



**News Release**

**15 September 2021: for immediate release**

## **The V&A and Art Jameel announce Ajlan Gharem as winner of the sixth edition of the Jameel Prize**

Ajlan Gharem has been announced as the winner of the sixth edition of the Jameel Prize, the world's leading award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. The £25,000 prize was presented to Ajlan Gharem by Fady Jameel, Chairman and Founder of Art Jameel, at a virtual ceremony on Wednesday 15 September 2021. Gharem was chosen by an esteemed, independent jury for his architectural installation *Paradise Has Many Gates*, 2015, which was commended for its boldness and ambition.

**Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A and chair of the jury, said:** *"We were incredibly impressed with the work of all finalists, selected for their innovative and imaginative projects with strong links between Islamic traditions and contemporary design. As this year's Jameel Prize winner, Ajlan Gharem's work speaks to global conditions and the experience of migrants, as well as being particularly resonant in its local context. This edition of the Jameel Prize celebrates contemporary design and Gharem's work is notable for its innovative use of material and ambitious scale. The transparent wire frame references border fencing but has the effect of demystifying the mosque for non-Muslim viewers. We also commend the use of the installation as a space for cross-cultural connection and community gathering."*

**Antonia Carver, Director of Art Jameel commented:** *"We are excited to be witnessing a new era for the Jameel Prize, with its thematic focus this year on contemporary design. Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics welcomes both the personal and the political as drivers of change. This year's finalists have presented works that engage with this theme critically and deeply, all while paying great attention to aesthetic consideration. Our partnership with the V&A is an extension of the work Art Jameel does in the region and the world to bring forth critical conversations on the relationship between contemporary practices and historical movements. We are incredibly proud of all the finalists' contributions and thank Jameel Curator Rachel Dedman for her work daily on a broad, dynamic programme across the museum. Lastly, a huge congratulations to Ajlan Gharem whose work continues to spark conversation and inspiration."*

Ajlan Gharem is a multidisciplinary artist and mathematics teacher based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. His work explores how Saudi communities understand and articulate their culture amidst globalisation and changing power dynamics. Ajlan's installation, *Paradise Has Many Gates*, is true to the design and function of a traditional mosque, but is made of the cage-like chicken wire used for border walls and refugee detention centres. Such material provokes anxiety, but also renders the mosque transparent and open to the elements. The installation's transparency challenges the political authority that can underpin religion; the installation also seeks to demystify Islamic prayer for non-Muslims, tackling the fear of the other at the heart of Islamophobia. The mosque is welcoming

to everyone, and the installation is usually accompanied by a public programme that invites people of all backgrounds to meet and spend time together.

The sixth edition of the Jameel Prize marks a new era by introducing a thematic focus, with this iteration dedicated to contemporary design. Eight finalists were shortlisted for the prize from over 400 applications: **Golnar Adili, Hadeyeh Badri, Kallol Datta, Farah Fayyad, Ajlan Gharem, Sofia Karim, Jana Traboulsi, and Bushra Waqas Khan**. Their work will be on display in the exhibition *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* at the V&A, 18 September – 28 November 2021, before touring internationally. Ajlan Gharem's *Paradise Has Many Gates* is represented in the exhibition through large-scale photographic prints, video, and a recreation of the mosque's dome.

The eight finalists are from India, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the UK. With diverse practices spanning graphic design and fashion, typography and textiles, installation and activism, the finalists engage with both the personal and the political, interpreting the past in creative and critical ways. The works in the exhibition address global events and lived realities, and the legacies of language, architecture and craft.

The international jury for *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics*, which selected the shortlist and chose the winner, includes V&A Director **Tristram Hunt** as jury chairperson, the joint-winners of Jameel Prize 5, Iraqi artist **Mehdi Moutashar** and Bangladeshi architect **Marina Tabassum**, as well as British author and design critic **Alice Rawsthorn** and Emirati writer, researcher and founder of Barjeel Art Foundation, **Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi**.

The Jameel Prize was founded by the V&A in 2009 in partnership with Art Jameel. Through the past five editions, the Prize has received applications from more than 1,000 artists from over 40 countries, exhibited the work of 48 artists and designers, and toured to 16 venues globally. The first five iterations of the Jameel Prize shaped an overall understanding of the role that Islamic tradition can play as an inspiration for both art and design. As the V&A seeks to promote different aspects of this burgeoning field, *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* is the first devoted to a single discipline. This edition also welcomed submissions via open call for the first time, alongside its traditional nomination system.

Currently, the Jameel Programming at the V&A includes the inaugural Jameel Fellowship, inviting artists Nour Hage, Dima Srouji and Babak Golkar to take up residencies in the museum in 2021/22, facilitating artistic research in conversation with the V&A's collection. Additionally, Beirut Mapped, an editorial project on the V&A blog, invites reflections on the city of Beirut from the perspective of artists and writers who live there, in the wake of the devastating explosion of 4 August 2020. This project is organised in partnership with the Arab Image Foundation, Beirut.

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**For further PRESS information about the Jameel Prize, please contact Rosanna Hawkins on behalf of the V&A on [rosanna@reesandco.com](mailto:rosanna@reesandco.com), or Arfa Shahid on behalf of Art Jameel on [arfa@rpr.ae](mailto:arfa@rpr.ae) (not for publication).**

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from [pressimages.vam.ac.uk](http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk).

