

# EVIDENT PRESENCE: A COMMUNITY OF CARE ABU DHABI ART FAIR 2025





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**A WORD FROM  
OUR ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**





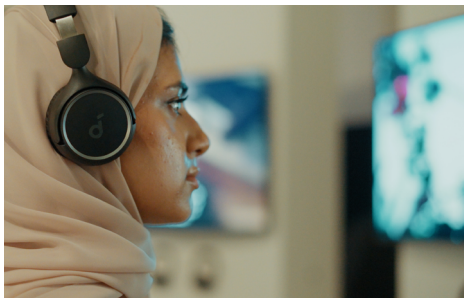
Evident Presence creates a space to witness the lived experiences of people with MS - not as conditions, but as stories shaped by identity, and care. True inclusion is built not only through awareness but through presence, empathy, and shared purpose.

We are grateful for the support of the Ma'an Authority, and we are proud to have worked with partners whose careful approach helped bring these lived narratives into a cultural space where understanding and representation can continue to grow.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Abu Dhabi Art for fostering a cultural ecosystem that celebrates reflection, connection, and community, a platform where the power of art reminds us of its ability to move us, expand our understanding, and bring people together through shared humanity.

**MARAL ALEXANDRIAN**

Acting Executive Director  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society



**Evident Presence:**  
**A Community of Care** was  
 presented as part of the  
 Community Partners Space at  
 Abu Dhabi Art 2025.



## OVERVIEW

The two-part installation comprised a multi-channel video production and a complementary series of live performances and readings developed in collaboration with UAE-based artists.

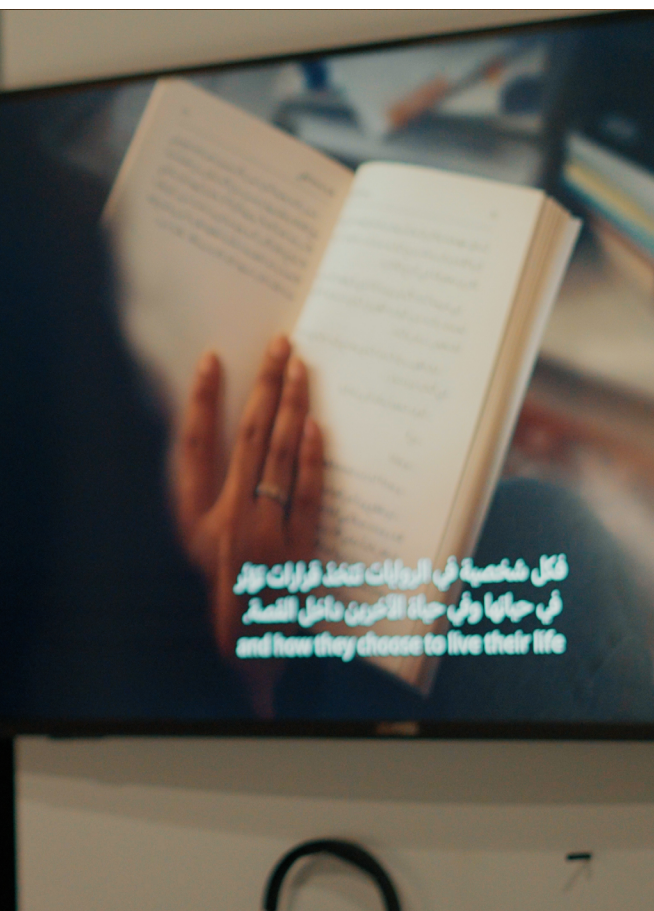
Curated by Dirwaza Curatorial Lab and produced by Triplets on Set, the installation invited visitors to engage with the lived realities of multiple sclerosis (MS) and to reflect on the shared role of community care.

Supported by the Authority of Social Contribution – Ma'an, the video installation consisted of five short films, each following one individual living with MS. Each story unfolded within a symbolic environment – by the sea, in the desert, within gardens, and creative spaces – reflecting the ways these individuals find grounding, clarity, and connection through everyday acts of making and belonging.

The films paired spoken narrative with carefully composed visual language to convey identity, creativity, and continuity. Each film revealed the turning points in every participant's journey: the first signs of change, the moments of acceptance, and the rediscovery of purpose. Collectively, the films offered a human portrait of living with an invisible condition, bringing visibility to experiences that are often unseen.

As an extension of the installation, Evident Presence included live performances by Maitha Al Omaira, Shahad Al Saqqaf, and Carlos Páez. Through poetry, gesture, sound, and audience participation, each artist explored different aspects of living with MS and reflected on the role of care, connection, and community. These performances unfolded across several days of the fair, transforming the installation into a living, evolving experience.

