

وزارة التصميم الجرافيكي
Ministry of Graphic Design

NOVEMBER 9-30

2018

PRESS RELEASE | Oct 2018

EVENTS, EXHIBITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

Fikra Graphic Design Biennial programme announced

9–30 November 2018



The Stand In (Or a Glass of Milk), Phase 1: An Unbiased Teal, presented by Public Fiction as part of the Department of Flying Saucers

On **Friday 9 November**, the Middle East's first graphic design Biennial opens its doors. Over the course of 21 days, the UAE's fictitious '**Ministry of Graphic Design**' will introduce visitors to the best and most ground-breaking graphic design in the Middle East and beyond, examining the discipline's limits, scope and purpose in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century.

The biennial brings together hundreds of designers, collectives, institutions and industry leaders from **more than 20 countries** for one of the most wide-ranging and ambitious creative events to be undertaken in the city. Organised by graphic design studio and education platform **Fikra**, it seeks to act as an international platform for creative practitioners in the Middle East to contribute to **global design conversation, foster collaboration** and explore the role of graphic design in an increasingly complex and culturally fragmented landscape.

'The biennial comprises exhibitions, performances, workshops, talks, and a conference that collectively showcase an expanded view of the field of graphic design. It will question the very role of the graphic designer. This is perfect especially for the first edition of the biennial, as I would like to think of it as un-defining graphic design – challenging preconceived ideas of the discipline but providing an unexpectedly broad array of graphic design works, concepts and initiatives.'

– **Salem Al-Qassimi**, founder, Fikra

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Fikra Graphic Design Biennial takes place in an iconic 1970s modernist block that once housed the **Bank of Sharjah** and is now scheduled for demolition. **T.ZED Architects** have been commissioned to adapt and repurpose the building to house the Ministry of Graphic Design across multiple floors, preserving many of the old features and remnants of the bank's design in the process. The Ministry of Graphic Design will be the building's final occupant, and a consciousness of its history and heritage informs a number of elements of the event.



Bank of Sharjah/eLseed Building

The Makings of the Ministry

The innovation-driven administrative structures of the UAE have inspired the inaugural biennial's theme. The country already has designated Ministers of State for happiness and AI; now for three weeks, it has an (entirely unofficial) Ministry of Graphic Design. As conceived by the exhibition's artistic directors **Prem Krishnamurthy**, **Emily Smith**, and **Na Kim** 'Ministry of Graphic Design' is a playfully formulated but serious-minded pop-up institution to create a starting point for continued dialogue, research, and understanding within the graphic design field – locally, regionally, and internationally.

Reflecting the hierarchical structures of government, the Ministry comprises six distinct departments of offices, each of which focuses on a different aspect of historical or contemporary graphic design. The departments are led by a diverse curatorial team, with each 'Head of Department' responsible for the content and contributors of its exhibitions and events.

The Department of Mapping Margins

Head of Department: Uzma Z. Rizvi

Curated by anthropological archaeologist **Uzma Z. Rizvi**, the **Department of Mapping Margins** evokes the future of critical design while providing strategies to decentre and decolonise disciplinary lines of control. Its programme of talks, communal feasts and pedagogical experiments creates opportunities to reflect on the state of contemporary graphic design, highlighting regional research, addressing cross-cultural questions, and unpacking the overlaps between working methods, conditions and models. Each conversation will map out the discursive possibilities that emerge during the biennial.



'In our world today, margins, boundaries, and borders are being tested in every sense of the word. A line is no longer – and perhaps never has just been – a line. By focusing on margins, this department illustrates the many ways by which there is a fluidity, openness and criticality to the ways by which contemporary graphic designers are testing and realigning those lines. Each event, conversation, meal, taste, smell, sound and movement linked to this department provides an opportunity to reconsider the field, and understand how design is deeply relevant to the political, social, and cultural global narrative.'

