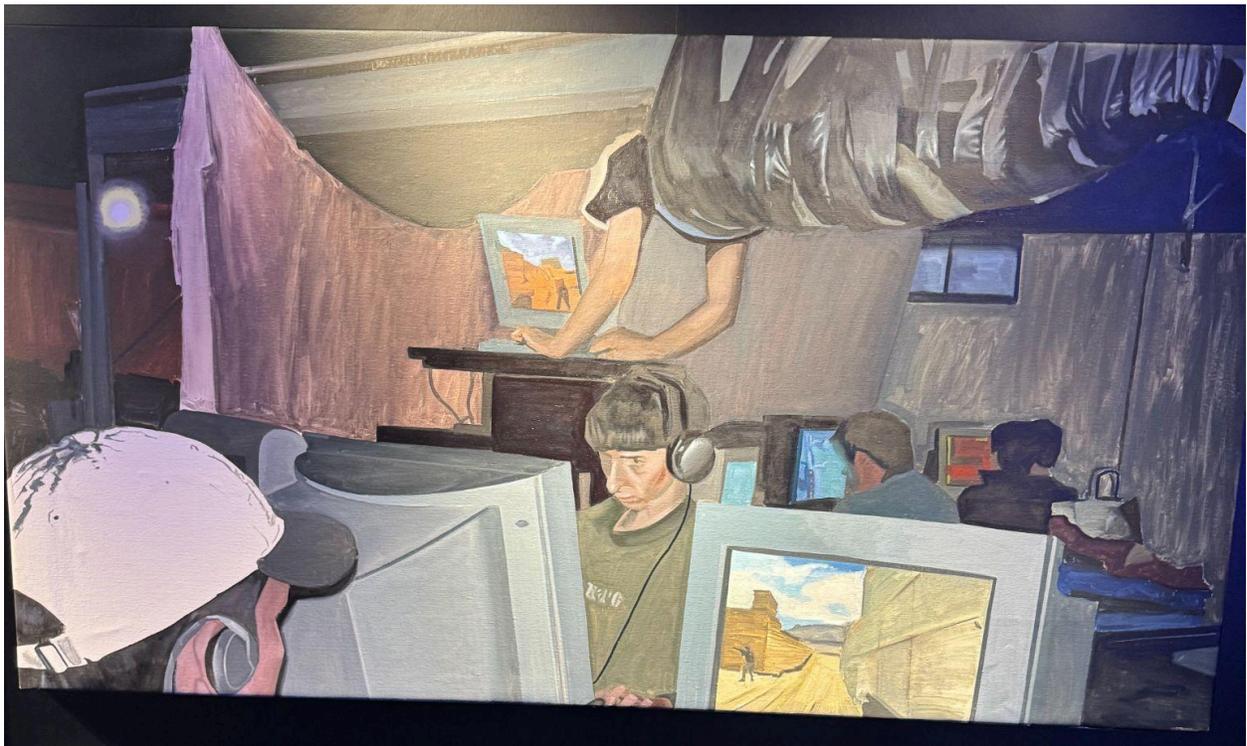


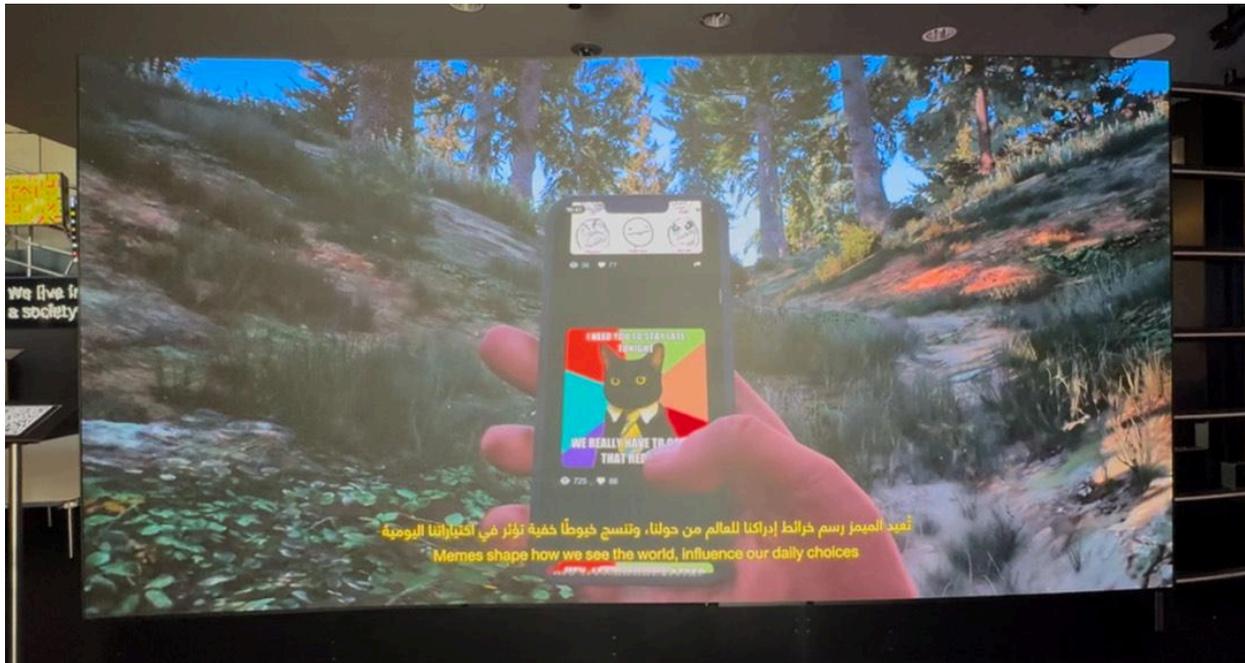
Northwestern University in Qatar regularly hosts exhibitions in its *Media Majlis*, creatively contributing to contemporary discourse on media and politics. I attended a few, but I was surprised to hear that their 10th exhibition, curated by Jack Thomas Taylor and Assistant Curator Amal Zeyad Ali, would be about memes. When visiting the *Memememememe* exhibition, I intentionally slowed down so as not to skip over the series of texts introducing the exhibition. While reading the introduction, three students walked into the room, immediately racing towards the large screens at the end of the corridor, to an installation named ‘Good Soup: A Meme Culture Altarpiece’ by Anna Horel, which exhibited a genre of memes the internet calls: *Brain Rot*. Three screens played different videos, and the students laughed in recognition of the celebrities, music, and cultural references. Standing near my text, I judged them till I realized I would've been doing the same had I visited with my friends. The exhibition’s entrance confines visitors to a corridor, forcing them to walk a curved path through every installation so as not to get distracted by other pieces. This design choice meant the organizers knew something about our fragmented attention and our modern habit of rushing. In an exhibition about memes, the setup and how visitors engaged revealed a deeper understanding of our relationship with the internet, our decaying attention spans, and the content we consume.



Mauro C. Martinez, “Trust 2 and Trust 3”, oil on canvas— personal photography by Noon Elsharif.

Through the speakers in the room, you hear a scripted exchange about memes that is continuously interrupted by viral meme audios. It is faint enough to sound like someone browsing their feed in the distance, but striking enough to make you listen. The dim lighting, the tight corridor, and the faint audio playing through the speakers combined into an overstimulating environment that felt strangely reminiscent of the hours I spend on my bed scrolling through an endless algorithm. However, the faint familiarity I felt showed that I wasn't unaccustomed to the constant chatter of the