

الجناح الوطني لدولة الإمارات
بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi inaugurates *Wetland*, National Pavilion UAE's tenth exhibition at the Biennale Architettura 2021

- *In the pavilion, an environmentally-friendly recycled MgO-based cement sits alongside images of the UAE's ancient salt flats, combining heritage and innovation in a 'future vernacular'*
- *Curated by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto with photography by artist Farah Al Qasimi*
- *On view at the National Pavilion UAE – la Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale) until November 21, 2021*
- *Virtual tour of the exhibition available*

21 May 2021, United Arab Emirates: Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, the UAE's Minister of Culture and Youth, yesterday inaugurated *Wetland*, the National Pavilion UAE's tenth exhibition at the Biennale Architettura 2021 (Venice Biennale).

Curated by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, *Wetland* presents an environmentally friendly salt-based cement alternative which could reduce the climate impact of the construction industry. Created from recycled industrial waste brine, the MgO cement has been hand-cast into organic shapes recalling the UAE's traditional coral-built houses, forming a hand-built 7 x 5 meter prototype structure. The prototype is accompanied by large-scale images created by New York-based Emirati artist Farah Al Qasimi of the UAE's UNESCO World Heritage Site-nominated sabkhas (salt flats), which provided inspiration for the research process. A virtual tour of the exhibition is available on the National Pavilion UAE website.

H.E. Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Youth, said: "Over ten fantastic exhibitions, the National Pavilion UAE has brought some of the best of the UAE's cultural stories to a global audience, demonstrating our ambition, our creativity and our commitment to cross-cultural exchange while making a tangible contribution to national development. Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto's work embodies the UAE's national spirit of creativity, innovation and cutting-edge thinking about global issues, while remaining informed by our heritage, and is a true exemplar of the National Pavilion UAE's role as a bridge from the UAE to the world."

The inauguration was also attended by H.E. Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities and Chairperson of the Board of the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage; H.E. Salem Al Qassimi, Assistant Undersecretary of Heritage and Arts Sector, UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth; and Roberto Cicutto, President, La Biennale. Also in attendance were Lubna Al Gergawi, Minister Office Director; Alia Al Qassimi, Acting Assistant Undersecretary of Cultural and Creative Industries Sector, from the UAE Ministry of Culture and



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وزارة الثقافة والشباب

Youth; Maitha Alabdouli, Assistant Project Manager, UAE Ministry of Culture, and Youth and Nasser Al Khaja, Head of Media and Public Diplomacy Section, Embassy of the UAE.

Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director of the National Pavilion UAE, said: “In 2021, the National Pavilion UAE is celebrating its tenth exhibition at the Venice Biennale and thinking about our future as the most consistent international cultural platform to showcase the UAE’s talent and perspectives. Against the continuing challenges of the pandemic, the Venice Biennale’s role as a convener and platform for ideas has become even more important. Presenting our tenth exhibition here in person enables us to bring a fresh, timely and locally-informed perspective to the global issue of climate change.”

Curators and architects Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto said: “Exploring the relationship between nature and the built environment and developing new and more sustainable architectural methods are vital for our future, and this global conversation is long overdue. The theme for the 2021 Biennale, *How Will We Live Together?*, asks us to consider new modes for a shared future. For us, that meant examining the relationship between urban development and nature, but also reconsidering how we worked throughout our research process to bring a new focus on collaboration and collective thinking.”

The curators collaborated with specialist teams at three universities in developing the project. NYU Abu Dhabi’s Amber Lab contributed to the chemical formula for the cement; the University of Tokyo’s Obuchi Lab and Sato Lab supported the development of the construction modules and used advanced 3D remote engineering technology to formulate a viable hand-built structure in Venice; and the American University of Sharjah’s Department of Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences contributed research that advanced understanding of the sabkhas.

Wael Al Awar is also participating in the [Curators’ Collective](#), a collaboration between curators of many of the national pavilions at the 2021 Biennale. Throughout the extended preparation period of this edition, the curators have met regularly to develop a manifesto for the future of architecture, generate ideas through dialogue and investigate new avenues to fulfil the Biennale’s platform for accessible collaboration. To support the goals of sustainability, the curators are working together to share and repurpose excess materials from the construction of their exhibitions, including an open call supported by the National Pavilion UAE for designers to develop a public bench from recycled materials left over from the construction of exhibitions, which will function as both an architectural statement and public seating that supports social distancing.

Wetland is now open to the public at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale until Sunday November 21st 2021. The National Pavilion UAE continues to monitor the situation closely with the safety of staff and visitors as its top priority, and has made available a digital version of the exhibition on its website [\[link\]](#). Throughout May, experimental early versions of the prototype are also available on display at the *Wetland* research lab in Dubai’s Alserkal Avenue. The lab is open from 1:00pm - 6:00pm (GST) until May 24th, 2021, except for Fridays, where the lab will be open from 4:00pm to 9:00 pm (GST). Starting May 25th and until the end of the month,





visitors are encouraged to book an appointment before visiting by e-mailing lujaine.rizk@waiwaidesign.com.

