

الجناح الوطني لحولة الإمارات
بينالي البندقية

National Pavilion UAE
La Biennale di Venezia



La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
Internazionale
d'Arte

Partecipazioni Nazionali

THE NATIONAL PAVILION UAE PRESENTS A NEWLY COMMISSIONED PERFORMANCE BY TAUS MAKHACHEVA AT THE 61st INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION OF LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

- The National Pavilion UAE announces a new performance by Taus Makhacheva as part of her ongoing installation, *And What Did You Say?* (2026) at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.
- Performed by Anna Abalikhina, Rei Kassandra Co, and Salvatore De Simone, the work is part of the exhibition *Washwasha*, curated by Bana Kattan with assistant curator Tala Nassar.
- The performance will take place at 2pm and 5pm on July 24, 25, 26, and 28, inside the National Pavilion UAE at the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi.

July 7, 2026, United Arab Emirates

The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates presents *And What Did You Say?* (2026), a newly commissioned performance by artist Taus Makhacheva, as part of the exhibition *Washwasha* at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. *Washwasha* is curated by Bana Kattan with assistant curator Tala Nassar. The performance will take place on July 24, 25, 26, and 28, twice daily at 2pm and 5pm.

And What Did You Say? is a two-part work comprising a choreographed performance and an interactive bench installation with sound. The installation includes opening compartments that house the props and costumes, which will be used during the performance. Located at the entrance of the pavilion, the bench includes headphones with dialogue that guides visitors through inner monologues, scripted conversations, and narrated commentary on the historical and contemporary uses and consequences of gossip. Taken together, the work explores the multiple utilities of gossip, such as care and allyship, horizontal knowledge sharing, coping strategies, political commentary, and gatekeeping and harm.

In the performance, Taus Makhacheva approaches gossip with an inquisitiveness on its potentiality, ruminating on the idea of "metabolizing gossip" and turning it into movement. Performed by dancers Anna Abalikhina, Rei Kassandra Co, and Salvatore De Simone, each of the three performers represents a different stage of gossip: the "source", the "spread", and the "core." The performers

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who embody these characters guide the audience through the ways gossip enters the body: how it is carried, how it mutates, how it settles, and how it departs.

Taus Makhacheva, Artist, said: “Gossip is often dismissed, yet it is one of the ways people navigate the world. I was interested in its ability to move inside the body and between bodies, voices, and communities, constantly changing shape as it travels. In *And What Did You Say?*, gossip becomes both material and method – a way of thinking through how information, care, power, and imagination circulate.”

Bana Kattan, Curator, said: “Taus Makhacheva’s performance touches on some of the central themes of *Washwasha*. Gossip operates as a form of social choreography: it moves through networks, influences relationships, and carries histories that often exist outside official records. Through movement, *And What Did You Say?* invites audiences to consider the complexity of gossip as a cultural practice.”

Laila Binbrek, Director, National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia, adds: “We are delighted to present this commissioned performance by Taus Makhacheva as part of the National Pavilion UAE’s participation at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. By bringing together performance, sound, and installation, *And What Did You Say?* expands the experience of *Washwasha* and offers visitors new ways to engage with the exhibition’s themes.”

Performances of *And What Did You Say?* (2026) will take place twice daily at 2pm and 5pm on July 24, 25, 26, and 28, inside the National Pavilion UAE at the Arsenale – Sale d’Armi and will last approximately 30 minutes.

And What Did You Say? (2026) is performed at the National Pavilion UAE as part of the exhibition *Washwasha*. The exhibition presents six artists whose practices span generations and disciplines, bringing together newly commissioned and existing works by Mays Albaik, Jawad Al Malhi, Farah Al Qasimi, Alaa Edris, Lamya Gargash, and Taus Makhacheva. A phonetic transliteration of the Arabic word for “whispering,” *Washwasha* is a starting point for exploring themes of movement, technology, oral histories, and the relationship between language, body, and identity. The exhibition invites visitors to consider how sound informs identity and collective memory within a rapidly changing cultural context, offering new ways to listen to the invisible and overlooked histories that shape the Emirates today.

