

PRESS RELEASE

The Africa Institute Sharjah gathers great minds in the field of the Indian Ocean

A four-part multi-disciplinary conference series highlights the complex history, and rich cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean rim to a wide, international audience.



Dr Salah M. Hassan, Director of The Africa Institute welcomes leading scholars, activists, and artists from diverse geographies and disciplines to discuss Africa's Indian Ocean Islands

15 December 2022 – Sharjah: The Africa Institute successfully opens the Indian Ocean region to be the third edition of its 'country-focused season' on December 15, 2022. A flagship initiative that takes place annually to explore one African country or African diaspora community through a range of scholarly and public programs such as panel discussions, film screenings, music performances, theatre, and more.



The four-part conference season themed “Thinking the Archipelago: Africa’s Indian Ocean Islands” is organized by The Africa Institute in collaboration with leading scholars Jeremy Prestholdt, Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego; Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Professor of Anthropology, Georgetown University, Qatar; and Uday Chandra, Assistant Professor of Government, Georgetown University, Qatar.

Hoor Al Qasimi, President of The Africa Institute officially opened the event by welcoming the leading scholars specializing in Africa’s Indian Ocean region. “The Institute’s country-focused seasons are an integral part of the year-round work to develop and support original scholarship and programming that expands understanding of African and African diaspora studies among the academic community and the broader public. Indian Ocean Rim as a third season further adds to the understanding of the complex history of the African world while also providing a forum for creatively engaging its present and imagining new futures,” said Al Qasimi.

Dr. Salah M. Hassan, Director, The Africa Institute Sharjah followed by further contextualizing the history of founding the Africa Institute with its current programs, fellowships, and future campus. He also welcomed the convenors and leading scholars, opening the first conference of the season titled, ‘Reimagining Mobilities/Immobilities in the Indian Ocean’.

“Following two successful seasons focused on Ethiopia and Ghana in 2019 and 2021, respectively, The Africa Institute chose the Indian Ocean region due to its significance in the contemporary multipolar world. This season sees scholars, activists, and others from various disciplines and geographical locations highlight the complex history and rich cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean rim enabling us to center Africa within studies of global relations to an international audience,” said Professor Hassan.

Professor Prestholdt in his opening remarks shared, “Africa has occupied a central place in the Indian Ocean’s matrix of connectivity. The historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical significance can hardly be overstated. This season represents a multi-disciplinary approach with the aim to raise the profile of Indian Ocean islands by examining and reimagining circulation, mobility, race and slavery, ecological change, and cultural production through the lens of Africa’s islands.”

The symposia saw four panels, 16 presentations, and discussions, a performance from scholars specializing in Indian Ocean studies from Mauritius, the United Kingdom, United States of America, Italy, Norway, Germany, India, Pakistan, Qatar, Canada, and U.A.E.



Furthermore, to culminate the season and proceedings of the four conferences, a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, biannual journal titled, '*Monsoon*' will be published by Duke University Press and the Africa Institute in 2023. With a distinct emphasis on Africa and the Western Indian Ocean, the journal will provide a platform for research on new ways of understanding Indian Ocean perspectives, networks, and the region's global interfaces.

To resonate and represent the country-focused season, The Africa Institute collaborates with Pakistani artist Naiza Khan to use her images to visually depict the monsoonal circularities of the Indian Ocean and what it represents as a heterogeneous assemblage of power, colonial history, and collective memory.

The second rendition of the season titled, "Legacies of Race and Slavery in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans" is tentatively scheduled to take place in Zanzibar, in early June 2023. Visit theafricainstitute.org for more information.

Click here for [hi-res photos](#).

