

<b>Mangroves from the Water</b>				
<p><b>an exhibition of</b></p> <p><b>paintings</b></p> <p><b>film</b></p> <p><b>illustrated stories</b></p> <p><b>weaving</b></p> <p><b>onsite installation</b></p>				
<b>by</b>				
<p><b>Zahidah Zeytoun Millie, Alexis Gambis, Alanood Al Zaidi, Dana Al Mazrouei,</b></p> <p><b>Hanan Al Marzougi, Noor Zadeh, Shaikha Al Suwaidi, Brioné LaThrop,</b></p> <p><b>Stephanie Neville &amp; Geraldine Chansard</b></p>				

<b>Sponsored by</b>		
 <p>هيئة البيئة - أبوظبي Environment Agency - ABU DHABI</p>		

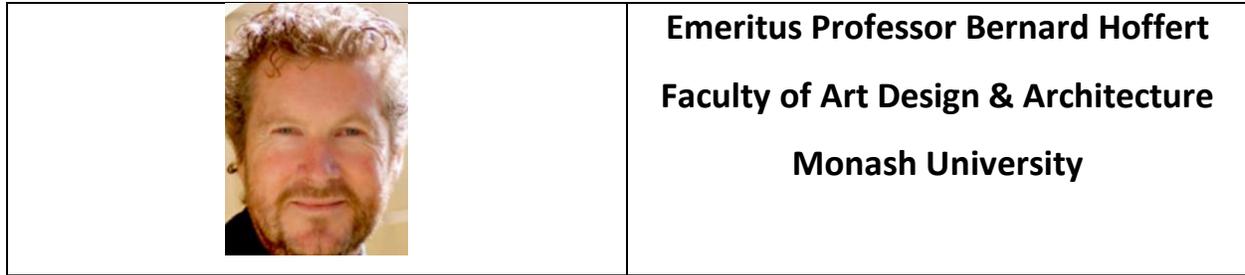
“إننا نولي بيئتنا جل اهتمامنا لأنها جزء عضوي من بلادنا وتاريخنا وتراثنا، لقد عاش أبائنا وأجدادنا على هذه الأرض وتعايشوا مع بيئتنا في البر والبحر، وأدركوا بالفطرة وبالحس المرهف الحاجة للمحافظة عليها وأن يأخذوا منها قدر احتياجاتهم فقط، ويتركوا منها ما تجد فيه الأجيال القادمة مصدراً ونبعاً للعطاء.”

*“On land and in the sea, our forefathers lived and survived in this environment. They were able to do so because they recognised the need to conserve it, to take from it only what they needed to live, and to preserve it for succeeding generations.”*

HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan

الشيخ زايد بن سلطان آل نهيان رحمه الله

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HE Zaki Nusseibeh</b> <b>Cultural Advisor</b> <b>Ministry of Presidential Affairs</b></p>
<p><b>An introduction</b></p>	
<p>History shows us the role art plays in dedicating natural spaces as land to be preserved for future generations. The work of painter Henri Rousseau influenced the modernist treatment of the interaction of humans and nature at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.</p> <p>The 19<sup>th</sup> Century American philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote of the value of the natural environment:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and most interminable, and to the citizen, most dismal, swamp. I enter a swamp as a sacred place- a sanctum sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature.</p> <p>I'm happy to introduce the work of the 10 UAE artists in '<i>Mangroves from the Water</i>'. Our traditions, beliefs, values and lifestyle all shine through in what we produce as art. The conservational purpose of the artists in this unique project is clear and we appreciate their stunning and original creations to highlight the beauty of our mangrove regions. These artists bring their inner worlds to our outer ones, forcing us to negotiate our own values with their creative worlds.</p> <p>I also admire the 10 artists for achieving an artistic collaboration through their independence. Just as mangroves cover much of our coastline, the artists too reside in different emirates. Indeed, the project is to move from Abu Dhabi, to Dubai, Sharjah, Kalba and finally Um Al Quwain. It is the wondrous natural space of Khor Baidhah (UAQ) that inspired Zahidah to embark on her ambitious project and gather artists to celebrate the multi-sensory beauty of the mangroves with a multi-media exhibition.</p>	



The 21st century has been dominated by issues related to the environment. Politics across the spectrum, the scientific world, artists across medium and form have all reiterated the need to sustain the planet which is now so evidently threatened. Summits on climate change grapple at an international level with policies and solutions for governments to adopt; national campaigns across the globe explore the effects of change on weather patterns and the impact they might have on lifestyle, economics and cultural wellbeing. The identification of heating oceans, melting polar caps, dissolving glaciers and flooding coastlines are reported regularly in the news. The impact of a damaged ozone layer and its effects on health are linked to the growing instances of melanoma. And yet we still exploit, damage, even ravage our natural resources for personal gain.

This exhibition addresses this issue, focusing on the small scale, a specific example of damage to the natural coastline, where the mangroves house a fascinating and inspiring world of birds, fish and plants, a haven in the turbulence of life and a refuge for those who swim and boat, exploring the natural beauties of the Emirates. In painting, sculpture, photography, storytelling and film this group of artists, sensitive to the value of their surroundings, offer their vision of beauty, a beauty which is threatened with damage and even loss. They explore the deeper meaning of the environment; what it brings to our sensibilities and experiences, our quality of life and our understanding of what beauty gives us-and how the world is lessened by its loss. We enjoy the beauty of the land, almost without thinking, the hills and deserts, sea and sky-the enrichment of nature; for many of us this is what beauty means. Do we ever consider what happens when beauty is compromised, overlooked, lost-it is replaced by ugliness, for by definition, ugliness is the absence of the beautiful. The mangroves are beautiful and life enhancing; what will replace them if they are damaged and forgotten.

Particularly vivid are the paintings with their spontaneity and freshness offering the experience of the mangroves, a world of the senses, immersing and alive-floating, swimming amid the enclosed world of nature, bringing us the intimacy of the mangroves and what they offer.



“What the future will yield we cannot know-whether the bridging of the opposites will give positive results, or whether the way will lead through yet more unimaginable catastrophes. There is too much anxiety and too much dread at work in the world, and this is still the predominant factor in art and society”. Carl G. Jung

The trucks I see every early morning filled with chopped mangroves have been the force for curating this touring exhibition *Mangroves from the Water*. I’ve been kayaking around the mangroves in UAQ and RAK since 2009. I feel the great connection of my body and soul with nature, when I am out there in the mangroves or when I am kayaking, even when I have to struggle against a current or from the heat and high humidity. I find there is another power or energy source coming through me as I paint out there for many hours without the need to rest.

Painting from a kayak is an opportunity to recognise the delicate balance between nature and urban life. Mangroves provide me with a great rejuvenating energy as they are nurseries of many hidden lives: fish, birds, turtles, colourful crabs and more. Yet just over the fringe of the tree cover is the bustle of the growing city. The serenity of the khor, though, is what grabs me. One can easily become entranced by the place and my mind often wonders to the mythology of my native country, Syria. Many of the creatures I see are major symbols of energy of ancient Syria.

The loss of my father and the ongoing violent crisis in Syria have encouraged me to be inside myself, my mind travelling beyond my body, being like the hero Gilgamesh in a time of searching as he traveled walking between lands searching for the meaning of life and death. I have found the mangroves a source of power, beauty, energy and simplicity. These havens of beauty are so close to us, but many of us don’t have the time to enter them. I encourage people to love the mangroves and to protect them. A trip to the mangroves is a meditative experience.

Emotions have also played an important role in the production of this series; the process of painting has actually been a form of art therapy, a kind of meditation. *Coffee Morning* is about my daily contact with the world in the morning through Facebook, talking to the world about the beauty of the mangroves, sharing photos; also talking emotionally about those trucks, hoping that a post will help to stop them!

It hurts me deeply when I see the trucks every morning cutting the mangroves and being filled up with the chopped branches to feed racing camels in Umm Al Quwain. Or when I see a reclaimed area that used to be full of mangroves gets replaced by a bank or a car park or a building as I see in Ras Al Khaimah. It hurts also when I see people camping by the mangroves and throwing all their rubbish. Here again we face the ugliness and the beauty.

Finally, I greatly thank my husband Daniel for his support of my art project and being part of this exhibition, behind the scenes. I thank the artists involved and Bernard Hoffert for continuing his thoughtful feedback support, the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi for their sponsorship and HE Zaki Nusseibeh for his unending support.



Established in 1996, the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) is committed to protecting and enhancing air quality, groundwater as well as the biodiversity of our desert and marine ecosystem. By partnering with other government entities, the private sector, NGOs and global environmental agencies, we embrace international best practice, innovation and hard work to institute effective policy measures. We seek to raise environmental awareness, facilitate sustainable development and ensure environmental issues remain one of the top priorities of our national agenda.

## Mangroves - Vanguard of the Sea



The word 'Mangrove' is used to denote salt loving tall evergreen woody trees and shrubs that prefer to grow in coastal environments such as mudflats and upon the banks of tropical and sub-tropical estuaries in many parts of the world.

Mangroves constitute a fascinating habitat interface between the terrestrial and the marine environments located in the zone between the high tide and the low tide. They act as a bridge between the ecosystems found on land and in the sea, providing a safe haven for many organisms. They are one of the most productive and diverse wetlands on earth, yet these unique coastal forests are one of the most threatened habitats in the world. The rate of loss of mangrove forests is 3 - 4 times higher than that of terrestrial forests! Since 1980 there has been a 20% loss of mangrove forests in the world.

## About Mangroves

Although mangroves can be found near rivers, they are most common in coastal and tidal wetlands. While these tidal swamp forests thrive in saline environments, they still need fresh water to grow and survive. Mangrove trees have two very special characteristics:

1. The roots of mangroves are special as they not only help stabilise the tree in one of the most dynamic zones on Earth, but also help take in air, water and nutrients. These trees actually breathe through their roots, which are called *pneumatophores*.
2. In most mangrove trees the seed germination occurs in the tree itself; a condition known as *vivipary*.

While there are about 70 known species of mangroves found around the world, they can be broadly grouped under four categories namely the Red, Black, White and the Grey mangrove.

The highest concentration and variety of mangrove forests can be found in Southeast Asia and Australia. The UAE, despite having harsh climatic conditions, still supports the *Avicenna Marina*, the Black/Grey mangrove. This is the only species that can withstand the highly salinic and arid conditions of the Arabian Gulf and can be found along the khors (lagoons and creeks). The total area of mangroves in Abu Dhabi is 155.21 km<sup>2</sup>. Abu Dhabi has both planted and natural mangrove areas.

## Why are Mangroves so important?

1. Mangroves support a complex aquatic food web and a unique habitat.
2. They act as a fish nursery and are a rich source of fish, shellfish, oysters, shrimp and other crustaceans such as crabs etc.
3. They are also frequented by many birds and mammals that feed on the marine resources available within the mangroves.
4. Mangroves serve as rookeries or nesting areas for many species of birds.
5. They protect and stabilise low lying coastal lands against strong wave action, winds and floods
6. Mangrove leaves provide fodder for livestock such as camels.
7. Mangrove trees act as a sink, absorbing pollutants from water wastes.
8. Honey is produced from mangrove flowers.

9. Mangroves provide excellent opportunities for ecotourism.
10. Some mangrove seeds are used for human consumption and have medicinal value.
11. Mangrove trees and accompanying vegetation such as salt marshes act as carbon sinks.

## **Threats to the Mangroves**

### **Manmade Threats:**

- Reclaiming or dredging in mangrove areas - coastal development, and land filling activities.
- Unsustainable fish and shrimp aquaculture – removing mangroves to create aquaculture ponds.
- Dumping waste - using mangroves as dump sites.
- Over logging - timber and fuel wood.
- Browsing or over grazing - by camels and other livestock.
- Pollution- oil, wastewater and other industrial pollutants.

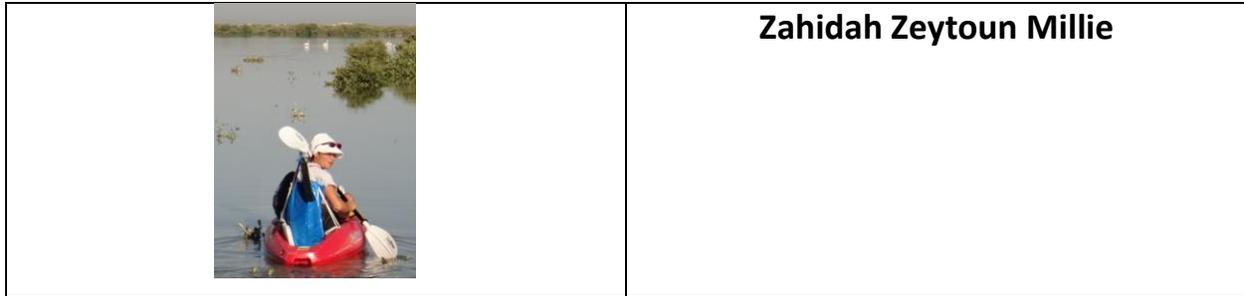
### **Natural threats**

- Lack of inflow of fresh water- mangroves in the UAE face this pressure as there is no natural inflow of fresh water from rivers or deltas. This reduces their growth and makes the UAE mangrove 'dwarf' sized.
- Harsh environmental conditions, such as high temperature and high water salinity, can stunt the growth of mangroves.

## **EAD's efforts to protect the Mangroves**

Mangroves are protected under the UAE's Federal Law number 24 of 1999. This law offers protection to all the natural ecosystems in the country. Rapid growth and development constitutes a direct threat to the mangroves in the country. In light of this fact, Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, the mandated authority for protecting the environment in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, advises all developers to adequately avoid, mitigate and compensate for any loss of mangroves. This is achieved through the assessment and permitting process that EAD requires for all development, industrial and infrastructure projects. It is also important to note that the protection of natural mangroves is given a higher priority over the plantation of new mangroves.

EAD also promotes ecotourism, education & awareness programmes to students and the community to help them experience the mangroves and learn about their ecological significance. Our Mangrove National Park is open to the public for kayaking activities and tours that can help the community connect with the beauty of this ecosystem.



**Zahidah's** work comes directly from the mangroves. Painted from her kayak, Zahidah gathers 50 sketches as a one-piece mosaic, each upon a music stand, gathered together as if an orchestra. The large size painting '*Coffee Morning*', representing her daily world amidst the expanse of the UAQ mangroves, is the 'conductor' of her display.

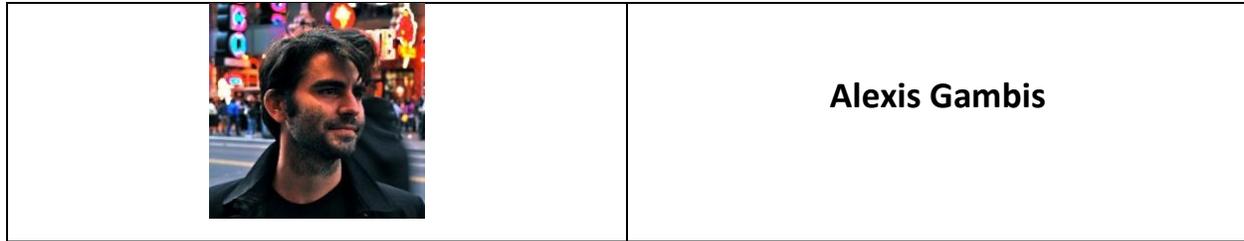
Zahidah also presents a further 50 watercolours framed on the wall. The artist plays with the form, lines, colour and texture to create the effects of natural energy, playfulness, sadness, softness and depth. A sculpture depicts the beauty of the mangroves at sea bed level. A lifelike display of the mangrove shoreline with detritus of human civilisation stands at the entrance to the gallery space.

Zahidah is a masters graduate in Visual Arts from Monash University. A thematic artist, her work focuses on humanity and nature, influenced by mythology, poetry, science and philosophy. Her work often highlights forgotten issues. Her 2008 '*Al Safha to Starchitecture*' project at the RAK Higher Colleges of Technology highlighted the cause to revive regard for traditional UAE coastal and mountain architecture. Zahidah now turns her energy to celebrating the wonder of the UAE's little-known forests: the coastal mangroves. An exciting challenge, the new project quickly grabbed a life of its own, moving her along in its wake. Emotions have been important as the mangroves are a source of power, beauty, energy and simplicity. Zahidah has worked almost entirely from her kayak in the mangroves, water colours upon different types of paper. She plays with the form, lines, colour and textures to create the effects of natural energy, playfulness, softness and depth.

For further information on the artist, visit [www.zahidahart.com](http://www.zahidahart.com).



*Mangroves from the Water, water colour sketches from a kayak, 2015*



Fatouh, the guardian of the Mangroves has not been seen for the last few decades. Some say he left after disputes with local tribes while others claim that it is increasing destruction and pollution of these ecosystems in the Arabian Gulf that have forced him out. And yet recently, two witnesses have reported sightings of Fatouh and share these accounts with us. As we maneuver into the tiny mangrove islands inhabited by flamingoes and cormorants of Umm Al Quwain, we discover traces of this forgotten creature and reminisce about his life.

<p><i>Guardian of the Mangroves</i>                  Directed by Alexis Gambis                  Featuring Shakhbout Al Kaabi &amp; Noor Al Mahruqi                  Voices: Ritchi Te, Ronak Babubhai Yadav, Salim Mohammed Bopary, Judith Fernandes, Ozge Calafato, Rebecca Pittam                  Assistant Camera: Xavier Zeytoun Millie                  Production Sound: Ozge Calafato                  Original Score by Daniel Wohl</p> <p><i>Through the Mangroves</i>                  Recorded by Ozge Calafato                  Edited by Alexis Gambis</p> <p>Shot in Umm Al Quwain, UAE</p> <p>Field Work   Imagine Science Films 2015  <a href="http://imaginesciencefilms.org">imaginesciencefilms.org</a>                  Supported by NYUAD Arts Center</p>	<p><b>Special thanks:</b>                  Zayed University                  Brioné LaThrop                  UAQ Marine Club                  Zahidah Zeytoun Millie                  Daniel Zeytoun Millie                  ZouZou                  Brian Doyle                  Omar Shoukri</p>
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Alexis Gambis is a filmmaker, biologist and an assistant professor of Biology, Film & New Media at New York University Abu Dhabi where he teaches courses in scientific visualization and storytelling. He is also the Executive Director of Imagine Science Films, a non-profit organization promoting a high-level dialogue between scientists, artists, and filmmakers through the Imagine Science Film Festival and a multitude of other initiatives at the intersect of science and art. His films combine scientific research and narrative often blurring the lines between reality and fiction.

For more about this work, visit: [alexisgambis.com](http://alexisgambis.com)



Stills from *Guardian of the Mangroves*



**Alanoud Al Zaidi, Dana Al Mazrouei, Hanan Al Marzougi, Noor Zadeh, Shaikha Al Suwaidi, Brioné LaThrop**

**Alanoud, Dana, Hanan, Noor, Shaikha & Brioné** and other **Kharareef Heritage Storytellers** will take you on a journey through the heart of the mangroves with their original tales featuring the ancient guardian, the jinni *Fatouh* in the exhibition’s majlis.

Original stories based on the Emirati folkloric character <i>Fatouh</i>	
<p><b>Alanoud Salem Saeed</b> (live narration)</p> <p><i>“The Mighty and Powerful Tribes”</i> by Moza Jassem al Hammadi</p> <p><i>“The Mangrove Masquerade”</i> by Shaikha Hassan Al Hosani</p> <p><b>Nour Abdulhamid</b> (recorded narration)</p> <p><i>“The Guardian of the Mangroves”</i> by Moza Jassem Al Hammadi</p> <p><i>“The Protector of the Mangroves: Myth or Reality”</i> by Alanoud Ali Mousa</p>	<p>Directed and Edited by Alexis Gambis</p> <p>Sound Recording &amp; Mixing by Omar Shoukri</p>

Alanoud and Noor are Communication & Media Science majors and members of Zayed University’s Kharareef Storytelling Club along with their founding member, senior IT Security major Hanan; have entertained audiences at the Abu Dhabi and Sharjah International Book Fairs as well as during numerous TV appearances.

