

أغريب إدراك

AGHRAB

IDRĀK

THRESHOLDS  
OF PERCEPTION



La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte

Eventi Collaterali

من التوجه إلى البندقية  
From Doha To Venice



مؤسسة قطر  
Qatar Foundation

vcuarts  
QATAR

أغرب إدراك | *Aghrab Idrāk: Thresholds of Perception* a Collateral Event presented by Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) at the 61st International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, explores perception as a relational and situated way of knowing. Structured as a sequence of spatial thresholds, the exhibition invites visitors to move through environments shaped by light, shadow, sound, movement, and material presence. Rather than centering spectacle, the works foreground subtle forms of experience – where meaning emerges through proximity, ambiguity, and sustained sensory attention.

The exhibition brings together projects from ten research labs within the Institute for Creative Research at VCUarts Qatar. Each lab contributes a distinct line of inquiry, forming a landscape of intersecting approaches rather than a single narrative. Together, the works reflect the Gulf region’s long histories of exchange and circulation across space and time, emphasizing plurality, mobility, and layered cultural memory.

Across the exhibition, material systems function as modes of sensing and inquiry. Light, sound, and movement are not illustrative elements but active agents in the production of knowledge. Visitors encounter research not as fixed conclusions, but as evolving propositions – experiential, negotiated, and emergent.

Lab-based research at VCUarts Qatar operates as a collective and situated practice. Projects develop through experimentation, dialogue, and shared authorship, remaining attentive to material, cultural, and social conditions. In this context, place is not a backdrop but an active condition shaping how understanding takes form.

Extending these concerns, the accompanying symposium, *Relational Ecologies: Perception, Mobility, and Collective Form*, provides a discursive platform that deepens the exhibition’s themes. Through conversations on perceptual, translocal, and collaborative ecologies, the symposium examines how creative research generates knowledge through connection – between bodies, histories, infrastructures, and environments.

# MAPPING MIGRATION MEMORIES



A multimedia installation that traces Qatar's historic journeys between desert and sea through sound, light, and oral histories, preserving intangible cultural practices and generational knowledge.

# BANDHANI ARABI: FROM THREAD TO WORD

A blend of South Asian textile traditions and Arabic calligraphy, that celebrates craft, language, and intercultural exchange across the Indian Ocean.





# OCEANS & LANDS: DRIFTING SENSES AND KNOWLEDGES

An immersive sound environment that reimagines histories of movement, culture, and connection between Asia and Africa.

