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FOREWORD

Recreational Purpose is a group photography exhibition organiséd by Bahrain's Ministry of Culture to celebrate the naming of Manama as Capital of Arab Tourism 2013 by the Arab League. The curatorial intent was to question the increasingly close link between culture and tourism, notably in the Gulf region. If culture was increasingly being used as an asset to attract further tourism, would it be possible for tourism promotion to create critical cultural content?

The rules of the game were simple. Six photographers from outside the country and five from within Bahrain, either citizens or long-term residents, were given a short brief: to take photographs of the island without any constraints on format, content, message or intentions. The only restriction was the use of photography as a medium.

Nicène Kossentini, Taysir Batniji, Steve Sabella, Hrair Sarkissian, Wed Abdul-Jawad and Jamal Penjweny, the six photographers from outside of Bahrain, arrived as tourists and were given minimal logistical support. Instead, they were presented with the country as a virgin canvas and given free reign to inscribe their personal readings and interpretations on to it.

Camille Zakharia, Ghada Khunji, Eman Ali, Waheeda Malullah and Haya Alkhalifa, were given the same minimal indications but embarked with the apparent advantage of an insider's view of the country.

At first glance, it is difficult to differentiate photographs taken by the outsider from those taken by the insider. The resulting photographic portfolio included all of the ingredients of our tourism assets, albeit in a slightly different package, and with very personal interpretations. The Tree of life, the Dilmun Burial mounds, the Qal'at Al Bahrain Fort, the coral stone houses, the towers, the beaches, the desert and the farms all feature in the photographs.

The contents of the National Museum appear somewhat mystical in Sarkissian's images; the sea is rendered surreal in Kossentini's portrayal; Sabella recomposes the urban landscapes; Ali's iPhone images unveil a side of Bahrain that is often hidden from the tourist; Alkhalifa's photos reveal contemporary developments with a starkness that conveys the sterile environments that she perceives them to produce; Malullah's photographic series illustrates the urban composition of Bahrain, creating a visual map of the country through the naming of all its cities and villages; Penjweny's *plastered* optimism gives a portrayal of a village lifestyle still very present in Bahrain; Abdul-Jawad plays on the advertising idiom of old against new through the very old technique of pinhole camera and finally, Zakharia, Batniji and Khunji celebrate the mundane that captures, better than any tourism promotion attempt, the identity of the Bahraini landscape.

Tourism and travel rely on emotions and sensations more than on market research and data, and art as a medium conveys a candour that is often missing from commercial promotional efforts. The multitude of tourism campaigns that seek to portray the Gulf region as a self-orientalising and exotic destination filled with the requisite palm trees, sand dunes and a tent thrown in for good measure against a contrasting backdrop of modern towers, shopping malls, beach resorts and world-class museums have flattened the diverse geographies and histories that make up this part of the world. By continuously attempting to be unique, rich in culture and heritage yet fun-filled, we are, in fact, increasingly all portraying ourselves as the same.

As this exhibition travels, presenting an image of the country less polished and correct but hopefully more real than the one in travel brochures, we hope that it will, nonetheless, do its share in promoting the country as a place where culture is understood as a specific social and urban context and not as a standardised template. For recreational purposes, this was an experiment in doing things differently.

RECREATIONAL PURPOSE: BAHRAIN REVISITED

SULAF ZAKHARIA

As an art medium, photography is enjoying the wholehearted embrace of the Arab World. It has both the immediacy and the wanton disregard for convention necessary to capture the region's fast developing and starkly contradictory realities.

Photography in Bahrain dates back to the late 19th century. It was not until 1985, however, that its official beginning as a mode of artistic expression was marked with the establishment of the Photo Club by the Bahrain Arts Society. This non-profit body provided training and a platform for Bahraini photographers to exhibit at home and abroad.

In 2005, and again in 2007, Andreas Gursky's iconic photographs of Bahrain's Formula One track drew global attention to the country's hitherto unexploited potential as a subject. While a number of Bahraini photographers were already practicing professionally, several factors—a renewed economic affluence, readily available technology, rapid changes that inspired a desire to record for posterity a fast disappearing way of life, as well as the popularity of the medium in the rest of the Middle East—converged to swell the ranks of amateurs and professionals.

