

Assembled Identities

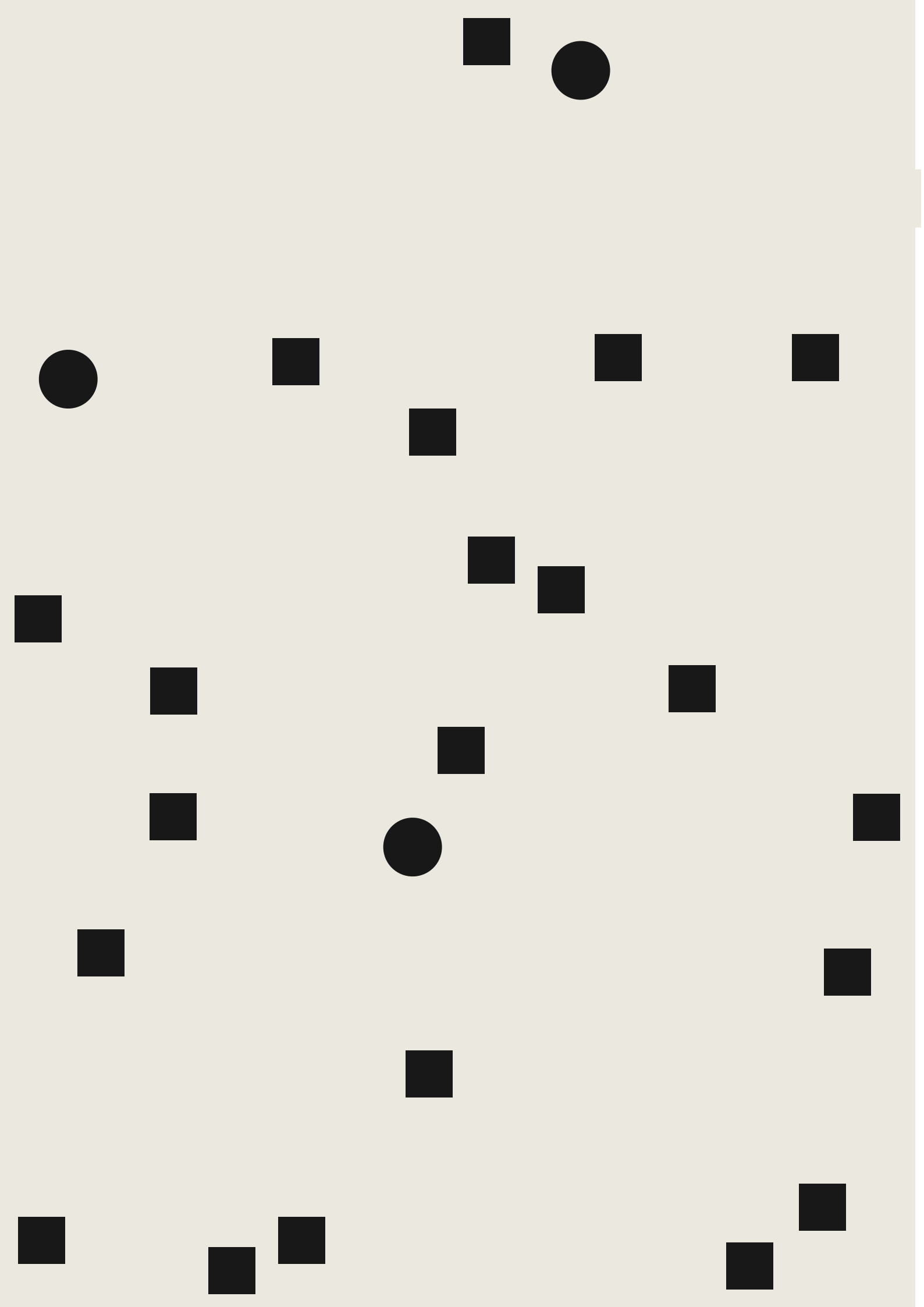
Variation Within Systems

