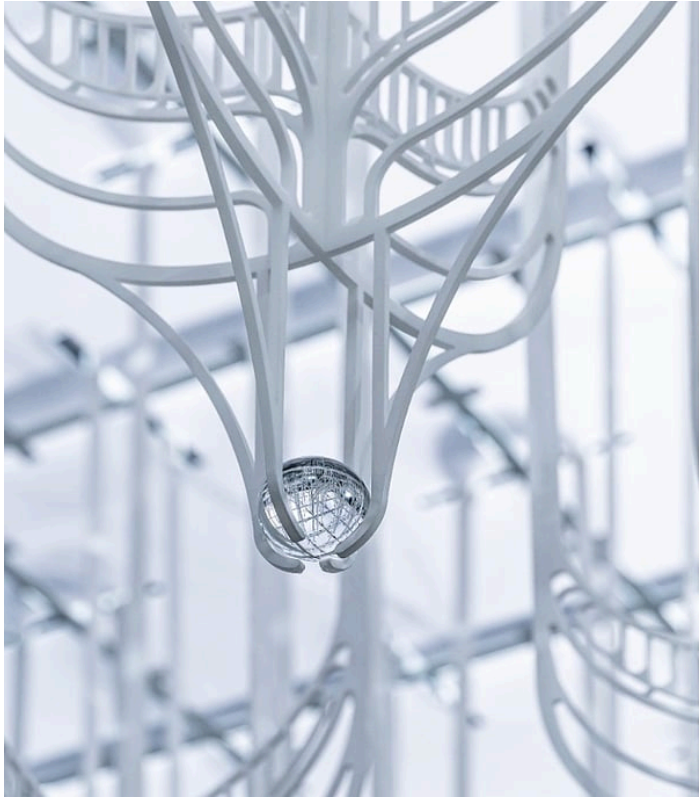


Large-scale sculptures, light art: Manar Abu Dhabi to turn emirate into open-air gallery

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Manar Abu Dhabi 2025 returns this November, transforming the emirate's natural and urban landscapes, from the mangroves of Jubail Island to the ancient oases of Al Ain, into a glowing open-air gallery of light installations and large-scale art.

Organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), the exhibition's second edition gathers 15 artists and collectives from 10 countries under the theme "The Light Compass," exploring how light has long guided human journeys both physical and spiritual.

For the first time, the exhibition extends to Al Ain, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where eight installations will illuminate the Al Qattara and Al Jimi Oasis Trails. Visitors can experience new works by Emirati artists Maitha Hamdan, Ammar Al Attar and designer Khalid Shafar, whose installations respond to the heritage and natural environment of the historic oases.

At Souq Al Mina, global art icon KAWS will unveil a luminous COMPANION sculpture— a reclining figure holding a glowing moon —marking the American artist's first major work in the UAE. The monumental piece arrives fresh from Shanghai. Positioned against Abu Dhabi's city skyline, with passing ships and shore activity, it creates a contemporary scene linked to maritime memory.

Five Emirati artists feature prominently this year, joining an international lineup that includes DRIFT from the Netherlands, Montreal-based studio Iregular, Spanish digital artist Six N. Five, and Malaysian sculptor Pamela Poh.

ADVERTISING

"Manar Abu Dhabi continues to celebrate the dialogue between Emirati creativity and global innovation," Artistic Director Khai Hori said.

On Jubail Island, Dutch studio DRIFT creates immersive experiences where visitors' biometric data transforms into ephemeral digital flowers and soundscapes inside a dome-like structure. Outside, hundreds of choreographed drones will move across the island's mangroves in synchronised motion, evoking growth and renewal against the natural landscape.

Emirati sculptor Shaikha Al Mazrou presents a 30-metre circular installation that transforms as water crystallizes into salt, creating an ephemeral landmark amid the mangroves. The work reflects her ongoing exploration of material transformation and the visual patterns created by natural processes.

In Al Ain's palm-dense Jimi Oasis, Maitha Hamdan's sensor-activated illuminated ropes cascade from a six-meter acacia tree, responding to visitors' movements and creating harmony between technology and the surrounding environment. Nearby, Ammar Al Attar transforms a historic house courtyard with photographic self-portraits captured while cycling in circles, presented sequentially in lightboxes as a meditative performance connecting body, space, and time.

Khalid Shafar reinterprets traditional Sadu weaving — which features on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage — into a 70-metre pixelated pattern of light and bricks stretching through a historic building along the Al Qattara Oasis Trail.

Canadian-Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, returning to Manar Abu Dhabi, presents poems by contemporary Emirati poets Nujoom Alghanem, Khalid Albudoor and Adel Khozam as slow streams of letters along the trail, alongside a hovering light canopy that pulses in rhythm with visitors' heartbeats.

The exhibition emphasises accessible public art experiences across Abu Dhabi's diverse landscapes. Part of DCT Abu Dhabi's Public Art initiative, Manar aims to enhance the emirate's cultural fabric while fostering creativity through large-scale installations that engage both residents and visitors.

Manar Abu Dhabi runs from November 1, 2025, to January 4, 2026 in Al Ain, and November 15, 2025, to January 4, 2026 in Abu Dhabi. Entry is free, with accompanying talks, performances, and workshops to be announced soon.

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