About The Africa Institute

Established in 2018, The Africa Institute in Sharjah, UAE, is an interdisciplinary academic research institute dedicated to the study, research, and documentation of Africa and the African diaspora. As the only institution of its kind located in the Gulf—the historical nexus of African-Arab cultural exchange—The Africa Institute is uniquely positioned to expand its understanding of African and African diaspora studies as a global enterprise. The Institute is conceived as a research-based think-tank, and a postgraduate studies institution, which aims to train a new generation of critical thinkers in African and African diaspora studies. Offering both master's and Ph.D. programs in the humanities and social sciences, The Africa Institute aims to be a model center of excellence that engages with, as well as shapes, new paradigms of thought in ways that will ensure Africa's place at the forefront of the academy for years to come. This is further pursued through its named senior and postdoctoral fellowships, its programs of international symposia and conferences, visual art exhibitions and artist commissions, film and performance series, and community classes and outreach events. The Institute has commissioned Adjaye Associate to design a new campus that is scheduled to complete in 2023, which will allow for significantly expanded programming. For further information visit theafricainstitute.org.

Read more about the Indian Ocean Season - conference themes:

<https://theafricainstitute.org/institute-program/indianoceanseason/>



About Hoor Al-Qasimi

Hoor Al Qasimi has been spearheading the establishment of The Africa Institute into a major international institution, building upon the rich legacy of Afro-Arab cultural and scholarly interchange in Sharjah, including the landmark 1976 “Symposium on African and Arab Relations” that envisioned a future nexus for learning and collaboration between the two regions. Working in partnership with Africa Institute Director Dr. Salah M. Hassan, she continues to shape its programming and future endeavors.

A practicing artist and curator, Al Qasimi is also President and founding Director of Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), which was established in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the role of art in Sharjah, the UAE, regionally, and internationally. With a passion for supporting experimentation and innovation in the arts, Al Qasimi has continuously expanded the scope of the Foundation over its 10-year history to include major exhibitions that have toured internationally; artist and curator residencies in visual art, film, and music; commissions and production grants for emerging artists; and a wide range of educational programming for children and adults in Sharjah. In 2003, Al Qasimi co-curated Sharjah Biennial 6, and has since continued as Biennial Director. Under Al Qasimi’s leadership, the Sharjah Biennial has continued to grow as an internationally recognized platform for contemporary artists, curators, and cultural producers. Her leadership in the field led to her election as president of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2017.

About Dr. Salah M. Hassan

Salah M. Hassan is the Director of The Africa Institute, Sharjah, UAE, and a Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences at Cornell University. Salah M. Hassan. Hassan is an art historian, critic, curator, and editor and co-founder of *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* (Duke University Press). He currently serves as a member of the editorial advisory board of *Atlantica*, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. He authored, edited and co-edited several books including *Ahmed Morsi: A Dialogic Imagination* (2021); *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2012); *Darfur and the Crisis of Governance: A Critical Reader* (2009), and *Diaspora, Memory, Place* (2008); *Unpacking Europe* (2001); *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (2001); and *Art and Islamic Literacy among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria* (1992). He also edited and introduced, *Ibrahim El-Salahi: Prison Notebook* (New York and Sharjah, MoMA and SAF Publications, 2018, and guest-edited a special issue of *SAQ: South Atlantic Quarterly*, titled *African Modernism* (2010). Hassan has contributed essays to journals, anthologies and exhibition catalogues of contemporary art. He has curated several international exhibitions such as *Ibrahim El Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, exhibited at The Tate Modern in London (July-October, 2013) after premiering at the Sharjah Art Museum (in March 2012) in Sharjah, UAE; *Authentic/Ex-Centric* (49th Venice Biennale, 2001), *Unpacking Europe*



(Rotterdam, 2001-02), and *3x3: Three Artists/Three: David Hammons, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Pamela Z* (Dak'Art, 2004). He also curated several exhibitions for the Sharjah Art Foundation including *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan, 1945-2016* (2016-2017), and *When Art Becomes Liberty: The Egyptian Surrealists (1938–1965)* (2016) in collaboration with Hoor Al Qasimi. He is the recipient of several grants and fellowships, such as the J. Paul Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship, Sharjah Art Foundation, Ford, Rockefeller, Andy Warhol and Prince Claus Fund foundations. Hassan has been honored as the 2021 Distinguished Professor by the College Art Association (CAA).

