

# Vikram Divecha

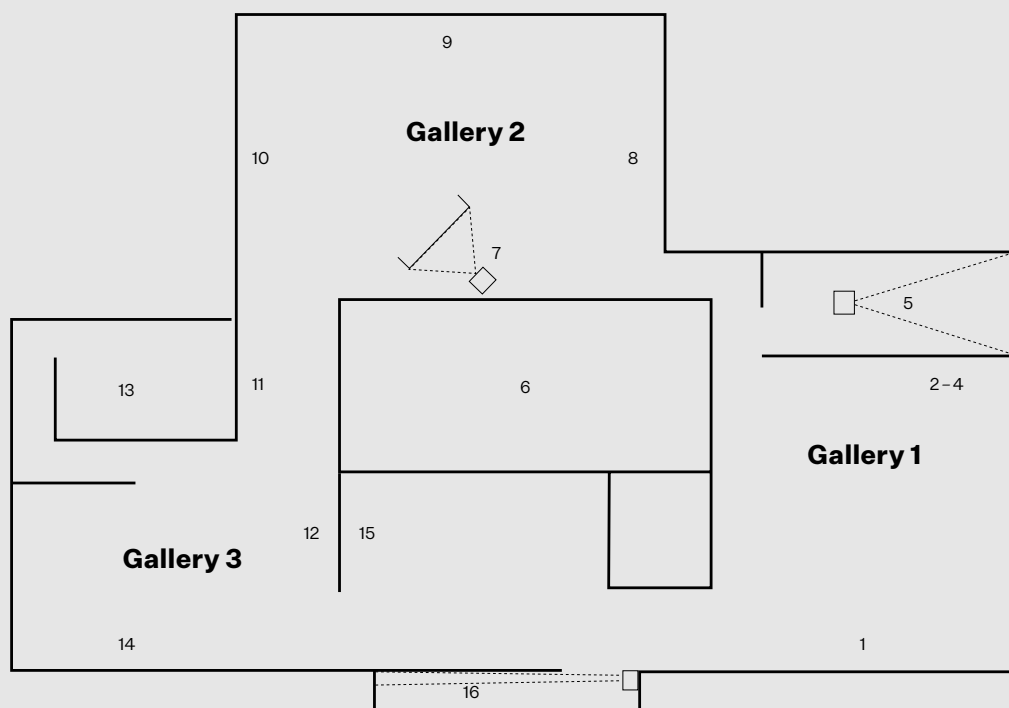
## Short Circuits

February 01 – June 16, 2024

**Exhibition guide**

# Vikram Divecha

## Short Circuits



### Gallery 1

- 1 Portrait Sessions, 2016
- 2 Gardeners' Projects, 2024
- 3 Gardeners' Sketchbooks, 2017
- 4 Anecdotes, 2017
- 5 Dohrana, 2021

### Gallery 2

- 6 Degenerative Disarrangement, 2013
- 7 Bathing Boulders, 2017
- 8 Miziara Architects, 2014
- 9 Road Marking, 2017
- 10 Façade No. 3, 2014

### Gallery 3

- 11 Demolition Monoprints, 2021
- 12 Warehouse Project, 2016
- 13 Gallery 354, 2019
- 14 Train to Rouen, 2017
- 15 Wall House Elevation Drawing, 2024
- 16 Differed Cross Section, 2016

## Introduction

‘Short Circuits’ is artist Vikram Divecha’s first survey exhibition, bringing together works created over the past eleven years, as well as new commissions that engage with the United Arab Emirates’ urban and social histories.

Providing a nuanced exploration of socio-political structures and human connections, Divecha probes urban landscapes and other specific environments through a collaborative and conceptual approach. Often working with readily available material and space, he attempts to reveal the untold stories inherent in the everyday.

Developing long-term collaborations with workers, contractors and decision-makers, Divecha takes an interest in the otherwise invisible structures of planning, construction, demolition and maintenance that shape cities in the UAE and beyond. From masons to municipal gardeners, government officials to railway traffic managers, Divecha’s collaborators are integral to each project, informing not only his practice but also, in certain cases, actively contributing to the artwork’s creation.

His works – playful and poetic – rely on what he calls “found processes”, whereby the artist inserts himself within certain environments, observing how individuals navigate, experiment with and bypass established systems. By interrupting these processes and challenging existing hierarchies, Divecha raises questions about time, value and authorship.

Vikram Divecha is a Beirut-born artist who grew up in Mumbai and is based in the UAE. He holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University and was a participant in the Whitney Museum’s Independent Study Program. His work has been exhibited regionally and internationally, including at the 57th Venice Biennale - National Pavilion UAE, the 13th Sharjah Biennial, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the Centre of Contemporary Art (Warsaw) and the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (New York). He currently teaches as an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Art and Art History at the New York University Abu Dhabi.

**Curated by** Dawn Ross and Lucas Morin

**Research Assistant:** Daniya Jawwad

**Exhibition Production and Design:** Albert Kolambel and Zahra Mansoor

**Exhibition Graphics:** Clara Sancho studio

**AV Coordination:** Barış Doğrusöz and Alex Wachira

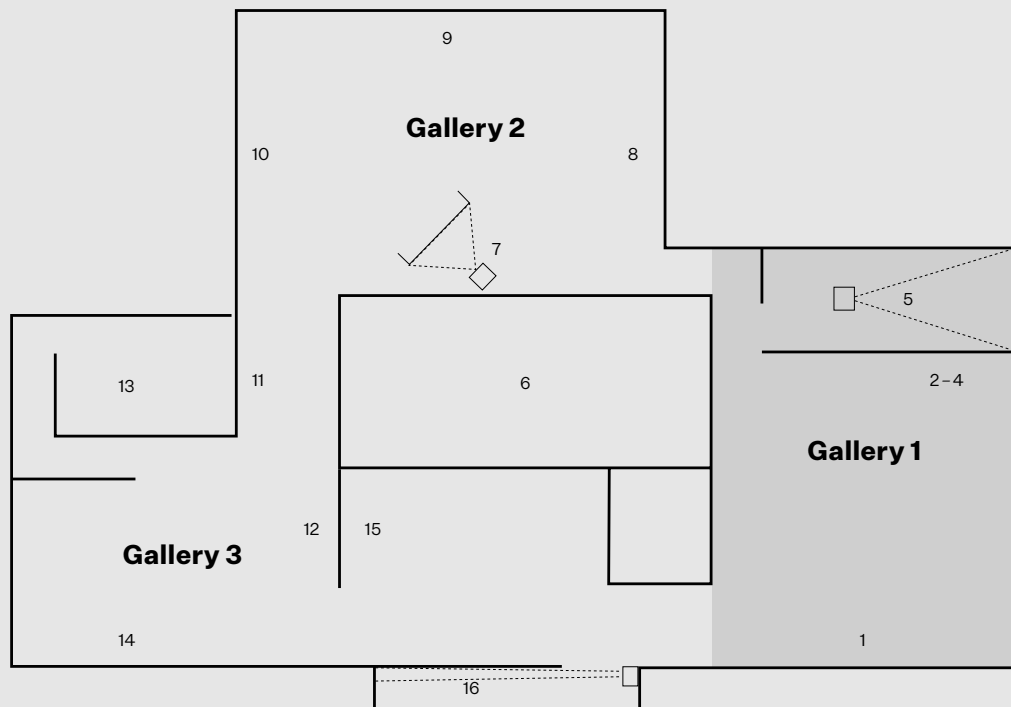
**Shipping Coordination:** Naseef Ismail

**Collection Registrar:** Rhoda Azizoghly

**Arabic Translation:** Nour Refaie

Unless otherwise noted: All images courtesy of Art Jameel.  
Photography by Daniella Baptista.

