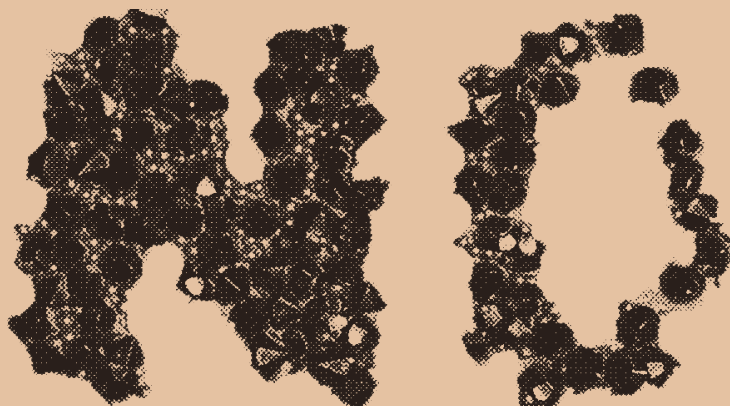


An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in various colors including yellow, orange, blue, red, green, and brown. The composition is dynamic and layered, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. A central rectangular area is overlaid with a solid light orange background.

MOHAMED AL MAZROUEI





NO

Mohamed Al Mazrouei

2 March - 29 May 2022

Aisha Alabbar Gallery is pleased to present “NO”, a solo exhibition by prominent Emirati artist and poet Mohamed Al Mazrouei. Comprised of new and existing work, NO becomes a gesture to follow a thread in his practice and shows his interest in language’s dynamism.

The concept for Al Mazrouei’s first exhibition at the gallery is based on a textile remnant found along the street. The artist noticed how this fragment with the English word “NO” reflected his current intention and orientation, feeling alienated, not geographically, but as a personal feeling of estrangement or an expression of nostalgia.

The exhibition derives visual elements from childhood, even if most of its components do not make direct reference to it. It works through repetition, in which elements are repeated within the same piece, a subject is repeated in several pieces, or a theme is repeated as psychological manifestations. The works imagine unconstrained truths about life and its many mysteries as a means to pure expression. Primitive instincts that are unconditioned channel every expression, while a conscious awareness of reality deforms alluding to further mysteries.

One may notice torn edges, cracked paint, and crossed-out visual elements in his paintings that he considers to be a performative act that questions attachments to material objects. What appears as damage is in fact a calculated technique to balance bare instincts with mastered awareness. For Al Mazrouei, when language is explored outside social structures, there is truth. The same is true for visual language, in which the value of visual elements need not be limited to what they appear to be. He says, “My work imagines unconstrained truths about life and its many mysteries as a means to pure expression.”



Installation view of NO | Mohamed Al Mazrouei | Aisha Alabbar Gallery | 2022

Mohammed Al Mazrouei: the poetry of colour

Cecilia Ruggeri, Art Historian and Curator

The work of Emirati-Egyptian artist Mohammed Al Mazrouei could be best described as an autobiographical experience. He was born in Tanta, Egypt, in 1962, where he spent the first half of his life before moving to Abu Dhabi. The cultures of the two nations that influenced his upbringing are an integral part of his artistic practice, which is evident in his mixed background. Al Mazrouei is a ‘total artist’ in the romantic sense—self-taught, his practice stretches across the various disciplines of art, poetry, cinema and photography. An accomplished poet, his creativity first existed in language and later revealed itself through visual art. Al Mazrouei describes writing and painting as his ‘firm basis’ because they represent ‘two forms of expression that require great commitment from me.’

He started on the path of becoming an artist when he secretly began to write poetry at the age of ten, poems that expressed his feelings and aspirations. After becoming acquainted with a group of intellectuals in Tanta, Al Mazrouei began reading and learning extensively from diverse disciplines including philosophy, art, history, cooking, human civilization and photography.

Al Mazrouei paints for the sake of pure expression in a visual medium, feeling his art is not authored as such but is a part of an emotion that, at times, leads to a cure for distress. He addresses the subject of life as it exists. With its sweet moments and its problems, coupled with a thirst and a keen interest in continuing to learn, art has helped the artist recover from a troubled childhood. His artworks are not a reaction to, but a continuation of a specific moment. Al Mazrouei believes that expression is expression—whether the form is one of his slang poems or one of his paintings.

