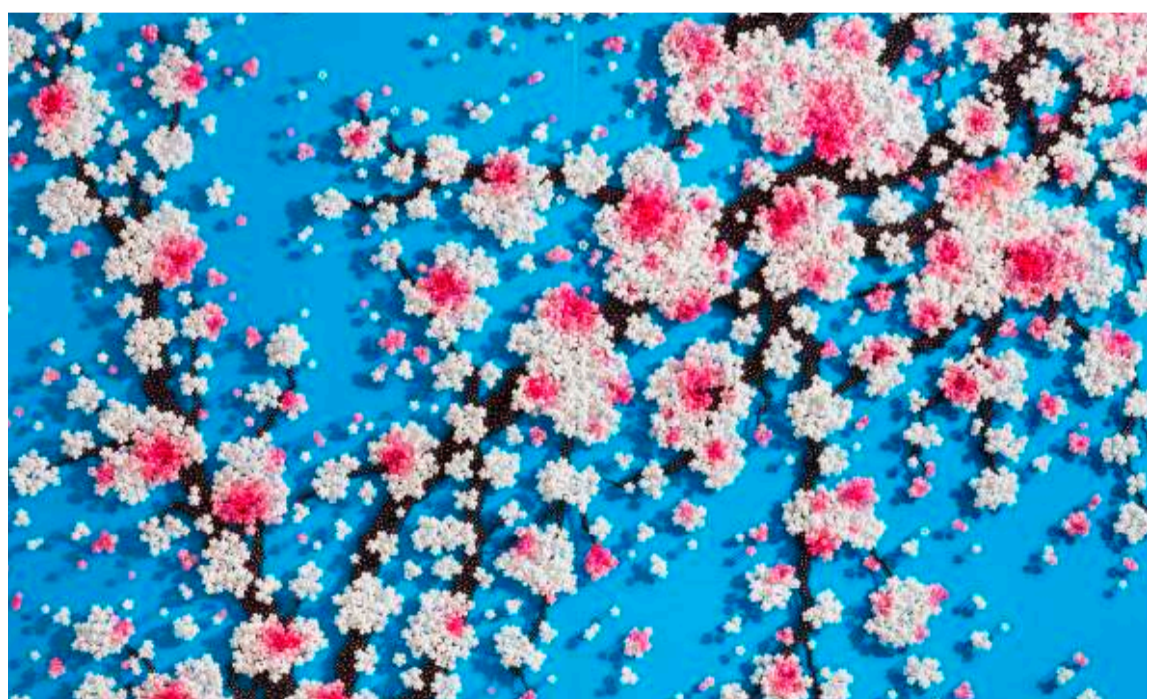