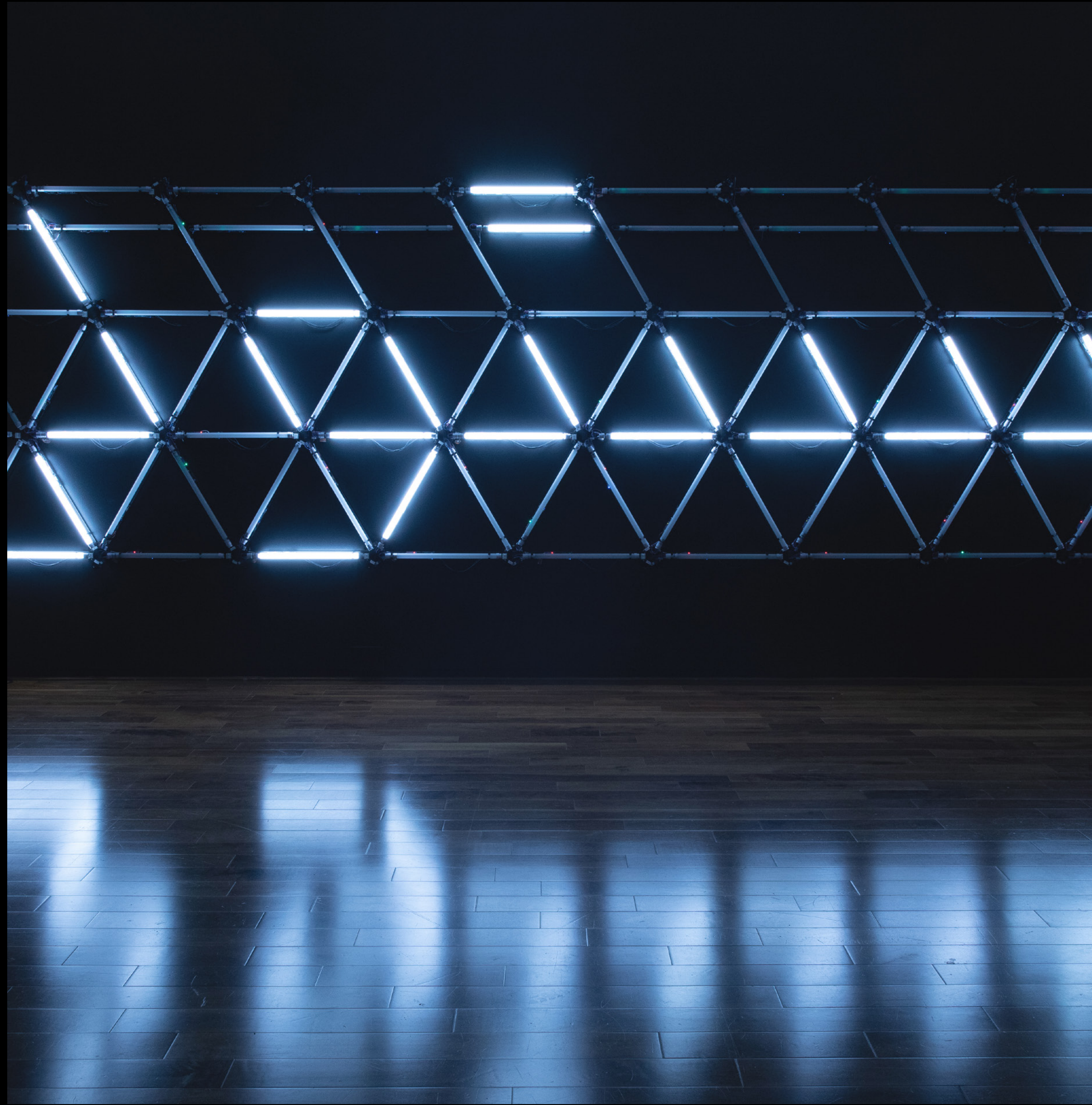
... AND I WAS  
LEFT BEHIND

... راحوا و خلوني

An intimate, large-scale film installation that reanimates personal memories of home, loss, and generational bonds between women.



