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National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



Press release

National Pavilion UAE explores the potential of arid environments at upcoming 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, with its exhibition 'Aridly Abundant'

- Curator Faysal Tabbarah will consider how arid environments can be spaces of abundance by exploring architectural possibilities within arid landscapes in the UAE, working at the intersection of land-based practices in architecture and contemporary technology
- The accompanying publication to the exhibition, co-edited by Faysal Tabbarah and Meitha Almazrooei, advocates a change of the way we look at aridity

13 February 2023, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: For its participation at the upcoming Biennale Architettura 2023, the National Pavilion UAE will exhibit a body of research titled *Aridly Abundant*, curated by Faysal Tabbarah, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Architecture at the College of Architecture, Art and Design at American University of Sharjah.

The exhibition will consider how arid environments can be spaces of abundance by exploring architectural possibilities within arid landscapes in the UAE's desert plateau, wadis, and coastal plains within Al Hajar Mountain range and its environment. The exhibition will focus on integrating land-based practices in architecture with contemporary technology and explore how these practices could be shared with other countries facing similar impacts of climate change.

Aridly Abundant will transform the pavilion's space at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia into an environment that exhibits the spatial, material, and tactical qualities of arid environments, creating a backdrop for architectural provocations suited for future global arid contexts; thus, responding to the Biennale Architettura 2023's theme, *The Laboratory of the Future*, curated by Ghanaian-Scottish architect, academic, educator and best-selling novelist, Lesley Lokko.

Faysal Tabbarah, curator of the National Pavilion UAE's 2023 exhibition said: "The overarching question I'm exploring through *Aridly Abundant* is: *What architectural possibilities can emerge when we reimagine arid landscapes as spaces of abundance?* The National Pavilion

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UAE's exhibition at Biennale Architettura 2023 delves into themes, lessons and questions based on learnings from within the UAE's arid landscapes that other places around the world facing the threat of aridity and desertification can find of use, including countries across Africa, Asia, and southern Europe such as Italy, Spain, and Greece."

Focusing on the relationship between architecture and arid landscapes, the exhibition challenges the perception of arid environments as spaces of scarcity by uncovering ongoing arid land-based practices that rethink mainstream material practices, while foregrounding aridity within architectural production and discourse provokes a future built *in, with* and *for* aridity.

The three main areas that are being explored in the research, are:

1. ***Building in Aridity – Uncovering arid lands-based practices***: Exploring how the intersection between contemporary technologies and land-based practices can provoke resilient context-specific built environments that adapt and react to the challenges imposed by surrounding conditions of aridity.
2. ***Building with Aridity – Rethinking extractive material practices***: Exploring materials within arid landscapes that can be used to construct environmentally sustainable and culturally rooted built environments.
3. ***Building for Aridity – Recognizing aridity as a future global condition***: Exploring resources, conditions and knowledge embedded within arid landscapes that can provide critical lessons for regions confronting aridity as a new condition as a result of the climate crisis.

Angela Migally, Executive Director of the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation said: "Through the National Pavilion UAE's participation in the Biennale Architettura, we're particularly excited to see a global exchange that can help us share our knowledge, and collectively co-create sustainable solutions for the future. We look forward to its presentation within the wider architectural discourse discussions presented at La Biennale di Venezia."

Accompanying the exhibition, this year's publication is conceived as a travelogue, will advocate a change in the way we look at aridity by exploring it as a concept; a dynamic condition which can be a state of mind, a practice, or a shared identity. The publication will be taking the seemingly arid landscapes of the UAE as a case study that allows us to declare aridity as a shared and common cultural space through diverse pieces – fiction and poetry, scientific essays, travel stories and photography. The book is co-edited by Faysal Tabbarah and Meitha Almazrooei. Almazrooei is a Ph.D. student in History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, graduate of Columbia University and founder of WTD Magazine.

Laila Binbrek, Director of the National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia said: "Arid landscapes are a growing global phenomenon and will challenge us to adapt our future ways of life. Tabbarah's research will shine a light on the UAE's ancient and modern practices in dealing with conditions which are inherent to our culture. By asking the right questions, Tabbarah encourages necessary dialogue to deepen our understanding of this topic, which other nations who might have to deal with this condition in the future, can use and build upon."