## Gallery 1



- 1 Portrait Sessions, 2016
- 2 Gardeners' Projects, 2024
- 3 Gardeners' Sketchbooks, 2017
- 4 Anecdotes, 2017
- 5 Dohrana, 2021



## *Portrait Sessions, 2016*

Acrylic on primed canvas paper, copy paper, frame, private studio  
30 uncredited paintings (65 × 50 cm each), 3 documents (21 × 29.7 cm each)  
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle



From July to October 2016, Vikram Divecha reached out to dozens of UAE residents, offering them AED 150 to paint his portrait. The artist only approached people who did not describe themselves as professional painters. The duration of each portrait session was determined by how much time that amount could buy according to each participant's wage or professional rate.

Divecha already used that fee for workers with whom he collaborated in previous projects; it came to exemplify the informal rate of a daily wage. The different levels of detail in each portrait bring attention to social and financial disparities: while some painters produced elaborate portraits, others barely had time to put together a rough sketch.

*Portrait Sessions* questions usual markers of value in art. Is value determined by the time dedicated to creating an artwork, in this case, the artist's portrait, or by the level of skill displayed, regardless of the amount of time dedicated to its finalization? The painters Divecha commissioned remain uncredited, obscuring another conventional link between authorship and value.

*Portrait Sessions* was a culmination of the year-long Critical Practice Programme run by Tashkeel, Dubai; Divecha's mentor was Debra Levine

## Gardeners' Projects, 2024

Documents, drawings, images, audio recording (30 min.)

Dimensions variable

Images courtesy of the artist, Tariq Mahmood Muhammad Riaz Ahmed, Sajad Hussain Bughio, Muhammad Shabbir Ahmad Din, Shahid Ahmad Bashir Mahmood, Mohammed Mostafa Mohammed Junu Mia, Muhammad Saleem Manzoor Ahmed, Muhammad Asghar Hashmi, Kundan Raut, Elias Trad, Maraya Art Centre and Sharjah Art Foundation  
Commissioned by Art Jameel



*Gardeners' Sketchbooks* brings together the sketches of five Sharjah municipal gardeners Vikram Divecha collaborated with as part of his 2015 project, *Shaping Resistance*. For this work, he invited gardeners to rethink the design of Al Majaz Park's hedges towards what they each would consider 'beautiful'. These prints are extracts from the sketchbooks containing the gardeners' proposed designs.

The act of commissioning gardeners to design and shape the hedges they are traditionally employed to care for, yet lack creative authority over, makes visible their often overlooked labour. The unconventional nature of the designs came to draw the attention of unsuspecting viewers, inviting them to be more conscious of those who maintain and care for public spaces.

A recurring question in Divecha's collaborations is that of authorship, a pertinent question given that the displayed prints of the sketchbooks were created by the gardeners. The gardeners share the artistic credit and sales of their respective works.



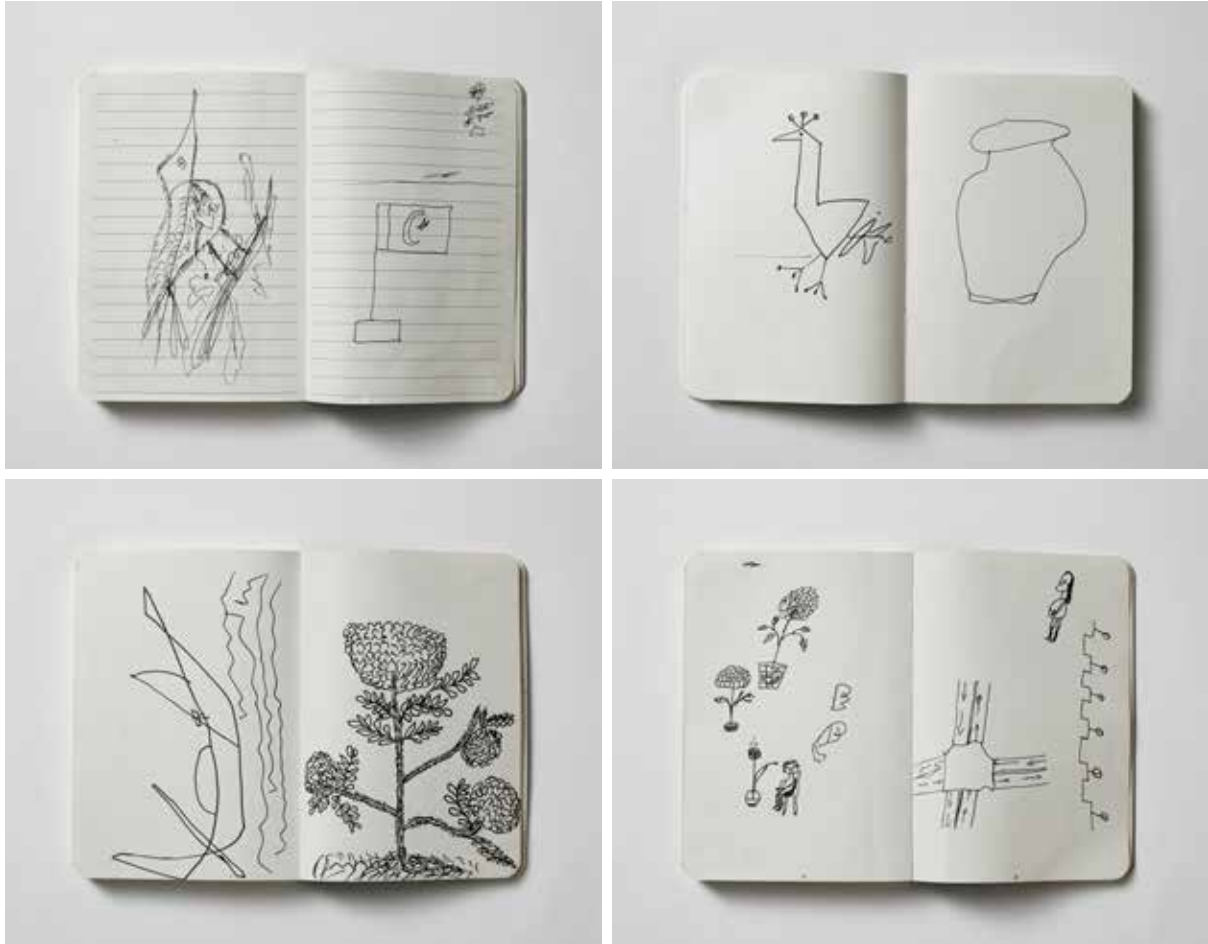
- 3 Tariq Mahmood Muhammad Riaz Ahmed, Sajad Hussain Bughio, Muhammad Shabbir Ahmad Din, Vikram Divecha, Shahid Ahmad Bashir Mahmood, Mohammed Mostafa Mohammed Junu Mia

## *Gardeners' Sketchbooks, 2017*

Inkjet print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag

Series of 5 (78.4 × 100 cm each)

Courtesy of the artists and Gallery Isabelle



*Gardeners' Sketchbooks* brings together the sketches of five Sharjah municipal gardeners Vikram Divecha collaborated with as part of his 2015 project, *Shaping Resistance*. For this work, he invited gardeners to rethink the design of Al Majaz Park's hedges towards what they each would consider 'beautiful'. These prints are extracts from the sketchbooks containing the gardeners' proposed designs.

