



Press Release  
6 November 2014

### **Ruya Foundation announces Philippe Van Cauteren as Curator of the National Pavilion of Iraq for the 56th Venice Biennale**

Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq (Ruya) is delighted to announce the appointment of Philippe Van Cauteren as curator of the National Pavilion of Iraq for the 56th Venice Biennale in May 2015. The appointment follows the great success of *Welcome to Iraq*, which Ruya commissioned for the 55th edition of the Biennale in 2013.

Philippe Van Cauteren, artistic director of S.M.A.K. Museum for Contemporary Art in Ghent and who co-curated the Belgian Pavilion in 2013, has been appointed by Ruya to curate a pavilion that resonates with the rich scope of Iraqi identity extending beyond the country's fragile borders. Van Cauteren is currently in conversation with a range of artists from various disciplines and he will finalise his vision for the exhibition after a trip to Iraq, organised and facilitated by Ruya.

Van Cauteren's commitment to nurturing and empowering Iraqi artists also extends beyond the Biennale. He said, 'the Pavilion exhibition will constitute the beginning of a continued relationship with Ruya, working to enable a new generation of Iraqi artists to transcend their geography and prosper on a global scale.'

Chairman of Ruya Tamara Chalabi said, 'Philippe Van Cauteren is suitably positioned to explore Iraq's complicated terrain, having worked in diverse international contexts, as well as further enlarging S.M.A.K.'s artistic focus. At this very critical juncture in Iraq's existence, Ruya believes that the presence of a National Pavilion of Iraq at Venice will act as a crucial ambassador for the endurance of Iraqi contemporary culture.'

To coincide with the exhibition Ruya is producing a book in collaboration with Mousse Publishing.

Further details about the Pavilion and the artists involved will be announced in March 2015.

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## Notes to Editors:

### About Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq

Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq (Ruya) is an Iraqi-registered not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 2012 by Iraq art and culture enthusiasts with the aim of aiding and enriching culture in Iraq, and building cultural bridges with the world. Ruya's fundamental aim is to promote culture in Iraq – a mission with particular significance at a time when priorities are focused elsewhere – and to build a sustainable platform that will enable Iraqis in the arts, the young in particular, to benefit from and participate in international events. Please visit [www.ruyafoundation.org](http://www.ruyafoundation.org) for further details on Ruya's wide range of projects.

Concurrent with its ongoing support of local projects, Ruya's focus rests on creating a network of intercultural events by which it can contribute to the development of civil society in Iraq and continue to nurture a multicultural dialogue through the arts. Ruya's unique network of artists includes those working both within Iraq and outside of it, spanning all disciplines in the visual, performing and literary arts. This network provides an incomparable overview of Iraq's contemporary culture and allows cultural organisations to view and engage with this culture through the foundation. Collaborating worldwide, Ruya works with institutions to create regular and meaningful opportunities for Iraqi artists, including residencies and exhibitions.

### About Philippe Van Cauteren

Philippe Van Cauteren is artistic director of S.M.A.K. (Museum for Contemporary Art) in Ghent, Belgium. Since 2004 he has been leading the museum through new developments that will allow it to meet the needs and requirements of a contemporary art museum. Under his guidance the exhibition programme has mainly concentrated on major monographical exhibitions: Lois Weinberger (2006), Kendell Geers (2007), Paul McCarthy (2008), Mark Manders (2009), Dara Birnbaum (2009), Koen van den Broek (2010), Jorge Macchi (2011), Nedko Solakov (2012), Joachim Koester (2012), Maria Nordman (2013), Javier Tellez (2013), Richard Jackson (2014) and Thomas Ruff (2014). At the 55th edition of the Venice Biennale, he was co-curator of the Pavilion of Belgium exhibition *Kreupelbout – Cripplewood* by Berlinde De Bruyckere, who currently has a retrospective in S.M.A.K. Van Cauteren's particular interest in art in the public sphere was exemplified by the international exhibition TRACK (2012) in Ghent, which was co-curated with Mirjam Varadinis (curator at Kunsthaus, Zürich). Before joining S.M.A.K. Van Cauteren worked as a freelance curator and publicist in Germany, Mexico, Chile and Brazil. He was the curator of the first Biennial Ceara America in Fortaleza, Brazil in 2002. He regularly writes and lectures on contemporary art.

Curator: Philippe Van Cauteren, Director, S.M.A.K.

Commissioner: Ruya Foundation for Contemporary Culture in Iraq

Local commissioner: Vittorio Urbani, Nuova Icona

The 56th Venice Biennale will run 9 May – 22 November 2015 with previews Tuesday 5 May – Friday 8 May 2015. The exhibition will travel to S.M.A.K. in Spring 2016.

[www.theiraqpavilion.com](http://www.theiraqpavilion.com)

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634