

**Exhibition:** *Abdulnasser Gharem: Pause*  
**On View:** April 16–July 2, 2017  
**Location:** Ahmanson Building, Level 4

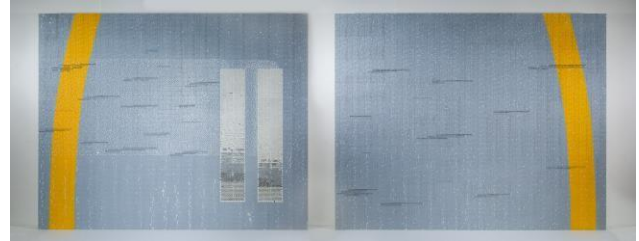


Image captions on page 5

(Los Angeles—March 14, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) is pleased to announce *Abdulnasser Gharem: Pause*, marking the first solo presentation by the artist in the U.S. The exhibition is curated by Linda Komaroff, curator of Islamic art and department head of art of the Middle East at LACMA, and includes 11 remarkable works of sculpture, stamp paintings, prints, and film—all of which were created in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. For Gharem, seeing the World Trade Center destroyed on television was a horrific moment that seemed to make the world standstill, or pause; he learned soon after that two of the hijackers were former classmates. The fact that Gharem is a Muslim, an Arab, and a lieutenant colonel in the Saudi Arabian army will likely provide added resonance for an American audience, while serving as a reminder that terrorism is experienced on a global scale.

Gharem deeply absorbs the notion of pause into his work as an occasion to examine certain universal dichotomies that lead one to choosing his or her path in life. More literally, he has used the digital symbol for pause—a pair of solid rectangles—as a visual metaphor for the Twin Towers, which can be observed in the diptych *Pause* (2016), featured in the exhibition. Although the mediums and platforms for his work clearly borrow from the mainstays of modern art, the narratives and images are drawn from the artist's everyday world while many of his motifs, including geometric designs and floral arabesques, belong to the canon of Islamic art.

“Abdulnasser Gharem belongs to a pioneering generation in Saudi Arabia that has introduced a local arts community to the global discourse. Gharem is at the forefront of

this movement, creating art in a range of mediums and techniques largely outside the traditions of painting, drawing, photography, and sculpture,” says Komaroff.

“Over the last decade, LACMA has built the largest collection of contemporary Middle Eastern art of any U.S. museum,” says Michael Govan, LACMA’s CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “As an encyclopedic art museum, we recognize the importance of creating links among the past, present, and future within our larger collection, notably within our extensive Middle East holdings, which extend from the fourth millennium B.C. to the present. In addition to presenting two successive exhibitions dedicated to our own contemporary Middle East collection (*Islamic Art Now*, Parts 1 and 2 (2015–16)), we recently hosted a show focusing on the work of Iranian-born and New York-based artist Y.Z. Kami (*Y.Z. Kami: Endless Prayers* (2016–17)). We are thrilled to continue such efforts in presenting this monographic exhibition of Gharem’s work, which includes two pieces from LACMA’s collection.”

“King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture strives to support and provide platforms for Saudi artists to express their work locally and internationally. It is with great pleasure to provide a platform for Abdunasser Gharem, one of the most distinguished Saudi artist of his generation. It is also a great pleasure to collaborate again with one of the most renowned cultural institutions, LACMA.” says Tareq AlGhamdi, King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture’s director.

*Abdunasser Gharem: Pause* will be on display in the Ahmanson Building, Level 4, with the artist’s newly created large-scale piece, *Camouflage* (2017) installed in the lobby of the Ahmanson Building, on Level 1.

### **Exhibition Highlights**

*Camouflage* (2017): Gharem frequently uses Islamic architectural settings in his work. With *Camouflage*, he employs an Iranian mosque as the backdrop for this monumental “stamp painting,” which depicts an army tank with a giant orange daisy protruding from its cannon. The flower and the colorful tile decoration of the mosque façade belie and even disguise the deadly nature of the armored vehicle. For the artist, this form of camouflage represents his own critique of theocracies that prey on sincere religious beliefs by promoting a message of intolerance toward adherents of other faiths. For an American audience, the combination of weapon and flower may be reminiscent of some of the antiwar imagery from the Vietnam War era; this powerful work perhaps takes on a new meaning once transplanted to U.S. soil.

*Road to Makkah* (2014): Like many contemporary artists, Gharem often uses mundane everyday elements to form penetrating appraisals of modern society. In *Road to Makkah*, he transforms a standard sign found on the road to Mecca into one of his iconic “stamp paintings,” the surface of which is composed of small rubber stamps. As the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammad, the site of the Kaaba (the directional locus of Muslim prayer), and the endpoint of *hajj*, the annual Muslim pilgrimage, the city of Mecca is considered a holy space. This sign directs Muslims straight ahead into the city, while non-Muslims are sent to the right and those involved in official business are sent to the left. Embedded within the larger text of the sign are smaller quotes made from the rubber stamps and therefore seen in reverse. The quotes refer to the unity, peacefulness, and sanctity of the city, perhaps included by Gharem as a subtle critique of the practice of exclusivity.

