



Image: Khaled Sabsabi, *conference of one's self*, 2026, Australia Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia. Photo: Andrea Rossetti. Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery.

Australian artist Khaled Sabsabi reveals details of presentations in the Australia Pavilion and in the International Exhibition *In Minor Keys* at Biennale Arte 2026

- In *conference of one's self*, Sabsabi transforms the Australia Pavilion with an immersive multisensory installation exploring spirituality, migration, and shared humanity, inviting audiences to reflect on the interconnectedness of the inner and outer self.
- In a historic first for an Australian artist, Sabsabi simultaneously presents work in the International Exhibition, *In Minor Keys* by Koyo Kouoh at the Arsenale, titled *khalil*.
- Central to the presentations is a philosophical framework drawn from tasawwuf (Sufi) thought, in which spiritual transformation unfolds through reflection and collective experience.
- *conference of one's self* and *khalil* offer counterpoints to the disorder and uncertainty engulfing the contemporary moment, demonstrating what could be possible when cultural, linguistic and spiritual differences are honoured within individual and collective experiences.



conference of one's self, an immersive artwork created by Khaled Sabsabi, premieres at the Australia Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Commissioned by Creative Australia, the exhibition is curated by Michael Dagostino and is on view from 9 May – 22 November 2026.

In *conference of one's self*, Sabsabi has transformed the Australia Pavilion into a contemplative environment that explores spiritual inquiry, migration, and the vastness of shared humanity. Drawing on more than thirty-five years of artistic practice, the installation reflects Sabsabi's enduring exploration of identity, displacement, and collective experience. Born in Lebanon and arriving in Australia as a child after fleeing civil war, the artist frequently engages with histories of migration and the complexities of belonging in his work. *conference of one's self* offers international audiences the opportunity to experience Sabsabi's practice within a global context.

At the centre of the Pavilion installation are eight monumental canvas paintings, each measuring three metres by two metres, arranged in an octagonal formation. Suspended video projectors cast moving imagery onto the painted surfaces, reflecting fragments of the canvases back onto themselves in a shifting visual dialogue between painting and projection. Accompanied by a soundscape of everyday sounds recorded on analogue tape, the installation unfolds across a 54-minute loop, immersing visitors within a multisensory environment of image, sound, and movement.

Inspired by the 12th-century Sufi allegory *The Conference of the Birds* by Farid al-Din Attar, the installation explores the idea of a collective spiritual journey. Numerology is central to the work: the eight-sided structure references the valleys described in Attar's poem, which represent stages of transformation in tasawwuf belief. The first seven valleys symbolise phases of spiritual progression, while an additional eighth valley imagined by Sabsabi suggests completion and enlightenment. Across cultures, the number eight also evokes balance, cosmic order, and harmony, linking astronomy, faith, and mysticism.

The installation also reflects the multicultural and multi-faith character of contemporary Australia. Drawing on spiritual traditions spanning cultural and religious contexts, Sabsabi creates a space where viewers from diverse backgrounds can encounter one another through shared reflection. By encouraging audiences to move slowly through the Pavilion—encountering subtle shifts in light, rhythm, and perception—the work proposes art as a space for empathy and contemplation.

In a historic first for an Australian artist, Sabsabi simultaneously presents a second installation, *khalil*, in the Biennale Arte 2026 International Exhibition *In Minor Keys*, by Koyo Kouoh, at the Arsenale. While *conference of one's self* represents the outward dimension of the self, *khalil* explores the inner dimension through a meditative multimedia environment. Together, the two works connect the Australia Pavilion and the Arsenale through a shared philosophical framework rooted in tasawwuf belief.

khalil, the Arabic word for 'friend', unfolds across three chapters (Khanaydiyak the threshold, El khalil the friend, and Khalwa solitude) as a major site-specific multisensory artwork, comprising a floating lamp-like installation with 40 metres of painted canvas upon which Sabsabi's paintings are projected, a soundscape, and the scent of black oud. Entering the installation, audiences move through the work in a counterclockwise direction, referencing the movement of Whirling Dervishes. Running on a 64-minute loop, the work creates a space for global contemplation where, as in life itself, all remains in perpetual motion.



Artist Khaled Sabsabi said: “*conference of one’s self* and *khalil* continue my poetic inquiry into spiritual and everyday journeys shaped by commonality and difference. The installations invite audiences to move through a shared space of reflection, where collective emotions and experiences may meet and transformation becomes possible.

“Western Sydney and Venice are both places shaped by migration and cultural exchange. These histories of resilience, coexistence, and movement have anchored the conceptual framework of the work and informed the environment created.

“Although the two works are presented in different locations across the Biennale, they speak to one another and emerge from the same philosophical inquiry. They are one body with two limbs, and together they explore the relationship between inner and outer experience, inviting audiences to reflect on the shared human values of compassion and kindness that connect us.

“Michael and I are deeply grateful to the Australian and international arts community for their ongoing support throughout this journey. That support made it possible to realise works we hope will resonate with audiences in Venice and beyond.”

Australia Pavilion curator Michael Dagostino said: “Khaled’s work welcomes audiences into a space that embraces the *tasawwuf* (Sufi) sensibility that everything flows and nothing remains fixed. Having worked with Khaled for more than 25 years, I have seen how his practice consistently centres empathy and the possibility of bringing people together through shared experience.

“*In conference of one’s self*, the Pavilion becomes a contemplative and nurturing environment where painting, moving image, and sound converge. Through this immersive experience, the work speaks to Australia’s contemporary identity as a society shaped by migration and cultural exchange while offering a broader meditation on shared human experience.

