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National Pavilion UAE at the Venice Biennale 2022 announces Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim's 'Between Sunrise and Sunset' is a major new installation by one of the UAE's leading experimental artists



Entrance to the UAE's permanent pavilion at la Biennale di Venezia 2015, located at Arsenale - Sale d'Armi in Venice, Italy

Press Release

- The National Pavilion UAE is presenting a major new installation by Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, curated by Maya Allison, Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery. The artist is an influential member of the UAE's historic group of experimental, conceptual artists who have led the vanguard of visual art in the UAE since the 1980s
- Titled, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*, this project derives from the artist's deep connection to the local environment of his hometown, Khor Fakkan
- The exhibition will be accompanied by the first comprehensive book on the artist, titled, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works: 1986-2022*
- The publication is co-edited by Maya Allison and Cristiana de Marchi, with multiple contributing writers documenting the artist's journey, work process and art forms to date
- The 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale) will open to the public in Venice, Italy on 23 April 2022 and runs until 27 November 2022

United Arab Emirates: The National Pavilion UAE (United Arab Emirates) announces its upcoming exhibition at the Biennale Arte 2022 (Venice Biennale) titled *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*. The exhibition will present a new body of work created for the National Pavilion UAE by Emirati artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, a veteran of the experimental art community in the UAE. Curated by Maya Allison, Executive Director of The New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, *Between Sunrise and Sunset* is an installation of human-sized, abstract and organic sculptural forms. The work draws from Ibrahim's deep connection to the local environment of his hometown, Khor Fakkan – a city harbouring the rocky Al Hajar mountains on the east coast of the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.

This exhibition marks the National Pavilion UAE's seventh participation at the Biennale Arte, along with its move towards an artist-led approach whereby Ibrahim nominated Allison to curate the exhibition. The 59th International Art Exhibition at the Venice

Biennale in 2022 (Biennale Arte 2022) will open to the public between 23 April - 27 November 2022.

The 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia is curated by New York based Italian curator and artistic director Cecilia Alemani under the theme *The Milk of Dreams*, which questions the representation of bodies and their metamorphoses, and the connection between bodies and earth. In resonance with this theme, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim's biomorphic sculptures cluster in undulating colour and movement – suggesting bodies, mutation, and metamorphosis. These forms arrive from his physical dialogue with the materials of the work: accretions of papier-mâché are built up over loose skeleton structures that shift and settle into their final position as he works. Often incorporating actual earth, leaves, tea, coffee, and tobacco, the texture of the forms derives from his raw materials.

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim said, “*Between Sunrise and Sunset* highlights the connection I have with the nature of Khor Fakkan - my hometown and the place I continue to live in. The exhibition demonstrates the tension between Khor Fakkan's colorful bright mornings, when the sun rises over the ocean, and the disappearance of colors in mid-afternoon, when the sun drops behind the mountains that loom over my hometown. We can never see the sunset in Khor Fakkan, but we can imagine it on the other side of the UAE. I am looking forward to showing my new installation, working alongside Maya Allison and the National Pavilion UAE, to represent my country in our upcoming presentation at the Venice Biennale in 2022.”

Curator Maya Allison said, “Over the years, I have closely observed Ibrahim's work process and its intense and intimate relationship with each environment he encounters, whether that be the rocky mountainous landscape of his lifelong home, or the landscapes of his residencies in Holland, France, India, and beyond. Even after almost 4 decades of art-making, the artist continues to evolve and deepen his practice, with a stubbornly persistent exuberance, nourished by his connection to his work and his artist community. For many years he worked against the odds of location and access, and I'm gratified to see the exposure and recognition of this artist by the wider art world. This is a watershed moment for the work of the institutions that are supporting this project.”

Allison added, “Over the past decade, the National Pavilion of the UAE to the Venice Biennale has played a pivotal role in telling stories of the UAE's culture and history on the global stage. During this same period, NYU Abu Dhabi's commitment to The NYUAD Art Gallery exhibitions, publications, and curatorial fellowships have made possible our sustained study of the UAE's art history. Today, I am grateful to both of these institutions for their partnership in support of the 2022 National Pavilion of the

UAE to the Venice Biennale. Serious and important art has been made in the UAE for much longer than international art audiences may realize, and I look forward to contributing again to the development of the historical record.”

