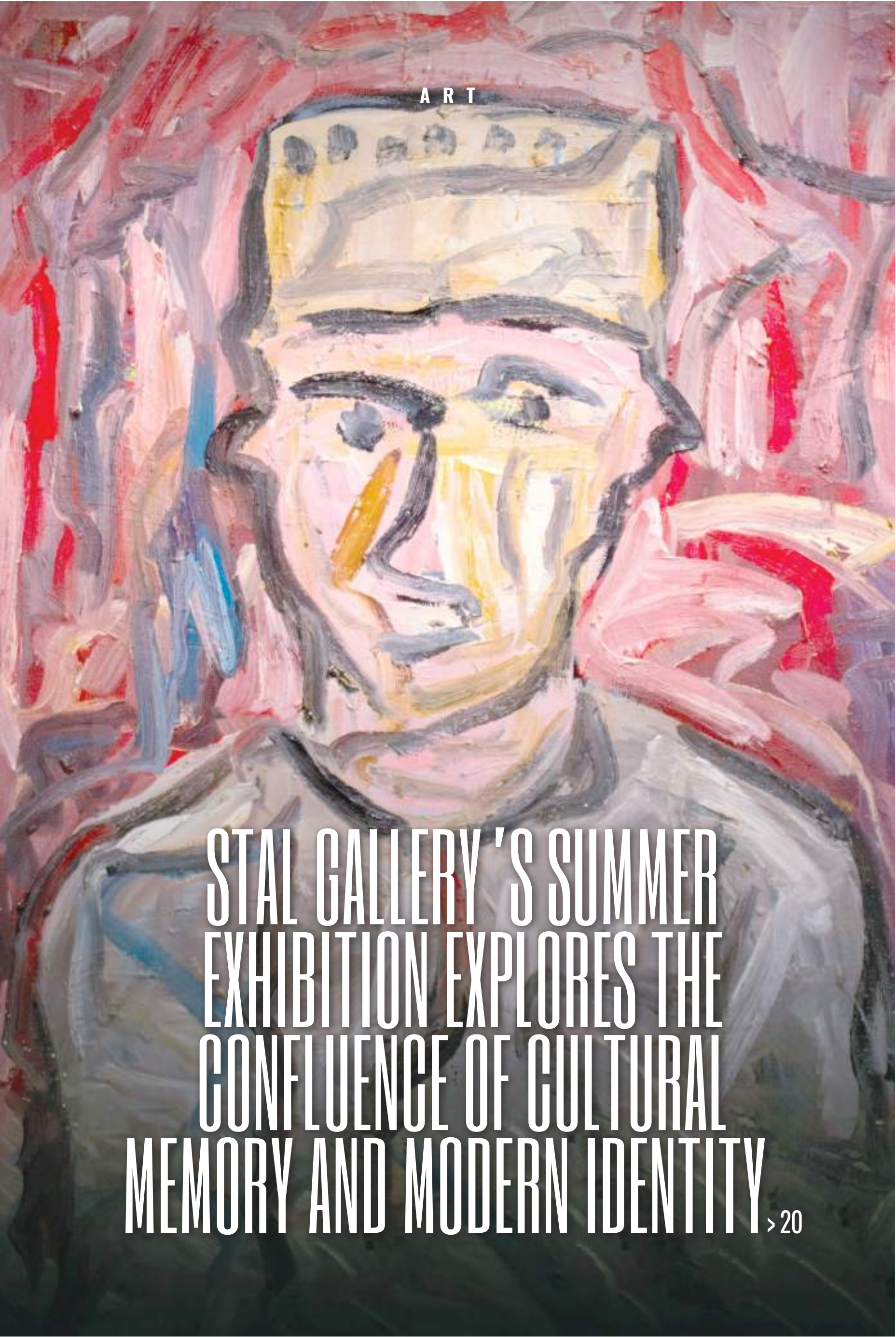


# ART/LIFE



## STAL GALLERY'S SUMMER EXHIBITION EXPLORES THE CONFLUENCE OF CULTURAL MEMORY AND MODERN IDENTITY > 20

### WINGS OF HISTORY

## France's military pigeons race in memory of brave predecessors



Pigeons fly over a French army's military dovecote at Mont-Valerien in Suresne, near Paris. — AFP

**MONT VALÉRIEN:** These days, French military pigeon number 193-529 is no longer needed to carry tiny messages during war-time communication blackouts.

But the racing bird serves as a reminder of the brave service of its predecessors in World Wars I and II; and the 1870 siege of Paris.

Inside Europe's last military pigeon loft, Sergeant Sylvain cradled 193-529, an alert feathered athlete with an iridescent green neck.

"He's a carrier pigeon, like the ones who served in World Wars I and II", said Sylvain, withholding his surname for security purposes.

"But today he races", added the member of the armed forces, whose grandfather was also a pigeon fancier.

In Mont Valerien outside Paris, Sylvain flits between dovecotes, tending to some 200 pigeons — cleaning their shelters and making sure they have enough to eat.