Portraiture comprises a significant part of his practice. Whether in paintings or in works on paper, he continually reinterprets a subject using the technique of mixed abstraction figuration. Through his portrayal of eccentric gestures and facial expressions, he conveys urgency by relentlessly interrogating the body and suggests self-reflection in a blending of corporeality and sensuality that poses existential questions. Due to his independent use of colour, free from any restrictions or rules, he is often labelled a ‘neoexpressionist’, although his practice cannot be classified into a one-dimensional category. Al Mazrouei applies vibrant colours juxtaposed with black lines on a colour block background. Influenced by the exploration of identity, as well as inspired by African masks, his work draws on

both Western and Eastern sources. One cannot look at his female figures without recalling the portraits created by Schiele or Basquiat or Mahmoud Said’s seductive canvases, which feature exaggerated colours and forms ‘adopted’ by the Egyptian surrealist movement in the early 1940s.

Al Mazrouei’s saturated palette is Egyptian, with vibrant tones that echo the colours of that land—its soil, its water, its fertile deltas. Among his projects are replicas of the Fayum mummy portraits, perhaps created as an homage to the genre of the classical portraiture of Roman Egypt.

The artist explains, ‘Portraiture has been a continuous subject since my very beginnings in painting until the present. It is an essential part of my practice’. For Al Mazrouei, ‘painting the female figure is an artistic genre like still life and landscape’. Reminiscent of Carl Jung’s theory of anima and animus, he depicts femininity as a universal concept, portraying his women using acrylic paints and then surrounding them with pastel sketches of figures. At times, he portrays elements and creatures to support the figures of the women and balance the composition.

His figures are delineated by strong lines and dark, gazing eyes that lean towards the primitive and function as the representation of pure basic instincts. The faces and bodies are intentionally distorted to emphasise desire, moodiness and resentment, at times in a provocative and horrifying manner. The faces, which lack distinct features or do not have any features at all, are suggestive of the fading memory of his childhood. Recurrence is essential to his practice; elements are determinedly repeated within the same piece, a subject is repeated in several pieces, or a theme is repeated through conventional evocations.

A prolific painter and pioneer of the modern school in the United Arab Emirates, Al Mazrouei’s vast and diverse oeuvre embodies the tireless investigations of an artist who is fascinated by the artistic process and who is intent on exploring the nuances of portraiture in a manner that is both modern and contemporary.



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Q&A

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
and Aisha Alabbar Gallery

AAG: Tell us about the ideas behind NO.

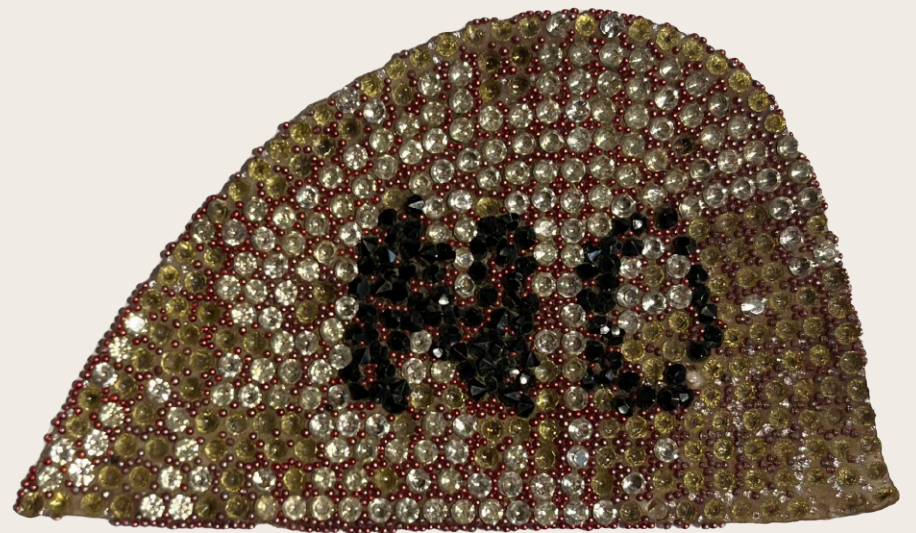
MAM: I had planned on naming the exhibition “غربة” or “Alienation”, until I recently attended Ali Ashour’s exhibition titled “اغتراب”, that had the same English title. Then, while walking down the street, I found a small piece of clothing with the word “NO” in English on it. It felt close to my intention and direction. Indeed, it felt as though the original titled subsumed the new one and vice versa. They shared a history, and their use and meaning were part and parcel of my experience.

