

# LOVE LABOUR LEISURE

CURATED BY FAREED MAJARI, EVENT PROGRAMMED BY NADINE KHALIL  
DECEMBER 13 & 14, 2021 ALSERKAL AVENUE, WAREHOUSE 51



An interdisciplinary project that delves into the ethos of migrant communities in the UAE by reflecting on context, capital and cultural life. Through the lenses of art, performance and music, alternate ways of looking and mapping are presented, from wide-ranging aerial views to forensic, facial close-ups.

Artists: Amirah Tajdin, Anahita Razmi, Augustine Paredes, Eisa Jocson, Mohamed Somji, Saba Qizilbash, Riyas Komu, Vikram Divecha, curated by Fareed Majari, event programmed by Nadine Khalil. Music program courtesy of Nadia Says, Mehdi Ansari, WYWY.

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# PROGRAM

## December 13

06:00 pm Exhibition, Reception, mingling

07:00 pm Welcome and introduction

07:15 - 08:00 pm **Open channels/restrictive paths: socially engaged art and migratory patterns between the UAE and South Asia**  
Presentation by **Atteqa Ali**

This talk considers three artworks that the Sharjah Art Foundation commissioned. Artists Ali Cherri, Wael Shawky, and Rayyane Tabet chose to address situations that highlight the migratory patterns between the UAE and South Asia, which indicate that the movement of people is encouraged/allowed yet also imprudent/prohibited. Utilizing socially engaged practices, their art will be addressed within a framework of “relational aesthetics”, a term that curator Nicolas Bourriaud developed, who argues that much of contemporary art provokes encounters over time. It is about exchanges between people, rather than about an individual looking at an isolated object.

**Atteqa Ali** is an Associate Professor of Art History and Curatorial Practices at Zayed University in Dubai. She has written the manuscript *Collaborative Art Praxes and Contemporary Art Experiments in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). *Play: Subversion in Contemporary Pakistani Art and Its Diaspora* is under press with Oxford University Press and will be published in 2022. She has organized several exhibitions, including a project at Twelve Gates Gallery in Philadelphia entitled “Back to the Future: History and Contemporary Art in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia”; it considered the work of artists who utilize historical references to talk about current social and political events.

08:00 - 08:45 pm **Stepping Out from the Shadows - Performing Cultures in the UAE's Public Spaces**  
Presentation and performance by **Woodman Taylor** and **Shereen Saif**

Although initially considered “impossible citizens”, as suggested by Neha Vora, the UAE’s diverse communities are now celebrated and able to pursue their cultural practices in public spaces. For Shereen Saif – trained as a dancer in Indian traditions – her practice negotiates between and across cultures – South Asian, historic western traditions and transglobal modernities. Similarly, in streets and neighborhoods, workers negotiate ways to perform their cultural practices in the privacy of labor camps as well as in public spaces. Activating aspects of the *Cycling the City project*, the presentation also considers the everyday experience of Dubai from the perspective of a worker’s bicycle.

**Woodman Taylor** is an educator, curator and musician whose practices negotiate across multiple cultural spheres. Hollywood born, raised in India and now resident in Dubai. His undergraduate degree in Ethnomusicology and Asian History is from Wesleyan University followed by a PhD in Art History from the University of Chicago. As a scholar, his interests range from the multiple visualities activated in Indian cinema to the cultural scripting of public and private spaces by communities of South Asian diasporas. This led to the exhibition *Devon Chalo: Constructing South Asian Identities along Chicago’s Devon Avenue* (2005). As curator of South Asian and Islamic Art, first at the Harvard Art Museums and later at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Dr. Taylor has curated exhibitions on historic and contemporary South and West Asian topics. He has taught at the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, the American University in Dubai and currently teaches at Zayed University as Professor of Art History. He also is a founding co-editor of *Tribe: Photography and New Media from the Arab World*. Woodman’s first artwork, an installation commissioned by Dubai Culture, was *Cycling the City* (2013), which explicated the experience of Dubai from the perspective of an Indian worker’s bicycle.

**Shereen Saif** is a Dubai-based Indian-born artist with a practice that spans dance, theatre, storytelling, voice acting and installation art. Her foundation is diverse and has deep roots in Dance, Theatre and Architecture. Her movement vocabulary is shaped by her fundamental training in Indian classical dance forms and select exposure to contemporary dance. She is a LAMDA (London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art)-certified acting professional with training in Navarasa.

09:00 – 09:30 pm **New Silk Road Patterns**

Guided tour and conversation by and with the artist **Anahita Razmi**

*New Silk Road Patterns #02* is a reference to the ancient trade route that connected China through the Middle East with the Roman Empire. In this photo series, Razmi features herself posing in shirts emblazoned with nonsensical phrases from the markets of Tehran, Tokyo, Beijing, Dubai, and Istanbul in a play on Oriental motifs, logo mimicry and arbitrary copy. In this conversation, she will discuss her use of irony, East-West aesthetics and the politics of cultural appropriation in her artistic practice.

**Anahita Razmi** studied at Bauhaus-University Weimar, the Pratt Institute New York, and the State Academy of Art and Design Stuttgart, prior to exhibiting widely internationally and at numerous institutions like Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria, Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Germany, Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany, The National Art Center, Tokyo, and within the 55th Venice Biennale. Her video, installation, and performance works focus on issues of identity and gender and examine processes of cultural appropriation in which the meanings of existing images, artefacts, and thus identities are questioned by situating them in another context. Razmi often uses strategies of disarrangement to consider structures of perception within consumer and pop culture against the background of different communities between “the West” and “the Middle East”. The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its current political and social conditions and relations, remains an open, ambivalent point of reference. Razmi was a fellow of the Goethe@Lux Residency (2018), the Werkstattpreis of the Erich Hauser Foundation (2015), the MAKSchindler Artists and Architects-in-Residence Program, Los Angeles (2013), and the The Emdash Award, Frieze Foundation (2011). Her work is included in several international collections like the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the Museo Novecento, Florence, and Davis Museum at Wellesley College, USA.

09:30 – 10:00 pm **Negotiating Liberation**

Screening and Q&A with film director **Amirah Tajdin**

This 16mm film on dance, homesickness, love, and language was commissioned by the Goethe-Institut for the project *Love, Labor Leisure*

**Amirah Tajdin** is a Kenyan artist and filmmaker. She graduated from Rhodes University in South Africa and Goucher College Maryland (USA) with a Bachelor of Fine Art (Photography). Over a ten-year period of film-making she has crafted a signature style of blending reality with fiction through her strong visual language in both her commercial and cinematic work. She is a Sundance Institute fellow, which makes her the first Kenyan director to be selected for both the Screenwriters Labs (Utah, 2017) and Director’s Lab (Utah, 2018) for her feature film currently in development. Her short film *Marea di Tierra* was in the main competition at Sundance (2016) and Cannes Director’s Fortnight (2015) and went on to play over 20 festivals globally. She has also directed various award-winning and nominated short films and feature-length documentaries. She forms the creative half of SEVEN THIRTY Films, an Africa-based indie production company which she founded in Nairobi in 2011 alongside her sister, producer Wafa Tajdin.

10:00 – 11:00 pm **WYWY** presented by **Analog Room/Mehdi Ansari**

WYWY is a dream pop couple from the Philippines, based in the United Arab Emirates and featuring X as vocalist, synth, and xylophone player, and Mckie on synth, bass, and guitar. Since 2015, the duo have made a name for themselves with their dream-like yet dark and ethereal sound and visual live performances. In 2017, they released their first EP album *Within You Without You*, featuring five original tracks.

## December 14

06:00 pm Exhibition, Reception, mingling

### 07:00 – 08:00 pm **Labour's Love's Lost**

A conversation between artist **Vikram Divecha** and curator **Murtaza Vali** on the politics of the gaze, portraiture and artistic labor.

Jumping off from Divecha's 2016 project *Portrait Sessions*, this conversation with critic and curator Murtaza Vali—who has been in dialogue and has collaborated with the artist for almost a decade—will discuss the relationship and exchange between art and other types of work in the UAE. Questions will include: How does one make art about labor in the Gulf? What are some of the strategies one might use to address the conditions of labor without further exploitation? Does the frame of art facilitate or hinder a conversation about labor? How is art work different from other types of work in the region? Is solidarity among workers across different economic sectors simply a utopian ideal?

Beirut-born and Mumbai-bred, **Vikram Divecha** is an artist based in Dubai. His practice raises questions about time, value, and authorship by engaging people across urban and social spheres, and working with available material and space. Divecha terms this approach “found processes”, which often sees him intervene within public and social systems. From wholesale exporters to municipal gardeners, architectural consultants to railway traffic managers, Divecha's participants inform and shape his projects in various ways, in some cases for sustained durations. These attempts translate into public art, site-specific interventions, workshops, installations, moving images, paintings, surfaces, drawings, photographs, performances, and text. Divecha holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University and was a participant in the Museum's Independent Study Program. Divecha's works have been exhibited in various institutions, including Jameel Arts Center, Dubai (2019); The Jewish Museum, NY (2019); Wallach Art Gallery, NY (2019); 57th Venice Biennale (2017); 13th Sharjah Biennial (2017); Abu Dhabi (2017); Centre for Art, Warsaw (2015). Vikram Divecha is represented by Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai.

**Murtaza Vali** is a critic, curator and art historian based in Sharjah and Brooklyn. His ongoing research interests include materialist art histories, ex-centric minimalisms, ghosts and other figures of liminal subjectivities and repressed histories, the weight of color and contemporary art of the Indian Ocean littoral. A recipient of a 2011 Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for Short-Form Writing, he regularly publishes reviews and essays in various international art periodicals and publications for non-profit institutions and commercial galleries around the world. Vali is Curator-at-large of FRONT International 2022: Cleveland Triennial for Contemporary Art and an Adjunct Curator at the Jameel Arts Centre in Dubai, where he curated the widely acclaimed inaugural group exhibition *Crude* (2018), which explored the relationship between oil and modernity across West Asia. Other recent curatorial projects include: *Substructures: Excavating the Everyday* (2020-22), a series of exhibitions about “intimate infrastructures” in the Gulf at Warehouse421 in Abu Dhabi, which tackled subjects such as manual and domestic labor, the instrumentalization of flora by capital and politics, and the aesthetics and rituals of neoliberal real estate development; and (with Uzma Rizvi) *Accommodations*, the National Pavilion of Saudi Arabia at the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale (2021). A Visiting Instructor at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, he was a Guest Tutor of Campus Art Dubai 1.0-2.0 (2012-14), a Lead Tutor (with Uzma Rizvi) of Campus Art Dubai 3.0-8.0 (2014-20), and a Lead Mentor for the inaugural Hayy:Learning Curatorial Fellowship (2020-21).

08:00 – 09:00 pm **Performance by Augustine Paredes and Anna Bernice**

Augustine Paredes and Anna Bernice are co-founders of Sa Tahanan Co., a collective for Filipino artists and creatives in the UAE and the rest of the world. Augustine Paredes' *Slouching through Bedspaces* is a series of photographs that recounts his migration from the Philippines to the UAE as an introspective journey to find a home or homes. In his new book *Long Night Stands with Lonely, Lonely Boys* he reminisces on the pain of growing and going. In response to a photograph entitled *How to Slouch When Sleeping*, poet and curator Anna Bernice will read a poem on loss and intimacy, entitled *To Make a Home in a Stranger's Bed*.

**Augustine Paredes** is a Filipino artist and photographer based in Dubai. Augustine's lyrical, contemporary, and sensuous visual narratives are derived from his many-storied travels, South East Asian consciousness, and queer gaze. He is an alumnus of *Campus Art Dubai* and the *International Summer School of Photography*, and has been nominated for the *World Press Photo Joop Swart Masterclass*. He has been exhibited in the Philippines, Malaysia, Latvia, Australia, and other countries.

**Anna Bernice** is an independent arts and culture writer, culture researcher and curator based in Dubai, contributing to platforms such as *Vice Arabia* and *Global Art Daily*. She graduated with a BA in Sociology and Theater from New York University Abu Dhabi. Together with artist Augustine Paredes, she co-founded Sa Tahanan Collective, a UAE-based Filipino art collective dedicated to creating an inclusive artistic platform for Filipino artists in the Gulf. Her most recent curations include *In Response to Solastalgia* at Maisan15, *After the Beep* at Satellite, Alserkal Avenue, co-curated with Sarah Daher, and *Sa Tahanan Co. Exhibition 01* co-curated with Augustine Paredes..

09:00 – 09:30 pm **Spaces of work and spaces of play**  
Guided tour and conversation by and with the artist **Mohamed Somji**

*Dubai and Dusk and Dawn* by Mohamed Somji is a photography series that zeroes in on the use of green and public space by migrant communities. These are communal spaces of gathering, leisure, dance, and sports. They are also improvisational spaces like empty parking lots or patches of land where different communities mingle, rest, worship, and make TikTok videos. Somji will be in conversation with Fareed Majari about the social documentary vein of his practice and how it started.

**Mohamed Somji** is the Director of Gulf Photo Plus (GPP), a Dubai-based gallery and community organization that has been cultivating visual practices in photography in the UAE and across the wider MENASA region since 2004. As part of GPP's commitment to developing visual and critical literacy, the organization engages the community with regular educational and art programming, and for a number of years hosted an annual photography festival that draws international attendance and showcases the world's preeminent talent in photography. Mohamed is a co-curator of the bi-annual BredaPhoto Festival in the Netherlands, and has served as a jury member for various visual arts initiatives, notably the prestigious Arab Documentary Photography Program. Mohamed's pedagogical expertise is broad, from teaching varied photography workshops and designing photo walk experiences across the UAE, to conducting portfolio reviews for Canon's Student Development program, and leading a capacity building mentorship program for students in the Emirates with Warehouse421, a multidisciplinary arts organization based in Abu Dhabi. Mohamed's documentary photography practice locates and probes schisms in contemporary life, challenging the status quo with sensitive, critical commentary on the politics of representation.

09:30 – 10:30 pm **Nesa Azadikhah presented by Analog Room/Mehdi Ansari**

**Nesa Azadikhah** (1984) is a Tehran-based DJ, music producer, composer, sound artist and musician. From playing tonbak and daf at the age of sixteen in underground music scenes, she has established herself as one of Tehran's most in demand sound artists around. She is the founder and managing director of Deep House Tehran, an electronic music platform that supports local and international artists.