Photography: Kundan Raut Studio

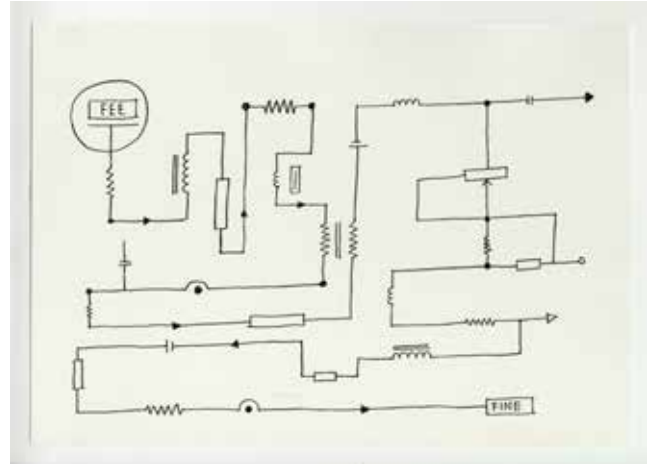
The act of commissioning gardeners to design and shape the hedges they are traditionally employed to care for, yet lack creative authority over, makes visible their often overlooked labour. The unconventional nature of the designs came to draw the attention of unsuspecting viewers, inviting them to be more conscious of those who maintain and care for public spaces.

A recurring question in Divecha's collaborations is that of authorship, a pertinent question given that the displayed prints of the sketchbooks were created by the gardeners. The gardeners share the artistic credit and sales of their respective works.



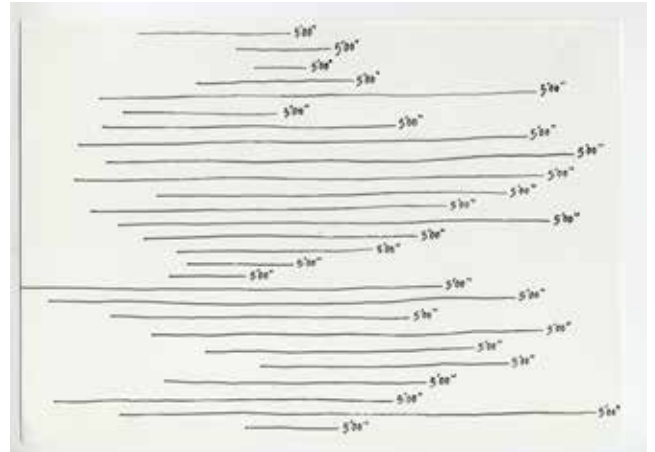
## Fee Transfer, 2017

From the *Anecdotes* series  
Ink on acid-free fine grain paper  
21 × 29.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle



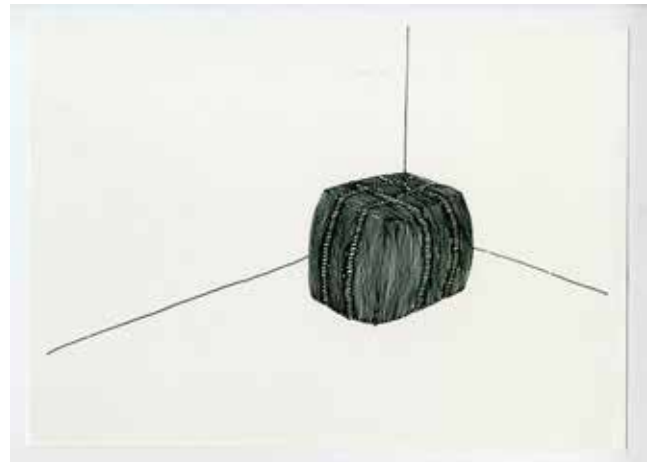
## 5 minutes, 2017

From the *Anecdotes* series  
Ink on acid-free fine grain paper  
21 × 29.7 cm  
Vilma Jurkute Collection, Dubai



## Unregistered Seeds, 2017

From the *Anecdotes* series  
Ink on acid-free fine grain paper  
21 × 29.7 cm  
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle



*Anecdotes* is a series of line drawings produced in black felt tip pen. The drawings reflect on moments, conversations and lessons accumulated by Vikram Divecha across his research and collaborations.

Images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

## *Dohrana, 2021*

4:3, 2160p video, colour, sound

34 min.

Urdu (English and Arabic subtitles)

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

Commissioned by 421 (Abu Dhabi)

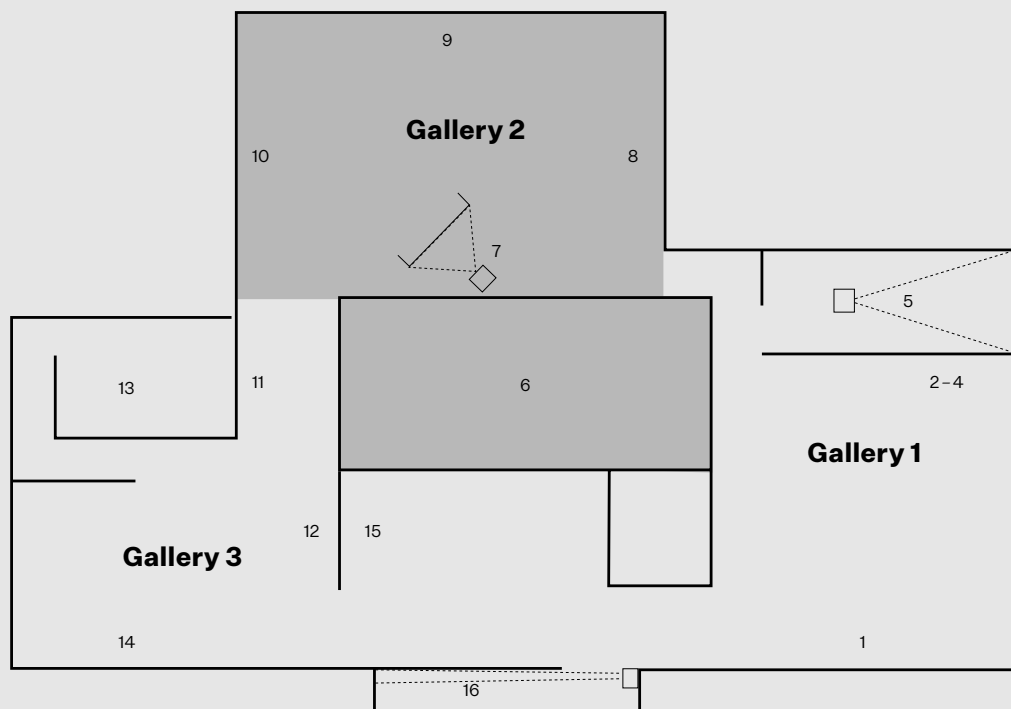


In *Dohrana* ('to return' in Urdu), Vikram Divecha worked together with Sharjah municipal gardeners to develop Urdu poems (*ghazals* and *nazms*). Many of the gardeners come from South Asia and have a farming background; their texts reflect on hunger, farmers' rights as well as experiences of migration in the Gulf.

The film features Shabbir, a poet, who wanders across verdant landscaping sites along highway intersections. *Dohrana* was shot in the summer months, when gardeners are instructed to maintain grass areas pristine and green throughout the city, despite unfavourable environmental conditions. The traffic islands cared for are designed to be seen from afar, but are often dotted by workers taking a pause and seeking shade in between their working hours.