# PRECEDING EMPTINESS



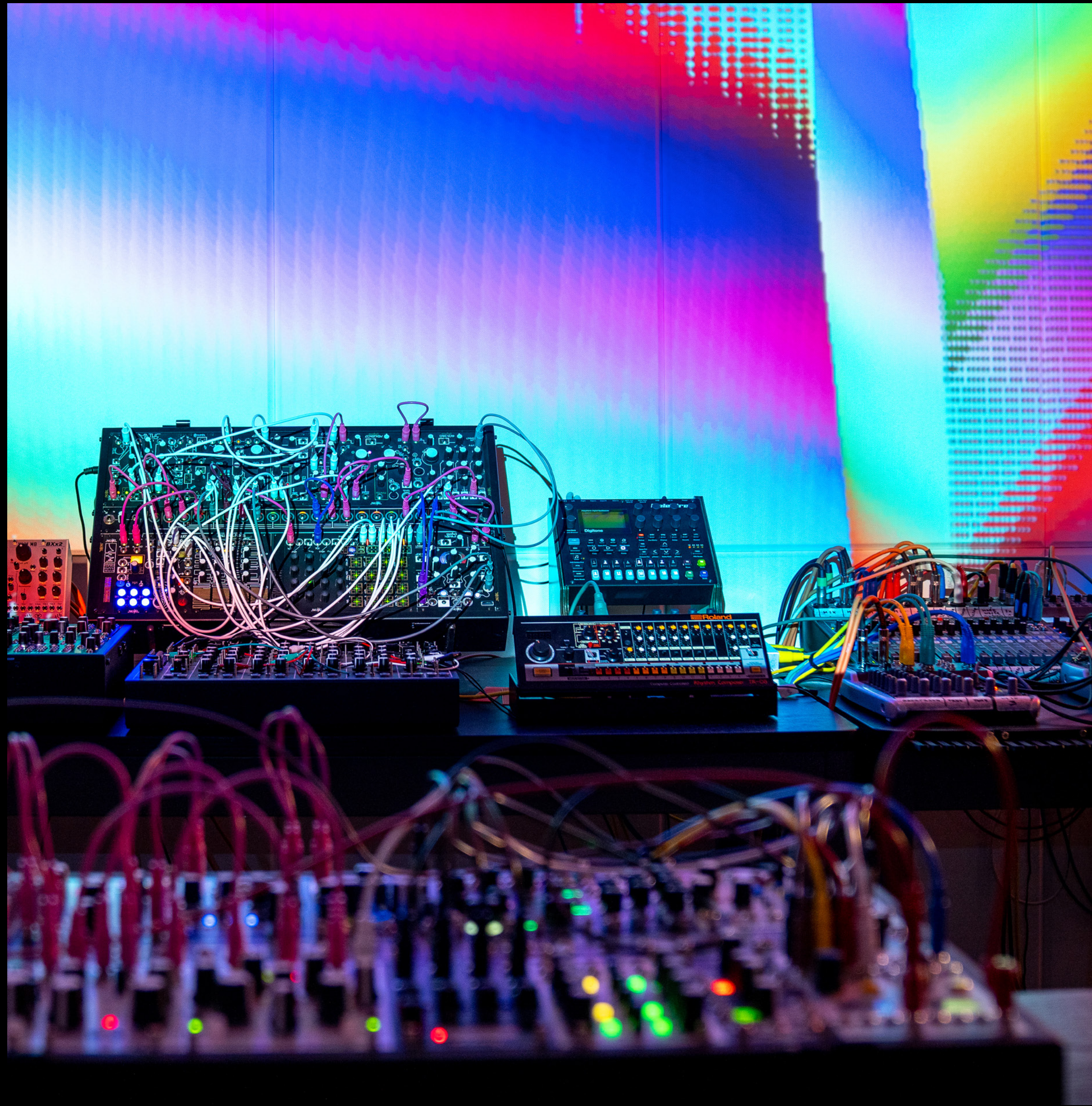
A kinetic light installation that explores the Arabic language as a living, evolving form that carries heritage into the future.

# THE GULF BETWEEN US

A photography zine and sculptural installation capturing everyday life and unheard stories from across the Arab Gulf.



