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National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



La Biennale di Venezia

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PRESS RELEASE

NATIONAL PAVILION UAE OPENS *WASHWASHA*, A GROUP EXHIBITION AT THE 61ST INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION – LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

- The Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates unveils *Washwasha*, a group exhibition curated by Bana Kattan.
- The exhibition presents six artists whose practices span generations and disciplines: Mays Albaik, Jawad Al Malhi, Farah Al Qasimi, Alaa Edris, Lamya Gargash, and Taus Makhacheva.
- The exhibition is on view at the National Pavilion UAE's permanent space at the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi in Venice, until 22 November 2026.
- Grounded in the UAE's sonic history, the exhibition includes a programmatic activation honoring veteran broadcaster Salem Obaid Alaleeli, the founding of Ajman Radio in 1961, and a key program called "Voice of the Country."

May 6, 2026, United Arab Emirates

The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) unveils its exhibition, *Washwasha*, at the Biennale Arte 2026. Curated by Bana Kattan, Curator and Associate Head of Exhibitions at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Project, with Assistant Curator Tala Nassar, the exhibition features newly commissioned and existing works by **Mays Albaik, Jawad Al Malhi, Farah Al Qasimi, Alaa Edris, Lamya Gargash, and Taus Makhacheva.**

Washwasha is a single onomatopoeic word meaning "whispering" in Arabic. Its meaning resides in the sound itself: quiet, suggestive, and open. The six artists in *Washwasha* use sound as a starting point to explore the intangible. The exhibition brings together intergenerational and interdisciplinary practices to expand on themes of migration, technology, oral histories, and the relationship between language, body, and identity.

Developed by the curatorial team and designed by Büro Koray Duman (B-KD) Architects, the exhibition space guides visitors from zones of quiet, close listening to areas consumed by noise and sonic overlap. The order of the works in the floor plan serves the exhibition narrative, moving from oral histories and storytelling to language and communication, and finally to technology and hyper-connectivity.

In *Naiman* (2008/2026), Jawad Al Malhi presents recordings of men recalling the celebratory rituals performed on the eve of their weddings. In *Kūnī Kai Akūna Kamā Aqūl!* (*Be, so that I may be as I*

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say!) (2026), Mays Albaik presents two sets of glass sculptures casting the inside of her mouth at the very moment she attempts to speak, inviting us to consider what is lost in the attempted preservation of oral histories. In her photographic series *Majlis* (2009), artist Lamyā Gargash positions the *majlis* as a sonic gathering space that facilitates the social practice of hosting, listening, celebrating, grieving, and solving problems. In Farah Al Qasimi's multi-media installation *The Curse* (2026), the artist explores children's cursory understanding of guilt, as well as historical and contemporary ways people navigate communication barriers.

In a multi-media installation titled *Wiswās* (2026), Alaa Edris approaches washwasha through the lens of her Emirati colloquial dialect, in which the term signifies interference or confusion. Through this work, Edris reflects on the mechanization and noise of contemporary life. In parallel, Taus Makhacheva's *Dear R., R., K., S., M., A., C., S., K., I., G., L., A., A., L., P., G., E., J., D., M., C., B., O., F., F., R., D., M., E., L., I., F., L., A., M., T., K., K., L., P., F., V., A., L., L.* (2018/2026) comprises a sound installation that humorously reflects on a hyper-connected world in which a demand for constant communication produces exhaustion, apology, and failure. In a second work by Makhacheva, titled *And What Did You Say?* (2026), the artist approaches gossip with an inquisitiveness on its potentiality. Through a performance and installation, Makhacheva ruminates over the idea of "metabolizing gossip," thus turning it into movement and speech.

Near the entrance of the exhibition, visitors will encounter a programmatic activation inspired by veteran broadcaster Salem Obaid Alaleeli, who cofounded Ajman's first radio station in 1961 using modest equipment and a domestic space. Among its most notable segments was "Voice of the Country," in which a live microphone was set up to broadcast everyday sounds. This activation foregrounds an early chapter in the UAE's sonic history, where listening, recording, and transmission became forms of cultural connection. In response to this legacy, Moza Almatrooshi (ballad), Roudhah AlMazrouei, and Spencer Shea present contemporary recordings drawn from daily lives across the UAE, tracing landscapes, domestic rhythms, communal exchanges, and fleeting encounters.

His Excellency Sheikh Salem bin Khalid Al Qassimi, UAE Minister of Culture, commented: "*Washwasha* positions the UAE as an active contributor to the global cultural ecosystem, using sound as a medium for dialogue, experimentation, and exchange. By convening artists who reflect the region's evolving sonic identity, the pavilion presents intangible heritage as a living practice, continuously reinterpreted within contemporary global contexts.

This approach reflects the UAE's broader cultural strategy, which focuses on investing in creative production, amplifying regional voices, and building sustainable pathways for cultural export. Through initiatives like *Washwasha*, the UAE advances culture as a marker of identity and a driver of innovation, international collaboration, and long-term development."