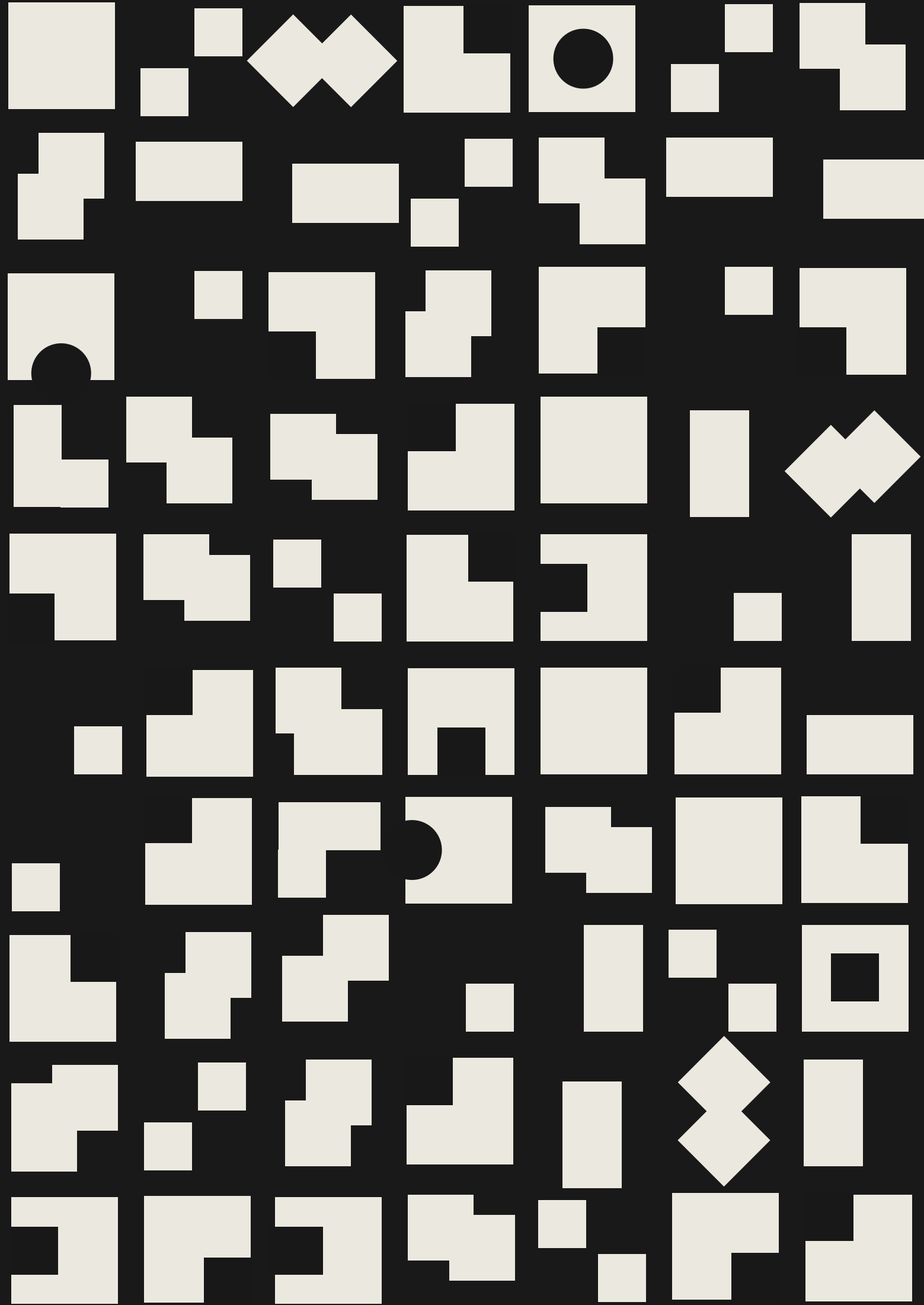
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