

# BAZAAR

Harper's

ARABIA

# ART

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FARIDEH  
LASHAI  
AND HER  
ENCHANTING OEUVRE

AFRUZ AMIGHI'S  
UTOPIAN  
TOWERS

WINDS OF CHANGE  
MIDDLE EASTERN ART  
*at the* GUGGENHEIM  
NEW YORK

COMPLIMENTARY COPY

Musa Al-Shadeedi. *His Look*. 2016.  
Print on paper. 40 x 60 cm.



*For a*  
**WOMAN'S**  
**LIBERTY**

*At once an exhibition and a fundraising campaign, Abolish Article 153 reveals artworks by emerging Middle Eastern artists which protest against a discriminatory law that continues to permit honour killing, says **Rebecca Anne Proctor***

**R**ows of blue empty bleachers define an area used to habitual mass crowds. But no one is there now except for one small box allocated up the stairway. In it is a woman dressed all in white, the tail of her veil draped over to one side, as she bends her head over, as if in prayer or in mourning. An untitled work from the *Cornered* series by Kuwaiti artist Farah Salem, the photograph is one of many by the artist that features women trapped in boxes in various landscapes. It evokes the idea of physical and mental entrapment either from societal constraints or from the conflicts ranging in an individual's mind. It is being displayed as part of *Abolish Article 153*, a group exhibition at JAMM Art Gallery in Dubai as part of a larger eponymous campaign initiated by a group of Kuwaiti women active in society, business and the arts, calling for the abolition of article 153 in the Kuwaiti penal code.

The cause is one that Lulu Al-Sabah, a member of the Kuwaiti royal family and founder of JAMM art gallery, has been championing for years. "I had wanted to be more active in helping women and children in this region," says Lulu. "Then I found out about this law [Article 153]. While it exists you cannot build shelters to protect women and children. The same goes with domestic violence, if a husband and wife have a fight the police cannot intervene because by law it is between them. If a woman's life is under threat there is nowhere for her to go." The law states that any man who surprises his mother, sister, daughter or wife in an unsavoury act with a man and kills her or him or both will be treated as committing a misdemeanour punishable by a maximum of three years of jail time or a fine of 14 Kuwaiti dinars (approximately US\$60). The aim of the campaign and of the exhibition is to build coalitions across the GCC and Arab world to abolish similar laws across the region. Al-Sabah also plans to further its mission internationally and build coalitions with like-minded organisations and individuals.

The second iteration of an event that took place in Kuwait in 2015, the Dubai show features 40 works by emerging artists from the region, including Iraqi artist Musa Al Shadeedi, Saudi artist Tagreed Al Bagshi, Iranian Mehdi Darvishi, Bahraini Zuhair Al Saeed and Kuwaiti artists Maha Al Asaker, Farah Salem, Thuraya Lynn Al Jasem, Zahra Al Mahdi, Amani Al Thuwaini, Deena Qabazard and Tareq Sultan. The works have been specially commissioned for the exhibition, with half of the sale proceeds going to the Abolish



# ABOLISH ARTICLE 153

ART COLLECTORS EDITION

Above: The collector's edition catalogue for Abolish Article 153.

Left: Tagreed Al Bagshi. *Freedom*. 2016. Acrylic on canvas. 230 x 186 cm.

153 campaign. "I told all the artists that what you do is entirely up to you as long as the artworks are for this show," says Lulu. "I told them to push the envelope and be free in their expression."

At the crux of the exhibition is a reflection on how the status of women in the region has influenced their visual representation. Artworks explore notions of gender inequality, sensuality and ultimately, a woman's right to control her own body. The works, which are done in a variety of media, from painting, sculpture and illustration, all give voice to the otherwise invisible or phantom female persona. In the photographs of Musa Al-Shaheedi we are provided with a glimpse of a constantly disappearing woman: she is *The Grand Odalisque* painted in 1814 by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres. Al-Shaheedi captures parts of Ingres' beautiful woman wrapped within a black veil. She peers out at the viewer and similar to the 19th century version, we want to see more. But what differentiates this contemporary version from its historical one is how it interrogates the art historical canon regarding what is visible to history. The artist seems to ask: How can a woman's true presence be narrated through an image?

In the abstract and largely conceptual works of Zuhair Al Saeed and Tarek Sultan the woman becomes "the other" through depictions of the female form through expressionistic renditions of an external consciousness—a woman's body is not seen here, only references to her former presence are revealed. This is seen in Sultan's *My Liver* that shows a human liver on a weighing scale balanced by stacks of coins. Meanwhile, Tagreed

Bagshi paints endearing figurative renditions of male-female relationships in Gulf. In one work entitled *The Gate*, a line of five men dressed in their white konduras appear in an enclosed space, while three women donning their black abayas and burqas stroll into the room as if to scope out the men. One man holds out a bouquet of roses, another worry beads, while the last one has a falcon perched on his hand. Here Bagshi portrays subtle metaphors that reference the gender stereotypes around her.

While the participation of women in politics and society across the Gulf has certainly witnessed an increase over the last decade, with notable examples in the UAE, it is largely inconceivable that such laws continue remain in place. Art here offers a middle ground that you can't persecute. It offers a way to communicate this cause to all through visual representation. "As we venture into the best of all possible worlds, ahead of us, and embodied in purely human dreams, we ought to discard social structures from a past that we did not choose, in order to articulate a common future desirable for all," says Arie Amaya Akkermas in one of the catalogue essays. The artwork in this exhibition as the campaign does—offers hope.

And that hope or rather liberty is something that is portrayed in Bagshi's painting *Freedom*. In the artist's endearing style she portrays a woman dressed in white with her long black hair blowing in the wind and arms outstretched. Two hungry looking lions approach her but she seems not to notice. With her eyes closed and standing against a bright golden sun, the woman seems free from all pain and suffering. ■

[abolish153.org](http://abolish153.org)