

SYN THE SIS



جامعة نيويورك أبوظبي

NYU ABU DHABI

2023 MFA GRADUATE SHOW

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2023 MFA Degree Show, part of the New York University
Abu Dhabi Master of Fine Art in Art and Media

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2023 MFA GRADUATE SHOW



THE INAUGURAL MFA THESIS EXHIBITION
AND CATALOG IS DEDICATED
TO PROFESSOR OF VISUAL ARTS
TAREK AL-GHOUSSEIN [1962-2022]

Thank you for your kindness, humor, and generosity.
We cherish the inspiration and time you shared
with each and every one of us.

ART AT THE HEART OF NYUAD

Mariët Westermann

It is a joy to congratulate our first cohort of students in the Master of Fine Arts in Art and Media at New York University Abu Dhabi on their magnificent thesis exhibition!

Our first MFA thesis show marks a milestone for the artists, their teachers, and NYU Abu Dhabi, and for Abu Dhabi as an ever more vibrant creative crossroads. First and foremost, the exhibition marks the anticipated graduation of our inaugural MFA Class of 2023. Mahra AlFalahi, Liane Al Ghusain, Majd Alloush, Fabiola Chiminazzo, and Elizabeth Dorazio are the pioneers who entered the program in the fall of 2021, at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic still caused much havoc. We are so grateful these talented and creative artists came to NYU Abu Dhabi despite the risk of continued interruptions. Indeed, we had planned to welcome them a year earlier, and were disheartened in the summer of 2020 to have to delay the start of the program until a time when in-person studio instruction and site travel would be possible. That day did arrive, and with this first graduating class we have now begun to fulfil an ambition of NYUAD's earliest days.

More than 15 years ago, as we began to design the full scope of the University, we resolved that the arts would be integral, not ancillary, to NYUAD's educational offer, research, and public programs. Most universities are both deeply

logocentric and driven by mathematics, science, and engineering, but without the arts a university cannot be universal in its mission. The arts give us special access to human experience, make us see the present, and help us imagine past and future. NYU in New York has always embraced its location in the most vibrant art city in the world, and NYUAD was designed to garner that energy and contribute it to Abu Dhabi's vision to become a thriving city of art and culture.

In recognition of the role of the arts in human flourishing, organizations in Abu Dhabi have long made generous investments in art, architecture, and culture, from the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation (ADMAF), and 421 to the Louvre Abu Dhabi, Berklee School of Music, and Abraham Family House—soon to be joined by The Zayed National Museum and Guggenheim Abu Dhabi. Many of these developments were in view when we planned NYUAD's arts programs and facilities. When we opened our doors to students in 2010, our first arts faculty and undergraduates set the tone for excellence in visual art, theater, music, dance, and media at NYUAD. Inspiring programs like the Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award for public art by university students in the UAE, co-hosted by ADMAF and NYUAD, created fruitful new partnerships across the country. And since the opening in 2014 of our

Saadiyat campus—itself a masterpiece of architecture by Rafael Viñoly Architects—NYUAD's Art Gallery and Arts Center have been enriching the GCC arts ecosystem. They have done it in a way that only universities can, by pursuing creative research, educating some of the most talented students from around the world, and commissioning, producing and presenting work of great local and international resonance.

As NYUAD established its arts programs in our stunning studios, theaters, and galleries, establishing the first MFA in Art and Media in the Gulf was a logical aspiration. This inaugural thesis exhibition puts on full display the generative combination of Abu Dhabi's creative community, NYUAD's dedicated arts faculty, and our students' tireless creativity. The works in the show prompt new knowledge and insights about themes such as landscape, nature, chance, archives, loss of country, and personal belief, across a wide range of media from painting, photography and collage to embroidery, storytelling and video.