– **Uzma Z. Rizvi**, head of department

On **Saturday 10 November** the Department of Mapping Margins plays host to the biennial's **graphic design conference** – a day of wide-ranging conversations featuring some of the leading thinkers in the world of graphic design:

10:15 – 11am 'Curator/Designers and the Images that Motivate our Imaginations'

Uzma Z. Rizvi; Prem Krishnamurthy; Emily Smith; Na Kim

Uzma Z. Rizvi brings together curators Prem Krishnamurthy, Emily Smith and Na Kim for a short conversation about their long game when it comes to design and their curatorial premise for the Fikra Graphic Design Biennial. She will host a game with the Artistic Directors in which they will respond to queries with images of their own.

11–12pm 'Pedagogy and The Future of Design'

Dr Elizabeth Tunstall, Dean of Design (OCAD, Canada); Nina Paim & Corinne Gisel (common-interest, Switzerland); Mitch Sinclair, Creative Director (Palmwood, Dubai). Moderator: Dr Danah Abdulla (Brunel University, London)

Can design have an impact on the world? What is the role of socially responsible design practice in the future of design? A panel of global educators, UAE-based creative organisations and design incubators asks how we might envision the future of design.

12–2pm 'Tracing Flavours and Designing Tastes'

Uzma Z. Rizvi; Tetsuya Goto

A collaboration between the Department of Mapping the Margins and the Office of the Archive, this noon-time lunch hour brings together the head of both departments to cook lunch, explore a more sensorial approach to design and share notes on what sorts of traces are left by vernacular flavours and how food histories might intersect with design histories. There will be maps, markers, chillies, nutmeg, and some cumin, alongside a discussion about the links between cartography and archives.

2–3pm 'De-centering English'

Huda AbiFarès; Santi Lawrachawee; Asad Pervaiz

Three designers come together to make sense of how the visual might be interpreted without relying on the structures that uphold linguistics. What multiplicity of forms emerge from such conversations? How do we map this diversity of overlapping margins?

3–4pm 'Optimism and Futurity'

Hala Al-Ani; Alia Al-Sabi; Uzma Z. Rizvi

Uzma Z. Rizvi moderates a discussion between curators Alia Al-Sabi (Department of Graphic



Optimism) and Hala Al-Ani (Department of Flying Saucers) about what it means to curate, imagine, and work within the archival impulses of nation building, and the speculative future of the now.

4–5pm, 'Karak Conversations at the Fikra Graphic Design Biennial'

Prem Krishnamurthy; Emily Smith; Na Kim

As the day nears its culmination, karak chai will be served in the Department of Mapping Margins, as the biennial's artistic directors discuss the event and hold an open conversation with the audience.

The Department of Graphic Optimism

Head of Department: Alia Al-Sabi

The starting point for the biennial, the Department of Graphic Optimism on the first floor looks back at the changing role of the graphic designer in the UAE since the country's formation. Writer and curator Alia Al-Sabi begins the exhibition with a survey of the visual trends and cues that were in circulation in print, newspaper, and media during the 70s and 80s. Encompassing a range of governmental and non-governmental publications and magazines, this section considers such early modes of visual production and how they reflect the nation's identity at the moment of its formation.

The department features an extensive range of work from the design archives of Hisham Al Madhloum – a cultural administrator with a parallel practice as a graphic designer who contributed enormously to the direction of UAE graphic design in the 1980s and 90s. He represents the discipline's capacity to combine the administrative and the artistic, the coordinating and the creative.

Alongside the exhibition, the Department will present talks and workshops by UAE-based designers and artists that delve into the history of the works displayed. The programme will be an exploration of the cultural era in which Hisham Al Madhloum's early works were produced, as well as a historical examination of the graphic trends prevalent in print media in the early decades of the UAE.



Examples of work from Hisham Almadhloum and archive materials from the early decades of the UAE

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From top left: work from Alexandra Bell, Anja Kaiser, Lawrence Lemaona, Cheb Moha, Manuela Eichner and Benedetta Crippa who are part of the Department of Non-Binaries.

The Department of Non-Binaries

Head of Department: common-interest (Nina Paim and Corinne Gisel)

Curated by Basel-based non-profit cultural association common-interest, the Department of Non-Binaries celebrates hybridity and ambiguity, crosses boundaries, subverts conventions and defies expectations.

