

Show of pioneering Emirati artist Hassan Sharif opens in Sweden



A pioneer of conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East, late Emirati artist Hassan Sharif seen in his studio. (Courtesy: Maaziar Sadr)

The major retrospective 'Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist,' organized in collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation, is now open at Malmö Konsthall in Sweden, its second venue European venue. The exhibition in Sweden is curated by Mats Stjernstedt, Director of Malmö Konsthall, and Hoor Al Qasimi, president and director of the Sharjah Art Foundation. Running until January 10, 2021, the exhibition traces the career of the late pioneering artist and features over 150 works, which range from early satirical cartoons to documentation of performances in the Hatta desert to sculptural works produced in the last year of his life.

A range of public programs, including audio tours and creative workshops in Arabic, take place alongside the exhibition. This exhibition follows Sharjah Art Foundation's original 2017–2018 iteration, the largest solo exhibition organized by the institution to date, and the presentation at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, earlier in 2020.

Five decades of multimedia practice

'Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist' traces nearly five decades of the artist's multimedia practice, through over 150 works from the artist's diverse oeuvre, which range from early satirical cartoons and documentation of performances in the Hatta desert to sculptural works that were produced in the last year of his life, and emphasizes the artist's sculptural works and objects.



Hassan Sharif, Slippers and Wire , 2009. Installation view: Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist , Malmö Konsthall, Sweden, 2020. (Photo: Helene Toresdotter)

“Hassan Sharif was a strong advocate for the contemporary art community in the Emirates and the impact of his highly experimental, prescient body of work continues to reverberate today,” said Hoor Al Qasimi.

“We are humbled to have worked with him since his presentation at the first Sharjah Biennial in 1993 and to have witnessed his incredible impact through the years, and we are delighted to partner with a distinguished institution like Malmö Konsthall to showcase his work to new audiences around the world.”



Dictionary. 1981. Photographs and pencil on mounting board and glue, dictionary pages and cotton rope.
Installation view: Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist, Malmö Konsthall, 2020. (Sharjah Art Foundation Collection. Photo: Helene Toresdotter)

A pioneer of conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East, Hassan Sharif explored form, time, social action and mathematical systems throughout his career. His work is marked by the use of common materials in accumulative installations as well as complex social and philosophical reflection.

His best-known works are his 'weaving' series of assemblages and 'urban archaeology objects' which were created from inexpensive and mass-produced consumer materials and, for Sharif, represented the transformation of industrial excess into art.

Sharif's 'semi-systems' of the 1980s reveal the artist's fascination with constructing intricate systems and methodologies. Often taking the form of drawings, these works illustrate playful procedures and rules of repetition developed by the artist, which are carried out on paper and result in geometric shapes and forms.

Rejecting calligraphic abstraction, the dominant regional art discourse in the 1970s, Sharif pursued a contemporary art vocabulary that drew upon the non-elitism and intermedia of the art collective Fluxus and the systemic processes of making found in British Constructionism.

Moving between roles as artist, educator, critic and writer, Sharif worked to encourage the engagement of local audiences with contemporary art through his Arabic translations of historical art texts and manifestos.

His works illustrate his enduring social and philosophical reflections on mathematical systems, time and the banality of the everyday. He was a founder of The Flying House, Dubai (2007); Art Atelier, Youth Theatre and Arts, Dubai (1987); Al Mureijah Art Atelier, Sharjah (1984) and Emirates Fine Arts Society, Sharjah (1980). All these organizations support interdisciplinary approaches to contemporary art in the Emirates through mentorship and exhibition.

Eponymous monograph

Accompanying the exhibition tour is the eponymous monograph published by Sharjah Art Foundation and Koenig Books, London. Edited by Hoor Ale Qasimi, the publication presents the Foundation's research into Sharif's multidisciplinary practice.

The major publication, which includes images of lost works, original English translations from his journalistic and experimental writings alongside archival materials from ephemeral exhibitions, as well as dialogues and reflections by Sharif's contemporaries in the UAE, the book is not a typical exhibition catalogue or a chronological book, but an experimental work that reflects Sharif's practice and weaves a personal narrative from the various threads of his career.

