FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2023

RAKFAF

RAS AL KHAIMAH FINE ARTS FESTIVAL

A GULF NEWS SPONSORED SUPPLEMENT





AL JAZEERA AL HAMRA HERITAGE VILLAGE FEBRUARY 3-28, 2023

rakfinearts.ae



RAS AL KHAIMAH
HOSTS THE LARGEST
OUTDOOR FINE ARTS
EXHIBITION IN THE
UAE

Suqrat bin Bisher, Festival Director for Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival shares his reflections on this year's exhibition.

The 11th annual edition of Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival (RAKFAF) means a lot to me. As the Director of the Festival and as an Emirati from Ras Al Khaimah, I'm extremely proud of all our achievements throughout these eleven years. The Festival represents an integral part of Al Qasimi Foundation's efforts to make tangible contributions to the cultural development of Ras Al Khaimah. It is an exchange of culture between us and other nationalities across the globe. This year, we are delighted to see more artists, embassies and art foundations joining us, and the quality of artwork is outstanding. We have increased the number of *Bayts* (meaning 'houses' in Arabic) which means there are more art and cultural stories to share. Not just that, I'm pleased to say that we are growing as a team within the

The idea of Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival is well known and everybody is very keen to know what is new in terms of collaborations. With 'Discover your Nature' as the main theme, this year's Festival intends to convey distinct perspectives of creatives from around the world with key emphasis on nature, the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Ras Al Khaimah and its connection with preserving the environment for a sustainable future.

For the first time in the Middle East, visitors get a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to indulge in a unique and exclusive curated Italian gastronomic adventurous journey with Australian chef Paolo and Kelly Picarazzi from the award-winning Antica Australis. Serving at the Al Jazeera Al Hamra village only for two days, the four-course menu features locally-sourced produce from RAK's organic farms. The Italian/ Emirati cuisine will be presented in Antica's unique cultural dining experience and storytelling format.

In collaboration with our valued cultural partners, the Festival will feature six special exhibitions that will identify and understand 'nature' at its core. The partners include Marinko Sudac Foundation, US Mission to the UAE, Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Abu Dhabi, Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Dubai, Consulate General of France in Dubai, and FLICK Camera.

The RAKFAF will also showcase thought-provoking film - **The Chocolate War**, several dialogues and interactions with prominent speakers highlighting the connection between art and various forms of nature besides the need for preservation of cultural heritage.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our presenting partner, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) and our supporting partners Stevin Rock LLC, RAK Ports, RAK Economic Zone, Waldorf Astoria Ras Al Khaimah, VOX Cinemas, RAK Transportation Authority, RAK Hospitality Holding, Accenture Song and MonViso for making this Festival a reality.

The Festival will run through February 3rd-28th and the outdoor exhibition will continue till March 31st at the Al Jazeera Al Hamra Heritage Village. The village itself has an enchanting story dating back to the 17th century about the Za'ab tribe. It's very interesting to see how the village comes back to life so vibrantly during the Festival. It is this diversity of 'old meets new' that makes this exciting Festival so unique

It is a celebration that happens here in Ras Al Khaimah, and we welcome the world to join us for this celebration starting today.

SUQRAT BIN BISHER

FESTIVAL DIRECTOR, RAS AL KHAIMAH FINE ARTS FESTIVAL



THE RAKFAF JOURNEY: DRAWING FROM OUR PAST, LOOKING TOWARDS OUR FUTURE

Since 2013, the Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival has drawn artists, students, and the curious public from UAE and the world to its displays of local and international artwork in a variety of media - art, photography, sculpture, film, and poetry. As RAKFAF prepares for its eleventh year, we reflect on the decade of growth, innovation, and collaboration that has transformed the Festival into the largest open-air fine arts gathering in the Middle East.

2013 - 2017

A unique event that brings together historical preservation, modern and traditional art, international and local Emirati culture, the RAKFAF was inaugurated in 2013.

