

The Art of Living

Middle Eastern creativity shone bright at AD's immersive design show at Abu Dhabi's Jubail Island

Art, design, architecture and emotion came together at Art of Living, a new design show curated by Architectural Digest Middle East. Offering a platform to regional artists and designers to express their creativity unhindered, AD invited a diverse mix of established and emerging talents to imagine unexpected, dreamlike scenographies at Jubail Island, a new nature-bound luxury mixed-use development in the mangroves of Abu Dhabi.

Exploring the dual themes of New Traditions and Nature Connection, in October, the show took over two villas in the exclusive district, presenting guests with fresh takes on historic craft and the perspectives guiding creative expression, circa right now. Through a mix of objects, spaces and concepts conceived exclusively for the occasion, it underscored the inspiring blend of the past and present that is the essence of the UAE.

With its focus on community building, Jubail Island – the AED10 Billion mega-project envisioned and managed by LEAD Development, a leading real estate development company dedicated to delivering

high-end mixed-use masterplans – offered the perfect foil for this ambitious expression of regional creative excellence.

“Community is a word synonymous with Jubail Island,” says Mahmoud Dandashly, the chief business officer at LEAD Development. “Fostering authentic connections for residents, guests and the wider Abu Dhabi community is something we take very seriously. We believe that creativity is a universal language. Meaningful design can uplift us emotionally, aesthetically and culturally.”

Over the course of ten days, the show hosted private dinners, guided tours, panel discussions and interactive workshops that forged a connection between the designers, visitors and the location. AD's mission behind Art of Living was timely: to spotlight the region's booming creative landscape and demonstrate the exceptional creativity of our talent. By removing the usual limits of practicality, functionality and commerce, and with the help of Jubail Island's expert design and construction teams, it became a larger-than-life invitation to dream, and to inspire. jubailisland.ae

Words Pratyush Sarup
Photography Aasiya Jagadeesh



A Gathering Space

OMAR AL GURG

Many designers have attempted contemporary interpretations of the Arab *majlis*, but few come close to the Dubai-based Omar Al Gurg's nuanced approach to this cornerstone of Emirati hospitality. From the incense-burner that scented his space, to selecting the most comforting shade of brown that enveloped it and plush leather cushions that could be adapted to suit the user's individual needs,

Al Gurg envisioned a room that was both familiar and enchanting. *Misnad*, the floor seating typical of Arab homes, was expertly interpreted through the designer's atelier, Modu Method's vision of making modular design cool, whilst his instantly-recognisable carved concrete blocks were arranged into a central coffee table. “I wanted to create a feeling of entering a home that had been passed down through generations, but when you came close, was utterly modern,” he says. @modumethod



Expression of Love

REINA MASRI

With a background in interior design and a passion for Picasso's work, Reina Masri has fashioned a furniture studio focused on creating pieces inspired by organic shapes and nature. Her ongoing research into colour and materials informs every new collection and all that she creates is with the hope to inspire others to be more adventurous with their spaces. Love Expression stems from her desire to create a place for loved ones to come together. Handcrafted objects in light-weight concrete – a cold and impersonal material that springs to life with the right attention – integrated the rose, a symbol of affection, to demonstrate design's ability to help reframe narratives. [@renamdesign](#)



