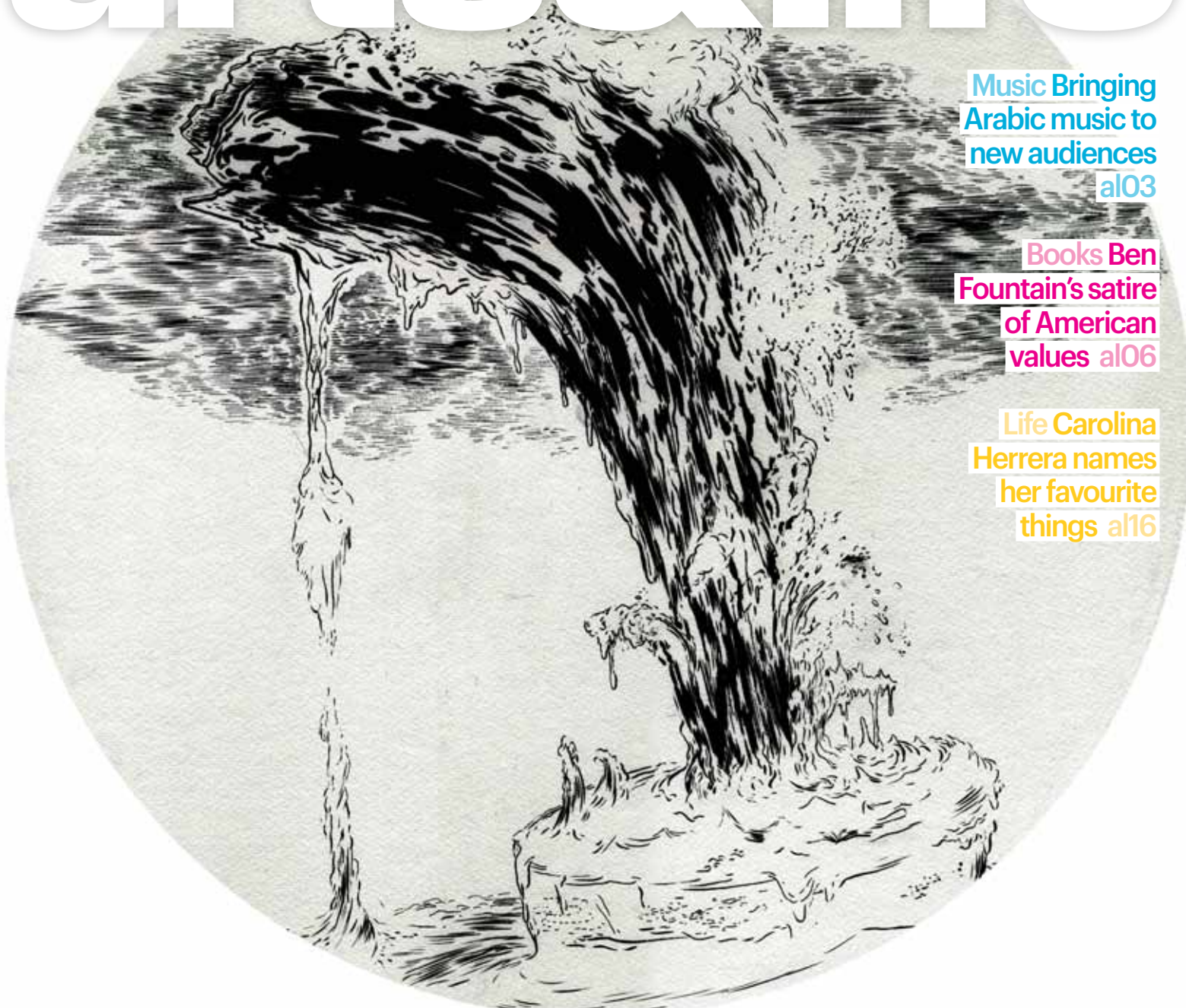


arts & life



Music Bringing Arabic music to new audiences **al03**

Books Ben Fountain's satire of American values **al06**

Life Carolina Herrera names her favourite things **al16**

A great transformation

It's the last chance to see Abdelkader Benchamma's pen drawings, which depict a world superficially like our own – but, the more you look, the odder they become **al08**

