

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/Platform for Visual Arts, U.A.E. His work has been shown in recent exhibitions including *In the Heart of Another Country: The Diasporic Imagination Rises*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE (2023) following its debut at Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2022); *The Art Library Exhibitions: Woven*, Misk Art Institute, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2023); *Emirati Art Reimagined: Hassan Sharif and the Contemporary Voices*, Christie's, London, UK (2023); among others. 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, Malmö, 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, Sharjah, 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, Sharjah, 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

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, Sharjah, UAE

GALLERY ISABELLE

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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, China
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, STUDIO SPACE 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, inimprimés, Foundation 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, Yinchuan, 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, Sharjah, 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, Venice, Italy
Sharjah Biennial 12: The past, the present, the possible, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE
Adventures of the Black Square: Abstract Art and Society 1915-2015, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK

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2014 *Seconds*, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, 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
Vis 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 Arts 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, UAE

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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

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, 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
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

2022 Warehouse421 Podcast, 3 Episodes, Season 2: A Future in the Folds of the Past