# SONIC FIELDS



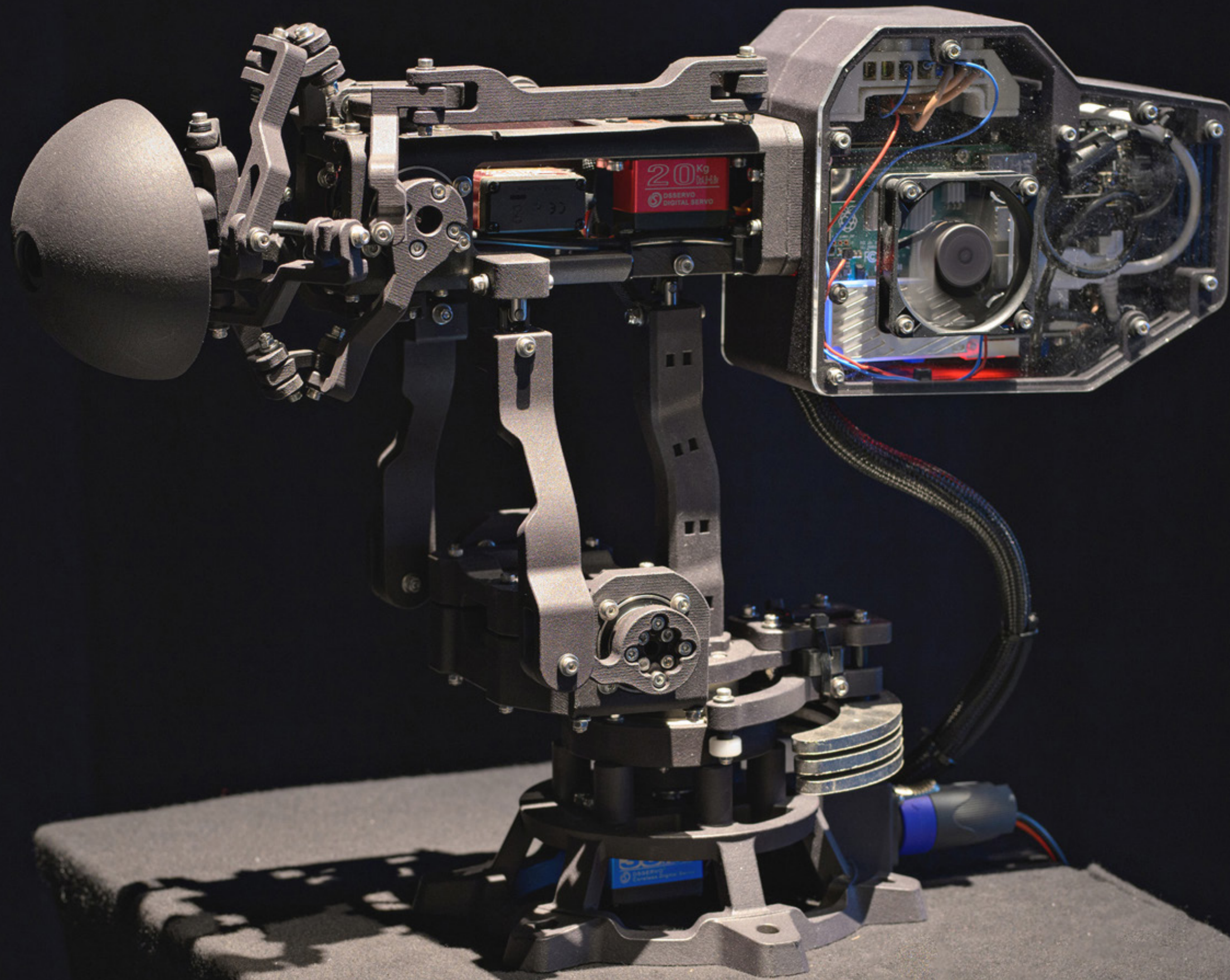
A sound installation that transforms the traditional majlis into a sonic lounge, inviting visitors into an ever-changing soundscape shaped by field recordings and generative audio.

# CHRYSALEIS

A kinetic air-cleaning sculpture that transforms fabric and structure into a beautiful “breathing” system.



# A MONOCULAR MONOLOGUE



An AI-powered, single-eyed robot that interacts with visitors to explore how people connect with machines.

# WHISPER FROM UNITED GEEKDOM

A series of video portraits celebrating Qatar's "geek" communities, challenging stereotypes and amplifying underrepresented voices.



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EXHIBITION DATES

June 1 – November 22, 2026

OPENING HOURS

Tuesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Mondays: Closed, except June 1, June 22, Sept. 7 and Nov. 16

INAUGURAL EVENT

June 22, 6 – 8 p.m.

