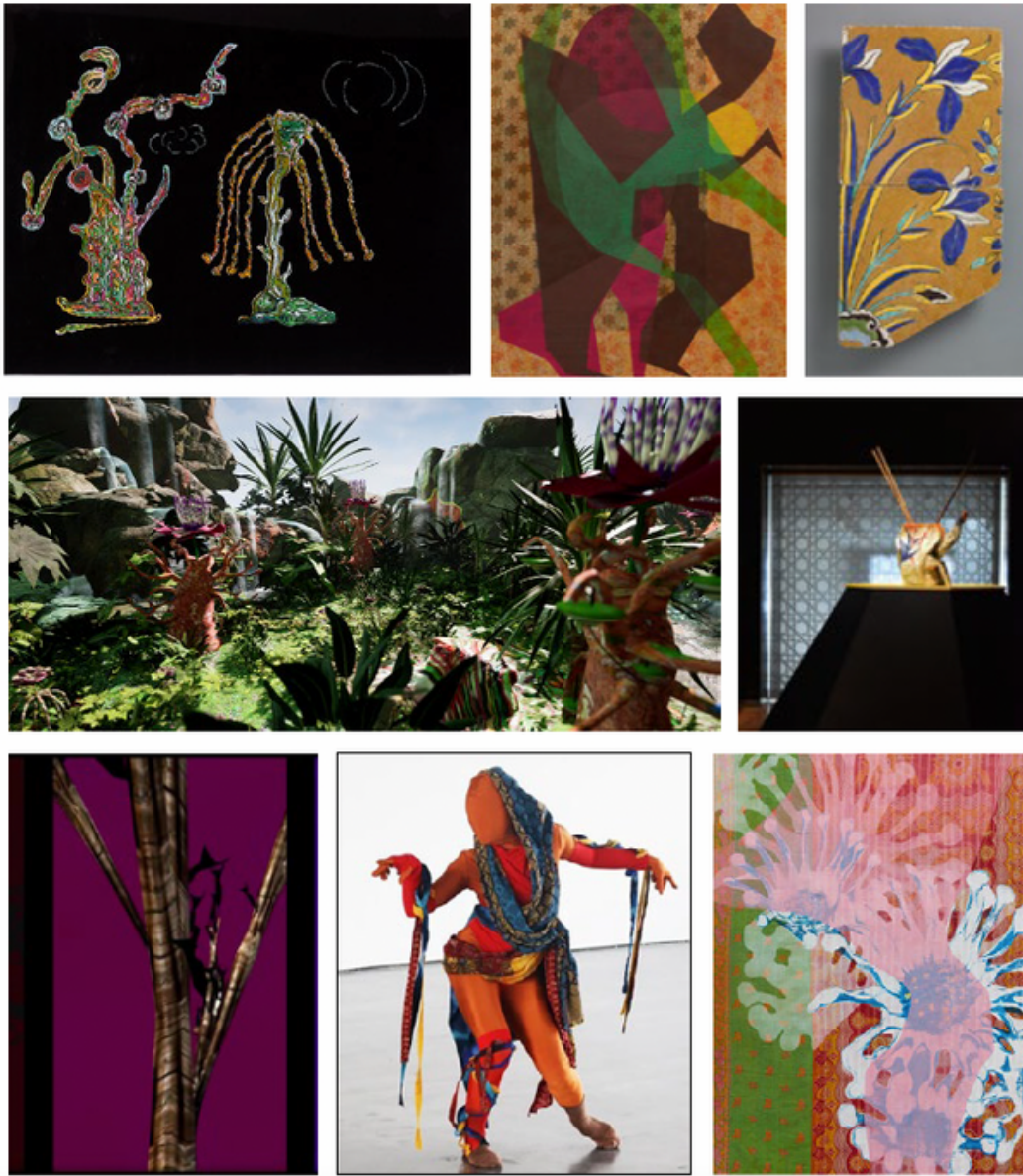


CURATOR'S PICKS

SHEZAD DAWOOD: NIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF LOVE INSPIRED BY AND FEATURING YUSEF LATEEF

November 10, 2023–May 5, 2024
Temporary Exhibitions Gallery
Marianne Fenton, Special Projects Curator



NIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF LOVE



Yusef Lateef,
Untitled [Night in the Garden of Love],

Acrylic, chalk, and watercolour
on paper

Photo: ©We Document Art

This acrylic chalk and watercolour painting exemplifies Yusef Lateef’s artistic practice. His daily creative routine frequently involved drawing before practicing his instruments and composing music on the piano. Lateef’s drawings were more than just reflections of his passion for nature; they were both drawings and visual expressions that reflected his musical thinking. Lateef was known to have performed some of these drawings as if they were musical notations.