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset marks Ibrahim and Allison’s fifth collaboration together and the third book that Allison has worked on that studies Ibrahim’s work – marking a special collaboration for them. In the first monograph on the artist, the exhibition’s accompanying publication, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset / Works: 1986-2022*, is co-edited by Maya Allison and Cristiana de Marchi, artist, curator, and poet based between Dubai and Beirut, who has a long record of work with and writing on this UAE art community. The editors have commissioned new texts that comprehensively explore Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim’s work, representing a major contribution to the UAE’s art history, documenting and archiving part of the country’s long-standing experimental art community. The book will make new material and histories available for future scholars, bringing these untold stories of the UAE into the contemporary art world narrative.

Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia, said, “*Between Sunrise and Sunset* will present important new sculptural forms by Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, who has been one of the influential members of the UAE’s long-standing avant-garde community since the early 1980s. Ibrahim confronts his imagination to encompass his deep connection to the UAE’s natural environment. Through this exhibition the National Pavilion UAE highlights a member of the UAE’s extraordinary community of well-established artists as we continue our commitment to reveal the untold stories of the UAE.”

Angela Migally, Executive Director, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, commissioner of the National Pavilion UAE, said, “National Pavilion UAE, NYUAD and its Art Gallery are shaping the UAE’s cultural and scholarly efforts by realizing Ibrahim’s work process through the National Pavilion UAE’s 2022 exhibition, *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset*. Together with the publication, this exhibition is a testament to our long-standing commitment to invest in people and the UAE’s art ecosystem - spearheading the growth and understanding of the UAE’s art and creative community. Extraordinary artists like Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim deserve global recognition and the Venice Biennale is a catalyst to providing a unique opportunity to connect with an important international audience and engage in global cultural dialogue tying to the untold stories of the UAE art community and beyond.”

Vice Chancellor of NYU Abu Dhabi Mariët Westermann said, “The Venice Biennale is one of the most significant and prestigious showcases for art in the world. We are incredibly proud that our Chief Curator, Maya Allison was selected to curate the

National Pavilion UAE this year. NYU Abu Dhabi has always been profoundly committed to the arts, from its museum quality Art Gallery and lively Performing Arts Center to its brand new Master of Fine Arts. It is an honor for us to collaborate with the National Pavilion UAE and be part of such an important milestone in the global arts calendar. We look forward to seeing the exhibition come to life on this great world stage."

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.

Maya Allison and Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim's collaborations over the years

In 2014 Allison included Ibrahim's Stones Wrapped in Copper (2007) in On Site, the inaugural exhibition of The NYUAD Art Gallery. In 2017 she featured Ibrahim in the book and exhibition, But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1986-2008. The book told, for the first time, a definitive narrative of the UAE's experimental art scene from this period. In 2017 she commissioned Ibrahim to make an immersive room-installation for her exhibition Gateway: Line for the curated section of Abu Dhabi Art and presented his work alongside international artists such as David Claerbout, Saloua Rounda Choucair, Shilpa Gupta, and Tatsuo Miyajima. In 2018: Allison commissioned Ibrahim to make a 5-meter-high sculpture presented in the Cultural Foundation – Abu Dhabi, for which she wrote a book expanding her study of the UAE's local art history.

About Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim (b. 1962, UAE) is part of the UAE's first generation of contemporary artists from the late 1980s, an avant-garde scene that included Hassan Sharif, Abdullah Al Saadi, Hussein Sharif, and Mohammed Kazem.

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim came of age as an artist in the UAE in an era in which the visual arts were not yet valued culturally or taught in university degree programs. In 1986, when he met the late artist Hassan Sharif (a founding member of the influential Emirates Fine Art Society), Ibrahim was pulled out of a secluded practice and carved out unshakable friendships and collaborations that have formed the foundation for the creative community that defines the UAE today.

In March 2018 Elements, a survey of works spanning three decades of his practice, was presented at the Sharjah Art Foundation, curated by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi. Ibrahim's recent solo exhibitions include The Space between the Eyelid and the Eyeball at Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai (2019), and a series of solo shows at Cuadro Gallery, Dubai (2018, 2016, 2015, 2013).

