

## **Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

### ***Zahrah Al Ghamdi is the artist to exhibit in the Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the Biennale Arte 2019***

Saudi Arabia will take part in the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with a presentation of new work by celebrated land artist Zahrah Al Ghamdi. Her exhibition *After Illusion* follows Saudi Arabia's successful presentation at Biennale Architettura 2018.

Zahrah Al Ghamdi is known for her site-specific installations that are assembled using natural materials such as sand, rocks and leather.

For the exhibition *After Illusion*, Zahrah Al Ghamdi will demonstrate the intimate tactile encounter she undergoes in the process of making the work that exhibits her master craftsmanship. The exhibition aims to recognise, reconnect, and revisit a feeling where one tries to explore something new but rather familiar; a step into an imaginary world created by the artist to seek comfort in her journey towards self-realisation. *After Illusion* is curated by Eiman Elgibreen, to reflect on the history of Saudi Arabia and its identity. The team is guided by Project Advisor, Nada Shabout.

The title *After Illusion* is inspired by a line from an ancient Arabic poem written by Zuhayr bin Abī Sūlmā (b.520 – d.609), in which he described his struggle to recognise his home after being away for twenty years. Only 'illusion' helped the eighty-year-old poet recognise it – a state of mind that we fight during our search for the 'truth' but somehow it paves a path to it. Old Arabic poetry is cherished by many Saudis as an important substitute source of 'truth', inspiration and a resort for those who seek assurance.

Eiman Elgibreen, curator of the exhibition, said: "Saudis have long been living in interesting times. Their complicated sociocultural history has forced them, and others, to be seen as interesting. There is a sense of lost cultural and historical agency due to the hegemony of global discourse. Their significance has been encapsulated within two narrow historical moments: the emergence of Islam and the discovery of oil, leaving them confused on how to perceive their history outside of those moments, particularly with the absence of visual evidence."

*"After Illusion* is an exhibition that offers an attempt to meditate on the value of 'uncertainty' in opening new doors to self-awareness and transformation."

Zahrah Al Ghamdi was born 1977 in Al Bahah and now lives and works in Jeddah. Her work focuses on the memory of traditional architecture from south western Saudi Arabia. Known primarily as a land artist, Al Ghamdi's practice involves the use of natural materials to create site-specific installations. Growing up in the south western region of Saudi Arabia, surrounded by traditional

Aseeri architecture, has played an integral role in her practice. Al Ghamdi exhibited in London in 2017 as part of the Shubbak Festival of Arab Culture, producing a large site-specific installation in the British Museum's Great Court in front of a live audience.

Al Ghamdi graduated with a First Class degree from King Abdulaziz University in 2003 and graduated from Coventry University in 2009 with an MA in Contemporary Craft. Al Ghamdi also has a PhD in Design and Visual Arts from Coventry University. Al Ghamdi is currently a faculty member of the Islamic Arts Department at King Abdulaziz University.

The Saudi National Pavilion is supported by the Ministry of Culture of Saudi Arabia and commissioned by Misk Art Institute.

## Listings

Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia  
11 May – 24 November 2019

## Press Contacts

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## Notes to editors

### **Eiman Elgibreen, Curator of *After Illusion***

Eiman Elgibreen is an artist and a writer. She holds a PhD degree in Modern and Contemporary Saudi Art History from the *University of Sussex*, with special interest in female art practices. She started publishing her Arabic essays in 2011; and her art was exhibited earlier than that in several local and international art shows, such as the *55<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, La biennale di Venezia* (2013). Her work, both her art and her research, aim to share her insider views and understanding of some conflicting cultural matters; to instigate an ideological dialogue and promote tolerance towards cultural differences. She is currently working as an assistant professor of Art History at the Princess Nourah University in Riyadh/Saudi Arabia.

### **Nada Shabout, Project Advisor of *After Illusion***

Nada Shabout is a Professor of Art History and the Coordinator of the Contemporary Arab and Muslim Cultural Studies Initiative (CAMCSI) at the University of North Texas, USA. She is the founding president of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran and Turkey (AMCA); author, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*, University of Florida Press, 2007; co-editor, *New Vision: Arab Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Thames & Hudson, 2009; and co-editor with A. Lenssen and S. Rogers, *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2018. She is the curator of *Sajjil: A Century of Modern Art, Interventions: A dialogue between the Modern and the Contemporary*, 2010; co-curator of *Modernism and Iraq*, 2009, and curator of the traveling exhibition, *Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art*, 2005-2009.