



Press Release
20 June 2016

Ruya Foundation announces Tamara Chalabi and Paolo Colombo as Co-curators of the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 57th Venice Biennale

The Ruya Foundation is pleased to announce that Tamara Chalabi, Chair and Co-founder of Ruya, and Paolo Colombo, Art Adviser at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, will co-curate the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 57th Venice Biennale, 13 May – 26 November 2017.

The exhibition, 'Archaic', will explore the duality and tension in the concept of the archaic, which represents both the idea of a fundamental source, which is antique and steeped in history, as well as the idea of something outdated and no longer in use. The exhibition will refer to this dual understanding of the landscape of Iraq, where 'archaic' can simultaneously describe an ancient cultural and geographical heritage and a fragile contemporary political entity.

The exhibition is the product of over two years of dialogue between Chalabi and Colombo and will feature ancient artefacts from the region alongside works of Iraqi Modernism and new commissions by Iraqi artists living both in Iraq and elsewhere.

'Archaic' will be the third occasion on which the Ruya Foundation has commissioned the Iraq Pavilion at Venice. It follows the critical success of 'Invisible Beauty', which Ruya commissioned for the 56th edition of the Biennale in 2015 and is currently on display at S.M.A.K (Museum for Contemporary Art) in Ghent, Belgium.

Tamara Chalabi said:

'Archaic' is an exciting concept which will allow us to explore the complex and contradictory elements in representing Iraq visually on an international scale.

Paolo Colombo said:

'Archaic' presents a wonderful opportunity to juxtapose works by contemporary artists with rich, deep and layered historical artefacts that are at the origin of western civilization.

Further details about the Pavilion and the artists involved will be announced at a later date.

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Notes to Editors

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The 57th Venice Biennale will run 13 May – 26 November 2017 with previews Thursday 10 May – Friday 12 May 2017.

About Ruya Foundation

The Ruya Foundation is an Iraqi registered non-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 2012 with the aim of aiding and enriching culture in Iraq, and building cultural bridges with the world. Ruya's initial goal is to promote culture in Iraq at a time when priorities are focused elsewhere, and to build a platform that will enable Iraqis in the arts, the young in particular, to benefit from, and participate in international events. In addition to supporting local projects, its aim is to create a network of intercultural events that can contribute to the development of civil society in Iraq. It is also committed to nurturing a multicultural dialogue through the arts.

Ruya initiates and commissions creative projects in the visual, audio visual and performing arts. Ruya was the commissioner of the National Pavilion of Iraq for the 56th and 55th Venice Biennales in May 2013 and May 2015. Ruya collaborated with international artist Ai Weiwei on a major publication *Traces of Survival: Drawings by refugees in Iraq selected by Ai Weiwei* (2015). In March 2015 Ruya launched the first drama therapy project in Baghdad, supported by the Prince Claus Fund. In April 2016 Ruya launched the first publically accessible online database of contemporary Iraqi artists. In addition, the Ruya website is a live platform for Iraqi art. Interviews with emerging and established artists both in Iraq and those based in the diaspora are published regularly to encourage dialogue, the exchange of ideas and promote the possibility of collaboration.

www.ruyafoundation.org

About Tamara Chalabi

Tamara Chalabi was born in Beirut to Lebanese and Iraqi parents. She studied at Cambridge and later at Harvard where she earned a PhD in History and the Middle East. She specialises in contemporary Middle Eastern art and culture.

Her first book *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: 1918-1943* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) was a pioneering study of politics and culture at a crucial period of change in Lebanon. *Late for Tea at the Deer Palace; the Lost Dreams of my Iraqi Family* (HarperCollins, 2010) uncovered the lives of four generations of Chalabi's family at the forefront of Iraqi political life and was praised in *The New York Times* as 'a work of exile literature, beautifully written, rich with human detail as only personal family histories can be.' Chalabi has also written for publications including *The Sunday Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Prospect* and *Condé Nast Traveler*.

In 2012, Chalabi co-founded the Ruya Foundation with Shwan Taha and Reem Shather-Kubba. As Chair of Ruya, Chalabi steers the Foundation's main programme and she was closely involved with the mounting of the last two Iraq pavilions at the Venice Biennale. She co-wrote and co-edited the catalogues for the Iraq Pavilion in 2013 and 2015 and also edited Ruya publication *Traces of Survival: Drawings by refugees in Iraq selected by Ai Weiwei* (2015).

About Paolo Colombo

Paolo Colombo has been Art Advisor at the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art since 2008 and during this time he has also been a curator for the 2nd Mardin Biennial in 2012 and

the 3rd Thessaloniki Biennale in 2011. From 2001 to 2007, Colombo was Curator of the Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo (MAXXI) in Rome. Before that he was Director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva for over 10 years and in 1999 he curated the 6th Istanbul Biennial.

Colombo has worked on exhibitions including 'Ed Ruscha MixMaster' at Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin (2015); 'In Praise of Shadows' at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, which toured to the Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey and the Benaki Museum, Athens (2009), and 'Francis Alÿs' at MAXXI, Rome (2003). Notable exhibitions curated during his tenure at the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva include 'Kara Walker' (2000), 'Ugo Rondinone: I don't live here anymore' (1996) and 'Pipilotti Rist: Shooting Divas' (1996).

Colombo was Associate Producer for the award-winning films *The Edge of Heaven* (2007) and *Soul Kitchen* (2009).