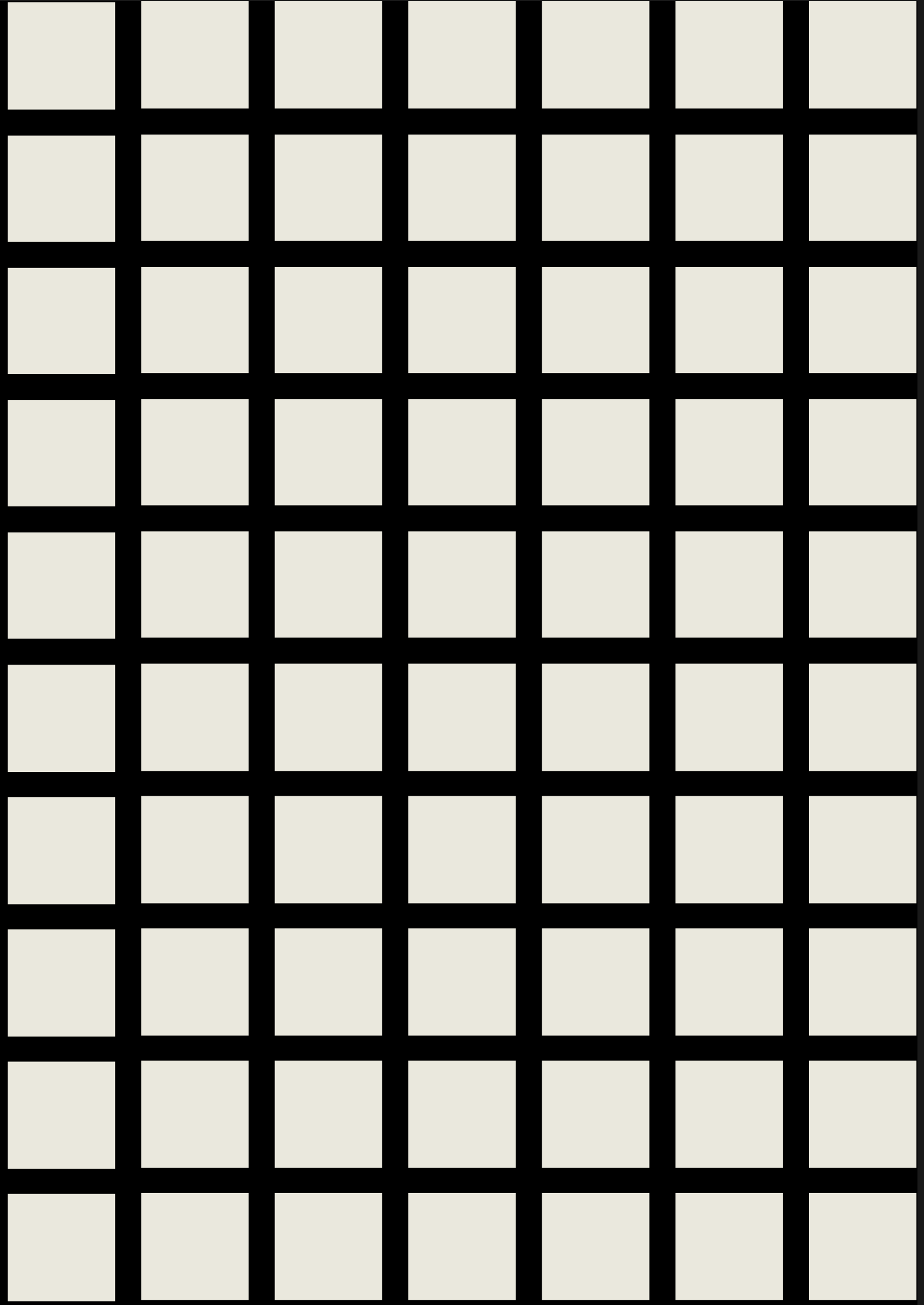
PHASE 2- Curatorial Development
المرحلة الثانية – التطوير القيّم

