



Transformative Artistic Discourse (Environmental Consciousness in Saudi Arabian Contemporary Art)

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ABSTRACT

The evolving landscape of Middle Eastern contemporary art, particularly from Saudi Arabia, necessitates reexamining existing art historical approaches. The growing imperative drives this research to illuminate conceptual and historical narratives in regional art production. This study contends that the creative endeavors in Saudi Arabian contemporary art give rise to novel manifestations and concepts that mirror the region's environmental ethos. Supported by governmental initiatives and local art institutions, these emerging narratives explore urgent environmental concerns while resonating with ecology, energy, and urban development themes. To examine the interplay of local and international perspectives, this paper uses a qualitative methodology to conduct a review analysis of artworks showcased at prominent exhibitions such as those hosted by Noor Riyadh and Tuwaiq Sculpture. By scrutinizing these platforms, the study aims to shed light on the significant and transformative influence of governmental initiatives, biennials, art fairs, and local art institutions on shaping contemporary artistic conceptions from Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: contemporary art, Saudi Arabia, art history, environmental humanities, energy.



Methodology

The research employs a comprehensive qualitative approach to investigate the changing landscape of contemporary Middle Eastern art, with a specific focus on the art scene in Saudi Arabia. It involves analyzing artworks from key exhibitions and institutions to explore regional art's historical and conceptual narratives. Artworks from renowned institutions such as Noor Riyadh and Tuwaiq Sculpture will be selected based on their representation of themes related to the region's environmental consciousness, energy, and urban development. Data collection methods involve examining selected artworks through observation, documentation, and potential interviews with artists or curators to gain insights into the meanings and contexts of the studied artworks. The analytical framework is grounded in concepts such as environmental awareness, governmental initiatives, and the role of local art institutions in shaping contemporary art in Saudi Arabia. By interpreting the selected artworks through this framework, the study aims to reveal the influence of these elements on artistic production in the region.

Introduction: Contextualizing Middle Eastern Contemporary Art

Through proactive environmental initiatives driven by government agencies in alignment with Saudi Arabian's Vision 2030, a strategic roadmap devised by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, various art forms such as exhibitions, biennials, and awards have stimulated an artistic response and bolstered contemporary artists' engagement. The research delves into the region's environmental affairs by scrutinizing current art exhibitions and fairs and conceptualizing contemporary art production in Saudi Arabia during the twenty-first century. Exploring contemporary art from Saudi Arabia through environmental humanities studies establishes a novel regional discourse in art history, enriching the regional artistic repository and broadening artistic methodologies in contrast to prevalent themes. In addition, LeMenager and Stephanie Foots (2012) have argued that “sustainability and the humanities have always been compatible projects. While the sustainable humanities include the work of ecocritics and environmental critics, it refers more broadly to the ecological value of humanities education (LeMenager & Stephanie Foots, 2012, p.572).” Hence, dialogues surrounding sustainability and the environment within the realm of art serve to cultivate societal consciousness and incite substantial transformation for the times ahead. This conscientiousness towards the environment would remain unrealized without acknowledging art's role as a driving force for societal transformation within the locale.

Scholars have reservations regarding Western methodologies for interpreting Middle Eastern art, cautioning against overarching generalizations about the region's artistic output. In his work from 2015, art historian Hamid Keshmirshakan contends that it is imperative to employ art historical and cultural studies methodologies in defining the "Middle East." This approach facilitates an appreciation of the region's distinctive intellectual and artistic advancements. Keshmirshakan asserts that, until recently, Western perspectives dominated the presentation and discussion of Middle Eastern



art. Furthermore, art historian Nada Shabout (2015) discusses the challenge of accessing credible resources essential for research and pedagogy. She attributes this shortage of resources to the legacy of colonization, whereby the colonizing powers should have scrutinized and acknowledged the region's art history.