Across the second floor of the building, a highly eclectic selection of 21 international designers, artists and multidisciplinary practitioners present projects that resist simple categorisation and explore the world through a 'graphic-design gaze'. Diverse is scope, scale and medium, they are all critically attuned to the power that tools of communication assume in our increasingly designed society, while also being conscious of their own ways of presentation and representation.

This department rejects smooth-edged simplicity and clear labels, and recognises the complexity associated with graphic design, human culture, and personal identity in an age of social polarisation and rapidly eroding certainties.

'From our perspective, "binarism" is at the bottom of many problems we face today. Binarism reduces complex and multilayered issues into one-dimensional, simplified oppositions. And although we believe us humans can never fully understand a complex issue in its entirety, the more we engage with a multiplicity of perspectives, the better our chances to overcome the struggles between us. We have much to gain from conversations with one another across our differences.'

– **Nina Paim and Corinne Gisel**, Heads of Department



Non-binary exhibits include:

- Artist **Alexandra Bell**'s visual interrogation of newspaper bias through redaction and annotation in her piece *A Teenager With Promise (Annotated)*.
- Netherlands-based duo **Oddkin**'s board-game interpretation of the moral implications of industrial livestock farming, *Today's Success Is Tomorrow's Disaster*.
- Designer/researcher **Paula Minelgaite**'s study of the hidden causes of the UK's cultural divide: *Brexit: Why did it happen?*
- UAE designer **Shamma Buhazza**'s study of cultural identity, *Disorientation*, which fuses elements of the flags of Somalia, Bahrain, the UAE and the UK to express her own fragmented identity.
- Dominican artist **Lizania Cruz**'s *Flowers for Immigration* – a participatory, photography project featuring the personal stories of undocumented flower workers told through their flower arrangements.

All exhibits will be positioned in the open-plan space with no predetermined navigation between them, leaving visitors to forge their own path and discover new juxtapositions.

The Department of Flying Saucers

Head of Department: Hala Al-Ani

Named in homage to the Sharjah Art Foundation's architecturally unique Flying Saucer building – a visionary attempt to manifest a bold new future – the Department of Flying Saucers is a celebration of the independent cultural spaces founded by graphic designers that have appeared in cities around the world over the past decade.

Curated by Dubai-based designer Hala Al-Ani from Mobius Studio, the department comprises an open space which hosts parachute exhibitions that are temporal and extraordinary – each one integrating design, art, music, food, and other programming to create a unique, iconoclastic, peculiar, provocative or otherwise bewildering environment – every bit as unsettling, dramatic and rich with possibility as the appearance of a flying saucer in the sky.

Four 'flying saucers' will visit the department over the course of the biennial, offering a variety of activities including workshops, music performances, lectures and more.

Flying Saucer 1: Seendosi

Seoul experimental art and event space Seendosi is collaborating with six graphic artists working in Seoul and Sharjah to create *Eight Coloured Beads*, series of animations inspired by fairy tales from both regions. The fairy tales will manifest in a series of LED mirror balls and carpets. On 9 November, Seendosi host the biennial's launch party with live music from DJ Daham Park from 9pm - midnight.

Flying Saucer 2: Public Fiction

During their saucer's visit, Los Angeles-based curatorial project Public Fiction will organise an exhibition of new laser sculptures by artist Nicole Miller, conceptualise a publication and performance, and hold a lecture addressing the role of pop-culture in instigating social and political affairs.

