

URBAN PETROSCAPE IN CONTEMPORARY ART FROM SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

The unprecedented transformation of petromodernity in the Arabian Gulf's landscape and culture during the 20th century coincided with the formation of the Arabian Gulf nation states. As such, the Arabian Gulf's oil economy is considered an important factor in the stability and prosperity of these countries. This oil transformation has generated a modern lifestyle, denoted by petromodernity, which hinges on petroleum as its mode of energy. Petromodernity and its subsequent petroleum culture, or petroculture, serve as the framework for this research analysis of the Arabian Gulf's contemporary art, specifically works by artist Ahmed Mater and Manal Al-Dowayan. This paper focuses on how these works of art reflect the manifestation of petroculture on urban landscape of the region. Navigating contemporary art in the Arabian Gulf through manifestations of petroculture attest to a new regional field in art history. This research aims to lay out art as a mode of civic engagement and critical space regarding the discourse around the inevitable ramifications of energy transition by opening the possibility for the advocacy and the discussion of this topic within and beyond the region.

Keywords: contemporary art, visual art, petroculture, Arabian Gulf, cultural anthropology, Middle Eastern studies, urban planning, energy, environmental studies.

1 INTRODUCTION

The history of modernization and development in the Arabian Gulf is one that is inseparable from the history of oil exploitation in that, it has shaped the culture of the people and the development of the region. This section examines photographic urban landscapes by Saudi artists Ahmed Mater and Manal Al-Dowayan that illustrate the drastic petroscape shift in the region. These artworks were investigated with several themes in mind. First, the artists highlight the conflict between the views of utopia and dystopia that have resulted from the transformation of petromodernity in the urban landscape of the Arabian Gulf. Specifically, many believe that oil brings wealth and utopia to the region as evidenced by building the cities, including new neighborhoods, roads, and highways, but the artists introduced in this section reflect on petromodernity with a negative inclination that could be described as a dystopian depiction. Dystopia is understood through the artists' concerns that the urban development in the country is replacing the natural scenery and landscape. Dystopia is understood as fear related to the uncertain future of the region after the inevitable depletion of its oil reserves.

The second theme examined in this section is the sense of anxiety as presented by these artists. Specifically, Ahmed Mater's artistic depictions are examined to explain oil as both an agent for modernization and a source of anxiety. Manal Al-Dowayan's investment in issues related to the changing perceptions and status of women are considered within her artwork. Further, Al-Dowayan's artwork, which incorporates physical samples of oil, interviews, and photography to recount the stories of individuals who worked in oil fields during the early history of oil extraction in Saudi Arabia is considered as well. Taken together, these discussions highlight the artists' anxieties surrounding petroculture as demonstrated through their artwork. In doing so, my aim for this topic on petroubanism is to draw out how each artist understands the intricacy of petroculture in their visual renditions as well as to visualize the historical narratives of the transformation to modernity in the Arabian Gulf.



Recent studies of urbanism and petroculture have explained how our modern lives are saturated with oil and how there is no apparent “outside” to the oil culture [1, p. 63]. Almost every material aspect of our modern lifestyle is shaped and permeated by the fossil fuel industry. For example, air conditioning, cars, and medicine are all oil dependent. Even ideas regarding success, wealth, beauty, and countless social relations and environmental realities are also examples of how fossil fuels affect our modern infrastructure and lifestyles [2, p. 41]. Therefore, in order to better understand the complexity of petroculture, and to examine “sensory and emotional values associated with the oil cultures of the 20th century” [1, p. 68], addressing this tangible subject of petroculture within the fields of humanities is central.

Re-examining progress as a concept in relation to urbanism in the Arabian Gulf is what drives the discussion on this group of artworks. Critic Saara Liinamaa in “Contemporary art’s urban question and practices of experimentation”, describes “urbanism [as] one of our most powerful ‘dominant metanarratives’, and states that contemporary urban art practice is part of the ‘urban problem-solvers’” [3]. Contemporary art’s urban practice contribute to the visibility of the effects of oil and petrocultures, and can “undermine dominant interpretations of the world” [2, p. 45]. The Petrocultures Research Group in *After Oil* articulately argues for the importance of the contributions of the arts and humanities in better understanding the critical role of oil in forming and shaping our ideas on progress and the mindset associated with petrocultures.