internet; I was simply unsettled that this feeling was replicated in a foreign location. This highlights the success of the exhibition in displaying what it is like to view media daily and to be trapped in this cycle of consumption. (While finishing this sentence, I took a five-minute break to watch some memes. The irony of this is not beyond me.)

Content consumption or doomscrolling is a recurring theme throughout the exhibition. First, it is praised as an act of resistance in Alia Leonardi's "dnd, still online, still alive" embroidered fabric installation, which features three pieces of white fabric, embroidered with black text. The last one reads: "*Girl, the world is bigger than your bedroom. Sometimes you run away back to the safety of your bed. You lie in desires scrolling to find who you will become. Returning to the persons you were: you have it all (you are bored). You change (it hurts).*" Though the installation text describes 'bed rotting' as an opportunity to exist outside of the watchful gaze of capitalism, and a way to defy social media's expectations, I think it's the absolute opposite. Doomscrolling is the epitome of capitalism, as it encourages and expects us to turn off our brains and endlessly consume content. Capitalism steals the little free time we have by placing in our hands the most enticing habit in the form of a screen that contains everything and nothing. As a student constantly trying to find a balance between my education and extracurricular work, while also making time for hobbies and family, I often find myself reaching for my phone in the brief windows of time I have to myself. An hour between my classes, an hour before bedtime—even the fifteen minutes waiting for the tram, I browse my feed(s) to see what the world has to offer, and more often than not, I am left with less time to myself and a sinking feeling in my stomach that my life is not good enough. The text embroidered in the fabric reflects the essence of what our generation is experiencing: being bound to a screen because of the comfort we find in scrolling. Some of us have separation anxiety from our phones, and if you think you don't, I challenge you to leave your phone in another room for one hour with nothing else to do.