The National Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates 2027
20th International Architecture Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia

الجناح الوطني لدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة 2027
المعرض الدولي العشريون للعمارة في بينالي البندقية







Assembled Identities

Variation Within Systems

01 — Executive Abstract

Assembled Identities investigates how domestic identity in the United Arab Emirates is produced through housing systems rather than symbolic architectural forms.

The project focuses on how standards, repetition, and curated choice shape the planning, inhabitation, and long-term adaptation of homes.

The pavilion re-frames the real estate showroom as an exhibition interface. In a space familiar to decision-making yet deliberately unresolved, the visitor encounters fragments, rules, and constraints rather than a finished home. Domestic configurations are assembled by navigating a limited set of options, where each decision produces a consequence. Through this process, the exhibition makes visible how identity forms within systems that often appear neutral.

The project draws on housing production in the United Arab Emirates since the country's formation, with an emphasis on developer-led, commercially driven housing systems and their standardized spatial frameworks.

These models were gradually transformed through use, modification, and adaptation. Identity did not precede construction; it accumulated over time through habitation, climate response, economic conditions, and everyday spatial negotiation.

Assembled Identities does not propose a housing model or technological solution. It offers a curatorial method for understanding how domestic identity is assembled through choice, repetition, and constraint.

Presented in Venice, the pavilion positions the UAE as a specific case through which broader housing systems can be examined, without representation or spectacle.

02 — Curatorial Concept & Objectives

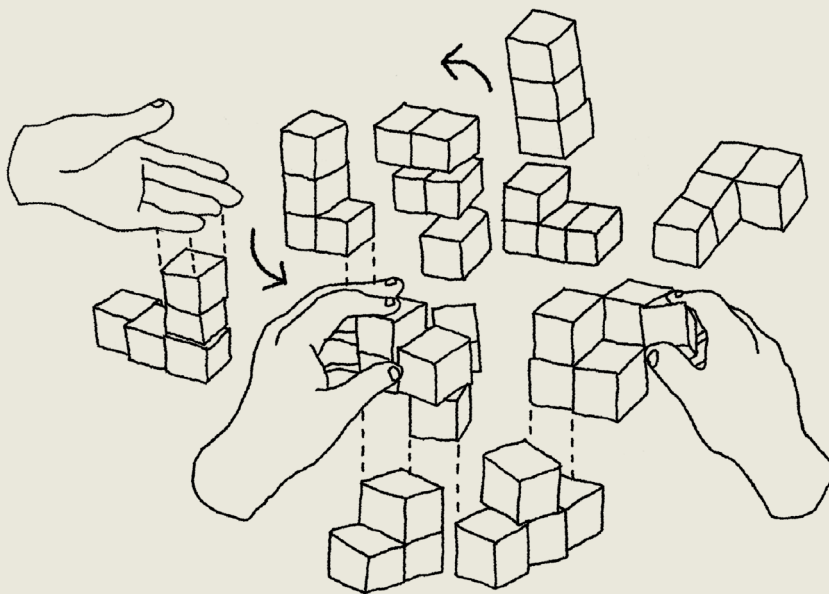
Housing in the United Arab Emirates is encountered primarily as a system. Plans repeat. Typologies standardize. Options are curated. Identity forms over time through inhabitation and change.

Assembled Identities takes this condition as its subject. The project treats identity as an outcome of systems that organize how homes are produced and lived in. These systems define what can be chosen, what can be modified, and what must remain fixed.

The pavilion adopts the real estate showroom as its curatorial framework, not as a metaphor, but as an operational structure grounded in everyday spatial decision-making.

The primary objective of the pavilion is to make these systems visible and legible. **Rather than presenting architecture as a finished object, the exhibition frames architecture as a process of assembly.** Visitors engage with constraint, repetition, and limited choice as the conditions through which domestic identity is produced.

The pavilion asks how domestic identity emerges when individual choice is exercised within standardized housing systems over time.



System logic showing fixed rules and limited choices. Illustration by Sarah Aladayleh, (2026).

03 — Research Framework & Context

The project is grounded in the history of housing production in the United Arab Emirates. However, it does not focus on vernacular domestic life or privacy-led readings of the home.

