



SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

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Sharjah Art Foundation Appoints Omar Kholeif as Director of Collections and Senior Curator

Foundation also Announces Plans for Jurainah Art Space, A New Building for Foundation's International Collection Rooted in Contemporary and 20th-Century Art of the Region

Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation, today announced the appointment of **Dr Omar Kholeif** to the newly created position of Director of Collections and Senior Curator, where he will lead the foundation's acquisition strategy and develop a year-round programme of exhibitions, as well as shape international partnerships, organise symposia and develop publications. Kholeif will also work in collaboration with Al Qasimi and the Sharjah Art Foundation team in developing plans for **Jurainah Art Space**—a new, 13,000 square-meter building that will house the foundation's growing collection of more than 1,000 works of contemporary and 20th-century art rooted in the region and radiating internationally. Kholeif begins his new role in June 2019.

Al Qasimi also announced the creation of the **Jurainah Art Space**, an interactive centre that will bring together the local community with international artists, researchers and visitors to Sharjah. Jurainah Art Space will showcase installations drawn from the foundation's collection, rotating exhibitions and symposia, and will also be home to an archive of every edition of the Sharjah Biennial from 1993 to the present. It will be free and open to the public, serving as an educational resource and community gathering space featuring multipurpose rooms, courtyards, a bookstore, a restaurant and a cafe. Jurainah Art Space continues Sharjah Art Foundation's growth through a combination of new and revitalized spaces and will be located adjacent to both Sharjah University City, which is home to many of the Emirate's institutions of higher learning and a popular retail district. Designed by Mona El Mousfy, architect founder of SpaceContinuum, the building is anticipated to open in 2022.

In his new role, Kholeif will also lead acquisition strategy and curate a programme of installations drawn from the SAF collection and special exhibitions. Over the past 10 years, Sharjah Art Foundation has been building a collection rooted in contemporary artists from the region and their predecessors, together with works by artists it has commissioned for the Sharjah Biennial and others from around the world engaged in ideas of interest to the people of the UAE. Spearheaded by Al Qasimi, this ground-breaking collection is the first to place MENASA artists at the centre of an international art dialogue. The collection holds important works and commissions by such artists as Ibrahim El-Salahi, Wael Shawky, Emily Jacir, Hrair Sarkissian, John Akomfrah and

Mona Hatoum, as well as major works by 20th-century masters including Hassan Sharif, Marwan and Rasheed Araeen, among many others.

‘Sharjah Art Foundation—first through the Sharjah Biennial and now through a year-round series of exhibitions and programs—has been both a vital international advocate for contemporary artists from the region and a convener that has brought important artists from around the world to Sharjah for more than a decade. The appointment of Dr Omar Kholeif and the development of Jurainah Arts Space together demonstrate the continuity of this work,’ stated **Hoor Al Qasimi, Director of Sharjah Art Foundation**. ‘As a leading curator and scholar with a deep knowledge of both the artists and art history of the region and the broader international arts dialogue, Omar brings a critical new dimension that will greatly enhance the advancement of our mission both within the UAE and internationally.’

‘I am incredibly excited to be working with Hoor and the SAF team, to dream of the full art historical scope and potential of the foundation, especially its collection,’ said **Dr Omar Kholeif**. ‘It is increasingly one of the most important collections in the region and it is a privilege and an honour to lead its continued development and ultimately create ways to share it with the public in Sharjah and internationally. Moreover, having the opportunity to create exhibitions for the foundation represents an exciting opportunity to build upon its ground-breaking work in fostering international exchange and collaboration.’

Dr Omar Kholeif has organised more than 100 exhibitions, special projects and commissions around the world over the past decade, including **Sharjah Biennial 14: *Leaving the Echo Chamber: Making New Time***, on view through June 10. Prior to joining SAF, Kholeif was Manilow Senior Curator and Director of Global Initiatives at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) Chicago, where he curated major exhibitions and oversaw significant acquisitions with a focus on contemporary and 20th-century artists of the Global South, including Michael Rakowitz, Otobong Nkanga, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Walid Raad, Basim Magdy, Etel Adnan and Marwan, among many others. Kholeif also served as Curator at Whitechapel Gallery, London; Head of Art and Technology at Space, London; Senior Curator at Cornerhouse and HOME, Manchester; and Curator at FACT, Liverpool; and he is the author or editor of more than 20 books on contemporary art.

About Dr Omar Kholeif

Egyptian-born, Dr Omar Kholeif is a writer and curator, who, over the last decade, has curated more than 100 exhibitions, special projects and commissions globally. He has authored and/or edited more than 20 books and catalogues on art, including recent publications *Goodbye, World! Looking at Art in the Digital Age* (Sternberg Press, 2018) and *The Artists Who Will Change the World* (Thames and Hudson, 2018). Kholeif's most recent projects include *Time, Forward!*—the V-A-C Foundation's contribution to the 58th Venice Biennale—, the 14th Sharjah Biennial: *Leaving the Echo Chamber: Making New Time*, as well as upcoming projects including the first retrospective of

David Lynch's art in the UK for the Manchester International Festival and Focus: Drawing, Tracing, and Mapping at Abu Dhabi Art. He also recently served as a Visiting Tutor at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford.

Previously, he was Manilow Senior Curator and Director of Global Initiatives at the MCA Chicago, where he curated the first ever museum solo museum show of Michael Rakowitz, Otobong Nkanga's first U.S. museum survey and the first U.S. museum solo show of Egyptian artist Basim Magdy. Kholeif also oversaw major group shows—including *Eternal Youth*—and co-curated the museum's 50th anniversary exhibition. He also oversaw numerous major acquisitions, especially by artists from the Middle East including Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Jumana Manna, Walid Raad, Latifa Echakhch, Basim Magdy, Michael Rakowitz, Etel Adnan, Sophia Al-Maria and Marwan—for which the MCA remains the only major museum in North America to hold a major painting in its collection.

Prior to his time with the MCA Chicago, he was Curator at Whitechapel Gallery, London, where he curated *Emily Jacir: Europa*, which travelled to the Irish Museum of Art. He also curated the blockbuster *Electronic Superhighway*, which travelled to MAAT in Lisbon. He also instigated the major collaboration with the Barjeel Art Foundation, *Imperfect Chronology: Arab Art from the Modern to the Contemporary*, as well as projects with the V-A-C Foundation including Mike Nelson, Fiona Banner, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and James Richards.

He has also been Senior Curator at Cornerhouse and HOME, Manchester—where he curated solo shows of Sophia Al-Maria and Joana and Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige—the latter which was a collaboration with the MIT List Center. Prior to that, he was Curator at FACT—Foundation for Art and Creative Technology—where he organised exhibitions of Akram Zaatari and Ahmed Basyony. His multiple curatorial projects include Focus: Middle East, North Africa and the Mediterranean at the Armory Show, New York; Abraaj Group Art Prize; Cyrus Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale; and contributing curator to the 2012 Liverpool Biennial.

Kholeif is a Churchill Fellow, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and member of AICA—the International Association of Art Critics. He has served on numerous juries, including those for the Film London Jarman Award and the Thoma Foundation Arts Writing Award in Digital Art and has received awards and grants from major organisations, including the Graham Foundation for the Advanced Study in the Fine Arts and the Andy Warhol Foundation | Creative Capital. In 2016, he was the Goldberg Visiting Professor/Curator at Hunter College, New York. He holds MA degrees from the University of Glasgow and Royal College of Art, London as well as a PhD from the University of Reading and the University of the Arts, Zurich.

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 exhibitions 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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