

# The Wild Within

RYAN KOOPMANS & ALICE WEXELL





# The Wild Within

RYAN KOOPMANS & ALICE WEXELL

The Wild Within

An Exhibition by Ryan Koopmans & Alice Wexell

*The Wild Within* is a series of lens-based artworks by Dutch-Canadian artist Ryan Koopmans and Swedish artist Alice Wexell that explores the evolving relationship between nature and architecture.

The body of work reimagines historic, unique, and often abandoned spaces through themes of rebirth transformation, and renewal.

Blending photography with three-dimensional digital sculpting, the artists breathe new life into architectural sites, envisioning them as places where nature gently reclaims the built environment.

Overgrown vegetation winds through ornate halls, light drifts across aging surfaces, and each scene becomes a meditation on the passage of time. The work creates a suspension of disbelief, drawing viewers into a world that feels both tangible and imagined.

Each artwork takes the artists many months to create, shaped by meticulous attention to detail and a deep fascination with geometry, symmetry, and the intricate patterns found in both nature and architectural design. These pieces demand substantial resources and technical precision, resulting in artworks that are highly sought after by collectors and institutions worldwide.

A recurring motif is the flower, a symbol of life’s fleeting cycle from seed to bloom to decay. In the physical world, flowers embody impermanence; in these artworks, they are preserved, their transience prolonged to infinity.

The artwork is informed by the artists’ global travels and by their process of creating virtual foliage in their Swedish studio, shaped by seasonal extremes. Long, dark winters contrast with luminous summers culminating in midsummer rituals of flowers, greenery, and light that inspire the project’s meditation on cycles of life and renewal.

When stepping into the spaces they photograph, from the cracked walls of a forgotten sanatorium to the intricate carvings of a grand palace, a sense of curiosity arises about the lives once contained within. Who conceived these structures? Who lived here? What conversations filled these rooms, and what memories linger in their walls? These same questions guide the artists’ creative process, transforming each work into a site of reflection, history, and memory.

Spanning Azerbaijani spas, Turkish temples, Lebanese villas, and Emirati palaces, Koopmans and Wexell capture culturally significant sites suspended between history and transformation. On location, they photograph and scan interiors; in the studio, they digitally sculpt foliage, adjust lighting, and add subtle motion, reviving stillness with imagined growth and vitality.

Conceptually, the project draws from the 17th and 18th century Capriccio tradition, when artists painted architecture overgrown with nature, merging archaeology and imagination. Koopmans and Wexell adopt a similar approach, blending documentary precision with invention to explore the tension between structure and wilderness, permanence and impermanence.

In *The Wild Within*, nature and architecture coexist in fragile balance. The overgrowth is shown at a moment when both can equally shine, embodying nature’s quiet presence, softening, reviving, and ultimately reclaiming. In some cases, the buildings depicted have since deteriorated or been demolished, making the artworks a preservation of memory as well as an imaginative reconstruction.

*The Wild Within* exists as still images and seamlessly looping videos, offering immersive experiences where time feels suspended. Each piece reflects on reality, imagination, and the poetic balance between human creation and natural resilience.

Works by Koopmans and Wexell are held in some of the most significant private and institutional art collections worldwide. They form part of the permanent collection of the Francisco Carolinum Museum in Linz, Austria, and the Swedish Ministry of Culture Permanent Collection, and have been exhibited at leading cultural institutions and events including the Museum of the Future in Dubai, Fabbrica del Vapore in Milan, the 2022 Venice Art Biennale, Milan Design Weeks, and Prague Castle in the Czech Republic. Additional partnerships have taken place at Le Bristol Paris, the Jane Goodall Institute at the Cannes Film Festival, UNICEF art galas, and through the world’s foremost auction houses Christie’s and Sotheby’s.

All artworks exist in two formats

- Video with motion (time-based media) adaptable to any dimensions
- Archival pigment prints

	263 x 148 cm
	203 x 114 cm
	103 x 58 cm



[Previous Page](#)

*Around Us*  
Denizli, Turkey, 2025

This artwork reimagines the interior of the Akköy Yukarı Mosque, an early 20th-century village mosque in Denizli Turkey, known for its vivid botanical wall paintings and ornate Ottoman brushwork (kalem işi).

[Opposite Page](#)

*Heights*  
Beirut, Lebanon, 2022

Within a crumbling villa in Beirut's Dannawi neighbourhood, built between 1890 and 1920, the artwork reimagines its faded grandeur as a flourishing garden.

Sunlight streams through the partially collapsed roof illuminating a hybrid of Parisian influences and Baghdadi painted ceilings, alongside intricate mouldings, arched columns, and timeworn walls.

Wild blooms and ferns reclaim the space, merging Lebanon's architectural heritage with the quiet resilience of nature.





