Mind the Gap

إنتبه للمسافة
It is the month of March, the infamous art month in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This is the month that the galleries, art studios and artists prepare for all year round. This is also the time to show off the hidden talents who live and work in the country.

For Tashkeel this time of year has always been about the discovery of the new. Since first opening in 2008 we have annually put out an open call, seeking out individuals or collectives to respond to a carefully selected theme. Reaching out to artists working in diverse mediums and who are at different points in the development of their careers, with wide-ranging previous experience and with varying ambitions. For the last nine years this has been an internal project, with the team at Tashkeel identifying the theme and writing the brief, putting out the call and selecting the work for inclusion and, finally, collating the work for exhibition in the gallery. This year we decided to do it a little differently and to use the open call as a means to nurture new curatorial talent in addition to uncovering new creative talent. Instead of curating the exhibition in-house, we decided to give the opportunity to a young curator to write and develop a theme, lead the selection panel, and to help work closely with all the artists who are chosen to be exhibited, to help guide and advise them about concept to fruition of the project.

Forging a close working relationship between the curator and the artists helps to broaden the understanding of the makers and thinkers within the region as well as ensuring a cohesive and thoughtful exhibition and, on this occasion, it also provided an opportunity to be a mentor at times and not just a facilitator of the exhibit.

We invited Jack Thomas Taylor, a long-time friend of Tashkeel and recent graduate of the MA Culture, Criticism and Curation programme at Central Saint Martins, London, to be the first guest curator of the annual open call. Jack is no stranger to the UAE, having lived and worked at Tashkeel identifying the theme and writing the brief, putting out the call and selecting the work for inclusion and, finally, collating the work for exhibition in the gallery. This year we decided to do it a little differently and to use the open call as a means to nurture new curatorial talent in addition to uncovering new creative talent. Instead of curating the exhibition in-house, we decided to give the opportunity to a young curator to write and develop a theme, lead the selection panel, and to help work closely with all the artists who are chosen to be exhibited, to help guide and advise them about concept to fruition of the project.

As Jack explains, Mind the Gap is an exhibition that “surveys a landscape of different voids . . . it is a story told through chapters of gaps from language to gender, social to economic . . . The exhibition repositionings gaps as openings that intertwine and complement each other.”

Tashkeel gives curators and artists a platform to voice their creative expression in whatever form they choose and the annual open call has an important role to play in that process. This is their stage for art month; for some it is the first opportunity to expose their work to the public, but we hope that we can empower them as artists so that it will prove to be just the first of many. This is the time to discover an artist at the beginning of their career, so that perhaps, in years to come, we can look back and we will be able to say “I remember their first show at Tashkeel”.

Lateefa bint Maktoum
Tashkeel Director
February 2017
Curatorial statement

Mind the Gap is a culmination of different drivers all coming together in one place. It surveys a landscape of different voids with the contextual backdrop being the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is a story told through chapters of gaps - from language to gender, to social to economic - and is supported by a series of workshops that aid to provide opportunities for further knowledge and education. The exhibition presents humanity and nature coming together under the pressure of today's constantly changing political, social and natural climate. Bringing together a diverse and multidisciplinary group of artists, architects, filmmakers, writers, and outsiders, the exhibition repositions and expands gaps as openings that intertwine and complement each other.

For this, the gallery has been transformed from a conventional exhibition space to a physical narrative, akin to a research lab of thoughts, feelings and expressions. The presentation and display has been stripped back to allow accessibility to all audiences and to enable everyone to be inspired and to think differently. A section of the gallery has been dedicated to documentation and research and acts as repository of processes and an archive of experiments.

The idea for Mind the Gap was to not only to host an exhibition but to select and organise an arts programme, to diagnose a need in the community, and to seek out new and unusual settings for people's work, forge partnerships, and cede a certain amount of artistic control to all individuals to be inspired and to think differently. A section of the gallery has been dedicated to documentation and research and acts as repository of processes and an archive of experiments.

This approach originated from a need to try and answer the question: How can a curator change their approach to ensure exhibitions have more meaning, an increased affect, and in-turn, bridge bigger gaps?

