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National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



National Pavilion UAE announces publication of the first comprehensive monograph for leading experimental Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works 1986-2022

- This publication accompanies the National Pavilion UAE's upcoming exhibition at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2022 (Venice Biennale).
- The monograph is the first comprehensive book on the artist's body of work, featuring commissioned essays and interviews from experts in the field, as well as from his art community.

28 February 2022, United Arab Emirates: The National Pavilion UAE announced today the details on its upcoming publication accompanying its exhibition, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*, at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia 2022 (23 April - 27 November 2022).

Titled *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works 1986-2022*, the monograph will be the first comprehensive publication on the Emirati artist, covering his biomorphic abstraction paintings of the 1980s, his Land Art experiments and immersive installations of the 1990s, and the evolution of his papier-mâché sculptures over the last two decades. The monograph, co-edited by **Maya Allison**, curator of the National Pavilion UAE 2022 exhibition and Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, and **Cristiana de Marchi**, artist, curator, and poet, will be published by [Kaph Books](#). The publication will launch with the Pavilion's exhibition in April.

Retracing Ibrahim's body of work to date, the publication contextualizes the artist within the UAE's contemporary art scene and his contribution to its development over the last four decades. Through a series of essays and interviews by prominent figures in the art world and in his own art community, the texts bring to life Ibrahim's journey, personality, and work process. The book tracks his early formation as an artist, framed against the historical backdrop of a country that came into being during his lifetime (the UAE was founded in 1971, a decade after his birth). Arising from the contributors' in-depth research, and personal interactions with the artist, the authors trace his rise as one of the leading experimental artists of the UAE, and situate his work today in its local and global context.

Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia, said, "One of main missions at the National Pavilion UAE is telling and sharing the UAE's untold stories on a global platform that is the Venice Biennale. Over the years, we have carefully crafted our publications to document and make available new academic material about the UAE's cultural scene – ensuring our contributors' efforts sustain a greater impact beyond the exhibition itself. Our annual publications are an important aspect of the UAE Pavilion's legacy, as we proactively invest in contributing new researched materials to the local arts and architecture discourse. This year's publication features Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, a member of the UAE's first generation of contemporary artists, which includes Hassan Sharif, Abdullah Al Saadi, Hussain Sharif, and Mohammed Kazem, as well as uncovers interesting information about the UAE's art movement since the late 1980s."

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

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The upcoming exhibition, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*, marks Ibrahim and Allison's fifth collaboration together, with the accompanying publication becoming the third book that Allison has worked on that studies Ibrahim's work. Similarly, de Marchi's record of collaboration with Ibrahim dates back to 2008, beginning with her tenure as curator of The Flying House (a foundation for the promotion of Emirati conceptual artists) and since that time, has included him in a number of exhibitions, as well as edited four catalogues that featured his work.

Maya Allison said, "In the U.S., during my college years studying the history of art, access to art histories from non-European, non-North American regions was exceedingly hard to come by (when not routinely dismissed by those who didn't know better). It has been a great gift to work directly with Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, to hear his history in his own voice, and to—I hope—be part of laying a groundwork to eventually fill the gap on the art history bookshelves, making visible and accessible the unique and complex history of contemporary art in the UAE, through the study of Mohamed's life and work. I'm particularly energized and humbled to read the many kinds of voices in this book, from across generations, from scholars to peers to his fellow travelers, whether poets, curators, or artists."

Cristiana de Marchi said, "I've had the great privilege to meet Mohamed and to work closely with him during a long period of evolution in his work. This has led not only to a structured knowledge of his practice but also to developing a deep admiration of his human qualities and a long-lasting friendship. As editors of this publication, Maya and I hope to contribute to creating awareness about his practice, in an academic yet lively documentation, and contextually to shed further light on moments and circumstances that have shaped the UAE's cultural life and art scene."