Since the year of its inception, the story of RAKFAF has been one of growth, expansion, and grounding within the local community in Ras al Khaimah. In its first year, the festival, which lasted for 4 days was held in the National Museum of Ras Al Khaimah, and drew 26 artists from 12 different nationalities, while emphasizing and promoting local Emirati talent.

Following a trip to La Gacilly in France, the festival organizers were inspired by the small town's annual 'Festival Photo de La Gacilly', an outdoor arts and photography event during which larger-than-life artworks were displayed on the town's streets and in its botanical garden. After this trip, the organizers saw a unique opportunity to bring this type of festival to the UAF



2023

This year, with the main theme as 'Nature', the Festival is once again expanding its offerings, including hosting an exhibition of Avant-garde Eastern European art from the Marinko Sudac Collection of Croatia.

RAKFAF's cultural programs and outreach, including to members of the community and students in schools throughout Ras Al Khaimah and the UAE, is also continuously expanding and the various free art workshops are getting more popular.

Looking towards the future, the RAKFAF team is planning further improvements and expansion, a campaign of rebranding and enhancing collaborations with local and international artists, as well as an increased emphasis on film. With the efforts of the festival's founders, organizers, supporting partners and the large team of volunteers that make it a reality every year, RAKFAF will continue to be a beacon for the arts community and the wider public well into the future.



2018 - 2022

The old village of Al Jazeera Al Hamra is the historical home of the local Za'ab tribe. Largely abandoned since the 1960s due to the migration of its inhabitants to Abu Dhabi. However, in 2019, the organizers reimagined the Festival in the context of Al Jazeera Al Hamra and made the village its new home.

The journey of rehabilitating and renovating the heritage village site and making it suitable for an arts festival was in close collaboration with the Za'ab tribe. Part of this partnership culminated in an ethnographic project of recording oral histories of community elders who spent their childhood in the village.

Last year, the number of artists in attendance at the Festival had grown to more than 150, representing 49 countries. For instance, following the signing of the Abraham Accords and the subsequent normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE in 2020, the Festival had a unique collaboration with Israeli curator Sharon Toval in 2022, marking the first formal collaboration between Israeli artists and the UAE arts community.





A DIALOGUE OF ART AND NATURE

Alfio Tommasini has a keen interest in the relationship that people have with the environment they live in. This is why he was so attracted to the RAK Fine Arts Festival. Curating an exhibition among the Al Jazeera Al Hamra Heritage Village — a historic site of clay, sand and corals — offers the possibility for Art to connect and interact with the elements on a new level. Here are some insights on how Tommasini approached the process and the inspiration he hopes will be passed onto visitors of the Festival.

What is your inspiration behind this year's curation of RAKFAF?

My inspiration was just the feeling of the place. To see these constructions, the corals, how this past culture built with these materials coming from the sea. I tried to see what their nature was — what their connection with the elements was. It is interesting to immerse yourself as much as you can in the place because you create this interaction with it. Of course, you will pass many artworks, but it is always keeping in consideration where this artwork will end.

Sometimes it is interesting to create a contract with artwork coming from all over the world. You try to give space to a variety of visual languages. So, it is a question of immersing yourself in the place. I returned many times, taking time to learn what the place is communicating to you and that is, in the end, where the inspiration comes from.

How do you choose the artwork for RAKFAF?

The theme for this year is 'Discover your Nature'. We received quite a lot of submissions. The process of selection was based on the quality of work, of course, but it was also based on the works aligning with the theme of the Festival. So, I looked for works that had a distinctive personal relationship of the artist with nature.

For the curation, I tried to build a narrative on the site with a starting point. You will see paintings, photography, and sculpture but there is a narrative and connection between images. So, you will discover an image and then walk to discover the next piece and its connection. I tried as much as possible to respect the site because it is not just about the artwork but creating a relationship with the place. So, it is not only about the images and artworks like in a museum, but it is a different approach. It was always really important to consider and respect the place — to create a dialogue without being aggressive with the space.

The site is very big, so this can be a challenge. But you do not need to follow a strict path. The beginning is the Fort. At the beginning you will see just images of vegetation. Then slowly you start to see human presence, which develops over the pieces of art.