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in contemporary Middle Eastern art, especially from the Arabian Gulf. The roles played by art institutions in the region have significantly contributed to this interest, elevating the Gulf as a prominent cultural and artistic destination in the global art scene. Even though these institutions have gone far in reaching out to the international art world, other socio-political aspects underline this sudden interest in the artistic production of this region, including the globalization of the art scene, the increased interest in topics related to art and politics, which has shifted the attention to conflict zones and trouble spots; and the events of September 11, 2001, and its aftermath (Shabout, 2015). She adds that the events of 9/11 marked a pivotal moment in the increased focus on anything related to the Middle East. In addition, Wilson-Goldie (2010) argues that the rise in this interest is partly due to the rise in prominence of the Gulf as the center of promising galleries and exhibitions. Diversifying approaches to Arabian Gulf contemporary art is of utmost urgency and importance. As such, this research emphasizes the originality and distinctiveness of Saudi Arabian art, which deserves recognition.

The existing literature reviews highlight significant issues concerning Western interpretations of Middle Eastern art. Art critics and scholars have stressed that Middle Eastern art is still predominantly viewed through a Western lens within the contemporary art discourse. This perspective must encompass these artists' approaches, themes, and interests. Therefore, we must re-evaluate how we theorize art to address these issues. Art critics should aim to broaden their approaches and narratives, moving beyond recurring themes that contribute to existing stereotypes and perceptions to challenge and diversify them. Embedding energy narratives in contemporary art offers insights into the cultural ethos of a specific time and place, unveiling lesser-explored environmental issues in Saudi Arabia and documenting the region's cultural and ecological transformations. Consequently, these visual and theoretical explorations herald a fresh perspective on the impact of energy on modern life in Saudi Arabia, paving the way for heightened artistic engagement with the region's environmental discourse.

The paper aims to provide a critical perspective on a collection of chosen contemporary artworks from local Saudi exhibitions and art fairs. The paintings reflect aspects of environmental humanities and subsequent petroculture that have defined the region since the advent of its oil economy in the 20th century. The research provides a different approach to Arabian Gulf contemporary art to diversify the approaches to this region's current and evolving art and culture.

By examining current art exhibitions and fairs, the research delves deeper into how these platforms reflect the evolving environmental landscape of Saudi Arabia. By reviewing the thematic threads that run through these artistic expressions, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how contemporary artists respond to environmental challenges within the socio-political context of the region. Moreover, diverse



perspectives, including those of art historian Hamid Keshmirshekan, add depth to the interpretation of Middle Eastern art production. By incorporating methodological approaches from art history and cultural studies, the research contextualizes the regional artistic developments and intellectual legacy, shedding light on the complexities of defining and categorizing artistic practices in the Middle East.

Furthermore, it includes a more thorough analysis of the interconnected relationship between energy narratives and cultural expressions in contemporary Saudi Arabian art. By delving into how artists navigate these complex intersections, the paper provides valuable insights into the region's multifaceted dialogue surrounding environmental awareness and artistic creativity. By incorporating these improvements, the research offers a more cohesive narrative addressing the importance of ecological consciousness in contemporary Saudi Arabian art within a broader cultural and historical context.

Evolution of Environmental Consciousness in Art

Exploring environmental concepts has been a prominent and critical subject in artistic discourse for centuries. The evolution of ecological art mirrors shifting attitudes towards nature and the environment. Artists have consistently grappled with environmental concerns, from the 19th-century landscape paintings that exalted the natural world to the contemporary installations confronting climate change and biodiversity loss.

During the 19th century, the Romantic art movement celebrated nature's awe-inspiring beauty. Artists such as Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) and J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) captured the magnificent force of the natural world in their landscapes, often imbuing their works with feelings of contemplation and solitude. They aimed to elevate nature to a spiritual realm, emphasizing its role as a wellspring of inspiration and wonder (Gombrich, 2006).

As the 20th century progressed, the modernist movement revolutionized artistic representation, with artists like Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) exploring abstract forms and vibrant hues. Even as artists departed from realistic depictions of the natural world, environmental themes continued to inspire. For instance, O'Keeffe's vibrant flower paintings can be interpreted as an homage to the beauty and diversity of plant life (Arnason, 2004).

