

By **Jyoti Kalsi**  
Special to Weekend Review

**W**ho am I?  
Where do I belong?  
What is my identity and my place in a world where technology and globalisation are leading society towards a unified existence and a universal identity? These are some of the questions addressed by Intimaa: Belonging, the sixth edition of the annual art exhibition presented by UAE Unlimited, in collaboration with the NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery with support from the Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development.

The show, curated by Emirati arts researcher Nasser Abdullah, features new commissioned works by emerging UAE-based artists Saeed Al Madani, Sarah Al Mehairi, Sofiane Si Merabet and Majd Alouloush. A special feature of this edition is the inclusion of poems by four upcoming Emirati poets, Ahmad Al Mannei, Ali Al Mazmy, Hassan Al Najjar, and Shamma Al Bastaki, who were each paired with an artist and commissioned to create a new composition inspired by their artworks.

Established in 2015, UAE Unlimited is an Abu Dhabi-based satellite platform supported by Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, a prominent patron and collector of the arts. Shobha Pia Shamsani, Executive Director of UAE Unlimited says: "Our aim is to nurture a new generation of artists and contribute to the overall cultural production in the UAE by producing and promoting the work of emerging Emirati and UAE-based artists through strategic collaborations with art and culture organisations across the country."

"Our annual exhibition provides them new opportunities and encourages them to experiment and develop new practices, processes and techniques with the guidance of experienced mentors. I decided to blend art and poetry



A piece by Saudi-Palestinian artist Dana Awartani.

## UAE artists explore identity

UAE Unlimited's latest exhibition called 'Intimaa: Belonging' sees creators contemplate their place in the world



Lull by Saeed Al Madani.

in this edition because poetry has always been such a vital component of the UAE's rich literary heritage."

This year, Saudi-Palestinian artist Dana Awartani mentored the participants, guiding them in developing, researching, producing and presenting their works.

The participants also benefitted from dis-

cussions with artists Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, and Hesam Rahmanian. The young poets were mentored by award-winning poet and writer Khalid Al Budoor.

UAE Unlimited also launched the Stellar Programme, a comprehensive curriculum of conversations, mentorship sessions and workshops led by experts that

is designed to prepare the participating artists for the real art world. Through this programme, the artists acquired skills such as taking professional photographs of their artworks, writing about their work, communicating with the media and understanding the business of art.

Each artist has explored a different facet of belonging and identity. Al Madani

examines his identity as an Emirati living in a multi-cultural community and a globalised world with *Lull*, an installation featuring 3D printed models of desert truffles suspended in a magnetised field.

"This expensive truffle, which grows only after a thunderstorm, signifies the sudden emergence of riches in the desert as well as my relationship with my country, landscape and culture. So I have used it as a self-portrait and a portrait of the region. The magnets keeping the truffles in constant motion represent all the external factors that constantly shape and change our identity, ranging from place, culture, or language to technology, commerce and social change," Al Madani says.

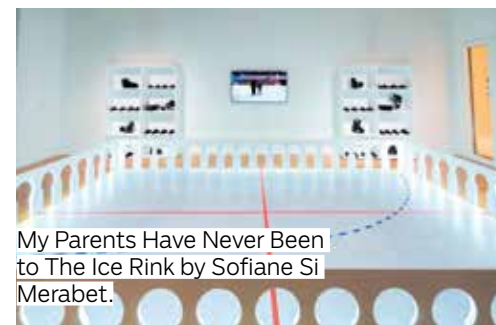
Al Najjar has expressed similar thoughts in his poem *Off a Biogra-*



Sara Al Mehairi (right) explains her work to Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Bin Khalifa Al Nahyan and Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development.



Show and Tell by Sarah Al Mehairi.



My Parents Have Never Been to The Ice Rink by Sofiane Si Merabet.

Photos supplied



Shobha Pia Shamsani.

"I see identity as something fluid that changes with new experiences and needs freedom to evolve."

