

الجنال الوطنى لءولة الإمارات  
ببنالى البندقىة

National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia



Press release

## National Pavilion UAE's *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* exhibition comes to a close with record number of visitors at La Biennale di Venezia

- 277,203 visitors visited the National Pavilion UAE's 2022 art exhibition out of over 800,000 visitors at La Biennale di Venezia
- *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* exhibition is the most visited exhibition by NPUAE to date
- Publication is available for sale and exhibition can be viewed online via the National Pavilion UAE's website

**5 December 2022, United Arab Emirates:** The National Pavilion UAE closes its seventh participation at the Biennale Arte, with a record number of visitors to its exhibition, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*. Inaugurated in April 2022 by Her Excellency Noura Al Kaabi, the UAE's Minister of Culture and Youth, the exhibition saw 277,203 visitors, making it the most visited show produced by the National Pavilion UAE at La Biennale di Venezia to date.

**Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia said:** "The National Pavilion UAE's exhibition this year was received positively by local and international audiences. This is evident from the record number of visitors the Pavilion saw and the conversations around the exhibition narrative itself. *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* resonated with audience emotionally, and it reflects our commitment to telling the untold stories of the UAE through the lens of art and architecture. We look forward to next year's exhibition at Biennale Architettura 2023, which will be curated by Faysal Tabbarah, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Architecture at the American University of Sharjah. Tabbarah and his team aim to explore the relationship between architecture and arid landscapes in the UAE and reimagine them as spaces of abundance and productivity."

Curated by Maya Allison, Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, the exhibition presented a major new work by Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim – a single work in which dozens of human-sized, biomorphic sculptures cluster in undulating color and movement—suggesting bodies or trees, metamorphosis, and mutation.

**Maya Allison commented :** "Today in the UAE, anyone with a sense of curiosity can look at art. This thriving creative scene is possible in part due to the work that Mohamed and his artistic community have done over the decades. What he has brought to Venice for the UAE Pavilion shows his complete commitment to exploration, curiosity, and our interconnectedness through art -- the very characteristics that I love about the UAE's art scene."

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 exhibition responded to the theme of the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia titled, *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Cecilia Alemani, which focuses on the connection between bodies, the earth, and metamorphosis. The International Art

Exhibition presented 58 National participations with 5 from the region, namely, the Sultanate of Oman in their inaugural participation, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria.

**Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim said:** "Representing my country in the Venice Biennale, one of the most international and prestigious platforms for the arts, was a great honour for me. It was a huge responsibility to have my work act as a conduit through which the world could see the diversity and dynamism of the Emirati arts scene. I chose to highlight my authenticity in my artwork to encourage the next generation of artists in the UAE to embrace their originality and never lose their individuality as they go on to become the future of arts in the Emirates."

The exhibition's accompanying publication, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works 1986-2022*, covers the years of in-depth research and personal interactions with the artist from regional and international cultural vanguards that have helped trace his rise as one of the leading experimental artists of the UAE.

The publication is co-edited by Maya Allison, and Cristiana de Marchi, artist, curator, and poet. With extensive essays from scholars, curators, and fellow artists. Published by [Kaph Books](#) it is available for purchase through [Amazon](#) and is retailing for €35 or AED 130.

The 2022 National Pavilion UAE saw the participation of 22 interns, who were overseeing the daily operations of the pavilion throughout the Biennale. The Venice Internship program offers hands-on experience, where interns spend one month in Venice staffing the UAE's art and architecture exhibitions at La Biennale di Venezia and overseeing the daily operations of the exhibition. The program is open to Emiratis and long-term residents of the UAE aged 21 and above, with an interest or background in arts, architecture, diplomacy, international relations or representing the UAE on a significant global platform. The interns are selected through an open call.

*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. For those who would like to see the exhibition, a virtual tour remains available on the National Pavilion UAE website, [nationalpavilionuae.org](http://nationalpavilionuae.org).

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* (1×1 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.