

National Pavilion UAE hosts Emirati artist at Venice Biennale

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Maya Allison and Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim.

Muhammad Yusuf, *Features Writer*

The National Pavilion UAE has announced its upcoming exhibition at the Biennale Arte 2022 (Venice Biennale). Titled Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: *Between Sunrise and Sunset*, it 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 the artist'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.

The show 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, April 23 — Nov. 27) 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 alignment with this theme, Ibrahim's biomorphic sculptures cluster in undulating colour and movement — suggesting bodies, mutation and metamorphosis.

The forms arrive from his physical dialogue with the materials of the work: accretions of papier-mâché are built over loose skeleton structures that shift and settle into their final position as he works.



A composition from Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim.

Often incorporating actual earth, leaves, tea, coffee and tobacco, the texture of the forms derives from his raw materials. 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 colourful bright mornings, when the sun rises over the ocean, and the disappearance of colours 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.” 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 four 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.”



Another composition from Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim.

She 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.”

The exhibition’s accompanying publication — which is also the first monograph on the artist — Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset/Works: 1986-2022, is co-edited by 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.

Laila Binbrek, Coordinating Director, National Pavilion UAE — La Biennale di Venezia, said: “Ibrahim confronts his imagination to encompass his deep connection to the UAE’s natural environment.”

Angela Migally, Executive Director, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, commissioner of the National Pavilion UAE, said that “extraordinary artists such as 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.”

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.

He 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 programmes.

In 1986, when he met the late artist Hassan Sharif (a founding member of the influential Emirates Fine Arts Society), he 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.

Allison is founding Executive Director of The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery and Chief Curator at New York University Abu Dhabi. Her curatorial specialisations intersect two areas: artistic communities and installation art.