

Sharjah Art Foundation Announces Sharjah Biennial 14 Curators: Zoe Butt, Omar Kholeif, and Claire Tancons

Leaving the Echo Chamber Will Examine the Possibilities for Producing Art
in Today's Rapidly Changing Environment

Opens March 2019 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

Sharjah, UAE – 6 November, 2017 – Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) announced today the three curators for the next Sharjah Biennial, opening in March 2019: Zoe Butt, Omar Kholeif, and Claire Tancons. The 14th edition of the Sharjah Biennial (SB14), *Leaving the Echo Chamber*, will question the possibilities for producing art when material culture is under constant threat of human destruction and climate degradation, continuing the Biennial's tradition of offering artists from the surrounding region and beyond an internationally recognised platform for exhibition and experimentation. Curators of the Sharjah Biennial have hailed from countries and institutions all over the world, and have explored biennial themes as diverse as climate change, agriculture, political conflict, and artistic production.

SB14 will include distinct exhibitions by each of the three curators, bringing together a range of experiences and works by contemporary artists—including major commissions, large-scale public installations, performances, and films—to explore the ways in which contemporary life, enabled by rapid technological change, has created a seemingly inescapable “echo chamber” of information, complex personal networks, and shifting narratives that are physical, spiritual, and virtual.

“Contemporary life is dominated by competing information and fluctuating histories—a reality that raises important questions about the trajectory of contemporary art, as well as the conditions in which it is made,” said Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation. “Butt, Kholeif, and Tancons bring incredibly different perspectives to these questions, and together represent the complexity of challenges faced by today's artists and society as a whole. The aim of the Biennial is to deepen the context of these questions through thought-provoking and often experiential works of art.”

On view in SAF buildings and courtyards across the city's arts and heritage areas, as well as other spaces in Sharjah, *Leaving the Echo Chamber* will explore subjects ranging from migration and diaspora, to concepts of time and interpreted histories, in relation to today's continuous loop or “echo chamber” of information and history. Invited to respond to the overarching issues and inquiries *Leaving the Echo Chamber* propose, the curators will present three distinct exhibitions, for which they will invite a selection of artists from around the world, as well as from the UAE and the surrounding region, to participate. Summaries of the three curatorial statements follow below:

- ***Journey Beyond The Arrow. Curated by Zoe Butt***

Journey Beyond The Arrow gives deeper context to the movement of humanity and the tools that have enabled (or hindered) its survival. From spiritual ritual to cultural custom; from technological process to political rule of law; all such practices possess particular tools (object and action), which aid or abet mobility. In this exhibition, artists reveal the generational impact of a range of physical and psychological ‘tools,’ whose representation and meaning has shifted

as a consequence of colonial exploit, religious conflict, or ideological extremism. *Journey Beyond The Arrow* seeks to illuminate the necessary diversity of humanity and its exchange across the globe.

- ***Making New Time. Curated by Omar Kholeif***

Making New Time examines time as a unit of experience that is at once singular and collective, representing chaos and possibility. Unfolding in three parts, this exhibition examines the physical body through the lens of artists who have represented tactile figures and forms in vibrant ways to question how we experience ourselves in relation to others. From here, the exhibition moves into worlds of augmented and virtual reality, featuring works that establish how time has enabled new forms of shared experience. The presentation concludes with an investigation into the trials, tribulations, and traces of history, suggesting how our existence can be changed, altered, and re-imagined.

- ***Look for Me All Around You. Curated by Claire Tancons***

Look for Me All Around You questions if obscurity is the harbinger of futurity, darkness the site of seeing, and blackness the scene of unmasking. In *Look for Me All Around You*, what is being “looked for” is not what is being “looked at”—if only it could be seen. Standing witness to the imperilment of the contemporary in the atomised space between “me” and “you,” *Look for Me All Around You* seeks to eschew the sole realm of the retinal embedded within hegemonic structures of looking, learning, and feeling. It strives instead, through mechanisms of repossession of perception, to reflect and deflect encroaching conditions of dispossession and diaspora, between piracy, clandestinity and fugitivity.

About the Curators

Zoe Butt is the Artistic Director of The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. With a focus on building critically thinking, historically conscious artistic communities, Butt previously served as Executive Director and Curator of Sàn Art in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Director of International Programs at Long March Project in Beijing, China; and Assistant Curator of Contemporary Asian Art at Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia. Select curatorial projects include *Spirit of Friendship* and *Poetic Amnesia: Phan Thao Nguyen* (2017) and *Dislocate: Bui Cong Khanh* (2016), The Factory Contemporary Arts Centre, Ho Chi Minh City; the online exhibition *Embedded South(s)* (2016), *Conscious Realities*, Sàn Art, Ho Chi Minh City (2013–2016); and *Disrupting Choreographies*, Carré d’Art, Nimes, France (2013). Butt is a member of the Asian Art Council for the Solomon R Guggenheim, New York; a member of Asia 21 Young Leaders of the Asia Society; and in 2015, became a Young Global Leader of the World Economic Forum.