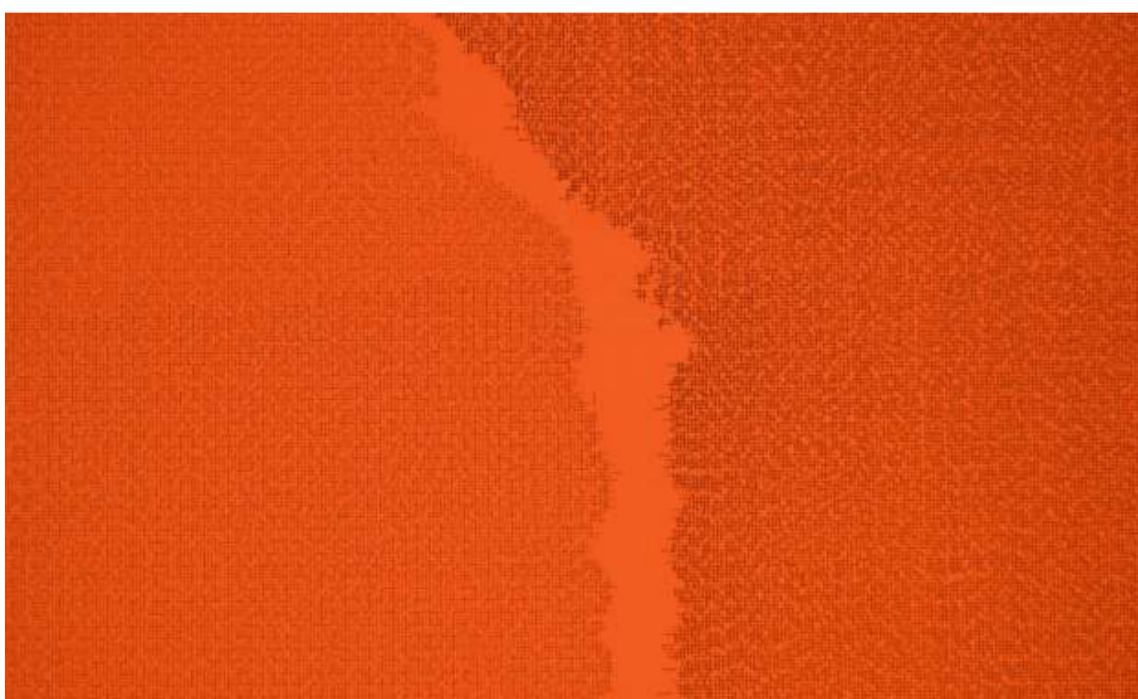
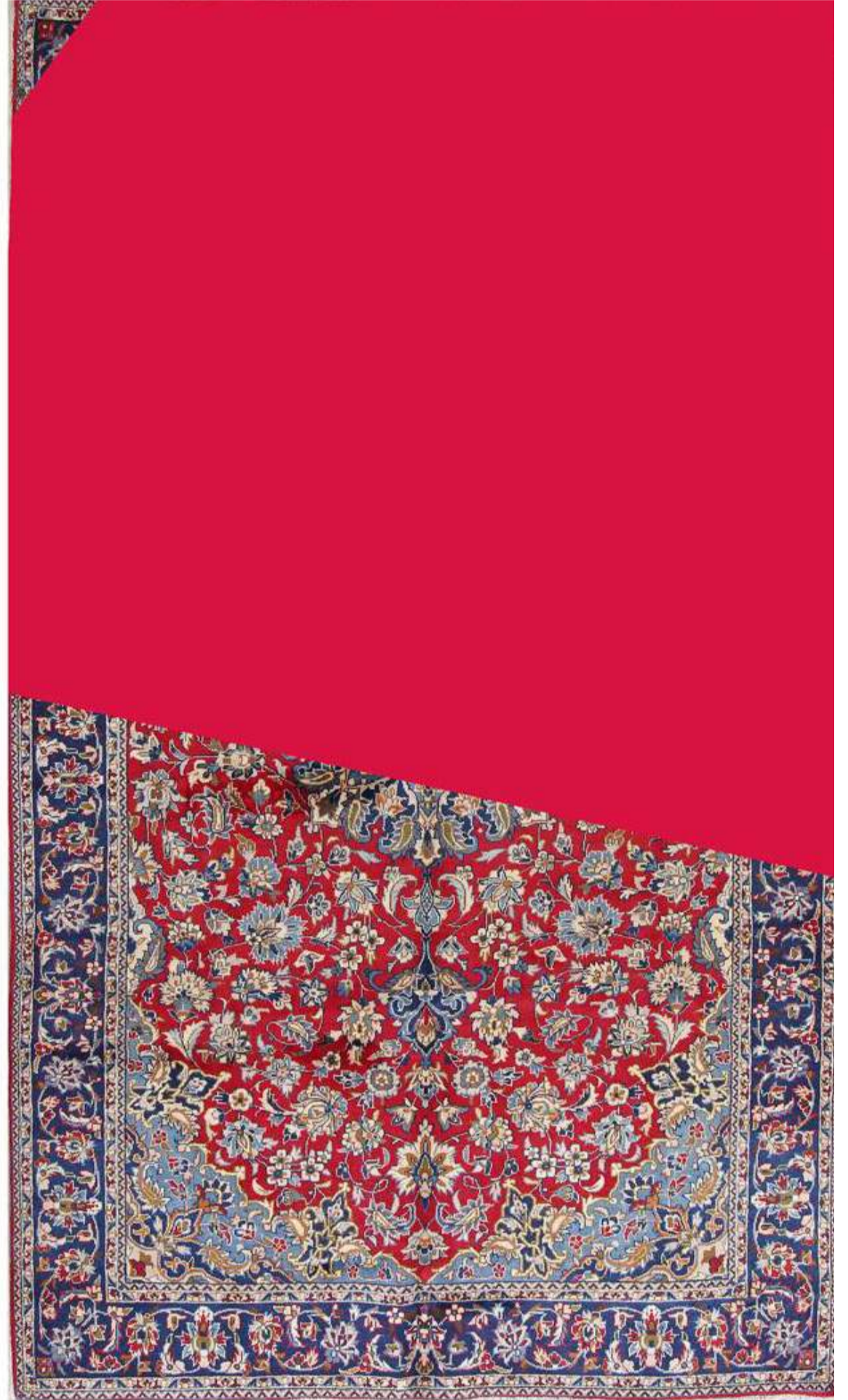
