



la Biennale di Venezia

16. Mostra  
Internazionale  
di Architettura

Partecipazioni Nazionali

Pavilion of the Kingdom of Bahrain  
at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia

### **In Muharraq**

Commissioned by her Excellency Sheikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, Head of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, “In Muharraq” is the Kingdom of Bahrain’s National participation at the 17<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia. The curatorial team is composed of Noura Al Sayeh, architect, and Ghassan Chemali, architect and heritage consultant both based in Bahrain.

Located in the Arsenale (Artiglierie), the pavilion focuses on the unifying qualities of culturally-led regeneration processes, notably through the ongoing development initiatives in the historical core of Muharraq city. At the centre of these initiatives is the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy” (or “Pearling Path” in short) which embodies the legacy of Bahrain’s pearling era. Through the rehabilitation of the city’s architectural and urban heritage as well as the conservation of a beach and three oyster beds in the sea, the pearling narrative is being perpetuated while an economic development is being triggered, bringing together several social, environmental, cultural and functional aspects of the city. The process is incremental, continuously adapting itself to the challenges of a living city and reinventing it in continuity with its existing footprint and social practices. The exhibition presents both the results and the processes of making, through the presentation of models, objects, artifacts, drawings and conversations, showing the project in its current state. It explores the challenges in reviving the memory of “Pearling” as a binder between the physical makings of the city and its identity, and questions whether pearls, oysters, coral stones, cars and humans can sustainably cohabit today.

The pavilion consists of an artificial “plateau” on which the different objects are exposed, taking most of the space in the room, and leaving a narrow circumambulatory passage. It showcases fragment of the ingredients that compose the Muharraqi revival process, whether it involves single building projects or urban scale regeneration policies. These fragments include natural components such as oyster shells, mock-ups of new developments such as the public spaces designed by Office KGDVS and Bas Smets, architectural models such as the models of the multistorey car parks designed by Christian Kerez, original pieces extracted from the traditional Muharraqi architecture and working documents such as the ones related to an urban upgrade project, put together by Gulf House Engineering.

As the “Pearling Path” World Heritage Site revolves around a narrative- that of the foregone pearling economy- so does the pavilion, as its different components tell the chapters of the development’s “story”. While the pearling visitor centre, designed by Valerio Olgiati, highlights the role of the Site as a social binder providing an agora for the city; the Siyadi Pearl Museum, designed by Studio Anne Holtrop, turns the attention towards the history of craftsmanship and exchange of knowledge that Muharraq witnessed. Elsewhere, the exposé of heritage conservation approaches, made by Studio Gionata Rizzi through two models, puts the accent on the value of heritage as a new economic driver for the former pearling city.

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