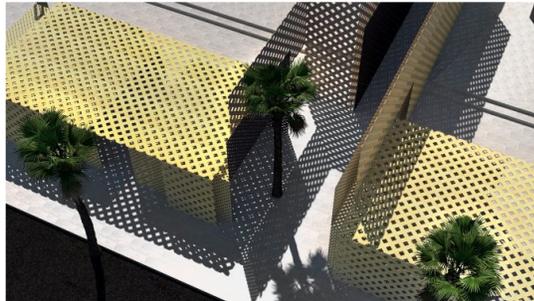


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Detailing Dubai Design Week

30 September 2019 Design, Festival



The fifth edition of Dubai Design Week, which is describing itself with justification as "the largest creative festival in the Middle East", will run 11-16 November with its most substantial programme yet – over 200 events, among them the inaugural edition of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial.

As usual, the B2B show **Downtown Design** (12-15 November) provides the core of Design Week. It's the leading fair for high-quality (aka pricey) design and design brands in the Middle East; there's not so much for the casual visitor, but if you're in the business of fitting out a five-star hotel or a new Palm villa, this is a must-visit ...

We'll be looking at the Architecture Triennial next week, but the reference to the Triennial (which takes advantage of the Design Week brand umbrella but otherwise operates independently) highlights a desire to get outside Dubai itself and embrace the wider region. So the Abwab collection of architectural installations will host designers from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and India. The MADAR exhibition features works by regional designers and others, describing the design ecosystem of the Middle East; and **Downtown Editions**, the fair's dedicated showcase for original work by individual designers, will also focus on regional talent.

Downtown Editions grew out of the now-defunct Design Days Dubai, which used to be held in the spring and tended to be somewhat unfocused. In its new incarnation there's a bit more rigour about its role and purpose, which is defined as "to present the next generation of regional talent".

You can certainly find that in the continuing (and probably fundamental) participation of Tashkeel, which will show the 2019 cohort of designers from its Tanween programme. The Sharjah-based Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council, which was set "to empower women economically and socially across the Middle East, North Africa, South East and Central Asia regions", will be presenting pieces of traditional and modern crafts from across the UAE.

There are a couple of names there too – notably Aljoud Lootah, who will have a limited-edition collection inspired by the mandoos, the Emirati wooden dowry chest (she has recently designed pieces for Irthi too). Other exhibiting designers will include Kuwaiti Meshary AlNassar with a collection of sculptural marble lights inspired by his family home; and Emirati Hajar Abdallah, who makes her Dubai Design Week debut with some equestrian-inspired work.



Mandoos-inspired wares by Aljoud Lootah

Sited within Downtown Editions are two exhibitions that focus specifically on regional design. Both are curated by Ghassan Salameh, Beirut-based "interdisciplinary conceptual and solution oriented designer", and both look interesting.

Salameh has a good track record on empowering local and regional design, especially for collaborative and community projects. As well as running an active studio, he curated Beirut Design Week 2018 and was the chief advisor on the FANTASMEEM entrepreneurship training programme for design startups.

"The thematics of empowering local and regional design have been at the centre of my research and practice for the past few years," he said. "I'm looking forward to expanding on this in my new role as Guest Curator of Dubai Design Week 2019.

"I'm also a firm believer in collaboration and know that many cultural producers in the region have put much effort into activating change through their communities. It is these efforts that I'll be spotlighting."



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Ghassan Salameh: empowering local and regional design

MADAR, an initiative supported by d3, looks to be the interesting one: it will have exhibits from designers and others that offer insights on "the different components and stakeholders that constitute the ecosystem behind the design industry as well as ... the various stages of a starting a design business".

And **INSIGHT/ONSITE** gives a standardised display format to a group of emergent and independent local and regional designers, in a standardized equal space format. The blurb says that this will allow the designers to get "real-time feedback on the viability of their concepts".

