

Sheikha Bodour opens two new exhibitions at Maraya Art Centre in



Sheikha Bodour during her tour of the exhibitions.

Gulf Today, Staff Reporter

Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi, Chairperson of Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), has opened two new exhibitions, titled "Thinking Art: Artists as Writers from the UAE" and "33 Songs, 99 Words", at the Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah, a non-profit creative initiative by Shurooq that supports the region's emerging and established artists.

The opening ceremony was attended by Sheikha Nawar Al Qassimi, Director of the Sharjah Art Foundation; Sheikh Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, writer and founder of the Barjeel Art Foundation; Maria Camilleri, Ambassador of the Republic of Malta in the UAE; Assaf Doumit, the Lebanese Consul General at the Lebanese Consulate in Dubai; Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Musallam, President of the Sharjah Institute for Heritage; Ahmed Obaid Al Qaseer, CEO of Shurooq; Shatha Al Mulla, Acting Assistant Under-Secretary for the Heritage and Art Sector, Ministry of Culture and Youth; Dr Nina Heydemann, Director of Maraya Art Centre; Salem Al Juneibi, former President of the Emirates Fine Arts Society; and several renowned artists in the cultural and artistic scene from the UAE and beyond.

Sheikha Bodour Al Qasimi toured the two exhibitions, gaining insights into the artistic vision of key Emirati artists who are being celebrated by the two exhibitions. "Thinking Art" features artworks of seven of the UAE's fine-art movement pioneers, namely, Hassan Sharif, Dr. Najjat Makki, Dr. Mohammad Yousif, Nujoom Alghanem, Abdallah Alsaadi, Ali Al Abdan and Nasir Nasrallah. The Shurooq Chairperson also explored the relationship that Syrian/Palestinian artist Sawsan Al Bahar has built between the visual and the auditory expression transferred from folk songs into the visual art space in the exhibition titled "33 Songs, 99 Words".

Thinking Art: Artists as Writers from the UAE

Supervised by Salem Al Juneibi and curated by Dr. Noha Farran, this exhibition pays tribute to the artistic prowess of seven established Emirati artists and authors, providing a glimpse into their diverse talents and creative processes. Through an exploration of their written works, visitors are granted profound insights into the thoughts, inspirations, and motivations that lie behind the captivating artworks showcased.



Sheikha Bodour with dignitaries at the event.

“Thinking Art” seamlessly blends archival material, extensive academic research, video interviews with the artists, and an impressive display of their artworks and publications. This amalgamation offers a unique perspective on the interconnected roles of artists as both creators and writers.

“Thinking Art: Artists as Writers from the UAE” stands as a testament to the profound impact of culture and education on art and provides a valuable resource for art enthusiasts, researchers, and anyone eager to comprehend the vibrant art landscape of the UAE.

The artworks on display reflect the artists’ personal narratives, thoughts, and emotions, bringing forth a rich tapestry of cultural perspectives and storytelling techniques.

Organised by the Emirates Fine Arts Society (EFAS) and hosted at Maraya Art Centre, this exhibition exemplifies their unwavering dedication to nurturing creativity and advancing artistic pursuits in the UAE, making it a truly remarkable exhibition.

Dr. Noha, curator of the exhibition stated: “The primary objective of this exhibition is to showcase the remarkable artistic and intellectual capabilities of Emirati artists, who are not only accomplished creators but also accomplished writers. It seeks to illuminate the captivating interplay between creative expression and ideas.”



Sheikha Bodour gained an insight into the artistic vision of the creatives.

Salem Al Juneibi, Secretary General and former Chairman of the Emirates Fine Arts Society remarked: "This exhibition offers a distinctive opportunity to delve into art and explore the invaluable educational resources and insights that have shaped the cultural and artistic landscape in the region. We extend our deepest appreciation to Maraya Art Centre for graciously hosting this event."

"33 Songs, 99 Words" by Sawsan Al Bahar, curated by Cima Azzam

Curated by Cima Azzam, Curator of Maraya Art Centre, the '33 Songs, 99 Words' is a dialogue between songs from the past and the perpetual present. Sawsan Al Bahar, a Syrian/Palestinian artist who lives and works in Dubai, recalls her childhood as a rich tapestry of music with her father teaching her about life through the language of song.

The Arabic song, often an interpretation of poetry or monologue, is treasured within the region and the wider world as one of the most expressive forms of art. Songs are vessels for both music and stories, and are passed down through generations as a way of history making. Described as a father-daughter project, charting the songs that Al Bahar has shared with her father over the past 33 years, the exhibition delves into her identity and sense of belonging.

It is a collection of melodies including songs by some of the most celebrated Arab singers and musicians of the 20th century, such as Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers, who created a world of dreams and nostalgia that amplified listeners' emotions.

The exhibition reveals a multi-media installation alluding to the long conversations, listening sessions, and research shared between the artist and her father, a passionate music aficionado.

Sawsan Al Bahar commented about the exhibition in Maraya Art Centre, saying: "In my 33 years, 'the Arab song' gave me a space of belonging. I can trace my life through the songs I grew up hearing and listening to with my parents. My relationship with my past, my language, and Art is an extension of my relationship with these songs; it ebbs and flows with the music. My 33 songs were given to me by my dad, along with the sensibility to appreciate them."

Publications:

"Thinking Art" Exhibition is accompanied by an in-depth publication authored by Dr Noha Farran. The publication is preceded with forewords by the Chairman of the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), Ahmed Al Qaseer, and Dr Nina Heydemann, Director of Maraya Art Centre.

Programme:

Both exhibitions feature an extensive public programme including talks, workshops, and panel discussions with participating artists, offering visitors a unique opportunity to delve into their creative processes and inspirations while exploring the limitless possibilities of human expression.