The momentum culminated in Bahrain winning the Golden Lion Award at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2010. The project, *Reclaim*, included a significant photographic component along with film and architecture. At Bahrain's 2013 Venice Biennale pavilion, two out of the three artists featured were photographers. Earlier this year, the Centre for Photographic Arts was established in the Jamsheer House in Muharraq, supported by the Shaikh Ibrahim Centre, the French Embassy and the Alliance Française. From within this context, Bahrain's choice to curate an exhibition of photographic art to celebrate Manama's status as Capital of Arab Tourism 2013 appears a natural one.

Of the eleven photographers whose images comprise this show, six were tourists and five live in Bahrain. Of the latter, three are Bahraini. All are Arab. Armed with no more than their cameras and the instruction to take pictures, the cohesion evident in the final exhibition belies the size of the curatorial gamble.

While initially difficult to identify the tourists' images from the rest, on closer examination it becomes clear that those unfamiliar with Bahrain brought to the task their own aesthetic and conceptual references while the projects of those who live here were in large part informed by a keen nostalgia and a sense of ownership of the space, sharing it with a curiously unguarded hospitality.

Common threads run through the exhibition, the two most obvious being the distance the photographers placed between themselves and new urban developments, and the sparse human presence. Almost unanimously, the city skyline was captured from afar. The towering new buildings with their glass façades appear diminutive, sandwiched between the vastness of the sky and land. All sought the perspective that could only be imparted by distance, whether to enable them to better understand and connect with an unfamiliar city, in the case of visiting photographers, or to make sense of the changes that are engulfing their hometown and better comprehend their place in it.

Nicène Kossentini inserts thin slivers of distant cities, playgrounds, industrial silhouettes and beaches between expanses of sky, each a playful tableau that resonates with her belief that Bahrain is one of the mythical lands of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The romantic feel of her work is echoed by Wed Abdul-Jawad's pinhole images. Shot from the bottom of a spiralling glass tower, the dreamy quality characteristic of her device softens the monolith's violent eruption out of the ground. The same camera lends an otherworldly aura to older buildings. Steve Sabella's photomontage features the same cityscape of which Abdul-Jawad's building is a part, also at a distance, repeated with its reflection. Standing alongside a similarly sleek work of the Tree of Life, Sabella grants the same aesthetic weight to the ancient tree as he does an entire city.

Haya Alkhalifa takes the viewer behind the scenes of a paradise island to witness the spartan efficiency of the realities of creating and maintaining a tourist destination. A seemingly endless row of new air conditioning units hidden from the view of sun worshippers cools their hotel or mall from behind a low wall; newly reclaimed beaches await transformation. Her visual forthrightness contrasts with the pragmatism of her written statement and hints at nostalgia for what has been left out of the pictures.

In an exhibition about tourism, the absence of people is immediately conspicuous with all but two of the photographers opting to leave people out of their work to a large degree; some have left them out completely. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the black and white photographs of Ghada Khunji whose earlier work is populated by a rich cast of characters with whom she gets up-close and personal. This is a more personal journey for Khunji and the intimacy she is seeking is with the space itself, the backdrop of her childhood. The only concession she makes is allowing the ghostly figures of a football match to appear backlit against the glare of a setting sun.

Totally devoid of human presence are the works of Taysir Batniji, Hrair Sarkissian and Camille Zakharia. Their visual approach appears to be similar but they diverge conceptually.

Each of Batniji's photos captures a single moment midway between a beginning and an end. In most cases, the task or object appears to have been inexplicably abandoned, as in the case of the unfinished buildings and the shrouded car. Collectively, however, the images imply a linear dynamism that negates the stasis of the individual shots. The mundane tasks may have been foresaken in favour of others, more productive or interesting. A sense of loss permeates the portfolio, as if Batniji believes that the abandonment is permanent.

