

**THE CHRISTO &
JEANNE-CLAUDE
AWARD 2020**

Under the patronage of
HER HIGHNESS SHEIKHA SHAMSA BINT HAMDAN AL NAHYAN
Wife of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan

THE CHRISTO &

JEANNE-CLAUDE

AWARD 2020

presented by New York University Abu Dhabi
in partnership with Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation

“...the Award was established to encourage the creation of new artwork in the UAE, to act as a launch pad for visual artists across the Emirates...”

The Christo & Jeanne-Claude Award, under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Shamsa Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan, is an art award presented by New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) in partnership with Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation (ADMAF).

About the Award

The Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award offers new artists the opportunity to make a work of art, from commission to exhibition. As awards go, it is a unique proposition: student or graduate, regardless of age or background, applicants are invited to propose a piece of public art that can be exhibited in the grounds of New York University Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi Art and Umm El Emarat park, Abu Dhabi.

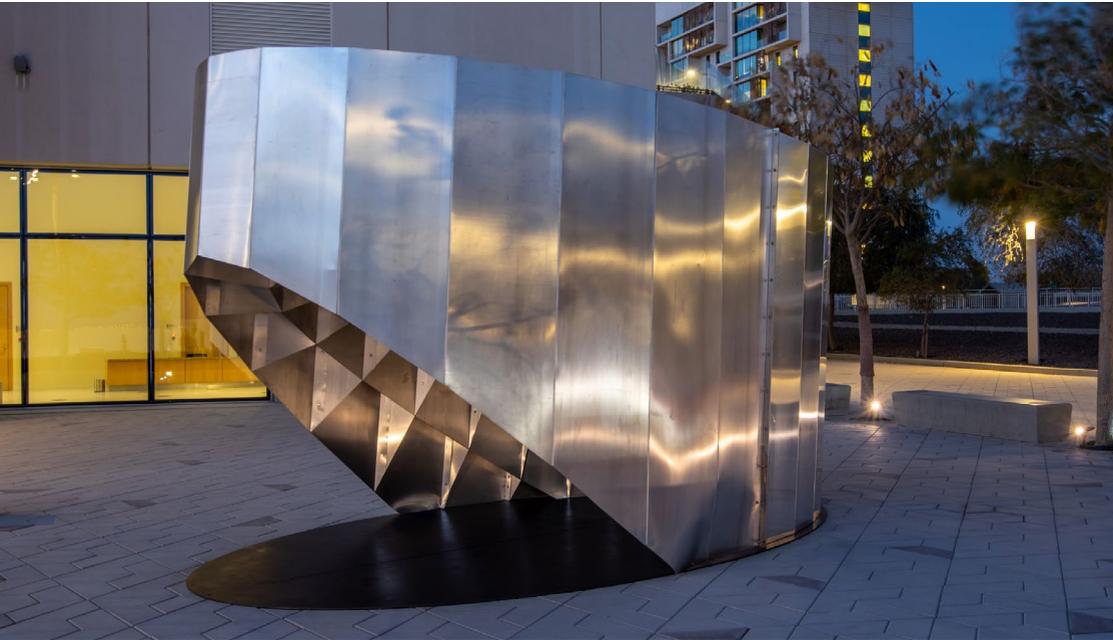
From the point of application, our artists are exposed to the professional experience: they are tasked with filling in a form that demands a vision of an as yet, unrealized work. Much like a formal, grant seeking application form, they are asked to think about a schedule of production, potential materials, suppliers, to research a budget.

Five artists are shortlisted and invited to present their proposal in person to a selection committee – the great and good of UAE arts. Based on those presentations, the committee decides to whom they will give the \$10,000 award.

For the winners, something unique then kicks into gear: they are introduced to a highly skilled team at the NYUAD Art Gallery and can produce their proposed artwork bolstered by a stable of professional expertise. Respected curators, a museum registrar, a preparator and a team of press and public relations experts work with them, visiting them in the studio, working through potential difficulties throughout the six month production period.

At the end of their exhibition, the artist is personally gifted \$5,000 by the Christo Estate to fund future artistic projects, study or work experience.

About the Artists



Sara Mohamed is an Egyptian architect who recently graduated from the American University of Sharjah. Through studying architecture, Sara has found her passion in detail design, exploring spatial relationships, and form making through physical and digital modeling. She believes that innovative ideas are born through patience and discovery driven by an intent to unravel novel outcomes. In addition to the Christo award, Sara took part in a two-semester design build project and the Abu Dhabi Heat Island challenge.

Sara says:

This award has been a special experience because it is one of the few opportunities where the winners are given the chance to work within a professional arts context, with the support of experts in their field.

It has consistently tested and exercised our abilities to think on the spot, prepare backup plans and backups of the backups. When we applied for this award, I knew we would face multiple challenges from day one, but the added virtues of home quarantine, virtual learning, and Zoom conferences took our efforts and struggles to a whole new level.

