



Smithsonian Institution

Symbolic Cities

The Work of Ahmed Mater

artJameel

AHMED MATER EXHIBITION IN U.S. CAPITOL EXPLORES URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

- **Leading Middle Eastern Artist, Ahmed Mater, to Present First U.S. Solo Exhibition at The Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C.**

13 March, 2016

Remounted Saudi artist, Ahmed Mater, will present his first U.S. solo exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. 'Symbolic Cities' is being presented in collaboration with [Culturunners](#) in partnership with Art Jameel, a Community Jameel initiative, and Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts (SASCA), and will be on view at the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery March 19–Sept. 18, 2016.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an immersive program of dialogues and discussions across Washington D.C. including:

- **March 16, 9:30am–12pm:** a dedicated exhibition **press tour** (by invitation only) with artist, Ahmed Mater, chief curator at Freer|Sackler, Massumeh Farhad, & assistant curator of contemporary Asian art at Freer|Sackler, Carol Huh;
- **March 17, 6:30pm: exhibition preview and reception** (by invitation only) with remarks by Carol Huh, assistant curator of contemporary Asian art;
- **19-20 March:** further **artist/curator exhibition tours**;
- **March 22, 12-1:30pm: panel discussion: *New Voices, New Visions: The Impact of the Arts in Saudi Arabia*** at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Hosted by the [Middle East Institute](#) in partnership with Art Jameel and featuring artist Ahmed Mater, in conversation with U.S. based journalist/expert on Saudi Arabia. Moderated by MEI Sr. Vice President Kate Seelye;
- **March 22, 6:30pm-8pm:** artist's talk **Documenting Unofficial Histories: A Conversation with Saudi Artist Ahmed Mater** at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at George Washington University; Organised by the Middle East Institute in partnership with Art Jameel and featuring Ahmed Mater and Sackler associate curator Carole Huh. Moderated by Sanjit Sethi, the Director of the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design. Reception to follow;
- **Thursday, March 24, 6pm-8pm:** a celebration of **Art, Music and Pop Culture from the Arabian Peninsula** presented by [Desert Storm](#) and Culturunners at, Bus Boys and Poets restaurant on 14th Street; featuring Ahmed Mater, the Kuwaiti rap band, [Sons of Yousuf](#), Emirati artist and curator Noor al Suwaidi.

Since the early 20th century, Saudi Arabia has experienced extraordinary political, economic and social transformation. Bringing together works by leading Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater (b. 1979), “Symbolic Cities” offers unique perspectives on the effects of such changes on this country. This is the first and only showing of this exhibition in the United States solely dedicated to works by this artist.

While Mater works in a variety of media, including painting, installations and performance, [“Symbolic Cities: The Work of Ahmed Mater”](#) will focus on his landscape photography as a means of exploring the tension between the traditional world and the realities of contemporary Saudi Arabian life. The exhibition will highlight three journeys through Saudi Arabia, with an eye toward the impact of urbanization—“Empty Land,” “Desert of Pharan” (2011-13) and “Ashab Al-Lal/Fault Mirage” (2015). Beginning with his aerial views of abandoned desert sites and continuing through the reconstruction of Mecca, a series of large-scale photographs and videos are organized as an experiential encounter, a progression from quiet emptiness to the physical and emotional intensity of the changes Mater is witnessing. The exhibition culminates with the installation “Ashab Al-Lal/Fault Mirage: A Thousand Lost Years,” the first chapter in Mater’s latest project examining the growth of Riyadh, the country’s administrative capital and largest city.

“Mater brings the rigor of his training as a physician—as well as unparalleled access—to gather frank observations of his own time and place,” said exhibition curator Carol Huh, the Freer|Sackler’s curator for contemporary art. “The resulting imagery is straightforward and striking, while his newest research-based project presents another fascinating shift in his use of the photographic medium.”

“Symbolic Cities” is the second in a series of exhibitions highlighting artists and works in Freer|Sackler’s growing collection of contemporary photography.