While this moment gives much cause to celebrate, it also reminds us that we have lost two giants of the NYUAD community this past year. In June 2022, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, one of our founding faculty members and the MFA program's beloved first director, passed away in New York. Without the lodestar of his art or his unending

support of our students, the program could not have been launched in 2021 or led to this sparkling result. In March 2023, Rafael Viñoly, the effervescent master planner and architect of our campus, died after suffering an aneurysm at his New York office. Seeing the works in this exhibition, it is impossible to forget that they were created in our Arts Center, one of the signature buildings, and the one on our campus most dear to Rafael.

As Tarek and Rafael would have wished, and as our current Director Tina Sherwell has ensured, this exhibition gives great hope for the future of the arts at NYUAD, and for the imaginative capacities of this generation of students who face such a challenging future.

Alf Mabrouk to all!

WORD FROM THE DEAN OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES NYUAD

Awam Amkpa

How do you train the next generation of artists not only to serve but to guide this industry artistically? The MFA is a pathway and we are bringing artists from all over the world and using the MFA as a staging ground. The NYUAD MFA in Art and Media gives students access to globally diverse aesthetics, exchanges, and opportunities to create within those intersections. The MFA in Art and Media Program is the first of its kind in the UAE and focuses on immersing students in contemporary research and art practices while training them to be deep thinkers and innovative artists.

It is with great pride and deep fulfillment that we honor and congratulate our first graduating class of NYUAD's Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) in Art and Media.

As we celebrate them, we invite you to a showcase of their education over the last two years. Individually and collaboratively, these highly dedicated artists came to us in their quest to enlarge their visions and innovative energies which not only awed but inspired us as their teachers in the last two academic years.

As we celebrate their success we want to dedicate this event to the memory of Tarek Al-Ghoussein who was the inaugural director of the MFA.

Please enjoy this catalog showcasing NYUAD's MFA in Art and Media graduating class of 2023.

421 Faisal Al Hassan FOREWORD

This exhibition marks the second year of our collaboration with New York University Abu Dhabi's (NYUAD) Master of Fine Arts in Art and Media. Our partnership feels like the perfect match: two programs with a mission to support the production of emergent contemporary practices from the region coming together so seamlessly. While the faculty at NYUAD prepares practitioners for a future in the arts through a rigorous academic program that culminates in the production of new bodies of work, the team at 421 facilitates their exploration of public spaces as sites of community engagement and critical dialog. These are two sides of the same coin for artists working towards an expansive studio practice beyond purely academic or institutional environments.

When thinking about forming institutional partnerships, we've always steered away from quick, short-term arrangements. At 421, we cultivate truly long-lasting and sustainable collaborations that provide a nurturing and meaningful ground for artists in the UAE and across the MENASA region. We are especially lucky to work closely with partners like NYUAD, an institution that has been pioneering academic thought and research about today's most pressing local and global issues from the vantage point of Abu Dhabi. It's a pleasure to provide a platform for their exceptional MFA students to expand their praxis

and encourage their explorations as they confront new ways of presenting their work to audiences in the UAE.

Located in Abu Dhabi's Mina Zayed, 421 is dedicated to emerging artistic practices through a broad program that focuses on experimentation and process, encouraging conversation, exchange, and reflection. We exist to help bridge a gap in the current ecosystem, one that previously needed to offer young creative practitioners critique, feedback, conversation, dialog, and generous interaction with other practitioners and the wider public. We support artists in their pursuit of creative expression that is driven by social inquiry and that advocates for societal transformation.

We invite audiences to join us on this mission by visiting the exhibition on view and offering their own reflections. How do the works on display respond to current issues in contemporary history? In what ways do they respond to questions around collective, interpersonal, and individual concerns? We encourage you to walk through the gallery spaces and take a moment to consider the projects presented as points of departure for larger questions about the world around us.

MFA IN ART AND MEDIA

Tina Sherwell

In early 2022 I had the privilege to begin working with our esteemed colleague Tarek Al-Ghoussein on the MFA in Art in Media. His daily humor, care and commitment to the MFA students and the program, is something that continually resonates with me, as I feel deeply privileged to be entrusted by him and the NYUAD leadership with the responsibility to take the MFA program forward.