[Previous Page](#)

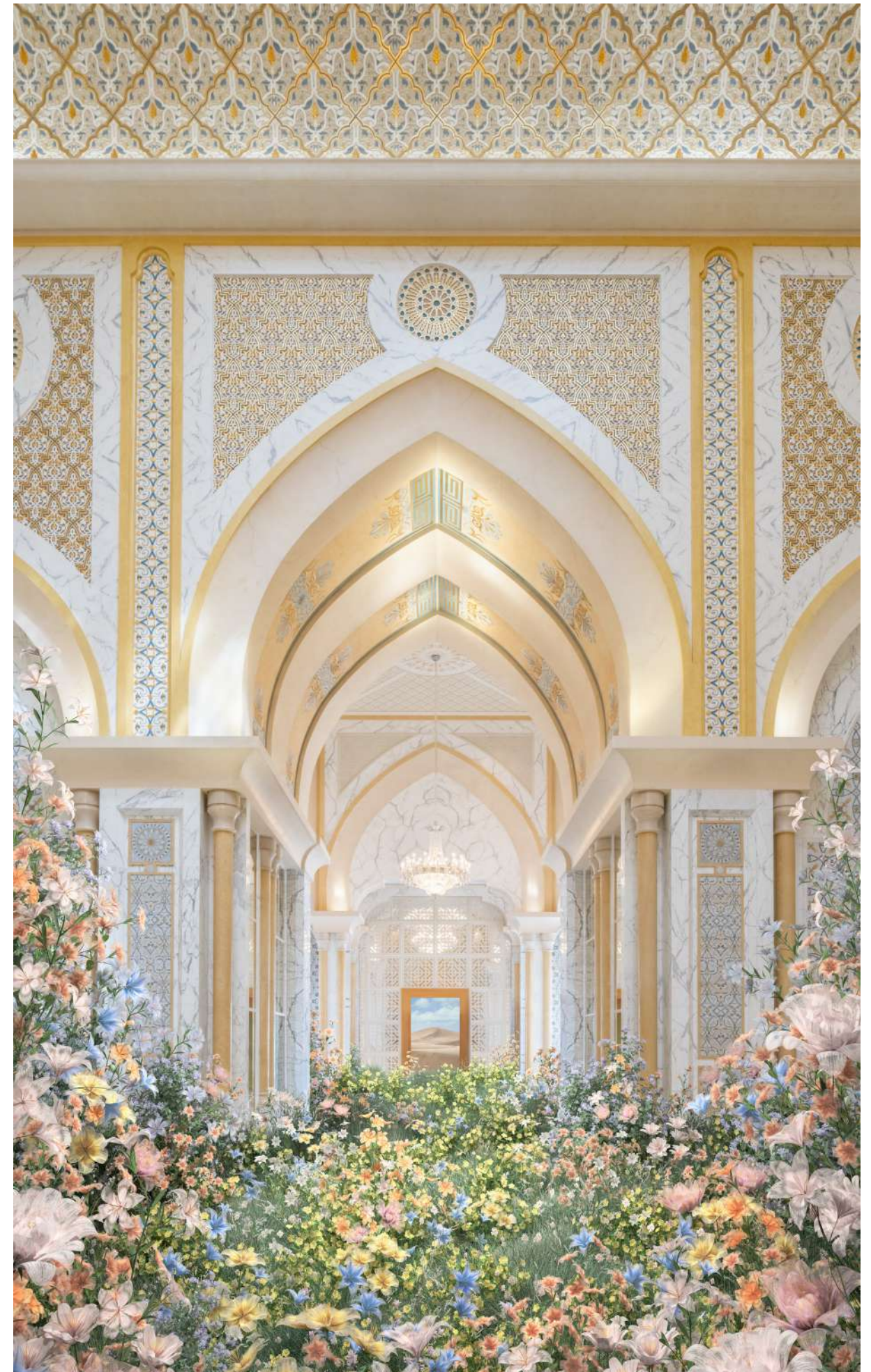
***Constellations***  
**Istanbul, Turkey, 2025**

Set within the abandoned 19th-century Yusuf İzzettin Efendi Mansion in Istanbul, this work reimagines the Ottoman heir's former residence as a blooming, dream-like interior. Once celebrated for its blue ornamentation, intricate woodwork, and sweeping gardens, the mansion's imported Romanian timber now frames a vision where history and nature intertwine.

[Opposite Page](#)

***Beyond Time***  
**Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025**

Set within the ornate halls of Qasr Al Watan, the UAE's Presidential Palace, this work transforms gilded arches and marble inlays into a flourishing garden. Digitally sculpted blooms, including the national flower *Tribulus omanense*, weave cultural heritage into the scene.





[Previous Page](#)

***Between Worlds***  
**Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025**

Set within the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque’s luminous Al-Noor Foyer, this piece reimagines walls adorned with climbing floral vines and stylized botanical motifs, transformed into a blooming garden that spills softly into the architectural space. In this meditative tableau, nature and ornamentation merge, inviting quiet reflection in a sanctuary of light and form.

[Opposite Page](#)

***Resilience***  
**Aley, Lebanon, 2025**

The Grand Aley Hotel, built in 1926 in the mountain town of Aley, witnessed decades of change, from glamorous summers to wartime service, before falling silent during the Civil War. Its walls, with paint now flaking and peeling, bear the markings of time. The work reflects Lebanon’s enduring spirit, meditating on renewal, the quiet partnership of nature and architecture, and the persistence of memory.



[Next Page](#)

***Memories of the Future***  
**Baku, Azerbaijan, 2025**

Reimagining the abandoned “Fantasy Hamam,” a lavish bathhouse once adorned with painted ceilings, Romanesque columns, and ornate detailing, as a surreal sanctuary.





[Previous Page](#)

*Taif Roses & Diamonds*  
Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2025

*Taif Roses & Diamonds* depicts a historic building in Al Balad, Jeddah, where painted rawasheen shutters with diamonds frame imagined mountains and vibrant blooms merge Hijazi architecture with flourishing nature.

