

Developments in Arts and Culture in the GCC and Migratory Flows



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Executive Summary

Over the last decade, the UAE has made significant investments aimed at transforming the country into a cultural hub in the Middle East and beyond. Starting with the construction of branches of museums that are internationally recognized for their vast collections of artworks (Louvre Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Museum Abu Dhabi—still in progress) to the organization of international festivals in art and literature, as well as creating gallery spaces that harbor artists in residence, there is an ever-growing presence of artistic endeavors across the emirates. Given this interest, some of the emirates are facilitating long-term residence for foreigners who work in creative industries, shaping the UAE's role as a global curator of creative arts.

The last decade witnessed a boom in creative arts industries across the United Arab Emirates, especially in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. With purpose-built strategies and continued investment in the arts sector, the UAE has been realizing the vision of becoming not only a regional but a global center for creative arts. In November 2017, the Louvre opened a branch in Abu Dhabi, the first large-scale project in the Saadiyat Cultural District that harbors, among others, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (set to open in 2025) and Zayed National Museum (opening date TBC). The first two museums reflect the international status of the UAE's cultural achievements, solidifying the country's role as a center for the arts on par with Western counterparts. The investments dedicated to the expansion of the sector are noteworthy, with Louvre Abu Dhabi alone having cost more than USD 1 billion in execution and agreements and prohibiting the creation of a similar project in other emirates and countries in the region (Assemblée Nationale, 2007). The cost of Guggenheim Abu Dhabi has been reported to amount to another USD 1 billion (Arab News, 30 September 2021). Dubai invested in the Dubai Opera, a state-of-the-art facility designed for international performances that opened in 2016. An innovative Dubai Art Museum structure is slated for completion by 2030 (Open Space, 17 October 2024). In addition, the Sharjah Art Biennial has been held in Sharjah since 1993, and the Sharjah Art Museum opened its doors in 1997.

Indeed, infrastructure helps to facilitate the enriching exchanges that occur during international events. The UAE has a long-standing tradition of organizing international book fairs in Abu Dhabi (since 1981) and Sharjah (since 1982), but in the recent decade, the Emirates has been committed to the organization