Sarkissian, on the other hand, hones in on a natural cyclicality. His exploration of the unfamiliar leads him to the cycle of life as universal constant. Bahrain's ancient burial mounds foreground the dwarfed village on the horizon, perhaps as a reminder that death is a very natural part of life and as such, should be equally celebrated. But he also celebrates the beginning of a new life in his photograph of a billboard stand-in for a yet-to-be constructed development, maturity in the form of a pristine white compound and a city skyline, as well as the timeless beauty of a barren landscape.

Zakharia's photographs confront head-on the romanticised notion of compound living. He replaces the soft focus of the real estate agent's lens with the ostensible neutrality of the documentary photographer's. By presenting them unpopulated and in mid-construction, from outside high walls or at a great distance, he strips away the element of 'home' and asks the question: do cookie-cutter developments imply a cookie-cutter life?

Unlike the rest, Eman Ali's and Jamal Penjweny's photos are teaming with people. Ali's voyeurism is democratic and unapologetic. The iPhone camera is there for a reason, and she has no qualms about using it. Equally idealised by the indiscriminate hunger of her camera is the solitude and serenity of prayer and the frenetic energy of mall shoppers. Slippered feet under the lacy hem of a nightgown, hands adorned with henna and gold clasped in gossip, a billowing *bisht*[1], the backs of heads, an unlikely and awkward hallway conversation all thrust the viewer into the very innards of Bahraini life.

Jamal Penjweny mitigates the anxiety of the unfamiliar with a psychedelic explosion of roses that strangely unites the unwary inhabitants of his dreamscapes. The whimsy initially appears out of place in the portfolio of a photo journalist whose work includes photographs of the Iraqi conflict and documentaries about gun running. However, his is a dark whimsy. The flowers divert attention away from the illicit fantasies of a married woman while she sits secure in the anonymity afforded by her black veil, they conceal nipples,

burst out of heads, human and avian, and button up a soldier's shirt. Innocently beautiful at first, one cannot help but question how benign their invasion is.

It is Waheeda Malullah's work that best sums up the exhibition. Like most of the other works, Malullah's features no people but in this case, she takes it a step further, underscoring the absence by naming her work *People of Bahrain*.

Malullah inscribes the names of cities, towns, suburbs and villages on Bahrain's staple bread and then systematically tears it up into ever smaller pieces, dismantling the names in a metaphor for the centuries' old hybridisation that has not eliminated the differences between the inhabitants of these areas but has, to a large though not total extent, subsumed them—a plaintive call to look beyond differences. To the familiar eye, Malullah stops just short of the cascade of hot broth that would have turned her bread to *thareed* [2], a climax that would not have served her project aesthetically or conceptually as it would have turned the bread into a glutinous porridge.

If nothing else, one clear message reverberates throughout this show: this is not a place where worlds collide but rather coexist, albeit not always seamlessly, sometimes even grating uncomfortably against each other. The world that is presented here is oftentimes concealed from the casual beach-going visitor. This exhibition can thus be construed as an invitation to venture out into that very real Bahrain that exists outside the glitz, but to do so in a hushed reverence with no more than these haunting images to guide the would-be tourist. Alternatively, like these photographers, he can choose to chart his own way.

1. A DARK, LIGHTLY WOVEN WOOLLEN CLOAK WITH GOLD TRIM WORN BY MEN IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE ARABIAN GULF ON FORMAL OR CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS. A SIMILAR GARMENT OF THICKER WOOLLEN FABRIC, OFTEN CALLED *ABAYA*, IS WORN BY MEN IN OTHER PARTS OF THE ARAB WORLD.
2. A TRADITIONAL BAHRAINI DISH MADE OF HAND-SHREDDED PIECES OF UNLEAVENED BREAD WHICH ARE TOPPED WITH A CHICKEN AND VEGETABLE BROTH IMMEDIATELY BEFORE SERVING. IT IS MEANT TO BE EATEN BEFORE THE BROTH SATURATES THE BREAD, TURNING IT SOGGY.

INSIDER/OUTSIDER PHOTOGRAPHERS AND THE INTRA-CULTURAL TOURISM LANDSCAPE

ISABELLA ELLAHEH HUGHES

On the occasion of Manama being named the Capital of Arab Tourism in 2013, six photographers originating from the Arab World participated in short-term residencies together with five Bahrain-based photographers. All were given the same task: to create new work focused on personal explorations of Bahrain's urban and natural landscape. The resulting commissions are presented through the internationally travelling exhibition *Recreational Purpose*, a photography exhibition featuring many noted photographers from the Arab world, but also serving the dual purpose of promoting in a progressive fashion, cultural tourism.