“Yusef Lateef’s drawings were never given titles by the artist but were posthumously titled by his widow, Ayesha Lateef. This particular painting, called *Night in the Garden of Love*, was titled after Lateef’s novella of the same name.

The imaginary plant forms in this painting are set like living and moving jewels on the dark background. These extraordinarily complex and detailed paintings provide a glimpse into the multidisciplinary practices of Lateef and set the stage for the hopeful exhibition narrative that follows. Art, partnerships, nature, and cross-disciplinary thinking provide pathways to creative problem-solving and hope for our collective future on this planet.”

Marianne Fenton
Special Projects Curator
Aga Khan Museum

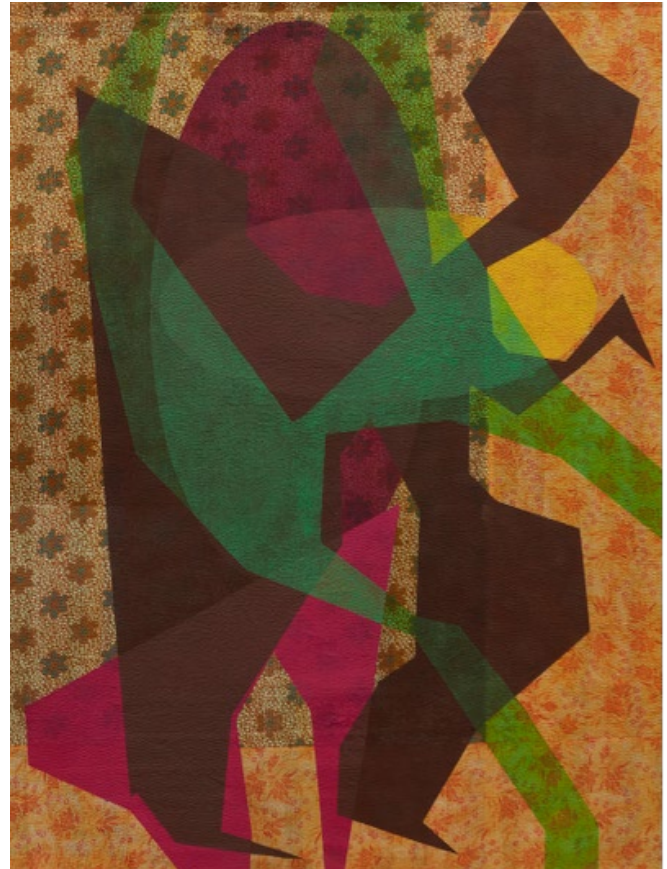
MUTANT DANCER

These hanging, painted textile pieces were created using vintage fabric from Shezad Dawood’s personal collection. The textiles originate from the Sindh province in Pakistan, dating back to the 1970s. Local nomads gathered these offcuts and meticulously stitched them together, creating their own unique renditions of the textiles. The pieces in the exhibition underscore the collaborative essence of the exhibition. In it, Dawood, inspired by Lateef, collaborates with various artists, both contemporary and from the past.

Within the exhibition, each textile piece highlights a distinct plant or element that would be present in a garden — both real and imagined. They are displayed in a manner that evokes the sensation of strolling through a garden.

“The Mutant is a key figure introduced through Yusef Lateef’s novella, *Night in the Garden of Love*. The Mutant character connects and communicates through dance and movement.

The notion of a mutant is interesting in that it represents a hybrid of two forms. It is a transitional being that is recognizably human but is in the process of evolving in shape and awareness to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. Similarly, the textiles Dawood used were originally created for one purpose, but over time, they evolved to encompass new layers and meanings that have been adapted for their new contexts. Here, textile and paint combine to create this captivating image reminiscent of plant-like forms in movement. Many of the textiles hint at the



Shezad Dawood
Mutant Dancer, 2023

Acrylic on vintage textile hanging
Photo courtesy of the Artist

visual language Lateef used in his paintings and drawings, which are in conversation with these works.

For Shezad Dawood, textiles are also seen as a precursor to the digital. They represent a space where analogue and digital worlds intersect — where the artisan’s hand meets the loom.”

