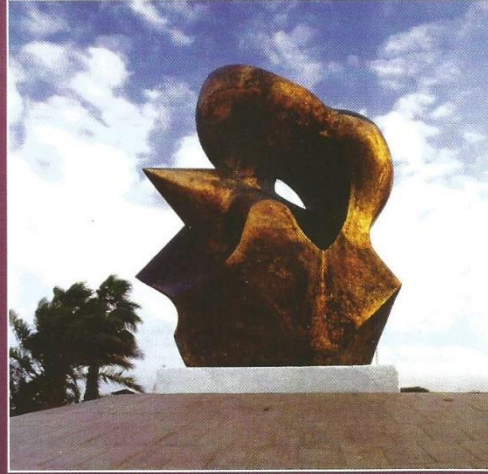


The beautiful Koranic Verse, by Julio Lafuente, with an amazing sunset over the Red Sea in the background

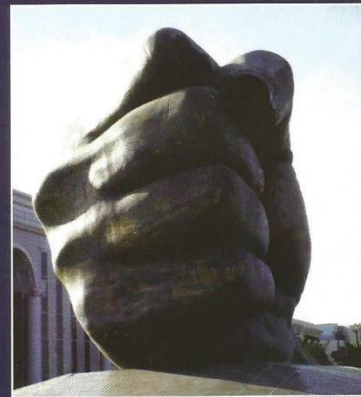


Large Spindle Piece is one of Henry Moore's abstract creations

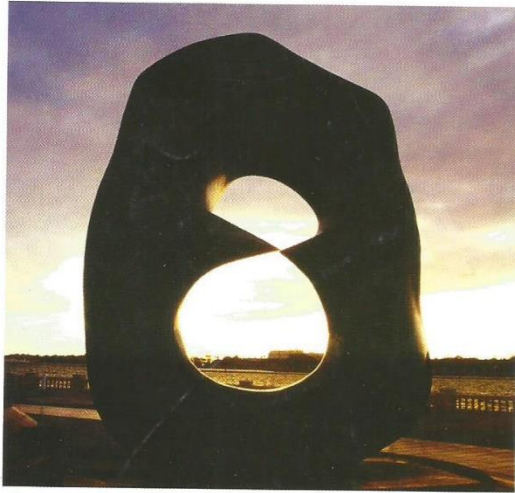
JEDDAH'S OUTDOOR ART

Written by Susana Pint
Photographed by Susana and John Pint

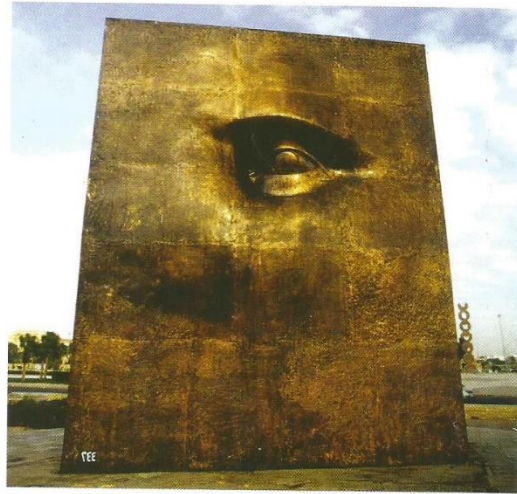
I have always found Saudi Arabia to be full of surprises, and a recent visit to Jeddah did not disappoint. Driving through the city, I was immediately taken aback by the wealth of magnificent art displayed at strategic points and junctures. What was even more surprising was to find out that many of these pieces were the works of internationally famous artists such as Henry Moore, Joan Miró, Victor Vasarely, César, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Eila Hiltunen, Ottmar Hollmann and others. One of the most impressive pieces is César's *The Fist*, sited on a roundabout along Al Amir Sultan Street. Enthralled at what is available for all to enjoy, for free, as they traverse the city, I began to collect as much information as I could about Jeddah's monumental art. ►►



The Fist is César's work of art which initiated me in my search for Jeddah's outdoor art



Oval with Points - Artist: Henry Moore



The Eye is a spectacular master piece by French artist, César

How fortunate you feel to stand before works of art like those of Joan Miró



A Saudi architect's dream come true

The project turned out to be the dream come true of not just an enthusiastic art lover, but a man who was also an art connoisseur: architect, Mohamed Said Farsi. Not only was he once the mayor of Jeddah, from 1972 to 1986, but also the city planner, having taken over the post in 1968. At that time, the oil boom was at its height, and Mr. Farsi wanted to use oil revenues to improve the basic services of a city that had grown tremendously since becoming the official port of entrance for Muslim pilgrims, the world over, to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. As an architect, a planner and someone with a natural fascination for art, he envisaged a beautiful city that would be admired not only by Saudis but also by international visitors. So, he set out to beautify Jeddah, and what an admirable achievement it is.

Balad, Jeddah's greatest monument

When you visit the Balad (the old part of the city) you will feel nothing but admiration and respect for those who worked so hard - and are still working - to keep it as it looked hundreds of years ago. Walking through the narrow streets, shadowed by such marvelously maintained ancient buildings, and inhaling the scent of incense and spices as you stroll along, is an experience you will never forget. For me, at least, the Balad is still the greatest of Jeddah's monuments.