The paper uses the following line of questioning in order to guide the analysis of this group of artworks: How does the artist conceptualize the transformation in the Arabian Gulf landscape in aesthetic terms? How can we understand the conflicting perspectives of utopian and dystopian imageries as a result of petromodernity on the landscape? How do artists envision the future in relation to energy, oil, and the city?

1.1 Oil town and the neocolonial practice

Before delving into his artworks, it is important to take a step back to describe how petromodernism took hold. According to Fuccaro [4], the urban change that overtook the region began primarily in oil towns and “oil revenues [were] used as a tool of statecraft”. The construction of these oil towns and their compounds eventually created states within states, such as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, and brought about aspects of neocolonial urbanism into the context of petromodernity. Fuccaro explains how this statecraft entailed “oil companies, local governments, and city planners” imposing visions for urbanism and development without regard to the welfare or opinions of the indigenous population, which favored oil urbanism over traditional town [4, p. 3].

Historian Alissa [5] argued that oil towns were built in a neocolonial fashion in that the social hierarchy of oil towns generated a hierarchical structure. Further, she stated that this hierarchical structure is especially apparent in employment related to urban development, and is manifested by the “division in labor based on professional grade, ethnicity, and housing” [5]. One prime example of this hierarchical structure and neocolonial practice is the Ahmadi oil town in Kuwait. The “urban plan” that Alissa references was a plan designed by British architect James Mollison Wilson (1887–1965) and commissioned by KOC (the oil company in Kuwait). The colonial, urban development in this oil town is manifested in a socio-spatial segregation through the hierarchical share of houses and lot sizes. Housing also followed this hierarchical structure by providing privileges based on ethnicity such as air conditioning, swimming pools, and sport yards. Alissa argued that Wilson based his design for the oil town on previous projects that followed a colonial practice [5, p. 43–45].



2 AHMED MATER'S QUEST FOR A REGIONAL URBANISM

The artistic oeuvre of Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater (b. 1979) can be considered an attempt to express anxiety about the rapid transformation that has occurred to the landscape of the Arabian Gulf. His increasing concerns about the region after the introduction of petromodernity can be traced throughout his career. His early practice depicts a simple contemplation on modernity, its relation to humanity, and the rigid dependency on oil. In his latest artworks, however, he imagines the life in Saudi Arabia much differently. Mater's artistic practice is discussed here to reflect on the forces that have shaped the pace of urbanization in the region. His work implies a sense of frustration with not being able to find a regional identity amidst the urbanization of the landscape.

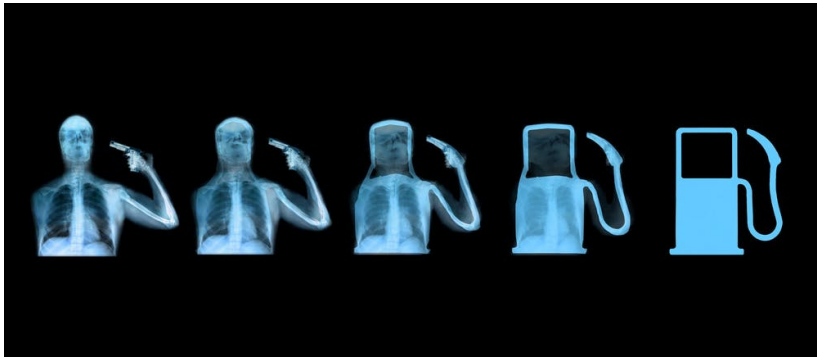


Figure 1: Ahmed Mater, *Evolution of Man*, 2010. (Courtesy of the artist.)