With the environmental movement gaining momentum in the 20th century, leading to increased awareness of pollution, deforestation, and climate change, artists began addressing these concerns in their work, harnessing their creative talents to raise consciousness and stimulate thoughtful reflection. The Earthworks movement of the 1960s and 70s saw artists like Robert Smithson (1927-1974) and Richard Long (1938-1973) creating large-scale installations that interacted with the landscape inventively, challenging conventional art concepts and highlighting the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world (Miller et al., 2008).

In recent decades, environmental themes in art have become increasingly urgent and impactful as the repercussions of human activity on the planet have grown more



pronounced. Artists have responded to these challenges with impactful installations addressing climate change, diminishing biodiversity, and pollution. For example, Olafur Eliasson's (b. 1967) Ice-Watch (2014) project features twelve enormous blocks of ice that broke off from the Greenland ice sheet. These blocks are collected from a fjord near Nuuk and arranged in a clock formation at a notable public location. Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing's project aims to raise awareness about climate change by providing a first-hand and palpable experience of the actuality of melting arctic ice. The project drew attention to the effects of global warming on polar ice caps by transporting large ice chunks from Greenland to major cities globally, where they slowly melted (olafurEliasson.net, n.d.).

From the Romantic landscapes of the 19th century to the cutting-edge installations of today, artists have consistently tackled environmental issues using various creative and pioneering methods. By delving into these subjects through art, we can contemplate the effects of human actions on our planet. As we grapple with the complexities of the environmental crisis, art continues to serve as a potent medium for raising awareness and prompting deep reflection.

Environmental Consciousness Themes in the Saudi Art Scene

This section of the study presents a coherent narrative that delves into the significance of ecological awareness in contemporary Saudi Arabian art within a broader cultural and historical framework. It explores government initiatives and local art organizations that promote evolving conceptual frameworks, including projects aligned with Saudi Arabian Vision 2030. These projects encompass the King Salman Energy Park, Green Riyadh, Low Power Research Reactor, Middle East Green Initiative, Sakaka Solar Power Plant, Saudi Green Initiative, and the Water Desalination Project Using Solar Power. Additionally, it examines cultural and artistic programs within Vision 2030, which include institutions such as Diriyah Gate, Riyadh Art, Urban Art Lab (ميادين Art on the Move حدائق المرح)، Joyous Gardens (ساحات الفن)، (نور الرياض) Noor Riyadh (الفن)، and the Tuwaiq Sculpture Festival. The artworks showcased in these Saudi Arabian initiatives provide insight into two main themes: energy dynamics and the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Haroon Mirza's Energy for the Sake of Retaining Power (Solar Symphony 16) (2022) installation at the Noor Riyadh is a testament to the innovative spirit of contemporary Saudi Arabian art. This captivating piece explores the intersection of art, energy, and nature in a way that is both thought-provoking and inspiring. Mirza's reimagining of the 'Dyson Sphere' configuration, traditionally a theoretical megastructure encompassing a star to capture its power, to incorporate indigenous flora and photovoltaic panels, is a stroke of artistic genius. The fusion of technology and natural elements creates a harmonious system to generate electricity to support and nurture botanical specimens, a concept that is as innovative as it is beautiful.

Mirza's work challenges traditional notions of art by highlighting the impact of eclecticism on human perceptions. By prioritizing the reception of the message over



its transmission, the installation prompts viewers to contemplate the broader implications of renewable energy, sustainability, and the coexistence of art and nature. The thought-provoking nature of the artwork encourages a deeper exploration of the relationship between humans, technology, and the environment, inviting contemplation and engagement with these pressing contemporary issues.

The sculpture *Synergy Equilibrium* (2023) by Sasho Sazdovski is a mesmerizing work of art that intricately combines various forms and textures in beautiful beige and dark brown shades. This masterful piece symbolizes a harmonious interplay of energies and forces, inviting viewers into deep contemplation and reflection. When observing this sculpture, one is captivated by a story that delves into the themes of change, transition, and the simultaneous existence of contrasting ideas. Sazdovski's expertise in seamlessly integrating these contrasting elements offers a profound meditation on the themes of transformation and evolution. "*Synergy Equilibrium*" represents the artist's skill in capturing the intricate dance of energies and forces through sculpture.

