

ENCOUNTERS WITH ANOTHER WORLD - A NEW INITIATIVE TO OPEN THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF THE YOUNG GENERATION

By: Imogen Ware

In April of 2015, a group of six talented young photographers from Saudi Arabia travelled to Andalucía in southern Spain. There, they were given a unique opportunity to work with innovative photography collectives and professional photographers, and to practice cutting-edge photographic techniques in the magnificent settings of Cordoba, Seville, Granada and Madrid. The group's experiences on the "Journey to Andalucía" were documented and disseminated on social media and via a series of short films available to view online. It's clear from the feedback of the participants that this experience was quite transformative. 22-year old Majed Anqawi from Jeddah said *"The Journey to Andalucía was a real tipping point in my life. I experienced so many new things: aside from travelling outside Saudi Arabia for the first time, in Spain I discovered that there are another ways to understand photography. I enjoyed exploring the differences between the concept of photography in my country and the concept of photography here in Europe. Now I feel I can connect these two concepts"*.

Salwa Sejini, aged 23 and also from Jeddah, spoke poignantly about the difference the experience had made on her photography from an emotional as well as technical point of view: "I learnt how to see art from a new perspective. I learnt how to take pictures from my heart not just through trying to take the perfect shot hence I now put my own emotions into my photography."

The project was organised by the Crossway Foundation, a London-based organisation that delivers arts education initiatives for young

people in the Middle East, the United Kingdom and internationally, in partnership with Art Jameel, which promotes contemporary art and creative entrepreneurship across the MENAT region. Now, the two organisations are continuing their partnership by giving young artists from the region the opportunity to travel to Japan in November 2015 for an intensive and immersive exploration of the country's cultural and artistic scene. The "Journey to Japan" is run as an open call to visual artists, photographers, filmmakers, designers and other creative minds aged 18 to 25, who are citizens or residents of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and the United Kingdom. Applications are submitted via the Crossway Foundation's website, and those interested in the experience are invited to submit a creative project that relates to the theme 'Encounters with Another World'. The eight participants are yet to be selected to take part in the trip, which is the third in the series, Brazil having been the first in 2014, followed by Andalucía earlier this year.

Discovering new and unfamiliar 'worlds' can greatly enrich the creative process. Whether these new worlds exist in a different country, within your local community, in the maze of the internet, or even simply inside your own mind, their physical shape is of little importance. What is important, however, is to allow yourself to look outside the everyday and find new territories in which to plant and nurture your imagination. Our aim in organising these journeys is to identify and invest in the next generation of artists and creative entrepreneurs, to give them the opportunity to develop personally



Taro Okamoto, Tower of the Sun, Expo Commemoration Park, Osaka

and professionally through first-hand experience of other cultures and art practices, and to provide them a platform to express themselves in an innovative and creative way. During these journeys we endeavour to engage professional local artists and workshop facilitators who can impart their knowledge and experience in a clear and effective way. We hope this will facilitate a network between young artists locally, regionally and internationally through which they can help one another to grow and develop in the long term.

Kuwaiti visual artist Monira Al Qadiri has been appointed the Artistic Lead on this project. Al Qadiri completed her arts education in Japan, and has a PhD in inter-media art from Tokyo University of the Arts. The Beirut-based artist has been involved in the project since the outset, and conducted workshops inspired by the work of Japanese artists and thinkers to promote the opportunity in London, Jeddah and Riyadh. Similar promotional talks and workshops also took place in Dubai and Kuwait. Speaking of her involvement in the project, Al Qadiri says, "It has always been my dream to share my knowledge and experience of Japanese arts and culture with younger practitioners from the region. Being in Japan can stimulate the mind of any artist in a myriad ways, and this journey can become a gateway to endless sources of inspiration for years to come," she says.

During their time in Japan, the group will visit Tokyo, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Naoshima, staying in accommodation ranging from modern hotels to a traditional ryokan in Kyoto and beach huts in Naoshima. Al Qadiri has planned an extensive itinerary of workshops and cultural experiences for the participants in every city. "I went to Japan when I was 16 and lived there for 10 years. I am trying to condense my experiences of a decade in Japan into two weeks for these young artists. We want them to get the broadest possible experience of Japanese culture, history, traditions and the contemporary art scene. We will be working with various Japanese artists, artists' collectives and major national museums to organise workshops and tours for the group" she says.

The group's itinerary includes training in the art of butoh (Japanese dance theatre), a bonsai workshop, visits to the MORI Art Museum in Tokyo, the Chichu Art Museum in Naoshima, and various other experiences of cultural significance, such as taking part in a Tea Ceremony and a meditation workshop. A visit to the studio of an internationally-recognised contemporary arts collective is also being arranged. Each participant will work on a creative project of their choice, which they will present to the group during a final review session in Tokyo after their experiences in Tokyo, Kyoto, Naoshima and Hiroshima. They will also work collectively on a group project. "I hope what they see, feel, learn and experience will

inspire them and open their minds to think in new ways." Al Qadiri says. She remarks upon the fact that some of the participants may not have left their home or travelled independently before, so the experience of being in Japan would doubtless prove beneficial in terms of encouraging the key skills of leadership and communication in these young artists and creative entrepreneurs.

As with previous iterations of this initiative, the group will be followed by a filmmaker who will be releasing short films 'in real time' via the partners' websites and social media, so that an international audience can follow the journey as it happens. The participants will continue to be supported by the Crossway Foundation even after completing this journey of a lifetime. We stay in touch with our 'alumni' and try to engage them in our future projects because we believe they are the best ambassadors for our work and the impact of our initiatives.

For example, some of the promotional workshops for the Japan project were delivered by alumni who came with us to Brazil in 2014. The trailer for our competition in 2014 was created by an alumnus from 2012. The judging panels this year will count alumni in their number. After all, they know better than anybody what it takes to make the most out of the opportunity.

For more information visit www.crossway-foundation.org

ART JAMEEL

Art Jameel, a part of the Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives (ALJCI), fosters and promotes contemporary art and creative entrepreneurship across the MENAT region. In partnership with arts organisations worldwide, Art Jameel is developing two arts centres and cultural exchange programmes to encourage networking and knowledge sharing. In partnership with the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, it awards the biannual Jameel Prize for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic traditions. Other projects include Art Jameel Photography Award; Jeddah Sculpture Museum, a public park established in collaboration with Jeddah Municipality; Art Jameel Olympics, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, and Art Jameel Programme for Traditional Arts and Crafts in Fustat, Egypt, in collaboration with the Prince's School of Traditional Arts. ALJCI was set up in 2003 to promote positive social change through the establishment of long-term partnerships with international institutions, and a range of social, cultural and educational initiatives.



George Rickey, Three Squares Vertical Diagonal, Benesse House Museum, Naoshima Island