To begin, childhood dictates language. When concepts are cemented, the image fades. The exhibition claims there is a constant non-relative instability, where nothing is permanent as evident by most memories of childhood. It becomes clear overtime that modes of expression are pre-programmed, leaving no space for pure language. Therefore, ideas formulated outside of reality are often received as dreams or fiction, where what an image portrays is not what it is. This is a primitive and naïve style of expression, in which thought does not develop not by control, but by chance.

AAG: What is the link between “No” and “Alienation”?

MAM: The word “alienation” leads to several directions simultaneously. Its social meaning is obvious, but my intention is not geographic alienation of a displaced person. It is a personal feeling of estrangement or an expression of nostalgia. That is why it is important for it to be expressed in a different language, so that it is indicative instead of socially defined.

Both words have countless synonyms and usages in Arabic. It is an example of language’s dynamism. The title is therefore multifarious and open. The exhibition derives visual elements from childhood, even if most of its components do not make direct reference to it. It works through repetition, in which elements are repeated within the same piece, a subject is repeated in several pieces, or a theme is repeated as psychological manifestations.



(1) Front and back view of the small piece of beaded cloth with the word “NO”.

AAG: So, what is the philosophy of your practice?

MAM: Becoming an artist started in secret at age 10. I would hide from my family to write poems, or expressions of my distress. Later I met a group of intellectuals in Tanta, Egypt who encouraged me to read and learn about nothing and everything, including philosophy, literature, language, history, art, and cooking. This knowledge expanded my understanding of myself, the circumstances of society and the universe, however it is a continuous practice to understanding the nature of life. My work imagines unconstrained truths about life and its many mysteries as a means to pure expression. Primitive – or basic human – instincts that are unconditioned by social systems channel every expression, while a conscious awareness of reality deforms alluding to further mysteries.

AAG: How does language affect expression?

MAM: Language is fluid, but as social practice it is restricted. The reason is language loses the depth of meaning. For instance, the word “سماء”, which is Arabic for “sky” also means “to be over something”, but because of the word’s association to religious contexts, the word loses its broader meaning and its ability to be is limited. On the other hand, when language is explored outside social structures, there is truth. The same is true for visual language, in which the value of visual elements need not be limited to what they appear to be.

To emphasize, sometimes I deliberately let my work experience the course of my movement without preserving it. As you can see in the sculpture *Untitled 52* (2018), you’ll notice a yellow tint around the creases. What appears as damage is in fact a calculated technique to balance bare instincts with mastered awareness. You may also notice torn edges, cracked paint, and crossed-out visual elements in my paintings that I consider to be a performative act that questions attachments to material objects.

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 52, 2018
Polyester
43 cm x 17 cm x 29 cm



AAG: How do you create and employ visual elements?

MAM: The subject is always life as it is and its mysteries. Folktales and myths were popular where I grew up, and sometimes I mirror that objectively as a way of explaining a mystery in dreams, spirits, animals, and creatures. The result remains a mystery, like creating a world you do not understand. In *Untitled 92* (2015), the mystery of femininity in nature is explored. You'll see the central nude figure in a bedroom, vulnerable to forces of femininity and the other that surround her. I'm not talking about men and women in society, but rather the idea of femininity, or what Carl Jung described as the anima and animus. Therefore the 'characters' of the work are used as visual elements, that together become symbolic of a parallel reality. Another example is *Untitled 64* (1998), the two X's in the foreground are elements that create a visual language - not unlike a square, triangle or a figure of an animal - and create balance.