The two-year Master of Fine Arts in Art and Media at NYU Abu Dhabi is one of a kind in the region, it immerses students in contemporary research and art practices with courses that emphasize artistic experimentation within a context of theoretical, cultural, and historical study. Its multidisciplinary ethos bridges disciplinary skills and diverse bodies of knowledge. The program leverages Abu Dhabi's location as a global hub for the exchange and dialog in the arts and culture as the MFA in Art and Media emanates outward from the Emirates to the world. Taught by faculty from across the Division of Arts and Humanities, students study with professors from across NYUAD global network who come from the fields of art, art history, film, theatre and literature as well as a roster of international artists and curators.

The exhibition is an articulation of the research and experimentation of the first MFA cohort who visualize questions and ideas in expansive ways, providing valuable insights to our global

contemporary condition. For Elizabeth Dorazio nature is the central subject in the *Cosmic Forest* in which she questions transforming matter that is random, unpredictable and in constant movement through drawing that is a cornerstone of her practice. In *I Would Tread Lightly*, Liane Al Ghusain presents objects related to being a Palestinian in diaspora, which include geometric embroidery, tactile sculptures, non-narrative videos, and performance work for processing emotional trauma, both individually and collectively. Majd Alloush examines the intersection of art and technology, exploring the transformation of pixels into tangible objects through printmaking, moving image, and digital fabrication with the aim to document the often-overlooked urban and absurd landscapes that exist all around us. Working with textiles Mahra AlFalahi's body of work, *Folded Stories*, is rooted in exploring the effect of memories of storytelling drawn from her own childhood in which she highlights societal norms and expectations that are nurtured through such narratives. Fabiola Chiminazzo's work investigates our society's excess imagery using archival images from photos, books, prints and museum catalogs as a critical tool to propose thinking with and through images in *Encounter Museum*.

Congratulations to the first cohort of the MFA on this amazing achievement!

REFLECTIONS ON THE INAUGURAL COHORT

Terri Geis

In the fall of 2021, I gathered with the inaugural cohort of the new MFA program to discuss the course I would be leading, Individual Studio Critique and Review. I explained that we would meet each week in the studios, where the five students would welcome different artists, curators, and writers to discuss their current projects and explore future possibilities. I'd be there to support this intensive and at times vulnerable process and I'd also read the weekly reflections the students would subsequently submit. And we would do this again and again over the course of three semesters. One of the students smiled broadly and said, "You will be with us the whole time. You are going to learn so much about us and see so closely how we evolve!" I really took this comment to heart, and it has certainly proven to be true.

During my time with this MFA cohort, I've seen them expand their practices and stretch beyond their comfort zones, as my colleague Shaikha Al Mazrou puts it. Their pristine new studios have transformed into spaces that bear the deep traces of hard work and experimentation. In their own voices, through their own evolving formal strategies, they have explored many themes, perhaps most significantly the re-enchantment of the world as a force against displacement, trauma, and environmental corruption. And the students have benefited so powerfully from the influences of my

faculty colleagues, with illuminated guidance on the possibilities of new materials, the strengthening of their creative practices through rigorous writing, the deepening of their theoretical investigations through perspectives of the archive, surveillance and public space, and the Anthropocene.

Many exciting milestones forecast the possibilities that lie beyond the MFA. Together we had the opportunity to engage with the prominent artists-in-residence at NYUAD's al Mawrid Arab Center for the Study of Art and to visit the Venice Biennale and hear directly from the team of the UAE National Pavilion, underscoring the future for artists in this region. I've watched as the students were awarded scholarships and fellowships, and as they (at times anxiously) prepared for exhibitions in the UAE and beyond. With this final exhibition at 421, we celebrate a culmination that also leads out into the future; it has been an honor to be a part of this journey.