[Opposite Page](#)

*Meet Me Here*  
Dubai, UAE, 2025

The Iranian Mosque Hosainia (also known as the Ali Ibn Abi Talib Mosque) is a Twelver Shia mosque built in 1979 in the Bur Dubai district of Dubai, near the historic Textile Souk. Established by the city’s Iranian community, it is renowned for its Persian-inspired architecture.





[Previous Page](#)

*Tides of Time*  
Mumbai, India, 2025

Along the rocky shore of Worli in Mumbai, a pale blue shrine rises at the edge of the Arabian Sea. Built in 1908 by a mariner shaped by those same waters, it stands where the land yields to the tide, its dome and arches breathing with the sea’s slow rhythm.

Within it, soft blue flowers unfold like echoes of the ocean, symbols of maternal grace and quiet renewal, their forms drifting between solidity and surrender.

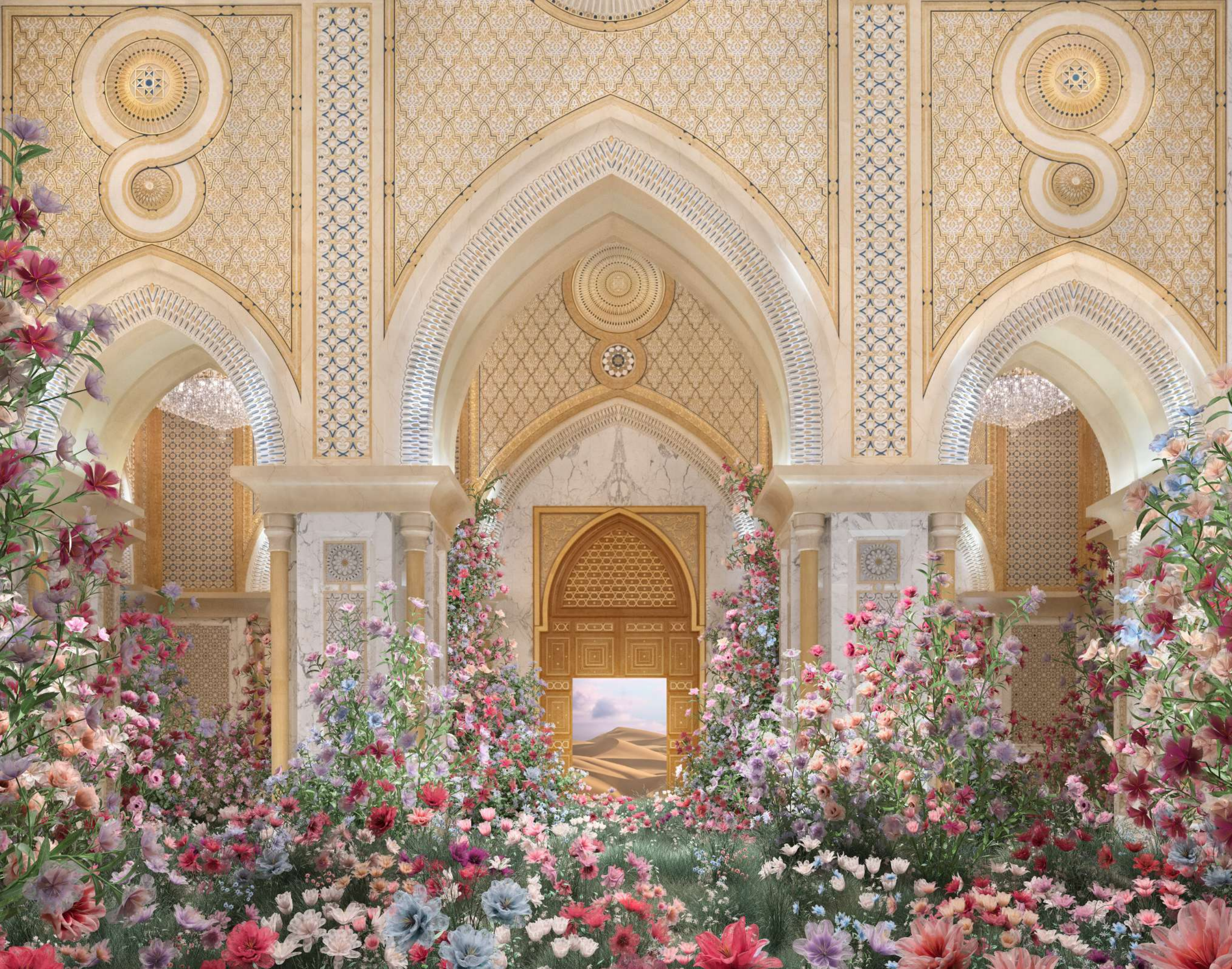
Framed by the shifting skyline of Mumbai, the room becomes a threshold between nature and architecture, the real and the imagined, a moment of stillness held within an ever-changing city.

[Opposite Page](#)

*Blossom of the Ancestors*  
Dubai, UAE, 2025

Set within the historic Al Maktoum Residence in Dubai’s Al Shindagha district, overlooking the waters of Dubai Creek, this work reimagines its arched colonnade and coral-stone walls. Lush flowers spill across the courtyard, merging the city’s maritime heritage with nature’s quiet renewal.





