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بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



PRESS RELEASE:

National Pavilion UAE at the Biennale Arte 2024 announces *Abdullah Al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, by leading Emirati conceptual artist Abdullah Al Saadi curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh

- The National Pavilion UAE is presenting eight artworks by Abdullah Al Saadi, curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh, currently Senior Curator and Director of the Performance Department of Sharjah Art Foundation.
- The artist is considered one of the key figures of the founding contemporary art scene in the UAE.
- Titled, *Abdullah Al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, the solo exhibition stems from the artist's chronicled journeys into the wilderness, and invites visitors to look into his creative process.
- The 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia will open to the public in Venice, Italy on April 20 and runs until November 24, 2024

6 February 2024, United Arab Emirates: The National Pavilion UAE (United Arab Emirates) announces its upcoming exhibition at the Biennale Arte 2024 titled *Abdullah Al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*. The exhibition will present eight artworks, produced by Emirati artist Abdullah Al Saadi, a conceptual art pioneer in the UAE, featuring his journeys into the wilderness. Curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh, currently Senior Curator and Director of the Performance Department of Sharjah Art Foundation, *Abdullah al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia* proposes to look at his creative process in relation to the practices of Arab poets centuries ago. Al Saadi starts to draw, paint, or write during his journeys once he feels immersed in nature. Similarly, classical Arab poets described this immersion as the process leading up to the composition of their poems.

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This exhibition marks the National Pavilion UAE's eighth participation at the Biennale Arte. The 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia will open to the public between 20 April - 24 November 2024.

Visitors are invited to enter Al Saadi's singular world and discover both the displayed art pieces and others hidden in metal chests. In a re-enactment of the artist's ritual with visitors in his studio, a selection of the hidden artworks will be revealed by performers who are constantly present in the space. The chests store maps, stones, scrolls, and drawings that Al Saadi produced during his journeys and that he numbered, dated, and coded as if creating and preserving a collective memory for the future.

His Excellency Sheikh Salem bin Khalid Al Qassimi, Minister of Culture, said, "As one of the world's largest and most important contemporary visual art exhibitions the International Art Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia is a significant platform for UAE's homegrown talent to showcase their work on a global stage.

"By presenting UAE-based artists and architects at the forefront of international contemporary culture, the National Pavilion UAE has successfully driven global discourse around locally relevant issues through these exhibitions since 2009.

"We are proud of what our creatives have achieved over the years. Not only have they made a mark in the world of art highlighting the UAE's growing role on the global art circuit, but have also played a key role in forging closer ties with other countries."

His Excellency continued: "Curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh, the exhibition will feature Emirati artist Abdullah Al Saadi's artworks inspired by the UAE's landscape, ancient national heritage and his own family history. We look forward to a thought-provoking exhibition inspiring global dialogue about contemporary issues."

Artist Abdullah Al Saadi said, "I draw inspiration from my environment during my various journeys. I always like to travel alone, with the company of a specific book, music, animal friends, or means of transportation. The presence of these travel companions has a significant impact on my artworks, as they accompany me during my exploration of the land and humankind's place in it."

Curator Tarek Abou El Fetouh said, "I am pleased to be working with Abdullah again and to discuss his work process in depth. I worked on the exhibition to show the persistent and diligent work he has been engaged in for over 40 years. The exhibition will be performative, summoning the atmosphere of Abdullah's studio in a re-enactment of his rituals of archiving and showing his work to visitors. The exhibition design as well is inspired by his artworks. An accompanying publication will present a novel reading of his practice, which I hope will contribute new perspectives on the art practices in the UAE and the region."

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Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia, said, “*Abdullah Al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia* will present important artworks by Abdullah Al Saadi, who has been pivotal to the UAE’s long-standing contemporary art community since the 1980s. Through this exhibition, the National Pavilion UAE highlights a member of the UAE’s remarkable community of well-established conceptual artists as we continue our commitment to reveal the untold stories of the UAE.”

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

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Notes to Editors:

About Abdullah Al Saadi

Abdullah Al Saadi is an Emirati artist who lives and works in Khor Fakkan and is one of the “Pioneer Five” conceptual artists, who, in the 1980s, bolstered the contemporary art scene in the UAE and influenced a generation of artists in the region. He studied English literature at the United Arab Emirates University, Al Ain, before studying Japanese painting at Kyoto Seika University in Japan between 1994 and 1996.

Al Saadi’s work ranges from painting, drawing, and the creation of lengthy artists’ notebooks to the collection and systematic categorisation of found objects and the invention of new alphabets. A great affinity with nature and rural life informs the artist’s practice, which explores local environments as well as intersections of personal and cultural history.

In 2021, his work was included in the permanent Public Art Programme of Expo 2020 Dubai. He also participated in a number of group and solo exhibitions, including the Sharjah Biennale 12 & 13 (2015, 2017); The 54th and 56th International Art Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia (2011, 2015); *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, New York (2014); *Al-Toubay*, the Sharjah Art Foundation (2014); *Emirati Expressions: Realised*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2013); *Languages of the Desert*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, (2005); Sao Paulo Biennale (2004); and *The Art of the Five from the United Arab Emirates*, Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen, Germany (2002). The artist currently lives and works in Khor Fakkan.

About Tarek Abou El Fetouh

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Tarek Abou El Fetouh is currently Senior Curator and Director of the Performance Department of Sharjah Art Foundation. Abou El Fetouh's previous curatorial projects include the Public Art Programme for Expo 2020 in Dubai (2019-2021), *Durub Al Tawaya*, an annual performance event at Abu Dhabi Art (2013-2018); *Rituals of Signs and Metamorphoses* (2018) and *Captive of Love* (2017) at Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing; *The Time is Out of Joint*, Sharjah Art Foundation and Asian Culture Center, Gwangju (2016); *Lest the Two Seas Meet*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2015); *Home Works 6*, Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2013); Sharjah Biennial 9 (2009); *Roaming Inner Landscapes*, Bibliotheca Alexandrina and Garage Theatre, Alexandria (2004); *Windows* (a multidisciplinary festival of contemporary arts), Minya and Cairo (2004); *DisORIENTATION*, House of World Cultures, Berlin (2003) and *It's Happening in the Garage*, Jesuits Cultural Center, Alexandria (2000).

Abou El Fetouh established innovative initiatives in the Arab world and has sought to develop conversations among practitioners both regionally and internationally. He founded the Young Arab Theatre Fund (YATF), renamed Mophradat since 2015, which is a Brussels-based foundation working in the field of contemporary visual and performance arts. He initiated the Meeting Points Festival of Contemporary Arts (MP) in 2003 and curated the first four editions of the festival (MP1 to MP4), which took place in several cities in the Arab world. Abou El Fetouh served as the artistic director of MP7 with the Zagreb-based collective WHW (2013-2014), MP6 with curator Okwui Enwezor (2011-2012) and MP5 with curator Frie Leysen (2007-2008).

National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE 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 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, 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.

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

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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 the cultural sector.

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

The Ministry of Culture works to enrich the cultural ecosystem of the UAE by supporting the country's cultural, art and heritage institutions. It provides a platform for artists and innovators, promotes cross-cultural dialogue, and delivers dynamic productions and experiences that represent the UAE's rich and eclectic culture on national as well as international level. The Ministry's key mandates include investing in youth and empowering them and building a knowledge-based economy for a sustainable future.

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