

HASSAN SHARIF

Hassan Sharif (1951-2016) made a vital contribution to conceptual art and experimental practice in the Middle East through forty years of performance, installation, drawing, painting, and assemblage. Prior to leaving the U.A.E to study in London in 1979, Sharif gained attention for his cartoons published in the U.A.E press—ironic, outspoken critiques of the rapid industrialisation of the Emirates and the political deadlock of 1970s Arab Nationalism. As an artist, he rejected calligraphic abstraction, which was becoming the dominant discourse in the Middle East at that time, and pursued instead a pointedly contemporary vocabulary, drawing on the non-elitism and intermedia of Fluxus and the potential in British Constructionism's systemic processes of making.

Sharif graduated from The Byam Shaw School of Art (now part of Central Saint Martins) in 1984 and returned to the U.A.E shortly thereafter. He set about staging interventions and the first exhibitions of contemporary art in Sharjah, as well as translating art historical texts and manifestos into Arabic to provoke the local audience to engage with—or at least reject— contemporary art discourse. Beginning in 1982, Sharif began to formulate and document private performances of mundane activities (e.g. discussing art in a toilet cubicle with the faculty of The Byam Shaw School, jumping or digging holes in the U.A.E desert). Simultaneously, he began work on what he referred to as *Experiments*—formal exercises, like counting cars on a street in Dubai or tracing every instance of the letter 't' on a page of *The Daily Mail* newspaper. These absurdist and purposely boring practices were initially performed, in part, as an ironic response to the functionality of economics and globalisation: uselessness as a gesture. This critical stance, what he termed 'positive irony,' has since been expanded in subsequent works in other media.

Sharif started creating his *Objects* in the 1980s using found industrial materials or mass-produced items purchased in markets and stores around the U.A.E. Weaving these objects together with rope, coil and twine, the heaps and bundles that Sharif created became visualisations of the surplus of mass-production—the commonly unseen by-product of the U.A.E's globalised, consumerist society that had developed since the country's formation. His *Objects* – which handed cheap, mass-produced, or discarded materials back to society as artworks—were a vital instrument in provoking and engaging U.A.E audiences with contemporary art in the 1980s. Sharif's *Semi-Systems* were initially informed by British Constructionism, particularly Kenneth Martin's notion of 'Chance and Order.' He invented a set of rules, following this system, to create line drawings that transform within a grid, and colour, studies on paper. Sharif reveled in the mistakes and slippages occurring naturally in the monotonous creation of the work, believing that “‘art’ is a result of errors.”

In addition to his own practice, he also encouraged and supported several generations of artists in the Emirates. Sharif was a founding member of the Emirates Fine Arts Society (1980) and the Art Atelier in the Youth Theatre and Arts in Dubai. In 2007, he was one of the four artists to establish The Flying House, a Dubai institution for promoting contemporary Emirati artists.

The first Emirati to have his work shown in the Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha, Qatar, Sharif was also among the selected artists to represent the U.A.E. during its first national pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2011, Sharif was the subject of a retrospective exhibition, *Hassan Sharif: Experiments & Objects 1979–2011*, curated by Catherine David and Mohammed Kazem and presented by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage. His retrospective exhibition, *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, debuted at Sharjah Art Foundation in 2017, the year after his passing, before travelling to Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden; Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany; and finally the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMC+), Saint-Étienne, France. In 2022, Hassan Sharif's atelier was re-constituted at a Whitechapel Gallery's exhibition, *A Century of the Artist's Studio*, a major historical undertaking. His works are held in the collections of the Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah; MAMCO, Geneva; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Guggenheim New York and Abu Dhabi; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchuan, to name a few.

EDUCATION

1984 Diploma in Fine Art and Design, The Byam Shaw School of Art, London, UK

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 *The Storyteller*, curated by Murtaza Vali, Gallery Isabelle, Dubai, UAE
Gathering, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
- 2024 *Solo show*, Galleria Franco Noero, Turin, Italy
- 2023 *The Art Library Exhibitions: Woven*, Misk Art Institute, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- 2022 *Political Paintings*, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
184 Nails, curated by Vikram Divecha, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
- 2021 *Hassan Sharif: The Flying House, 2008-2012*, gb agency, Paris, France
Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist, musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMC+), Saint-Étienne, France
- 2020 *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden
Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist, Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany
- 2019 *Blue*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
- 2018 *Hassan Sharif: Semi-Systems*, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
- 2017 *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE
Reading is Making: Books and Boxes, gb agency, Paris, France
Experimentations, La Patinoire Royale, Brussels, Belgium
- 2016 *Hassan Sharif*, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
Hassan Sharif: Objects and Files, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
- 2015 *The Physical is Universal*, gb agency, Paris, France
Images, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
- 2014 *Hassan Sharif*, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
- 2013 *Approaching Entropy*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
Hassan Sharif, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
Hassan Sharif, Works 1980-2012, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
Hassan Sharif, Level One, gb agency, Paris, France
- 2012 *Hassan Sharif, Level One*, Paris, France
Hassan Sharif Works 1980-2012, Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
Hassan Sharif, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
- 2011 *Hassan Sharif, Experiments & Objects 1979-2011*, Qasr Al Hosn, Cultural Quarter Hall, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2007 *Hassan Sharif*, Sharjah Art Museum, UAE
- 2009 *Press Conference*, 1x1 Contemporary, Dubai, UAE
- 1986 *Emirates Fine Art Society*, Sharjah, UAE
- 1985 *Emirates Fine Art Society*, Sharjah, UAE
- 1976 *Caricature*, Central Public Library, Dubai, UAE