In 2010, Mater exhibited his art installation entitled *Evolution of Man* (2010) (Fig. 1) in London as part of an exhibition held by Edge of Arabia. This piece instantly attracted attention and catapulted him into fame within the global contemporary art scene. The reason for its critical acclaim lies in the striking visual elements that *Evolution of Man* paints regarding the relationship between humanity and petromodernity. The video installation consists of 100 x-rays, featuring a striking x-ray image of a figure (Mater himself) holding a gun against his head (Fig. 1). Over the passage of two minutes, the image of the figure with the gun gradually morphs into an image of a gas pump, then slowly morphs back into the figure holding a gun to its head. This remarkable juxtaposition of a suicidal scene with a gas pump illustrates some of the anxieties expressed in this region. The gas pump is a direct reference to the oil economy and its association to humanity in recent years. This suicidal scene symbolizes the fear and the uncertainty caused by the effects of the oil economy on the future of humanity. By using x-rays as a metaphor, Mater conveys to the viewer that “reality” is hidden. More specifically, “reality” is conveyed as the merging and fusing relationship between oil and humanity, thus invoking the notion of petroculture becoming deeply engrained in the regional inhabitants. The depths of how oil has permeated individuals’ daily lives and how quickly petroculture has arisen is expressed in Mater’s statement:

I am a country man and, at the same time, the son of this strange, scary oil civilization. In 10 years, our lives changed completely. For me, it is a drastic change that I experience every day [6].

The connotations of the gas pump in *Evolution of Man* are undeniably a key to understanding the cultural, economic, and social changes after the discovery of oil in the Arabian Gulf.

In *Evolution of Man*, Mater used a friend's gun to perform and obtain his x-ray images. Invoking the concept of committing suicide here is provocative given the fact that Mater knows his audience and how they believe that Islamic tradition prohibits suicidal messages. Mater's use of the notion of suicide was not an endorsement of suicidal behavior. Rather, it (suicide) was used as an attempt to shock and engage the viewer and draw attention to the disturbing reality of humanity's dependence on oil.

Mater's sentiment toward petromodernity and urbanism is manifested in his demand that Saudi institutions should be reinvented "based on local and cultural sensibilities" [7]. It is out of this sentiment that Mater started to question this Arabian Gulf modernity in relation to oil and particularly in relation to the transformations taking place in the landscapes of the Arabian Gulf.

2.1 Nostalgia and migration in "empty land"

The artistic growth in Mater's art is recognizable as he continues to use photography to question petromodernity in relation to the landscape of the Arabian Gulf. In 2011, Mater went with his camera to photograph construction work on various desert-like areas of Saudi Arabia's landscape. These places were discarded after the locals migrated to big cities in search of jobs and opportunities. Now, all that is left in these areas are abandoned construction machines and equipment.

Mater's *Empty Land* (2011) is an artistic investigation of the petroscape in the Arabian Gulf. Art critic Robert Kluijver describes *Empty Land* as "being an attempt to read the scars modernization had wrought on his homeland" [8]. This series of 18 photographs was taken in seemingly untamed, solitary, and deserted lands. The depth of such despondency can be seen in Mater's own words in which he describes these photos as evidence of the indigenous "leaving behind a scarred and empty land where not just material things, like buildings and cars, are abandoned, but also traditional values and a connection to the land" [7]. Although representations of modern life, such as cars, trucks, roads, and buildings, are present, the stillness of the scene—a scene completely void of movement and the omission of human figures—marks the space as uninhabited and alarming. The prevailing dusty atmospheric depiction makes the viewers feel as if something is about to occur or that a disaster has already happened while simultaneously evoking a sense of loneliness and despondency.

Artists and critics have acutely addressed changes in the landscape throughout history. The landscape, as a subject matter, is depicted in many forms and for different contexts extending from naturalistic, romantic, or sublime depictions [9]. Art critic Zuromskis [9] states that these depictions and what we make out of them ideologically are not limited to the artist's taste but also are "vital tools in the construction of social and national identities and, indeed, a culture's perceptions of the world" [9]. In *Petroaesthetics and Landscape Photography*, Zuromskis explains that the shift in art depictions from "the wilderness" to the landscape of petromodernity is politically and environmentally motivated. More significantly, Zuromskis argues that, while conceptions of the landscape prior to petromodernity were sublime, art concerned with the issue of petromodernity presented a more conflicted aestheticization. Thus, the landscape of petromodernity revealed "both the physical and psychological terrains of petromodernity in Western culture" [9]. This conflicted aestheticization is also represented through anxiety toward the petroscape of the Arabian Gulf.