Aligned with Tashkeel's vision, my curatorial approach has been primarily focused on having a greater impact on audiences, through the expansion of ideas and tactically connecting these with understanding. For the call, I asked the UAE - how can you visualise the UAE? Through the expansion of ideas and connecting these with understanding, we can attempt to enhance the historical, social and cultural fabric of the UAE.

I knew that people craved the opportunity to be impactful, but all too often no one had challenged them to try. Thus, I urged people to observe cultural differences and similarities, question, interrogate and illuminate the cultural gaps in our everyday life.

Whether this is bridging society through food and using memory to create dialogue, or observing regeneration in communities and how they can be articulated through different contemporary art practices, the exhibition attempts to look in-between the ideas of planning and design, and the material reality of change in our built, lived, and social environments.

This exhibition is their response, thus a culmination of the process, rather than just the focal point; an event that brings people together, shares happiness, distributes knowledge and documents research.

Jack Thomas Taylor
Curator
February 2017
Jack Thomas Taylor, 25, is a British cultural producer and curator with specialist knowledge in creative governance. Calling the Middle East his home since 2009, Taylor has worked in the fields of journalism, publishing and branding, and most recently curation, with leading organisations, international companies and even small start-ups, using strategy, innovation and marketing to create opportunities to solve problems.

Taylor graduated from Central Saint Martins in 2016 with an MA Culture, Criticism and Curation whereby he applied his work experience to produce frameworks for critically engaging with history and present scenarios of culture. This has enabled his practical hands-on experience and academic knowledge to combine and create outcomes of new understandings through expanded forms of curation. His research focus combines theoretical issues and practical skills, working with concepts and historical objects to consider how potential new knowledge can be presented in the public domain.

Out of this has emerged a critical questioning of curating World Expos, by examining the binary of ‘Control or Curation’. Taylor’s published research observes the values that pertain to Expos and broaches the argument that organisations should inherit a new set of values that would help enhance the overall meaning and impact of Expos. Taylor argues that the notion of a tightly curated Expo concept would instinctively add a layer of cohesion, and by developing a collection of values, the overall emphasis of an Expo would be on audience and content together, rather than creating a design-led spectacle which focuses on one of these, creating a more impactful experience and a long-lasting legacy.

His research now inspired his curatorial approach whereby he explores an approach of contributing values to tell stories.

Taylor has recently co-curated two exhibitions: Inert Matter, then Live Wire, an archival exhibition held at Central Saint Martins’ Window Gallery in London, UK, that featured objects from the David Usborne collection, University of Arts London Archives and Collections. The second, titled Heritage: A User’s Manual was a multi-faceted archival exhibition on show at London’s Southbank Centre that featured video and sound recordings produced with local community groups and dancers who use Royal Festival Hall, founded on the belief that the heritage of a building is characterised by the ever-changing contributions of its community.

Taylor is also an arts and culture writer who has written for Brownbook, Canvas, Harper’s Bazaar, LS:N Global, Sotheby’s, Time Out and Vision. He also founded arts and culture journal Alef.
We are living in an interesting time run at a rapid pace leading to an extraordinary face-lift of our cities as we knew them. As humans we require time to process transformations. This work evokes the idea of time, and the thin wall between ourselves and our past, what we have and what we had. What would our memories look like if our moments lasted as long as snapping a picture?
2. Aisha Nawab Al Blooshi

Name: The Connection of the Cycle
Gap: Tradition
Material: Sculpture
Date: 2017

This artwork exhibits the bridges between old and modern times through genders, age groups and occupation. The figures in this piece are a representation of society, through their interaction they demonstrate the “domino effect”, in which one action will affect the coming actions, giving a possibility to create a link between the gaps in our society.
3. Amal Al Gurg

Name: Amalgamate
Gap: Gender and society
Material: Screenprint
Date: 2017

The gender gap is prominent in a society where there are reservations regarding commingling. This piece explores the endless possibilities of creative outcomes when the gap is filled, taking into consideration respect of traditions and culture. The artwork shows two Arabic letters (Alef and Thal) used to create balance and perfect harmony.

