

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES IN ACTION: ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH POSTER SESSION

Artistic Taste-Making at the Sharjah Biennial

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This poster investigates the role that the Sharjah Biennial (SB), an international art showcase in the United Arab Emirates, plays in the development of a local artistic and cultural taste. It argues that the SB contributes to the molding of local aesthetic values through its selection of curatorial themes, artists, artworks, and, especially, venues. Using field visits, interviews, and archival research informed by sociological and anthropological theories on aesthetics, the author shows that organizers of public art exhibitions and programs are in a key position to shape the art to which people are exposed and how this, in turn, creates a public valuation of aesthetics. This project fills a gap in contemporary biennial literature by shedding light on the pivotal roles of art events in shaping societal aesthetic values. ✂

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Abstract

How does the eclectic, city-wide display of conceptual art at the Sharjah Biennial impact the aesthetic preferences of local residents? This paper explores this question and argues that the Sharjah Biennial contributes to the molding of local aesthetic values through its selection of curatorial themes, artists, artworks, and, especially, venues. This project contributes to contemporary biennial literature by shedding light on the pivotal role of art events in shaping societal aesthetic values.



Methodology

- Interviews with organizers of the Sharjah Biennial at the Sharjah Art Foundation
- Conversations with participating artists at the SB and local residents
- Archival research at the Sharjah Art Foundation and Gulf News

Findings

- The Sharjah Biennial's move to Old Sharjah brings it closer to the artistic and economic roots of the city, and enables it to engage a wider socioeconomic demographic.
- The curators, who select themes, artists, and sites for the SB, play a critical role in shaping the art to which the public is subliminally and directly exposed.

