

## It's A Wrap: Jeddah Art Week

Recently, Saudi Arabia has made a cultural statement by promoting local artists and showcasing a growing interest in developing its contemporary art scene—for instance, take the newly founded [Jameel Photography Award](#) for Saudi artists and the upcoming inaugural Saudi Design Week in Riyadh. Jeddah, in particular, has seen its cultural landscape blossoming with a set of art events, reflecting a new dialogue enhanced by the work of contemporary talents from the Middle East. This month, Jeddah is home to three major contemporary art exhibitions—Jeddah Art Week; 21,39; and Contemporary Kingdom. The city has also applied for registration in [UNESCO's World Heritage List](#).

The second edition of [Saudi Arabia's Jeddah Art Week](#) (JAW), held at Al FuruSiya, Park Hyatt Jeddah, under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture and Information and Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives, ended last week. The event made for a week full of regional and international contemporary art, displayed through a dozen exhibitions, street performances, and outdoor installations.

JAW's main events coincided with both the newly founded 21,39 [contemporary art event](#) and Ayyam Gallery's current exhibition Contemporary Kingdom, which puts the latest works of six established and up-and-coming Saudi artists on display.

These art initiatives were not only aiming to invigorate the local art scene, by establishing a creative dialogue that reflected various cultural influences common to the region, but also to capture international attention with a display of selected works from internationally reputed artists.

In this context, Damien Hirst's *Tranquility* (2008) and *Har Megiddo* (2008) paintings were showcased for Sotheby's Contemporary Highlights exhibition, and [eL Seed](#) was invited to do a street-art performance, entitled Poetic Ballad, which kicked-off the art fair. eL Seed was commissioned to embellish Al Balad, Jeddah's historical city district, with his specific style of ["calligrafitti" art](#).

Other artists included up-and-coming Middle Eastern talents, such as pop-culture artists [Huda Beydoun](#) and [Shaweesh](#), who produced a humor-filled critique of the Kingdom's political and social status quo. Additionally, more well-established names were present, including Saudi artist [Khalid Zahid](#) and his *'I Dream Kingdom'* solo-show, along with Tunisian calligraphers [Nja Mahdaoui](#) and [Khaled Ben Slimane](#), who exhibited *Mapping Azimuth: Two Calligraphic Ascensions*, an installation curated by Galerie El Marsa.

JAW also made a statement by addressing topics of the moment, such as the influence of social media and internet on every day life (Esc, Virtual Reality, design installation by [Nour Kelani](#)), the stereotypical representation of Saudi Arabian women (Single Saudi Woman, exhibition by [Wasma Mansour](#)), and the on-going Orientalism trend (a collection of works by Dr. Mohammed Abu Al Naja).

Although the contemporary art events have officially ended, JAW's exhibition at Al Fursiya and Ayyam Gallery's Contemporary Kingdom are continuing until February 28th.

by Elisabeta Tudor

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