تأنذام
الفجوة في: الجنس والمجتمع
المواد: الطباعة بالشاشة الحريرية
التاريخ: ١٧

تبرز الفجوة بين الجنسين في المجتمع حيث توجد تحفّظات بشأن الاختلاط، تستكشف هذه القطعة الفنية احتمالات لا تعد ولا حصر لتنتهي دائمة يمكن تحقيقها عند سد هذه الفجوة، مع الاعتراف باحترام التقاليد والثقافة، يعرض هذا العمل الفني حرفيين بالعربية (الألف والذآل) ثم استخدامهما لإنشاء توازن وإنسجام مثالي.
A literal representation of minding the gap by discovering what lies within. The work aims to bring attention to the gaps between a conventional set of forms and patterns, drawing attention to the light in-between and raising questions about the forms around.
5. Ayman Zedani

Name: طاء س
Gap: Language
Material: Pastel, Charcoal, sand and ink on paper
Date: 2016

There is no direct connection between the word to describe something and the thing we attempt to describe. This series centres around exploring the role of signs and their proposed meaning - understanding the fluid relationship between the signifier and the signified, both for the audience and for the artist, exploring the free-flowing malleability of meaning.

لا يوجد رابط مباشر بين الكلمة التي تصف شيئاً والشيء الذي نحاول وصفه. تتركز هذه المجموعة على اكتشاف دور العلامات ومعناها المفترض، أي فهم العلاقة السلسلة التي تجمع بين الدال والمدلول، بالنسبة للجمهور والفنان على حد سواء، وإثبات التصوير الإنسابي للمعنى.
This artwork revives the question: to what extent do the urban transformations in the industrial areas for nurturing arts and culture create gaps and to what extent do they build bridges? This issue is explored through the case of Warehouse 421, in historical Mina Zayed in Abu Dhabi, with an open-plan configuration referring to the architectural character of the building.
This work is a tribute to the modest structures built throughout the United Arab Emirates to provide shade and shelter for the construction labourers. Due to the overwhelming architectural landscape of the country, these ephemeral constructions often go unnoticed.
This body of work consists of images detailing the inner workings of a petroleum refinery and the by-product of relying on a finite resource. Our relationship with petroleum has helped society advance into the modern era but with these advancements have come other challenges, such as the strain on our planet's eco system and the lasting effect it will have on generations to come who may never see the benefits of this finite resource.
These works represent selections from a body of work that emerges from the part of the artists’ practice concerned with noticing the everyday and “actual” fleeting moments: sunlight glowing on a cat’s paw, shifting clouds, and sidewalks and architecture. These images capture and hold what might otherwise be gaps in our memories.
10. Katie Venner-Woodbridge

Name: Divergent Resemblance
Gap: Society
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2017

Embroidered panels of household cotton and wire mesh, symbolically interlace sub-cultures. Sunlight exposes the layers, reflecting the daily navigations of different sectors of the United Arab Emirates. The work questions the ease of communication and daily practices in an environment where these vary due to cultural expectations, and how this discord is accepted in a harmonious manner.
11. Mays Albeik

Name: “I over look, like the balcony of a house...”
Gap: Environment
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2017

The installation reverses what a balcony does (taking the inside out), and instead takes the outside of the exhibition space inside, allowing the trees, the streets, the sun, the stars and the breeze to overlook and to overhang in the exhibition space.
12. Mobius Design Studio

Name: Silhouette, Altered.
Gap: Technology and craft
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2016

By altering the function of a cheap vinyl cutter, we analyse qualities that stem from combining inaccurate tools used in producing hand drawings with a machine associated with precision. The adapted tools change the kind of aesthetics expected from the machine, making the output unpredictable.
A New Person? is an interactive, audience-driven project that encourages participants to open a communication channel with another person within the exhibition space. The participant will be able to pick the communication channel they prefer, including Twitter, Instagram, email, or even snail mail.
14. Noush Anand

Name: ALL UR BASE R BELONG 2 US
Gap: Human and non-human
Material: Video
Date: 2017

Taking reference from Meme culture and history, this project investigates the creation and distribution of non-human images, specifically of cats. Cats are empowered with wearable technology that protects their privacy from night-time cameras, thus returning their anonymity to their nocturnal prowls.