Film stills courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

## Gallery 2



- 6 Degenerative Disarrangement, 2013
- 7 Bathing Boulders, 2017
- 8 Miziara Architects, 2014
- 9 Road Marking, 2017
- 10 Façade No. 3, 2014



## *Degenerative Disarrangement, 2013*

Interlock pavement bricks

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

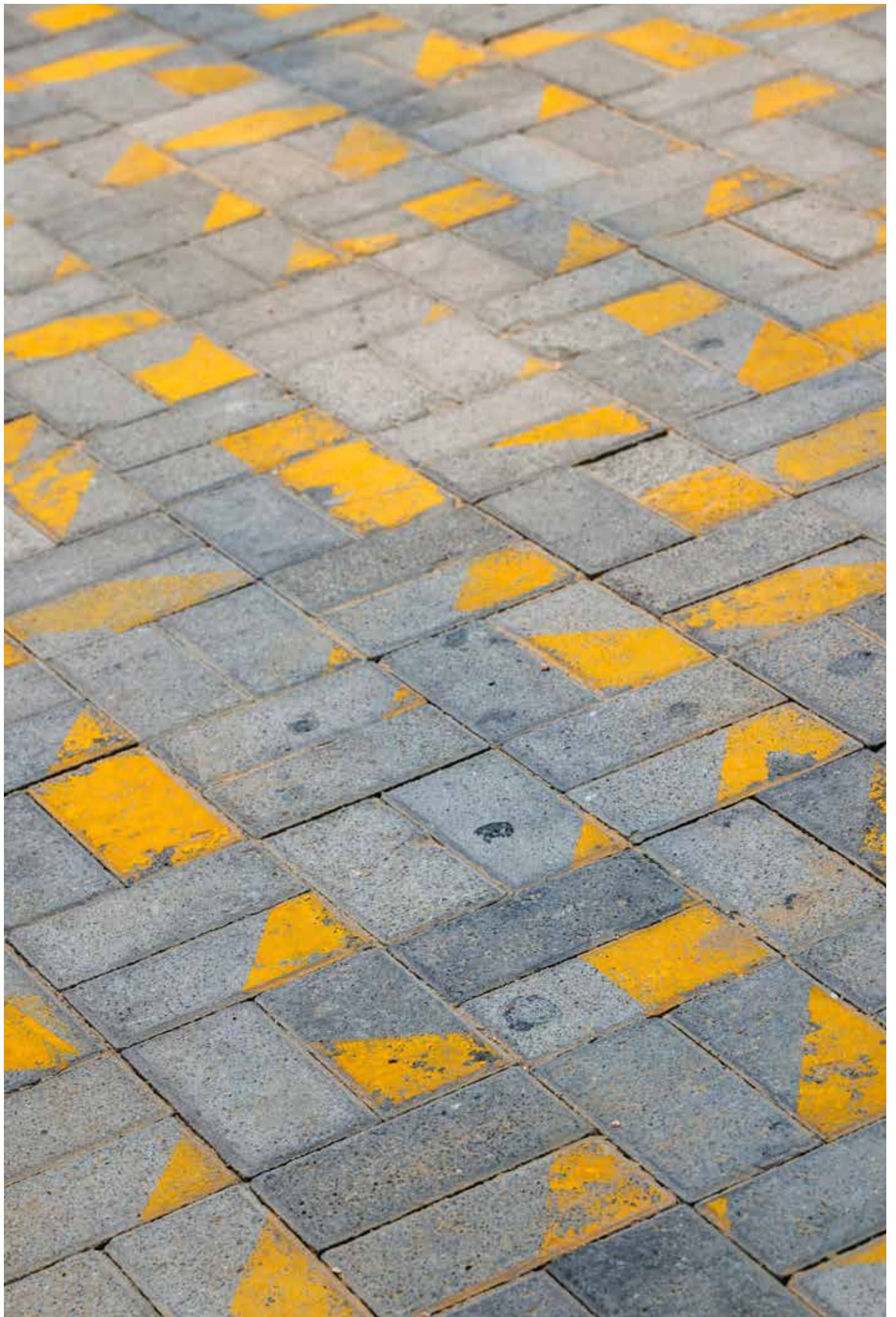
Commissioned by Dubai Culture & Arts Authority



This installation is made of pavement bricks taken from a public site and relocated to this courtyard. In each iteration of the work, masonry workers are asked to arrange the bricks within the time constraints they routinely face, creating disarranged patterns as a result.

Divecha drew inspiration from observing the rearrangement of pavement bricks in Dubai's city streets following repairs. The demanding nature of the job, characterised by tight schedules and a requirement for workers to approach the task mechanically, results in efficiency being prioritised over accuracy. A recurring theme in Divecha's work involves bringing elements from the sphere of everyday life into that of the more exclusive art world, as exemplified in this work, where pavement bricks find their place in a gallery setting.

This is the third iteration of *Degenerative Disarrangement* to be exhibited. It was originally displayed in the Al Fahidi Historical District, Dubai (2013), and an extension of it was exhibited as part of the National Pavilion - UAE for the 57th Venice Biennale (2017). Images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle.



## *Bathing Boulders, 2017*

4:3, HD video, silent, colour

4 min. 24 s.

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

Commissioned by the National Pavilion - UAE for the 57th Venice Biennale (2017)



*Bathing Boulders* was created through the process of preparing boulders as part of an earlier public art commission, *Boulder Plot* (2014). To ready the work for display, Vikram Divecha's assistant washed the boulders, which the artist documented. From this ritualistic act emerges a moving meditation set to the rhythm of the washing gestures, the flow of water and the movement of shadows.

*Boulder Plot* was a site-specific installation made up of 24 boulders meticulously handpicked from quarries in the mountainous emirate of Fujairah. These quarries extract rocks used in asphalt, concrete, marine and infrastructure construction works. Each displayed boulder features a cylindrical hole running through it, a result of rock blasting – a process that includes drilling holes into a mountain, which are subsequently filled with explosives. Occasionally, the boulders kept the drill holes, with their perfectly cylindrical shape contrasting the irregular surface of the rocks.

Washing Assistant:

Helal Thakur Titon Thakur

Videography: Vikram Divecha,

Swapna Kurup

Editing (Blacktop Films):

Dominique Petrot

Post Production (White Light Studio):

Nuttacha Khajornkaiatsakul (Colorist),

Sorawich Khunpinij (Digital Conform),

Nathamon Thatthanakan (VFX Artist),

Max Tersch (Post Supervisor), Siripun

Sangjun (Post Producer)

