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UAE Pavilion at the 2018 Venice Biennale

Bambini che giocano nel quartiere di Bani-Yas ad Abu Dhabi. Courtesy National Pavilion UAE – la Biennale di Venezia.



The UAE presents itself at the forthcoming Venice Biennale with a reflection that, like in previous editions, maintains its focus on the small scale to concentrate on the theme of human-scale architectural landscapes in everyday life. The curator ***Khaled Alawadi*** *(image courtesy National Pavilion UAE – la Biennale di Venezia), an architect, scholar and Assistant Professor of Sustainable Urbanism at the Masdar Institute in Abu Dhabi (part of Khalifah University of Science and Technology), draw on the belief of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the UAE's founding father, according to whom urban planning should aim to support happiness and social cohesion by putting human needs at the center of the design. We asked the curator for some previews and thoughts in this regard.*

Italy, the UAE and Arab region share a long tradition of relations across the centuries. This relationship is especially strong between Venice and the Arab world. How do you refer to this long history and what is your personal opinion about the Venice Biennale?

The Venice Biennale is one of the world's most significant cultural events that takes place in the unique city of Venice. It provides the opportunity for countries from around the world to meet in dialogue and exchange and provides us a platform to celebrate and endorse the UAE's arts and architectural practices and developing cultural scene on an international stage.

The UAE pavilion is a relatively recent addition to the Biennale, but is now one of the event's most interesting points of reference. What are your expectations for the 2018 Biennale?

By presenting an array of original observations about different sites and lifescapes in the UAE and focusing on the informal and everyday spaces, I hope to enrich visitors' understanding of the UAE's urban development and architecture beyond common perceptions about the UAE's mega-development discourse.

Can you give us a preview of the UAE pavilion in Venice? What is your approach to the "Freespace" theme proposed by the curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara?

"Lifescapes Beyond Bigness" provides an excursion into the more humane and under-celebrated parts of the UAE's social and physical landscape. It will take the architectural and planning discourse in the UAE outside the confines of the spectacle to highlight the role of architecture and urban design in forming the choreography of people's daily routines. It particularly investigates the role of 'quotidian' (everyday) landscapes in accommodating, enhancing, and facilitating social activities across different places in the UAE.

The presentation at Venice will explore the interplay between the physicality of architecture and places, and the dynamic choreography of everyday life. Everyday life or the choreography of informal, un-programmed lifescapes in the UAE will be explored through a curatorial selection of different typologies and places from the UAE's diverse landscapes such as neighborhoods, urban blocks, streets and alleyways, squares and public spaces, mountains and agrarian settings. The exhibition will present an exploration of their physical characteristics and

typologies; behavioral rhythms and informal patterns of life; and the architectural and design traditions that have shaped them. It will invite visitors to experience important landscapes that are often overlooked in common perceptions about the UAE's mega-development discourse.

What are your expectations for discussion of the "Freespace" theme proposed by Yvonne Farrell e Shelley McNamara with other countries?
The UAE has a unique architectural heritage, which sits in dialogue with rapid urbanization and development, and offers a rich environment for thinking about the future of architecture and urban planning. I am honored to share it with the rest of the world at the Biennale and I look forward to discussing and exchanging ideas with other nations about their own unique urban landscapes.

Cover photo: children playing at their doorstep and in the alleyways of Bani-Yas, a traditionally designed Abu Dhabi neighborhood. Courtesy National Pavilion UAE – la Biennale di Venezia

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