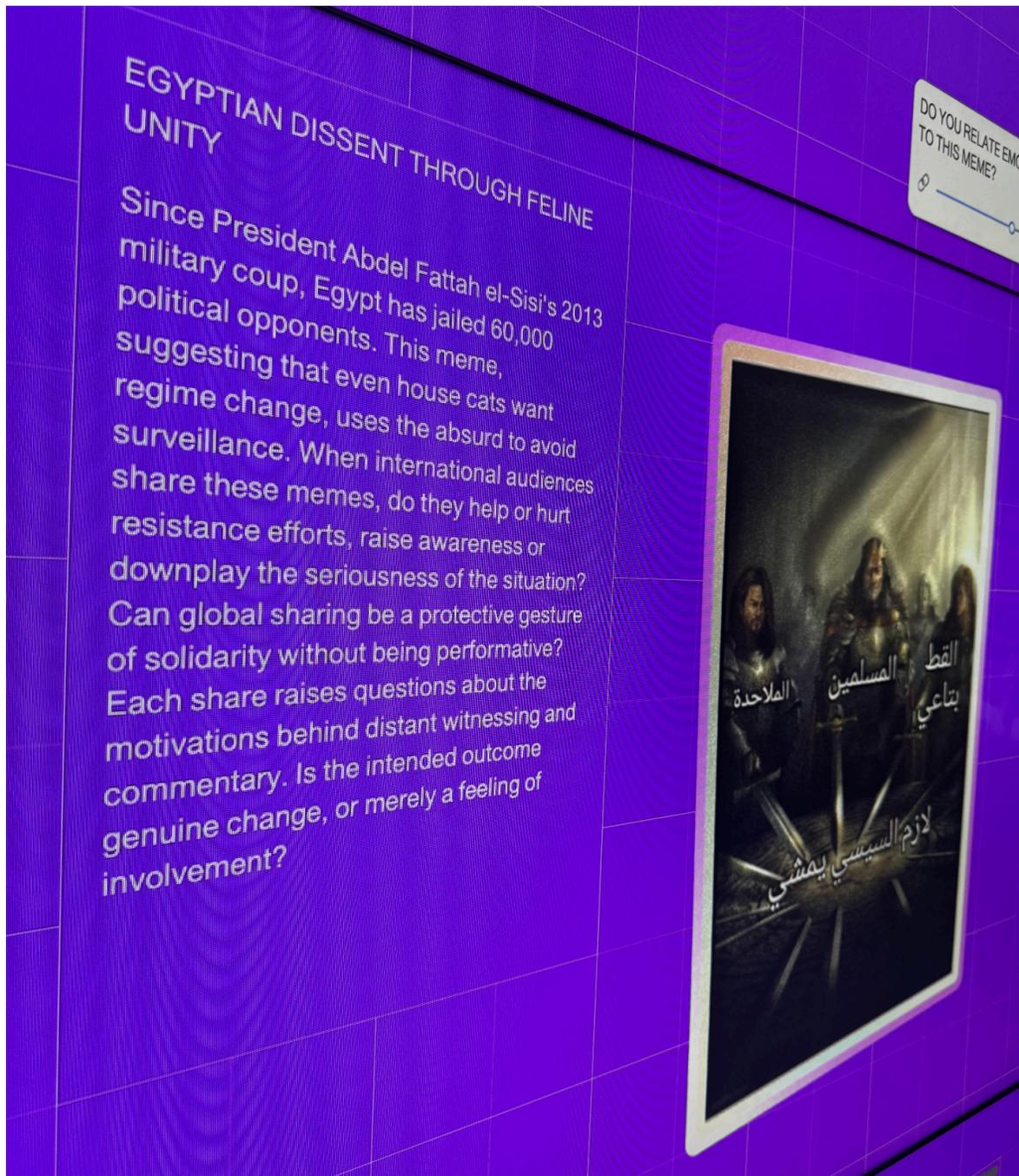


Superposition and Idil Galip, “*First Person Scroller*”, visual essay— personal photography by Noon Elsharif.