These days, they only use their navigating skills when they are released during competitions, military ceremonies, or demonstrations for visitors, he said.

Humans have been using homing pigeons since Antiquity, but the French military started using them as a communication tool during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 after the Prussians besieged Paris.

In October that year, the interior minister boarded a hot-air balloon to flee the French capital.

Around a month later, the French military had elaborated a messenger pigeon plan to communicate with people still in the city, according to a French government account.

Patriotic Parisians donated more than 300 pigeons to the war effort, which were loaded into the wicker baskets of hot-air balloons and transported southwards to the city of Tours.

Upon arrival they were fitted with small tubes containing 3 to 4 cm (1 to 1.5 inch) of microfilm on which minute messages had been inscribed, called "pigeongrams".

They were then released as close to the capital as possible so they could carry them back inside. — AFP

### QUICK FEATURES



#### HERITAGE

An actress performs during a theatrical performance retracing the history of civilisations that occupied the archaeological site of Chellah: Phoenicia, Mauritania, Carthage, Rome and the Islamic Amazigh Marinid dynasty; in Morocco's capital Rabat. — AFP



#### FILM

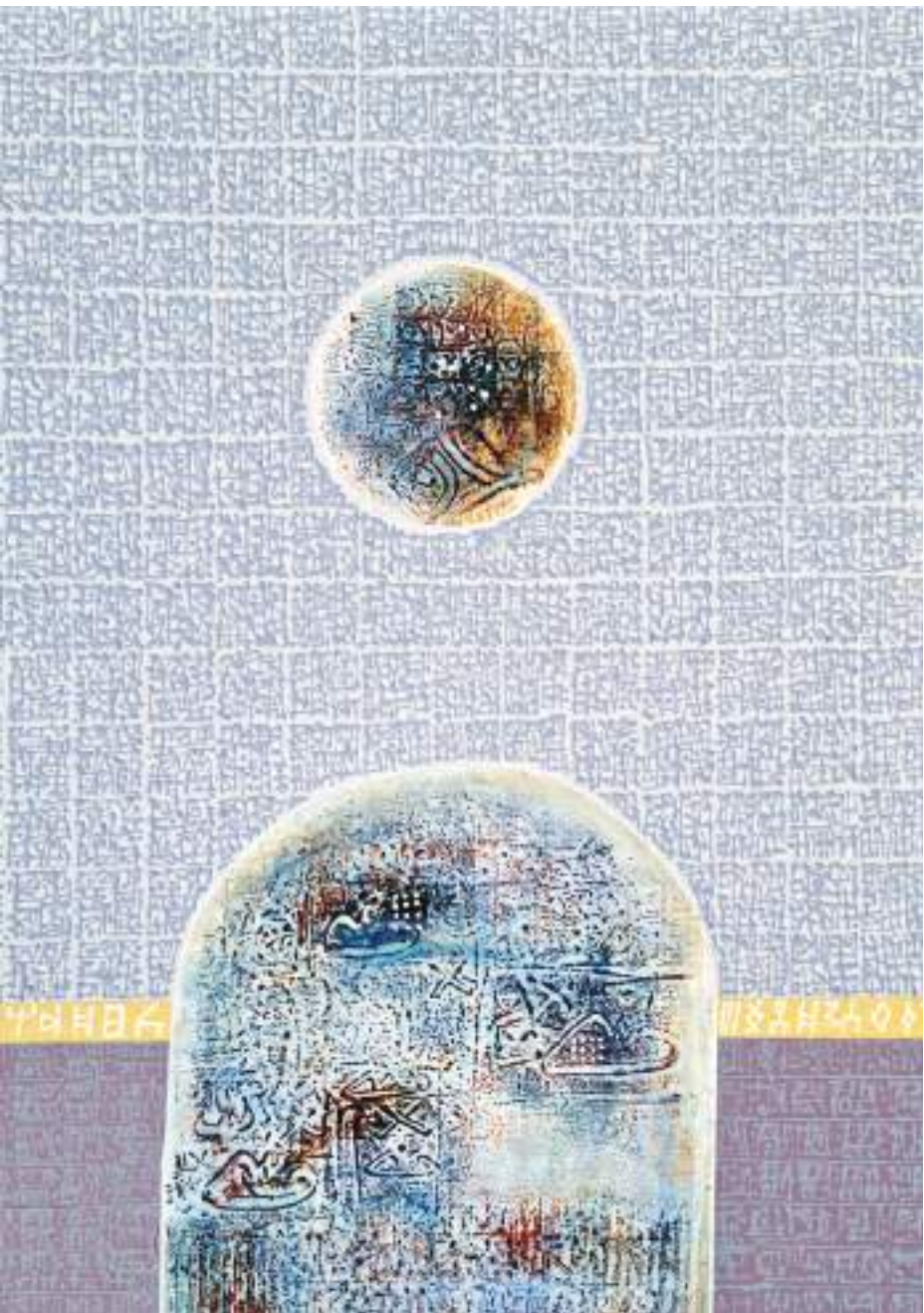
Bollywood actor Ravi Kishan attends the trailer launch of upcoming Hindi-language film 'Son of Sardaar 2' in Mumbai. — AFP