Film stills courtesy of the artist and

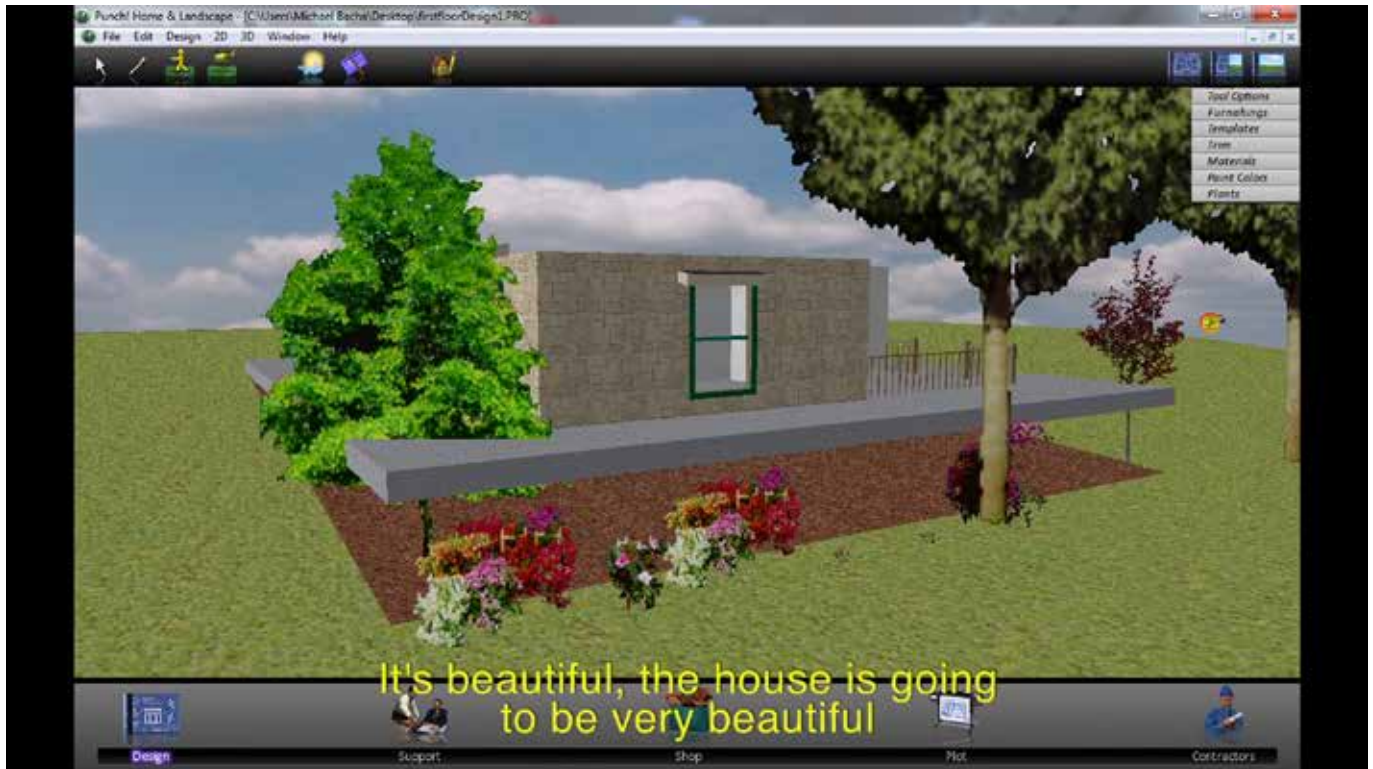
Gallery Isabelle

## Miziara Architects, 2014

Single channel colour video with sound

22 min. 21 s.

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

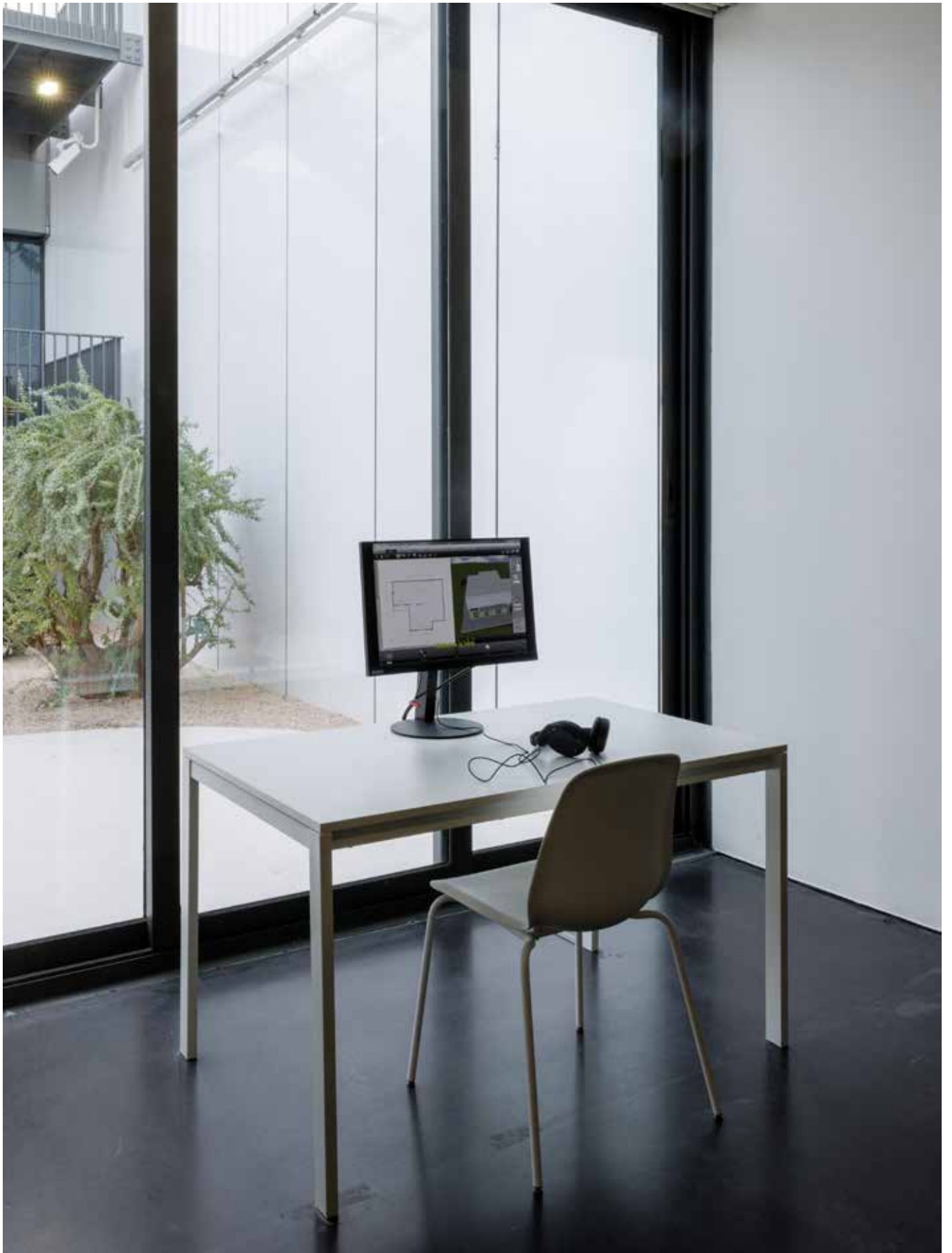


In this project, Vikram Divecha follows the El Bacha family as they decide to build a family home in Miziara, a mountain village in North Lebanon. Like many of Beirut's residents, the family sought to spend their summers in the country's quieter, rural areas.

Divecha documents the conversations between the El Bacha patriarch and his son as they plan and envision their house using user-friendly software designed for non-professionals. They disagree, debate, collaborate and create a building that doesn't adhere to the conventional rules or norms of architecture, reflecting gaps between generations, and shifting from a traditional to a contemporary design aesthetic.