When looking at the varied images produced, the international artists: Taysir Batniji, Nicène Kossentini, Hrair Sarkissian, Wed Abdul-Jawad, Jamal Penjweny, Steve Sabella, most of whom were not familiar with Manama and furthermore, Bahrain's history beforehand, it is apparent through their work and personal statements on the experience, they operate as intra-cultural tourists from the Arab World. Tasked with examining and ruminating through their photographer's lens, Bahrain, Manama and all the city encapsulates—at once representing not only the capital of Bahrain, but a modern Arab hub of trade and commerce in the Gulf, linked to its historic past, but perpetually moving forward. The deft navigation of the push-and-pull between contemporary culture and heritage is best exemplified via Manama's modern architectural skyline, which upon exploring and embedded deeper into the city and surrounding area's infrastructure, numerous historic and UNESCO World Heritage sites are preserved; many of them are alluded to in these commissions.

Examining the place they call home under the premise, and later an exhibition, thematically exploring cultural tourism turns Camille Zakharia, Ghada Khunji, Eman Ali, Waheeda Malullah and Haya Alkhalifa into insider-outsiders. Both belonging and understanding the place they call home with an 'insider perspective', by commissioning them to create new work under the auspicious guise of promoting cultural tourism, they are repositioned as observant 'outsiders'.

A pervading sense of nostalgia and awareness of the relationship between the natural and manmade world are central themes in Batniji's *Interface* series. In one frame, an image of a weathered armchair humbly sitting on the shore suggests the need for recollection as time quickly moves forward, progressing into the future, as exemplified in his landscape of the Manama skyline in the background. In less obvious ways, Batniji suggests more elusive interactions between the natural world and the manmade, presenting a barren desert image, free from recognisable conventions of civilisation, with the exception of a distinct mound of darkened sand in the middle of the frame, referencing human engagement.

The seven black-and-white landscapes that comprise Kossentini's *The City in the Sky* series cause one to question their own perception of reality. The landscapes are both

hyper realistic, depicting everyday scenes in Bahrain, from a beach scene of families, to a campground set up near a tree serving as an oasis in the desert, images that one might expect for a tourism campaign, yet their underlying fantastical nature gives them an otherworldly, unexpected quality. As each landscape is manipulated so the sky is both above and below, enveloping the main scene that commands one's focus, these realistic scenes offer a skewed sense of intriguing reality at the same time.

Sarkissian's images from *Under Process* present scenes in Bahrain as very much a stage for examining the history of the place, which upon arrival, he was unfamiliar with. Using his camera as an excavation tool, Sarkissian operates very much like an archaeologist, 'digging' through Bahrain's history in the National Museum, resulting in an image of a diorama of buildings and palms, as well as the eerie skeleton curled in a foetal position, with a museum didactic placard in the foreground, reminds us of the important place museums hold in tourists' psyche as a site for intellectual enlightenment and edutainment.

Digging into the architectural history of Bahrain further, Abdul-Jawad's vertical, upwardly angled black-and-white photographs of heritage buildings, contemporary architecture, everyday street scenes, and sometimes, a shot with both styles of buildings in the frame, offer visual vignettes on the architectural histories and transitions that epitomise the Manama landscape. Giving the buildings full attention, these photographs serve as 'portraits,' of each building, capturing their personality as one would attempt to capture in traditional portraiture. Devoid of any human figures, these dreamy images render an intimate quality, characteristic of what one might find in a personal album.

Penjweny's photographs from the *City of Flowers* series bring magic in the form of vibrant, pink roses into everyday scenes, where his focus is less on Bahrain as a specific, physical place and more on the people who live there. The imposed roses transform normalcy into fantasy—four young men, holding chickens with heads of roses, a shot of an unassuming woman in front of a worn building, with a large, luscious rose in place of her head. Some shots are so focused on the people they represent, the possibility for miracles in their personal stories that any reference to Bahrain is lost altogether and the scene is universally welcoming, yet mysterious in the wonderment that envelopes this cast of characters.

