



Ark Re-imagined: the Expeditionary Pavilion

Pavilion of Iraq at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia

EXHIBITOR: Rashad Salim

DATES: May 20 – Nov 21, 2021

COMMISSIONER: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Iraq

WEBSITE: www.arkforiraq.org

CURATOR: Safina Projects

PAVILION PILOTS: Community Jameel & CULTURUNNERS

In 2021 Iraq participates for the first time ever in the **International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia**, with artist Rashad Salim's project '**Ark Re-imagined: the Expeditionary Pavilion**'. This year also marks the **Centenary of the founding of the modern state of Iraq**. Curated by Safina Projects, and with Community Jameel and CULTURUNNERS supporting production as *piloti del padiglione* (pavilion pilots), the pavilion returns to the origins of Iraq's architectural legacy, celebrating the **vernacular architecture and watercraft of the Tigris-Euphrates river system**, and the seminal 'alphabet of making' from which early architecture emerged.

Challenging standardised images of the Ark based on European boat-building techniques, Salim proposes '**an Ark of its time and place**': an organic, tensile-built structure, its design derived from the **vernacular construction techniques and boat types attributable to the period of the ancient Flood**, a rise in sea level around 10,000 years ago that created what we know as the Gulf.

Rashad Salim's '**expeditionary art**' practice employs the concept of the Ark as a means of **enquiry into Iraq's material cultural heritage**. Since 2016, the Ark Re-imagined project has engaged artisans across central, southern and western Iraq to **revive and document what remains of traditional boatbuilding, architecture and craft practices**. This heritage, sustained since earliest recorded history, has been **brought to the brink of extinction during recent decades of devastating conflict and trauma**.

Through outdoor installations and digital elements, the Expeditionary Pavilion will engage dynamically with its location, **exploring links between Venice's delta wetland environment and proud boating traditions, and those of Basra and the Ahwar (marshlands) of southern Iraq**. Like Venice, southern Iraq now faces the critical challenge of the Anthropocene, a

climate event comparable to the ancient Flood. Ark Re-imagined **addresses the crises of our time** through enquiring into the transformative processes that shaped human culture and remain urgently relevant to our fragile future.

The mission of the project is to gather resources and people and **convene cross-cultural dialogue**. Rashad Salim comments "The Ark Re-imagined addresses the title of this year's Biennale Architettura – "**How will we live together?**" – by applying the principle of gathering. This Ark centres on a geometric pattern that is ubiquitous in nature and science. An amulet based on this pattern called the seba'ayoun is given to newborn children throughout Iraq as a blessing. The Ark Re-imagined project was inspired by this pattern of unity and aims to revive and protect its culture of origin."

The pavilion and documentation of the project are supported by the **Iraq Cultural Health Fund** created by Community Jameel and CULTURUNNERS within The Future is Unwritten Artists' Response Fund, a new initiative to provide financial and production support to artist-led projects that contribute to improved **mental, social and environmental health** in the wake of COVID-19. The pavilion programme is being developed in conversation with the Healing Arts initiative, launched in partnership with the **WHO Foundation** under the auspices of the **World Health Organization**, as part of the **United Nations 75th Anniversary Program** (UN75). In 2020 Ark Re-imagined project was [officially recognised by UN75](#) as an exemplar of an artist-led project implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

George Richards, Director of Community Jameel comments, "This exhibition and the broader Ark Re-Imagined programme reach deep into Iraq's past while tackling very immediate problems, exacerbated by the pandemic, of trauma, loss of identity, and isolation. As *piloti del padiglione*, Community Jameel is proud to be part of this expeditionary pavilion and to be exploring innovative approaches to document and sustain Iraqi cultural practices in order to strengthen mental health resilience."

Pavilion production is co-funded by ALIPH Foundation, while project research and programme content have been supported by funders including Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Arab Council for the Social Sciences, Makiya-Kufa Charity, the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund in partnership with DCMS, and Nahrein Network.

The pavilion's inaugural event in Venice is a conversation with Rashad Salim hosted by **TBA21-Academy at Ocean Space** on **May 20**.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

COMMISSIONER: Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, Iraq

PARTICIPANT: Rashad Salim

Rashad Salim is an Iraqi-German artist and interdisciplinary researcher, with a particular interest in ecology and the history and development of culture and technology, as reflected in ancient boats, vernacular architecture, crafts and intangible cultural heritage.

Rashad was born in 1957 in Khartoum, Sudan to a German mother and an Iraqi artist / diplomat father (Nizar Salim) from the well-known Selim family of artists. He travelled extensively from birth, spending his childhood in China, Sweden and Yugoslavia; lived in Iraq during his formative years (1970-1982) and studied at the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and Saint Martin's in London. In 1977-78, as a crew member on Thor Heyerdahl's Tigris expedition, he voyaged on a reed boat from Iraq across the Indian Ocean.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Rashad lived in Morocco and Yemen where he worked as a sculptor and printmaker, engaged with local cultural heritage and co-founded cultural associations. As an artist he has works in major collections including the British Museum and the Agha Khan collection. He was a trustee of iNCiA (International Network for Contemporary Iraqi Artists) from 1998-2012. He has lived in London, UK since 1999, returning to Iraq in 2003, 2013 and on a regular basis since 2016.