Washing Assistant: Helal Thakur  
Titon Thakur  
Videography: Vikram Divecha,  
Swapna Kurup  
Editing (Blacktop Films):  
Dominique Petrot  
Post Production (White Light Studio):  
Nuttacha Khajornkaiatsakul (Colorist),  
Sorawich Khunpinij (Digital Conform),  
Nathamon Thatthanakan (VFX Artist),  
Max Tersch (Post Supervisor), Siripun  
Sangjun (Post Producer)

Film stills courtesy of the artist  
and Gallery Isabelle





## *Road Marking, 2017*

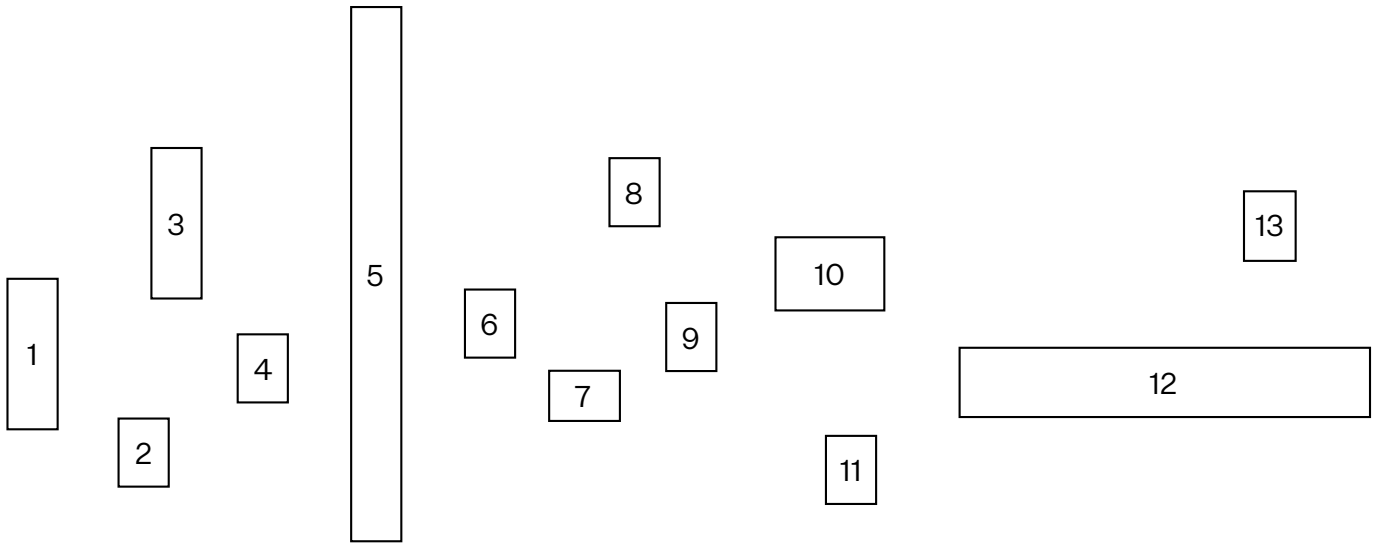
Thermoplastic paint and reflective glass particles on grey boards  
Set of 17 boards, 35 × 50 cm each  
Art Jameel Collection



In this series, Vikram Divecha collaborated with workers who maintain and paint Dubai's navigational and safety-related road markings. Instead of applying viscous thermoplastic paint on an asphalt road, Divecha instructed the workers to do so on differently-sized rectangular grey boards.

Each of the pieces notes the location and conditions that have shaped their making. Some were made on busy streets under time constraints, and Divecha incorporated the boards into ongoing maintenance operations, resulting in consistent lines and shapes; in contrast, other pieces were made by teams working on unused or quiet roads and enjoyed more time, agency and control over the final result than the artist. They created lines of different widths and lengths, and some boards were placed to dry vertically, causing the paint to droop and overlap.





1 - 100mm (W), 1.5mm (T), Yellow, Edge Line (613), Machine Marking, Al Khawaneej 1, St 120

2 - 300mm (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha 1, St 11

3 - 1000mm (Section) (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Straight Left Arrow (618), Hand Marking, Remarking, D83 Jabal Ali-Lehbab Road, LP 230

4 - 300mm (W), 2mm (T), Yellow, White, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha South, Unnamed Street

5 - 100mm (W), 1.2mm (T), White, Parking Envelope Line (620), 1000mm (L), Al Barsha 1, St 38b, LP 161

6 - 300mm (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha South, Unnamed Street

7 - 1000mm (section) (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Left Turn Arrow (616), Hand Marking, Remarking, D83 Jabal Ali-Lehbab Road, LP 230

8 - 300 (W), 2 mm (T), Yellow, White, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha South, Unnamed Street

9 - 300mm (W), 100mm (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Yellow, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha South, Unnamed Street

10 - 500mm (section) (W), 1.5mm (T), White, Hatching Gore Area (657), Hand Marking, Remarking, D83 Nad Al Hamar, LP 32

11 - 150mm (W), 1.5mm (T), Yellow, Random Mark, Hand Marking, Al Barsha South, Unnamed Street

12 - 300mm (section) (W), 5mm (T), White, Stop Line (601), Hand Marking, Remarking, D88 Omar Bin Al Khattab St, LP 47

13 - 200mm (W), 1.5mm (T), Yellow, Edge Line (613), Machine Marking, Remarking, D83 Nad Al Hamar, LP 10

This project was supported by Byblos Roads Marking and Traffic Signs LLC - Ghassan Kandil, Sanas V Salam, Sattanathan Selvarasu, Ponnalagan Solai, Muhammed Javed Babar, Alagu Veeran, Zia Ur Rahman, Manivasagam Chinnu, Wasim Ahmad, Sarathbabu Jaybal, Abhijith Jayachandran, Kumara Swamy Ganesula, Zawar Hussain, Yasir Shah, Akhilesh Chauhan, Rajeev Chauhan, Ranjeet Jhalman, Ajay Chauhan, Uma Mahesh Vegistte, Ghulam, Muhammad Noman, Speen Badshah. RTA - Musab Yahyia Al-Asawedh, Ashraq Abdul Jaleel, Zeyad Adel Amayri.

## *Façade No.3, 2014*

From the *Variable Memories* series

Extruded aluminium mullion, extruded rubber gasket, aluminium composite cladding, structural silicone sealant, C-print, plexiglass

288.5 × 213.5 × 14 cm

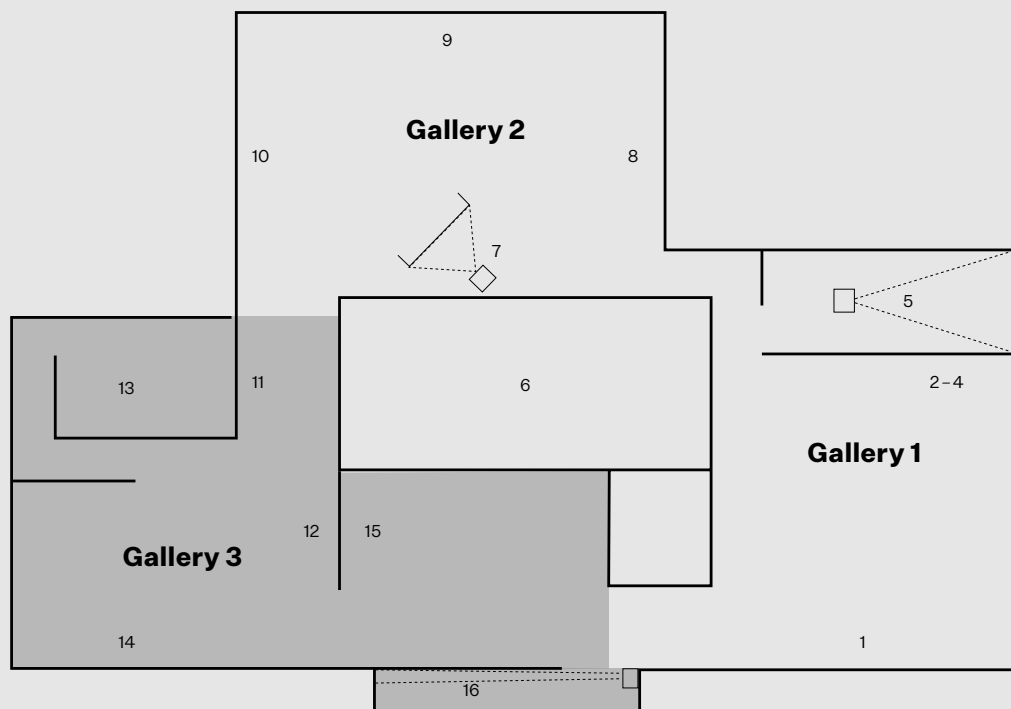
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle



This work is part of *Variable Memories*, a series that features the facades of buildings located in Dubai's Deira and Satwa areas. The motif depicted in *Façade No. 3* was part of a now demolished single-storey structure in Satwa. The artist mounted the photographs onto large aluminium panels that evoke the glossy window panes commonly linked to Dubai's high-rise, glass-dominated architecture.