**Notes to Editors**

- Ajlan Gharem is the winner of the sixth Jameel Prize.
- *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* at the V&A, London runs from 18 September – 28 November 2021.
- *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* will showcase work by the eight shortlisted designers: Golnar Adili, Hadeyeh Badri, Kallol Datta, Farah Fayyad, Ajlan Gharem, Sofia Karim, Jana Traboulsi, and Bushra Waqas Khan.
- *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* is curated by the V&A's Jameel Curator of Contemporary Art from the Middle East, Rachel Dedman, in collaboration with V&A Senior Curator for the Middle Eastern Collection, Tim Stanley.
- *Jameel Prize: Poetry to Politics* is a free exhibition. To enter the museum you will need to book a free advanced ticket at [vam.ac.uk](http://vam.ac.uk).

### Social Media

- **V&A:** Instagram [@vamuseum](https://www.instagram.com/vamuseum) | Facebook [@VictoriaandAlbertMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/VictoriaandAlbertMuseum) | Twitter [@V and A](https://twitter.com/V_and_A)
- **Art Jameel:** Instagram [@art\\_jameel](https://www.instagram.com/art_jameel) | Facebook [Art Jameel](https://www.facebook.com/ArtJameel) | Twitter [@Art\\_Jameel](https://twitter.com/Art_Jameel)

### About Ajlan Gharem

Ajlan Gharem (b. 1985, Saudi Arabia) is a multidisciplinary artist who explores how Saudis articulate their culture. He is particularly interested in Saudi culture in a world of increasing globalisation and constantly changing power dynamics. In a climate of rapid development across the Gulf, and a cautious Saudi response, Ajlan's work focuses on the balance of power between the individual and the state and on his generation's ability to create change.

Born in the conservative southern city of Khamis Mushayt in Saudi Arabia, Ajlan received an undergraduate degree in Mathematics at King Khalid University and continues to apply this analytical training to his art practice. He is now based in Riyadh where he works as a teacher of Mathematics at Al Sahabah Public School. He is a co-founder of Gharem Studio along with his brother, the artist Abdunnasser Gharem.

Ajlan Gharem has had numerous group exhibitions, including at the Brunei Gallery, London (2016), Asia House, London (2015), Fotofest Biennial, Houston (2014), the British Museum, London (2014), and the Vancouver Biennale (2018). In 2011 he was selected by the Crossway Foundation to travel to London to meet with museum curators and artists and collaborate with the British Museum, Tate Modern and Penguin Books.

### About the Jameel Prize

The Jameel Prize, founded in partnership with Art Jameel, was conceived after the renovation of the V&A's Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art. The gallery is an outstanding presentation of the rich artistic heritage of the Islamic Middle East, and the Prize aims to raise awareness of the thriving interaction between contemporary practice and the great historical legacy of the region. It has also contributed to a broader understanding of Islamic culture as well as its place in the contemporary world.

Launched in 2009, the winner of the first Jameel Prize was **Afroz Amighi** for her work *1001 Pages* (2008), an intricate hand-cut screen made from the woven plastic used to construct refugee tents. In 2011 **Rachid Koraïchi** was awarded the prize, for his work *Les Maîtres Invisibles (The Invisible Masters, 2008)*, a group of embroidered cloth banners which display Arabic calligraphy and symbols and ciphers to explore the lives and legacies of the 14 great mystics of Islam. In 2013 the winner of

Jameel Prize 3 was **Dice Kayek**, a Turkish fashion label established in 1992 by Ece and Ayşe Ege for their series *Istanbul Contrast*, a collection that evokes Istanbul's architectural and artistic heritage. This was the first time the Jameel Prize was awarded to designers. In 2016, the winner of Jameel Prize 4 was **Ghulam Mohammad**, who trained in the Islamic tradition of miniature painting, for his works of paper collage. In 2018 the first ever joint winners of Jameel Prize 5 were **Mehdi Moutashar** —awarded for his bold work of minimalist abstraction rooted in Islamic geometry and **Marina Tabassum** — for her visionary Bait ur Rouf mosque built in 2012 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Now a triennial Prize, the sixth edition in 2021 marks a new era. Future Jameel Prizes will be dedicated to a single discipline, with the 2021 edition focusing on contemporary design.

### **About the V&A**

The V&A is the world's leading museum of art, design and performance with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity, spanning 5000 years of human creativity. It was established in 1852 to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, its purpose is to champion creative industry, inspire the next generation, and spark everyone's imagination.

### **About Art Jameel**

Art Jameel supports artists and creative communities. Founded and supported by the Jameel family philanthropies, the independent organisation is headquartered in Saudi Arabia and the UAE and works globally. Art Jameel's programmes – across exhibitions, commissions, research, learning and community-building – are grounded in a dynamic understanding of the arts as fundamental to life and accessible to all.

Art Jameel's two institutions – the forthcoming Hayy Jameel, a dedicated complex for the arts and creativity in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and Jameel Arts Centre, an innovative contemporary institution in Dubai, UAE – are complemented by digital initiatives plus collaborations with major institutional partners and a network of practitioners across the world.

The Jameel family is currently celebrating three quarters of a century of philanthropy; this amazing journey is marked through the 75 Years / 75 Voices / 75 Stories project, which includes a contribution from Tristram Hunt, Director, V&A, alongside other key figures from the worlds of business, arts, academia and philanthropy, including HRH The Prince of Wales; HE Noura Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth; Max Hollein, Director at the Metropolitan Museum New York; and L. Rafael Reif, President, MIT.