

Albareh gallery

Albareh gallery hosts Jordanian artist Mohammed Al Ameri and Mohammed Al Mahdi from Bahrain. We take a closer look

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Tucked away in Umm Al Hassan, fronted by a tranquil courtyard, [Albareh Gallery](#) is an oasis of calm by all appearances, but inside it's a hotbed of creative talent from the Middle East and beyond spread over two very different spaces: a light, white contemporary gallery and an earthy-hued eclectic café. This month, both offer good reason to visit.

In the gallery, there's an exhibition by acclaimed Jordanian artist Mohammed Al Ameri, while the café showcases works by rising Bahraini star Mohammed Al Mahdi in an extended run after a solo exhibition next door. While the styles and ethos of both artists couldn't be more different – Al Ameri's works are abstract landscapes, while Al Mahdi's are naive and figurative – they have one essential thing in common: both claim that their art is strongly influenced by childhood experiences.

Mohammed Al Ameri

One of the most striking features of Al Ameri's works is their translucence and harmony of colours, combining earthy tones with jolts of vivid blue, red, rich metallic gold... These, he says, are the colours of his childhood, growing up in Jordan, where he recalls hearing the crowing of roosters, chasing rabbits, and watching the sky changing from blue to purple over his village's mud houses. These houses and the annual collective ritual of restoring them with mud and hay were a strong artistic trigger, he says: 'My first drawings were etchings on the surface of the soft mud, as if I was writing a future ambiguous to me, and I've never departed from the texture

of these houses.’ As for the colours, these are born of memories of beads and talismans hanging from door frames, of hands adorned with henna patterns, basil tiaras and groups of men setting off at dawn to work in the fields. ‘These deeply rooted scenes brought to life in me the artist and the poet, and are still in my memory like a mirror I look into daily.’

Initially, Al Ameri drew this reality literally and figuratively, but as other life experiences melded with his childhood ones, in particular his emergence as a celebrated poet, his art became increasingly abstract. ‘After initially wandering between painting and poetry, I now paint and write poetry in parallel,’ he says, ‘each influenced by the other, so that the two intermingle in a mesh of dream and language.’ If his beautiful artistic creations are increasingly removed from reality, however, the materials from which they are created are firmly embedded in it, since he mixes his own colours from things like pomegranate peel, grass, walnuts, tea, hibiscus and various herbs to make colours impossible in manufactured paints – an exciting, adventurous approach that the inner child would surely also applaud.

Al Ameri's works are in several museums and have been sold at auction by Christie's.

Mohammed Al Mahdi

The link between Mohammed Al Mahdi’s work and his childhood is far more overt because, not only do his paintings depict childhood experiences, but the technique he’s adopted is naive and child-like. ‘Make no mistake, though,’ says Hayfa Al Jishi, the gallery’s director, ‘the apparent naivete is due to no lack of skill, but a choice of technique in order to lay bare the innocence and vulnerability of childhood.’

Among the experiences that come through in Al Mahdi's work, one that is repeated regularly is a shattering car accident that the artist was involved in as a child that assigned him to bed for several months and, he says,

robbed him of his childhood. Perhaps his childlike images are an attempt to rediscover this lost innocence, however, approached from the perspective of the 32-year-old man, the memories depicted are tinged with cynicism and laced with subtle wit, so that his large, colourful paintings sometimes approach black comedy. Look closely at any of them and something quirky and off-centre will draw your eye and capture your imagination, make you think, maybe smile.

Picasso once famously said that it took him four years to paint like Raphael and a lifetime to paint like a child; Al Mahdi hasn't wasted any time getting to the latter stage, and has already had his efforts recognised with Bahrain's prestigious Al Dana art prize and two solo exhibitions.

Mohammed Al Mahdi's works will be exhibited in Albareh Café from June 1, and a selection of Mohammed Al Ameri's works will be exhibited in [Albareh Gallery](#) from June 2; he will also lead a painting workshop on June 3 (5pm-7pm) and 4 (10am-12 noon). Albareh Gallery, Um Al Hassan (17 717 707).