



SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

For Immediate Release
19 December 2019



March Meeting 2019, Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, Sharjah, 2019. Photo: Sharjah Art Foundation

Sharjah Art Foundation Announces Spring 2020 Exhibitions and March Meeting

**Including Major Surveys of Tarek Atoui and Zarina Bhimji
And First Exhibition in the Region to Focus on
Art in the Age of the Internet**

Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) today announced its spring 2020 programme, which features major exhibitions exploring vital issues in contemporary art theory and history and examining the work and impact of significant artists from the MENASA region, as well as the annual March

Meeting, a three-day convening of artists, curators and art practitioners to explore critical issues in contemporary art.

The spring 2020 season includes a major survey of **Tarek Atoui's** work, which features live performances by the artist and a series of guest creators, that celebrates the composer's decade-long collaboration with the Foundation and the wider Sharjah community; a mid-career retrospective of **Zarina Bhimji**, which includes some of the artist's seminal works in film, photography and installation; and ***Art in the Age of Anxiety***, the most ambitious show of its kind to take place in the Middle East, which brings together a global group of artists to consider how our everyday devices and technologies have altered our collective consciousness; all **opening 21 March 2020**.

In addition, the foundation's annual **March Meeting (MM)** returns from **21 to 23 March 2020**, gathering leading artists, curators, and art practitioners from across the region and around the world for a series of talks, workshops and performances. MM 2020 will launch the [15th edition of Sharjah Biennial](#), conceived by the late curator Okwui Enwezor and entitled ***Thinking Historically in the Present***. Designed by Enwezor as the 'historical prelude' to the Biennial, MM 2020 will take place a year prior, leading up to the 30th anniversary of Sharjah Biennial in 2021. MM 2020 will examine the history of the Biennial and past March Meetings by bringing together former Sharjah Biennial curators, participants and interlocutors as well as art historians and critics to discuss the role of the Biennial as a catalyst for critical dialogue and transnational exchange.

Detailed information on SAF's spring 2020 programme follows below.

Tarek Atoui: *Cycles in 11*

Marking over a decade of collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation and the surrounding community, Tarek Atoui: *Cycles in 11* centres around experimental and innovative musical forms and offers audiences opportunities to learn about and explore instrument-making, compositional structure and musical collaboration.

Developed over the last 11 years, the exhibition represents the culmination of the artist's ongoing exploration of different methods of listening, composition and performance. The instruments Atoui has created are the product of extensive research into music history and tradition as well as collaborations with different experts. Challenging established ways of listening through innovative approaches to sound, the instruments also build on the artist's collective project WITHIN, which grew out of years of work with Deaf culture. This collective originating in Sharjah investigates how deafness can influence the way sound performance, space and instrumentation are understood.

For three months, the exhibition will be activated through live performances by Atoui and a series of guest collaborators. Also central to the exhibition is a residency in which musicians, composers and artists will be invited to experiment and interact with different audiences in

Sharjah in order to develop or produce new work. Lastly, a temporary sound lab in Sharjah's east coast city of Kalba will serve as a space for education and experimentation.

The full schedule of performances will be available in early 2020.

Art in the Age of Anxiety

The most ambitious show of its kind to take place in the Middle East, *Art in the Age of Anxiety* considers how our everyday devices and technologies, as well as their attendant content, networks and systems, have altered our collective consciousness. Presenting a global group of artists whose work stretches from algorithmic culture to virtual reality, including works by **Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Cory Arcangel, Wafaa Bilal, Douglas Coupland, Cao Fei, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Jon Rafman and Guan Xiao**, as well as a major new commission by **Simon Denny**, the exhibition tells the story of the culture that we live in now and posits speculations for its future.