The installation *Sand and Oil* (2018-2022) by Bricklab, showcased at Noor Riyadh, presented a captivating blend of translucent sheets meticulously crafted from a unique combination of sand and resin. The sand, representing Saudi Arabia's iconic landscapes, was carefully juxtaposed with resin sourced from petroleum, symbolizing the nation's economic strength and role in urban development. Created for the Saudi pavilion at the 16th International Venice Architecture Biennale, this remarkable installation was later adapted for the Noor Riyadh Festival, incorporating lighting elements to symbolize the country's dynamic development path. The interplay of light and shadows on the handcrafted surfaces emphasized the artistry while offering a symbolic representation of Saudi Arabia's potential for progress and innovation in an urban context. The artwork skillfully captures the harmonious balance between the country's natural resources and economic growth by using sand and resin to create translucent sheets, making *Sand and Oil* a potent and thought-provoking artistic statement. The installation's portrayal of the country's natural resources and economic strength was exceptionally evocative. The choice of materials and lighting elements added another layer of meaning to the artwork. The interplay of light and shadows highlighted the craftsmanship's intricacy and served as a metaphor for the country's journey of progress and innovation. This thoughtful integration of materials and artistic elements made *Sand and Oil* a powerful commentary on the relationship between natural resources, economic development, and the potential for creative expression to convey complex societal narratives.

Nasser Al Turki's *Growth* (2022) at Noor Riyadh is a captivating sculpture that features a mesmerizing spiral structure inspired by the unique form of an oil well drilling rig. This sculpture is a powerful symbol of the intertwining narrative of progress and prosperity associated with the oil industry, reflecting Saudi Arabia's deep economic connections to oil production. Al Turki's creative transformation of an industrial object into an art piece encourages viewers to reflect on the cyclical nature of growth and contemplate the evolving role of oil in shaping the country's complex socioeconomic landscape.



The Eshroun Thalathoun: Tahawul (transformation) (2022) installation by Omar Abduljawad at the 2022 Noor Riyadh Festival is a remarkable display of architectural light. This art piece symbolizes Saudi Arabia's transition towards a more diversified economy, as outlined in Vision 2030. The installation's visual narrative is a juxtaposition, with one side in black representing the nation's historical dependence on oil and the illuminated side symbolizing its aspirations for a future beyond an oil-centric economy. The installation's interplay of light and shadow creates a thought-provoking experience that invites contemplation on the country's economic evolution. In parallel, Rashed Alshashai's 100 Million (2022) installation at Noor Riyadh delves into the complex and multifaceted relationship between oil production, environmental sustainability, and potential hazards. Using a combination of artistic elements, including oil, light, and planetary motifs, Alshashai's work sparks significant discussions on resource utilization, the importance of environmental conservation, and the ecological impact of oil-focused economies. This thoughtfully crafted installation encourages viewers to consider the broader implications of oil economies and the interconnectedness of environmental and economic factors.

The featured artworks offer a captivating exploration of the intricate realm of energy, presenting a deep understanding of historical energy dynamics and their profound impact on the quality of life. A central theme reflected in these pieces is the pressing need to explore alternative energy sources while paying homage to the past and forging a sustainable future. The artworks introduce many new themes, including hope, oil, renewable energy, transformation, growth, and alternative energy, providing a nuanced perspective on energy sustainability. Drawing influence from Vision 2030, the contemporary art scene in Saudi Arabia embraces a forward-looking approach, profoundly shaping the country's socioeconomic landscape and leaving an indelible mark on the art community. International artists have lauded Saudi Arabia's efforts towards environmental conservation and urban development, expressed through their artworks capturing this evolving narrative.

Works by renowned artists such as Bricklab, Nasser Al Turki, Omar Abduljawad, and Rashed Alshashai are potent expressions of Saudi Arabia's response to the imperative of economic diversification away from oil dependency. Their creations encapsulate the Saudi vision for a sustainable, progressive, post-oil era. Notable installations such as Sand and Oil by Bricklab, Growth by Nasser Al Turki, Eshroun Thalathoun: Tahawul (transformation) by Omar Abduljawad, and 100 Million by Rashed Alshashai at the Noor Riyadh Festival symbolize profound themes relevant to Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic and environmental landscape, weaving together layers of symbolism, allegory, and visual storytelling to reflect the country's history, industry, and aspirations. In essence, these artworks mirror Saudi Arabia's socioeconomic evolution and environmental consciousness within the framework of Vision 2030. They challenge viewers to contemplate the nation's past, present, and future realities and highlight the convergence of industry, environment, innovation, and sustainability in reshaping Saudi Arabia's artistic and developmental spheres.