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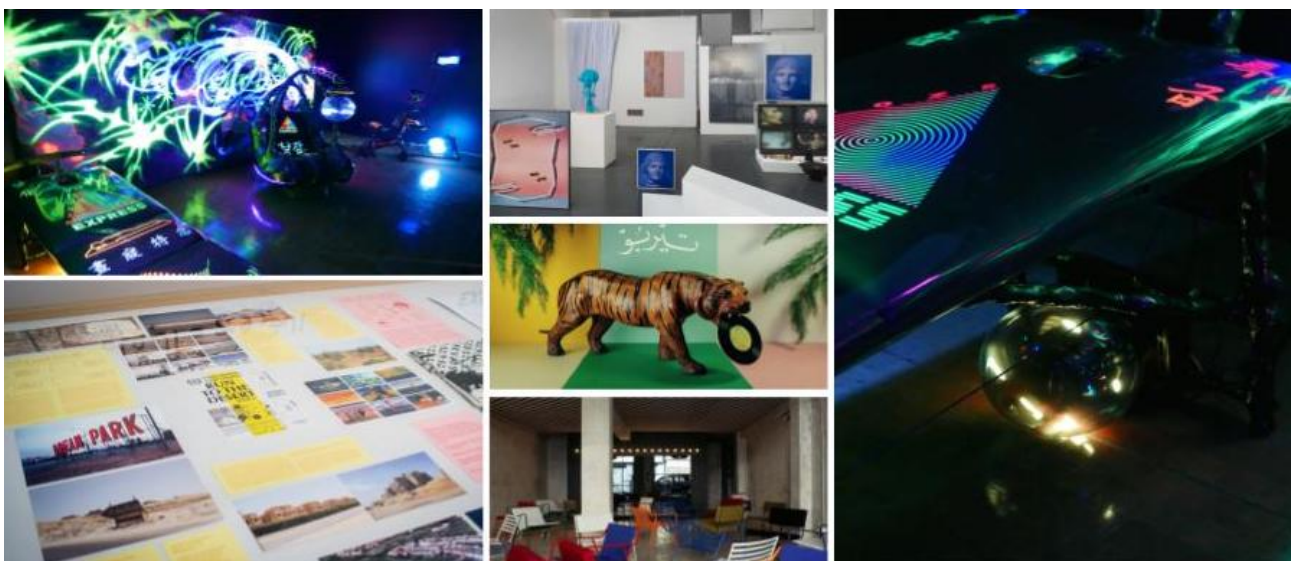
Flying Saucer 3: Foundland

Amsterdam/Cairo-based collective Foundland is exploring concepts of immigration and community through the installation *Escape Routes and Waiting Rooms*, which co-opts the visual language of news media to present an alternative view on the Syrian refugee crisis, from the perspective of one family. Alongside, *Friday Table 2014* is a restaged Syrian lunch table, which depicts a schematic map of a family where most of the members have migrated from the country over time. The second half of Foundland's 'saucer', *The New World, Episode One*, tells the story of the Lebanese musicians Amer and Sana Khaddaj, who sang for the Palestinian Broadcasting Station before migrating to the United States in 1947. The piece follows their subsequent lives as singers in Brooklyn and Detroit and considers the representation of their homeland in their songs and lyrics.

From 17–22 November, Foundland's series of invitation-only workshops, entitled *The New World, Sharjah Interlude*, will explore how waves of immigrants from around the Middle East – especially Syria – have managed to set themselves up in Sharjah and around the UAE and have survived by developing small businesses, usually related to food and hospitality. The collective will draw parallels between the historical Syrian community, *Little Syria*, which developed in New York City between 1880-1940, and the present-day Syrian communities in Sharjah. The results of the workshops will be presented publicly with a talk on 22 November (5pm).

Flying Saucer 4: Turbo

On 24–31 November, Multidisciplinary design studio Turbo commemorates the last days of the Bank of Sharjah building, through *The Bank Street Memorabilia Pop-Up Shop*, featuring print merchandise inspired by both the visual elements of the structure and objects found at the site. On 24 November, Turbo will present *Patterns, Patterns On The Wall* – an I Spy-themed evening, in which they aim to pinpoint and extract graphic patterns from the surrounding buildings' exterior and interior to be fused into items at the shop. Finally, as the biennial comes to a close on 29 and 30 November, Turbo will host *No Music, No Party*, a musical performance of a mix tape consisting of tunes collected from the local area.



From top left: previous installations from Seendosi,, Public Fiction, Seendosi, Turbo and Foundland.



The Department of Dematerialising Language

Heads of Department: Kith & Kin

Aiming to relieve language of its tangible trappings, this ministry department explores the communicative potential of objects and symbols beyond the written word and introduces transient, participatory, performative, and other unexpected modes of communication.