The Biennale Arte 2026 marks 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](#).

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

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Notes to Editors

Performance information

Venue: National Pavilion UAE at the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi, Venice

Dates: July 24, 25, 26, 28, 2026

Time: 2pm and 5pm

The performance will take place inside the National Pavilion UAE. No registration is required. A valid Biennale Arte 2026 pass is required to enter the Biennale exhibition premises in the Arsenale – Sale d'Armi.

About *Washwasha* at the National Pavilion UAE for Biennale Arte 2026

Washwasha, curated by Bana Kattan with assistant curator Tala Nassar, brings together six artists (Mays Albaik, Jawad Al Malhi, Farah Al Qasimi, Alaa Edris, Lamy Gargash and Taus Makhacheva) whose practices contemplate contemporary soundscapes in the UAE, shaped by migration, technology, oral histories, and the relationship between language, body, and identity. A phonetic transliteration of the Arabic word for “whispering,” washwasha refers not only to hushed speech, but also to subtle forms of communication, to murmurs, background noise, and intangible traces that risk going unnoticed. These themes reflect the lived realities of many who shape and are shaped by the UAE’s cultural landscape. The works within the exhibition embody an elusiveness of intangible histories that exceed the frameworks of the nation-state. These contributions resist a singular narrative or definition of washwasha. Rather than representing the term, the works activate it, exploring what washwasha can be or do. These histories reveal the UAE not as a fixed cultural form, but as a space shaped by mobility, correspondence, and layered forms of listening across land and sea.

Performance credits

Taus Makhacheva

And What Did You Say?, 2026

Performance, installation, sound

Dimensions variable

Text: Ksenia Skorytchenko, Kate Sutton, Taus Makhacheva

Costumes and props design: Panika Derevy

Props design and 3D visualizations: Victoria Daue

Performers: Anna Abalikhina, Salvatore De Simone, Rei Kassandra Co

Research: Ksenia Skorytchenko

Producer: Alexandra Maleeva

Jewelry props producer: Anna Pavlova

Sound design: Roman Kurochkin

Text consultations: Deborah Pearson

Costumes design and fabrication: Sonya Kutuzova, Marina Bainova

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Voices: Gemma Paintin, Jon White

3D avatar printing: Nika Peshekhonova

Textile print design: Ksenia Kazmina

Textile print: Nikita Skrip

3D jewelry visualization: Nika Peshekhonova, Yuri Yakushev

3D jewelry production: Alexander Kalinin, Vache Manukyan, 3D Cult

Glass props: Alexander Sorokin, Dmitry Suzyumov, Ivan Panchenko

Props production: Tactic Studio | Askarbek Abdikarimov, Vladlena Gromova, Dmitry Kayurov, Sofia Kolontaeva, Tatiana Korosteleva, Alexey Mazur, Ahmed Magomedov, Artem Paramonov, Ekaterina Pleshkova, Timofey Rybka, Leonid Sokolov, Alexey Tyapkin, Timur Veliev

Gossip bench fabrication and AV team: Marco Altan, Mazzocco Alessio, Jacopo Baio, Giovanni Bergamo, Francesco Carrer, Michael Comelato, Roberto Dal Corso, Carlo de Silvestri, Koray Duman, Mateo Ivan Eiletz, Lorenzo Ferrari, Anna Ghiraldini, Mauro Graziano, Nicola Graziano, Andrea Norbiato, Claudia Ortigas, Angel Rodriguez, Niccolò Salvato, Samuele Tulio

Consultation: Victoria Parkhaeva

Guest relations: Leila Salavatova

Studio Taus Makhacheva: Anastasia Chebotareva, Yana Dvoenko, Anastasia Krupina, Helga Lyubartovich, Ekaterina Muratova

