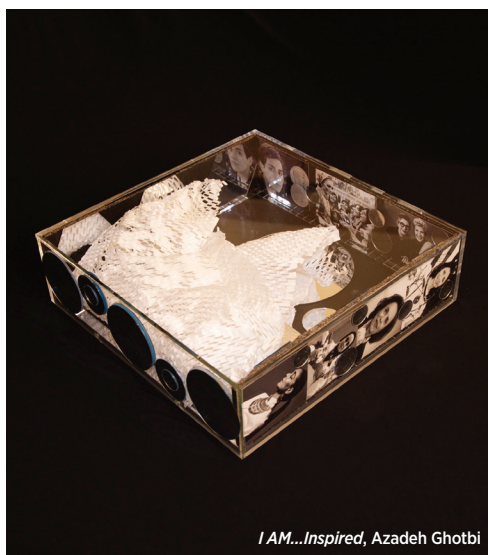
I make art to stay sane, as Louise Bourgeois said, "Art is a guarantee of sanity."

What are your passions and how do you express them through art?

Reading, looking at art, gardening, nature, and travelling; all these come together and resurface in my work.

Can art really change the world?

Art can bring people together and maybe this togetherness can result in positive change.



I Am...Inspired, Azadeh Ghotbi

This summer, contemporary women artists from the Middle East gear up to assert themselves through a series of exhibitions at the forefront of London's vibrant art scene. *I Am* exhibition is among those leading the charge, presenting 31 Middle Eastern female artists who will make their way to St Martin-in-the-Fields in the UK capital this month to present their original artworks at the show.

The upcoming Shubbak Festival, London's largest and increasingly global biennial of contemporary Arab culture that's now in its fourth year, will include two exhibitions titled *Shift* and *The Craft*, also showcasing works by female artists.

Shift at The Mosaic Rooms is London's first all-women show of Saudi artists, featuring Dana Awartani, Reem al-Nasser and Zahra Al-Ghamdi. *The Craft* is Amsterdam-based Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qadiri's first solo exhibition in the UK.

Bazaar speaks to some of these inspiring women who are on the cusp of this shift in the global art scene.

WORDS: LUZZY VARTANIAN COLLIER; PHOTOGRAPHY: SEBASTIAN BÖTTCHER
IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND GALLERIES

Alia Ali, 32
Yemeni-Bosnian-American,
visual artist

What's it like to be a female artist from the Middle East?

Empowering. I see myself as a representative of my perspectives, experiences, diaspora, and education.

Why do you make art?

Art is a way of interacting with individuals and societies and I would lose my language without it.

What are your passions and how do you express them?

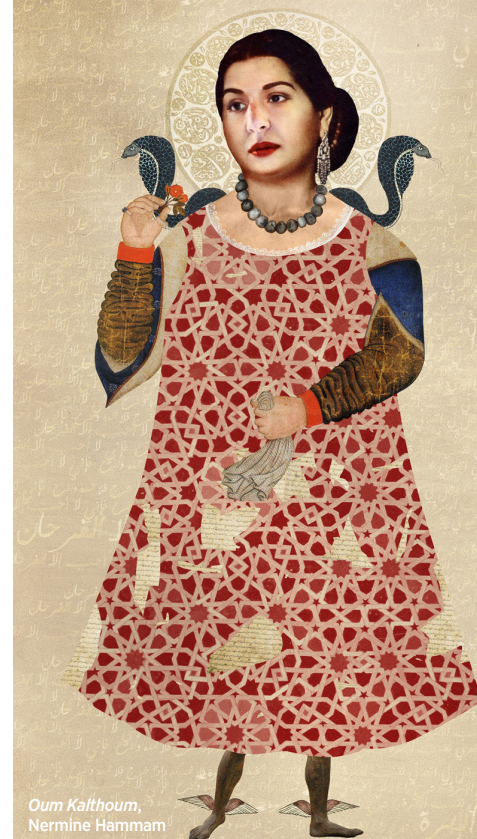
Stories and language are my passions and I've travelled far to seek them. Questions and curiosity grow and the need to be in the studio becomes overwhelming.

Can art change the world?

Art is a reminder that history is a set of stories and is not, as many would call it, a 'fact'.



[Laysa] Ana/I am
[NOT], Alia Ali



Oum Kalthoum,
Nermine Hammam



Al Kouwa Fi
Yad El Mar2a,
Zena Assi

Zena Assi, 43
Lebanese, mixed media artist

What's it like to be a female artist from the Middle East?

