

الجناح الوطني لدولة الإمارات  
بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia



La Biennale di Venezia

18. Mostra  
Internazionale  
di Architettura

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Press release

## His Excellency Sheikh Salem Al Qassimi inaugurates *Aridly Abundant*, National Pavilion UAE's fifth exhibition at the Biennale Architettura 2023

- *The exhibition will be a backdrop for architectural provocations in response to climate change, displaying spatial, material, and tactical qualities of aridly abundant environments harnessed from integrating land-based architectural practices in the UAE with contemporary technology.*
- *Aridly Abundant is curated by Faysal Tabbarah, supported by a curatorial research team comprised of American University of Sharjah alumni, and photography by Reem Falaknaz, also an alumnus.*
- *The exhibition's accompanying publication, In Plain Sight: Scenes from Aridly Abundant Landscapes is conceived as a travelogue that challenges preconceptions around aridity; the publication is co-edited by Faysal Tabbarah and Meitha Almazrooei, another American University of Sharjah alumnus.*
- *The exhibition will be on view at the National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia until November 26, 2023.*
- *Virtual tour of the exhibition is available.*

**19 May 2023, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:** His Excellency Sheikh Salem Al Qassimi, the UAE's Minister of Culture and Youth, inaugurated *Aridly Abundant*, celebrating the National Pavilion UAE's fifth participation at the 18<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. The exhibition will be on view until 26 November 2023 at the National Pavilion UAE's permanent pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia's Arsenale – Sale d'Armi.

Curated by Faysal Tabbarah, *Aridly Abundant* investigates what architectural possibilities can become possible when we reimagine arid landscapes as spaces of abundance. This is explored through the integration of land-based knowledge and contemporary technology within the arid landscapes of the UAE, with a specific focus on the desert plateau, wadis, and coastal plains in and around Al Hajar Mountains.

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**H.E. Sheikh Salem Al Qassimi, Minister of Culture and Youth**, said: "Our participation in this prestigious global platform is a reflection of our country's cultural and social status and its rich artistic heritage. The works of UAE's homegrown talent exhibited at the National Pavilion have contributed to the growth of the National Pavilion in the biennales over the past 12 years. The UAE's talent has been adding much value to the Pavilion in recent years."

H.E. added "It gives us pride that the National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates has evolved to be regarded as a significant creative platform which has gained global recognition. We are delighted by the achievements of the National Pavilion, which reflect the creative scene in our country and demonstrate how art from the UAE is being noticed and appreciated by artists and culture bearers from around the world, acting as a bridge from the UAE to other cultures worldwide."

The inauguration was attended by His Excellency Sheikh Salem Al Qassimi, UAE Minister of Culture and Youth; His Excellency Sheikh Khalifa Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, President of Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities; Her Excellency Sheikha Bibi AlSabah; Chairperson of Kuwait Sadu Society; Her Excellency Shatha Al Mulla, Assistant Undersecretary for the Arts and Heritage Sector, Ministry of Culture and Youth; His Excellency Saeed Kharbash, Chief Executive Officer of Arts & Literature Sector at Dubai Culture Authority; Dr. Mohammad Aljassar, Acting Secretary-General of Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts, & Literature (NCCAL); Nasser Al Khaja, Head of Media and Public Diplomacy Section, at the UAE Embassy in Italy; and Dr. Varrki Pallathucheril, Dean, College of Architecture, Art and Design, American University of Sharjah.

**Faysal Tabbarah, curator of the National Pavilion UAE's 2023 exhibition**, said: "Through *Aridly Abundant*, our aim is to change perspectives of arid landscapes as devoid of value, and reimagine them as an abundant source of knowledge and resources, by investigating an alternative and contemporary building system rooted in the UAE's cultural and material environment. Our research integrates land-based practices with contemporary technology such as 3D scanning and 3D printing to present the potential of stone construction as an adaptable and sustainable form of architecture for countries affected by climate change to explore and adapt to their own environments."

For the 2023 exhibition, the National Pavilion UAE addresses the misconception that arid spaces are spaces of scarcity to highlight the thriving ecosystems that have always been present in the UAE and its surrounding areas, supported by land-based practices developed by inhabitants who understood and cherished the particularities of the land. The exhibition aims to bring back these practices to the forefront as climatic conditions exacerbate the challenges associated with aridity around the globe. These practices have successfully supported life in water-scarce environments and can be adapted to other contexts, relieving the strain on natural resources and slowing the degradation of land.