This project was realised with the support of Sedam Aluminium, Reprotronics and George Shahda Photography.

## Gallery 3



- 11 Demolition Monoprints, 2021
- 12 Warehouse Project, 2016
- 13 Gallery 354, 2019
- 14 Train to Rouen, 2017
- 15 Wall House Elevation Drawing, 2024
- 16 Differed Cross Section, 2016



*Broken structural column, Tower 4,  
Mina Plaza Towers, Al Wudouh St, Al Meena,  
Abu Dhabi, 2021*

*Corridor archway, 4th floor, Apt No.16, Khalifa  
building (Habib Bank building), Hisn Avenue  
(Bank Street), Al Shuwaiheen, Sharjah, 2021*

From the *Demolition Monoprints* series  
Printmaking ink on Legion acid-free rag paper  
55.9 × 76.2 cm each  
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle



*Demolition Monoprints* are prints of sections of walls from buildings slated for demolition – a common occurrence in the UAE, where buildings undergo a high turnover, serving as a record of structures that no longer exist.

To make the prints, Divecha covers certain walls of the buildings with thick, viscous ink, onto which he then places paper and meticulously rubs it, creating what he calls an “on-site monoprint”. Beyond serving as a record of structures that no longer exist, the prints also become a documentation of the lives of families who once inhabited these walls.

This project was realised with the support of Sedam Aluminium, Reprotronics and George Shahda Photography.

## Wall text (*Warehouse Project, 2016*), 2024

Vinyl print mounted on foam board

300 × 200 cm

Courtesy of the artist, Alserkal Avenue and Gallery Isabelle



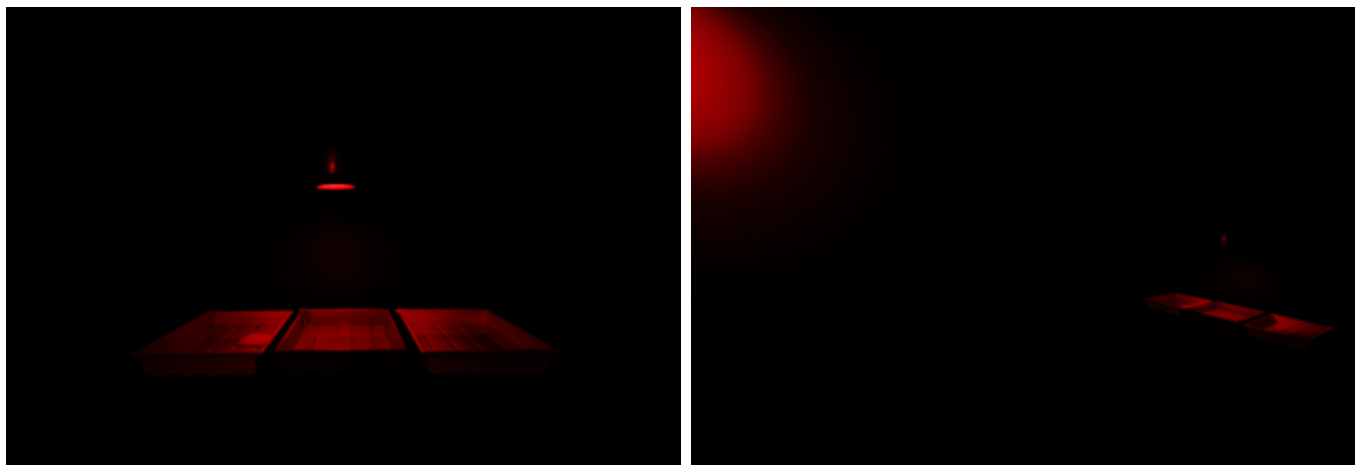
The wall text displayed here is reproduced in the original dimensions it was displayed in for *Warehouse Project* (2016), a process-based work by Vikram Divecha that took place in an Alserkal Avenue warehouse. It engaged with the UAE's past and present economic role as an entrepot, i.e. a temporary repository of goods destined for global markets.

## Gallery 354, 2019

Looped voice recording, spent light bulbs from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, discarded cardboard box, darkroom safelight, direct positive paper, developing trays with photography chemistry solutions and safelight holder, water, folding table, studio minor, media player, partition wall fittings, wall paint, blackout fabric, carpet, printed cards, wooden shelf

Dimensions variable, audio 10 min. 28 s.

Art Jameel Collection



*Gallery 354* is named after the gallery in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) in New York which houses objects from Melanesia. The installation acts as a photographic darkroom, replicating Vikram Divecha's experience of the gallery space, which he frequently visited during his time in the city. Taking the subdued lighting from the gallery space as a departure point, the work explores the materiality of darkness and themes of failure, exposure, display, time and loss.

The looped voice recording playing in the background lasts for around ten minutes, the same amount of time it takes one's eyes to acclimatise to the dim lighting in the room. This focus on lightness and darkness is emphasised by Divecha's choice of creating a dark room purposefully dimmed to allow for the processing of light-sensitive images, which in any other lighting would either get damaged or fail to properly develop.

The printed cards on display reference Divecha's proposed light intervention at The Met, disrupting the motorised blinds that typically block sunlight from the space and whose main function is to shield the objects from direct sunlight for conservation purposes.

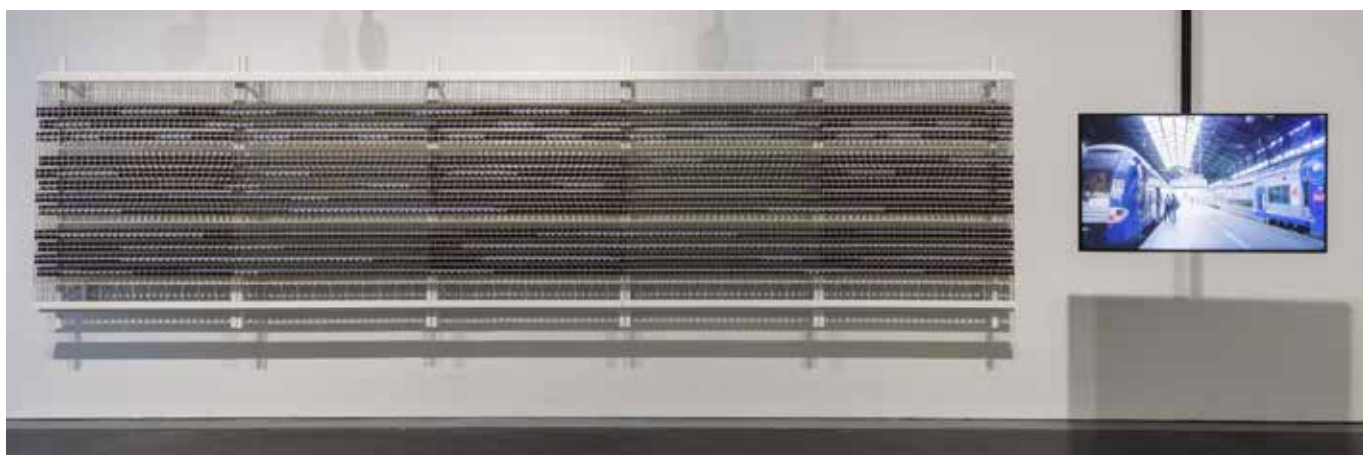
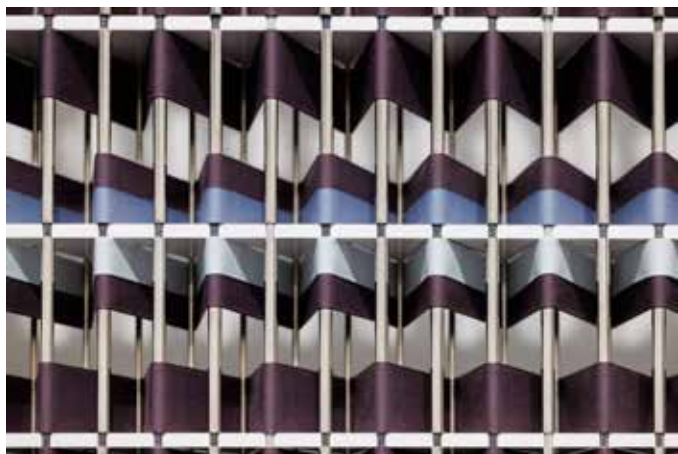


