

PRESS RELEASE

## Abu Dhabi Art Announces Guest Curators and Commissioned Artists for 2021

*Annual event welcomes back star curators Simon Njami and Rose Lejeune for curated gallery sector and performing arts programme*

*New Performing Arts Programme commissions by Louise Hervé and Clovis Maillot, Mays Albaik, Rand Abdul Jabbar and Taus Makhacheva*

*New Art Commissions by Aya Haidar, Hazem Harb, Dr Najat Makki, Rasheed Araeen and Richard Atugonza*

**Abu Dhabi, UAE, 29 September 2021:** After being held as a virtual event in 2020, Abu Dhabi Art is making a triumphant return in physical form this year, taking place from 17 to 21 November at Manarat Al Saadiyat, with the internationally renowned fair announcing its guest curators and commissioned artists for 2021.

This year, the globally respected **Simon Njami** and **Rose Lejeune** will be the [guest curators](#), while commissioned works by artists **Aya Haidar**, **Hazem Harb**, **Dr Najat Makki**, **Rasheed Araeen** and **Richard Atugonza** will be included in the [Beyond: Artist Commissions](#) programme.

Alongside these works, additional works by exhibiting artists including, **Alfredo Jaar** represented by Giorgio Persano Gallery (Turin), **Hera Büyüktaşçıyan**, represented by Green Art Gallery (Dubai), **Siah Armajani** represented by Rossi & Rossi (London, Hong Kong), and **Zineb Sedira** represented by The Third Line (Dubai), will also be featured as part of Abu Dhabi Art's special installation sector, *In & Around*.

Each year, distinguished guest curators work closely with a number of galleries exhibiting at the fair to present curated gallery sectors and programmes. This year, Njami's gallery sector will draw connections between artists through the language of music, while Lejeune will bring together a new performance art programme. Both guest curators had previously contributed to the virtual edition of the fair in 2020 and are back this year to contribute in-person.

The *Beyond: Artist Commissions* programme was launched in 2017 to present new, site-specific public installations by established artists in public spaces across the Emirate. This year's programme is the most ambitious to date, with works being shown in historic and cultural sites throughout the capital. *Beyond: Artist Commissions* will launch during the fair and remain open for three months as part of Abu Dhabi Art's year-round programming. Each year, the fair also features *In & Around*, with distributed spaces throughout the fair venue for galleries to show large-scale installations outside their booth space.

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“We are delighted to be able to bring a physical experience to our visitors this year,” **said Dyala Nusseibeh, Director of Abu Dhabi Art.** “It was important to enable our guest curators to bring their exhibitions and research into material form at the fair this year, to enable gallery exhibitors to once again connect first-hand with our audience and show their works in real life as well as to commission new artists to create site-specific works for the emirate. Across all these initiatives rests an abiding emphasis on a diverse and accessible public engagement programme, on offering an important meeting point for international and local artists and galleries and on supporting the local art ecosystem through our flagship event in November.”

For the fair’s first ever digital edition in 2020, Njami curated ‘*The Day After*’, dedicated to contemporary art from across the African continent, in an online format only. This year, Njami will spotlight selected artists and galleries under a new curatorial framework, *Kind of Blue*. The title of the exhibition references an album by Miles Davis, with Njami positioning jazz music as a metaphor for the open-ended parameters of the exhibition. *Kind of Blue* likens galleries to orchestras, each presenting musicians who together create a collective project that is wider than their singular expression. *Kind of Blue* references the improvisation harnessed by the creation of jazz music as a means to create an exploratory space and dialogue for these artworks to be understood together. Njami will be presenting his curatorial vision at the fair, giving audiences the opportunity to explore and experience this dynamic position first-hand in November.

“I am always interested in showcasing African contemporary art and for this year’s edition of Abu Dhabi Art, the African artists I selected have unique techniques and ways of addressing contemporary issues,” **said Njami.** “They also come from various locations not just mainland Africa. *Kind of Blue* is based on a masterpiece album by jazz legend, Miles Davis. I have chosen jazz music as a metaphor for the gathering of the galleries I have invited to take part for this edition of the fair because, in my eyes, jazz is the best representation of what is at stake with ‘African Contemporary Art’,”

“I am interested in bringing my theories and vision to Abu Dhabi to initiate a new dialogue here, as I feel that there is a cultural gap between the Middle East and Africa. Abu Dhabi can play a role in bridging this gap.”

Lejeune, curator of the fair’s public Performing Arts Programme in 2020, is also returning for the 2021 edition with a diverse line up of performances across different locations in Abu Dhabi. Lejeune will be commissioning four artists including, **Louise Hervé and Clovis Maillet**, French artists who explore projections of the future and anthropological knowledge through the language of performance and film; **Mays Albaik**, a Palestinian interdisciplinary visual artist interweaving poetry, socio-politics and geography; **Rand Abdul Jabbar**, an Abu Dhabi-based Iraqi multi-disciplinary artist whose socially engaged works intersect architecture and visual arts; and Moscow-based **Taus Makhacheva**, whose Dagestan cultural origins inform her installation and performance art practice. Each commissioned artist will select a site for a live performance in different locations around Abu Dhabi and at the fair with the aim of offering an abstract and poetic experience of different sculptural landmarks and sceneries around the city.

**Lejeune said:** “I am delighted to be invited to curate performance at Abu Dhabi Art again this year. Having worked within the ‘ever live’ of the digital space in 2020, my 2021 programme will place audiences back in the temporal and physical space of the artists’ work; exploring the transformative power of storytelling to create a series of journeys through histories, memories and fictions – both at the fair and throughout the city itself.”

