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بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia



## National Pavilion UAE wins Golden Lion Award for Best National Participation at the 17<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale

**31 August 2021, United Arab Emirates:** The National Pavilion UAE was awarded the Golden Lion Award for best National Participation at La Biennale Architettura 2021 at an awards ceremony in Venice on 30 August 2021. The Golden Lion award is the Biennale's top honor.

Curated by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, *Wetland*, the National Pavilion UAE's tenth exhibition at La Biennale Architettura, was selected by the Biennale jury for being "a bold experiment that encourages us to think about the relationship between waste and production on a local and global scale, and opens us to new construction possibilities between craft and high-technology", Kazuyo Sejima, President of this year's jury said at the ceremony.

**Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director of the National Pavilion UAE,** said: "Following ten exceptionally thought-driven and creative exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, National Pavilion UAE is honored to be chosen for the Golden Lion Award for best National Participation out of 60 national pavilions. This is a testament to the work we have been doing to contribute to the UAE's evolving art ecosystem, and a recognition of our continued efforts to tell the UAE's untold stories in a globally relevant way. Winning this award also coincides with a milestone participation for us, as well as the UAE's landmark 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this December. Wael and Teramoto have put forward a notable contribution at the heart of a global conversation surrounding sustainable building, which makes us very proud that *Wetland* demonstrates yet another exemplar untold story from the UAE."

**Curator and Architect, Wael Al Awar,** who accepted the award on behalf of the Pavilion at the ceremony said: "Marking a tenth successful participation for National Pavilion UAE in Venice, we are honored to accept this award. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the National Pavilion UAE team, the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, the Ministry of Culture and Youth and all our cross-discipline collaborators who have enabled us to bring *Wetland* to life with their continued support. We are very proud and humbled as we continue to spotlight potential solutions to global issues and move towards the future."



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*Wetland* presents a prototype of an environmentally friendly salt-based cement alternative from recycled industrial waste brine, which could reduce the impact the construction industry has on the environment.

The exhibition, which will remain on display until November 21, 2021 also celebrates the UAE's Sabkhas (salt flats), which inspired the research for the development of the renewable building material, through large-scale images of the UAE's UNESCO World Heritage Site-nominated sabkhas (salt flats) created by New York-based Emirati artist Farah Al Qasimi.

The curators worked with specialist teams at NYU Abu Dhabi's Amber Lab, the American University of Sharjah's Department of Biology, Chemistry and Environmental Sciences, and the University of Tokyo's Obuchi Lab and Sato Lab to develop the chemical formula for the cement.

A publication titled *The Anatomy of Sabkhas*, written by urban researchers Rashid and Ahmed bin Shabib and co-edited by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, accompanied the exhibition, and explored the ecological and socio-economic significance of these natural phenomena in detail based on case studies, personal essays, and photography. A supplementary volume edited and written by Aga Khan Award-winning architect Marina Tabassum details the journey of Wael and Teramoto's research for the *Wetland* exhibition.

The news marks the region's second ever country pavilion to win the Golden Lion, following the Kingdom of Bahrain which was awarded the Golden Lion for the best national participation at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition in 2010.

The National Pavilion UAE is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the Ministry of Culture and Youth. The current exhibition, *Wetland*, is curated by Wael Al Awar, Principal Architect and founding partner of waiwai, an award-winning multidisciplinary architecture, landscape, graphic and urban design studio, and architect Kenichi Teramoto who was a founding partner of waiwai and recently founded the Office of Teramoto in Japan.

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#### For Press Inquiries:

Brunswick Arts

[NP UAE@brunswickgroup.com](mailto:NP UAE@brunswickgroup.com)

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#### 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



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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. Meanwhile in 2021, architects and curators Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto have been presenting research into an innovative sustainable cement alternative inspired from salt minerals found in the UAE's Sabkha heritage sites. In the coming year, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibition will showcase works by ground-breaking painter, sculptor and land artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim at the 2022 edition of la Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale).

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**

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.



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