



## Art in the UAE: the exhibitions and installations to look out for in 2018

Experimentation and collaboration will shape the UAE's art scene in the new year

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DAAR's 'Concrete Tent', at NYUAD will highlight the paradox of permanent temporariness for refugees. Anna Sara for Campus in Camps

Last year was full of big stories for the UAE's art scene. Louvre Abu Dhabi opened; Art Jameel announced a spacious complex on Deira Creek; and Sharjah Art Foundation held a retrospective of the Emirates' most historically important artist, Hassan Sharif.

By contrast, 2018 is expected to be modest, but not unambitious. In fact, shows opening over the next few months are strong on political critique and international collaboration, and many will take risks with the "exhibition" format.

Here are some of the highlights of the year ahead.

**January 20 – March 7**

**Instrumentalized: Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck, Green Art Gallery, Dubai**

This solo show by Venezuelan artist Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck takes up the question of refugees, arguing that human rights NGOs and charities have developed into a full-blown industry, with their own marketing and propaganda techniques. Working as an artist and a researcher, Balteo-

Yazbeck proposes that governments and NGOs use human tragedies, such as the migration crisis, to advance political and ideological agendas.

In his *Instrumentalized* (2017) series, he uses clothes in place of artworks, wrapping used items – such as those that well-intentioned people regularly donate – around canvases, or placing them upon plinths. The cycle of pathos and contributions that follows viral videos on social media is a narrative arc like that of art itself, and Balteo-Yazbeck suggests it should be interrogated, politically, as such.



'Too Far From Home' by Serge Attukwei Clottey. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai.

**January 20 – March 3**

**Gallery Takeover by Gallery 1957, Lawrie Shabibi Gallery**

Over the past few years, galleries have initiated swaps: experimenting in collaboration as a means to expand their exhibitions internationally and a way to mutually benefit from new audiences. Galleries in New York and London started the popular Condo programme in 2016 – a month-long initiative where galleries from each city either swap sites or co-curate exhibitions. In a similar vein, Lawrie Shabibi has invited [Gallery 1957](#) from Accra, Ghana, to take over its premises in Dubai. Gallery 1957, which focuses on art from West Africa, will bring two separate exhibitions to the Alserkal Avenue site. *The Displaced*, a solo show by Serge Attukwei Clottey, will be followed by a joint exhibition by Gerald Chukwuma and Yaw Owusu.

**February 1 – March 17**

**From Barcelona to Abu Dhabi: Works from the MACBA Art Collection in Dialogue with the Emirates, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Gallery A**

Collaboration is the name of the game this year, mimicking Louvre Abu Dhabi's French-Emirati partnership on a smaller-scale. Organised as part of the Abu Dhabi Festival, this exhibition partners artists from the UAE with those of MACBA in Barcelona, one of the most forward-thinking museums in Europe.

It includes work by Fischli & Weiss, Ana Mendieta, Nancy Spero and Hans Peter Feldmann. Co-curated by MACBA's director, Ferran Barenblit, and Nasser Abdullah, chairman of the Emirates Fine Arts Society, which is headquartered in Sharjah, the exhibition places some of the UAE's best-known artists, such as Mohammed Kazem, MA Ibrahim and Ebtisam AbdulAziz, in conversation with MACBA's Spanish and international stable.

**February 24 – June 9**

**Permanent Temporariness: Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, New York University Abu Dhabi Art Gallery**

Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, co-directors of DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency) examine conditions of exile, highlighting how refugees' state of displacement unsettles how we think of



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temporary living conditions. Trained as architects, the duo show how these living conditions have developed social, economic and political systems, and created built environments that deserve to be seen as fixtures rather than as aberrations.



Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti's installation at Jardin de la Men.  
Courtesy NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery

Their work takes the form of installations and collaborative projects, such as *Campus in Camps*, an experimental educational programme they ran in Palestinian refugee camps. *Decolonizing Architecture*, with Eyal Weizman, meanwhile, uses spatial analysis to highlight and contest the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Co-curated by NYUAD associate professor Salwa Mikdadi and Bana Kattan, NYUAD Art Gallery curator, this is the first large-scale retrospective of Hilala and Petti's work, and will take place within the gallery and across the NYUAD campus.

**March 5 – April 1**

**Ishara: Signs, Symbols and Shared Languages, Concrete, Alserkal Avenue**

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UAE Unlimited is partnering with Alserkal Avenue to focus on emerging artists in the Emirates: Amna Al Dabbagh, Cheb Moha, Chndy, Dina Khorchid, Farah Al Qasimi, Flounder Lee, Nasir Nasrallah, Saba Qizilbash, Salem Al Mansoori, and Shaikha Al Ketbi.

The show, curated by Karim Sultan of the Barjeel Foundation, explores the idea of communication in contexts (like Dubai) where people from different cultures converge and signs, body language and gestures fill in the gap of a spoken lingua franca.



Mentors for the UAE artists at Ishara. Courtesy Alserkal Avenue

As part of the UAE Unlimited mission of supporting young artists, Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmanian have mentored the commissioned artists. They have each played a role in the evolution of Dubai's art scene over the past 10 years and will loan personal works to the exhibition.

**March 16 – June 16**

**Anna Boghiguan, Sharjah Art Foundationf**

This is the first retrospective of the Egyptian-Armenian artist Anna Boghiguian, whose tactile, expressive and idiosyncratic sculptures and installations tell stories of life in urban communities. Born in Cairo, Boghiguian has moved from place to place, from Canada to France and India to Italy. The images and objects she has collected, alongside her drawings, offer vignettes of life in modern metropolises: billboards; traffic; furtive embraces; and anonymity. Spanning more than four decades, it's an exhibition to become lost in, or in which to see yourself reflected.

**March 21 – 24**

### **Good Morning GCC, The Room, Art Dubai**

In 2013, nine Khaleeji artists founded the GCC – an art collective – in the VIP room of Art Dubai, and this year they will return to their roots. The artists will transform The Room, an installation within the art fair, into a TV studio in which they will create the daytime show *Good Morning GCC*. This will combine segments on Arabic cooking and fair parties with art-historical references. Comprising Fatima Al Qadiri, Abdullah Al-Mutairi, Amal Khalaf, Aziz Al Qatami, Barrak Alzaid, Khalid al Gharaballi, Monira Al Qadiri, Nanu Al-Hamad and Sophia Al-Maria, the collective will examine power and economic relations in the Gulf – and how the area is perceived internationally – both mimicking and challenging stereotypes of the region's young residents.

### **Anniversaries**

Finally, if the past few years in the UAE have been about examining the legacy of Hassan Sharif and the artists who gathered around him, expect the next few years to look at the period between 2007 and 2017. This is the time when Dubai's art scene truly took shape, to reflect the international character of the city. A couple of anniversaries taking place this March will act as important markers.

Tashkeel, the studio and exhibition site in Nad Al Sheba, will celebrate its 10th anniversary in March with a look back at its history of fostering art and design production in Dubai.

Grey Noise, in Alserkal Avenue, will also celebrate its 10th anniversary in March, but with a so-called “non-show show”. Over the course of five months, the gallery will change its contents on a daily basis, starting with a sound piece from Australian artist Tim Bruniges – a show with nothing on the walls. The gallery will continue throughout its course to

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investigate non-commercialism and self-promotion, eschewing the normal channels of gallery communication such as press releases and wall text.

Grey Noise gallery director Umer Butt says it is “celebrating the gallery’s commercial failure” – but even in the land of commerce, art takes other forms of value.