At first glance, Sabella's manipulated photographs from *Sinopia* appear curiously out-of-place amongst the other commissions, as they have such strong painterly qualities one wonders if they are photographs at all? Various, repetitive monochrome shapes are layered upon one another, creating a new world order of ambiguous architecture, with small identifiable elements, such as satellite dishes, windows and doors, give some reference point to the clandestine image. In contrast, a multi-frame rendering of Manama's iconic skyline is at once instantly recognisable, yet Sabella's technique once again is evocative of painting, this time more specifically watercolour, causing viewers to rethink not only their own presumptions about Bahrain, but also about the very medium of photography.

Geometry in the ordinary, in this case, the compounds, which generally house expats, is prevalent in Zakharia's *Birds of a Feather* series. Clean, orderly rows of villas, some more luxurious than others, shown in quiet pairs of twos and threes populate these suburban scenes of solitude. Contemporary, high-rise residential buildings, some finished, others still under construction, offer room for rumination on the kinds of lives lived inside these structures. Unabashedly anonymous and devoid of insight into the personal lives lived inside these buildings, Zakharia documents what life looks like from the outside for those living inside these shrouded communities.

The street scenes are filled with suggestions of faded opulence and urban grittiness in Khunji's *Within the Shadows* series. Lush bougainvillea blooms droop languidly over a covered, parked car. Black graffiti 'frames' a European-style, ornate protruding vase from a wall. Scenes of youthful figures engaged in sports activity behind a fence, a shot of a squalid home that looks long-forgotten, with a bevy of satellite dishes strewn on the roof, all offer a varied and intriguing narrative on multifaceted Bahrain, a side rarely portrayed to the outside world.

Ali's journalistic, action-style photographs are filled with scenes that seem only possible to capture from an insider's perspective, filled with unparalleled vibrancy. Action shots, blurred with the movement of figures, such as a group of women in colourful skirts walking and chatting, breathe literal life into the oft-static medium of photography. A scene of men eating in a cafeteria and a cropped shot of a man in traditional *Khaleeji* dress with a jacket, looking down at his phone, but missing his head, rendering his identity a secret, pushes viewers to focus on the instantaneous moment these events occur, rather than the specific identity of whom they suggest to represent.

The bread circles in Malullah's *People of Bahrain* stand as a symbol for both the sustenance of life as well as representing the various geographic regions of Bahrain. Capturing through photography the performance-like quality of this highly conceptual exploration of Bahrain's identity, the dichotomy between the broken bread and whole pieces, coupled with tattooed text offer insight into the multiethnic, multicultural history and character of Bahrain through a most unexpected pictorial surprise.

The sea and relationship between the ever-changing coast is the central element of focus in Alkhalifa's vibrant *Flux* series landscapes, which inherently is central to the history and culture of Bahrain. Two-frame, large landscape shots of a pristine bay tease with inviting, turquoise waters akin to what one expects to find on a tropical island paradise, yet subtly hints at the connection between the natural landscape and manmade world with a structure peeking out at the far right corner. Alternatively, more obvious examinations of the relationship between construction and the development of Bahrain in correlation to reclaimed land abound in images of new developments being built with the Manama skyline in the distance.

The works in *Recreational Purpose* challenge both insider and outsider visions of Bahrain today, a testament to the never-ending ability that photography has to capture and reimagine the human and physical realities of the environment we call home and ones we sojourn to as visitors. Moments that could so often have gone unnoticed and underappreciated are brought to permanence through the photographer's lens.