Jeddah's cornice and Open Air Museum

When you take a walk along the northern Corniche, however, you will think you are dreaming. After enjoying the beautiful view and soft breeze of the Red Sea on one side, you then turn your head in the other direction and discover a series

of fantastic sculptures amidst beautifully manicured gardens. As you continue your walk, you will see works of art situated out in the water as well, and what a silhouette they make at the end of the day, as the sun dips below the horizon behind them!

At the southern part of the cornice is the Al Hamra Open Air Museum, an overwhelming and unusual outdoor art arena that provides inspiration and enjoyment for all. Not only that but entrance is also free of charge, ensuring that access is available to everyone. Here, for example, you will find not one but four bronze sculptures by the master Henry Moore. What a delight it is to see children playing around their smooth surfaces. Another well known figure represented at the museum is Joan Miró - who, according to aficionados of Spanish art, takes his place next to Dali and Picasso. It is said that he fought tooth and nail to make sure that his sculptures would be located close to those of Henry Moore.

Eila Hiltunen - the only woman who contributed to the success of Jeddah's beautification project - is a Finnish artist whose talent won her the right to create what is possibly the most important landmark in Helsinki: *The Sibelius Monument*. Her most outstanding work of art along the Red Sea is, without doubt, her *Sunflower Field*, made from acid-proof steel, the perfect material for a sea environment! Besides *The Fist*, the Marseilles born, César Baldaccini (known simply as César), also has other sculptures in Jeddah, such as *The Eye*, a fabulous work made of bronze forming a solid plaque that stands at the northern edge of the museum.

When driving along the cornice, Mustafa Senbel's *Fisherman's Net* and *Dialogue* are a must to contemplate at sunset. These steel marvels are like magical



Both magnificent and inspiring is the Verse Boat, by Julio Lafuente

drawings painted with delicate brushstrokes that move softly in space.

Geometry par excellence

Victor Vasarely, a master in optical illusion (the 'Father of Op Art'), has several works in Jeddah. His art mostly consists of geometrical figures where colours play an essential role. As you drive along Tahliya Street, his magnificent *Al-Mafrooka* may distract you so much that you'd be better off stopping your car so you can take a leisurely (and safe) look.

I imagine passersby will feel, as I have, that time has suddenly halted when they gaze at the fascinating works in cast alloys by Ottmar Hollmann. Some of them can be found at the Open Air Museum, others are strategically sited on some of the city's roundabouts. His *Cosmos* is surely one of the most imposing monuments to be seen in Jeddah.

Julio Lafuente

At some point during the plan to beautify Jeddah, the Spaniard, Julio Lafuente was hired as an architect to specifically help in the development of the city's landscapes and gardens. Eventually, he also became one of its most important and prolific artists. For example, he impressed everybody by showing that scrap debris can be transformed into art forms rather than being thrown away! In this way, he transformed the components of a Turkish condenser for drinking water (used between 1905 and 1946) into surrealist structures. These now stand at the junction of the streets leading to the new desalination plant.

Around the same area, don't miss his impressive *Mameluke Lanterns* (which are lit at night), as well as some of his beautiful Water Jars and Coffee Pot Fountains.

Among his works, one of my very favorites is *The Illuminated Globe*, a huge representation of our planet, which is made with coloured glass. Another of my favorites by Lafuente is the *Verse Boat*, a fantastic bronze

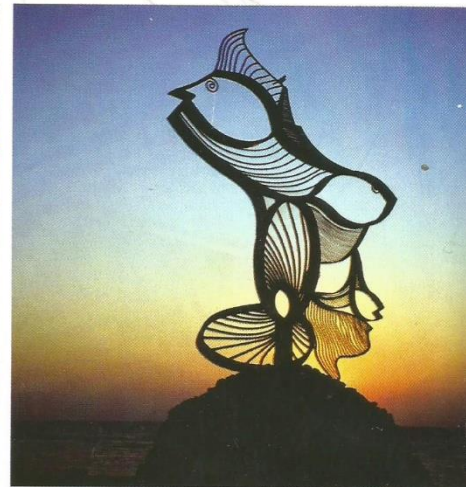


What a funny feeling it is to stand by the gigantic bicycle - Artist: Julio Lafuente - *The Bicycle*

sculpture created out of Arabic calligraphy.

Everywhere you go!

Many other works of art are scattered throughout the city, often adorning roundabouts where the most important streets cross. Interestingly, these giant bicycles, protractors, airplanes or globes have spontaneously become the key landmarks of the city, making it easy for people to drive from place to place and to give directions. Furthermore, every work faithfully follows the traditions of Saudi culture and religious beliefs, avoiding representations of the human form and sometimes employing verses from the Holy Quran,



Mustafa Senbel's work rising right up from the waters of the Red Sea are like paintings in the sunset sky

which may take the shape of an elegant ship or a harp. Some are also inspired by scientific facts or by the inventions of Muslim scientists.

Much more could be said about the works of those other artists who have had the opportunity to leave tangible proof of their artistic passion in Jeddah. In this alone, Jeddah is truly an artistic experience in itself. With so many wonderful masterpieces in such a relatively small space, I am reminded that art has the ability to immerse us, in mere minutes, into new and far loftier dimensions; it leads us away from life's humdrum which could otherwise be all pervasive ☺