*Hemisphere* (2017): Gharem has produced other dome sculptures, but this work, his most recent version, presents an amalgam of two distinct forms to create the cupola: a mosque dome and a late Islamic-style warrior’s helmet. The title of the work is intended to suggest two halves that form a whole, as in the human brain with its left and right hemispheres, the former governing logic and the latter creativity. In the sculpture, the right half is based on the distinctive green dome of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, Saudi Arabia, which is the second holiest site in Islam, after the Ka’aba in Mecca. Expanded many times over, the mosque’s dome was constructed in the early 19th century. The left side of the sculpture is patterned on an Iranian helmet inscribed with verses from the Qur’an, dating to the 18th or 19th century, and probably intended for ceremonial and parade wear rather than for actual battle. The two halves of the dome are separated by an appropriately enlarged and inscribed nasal piece—the projecting bar on a helmet covering the nose and protecting the center of the face. The comingling of the dome and the helmet in a single sculpture is meant to allude to the dichotomy inherent in most faiths—a message of peace and supplication versus the types of political and sectarian concerns that sometimes lead to violence.

### **About Abdunasser Gharem**

Abdunasser Gharem was born in 1973 in the Saudi Arabian city of Khamis Mushait, where he continues to live and work. In 1992, Gharem graduated from the King Abdulaziz Academy before attending the Leader Institute in Riyadh. In 2003 he studied at the influential Al-Meftaha arts village in Abha, and, in 2004, Gharem and the Al-Meftaha artists staged a group exhibition, *Shattah*, which challenged existing modes of art practice in Saudi Arabia. Since then, Gharem has exhibited in Europe, the Gulf and the U.S. including at The Martin-Gropius-Bau and at the Venice, Sharjah, and Berlin Biennales.

Gharem's vocational path embraces the polarities of artist and soldier. Although he has had no formal art training, as a commissioned officer he found time to study on his own—learning about 20th-century art through the internet—and to form a cooperative venture with other artists, which in 2003 became the art collective Edge of Arabia. Co-founded by Gharem, the organization was intended to help support contemporary Saudi artists reach an international audience. Gharem is at the forefront of this movement.

### **Programming**

An Evening with Artist Abdunasser Gharem & Gharem Studio

Tuesday, April 18, 2017 | 7:30 pm

LACMA Bing Theater | Free and open to the public

Join artist Abdunasser Gharem as he discusses his first solo exhibition in the United States, *Abdunasser Gharem: Pause*. Special screenings and presentations by Gharem's Riyadh based studio will be followed by a Q&A with the artist.

For further information, please contact 323-857-6011 or email [amec@lacma.org](mailto:amec@lacma.org).

**Credit:** This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture. The organizers are grateful for the special collaboration of Gharem Studio.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by Kitzia and Richard Goodman, with generous annual funding from the Judy and Bernard Briskin Family Foundation, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Jenna and Jason Grosfeld, The Jerry and Kathleen Grundhofer Foundation, Taslimi Foundation, and Lenore and Richard Wayne.

### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes more than 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of

Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

Press Contact: [press@lacma.org](mailto:press@lacma.org) or 323 857-6522

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**About King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture:**

King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, known as ithra, is a one-of-a-kind institution that brings together multiple offerings under one roof. From arts and culture to science and innovation, this bold initiative by Saudi Aramco promises a continuous journey of enrichment designed to energize the next knowledge economy of Saudi Arabia.

ithra aims to make a positive and tangible impact on the cultural scene by focusing on building local talents in the knowledge and creative industries. Blending iconic architectural design with advanced technology, and unique learning methods with enriching programs, ithra is an infinitely inspiring platform for explorers, learners, creators, and leaders—a thriving hub of knowledge, creativity and cross-cultural engagement.

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia strives to achieve its ambitious national development goals to transition to a knowledge-based economy, ithra acts as a bridge connecting cultures and cultivating a creative and innovative community.

[www.kingabdulazizcenter.com](http://www.kingabdulazizcenter.com) | @ithra

**Image captions:**

(Left) Abdulnasser Ghareem, *Camouflage*, 2017, digital print and lacquer paint on rubber stamps on aluminum, 94 1/2 × 189 in., © Ghareem Studio, photo courtesy of the artist and Edge of Arabia  
(Right) Abdulnasser Ghareem, *Pause*, from the series *Restored Behaviour*, 2016, lacquer paint on rubber stamps on aluminum, each section: 63.2 x 78.9 in., total: 63.2 x 159.8 in., © Ghareem Studio, photo courtesy of the artist and Edge of Arabia