Curated by **SAF Director of Collections and Senior Curator Omar Kholeif**, *Art in the Age of Anxiety* explores what it means to live in an age where hard knowledge has been replaced by rumours, exaggeration and hypomania. The exhibition poses questions: is any of the information that we consume real or reliable? Does it pose a danger? Or open up possibilities? In the age of digital technology, we lie in a murky territory or 'nervous state' to quote political scientist Will Davies—living in a constant condition of heightened alertness, relying on our feelings. Here, sensations become data and emotions become statistics. Indeed, emotions are now captured and algorithmically analysed using behavioural data and in turn everything becomes speculative: is this even really happening, one might ask? *Art in the Age of Anxiety* sits at this historical juncture and questions: have we lost all sense of objectivity? Are irrational forces now at the core of how belief is constructed? How do we regulate our feelings? Should we assume that they are untrustworthy? This exhibition explores the content of this post-digital condition, what can be broadly defined as the human manners and behaviours found in a world that has emerged after the rise of digital technologies. **The exhibition is being especially designed by architect Todd Reisz and an interactive publication and series of discursive events will follow the exhibition.**

Zarina Bhimji

For over 30 years, Zarina Bhimji's work has drawn from anthropology, sociology, painting, poetry and history to explore ways of knowing that elude established systems of order and institutional record. This major survey organised by Sharjah Art Foundation presents a number of the artist's seminal works in film, photography and installation, which taken together, provide space to think the unnamed and value forms of knowledge that are deeply cultural and emotional. Although many of the artist's works draw from specific historical circumstances—the rise of anti-immigration sentiment in Britain of the 1970s, the expulsion of South Asians from post-liberation Uganda, the deployment of racial classification in the maintenance of British

colonial rule and the Indian Ocean trade routes that have long connected cultures and continents—Bhimji has stated that her intention is not to communicate the facts of such histories but rather to ‘feel the force with which it all happened.’

Bhimji conceives of her films and photographs as compositions of light, shadow, colour, texture and sound rather than mere documentary record. The use of the camera as a subjective, painterly tool is central to this endeavour. In her films such as *Out of Blue* (2002), *Yellow Patch* (2011) and *Jangbar* (2015), which are included in this exhibition, the artist advances a powerful aesthetic language characterised by its sensuality and rigor and reflects a devotion to the experiences of those who came before her. Her compositions, whether in moving image or other media, spatialise attitudes, gestures and movements, allowing sentiment to stand on its own, to seize the viewer and to resonate between bodies in a gallery. In her work, Bhimji’s handling of space is ripe with metaphor—whether in slow pans across lush forested landscape, lingering shots of deserted architecture or careful study of the stamps and official seals that mark colonial documents—she employs profound structures of feeling and psychology in narrative treatments that transcend their historical contexts and continue to shape our moment.

March Meeting 2020

Sharjah Art Foundation’s annual March Meeting brings together artists, curators and art practitioners from around the world for a wide-ranging programme of talks, panels, presentations and performances that explore vital issues in contemporary art. The 2020 edition of March Meeting (MM 2020) will be organised around the title and theme of the forthcoming Sharjah Biennial 15 (SB15), *Thinking Historically in the Present*, conceived by the late critic and curator Okwui Enwezor.

According to Enwezor, the 15th edition of the Sharjah Biennial will be ‘structured with a historical prelude in 2020 and contemporary presentations in 2021.’ Following his vision for the Biennial and coinciding with its 30th anniversary, SB15 will reflect on the Biennial as a means for addressing the disruptive power of ‘artistic monolingualism’ and exploring other approaches to thinking about the past in the present. As its prelude, March Meeting 2020 will serve as a congress of thinking about what Enwezor called the ‘unravelling present’ with artists and members of the ‘global intelligentsia.’

The MM 2020 programme will examine the history of the Biennial and past March Meetings by bringing together former SB curators, participants and interlocutors as well as art historians and critics to discuss the role of the Biennial as a catalyst for critical dialogue and transnational exchange. MM 2020 will explore the evolution of the Biennial and its transformation from geographic to non-geographic models of representation as well as its move towards non-traditional methods of curating and displaying art and the activation of non-institutional spaces. The three-day programme will also examine the impact of the Sharjah Biennial on the regional and global contemporary art scenes and its educational role in developing new narratives and shaping the understanding and dissemination of all art forms. Further details about MM 2020 programme will be announced in early 2020.

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 and 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.

Media Contacts

Sharjah Art Foundation:

Alyazeyah Al Reyaysa, alyazeyah@sharjahart.org, +971(0)65444113

Resnicow and Associates:

Sarah Morris, smorris@resnicow.com, +1-212-671-5165

Delaney Smith, dsmith@resnicow.com, +1-212-671-5160