[This Page](#)

*Heartbeats*  
Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025

Set in the grand entrance hall of Qasr Al Watan, the UAE's Presidential Palace, this work transforms its soaring arches, marble pillars, and intricate geometric patterns into a verdant threshold. Digitally sculpted flora softens the symmetry and gilded detail, creating a vision where architectural splendour meets the gentle persistence of nature.

[Next Page](#)

*Adore You*  
Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025

Situated in the Al-Salaam Foyer, a ceremonial space leading to Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque's main prayer hall this work transforms its marble surfaces, inlaid floral patterns, and sweeping arches into a living sanctuary. Digitally sculpted blossoms echo the mosque's botanical motifs, creating a seamless dialogue between the permanence of stone and the vitality of nature.





[Previous Page](#)

***Beneath the Painted Sky***  
**Shaki, Azerbaijan, 2025**

This work draws upon the Palace of Shaki Khans’ renowned shebeke stained glass, intricate frescoes, and vivid geometric ornamentation, a fusion of Islamic, Persian, and Caucasian aesthetics.

[Opposite Page](#)

***Passages***  
**Dubai, UAE, 2025**

Dubai’s Jumeirah Mosque, built of sandstone in 1979, blends Fatimid and Mamluk architectural styles. A gift from the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum to his son, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, its stately façade is here reimagined as a gateway framed by palm leaves and blooming desert flora, where tradition meets the lush vitality of nature.





This Page

*The Wish*  
Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025

*The Wish* reimagines the exclusive upper floors of the Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental in Abu Dhabi, a space traditionally reserved for dignitaries and other high-profile guests. Lush flora cascades across marble and gold interiors creating a sanctuary where nature and opulence coexist.

Opposite Page

*Dreams of You*  
Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2025

The historic Batarji House in Jeddah's Al Balad district, later serving as the former American Embassy, is reimagined with its ornate arched doorway transformed into a portal between worlds. Beyond, the golden expanse of desert meets a lush cascade of imagined blooms, merging the city's layered heritage with the timeless landscapes of the Arabian Peninsula.

Next Page

*Into the Light*  
Gelebeç, Turkey, 2025

Set within the abandoned Church of St. Nicholas (Aziz Nikolaos Kilisesi) in Gelebeç, Turkey, this work reimagines the 1821 structure, built atop the remains of an earlier church and later converted into a mosque. Digitally sculpted flora and a central tree fill the crumbling nave weaving nature into the building's layered history of cultural and religious transformation.







[Previous Page](#)

*A New Era*  
Sharjah, UAE, 2025

Set within the shifting sands of Sharjah’s desert, *A New Era* reimagines a once-inhabited settlement where traditional Emirati architecture meets the quiet vastness of the dunes. Koopmans and Wexell were drawn to the site by its serene atmosphere, the clarity and gentle geometry of its structures, and the striking palette: soft blue interior hues contrasted by the golden light of the surrounding landscape.

[Opposite Page](#)

*The Near and The Vast*  
Dubai, UAE, 2025

Inspired by Dubai’s Imam Hussein Mosque, often referred to as the Iranian Mosque and built in the 1970s, this piece transforms its iconic Persian-style façade into a surreal sanctuary. Vivid floral arabesques and calligraphic patterns bloom into three dimensions, merging architectural craftsmanship with imagined organic growth.

[Next Page](#)

*Mirage*  
Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025

A view of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque’s Al-Noor Foyer where striking white marble and fantastical flowers form a protective wall against the wild desert climate beyond.





[Next Page](#)

***Under the Rain of Light***  
**Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025**

Set beneath the celestial canopy of the Louvre Abu Dhabi’s iconic dome, *Under the Rain of Light* envisions a solitary oak tree rooted at the heart of the museum’s Great Hall, a symbolic intersection of history, architecture, and nature.

The artwork draws inspiration from the museum’s architectural poetics, echoing the radial geometry and filtered luminosity that define the space.

The oak tree, long a symbol of strength, wisdom, and continuity across cultures, becomes here a vessel for temporal dialogue.

Digitally sculpted and seamlessly integrated into the Louvre’s central atrium, the tree grows not from soil but from cultural sediment: centuries of art, migration, and memory converging in this iconic institution.

Its branches reflect and refract the same light that filters through Giuseppe Penone’s ‘Leaves of Light’, placing this new work in quiet conversation with Penone’s bronze tree, another expression of time, nature, and human perception.

Suspended in an infinite loop, the foliage sways gently, as if caught between motion and memory. Within the museum’s architectural calm, a subtle pulse of organic life animates the stillness.

*Under the Rain of Light* continues *The Wild Within*’s exploration of abandoned and historic spaces. But here, the artists expand their vision into a masterpiece of institutional architecture, reimagining a living symbol of rebirth within a sanctuary dedicated to cultural preservation.

The result is a layered meditation on permanence and impermanence, the artificial and the organic, the physical and the digital, and the enduring human instinct to find sanctuary in the union of art and nature.