The cultural diversity within our group and context was the major inspiration behind this project.

The design's reflective outside shell signifies the coherence of our context, yet the inside reflects its diversity. The piece celebrates all the different identities out there: it's for everyone to observe, imagine, and reflect. We are honored and grateful for such an opportunity that'll allow us to materialize our vision into built work.

Sahil Rattha Singh is an Indian artist and an undergraduate architecture student currently enrolled at the American University of Sharjah. He is interested in bringing conceptually and theoretically motivated architecture into physical constructions through parametric modeling, digital visualization, and the application of advanced fabrication techniques. He is also greatly influenced and intrigued by ecological sustainability while striving to achieve a sense of equilibrium between social, contextual and performative aspects of his work.

He says:

Haweia is an amalgamation of art and architecture. We began working on the piece in my second year Architecture studio at the American University of Sharjah with the help of faculty and staff at CAAD, and this would not have been possible without them and our mentor Professor Jason Carlow. Seeing the work come to life during a global pandemic and its challenges has been an amazing experience. It is truly an honor to receive the prestigious Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award.

Laura AlDhahi is a recent architecture graduate from the American University of Sharjah, born and raised in Kuwait. She perceives *Haweia* as a metaphysical reflection of identity in terms of personal growth and self-realization. Laura strives to address local issues and provide solutions to an evolving city through sustainable architecture in parallel to the production of cultural narratives. Her work also concentrates on diminishing the threshold between vernacular construction and contemporary design through cross-disciplinary studies and digital technology.

She says:

It's an honor to be part of this journey that will bring our design to life with the help of my group members and our mentor, Professor Jason Carlow.

Notes from the artists about their work

“Haweia” is an Arabic word for identity. This installation was inspired by creating overlapping and consecutive curves that converge at an oculus, which accentuates a focused moment in time and space and is oriented to frame different perspectives of the sky. The design strives to intrigue the viewer from a distance with the contrasting interior and exterior environments. The exterior forms a sublime, smooth facade of folded aluminum sheets, while the interior reveals a complex reflective structure of surfaces and fins. The art installation is an aggregate of diverging materials that provides atmospheric character and acknowledges human engagement in creating a phenomenal experience. It also serves as a contemplative lens to its visitors to reinforce the connection with their inner selves and identities.

Director of The Christo & Jeanne-Claude Award, Emily Doherty

2020 has been a year of universal challenge. For our winning artist team, this has meant university campus closure, creating studios at home – sometimes internationally and apart from each other, communicating with The NYUAD Art Gallery team via Zoom, a delay in the public exhibition of their work and now the launch of their winning piece *Haweia*, in a virtual setting.

And yet to their great credit, these unusual circumstances have not deterred them. They have shown their mettle by leaning into the challenges and continuing to work remotely, intensively and with the support of their chosen mentor, Jason Carlow. Congratulations to them all.

In a further twist to the tale of 2020, we said a sad goodbye to Christo (1935 – 2020) himself; a profound loss to his family and friends, our Award community and of course, the wider world.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude's relationship with the United Arab Emirates spanned forty years and it was Christo's desire to support the emerging arts scene in 2012 that resulted in the creation of an Award in his name. In his eighties by then, he attended every unveiling of winning work until the year of his death. He met with winners, chatted over dinner, regaled those lucky enough to be within ear shot with wonderful tales of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol in sixties New York and if it was a year in which he had a live project – *Big Air Package*, Germany (2013), *The Floating Piers*, Italy (2016), *The London*

Mastaba (2018) – the winners would be invited to join him for a private tour. Bearing in mind that in its 16 day existence, *The Floating Piers* received 1.5 million visitors, this was an incredible privilege.

Christo sought to encourage a new generation of artists to find inspiration in creativity and bring joy to others, although it might be said that his true legacy was one of tenacity: in the pursuit of his vision, he never gave up – often over the the course of many years and in the face of profound opposition – and in the context of the past year, this will chime with many.

In every Award year since 2012, I seek to thank those who have made this project possible - often in a speech at the official unveiling of work on campus at NYUAD. In a year in which the arts, globally, have been suffocated by COVID-19, efforts to create forums for creative work have become essential. Portals for artists are antidotes to the monotony of lockdown, border closures and cultural suppression and as such I'd like to champion our teams of enablers here. Thank you, very much to:

H.E. Huda I. Alkhamis-Kanoo, Abdallah Haidar, and Georgia Chambers at the Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation. Maya Allison, Tala Nassar, Hala Saleh, Kimberly Moinette, Tyler Lewis, Sebastian Grube, Alaa Edris, Melroy D'souza, and Maisoon Mubarak at New York University Abu Dhabi. And, of course, to dearest Christo.

