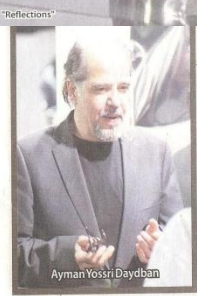


## 'I AM ANYTHING, I AM EVERYTHING' (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF ARAB NATIONALISM



Ayman Yossri Dayaban

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**DON'T WANT** anything I make to be still. My objects must not die. Instead I want to keep them permanently in a state between birth and death." These words, resonating with a loyal welcome at the entrance, lead visitors into the space of exhibited works that the artist may have deliberately moved to reiterate his greeting message to passersby.

"You see, I'm not a philosopher, writer or maybe even an artist. I'm a watcher," he enthused. This explained his adopted moniker Dayaban.

Born in 1966, Palestinian Ayman Yossri Dayaban graduated with a degree in microbiology, not by choice but due to the lack of arts education and having been prevented from studying courses that involved drawing on account of his nationality. Nonetheless, he found ways to examine and indulge in the arts through the myriad of designs emerging from laboratory specimen under a microscope.

As a Palestinian who has spent his entire life in the Kingdom, it is hard not to notice the symbolism in his recent seventh solo exhibition titled "I Am Anything, I Am Everything" at Jeddah's ATHR gallery.

Greeted with "The Flag" series, one is almost shocked at the shamelessly unforgiving large sheets of erected stainless steel arriving in a cycle of metamorphosis in both reflections and distortions. The national flag of Arab unity is broken down, in various stages, into bare, cold sheets of stainless steel and other artistic shapes. Acting as a mirror, the unsuspecting observer is

shown his reflection in the flag thus sealing his involvement in forming a unified Arab identity.

Each installation indicates a time period when individually perceived identities become universal, ideologies get formed, suppressed, explored, revealed and absorbed.

When asked where he is from, Dayaban gave a puzzled look. Perhaps from his own sense of dislocation, the artist hesitated to explain where he belongs. Growing up in exile and longing for a country that does not exist is the Palestinian plight that Dayaban so effectively conveys with his art.

"The situation has more to do with human beings than politics. The Palestinian solution can only come from human beings. I used a symbol that many people in the Arab world can relate to—a shape that unites all people and forms a symbol for a bigger group of people," he said.

His collection, "Globalizations," is a forbidding call into a space that is an extension of and a sizable response to "The Flag" series. By using symbols of local and global consumerism, such as bubblegum wrappers, matchboxes, dollar notes, luggage travel tags, cigarette boxes, chocolate wrappers and snippets from comic book pages, the exhibition gives an impression of gained identity and belonging to the observer, with an almost annoying irritation toward the simplicity used in the execution of the idea.

Every single item displayed indicates a particular history with the artist. They reflect larger things in art and reality although they may seem very "small" in presence. This was also a deliberate attempt by the artist to confuse the observer's eyes and mind.

"I am a human being before belonging to any particular group. I use my art without aggression or hatred toward the situation. I want to reflect it as a general situation. Everyone must learn to see the new changes to move on."

"I Am Anything, I Am Everything" will run until Feb. 16 at ATHR Gallery, Jeddah.

**Opening hours:** Saturday-Thursday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.



"Reflections"



"Suffering" from "The Flag" series.



"Braille" from "The Flag" series.



"Dollar" from "The Flag" series.



"Superman" from "The Flag" series.