How do events like RAKFAF help the community?

Art should not just be for people that are already working in the Arts sector. It should be a gateway for education and curiosity for the whole community. It is important to develop this type of initiative. I like the fact that it takes place in a historical site. To understand the present, we must look into the past. This is a good example not just to mix contemporary art and promote new artists, but also give value to a site like this. It is very important for the Emirate and the whole community - that families and children can come to be simulated and engaged in both the art and the historical significance of the site. I'm really pleased that RAKFAF is happening at Ras Al Khaimah's historic Al Jazeera Al Hamra, which was an ancient pearling village — an enchanting site carved out of clay, sand, and corals. It's great to have the Festival in the village - thanks to RAKFAF, organizers and the creative works of all artists, visitors can explore a historical place that springs back to life again.

What can visitors expect at the 2023 RAKFAF?

The curation of art is only one major part of the RAKFAF. However, the organizers of the Festival will have various other engaging cultural festivities, outdoor film screenings, thematic events for family and children alike. I hope that people will feel this kind of immersion that you can have on the site with the images and other activities.

What is your personal favorite aspect of RAKFAF?

That's a tough one! Well, I love the fact that RAKFAF is happening in a historical open-air site. I feel this nice energy on the site — there is a real interaction with viewing the art and walking in the sun and reflecting on the lives of the people who built this village. Even if in simplicity, they were very creative and they built a sense of community where everything was connected with the elements. I have a lot of respect for the site, and that is why it is central when I am considering the narrative and artwork. Organizing RAKFAF in this heritage village is a distinctive way to promote contemporary art and at the same time, give value to the history of the Za'ab tribe.

Any key message for aspiring artists?

More and more people are looking for unique experiences. That is why I like this Festival, which takes place in context. This is an interesting platform for the fusion of their work. RAKFAF is a great opportunity to showcase works from both local and international artists. I would encourage aspiring artists to take a look at RAKFAF as a place to submit their work. Besides exhibiting your art, the experience of participating will be a revelation.

Art Director and RAKFAF
Curator, Alfio Tommasini,
shares his inspiration
behind the curation of
RAKFAF and why he finds
the Festival such a
unique opportunity to
promote art in a
one-of-a-kind setting.



'Portal of Peace' a permanent rock installation in RAK

Slovenian born Marko Pogacnik, is a renowned sculptor and is one of the key featured artists from the Marinko Sudac Foundation. In the early 1960s, he founded the OHO Group and in 1971, transformed it into Sempas Family — a rural art community. Pogacnik worked as the UNESCO Artist for Peace from 2016 to 2022. He treasures the idea of sustaining the Earth as a peaceful and nurturing home not just for human society but also for all living beings on the planet.

During the period, he actively voiced the need for peace within human beings. His projects include telepathic workshops, earth healing/geomancy and peace workshops.

A permanent installation created for 2023 RAKFAF, the 'Portal of People' portrays Pogacnik's engagement in the philosophical examination of the relation between humans and the biosphere. He feels that humans are responsible for the aggressive attitude developed against nature.

Created from a selection of rocks from Ras Al Khaimah, the installation symbolically highlights the need for peace and the rich natural resources of the Emirate that ought to be conserved along with the currounding nature.

Steven Rock LLC has made this permanent installation possible at the RAKFAF site.