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For Press Inquiries:

Brunswick Arts

NPUAE@brunswickgroup.com

To join the conversation visit nationalpavilionuae.org, follow National Pavilion UAE on [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) and use the hashtag #UAEinVenice

Notes to Editors:

National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia curates untold stories about the UAE’s arts and architecture through its participation at the Venice Biennale, and provides a high-profile platform for curatorial concepts that address critical international conversations from a distinctive local perspective.

For each annual edition of the Biennale, one of the world’s most significant and rigorous cultural platforms, the National Pavilion UAE appoints and works with curators, artists and contributors to conceive, research and develop an exhibition and accompanying publication that advance and preserve understanding of the UAE’s cultural landscape.

Since 2009, its exhibitions have explored the nation’s cultural evolution from 20th century experimental artists to the diverse contemporary scene. In 2019, the National Pavilion UAE presented an acclaimed installation exploring geographic and psychological displacement from filmmaker Nujoom Alghanem, and in 2021, architects and curators Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto present research into an innovative sustainable cement alternative derived from salt and minerals found in the UAE’s Sabkha heritage sites.

In parallel with its exhibitions in Venice, the National Pavilion UAE engages with communities in the UAE to support the growth of the local cultural and creative industries, through public programming and professional opportunities. Alongside an extensive pool of artists, curators, researchers and partners who have contributed to its exhibitions over the years, the UAE’s Venice Internship program has provided training and hands-on experience to more than 200 interns, many of whom are now working successfully in cultural fields.

The National Pavilion UAE is an independent non-profit organisation, commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth.

Commissioner: The Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation



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The Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation (SHF) is a private not-for-profit foundation committed to the cultivation of a more creative, connected and thriving UAE community. Based in Abu Dhabi, SHF oversees a diverse portfolio of not-for-profit programs and initiatives spanning the arts, culture, heritage, human development and early childhood development in the UAE and internationally. Underpinning SHF's activities is a common ambition to invest in the knowledge and capabilities of the UAE people in order to support them to unlock their full potential.

Supporter: Ministry of Culture and Youth

The Ministry of Culture and Youth works to enrich the cultural ecosystem in the UAE through initiatives and policies that stimulate the development of the cultural and creative industries and its contribution to the country's GDP, developing new legislation and policies that promote integrated media growth in the country and creating avenues for the youth to invest their capabilities in the aforementioned fields.

The Ministry of Culture and Youth is responsible for empowering and engaging the youth in the UAE by enhancing their leadership skills, involving them in decision-making process and programs, and giving them opportunities to contribute to the creative development of the country.

About waiwai design

waiwai is an award-winning multidisciplinary architecture, landscape, graphic and urban design studio with offices in Dubai and Tokyo.

Known for addressing the social, environmental, economical and technological aspects of architectural projects, the firm has worked on prominent cultural institutions including Dubai's Jameel Arts Centre, Jaddaf waterfront sculpture park, Al Warqa'a mosque, Hai d3 and Jeddah's Hayy: Creative Hub.

Formerly known as **ibda design** ('start' in Arabic), in 2019 the firm was renamed **waiwai** – a Japanese onomatopoeia which refers to the sound of a cheering crowd – to mark its 10-year anniversary.

Dubai and Tokyo each foster multicultural diversity, and the range of cultural backgrounds in the **waiwai** team inspires communication through a clear, simple and deliberate approach to architecture. The founding partners of **waiwai**'s Dubai office, **Wael Al Awar** (Lebanon) and **Kenichi Teramoto** (Japan), have unique stories that first led them away from their home countries, then later to collaborate in Dubai. They share an ability to observe a city up-close and intimately, yet also from afar, with the attentive eye of an outsider.

Their projects layer their individual design sensibilities into an architecture of natural light, time, structure and landscape. By aligning with natural phenomena, **waiwai** seeks to create an architecture that is more than man-made fabrication, but instead remains open to adaptation and appropriation. The spaces that emerge from this approach are site-specific provocations that encourage unexpected experiences, activities and behaviors.

Wael Al Awar founded what was then known as **ibda design** in 2009 after moving back to the Middle East from Tokyo. With interests in natural phenomena, landscape and formless diagrams of relations, Wael has a multi-disciplinary approach to design and is always looking to challenge conventional processes to push the boundaries of design.



Kenichi Teramoto joined **ibda design** as a principal architect and partner in 2012, and became a founding partner in **waiwai** following its 2019 rebranding. Teramoto's working experiences have trained him to develop an understanding of culture, geography and materiality. His approach to design is multi-disciplinary, and he has a deep interest in natural phenomena and structure. He is always re-questioning the design approach with the aim of delivering a distinctive design.

They share extensive experience in designing projects of various scales and programs, including art centers and parks, school and university campuses, mixed-use developments, private villas and mosques.

waiwai was named among the top 17 architects and top 50 influential designers of the year by Nikkei Magazine in 2019; recognized by Architectural Record's annual Design Vanguard issue as one of the top 10 emerging firms in the world in 2018; and included in Architectural Digest's top 50 offices in the Middle East in 2017.

