

Formafantasma creates transitory scenography for Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale

Maghie Ghali

5–6 minutes

Despite the works of over 65 artists being on show together, the third edition of Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (until 2 May 2026) manages to make the works feel connected and part of a cohesive experience. With artists hailing from 37 nations and working across various mediums and styles, scenography is just as important as curatorial theming.

On show at Jax, Riyadh's vibrant former-industrial centre-turned cultural hub, the biennale is titled *In Interludes and Transitions*, led by co-artistic directors Nora Razian and Sabih Ahmed. The exhibition's scenography has been created by multi-award-winning [Milan](#)-based design studio [Formafantasma](#), who have reimagined Jax's industrial architecture as a weightless arrangement of colour and form.

In Interludes and Transitions: Formafantasma's exhibition design for Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale

As a nod to the theme – which unpacks topics of migration, transformation and alternate pathways – [Formafantasma's founders](#) Andrea Trimarchi and Simone Farresin have crafted a fluid composition of shifting planes and curved passages across the 12,900 square meters of exhibition halls, courtyards, and terraces.

'For *In Interludes and Transitions*, we approached exhibition design as a spatial condition rather than a backdrop,' Farresin tells [Wallpaper*](#). 'The main idea was porosity: avoiding rigid separations and instead creating a sequence of transitions between works. Rather than using conventional plasterboard walls, we worked with floating partitions made of textile stretched over simple wooden frames.'



Pacita Abad, *Asian Abstractions* (1983–92)

(Image credit: Courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, photo by Marco Cappelletti)

'These elements guide the visitor without imposing a fixed route or hierarchy. They hover in space, allowing visual and spatial continuity, and create moments of overlap rather than enclosure,' he adds. 'Colour was also central to the concept. We deliberately avoided white, which has become a default and often unexamined choice in contemporary exhibition making. Instead, we worked with subtle, calibrated tones that support the works without neutralising them, and that help define the atmosphere of the exhibition as a whole.'

Many of the artworks contain sonic elements, so the textile partitions soften the space acoustically and allow the works to maintain their integrity, rather than having audio track clashing together in the large hangers.

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Simone Farresin, Formafantasma



Front: Pio Abad, *Vanwa* (2023/2026). Background, on wall: Kamala Ibrahim Ishag, *Lady Grown in a Tree*, 2017

(Image credit: Courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, photo by Marco Cappelletti)

The modular structures – which reference the familiar construction of a painting canvas – create thresholds and rooms; screens and partial views, which encouraging a slower, more exploratory movement through the exhibition. Certain platforms extend into benches, allowing rest stops for contemplation of the artworks, and in some cases, activating the pieces themselves.

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'In this sense, the scenography acts as an interlude itself: a mediating layer that frames the encounter between the viewer and the artworks, without overwhelming it,' Farresin says 'It's fundamentally a mediation between the viewer and the work: an intellectual, spatial, and emotional encounter that shapes how an artwork is understood and experienced.'



