

PRESS RELEASE

Aisha Alabbar Gallery Presents *Interwoven Realities* at Art Abu Dhabi 2025 – Booth #S8 Featuring Dr. Najat Makki, Khalid Al Banna, and Samar Hejazi

Dubai, UAE — October 28, 2025

Aisha Alabbar Gallery proudly announces its participation in **Art Abu Dhabi 2025** with the presentation *Interwoven Realities*, featuring three groundbreaking artists: **Dr. Najat Makki, Khalid Al Banna**, and **Samar Hejazi**. Together, their works create a profound conversation on memory, materiality, and perception illuminating the evolving landscape of contemporary art from the UAE and the wider region.

Bringing together three distinct yet interconnected practices, *Interwoven Realities* examines how identity, heritage, and transformation converge through texture, color, and form. The presentation invites audiences to reconsider the fabric of reality not as something static, but as something continuously reinterpreted, layered, and reimaged.

Samar Hejazi, a Palestinian-Canadian artist, presents ethereal textile installations that question what is seen and unseen, visible and obscured. Working with suspended thread embroidery created without fabric Hejazi transforms the traditional language of *Tatreez* into a contemporary, conceptual expression. Each thread sustains itself, forming fragile yet resilient networks that reflect connection, displacement, and persistence. Her works shift with light and movement, dissolving and reappearing as viewers pass a poetic embodiment of perception as political and relational.

Khalid Al Banna, one of the UAE's foremost contemporary artists, presents vibrant sculptural collages that merge abstraction with memory. Rooted in a visual vocabulary formed in the 1970s and 1980s, his compositions rise vertically in rhythmic geometries circles, triangles, and rectangles that pulse with the colors of everyday life. Through his use of cement, paint, and found materials, Al Banna documents the UAE's rapid urban transformation, juxtaposing nostalgia with modernity. His works speak to a nation in transition balancing tradition, construction, and the ever-shifting architecture of collective memory

Dr. Najat Makki, a pioneer of Emirati abstraction and one of the first women in the Gulf to earn a PhD in Art Philosophy, continues her lifelong exploration of color, emotion, and light. Her luminous canvases transcend representation, inviting viewers into a sensory dialogue between form and feeling. Through a masterful command of pigment, Dr. Makki's works embody both the rootedness of Emirati heritage and the vibrancy of a rapidly evolving world translating memory and desert light into visual symphonies that resonate across generations.

"*Interwoven Realities* brings together three generations of artists whose practices redefine what contemporary art from the UAE can express emotionally, materially, and conceptually," said **Shilan Samaei**, Gallery Director at Aisha Alabbar Gallery. "This presentation celebrates both legacy and innovation; it's about memory as matter, and form as emotion."

Art Abu Dhabi 2025 marks another milestone for **Aisha Alabbar Gallery**, reaffirming its role as one of the UAE's leading platforms championing regional voices. Since its founding in 2018, the gallery has been dedicated to fostering cross-generational and cross-cultural dialogues that deepen understanding of local identity within a global context.

Interwoven Realities invites viewers to enter a space where tradition transforms, memory bends, and imagination takes form where threads, textures, and pigments converge to reveal the infinite ways in which art holds our shared humanity.

About the Artist

Najat Makki (b. Dubai, 1956) is a pioneering Emirati artist best known for her curiosity for color and dreamlike, abstracted depictions of the natural landscape in the UAE. What started as childlike wonder led her to Cairo, where she graduated with a Bachelor's and Master's degree in relief sculpture and metal from the College of Fine Arts (1982 and 1998, respectively). Upon returning to the UAE, the colorist and painter started exploring fluorescent paints through her work in scenography for children at the Ministry of Education, introducing the Gulf to a style of abstract painting that is characterized primarily by large fields of flat, solid color, spread across, creating areas of unbroken surface and a flat picture plane. Her use of this material in contemporary art contexts created an unconventional viewing experience, often accompanied by UV-A lights that elevate matter from canvas in lurid dimensionality. This experimentation was first debuted in her solo exhibition at Al Wasl Club in Dubai in 1987, marking a turning point in her career and gaining her regional recognition. Makki later returned to the Egyptian capital to pursue a doctorate degree, making her the first Emirati woman to formally specialize in the philosophy of art (2001), adding a theoretical dimension to her practical aptitude and visual flair.

