



## Unframed | Nujoom Alghanem

22 February – 28 April 2023

Aisha Alabbar Gallery is delighted to present *Unframed*, a solo exhibition by Nujoom Alghanem. Bringing together for the first time historical and new paintings as well as a new series of photographic film stills, the exhibition identifies key moments from Nujoom's two-decade-plus career as an artist, poet, and filmmaker, looking beyond the metaphoric film reel and focusing one frame at a time.



Nujoom Alghanem, *Between Two Shores*, 2022, Acrylic and charcoal on canvas, 145.5 cm x 240 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Aisha Alabbar Gallery.

There is something sinister about *Between Two Shores*, Nujoom Alghanem's large acrylic and charcoal painting. Is it the ghostly eight white figures that hover over the orange water? Is it the cityscape – undeniably Deira – rendered in flaming red? Or is it Alghanem's compositional intention to convey the impossibility of the figures reaching shore? It could be all these possibilities, and it is a lot more. All Alghanem's creative productions are in fact visual essays, and *Between Two Shores* is one such example; one that first manifested as something that pierced her heart, then struck her hand that felt compelled to write poetry and then became a graphic manifestation as a painting. Across all that Alghanem creates – paintings, poems, and films – a core aspect shared by the three art forms is the sense of healing that they lend their maker.

One of the show's crown jewels is the collection of paintings from the mid 1990s. Distinct in their small size, earthy colour scheme and compositional intrigue – abstract and figurative all at once – many of these oil paintings were made during Alghanem's time in the USA, from where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in Video Production from Ohio University in 1996. During her undergraduate years, she took a variety of electives and developed deep fascinations with history, African masks, mysticism, mythology and "the anthropological aspect of things". It reflected in her work. She experimented with materials, such as burlap, to give her paintings texture and in her oil paintings, the "undefined creatures, both human and non-human but not animals" told of other worlds. "These kinds of obsessions don't go," says



Alghanem. “They come back.” They did, in paintings from the early 2000s, also on show in *Unframed*.

For the first time, Alghanem presents photographs – stills from her films – with select handwritten verses of her own poetry. There’s the legendary conceptual Emirati artist Hassan Sharif from *Sharp Tools* (2017), the 90-year-old female healer from Sharjah in *Hamama* (2010), Fatima, the female camel breeder in *Nearby Sky* (2014) and of course Falak from *Passage* (2019), who tells us never to settle for what we know, and a host of other admirable subjects. In marrying the written word with a still from the moving image, Alghanem posits: do we read the text and understand the image, or do we see the image and understand the text? Does it even matter? Isn’t film poetry? Isn’t poetry words? And don’t words ultimately make a visual essay? The answers are in one’s secrets.

- **Words by Myrna Ayad**

### **About the artist**

**Nujoom Alghanem** (b. 1962, Dubai) is a pioneering Emirati artist, poet, and multi-award-winning film director. Her multifaceted career which spans four decades, explores forms of storytelling. A core aspect shared by the three art forms is a sense of healing that they lend to their maker.

Nujoom is a longstanding member of the UAE’s creative scene from its very beginnings. During the 1980s, she cofounded Aqwas Collective with the late legendary artist Hassan Sharif, Youssef Khalil and Khalid Albudoor in an attempt to look beyond traditional art by experimenting with free-verse poetry composition, constructionism, and post-modernism – inviting a certain amount of criticism. The group orchestrated pop up exhibitions in public spaces, like *Central Market of Sharjah* (1985) in addition to producing *Silsilat Al Ramad* (Chain of Ashes), a non-conventional poetry, art, and short stories publication.

In 2019, Nujoom made history becoming the first woman to stage a solo exhibition at the UAE’s pavilion at the Venice Biennale, showing *Passage*, a site-specific film installation. The installation was recreated in 2021 for a solo presentation at Abu Dhabi Art and again in 2022 as part of *Portrait of Nation II: Beyond Narratives*. Other solo exhibitions include *An Imaginary Portrait of Palestine*, Tashkeel – Al Fahidi, Dubai, UAE (2022) and *Malamih – Faces, Phantoms, and Expressions*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE (2021).