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Aga Khan Museum

OSTEOSPERMUM

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“Osteospermum presents viewers with a more recognizable and less abstracted image. This daisy from South Africa represents the global breadth of Dawood's interest. Time and space are collapsed in these works in which textiles from the 1970's which were woven in Pakistan, collide with a distinct South African flower which was painted onto these textiles in Dawood's London studio. All these elements coexist within the context of an exhibition that is exploring future realities. In this piece, we find an example of how Dawood's cross-cultural and trans-historical vision operates outside of Western-centric traditions. These strange and unexpected connections remind us of how interconnected we are.”

Marianne Fenton
Special Projects Curator
Aga Khan Museum



Shezad Dawood
Osteospermum, 2023

Acrylic on vintage textile hanging
Photo courtesy of the Artist

MUTANT DANCER 1 AND MUTANT DANCER 2



Shezad Dawood x Ahluwalia
Mutant Dancer 1 and Mutant Dancer 2, 2023

Vintage fabric

Co-commissioned by WIELS in Brussels and Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.

Photo: © Wiels

Created in collaboration with UK-based designer Priya Ahluwalia, the costume sculptures were crafted from the same vintage fabrics that were used in the hanging textile paintings by Shezad Dawood. They were designed as a physical representation of the Mutant that appears in Lateef's novella. Both costumes feature in the virtual reality and are worn by the choreographer and dancer Wan-Lun Yu.

“These costumes also reference the Mutant figure that is a key character in the novella. It emerges both literally and thematically throughout the exhibition. The costumes were designed to be worn by a dancer who was filmed for the virtual reality experience. The movement represented by these costumes activates the exhibition through the potential of dance.”

Marianne Fenton
Special Projects Curator
Aga Khan Museum

NIGHT IN THE GARDEN OF LOVE (VR)



Shezad Dawood
Night in the Garden of Love (VR),
2023

VR Environment, duration variable

Co-commissioned by WIELS in
Brussels and Aga Khan Museum
in Toronto.

The 12-minute, two-player virtual reality (VR) experience immerses audiences in key scenes from the novella, *Night in the Garden of Love*, as envisioned by Shezad Dawood. This 3D reimagining of the novella begins in outer space, transports the players to the streets of Detroit, trails the Mutant to a recycling plant, and culminates in a utopic garden adorned with imagined plants. Players have the ability to navigate this space and engage with one another within the virtual realm. The Mutant character is embodied and performed by the choreographer Wan-Lun Yu.

transports them into a lush, growing, and breathing imaginary garden — a hopeful space in the light of a dystopian present.

By making the players an integral part of the narrative and granting them the agency to navigate this imagined space together, the experience reinforces the notion that we all possess the ability to make positive, lasting impacts on the real world around us.”

Marianne Fenton
Special Projects Curator
Aga Khan Museum

“The VR experience provides viewers with imagined interpretations of key moments from the novella. It also provides an interesting take on sustainability by viewing the discourse surrounding climate change through a hopeful lens. It guides viewers through a dystopian city scene, into a recycling plant, and then

DIGITAL SEEDBANKS

Displayed across seven distinct screens, the Digital Seedbanks showcase algorithmically generated, imagined plants that react to musical stems. The accompanying original composition for the Seedbanks was inspired by Lateef’s autophysiopsychic methodology and was performed by a selection of his past students and collaborators. For the composition, Dawood grouped together over 30 instruments into seven stems, creating a two-hour immersive installation.

The music was composed and arranged by Adam Rudolph and Alexis Marcelo, with additional composition by Ralph Miles Jones. It features Batya Sobel, Matt Waugh, Gwen Laster, Mia Theodoratus, and Stephanie Griffin.

“Night in the Garden of Love reimagines how we experience exhibitions. It creates a space where sensory experiences converge, and we find ourselves rethinking the way in which we process our senses and experiences.”

In the case of the Digital Seedbanks, we are experiencing sound in a visual way. The two artforms overlap and create a connected sonic and visual experience. In this context, one is incomplete without the other.”

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Shezad Dawood
Night in the Garden of Love (Digital Seedbanks), 2023