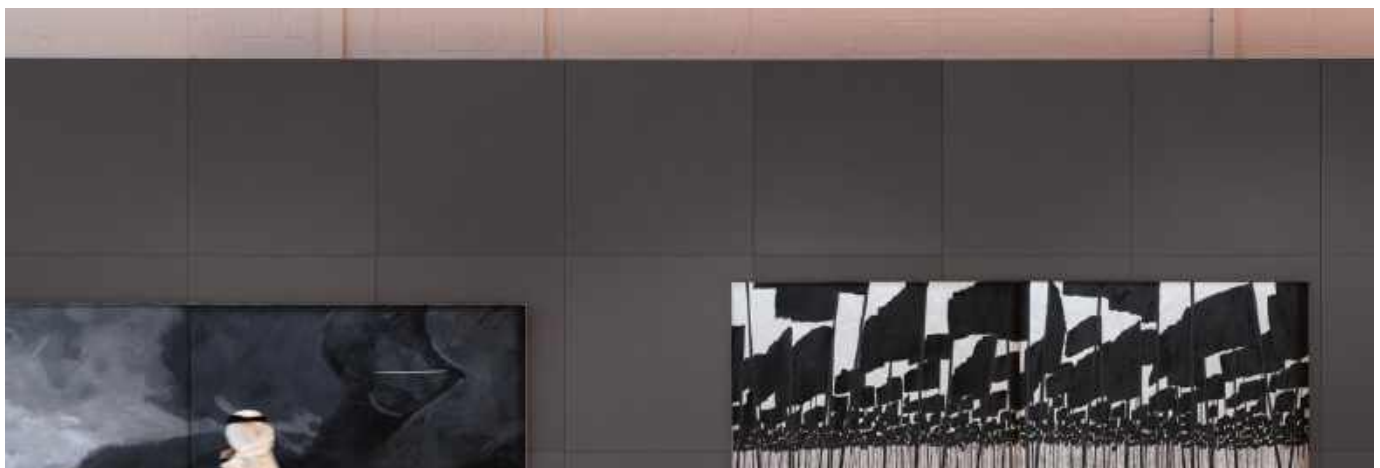
Installation view of Petrit Halilaj, *Very volcanic over this green feather* (2021)

(Image credit: Courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, photo by Marco Cappelletti)

'Good exhibition design is not neutral; it actively articulates ideas and provides a context in which meaning can unfold,' he concludes. 'We are interested in how spatial gestures become thinking gestures: how material choices, thresholds, platforms, and architectural presence can invite reflection. It roots art in reality.'

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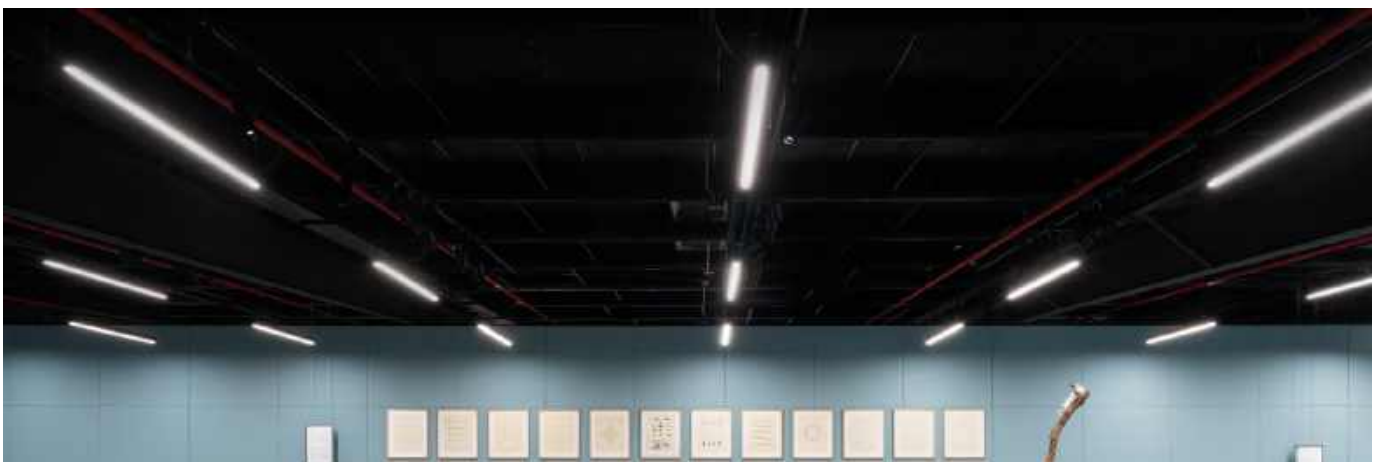


(Image credit: Courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, photo by Marco Cappelletti)



Trương Công Tùng, The State of Absence... Voices from Outside (2020–ongoing)

(Image credit: Courtesy of the Diriyah Biennale Foundation, photo by Marco Cappelletti)





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