14. نوش أناند

الإسم: ALL UR BASE R BELONG 2 US
الفجوة في: البشر وغير البشر
المواد: فيديو
التاريخ: 2017

باستناد إلى ثقافة الميميات وتاريخها، يدقق هذا المشروع في إبتكار صور غير جسدية وتوزيعها، خصوصاً صور القطط. إذ أن هذه الأخيرة مزودة بتقنية يمكن إرتدائها تهدف إلى حماية خصوصية القطط من الكاميرات الليلية، وبالتالي تستعيد تجولاتها الليلية بهوية مجهولة.
In a unique art performance, a human breath brings unity to body and voice. Together they become a complete mystic mantra to fill in the gaps between air molecules and the shadows created by the dancer's movements.

الإسم: الرقص مع الظلال
الفجوة في: الثقافة
المواد: فيديو
التاريخ: 2012

يجمع نفس الإنسان ما بين الجسم والصوت في أداءٍ فني مميز. فيمسي الأثنان لحناً روحاً يملأ الفجوات بين الجزيئات الهوائية والظلال التي تخلفها خطوات الراقص.
Traditionally the fastest way to drink hot tea with milk is by pouring the tea into a saucer and to drink from the plate. This is an outdated Emirati habit, but out of humility is only performed within intimate circles. In spite of what Emiratis might think, this is not a well-known habit, and this artwork aims to reduce the gap between elders and youngsters.
17. Owais Husain

Name: The Unfolding Wall
Gap: Environment
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2016

The trunk is a metaphor for migration and identity. Enclosed is video imagery of water, symbolic of life and homage to the environment which faces the mounting threats of climate change.
European legislation makes provision for laying down marketing standards for bananas of uniform and satisfactory quality. Ironically, the individual characteristics of this ‘unruly bunch’ of ceramic bananas present a parody of the qualifying factors stipulated. These seemingly absurd disparities highlight a wider symbolic distinction for acceptance and inclusion of people. In a bid to unify and conform, at what point does the system reject nature’s diversity?
A statement that sheds light on the naive rational of how the gap between the classes is thought to have waned. The photo-series superimposes with agitation the two opposing ends of the sustenance spectrum in order to highlight a gap in everyday life.

19. Rami Alotaibi
Name: Let them eat cake
Gap: Socio-Economic
Material: Photography
Date: 2017

تُعتبر المقولة التي تسلّط الضوء على العقلانية الساذجة في ما يتعلق بالفجوة بين الطبقات متشابكة. تفرض سلسلة الصور هذه مع كثير من الحركة الطرفين المعاكسين للفجوة التطبيقية، بهدف تسليط الضوء على فجوة موجودة في حياتنا اليومية.
20. Romy Ravindran

Name: Trickle
Gap: Socio-economic
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2017

An installation made with steel and porcelain plates influenced by Dadaism. This artwork depicts the stark inequality in the distribution of wealth that resonates all over the world. The trickle-down effect theorises that tax cuts for the top earners would lead to increased job opportunities, spurring economic growth.
Physical infrastructure systems are almost mythical, too complex to comprehend. However, the ubiquitous, ornate manhole covers are often our only entry to those systems, both literally and figuratively. What about intangible infrastructure systems that are as important, including the cultural system? What would their proverbial manhole cover look like?
This artwork aims to show cultural diversity, a person’s identity and actualisation in attempt to culturally identify the artists’ origins. Using the flags from Somalia, United Arab Emirates, and United Kingdom elements from each have been used in an attempt illustrate an unusual aesthetic which represents the disoriented idea of generalised cultural identity.
23. Taqwa Alnaqbi

Name: Small six dresses: Red, Blue, Pink, Purple, Maroon, Yellow
Gap: Culture
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2016

This work celebrates the sensibility of the later stages of the artists’ grandmother’s life and how she found wisdom in her life. Her visual language has been translated and stitched on six of her dresses. The dresses have been represented through hand-made papers, to demonstrate the traditional handicraft of the grandmother’s past.