In *Empty Land*, Mater takes a unique perspective in capturing the effects of petromodernity on the landscape of the Arabian Gulf. In my 2016 interview with him, he spoke about borrowing the phrase “empty land” from references in maps and popular literature of the 19th and 20th centuries to describe the American West [10]. Specifically, “empty land” is described as a destination to which to migrate in search of natural resources, but this migration often leads to “the destruction of indigenous communities and native environments” [7]. Thus, in addition to describing the barren areas, *Empty Land* speaks to Western experiences and, subsequently, allows the work to delve into deeper and more global discourse. In doing so, Mater uses *Empty Land* to contribute to the current dialogue on globalizing the issues of energy, oil, and culture.

Perhaps Mater teases the viewer because of the impression the name *Empty Land* generates; he by presents a land that is not empty but, instead, consists of many entities such as cars, roads, parking lots, construction sites, and buildings. Thus, by viewing *Empty Land* as an allegory, one can see that it refers to the journey and migration the indigenous population undertook in their pursuit to survive. In modern Saudi Arabia, for instance, people migrated to either big cities or oil towns looking for better life. With that, they embraced new living styles and, consequently, new cultures and social relations had emerged.

The allegory of *Empty Land* implies moving from one place to another looking for better opportunities. Mater’s depiction of the landscape in *Empty Land* is reminiscent of the motif of standing upon the ruined abode motif in classic Arabic poetry, in which an Arabic poet opens her/his ode by awakening past experiences [11]. The celebrated Arab poet Al-Sharif Al-Radi says:

وَلَقَدْ مَرَرْتُ عَلَى دِيَارِهِمْ وَطَلَّوْهَا بِيَدِ الْبَلْبَى نَهَبٌ
فَوَقَفْتُ حَتَّى ضَجَّ مِنْ لَغَبٍ نَضْوِي وَلَجٍ بَعْدَ الْرُكْبِ
وَتَلَقَّتُ عَيْنِي، فَمَدُّ حَفِيَّتٍ عَنْهَا الطَّلُولُ تَلَفَتْ الْقَلْبِ

I did once pass by their abodes,
Their ruins a prey in decay’s grip.

And I halted till my jaded mount reared restively
And the company beset me with blame.

My eyes then turned away.
The ruins were no more—and then
My heart looked back [12].

This moving nature of the Arab nomads was due to the harsh circumstances of the life in the Arabian Gulf that required them to move from place to place looking for water and food supplies. Therefore, Mater’s nostalgic depiction of the landscape is parallel to the way classic Arabic poetry begins with a longing for desolate lands and the remnants of living. Through this motif, the new media art recollects tradition in the Arabian memory with modern petroscape remnants.

2.2 Anxiety at the Holy City of Makkah’s transformed landscape

The city of Makkah in Saudi Arabia is home to Islam’s holiest site, the Grand Holy Mosque, which includes the Ka’aba, and is one area that was recently and drastically affected by



urbanization. Makkah (or Mecca) has had numerous renovation projects throughout history that have altered its landscape to accommodate its ever-growing visitors each year. Recently, Makkah has been home to the largest modernization project undertaken by Saudi Arabia [13].

The renovation project includes expanding the grand mosque and the surrounding area and requires demolishing the historical districts in and around this specific site. Although expansion is much needed due to the increasing numbers of visitors annually and especially during the season of hajj (pilgrimage), the issue of Makkah's transformation has become a subject for debate between intellectuals and regional artists who often express their anxiety toward this project. The following artworks all deal with the renovation with the Holy Mosque of Makkah: Mater's latest photographic series titled *Desert of Pharan* (2012–2017), tackle the debate surrounding Makkah and renovation.