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Aridly Abundant exhibition is scheduled to be presented at the 18th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia from 20 May to 26 November 2023 (pre-opening May 18 and 19) in Venice, Italy.

The National Pavilion UAE is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth, with a permanent pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia's Arsenale – Sale d'Armi.

2023 marks the UAE's twelfth exhibition at the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions organized by La Biennale di Venezia since 2009, and its fifth participation in the International Architecture Exhibition.

-Ends-

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

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Notes for press

NPUAE exhibition inauguration:

- Date: Friday 19 May 2023
- Time: 11:30 am
- Location: NPUAE in Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice

About Faysal Tabbarah

Born in Aleppo, Faysal Tabbarah is an Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Architecture at the College of Architecture, Art and Design at American University of Sharjah (AUS), and co-founder of the experimental architecture and design studio Architecture + Other Things (A+OT), which is based in Sharjah. Tabbarah is also the curator of the National Pavilion UAE for the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2023.

Tabbarah's work, across teaching, research, and practice, explores the relationships between regional environmental and architectural imaginaries, or how people bring their natural surroundings to bear on how they understand and shape their world, to develop alternative building practices that are rooted in their surrounding material and cultural environments. To

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achieve this, Tabbarah's work moves between computational tools, emergent technologies, materials research and historical archives.

Tabbarah has published and exhibited globally. In 2020, Tabbarah's course at AUS, Architecture and Environmental Orientalism in the Arab World, received an Honorable Mention for the Course Development Prize organized by Columbia University's Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

A+OT's recently completed projects include Water in the Green, the winning entry for Sabeel Water Fountains competition at Expo 2020. He has previously held the position of Assistant Professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture in Denmark.

About Meitha Almazrooei

Meitha Almazrooei is a current Ph.D. student in History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She received her M.S. in Critical, Curatorial & Conceptual Practices in Architecture from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation. Her curatorial and editorial work encompassed; public programming for Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, publications for The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates in Venice, and establishing WTD Magazine, an architecture and design publication in 2012 as a platform to collect urban narratives from the Arabian Gulf, Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa.

National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE is an award-winning pavilion that curates' 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 the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of 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 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 the Biennale Architettura 2021, coinciding with the National Pavilion's 10th participation in the International Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia.

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For 2023, curator of the National Pavilion UAE's participation in the 18th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, Faysal Tabbarah, is exploring the relationship between architecture and arid, or dry, landscapes in the UAE and reimagining them as spaces of abundance and productivity.

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),

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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.

About American University of Sharjah

American University of Sharjah (AUS) was founded in 1997 by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed AlQasimi, Member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Sharjah. Sheikh Sultan articulated his vision of a distinctive institution against the backdrop of Islamic history and in the context of the aspirations and needs of contemporary society in the UAE and the Gulf region.

Firmly grounded in principles of meritocracy and with a strong reputation for academic excellence, AUS has come to represent the very best in teaching and research, accredited internationally and recognized by employers the world over for creating graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills and drive to lead in the 21st century.

AUS values learners not driven only by academic success, but by those that embrace our dynamic campus life and embody our ideals of openness, tolerance and respect. This combination of academic excellence and community spirit ensures AUS is filled with world-class faculty and students, poised to become the innovators, thinkers, contributors and leaders of tomorrow.

About American University of Sharjah' Silver Jubilee

Celebrating 25 years of excellence, AUS is ranked among the top 10 universities in the Arab world, acclaimed for its academic excellence, multicultural environment and outstanding facilities.

Since 1997, AUS has been nurturing and equipping students to become award-winning architects, designers, scientists, journalists, engineers, innovators, researchers, successful entrepreneurs—and even leaders of the UAE's space program.

AUS offers 28 undergraduate majors and 45 minors, 15 master's degrees and four PhD programs in the areas of architecture, design, humanities, science, engineering and business. Formed on the American liberal arts model, all classes are conducted in English.

Students apply their learning through internships, research, conferences, competitions and professional collaborations.

AUS graduates consistently secure roles with leading regional and international employers, and many pursue graduate studies at the world's top institutions.

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