Omar Kholeif is a writer and curator whose work focuses on the intersection of art, global politics, and emerging technologies. Currently the Manilow Senior Curator and Director of Global Initiatives at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Kholeif has held many esteemed positions including Curator at the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Senior Curator at Cornerhouse, Manchester; Curator at FACT, Liverpool; Head of Art and Technology at SPACE, London; Artistic Director of the Arab British Centre, London; and founding Director of the UK’s Arab Film Festival. He has curated numerous exhibitions, commissions, and programmes internationally, including *Focus: Beyond Territory*, Abu Dhabi Art (2017); Cyprus Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale (2015); Abraaj Group Art Prize, Dubai (2015); Focus: Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean, Armory Show, New York (2015); and Co-Curator of the Liverpool Biennial in 2012. Among his edited or co-edited books are *Electronic Superhighway* (2016), *The Rumors*

of the World: Re-thinking Trust in the Age of the Internet (2015), and *Moving Image* (2015). Forthcoming single-authored books include *The Artists Who Will Change the World* and *Goodbye World! Looking at Art After the Internet* (2018).

Claire Tancons is a curator and scholar invested in the discourse and practice of the postcolonial politics of production and exhibition. Tancons' independent vision has been supported by an Andy Warhol Foundation Curatorial Fellowship (2008), a Prince Claus Fund Artistic Production Grant (2009), and two Curatorial Research Fellowships from the Foundation for Art Initiatives (2007, 2009). She has curated for established and emerging international biennials including Prospect New Orleans (2008), the Gwangju Biennale (2008), the Cape Town Biennial (2009), Biennale Bénin (2012), and the Göteborg Biennial (2013). Other curatorial highlights include *En Mas': Carnival and Performance Art of the Caribbean*, an Emily Hall Tremaine Exhibition Award-winning traveling curatorial platform (2014–present); *Up Hill Down Hall*, a BMW Tate Live commission in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall (2014); and *Tide by Side*, the opening ceremony of Faena Art's Miami Beach district (2016). Tancons was recently the Artistic Director of *etcetera: a civic ritual* for Printemps de Septembre in Toulouse (2017), and is currently a curator for the *Origins* Season of the National Sawdust in New York (2017–18) and co-curator of the first edition of *Tout-Monde*, a festival of the Cultural Services of the French Embassy for the arts of the Caribbean in Miami (2018–19).

About Sharjah Art Foundation

Sharjah Art Foundation is an advocate, catalyst and producer of contemporary art within the Emirate of Sharjah and the surrounding region, in dialogue with the international arts community. Under the leadership of founder Hoor Al Qasimi, a curator and artist, the foundation advances an experimental and wide-ranging programmatic model that supports the production and presentation of contemporary art, preserves and celebrates the distinct culture of the region, and encourages a shared understanding of the transformational role of art. The foundation's core initiatives include the long-running Sharjah Biennial, featuring contemporary artists from around the world; the annual March Meeting, a convening of international arts professionals and artists; grants and residencies for artists, curators, and cultural producers; ambitious and experimental commissions; and a range of travelling exhibitions and scholarly publications.

Established in 2009 to expand programmes beyond the Sharjah Biennial, which launched in 1993, the foundation is a critical resource for artists and cultural organisations in the Gulf and a conduit for local, regional, and international developments in contemporary art. The foundation's deep commitment to developing and sustaining the cultural life and heritage of Sharjah is reflected through year-round exhibitions, performances, screenings and educational programmes in the city of Sharjah and across the Emirate, often hosted in historic buildings that have been repurposed as cultural and community centres. A growing collection reflects the foundation's support of contemporary artists in the realisation of new work, and its recognition of the contributions made by pioneering modern artists from the region and around the world.

Sharjah Art Foundation is a legally independent public body established by Emiri Decree and supported by government funding, grants from national and international nonprofits and cultural organisations, corporate sponsors, and individual patrons. All events are free and open to the public.

About Sharjah

Sharjah is the third-largest of the seven United Arab Emirates, and the only one bridging the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Reflecting the deep commitment to the arts, architectural preservation and cultural education embraced by its ruler, Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Sharjah is home to more than 20 museums and has long been known as the cultural hub of the United Arab Emirates. In 1998, it was named UNESCO's 'Arab Capital of Culture' and has been designated the UNESCO 'World Book Capital' for the year 2019.

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