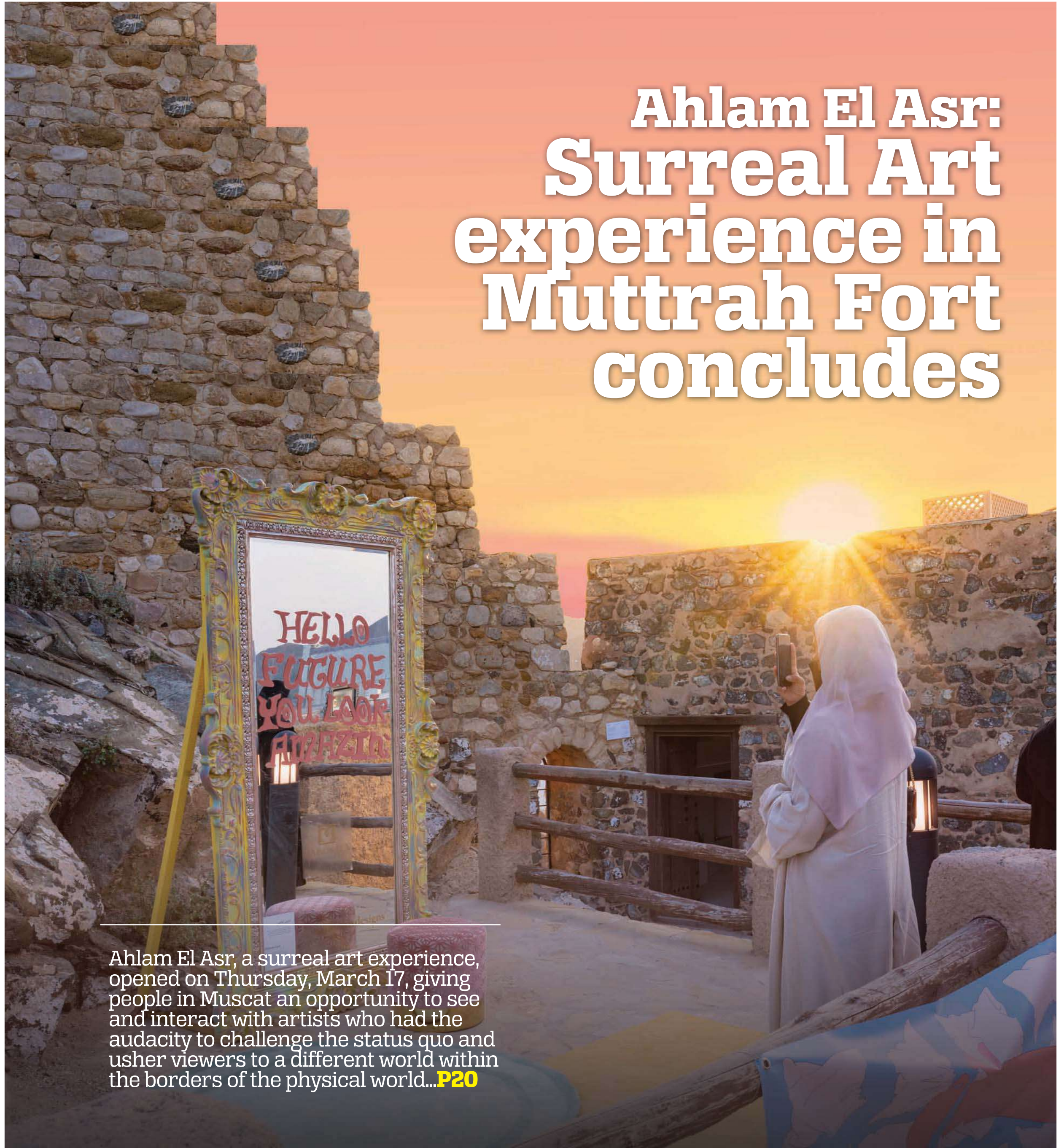


features

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Ahlam El Asr: Surreal Art experience in Muttrah Fort concludes

Ahlam El Asr, a surreal art experience, opened on Thursday, March 17, giving people in Muscat an opportunity to see and interact with artists who had the audacity to challenge the status quo and usher viewers to a different world within the borders of the physical world...**P20**

TRAVEL TALES

READ



THE BOOK THIEF
BY MARKUS ZUSAK

The book is all about a girl growing up in Germany during World War II. She steals books, learns to read, and finds comfort in words. She and Max, the Jew her family protects, are the only main characters that survive the war.

