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# Fresh Take On The UAE: Curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath To Curate UAE Pavilion at 58th Venice Biennale

**BY**

Katrina Kufer

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National Pavilion UAE

*Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath*

19  
December  
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The curator duo are set to  
dive into unexplored  
multidisciplinary strands

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UAE NATIONAL PAVILION

COMMISSIONER, the Salama bint

Hamdan Al Nayhan Foundation,

announced that Sam Bardaouil and Till

Fellrath, founders of Art Reoriented,

Chairmen of the Montblanc Cultural

Foundation, and Affiliate Curators at the

Martin-Gropius Bau, will curate the sixth

edition of the **UAE Pavilion**

at the 2019 Venice Biennale. “Although we are not of the UAE, we have been deeply ingrained in its landscape and artistic output for many years and have the ability to pull together many strands of dialogue and understanding, both local and global, to create an exhibition that is relevant and important,” they share. As curators, they emphasise that their role involves integrating nuanced understandings of artists and communities’ explanations of themselves and their works into broader contexts.

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contexts.

While keen to instigate a fresh

approach, it has been key to engage

with and reflect upon the UAE’s

pavillions since 2009. “We have

witnessed how over the years the UAE

Pavilion has featured a diverse array of

exhibitions, from Reem Fadda’s solo

presentation of Mohammed Kazem, and

Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi’s overview of

the pioneering generation of Emirati

artists and communities’ explanations of themselves and their works into broader contexts.

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artists, to Hammad Nasar's group exhibition "Rock, Paper, Scissors," say Bardaouil and Fellrath. "What all these presentations shared is a passion for different aspects of the multifaceted UAE art scene."



*Entrance to the UAE's permanent pavilion at la Biennale di Venezia 2015, located at Arsenale - Sale d'Armi in Venice, Italy*

Cultural pluralism is one of the country's defining characteristics—"the UAE functions in many ways as a microcosm of the globalised modern world," they explain. Referencing the plethora of languages, origins and nationalities which result in unique, individual perspectives, experiences and ideas—as well as the accompanying antagonisms—they add, "this makes for an unusually vibrant cultural context, that is quite a rich departure point for the artists who live here, and are responding in intriguing and creative ways to a rapidly-evolving, multicultural society, with all the challenges that come with it." But the duo is careful to note that while the UAE has a rich source to draw from, there are nuances that must be appreciated from the

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inside out. Citing John Berger's 1972 television show *Ways of Seeing*, the curators remark, "John Berger criticised the European tradition's approach to the world. He said: 'We study other cultures, far away, as anthropology. That is to say we study them from the outside. We don't judge them purely according to their own explanations of themselves.'"

Curating a national pavilion necessitates a developed understanding of the community as much as it does the preconceived notions associated with it. "All too often artists, regardless of where they come from, find themselves coerced into the role of cultural ambassadors for their places of origin," share the curators. "Similarly, many exhibitions are organised in a way that is meant to illustrate political positions and ends up forcing artists into preset curatorial themes. Throughout our own curatorial practice we have always been advocates for an understanding of the artwork first and foremost from an artist's perspective in order to allow artists to speak freely and creatively. Understanding the specific background and the circumstances leading to the creation of an artwork requires a lot of time and dedicated research." What one sees and what one thinks one knows is never simple, they assert. "As curators, it is our responsibility to enable the viewer to understand an artwork beyond the politics that underpin the cultural or national boundaries within which it was created, and the mechanisms that are used for its display."



*Entrance to the UAE's permanent pavilion at la Biennale di Venezia 2014, located at Arsenale - Sale d'Armi in Venice, Italy*

Working within the conditions of a biennale engages different curatorial format—one marked by the diversity and expertise of the audience, as well as “the volume of ideas synthesised into a limited space”, they explain. “One of the main curatorial considerations that we keep in mind upon embarking on any of our projects is the context in which it is going to be presented. Presenting an artwork within the context of museum collection will project upon it a certain aura that would differ from if it were presented in an outdoor public space. Curating an exhibition on Surrealism in Egypt at the Centre Pompidou, with the historical connections that Paris has to Surrealism, will differ immensely in terms of its reception from when it is presented at the Tate with the UK's contested Colonial past in Egypt.”

Further details will be revealed closer to the time, but Bardaouil and Fellrath believe that presenting a meaningful and well researched exhibition will transcend cultural barriers and stereotypes, allowing the public to

intimately connect.

*The 58th Venice Biennale will run 11 May  
to 24 November 2019*

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