Abwab (which translated as 'doors') has always been one of the interesting featuring of DDW. In its fifth edition, the selected designers are being challenged to recreate the local classrooms of their cultures through the "ways of learning" theme. So Qissa Ghar ('Home of Stories') by Mumbai-based Busride Design Studio will retell creation myths from cultures across India; seven artists have been invited to interpret these stories on to hand-spun natural-fibre Indian cloth.

WAL(L)TZ by Beirut based architecture and design studio T SAKHI Architects (basically the Lebanese-Polish sisters Tessa and Tara Sakhi) are giving us "an interactive wall portraying the sociopolitical barriers in society through a psychological and physiological journey for its visitors". Must be better than that sounds.

The Eastern Provinces of Saudi Arabia, supported by thra, are represented by Shahad Alazzaz of Azaz Architects in a research-led project on palm frond weaving. He has collaborated with local craftspeople to develop innovative textiles, each interpreted as a process and story.



Elegance in fronds: Azaz Architects' KSA project for Abwab

The DDW programme also features **Umbra**, a mashrabiya-inspired gateway to Dubai Design District developed by Dubai-based design studio Tinkah; a 6m high installation by Istanbul's MAS Architecture Studio titled **Barjeel**, a recycling project derived from the eponymous traditional wind towers of the UAE but made from layers of reclaimed cardboard and strip lighting to create a cool space for visitors; and sweeping steel pavilion that Emirati designer and architect Abdulla AlMulla of Mula design studio has produced for the **Audi Innovation Hub**.



The mashrabiya-inspired installation by Tinkah (also at top)

Elsewhere in d3 is **Green Nexus**, a site-specific installation by MAS Paints in partnership with UAE Modern – a landscaped podium that relates best practices in water security, water pollution, food security and health, all shaded by trees to provide a connection between technology and nature.

We also like the sound of the **Augmented Garden** by the Dubai-based architectural studio SUPERFUTUREDESIGN*, which always comes up with interesting responses to the environment. The Augmented Garden explores the perceived nervous system of plants, suggesting that they can exchange a significant amount of information by electrical stimulus. "By giving plants a voice, SUPERFUTUREDESIGN* will encourage visitors to engage in a new dialogue, interacting with nature in an unexpected way." Looking forward to it.

Then there's **Kabul Old City – a visual journey**. Produced by Turquoise Mountain, an organisation working to protect historic buildings and heritage crafts at risk in Afghanistan, this does exactly what it says in its title: it uses virtual reality technology to create a 3D digitisation of an endangered area. This may have to be the future of our response to heritage sites.





Kabul in 3D VR

And last but not least, there's what we regard as the single most significant element of Dubai Design Week, the **Global Grad Show**. This pulls in a great selection of designs from recent graduates around the world, demonstrating that good design and clever ideas are truly international.

It will be interesting to see how the Global Grad Show evolves with Eleanor Watson, appointed curator for the 2019 edition in succession to the GGS's progenitor Brendan McGettrick (he has been appointed Creative Director of Dubai's Museum of the Future, set to open at the end of the year; he'll continue to advise on the show, though).



Eleanor Watson: "engaging with the world around us with intelligence and compassion"

Ms Watson's pedigree is pretty good. She comes from the Design Museum in London, and has worked on a number of exhibitions there – including the museum's programme of free public displays and the Designs of the Year show for 2018.

She's been saying all the right things re the Global Grad Show: "Over the past few months I have been learning from some of the best design, art and engineering schools from across the globe on what it means to be a designer in a world that already has too much and how we can better live in an era where the links between the micro-scale of our individual human experience and the macro scale of our planet can no longer be ignored."

That sounds like a clear view of the future of design. And she went on: "Global Grad Show will be the coming together of all these ideas and will demonstrate that although the role of design seems to stay the same, it is about engaging with the world around us with intelligence and compassion."

Dubai Design Week runs 11-16 November, primarily at Dubai Design District. Information [here](#).



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