Desert of Pharan is a photographic series that includes hundreds of photographs that is published in a book by Lars Müller Publishers [14]. Mater has exhibited individual prints from the series in various exhibitions including his first solo exhibition in the U.S. at The Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., the Arthur Sackler Gallery in 2016, and just recently in the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 2017. He worked almost five years to its completion in 2017. The term "Desert of Faran" or "Desert of Pharan" is used to refer to the city of Makkah and the wilderness surrounding it [15]. The name "Pharan" is the ancient name used in the Old Testament for the area of Makkah [16]. The *Desert of Pharan* as an idea, then, refers to the significance of ancient Makkah and its historical connotations as a city attached to religion. For example, see this photograph from 1887.

According to Mater, when he visited Makkah in 2010, "something felt off" as "dozens of cranes were eating away at the mosque to make way for a larger complex surrounding the Kaaba" [17]. While the significance of Makkah "can be traced back to the time of Abraham" [8] it becomes a commentary on the creation of a multibillion dollar space that consists of the luxury hotels, restaurants, and malls needed to cater to the needs of the increasing number of visitors to Makkah every year, all at the expense of the erosion of its historical space [18]. As such, the transformation of Makkah's landscape can be understood as symbolic of for the tensions surrounding privatizing public spaces in Saudi Arabia [16]. For instance, compare the photographs in 1887 to the spatially diminished space today, dominated by hotels. According to Mater:

Like few other 21st century cities, [Makkah] is rooted in a complex and highly emotive context in terms of its historical, geopolitical, and religious symbolism. It is both one of the most visited places on Earth and one of the most exclusive and, yet it is in flux; it moves, grows, and invents itself again [8].

Referring to the work by its ancient name, Mater draws on the significance of the place and its extended history as well as signifies its landscape transformation.

In the entire *Desert of Pharan* series, Mater documents three stages of the Makkah project: the disappearance of the old city surrounding the holy mosque, the expansion process, and the completion of the new renovated holy mosque and its surrounding which occurred in the same years as Mater's project from 2012 to 2017. However, my discussion of the *Desert of Pharan* is limited to two photographs from the series. One is the expansion process in the construction site depicted in *Golden Hour* (2012). The second photograph is the renovated mosque captured in *After Iftar in the Fairmont Hotel* (2013). These two photographs from the *Desert of Pharan* series are particularly important to highlight as they exemplify the sweep of urbanism that is overwriting historical districts in Makkah and capture the dueling

tensions between the spiritual and material worlds of Makkah. They (*Golden Hour* and *After Iftar in the Fairmont Hotel*) both represent bold statements and a rigid contemplation of petroculture though they focus on different arenas of petroculture's influence: the landscape expansion in the *Golden Hour*, and materialism with the obscene seclusion of the spiritual site in *After Iftar in the Fairmont Hotel* despite the adjacent location between the mosque and the hotel room.

In *Golden Hour*, Al-Kaaba is a bright focal point in the photograph. Yet, surrounding the mosque is an army of mobilized cranes, which portray an act of besieging the holy site. In addition, Makkah's famous rugged mountains are fading in the horizon behind the holy site where they meet the bright orange shade of the sun. The luxurious clock towers stand tall behind the mosque which represent the threat of greed and temptation looming over the holy mosque.

The clock, though, labeled "Golden" in the piece's title, looks green, which makes one wonder why Mater chooses to name this work "golden" instead of "green". It could be that gold is used here as a symbol of capitalism. Gold, as a commodity, lasts and underlines the status of the economy in the country. The representation of the *Golden Hour* signals how the influences of materialism are drifting and stretching through space and landscape, even in one of the most sacred places on Earth. Thus, *Golden Hour* concerns the sweeping modern urbanism in the landscape of this holy site.