I saw a post on Instagram saying something like: *when I die and my life flashes in my eyes, it'll all be memes*. The best representation of this is the video installation titled ‘First Person Scroller’. In it is a narration containing a thorough analysis of memes, through the four concepts introduced at the beginning of the exhibition: Mass, Length, Time, and Volume. An animation of a person scrolling through an endless sea of memes while going about their day plays over this audio. The scrolling continues while this person is walking, hiking, and even driving. The animated figure would occasionally let out a small laugh at something on screen. At one point, I laughed at the same time the character did, and for a second, I felt like the joke was on me; that I was the one being mocked within this installation. It reminded me of a specific genre of content on the internet, typically featuring AI-generated narration of random Reddit posts, overlaid on videos of Subway Surfers gameplay. This content became a recurring online joke due to the absurdity of needing a background video just to focus on the main content. I then realized the creators used this format to maintain visitor engagement by showing us familiar memes, as the video was over five minutes long and fairly slow-paced. By adopting the format it critiques, ‘First Person Scroller’ invites us to confront how deeply embedded the act of scrolling is in our lives, and what we must do to prevent technology from becoming more captivating than reality.

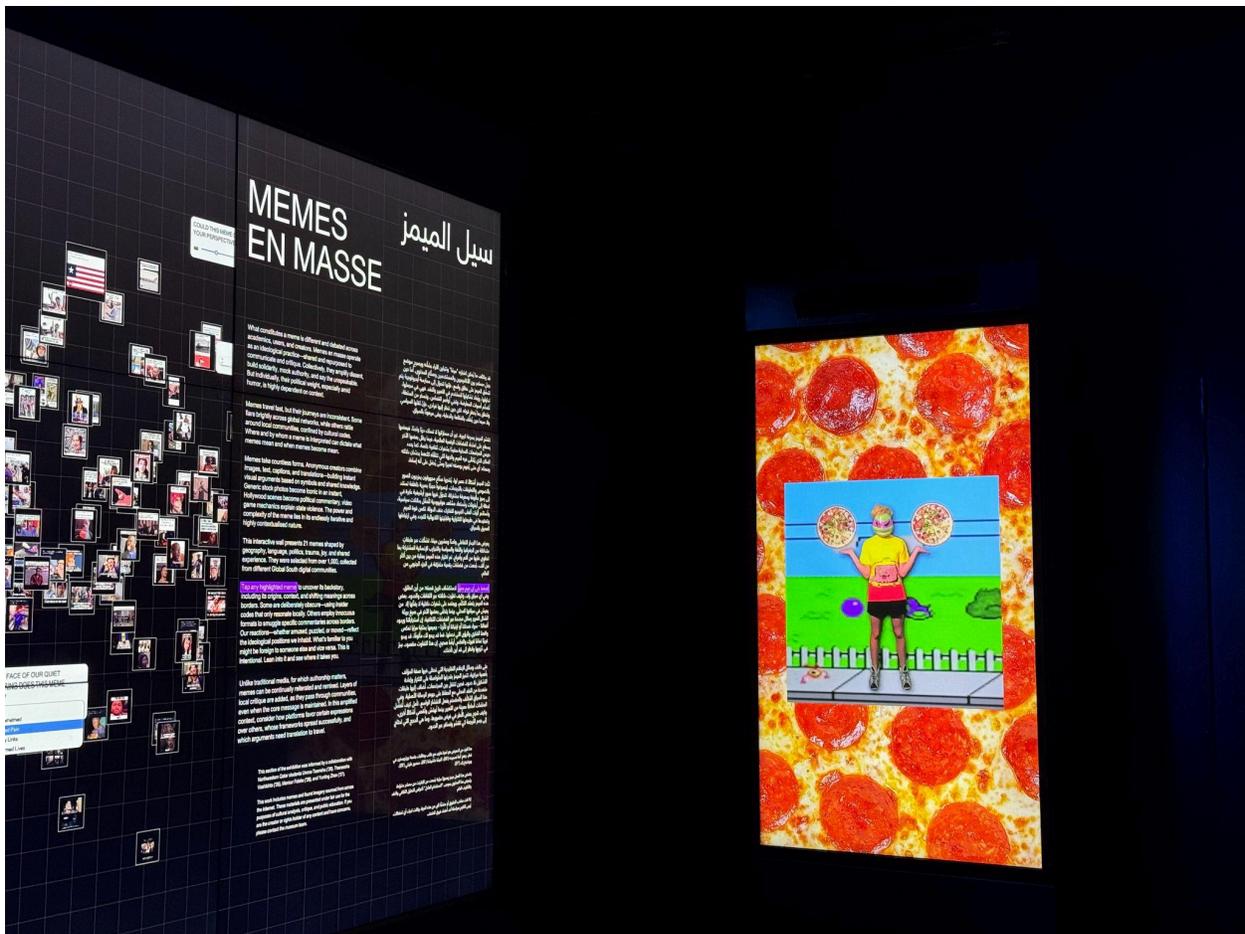
Majoring in international politics means I am becoming increasingly involved in global political conversations. This greatly impacted the genre of memes I pay attention to, and now my timeline is largely composed of political memes. I often see entire political ideologies summed up in a funny picture and a few words, and significant political conversations in comment sections that addressed questions journalists attempted to answer. This genre of memes was best addressed by the installation ‘Memes En Masse’, created by NU-Q students Umme Tasmeha (‘26), Mensur Feleke (‘28), and Yunting Zhan (‘27). This interactive installation features a large screen where viewers can click on countries, primarily in the Global South, to explore political memes