SEEING AND UNSEEING THROUGH RECREATIONAL PURPOSE
NAT MULLER

The history of tourism and that of photography intersect in interesting ways. Not only did the invention of photography in the mid-19th century coincide with mass-industrialisation in Europe and the creation of a middle class that could afford to travel, but tourism, and the ability to go elsewhere, became a marker of status. Photography, a technology that can capture the real and give proof of presence, became the means through which the discovery of place could be captured. The first 19th century daguerreotypes and the seminal early 20th century work of Lehnert and Landrock that documented the plains and the people of Egypt became stubbornly defining in the conception and representations of "the Orient". Nowadays, we exalt our own snapshots of family holidays that purport to show a carefree utopian moment in time, but also out of time, since tourism counters the banality of the everyday, or at least that is the experience the travel industry sells us. In any case, the economy of leisure has been—and still is—propelled by the image, or as sociologist John Urry so aptly notes in his groundbreaking 1990 study on tourism, *The Tourist Gaze*, "photography gives shape to travel." [1]

The photography project *Recreational Purpose*, in its very title, plays with the double entendre of recreational travel. Featuring the work of five Bahraini and six non-Bahraini Arab photographers, it takes to heart the notion that tourism, just like travel, is signified by an experiential (and oftentimes geographic) departure [2] from what we are used to seeing. In this sense, the recreational excursion into Bahrain is not only to be read as a diversion from habitual visual environments in terms of locale or of artistic practice, for the local as well as for the foreign artists, but it is simultaneously an attempt to literally (re)create an imagery of place, whether the artists are familiar or unfamiliar with that place. For many of the foreign artists working on this project, it was a first encounter with the island of Bahrain. Yet, looking at the bodies of work, it is difficult to make out who set foot in Bahrain for the first time and who has lived there for most of their lives. All photos complicate, to an extent, any representational images we might have conjured up of Bahrain, whether culled from news feeds, tourist ads, personal nostalgia or the annals of history. Together these photographs offer very personal takes on what could remain in and outside the frame, whether the photographers are "travelling" in their own country or "travelling" from abroad. In addition, the very subjective points of view of the photographers stress the complicity of the viewer within this visual dynamic. As a viewer, the desire to consume an all-encompassing image of Bahrain remains unquenched. Yes, clues are provided and hints are given but the nature of the project remains fragmented and sketchy, as if more questions were asked than answered. As such, there is a flirtation with the aesthetics of the tourist snapshot. Indeed, how can there not be? Yet there is also a refusal to fully succumb to it by frustrating the touristic gaze that wants to fully consume, appropriate and reproduce a certain visual representation of place.

In some cases, this produces particularly haunting imagery. Take, for instance, the series *Interface* by Palestinian artist Taysir Batniji where the artist has sought out sites where elements foreign to each other come together to form an interstitial space. Batnij's photos are like *objets trouvés* wherein the objects, surroundings or landscapes he shows us are filled with traces, incomplete or have lost part of their function. Piles of earth lean idly against a bridge, sit in front of buildings or at a construction site, testimony to some sort of labour. A comfy chair lies abandoned in the surf, and most strikingly, tire tracks in the sand suggest a past presence that has left an ephemeral yet physical imprint. There is a genuine engagement with form, texture and composition in these often desolate and at times even ominous images. A strangeness and sense of alienation permeates these images. Desolation is also to be found in the striking black and white photos of Bahraini photographer Ghada Khunji. Usually black and white photography renders an image timeless or of the past. In Khunji's work, the grey tones emphasise and sharpen the contemporaneity. Particularly strong are the images where graffiti on walls have been blotted out by the authorities with thick black paint. The squiggly blackness highlights the presence of the texts even more, even if we cannot read them anymore. Another image shows a corrugated iron fence only featuring the word *as-shaab* (the people) in Arabic, either a reference to a revolutionary call or to another political statement wherein the people take centre stage.

Both Batniji's and Khunji's work are informed by a gaze that is predominantly observational and is defined by encounters of the strange and the familiar. Syrian photographer Hrair Sarkissian's contribution is expressed in a similar vein, yet in his work there is also an estranging movement from a view on the micro-level to the macro-level; a close-up of an architectural scale model, palm trees and all, is juxtaposed with a close-up of a skeleton in a museum's display or a billboard on the roadside. It seems as if the characterising features of place have been kept to a minimum to, paradoxically, articulate the specificity of place. This is quite different from the methodology of Lebanese photographer, and long-time resident of Bahrain, Camille Zakharia, who is a master of urban typologies and seeks to document variation in similarity. In *Birds of a Feather,* he explores the