Eight projects are dispersed across the floors of the Biennial, interrupting the overall structure of the Ministry of Graphic Design. Co-artistic directors Na Kim and Emily Smith – aka Kith & Kin – have marked the department with custom-designed Mobile Units or site-specific locations, each containing works that challenge the assumed limitations of language. They include:

- Sound works by **Astrid Seme** and **Dina Danish**, both incorporating Kurt Schwitter's avant garde classic 'Ursonate', but from different cultural perspectives;
- **Uta Eisenreich's** Dadaist object/sound alphabet EiEiEi; Johannes Bergerhausen's project decoding 109,242 Unicode characters.
- *Video Snack*; an informal screening series by **Lauren Fancescone** and **Zeynad Izadyar**
- **Knoth & Renner's** *Common Canvas* – a collection of prompt-driven mobile phone creations from art and design programmes around the world;
- **Studio Moniker's** *Dazzle Fungus* – an ongoing mass-participatory installation by graphic designer Luna Mauer.

The Office of the Archive

Heads of Department: Tetsuya Goto and Saki Ho

The Office of the Archive is the biennial's on-site archiving programme/performance, documenting the activities of each department in the Ministry of Graphic Design. The archivist team the Absolute Beginners (Osaka-based curator **Tetsuya Goto** and assistant **Saki Ho**) will be working in a public office at the very top of the building to archive the biennial as it progresses. As well as collaborating with other departments on the specific events described above, the office will be inviting other biennial participants to engage in public dialogue over the course of the three weeks.

Fikra Graphic Design Biennial's official opening takes place **at 7pm, Friday 9 November**.

Notes for Editors

Fikra Graphic Design Biennial 01: *Ministry of Graphic Design*

fikrabiennial.com

#ministryofgraphicdesign

Organisers

Salem Al-Qassimi
Maryam Al Qassimi
Eleonora Cervellera



Artistic Directors

Prem Krishnamurthy
Emily Smith
Na Kim

Advisers

Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès
Kiyonori Muroga
Pascal Zoghbi
Catherine Ince
Uzma Z. Rizvi

Head of Departments

Alia Al-Sabi
Nina Paim and Corinne Gisel (common-interest)
Hala Al Ani (Mobius Studio)
Uzma Z. Rizvi
Tetsuya Goto

Participants

Alexandra Bell, Anja Kaiser, Arcadian Studio, Asad Pervaiz, Astrid Seme, Bayn Journal (Elham Namvar and Rasha Dakkak), Benedetta Crippa, Cheb Moha, Christopher Benton, Danah Abdulla, Dina Danish, Elizabeth Tunstall, Esen Karol, Foundland, gideon-jamie (Gideon Kong and Jamie Yeo) & Singapore Graphic Archives (Justin Zhuang), Hisham Al Madhloum, Huda Smitshuijzen AbiFarès, Johannes Bergerhausen, Jonathas de Andrade, Josh Begley, Knoth & Renner, Krishna Balakrishnan, Lawrence Lemaoana, Lizania Cruz, Loraine Furter, Mitch Sinclair, Oddkin, Paula Minelgaité, Public Fiction, Manuela Eichner, Naz Naddaf, Santi Lawrachawee, Seendosi, Shamma Buhazza, Sina Fakour, Studio Moniker, Thaakierah Abdul, Turbo, Uta Eisenreich, Video Snack (Zeynab Izadyar & Lauren Francescone), and more.

Strategic partner

Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development

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T.ZED Architects

Media Partner

Harper's Bazaar Art Middle East

Graphic Design

Wkshps, New York



About Fikra

Founded in 2006 by Salem Al-Qassimi, Fikra is a Sharjah-based design studio and educational platform comprising, a co-working space, café, gallery, library and educational programme. The studio launched the Fikra Graphic Design Biennial in 2018 as the next step in its mission to spur innovation in graphic design, broaden public understanding of its scope, and rectify the historic neglect of Middle Eastern design on the world stage.

fikradesigns.com

[@fikradesigns](https://www.instagram.com/fikradesigns)

Contact:

Fikra Graphic Design Biennial: Ministry of Graphic Design 01 runs from 9–30 November 2018. For more information, images and interviews, please contact Dorothy Bourne at dorothy@zetteler.co.uk or on +44 (0)20 3735 5855
