

## *Speculative Landscapes* now open at NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery

- Curated by Executive Director of the NYUAD Art Gallery and the University's Chief Curator, Maya Allison, this exhibition runs until December 7 at the main Gallery space.
- A public program of talks, screenings, and tours will take place throughout the exhibition's duration.
- "In recent decades, the UAE has hosted an increasingly diverse art ecology, with enhanced access to international art conversations alongside a profound shift in both urban and cultural landscapes, all of which manifests in different ways in the work of these artists," Allison comments



*Between Muddles and Tangles*, 2019 | Ayman Zedani

Two-channel video, sound, wooden shelf, LED plant lights, beakers, Kaff Mariam plants, water, digital print on archival paper; dimensions variable

Commissioned by The NYUAD Art Gallery. Photography John Varghese

**Abu Dhabi, September 17, 2019:** NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery, the University's academic museum-gallery, has opened its fall show, *Speculative Landscapes*. Curated by Executive Director of the NYUAD Art Gallery and the University's Chief Curator Maya Allison, this exhibition features four new installations by UAE-based artists. Each offers a distinct lens into the UAE and the region, and their work is gaining international recognition for its conceptual speculations on our contemporary world. Together the exhibition offers a landmark presentation of these important artists, both in terms of the scale of the new projects, and the distinct voice and perspective they offer.

**Areej Kaoud, Ayman Zedani, Jumairy, and Raja'a Khalid** each have an established reputation in the UAE, and are gaining international attention. Each installation in the exhibition can be experienced as both a physical and metaphorical landscape of the artist's projected world. Working from observations of life in the UAE and beyond, these artists reflect back on our surroundings through: the lenses of risk (Kaoud),

virtual reality (Jumairy), human-plant relations (Zedani), and the intersection of marketing with our metaphysical body (Khalid).

Kaoud's projects revolve around the risk and preparing for emergencies. These emergency preparations can take on a humorous quality that, as she puts it, "breaks the ice" of what her family had been through as Palestinians. In *Unknown Safety*, a red, rubber dome rises in the middle of the room, but with no instructions or guidance on its use; is it a playground or higher ground (in case of a flood)? From the wall emanate *An Escalation*, two sound pieces, one in English, one in Arabic, in which the artist reads her free-associations between daily life and the brutality of war, as with a paper cut making her think of hemorrhage.

The artist known as Jumairy is inspired by a lifelong fascination with pop stars, and uses the internet to stage the "Jumairy Universe" through performance art and experiments. In a major new installation, *A Comma, In Arabic*, a slice of this universe appears in the gallery. The artist asks: where does AI go when its technology body dies? Visitors will traverse twenty tons of synthetic sand dyed Pantone 213, a hot pink of both popular culture and apocalypse. Jumairy imagines visitors to the installation as 'smart entities' accessing a virtual landscape, like a Facebook friend coming online.

In a dark room, plants glow and ripple with electric light at night; Zedani's *Between Muddles and Tangles* offers a meditation on nature and technology. When an LED light enables a plant to sprout, where is the line between natural and electric life? An immersive video installation takes the viewer into the night view of Al Noor Island in Sharjah, where humans have brought plants from all over the world, and the plants, in turn, create tender new habitats for insect life.

Khalid's *a.quiet.wave* presents a possible yoga studio from 2021: here, famous yoga influencers will perform flows, which will appear on Instagram @nyuadartgallery. Yet the viewer will never see yoga happening in the space. The space is painted Coloro 'Quiet Wave,' predicted to be one of the five key colors of spring/summer 2021. Described in sales material as 'optimistic and futuristic... a perfect mood-setter for the start of the new decade,' it reflects Khalid's interest in the way the wellness industry commodifies physical and spiritual health. Commercialism and serenity exist side-by-side, creating opportunities to reflect, but also to promote products; visitors choose how to interpret this landscape.

Since the launch of The NYUAD Art Gallery in 2014, landscape has been one of the central themes of its curatorial framework, with the aim to encourage reflection on the experience of the UAE both culturally and physically. With *Speculative Landscapes*, the Chief Curator returns to the question of the UAE's landscape with artists who extrapolate from the rapidly evolving physical world around them in a series of conceptual meditations on their environment.

**Allison notes:** "I've been following the work of this emerged group of UAE-based artists for some time. They are part of a larger group that has developed a serious practice rooted in the UAE. They are taking on big questions in their work, and with these four in particular, I was struck by their call and response dialogue with the UAE surroundings and its expression of our contemporary world. These are among the most important rising UAE artists to watch if you are interested in art from the contemporary Middle East – or as we call it: West Asia). Because intense physical landscape and rapid urbanization characterize the experience of the UAE, we felt landscape was a critical subject for the Gallery when we opened in 2014, and I'm delighted that the artists responded to my invitation to propose a new commission in a manner that links so closely to the question of our landscapes."

A public program of talks, screenings, and family tours will take place throughout the duration of the exhibition. For more information, please visit <https://www.nyuad-artgallery.org/>.

**Exhibition Listing Information:**

Title: *Speculative Landscapes*  
Exhibition dates: September 16 - December 7 2019  
Address: NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, Saadiyat Island, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
Opening Times: Mondays – Saturdays, 12pm – 8pm  
Admission: Free  
Website: [www.nyuad-artgallery.org](http://www.nyuad-artgallery.org)

**For more information about the NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, please contact:  
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**Notes to Editors**

**About NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery**

[www.nyuad-artgallery.org](http://www.nyuad-artgallery.org)

The NYUAD Art Gallery is an academic museum-gallery that presents work by internationally-established artists, curators, and scholars, to serve the intellectual and creative dialogue among the university and wider communities, via topics of regional relevance and international significance. The Gallery and its projects serve as a catalyst and locus of intellectual and creative activity through multiple venues and projects. The main gallery is a teaching museum, connecting the curriculum and the public. Its team also oversees The Project Space is an exhibition laboratory for community artists. Collectively these two spaces, the new Reading Room, the annual Christo Award, the Campus Collection, and a series of original publications catalyze regional and international dialogue.

**About NYU Abu Dhabi**

[www.nyuad.nyu.edu](http://www.nyuad.nyu.edu)

NYU Abu Dhabi is the first comprehensive liberal arts and science campus in the Middle East to be operated abroad by a major American research university. NYU Abu Dhabi has integrated a highly-selective liberal arts, engineering and science curriculum with a world center for advanced research and scholarship enabling its students to succeed in an increasingly interdependent world and advance cooperation and progress on humanity's shared challenges. NYU Abu Dhabi's high-achieving students have come from 120 nations and speak over 120 languages. Together, NYU's campuses in New York, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai form the backbone of a unique global university, giving faculty and students opportunities to experience varied learning environments and immersion in other cultures at one or more of the numerous study-abroad sites NYU maintains on six continents.