Ibrahim's public works include: Falling Stones Garden (2020), Al Ula, Saudi Arabia, commissioned by the Royal Commission for Al Ula and Desert X; Grocery (2019), Madinat Zayed Market, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Ghadan 21, Government of Abu Dhabi as part of the For Abu Dhabi initiative; Untitled (2019), Reem Central Park, Al Reem Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Aldar Properties PJSC in partnership with Abu Dhabi Art; Kids' Garden (2019), Sheikh Khalifa Medical City, Abu Dhabi, UAE, commissioned by Abu Dhabi Health Services Company; and Bait Al Hurma (2018), Al Mureijah Square, Sharjah, commissioned by the Sharjah Art Foundation as part of the exhibition Elements.

Ibrahim's group exhibitions include participations in But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1988-2008 at The NYUAD Art Gallery (2017); The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Yay Gallery, Baku (2015); the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi (2016); the 53rd Venice Biennale, Venice (2009); the Sharjah Biennial (1993, 2003 and 2007); and the Dhaka Biennial (2002 and 1993). Select institutional exhibitions include the Kunstmuseum, Bonn (2005); the Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah (2005 and 1996), the Ludwig Forum for International Art, Aachen (2002); Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris (1998); Sittard Art Centre, the Netherlands (1995), and the Exhibition for the Emirates Fine Art Society in the Soviet Union, Moscow (1990).

He received the first prize for sculpture at the Sharjah Biennial in 1999 and 2001 and has been a member of the Emirates Fine Arts Society since 1986, founding Art Atelier at the Khor Fakkan Art Centre in 1997. He has participated in artist residencies at Trans Indian Ocean Artist Exchange, Kochi Murzi Biennale, India (2016); A.i.R Dubai (2015); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2009) and Kunstcentrum Sittard, the Netherlands (1994-1996, 1998-2000).

His works have been acquired by significant international collections, including Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah; Art Jameel Collection, Dubai; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Kunstcentrum Sittard, Sittard; The British Museum, London; and Le Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Ibrahim is represented by UAE based contemporary art gallery Lawrie Shabibi. He works and lives in Khor Fakkan, United Arab Emirates.

About Maya Allison

Maya Allison is founding Executive Director of The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery and Chief Curator at New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), a degree-granting research university in the liberal arts tradition. NYUAD shapes its scholarly and creative endeavors through an intercultural and multidisciplinary lens. The university has a deep commitment to support the work of UAE artists, and will launch an MFA program next year. Here, The NYUAD Art Gallery connects disciplines and integrates global and local dialogues in its exhibitions both in the main gallery, and the Project Space, as well as supporting emerging artists with the annual Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award.

*Allison's curatorial specializations intersect two areas: artistic communities, and installation art. Her most recent project, *Speculative Landscapes* (NYUAD Art Gallery, 2019) gathered four rising UAE-based artists who work in immersive, experimental installation. Her curatorial projects that included book-length publications include *Slavs and Tatars: Mirrors for Princes* (Curator, JRP Ringier/NYUAD Art Gallery, 2015), *Diana Al-Hadid: Phantom Limb* (Curator, Skira / NYUAD Art Gallery, 2016), *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Art Community, 1988-2008* (Lead Curator, NYUAD Art Gallery, 2017), and *Zimoun* (Curator, NYUAD Art Gallery, 2019).*

*Outside the university, she has guest-curated a number of projects in the UAE, including *Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years* (Lead Curator, with book publication, Cultural Foundation Abu Dhabi, 2018), a 30-year survey of 18 UAE artists.*

National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia is an award-winning pavilion which curates untold stories about the UAE's arts and architecture through its participation at the Venice Biennale, and provides a high-profile platform for curatorial concepts that address critical international conversations from a distinctive local perspective.

For each annual edition of the Biennale, 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, its 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 was 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 La Biennale Architettura 2021, marking the National Pavilion's 10th participation in the Venice Biennale. In the coming year, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibition will showcase works by ground-breaking painter, sculptor, and land artist Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim at the 2022 edition of la Biennale di Venezia (Venice Biennale).

Passage, the National Pavilion UAE's well-received exhibition at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia, created by Nujoom Alghanem and curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, returned to the UAE in 2021 at Abu Dhabi Art. The exhibition will also be presented as part of Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Festival exhibition Portrait of a Nation II, from January 2022 - April 2022. The return of Passage to the UAE was made possible by our partners Abu Dhabi Art and Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Festival.

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 working successfully 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.

About 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.