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National Pavilion UAE  
La Biennale di Venezia

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## **PRESS RELEASE UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL WEDNESDAY 9th OCTOBER**

AZZA ABOUALAM APPOINTED CURATOR OF THE NATIONAL PAVILION UAE AT THE 19TH INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA, IN 2025

- Azza Aboualam is an Assistant Professor at the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University and co-founder of Holesum Studio, an interdisciplinary architecture and design practice based between New York, USA, and Sharjah, UAE.
- Aboualam was selected following an open call for proposals in July 2023 to curate the National Pavilion UAE at the 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia.
- Aboualam was a Venice Intern for the National Pavilion UAE in 2014.
- The 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia will take place from 10 May to 23 November 2025.

9 October 2024, United Arab Emirates

The National Pavilion UAE announces the appointment of Azza Aboualam, Emirati architect and Assistant Professor at the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University, as curator of the UAE's participation in the 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2025. Research by Aboualam will be exhibited in Venice and supplemented with an accompanying publication. In 2014, Aboualam was a Venice Intern at the National Pavilion UAE's debut participation in the 14th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with the exhibition *Lest We Forget: Structures of Memory in the UAE*, curated by Dr. Michele Bambling.

Aboualam was selected through the National Pavilion UAE's open call, the third of its kind. The open call invites new voices, including architects, designers, artists, historians, and researchers who have worked or studied in the UAE and elsewhere in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (MENASA) regions, to highlight an untold story from the UAE that contributes to a global discourse on architectural practice. Following an initial request for concept proposals, shortlisted teams were invited to develop their ideas into a

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full proposal. A Selection Committee composed of leading figures from the UAE's creative sector, including representatives from universities, museums, and government, convened to review all proposals and selected three finalists to present their ideas in person. After intense deliberations, the committee nominated Aboualam's proposal as the winner. Each iteration of the National Pavilion UAE's open call process provides an opportunity to broaden the search for new voices and perspectives on the UAE and further establishes the country as an incubator and accelerator for creative ideas.

His Excellency Sheikh Salem bin Khalid Al Qassimi, UAE Minister of Culture, said: "The Ministry of Culture endeavours to boost local talent and present the UAE's cultural and creative output globally. We proudly announce Azza Aboualam as the curator for the next architecture exhibition hosted by the National Pavilion UAE. The exhibition will showcase innovative research from the UAE, bringing fresh perspectives to the international stage. It is heartening to see our nation's brightest minds and their compelling narratives resonating and engaging with people worldwide."

H.E. added: "The exhibition, a collaborative effort between the Ministry and the National Pavilion UAE, will showcase our nation's rich cultural legacy and forward-thinking approach in tackling global issues that concern us all. We commend the National Pavilion UAE's tireless efforts to elevate and share our nation's unique stories with the world, and our joint commitment to fostering talent and expanding their reach globally."

Azza Aboualam: "I am honored to have been selected to curate the National Pavilion UAE. My 2014 internship inspired me to specialize in the overlap of architectural design and research by pursuing my master's degree at Yale, and it is deeply fulfilling to return to Venice ten years later as a curator. I am grateful to the Commissioner, the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, and to the National Pavilion UAE for giving me a platform to present UAE-based research on a topic that binds us all: food. Presenting this work on the global stage is a remarkable opportunity, especially contributing to the architectural discourse on a stage like the Biennale Architettura 2025."

Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE: "The National Pavilion UAE is dedicated to telling untold stories of the UAE, and this year we are thrilled to feature the research of Emirati architect Azza Aboualam. I am delighted to see an alumna of the Venice Internship program returning as the curator of the National Pavilion ten years later. This speaks to our ongoing commitment to fostering the arts and culture ecosystem in the UAE, and the ways the National Pavilion UAE nurtures both the UAE's cultural legacy and its future."