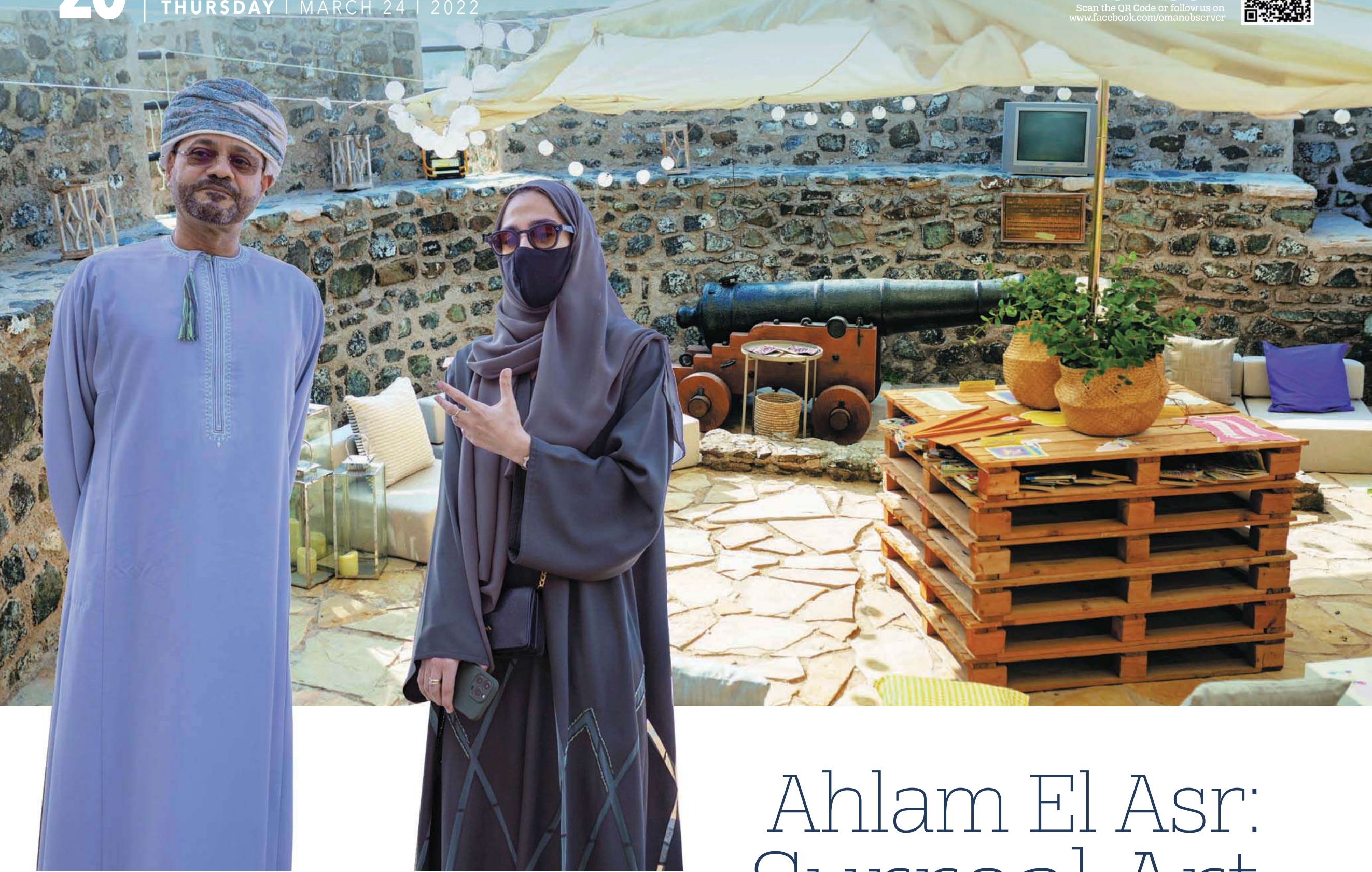
Eiffel Tower grows six metres after new antenna attached

THE EIFFEL TOWER grew 6 metres (19.69 ft) on Tuesday after a new digital radio antenna was attached to the top of the Paris monument. The tower, built by Gustave Eiffel in the late 19th century, now measures 330

metres after the DAB+ (digital audio) antenna was airlifted onto its peak by helicopter under a leaden sky. During its construction, the Eiffel Tower surpassed the Washington Monument to become the tallest man-

made structure in the world, a title it held for four decades until the Chrysler Building in New York City was topped off in 1929. The wrought-iron lattice tower is among the most visited tourist sites in the world, according to TripAdvisor. It has, however, also been used for broadcast transmissions for more than 100 years, with the height of its pinnacle changing numerous times as ageing antennas were replaced. Live television images showed the helicopter lowering the antenna onto its base atop the tower, where workmen made it secure in an operation that lasted less than 10 minutes. — Reuters





Ahlam El Asr: Surreal Art experience in Muttrah Fort concludes



By Kabeer Yousof
Photos by Burair al Kishri

It was simply a convergence of history, art and culture at the Muttrah Fort last Thursday when artists from Oman exhibited their works at the tall tower of history built in the 16th century.

