

# TheNational

## This time of year is one for celebration

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**Nick Leech**

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Usually, my mornings start with the same ritual. They begin with a cool, gentle sniff on the elbow (courtesy of my dog), the sound of the early morning fajr prayer (courtesy of two local mosques and always slightly out-of-sync) and the start of a raucous dawn chorus (courtesy of the white-eared songbirds that gather in the local trees).

For the past two weeks, however, this routine has been thrown out of whack by my youngest daughter, whose excitement at her approaching birthday, which falls today, has produced an excitable early morning chorus all of its own.

“Daddy, wake up! It is five, dot dot, four, seven, dot dot, three two, dot dot and it is only one day until my birthday,” she told me yesterday, reading the time on my watch – which she has taken to wearing - without fully realising what the numbers mean. “Tomorrow, I will be six!”

Although her countdown has come with a fevered level of excitement that I can remember from my own childhood but no longer conjure, my daughter is not the only member of the household who has been operating on a countdown in recent weeks.

In eight days time, a major Hassan Sharif retrospective, curated by Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, will open at the Sharjah Art Foundation, cementing Sharif's reputation not only as the most important artist to have emerged from the UAE, but as an artist who should be considered on a par with internationally-recognised names such as Yoko Ono, Chris Burden and Nam June Paik.

Two days later, the Palestinian architects AAU Anastas will unveil their latest installation at Concrete in Dubai, *While We Wait*, a collaboration with London's V&A museum. Two days after that, the latest edition of Abu Dhabi Art will open at Manarat Al Saadiyat, directed by Dyala Nusseibeh and featuring an exhibition organised by the international uber-curator, Omar Kholeif.

On November 11, there is the small matter of the Louvre Abu Dhabi opening to the public, which will attract the world's attention and media, and if that wasn't enough, more than a dozen new exhibitions are opening at Warehouse421, Alserkal Avenue and DIFC.

Starting on November 13, Dubai Design Week will be graced with an appearance by the British architect Sir David Adjaye, who will no doubt be talking about his recent selection as the designer of London's new Holocaust memorial.

The event will also include a major new international conference, UAE Modern, that will focus on the country's modern built heritage. Meanwhile, Alserkal Avenue will witness the launch event of a new, grass roots architecture biennale, which is scheduled to take place in 2018.

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As Sharjah Art Foundation's new Hassan Sharif exhibition shows, the UAE is a place where contemporary culture has found a way to express itself ever since the country was founded, and it now appears to be blossoming, if not into the mainstream, then certainly beyond the narrower sphere of art and into the fields of architecture, fashion, graphics and 3-D design.

Despite this, events such as the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi continue to prompt comments about the country importing culture from elsewhere, as a recent and all too predictable conversation I had with a US-based journalist attested.

When I was asked whether the Louvre Abu Dhabi would be worth visiting, I listed some of the artists whose works will be on display: Picasso, Monet, Manet, Bellini, Gauguin and Leonardo da Vinci.

"They obviously went for the premium package:" the writer sneered.

Luckily, November's events provide the perfect response to such prejudice, created and curated as they are by Emiratis and long-term residents who not only care about this place and appreciate its potential, but also recognise the creative opportunity and achievement it already contains.

As my daughter knows, the coming month is a time for celebration, even if it does prove to be exhausting for her father. Happy birthday, darling.