The publication starts with an introduction by **Salwa Mikdadi**, Professor and Director of the Arab Center for the Study of Art at NYU Abu Dhabi. The first section of the book, "Sunrise," takes a scholarly and curatorial approach to documenting Ibrahim's practice and journey. It begins with a comprehensive essay by **Maya Allison**, examining the characteristics of Ibrahim's practice over the decades. **Nada Shabout**, scholar of Arab modern and contemporary art history, contributes an essay that situates Ibrahim's work and his community in the larger history of the Arab region, while **Venetia Porter**, Curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East art at the British Museum, presents a study of Ibrahim's works with paper.

The second part, "Sunset," includes essays and personal reflections on the artist over time, penned by Ibrahim's friends and close colleagues. It begins with a recollection by **Fumio Nanjo**, Senior Advisor of Mori Art Museum in Tokyo and Representative Director of N&A Inc, who traces a portrait of the nascent UAE contemporary art scene and the progressive institutionalization of the art system through informal meetings and gatherings with leading figures of the movement such as Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim and Hassan Sharif. **Adel Khozam**, an influential member of Ibrahim's artistic community, himself a poet, composer, and journalist, reflects on Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim's practice and biography within the UAE cultural scene as it developed over the decades. **Munira Al Sayegh**, founder of the Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, recalls her discovery of Ibrahim's art and world during her work on his 2015 A.i.R. Residency. **Vivek Vilasini**, himself an artist who lived with this community during the 1990s, provides an "ecological" reading of Ibrahim's practice, highlighting his deep connection to the natural landscape of Khor Fakkan. In the final section, "Between Sunset and Sunrise," an in-depth interview gives the readers a rare portrait of the artist by **Cristiana de Marchi**.

The *Between Sunrise and Sunset* exhibition will present new works of human-sized, abstract and organic sculptural forms. The work draws from Ibrahim's deep connection to the local environment of his hometown, Khor Fakkan – a city harbouring the rocky Al Hajar mountains on the east coast of the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

This exhibition marks a move toward a more artist-led approach by the National Pavilion UAE, where it first appointed the artist, who then nominated their curator for the project.

Ibrahim is known for being one of the UAE's experimental artists and an influential member of the UAE's now-historic avant-garde art community, which formed in the early 1980s. Through his form-led practice and handcrafted works, he responds to his environment, with keen affinity for the natural landscapes of the UAE. His work has appeared in numerous solo and group exhibitions, internationally. Major institutions that have acquired his work include the British Museum, Centre George Pompidou, Sharjah Art Foundation, Art Jameel, and Barjeel Art Foundation.

For more information on the upcoming exhibition or any of the previous participations of the UAE at the La Biennale di Venezia, please visit nationalpavilionuae.org or follow the National Pavilion UAE on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#).

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Notes to Editors:

Maya Allison and Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim's collaborations over the years

In 2014 Allison included Ibrahim's *Stones Wrapped in Copper* (2007) in *On Site*, the inaugural exhibition of The NYUAD Art Gallery. In 2017 she featured Ibrahim in the book and exhibition, *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1986-2008*. The book told, for the first time, a definitive narrative of the UAE's experimental art scene from this period. In 2017 she commissioned Ibrahim to make an immersive room-installation for her exhibition *Gateway: Line* for the curated section of Abu Dhabi Art and presented his work alongside international artists such as David Claerbout, Saloua Rounda Choucair, Shilpa Gupta, and Tatsuo Miyajima. In 2018: Allison commissioned Ibrahim to make a 5-meter-high sculpture presented in the Cultural Foundation – Abu Dhabi, for which she wrote a book expanding her study of the UAE's local art history.

Cristiana de Marchi and Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim's collaborations over the years

In 2008 de Marchi joined The Flying House, where she played a curatorial role and met Ibrahim. Among the exhibitions that she curated, which included Ibrahim's work, *Vis Roboris* (AB Gallery, Luzern, Switzerland, 2010) was the first exhibition of the group in Switzerland, accompanied by a bilingual catalogue (English and German), also edited by de Marchi. In 2017 de Marchi presented Ibrahim's work in two exhibitions: *Homage without an homage* (Art Dubai), paying tribute to the late Hassan Sharif, while presenting works by some of his group, and *Is Old Gold?* (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, Dubai), reflecting on the generational gap between the "5 UAE" (Hassan Sharif, Hussain Sharif, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, Mohammed Kazem, Abdullah Al Saadi) and the younger generation of Emirati artists. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication in Arabic and English and a series of public talks organised by de Marchi involving prominent figures of the local cultural art scene, including Ibrahim and Allison.

About Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim (b. 1962, UAE) is part of the UAE's first generation of contemporary artists from the late 1980s, an avant-garde scene that includes Abdullah Al Saadi, Hussein Sharif, Mohammed Kazem, and the late Hassan Sharif.

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim came of age as an artist in the UAE in an era in which the visual arts were still nascent as a recognized discipline. In 1986, when he met the late artist Hassan Sharif (a founding member of the influential Emirates Fine Art Society), Ibrahim was pulled out of his secluded practice and went on to carve out unshakable friendships and collaborations that have formed the foundation for the creative community that defines the UAE today.

In March 2018 the Sharjah Art Foundation opened *Elements*, a survey of works spanning three decades of his practice, curated by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi. Ibrahim's recent solo exhibitions include *The Space between the Eyelid and the Eyeball* at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2019), and a series of solo shows at Cuadro Gallery, Dubai (2018, 2016, 2015, 2013).

Ibrahim's public works include: *Falling Stones Garden* (2020), Al Ula, Saudi Arabia, commissioned by the Royal Commission for Al Ula and Desert X; *Grocery* (2019), Madinat Zayed Market, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Ghadan 21, Government of Abu Dhabi as part of the For Abu Dhabi initiative; *Untitled* (2019), Reem Central Park, Al Reem Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Aldar Properties PJSC in partnership with Abu Dhabi Art; *Kids' Garden* (2019), Sheikh Khalifa Medical City, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Abu

Dhabi Health Services Company; and *Bait Al Hurma* (2018), Al Mureijah Square, Sharjah, commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation as part of the exhibition *Elements*.

Ibrahim's group exhibitions include participations in *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1988-2008* at The NYUAD Art Gallery (2017); *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Yay Gallery, Baku (2015); the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi (2016); the 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice (2009); the Sharjah Biennial (1993, 2003 and 2007); and the Dhaka Biennial (2002 and 1993). Institutional exhibitions include the Kunstmuseum, Bonn (2005); the Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah (2005 and 1996), the Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen (2002); Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1998); Sittard Art Centre, the Netherlands (1995), and the Exhibition for the Emirates Fine Art Society in the Soviet Union, Moscow (1990).

He received the first prize for sculpture at the Sharjah Biennial in 1999 and 2001 and has been a member of the Emirates Fine Arts Society since 1986, founding Art Atelier at the Khor Fakkan Art Centre in 1997. He has participated in artist residencies at Trans Indian Ocean Artist Exchange, Kochi Murzi Biennale, India (2016); A.i.R Dubai (2015); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2009) and Kunstcentrum Sittard, the Netherlands (1994-1996, 1998-2000).

His works have been acquired by significant international collections, including Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah; Art Jameel Collection, Dubai; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Kunstcentrum Sittard, Sittard; The British Museum, London; and Le Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Ibrahim is represented by UAE based contemporary art gallery Lawrie Shabibi. He lives and works in his hometown of Khor Fakkan, United Arab Emirates.

About Maya Allison

Maya Allison is founding Executive Director of The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery and Chief Curator at New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), a degree-granting research university in the liberal arts tradition. NYUAD shapes its scholarly and creative endeavors through an intercultural and multidisciplinary lens. The university has a deep commitment to support the work of UAE artists, and has launched an MFA program. Here, The NYUAD Art Gallery connects disciplines and integrates global and local dialogues in its exhibitions both in the main gallery, and the Project Space, as well as supporting emerging artists with the annual Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award.