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2026 *Global Positioning System*, Jameel Art Centre, Dubai, UAE
In Absence and in Presence: Works from the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection, Aranya Art Center, Guangzhou, China
Unlicensed Goods, YDP, London, UK
Resolutions: Evolving Realities, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
Move, Pause, Return, Gallery Isabelle, Dubai, UAE
Arduna, contemporary art museum in AlUla, co-curated in partnership with Centre Pompidou. Fifth edition of the AlUla Arts Festival, Saudi Arabia
- 2025 *Proximities*, Seoul Museum of Art and Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation, Seoul, Korea
The Imaginary Museum, Rizq Art Initiative, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- 2024 *Hour Eternal - Emirati Abstraction*, Bassam Freiha Art Foundation (BFAF), Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Matters Through Matter, Sharbatly House, Al-Balad, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
After Rain, Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale, JAX District, Diriyah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
- 2023 *Triennale Art & Industrie: Chaleur Humaine*, Frac Grand Large – Hauts-de-France, Dunkerque, France
The Art Library: Manal AlDowayan and Hassan Sharif, Misk Art Institute, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Long Story Short, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA
In the Heart of Another Country: The Diasporic Imagination Rises, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE

- Emirati Art Reimagined: Hassan Sharif and the Contemporary Voices*, Christie's, London, UK
- Between Looking and Seeing*, gb agency, Paris, France
- 2022 *A Century of the Artist's Studio*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
- In the Heart of Another Country: The Diasporic Imagination Rites*, Sharjah Art Foundation Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany
- Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, Johnson Museum, Ithaca, New York, USA
- Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Evanston, Illinois, USA
- Khaleej Modern*, New York University Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Portrait of a Nation II: Beyond Narratives*, commissioned by ADMAF, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE 2021
- The Dream of the Museum*, M+ collection, Museum for Visual Culture, Hong Kong
- Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College, Brighton, USA
- Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, University of Michigan Museum of Art, USA
- Hassan Sharif & Carolin Kropff*, STUDIOSPACE Lange Strasse 3, Frankfurt, Germany
- Concepts and The Divine Abstract*, The Farjam Foundation, DIFC, Dubai, UAE
- 2020 *To Speak with Many Tongues: Selections from the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection*, Royal College of Art, London, UK
- Taking Shape: Abstraction from the Arab World, 1950s-1980s*, Grey Art Gallery, New York, USA
- 2019 *Contemporary Art. Asia, Australia and the Pacific: Selection of the Asia Pacific Triennial of the Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art*, Centro Cultural La Moneda, Santiago, Chile
- Popular Culture & The City*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years*, Curated by Maya Allison and Alia Zaal Lootah, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Education Education Education Learn Learn Learn*, Division of Labour, London, UK
- 2018 *The Monochrome Revisited*, Jean-Paul Najar Foundation, Dubai, UAE
- Cashiers écrits, dessinés, imprimés*, Fondation Bordmer, Geneva, Switzerland
- The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT9)*, Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia
- Crude*, Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai, UAE
- Ways of Seeing*, New York University Art Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- We Began By Measuring Distance*, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva, Switzerland
- A Century in Flux: Highlights from the Barjeel Art Foundation*, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
- 2017 *Ways of Seeing*, Villa Empain, Brussels, Belgium
- Viva Arte Viva*, 57th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, Italy
- The Restless Earth*, Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, Italy
- But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Underground 1988 – 2008*, NYUAD Art Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence*, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Is Old Gold?*, Dubai Community Theatre and Art Centre, Dubai, UAE
- 2016 *For an Image, Faster Than Light*, 1st Yinchuan Biennale, China
- Portrait of a Nation*, Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation (ADMAF), Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi, UAE
- Looking at the World Around You. Contemporary Works from Qatar Museums*, Fundacion Banco Santander, Madrid, Spain
- Do it [In Arabic]*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE
- 1980-Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates*, The Flying Saucer, Sharjah, UAE
- In Search of Lost Time*, Brunei Gallery, SOAS University of London, London, UK
- White Cube... Literally*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE
- 34th Annual Exhibition*, Emirates Fine Arts Society, Sharjah, UAE
- 2015 *The Books of Asia, Part II*, Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju, South Korea
- Barjeel Art Foundation Collection*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
- A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things*, Delfina Foundation, London, UK
- 1980-Today: Exhibitions in the United Arab Emirates*, The 56th Venice Biennale, Italy
- Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE
- Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915-2015*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK

- 2014 *Seconds*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE
Artevida: Corpo, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Une Histoire. Art, Architecture and Design from the 1980s to the Present, The Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Here and Elsewhere, New Museum, New York, USA
International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Cartagena de Indias, Cartagena, Colombia
Parallel Forms, gb agency, Paris, France
- 2013 *MinD/Body: Body Art and Performance in the Gulf Area*, Dubai Community Theatre and Art Centre, Dubai, UAE
Broken Spaces: Cut, Mark, and Gesture, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, USA
Trade Routes, Hauser & Wirth, London, UK
Two Parallel Lines: Hassan Sharif and Luis Camnitzer, Satellite, Dubai, UAE
- 2012 18th Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
MinD, DUCTAC, Dubai, UAE
Systems and Patterns, The International Centre of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia
Paper, Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice, France
- 2010 *Interventions*, Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
Arab World Meets Zurich, AB Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
Dropping Lines, Salwa Zeidan Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Roboris, AB Gallery, Lucerne, Switzerland
- 2009 *Golden Gates, Contemporary Art from the Middle East*, Paris, France
ADACH Platform for Visual Arts, 53rd Venice Biennale, Italy
It's Not You, It's Me, UAE National Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, Italy
Performance Art of the 1980s, A Comparison, The Prague Contemporary Art Festival, Prague, Czech Republic
Across the Gulf, ARC Biennial, Brisbane, Australia
- 2008 *Contemporary Emirati Art*, Salwa Zeidan Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Selected UAE Contemporary Artists Expo, Zaragoza, Spain
The Flying House First Group Show, Mashreq Bank, Dubai, UAE
Season of Art, Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai, UAE
The Flying House, Creek Art Fair, Al Bastakiya, Dubai, UAE
- 2007 *The Emirates and Its Renowned Arab Artists*, Dubai Community Theater and Art Center, Dubai, UAE
The Masters, Royal Mirage, Dubai, UAE
- 2006 *Window, 16 UAE Artists*, Total Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2005 The 7th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
Language of the Desert, Kunst Museum, Bonn, Germany
Cultural Diversity, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
- 2003 The 6th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
- 2002 *5 UAE*, Ludwig Forum For International Art, Aachen, Germany
- 2001 The 5th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
- 2000 The 7th Havana Biennial, Havana, Cuba
The Contemporary Arts of the Arab World, Shoman Foundation, Darat Al Funun, Amman, Jordan
Emirates Identities, French Cultural Centre, Dubai, UAE
- 1999 The 4th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
- 1998 The 7th Cairo International Biennial, Cairo, Egypt
U.A.E Contemporary Art, Institute of Arab World, Paris, France
- 1997 The 3rd Sharjah International Art Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
U.A.E Artists, French Cultural Center, Dubai, UAE
- 1996 *The Six*, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
- 1995 The 2nd Sharjah International Art Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
Emirates Arts, Sittard Art Centre, Sittard, Netherlands
- 1994 *Five Artists*, Emirates Fine Arts Society, Sharjah, UAE
- 1993 The 1st Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, UAE
- 1990 *Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society in the Soviet Union*, Moscow, Russia
The 3rd Cairo International Biennial, Cairo, Egypt
- 1986 *Emirates Fine Art Society*, Sharjah, UAE

- 1985 *Emirates Fine Art Society*, Sharjah, UA
 Sea and Desert, Abu Dhabi, UAE
 Central Market, Sharjah, UAE
 One Day, Almarijah Art Atelier, Sharjah, UAE
- 1983 *-/+ (Minus/Plus)*, Al Ahli Club, Dubai, UAE
- 1976 *2nd Youth*, Dubai National Theatre, Dubai, UAE
- 1974 *1st Youth*, Dubai National Theatre, Dubai, UAE

FAIRS

- 2026 Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE
 The Leap Between, Art Basel Qatar, Doha, Qatar

COLLECTIONS

Louvre Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Saint-Étienne Métropole (MAMC+), France
Mohammad and Mahera Abu Ghazaleh Foundation for Art & Culture (MMAG Foundation), Amman, France
Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (FRAC), France
Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva, Switzerland
M+, Museum for Visual Culture, Hong Kong, China
Solomon R Guggenheim, New York, USA
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, UAE
Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France
Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis, Tunisia
Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE
JP Morgan Chase Collection, New York, USA
Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Yinchuan, China
Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE
Sittard Art Centre, Sittard, Netherlands
Tate Modern, London, UK
Farjam Foundation, Dubai, USA
Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, USA

PUBLICATIONS

- 2023 *Woven, The Art Library: Discovering Arab Artists*, edited by Mona Khazindar, Misk Art Institute and Rizzoli Publications
- 2020 *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist*, edited by Hoor Al Qasimi, Koenig Books
- 2018 *Performance in Contemporary Art*, edited by Catherine Wood, Tate Publishing
- 2017 *Hassan Sharif, 2017*, edited by Adel Khozam, Emirates Fine Arts Society
- 2011 *Hassan Sharif: Works 1973-2011, 2011*, edited by Catherine David, Hatje Cantz

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2016 *Sharp Tools*, Directed by Nujoom Al-Ghanem, Nahar Productions