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A retrospective of **Japan's reclusive living legend Yayoi Kusama, 83**, opened at New York's Whitney Museum last week. Running until September, the show features 150 works, including her signature spots and monumental multicolour Plexiglas light installation, *Fireflies on the Water*

The pace of change

With Ramadan now upon us, Dubai's art scene goes quiet and many galleries batten down the hatches for the summer. This week is the last chance to catch two of the more enticing exhibitions in galleries on Alserkal Avenue, writes [Christopher Lord](#)

All that is solid melts into air. That was Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's prognosis for a future at the mercy of the free market.

In their vision, the world would be in a constant state of flux, every grand idea would sweep in and out on the winds of money without ever

taking root. It was a prescient idea: in today's globalised world of constantly changing fashions and ever-present communication, nothing gold can stay.

An evaporating world is rendered in *Corrupted Theories*, an exhibition of the ultra-detailed pen drawings

The half-built buildings that pepper Benchamma's landscapes are almost the beginning of ideas that are being erased in a fog of accelerated change

of Abdelkader Benchamma, which have their final showing this week at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde before the space closes for the rest of Ramadan. "The drawings work just like sculptures," says the artist, who is based in Montpellier. "You start from a single point and you add new things to the form but don't necessarily know where each one is going."

Benchamma's world is one in which the laws of matter have gone missing. In an almost magical or apocryphal second of collapse, metal and wood disperses into clouds of locust-like specks. Water erupts in a skyward torrent and scaffold-like structures seem to bloom into mossy, organic forms.

The artist tells *The National* that it's the very moment of transformation that captures him.

"You don't really know what you're looking at, whether it's beautiful or not. I wanted to freeze these 'sculptures' in a special moment where everything is moving."

He explains that it's about holding an object at that second between making sense of what we're looking at and confusion.

The effect is oddly compelling. We look for a narrative or some way to make sense of the images but this, ultimately, evades us. In one work, a crowd of people in black suits are seen scattering in fear at the sight of a

great construction being vaporised in front of them. "They're like characters from a Franz Kafka or Samuel Beckett story," says Benchamma. It's as if some hand from above has interjected in reality, and absurdity has careered into this staid landscape.

While the works are not expressly about the future that Marx and Engels were talking about, they are an evocation of modern uncertainty. Benchamma talks about his terrified figures as "advanced in technology, but at the same time quite lost". *Corrupted Theories* is a show about the disturbed anchorage in a world where ideas, the media and communication create a constant churn. The half-built buildings that pepper his landscapes are almost the beginning of ideas that are being erased in a fog of accelerated change.

This is made obtuse in *Paysage et Décor sans Lumière*, a drawing of a landscape made out of prop trees and mountains. It could almost be backstage at a film set, and we're entirely privy to the artifice of what we're looking at.

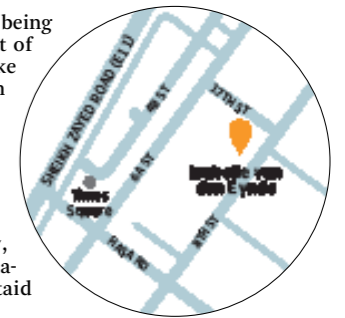
The ideas one might read in this collection may not be the most strikingly new – reality is accelerated and elusive in today's world, for instance. But as drawings, they're impressively wrought. It's a cold wonderland that Benchamma carries us into, somehow alluring in its fantasy. All that is solid melts into air.

● Until Thursday, 10am to 7pm, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz, Dubai, 04 323 0502 www.ivde.net

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Far left, Chimney I by Farzan Sadjadi, part of his exhibition Wet Dog. Courtesy Farzan Sadjadi / Carbon 12
Left, one of Abdelkader Benchamma's mysterious drawings. Courtesy Abdelkader Benchamma / Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde



On the cover

Work by Abdelkader Benchamma. Courtesy Abdelkader Benchamma / Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde