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# Perspective

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*Max Lunn*

# New vision at the Sharjah Biennial

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*The fifteenth edition of the Sharjah Biennial in the UAE runs until 11 June 2023*

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## [EXCERPT]

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Biennials by their nature reflect the progressive politics of the art they commission and curate. The fifteenth edition of the Sharjah Biennial is no exception, addressing postcolonial themes from contemporary artists living across the Middle East, Africa, Asia and South America (the “global south”) as well as diasporic artists originally from those regions. Sharjah is generally considered to be the cultural capital of the UAE and it’s a sizeable show, bringing together over 150 artists from 70 countries and occupying eighteen venues across the entire emirate of Sharjah, which has land on both the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Many of the venues are historic buildings that have been thoughtfully repurposed as exhibition spaces. The Old Al Jubail Vegetable Market in Sharjah city and the Ice Factory in Kalba (an abandoned fish-feed mill and ice storage facility on the coast) are not only the most notable, but also show the strongest work.

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At the Old Al Jubail Vegetable Market a gentle, curving interior leads to individual traders’ booths that have been left untouched since the market’s closure, complete with vintage signs, bright murals and arched windows. While the individual works here vary in their concerns, all respond subtly to the site’s history. Mirna Bamieh’s *Sour Things* uses the study and exploration of fermentation’s rich micro-worlds as a metaphor for examining urban life, while the large neon sculptures of Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi’s *Efflorescence* represent the national flowers of contested regions such as Palestine. Reminiscent of commercial signs, they play on the irony of how delicate natural forms like plants are being simultaneously destroyed and exploited, as signifiers of national identity. ...