A closer examination of these artworks and initiatives within Vision 2030 sheds light on the central themes of energy and the intricate relationship between humankind and



the environment. Notable government projects such as the King Salman Energy Park and the Middle East Green Initiative demonstrate an unwavering dedication to sustainability and renewable energy. Additionally, cultural endeavors like Diriyah Gate and Noor Riyadh exemplify how artists interpret these themes using diverse art forms, emphasizing the fusion of environmental awareness and artistic creativity, reinforcing Saudi Arabia's commitment to a sustainable and progressive future.

The Interconnection of Humans and Nature

The Noor Riyadh exhibition provided a distinctive and immersive experience, focusing on art and light in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This paper discusses the diverse and captivating collection of artistic installations that explore the intricate relationship between nature and humanity. One particularly memorable piece was Sylvain Patte's *Expansion* (2023), a remarkable sculpture depicting the delicate balance and profound connection between the natural world and human existence. "Expansion" prompted introspection and encouraged us to reassess our eroding connection with the environment. Additionally, a collection of artworks featured in Noor Riyadh is presented in this section, reflecting the connection between humans and nature.

For example, *Between Biotic and Bionic* (2022), an installation by the talented artist Ayman Zedani, provides an immersive sensory experience that seamlessly blends sound, lighting, sculptural elements, and live vegetation to evoke extraordinary animalistic forms known as "The Emergents." This captivating piece encourages profound contemplation on the harmonious coexistence of artificial and organic components and serves as a poignant reminder of the pressing environmental challenges that demand our attention. Another example is Obaid Al Safi's *Carving the Future* (2022), a mesmerizing crystalline structure showcasing AI-generated images of the desert and the city of Riyadh. This thought-provoking installation seeks to deepen our comprehension of the environmental impact of rapid changes in Saudi Arabia on the land and its society.

In addition, Zahra Al Ghamdi's *Soliloquy* (2022) is a powerful depiction of the Earth, presenting it as a vast sphere shrouded in harsh and rugged terrain. The artwork delves deep into the current environmental challenges humanity faces, offering a thought-provoking exploration of the impact of human activity on our planet. *Soliloquy*'s intricate details and masterful brushwork compel viewers to reflect on the pressing environmental issues of our time and the drastic changes in our planet's landscape. This nuanced portrayal by the artist prompts contemplation of the urgency and gravity of these challenges, urging us to consider our relationship with the Earth.

Mohammad AlFaraj hails from AlHassa, a thriving agricultural region in Saudi Arabia known as "al-Ahsa," home to the world's largest oasis. This environment sparked the artist's passion for nature and ecology, which he incorporated into his diverse art practice addressing socio-environmental issues. AlFaraj's work primarily explores the relationship between humans and nature, infused with hope. He utilizes digital mixed media to narrate his story, blending and contrasting elements of fiction



and reality. The artist uses photographic collages to explore non-fiction topics. In his 2017 video, *The Sun*, again, he highlights the significance of our everyday lives.

The artist employs dynamic visuals and orchestrated sounds to tackle a significant environmental imbalance, suggesting that controlling human instincts can avert a grim future. He urges a reconnection with nature, promoting a youthful mindset and curiosity about the Earth, water, and other natural elements. He emphasizes that humans are Mother Earth's descendants. His poetic message conveys that this boundless love will ensure the sun's return.

Abdullah Alothman's remarkable sculptural installation, *Rawdah* (2022), is a captivating and immersive piece of art that draws inspiration from the diverse natural elements in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The striking installation elegantly celebrates the city's unique indigenous flora, seamlessly intertwining art and nature. A careful observer can discern how the mesmerizing artwork intends to integrate these natural elements into Riyadh's vibrant urban landscape, creating a harmonious coexistence between the city and its natural environment.