2023 RAKFAF PROGRAMME

THE PUBLIC OPENING

Date: February 3

○ Time: 9:00 PM- 12:00 AM

PET-FRIENDLY WEEKEND

iii Date: February 10 & 11

○ Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 PM

FAMILY & COMMUNITY WEEKEND

iii Date: February 17 & 18

○ Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 PM

CULTURAL WEEKEND

iii Date: February 24 & 25

○ Time: 10:00 AM - 11:00 PM



THE RAKFAF SPEAKER SERIES

Topics

About Avant-Garde: The Legacy of OHO Group with Marko Pogacnik and David Nez

Life on Land: Wildlife Conservation and Biodiversity

Oceanic Organisms: The Rich World of Marine Life in the LIAF

Persistence in Preservation: Conserving Cultural Heritage in Ras Al Khaimah



FOREIGN FILM NIGHTS WITH VOX CINEMAS

Visitors can grab a cup of hot chocolate and immerse in the scenic surroundings of RAKFAF as VOX Cinemas proudly presents Foreign Film Nights every Friday from February 3rd – 28th, 2023. The films will be in French and South Korean languages subtitled in English and Arabic. These films are courtesy of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Dubai, Embassy of France in Abu Dhabi and Consulate General of France in Dubai, and Institute Français.

WORKSHOPS & TOURS*

Cosmograms on Air

iii Date: February 4, 2023○ Time: 4:00 – 6:00 PM

Face It

☐ Date: February 4, 202

Sandcastles

☐ Date: February 4, 2023☐ Time: 4:00 - 6:00 PM

Seeing the World as Beautiful

Make a Gift Animal Figure Painting

Canine Couture and Talent Show

🛅 Date: February 11, 2023

Resin Pets' Wearable Art

My loving Pet – One Line Drawing

∰ Date: February 11, 202 ○ Time: 4:00 – 5:00 PM

Contemporary Impressionism Painting

□ Date: February 12, 2023
 □ Time 1, 202 5, 20 5

City Food Tour

Silk Painting

☐ Date: February 17, 2023

3D Rustic Wall Art

iii Date: February 18, 202

Fibre Arts (Macrame)

🛗 Date: February 18, 2023

○ Time: 4:00 - 5:00 PM

Pottery & Ceramic Painting

🛅 Date: February 19, 2023

○ Time: 4:00 - 5:00 PM

Paper cards: Exploring Nature with Psaligraphy

🛗 Date: February 2023

○ Time: 4:00 - 6:00 PM

Designing Jewelry Trays & Boxes

○ Time: 4:00 - 5:00 PM

+ many more exciting ones! For details, visit rakfinearts.ae

"Schedules are subject to change Visit website for undated schedule



OUR COLLABORATORS FOR 2023 RAKFAF

As part of the Festival, RAKFAF features special exhibitions in collaboration with our cultural partners. Each Bayt is dedicated to understanding how our partners view and experience 'Nature'. In celebrating unity and diversity from Asia and Europe to the Americans, visitors can explore different perspectives on nature and human relationship with their environment.

BAYT 9

EMBASSY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS AND ORGANISATION IN DESIGN

The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Organization of Design has teamed up together to present the exhibition, 'The Nature of Dutch Design'. This exhibition has brought together three artist-designers by curator Margriet Vollenberg, founder of Organisation of Design. Artist Ruben van Megen examines the childlike simplicity of playing with what nature provides. The eye-catching wall hangings of Milla Nova explores her roots of the Mapuche people. And Timothy van Oorschot employs recycled materials that completely decompose in open soil.

BAYT 10

US MISSION OF THE UAE AND AMERICAN VOICES

The US Mission of the UAE seeks to support cultural exchange to better connect Emiratis and Americans. Teaming up with American Voices, whose mission is to provide cultural exchange through the performing arts and education to grow and connect through cultural diplomacy, the exhibition highlights nature as the birthplace of the universal language, music. To support this, the US Mission of the UAE has invited honorary guest Artist and curator, **Hillebrand**, to present some of her most poignant work about nature.

BAYT 12

CONSULATE GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA AND KOREAN-UAE ART AND CONTENT ASSOCIATION (KUACA)

The special exhibition, Nature: Recovery of the Senses, explores the methods to perceive what surrounds humans in a search for identity. Supported by the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea and the Korean-UAE Art and Content Association, the exhibition is curated by **Myunhhye Ryu**. Her work focuses on the relationship between art, nature, and society in the context of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, together with eight other artists.

