

Saudi Art Installation calls for unity at Vancouver

Biennale

Paradise Has Many Gates

9 hours ago

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Saudi Gazette

The Vancouver Biennale introduced its new edition, titled 're-IMAGE-n', with projects unfolding over the exhibition's two-year duration. Projects will 're-IMAGE-n' a progressive social framework that supports free speech, inviting international artists to respond to the prevailing current issues including the widespread refugee and migrant crisis, a global shift towards nationalism and isolationism, and an intensifying drain on shared natural resources.

An intriguing installation titled 'Paradise Has Many Gates' by Saudi artist Ajlan Gharem was chosen for its fourth edition. The installation is designed as a mosque and is made out of chain-link fence.

"It is an Islamic, holy and social design which looks like a mosque. This work may trigger a feeling of being locked and anxious because of its framework," Ajlan Gharem told Saudi Gazette. Through his work, Gharem explores the role of religion in society currently, especially for the youth whose thoughts and knowledge transcend the traditional spiritual beliefs.

The artist said that at a time where there is a massive immigration and refugee crises, this artwork invites us to look at how fences isolate people and thoughts. "The work calls on all of us Muslims and non-Muslims to view what traditionally divides people and find ways to unify human experiences," he added.

"As we launch this new exhibition, with the theme re-IMAGE-n, we open with an artwork that's transparent, which invites exploration into sacred space," Barrie Mowatt, President of the Vancouver Biennale said. "In a time when we're witnessing dramatic political shifts towards nationalism and isolationism around the world, we need to re-explore our beliefs, our fears and our vision for a new interculturalism. We are excited to have Ajlan, our first Saudi artist participate in the Vancouver Biennale and we look forward to working with more young and talented artists from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region participate through our International Artist Residency Program."

Over the past two weeks, Gharem engaged with a variety of local groups including academics at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies, First Nations artists and multi-cultural weavers who will be creating prayer rugs inspired by 'Paradise Has Many Gates' and their individual cultural traditions and iconography. These projects and events will continue over the course of the next several months and Ajlan will return in 2019 to engage in more programming and dialogue around 'Paradise Has Many Gates'.

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