

الجناح الوطني لدولة  
الإمارات العربية المتحدة  
بيئالي البندقيّة

National Pavilion  
United Arab Emirates  
La Biennale di Venezia



la Biennale di Venezia

56. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

## NATIONAL PAVILION UNITED ARAB EMIRATES LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA ANNOUNCES AMBITIOUS EXHIBITION WITH OVER 100 WORKS

*Over 100 diverse works by 15 Emirati artists will create dialogues across artist practices and explore the emergence of contemporary art in the UAE over the past four decades.*



Left Image: Obaid Suroor, *Ihmal Al Turath (Negligence of Heritage)*, 1994, Courtesy Sharjah Art Museum  
Right Image: Najat Meky, *Portrait*, 1984, Courtesy Sharjah Art Foundation



**20 April 2015 – Abu Dhabi, UAE.** *1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates* was conceived as a retrospective on contemporary art exhibitions in the Emirates over the last 40 years. Through an unprecedented and dense grouping of over 100 works structured to create dialogues between artists and across practices, curator Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation, will show the diversity and the history of the art scene in the UAE. Presented by the National Pavilion United Arab Emirates la Biennale di Venezia at the 56<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, the exhibition features work by fifteen Emirati artists: Ahmed Al Ansari, Moosa Al Halyan, Mohammed Al Qassab, Abdul Qader Al Rais, Abdullah Al Saadi, Mohammed Abdullah Bulhiah, Salem Jawhar, Mohammed Kazem, Dr. Najat Meky, Abdulraheem Salim, Ahmed Sharif, Hassan Sharif, Obaid Suroor, Dr. Mohamed Yousif, and Abdulrahman Zainal.

“Reflecting our generation’s collective obsession with memory, many recent exhibitions have been conceived to look at the past in order to reflect on the present. For these archival exhibitions, curators travel the world to discover overlooked artists and art scenes, institutions invest in research, gathering material, and publishing texts. But how do we connect all the information?,” said Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi. “This exhibition - and its accompanying publication - invites viewers to make connections directly between objects, historical archives,



and the collective memory they represent. The resulting discourse is both personal and collective, and marks the beginning of a much more detailed and intensive research project.”

Inspired by historic exhibitions in the UAE throughout the 1980s, Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi will structure the exhibition to follow the aesthetic experience and encourage connections between works. In addition to thematic groupings, some works will be arranged by artist to highlight elements of an individual’s practice, while others will be paired to create complimenting and contrasting dialogues between works. Rather than following a didactic chronology, the exhibition will create the sense of wandering through dense collections in conversation with one another. The works, many on loan from institutions and private collections as well as from the artists themselves, will demonstrate a juxtaposition of conceptual and formal approaches, time periods, and media. The selection of pieces will focus on sharing fundamental stages of the artists' careers as well as that of the UAE art scene collectively: Najat Meky and Abdurraheem Salim have primarily worked on paper or canvas since 1990s, however their earlier practice focused on sculpture and reliefs; Mohamed Yousif has in recent years been working with found objects and elements from his natural surroundings, while his older work included traditional wooden sculptures; and while Abdul Qader Al Rais is best known today for his landscapes and abstract paintings, he will exhibit a series of figurative paintings, some dating back to 1968. Works by Hassan Sharif from 1985 incorporating zinc and boiled linseed oil on canvas will be paired with *Notebooks*, a series he has been working on since the early 1980s.

Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi’s research relied heavily on the public archives of the Emirates Fine Art Society (EFAS): a trove of English and Arabic books on visual art, theatre, and literature, as well as catalogs, photo albums and copies of *Al Tashkeel*, EFAS’s newsletter, which has been published since the 1980s. The Emirates Fine Arts Society is a non-profit association that was formed in 1980 in Sharjah, and has long served as a galvanizing incubator for the UAE’s art scene.

“For our fourth exhibition at the International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia we are delighted to be working with curator Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi,” noted Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan, Founder of the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, the commissioner of the National Pavilion UAE. “Thanks to her vision and leadership we are able to share essential works from this key period in the UAE’s art scene and also to build links for future generations. I applaud her contributions to the development and advancement of the larger discourse on art from the region.”