BAYT 13

MARINKO SUDAC FOUNDATION

The Marinko Sudac Foundation has supported the premiere exclusive UAE presentation of the most notable Croatian art phenomena, the Zagreb-based Gorgona Group. Entitled The Solitude of Thought: On the Concept of an Experimental Re-examination of the Arts', the works showcase the group's activities, which is based on existentialism, nihilism, the absurd and Zen Buddism. The presented works are curated by Marinko Sudac. The Foundation aims to collect, research, and promote the Avant-garde artistic practices of Central and Eastern Europe from 1909 to 1989.

BAYT CONSULATE GENERAL OF FRANCE

The special exhibition of the Consulate General of France explores the relationship between the people and their natural habitat. As the curator and artist, French photographer **Mahilde Magnier-Rabate** documents the rapid transformation of the Emirati traditional landscape, ecosystems and waters. Through her images, she focuses on social themes such as environmental and social change, cultural identity, migration and refuges. Her other works include emergency crisis coverage, documentary projects, and corporate campaigns in Europe and the MENA region.















Netherlands











The Antica Australis team (from Left to Right): Kelly and Paolo Picarazzi

RAKFAF DEBUTS AWARD-WINNING ANTICA AUSTRALIS CULTURAL DINING EXPERIENCE

For the first time in the Middle East, the multi-award winning regional Italian cultural dining experience — Antica Australis — will be presented as part of the 2023 RAKFAF program, showcasing a specially curated four course set menu designed for the festival.

The unique Antica Australis experience has been transported from the historic village of Carcoar in regional Australia to the ancient pearling village of Al Jazeera Al Hamra in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE.

Presented by husband-and-wife team, Paolo & Kelly Picarazzi along with team member Mischa Cooper, since opening in March 2020 Antica Australis has built up a dedicated underground following amongst food lovers as well as cultinary and cultural aficionados across

"It is a real honor for us to have been invited to bring Antica Australis to Ras Al Khaimah all the way from Australia to participate in the festival", said Paolo and Kelly Picarazzi unanimously.

Antica [an-tee-ka] is renowned in Australia for its ethos of serving up ancient and traditional dishes from Paolo's home region of Ciociaria in central Italy using all locally-sourced and seasonal produce. As part of its unique format, stories behind the provenance of the food and the context of the history of each dish are woven throughout the dining experience.

Paolo will be taking inspiration from Ras Al Khaimah's local produce to curate a special four-course regional Italian set menu with an Emirati twist for RAKFAF.

"I am really looking forward to exploring the Emirate in the lead up to our festival events, and we have scheduled visits to local organic farms to source dates, olives, honey, camel milk and fresh produce direct from them," commented Paolo.

Kelly added that the Antica Australis team will also be foraging on Jebel Jais mountain for local flora such as wild lavender, sage and thyme to add to the curated festival dishes.

The set menu being presented as part of RAKFAF will include an antipasti platter of artisanal Italian cheeses to commence the dining experience; followed by an exclusively created dish of pistachio risotto with chicken breast and fried dates; main course is a 2000-year-old ancient Roman recipe combining the flavors of lamb and anchovies; with a medieval milk pudding with saffron-infused camel milk to finish.

"We are really thrilled to be working alongside the RAKFAF team to bring this extraordinary menu to life during our festival events and to introduce Antica Australis to the Middle East. It's also an incredible opportunity for us to become immersed in the magical atmosphere of RAKFAF at the Al Jazeera Al Hamra village along with all the other local and international artists — a truly incredible experience," concluded the Antica Australis team.

The Antica Australis cultural dining experience will be held during RAKFAF only on February 10th and 11th, with limited seats available. For reservations, visit www.rakfinearts.ae

2023 RAKFAF MIDDLE EAST PREMIERE 'THE CHOCOLATE WAR' BY MIKI MISTRATI



Join us for the Middle East premiere of **THE CHOCOLATE WAR**. A gripping documentary by Director and journalist **Miki Mistrati**, shedding light on child slavery in the cocoa and chocolate industry. It is nominated for the Best Documentary 2022 at the Warsaw International Film Festival, and is the official selection for the EU Human Rights Film Days in Istanbul, among several recognitions of note.