Makki has exhibited widely in her home country and internationally in Egypt, France, Germany, India, Jordan, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Her recent highlights include Festival of Optical Arts–Dubai Expo 2024, Portrait of a Nation (2016), and Women/Creators: Visionary Women in the Emirates Art Scene (2014). Earlier exhibitions include Heritage Horizons Exhibition at Abu Dhabi Officers Club (2004), Book Fair Exhibition in Frankfurt, Germany (2004), and a co-exhibition for UAE President Ascension Day held at Dubai International Airport (2004). That same year, she participated in the Immar International Arts Workshop and the Environment Exhibition at Dubai Trade Center. She previously exhibited at Sharjah Antiquities Museum (2003), the Tehran Biennial (2002), Emirates Media Inc. Exhibition: For You Jerusalem in Abu Dhabi (2002), and Woman & Arts: International View Exhibition in Sharjah (2000).

Her works are held in the permanent collections of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Sharjah Art Museum, the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi, Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation in Dubai, the Women's Museum in Dubai, and the Ministry of Culture and Youth in Abu Dhabi, among many.

Makki was the only female artist among the 15 showing at 1980–Today: Exhibitions in the UAE and represented the UAE at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015), curated by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi. Her acclaimed 2019 retrospective, Luminescence, was held at the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi.

A multi-award-winning artist, Makki received the Order of Arts and Letters from the French Government (2023), the Emirates Appreciation Award (2015), and the National Award for Arts, Sciences, and Literature from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Community Development (2008). Earlier distinctions include the Emirates Appreciation Award for Arts, Science and Literature (2007), the Al Mahabaa Syrian International Biennial Award (1999), the Gulf Cooperation Council Biennial Award (1998), the General Authority of Youth & Sports Welfare Silver Award (1996), the Sultan Bin Owais Cultural Award (1994), and the Jury Award at the first Sharjah Biennial (1993), in addition to numerous certificates of excellence and merit.

She is currently a member of the Dubai Cultural Council, the Emirates Plastic Arts Society, and the Art Friends Society.

Khalid Al Banna (b. 1975, Sharjah) is a contemporary Emirati artist, where he continues to live and work. A prominent figure in the UAE's art scene since the early 1990s, Al Banna is recognized for his unique approach to collage as an expressive visual language through which he explores themes of identity, memory, and the rapid urban transformations shaping the Emirates. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from the United Arab Emirates University. This academic foundation has profoundly influenced his understanding of form, space, and proportion—principles that continue to shape both the visual and conceptual framework of his artistic practice.

His body of work ranges from early black-and-white collages, which marked the beginning of his career, to vibrant, layered textile compositions rich in materials and color. In both series, negative space becomes a central arena for projecting inner narratives, inspired by his architectural sensibility and passion for constructing symbolic and spatial forms.

Alongside collage, Al Banna has developed a significant practice in sculptural design. His contemporary sculptures embrace geometric abstraction and minimalist aesthetics, drawing from fundamental shapes

such as circles, squares, triangles, and cones. These sculptural forms offer contemplative balances between mass and void, fluidity and structure. Deeply informed by architectural principles, his works reflect symmetry, repetition, and layering, turning pure shapes into contemporary symbols that engage with concepts of time, place, and identity.

He has participated in several sculpture design competitions, and in 2023, was commissioned by Dubai Culture and Arts Authority to create the Union Monument, in collaboration with a group of prominent Emirati artists. The project celebrates the spirit of the UAE's union and the values of national identity in public space.

Throughout his career, Al Banna has participated in numerous prominent exhibitions locally and internationally. These include the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi (1989), Sharjah International Biennial (1999), and Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany. He has also exhibited in Al Burda at Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2019), and Portrait of a Nation at the Abu Dhabi Festival (2016), which later toured to the me Collectors Room / Olbricht Foundation in Berlin (2017), and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. (2010). His work has also been included in group shows in France, Austria, the UK, Italy, and Mexico. His artworks are held in numerous prestigious public and institutional collections, including the Sharjah Art Museum, Barjeel Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi Music & Art Foundation (ADMAF), UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Youth, Sharjah Department of Culture, the Executive Council of Abu Dhabi, the UAE Embassy in Washington, D.C., Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Shurooq), and the Sharjah Research, Technology and Innovation Park (SRTIP), among many other local and international institutions.