Featuring over 100 works, the exhibition design creatively represents the subject and theme of the exhibition. In order to maximize the National Pavilion’s 250 square-meter space and protect the historic walls of the Arsenale – Sale d’Armi, a custom designed grid of mobile vertical elements and an elevated floor will be installed. The concept will combine free-standing modular showcases, a specialised hanging system, and sunken alcoves to allow for a tailored presentation of heterogeneous artworks.

Full biographies of each of the participating artists are available [here](#).

The 56th Venice Biennale runs from 9 May–22 November 2015, with a preview from 5 May–8 May. The official opening of the National Pavilion UAE - la Biennale di Venezia is on 7 May at 16:30.

### **The Curator**

Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi is President and Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation. She is a practicing artist who received her BFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London (2002), a Diploma in Painting from the Royal





Academy of Arts (2005) and an MA in Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Art, London (2008). In 2003 she was appointed curator of Sharjah Biennial 6 and has continued as the Biennial's Director since that time. She is Chair of the Advisory Board for the College of Art and Design, University of Sharjah; and Member of the Advisory Board of both the Khoj International Artists' Association, India and the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing. She serves on the Board of Directors for MoMA PS1, New York; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; the International Biennial Association, Gwangju; and Ashkal Alwan, Beirut. Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi is the first Emirati to be appointed as the curator for the National Pavilion UAE la Biennale di Venezia.

### **National Pavilion UAE at la Biennale di Venezia**

The National Pavilion UAE was established to endorse the UAE's contemporary art practices on an international platform and provide a foundation to support the nation's diverse and developing cultural scene. The UAE's participation at la Biennale di Venezia commenced in 2009 with a national pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition, and has continued in subsequent editions of the art exhibition since. 2014 marked the UAE's first participation at the International Architecture Exhibition.

The National Pavilion UAE la Biennale di Venezia is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development.

For more information visit [www.nationalpavilionuae.org](http://www.nationalpavilionuae.org)

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

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#### **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

##### **1. National Pavilion United Arab Emirates at la Biennale di Venezia**

Initiated in 2008, the National Pavilion United Arab Emirates at la Biennale Di Venezia manages the UAE's participation in various offerings of la Biennale di Venezia. The UAE has been participating at every edition of the International Art Exhibition since 2009, and debuted participation at the International Architecture Exhibition in 2014.

The office also organizes the Venice Internship, offering a range of opportunities to young Emiratis keen to engage with culture and arts at the highest international level through a 1 month internship on-site in Venice acting as custodians of the National Pavilion. These interns manage the exhibition and participate in a rigorous educational program.

##### **2. Commissioner: The Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation**

The Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation's mission is "to invest in the future of the United Arab Emirates by investing in its people." To that end, it develops and supports strategic initiatives in the areas of education; arts, culture, heritage; and health. The Foundation is the family foundation of Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan and was founded by Her Highness in 2010.

##### **3. UAE Ministry of Culture, Youth & Community Development**



The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development was launched in 2006 to highlight the UAE's fast-growing community and thriving youths while not losing sight of its heritage and cultural scene. The Ministry aims to revive the UAE's heritage by inspiring and encouraging the creative talents abundant among the youths of today.

It is responsible for promoting and investing in the energies of young people, inspiring them and adding to their artistic abilities. In doing so, the Ministry has raised much awareness towards the community's cultural practices and in turn, has promoted innovation and enrichment of cultural communication. It is constantly working at creating an integral framework for providing detailed information regarding the country's culture, youth and community development. In addition, the Ministry also organizes ongoing activities and develops mechanisms to secure the necessary support required to achieve its goals.

#### 4. La Biennale di Venezia

Universally recognized as one of the world's most prestigious contemporary art foundations, la Biennale di Venezia dates back to 1895 when the first art exhibition was organized. It is the oldest non-commercial art exhibition devoted to contemporary art in the world. It will present its 56th iteration in 2015. In addition to the International Art Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia hosts the International Architecture Exhibition, Film Festival, Music, Theater and Dance Festivals.