About the Convenors

Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf is a Sudanese ethnographer and Professor of Anthropology at Georgetown University in Qatar. She was a recipient of Postdoctoral and Senior fellowships at Durham University in the U.K., Brown, and Harvard. Her work was supported by Guggenheim Foundation, the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Sir William Luce Memorial Fellowship, Andrew Mellon and MIT Center for International Studies, and Rockefeller Bellagio Study Center. She writes on culture and politics, anthropology of gender, human rights, migration, and diaspora issues in Sudan, the Gulf, Oman and Zanzibar, and the Indian Ocean. She is the author of *Darfur Allegory, Transforming Displaced Women in Sudan: Politics and the Body in a Squatter Settlement* and *Wanderings*, both published by the University of Chicago Press; *Oceanic Circularities* coedited with Uday Chandra, Irene Promodh and Maurice Jackson and published by Georgetown University Press. She is the editor of the 2010 special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Duke University Press) and *Female Circumcision: Multicultural Perspectives* (Ed.) (University of Pennsylvania Press 2006). She is the co-editor with Dale Eickelman of *Africa and the Gulf: Blurred Boundaries Shifting Ties and Higher Education in the Gulf* both from Gerlach Press in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In addition to numerous book chapters and essays, some of her articles appeared in the *Sciences*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Differences*, *Anthropology and Humanism*, *History and Anthropology*, *Oriental Anthropology*, *International Migration*, *Radical Philosophy Review*, *Anthropology News*, *Transition: International Review*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* and *Black Renaissance*. Abusharaf is also the co-editor of *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim*, which will be published by Duke University Press in collaboration with The Africa Institute, beginning in 2023.

Jeremy Prestholdt is a Professor of History at the University of California, San Diego. He specializes in African, Indian Ocean, and global history with an emphasis on consumer culture and politics in East Africa. His work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, Rockefeller Foundation, Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, Social Science Research Council, and the Fulbright Foundation, among other



agencies. He has been a visiting fellow at Ritsumeikan University, the University of Warwick, the University of Basel, and the University of Bergen. His articles have appeared in journals such as the American Historical Review, the Journal of African History, Public Culture, the Journal of Global History, the Journal of World History, and the Journal of Eastern African Studies as well as many edited volumes. He is the author of *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (2008) and *Icons of Dissent: The Global Resonance of Che, Marley, Tupac, and Bin Laden* (2019). Prestholdt is the co-editor of *Monsoon: Journal of the Indian Ocean Rim*, which will be published by Duke University Press in collaboration with The Africa Institute, beginning in 2023. He is also a co-editor of the Brill monograph series African Social Studies.

Uday Chandra is an Assistant Professor of Government, Georgetown University, Qatar. He received his B.A. in economics from Grinnell College and his Ph.D. in political science from Yale University. He received the 2013 Sardar Patel Award for writing the best dissertation in a US university on any aspect of modern South Asia. Before coming to Doha, he held a prestigious research fellowship at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Goettingen, Germany.

Uday's research lies at the intersection between critical agrarian studies, political anthropology, postcolonial theory, and South Asian studies. He is interested in state-society relations, power and resistance, political violence, agrarian change, rural-urban migration, popular religion, and the philosophy of the social sciences. Uday's work has been published or will appear shortly in the Law & Society Review, Social Movement Studies, New Political Science, Critical Sociology, The Journal of Contemporary Asia, Contemporary South Asia, the Indian Economic & Social History Review, and Modern Asian Studies. He has co-edited volumes and journal issues on self-making in modern South Asia, subaltern politics and the state in modern India, caste relations in eastern India, and social movements across rural India today. His book, *Oceanic Circularities* coedited with Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, Irene Promodh, and Maurice Jackson is published by Georgetown University Press. With regard to his upcoming projects, he is working on volumes on the comparative politics of "populism" and transnational circularities in the Indian Ocean. His first monograph *Negotiating Leviathan: Making Tribes and States in Modern India* will be published by Stanford University Press. Chandra is also working on a second book project on Hindu nationalism and democracy in postcolonial India.

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