After Iftar in the Fairmont Hotel specifically brings the tension of spirituality and materiality created by petromodernity to the forefront because the piece shows the separation between the site of worship and the worshiper. Individuals can stay inside the hotel to pray rather than go outside. They can see the mosque without having to experience the high temperatures, noise, and humidity that exist in the open space of the mosque. The hotel rooms provide luxurious views of the mosque and sounds of the prayers (via microphones connected to the rooms upon request) so that one can follow the prayers and pray within the convenience of the hotel. The photograph features a typical five-star hotel room with the view of Al-Kaabah from the room window, a smart TV screen, beautiful interiors, an armchair with a side table, and a beautiful fruit basket. The fruit basket here conveys a level of luxury. Specifically, Mater uses it metaphorically as pandering to physical pleasures rather than spiritual ones – an interpretation of fruit that was often found in Western paintings during the Renaissance. In this way, Mater again highlights how Western culture, artifacts, and materialist values are infiltrating and conflicting with the spiritual site upon which the city was founded. Mater places the focus on the process and the transformation of the landscape and its inhabitants and, thereby, depicts the changes to the mosque as a by-product of petromodernity in the landscape.

Many artists' works have expressed their anxieties over these renovations as grounded in the basis of religious and cultural considerations. Mater's work, in contrast, is different, in that it steers the viewer's focus away from the mosque and onto the landscape. Mater's work suggests a broad dialogue on the impact of petroculture, urbanism, and materiality that affects this site and its inhabitants.

3 GENDER, MEMORY, AND STORYTELLING IN MANAL AL-DOWAYAN'S WORK

Landscape of the Mind series by Saudi artist Manal Al-Dowayan (b. 1973), are important artworks that emphasize the intersections among oil, identity, and memory in relation to the landscape. The work demonstrates the high cost of petroculture on women and their role in society. Although the *Landscape of the Mind* series is Al-Dowayan's early artworks, and perhaps her very first artistic creation, it is important because they mark the first account of



petroculture in contemporary art from Saudi Arabia, and perhaps in the region. Ten years after creating the *Landscape of the Mind*, Al-Dowayan revisited the subject of oil in her piece *If I Forget You, Don't Forget Me* (2015), in which she narrates a history of working in an oil company through stories collected from her late father and his co-workers. Al-Dowayan was raised in the Aramco compound in Dhahran, the oil company in eastern Saudi Arabia [19]. Being raised in Aramco has served as a foundation for her artistic practice, especially regarding how the creation of petroculture has impacted women's representation and how women were alienated from their native landscape. In addition, *If I Forget You, Don't Forget Me*, uses parts that constitute a landscape to describe the formation of a petroscape in the region. These three works provide a unique perspective of how petroculture has shaped and changed the landscape and changed the social lives of Saudi Arabians men and women.

3.1 The creation of a new social order in *Landscape of the Mind*

Al-Dowayan recognizes how petromodernity had caused changes in social relations among the communities of the Arabian Gulf, and demands to situate women within the social narrative of the history of transitioning to an oil economy. She describes how the status of women in society deteriorated after the discovery of oil and the subsequent development of the country. In a statement published on her website, Al-Dowayan explains how the social structure before oil allowed men and women to be financially independent and explains that men and women were equal earners and contributors in their communities. With the transition to modernity and the urbanization of the communities during the 1940s and 1950s, craft-making by women had vanished. In addition, women have not been trained alongside men to be part of the oil economy and, as such, became financially dependent [19].

Female autonomy and the representation of women in the workforce is a concern in Al-Dowayan's work titled, *Landscape of the Mind* (2009). The landscape in this series stigmatizes petromodernity by populating the land with heavy materialistic equipment. This harsh representation of the landscape of petromodernity is joined by strange elements inserted into the photographs, such as abstract birds, disguised flat female figures, hoisted palm trees, and female hands decorated with Henna and emanating from within the oil barrel. The surrealist scene, which includes imagery of concrete, satellite dishes, oil fields, birds, the desert, and disguised female figures, is a representation of the tension between petromodernity in the region and the deteriorating status of women in society [20]. Al-Dowayan, thus, depicted in *Landscape of the Mind* a sense of loss alongside a reassurance that women also belong and must be equal contributors to the economy.