LOCATION

Palazzo Cavanis at the Zattere

RELATIONAL  
ECOLOGIES:  
PERCEPTION,  
MOBILITY,  
AND COLLECTIVE  
FORM

SYMPOSIUM DATES

June 23 – 24, 2026

June 23:

1 – 4 p.m.

Biennale Sessions, Arsenale Educational Space, Venice

June 24:

10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

The Home of The Human Safety Net, Venice

## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

أغرب إدراك | *Aghrab Idrāk: Thresholds of Perception* offers a polyvalent chorus of voices, practices, and processes emerging from the Institute for Creative Research (ICR) at VCUarts Qatar. Inspired by Koyo Kouoh’s call to attend to “the other worlds that artists make – the intimate and convivial universes that refresh and sustain,” the exhibition emphasizes creative research not as solitary production, but as collective, embodied, relational inquiry. Here, research becomes gathering: assembling divergent disciplines, materials, stories, and sensibilities into experimental models of knowledge and action.

Installed within the historic rooms of Palazzo Cavanis at the Zattere, the exhibition unfolds through a series of encounters. Each space functions as a threshold – between light and shadow, sound and silence, past and future possibilities – as visitors progress through works spanning sound, film, robotics, immersive storytelling, textile arts, typography, ecology, ethnography, and nanotechnology. Each project stands independently while forming part of a dynamic, evolving sensory and material landscape.

The Arabic phrase *aghrab idrāk* (“strange knowledge” or “unusual perception”) originated in philosophical discourse between the ancient Greek and Arab worlds. Its use here invokes

those histories of exchange alongside contemporary explorations of meaning across horizons, embracing understandings in excess of certainty or subject-specificity. In this spirit, the exhibition advances models of knowledge grounded in hybridity, plurality, and responsiveness to context. Rooted in Qatar’s histories of migration, exchange, refuge, and rapid transformation, the works embody a research ethos shaped by local conditions while engaged in global dialogue.

Rather than presenting knowledge as conquest or definitive “truth,” *أغرب إدراك | Aghrab Idrāk: Thresholds of Perception* proposes research as contiguous, cohering, and interconnected. Exhibition-making becomes a site where diverse perspectives and phenomena converge, challenge, and sustain one another. Across these rooms, creative practice operates as ethical action – an ongoing negotiation of difference that transforms individual impressions into collective insight.

### CURATORS

Chase Westfall, Head of Gallery, VCUarts Qatar

Dr. Hesperia Iliadou, Director, The Museums & Exhibitions Study Society, Venice

# ABOUT US

Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts Qatar (VCUarts Qatar) is the international branch campus of Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, a top-ranked art and design school based in Richmond, Virginia. Established in 1998 through a partnership with Qatar Foundation, VCUarts Qatar offers a Bachelor of Arts in Art History, Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees and a Master of Fine Arts in Design.

Located in Education City in the heart of Doha, Qatar, the campus provides a research-driven environment where creative practice intersects with global perspectives, cultural dialogue and innovation. Through partnerships, exhibitions and public programs, VCUarts Qatar serves as a hub for contemporary art and design in the Middle East. To learn more, please visit: [qatar.vcu.edu](http://qatar.vcu.edu)



# ABOUT ICR

The VCUarts Qatar Institute for Creative Research (ICR), established in 2022, is the first institute in Qatar and the SWANA region dedicated to advancing discourse across creative domains. It brings together faculty researchers, students and alumni to contribute to local and global creative ecosystems through multidisciplinary research, scholarship and creative practice.

As disciplinary boundaries become increasingly porous, the ICR fosters critical making, creative inquiry and collaboration that generate meaningful societal impact. Faculty-led research labs pursue investigations across cultural production, material studies, visual cultures, heritage preservation and emerging technologies.

Through exhibitions, publications and international presentations – including at Ars Electronica (2023, 2024, 2025), 2025 London Design Biennale – the ICR advances cultural innovation while positioning Qatar within global creative discourse.

For any media inquiries, please contact Kathryn London-Penny,  
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