

## *Echoes of Sir Bani Yas: Artistic Reflections*

XVA Gallery - Al Fahidi Neighbourhood, Dubai, UAE

Wednesday, May 23 to September 4, 2024

Opening Reception: Wednesday May 23, 6-8 pm

Dubai, UAE - The XVA Gallery is proud to announce the opening of "Echoes of Sir Bani Yas: Artistic Reflections" exhibition featuring an array of works from students and faculty of the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University. This exhibition uniquely blends the discoveries from the COMET (Communicating Observing Mapping Environments and Tolerance) research cluster and a transformative mindfulness workshop as part of "*Behind the Scenes: Perceptions of Young Arab Women*" cluster research grant. The showcase includes diverse mediums such as sculpture, drawing, printmaking, photography and video, emphasizing the profound interplay between environment, mindfulness, and artistic expression.

### **About the Exhibition:**

"Echoes of Sir Bani Yas: Artistic Reflections" draws its strength from the serene mindfulness workshop at Sir Bani Yas Island led by Justin Thomas, Naz Shahrokh, and Stefan Messam and the exploratory endeavors of the COMET projects led by David Howarth and Janet Bellotto. The COMET initiative, deeply committed to studying island ecologies, has spurred students and faculty to interact with and artistically interpret the unique ecosystem of Sir Bani Yas Island. These explorations are rooted in environmental sustainability and the rich cultural histories of island environments.

Simultaneously, the mindfulness retreat at Sir Bani Yas facilitated by Dr. Justin Thomas has been an immersive experience, allowing Zayed University alumni and faculty Naz Shahrokh and Stefan Messam to delve into mindfulness practices through drawing. These practices have significantly enhanced their creative processes, resulting in artworks that resonate deeply with personal and collective narratives. These artworks, born from a place of reflective tranquility, explore profound themes such as connection, memory, and the subtle interplay between humanity and nature.

### **Special Events:**

The exhibition will feature a series of special events, including talks and guided tours led by the curators and participating artists, designed to provide deeper insights into the creative processes and research that shaped the artworks.

### **Visit and Engagement:**

"Echoes of Sir Bani Yas: Artistic Reflections" will be open to the public from Wednesday May 23 to Wednesday September 4 at XVA Gallery, Dubai. Attendees are encouraged to engage with the ongoing dialogue about island ecologies and artistic practices through the COMET website, an interactive platform for global island research and creative projects.

### About the Mindfulness workshop / cluster:

The Sir Bani Yas mindfulness cluster project offered an immersive program aimed at boosting the creativity of art majors through mindful practices. Daily meditation exercises helped foster open awareness, nurturing divergent thinking crucial for artistic creativity. The program featured easy-to-learn techniques such as mindful eating, mindful movement, and breath and body meditation. These practices were designed to be sustainable beyond the workshop, enabling students to continue incorporating mindfulness into their daily routines for ongoing personal and creative growth.

### Mindful Artworks from the Retreat:

- Reem Al Mubarak's "Forgiveness": This series comprises mono-printing, embossment, and watercolor techniques, drawing inspiration from the indigenous trees of Sir Bani Yas. Reem's work explores the concept of forgiveness as a foundational, yet often hidden element of personal growth and peace, much like the roots of a tree.
- Hassana Arif's "connect2": A poignant series of ink and watercolor illustrations that delve into the complexities of mother-daughter relationships. Through organic forms and intertwined figures, Hassana captures the emotional and physical nuances of this deep bond.
- Amira Nasser Albastaki's "Fear Fest": A collection of stitched ink drawings created during episodes of insomnia. These spontaneous drawings provide insight into Amira's personal reflections on memory, anxiety, and the impact of sleeplessness on mental health.
- Rafiaa Al Nassar's "Visions of Discovery": This project documents Rafiaa's exploration of Sir Bani Yas through various mediums. The artworks capture moments from different activities on the island, reflecting on the nature of discovery and observation.
- Shawq Salem Al Katheeri's "Sands": A series of prints that employ watercolor, monotype, and real sand to create abstract illusions of the landscapes of Sir Bani Yas. Shawq's work aims to preserve and highlight the natural beauty of the island's unique elements.
- Mahra Eisa Al Qubaisi's "Untitled": This mixed-media sculptural installation includes found materials collected from Sir Bani Yas, paired with sketches, prints, and watercolor paintings of the island's flora and fauna. Mahra's project intertwines human and natural tracks, reflecting on the impact of human activity on natural environments.
- Stefan Messam's "Focused Disconnection": Includes a graphite drawing where the artist has delved into the meditative aspects of doodling.
- Naz Shahrokh "On the Road (from then to Now #1-4)": This series of book arts made from digital photography, found and collected books and mixed media, the artist investigates the contemplative journey where a moment is depicted through the usage of an image to recount the nature of memory and place.

### About COMET:

The COMET cluster features two interconnected initiatives that deeply explore island ecologies through artistic exploration:

1. Mapping & Re-envisioning Islands - This initiative focuses on collecting cultural and environmental data to inform and inspire creative artworks, fostering a deeper connection to the island's heritage and ecological concerns led by Janet Bellotto.

2. Typographic Matchmaking - Led by David Howarth, this initiative explores innovative printmaking techniques that produce compelling visual narratives, effectively capturing the essence of Sir Bani Yas through both traditional and digital methods.

#### Highlighted Works and Artists from COMET:

- A series of videos will be showcased the night of the opening including: "Environment (Mirroring)" by Hessa Mahmoud that reflects how we become our environment and echoing solidarity with the island and Ayesha AlFalasi's "Growth and Death of an Island", a video that contemplates ecological persistence and transformation.

- In addition to the larger COMET themes, David Howarth's students have produced a range of typographic works that capture the essence of Sir Bani Yas through traditional and digital printmaking methods. These pieces beautifully complement the photographs and installations that portray the island's diverse landscapes and textures.

-Janet Bellotto's "Planetary Fluke": A series of photographs capturing moments of the landscape and its fragility at Sir Bani Yas Island while considering the relationship with water and the sea.

-David Howarth's "Untitled": A series of typographic works that investigate typography through the usage of the traditional letterpress and printmaking.

#### About Sir Bani Yas Island:

Sir Bani Yas Island, located off the coast of Abu Dhabi, UAE, was formed from a salt dome, a geological feature that contributes its stunning natural landscapes and rich biodiversity. Originally established as a royal nature reserve, the island serves as an oasis of calm and beauty, making it an exemplary location for retreats and creative explorations. It hosts a wildlife sanctuary home to over 10,000 free-roaming animals, including several endangered species, and features archaeological sites that trace back to 600 AD. The island's unique environment combines historical depth with ecological diversity, providing an inspiring backdrop for the artistic and mindfulness activities conducted during the cluster project.

We invite you to join us at XVA Gallery for this insightful exploration of nature, art, and mindfulness, envisioned through the creative perspectives of our talented artists and researchers.

Please contact the gallery for further information and sales lists: [xva@xvagallery.com](mailto:xva@xvagallery.com) or telephone +9714 3535383