It's a blessing and a curse. You have your scars that give layers of sensibility and a complexity that defines you and marks your work.

Why do you make art?

I don't know how to be anything other than an artist. My studio is my sanctuary. I can play the architect, the director, the slayer or the creator.

What are your passions and how do you express them?

I don't express my passions, I keep them buried deep inside, so that frustration forms and finds a way of escaping on its own.

Can art change the world?

Ideally, art can help build a bridge between different cultures. Words, sounds and images are powerful tools, it depends how you use them.

Ahaad Alamoudi, 25
Saudi, multidisciplinary artist

What's it like to be a female artist from the Middle East?

It's a very exciting time. As more women are highlighted, it offers a platform for the younger generation to aspire to.

Why do you make art?

I produce art to make sense of the world. Some works are commentaries, others are analyses.

What are your passions and how do you express them?

Most of my passions are expressed through my work. I'm very passionate about my country, society and culture.

Can art change the world and if yes, how?

Art is a reflection of the time. It creates dialogues and narratives and this can have an effect on cultures, forming a ripple effect and leading to global change.



Land of Dreams,
Ahaad Alamoudi

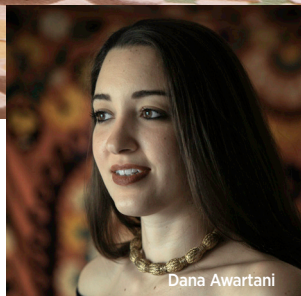
'I AM' EXHIBITION

I Am is on display at
St Martin-in-the-Fields from
3 July until 20 August 2017

I Am travels from Amman to London
under the patronage of Her Majesty
Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan.

The 31 featured female artists have
created original artworks for the show,
which celebrates the role of Middle
Eastern women as guardians of peace
when addressing cultural, religious and
social issues in an ever-evolving world.

Oncaravan.org



Dana Awartani, 30
Saudi, installation artist

What's it like to be a female artist from the Middle East?

Female artists from this region have an important role to discuss, tackle and overcome certain issues that stem from our society. I find it empowering.

Why do you make art?

I love working with my hands and using mediums requiring a deep knowledge of craftsmanship. I find the long amount of hours and deep concentration that I put into each piece immensely satisfying and therapeutic.

What are your passions and how do you express them?

I'm passionate about Islamic culture, heritage and philosophy from all parts of the Arab and Islamic world. I try to express them by going back to traditional and sacred aesthetics and giving them a new identity and language that's not stuck in time.

Can art change the world?

Art has the power to change the way an individual views certain things. If my work helps a person look at our part of the world from a different lens, then that shift in perspective will make a difference over time.

Above: *I Went Away and Forgot You. A While Ago I Remembered I'd Forgotten You. I Was Dreaming* (2017), Dana Awartani
Below: *Cell of the Earth* (2015), Zahra Al-Ghamdi



'THE CRAFT' EXHIBITION

The Craft is on display at Gasworks from 13 July until 10 September 2017

From the domestic to the alien, Monira Al Qadiri's solo exhibition explores science fiction as a tool to depict international diplomacy as an otherworldly conspiracy. Gasworks.org.uk

Monira Al Qadiri, 34
Kuwaiti, multimedia artist



What's it like to be a female artist from the Middle East?

I live in a post-gender world in my mind, which alleviates the need to think about these issues consistently.

Why do you make art?

My passion is escapism. I have a burning desire to constantly repaint the world as we know it.

What are your passions and how do you express them?

It's an urge I can't control. I have no idea where it comes from. It has been there since my early childhood.

Can art change the world?

Yes, but we have to look at it through a longer time lens. Hundreds, thousands of years.

Spectrum 1
(2016), Monira Al Qadiri

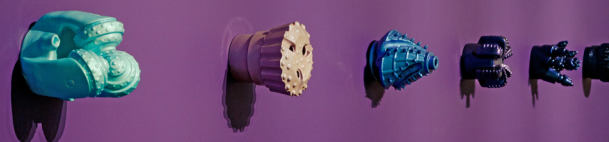


Plate (2017),
Reem al-Nasser



'SHIFT' EXHIBITION

Shift is on display at The Mosaic Rooms from 1 July until 2 September 2017

Saudi artists Dana Awartani, Reem al-Nasser and Zahra Al-Ghamdi explore domestic spaces in Saudi Arabia as it witnesses rapid social and cultural change. Mosaicrooms.org