Samar Hejazi (b. California, 1987) is a Palestinian-Canadian visual artist whose multidisciplinary practice spans textiles, sculpture, installation, and printmaking. Drawing on diverse global craft traditions, she investigates the shifting nature of perception and meaning-making. Her work often plays with light, shadow, reflection, and movement to create immersive experiences that explore memory, identity, and inner landscapes.

Hejazi's solo exhibitions include *Illusions of Separation* at the Aurora Cultural Centre, Canada (2023); *Geometries of Difference* at Open Studio Project Space, Toronto (2022); *An Unravelling* at The Plumb, as part of the Toronto Palestine Film Festival (2020); and *Maw6ini* at Xpace Cultural Centre Project Room, Toronto (2018).

Her work has been featured in major international group exhibitions, including *Sila*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah (2025); *Whispers of the Past*, Sotheby's, Dubai (2025); *Ihsan: Part of Islamic History*, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada (2025); *Women in War*, Intisar Foundation, Kuwait (2024); *Sharjah Islamic Arts Festival*, Sharjah Art Museum, UAE (2023); *Ghostly Makers*, Burnaby Art Gallery, Canada (2023); *Fragility*, MIA Art Collection, Canadian University Dubai (2022); *As They Gaze Upon Us*, Banat Collective and Warehouse421, Abu Dhabi (2021); and *And Other Monuments*, Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto (2021).

Hejazi's participation in auctions includes *Legacy Trilogy*, ArteEast Benefit Auction, Artsy, New York (2021); *International Women's Day Auction*, Embassy Culture House, London, Canada (2021); *Empire: Awakenings*, Toronto History Museums, Canada (2021); *Art with Heart Charity Auction*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2019); and *FUTURE PROOF*, Open Studio, Toronto (2019), among others.

Hejazi has participated in residencies at Arquetopia in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Cusco, receiving multiple scholarships in recognition of her contributions to contemporary craft-based practices. Her work has been featured in publications such as *BlackFlash Magazine*, *Create! Magazine*, *Art Queens Volume II*, and *Studio Magazine* (2023).

Hejazi's works are held in prestigious public and private collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York City), Citibank Art Collection, and numerous international private collections.

She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in New Media from Ryerson University, Toronto (2013) and continues to develop a visual language rooted in the personal, the poetic, and the perceptual.

About Aisha Alabbar Gallery

Established in 2018, Aisha Alabbar Gallery is a leading platform for contemporary and modern art in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Rooted in a strong curatorial vision, the gallery is dedicated to presenting a diverse roster of emerging and established artists from the UAE, the wider MENA region, and the international art world. It aims to foster dialogue between local practices and global contemporary discourse, contributing meaningfully to the evolving narrative of art in the region.

As one of the first women-led Emirati galleries, Aisha Alabbar Gallery has played a pioneering role in championing artists who are redefining the cultural landscape. The gallery is committed to nurturing talent through thoughtfully curated exhibitions, artist-led initiatives, and strategic collaborations with curators, institutions, and cultural organizations regionally and internationally.

With a strong emphasis on research, education, and public engagement, the gallery produces publications, hosts panel discussions, and develops educational outreach initiatives that encourage critical dialogue. Its programming reflects a dedication to presenting bold, innovative practices that speak to contemporary concerns while honoring the region's rich cultural heritage.

Aisha Alabbar Gallery continues to serve as a cultural catalyst, supporting artists in building sustainable careers and ensuring their work resonates globally — leaving an enduring mark on the contemporary art scene of the UAE and beyond.

Exhibition Details

Title: *Interwoven Realities*

Artists: Dr. Najat Makki, Khalid Al Banna, and Samar Hejazi

Presented by: Aisha Alabbar Gallery

Event: Art Abu Dhabi 2025

Dates: *November 19-23, 2025*

Location: Booth #S8, Art Abu Dhabi, Manarat Al Saadiyat

Press Contact

Raymund Salinel – Aisha Alabbar Gallery

☎ +971 54442 6598

✉ raymund@aishaalabbar.art

🌐 www.aishaalabbar.art