Since the 1970s, multiple housing systems have developed in parallel. Government housing formed one strand. Developer-led and commercially driven housing systems, particularly for expat and diverse populations, played a significant role in establishing standardized spatial models. These systems emphasized efficiency, repetition, and market logic.

Over time, residents modified these environments through extensions, internal changes, and spatial adjustments. These transformations responded to climate and economy. They were pragmatic rather than symbolic. Identity emerged through use rather than design intent.

The research framework combines:

- **Archival study of UAE housing typologies**
- **Analysis of developer-led and commercial housing systems.**
- **Spatial interface design as a curatorial method.**
- **Visitor participation is a research instrument that records outcomes under identical constraints.**

This framework positions identity as something assembled gradually within systems rather than expressed through fixed architectural language.

04 — Pavilion Experience & Visitor Journey

The pavilion operates as an interactive environment structured around a clear and repeatable sequence of engagement.

Orientation

The visitor enters a space organized at the scale and logic of a real estate showroom. Familiarity establishes orientation. The absence of a resolved house establishes the project's position.

Assembly

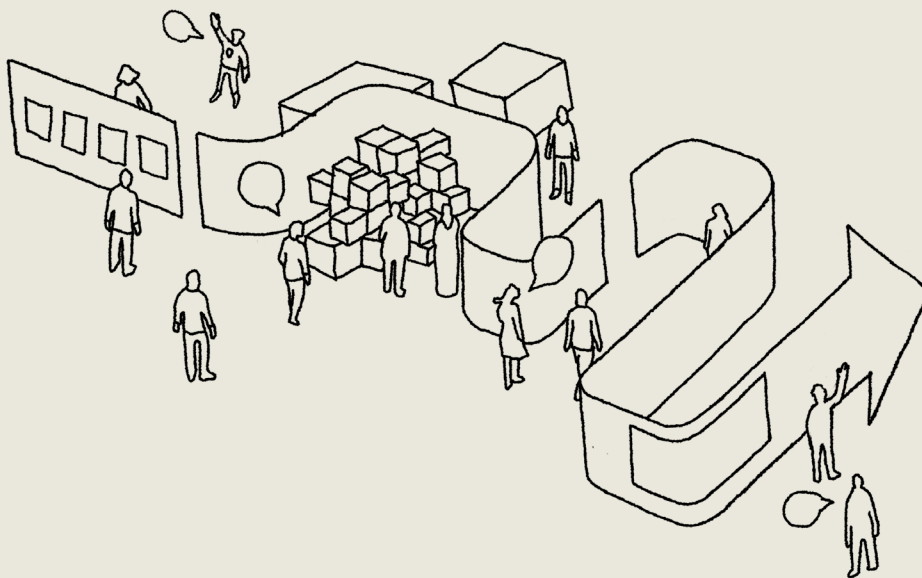
The visitor engages with a limited kit of domestic components governed by explicit rules. The visitor selects, combines, and adjusts elements within predefined constraints. The system responds. Outcomes are recorded.

Accumulation

As more visitors participate, individual configurations aggregate into a collective spatial record. The pavilion becomes an archive of 'assembled identities', revealing variation within uniform systems.

Reflection

Visitors exit with an understanding of how domestic identity is shaped by repetition, adaptation, and restriction. The exhibition does not ask visitors to design an ideal home. Rather, it asks visitors to recognize how systems shape what is possible.



Each visitor configuration is recorded as part of a growing spatial archive, allowing patterns of preference and variation to be observed over the exhibition period. This archive enables comparison across identical constraints rather than individual expression.

Visitor journey structured as a repeatable sequence.. Illustration by Sarah Aladayleh, (2026).

05 — Position Within The Venice Architecture Biennale

The Venice Architecture Biennale provides a context in which architectural systems from different regions can be examined side by side. **Assembled Identities** positions the UAE as a case through which global housing logics become legible.

The pavilion does not present the UAE as an exception or model. It presents it as a lens for examining questions of standardization, choice, and identity comparatively. Venice becomes a site of encounter rather than representation. The system remains constant while the interpretive layer can shift in response to the Biennale's announced theme, without altering the project's core logic.

