



bahith @ Gazelli Art House

[□Lizzy Vartanian Collier□Art, Reviews, Uncategorized□Amir Khojasteh, Art, bahith, basma alsharif, contemporary art, Farhad Farzaliyev, gazelli art house, Ghasemi Brothers, london, naqsh collective, Orkhan Huseynov, seeker□Leave a comment](#)

In *Akka Artwork* (Naqsh Collective, 2019), a large-scale piece made of natural stone marble and brass, a number of figures line up to jump off of a tall cliff into a calm sea down below. As they leap from their highly intricate surface, they wave their hands in the air and look down below expectantly, as if beginning a journey to a better, cooler world that the calm water will secure for them. The artwork, by Amman-based sisters Nisreen and Nermeen Abudail, is influenced by the tradition of Palestinian embroidery, the patterns of which make up the rock that their characters are leaping from. The work is part of a larger group exhibition titled *bahith* at London's Gazelli Art House.



Image courtesy of Gazelli Art House, artwork copyright Naqsh Collective

The word *bahith* means “seeker” in Arabic. Someone who seeks is someone who attempts or desires to obtain or achieve; someone who asks for something; someone who goes out to search for someone, something that they haven’t yet captured before. Like the figures in *Akka Artwork*, it suggests a leap into the unknown. *bahith* is the first in a new series of exhibitions at Gazelli Art House that is working with artists with roots in countries undergoing significant socio-political and economic changes – across the Caucasus, Middle East and West Asia – looking at the historic identities of those places through a variety of media.

