



SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

SAF Architecture Backgrounder

A central component of Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF)'s mission is to preserve the rich heritage and history of Sharjah's built environment while adapting it to create spaces for the exhibition and presentation of contemporary art and to meet the needs of the local community. Through the vision of SAF's President and Director, Hoor Al Qasimi, the Foundation has initiated a wide range of urban development projects across the Emirate of Sharjah, working closely with communities and a talented group of architects, designers and artists to construct vibrant spaces that fit seamlessly within the context of their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Taking adaptive reuse as its guiding principle, SAF plays an active role in the preservation of multiple layers of historic architecture in Sharjah, which dates as far back as the 19th century. Whether renovating an existing building or creating a new structure, the Foundation prioritises the needs of the community and works to avoid gentrification, displacement and disruption by remaining sensitive to each area's existing architecture, history and socioeconomic conditions—often by conducting in-depth field research and consulting archival documents. SAF's approach has led to thoughtful implementation of architectural practices, the revitalisation of important historical buildings and neighbourhoods, and a decentralisation of culture and arts.

Major projects completed to date include the following:

- **Al Mureijah Art Spaces (2013)**

The first major architectural project undertaken by the Foundation, Al Mureijah Art Spaces is a complex of five renovated buildings in the Al Mureijah neighbourhood that was inaugurated during Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013). The complex is home to SAF's contemporary galleries and acts as a community space for Al Mureijah residents. Designed to remain in close dialogue with the existing historic neighbourhood, Al Mureijah Art Spaces reactivates the area with multilayered, flexible and accessible spaces for the exhibition of contemporary art. With exterior courtyards, open squares and an interconnected roofscape, as well as a range of multifunctional, climate-controlled interiors that support works of various media and scales, Al Mureijah Art Spaces provides diverse art experiences and moments of engagement within Sharjah's core urban area. Designed by SAF and Mona El Mousfy, founder of SpaceContinuum Design Studio and Architecture Consultant, and Sharmeen Azam Inayat, the project was shortlisted for the prestigious 2019 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

- **Al Hamriyah Studios (2017)**

The artist workspaces and exhibition areas of Al Hamriyah Studios, situated on the Sharjah coast at Al Hamriyah, expand the Foundation's exhibition footprint and outreach activities beyond Sharjah's urban centre. Constructed on the site of a former souq, the complex largely maintains the footprint of the original courtyard and periphery while transforming it into a more open, fluid space and allowing for a communal social and spatial experience centred on contemporary art. The

design, which combines avant-garde and modern technologies with regionally inspired architectural customs and traditions, enables artists to concentrate on the production of artworks, while communal spaces such as the large courtyard provide areas for social interaction and space for SAF public events, including outdoor cinema screenings and performances. The building was designed by Emirati architect Khaled Al Najjar of dxb.lab.

- **Rain Room Sharjah (2018)**

In addition to preserving and adapting historic buildings, SAF is working with a number of artists on permanent, site-specific installations that will be located across the Emirate of Sharjah. The first is *Rain Room* (2012), a site-specific installation by London-based artist collective Random International, in which perpetual rainfall pauses wherever and whenever someone moves through the space. Permanently sited in Al Majarra Park, the work is housed within a building designed by SAF and SpaceContinuum in collaboration with Shape Architecture Practice + Research, Sharjah. The installation is part of Sharjah Art Foundation's growing collection of public art projects, and its Sharjah opening in 2018 marked the work's Middle East debut.

With over 25 buildings currently in development throughout Sharjah, the Foundation is continuing to expand to reach new audiences outside the city centre. Major upcoming projects include the following:

- **Flying Saucer** (Reopening 1 February 2020)

A permanent SAF venue since 2015, the Flying Saucer building was originally opened in 1978, and over the years it has housed a café and restaurant, newsstand, gift shop, convenience store and pharmacy. The current renovation of this much-loved local architectural landmark will remove later structural additions and reinstate the original circular brutalist structure. Characteristics of the structure are its fully glazed panoramic façade and a wide dome-capped roof that is supported by angled V-shaped pillars. All operational functions will be moved underground, enhancing the open character of the main exhibition space. The project will also introduce a multifunctional community space to support SAF programming and cultural activities in the neighbourhood as well as a café with a library that will double as workshop space and a multifaceted film screening venue. This project is led by the Foundation and SpaceContinuum.

- **Al Jurainah Art Space and New SAF Storage Space** (Opening dates TBC)

Al Jurainah Art Space will showcase a global history of art. It will be anchored by historic works from Sharjah Art Foundation's growing collection as well as site-specific commissions produced specifically for the new centre. Using the SAF collection as its point of departure, Al Jurainah Art Space will present both linear and rotating displays that will present a thoroughly researched alternative view of modern and contemporary art. The space will also host and stage symposia and house an archive of every edition of the Sharjah Biennial from 1993 to the present. Located in Sharjah's University City, home to many of the Emirate's institutions of

higher education, Al Jurainah Art Space and its programming will be free and easily accessible to the student population. The facility will also serve as an entry point to art across generations and function as an educational resource and gathering space that includes multipurpose rooms, courtyards, a bookstore, a restaurant and a café/restaurant. To complement the public rotating exhibitions in Al Jurainah Arts Space, the Foundation is also planning to construct the first independent storage facility for its collection nearby. The structure will provide a site for conservation and offer both local and international researchers and scholars access to SAF's collection even while it is in storage. These buildings are designed by Mona El Mousfy and Sharjah Art Foundation.

- **Kalba Ice Factory** (Opening date TBC)

Situated on the eastern coast of the Emirate of Sharjah, the abandoned Kalba Ice Factory was built in the 1970s and first used by SAF in 2015 as a venue for Sharjah Biennial 12. Led by Manuel de Rivero, co-founder of the Peru-based architecture studio 51-1 Arquitectos, the current project will renovate the warehouse, utilising its high, tactile and light-filled spaces to accommodate large-scale installations and performances. Additional features will include a café, spaces for curator and artist residences, and a guest retreat complex. The renovation will preserve the outdoor experience of the site, which juxtaposes the area's protected coastal mangroves with the building's brutalist industrial structure.

- **Dibba Ice Factory** (Opening date TBC)

A former factory on the northern tip of the UAE, the Dibba Ice Factory was originally designed in 1986. In 1994, a building housing the Fisherman's Cooperative Society was constructed on the same plot of land. In 2010, these facilities were relocated to new premises, and shortly afterwards, the complex was turned over to SAF. The Foundation is now working with an artist on a permanent site-specific installation and intervention for this location. Details on this project will be announced at a later date.

- **Khorfakkan Cinema** (Opening date TBC)

From 1978 to 2006, the Khorfakkan Cinema was the first, and for a while the only, cinema on the entire eastern coast of the UAE. The cinema screened a range of Indian, Bengali, Urdu, Arabic and Western films. By 2006, the building had fallen into disrepair and was closed for safety reasons. SAF is developing plans to renovate the building for exhibitions and other uses that will focus on film and moving image work. More information will be available at a later date.