06 — Scope & Limitations

Assembled Identities is an exhibition, not a housing proposal.

It does not offer a prototype or solution.

It does not argue policy or ownership.

It does not promote technology as an end in itself.

The pavilion reveals systems through which interpretation emerges.

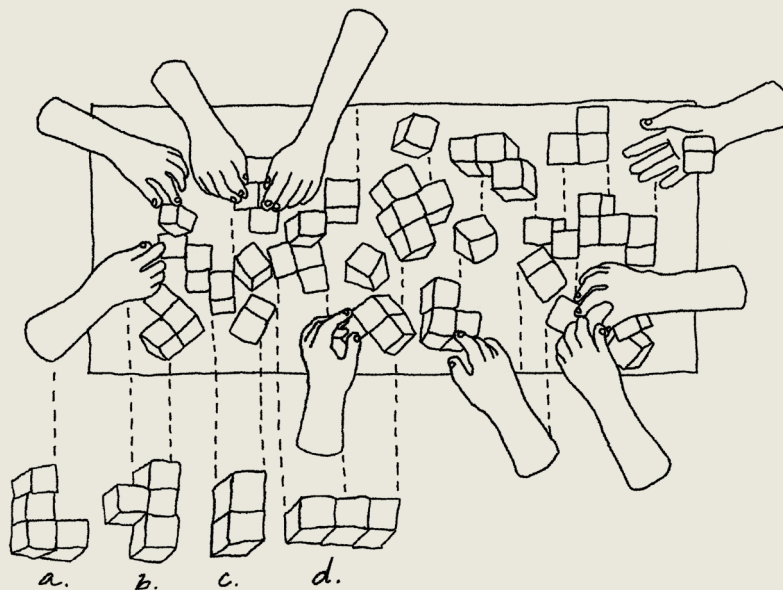
07 —Alignment with NPUAE Legacy

The project aligns with the research-driven trajectory of the National Pavilion UAE, which has consistently used the Biennale as a platform for architectural inquiry rather than representation.

Assembled Identities extends this lineage by focusing on the invisible structures that organize everyday domestic life. It shifts attention from architectural form to architectural operation.

Defining Statement

Assembled Identities reveals how domestic identity in the United Arab Emirates is assembled through systems of choice, repetition, and constraint.



Accumulation of configurations under identical constraints. Illustration by Sarah Aladayleh, (2026).

08 — Deliverables, Timeline & Budget

Project Scope and Deliverables

Assembled Identities will be realized as a curated exhibition for the National Pavilion UAE at the 20th International Architecture Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia.

The project brings together curatorial research, exhibition design, and public engagement, with research serving as a supporting framework that informs the exhibition rather than an end in itself.

The core deliverables include:

A site-specific exhibition for the UAE National Pavilion in Venice

An interactive spatial installation structured as a housing showroom interface

A visitor-generated archive documenting assembled outcomes over the duration of the Biennale

Public programming including talks, conversations, and workshops

An exhibition publication documenting the project's framework, process, and outcomes

A digital archive capturing visitor interactions and assembled configurations

Together, these components position the pavilion as both an exhibition and a live curatorial mechanism through which questions of identity, standardization, and choice are explored.

Indicative Project Timeline

The project will be developed and delivered according to the following indicative timeline, allowing flexibility to respond to the overarching Biennale theme once announced.

Key milestones are outlined here, with detailed monthly scheduling to be finalized during the development phase in coordination with the Biennale calendar.

