

Visual Whispers

Highlights from this month's cultural calendar in the Kingdom



Talent in Action

Elham (Bahrain's creative collective), presents an evening of contemporary cultural expression this month at Albareh Café.

Reena Abraham takes questions from the floor and reads excerpts from her latest book, 'Footprints in Time'. Vocalist Padmini Rao talks about her work and performs a blend of two of India's most charming musical streams; the dhrupad and the khayal. South African artist Anna Thackray's mixed media works combining paint and fabric come up for discussion. Last but not least, 19-year-old cartoonist Mohammed AlMahdi takes to the stage - à la Rolf Harris - to create one of his works live.

An Elham event is not only a great evening out but a sure way to stimulate the mind, body and soul. January's dose of artistic inspiration is not to be missed.

Albareh Café, Adliya. 7pm, 27 January.
Tel: 3624 4466. Visit www.elhambahrain.net

Back in Bahrain

Syrian artist, critic and poet, Talal Moualla (above) returns to Albareh with a solo exhibition. The co-founder of the Sharjah and Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial, Moualla's work has been enjoyed by thousands of art-lovers in the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Italy.

When it comes to its art, Moualla shudders at the thought of developing a signature style. Rather than being constrained by a fixed approach, his artistic quest can be summarised by a constant struggle to maintain a sense of freedom where he can implement ideas and develop them to their maximum potential. Moualla is also an acclaimed author and has played an integral role in the development of art criticism in the Arab world.

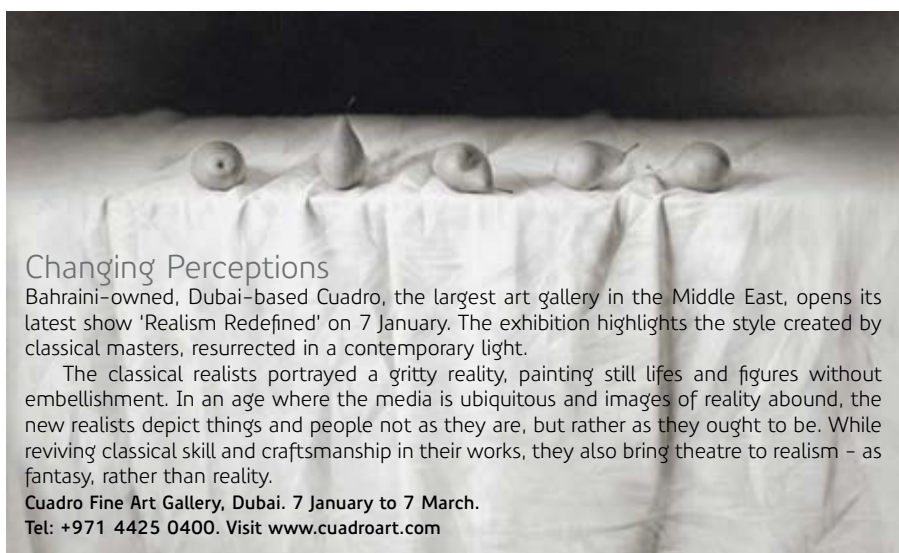
Albareh Art Gallery, Adliya. 13 to 23 January (exact dates to be confirmed). Tel: 1771 7707. Visit www.albareh.com

Joint Expression

Bahrain Art Centre plays host to the first joint exhibition by Ahmed Anan and Mohsen Ghareeb, two names familiar to Bahrain's culture vultures.

Anan and Ghareeb each possess a daringly distinct individual style, yet their works seem to complement one another. Their approaches to the canvas using acrylics, ink, watercolour and mixed media are strangely yet similarly melodic. Both are drawn towards the abstract; Anan's colourful brushstrokes culminate in a crescendo of tonality and boldness, while Ghareeb's calligraphy-inspired symphonies evoke a more contemplative mood.

Bahrain Art Centre, Budaiya. 13 to 22 January.
Tel: 3977 7394.



Changing Perceptions

Bahraini-owned, Dubai-based Cuadro, the largest art gallery in the Middle East, opens its latest show 'Realism Redefined' on 7 January. The exhibition highlights the style created by classical masters, resurrected in a contemporary light.

The classical realists portrayed a gritty reality, painting still lifes and figures without embellishment. In an age where the media is ubiquitous and images of reality abound, the new realists depict things and people not as they are, but rather as they ought to be. While reviving classical skill and craftsmanship in their works, they also bring theatre to realism - as fantasy, rather than reality.