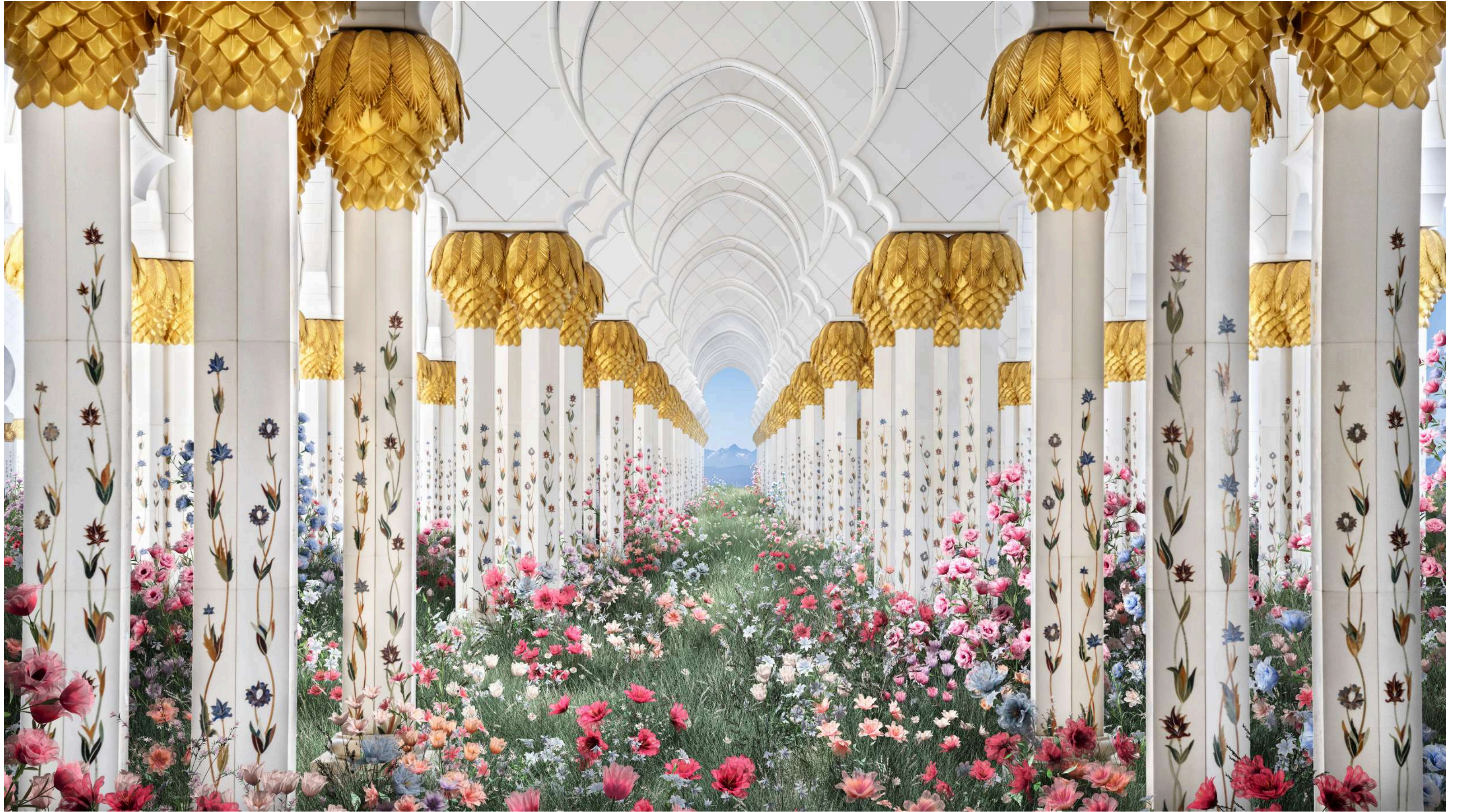


[Opposite Page](#)

***Heart of Sharjah***  
**Sharjah, UAE, 2025**

Set within Al Bait Al Gharbi (“The Western House”) in Sharjah’s Al Mareijah district, this work reimagines a historic residence of Sheikh Sultan bin Saqr bin Khalid Al Qasimi. Once a vibrant hub for merchants, poets, and pearl divers, the scene becomes a poetic fusion of Emirati architecture and imagined natural growth evoking the Gulf’s rich history of trade and cultural exchange.





**The Algorithmic Garden: Memory, Media, and Manufactured Decay**

In *The Wild Within*, Ryan Koopmans and Alice Wexell have created something paradoxical: digital artworks that use cutting-edge technology to evoke pre-digital forms of contemplation. Their practice operates at the intersection of multiple art historical lineages, from the architectural fantasies of the *capriccio* tradition to modern notions of spectacle in the cybernetic age.

But this isn't nostalgic pastiche. Koopmans and Wexell have identified something crucial about how post-digital cultural processes factor into ecological anxiety. Their digitally animated, historic architectural subjects do not simply document decay, they propose alternative narratives of transformation that feel both impossible and necessary.

The lush vegetation that emerges through Lebanese villas and Emirati palaces do not grow according to botanical logic but according to aesthetic and emotional logic, creating spaces where beauty and melancholy coexist in high fidelity and resolution.

The technical sophistication required to create these images arises from their collaboration. Ryan Koopmans brings the documentary photographer's eye for architectural detail, ensuring that even the most fantastic digital interventions remain grounded in specific material histories. Alice Wexell's background in animation and digital environments enables the precise choreography of light, growth, and atmosphere that makes these spaces feel genuinely inhabitable rather than merely spectacular.

Together, their collaboration, between documentary precision and digital speculation, produces what might be called *speculative archaeology*: a practice that uses contemporary image-making technologies to reimagine the life of architecture across shifting cultural and historical contexts.