Nazar Amulet

KAHHAL 1871 X KARIM MEKHTIGIAN X OKHTEIN

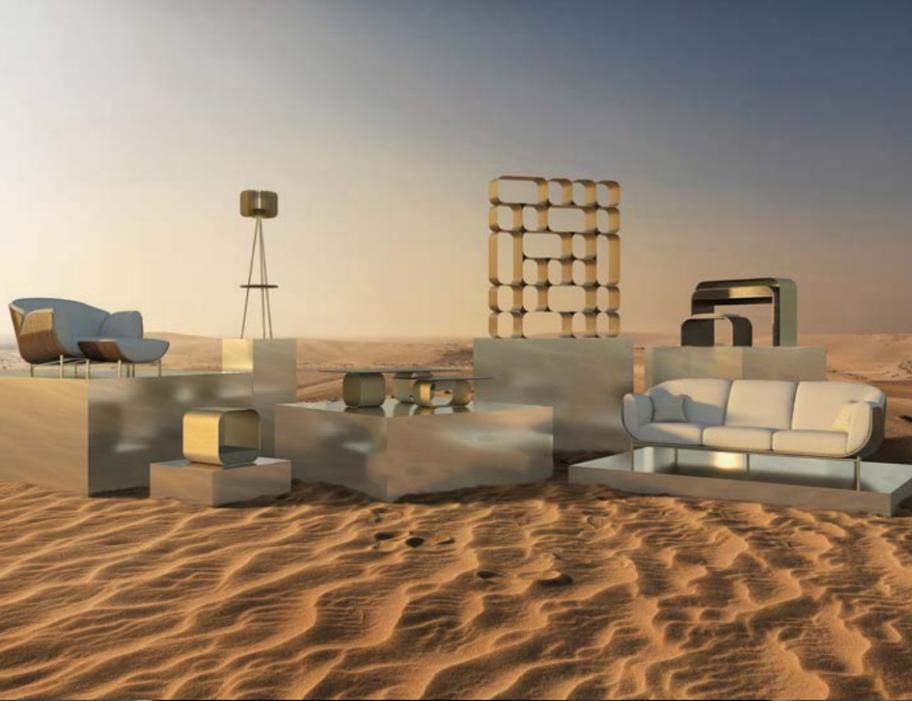
One of the oldest and most renowned manufacturers of handmade rugs in Egypt, for over a century Cairo-based Kahhal 1871 has been at the forefront of the nation's design scene, nurturing local weaving communities to help them preserve their know-how. Whether it's through his Cairo-based studio, Alchemy, or his latest concept Kyme, which spotlights the diversity of Egyptian creativity, Karim Mekhtigian is pioneer of contemporary design in the region. These stalwarts of Cairo's creative scene joined forces to present Nazar Amulet, a spatial interpretation of the ancient symbol of protection that inspired sisters Aya and Mounaz Abdelraouf (the duo behind fashion brand Okhtein) to design a series of rugs for the atelier. [@kahhal1871](#); [@karimmekhtigian](#); [@okhtein](#)

Neo-Oriental Boudoir

CARLA BAZ

Inspired by beauty of the Mangroves, French-Lebanese designer Carla Baz imagined a room for conversations, rest and repose, where nature-inspired colours and materials came together in a vibrant celebration of artisanal excellence. Her contemporary designs showcased the time-honoured skills of the Lebanese craftspeople. Brushed brass, marble, velvets and intricate woodcraft were paired with celadons, lilac, burned orange and golds to create an opulent vignette. [@carlabazstudio](#)





Shurouq

FROMM
 Founded by by Alia Rachid and operating between Qatar and Italy, Fromm works to empower young Middle Eastern designers. Offering infrastructure to help them not only develop and manufacture unique design, but also a network to access the global market in a meaningful way, it also operates a design lab and show space in Milan. For Art of Living Fromm fashioned a virtual landscape to present Shurouq, a new range of design pieces envisioned by two Qatari creatives: Shua'aAli and Maryam Al Suwaidi. Inspired by traditional Qatari architecture and the country's rich artisanal history, the collection was presented in a virtual desert, experienced through VR headsets. @fromm.qa



The Colour Yellow

ADRIAN PEPE
 Intertwining historic making traditions with fashion, interiors and performance, textile artist Adrian Pepe envisions objects as experiential tools that open discourse on our morphing cultural landscape. Using ochre, a pigment derived from the earth since palaeolithic times, his woven tableau, referenced the historic context of the hue. "In the East it has held an ancient association with gold, wheat and the sun that gave the colour a sense of purity, sustenance and divinity," explains Pepe. @adrian_pepe



