



Pavilion of the *United Arab Emirates*

at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia

Architectural Diagrams, Photographs, Scale Models and Archival Materials to tell the Story of the Transformations of the Emirati National House at the National Pavilion UAE at the Biennale Architettura 2016

‘Transformations: The Emirati National House’ will present insights into the transformative process of individualization of national houses in an exhibition to run May 28 – November 27 at one of the world’s most prominent architecture events

4 May 2016, UAE: *‘Transformations: The Emirati National House’*, the exhibition to be presented at the 15th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia by the National Pavilion United Arab Emirates, will feature a range of archival materials, photography, architectural diagrams and scale models. The National Pavilion UAE at the Biennale Architettura 2016 is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development.

The exhibition explores the transformative aspect of the housing model of Emirati national houses, also known as *sha’bī (folk)* houses, introduced across the UAE from the 1970s to offer homes and modern amenities to a fairly transient population. National houses are found in residential neighborhoods of most cities in the UAE. The standard housing typology is composed of a series of rooms overlooking a central square courtyard. The houses were initially designed as a standard model, but over the years, resident families made various architectural modifications to the basic structure, reflecting their changing lifestyles.

Curated by Yasser Elsheshtawy, Associate Professor of Architecture at the UAE University and a noted expert on regional architecture and urban planning; the exhibition will feature historical and technical materials including detailed architectural analysis of a current national house, archival newspaper clippings documenting the initial start of the National Housing program, and 1970s photographs by Dutch photographer Gerard Klijn. Additionally the exhibition will feature a specially commissioned series of new images by Emirati photographer Reem Falaknaz.

“Yasser Elsheshtawy has produced fascinating and detailed research on this unique element of the UAE’s urban and architectural landscape. The exhibition offers us the opportunity to share a lesser-known



aspect of our nation’s architecture at one of the world’s most prominent architecture events,” says Khulood Al Atiyat, Manager of Arts, Culture and Heritage, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation. “In line with the Foundation’s mission to invest in the future of the UAE by investing its people, we are particularly pleased that this year’s exhibition will focus on the everyday spaces of the UAE’s citizens, developing a new angle of architectural discourse about our country.”

“The exhibition and accompanying publication will share a comprehensive overview of the National Housing project as an interesting architectural experiment where people are actively involved in constructing and modifying their built environment,” says Yasser Elsheshtawy. “We would like to highlight the *sha’biyaa (folk)* neighborhoods as an ongoing living testimony about the resilience of the Emirati people and the extent to which the house, with all of its shortcomings, still plays a vital and important role.”

Presented in the UAE’s permanent pavilion in Venice’s Arsenale – Sale d’Armi, the exhibition will be divided into four interwoven sections conceptualized as a series of scales moving from the regional down to an individual house, laid out on a grid separated by wall panels that draw visitors through the story of the national house.

- **History** – This section presents archival images, documents and videos that record the establishment of the National Housing project throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It will include aerial photographs captured by British Petroleum, initial architectural drawings, images of *sha’biyaa (folk)* neighborhoods by Dutch photographer Gerard Klijn as well as the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Petroleum Operations Ltd. (ADCO), and archival newspaper clippings from Al Ittihad and other local publications.
- **Neighborhood** – The section examines the urban fabric of national housing developments at a city-wide scale. An interactive map will provide insight into the landscape of the UAE and the widespread development of traditional residential, or *sha’biyaa (folk)* neighborhoods. It will be accompanied by architectural models at various scales, analytical diagrams, photography and video.
- **House** – This section develops a detailed analysis of the national house at an individual level, through massing models, elevation drawings, diagrams representing individual changes to each building within a contemporary neighborhood and a large scale model of a group of houses.
- **Central** – The centrepiece of the exhibition presents a detailed case study of a single national house and the Emirati family who continue to live there, through a detailed architectural analysis as well as intimate family memories. The section is accompanied by a specially commissioned series of images by Emirati photographer Reem Falaknaz, who has travelled to these neighborhoods to capture the human aspect of living communities.

The accompanying publication will contextualize the exhibition and associated research, providing a backdrop to the content displayed in the exhibition. It features essays and academic studies by architects, sociologists, conservators and scholars.



The 15th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia runs from May 28–November 27, 2016, with a preview from May 26-27. The official opening of the National Pavilion UAE at the Biennale Architettura 2016 is on May 26 at 16:00 (GMT +2).

The Curator

Yasser Elsheshtawy is Associate Professor of Architecture at the United Arab Emirates University, where he has taught since 1997. His scholarship deals with urbanization in developing societies, urban history and environment-behavior studies, with a particular focus on Middle Eastern cities, and Elsheshtawy also runs UAE University's Urban Research Lab.

Elsheshtawy has produced more than 70 texts in leading international journals and publishing houses, including his authored book Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle and his edited books, The Evolving Arab City and Planning Middle Eastern Cities, which have become key references on urbanism and architecture in the region.

He has been invited to present his research at international institutions such as Columbia University, Harvard Graduate School of Design, the ETH/Zurich, the Louvre Auditorium/Paris, NYU and the Canadian Center of Architecture/Montreal, and his multimedia work has been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum and New York University.

National Pavilion UAE - La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion United Arab Emirates - La Biennale di Venezia was established to support the UAE's contemporary art and architecture practices on an international platform through participation at the exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia, and to promote a cultural dialogue between the UAE and the international community.

The UAE's participation at the art and architecture exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia commenced in 2009 with a national pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, and has continued in subsequent editions of the art exhibition. 2016 will mark its second participation in the International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.

End