Angela Migally, Executive Director, Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, said: "Through the years, the National Pavilion UAE has been an important platform for reflecting the depth of the artistic landscape in the UAE. It has also shown us how artistic practice is an integral part of how societies evolve with imagination, confidence, and depth. This year's exhibition turns to sound, memory, and everyday life as ways of thinking about identity, connection, and collective experience. We remain committed to supporting works that expand our cultural imagination,

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contribute to meaningful global conversations, and remain grounded in the UAE's evolving cultural landscape."

Bana Kattan, Curator, said: "This exhibition brings together a group of artists whose practices engage deeply with sound, language, and memory. Each artist brings a distinct perspective, and together they form a dialogue that reflects the depth of artistic practices connected to the UAE. The selection also reflects the demographic and cultural plurality of the UAE, bringing together artists with lived connections to the country."

Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia, said: "What audiences encounter in Venice is the culmination of more than a year and a half of dedicated work; it is the harvest of a deeply rooted, homegrown cultural ecosystem. This year's pavilion represents a 'full circle' moment for our community. Among our exhibiting artists are former Venice interns who began their early careers navigating the Biennale with us, now returning to the global stage as established practitioners. We also proudly welcome back an artist who represented the UAE in our very first pavilion in 2009. This exhibition is a testament to our unwavering commitment to developing the UAE arts scene at home, proving that when we invest in our youth and our creatives, we reap the rewards."

Through its Venice Internship Program – now in its fifteenth year and with over 300 interns to date, the National Pavilion UAE reaffirms its commitment to developing the UAE arts scene, highlighting the impact of sustained investment in emerging creatives and young talent. Reflecting this growth, four alumnae of the program are involved in this year's presentation: Alaa Edris (2009) and Mays Albaik (2016) are participating artists in the exhibition, while Moza Almatrooshi (2013) and Roudhah AlMazrouei (2024) feature in the 'Voice of the Country' Program Activation, which runs alongside the exhibition.

The Biennale Arte 2026 will mark the UAE's fifteenth participation at the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia and its ninth participation in the International Art Exhibition.

The National Pavilion UAE is commissioned by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and supported by the UAE Ministry of Culture, with a permanent pavilion at the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi. For more information on the National Pavilion UAE at the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia, visit nationalpavilionuae.org or follow the National Pavilion UAE on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#).

Please find high-res images and all press releases here: [NPUAE 2026 Media Downloads](#).

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About Bana Kattan

(b. 1986, Abu Dhabi, UAE; lives and works in New York, US)

Bana Kattan is Curator and Associate Head of Exhibitions at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Project and has been appointed curator of the National Pavilion UAE at the 61st International Art Exhibition

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of La Biennale di Venezia in 2026. Previously, she served as Associate Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Curator at the NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery. Her recent projects include solo exhibitions with Wafaa Bilal (2025), Maryam Taghavi (2024), and Mona Hatoum (2023). Kattan holds an MA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a recipient of the Barjeel Global Fellowship and Getty-CAA International Program Grants.

About Tala Nassar

(b. 1997, Amman, Jordan; lives and works in Boston, US)

Tala Nassar is a curator and researcher whose work focuses on modern and contemporary Arab art. She currently works at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Nassar holds an MA in Modern and Contemporary Art History from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a BA in Art and Art History from New York University Abu Dhabi. She was the inaugural David Webb Museum Fellow at the NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, where she later served as Associate Manager of Curatorial Projects. She served as Assistant Curator for *Khaleej Modern: Pioneers and Collectives in the Arabian Peninsula* at the NYUAD Art Gallery (2022) as well as Curatorial Research Assistant for *Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim: Between Sunrise and Sunset* for the National Pavilion UAE at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (2022), and *Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years* at the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi (2018).

About Mays Albaik

(b. 1991, Abu Dhabi, UAE, where she lives and works)

Mays Albaik is a visual artist working across video, performance, text, and installation. Her practice examines how the body negotiates place and language under conditions of migration and displacement, exploring entanglements of land, memory, and translation. She currently heads the Programs and Community Initiatives at 421 Arts Campus, Abu Dhabi. Albaik's solo exhibition, *A Terranean Love Note* at Tashkeel, Dubai (2021) was developed under the mentorship of Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Ala Younis, and her work has since been presented at the Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger (2024), UAE Embassy, Brussels (2023), Louvre Abu Dhabi (2022), and Manarat Al Saadiyat (2022). She has participated in residencies including the SOMA Summer Program, Mexico City (2025), and Darat Al Funun, Amman (2021). Albaik holds an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and a Bachelor of Architecture from the American University of Sharjah.

About Jawad Al Malhi

(b. 1969, East Jerusalem, Palestine; lives and works between East Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi, UAE)

Jawad Al Malhi works in painting, sculpture, photography, video, and installation. Al Malhi presented his most recent solo exhibition, *Wa Ba3den*, at Lumiar Cité, Lisbon (2025). Select group exhibitions include *Thinking Historically in the Present* at Sharjah Biennial 15, curated by Hoor al Qasimi (2023); *The Worldly House*, Documenta 13, Kassel (2012); *Palestine c/o Venice*, a collateral event at the Biennale Arte 2009, curated by Salwa Mikdadi; and *Global(e) Resistance*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, curated by Christine Macel (2020). He has been artist-in-residence at Delfina Foundation, Maumaus Ecole Lisbon, IASPIS Stockholm, the Accented Residency at Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, and the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi. His works are held in private and public collections in Europe and the Middle East, including the British Museum, Imperial War Museum, Centre Pompidou, Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Barjeel Collection, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah Art Foundation.

