

New exhibit in Sharjah showcases some of the best works by Emirati artists from last 40 years

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The Flying Saucer's echoing dome rests on slender columns and a series of triangulated, interconnected concrete beams. Victor Besa for The National

What does it take to create and nurture an environment in the UAE where the arts and artists can flourish?

This is a question that, since the start of the year, a number of events — such as the recent Andy Warhol-inspired party at the NYUAD Art Gallery, a Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan -Foundation- hosted panel discussion at Mina Zayed's Warehouse421 and Dubai's Global Art Forum 10 — have chosen to focus on.

GALERIE BRIGITTE SCHENK

“Our 10th anniversary led the panel to reflect on the growth of the art scene in the UAE, and how the UAE has not just become a meeting point in the international art scene but a place where art and ideas are produced and then disseminated to the rest of the world,” Art Dubai’s director, Antonia Carver, told an audience at the Dubai Design District in January.

But as 1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates, a new exhibition at the Sharjah Art Foundation’s Flying Saucer gallery shows, fostering local creativity is something that Sharjah’s Emirates Fine Arts Society (EFAS) understood long before the Saadiyat Cultural District or Art Dubai were even thought of.

Established in Sharjah in 1980 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to developing the fine arts and nurturing local talent through lectures, workshops, seminars and exhibitions, EFAS launched its 34th annual exhibition in January.

1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates was curated by Sheikha Hoor bint Sultan Al Qasimi, the head of the Sharjah Biennial and president of the Sharjah Art Foundation, last year for the UAE national pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale and now that it has returned to the UAE, local audiences have the chance to see more than 100 works by 15 Emirati artists that were selected by Sheikha Hoor.

A retrospective of contemporary art exhibitions in the Emirates over the past 40 years, the works include animal-bone and wood sculptures by Khor Fakkan-based artist Abdullah Al Saadi, paintings such as Turathona Al Mi’mary (Our Architectural Heritage) by the 60-year-old painter Obaid Suroor, from Ras Al Khaimah, and the early, 1968 oil painting Al Intithar (The Wait) by Abdul Qader Al Rais.

These are accompanied by the photographic collage Jumping No 1 (1983) by the veteran contemporary artist Hassan Sharif; Tongue (1994), a series of nine silver gelatin prints by the pioneering conceptual artist Mohammed Kazem, and uncharacteristic sculptures such as the clay relief Palestine (1995) by Najat Meky, the only female artist whose work features in the show.

1980 – Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates is at The Flying Saucer, Dasman, Sharjah until May 14

<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-life/exhibitions/new-exhibit-in-sharjah-showcases-some-of-the-best-works-by-emirati-artists-from-last-40-years>