



## National Pavilion United Arab Emirates la Biennale di Venezia to Highlight Transformations of the Emirati National House at the 15<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition in 2016 – la Biennale di Venezia

**3 January 2015, United Arab Emirates:** Yasser Elsheshtawy, curator for the National Pavilion United Arab Emirates (UAE) la Biennale di Venezia and Associate Professor of Architecture at the UAE University, Al Ain, will present *Transformations: The Emirati National House*, an exhibition highlighting the transformations of the Emirati National House, also known as Sha’abi (folk) house. His focus is on how a basic housing model was adapted by residents to individualized homes, thus reflecting their culture and life style.

The National Pavilion UAE la Biennale di Venezia is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development. The 15th International Architecture Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia will be held in Venice, Italy from May 28 to November 27, 2016.

Responding to the call of Alejandro Aravena, curator of the 15<sup>th</sup> Architecture Exhibition la Biennale di Venezia, to present examples of how the built environment can improve peoples quality of life, Yasser Elsheshtawy will present case studies that can provide useful lessons on how constructing an adaptable and flexible typology, as seen in the instance of the Emirati National house, can be used to address the universal concern of providing adaptable social housing.

National houses are found in residential neighbourhoods of cities in the UAE. Initially designed in the 1970s, they were implemented throughout the 1970s and 1980s, to offer homes and modern amenities to a transient local population. The standard housing typology is composed of a series of rooms overlooking a central square courtyard, and has proved to be highly adaptable as Emirati families’ lifestyles evolved. Many National, or Sha’abi, houses today show evidence of a cumulative accretion of various architectural elements over the years, a process of transformation from a basic model to individualised homes, which have become an important component of the etymology of the UAE’s built environment.

“This exploration of Emirati Sha’abi housing responds to the Biennale’s theme, which reflects on the ways in which the built environment can be formed to improve people’s quality of life,” Yasser Elsheshtawy explains. “Through the provision of a flexible model, inspired by older and existing buildings and their specific layout, the initial architects enabled residents to modify their homes to fit their needs. Changes occurred in allocated plot size and detailing but the basic framework remained the same. These houses proved to be highly adaptable with residents making a series of changes so that these models could be made more compatible with their lifestyle and local culture. Moreover by focusing on such neighborhoods the architectural discourse in the UAE moves to one that is concerned with the everyday spaces of its citizens.”





“For our second participation in the International Architecture Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia, we are proud that the National Pavilion UAE will explore the evolution of this element of local architectural heritage,” said Khulood Al Atiyat, Projects Manager – Arts, Culture & Heritage at the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, commissioner of the National Pavilion UAE, with support from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development. “As the UAE emerges as a global centre for arts and culture the National Pavilion UAE la Biennale di Venezia continues its commitment to further the arts and architectural practices of the UAE by facilitating a dialogue with the international community through its exhibitions.

The inaugural participation of the UAE at the International Art Exhibition at le Biennale di Venezia commenced in 2009 and has continued in each art exhibition. 2014 marked the UAE’s first participation in the International Architecture Exhibition in its 14<sup>th</sup> edition, with an exhibition titled *Lest We Forget: Structures of Memory in the UAE*, curated by Dr. Michele Bambling. The 2015 exhibition, *1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates*, curated by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, was a retrospective on contemporary art exhibitions in the Emirates over the last 40 years through an unprecedented grouping of over 100 works. The 56th International Art Exhibition at la Biennale di Venezia ran from May 9 to November 22, 2015 and received over 500,000 visitors. *1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates* will now return to the UAE where it will be hosted at the Sharjah Art Foundation between February 20 – May 20, 2016.

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