Their work examines how structures endure, transform, or disappear, through political forces, economic change, or natural evolution, and how digital reconstructions become alternate sites where these architectures resonate. Several of the buildings featured in *The Wild Within* have since been demolished, leaving the digital works as the only places where they continue to exist.

This idea also harkens to what some have called quantum archaeology, the theoretical possibility that soon through a process of retrodiction, the past can be rendered with greater precision than ever before.

If architecture could speak, what would these buildings say? In their series *The Wild Within*, the duo Koopmans and Wexell attempt to answer this question.

Using a blend of photographic tableaux, their works bear witness to the visual DNA and hallmarks of ultra-contemporary techniques and virtual processes. A first principle of art tied to the sublime power of nature, the melancholy of historical decay, the fantasy of peaceful reconciliation between culture and wilderness - becoming, in effect, forebearers of a new data-centric, speculative archaeology.

An arena of art in which dadaists become dataists, and the *capriccio* painting of Italian whimsy becomes a romantic way in which to recontextualize both architecture and decay.

— *Dorian Batycka*

*Dorian Batycka is an art curator, critic, and journalist who has contributed to Artnet, The Art Newspaper, and Artforum. He also has a robust curatorial background, working internationally on exhibitions across contemporary art and media.*

[Previous Page](#)

*Infinite Bloom*  
Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2025

Marble pillars with gilded palms at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque form part of the colonnades encircling the vast courtyard. The floral columns, inlaid with motifs by designers Kevin Dean and Fantini Mosaici reference the date palm, an enduring symbol of hospitality and life in the UAE. The diversity of global flora reflects the mosque's message of cultural inclusivity, paradise and divine beauty.

**Ryan Koopmans (b. 1986) and Alice Wexell (b. 1992)** are Stockholm-based artists whose collaborative practice explores the relationship between architecture, nature, and time.

For over a decade, they have worked together on art projects worldwide, often transforming real-world spaces into captivating digital environments that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination.

Koopmans, a Canadian-Dutch lens-based artist, holds a BA and MFA and has a long-standing interest in the built environment and its connection to society.

Since 2007, his work has been exhibited and collected internationally. In 2020, he published *Vantage*, a book featuring surreal architectural forms and urban landscapes.

Wexell, a Swedish artist, creates surreal digital environments using emerging technologies. With a background in animation and coding, she studied at Lund and Uppsala University before earning two degrees at Hyper Island.

Their global perspective has been shaped by residences in New York, London, and Amsterdam.

Together, they are best known for *The Wild Within*, an acclaimed series that reimagines architectural interiors through the introduction of flora and motion, symbolically exploring renewal and transformation.

Artworks from the body of work have been widely exhibited and acquired by leading collectors, institutions, and auction houses around the world.

Education

Ryan Koopmans

Master of Fine Arts (MFA)  
Photography, Video & Related Media  
The School of Visual Arts  
New York City, USA  
2009 - 2012

Bachelor of Arts (BA)  
Psychology, Geography & Art History  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada  
2004 - 2009

Traditional Technique in Drawing  
Emily Carr University of Art & Design  
Vancouver, Canada  
2008

Alice Wexell

Motion Creative  
Hyper Island - Stockholm, Sweden  
2021 - 2022

3D-Modelling & Animation in an Open Source-Miljö  
University of Gävle, Sweden  
2020 - 2021

Digital Media Creative  
Hyper Island - Stockholm, Sweden  
2014 - 2016

Webbdesign w/ HTML & CSS  
Uppsala University, Sweden  
2015

Digital Culture and Strategic Communication  
Lund University, Sweden  
2012 - 2014