Sara Abu-Abdallah's poignant creation, *Trees Speaking with Each Other* (2019), is a thought-provoking testament to the interconnectedness and nurturing relationship between plants. The installation consists of a giant wooden planter box with artificial grow lights to grow heirloom tomatoes that were once commonly grown in her hometown but are now becoming less available due to urbanization. This powerful piece symbolizes the profound significance of reclaiming what has been overshadowed by the rapid pace of urban development. In an evocative manner, the installation underscores the urgent need to recognize and actively prioritize our reconnection with nature and the environment. It is a compelling and dynamic reminder of crafting spaces that foster a meaningful and sustainable balance between urban living and the natural world.

The Noor Riyadh exhibition offered a genuinely immersive and thought-provoking experience that delved deeply into the intricate connection between nature and humanity. The varied artistic installations showcased at the exhibition emphasized our planet's urgent environmental challenges and encouraged viewers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world.

Through impactful works such as Sylvain Patte's *Expansion*, Ayman Zedani's *Between Biotic and Bionic*, Obaid Al Safi's *Carving the Future*, Zahra Al Ghamdi's *Soliloquy*, Mohammad AlFaraj's piece, Abdullah Alothman's *Rawdah*, and Sara Abu-Abdallah's *Trees Speaking with Each Other*, the exhibition provided a platform for artists to explore and convey the significance of re-establishing our bond with nature. Each installation prompted reflection, contemplation, and dialogue about the urgency of addressing environmental issues and striving for a sustainable balance between urban development and the natural world.

The artists featured in the exhibition conveyed their messages using various mediums, techniques, and narratives. They prompted viewers to contemplate their interactions with the environment and the impact of human activity on the Earth. From intricate sculptures to immersive installations, each artwork narrated a unique story and presented a distinct viewpoint on our relationship with nature.



The Noor Riyadh exhibition was a powerful reminder of the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment. It showcased the magnificence of nature, the challenges we face in preserving it, and the critical need to take proactive measures to protect our planet for future generations. The exhibition sparked meaningful conversations through art and light, encouraged introspection, and rekindled a profound responsibility towards our collective home, Earth. It emphasized prioritizing our connection with nature, advocating for sustainable living practices, and striving for a harmonious coexistence between humankind and the natural world.

The impact of government and art institutions in promoting environmental consciousness through art

The impact of Saudi Arabian government initiatives and art institutions in promoting environmental awareness through art is significant. Since introducing Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has seen a rise in contemporary art exhibitions addressing pressing environmental issues. These issues prompt deep reflection on how petroculture shapes artistic representation and ecological consciousness, contributing to the global energy discussion.

The Noor Riyadh Festival, launched in 2021, divided this year's exhibition into four distinct sections, or "rays," each exploring light as an artistic medium. These sections, named "Perceiving Light," "Experiencing Light," "Projecting Light," and "Environmental Light," offered different perspectives on the featured illuminations. The "environmental light" section showcased artwork on sustainability and environmental issues. Eiman Elgibreen, Pam Toonen, Susan Davidson, and Raneem Farsi curated Noor Riyadh to encourage viewers to consider their responsibility for the future of our planet. Curators Susan Davidson and Raneem Farsi emphasized the interconnected social and aesthetic awareness evident in the artworks presented in this section, fostering a greater understanding of environmental issues in our daily lives. These works evoke memories and emotions and call on us to actively safeguard our planet. This esteemed cultural event seamlessly blended art, technology, and sustainability through immersive installations and interactive experiences, providing artists a platform to address environmental challenges in original and thought-provoking ways.

Similarly, The Tuwaiq Sculpture 2022 project embodies the harmonious fusion of art, nature, and culture, celebrating the region's artistic heritage and promoting environmental awareness. According to their website, the theme of the 4th Tuwaiq Sculpture edition was 'Harmonious Energy,' encouraging artists to reconsider sculptural possibilities and capture the visible results of temporary change processes. Transformations that change shape are akin to composing music - seamlessly blending diverse voices and embracing diversity to achieve rhythmic unity. By conveying the concept of interdependence, 'Harmonious Energy' also embodies the principles of calligraphy and urban design, emphasizing integrity, balance, and coherence to create a whole more significant than the sum of its parts. 'Harmonious



Energy' establishes connections and focal points within Riyadh's urban environment, raising awareness of coexisting structures, voices, and patterns.