A Weaver's Dream

IWAN MAKTABI X ANOUD AL ZABEN

Inspired by the stories held within a single weave, heritage rugs atelier Iwan Maktabi celebrated Abu Dhabi's rich heritage by interpreting the ornate craft of carpet weaving through a scene envisioned by architect and experience designer Anoud Al Zaben. Pairing a rare, museum-worthy checkerboard carpet woven in Mamlouk, Cairo, around 1550 AD, with German designer Jan Kath's elaborate renditions of the historic design and gleaming, fishing net-inspired baskets that Al Zaben fashioned from artist Raya Kassisieh's handwoven copper mesh and decorated with local flora, the result was a dreamy, richly layered montage. @iwanmaktabiofficial; @anoudalzaben



Versatile

NADINE ROUPHAEL AND JIHAD
KHAIRALLAH

Beirut-based Nadine Roupheal is an interior designer whose passion for the arts has drawn her into the parallel world of painting and ceramics. Pushing the boundaries of clay her work invites us to explore the ancient craft anew. Her husband, the architect and designer Jihad Khairallah, has carved a niche for himself with an inspiring blend of modern and oriental styles. The duo's presentation was an ensemble of intricately designed pieces that explores the future of furniture design: flexibility, adaptability and its ability to engage with the end user's evolving lifestyle. This bright and bold installation was grounded by a monumental, sculpture-like wall unit with modular elements that could be re-arranged, combining man and material to create an ever-changing composition. [@ateliernadeen; jihadk.com](#)



Sleep No More

DESIGNKRAFT

Sidarth Menon founded DesignKraft as a platform for designers and enthusiasts to express their individuality. By marrying the freedom and creativity of a design studio with the capabilities of a full-scale joinery and fabrication facility, the Dubai-based atelier has evolved to creating limited-edition and customisable objects and furniture, made entirely in the UAE. With Sleep No More, Menon took Art of Living visitors into a dreamscape dotted with surrealist objects. Every element of the experience demonstrated the values that he lives by, from local sourcing and circularity, to helping the region's design scene to grow more sustainably. [@designkraft_furniture](#)



Slow Burn

ZEINA BACARDI SAKR

On a mission to push the boundaries of clay, self-taught ceramicist Zeina Bacardi Sakr founded her atelier in 2016, presenting handmade fine objects ranging from unique tableware and sculptural vessels to lighting. At Jubail Island, Sakr presented Sol, a series of porcelain lights and Queen Anne, a sculpture inspired by the Daucus Carota plant. Together, the works celebrated slow making, where the end result bears a meditative quality and carries the imprint of the process. [@zeinabacardi](#)

Renouvelée

GOSHÁ BURO

In the age of machines, creative entrepreneur Natalia Shustova wanted to celebrate something more human and established Goshá Buro as an incubator for emotionally driven concepts. Her Art of Living installation, *Renouvelée* (renewal in French), was a 'temporary' landscape that combined architecture, interiors and installation art, blurring the lines between the real and the fantastical, between nature and what's made by man. "As its colours changed during the course of the week, this celebration of newness became a metaphor for emotional and spiritual transformation, too," says Shustova. @shoestova; @gosha.buro



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The Inner Realm

TAMARA BARRAGE

A Lebanese artist and designer based in Dubai, Tamara Barrage uses an array of experimental techniques, manipulating familiar materials to evoke unexpected, tactile and sensory characteristics. Her interest in materiality has led her to creating unusual, animated shapes imbued with big personalities and a sense of playfulness. These fantastical objects also reveal the fragility of her chosen media. Populated by biomorphic objects and forms, her installation *The Inner Realm*, is imagined as an other-worldly space. @tamarabarrage