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About Farah Al Qasimi

(b. 1991, Abu Dhabi, UAE; lives and works between New York, US, and Abu Dhabi, UAE)

Farah Al Qasimi works with photographs, film, and music. Often employing large-scale vinyl imagery and photographic prints and screens, she is interested in the internet and its hierarchies of information and emotion. Her work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Guggenheim New York and Abu Dhabi. In 2025, she was selected as a Guggenheim Fellow, awarded by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Her work has been presented at Tate Modern (2024), C/O Berlin (2023), and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2021).

Al Qasimi's photographs were previously featured in the National Pavilion UAE's 2021 award-winning exhibition *Wetland*, curated by Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto.

About Alaa Edris

(b. 1986, Dubai, UAE; lives and works between Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, UAE)

Alaa Edris uses photography, film, and performance to enact experimental mappings and manipulations of her social and urban environment. Acting as anthropologist, cartographer, and sci-fi voyager, she contends with dominant issues from the field of Arab artistic research, including the construction of gender, the relationship between tradition and progress, and language as a medium for identifying, shaping, and articulating a culture. Edris's work has been exhibited at the Seoul Museum of Art (2025), Art Dubai (2024), KBH.G – Kunststiftung Basel H. Geiger (2023), Manarat Al Saadiyat (2022, 2019, 2018), the Middle East Institute Art Gallery in Washington D.C. (2021), Venice Art Projects (2021), Sharjah Biennial (2019), Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah (2016, 2014), and Oratorio di San Ludovico in Venice (2011). She completed the Salama bint Hamdan Emerging Artist Fellowship program in 2015 and participated in a residency at Fondazione Cini, Venice, in 2011. In 2019, she presented her first solo exhibition at 1X1 Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai.

About Lamya Gargash

(b. 1982, Dubai, UAE, where she lives and works)

Lamya Gargash is a visual artist working primarily in photography and film. Her practice explores the aesthetics of overlooked and transitional spaces within Emirati society, focusing on the architectural and social residues of rapid urban change. Through images of abandoned homes, budget hotels, and domestic interiors such as the *majlis*, she traces narratives of memory, absence, and cultural identity. Gargash presented her *Familial* series in the UAE's first national pavilion at the 53rd International Art Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia. Her artist book *Presence* (2006), published by The Third Line, was later exhibited internationally, including solo presentations in Cologne and Bologna. Gargash's work has also been shown at the FotoFest Biennial and screened at festivals including the Locarno Film Festival. She received first prize at the Emirates Film Competition (2004) for *Wet Tiles*. Gargash holds degrees from the American University of Sharjah and Central Saint Martins, London.

About Taus Makhacheva

(b. 1983, Moscow, Russia; lives and works between Dubai, UAE, and Moscow, Russia)

Taus Makhacheva creates works that explore the restless connections between historical narratives and fictions of cultural authenticity. Often humorous, her art considers the resilience of images, objects, and bodies emerging out of stories and personal experiences that complicate notions of

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empires. Her methodology involves reworking materials, landscapes, and monuments, pushing against walls, opening up ceilings, and proliferating institutional spaces with a cacophony of voices. Her work is held in the collections of Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Art Gallery of Ontario, Sharjah Art Foundation, and Van Abbemuseum. Selected exhibitions include the Bukhara Biennial (2025), the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (2024), the Gwangju Biennale (2023), and the 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2017).

About the National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE is an award-winning pavilion that curates the untold stories about the UAE's arts and architecture through its participation in the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions organized by La Biennale di Venezia. It provides a high-profile platform for curatorial concepts that address critical international conversations from a distinctive local perspective.

For every participation in the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia, 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, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibitions have explored the nation's cultural evolution, including experimental twentieth-century artists and the diverse contemporary scene. In 2021, the National Pavilion UAE's exhibition, titled *Wetland* and curated by architects Wael Al Awar and Kenichi Teramoto, was awarded the Golden Lion for best National Participation at the Biennale Architettura 2021, coinciding with the National Pavilion's 10th participation in the International Art and Architecture Exhibitions of La Biennale di Venezia.

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 three hundred interns, many of whom are now working in the cultural sector.

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.

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 to support them to unlock their full potential.

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Supporter: The UAE Ministry of Culture

The UAE Ministry of Culture, in line with its vision of “A culture that inspires the world and empowers young people to create the future,” is committed to enriching the cultural sector in the United Arab Emirates. The Ministry achieves this by supporting Emirati cultural, artistic, and heritage institutions, providing a platform for creative and talented individuals across various fields, and promoting dialogue between different cultures. Additionally, the Ministry collaborates with strategic partners to deliver impactful outcomes that reflect the UAE's vibrant and diverse cultural scene at the local, regional, and global levels.

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