addressing local struggles, political violence, and censorship. From critiques of authoritarian regimes to takes on topics like China's internet control, the work transforms serious political discussions into digestible, memeable content. This approach perfectly aligns with a snippet I heard from the narration sounding through the speakers, which referred to this genre of memes as 'modern political cartoons'.



Umme Tasmeha, Thaneesha Vashishta, Mensur Feleke, and Yunting Zhan, "MEMES EN MASSE", excerpt from interactive installation— personal photography by Noon Elsharif.

It was while engaging with this piece that I realized something about myself. During two major political events that took place in Qatar, I instinctively opened X (formerly Twitter) faster than I opened Al Jazeera. This was primarily to find fast updates from news accounts, but also because I subconsciously knew that if something happened, the chances are that someone had already made a meme about it. This reflex shows that our tendency to create and share memes in times of crisis isn't just about political commentary; it's also a coping mechanism. If someone finds a way to laugh about something as scary as an airstrike, then it must be fine. This habit of using humor as a coping mechanism can be valuable, but also dangerous. Memes about grave political events tend to repackage suffering as a joke and trade the weight of tragedy for momentary amusement. It's funny, and horrible. It's misleading and accurate. It's the worst and the best our society has to offer: it's us. But as a generation raised on technology and infinite content, there's a truth we must confront: not everything has to be funny. Sometimes, we must sit with the weight of political truths without feeling the need to find humor in them.



Anne Horel, “Good Soup: A Meme Culture Altarpiece”, Three-channel Video installation next to “MEMES EN MASSE”– personal photography by Noon Elsharif.

The tension between humor and heavy topics is highlighted in the curatorial decision to place ‘Memes En Masse’ next to the installation, ‘Good Soup’. The contrast between the two, one offering substantial political commentary and the other showcasing brain rot, perfectly captures the nature of the internet, but also the act of scrolling itself. Moments of political urgency mix

into meaningless content, as we swipe through timelines that flatten the weight of the world into entertainment. It's dystopian, especially at times of war when geopolitics are developing rapidly. It poses the question: what can we laugh about, and how can we make that distinction within the incoherent chaos of the internet? In the end, Memememememe is less an exhibition about memes and more a reflection of the internet itself. It is loud, funny, political, and unsettling. The variety of the installations captures both the joy and the misery of scrolling by recreating the sensory overload of being online. It's not an experience you attend comfortably, the constant chatter of the space making it difficult to stay for long, but that is precisely the point.

The last date to view the exhibition is December 4th, 2025.