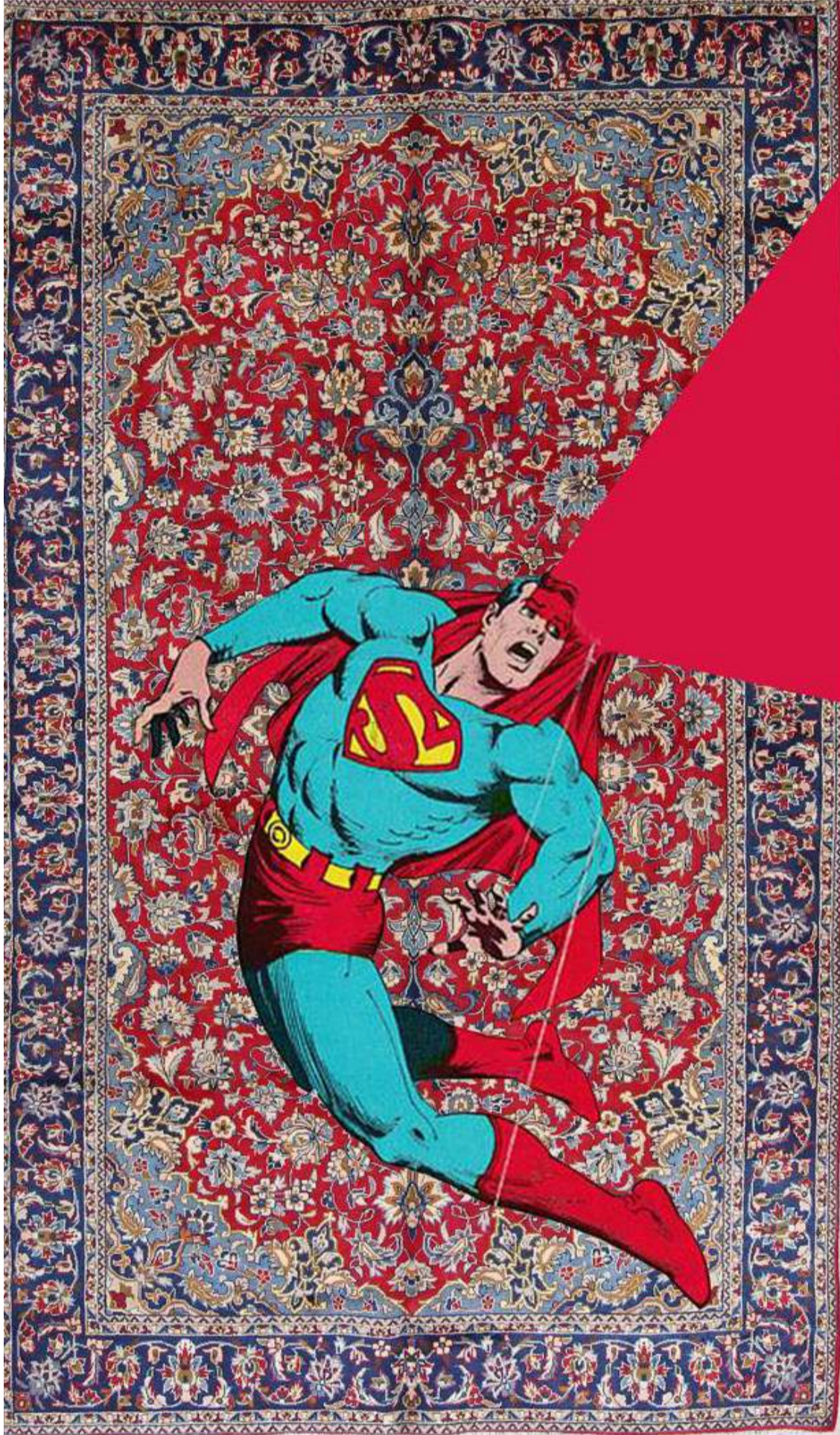