Shift

RAWDHA AL KETBI

Rawdha Al Ketbi is an Emirati visual artist working in photography, mixed media and installation art. Her work predominantly focuses on found materials, abandoned places and objects. As a result there is a poetic patina that places her creations at the intersection of the past and the future. Offering a metaphor for the marks left behind by time, *Shift* is a composition of copper plates, each with its own tones and textures. By stitching together the gradual change in the metal's pigmentation, Rawdha's freeze-frame interpretation of aging oddly grounds us in the now, imploring us to observe the moment just before it evolves, yet again. @r.ks





The Room

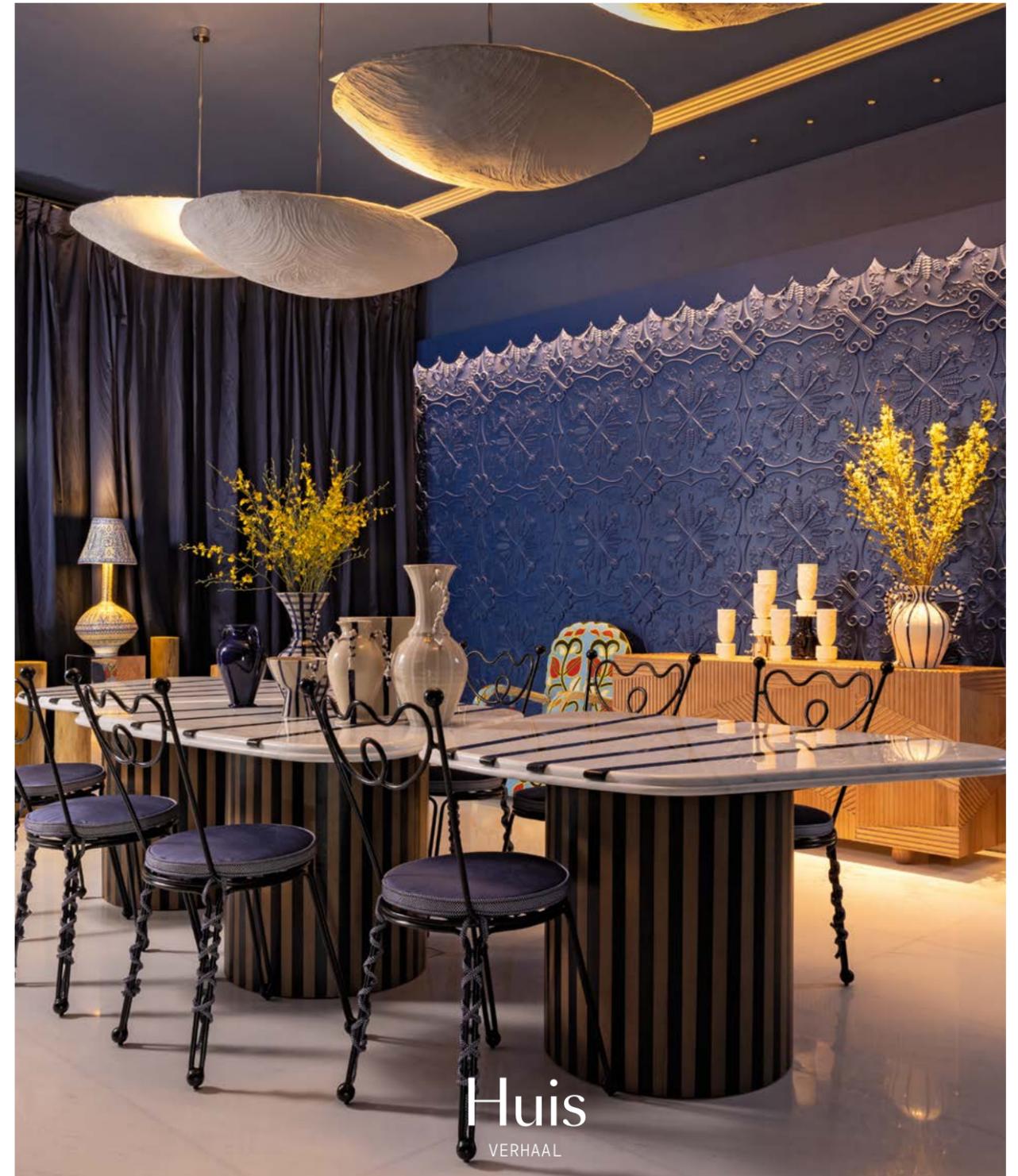
CHAFA GHADDAR

Painter Chafa Ghaddar's explorations in the fresco technique reveal new conceptual possibilities within the ancient style of mural painting. Anchoring her practice around this medium since 2010, Ghaddar experiments with materials such as canvas, introducing new creative, technical and stylistic exchange between stability and fragility, figuration and abstraction.

The Room was a space to experience the historic art form anew and contemplate the place of tradition and history in an ever-evolving milieu. Here, texture, scale and materials came together in bodily forms, suspended in space in an animated, life-like manner.

The artist has participated in several collective exhibitions between Beirut, Dubai, New York, Brussels and Verona, Italy. In 2014 she was awarded the Boghossian Art Prize for painting and was artist in residence at the Villa Empain in Brussels in late 2015. Ghaddar is currently working on her first solo show with Tabari Artspace, due to open in March 2023.

@chafaghaddar



New Traditions

HVILA EDITIONS

A nomadic collectible design gallery founded by Anita Hansen, Hvila Editions is known for its cherry-picked selection of home accessories and furniture that spotlight traditional craftsmanship through a modern lens. Created through material innovation and experiments with artisanal techniques, works by Steven Haulenbeek, Dan Yeffet and Setbyol Oh (whose six-metre long light made from 10,000 hand-pleated mulberry paper leaves was a sensation) tell stories of diverse making cultures – from Asia to Europe. Each object was special in its own way, unified through fluid, organic shapes. @hvilaeditions