Nujoom recently presented *That Sea*, an immersive video installation at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, ADNEC, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2023). Additionally, she participated in *Khaleej Modern: Pioneers and Collectives in the Arabian Peninsula*, NYUAD Art Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2022); *Union of Cultures*, Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Foundation, Dubai, UAE (2022); *Portrait of a Nation II: Beyond Narratives*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2022); *Ramadan Arcade*, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2021); *Tashweesh: Noise of Materials*, Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE (2018); *Untold Stories Retold*, Warehouse421, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2018); *The Room of Mysteries*, 21<sup>st</sup> Sharjah Islamic Art Festival, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE (2018); *Mind the Gap*, Tashkeel, Dubai, UAE (2017); *Rock, Paper Scissors: Positions in Play*, UAE National Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Italy (2017); *Mind/Body*, DUCTAC, Dubai, UAE (2013); and 4<sup>th</sup> *Emirates Fine Arts Society Annual Exhibition*, Expo Center, Sharjah, UAE (1985).

Nujoom has published eight poetry collections and produced around twenty films including short fiction, documentaries, and art films, earning regional and international awards and



recognition. Nujoom has a BA in Video Production from Ohio University in 1996 and an MA in Media Production from Griffith University in Australia in 1999.

Myrna Ayad is recognised as one of the Arab world's leading cultural commentators. She established her namesake consultancy in 2018, focusing on art advisory, cultural strategy and publishing. She was the Director of the region's foremost international art fair, Art Dubai, from 2016-2018. Additionally, she was the editor of Canvas, the premier magazine for visual arts from the MENA region, from 2007 – 2015. Myrna is the author of Assouline's *Sheikh Zayed: An Eternal Legacy* (2021), a seminal book on the late ruler of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan; as well as *Dubai Wonder* (2021), part of the House's iconic travel series. She is also the author of *The National's* monthly series, *Remembering the Artist*, an intimate portrayal of the lives of pioneering modernists from the region based on exclusive interviews with their relatives, friends or students. Myrna wrote about art from the region for titles including *The New York Times*, *CNN Online*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Artforum*, *Artsy*, *Artnet*, *Wallpaper\** and *The National*, among others, as well as for artist monographs and exhibition catalogues. Over the years, she has served as a panellist and moderator and sits on the committees of cultural organisations in the region. Based in the UAE for four decades, Myrna graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration in 2001 from the American University in Dubai.

### **About Aisha Alabbar Gallery**

Founded in 2018 in Alquoz, Aisha Alabbar Gallery is one of the first Emirati-led galleries in Dubai focused on contemporary and modern art by Emirati, local, and regional artists. The gallery seeks to further the practices of emerging and established artists, who are the inspiration for the gallery's diverse range of programming.

Dedicated to UAE-based artists and producing five innovative exhibitions per year, Aisha Alabbar Gallery has built a reputation for rigorous exhibition presentations and for collaborations with renowned curators and organisations, investing considerable resources in bringing the practices of artists in The UAE to the contemporary stage.

A commitment to education and community strengthens the gallery's exhibition programme. Each show is accompanied by immersive activations, talks, and workshops with the purpose of engaging diverse audiences. The gallery seeks to contribute to a lasting, evolving UAE arts ecosystem through its exhibitions, accompanying programming and commissioned, in-depth publications.

### **NOTE TO EDITOR**

Exhibition: Unframed

Artist: Nujoom Alghanem

Exhibition opening: Wednesday, 22 February 2023 | 6 - 9 pm

Exhibition duration: 22 February – 28 April 2023

To book a private tour, please email [info@aishaalabbar.art](mailto:info@aishaalabbar.art) or call +971 4 344 7747

### **PRESS ENQUIRIES**

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