**MAJD ALOULOUSH**  
★ Artist

phy of *Truffles*. Alloush's installation, *Liminal Margin*, highlights the restrictions imposed on him due to his identity. It features 10 copper plates, each of which was sent by the Dubai-born artist to an artist living in a country he is barred from visiting due to his Syrian identity.

The plates were returned to him after 30 days bearing the marks of the new environment they had been exposed to. "I see identity as something fluid that

changes with new experiences and needs freedom to evolve. Since copper is a highly reactive material, I used it as an extension of myself to travel to new places, assimilate new experiences and come back transformed," he says.

Al Mazmy's words — "If I were small enough, I would have hidden myself in a traveller's wallet" — from his poem *Who is Left of Me* echo the same sentiment.

French Algerian cultural cartographer Si Merabet is known for his digital platform *The Confused Arab* that researches Arab identity. His video and installation, titled *My Parents Have Never Been to The Ice Rink*, humorously highlights the challenges faced by immigrants in a new country and the change in the attitude and identity of the next generation.

The layered work inspired by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital includes elements such as the artist's favourite Algerian carpet placed in the ice rink, and ice skating shoes and traditional Algerian footwear symbolising the socio-cultural equipment required for entering a new arena.

Al Bastaki, who writes in English has responded to the work with a poem that celebrates the multiple ways of being and belonging.

Emirati artist Al Mehairi's work, *Show and Tell*, focuses on her personal identity. Her display of mundane personal ephemera such as fibres from her clothing and samples of cosmetics mounted on handmade rocks is a 'museum of the self'.

Al Mannei's poem *The Little One* also seeks answers to the question, 'who am I?'. Guest artist Awartani is also exhibiting a sculpture from her well-known series, *The Platonic Solid Duals*, where she has reinterpreted platonic solids using traditional Islamic craftsmanship.

### CULTURAL ROUND-UP

#### Brainwashed by Nature

His recent move from New York City to a house in the suburbs surrounded by a forest has inspired Swiss artist Olaf Breuning's show, *Brainwashed by Nature*, running at Carbon 12 until March 15. Using wood found around his home the artist has made woodcut gesso prints on canvas to create paintings expressing concerns about climate change and global warming.



#### Dealing with instability

Ayyam Gallery Dubai is hosting until March 14 British Iraqi artist Athier's exhibition *Nothing is Certain, Everything in Melting*, and that's Okay. The artist's surrealistic paintings of melting marble slabs, foam, plastic toys, metal and other objects reflect the uncertainties of our time and his decision to stop worrying and accept the reality.



#### Towards Opacity

Indian artist Vikram Divecha, who is currently doing his MFA at Columbia University, is presenting new works in an exhibition titled, *Towards Opacity* at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde until March 14. These include a series of paintings titled *Lazy Loading*; photogravure and sculptural works; and his final thesis work that is in the form of a vocal narration playing in a dark room.

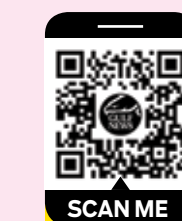


#### Online art auction

Dubai-based online auction house Artiana is offering works by MF Husain, SH Raza, Jamil Naqsh and other well-known artists in its sale of modern and contemporary South Asian art to be held from March 12 to March 16. Buyers can bid online via Artiana's free app. There is no buyer's premium and Flexipay options are available. For details visit [www.artiana.com](http://www.artiana.com).



◆ French artist Invader created a street art Rubik's Cube version of *Mona Lisa* in 2005 with 330 puzzles as the first in a series of works revisiting some of the world's most iconic images. That bold interpretation sold for €480,000 (Dh1.9 million) — four times the initial estimate — after a bidding war between two buyers at an auction in Paris recently.



SCAN ME

Scan the code to view a gorgeous picture gallery of how the Rubik's Cube version of the legendary Leonardo Da Vinci painting was created and why.

**Don't miss it!**

Intimaa: Belonging will run at The Project Space, NYU Abu Dhabi until March 28.