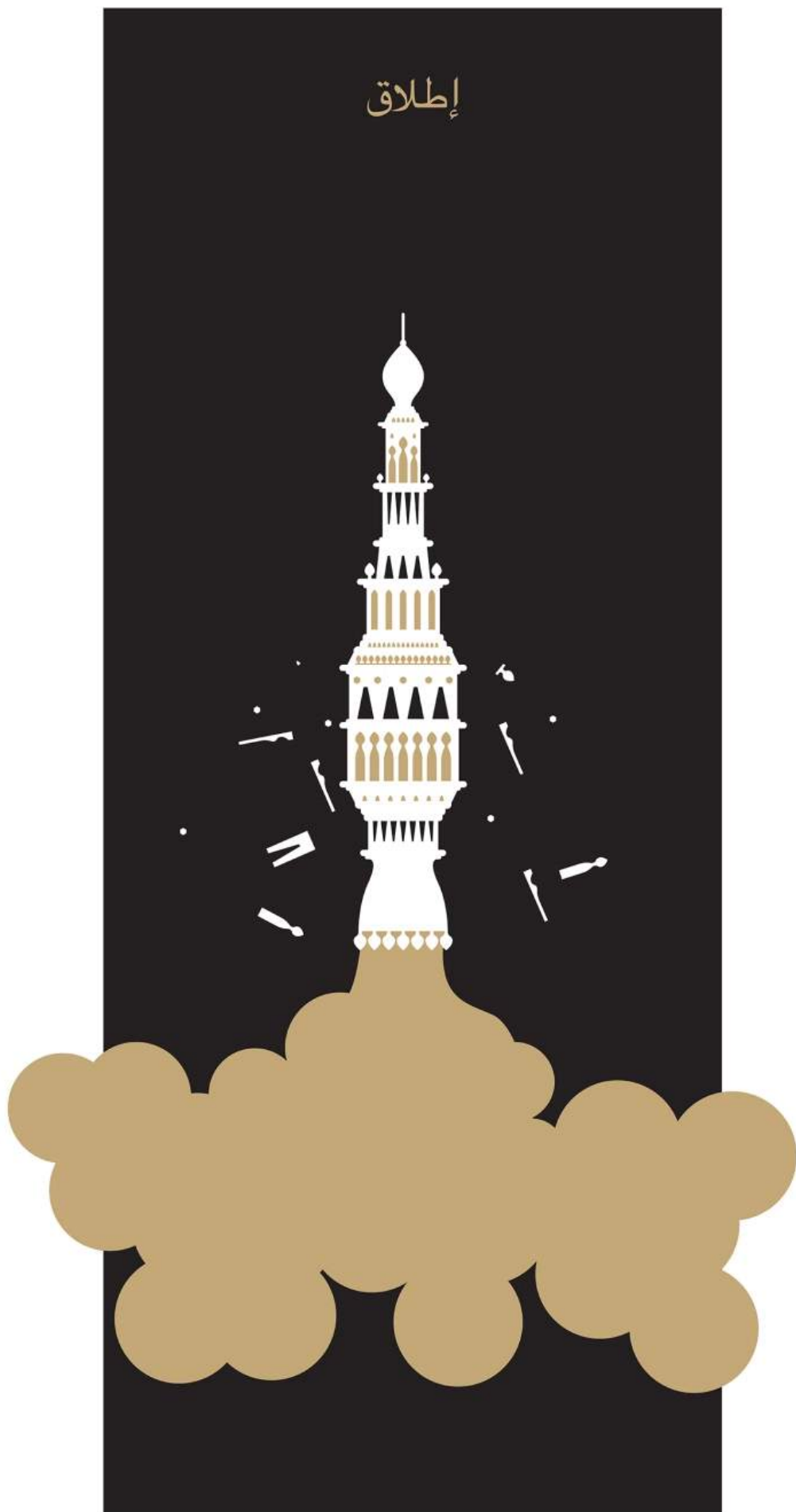


Image courtesy of Gazelli Art House, artwork copyright Orkhan Huseynov

The exhibition opens with the plexiglass work of Orkhan Huseynov, mixing rockets with traditional Islamic architecture, the black, white and gold images bring past and future together. In *The Launch* (2018) for instance, an ornate tower flies into the sky under a mass of gold smoke. The works ask the viewer to consider what happens once the tendency to place origin as a defining factor is shattered, presenting tradition in an uncharted and unfamiliar context. Flying towards space, the shuttle is heading on a journey to a place where national identity is seemingly unheard of, causing the viewer to consider how cultural and religious identity is preserved once living elsewhere.



Image courtesy of Gazelli Art House, artwork copyright Farhad Farzaliyev

Across Huseynov's work, motifs repeat themselves like patterns, something that recurs in Naqsh Collective's work, as well as in Farhad Farzaliyev's *Chrysanthemums and Tigers (Memory Inversion series)* (2019). The acrylic painting on fabric looks like a carpet, with the idea of modernizing tradition occurring across much of the exhibition. In another work *Recalling Isfashan (Memory Inversion series)* (2019) Farzaliyev looks to an Iranian influence, with the series signaling nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Across Farzaliyev's work, textiles originating from different periods in the history of Azerbaijan are stretched on frames and then painted, with sleeping blankets, curtains and sheets being said to remind him of his childhood.



([https://gallerygirl.co/2019/07/24/bahith-](https://gallerygirl.co/2019/07/24/bahith-gazelli-art-house/1-46/)

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In Amir Khojasteh's *Before The Sunrise* (2018) series meanwhile, the artist paints portraits of well known – and sometimes controversial – political figures, leaving it up to the viewer to interpret whose faces they belong to. The work, which appears comical, turns these politicians into caricatures,

with box-like faces and cartoon-like expressions, and is intended to highlight how society's attitudes to certain personalities can differ from one another.



([https://gallerygirl.co/2019/07/24/bahith-gazelli-art-](https://gallerygirl.co/2019/07/24/bahith-gazelli-art-house/dastan-gallery/)

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Also looking at how perceptions of people differ from place-to-place the Ghassemi Brothers' paintings ask how we view the struggle of the displaced as they assimilate abroad. With images of people on rafts at sea, and struggling in the rain amongst heavy waters, the seemingly gentle paintings carry a very heavy meaning.



Image courtesy of Gazelli Art House, artwork copyright Basma Alsharif

In the exhibition's only video work, Basma Alsharif's *Ouroboros* plays on the concept of the eternal return, honing in on the idea of life being a cycle of recurrences. Within the film a man is seen in various landscapes in the Gaza Strip, Los Angeles, the Californian desert, Italy and France. The work is influenced by Alsharif's experiences of witnessing what is happening to the Gaza Strip, forcing the viewer to think about what it means to view firsthand the atrocities made against mankind. It also touches on our never-ending cycle of destruction and renewal, and how we can recover from trauma; the cyclical world we live in. It is worth adding that the Ouroboros is the ancient symbol of the snake eating its own tale.

If we go back to Naqsh Collective's *Akka Artwork*, we see artists working with historic techniques, modernizing and revolutionizing them, preserving their heritage for future generations. While much of the work in *bahith* looks to the past, more often than not, this is a starting point to question how things might turn out in the future. In the ancient site of Akka, boys jump from a cliff into the water to symbolize moving from childhood into adulthood. As many of the artists within the exhibition go through a time of transition, this coming-of-age ritual reflects a common feeling of hope and positivity about what might come next.

bahith (seeker) is on display at Gazelli Art House, 39 Dover Street, London W1S 4NN until 11 August 2019

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Posted by Lizzy Vartanian Collier

Lizzy Vartanian Collier is a London-based writer and curator. She is the founder of Gallery Girl - a London-based curatorial platform and website dedicated to modern and contemporary art from across the globe. Her work is primarily focused on supporting emerging female artists from the Middle East and the Caucasus. She has written for Canvas Magazine, Harper's Bazaar Arabia, Ibraaz, Jdeed Magazine, Suitcase and Vice Arabia among other publications. Her exhibitions in London and Armenia have been featured in Vogue Arabia, The Art Newspaper, The Art Gorgeous and numerous other news outlets. Gallery Girl has also spoken in the UK, UAE and Belgium about the contemporary art scene in the MENA region, and is planning further events in London and Amman.