phenomenon of gated communities in Bahrain, an urban trait that aptly illustrates the rapid urban and economic development of the island, not always to the advantage of the social and environmental make-up. These homogenous-looking housing units in Budaiya, Hamad Town, Tubli and Reef Island vary in terms of scale, comfort and amenities but their function is pretty much the same: housing a particular social and professional group. By showing us the fluctuations in building types in a systematic way, Zakharia makes a subtle but poignant comment about social class and social mobility. In this case showing less is telling more. This is also the case for Haya Alkhalifa who, in her understated photographs, calls attention to the rapid transformation of Bahrain's coastal areas.[3] Voracious land reclamation has not only disrupted traditional ways of life, like for example those of fishermen, but also poses ecological challenges to marine life. The battle between old and new Bahrain is fought out most visibly on the waterfront; Alkhalifa's almost generic and neutral images, are testimony to that.

Bahraini artist Waheeda Malullah exemplifies the heterogeneity of the Bahraini population in a series of photographs that depict Arabic flatbreads with names of Bahraini villages and towns written onto them. As the sequence of photographs progresses, the bread appears torn up, the writing illegible. On the one hand, this project can be read as portraying Bahrain as a place where different populations interact and intertwine with each other in one big (bread) melting pot. On the other hand, the images also speak of fragmentation and ruptures in the social fabric. However, not all projects in *Recreational Purpose* take on a documentary or socio-political approach. Recreation, of course, also lends itself to the realm of the fantastical and the imaginary. This becomes most apparent in the projects of Tunisian artist Nicène Kossentini and of Palestinian artist Steve Sabella. Kossentini's dreamlike black and white images present a place suspended between the skies. Here fiction and reality blend seamlessly and Bahrain morphs into a territory that is literally ungrounded, a place of magical possibility and whimsy. Sabella's compositions veer from the surreal depictions of mirrored cityscapes and the iconic 400-year old Tree of Life, to highly deconstructed energetic painterly collages reminiscent of cubist and fauvist paintings. In one collage, the compiled facades of buildings make up a completely novel cubist and chaotic cityscape, with only windows, lanterns and satellite dishes as recognisable elements. It is as if Sabella has stripped his Bahraini images of their specificity in order to construct a composite image with layer upon layer of visual information.

I commenced this essay by pointing out that the advancement of photography as an image technology shares a history with the development of the tourism industry. With the advent of digital photography and mobile phones, photography has never been so accessible and democratised. Eman Ali has capitalised on this sensibility and has used the discretion of her mobile phone to snap images of urban life in Bahrain. Still, the people she captures remain anonymous for the most part as she focuses predominantly on their shoes, hands and backs. Caught up in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, Ali has worked as an urban anthropologist, a participant observer, who shares the heartbeat of her surroundings with us. In contrast to Ali's popular and contemporary usage of technology, Saudi photographer Wed Abdul-Jawad uses the classic technology of a handmade pinhole camera to capture the environs. This technique slightly deforms the image and attributes to even the most contemporary buildings a dated feel. Yet the most invasive usage of image technology is to be found in Iraqi artist Jamal Penjweny's series *City of Flowers* where he has Photoshopped pink roses onto his subjects. Bordering on the tacky, the roses become artificial substitutes for chairs, heads, or shirt buttons. They completely defamiliarise the photographs and in their very particular hyperbolic way, make us see things anew. As such, Penjweny has, like all other artists in *Recreational Purpose*, decided to play with the double-faced idea of tourism and travel: a departure that at its worst and in its most mass-consumed form, caters to an expected experiential desire as presented through postcard perfect advertisements, yet at its best generates a place of new possibility and perception.

1. JOHN URRY. "SEEING AND THEMING". *THE TOURIST GAZE*. LONDON: SAGE PUBLICATIONS, 1990. REPRINT 2008. P.128.
2. IBID P. 126
3. CFR. *RECLAIM*. KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN NATIONAL PARTICIPATION AT THE 12TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA (29TH AUGUST – 21ST NOVEMBER 2010). EDS. NOURA AL-SAYEH AND LÉOPOLD BANCHINI. BAHRAIN: MINISTRY OF CULTURE, 2010.