

الجناح الوطني لدولة الإمارات  
بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia



## National Pavilion UAE unveils major new installation by Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, bringing his multi-decade practice to a global audience at La Biennale di Venezia

- *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* exhibition presents a new work of a room-filling sculpture made up from 128 papier-mâché parts
- Alongside the exhibition, a major survey book publication, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works 1986-2022*, launched during the inauguration
- The exhibition is on view at the National Pavilion UAE's permanent space at the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi in Venice, until 27 November 2022
- Virtual tour of the exhibition is available on the [National Pavilion UAE website](#)
- The book is available for purchase at the Biennale bookstores in the Arsenale and Giardini and online at [Kaph Books](#)

**20 April 2022, United Arab Emirates:** The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today unveiled its exhibition at the Biennale Arte 2022, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*, inaugurated by Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, the UAE's Minister of Culture and Youth.

Curated by Maya Allison, Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, the exhibition presents a major new work by Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim - a room-filling sculptural form made up of 128 abstract and organic elements.

**Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Youth**, said, "The Ministry of Culture and Youth has always considered the UAE's participation in Venice as a point of pride for the nation and a vital element of our cultural narrative. *Between Sunrise and Sunset* weighs in on the cross-cultural exchange. Furthermore, it celebrates our identity in a creative fashion. This exemplifies our approach as regional cultural leaders, while also accelerating grassroots institutions' roles as a bridge from the UAE to the world."

The new work resonates with La Biennale's theme *The Milk of Dreams*, which focuses on the connection between bodies, the earth, and metamorphosis. Ibrahim's sculpture clusters human-sized, tree-like forms to fill the exhibit space. The commissioned artwork is derived from the artist's deep connection to the physical environment of his hometown of Khor Fakkan – a city at the edge of the rocky Al Hajar mountains where they meet the waters on the east coast of the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE. The title, *Between Sunrise and Sunset*, refers to his experience of the light there, where the mountains cast the town in afternoon shadow, obscuring the sunset on the west coast of the UAE. The color of the sculpture shifts from bright playful colors and forms to subdued black and white elements, and suggests undulating movement of bodies, mutation, and metamorphosis. The artist created the work from raw papier-mâché and natural materials including dirt, leaves, tea, coffee, and tobacco.

**Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, artist**, said, "I have always felt that Khor Fakkan, its mountains, the urban and rural environment, have a soul. I feel that my soul is attached to this unique city, and it inspires me to translate my immediate surroundings into art. When I go out into nature, the way I see things changes me and I need to express that somewhere. I also like to understand people's interpretations of my work, so I like to leave my work open-ended. My appointment to represent the UAE in Venice is a great honor and comes with great responsibility. Over the years and now more than ever, Maya has played a special role in delving deeper into my practice. This is certainly a fruitful way to mark our fifth exhibition together for the National Pavilion UAE at the Biennale Arte 2022."



The show presents Ibrahim's contemporary practice, drawn from his intimate relationship with the UAE's landscape. The exhibition's accompanying book is a retrospective of Ibrahim's life and work to date, and situates the artist in a global art-historical frame. The National Pavilion UAE launched this book during the inauguration, marking the first comprehensive monograph on the artist. Titled, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works 1986-2022*, it is co-edited by Maya Allison, and Cristiana de Marchi, artist, curator, and poet. With extensive essays from scholars, curators, and fellow artists, this book surveys Ibrahim's biomorphic abstraction paintings of the 1980s, his Land Art experiments and immersive installations of the 1990s, and the evolution of his sculptures to date, and includes a comprehensive biographical timeline. It is published by [Kaph Books](#).

**Maya Allison, curator of the exhibition and Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery**, said, "Ibrahim has spent the better part of four decades developing an intensely experimental and prolific art practice—ever more on the rise—as part of a community of artists who share his unflinching commitment to, and joy from, their work. Through my work with Ibrahim and the artists in his community, I have come to study the art history of the UAE, a process that has transformed how I think about my own curatorial practice. It is a privilege to have earned the trust and opportunity to be part of Ibrahim's work process, and of course to have the incredible experience of developing and presenting *Between Sunrise and Sunset* in Venice with the National Pavilion UAE."

**Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia**, said, "National Pavilion UAE's driving purpose is to tell the nation's untold stories. This year, we are excited to reveal this new commission, which builds on Ibrahim's multidecade practice, and records several decades of the UAE's under-documented art history through Ibrahim's first-ever monograph. *Between Sunrise and Sunset* underpins our efforts to provide a consistent international cultural platform to engage and present the UAE's talent, perspectives, and heritage with the world."

**Angela Migally, Executive Director, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, commissioner of the National Pavilion UAE**, said, "The National Pavilion UAE - La Biennale di Venezia reflects the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation's long-standing commitment to investing in people and the UAE's art ecosystem. Since its inaugural participation in 2009, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibitions and publications have added new research materials and thought-provoking programming aimed to foster knowledge about the nation's cultural scene with the world. The Venice Biennale is one of the world's strongest meeting points for cultural dialogue and exchange, and an important occasion to spotlight extraordinary artists like Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim."

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth; Her Highness Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation; His Excellency Omar Obaid Al Shamsi, UAE Ambassador to Italy; His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, Chairman of UAE Unlimited and Patron of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and of the British Museum in London; His Excellency Saeed Kherbash, Chief Executive Officer of Arts & Literature Sector at Dubai Culture Authority; and Mariët Westermann, Chancellor, New York University Abu Dhabi.

*Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* marks Ibrahim and Allison's fifth collaboration together, and the retrospective book publication is the third book that Allison has worked on that studies Ibrahim's work. Additionally, this is a second-time collaboration between National Pavilion UAE and New York University Abu Dhabi that reflects their ongoing commitment to supporting artists, curators, and scholars, and sustaining deep studies of the UAE's art history to expand the study and knowledge of art across the globe.

*Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* is now open to the public at the Biennale Arte 2022 until Sunday 27 November 2022. A virtual tour of the exhibition is also available on the National Pavilion UAE website, <https://nationalpavilionuae.org/art/2022-2/>. The book is also available for purchase at the Biennale bookstores in the Arsenale and Giardini and online at [Kaph Books](#).

This exhibition marks the National Pavilion UAE's seventh participation at the Biennale Arte. The National Pavilion UAE is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the Ministry of Culture and Youth, with a permanent pavilion at the Venice Biennale's Arsenale – Sale d'Armi. For more information on the participation of the UAE at La Biennale di Venezia, please visit [nationalpavilionuae.org](http://nationalpavilionuae.org) or follow the National Pavilion UAE on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#).

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#### **Notes to Editors:**

For all press releases and images, please visit the digital press kit [here](#). Media downloads are also available on National Pavilion UAE's [website](#).

#### **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 that curates the untold stories about the UAE's arts and architecture through its participation in the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions organized by La Biennale di Venezia and provides a high-profile platform for curatorial concepts that address critical international conversations from a distinctive local perspective.

For every participation in La Biennale di Venezia, 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, National Pavilion UAE's 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* curated by architects Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, was awarded the Golden Lion for best National Participation at La Biennale Architettura 2021, coinciding with the National Pavilion's 10th participation in the International Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia.

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 successfully working in cultural fields.

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.

**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.