The contemporary art scene in the Arabian Gulf region increasingly focuses on addressing environmental issues, the impacts of urbanization, and the preservation of cultural identities. This shift in artistic focus reflects a broader engagement with global concerns. Artists in this region use their platforms to raise environmental sustainability awareness, initiate ecological preservation dialogues, and advocate for meaningful social change. The country's collaboration extends to other projects that this paper needs to address due to the paper's limitations, such as the Misk Art Foundation, Jax Arts, and the Diriyah Gate.

According to Arab News, 2021, The Saudi Cultural Development Fund was established as part of Vision 2030 to support individuals, businesses, and civil society groups in the cultural sector. In 2021, it allocated SR 180 million (\$47.9 million) to various projects. Reem Al-Sultan, the CEO of Misk Art Institute, highlighted that Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant cultural transformation. The institute increased its annual Misk Art Grant to SR 1 million, making it the most essential art grant in the region. Additionally, it launched the Art Library, a new initiative to document the work of influential Saudi and Arab artists. Established in 2017 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Misk Art Institute aims to encourage grassroots artistic production in Saudi Arabia, promote the appreciation of Saudi and Arab art, and facilitate cultural diplomacy and exchange. Al-Sultan emphasized that by supporting Saudi art and artists through resources, infrastructure, and opportunities, they draw global attention to the region's rich cultural heritage, encouraging more excellent international dialogue and strengthening relationships with cultural counterparts worldwide.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia has been investing in cultural projects for many years and has recently intensified its focus on the Diriyah Gate project, an artistic and leisure complex located in the historic core of Riyadh. The budget for this ambitious project has been doubled from \$20 billion to \$40 billion, as revealed by Jerry Inzerillo, the CEO of the Diriyah Gate Development Authority, during an interview with Arab News. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman decided to expand the project's budget and scope. Diriyah, the seat of the first Saudi Kingdom in the 18th century, is a critical component of Vision 2030, a series of development and diversification initiatives launched in 2016 that encompass substantial investments in culture, leisure, and tourism.

Collaborations between government initiatives and art institutions have led to meaningful artistic interventions that amplify calls for environmental stewardship and cultural exchange. As the art scene continues to evolve in the Arabian Gulf region, there is a palpable increase in ecological consciousness and social responsibility among artists. The inherent connection between art, government initiatives, and environmental advocacy becomes increasingly evident.



In conclusion

The paper delves into the evolving art landscape in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. It advocates for reexamining existing art historical approaches to fully comprehend the conceptual and historical narratives underpinning the local art scene. The key argument is that contemporary art in Saudi Arabia embodies innovative expressions and ideas influenced by local environmental concerns and cultivated by government and regional art institutions.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to analyze artworks featured in prominent exhibitions, such as those organized by Noor Riyadh and Tuwaiq Sculpture. It underscores the significant impact of governmental initiatives, biennials, art fairs, and local art institutions in shaping modern artistic paradigms in Saudi Arabia. The art pieces featured in these Saudi Arabian projects offer an understanding of two primary subjects: energy dynamics and the complex connection between human beings and the environment.

The paper also highlights Saudi Arabia's influential role in global conversations surrounding sustainability, creativity, and societal transformation through art, emphasizing the pivotal role of art in promoting ecological consciousness and cultural exchange. Moreover, the paper identifies significant findings in the research, offering an original approach to examining how Saudi Arabian artists tackle environmental issues and urban development challenges. The objective is to contribute to discussions on cultural responses to environmental challenges and urban transformations, providing an interdisciplinary perspective on how art can intersect with and influence environmental and urban deliberations.

By examining Saudi Arabian art through this unique scope, this research paper remains relevant to contemporary global challenges and offers interdisciplinary insights. It holds promise for engaging research and scholarly contributions for those interested in exploring how art can drive transformative change about environmental and urban issues.

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