Q2 2026

- Finalization of curatorial framework
- Alignment with Biennale theme
- Initial exhibition design development

Q3 2026

- Content development and case study refinement
- Exhibition prototyping and interface testing
- Graphic and visual identity development

Q4 2026

- Final exhibition design and coordination
- Fabrication preparation
- Publication content development

Q1 2027

- Fabrication and assembly
- Shipping and logistics coordination
- Pavilion installation in Venice

May–November 2027

- Exhibition open to the public
- Ongoing visitor participation and archive accumulation
- Public programs and events

Post-Biennale

- Publication release
- Dissemination through talks, lectures, and presentations in the UAE and internationally

Indicative Budget Overview

The project will be delivered within the allocated maximum budget of **USD 350,000**, distributed across the following:

- Curatorial Fees: USD 45,000
- Research and Content Development: USD 35,000
- Exhibition Design and Prototyping: USD 60,000
- Fabrication and Materials: USD 90,000
- Graphic Design and Visual Content: USD 30,000
- Digital Interface and Archive System: USD 25,000
- Shipping, Installation, Dismantle: USD 30,000
- Publication Design and Printing: USD 20,000
- Travel and Accommodation: USD 10,000
- Contingency (approx. 5%): USD 5,000

Total: USD 350,000*

*This budget reflects a balanced allocation across curatorial development, exhibition realization, and public engagement. It ensures the project's conceptual ambitions are matched by practical deliverability.

09 — Team



Curator + Publication Editor

Riyad Joucka is an architect and researcher based in Dubai. He is the founder of MEAN* (Middle East Architecture Network), a design practice that integrates emerging technologies with the cultural and environmental narratives of the places in which it operates.

Alongside leading MEAN*, Joucka is the inaugural Research Fellow in Practice at the Zayed Institute for Architecture, Heritage and Arts at Zayed University, Dubai. His research, *The Adaptive Majlis*, explores this unique typology's evolution through technology, modular design, vernacular intelligence, and material innovation.

His work expands the boundaries of how we build, envisioning architecture that is both technologically forward and culturally grounded. From small-scale objects to landmark proposals, his projects have been exhibited and published internationally. At the heart of his approach lies a belief that architecture should be accessible, expressive, and connected to place, whether designing a pavilion, a home, or an entire neighborhood.

Joucka holds a Master of Architecture with distinction from the Emergent Technologies and Design (EmTech) program at the AA Architectural Association School of Architecture in London

Exhibition Design

MEAN* (Middle East Architecture Network) is an experimental architecture practice working at the intersection of emergent technologies and cultural production.

Founded in 2016, MEAN* has pursued a body of work that spans pavilions, public buildings, interiors, retail environments, and experimental products. Across these scales, the practice seeks to articulate a contemporary architectural language for the Middle East, one that draws from the specificity of place while remaining in dialogue with global avant-garde discourse.

Central to MEAN*'s methodology is a commitment to computation, material research, and digital fabrication as tools for rethinking how architecture is conceived and built. Rather than treating technology as an aesthetic end in itself, MEAN* uses it as a means to address urgent questions of climate, economy, and society.

The work is internationally recognized for its innovation in material and fabrication, and for positioning architecture as both a speculative pursuit and a practical craft.

MEAN* seeks to create architecture that is visionary yet grounded, preserving the memory and ecology of its context while projecting confidently toward a global future.

MEAN* www.m-e-a-n.design



Graphic, Publication Design + Art Direction

Clara Sancho's eponymous studio is a Madrid-based design practice specializing in arts and culture projects across Spain and the Arab world. The studio offers expertise in visual communication, publication design, typography, and exhibition graphics, working seamlessly across Latin and Arabic scripts.

Recent projects include the visual identity for Design Space AIUla, a new cultural hub in AIUla, Saudi Arabia, and its inaugural exhibition Mawrid: Celebrating Inspired Design (2024).

Trained in Spain, Finland, and the UK, Clara specialized in Book Design at the University of Reading. Over her 20-year career, she has collaborated with OMB Design, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Mind the Gap (Beirut), and GSM Dubai. She is available for international collaborations and open to fieldwork in support of cultural initiatives worldwide.

Clara Sancho Studio: www.clarasancho.com



Type Designer + Arabic Typography Expert

Pascal Zoghbi is a Lebanese designer and educator with a Master of Design in Type & Media from KABK.

He founded 29Letters Type Foundry in 2013. Building on a cross-cultural approach, he has developed an outstanding collection of contemporary multi-script typefaces. Having moved to Madrid in 2018, he expanded 29LT's focus on Arabic and Latin scripts to embrace a global multi-script approach that taps into other world scripts.

