

Ayman Yossri Daydban

By Nour Wali

As an artist of Palestinian origin, with a Jordanian passport who now lives in Saudi Arabia, Ayman Yossri Daydban has long been fascinated by concepts relating to cultural heritage, national integration, the East / West global melting pot of influence and inter-dependence and the difficulties in perfect assimilation and translation of divergent customs and traditions.

This artist, now in his forties, has long been respected and collected by renowned institutions in his hometown of Jeddah. Ayman Yossri soon came to international recognition following his contribution to the *Edge of Arabia* exhibition at the Brunei Gallery at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London in 2008. The public, and curators were impressed by his combination of interactive performance displays, such as his tent, inviting visitors to contribute with written comments about identity, and his much publicized “Maharem” floor sculpture - giving the impression of a fusion of the Pop Art and Nouveau Realist twist of appropriating movie posters with the crisp regimented display of tissue boxes recalling Carl Andre’s minimalist brick sculpture “Equivalent VIII” 1966 famously exhibited and collected by the Tate Museum in London. Yet having never been hitherto trained nor exhibited in the West – the artist’s conceptual works and Beuys-like enthusiasm to challenge existing rules and expectations – comes from his own innate zest to trigger new debates relevant to up-to-date global political and social realities.

The striking quality of his artistic approach is at once recognised by the shrewd experienced eye. The Green Box Museum in Amsterdam was quick to purchase a work by the artist and his work has reached auction highs at Christies Dubai sales in 2009.

Forming part of his latest body of work from his *Subtitles* series, Ayman Yossri’s photographs presented at Athr Gallery’s *Be Sharp! See Flat!* exhibition at Art

Dubai 2010 are appropriated from Western films he watches on TV at home with Arabic subtitles. The art lies in freezing moments from films whereby a strikingly composed scene is married with a translated Arabic phrase that is charged with innuendo, wisdom, and insight that cleverly criticizes clichés or perfectly evokes ideologies pertinent to the Arab world. Ironically, Western viewers will recognize the stills featuring famous Hollywood stars such as Nathalie Portman, Scarlett Johansson and Sigourney Weaver and may even identify the films, such as the *The Thin Red Line* and *The Other Boleyn Girl*, but unless they read Arabic and unless an English translation is co-present, they will feel alienated by the Arabic text and the symbolic relevance of the message to Arab society. For example, one photograph features a woman pointing a gun to her head with the phrase in Arabic pronounced “Tabban” – used in films (yet never colloquially employed) to reflect a polite way of translating all swear words. The viewer is always left to guess the exact profanity used in the original film script. To a Middle Eastern, the inside joke is immediately appreciated as well as the association of the word to the Holy Quran where it features in Surat Al Masad to reproach Abu Lahaban for openly insulting the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). Gradually, the text imparts a new narrative onto the selected image now frozen in time, opening unexpected imposed meanings perhaps completely irrelevant to the original film now dissociated from its original context. This is where the magic begins. Depending on the grouping and pairing of the *Subtitles* and images, novel messages flourish encouraging endless debates and thoughts. For instance, by displaying the image of the Boleyn sisters next to a film still of a crowded scene of Arab men traditionally dressed in the white Saudi “thobe”, a Western observer may perhaps note concepts of segregation in traditional Islamic society between men and women. The translations reveals Anne Boleyn asking her sister “How was he with you” and the statement accompanying the scene of Arab men is a famous quote in Islamic culture following Prophet Mohammed’s (peace be upon him) death emphasizing that “It is God who should be worshipped, for God is immortal and never dies”. Seen side by side, a myriad of interpretations are generated: Whereas in Christianity,

Ayman Yossri Daydban. *Damn!*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *Everyone said you've changed so much*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *How was he with you?*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery

Ayman Yossri Daydban. *But animals don't understand poetry*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy of the artist and Athr Gallery



Jesus is regarded as God's son, in Islam the Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) is regarded as a mortal messenger; whereas in Islam men can marry four wives, Henry the VIII had felt obliged to murder several wives so as to marry others, until divorce became legalized; whereas the Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) was renowned for his respectable and loving treatment towards all his wives, many Arab men feign religious adherence in public whilst abusing the teachings of Islam in the home by mistreating their wives in private. Oftentimes, it seems as though Ayman Yossri selects captions and images in the pretext of "art" to generate statements that can be as relevant to environmental and political issues as to the personal relationships featured in the films.

Although presented mostly as framed prints in the context of *Be Sharp! See Flat!*, Ayman Yossri's ongoing *Subtitles* series has been created in many guises, ranging from tissue boxes and mirrors to light boxes and chairs. The artist emphasizes that the art of communication, translation and re-interpretation presents itself to us not merely on our television screens but in all aspects of our lives and the objects we use. We just need to capture the moment and suspend it in time so as to instigate debate for the moral benefit of our society.

Multi-media artist Ayman Yossri Daydban (b. 1966 Palestine with Jordanian nationality) lives in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Well respected by collectors and fellow artists in Saudi Arabia, he has enjoyed solo and group exhibitions in Jeddah since 1992. Daydban came to international prominence following the exhibition *Edge of Arabia* at SOAS, Brunei Gallery in 2008 which has since toured to Venice during the 2009 Biennale. His work has since featured in Christies Dubai auctions as well as in the group show *Balla-Drama*, at Paradise Row Gallery, alongside prominent artists such as Mounir Fatmi and Shezad Dawood.

www.athrart.com
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Nour Wali is a London-based curator and contemporary art consultant.



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *I wanted peace but prepared for war*, Subtitles Series, 2010
 C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
 Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *Do you think you suffered less because you cared for kindness and justice?*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery

Ayman Yossri Daydban. *Then matters developed*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *ooh!*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery

Ayman Yossri Daydban. *You're a coward!*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery



Ayman Yossri Daydban. *I can't*, Subtitles Series, 2010
C-print (mounted on Aluminium)
Image courtesy the artist and Athr Gallery