Allison's curatorial specializations intersect two areas: artistic communities, and installation art. A recent project, *Speculative Landscapes* (NYUAD Art Gallery, 2019) gathered four rising UAE-based artists who work in immersive, experimental installation. Her curatorial projects that included book-length publications include *Slavs and Tatars: Mirrors for Princes* (Curator, JRP Ringier/NYUAD Art Gallery, 2015), *Diana Al-Hadid: Phantom Limb* (Curator, Skira / NYUAD Art Gallery, 2016), *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1988-2008* (Lead Curator, NYUAD Art Gallery, 2017), and *Zimoun* (Curator, NYUAD Art Gallery, 2019).

Outside the university, she has guest-curated a number of projects in the UAE, including *Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years* (Lead Curator, with book publication, Cultural Foundation Abu Dhabi, 2018), a 30-year survey of 18 UAE artists.

About Cristiana de Marchi

Cristiana de Marchi is an artist, curator and poet, based in Dubai and Beirut, who has a long record of work with and writing on the UAE art community. De Marchi has been the in-house curator at The Flying House (2008-2012), a collective of UAE pioneering visual artists, gathering around the leading figure Hassan Sharif. Her curatorial projects in the UAE include: *Rearranging the Riddle* (Maraya Art Centre, 2020), the first institutional solo show by Emirati artist Shaikha Al Mazrou, accompanied by the first monographic publication on Al Mazrou's artistic practice, also edited by de Marchi; *Beyond. Emerging Artists* (Abu Dhabi Art, 2017); *Homage without an homage* (Art Dubai, 2017); *Is Old Gold?* (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, Dubai, 2017); *A Public Privacy* (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, 2015), the inaugural iteration of "UAE Unlimited", an exhibition platform under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, to promote emerging Emirati and GCC based artists. *MinD/Body* (Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, Dubai and NYU Abu Dhabi, 2013), a historical show focusing on performance and the use of body in the Gulf Countries. Both these shows were accompanied by book-length publications edited by de Marchi. *Press Conference* (1x1 Contemporary, Dubai, 2009), the first mid-career solo exhibition dedicated to the late Hassan Sharif; and *Re-Source* (Elementa Gallery, Dubai, 2009), an exhibition entirely focusing on young, emerging Emirati artists.

De Marchi's writing regularly focuses on Emirati artists and art scene, often offering a critical and yet poetical view into their practice. In 2016, Sharjah Art Foundation published *Embodying*, de Marchi's collection of poems in response to Hassan Sharif's 1980s performances.

National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia is an award-winning pavilion which 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 2021, National Pavilion UAE's exhibition titled *Wetland* was curated by architects Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, who presented research into an innovative sustainable cement alternative inspired from salt minerals found in the UAE's Sabkha heritage sites, was awarded the Golden Lion for best National Participation at La Biennale Architettura 2021, marking the National Pavilion's 10th participation in the Venice Biennale. 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).

Passage, the National Pavilion UAE's well-received exhibition at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, created by Nujoom Alghanem and curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, returned to the UAE in 2021 at Abu Dhabi Art. The exhibition will also be presented as part of Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Festival exhibition *Portrait of a Nation II*, from January 2022 - April 2022. The return of *Passage* to the UAE was made possible by our partners Abu Dhabi Art and Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Festival.

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.

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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.

La Biennale di Venezia

La Biennale di Venezia was established in 1895 and is today acknowledged as one of the most prestigious cultural institutions. La Biennale di Venezia stands at the forefront of research and promotion of new contemporary art trends, and organizes events in all its specific sectors: Arts (1895), Architecture (1980), Cinema (1932), Dance (1999), Music (1930), and Theatre (1934), alongside research and training activities.

The history of La Biennale di Venezia is documented in its Historical Archives located at Marghera Venice and in its Library at the Giardini's Central Pavilion. The International Art and Architecture Exhibitions have had a new structure since 1998. In recent years, La Biennale promoted new Educational activities, training programmes (Biennale College), conferences and panels in its headquarters at Ca' Giustinian, close to San Marco square.