“In the end, we have a chance to come together despite our differences and recognise what we share. We hope you find yourself within *conference of one’s self*, and bring that understanding into your encounters with others.”

Creative Australia Chief Executive Officer Adrian Collette AM said: “Khaled Sabsabi’s presentation, *conference of one’s self*, reflects the strength and maturity of contemporary Australian art and its capacity to bring audiences together through shared human experience.

“Working with curator Michael Dagostino, Khaled has created an ambitious and immersive work that draws on more than three decades of practice, inviting reflection on spirituality, movement and our interconnected world.

“It is a rare honour for an artist to be presented across both the Australia Pavilion and the International Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, and a significant moment for Australian contemporary art on the international stage.”

Global Ambassador and Advocate Simon Mordant AO said: “Australia’s presence at La Biennale di Venezia is a powerful expression of who we are as a nation - bold, diverse and deeply committed to artistic excellence. It is a privilege to support Khaled whose work reflects our shared values of integrity, inclusion and respect, and to champion his voice on the world stage.



“In my role as Global Ambassador and Advocate, I extend my sincere thanks to the many individuals, families, partners and supporters whose generosity and belief in Khaled made this moment possible and congratulate the artistic team.

“Sabsabi’s presentation follows the Australia Pavilion’s Golden Lion win for Best National Participation at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, awarded to artist Archie Moore and curator Ellie Buttrose for the exhibition *kith and kin*. Building on this momentum, *conference of one’s self* positions the Australia Pavilion once again as a space for ambitious artistic experimentation and cross-cultural dialogue on the global stage.”

Press images: [Dropbox link](#)

Exhibition Details

61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

Exhibition Dates: May 9 – November 22 2026

- Khaled Sabsabi presents *conference of one’s self*, curated by Michael Dagostino at the Australia Pavilion, located in the Giardini della Biennale, as a part of the Biennale Arte 2026, commissioned by Creative Australia.
- Khaled Sabsabi’s work *khalil* is presented within the International Exhibition *In Minor Keys* by Koyo Kouoh, in the Arsenale. The artist is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

Website theinvitation.com.au



About the Artist: Khaled Sabsabi

Khaled Sabsabi is an acclaimed, award-winning Australian multidisciplinary artist whose work explores human collectiveness, the complexities of identity politics, and the impact of ideology through a continual transfer between the material and the philosophical. For over 35 years, he has worked across mediums and borders, collaborating with communities locally and internationally. Sabsabi's work centres on social justice and lived experience informed by his migration from Lebanon in 1976 to escape the civil war.

Sabsabi sees art as an effective tool to communicate and converse with people, through a familiar language, creating immersive and engaging experiences. Khaled started out his artistic practice working in hip-hop, as a performer and as a youth worker, engaging with Arabic, Aboriginal, and Pacific Islander communities. As he established his artistic practice, he also worked in detention centres, schools, prisons, refugee and settlement camps, hospitals and youth centres. This foundational means of community informed public service helped to establish social advocacy as the core of his process and practice and continues to impact his art making.

Sabsabi has been the recipient of more than fifteen international awards, including the Creative Australia 'Annual Visual Arts Award' 2023, International Council of Museums' and Heritage Awards, Video Art Prize 2016, and the Sharjah Art Programme Prize in 2016. He has produced more than 65 major mixed media and installation-based works to date, exhibiting in over 90 solo and group art exhibitions in Australia and internationally including 5th Marrakech Biennale, 18th Biennale of Sydney and the 21st Biennale of Sydney, 9th Shanghai Biennale, Sharjah Biennial 11, 1st Yinchuan Biennale, 3rd Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art 2018 and 2024.

Sabsabi is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane.

About the Curator: Michael Dagostino

Michael Dagostino is the Director of the Chau Chak Wing Museum at the University of Sydney. As a relatively new museum, it unites the university's diverse collections into a multidisciplinary institution dedicated to education, research and community engagement.

As the founding director of Parramatta Artists Studios, he established a key platform for emerging artists. In 2011, he became Director of Campbelltown Arts Centre, where he continued an artist-driven program supporting local, national, and international collaborations. Notable projects include *With Secrecy and Despatch* (2016), co-curated with Tess Allas and David Garneau, exploring colonial impacts through the Appin Massacre, and *Another Day in Paradise* (2017), showcasing Myuran Sukumaran's work co-curated by Ben Quilty. Dagostino curated Lisa Reihana's *Cinematica* (2018) and commissioned the Australian First Nations component of her *In Pursuit of Venus [Infected]* for the New Zealand Pavilion at the 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2017). *A Hope and A Promise* (2021), co-curated by Adam Porter and Matt Cox, surveyed Khaled Sabsabi's 30-year practice held at the Art Gallery of NSW and Campbelltown Arts Centre.

Dagostino has received Imagine Awards and ICOM awards for institutional excellence. His board memberships include Sydney Dance Company, FBi Radio, Accessible Arts, Artspace and the Sydney Writers' Festival, alongside advisory roles for the New South Wales Government. He remains committed to advancing museums' role in fostering access, equity and authorship.



About Creative Australia

Creative Australia is the Australian Government's principal arts investment and advisory body. They invest in creative people and organisations and help build audiences and markets for Australian creative work, both in Australia and internationally. They focus on developing skills and workforce capability, promoting equitable careers and workplaces, and building partnerships to support a sustainable and thriving creative sector. They advocate for the value of arts and culture and for the outcomes and priorities identified by artists and creative workers from across the creative and cultural industries.

For more information, please visit creative.gov.au.

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