*Aridly Abundant* focuses on these land-based practices to highlight these techniques respond to the environmental conditions of aridity, proving to be a sustainable architectural condition. By examining the materials inherent to the region and the tactics (architectural methods inspired by land-based practices), Tabbarah provokes a discussion on a future built *in* (uncovering arid lands-based practices), *with*

(rethinking extractive material practices), and *for* (recognizing aridity as a future global condition) aridity by maximizing the potential of natural resources.

*Aridly Abundant* transforms the pavilion into an environment that exhibits the ongoing spatial, material, and tactile qualities of aridly abundant landscapes. A series of stone assemblies are inserted into the space, acting as devices that exhibit the multitude of tactics of assembly that have been identified in Al Hajar such as dry-stacking, tethering, and blurring. Audio/visual vignettes by commissioned artist Reem Falaknaz allow one to experience the environment of Al Hajar. For this particular project, she traveled through the mountains sometimes with editors or other contributors to the publication and at other times on her own. Her photographs narrate her own experiences of her exploration. The exhibition includes a large-scale drawing of the landscape and material culture of Al Hajar, telling eight stories about the tactics observed in our fieldwork to ground the exhibition in the context of the UAE. The drawing acts as the device that highlights the relationship between the stone assemblies in the exhibition space with Falaknaz's audio/visual vignettes. In order to demonstrate that the tactics found in the UAE can be translated and employed in other contexts, the assembly methods have been applied to discarded stone fragments from quarries within the Veneto region. Infused with technologies such as 3D scanning and 3D printing that facilitate design and assembly, the stone devices suggest contemporary and alternative building systems that are rooted in their cultural and material environments.

**Angela Migally, Executive Director, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation**, said; “We are pleased to see the National Pavilion UAE sharing local knowledge and research to collectively co-create sustainable solutions for the future. The National Pavilion UAE has been a longstanding platform for the UAE to effectively showcase our knowledge and creativity to the world for the past 12 years, allowing us to impactfully participate in ongoing global discourse.”

**Laila Binbrek, Director of the National Pavilion UAE**, said: “This year marks our twelfth exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia as we continue to explore and highlight the cultural evolution of the UAE. Adapting to climate change has been a growing source of concern around the world and Faysal’s research not only allows us to provide a locally-informed perspective but also possible provocations to this problem as aridity becomes a new reality for many.”

The 2023 exhibition’s accompanying publication “*In Plain Sight: Scenes from Aridly Abundant Landscapes*”, co-edited by Faysal Tabbarah and Meitha Almazroei, advocates for arid practices that propose a new vantage point of looking at aridity as a dynamic condition which can be a state of mind, a practice, or a shared identity. Conceived as a travelogue, the publication is a reference to travel and expedition literature which has historically portrayed arid environments in a homogenous manner as spaces devoid of life. The contributors challenge this narrative by introducing nuance and concepts of abundance to construct multiple lenses to view, sense, and capture the multitudes contained within aridity. In addition to research by the curatorial team, the publication also includes photographs taken by Reem Falaknaz during her exploration as well as scientific essays, travel stories, fiction, and poetry contributed by academics, architects, artists, geographers and researchers based in the region. Published by Kaph Books, the book will be available for purchase at a later date to be announced.

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Faysal Tabbarah, who was chosen as this year's curator through an open call issued by the National Pavilion UAE, worked on this project with his curatorial research team consisting of American University of Sharjah (AUS) alumni. The curator's team also includes three interns from National Pavilion UAE's Venice Internship Program. The National Pavilion UAE continues to collaborate with local universities, such as AUS, in an ongoing commitment to support the next generation of cultural practitioners, curators and scholars, and sustain studies and research from the UAE.

*Aridly Abundant is now open to the public at the Biennale Architettura 2023 until 26 November 2023. A virtual tour of the exhibition is also available on the [National Pavilion UAE website](#).*

This exhibition marks the National pavilion UAE's fifth participation at the International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

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.

Special thanks to the American University of Sharjah and the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture for their support on the exhibition.

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](#).

-Ends-

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

#### **For press inquiries:**

Brunswick Arts, +971 54 305 6609

NPUAE@brunswickgroup.com

#### **Notes for press**

NPUAE exhibition inauguration:

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

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

### **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 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.

### **About Reem Falaknaz**

Reem Falaknaz's work documents the social and physical landscape of the UAE and its inhabitants. In 2014, she took part in the Arab Documentary Photography Program that is funded by the Arab Fund for

Art and Culture, the Prince Claus Fund, and Magnum Foundation. Her commissions include UAE's National Pavilion at the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, Lahore Biennale 2020, and Expo 2020.

### **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.

For 2023, curator of the National Pavilion UAE's participation in the 18<sup>th</sup> 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), 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**

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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