Cuadro Fine Art Gallery, Dubai. 7 January to 7 March.
Tel: +971 4425 0400. Visit www.cuadroart.com

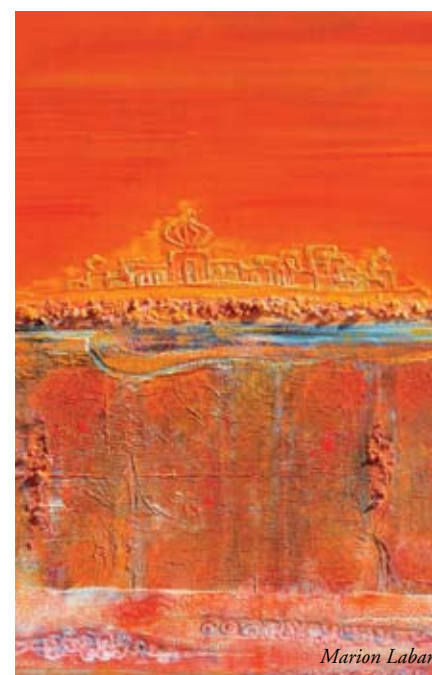
Courtesy of Cuadro Fine Art Gallery



Ahmed Anan



Mohsen Ghareeb



Marion Labani

Banyan Open Day

Local mavens of the arts and crafts movement unveil their latest works at The Banyan Tree Gallery Open Day on 22 January.

This is not the first time the hotel and spa has got a touch creative. The Gallery has a range of items from villages around the world. The boutique is a unique feature of every Banyan Tree property, and is an intrinsic element of the group's Corporate Social Responsibility policy and plays an important role in promoting local cottage arts and crafts. In that spirit, The Banyan Tree Al Areen has teamed up with Beit Al Qurar in Muharraq to offer exclusive textile designs as well as a magnificent array of clay pots by the local ceramicist, Ibrahim Ahmed Al Amadi.

Banyan Tree Al Areen launches a series of postcards this month inspired by the recent blockbuster artlounge show. The set of 10 postcards features works by Marion Labani, Fajer Al Khalifa, Balqees Fakhroo and Ali Al Kufi, to name but a few. All profits go to support Bahraini charities.

Banyan Tree Al Areen. 22 January.
Tel: 1784 5000. Visit www.banyantree.com



The Chamber of Culture

Crowds flocked to the grand opening of the new auditorium at the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research in Muharraq last month, which boasts a magnificent centrepiece; a monumental work by leading artist Balqees Fakhro.

Under the patronage of His Majesty King Hamad Al Khalifa, the new state of the art facility in Muharraq's heritage quarter will host lectures, presentations and conferences - further elevating the provision of cultural and creative education in the Kingdom.

Head to Muharraq for the following events in January:

5 January (8pm): Poetry Evening with Huda Al Noamani, at the Ebrahim Al Arrayed House of Poetry.

12 January (8pm): 'The Horizons of Contemporary Knowledge' by Ismail Surajeldin, at the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research.

19 January (8pm): 'When the French Media Speak Arabic' by Mohammed Alwafi, at the Abdullah Al Zayed House for Bahraini Press Heritage.

26 January (8pm): 'On Sursok Street: Cultural Heritage versus Real Estate Demand' by Ziad Akel, at the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research.

Shaikh Ebrahim Bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research, Muharraq.
Tel: 1732 3050

Ephemeral Space

The latest exhibition by Demi Mcleod opens this month at the Gulf Hotel.

The Bahrain-based artist trained at London's Royal College of Art and worked as a gallery owner and curator in Australia before moving to the Kingdom.

"My time in Bahrain has presented me with the opportunity to create on canvas and fulfil a cherished dream," she says. "Some days I am daunted by the challenges as having worked with such incredible artistic talents I question my ability. However, on good days I fly high and paint my own voyage. I never know where these journeys will end up. It's fun and emotional at the same time."

Gulf Hotel, Adliya. 29 January to 7 February.
Tel: 3642 5701. Visit www.demimcleod.com



Camille Zakharia, 'Markings II'. Edition of 8.

The career of Camille Zakharia is taking off. This month, the Bahrain-based artist is the only practitioner of Arab origin to appear at Chobi Mela V, the fifth international festival of photography in Bangladesh. To boot, Zakharia was recently short listed for the Victoria and Albert Museum's inaugural Jameel Prize, a new £25,000-award for work inspired by traditional Islamic art and craft practice. Zakharia, who is one of only nine artists selected, says, "This is a great acknowledgment. For me, I'm already a winner just by getting on the shortlist." Works from his 'Division Lines' and 'Markings' series were chosen by an eminent jury including Dr Khaled Azzam of The Prince's School of Traditional Arts and Venetia Porter, Curator of the British Museum. "They are very reminiscent of Islamic geometry," says Zakharia. "I use the photographic medium not in a representational manner but in a bid to reconfigure reality in an abstract and geometrical form." The three pieces will be exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, this summer.

Chobi Mela V, Bangladesh. 29 January to 20 February. Visit www.chobimela.org