Neydine Bak and Dewald Struwig co-founded Verhaal, a multi-disciplinary creative studio, in Sydney in 2016 and since then have expanded their operations across the world, recently opening a studio in the UAE. From the start, the duo has put the artisanal process at the heart of their work, collaborating with a global community of makers to create extraordinary hospitality, hotel and residential experiences defined through art and artisanship. Huis takes inspiration from the duo's Dutch heritage ingrained in African craftsmanship. Through an array of functional, yet delightful pieces that alludes to memories of their own upbringing, they've imagined the very heart of a huis (or home), the dining room, as a space for sharing love and creating memorable experiences. @verhaalstudio

Sweet Memory

AFRA SALMAN AL SUWAIDI
Whether figurative or abstract, Emirati artist Afra Salman Al Suwaidi's work is whimsical and nostalgic. "I work with clay and plaster, but also unexpected things like toys and candies," she says. "This material mix allows me to explore the structure of time by observing how things change and take on new forms." Following a playful approach, she moulded blow-torched marshmallows into an abstract 'family' of forms that interact with temperature and touch to slowly transform and reveal something different. "I think of my sculptures as metaphors for hidden memories and emotions that come to the fore with the right impulse." @afraalsuwaidii; @irisartadvisory



Narratives of Origin

KARIM EL HAYAWAN AND NEHAL LEHETA

Karim El Hayawan and Nehal Leheta, the duo behind Cairo-based Design Point Studio, explored the unifying power and socio-political significance of bread-making, an art, craft and source of livelihood that has connected cultures for centuries. Contemplating the everyday significance of bread, a monumental tapestry, handcrafted in the authentic style of Egyptian tent-making, Khayameya, was suspended above a symbolic plot of land sprinkled with gold dust. The accompanying soundtrack – Egyptian Artist Abu's interpretation of the 1946 classic operetta, El Qamh El Leila (Wheat Tonight) by Mohamed Abdel Wahab – celebrated the joy and optimism of harvest season. @karimelhayawan; @nehalleheta