الإسم: ستّة فساتين صغيرة باللون الأحمر، والأزرق، والوردي، والأرجواني، والبنّي والأصفر
الفجوة في: الثقافة
المواد: وسائل متعددة
التاريخ: 2016

يحتفل هذا العمل بحساسية المراحل الأخيرة التي عاشتها جدّة الفنانة، وكيف إكتشفت الحكمة في حياتها. التجسدت لغة الفنانة البصرية في كلّ درزة من الفساتين السّتة. تم تمثيل الفساتين بواسطة أوراق يدوية الصنع، لعرض الصناعة اليدوية التقليدية من ماضي جدّتها.
In this sculpture the pumpkins symbolise human frailty and the universal unavoidable process of ageing and deterioration of the body and the desire to prolong life and preserve beauty. The project bridged many gaps, spawning relationships with people and was successful in many ways. People, cultures, nationalities, ideas and inspiration can come in the most unlikely of ways - and often when it is not the intention or purpose of the exercise.
25. Upcycling Art Collaborative

Name: Weaving Bridges of Diversity
Gap: Culture
Material: Mixed-media
Date: 2017

There is a cultural gap in the United Arab Emirates, where expatriates from around the world live together but don’t really mix. To bridge this “melting pot gap”, an outdoor installation of fabrics from around the world, have been woven into the arcades at Tashkeel’s street entrance and internal courtyard. Colourful fabrics, yarns and ropes are wrapped around the columns, combining various weaving techniques from different countries. The public is encouraged to add found objects to this interactive artwork, which will evolve throughout the exhibition as a living expression of cultural diversity.
A guest-speaker is invited to share his/her experience over dinner to an audience of up to 20 people aged from 15 to 105 years old. The artwork consists mainly in the creation of a dialogue and to ensure intimacy, photos are not allowed, only the voices are recorded to document the evening. The intention is to create bridges (reduce the gap) between people and more specifically between Tashkeel and the public through the sharing of food and thoughts following the tradition of the “majlis”.

Leader
Judy Shinnick

There’s a hunger to learn the foundations of realist academic oil painting. To understand the methods of the old Masters such as Rembrandt, Titian and Caravaggio can seem like a daunting task for many people. It normally requires a lot of time, commitment, cost and dedication. Through a modular skills development programme, which is educational and at the same time captures and retains interest, participants can learn valuable skills in oil painting.

Leader
Katie Venner-Woodbridge

This workshop will provide the opportunity to learn traditional hand embroidery techniques, and how to apply these stitches to create fabric manipulations. Participants will discover how the techniques can be used to produce imagery, texture and movement in a number of different ways; using the tactile nature of the fiber and fabric, colour ways as well as composition and spacing, to produce work that cannot be achieved using machine led processes.

Leader
Mirzam Chocolate Makers

In between modern machinery and traditional hand processing, lies the world of the craft food movement. In this gap, Mirzam will be hosting a series of workshops about traditional methods of craft chocolate making, using your hands, some very basic tools and the most basic of ingredients: cocoa beans.

Leader
Tamsin Wildy

What is a collage? How do we read images? Can we change the way we look at everyday images and create new landscapes, adverts or even creatures? Through this workshop we will create a series of images using found materials. These could be from old magazines, envelopes and any other everyday materials we’re surrounded by. Participants are encouraged to collect their ephemeral materials (such as envelopes, bills receipts etc.) to work with.

Please visit tashkeel.org for updates on programming times and dates.
About Tashkeel

Established in 2008 by Lateefa bint Maktoum, Tashkeel is a contemporary art organisation based in Dubai that facilitates art and design practice through studio facilities, artists’ residencies, exhibitions, events and professional as well as recreational workshops. Tashkeel has a number of well-equipped communal studios. These include the following: photography studio and dark room, printmaking, textiles printing, a full digital/Mac suite and high grade printing facilities, including a Risograph printer, as well as a jewellery making and 3D workshop, complete with a laser cutter and 3D printer.