Through the Ark Re-imagined project, launched in 2015, he has worked to protect and revive the endangered craft heritage of Iraq, particularly its ancient boatbuilding techniques. Since establishing Safina Projects in 2017, he has delivered a programme of boat and craft workshops, heritage events on water, research and capacity-building in the field of Iraqi intangible cultural heritage, supported by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, Nahrein Network, and ALIPH Foundation among others. Public access to waterfronts and waterways is an increasingly important theme in Rashad's work; with this aim he is supporting the development of a network of locally managed youth boat clubs in Iraq.

CURATOR

Safina Projects

Safina Projects is a creative practice that works to protect and revive the endangered craft heritage of Iraq, particularly its ancient boats, through art and cultural research projects that engage the public in Iraq and internationally. Safina Projects is co-founded by artist Rashad Salim and project manager Hannah Lewis.

www.safinaprojects.org

PILOTI DEL PADIGLIONE (PAVILION PILOTS)

Community Jameel

Community Jameel is an international organisation tackling some of the world's most urgent issues and challenges, using a pioneering approach grounded in evidence, science, data and technology in the fields of education, health and climate.

www.communityjameel.org

CULTURUNNERS

CULTURUNNERS is an independent platform for cross-cultural campaigns, exhibitions, films and live events - promoting pluralism, peace-building and sustainable development through art. Launched at MIT in 2014, CULTURUNNERS prioritises artists-led projects that transform communities, societies and systems and foster greater empathy across ideological and geographical borders.

www.culturunners.com

COLLABORATORS

CO-PROGRAMMING: The Future is Unwritten Healing Arts Initiative

The Future is Unwritten facilitates urgent cooperation between the international arts sector and United Nations Agencies in order to accelerate implementation of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. It was launched in 2020 by CULTURUNNERS in partnership with the World Council of Peoples for the United Nations, as part of the UN's 75th Anniversary Program, UN75. The Future is Unwritten established the Healing Arts initiative in November 2020, under the

auspices of the World Health Organization, as a cultural call to action in response to the growing mental, societal and environmental health crisis exacerbated by COVID 19.

www.thefutureisunwritten.org

CO-PROGRAMMING: The Curators Collective (CC)

The Curators Collective (CC) is a coalition of 48 National Pavilion Curators participating in the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. The CC has developed a layer of independent programming and collaborative projects to run during the Biennale Architettura 2021, including a Pavilion Festival in October, as well as lectures, talks and moments of collaborative action that will unfold during the course of the Biennale. With official recognition by the Biennale and inclusion in the Historical Archives of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), the Biennale Foundation's archival programme, the CC is also looking beyond the 17th Architecture Biennale to explore how this collective, collaborative approach can inform the future of the National Pavilions.

www.curatorscollective.org

INAUGURAL EVENT: TBA21-Academy at Ocean Space

TBA21–Academy is a contemporary art organization and cultural ecosystem fostering a deeper relationship to the Ocean through collaborative research, artistic production, and new forms of knowledge by combining art and science and to inspire care and action. Established in 2011, the nonprofit's program is informed by a belief in the power of exchange between disciplines and in the ability of the arts as a vessel for communication, change, and action. TBA21–Academy's Ocean Space is an embassy for the oceans located in the Church of San Lorenzo in Venice.

www.tba21.org/-item--academy--1819

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND MODELLING: Association for Conserving Architectural Heritage

The Iraqi Association for Conserving Architectural Heritage works to preserve the built heritage of Iraq and to study the history of its urban planning and development processes. The Association acknowledges Iraq's craft and vernacular traditions as being deeply interrelated with its architectural heritage and of relevance to future development. In collaboration with Safina Projects, the Association is working to document and revitalise elements of Iraq's vernacular architectural heritage and spatial design that are otherwise at risk of disappearing from living memory.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANTS: Factum Foundation

The Factum Foundation was founded as a non-profit organisation in 2009 by Adam Lowe with the aim of using Factum Arte's innovative digital mediation processes and technologies for heritage preservation, education and the development of thought-provoking exhibitions. Factum Foundation are supporting the Ark Re-imagined project in its use of photogrammetry to document Iraqi maritime and vernacular architectural heritage.

www.factumfoundation.org

VENICE PARTNER: Royal Bucintoro Rowing Society

The Royal Bucintoro Rowing Society was founded in 1882 by Count Piero Venier with an initial group of young enthusiasts who wanted to resume the Venetian tradition of rowing. This was the beginning of a glorious story, crowned by Olympic, World and European golds and successes. Today the Bucintoro exemplifies the pride of Venetian traditions, constantly looking for a new link between the history of the lagoon and the future. Today the Society is supporting the development of comparable institutions in Iraq, by mentoring the newly emerging network of Iraqi Cultural Heritage Boat Clubs being developed by Safina Projects.

www.bucintoro.org

THANKS TO THE SUPPORT OF

ALIPH Foundation: www.aliph-foundation.org

Arab Fund for Arts and Culture: www.arabculturefund.org

Arab Council for the Social Sciences: www.theacss.org

British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, in partnership with DCMS: www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development/cultural-protection-fund

Makiya-Kufa Charity

Nahrein Network (AHRC and UCL): www.ucl.ac.uk/nahrein/