Time Capsule

GREGORY GATSERELIA X
THE GREAT DESIGN DISASTER

Renowned for his glamorous, impeccably layered interiors, designer Gregory Gatslerelia has been envisioning one-of-a-kind spaces since 1985. His latest endeavour, Milan-based studio The Great Design Disaster offers a one-stop-solution for anyone looking for site-specific art and design. At Jubail Island, Gatslerelia and Joy Herro imagined a snapshot that brought to life a moment that's been left suspended in time. A tribute to the Beirut Port blasts, the scene was crafted from paper pulp by Clayper. @gregorygatslerelia; @thegreatdesigndisaster





Roots

OMAR AND WAJIH NAKKASH
Dubai designer Omar Nakkash cut his teeth at his family's acclaimed gallery, Nakkash, before moving to Milan to study interior design. Following in the footsteps of his father, Wajih, who founded the eponymous gallery in 1983, Omar is currently working on several projects in the Middle East, from homes to hotels. Inspired by the two worlds the mangroves occupy, land and sea, the duo imaged an underwater scene anchored by objects that take their style cues the tropical flora of this rich ecosystem. "From the fabric with a fish-scaled texture that was draped like waves, to furniture that we selected for the way it celebrated natural materials, we wanted visitors to feel like they had dived into the mangroves to discover a mysterious room," says Omar. @nakkashgallery; nakkashdesignstudio.com

Garden of Temporal Formations

COLLECTUS
Led by Amer Madhoun, a multi-disciplinary designer who explores varied media in his quest to create tangible links between the built form and its context, UAE-based design studio Collectus authors authentic spaces with an emphasis on the human experience. "I focus on materials and the environment as the primary elements of any concept," he says. The Garden of Temporal Formations, a fantastical, cotton-candy hued collection of irregularly shaped objects fashioned from a mixture of sand and foam, and dispersed through a miniature desertscape, is a fine example. "I wanted to play with people's sense of scale. The sculptures look like the monumental rock formations in Abu Dhabi, but here, one is looking at them from above." @designcollectus



I Hear Their Echoes

JUMA AL HAJ

By not letting any particular word to over-power or be easily deciphered, Emirati creative Juma Al Haj implores the audience to find their own meaning. For Art of Living, the artist who is represented by Iris Art Advisory, a UAE-based art platform, painted on location for five days, drawing a life-size version of his canvasses onto one of the walls in the villa. "The thing about an echo is that it only lasts in that moment, when it feels so big and then it fades away," Al Haj says about his concept. "As the room gets painted over after the event, my work remains just as a memory." @jumalhaj





Sahra

COLLECTIONAL X GEORGE GEARA

Representing artists and designers from around the globe, Dubai-based design gallery Collectional spotlights rare and unique work. For Art of Living 2022, the gallery joined forces with George Geara, a Lebanese designer whose work centres on research and experimentation with local crafts and skills, imbuing a contemporary spirit in historic techniques. Titled Sahra (or soirée), the presentation that was curated by Catalina Ruiz Urquiola, the creative director of Collectional, featured work by a raft of designers alongside Geara, who through an array of exceptionally made objects explored how beautiful spaces can positively impact wellbeing. [@the_collectional](#); [@georgegeara.studio](#)



Prismatic Relay

NADER GAMMAS

Based between Boston and Dubai, designer Nader Gammas combines the latest in illumination tech with artisanal craft and refined materials to create unique lighting objects that never fail to make a statement. Like rays refracting through a crystal, Prismatic Relay scattered shafts of light to create a mesmerising dance of reflections. Presented in three parts – a cascading chandelier suspended in the atrium, cast plaster wall lights that perform like reflectors and metal portholes, the work created a moment for guests to pause and discover that which makes everything visible visible: light. [@nader_gammas](#)