Notable Collections

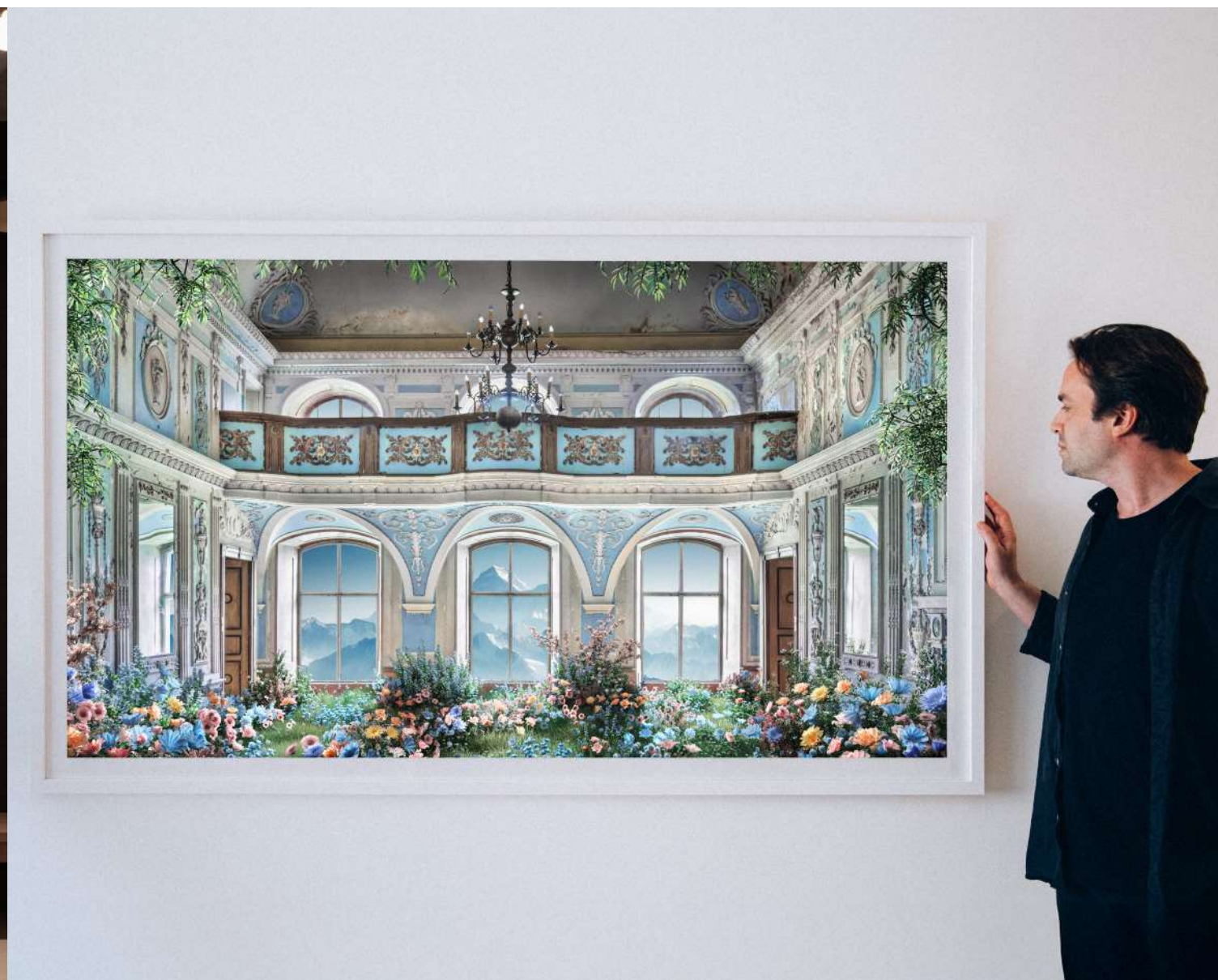
Francisco Carolinum Museum Permanent Collection, Linz, Austria

Statens Konstråd - Swedish Ministry of Culture Permanent Collection

Durres International Biennale of Contemporary Art Permanent Collection

Art Collection of actor Jim Carrey, and other major Private Collections







Published on the occasion of the exhibition:

*The Wild Within*

November 2025

Catalogue design by The Wild Within & Aarya Pramod

Front cover image:

*A New Era*

Archival Pigment Print & Time-Based Media

Back cover image:

