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SEARCH ...

A new festival for Abu Dhabi: old meets new?

📁 Festival



This December Abu Dhabi is getting a new city-centre festival, centred on the recently redeveloped Al Hosn area. Essentially it's a replacement for the old Qasr Al Hosn Festival, which took place on some of the same site but was suspended in 2016 when the builders moved in. So there's the same emphasis on heritage and tradition – but with some significant contemporary elements, more retail and feeding opportunities, and a lot more happening in general.

The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi is responsible for this “important annual addition to the capital's cultural calendar” which promises “a dynamic programme for all ages with innovative performances, art, traditional crafts, and design”.

You want more adjectives? Buckle in: “The first edition of this event offers a conceptual journey across the landscape of Al Hosn, bringing together historic traditions, creative initiatives, and inspiring artistic

perspectives ... This multidimensional experience will present a new perspective on culture in Abu Dhabi, providing a platform for stimulating cultural conversations and artistic possibilities”.

The old Qasr Al Hosn Festival ran for 10 days or so and explicitly celebrated the heritage of the UAE in general and the Emirate in particular. There wasn't too much acknowledgement of the present; by contrast, the new Al Hosn Festival aims to “showcase Abu Dhabi's vibrant heritage and contemporary creativity”. That sounds like a broader remit, and a conscious (and commendable) attempt to link the past and the present.



The Al Hosn site. Plenty of room for festival fun

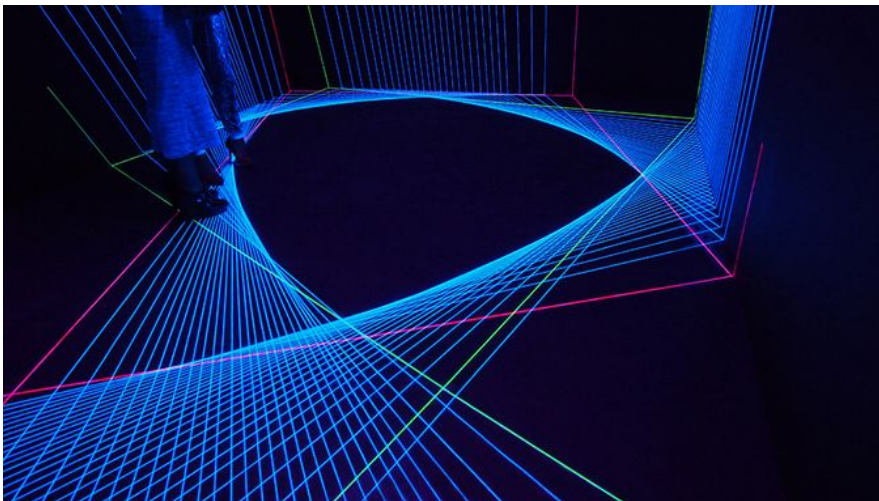
The Festival is separated into distinct areas, though, and there will be enclaves for Emirati tradition. Qasr Al Hosn itself will be the focus of the heritage element, transforming into a living museum with reenactments of the daily lives of the people who lived and worked in the palace in the last century.

The other centre of tradition will be the House of Artisans, hosting workshops on Emirati handicrafts such as burqa design, dyeing natural fibres and tote printmaking, amongst others; visitors can also watch traditional Emirati performances such as Al Ayyala, Al Razfa, and Al Naham, and “participate in crafts and Emirati culinary competitions”.

The open area between Qasr Al Hosn and the Cultural Foundation will have art pavilions, music performance stages, design, retail, and culinary offerings. There will be three new site-specific commissions here; we don't have any information about these, except that they will be by Mohammed Kazem, Jeongmoon Choi, and experience designers XPOZE.

Mohammed Kazem of course is one of the big names in Middle Eastern art. A pioneer of conceptual art in the UAE who lives and works in Dubai, Kazem typically “uses overlooked remnants of the everyday to measure and navigate global transformations” as the Guggenheim puts it. His work for the festival is titled *Directions, From Place to Place*; he’s long been interested in creating work that considers the meaning of ‘place’, so this could be another step into that world.

Korean artist **Jeongmoon Choi** has a piece titled *Drawing in Space*. More likely, it’s a continuation of series of works with that title; Jeongmoon Choi, who lives and works between Seoul and Berlin, has been creating arresting installations from coloured wool and UV light for some time, and several of her recent pieces continue the ‘Drawing in Space’ project.



Jeongmoon Choi: Drawing in space – transformation (2013)

“Through the joint interplay of surfaces and lines on the one hand and the contrast-rich relationship of different perspectives on the other hand, a unique space and depth effect is created,” says her website. “Threads are drawn to both classical surfaces such as canvas and also freely in space. The interesting thing about the use of threads as a material is that they are both very easy to destroy, but on the other hand, form very strong and powerful structured patterns. The works thus produce a tension that results from the pairs of opposites strength and vulnerability, security and risk ...

We assume **XPOSE** is the design studio / brand consultancy of the same name from Dubai. If so, XPOSE has a great collection of projects in its ‘experience design’ portfolio, which augers well.

This outdoor area will be screening al fresco films programmed by Cinema Akil, as well as live demonstrations in the oasis and water feature areas reflecting on Abu Dhabi’s diverse desert and coast traditions. Pavilions dotting the landscape will offer a retail experience with goods by UAE and international designers and brands.



Outside the Cultural Foundation

The Cultural Foundation will be hosting performing arts, visual art exhibitions, art workshops, and children's activities in its Abu Dhabi Children's Library. Expect the all too predictable "culinary and retail activations" here too.

We don't have details on the performances or the schedules, but we do know they include the Arabic rock band **Jadal**, formed in Amman in 2003 by main man Mahmoud Radaideh; it's been through several incarnations over the years but has stayed true to a polished rock sound with Arabic lyrics.



Jadal at work

The Argentinian dance company **Che Malambo** is featured, too. This all-male troupe brings the power, poise and posturing of the gaucho to the stage; expect precision footwork, rhythmic stomping, drumming with traditional Argentinian bombos, and whirling boleadoras (a throwing rope with cords weighted by stones designed to trip a steer and bring it down). The music has immigrant elements of

flamenco, Irish step dancing, and tap and body percussion brought to the country by African slave; Che Malambo's hallmark is zapeteo, the fast-paced footwork inspired by the rhythm of galloping horses.



Che Malambo with bombos and boleadoras

Also listed is “Maywa Denk” – which is presumably the Japanese art/music/tech combo **Maywa Denki**, essentially two brothers who wear blue work overalls, describe their works as “products” and their live performances as “product demonstrations”, and play instruments they have invented themselves (notably the Otamatone, a synth in the shape of a child’s plastic saxophone) . Maywa Denki’s blurb also says “their onstage musical instruments include one that resembles the mating of a xylophone and a helicopter, a robot rigged to play guitar, and various strange percussion instruments.”. Sounds pretty unmissable.



Maywa Denki. That’s the Otamatone in the front

The **current exhibitions** in the Cultural Foundation – Najat Makki: Luminescence and Tribute: A Dedication to Najat Makki – will continue throughout the Festival.

Al Hosn Festival will run 12 to 19 December. Entrance is AED 30 for adults, AED 15 for kids. Sorry, we don’t know any timings yet ... **Online**