

الجناح الوطني لحولة الإمارات  
بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia



La Biennale di Venezia

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Internazionale  
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Partecipazioni Nazionali

Media alert

## National Pavilion UAE's *Aridly Abundant* at La Biennale di Venezia comes to a close

- 56,661 visitors explored the National Pavilion UAE's 2023 architecture exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia.
- Publication is available for sale and exhibition can be viewed online via the National Pavilion UAE's website.

**28 November 2023, United Arab Emirates:** The National Pavilion UAE closes its fifth participation at the Biennale Architettura, *Aridly Abundant*, with great acclaim. Inaugurated in May 2023 by His Excellency Sheikh Salem bin Khalid Al Qassimi, the UAE's Minister of Culture and Youth, *Aridly Abundant* saw 56,661 visitors explore the exhibition curated by Faysal Tabbarah, Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Architecture at the American University of Sharjah (AUS).

*Aridly Abundant* considered 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.

**Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia** said, "The National Pavilion UAE's exhibition sparked conversations around land practices and knowledge from the UAE and the adaptability and possibilities they can present when combined with modern technologies. *Aridly Abundant's* exploration of marrying these ancient practices with modern tools, put forward knowledge from the UAE that is available to all, to be built on and adopted in regions facing similar arid conditions as a result of climate change. I would like to take a moment to thank the American University of Sharjah and its College of Architecture, Art and Design for their support. The National Pavilion UAE prides itself in its collaborations with educational institutions as part of our ongoing commitment to support the next generation of cultural practitioners, curators and scholars, and sustain studies and research from the UAE."

"As the 2023 exhibition comes to a close, we are working on the preparations for next year's exciting exhibition at the Biennale Arte 2024, which will present work by Emirati conceptual artist Abdullah Al Saadi, in an exhibition curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh," continued **Binbrek**.

**Faysal Tabbarah, Curator of the National Pavilion UAE's exhibition at the 2023 International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia** commented, "To see the research presented through *Aridly Abundant* embraced by an audience eager for a future where arid landscapes are conceived as having potential promising. As the exhibition comes to an end, we hope we managed to leave audiences with themes and lessons that other places around the world facing the threat of aridity and desertification can find of use. Finally, it is important to understand that this is a chapter within the research, and the lessons learned in this chapter will be applied to future iterations of the project and research."

Focusing on the relationship between architecture and arid landscapes, the exhibition challenged the perception of arid environments as spaces of scarcity by uncovering ongoing arid land-based practices that

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rethink mainstream material practices, while foregrounding aridity within architectural production and discourse provokes a future built in, with and for aridity.

The 2023 exhibition's accompanying publication, "*In Plain Sight: Scenes from Aridly Abundant Landscapes*", co-edited by Faysal Tabbarah and Meitha Almazrooei, 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 is available for purchase through [Amazon](#) and is retailing for 144.29 AED.

Faysal Tabbarah, who was chosen as curator through an open call by the National Pavilion UAE, was able to produce the exhibition and accompanying publication with the support of his curatorial research team. The team included American University of Sharjah (AUS) alumni, alongside interns from National Pavilion UAE's 2023 Venice Internship Program, who supported Tabbarah in the curatorial research and design.

*Aridly Abundant* marks the National pavilion UAE's fifth participation at the International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. 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 La Biennale di Venezia'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](#), [X \(Twitter previously\)](#).

**ENDS**

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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](#).

**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.

### **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**

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.