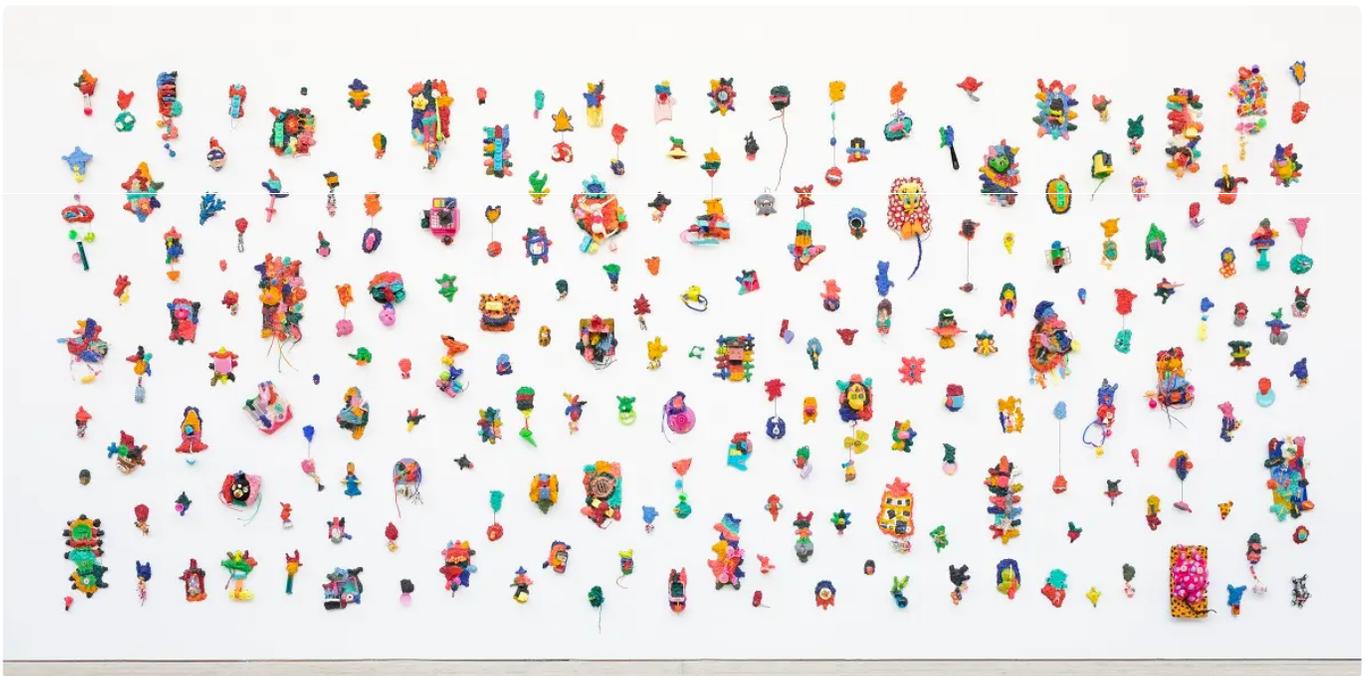
The publication serves as a vital resource for scholarly and curatorial interest in contemporary art practice, and as a reference for how cultural ideas travel and, in the process, are transformed. Since 1993, Sharif's work has also been exhibited in eight Sharjah Biennials, most recently in Sharjah Biennial 12 (2015) and over 90 of his works are currently part of the Foundation's collection, from small works on paper to large installations.



Hassan Sharif, *Jumping No. 1*, 1983. 3 of 7 photographs. Collage: photographs, ink and pencil on mounting board. Photo -documentation of a performance in Dubai. (Supplied)

The Foundation is also custodian of Sharif's studio and personal archives. Sharif's work has also been shown in '1980–Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates,' UAE Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale (2015); and ADACH Platform for Visual Arts, 53rd Venice Biennale (2009).

Sharif graduated from the Byam Shaw School of Art, London (1984), and returned to the UAE, where he began staging interventions and exhibitions of contemporary art in Sharjah. He lived and worked in Dubai until his death in 2016.



Hassan Sharif, *Playfulness No. 1*, 2015. Toys, papier mâché, wire, cardboard and acrylic. (Photo: Helene Toresdotter)