Dana and Shaika are two featured visual storytellers. Dana is a professional graphic designer and illustrator, who created the visual identity for the 2014 Emirati heritage initiative “Lest We Forget.” Shaikha is a senior specializing in Converged Media. Both artists are “Story Mile” illustrators, have been featured in the 2014 Abu Dhabi Festival and the 2014 International Symposium on Electronic Art in Dubai.

Brioné is a writer, producer and educator, who has nurtured and promoted the work of over 200 writers and illustrators in an Emirati heritage initiative.

These up and coming artists have come together using the ancient art of Emirati traditional storytelling to celebrate *Fatouh* and the UAE mangroves that he safeguards.



[http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/at\\_zayed/archivesQ2\\_14/storyMileN.aspx](http://www.zu.ac.ae/main/en/at_zayed/archivesQ2_14/storyMileN.aspx)

**Géraldine Chansard**

Géraldine is committed to the values of expressionism in painting. In this project she adds an artisanal dimension inspired by an authentic weaving technique known in the UAE as *Al Sadu*. The 'thread of life' is vegetal fiber and her work has a unifying essence with its connection to the tree, the symbol of life and peace for society. She extracts vegetal fibers directly from the sea, spinning them into a yarn when dry or as a flat surface on which to paint. Her choice of the weaving medium highlights the importance of a link with her UAE environment, connecting her to the essentials of being.

Géraldine's desire for authenticity and unity is consistent with previous weaving projects including the 2011 *Ma fibre naturelle* that took place in the birth house of Henri Matisse. Expressions from her inner childish sketch characters have consistently animated her art since her 2010 *Même pas mal*. The sculpture made with fishing nests, *Woman from the water*, illustrates the link between different worlds and cultures. The sculpture demonstrates the fragile harmony existing between humans, held together by the protective power of the woman.

Géraldine moved to the UAE in 2012 where she has found peace to work, exhibit and shape her own style.



*Crab.* Seaweed paper, acrylic, charcoal, 2015, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE



*Woman from the mangrove.* Wire weaving, wood, pearl, yellow rope, linen fibers, glue, sand, acrylic on fishing nests, 120x134x185cm, 2015, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE

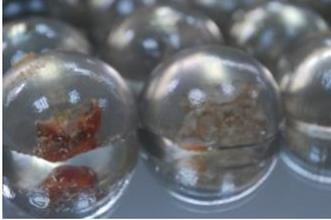
**Stephanie Neville**

Stephanie is interested in textile and installation art and presents a site-specific exploration of the mangroves while photo documenting the process to highlight its beauty and fragility. Expressing a feminine sensitivity, Stephanie explores mediums of embroidery, knitting, felting and soft sculpture. The process of documenting simulates a concern with memory, time, absence and loss.

Stephanie's site-installations mimic the emotions of nurturing and protecting by covering trees in knitted wool. This process is photo-documented. Photographs are transferred to cotton, and hand and machine stitched with thread. The stitching translates as caring for the environment, yet also expressing the fragility and eventual destruction by human hand. The resin cast 'water bubbles' encase fossilised objects from the mangroves, documenting the destruction and acting as a method of preserving. The technique of felting requires a lot of water and hand processing. The felted sculptures signify the human interaction needed to preserve the beauty and uniqueness of the mangroves landscape.

The South African artist (b. 1973) recently completed a BA in Visual Arts at the University of South Africa, winning the Excellence and Merit Awards at her graduation exhibition. A UAE resident since 1999, Stephanie has undertaken group and solo exhibitions across the country.

[www.stephanieneville.com](http://www.stephanieneville.com)

	
<p><i>Ashes.</i> Photo transfer and embroidery, 25 cm width, heights vary, 2015</p>	
	
<p><i>Bubbles.</i> Resin balls, found objects (fish/ crab bones/ shells/ seeds), sizes vary (approx 30x30 cm), 2015</p>	
	
<p><i>Capture.</i> Embroidery, thread, 30x30 cm, 2015</p>	<p><i>Roots.</i> Embroidery, thread, felted wool, sizes vary- 30x30 cm, 2015</p>

*(back cover)*



*I'll keep you safe.* Stephanie Neville, knitted wool, site specific installation, UAQ, 2015