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Since it began in 2007, Abu Dhabi Art has played an integral role in developing the evolving art scene in Abu Dhabi and the wider emirates. Returning in a physical format for its 13<sup>th</sup> edition, Abu Dhabi Art's agenda extends beyond the annual five-day fair at Manarat Al Saadiyat, with 2021 welcoming a number of exhibitions and commissions that will continue beyond the fair walls.

This year, *Beyond: Artist Commissions* will feature new works by **Aya Haidar**, a British-Lebanese multimedia artist who focusses on the use of found and recycled objects exploring loss, migration and memory; **Hazem Harb**, a Palestinian artist living between Rome and Dubai who delves into the spatial relationship between different phenomena such as, place and time; **Dr. Najat Makki**, a pioneering Emirati contemporary artist who works with large-scale installations; **Rasheed Araeen**, an early pioneer of minimalism who is well-known for his formal geometric sculptures; and **Richard Atugonza**, a Uganda-born sculptor who draws inspiration from his immediate surroundings. The artists' works will be revealed during the fair and will remain on view to the public until 22 January 2022.

The commissioned artists for *Beyond: Artist Commissions* will also be showing large-scale artworks at the fair as part of Abu Dhabi Art's on-site programme, *In & Around*, to connect fairgoers to the off-site projects. Other artists who will be presenting their works as part of *In & Around* include **Alfredo Jaar**, artist, architect and filmmaker who is represented by Giorgio Persano Gallery (Turin); **Hera Büyüктаşçıyan**, who examines the relationship between labour and productivity and the power dynamics embedded in the shaping of social, urban and historical landscapes and who is represented by Green Art Gallery (Dubai); **Siah Armajani**, a leading artist with a decades-long career, best known for his work in public art and who is represented by Rossi & Rossi (London, Hong Kong); and **Zineb Sedira**, who works across photography, film, sculpture and installation and is represented by The Third Line (Dubai).

Abu Dhabi Art's year-round talks programme, *Collectors Forum*, is curated by Middle Eastern art expert and former deputy chairman of Sotheby's, Roxane Zand. The talks started earlier this year with *How are NFTS taking over the art world?* and will continue until the end of the year. The [Collectors Forum](#) is a series of cultural talks targeting art collectors, and features some of the art world's leading figures, with the aim of engaging audiences in discussions related to the history of the UAE and contemporary art practice in the country and around the world.

Abu Dhabi Art's *Beyond: Emerging Artists* is curated by **Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath**, co-founders of multidisciplinary curatorial platform *Art Reoriented*. They have chosen three UAE-based emerging artists – **Hashel Al Lamki**, **Maitha Abdalla** and **Christopher Benton** – to participate in and create new commissioned works for this year's fair. Their exhibition will be on show at Manarat Al Saadiyat from 17 November 2021 until 4 December 2021. This year's programme is also the inaugural commission of Abu Dhabi Art's newly launched initiative, *Friends of Abu Dhabi Art*.

Strict precautionary and hygiene measures will be enforced at Abu Dhabi Art Fair 2021 to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all participants and visitors. Details of these measures will be announced soon.

For more information on Abu Dhabi Art 2021 and its year-round programmes, visit [abudhabiart.ae](http://abudhabiart.ae) and follow Abu Dhabi Art on social media: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

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More information on *Friends of Abu Dhabi Art* membership applications and how to support the local art scene is available on the *Friends of Abu Dhabi Art* [webpage](#).

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**Notes to Editors:**

**ABU DHABI ART**

**About Abu Dhabi Art**

Abu Dhabi Art expands beyond the notion of a traditional art fair, in placing strong emphasis on a diverse public engagement programme, including art installations and exhibitions, talks and events that take place in different locations throughout the year. The culmination of this year-long programme is the Abu Dhabi Art event in November, which provides an important sales platform for participating galleries whilst also offering these galleries an opportunity to showcase ambitious installations and site-specific works by their artists to a wide audience.

**About the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi**

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the emirate's people, heritage and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives and creative thought.

**About Dyala Nusseibeh**

Dyala Nusseibeh has been the Director of Abu Dhabi Art since 2016. Having graduated with a BA from Cambridge University and an MLitt (with Distinction) from Glasgow University, she spent a year at the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi followed by four years at the Saatchi Gallery in London as Head of Education. In this capacity she organised annual student shows, the education programme at the gallery and a travelling exhibition of works from the Saatchi collection to Ipswich in order to broaden outreach. In 2013, Nusseibeh became founding Director of ArtInternational Istanbul, managed by leading fair organisers Angus Montgomery, a position she held until 2016 when she joined the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi.

**About Performing Arts Programme**

Abu Dhabi Art works with a number of artists and curators to provide a strong performance component at the fair, with site-specific performances commissioned in different locations throughout the city, or experienced through the virtual platform.

**About Beyond: Artist Commissions**

Launched in 2017. Each year, Abu Dhabi Art invites established and well-known artists to create site-specific works in historic sites in Al Ain and the wider Abu Dhabi emirate, to activate these sites and draw new audiences to them. The works created by the commissioned artists are revealed during Abu Dhabi Art and remain on show to the public for several months afterwards.

**About In & Around**

Space for the fair's participating galleries to show large-scale installations outside their booth space within the fair venue during the fair.

**Beyond: Emerging Artists**

An annual initiative that launched in 2017. The programme provides three emerging artists in the UAE with a platform from which to develop their practice and realise ambitious art projects. The selected artists are chosen by a guest curator each year. They undertake a year-long programme of workshops and studio visits initiated by the guest curator which leads toward the realisation of a project for the Abu Dhabi Art fair in November. The works remain on exhibition to the public for several months beyond the fair dates.

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