Jason Carlow, Project Team Mentor

Project team mentor, Jason Carlow is Associate Professor at the American University of Sharjah where he teaches architecture and interior design courses. His design work, research and teaching are centered on the relationship between digital and traditional modes of drawing, modeling and fabrication. His work has focused on using digital design and fabrication as a lens to investigate building typologies, building component systems, and compact interior spaces related to dense, urban environments. He holds a B.A. in Visual and Environmental Studies from Harvard University and a Master of Architecture from Yale University.

He says:

Being part of this team from the concept design to the final fabrication of the artwork has been a very rewarding experience for me. The team of artists proved their determination to the project in working remotely, across three different countries during the final development of the artwork. The award has given them a remarkable experience and has yielded a wonderful and thought provoking sculpture.

H.E. Huda I. Alkhamis-Kanoo, Founder of the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation

ADMAF is committed to continuing this valuable cultural work in partnership with NYUAD in spite of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Christo & Jeanne-Claude Award reaffirms the importance of arts and culture as well as ADMAF's mission to invest in our nation's youth and unlock creative potential.



Haweia celebrates the unity of the participating artists from diverse backgrounds. Joined together in the creation of an artwork, they embody the power of art, culture, and knowledge to create dialogue and openness toward others.

The Christo and Jeanne-Claude Award was established nearly a decade ago, along with the late Christo, to cultivate creativity in the UAE that is inspired by his and Jeanne-Claude's work. Through the award, we continue his legacy, providing young artists with the opportunity to realize their project and showcase their work.



**Executive Director of The NYUAD
Art Gallery and NYUAD Chief
Curator, Maya Allison**

Each year, the Christo Award ventures into new territory, and NYUAD joins a new winner or winners on the journey of bringing a major public art work into existence. A global pandemic certainly took this journey into even more unexpected territory than usual. The artists worked remotely on this project, from three countries, across time zones. The pandemic changed almost every aspect of the production process and timeline – would the fabricators be able to do it? Do we have materials available still? Can we install it in the location of our choice? This 8th Christo Award will go down in history as the cliffhanger series par excellence. And yet, as we all had to in the pandemic, our winners found a way, and we along with them. The process reflects the core of our mission: to make possible learning by doing, and that includes us learning, by doing this, in a new time signature, in a new virtual way of working, and in a completely different kind of context for unveiling a work.

AWARD PRESENTED BY

Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Christo (1935-2020) and his wife Jeanne-Claude (1935-2009) created some of the most ambitious, impressive and beautiful large scale works in the history of art. They include *Le Pont Neuf Wrapped*, Paris (1985); *Surrounded Islands*, Greater Miami, Florida 1983; *Wrapped Reichstag*, Berlin (1995); *The Gates*, Central Park, New York (2005); *The Floating Piers*, Lake Iseo, Italy (2016); and *The London Mastaba* in (2018). These artworks presented audiences with a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience something truly extraordinary and unique and were often several decades in the making.

NYU Abu Dhabi

The award is produced by NYU Abu Dhabi's university gallery team. The NYUAD Art Gallery is an academic museum-gallery that presents curated exhibitions of art and material culture across historical and contemporary topics, with a special emphasis on subjects of both regional concern and international significance. Through focused exhibitions, events, and publications, the NYUAD Art Gallery serves as a catalyst and locus of intellectual and creative activity, linking the University with the Abu Dhabi public and a worldwide community of artists, curators, and scholars.



Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation

Founded in 1996, ADMAF is one of the oldest, not-for-profit cultural organizations in the Arabian Gulf. Pioneering new artistic practices, it seeks to deepen global cross-cultural dialogue and inspire a renewed interest in the creativity of the UAE and Arab world. Often in partnership with leading national and international institutions, it delivers multidisciplinary initiatives for people of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities through the Abu Dhabi Festival, year-round youth platforms and community programs.

For more information, please visit www.admaf.org

EXHIBITION DATES

Virtual Exhibition Launch

Thursday, March 25th, 2021

nyuad-artgallery.org/christo-award/2020

Exhibition at NYUAD

March 25 - April 17, 2021

The Christo & Jeanne-Claude Award 2020 wishes to sincerely thank:

Our Patron

Her Highness Sheikha Shamsa Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan

Our Selection Committee 2020

H.E. Huda I. Alkhamis-Kanoo

Fabio Piano

Azza Al Qubaisi

Dyala Nusseibeh

And our guest Selection Committee Member, Kevin Jones

Artist's Mentor

Associate Professor Jason Carlow, American University of Sharjah

Production Advisors

Azza Al Qubaisi

Mohamed Mouayad Abo Ghada

The team at The NYUAD Art Gallery

The Award team at ADMAF

The award team would like to thank artist Sara Mohamed for managing the final months of on the ground production, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

For more information visit

nyuad-artgallery.org/christo-award/2020