Ahlam El Asr, a surreal art experience, opened on Thursday, March 17 attended by Sayyid Badr al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sayyidah Meyyan bint Shihab al Said, an Omani photographer and digital artist, and Sayyidah Saraya bint Shihab al Said, including other officials, diplomatic representatives and creatives.

Visitors were able to travel on a surreal and nostalgic voyage amid the various installations by Omani artists, including installations by Brash Collective, an art initiative spearheaded by Majeda al Hinai, a 28-year-old Omani artist, after they climbed the 120 steps leading up to the fort.

One of Majeda's installations titled 'Us', was a sculptural piece with mirror elements that explored identity, self-reflection and mindfulness.

"Its human-like figures establish a sense of familiarity and upon turning the corner the viewer is left searching for more. The mirror introduces another dimension, a sense of 'utopia' where another reality exists. It is a space of otherness that is simultaneously physical and mental. Viewers were led to gaze at themselves in the mirror and discover more about what lies beyond the image", shared Majeda.

"With these pieces, we hoped that the viewer was put in a space to explore 'otherness' beyond the literal and physical. The motif of the mirror is symbolic of the threshold between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. By looking into the mirror, the viewer may have felt a sense

of self-discovery and infinite possibility. We wanted the audience to engage with an inverted reality, a world of fantasy and delight, while spreading the message: 'We can be whoever we want to be.'"

Visitors to Ahlam El Asr were also able to see a mixed media installation made by Omani artist Safa al Belushi in collaboration with Taher Majid, Rayan al Balushi and Tara Atkinson. Titled The Folding City, the media installation took the visitors through an abstract sensual trip to Muttrah, retracing and unfolding the layers of what makes this city magical. Walking through the folds, one was able to experience not only what this city has in offer, what we see, smell, taste, touch and hear but also the hidden gems: The abandoned houses and the untold stories. In The Folding City, textile was used as a canvas, and each layer was created from materials that were collected and recycled from Muttrah.

In addition, visitors were able to view an art installation by Grid and Grain Studio Oman that was composed of colourful mattresses and pillows.

The one-of-its-kind art experience was born out of a collaboration between Sekka, a London-based independent magazine and integrated creative platform that is dedicated to art, culture, literature and opinions from the Arab world, Zawraq Collective, a duo of creative Omani women who reimagine Muscat's art scene as belonging to its youth and their explosive talents, and Teepee Oman, an Omani pop-up glamping experience that creates one of a kind experiences that encourage cultural immersion, reconnecting with nature and ignite a sense of adventure.

"Ahlam El Asr was a nostalgic and surreal pop-up where visitors walked through Muttrah Fort and explored a maze of illusive installations created

by contemporary Omani artists", say Zaima al Adawi and Noor al Mahrouqi, the founders of Zawraq Collective, and the event's art curators. "We all yearn for a rose-tinted past that only exists in our imagination. In this space, visitors travelled through a utopia of nostalgia that intertwined cultures of the past and the present."

Indeed, it takes ages of persistence, hard work and consistency before we could see the fruits of labour. And for Ahlam El Asr too, it took several months of collaborative planning and organising between Sekka, Zawraq Collective and Teepee Oman before the experience was brought to life.

As Noor and Zaima explain, "Ahlam El Asr is a commonly used term in Arabic that refers to a kind of psychedelic daydream that is both strange and entertaining. It has some double entendre that could also mean 'the dreams of the generation', which fits perfectly with this experience." They add, "The inspiration behind the title came from an innate desire to create something for the youth, by the youth. It was exciting to be able to juxtapose the historical fort with the fantasies of young people."

"Muttrah Fort played a major part in the history of the country defending the sovereignty of our nation and today, it will play the role of inspiring our young generations through our history and unity. It will be a blend of history and culture", says Hilal al Busaidy, Chairman of Muttrah Fort Tourism LLC, the main sponsor of the event and who provided the venue for it.

Aside from the artworks, visitors also enjoyed slushies, softies and popcorn provided by the Muscat-based Hafsah, and open-tent outdoor seating set up by Teepee Oman. The set-up enabled visitors to network and socialise with some of Oman's creatives in an artistic setting.