

March 8, 2018

The Secret Life of Mushrooms and Other Stories

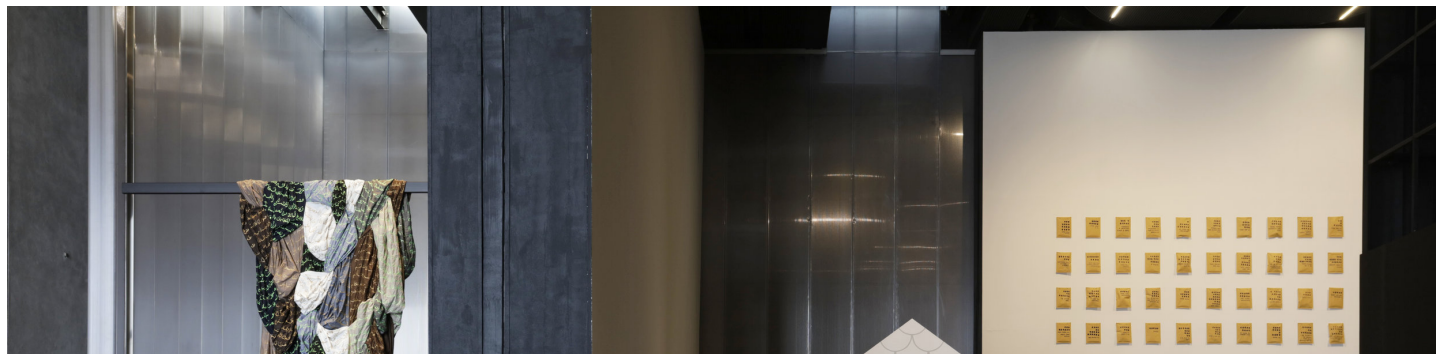


shot, *Mycelial Meshing* (2018) by Flounder Lee. Courtesy UAE Unlimited and Alserkal Programming.

Ok, so I couldn't resist the title, because when I came across Flounder Lee's work as part of *Ishara: Signs, Symbols and Shared Languages*, I was totally fascinated by his concept and the research behind it. For *Mycelial Meshing* (2018), Lee has mimicked the underground network of fungi, which is the way scientists have recently discovered that plants communicate with each other. While mushrooms might be the most familiar part of a fungus, most of their bodies are made up of a mass of thin threads, known as a mycelium that thread their way underground and link roots of different plants: rather like a botanical internet.

For an exhibition that investigates communication, this is a genius analogy of the way we are all connected and Lee's installation uses steel pipes, concrete and electrical cables as well as incorporating a low-frequency sound that is hardly perceptible to the human ear yet is deeply unsettling at a subconscious level. This, combined with motion-sensitive cameras that trigger coloured lights to come on as you pass, and a viewer ends up being simultaneously entranced and repelled by this artwork.

"What I am also addressing [alongside the way mushrooms talk to each other], is the network and infrastructures that human communication relies upon as well as the underlying anxieties of the digital age," he says.





Ishara: Signs, Symbols and Shared Languages (installation view). Hanging on the left is Amna Al Dabbagh's *The Hanging Odes* (2018) and the installation on the right is Farah Al Qasimi's *Everybody was Invited to a Party* (2018). On the rear wall is Nasir Nasrallah's *Forgotten Title* (2018) made of 100 everyday objects in envelopes with a coded description written on the surface. Courtesy UAE Unlimited and Alserkal Programming.

The show is the fourth annual exhibition to emerge from the UAE Unlimited platform. Supported by one of the country's most prominent – and youngest – art collectors Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, the initiative recognises the importance of supporting and allowing young and emerging artists and curators to develop their skills. Lee is one of 10 artists who have spent the past few months working under the guidance of the exhibition's curator, Karim Sultan, senior advisor, Laura Metzler and Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmanian, a trio of artists who were the selected mentors for this year's exhibition.

“Responding to the idea of language,” Sultan explains, “is a way of reflecting on the way of life in the UAE.” In a city with 200 nationalities and several lingua franca, the nuance and subtleties of communication that accompany the actual spoken word are often lost and learning to navigate misunderstandings and peculiarities of expression is part of everyday life in the UAE.