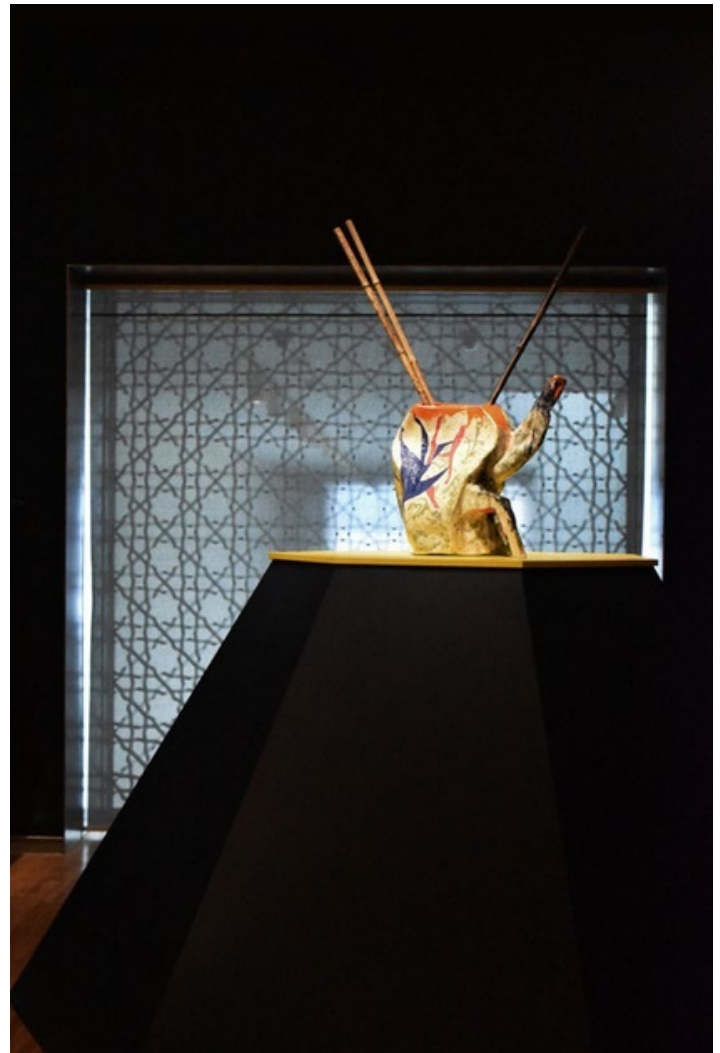
Seven algorithmically generated plants responding to a new musical score
116 min.

XYLOFLOR

This diffuser was crafted from a unique ceramic in collaboration with ceramic studio, Ofumum. The diffuser contains a distinctive scent named Xyloflor, which was created in collaboration with Olivia Bransbourg from boutique perfume label, Iconofly, France-based perfumer Nicolas Bonneville, and fragrance house dsm-firmenich. The name derives from ‘xylon,’ meaning wood, and ‘flora,’ signifying flower. This scent boasts eight middle notes, including familiar ones like jasmine and imagined ones such as lion’s foot. Artificial intelligence (AI) was used to develop unique notes to represent plants whose scents have not been captured or that lack a discernible scent.

“This work underscores a key theme that emerges throughout the exhibition – the power of collaboration in addressing challenges and re-orienting our present in relation to sustainability and climate change.

Conceptually, Xyloflor is a fusion of Dawood’s sensory vision of an imaginary garden, inspired by his own interest in plants and nature, as well as Lateef’s profound passion for botany. The diffuser is the result of a collaboration between Dawood and Ofumum, and the scent – which was created as a collaboration between Dawood, Olivia Bransbourg (from boutique perfume label, Iconofly), and France-based perfumer, Nicolas Bonneville – is a union of nature and artificial intelligence.



Shezad Dawood
Xyloflor, 2023

Ceramic Vase and scent

Here we see the digital and the analogue intersecting to create something previously unimagined and unique.”

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Special Projects Curator
Aga Khan Museum

TWO TILES WITH IRIS PLANTS

Shezad Dawood selected three works from the Museum's Collections that reflect the themes of gardens and plants. Each object is connected with his and Yusef Lateef's work, both visually and conceptually.

This pair of tiles belonged to a large, arch-shaped panel — as indicated by the cut-off corner of the lower tile — in a 17th-century palace in Isfahan. Although the central theme of the panel is not known to us, this detail demonstrates the skill and artistry of the painter. The stems and leaves of an iris plant bend gracefully in a naturalistic fashion. The lower tile with the irises is cut obliquely, indicating it belonged to the left spandrel, but the theme of the rest of the panel is unknown.

“Images of gardens and plants are plentiful in Islamic art. More than just decorative artworks, they remind viewers of paradise and create hopeful, positive spaces where people come together to connect with each other and the world beyond.

By incorporating work from the Museum's Permanent Collection into this exhibition, Dawood creates a dialogue between his and Lateef's work that is underscored by the rich history that has inspired both of their creative practices. These works link the artists with a longstanding creative tradition and remind us of the ways in which we are interconnected with history — we are part of a much longer and larger trajectory that connects us to the past, into the present, and towards the future.”

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Two Tiles with Iris Plants, from an arched panel

Isfahan, Iran, c. 1660-79

AKM590