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Alongside her role in academia, Azza Aboualam is a co-founder and director of research at Holesum Studio, an interdisciplinary architecture and design practice based between New York and Sharjah. Her scholarly interests include the intersection of memory, architecture, and society in the Middle East and North Africa region, and she has worked with the UAE Ministry of Culture's Architecture Initiative, which published her field research, sketches, and writing in the book *In Search of Spaces of Coexistence: An Architect's Journey* (2019), edited by Dr. Alamira Reem Al Hashimi and Adina Hempel.

The National Pavilion UAE will present its exhibition for the 19th International Architecture Exhibition from 10 May to 23 November 2025 (pre-opening on 8 and 9 May). The Biennale Architettura 2025 will be curated by Italian architect, engineer, and educator Carlo Ratti with the title *Intelligens. Natural. Artificial. Collective*.

Biennale Architettura 2025 will mark the UAE's fourteenth exhibition at the Art and Architecture International Exhibitions organized by La Biennale di Venezia and in particular its sixth participation in the International Architecture Exhibition. The National Pavilion UAE won the Golden Lion for the best National Participation at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2021 for its exhibition *Wetland*, curated by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto. The UAE's current exhibition at the 60th International Art Exhibition is *Abdullah Al Saadi: Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh. The exhibition features eight artworks by pioneering Emirati conceptual artist Abdullah Al Saadi, which explore personal constructions of meaning emerging from his immersion in the landscapes of the Arabian Peninsula. It is on view until 24 November 2024.

The National Pavilion UAE is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture and has a permanent pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia's Arsenale – Sale d'Armi. For more information on the participation of the UAE, please visit [nationalpavilionuae.org](https://nationalpavilionuae.org) or follow the National Pavilion UAE on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#).

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### About Azza Aboualam

Azza Aboualam is an Emirati architect and curator of the National Pavilion UAE for the 19th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia in 2025. She is an Assistant Professor at the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University, Dubai, UAE, and a co-founder and director of research at

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Holesum Studio, an interdisciplinary architecture and design practice based in New York, USA, and Sharjah, UAE. She co-founded the studio in 2021 a few years after graduating from the Yale School of Architecture.

Her scholarly interests include the intersection of memory, architecture, and society in the Middle East and North Africa region. Aboualam worked with the UAE Ministry of Culture's Architecture Initiative, and her field research, sketches, and writing were published in the book *In Search of Spaces of Coexistence: An Architect's Journey* (2019), edited by Dr. Alamira Reem Al Hashimi and Adina Hempel. She also contributed research to *Building Sharjah* (2021), edited by Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi and Todd Reisz, and *Showpiece City: How Architecture Made Dubai* (2020), written by Todd Reisz. While working in Sharjah's Department of Public Works, Aboualam managed the design and construction of large-scale projects such as the Aga Khan Award-winning Wasit Wetland Center. In 2014, Aboualam was a Venice Intern at the National Pavilion UAE's debut participation at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with the exhibition *Lest We Forget: Structures of Memory in the UAE*, curated by Dr. Michele Bambling.

### **About the 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, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibitions have explored the nation's cultural evolution, including experimental twentieth-century artists and the diverse contemporary scene. In 2021, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibition, titled *Wetland* and 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 have contributed to its exhibitions over the years, the UAE's Venice internship program has provided training and

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hands-on experience to more than two hundred interns, many of whom are now 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.

### **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 to support them to unlock their full potential.

### **Supporter: The UAE Ministry of Culture**

The Ministry of Culture, in line with its vision of "A culture that inspires the world and empowers young people to create the future," is committed to enriching the cultural sector in the United Arab Emirates. The Ministry achieves this by supporting Emirati cultural, artistic, and heritage institutions, providing a platform for creative and talented individuals across various fields, and promoting dialogue between different cultures. Additionally, the Ministry collaborates with strategic partners to deliver impactful outcomes that reflect the UAE's vibrant and diverse cultural scene at the local, regional, and global levels.

Please find hi-res images and the full press-releases here: [2025 Media Downloads](#)

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