She depicted a landscape that consists of electric fences and doves added oddly to security concrete. The doves could be understood as a metaphor for the mediation between the materiality of the scene and the static depictions of the human figures [21]. The doves' roles as mediators are manifested in the suggestion of the movement and motion that they appear to imply. The electric fence is reminiscent of the type used to surround oil fields and protect American residency camps inside cities.

In *Landscape of the Mind*, the female body is strongly present and awkwardly inserted in many ways varying from actual representations to suggestions by different elements and natural forms. For example, the female body is represented by the oversized Henna hands coming out of the oil barrels. In one photo, the hands are extending and pointing to the sky in an attempt to ascend above the oil barrel. In the second photo of the series, the female body is suggested by the palm trees as they imply fertility and maternity. These palm trees are incorporated behind the oil barrels and one is upside down. The female body in the third photo of the series is veiled in a black Abaya, secluded and located outside the oil field. The

references to the female body being either secluded or peculiarly inserted or hinted at were done in order to demonstrate the tension surrounding women's rights in the workplace, especially with the advent of petromodernity and the creation of petroculture in this region.

3.2 *If I Forget You, Don't Forget Me*: An ethnographic exploration

Al-Dowayan started her art practice by questioning how petromodernity shaped the landscape and affected social relations in the region. In *Landscape of the Mind*, she challenged what she calls "the identity of the landscape" and what it means in terms of empowering women and engaging them in the process of this transformation to petroculture. However, after the death of her father, Al-Dowayan felt the urge to fully understand the early history of oil discovery from the people who lived that history. Realizing how little she knew about the nature of her father's work as well as his friends and life revolving around oil, Al-Dowayan recognized a need to carry out an ethnographic investigation of first-generation Saudi Arabian oilmen.

In order to carry out this ethnographic representation, Al-Dowayan took an intimate look at the petroscape through the lens of her deceased father. In doing so, Al-Dowayan investigated a history rarely exposed or written about. Indeed, working at an oil company that shifted the region and the world into this modernized phase we live in is a unique experience of which many would not know otherwise. Further, by translating the history of these men and women into stories, Al-Dowayan provides a unique history that will help better understand the sociopolitical aspect of the cultural transformation into that of petroculture [22].

The *If I Forget You, Don't Forget Me* (2015) installation contains a five watt luminous bulb and a black wire in the shape of a sentence, that reads in Arabic, "If I forget you, don't forget me". In addition, the artwork contains actual samples of oil, written diaries, photographs, and video interviews with her father's co-workers at the Aramco oil company. *If I Forget You, Don't Forget Me* expresses grief and nostalgia and creates a sensory experience by looking at real objects collected from those workers, evoking emotions associated with each item. In addition, the works use actual oil samples that the artist collected from her father's own belongings. These oil samples have embedded meanings as they are a reminder to consider aspects of oil and labor in order to create a collective memory. She dedicated the work to her father, whom she knew little of growing up and only briefly began to know after his death.

4 CONCLUSION

The urban landscape as a by-product of petroculture appears strongly in the contemporary art of Saudi artists Ahmed Mater and Manal Al-Dowayan. These artists articulate their own distinct, yet similar, narratives of the social and landscape brought about by petroculture. The social narratives derived from the aesthetic choices made by the artists considered in this paper provide insights into the ways in which these social and urban impacts of petromodernity are expressed in petrosapes. The artworks discussed here suggests an awareness on the part of these artists of importance of narrating the history of oil in the region. One can hope that these narratives will start a conversation and contribute to thinking about the future of energy. In addition, this group of artworks presented in this paper portrayed conflicting utopian and dystopian ideas brought about by the oil industry and portrayed future concerns and anxiety about political power, social inequality, and the damaged environment. These artworks convey utopian ambitions and the dystopian anxieties and shed light on the history of oil in the Arabian Gulf. This perspective of history challenges previous historical



narratives of this culture in that it focuses on the many negative impacts of the oil boom. Further, the sensorial affects in the works considered are demonstrated through notions of ambition and anxiety, which are parallel to the metaphors of utopia and the apocalypse used in the current social discourses of oil and petroleum infrastructures [23].

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