Open call contributors: Alexey Maslyaev, Anastasia Lander, Anna Dimova, Andrey Misiano, Andrey Shental, Elizabeth Molchanova, Hattie, Bogdana Skorik, Chris Clarke, Julietta, Kim Sluijter, Leila Salavatova, Leyli Salayeva, Lina Serova, Liza, Liza, Maria Dubodel, Olivia Abächerli, Sveta Amova, Wasilya Krasnojarowa

With special thanks to: Tarek Abou El Fetouh, Sabih Ahmed, Andrei Aikashev, Mays Albaik, Rawdha Al Hosani, Rawan Al Ramahi, Dana Al Sadek, James Baldwin, Laila Binbrek, Anita Buscaino, Bart De Baere, Alexandra Chistova, Mats Ek, Tim Etchells, Farah El-Rafei, Maksim Frolov, Yana Isaenko, Olga Glagoleva, Rahul Gudipudi, Bana Kattan, Natalia Krymskaya, Claire Marsden, Hugo Marchand, Esteban Mereles, Tala Nassar, Monica Narula, Arina Rakhmanova, Antonio Scoccimarro, Emanuela Semiani, Charles Simonds, Polly Sinelnikova, Nedko Solakov, Mikhail Spasskiy, Nikita Starikov, Ksenia Tertyshnikova, Olga Tsvetkova, Vincent van Velsen, Lantian Xie, Jay Yambao, Margo Yushkova, Igor Zolotov

People who gossip, People who don't

Commissioned by the National Pavilion UAE for the 61st International Art

Exhibition in Venice, Italy

Courtesy of the artist

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 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 institutions including Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Art Gallery of Ontario, Sharjah Art Foundation, and Van Abbemuseum, etc. Selected exhibitions include the Bukhara Biennial (2025), the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (2024), the

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Gwangju Biennale (2023), the Yokohama Triennale (2020), Lahore Biennale (2020), Lyon Biennale (2019), Riga Biennial (2018), Liverpool Biennial (2018), Manifesta (2018), and the 57th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (2017).

About Anna Abalikhina

(b. 1981, Russia; lives and works in Riga, Latvia)

Anna Abalikhina is a choreographer and director working across contemporary dance, theatre, opera, and site-specific performance. A graduate of the Moscow Ballet School and the Rotterdam Dance Academy, she has been based in Riga since 2022. Her work combines precise physical language with conceptual depth, often weaving together movement, music, text, and space. Anna creates original productions and collaborates internationally as a guest choreographer. Her projects have been presented at major venues and festivals in Germany, Austria, Latvia, France, Bulgaria, and Russia, Vienna State Opera, HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), Dailes Theatre and Latvian National Theatre (Riga), Stanislavsky Electrotheatre and Bolshoi Theatre (Moscow), Alexandrinsky Theatre (St. Petersburg), and Perm Opera and Ballet Theatre.

About Rei Kassandra Co

(b. 2006, Philippines; lives and works in Dubai, UAE)

Rei Co is a contemporary dancer and aspiring choreographer whose work explores memory, identity, and human connection. Based in the UAE and trained with Sima Dance Company, she began performing professionally at a young age and continues to develop a practice rooted in storytelling and physical precision. Her creations — including INA, Layag, and Metro Diaries — investigate lived experience through movement, space, and collaboration. Alongside performing, she teaches and researches the body as a site of emotion and history. Rei is currently a scholarship student at University of the Arts Sharjah, continuing to refine her voice as both performer and maker.

About Salvatore De Simone

(b. 1995, Italy; lives and works in Rome, Italy and London, United Kingdom)

Salvatore De Simone is an Italian dance artist, choreographer, and performer working internationally. Alongside his independent artistic practice, he collaborates with Studio Wayne McGregor amongst other institutions spanning from performing arts to opera, fashion, and installation, etc. His choreographic research explores embodiment, imagination, and visual dramaturgy, investigating how movement can reveal hidden narratives within the body.

About the National Pavilion UAE – La Biennale di Venezia

The National Pavilion UAE is an award-winning pavilion that curates 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.

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, professional opportunities and the Venice Internship program it offers.

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.

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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.

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.

For media enquiries

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