Zoghbi taught for ten years at various design schools in Lebanon and in the UAE. Internationally renowned, he has received prestigious design awards, such as TDC, Granshan, AIGA, and was nominated for Jameel Prize 3. He also co-authored and edited the "Arabic Graffiti" book.

29LT: www.29lt.com



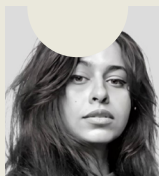
Photographer

Hussain Al Moosawi is an Emirati designer, photographer and storyteller who is actively documenting the UAE's urban identity. After obtaining his Higher Diploma in applied media, he went to Australia in 2004 to study, work and live for 8 years, where he obtained his BA and MA in communication design.

Returning to the UAE in 2013, he served as an infographic artist for The National, and content creator and art director for various brands at Abu Dhabi Media.

His ongoing project "Facade to Facade" is creating a comprehensive visual classification system of buildings from all around the UAE, to better shape our understanding of the country's heterogeneous architectural identity. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief of National Geographic AlArabiya Magazine.

Hugraphic: www.hugraphic.ae



Illustrator

Sarah Aladayleh is a Jordanian architect and illustrator based between London and Dubai. She is a Design Lead at Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) in London, leading large-scale urban and architectural projects across the Middle East and the UK.

Her research-based illustrations draw on the aesthetics and histories of technical manuals, how-to-guides, and other systems of architectural drawings.

She subverts these conventional representations by weaving satire commentary, collective memories and emergent forms of storytelling. Sarah's work has been commissioned and published internationally, including by the Institut du Monde Arabe in France, Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah Art Foundation.

Sarah Aladayleh: www.sarahaladayleh.com

10 — Publication



Co-Editor

Adina Hempel is an architect, urban researcher, and Associate Professor at Zayed University, where she leads the Zayed Institute for Architecture, Arts, and Heritage, studying arid and desert culture in the region.

Adina's research investigates the socio-cultural and contextual influences on architecture, focusing on the evolution of the built environment in the Arabian Peninsula.

Adina is a member of the Technical Committee for Modern Heritage of the UAE. She has served as Head of Research for GSMproject on the Shindagha Museum in Dubai, and in 2014, was part of the curatorial team for the 1st National Pavilion of the UAE at the 14th International Architecture Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia.

Adina Hempel graduated with distinction from the Technical University of Dresden, trained in Urban Studies at Columbia University in New York, and is currently completing her PhD dissertation on the role of 'The Majlis: A Space for Mediation'.

Zayed University: www.zu.ac.ae



Co-Editor

Basem Mohamed is a designer, researcher, and educator whose work explores computational design and fabrication in housing. He earned his PhD from McGill University's School of Architecture, where he developed a digital platform for mass customization of prefabricated housing systems.

His research focuses on design processes and digital tools that rethink housing production through technology and cultural context. Basem has collaborated with leading prefabrication companies in Quebec and housing authorities in Abu Dhabi to develop new design protocols addressing local needs. His work has been published in ARCC, MCPC, and Open House International, among others.

With over fifteen years of teaching experience across Egypt, Canada, and the UAE. He currently serves as Associate Professor at Zayed University's College of Arts and Creative Enterprises, where he teaches design studios, furniture design, and digital modeling, integrating computation and making in architectural education.

code_lab : www.instagram.com/code_lab/



Contributor

Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi is an Emirati columnist and researcher on social, political and cultural affairs in the Arab Gulf States. He is also the founder of the Barjeel Art Foundation, an independent initiative established in 2010 to contribute to the intellectual development of the art scene in the Arab region.

He has taught 'Politics of Modern Middle Eastern Art' at New York University, Yale University, Georgetown University, Boston College, The American University of Paris, Brandeis University, Harvard Kennedy School, Columbia University and Bard College Berlin.

In 2023, Sultan completed a Fellowship at Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and in 2024, Sultan was a Research Associate at SOAS Middle East Institute, London. Sultan is currently an Instructor at the American University of Sharjah.

Barjeel: www.barjeelartfoundation.org

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