## *Train to Rouen, 2017*

Wall-mounted installation, single-channel video

600 × 170 × 40 cm, 6 min. 45 s.

Courtesy of the artist, Gallery Isabelle and Studio MTX



On October 4, 2017, Vikram Divecha collaborated with France's national state-owned railway company on producing a five-minute delay for a train travelling from the Paris Saint-Lazare station to Rouen.

Divecha imagined the work in conversation with Claude Monet's painting, *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877). The famed impressionist painter allegedly delayed a Rouen-bound train to catch better lighting.

Across the world, time zones were only standardised after the advent of rail travel, which forced coordination. In 1891, France adopted Paris Mean Time as its standard national time. The French railway companies then decided to run their trains five minutes behind scheduled time to benefit non-punctual travellers.

The artist's minuscule delay, barely noticed by railway users, revived a tradition discontinued in 1911. This five-minute delay was documented on the traffic occupation chart, a complex internal railway document that informed and shaped the form of the woven sculpture on display here.

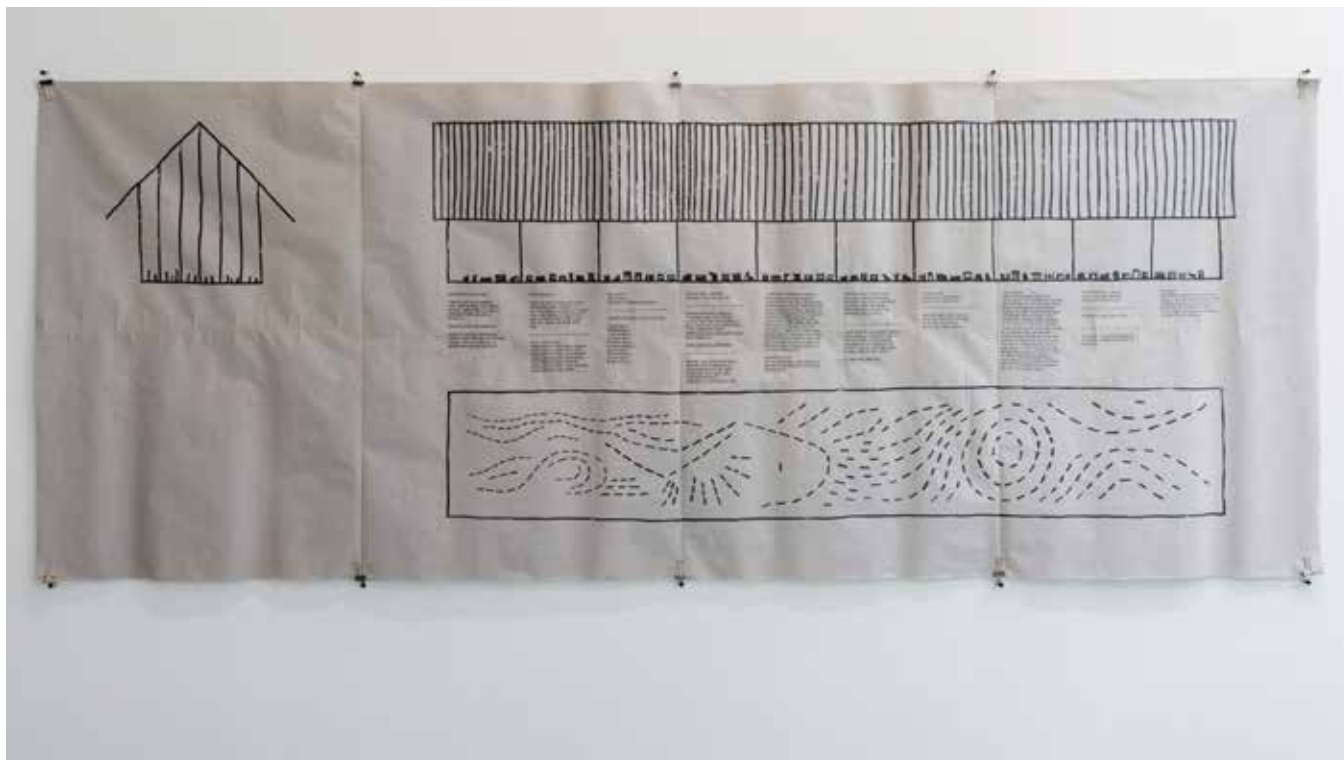
Conceptual Artwork: Vikram Divecha  
Collaboration and Production: Vikram Divecha, Studio MTX – Architectural Embroidery

For Co-lab, a commission by Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism and Institut Français, exhibited at Louvre Abu Dhabi

Click [here](#) to view the artist's interview

## *Elevation Sketch (Wall House, 2022), 2024*

Ink on paper  
235.5 × 92 cm  
Courtesy of the artist



This sketch is part of the artist's proposal for *Wall House*, a museum comprising hundreds of walls and facades handpicked by researchers and communities from buildings slated for demolition around the world. Acting as a translocal and multicultural archive, the walls will document the architectural heritage and invisible histories of those who once lived within them.

For Divecha, *Wall House* will not simply be a space strictly featuring walls, but a social object and will invite artists, researchers and performers to build communities around the wall – a living, breathing museum for all.

## *Differed Cross Section, 2014*

Single channel colour video, no sound

8 min. 14 s.

Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle

Commissioned by Dubai Culture & Arts Authority



*Differed Cross Section* is a site-specific video work, tracing the path of the demolished historic boundary wall of the historic district of Bur Dubai through the modern-day city. The wall was built in the 1800s and was 800 metres in length. The video is cropped to match the cross-section dimensions of the original wall, and navigates its entire covered area, meandering through thriving market areas of the neighbourhood.

The wall originally protected the older settlement along Dubai Creek, and as Dubai expanded, the role of the wall as a line of defence became redundant and was later demolished in the 1900s.

Cinematographer: Adnan X Khan  
Focus Puller: Hasan Aslan  
Steadicam Operator: Tom Lebaric  
Editor: Hanoz Nawdar

Film still courtesy of the artist and  
Gallery Isabelle



Unless otherwise noted: All images courtesy of Art Jameel.  
Photography by Daniella Baptista.