The piece is made from hanging fabrics that are layered upon each other and bear patterned prints from in Palestinian heritage and tradition. “I wanted to form a kind of landscape to identify with a land I cannot access as well as talk about the transiency of language,” Khorchid explains. Subtle and delicate, this piece demands attention in an understated way.



Still from Farah Al Qasimi's *Everybody was Invited to a Party*, 2018, a video based on the Arabic version of Sesame Street that addresses issues of translation. Courtesy UAE Unlimited and Alserkal Programming.

called Al Mu'allaqat – often considered as the equivalent to Shakespeare or Chaucer in the English language. She has embroidered lettering onto the cloth made for every day garments as an attempt to give physical shape to lettering yet simultaneously making it illegible.

Farah Al Qasimi also responded to the idea of illegibility by addressing translation issues in her playful video *Everybody was Invited to a Party (2018)*. It pulls inspiration from the 1980s Arabic version of Sesame Street (Iftah Ya Simsim) and uses puppets to present language and letters as malleable objects without fixed meaning.



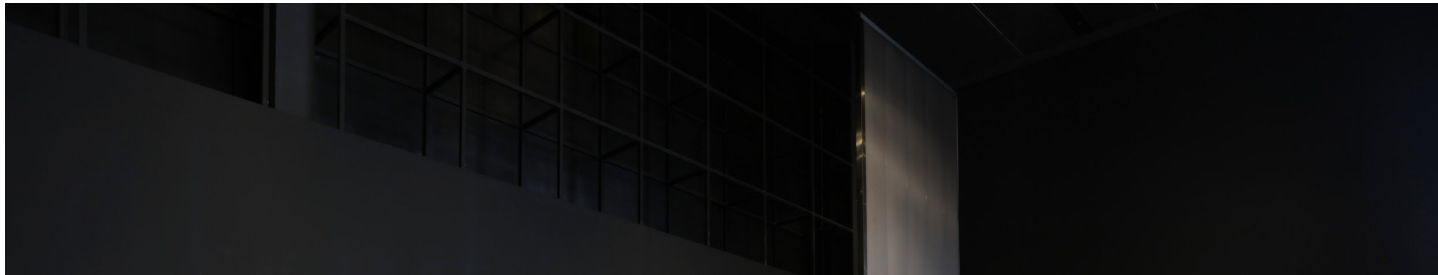
Alserkal Programming.

One of my standout works in the exhibition is Sheikha Al Ketbi's *Ath'thaniyah (2018)*. It is a performative video work showing the artist recreating a subconscious vision that she had of herself climbing stairs in a barren landscape towards a satellite dish. The video plays to her interest in objects as animated beings and her fascination with satellite dishes as responsive to the information they receive. "I don't know if it is dream or reality," she says. "It is a metaphysical reaction towards language and represents my consciousness talking to my subconscious."

All the artworks in the show offer a contemplative experience in their own way and it has been beautifully curated within a purpose built exhibition inside Concrete: Alserkal Avenue's multifunctional space, which allows for an enjoyable viewer experience.

Other highlights include Saba Qizilbash's *Land Marks (2018)* – a grid-like structure of pencil drawings mounted on wood-blocks. The drawings are of actual geographical borders but together, they discuss the no-man's land of misunderstanding that can arise with translation between languages. Lastly, I have to pay a mention to Salem Al Mansoori's four pieces of 3D printed works made from an algorithm that turns verbal speech into a physical structure. The conceptual stand of turning the intangibility of voice into a sculpture is intriguing and just another example of a way in which this exhibition can surprise you.

- *Ishara: Signs, Symbols & Shared Languages. March 5 – April 1, Concrete, Alserkal Avenue.*





Ishara: Signs, Symbols and Shared Languages (installation view). Visible on the left is Saba Qizilbash's *Land Marks* (2018) and on the right, Salem Al Mansoori's *Going Inside, In The Dictionary and Body Language* 2018 Courtesy UAE Unlimited and Alserkal Programming.

Dine with a Jeff Koons for Dubai Art Week

NEXT

Art Dubai to partner with Misk Institute



Content ©Anna Seaman 2017

*Website by Monsoon Media
Collective*