#### ENTERTAINMENT

A dancer performs on stage during the closing ceremony of the 59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) in Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. — AFP

FEATURES



# STAL GALLERY'S SUMMER EXHIBITION EXPLORES THE CONFLUENCE OF CULTURAL MEMORY AND MODERN IDENTITY

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

**STAL GALLERY** & Studio has officially opened its annual summer exhibition, Summer 2025: The Contemporary Perspective, inviting the public into a vibrant conversation about Oman's evolving artistic identity. The exhibition, which runs until 31 August at the gallery's space in Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat, showcases works by seven Omani artists — each exploring the complex intersections of memory, place and personal expression.

The exhibition draws from a wide palette of mediums and artistic approaches. From abstract painting and mixed-media installations to textile-based pieces and narrative collages, the works reflect a deeply personal yet collectively resonant engagement with the past and present.

The exhibition explores a cultural moment where Oman's past and present are in constant dialogue. Each artist brings a distinct emotional frequency, shaped by their materials and their relationship to identity, memory and landscape. Together, their voices build a mosaic that speaks not only to the soul of the region but to the universal impulse to preserve and reinterpret who we are.

Among the featured artists is HH Sayyidah Afra bint Talal al Said, whose work is being exhibited at Stal Gallery for the first time. Her debut marks a significant moment, not only in her personal artistic journey but within the larger context of contemporary art in Oman.

In Shades of Oman, she introduces a series of mixed-media



paintings that blend traditional Omani fabrics with the natural motif of palm frond shadows — a familiar sight across the Omani landscape. The layered textures, subtle colour palettes and fabric integrations offer a meditative experience for the viewer. Drawing from her deep connection to nature and the textures of local life, her works move between the physical and the emotional, between what is seen and what is remembered.

HH Sayyidah Afra bint Talal al Said's use of materials is intentional and symbolic. The textiles speak to cultural heritage, while the soft interplay of shadow and colour creates a contemplative atmosphere. Her technique offers a quiet, almost spiritual rhythm. Sayyidah Afra paints not only what she observes, but what she holds within — memories, landscapes and emotions filtered through texture and tone.

Also featured is Anwar Sonya, a pioneering figure in Oman's contemporary art scene. Known for his bold, expressionist style, Sonya revisits the traditional bullfighting rituals of the Wilayat of Al Musannah in the Al Batinah South Governorate, translating the raw energy and cultural symbolism of these events into powerful, colour-saturated canvases. His work serves as a visual archive, capturing a tradition that is both visceral and deeply rooted in Omani heritage.

Idris al Hooti contributes a quietly nostalgic series titled Muttrah Memories, portraying the subtle textures of Muscat's historic district — palm trees silhouetted against fading buildings, quiet streets imbued with memory. His brushstrokes carry a sense of longing, inviting viewers to reflect on spaces that are disappearing or transforming with time.

In contrast, Omani artist Hassan Meer — a pivotal figure in the country's contemporary art scene, with exhibitions both locally and internationally — presents a series of deeply personal impasto paintings that explore themes of identity and metaphysics. Works such as Father and Son; and Omani Women Gathering use thick, expressive strokes to convey themes of family, collective memory and spiritual continuity. Meer's art often delves into the unseen — the emotions

and cultural threads that bind generations together.

Suha Salim, an emerging voice in the Omani art scene, introduces a new cubist-inspired series titled Distraction. Her fragmented compositions explore the mental and emotional fragmentation of modern life. Through sharp angles, layered geometries and disjointed forms, her work examines interiority — what lies beneath the surface of daily experience.

Hussain Obaid, long regarded for his contributions to Oman's contemporary plastic art movement, returns with compositions rooted in ancient Omani visual symbols.

His work layers history with abstraction, inviting viewers to decode motifs drawn from tribal patterns, maritime heritage and desert iconography. His pieces act as bridges — linking the ancestral past with the visual language of today.

Completing the exhibition is the late Moosa Omar, whose final series Hearts of Departed reflects his lifelong engagement with the environment and spirituality. Using jute — a humble material common in Omani crafts — he forms textured, circular compositions that evoke both the physical terrain and the metaphysical. His work is a quiet tribute to memory and loss, grounded in earth tones and tactile presence.

Together, the seven artists offer not only a survey of Omani contemporary practice but a shared meditation on themes of identity, place, and transformation. Through their distinct voices, the exhibition captures a moment in time — one that holds space for tradition while embracing innovation.

The Contemporary Perspective is more than an art show — it's a living archive of how Oman's artists are responding to the world around them. It's about how they remember, how they reinterpret and how they imagine what's next.

The exhibition is open to the public and free of charge until 31 August 2025, at Stal Gallery & Studio, Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Muscat.

Visitors are encouraged to experience the full breadth of the works on display — and to engage with the stories embedded in every piece.