About Wael Al Awar

Wael Al Awar founded waiwai design (formerly ibda design) in 2009 after moving back to the Middle East from Tokyo. He has extensive experience in designing projects of various scales and programs, including art centres and parks, school and university campuses, mixed-use developments, private villas and mosques.

With interests in natural phenomena, landscape and formless diagrams of relations, Wael has a multi-disciplinary approach to design and is always looking to challenge conventional processes to push the boundaries of design.

Wael has worked in the Middle East, the West and for several years in Tokyo, working with renowned Japanese architects. He has developed a strong cultural understanding and geographical sensitivity to different project contexts, and offers the perspective of a permanent outsider working with no geographical boundaries.

Wael holds a B.Arch from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

About Kenichi Teramoto

Kenichi Teramoto joined **ibda design** as a principal architect and partner in 2012, and became a founding partner in **waiwai** following its 2019 rebranding.

Previously, Teramoto worked with renowned architects in Tokyo and Rotterdam, on local and international projects, building an extensive design experience in both Asia and Europe. His architectural design proficiency includes a diverse range of projects including art centres and parks, school and university campuses, mixed-use developments, private villas and mosques.

Teramoto's working experiences have trained him to develop an understanding of culture, geography and materiality. His approach to design is multi-disciplinary, and he has a deep interest in natural phenomena and structure. He is always re-questioning the design approach with the aim of delivering a distinctive design.

Teramoto holds a M.Arch from Tokyo University of Science, Japan.

About Farah Al Qasimi

Working primarily with photography, video and performance, Farah Al Qasimi examines postcolonial structures of power, gender and taste in the Gulf Arab states.

Farah studied photography and music at Yale University in 2012 and received her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 2017. Dividing her time between Dubai and NY, Farah has integrated her practice as a social critique and observation of the layered aspects of each place indirectly. Through her bold and vibrant photographs, she explores the unspoken social norms and values embedded in a place, a moment or an object. Her thought-provoking images act as an invitation for the viewer to sense the unspoken boundaries that govern the scenes which they catch a glimpse of.

Al Qasimi's recent works challenge the viewer to consider their own understanding of reality, aspiration, individuality and the reflected image. In series such as 'Funhouse', Farah demonstrates her skill with mise-en-scene in photographs that are richly detailed, evoking a tromp-l'oeil effect, which are at turns delightful, delirious and disturbing. Elsewhere, the artist creates works that confront commonplace notions of figurative photography and portraiture; Back and Forth Disco is comprised of works offering a distinct representation of a subject without allowing the viewer full access to the person, highlighting the unique qualities that determine individuality and capturing the diverse essence of New York City.

Selected exhibitions include Funhouse, Helena Anrather Gallery, NY, USA (2020); Back and Forth Disco, Public Art Fund, New York, NY, USA (2020); Lahore Biennale, Lahore, Pakistan (2020); Open Arm Sea, Houston Center for Photography, Houston, TX, USA (2020); March Projects, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE (2019); Arrival, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2019); Age of You, MOCA Toronto, Canada (2019); List Projects: Farah Al Qasimi, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, USA (2019); Artist's Rooms, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, UAE (2019), Conversation 7 (with Marcela Pardo Ariza), San Francisco Arts Commission, SF, USA (2018); No to the Invasion: Breakdowns and Side Effects, CCS Bard Galleries, New York, USA (2017); More Good News, Helena Anrather, New York (2017), and Coming Up Roses, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2016).

She has participated in residencies at the Delfina Foundation, London (2017); the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine (2017); and was also awarded the New York NADA Artadia Prize and the Aaron Siskind Individual Photographer's Fellowship (2018).

Wetland exhibition research contributors

Research Team

Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, Research Directors

Ryuji Kamon, Head of Research and Lab Prototyping

Lujaine Rizk, Lab and Research Coordinator

Aisha Al Sahlawi, Lab and Research Assistant

Dina Al Khatib, Lab Documentation

Ibrahim Khamis, Lab Assistant

Ahmad Beydoun, Lab Assistant



Adomas Zeineldin, Lab Assistant
Ibrahim Ibrahim, Lab Assistant
Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, Lab Space

Collaborators

New York University, Abu Dhabi, Amber Lab

Dr Kemal Celik, Assistant Professor of Civil and Urban Engineering
Dr Rotana Hay, Research Scientist
Dr Abdullah Khalil, Postdoctoral Associate
Dr Ghanim Kashwani, Postdoctoral Associate
Cornelius Otchere, Student Assistant
Sara Alanis, Student Assistant
Roshan Poudel, Student Assistant

University of Tokyo, Sato Lab and Obuchi Lab

Jun Sato, Structural Designer
Yusuke Obuchi, Digital Fabrication Designer
Mika Araki, Structural Designer

American University of Sharjah, Department of Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences

Dr Lucia Pappalardo, Associate Professor of Chemistry
Aysha Shabnam, Research and Lab Assistant