“Symbolic Cities: The Work of Ahmed Mater” is organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, in collaboration with [Culturunners](#) in partnership with [Art Jameel](#). Generous exhibition support is also provided by Faisal Tamer and Sara Alireza; the [Barjeel Art Foundation](#), Sharjah; and Jerome and Ellen Stern.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY:

Ahmed Mater works as an artist and medical doctor and splits his time between Abha, Jeddah and Makkah in Saudi Arabia. He has attracted international attention for his groundbreaking work, which encompasses photography, calligraphy, painting, installation, performance and video. His work explores the narratives and aesthetics of Islamic culture in an era of globalization, consumerism and transformation. His recent work increasingly uses image and video to explore local collective memory and unofficial histories behind contemporary Saudi Arabian sociopolitical life. Mater is one of the founders of the Al-Meftaha Arts Village in Abha and in 2003 co-founded the Edge of Arabia collective which connected a new generation of Saudi artists with international audiences.

<http://www.ahmedmater.com>

ABOUT FREER GALLERY OF ART AND ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY

The Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., together comprise the nation’s museum of Asian art. It contains one of the most important collections of Asian art in the world, featuring more than 40,000 objects ranging in time from the Neolithic to the present day, with especially fine groupings of Islamic art, Chinese jades, bronzes and paintings and the art of the ancient Near East. The galleries also contain important masterworks from Japan, ancient Egypt, South and Southeast Asia and Korea, as well as the Freer’s noted collection of works by American artist James McNeill Whistler. The Freer Gallery of Art, which will be closed during this exhibition, is scheduled to reopen in spring 2017 with modernized technology and

infrastructure, refreshed gallery spaces and an enhanced Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Auditorium. The Freer|Sackler Gallery is open every day between: 10 am–5:30 pm.

<http://www.asia.si.edu/>

ABOUT CULTURUNNERS:

Developed in collaboration with an international network of artists and institutions from the Middle East, Europe and the United States, *CULTURUNNERS* is an unconventional and independent model of cultural exchange and production, one which combines the localised rituals of an artist road trip with the far-reaching power of communications technology.

Since *CULTURUNNERS* launched in 2014, artists and curators from the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UK, Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, Palestine, Syria and Morocco have participated in programs at [The Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas](#); [Louisiana State University](#); [The Middle East Institute in Washington DC](#); [ISCP Residencies in Brooklyn](#), [The Armory Show](#) and [Columbia University](#) in New York and [MIT](#) in Boston.

While travelling with *CULTURUNNERS*, artists take part in exhibitions, talks and workshops with partner institutions; have full use of a state-of-the-art studio featuring digital and traditional materials and equipment; and broadcast artists' 'Dispatches' from the road via *CULTURUNNERS* interactive website.

<http://www.culturunners.com>

ABOUT ART JAMEEL:

Art Jameel, one of Community Jameel's Initiatives, fosters and promotes contemporary art and creative entrepreneurship across the MENAT region. In partnership with arts organizations worldwide, Art Jameel is developing two arts centres and cultural exchange programmes to encourage networking and knowledge sharing.

Art Jameel is the founding partner of Edge of Arabia, The Crossway Foundation, Jeddah Art Week, and The Archive. In partnership with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, it awards the biannual Jameel Prize for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic traditions. Additional projects include: Art Jameel Photography Award; Jeddah Sculpture Museum, a public park established in collaboration with Jeddah Municipality; Jameel Arts Education at schools; the House of Traditional Arts in Jeddah and the Art Jameel Programme for Traditional Arts and Crafts in Fustat, Cairo, both developed in partnership with the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in London.

Community Jameel was established in 2003 to promote positive social change, and has been undertaking this through the establishment of long-term partnerships with international institutions, and the creation of initiatives in the fields of Job Creation, Global Poverty Alleviation, Arts & Culture, Education & Training, Health & Social, and Food & Water Security. More information on Community Jameel's considerable set of initiatives can be found online at <http://www.cjameel.org>.

For more information, please contact:

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