Detail view of Mohamed Al Mazrouei, *Untitled 92*, 2015. Acrylic and pastel on canvas, 115 cm x 115 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 64, 1998
Acrylic on canvas
123 cm x 92 cm

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Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 81, 2010
Acrylic on canvas
101 cm x 127 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Front and Back (Untitled 3), 2013
 Acrylic and pastel on canvas
 90 cm x 70 cm (framed)



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 10, 2012
 Acrylic and pastel on canvas
 90 cm x 60 cm

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 56, 2012
Signed
Acrylic and pastel on canvas
100 cm x 80 cm

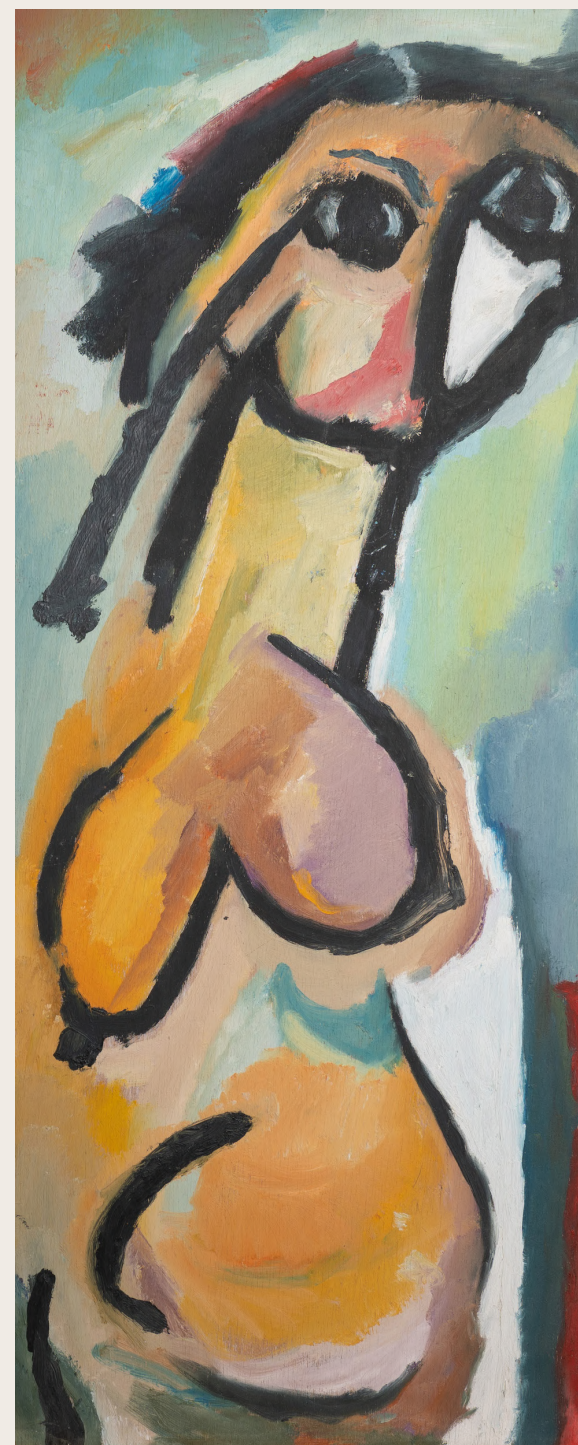




Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 53, 2018
Polyester
55 cm x 10 cm x 92 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 36, 1998
 Pastel and chalk on paper
 68 cm x 39 cm
 (framed)



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 126, 1988
 Oil and acrylic on canvas
 67 cm x 38.5 cm (framed)

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 101, 1988
Signed
Oil on canvas
103 cm x 133 cm (framed)





Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 117, 1987
 Oil on canvas
 70 cm x 50.2 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 118, 1996
 Signed and dated
 Oil or acrylic on canvas
 70 cm x 50 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 151, 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 62.2 cm x 37.3 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 114, 2016
 Signed
 Acrylic on canvas
 63 cm x 37 cm

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 103, 2015
Acrylic pencil and pastel on canvas
100 cm x 120.5 cm





Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 57, 1998
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 cm x 80 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 155, 2018
 Polyester
 47 cm x 26 cm x 13 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 132, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
60 cm x 90 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 48, 2013
 Signed and dated
 Acrylic and pastel on canvas
 120 cm x 80 cm



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 61, 2010
 Signed and dated
 Acrylic, pastel, wood on canvas
 120 cm x 100 cm

Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 66, 2002
Signed and dated
Acrylic on canvas
149.7 cm x 100 cm





Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 33
 Acrylic on paper
 61 cm x 45.5 cm
 (framed)



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 34
 Acrylic on paper
 61 cm x 45.5 cm
 (framed)



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 92, 2015
 Signed and dated
 Acrylic and pastel on canvas
 115 cm x 115 cm
 (framed)



Mohamed Al Mazrouei
Untitled 58, 2018
 Polyester
 52 cm x 24 cm x 22 cm



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ABOUT THE ARTIST



Mohamed Al Mazrouei (Tanta, 1962) is an Emirati artist, poet, and writer. He studied ancient languages at the Faculty of Languages and Translation at AlAzharUniversityinCairo. He moved to Abu Dhabi in the early Eighty's to eventually become instrumental to the Cultural Foundation and establish himself as a prominent artist, writer, photographer as well as manager of the Emirates Writer's Union. He has written and published nine books of short stories and poems. His art

practice – mainly painting in a signature Neo-Expressionist style – allows viewers to enter the world of his vast imagination. His artworks are rich with figurative iconography and include many humanoid forms. Mohamed's paintings depict a feeling of fervour and urgency that invites the viewer to follow every brushstroke. The human face and figure are often his preferred subjects to paint. However, with a rich, non-linear training, Mazrouei's approach to the abstract incorporates black and white in absolute purity. Like letters or musical notes, lines and colours fuse to create a composition that strives for a sense of equilibrium. His delineation of a particular object challenges traditional shapes, begging the eye to decipher elements of his compositions.

In the past four decades spanning his career, Mohamed held several solo exhibitions in the UAE and abroad, including *Raw Cooked* (2017), AB43 Contemporary, Zurich, Switzerland; *Prototype* (2016), Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE; *Maidens of Fair* (2012), Abu Dhabi Theatre, Abu Dhabi, UAE; and *The Smell* (1990), Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Additionally, he participated in several important exhibitions, including *Portrait of a Nation I and II* (2022 and 2017), Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *Artists and the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years* (2018), Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *(Alibadah): Hashel Al Lamki and Mohamed Al Mazrouei* (2018), NYUAD Art Gallery – Project Space, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *Noah's Ark: the 34th Emirates Fine Art Society's Annual Exhibition* (2016), Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE; *There Are Too Many Walls but Not Enough Bridges* (2015), Kunstzeughaus, Rapperswil/Zurich, Switzerland; *Sky Over the East* (2014), Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *3rd Emirati Expressions: Realised* (2013), Manarat

Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE; *MinD/Body: Body Art and Performance in the Gulf* (2013), Ductac's Gallery of Light, Dubai, UAE; *the 3rd Al Kharafi Biennial* (2010), Kuwait City, Kuwait; and *the 1st Sharjah Biennial* (1993), Sharjah, UAE. Mohamed is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including the Jury Prize (2012) at the 30th Emirates Fine Arts Society Exhibition, Sharjah, UAE and the 1st Award in Photography from Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Furthermore, his works can be found in prominent public and private collections in the UAE, such as ADMAF, Cultural Foundation, and UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Abu Dhabi; Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah; and the Qatari Ministry of Culture in Doha; in addition to several private collections around the world.

EDUCATION

2019 – 21	Professional Certificate in Filmmaking, French University, Cairo, Egypt
1981	Ancient Languages, Faculty of Languages and Translation, Al Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022	<i>NO</i> , Aisha Alabbar Gallery, Dubai, UAE
2017	<i>Raw Cooked</i> , AB43 Contemporary, Zurich, Switzerland
2016	<i>Prototype</i> , Mojo Gallery, Dubai, UAE
2015	<i>How a Toy may Give Birth</i> , Fann-A-Porter, Dubai, UAE
2015	<i>New Works</i> , AB Gallery, Lucerne, Switzerland
2012	<i>Maidens of Fair</i> , Abu Dhabi National Theatre (Abu Dhabi Department of Tourism & Culture), Abu Dhabi, UAE
1995	<i>Solo</i> , Art Café gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
1990	<i>The Smell</i> , Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022	<i>Portrait of a Nation II: Beyond Narratives</i> , Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2019	<i>Transcendence</i> , Gallery Ward, Dubai, UA
2018	<i>Artists & the Cultural Foundation: The Early Years</i> , Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2018	<i>(Alibadah): Hashel Al Lamki and Mohamed Al Mazrouei</i> , NYUAD Art Gallery - Project Space, Abu Dhabi, UAE

2017	<i>Portrait of a Nation, me</i> Collectors Room Berlin, Berlin, Germany.
2017	<i>Selections from the Contemporary Middle Eastern Art Scene</i> , Vol. 1, Gallery Ward, Dubai, UAE
2016	<i>Noah's Ark</i> , the 34th Emirates Fine Arts Society Annual Exhibition, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
2015	<i>There Are Too Many Walls but Not Enough Bridges</i> , Kunstzeughaus, Rapperswil/Zurich, Switzerland
2014	<i>Sky Over the East</i> (by Barjeel Art Foundation & ADMAF), Emirates Palace Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2014	<i>Eye-Look: Emirati Chinese Artists</i> , DuJiangYan, China
2013	<i>3th Emirati Expressions: Realized</i> , Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2013	<i>MinD/Body: Body Art and Performance in the Gulf</i> , Ductac's Gallery of Light, Dubai, UAE
2012	<i>30th Annual Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society</i> , Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
2010	<i>Globe</i> , Salwa Zeidan Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2010	<i>Al Kharafi Biennial</i> , Kuwait City, Kuwait
2009	<i>Colours of the Wind</i> , Crystal Hotel, Abu Dhabi – UAE
2009	<i>Contemporary Emirati Artists</i> , Salwa Zeidan Gallery, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2008	<i>Season of Art</i> , DIFC, Dubai, UAE
2008	<i>Creek Art Fair</i> , Al Bastakiya, Dubai, UAE
2008	United Arab Emirates Pavilion, Expo Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain
2007	<i>Portrait Exhibition</i> , Total Art Gallery, The Courtyard, Dubai, UAE
2006	<i>UAE photographers' Exhibition</i> , Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
1991-95	<i>The Annual three Artists</i> , with Mohamed Al Zowari & Mahmoud Al Ramahi, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
1993	<i>Sharjah International Art Biennial</i> , Sharjah – UAE

PERFORMANCE

2016	<i>Actor in Under the Hat</i> , directed by Amal Al-Agroobi.
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AWARDS

2012	Jury Prize, 30th Annual Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society, Sharjah Art Museum, Sharjah, UAE
2011	Souad Al Sabah 1ST Award, the 3rd Al Kharafi Biennial, Kuwait City, Kuwait
1995	1ST Award in Photography, Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
1998	1ST Award in ADNOC Art Expiation, Abu Dhabi, UAE

PUBLICATIONS

2013	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"To Watch My Hanging Twice Over."</i> Ministry of Culture, Youth & Community development. Abu Dhabi, UAE
2010	Muhammad Al-Mazru'I. <i>"Ich Tauge Nicht Fur Die Liebe."</i> Lisan Lyrik. Basel, Switzerland
2009	Mohamed Al Mazrouei <i>"For No Reason We Are Poor."</i> Abu Dhabi Culture & Heritage, The Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2003	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"The Agitation of Pattern."</i> Self Published. Cairo, Egypt
1998	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"But It Is You, Oh Adam."</i> Sharqiyat Publishing House. Cairo, Egypt
1997	Mohamed Nasser Abdullah. <i>"Who Will Care For The Flies?"</i> Sharqiyat Publishing House. Cairo, Egypt
1996	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"The Smell of Blood."</i> Self Published. Cairo, Egypt
1990	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"The Lemming."</i> Self Published. Cairo, Egypt
1986	Mohamed Al Mazrouei. <i>"On Watching Fire."</i> Masreya Publications. Cairo, Egypt

PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

2016	Curator of <i>34th Annual Exhibition of the Emirates Fine Arts Society, (Noah's Ark)</i> : Sharjah Art Museum & Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, UAE
1988-1991	Senior Cultural Decoration & Camera man, at Abu Dhabi TV, Ministry of Information & Culture, UAE
1991-2006	Senior Cultural Coordinator, at Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
1988-2015	Member of the Board of Directors of the Emirates Writers Union & the head of the Emirates Writers Union - Abu Dhabi branch, several times

COLLECTIONS

Barjeel Art Foundation
ADMAF
Cultural Foundation
UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Qatari Ministry of Culture
UAE Unlimited



Aisha Alabbar Gallery is one of the first Emirati-led galleries in Dubai focused on contemporary and modern art by Emirati, local, and regional pioneering artists. Dedicated to locally-based artists and producing five innovative exhibitions per year, Aisha Alabbar Gallery has built a reputation not only for rigorous exhibition presentation but also for collaborations with renowned curators, investing considerable resources in bringing the practices of pioneering artists to the contemporary stage.

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