Elizabeth Dorazio
Xylophone, 2022
Drawings on scrap wood
180 x 400 cm
Photo: Dustin Foster

ELIZABETH DORAZIO

Cosmic Forest

Nature is the very essence of my work. By nature, I understand not only the environment or the enormous variety of living forms, but also the dynamic principle that transforms matter and keeps it in constant movement.

Scientific disciplines are devoted to the comprehension of natural phenomena despite unpredictability. Most theories cannot deal with the imponderable element that suddenly changes everything. Randomness acts everywhere.

My practice is based on three basic operations: cutting, overlapping, and pasting. I never change these procedures, which I understand as drawing. Cutting is the same as drawing—it admits no errors, otherwise the result would not correspond to the initial intention. However, nothing works exactly as planned or as predicted. I try to incorporate failings and inexplicable errors into my work. Randomness and unpredictability are inseparable from my poetics and my artistic practice as well.

The Cosmic Forest results from several reflections on nature and its presence in human imagery. As most people perceive forests as being nature

itself, I began to meditate on the theme of forest as a single organism. In fact, a forest is a highly complex body in which interconnected elements function as in a network based on collaboration and resilience.

The Amazon forest is a powerful image in people's minds all over the world. For a Brazilian native as myself, it has always been present in textbooks, newspapers, on television and in myths and fables.

The *Cosmic Forest* is a multisensory installation. An immersive environment in which I seek to convey the idea of interconnection between natural elements, on both macro and micro scales. By activating our senses, it is an invitation to the public to become part of the infinity of the cosmos.

The installation occupies a room where a drawing made with artisanal cotton paper covers the main wall and from the top unfolding along the floor. It is composed with large drawings of foliage that disturb the perception with its scale. Sculptures from the *Animalia* series are also displayed in the exhibition room. These fictional creatures evoke primary forms of life, figures whose hybridism between animal and vegetal is highlighted by the plants that sprout from them.



On Nature, 2021
Drawing on paper collage
300 x 470 cm
Photo: Dustin Foster

The other walls are painted black and are covered with images of constellations which I draw randomly with chalk in order to suggest a correspondence between the vastness of the cosmos and the richness of the forest.

This installation is the synthesis of the research I initially had begun almost three decades ago. Through drawing, it has led me to explore new ideas about nature by using different materials and techniques. My work is like a living organism, in constant movement, fueled by the desire to express what cannot be said with words, but which will never cease to be questioned.

Elizabeth Dorazio
(b. 1957, Araguari, Brazil)

Elizabeth Dorazio earned her BFA in Visual Arts from the Guignard University of Art, Belo Horizonte (Brazil); and subsequently trained in ancient Italian art techniques at The Institute of Art and Restoration (Italy) and Städel Schule (Germany). Dorazio's art practice deploys drawing, collage, woodwork, and installation to explore the mysteries of human relations to nature and the cosmos. Her work often includes collaborations with traditional arts practitioners from around the world.

Dorazio's solo exhibitions include *I Went on a Trip*, Dan Galeria, Brazil (2022); *Drawings and Editions*, XVA Art Gallery, UAE (2021); *Symphonies*, Project Space NYUAD, UAE (2018); *Kunstverein Familie Montez* (2014); *Leben, Organismus, Kosmos*, Platform Sarai (2012); *Hier und Anderswo*, Gallustheater (2002) (all in Germany); *Mantra*, Capela do Morumbi, Brazil (1998). Her group exhibitions include *Art Here, Richard Mille Price*, Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE; *In Process in Progress*, 421, UAE; *As Mais Altas Torres*, Dan Galeria, Brazil (2022); *Made in Taskheel*, Taskheel, UAE (2021); *Existenzielle Korrespondenzen*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Brazil (2016); *Symbiose der Kulture*, Rosalux, Germany (2014); *Blue Connection*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Sorocaba, Brazil, (2011); and *Seis Artistas Brasileiras*, Memorial da América Latina, Brazil (1998).



Cosmic Forest (detail), 2023
Drawing on paper
530 x 600 cm
Photo: Fabiola Chiminozzo

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معرض خريجي ماجستير الفنون
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