Following the documentary, human rights lawyer **Terry Collingsworth**, leads a panel discussion on the ethical sourcing of cocoa.

iii Date: February 18, 2023

O Time: 7:00 PM



SUSPENDED IN TIME - A HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: AL JAZEERA AL HAMRA HERITAGE VILLAGE

Many people know of Al Jazeera Al Hamra Heritage Village as a hub for events, the most notable of which is the annual Ras Al Khaimah Fine Arts Festival.

With the first settlers recorded between late 16th to early 17th centuries, Al Jazeera Al Hamra has withstood the test of time as the only historical, pearling village to remain standing across the entire Gulf region. It was the ideal convergence between the desert, mountains and coastline.

Beginning in 2010, the UAE Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and the Department of Antiquities and Museums of Ras Al Khaimah have stewarded the preservation of the village, bringing it back to life with the support of a team of local and international experts.

Emblematic of Ras Al Khaimah's rich history, the restoration and conservation of existing structures in the village have continued over the past decade. Moving forward, the complete restoration of six additional houses is planned for 2023-2024, helping to further add value to the Emirate as a cultural and historical tourist destination.

The preserved buildings and artefacts in the village speak volumes about the deeply humble and hardworking inhabitants residing in the seafaring town. However, these architectural structures not only speak to the lives and livelihoods of the people therein, but also provide visitors with a snapshot of an authentic Emirati way of life that predates the discovery of oil and widescale modernization.

Suspended in time, the village compels visitors to stop in their tracks to ponder a somewhat simpler era, exquisitely captured by the artefacts enveloped within the enchanting, historical enclave. From traditional Gulf-style mosques and madbasas (date presses) to freshwater wells and areesh roofs (woven from palm fronds), Al Jazeera Al Hamra stands proud as an emblem of Emirati heritage.

The Heritage village is open to public from 2:00pm to 9:00pm in the summer months from June to October, and 9:00am to 5:00pm in the winter months from November to February.

For more information about Al Jazeera Al Hamra, visit **www.ajah.ae**.



FORT

- The oldest part of the fort is the distinguished round watchtower that offers sweeping views of the surrounding areas, serving as an excellent defense system.
- The fort also served as the local Sheikh's residence and comprised several domestic buildings.

COURTYARD HOUSES

- Located adjacent to one another behind the fort, six restored compounds on site provide exemplary insight into some of the village's traditional living quarters.
- Differing in size and number of houses, each courtyard house includes architectural components reminiscent of the traditional Khaleeji lifestyle.

MASJID BINT SAMIKH

- Serving as a focal gathering point for residents, Masjid Bint Samikh is visible from the entire pathway between the shops, located at the end of the Suq (marketplace).
- It was named after Aisha Bint Abeed Al Samikh Al Zaabi, who relocated from Al Jazeera Al Hamra to Saudi Arabia after marrying a member of the Saudi Royal Family.

SUQ

- One of the liveliest areas of the ancient pearling village, the Suq brought together buyers and sellers from all walks of life.
- Two rows of shops with a wide pathway between them formed the core of Al Jazeera Al Hamra's suq, which was established in the northwestern part of the town.

AHMED BIN OMRAN HOUSE

- Home to one of the most successful pearl traders in Al Jazeera Al Hamra, the Ahmed Bin Omran house, named after its owner, is situated in the vicinity of the Large Friday Mosque and the seashore, where pearling vessels beached after their return.
- The complex is dominated by an impressive, two-storey building surrounded by windows with beautifully decorated plaster screens.

ABDUL KAREEM HOUSE

- Once the residence of Al Jazeera Al Hamra's main trader, the Abdul Kareem house is a large complex currently owned by Abdulkarim Julphar and Abdullah Abdulkarim.
- It stands out due to its four wind towers, which are surrounded by a central courtyard. The unique differences in building material and style signify many alterations in the historical development of the compound.

2023 RAKFAF PARTNERS

PRESENTING PARTNER

FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL

STRATEGIC PARTNERS