*Beneath the Painted Sky*

Archival Pigment Print & Time-Based Media

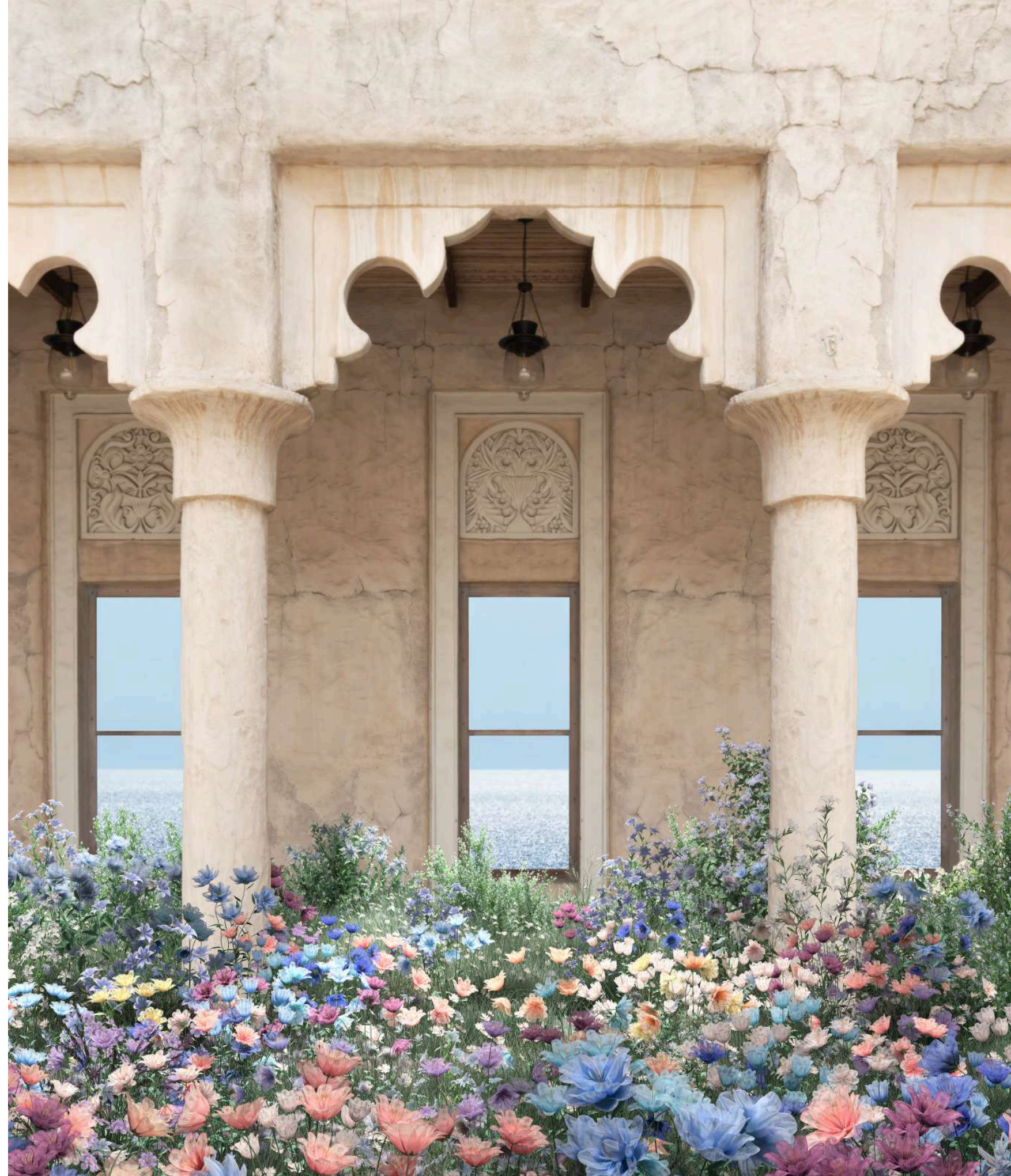
LEILA HELLER GALLERY

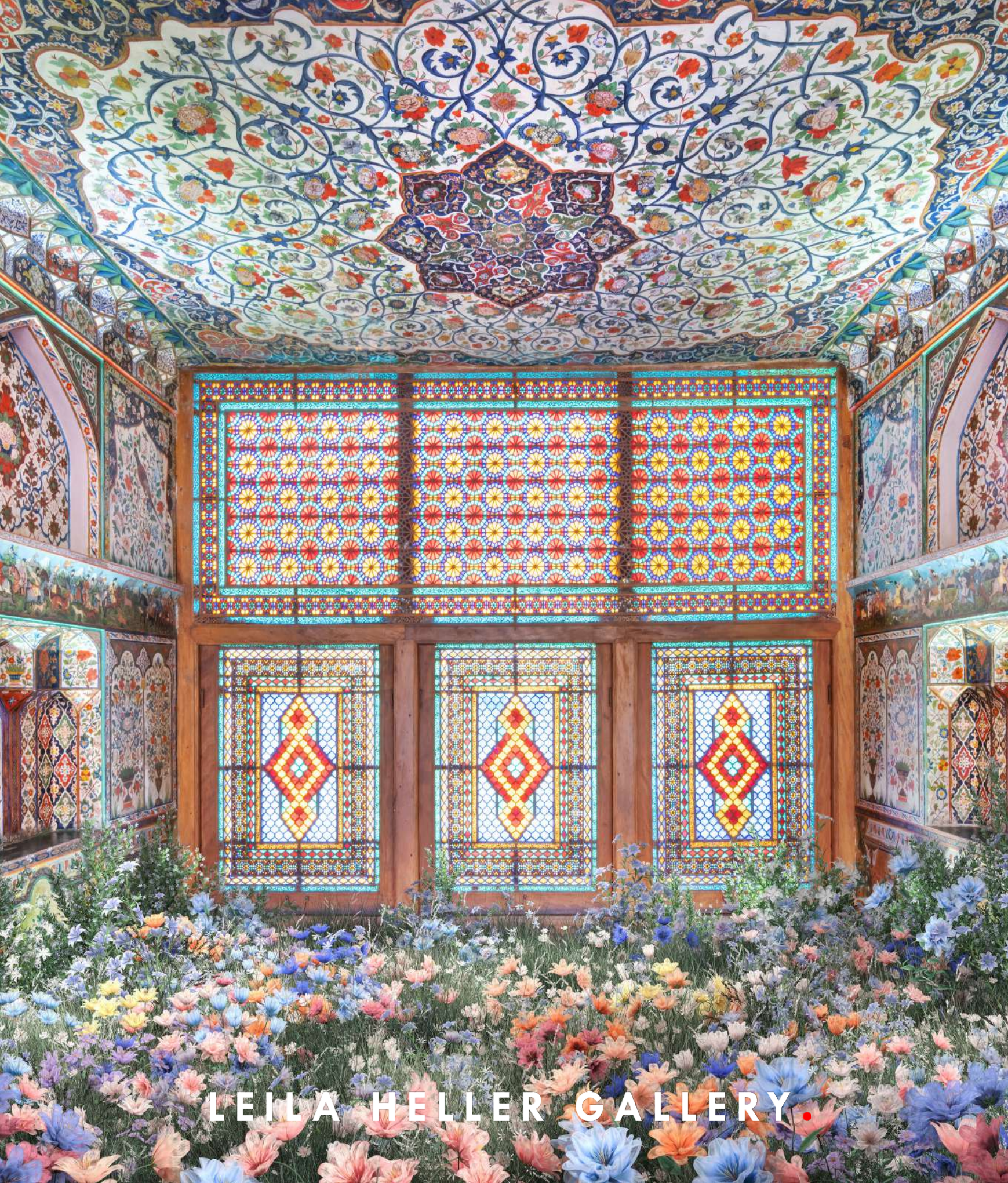
I-87, Alserkal Avenue, PO Box 413991

Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

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

Publication © 2025 LEILA HELLER GALLERY, Dubai





LEILA HELLER GALLERY.