# ARTS & CULTURE

## The past is never dead. It is not even past.



**DUBAI:** Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, is hosting the first solo exhibition in the UAE of contemporary Korean artist Ran Hwang. The Flight of Time it is on view through November 7.

Hwang has transcended the meaning of "everyday use" as she employs materials such as paper buttons, to create intricate powerful depictions of natural beauty. Her work is both conceptual and practical, as she engages with Zen Buddhist ideology of repetition through her artistic process.

She finds tranquility through meditative principles, transforming pins as they are hammered to Plexiglas panels, just as she does when weaving thread. Concentration, patience and dedication are the ruling features, as she creates these works - all in an effort to celebrate the transience of this very practice.

Hwang's Korean heritage as well as her experience living and working in the United States influence her artmaking. Her earlier career began in the fashion industry at an embroidery design studio in the garment district.

While there, she discovered boxes of unused buttons, and was struck by the lack of attention they received. Later, at her studio in Dumbo, Brooklyn, she would observe the twin towers collapse during 9/11 from her window.

This left a great impression on her, leading her

to contemplate ideas of collectivity, life, death and rebirth that would translate in her work for years to come.

Hwang's work is built around the idea of time, ephemerality, transience and disappearance. Flight and ephemerality are very well-established themes in poetry, which is full of references to passing time and the urgency to seize beauty in the present moment.

The first solo exhibition in the UAE of contemporary Lebanese artist Ali Chaaban, Anonymus Hours, is also on view in the gallery (Sept. 25 - Nov. 7).

As a Lebanese-Saudi artist living in Jeddah, Chaaban explores his identity as an Arab man within a Westernised society in the Middle East. Yet he tries to embrace Orientalism and his past to inspire new dialogue.

In his superhero carpet works, the Arab man is not only an indirect self portrait of the artist, but also represents a dichotomy between the Westernised heroic figure who is seeking balance between the modern world and the rich historical Orientalist past ingrained within the artist's heritage.

The carpet is a prominent aspect of visual culture, and society's mindful appreciation of the object as an Arab heirloom allows the artist to use it as a symbol of the Arab man, juxtapos-

ing it with a contemporary portrait of a Western superhero.

To Chaaban, the idea of creating a work is not necessarily an aesthetic process, similar to the style of Marcel Duchamp. Instead, he approaches it as a deconstruction of ideas and exploration of raw materials, bringing his audience back to his roots and consuming strictly the basics, with no additives.

The textures within his works contain hidden messages and reveal elements that are unexpected yet integral to his artistic practice and identity. Not only do Chaaban's works discuss identity, but they also address the digital age and technology as a dangerous departure from traditional reading and metaphysical exploration of self.

In They don't make Nostalgia like they used to, he discusses how millennials constantly refer

to the past to reinvent the future rather than creating new and unique aesthetics of our contemporary times.

This creates a post-contemporary era which is lost, revealing the toxicity of nostalgia and its darker side. Similarly, his works comment on the dangerous reliance on digital information. I Saw The Internet and the Internet Won reveals the treacherous world opened up by the Net, in which people constantly seek validation.

Also being presented is Pakistani artist Shahzad Hassan Ghazi's debut solo exhibition in the UAE. Are We From The Same Ocean? is on Sept. 18 - Nov. 7.

Ghazi's practice draws upon his own meditation as well as the traditional practice of miniature painting embedded in his roots. Miniature painting, for Ghazi, is an innate and instinctive internal calling, perhaps from his ancestors, which he has revived and brought into contemporary art. He says he has been noticing that many Pakistanis have let go of the practice of traditional miniature painting as it requires hard work, concentration and time.

Even as his family, particularly his father, urged him to study science or literature, he found he was able to physically translate the miniature tradition into new mediums and experiment in other materials as a method of coping with the

dilemma and frustration he faced when transferring such history into the now.

The use of gold in the Ghazi's work is reminiscent of the use of the precious material in miniature paintings for details on Mughal Emperors crowns or elegant rugs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He brings the ancient traditional technique and royal material to the contemporary realm by incorporating it into his own artwork.

However, it is not the traditional motifs often found in miniatures that the artist aims to capture - rather, he is portraying his own splendid vision of the world as he experiences it living in the Middle East.

He often sees sand which is tinged with sunlight, giving a shimmery effect and a precious feeling. The artist relates this to the memories he has of interacting with miniatures, linking it to his own practice.

His series exhibited in Dubai is a personal connection also to the spirit of the ocean and the moods of the waves, capturing the infinite colour variations that the sun casts upon the ever changing Gulf. Ghazi practices what to him are the habits of the ancient world such as concentration, repetition and mark making, while capturing the modern world.

**Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer**