



SHARJAH ART FOUNDATION

In Absence and in Presence:
Works from the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection

Aranya Art Center Guangzhou
March 22 – August 30, 2026

Aranya Art Center Guangzhou is pleased to announce *In Absence and in Presence: Works from the Sharjah Art Foundation Collection*. The exhibition features more than 70 works across painting, sculpture, photography, video, and textile by 28 artists. *In Absence and in Presence* marks the largest international presentation of the Collection in Asia.

Curated around the concept of land as seen through the perspectives of artists from West Asia, South Asia, Africa, and their diasporas, the exhibition follows some of the unique trajectories of artistic practice and experiments in these regions from the 1950s to the present. Seminal modern works are brought into dialogue with contemporary practices, foregrounding the artistic lineages, resonances and continuities that connect generations and situate contemporary art within a deeper historical framework. The exhibition is one of the first institutional efforts in China to survey artistic practices across these interconnected regions.

In Absence and in Presence takes its title from Egyptian artist, poet, and writer Ahmed Morsi, whose multidisciplinary practice has long engaged with questions of displacement and the persistence of place. The exhibition unfolds through thematic constellations that explore the interrelations among land, the people who inhabit it, and the imagination that animates it. Land is approached not only as a geographic condition or setting, but as an enduring presence that informs the artists' visual language. Human figures appear throughout the galleries as carriers of personal and collective histories, revealing how the identities tied to land can travel across places and generations. Together, the works propose new ways of thinking about continuity and the possibility of belonging across shifting geographies.

The exhibition is curated by Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation, and Damien Zhang, Director of the Aranya Art Center, along with Assistant Curator May Alqaydi and Senior Researcher Souraya Kreidieh from Sharjah Art Foundation, as well as Curatorial Assistant Li Fangwen and Curatorial and Research Fellow Li Xinyang from the Aranya Art Center. It is organized by Aranya Art Center Guangzhou in collaboration with Sharjah Art Foundation.

Artists featured in the exhibition include Etel Adnan, Latif Al Ani, Tarek Al-Ghoussein, Rasheed Araeen, Baya, Saloua Raouda Choucair, Salah El Mur, Aref El Rayess, Simone Fattal, Madani A. A. Gahory, Abbas Habiballa, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Samia Halaby, Mona Hatoum, Kamala Ibrahim Ishag, Iman Issa, Hayv Kahraman, Marwan Kassab Bachi (Marwan), Helen Khal, Anuar Khalifi, Farideh Lashai, Jumana Manna, Ahmed Morsi, Khalil Rabah, Zineb Sedira, Hassan Sharif, Mohamed Yousif, and Akram Zaatari.



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10:00 – 18:00, Tuesday to Sunday
Aranya Art Center Guangzhou, Jiulonghu, Huadong Town, Huadu District, Guangzhou,
Guangdong Province, China



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About Sharjah Art Foundation

Sharjah Art Foundation is an advocate, catalyst and producer of contemporary art within the Emirate of Sharjah and the surrounding region, in dialogue with the international arts community. The Foundation advances an experimental and wide-ranging programmatic model that supports the production and presentation of contemporary art, preserves and celebrates the distinct culture of the region and encourages a shared understanding of the transformational role of art. The Foundation's core initiatives include the long-running Sharjah Biennial, featuring contemporary artists from around the world; the annual March Meeting, a convening of international arts professionals and artists; grants and residencies for artists, curators and cultural producers; ambitious and experimental commissions and a range of travelling exhibitions and scholarly publications.

Established in 2009 to expand programs beyond the Sharjah Biennial, which launched in 1993, the Foundation is a critical resource for artists and cultural organizations in the Gulf and a conduit for local, regional and international developments in contemporary art. The Foundation's deep commitment to developing and sustaining the cultural life and heritage of Sharjah is reflected through year-round exhibitions, performances, screenings and educational programs in the city of Sharjah and across the Emirate, often hosted in historic buildings that have been repurposed as cultural and community centers. A growing collection reflects the Foundation's support of contemporary artists in the realization of new work and its recognition of the contributions made by pioneering modern artists from the region and around the world.

Sharjah Art Foundation is a legally independent public body established by Emiri Decree and supported by government funding, grants from national and international nonprofits and cultural organizations, corporate sponsors and individual patrons. Hoor Al Qasimi serves as President and Director. All exhibitions are free and open to the public.

About The Sharjah Art Foundation Collection

The Sharjah Art Foundation Collection grew from the seeds of acquisitions and works commissioned for the Sharjah Biennial and the Foundation's programs. The artworks span art movements from the 1920s to the present in an ever-expanding range of visual culture and forms. Reflecting Sharjah's history as a major regional trade route, the Collection acts as a node that connects cultures through modern and contemporary art. Proposing a re-authoring of art and its histories as well as contextualizing it from a South/South and East/East perspective, the Collection offers a view that seeks to shift the axis to a more inclusive, intergenerational and transcultural history.



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About Sharjah

Sharjah is the third largest of the seven United Arab Emirates, and the only one bridging the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Reflecting the deep commitment to the arts, architectural preservation and cultural education embraced by its ruler, Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Sharjah is home to more than 20 museums and has long been known as the cultural hub of the United Arab Emirates. It was named UNESCO's Arab Capital of Culture for 1998 and the UNESCO World Book Capital for 2019.

Curators

Hoor Al Qasimi

Hoor Al Qasimi is President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation, the public art institution she founded in 2009 as a catalyst for contemporary art and cultural exchange in Sharjah, the UAE and internationally. Director of Sharjah Biennial since 2003, she has curated and co-curated major exhibitions for the Foundation and numerous international institutions, including the acclaimed Sharjah Biennial 15 (2023), the touring retrospective *Hassan Sharif: I Am The Single Work Artist* (2017–2018) and solo exhibitions of artists Simone Fattal, Rasheed Araeen, Yayoi Kusama, Farideh Lashai, Khalil Rabah, Bouchra Khalili, Emily Karaka, Antonio Dias, William Kentridge and Jorge Tacla. Al Qasimi also serves as President of the International Biennial Association; President of The Africa Institute, Sharjah; Director of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial; head of Sharjah's Global Studies University; President of the Sharjah Creative Quarter; and President of the University of the Arts Sharjah. Al Qasimi curated the 2020 Lahore Biennial and was the Artistic Director of the 6th Aichi Triennale (2025). She is the Artistic Director of the 25th Biennale of Sydney (2026). She received the insignia of Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, conferred by the Embassy of France in the UAE. She was appointed 2025–2026 Ambassador Extraordinary for Arab Culture by ALECSO.

Damien Zhang

Damien Zhang is Director of the Aranya Art Center. He has organized solo exhibitions with artists such as Wiebke Siem, ikkibawiKrrr, Payne Zhu, Cao Minghao and Chen Jianjun, Trevor Yeung, Yuko Mohri, Nguyen Trinh Thi, Gabriel Kuri, Tao Hui, and Sylvie Fleury, as well as research-based group exhibitions including "As She Descends" and "Paint for Life!". In 2023, he curated the first edition of the aranya plein air art project. Damien Zhang received a Master's degree in Communications and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Sciences Po Paris.



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About Aranya Art Center

Aranya Art Center is an independently operated contemporary art institution under the Aranya Group. It is dedicated to fostering connections between art and local communities through exhibitions, research, and public programs. Since its establishment in 2019, Aranya Art Center has maintained an ongoing engagement with contemporary art practices in a global context, collaborating with artists, curators, and cultural institutions both in China and internationally to present projects of academic rigor and public resonance.

Grounded in site-specificity, the institution's practice responds to the artistic landscape, cultural history, geographical environment, and social realities of each venue's locale. These distinct local contexts serve as concrete points of departure for reflection, encouraging sustained exploration of modes of cultural production with greater critical depth, sustainability, and contemporary relevance. The institution currently comprises Aranya Art Center (Main Site), Aranya Art Center North, and Aranya Art Center Guangzhou, forming a cross-regional network that expands the possibilities of contemporary art institutions through a strategic North-South presence in China.

About Aranya Art Center Guangzhou

Established in 2025 within the CTG · Aranya · Jiulonghu community, Aranya Art Center Guangzhou marks the institution's inaugural urban branch. Designed by Dong Gong (Vector Architects), the architecture threads four exhibition halls and an open-air pavilion through two rows of mature native banyan trees, adopting a cluster-style layout that responds to the climate and natural landscape of the Lingnan region. As a geographical and cultural extension of the institution, Aranya Art Center Guangzhou is deeply rooted in the vibrant and open cultural soil of the Pearl River Delta. While engaging with the local cultural fabric and urban context, it strives to serve as a cultural platform that bridges Lingnan perspectives with international contemporary art.



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