

**The Arts of the Emirates:
A Presentation on the UAE Visual Arts Sector**

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The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

Thursday, October 29, 2015

Thank you Ambassador Wahba for the kind introduction and the warm welcome to the Arab Gulf States Institute. I would like to express our appreciation to the Middle East Institute, and in particular Lyne Sneige, MEI's Director Cultural Affairs and Programs.

Why the Art of the Emirates?

I come from Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, a nation that believes art is a force for innovation and progress. It is essential fuel for the continuing evolution of civilization.

Art connects us to our deeper selves, both as individuals and as societies. Indeed, it connects societies by revealing the deep and shared roots of our humanity. Art is also a powerful yet peaceful statement. A statement of identity. A statement of values. A statement not made *against* others. But *to* others. And to ourselves.

In such challenging times - as the Arab World struggles with many forces both internal and external - allowing art to assert, express, and connect is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Now more than ever, we need to remind the world, and remind ourselves: "This is who we truly are".

Our roots in the arts are not new, for art has been embedded in us through our own historical traditions. In the UAE, this is reflected in the graceful, flowing beauty of Arabic calligraphy, the mesmerizing geometry of Islamic art, the creative

expression of Emirati embroidery through to the immensely powerful visualization of the written word and the lyrical splendor of our oral poetry.

For decades we have enjoyed visiting our own museums across the seven Emirates. There are over thirty museums in the Emirate of Sharjah alone! With more to come across the UAE.

Private collectors have also contributed to the cultural wealth of the country by sharing their exquisite collections with everyone – citizens, residents, and visitors.

Art is elegant, art is beautiful, art is hope, and today on the serene Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi there are three magnificent museums being built.

The Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim, the Zayed National Museum conceived by Sir Norman Foster, and next year, we will experience the opening of Jean Nouvel's Louvre Abu Dhabi. I fondly remember my earlier visits to Washington, DC, this great city. Discovering the Mall and experiencing its many exciting museums and rich cultural heritage, I cannot but help think how similar we are.

DC proudly makes a statement for this country through these museums in giving its capital's visitors a glimpse into the history of this nation but also into its interest for the world's arts.

With our museums in the UAE we want to tell the world who we are. And we want to extend an open heart and open hands to other cultures in allowing them to find a home in those exceptional museums in Abu Dhabi.

We believe in the strength of soft power. Sheikh Zayed, our nation's founder, has always said that a country is measured by the achievements of its people. Our book, *The Art of the Emirates*, tells the dynamic, creative story of the guardians of creativity and knowledge - Emirati artists, galleries, foundations and universities - and explores the impact they make upon society in their own words. They have all been instrumental in building a confidence that reaches out and enables the young

to generate innovative ideas of their own with passion and determination. Ideas that will make a difference and drive the change.

The supreme value of a nation lies in its culture. *The Art of the Emirates* reveals this truth.

Thank you.