Together, the installation and activations created an atmosphere of reflection, empathy, and shared presence – an environment where art became an instrument of care and understanding.



# ART AS — A TOOL FOR ADVOCACY.



Art has become an essential part of how the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) communicates care, connection, and visibility. For NMSS, art is more than expression; it is a way for the public to encounter the lived experiences of people living with MS and to understand them through empathy rather than explanation.

Since its first participation in Abu Dhabi Art in 2023, NMSS has continued to explore how artistic collaboration can transform awareness into inclusion. That debut project, *How is Nature Constant When the Sun Never Rests*, curated by Dirwaza Curatorial Lab and created by artist Maitha Al Omaira, reflected the relationship between the body, the nervous system, and the natural world.

In 2024, this partnership expanded through *Curatorial Paths: Introduction to Exhibition Curation*, an apprenticeship program that trained people living with MS to translate their stories into curatorial and artistic expression.

In 2025, NMSS presented *Evident Presence: A Community of Care* within the Community Partners Space at Abu Dhabi Art, curated by Studio Salasil under the theme “Mutual Systems.” The initiative invited audiences to experience how communities connect through care, exchange, and collective memory.

Responding directly to this theme, *Evident Presence* explored care as a shared system - one that connects individuals, families, and society through empathy and creative collaboration. Through film, performance, and storytelling, NMSS demonstrated how inclusion can be felt, not just understood, reaffirming the power of art in expanding understanding and bringing communities together.

## PARTNERS



### Authority of Social Contribution - Ma'an

This project was made possible with the support of the Authority of Social Contribution - Ma'an, whose commitment to community impact helped bring this vision forward.



### Dirwaza Curatorial Lab

Led the curatorial direction, conceptual development, and narrative framing of the installation and performances.



### Triplets on Set

Produced the five short films for the video installation, handling direction, filming, and post-production.

# The installation centered five individuals whose experiences with MS formed the heart of the project.

## PARTICIPANT STORIES

Their stories revealed a spectrum of human resilience, from personal battles and family care to professional adaptation and artistic expression.

Each video segment unfolded through layers of sound, texture, and movement, reflecting not only physical realities but emotional and social ones.

The camera became an act of listening, turning everyday gestures into symbols of strength, adaptation, and care.

Featuring participants of diverse ages and backgrounds, the work brought visibility to the often-invisible nature of MS, where symptoms such as fatigue, numbness, or vision changes may not be outwardly apparent - offering a deeply human portrait of community, creativity, and quiet strength.





### **BETOUL ALABSI**

Betoul's early experience with MS was marked by moments of confusion and the sudden shift that comes with a new diagnosis. Her film unfolds along the shoreline - a place she returns to for grounding and clarity.

Waves, coastal textures, and long, steady shots evoke calm, rhythm, and continuity, reflecting how nature supports her sense of stability. Her narrative traces a journey of rebuilding and rediscovery.



### **ARIFA THAWER**

Diagnosed at 18, Arifa began navigating MS during a formative moment in her life. Her film is visually dynamic, echoing her personality through expressive colours, movement, and the texture of paint.

Painting helps her process emotion and maintain momentum during difficult moments. The visual style reflects her warmth, curiosity, and passion, showing how creativity and purpose remain central in her life.



### **AFARA ALNUAIMI**

Afara's MS journey began with a sudden change in her vision. Set in the desert landscape, her film uses the openness of the environment to convey clarity, grounding, and renewal.

When MS required her to step back from her former career, she forged a new path in writing - and today, she is a published children's author. Visual motifs of solitude in the desert and calm, open spaces echo the creative path Afara has carved for herself as a writer.



### **ABDULRAHMAN ALBLOOSHI**

Abdulrahman's MS journey started with an unexpected change in the feeling in his hands. His film turns to gardening, to the textures of soil, plants, and quiet natural spaces, as a language for patience, growth, and reconnection.

The visual language points to a grounded sensibility, shaped by care, routine, and the environments that support and inspire him.



### **HAJAR ESSAHYAOU**

Hajar's first symptom appeared during a moment with friends, when she felt an unexpected sensation in her legs. Her film evokes the transition from a fast-moving lifestyle to a more attentive, embodied way of being.

Chess anchors the visual language - measured moves, pauses, and focus echoing clarity, steadiness, and mental strength. Reading, contemplation, and the metaphor of the chessboard together reveal a life reshaped by balance, awareness, and a thoughtful new rhythm.

## LIVE ACTIVATIONS



**Live performances  
expanded the installation  
beyond the screen.**

Artists Maitha Al Omaira, Shahad Al Saqqaf, and Carlos Paez brought the audience into direct contact with the rhythms of care and embodiment.

Each performance drew from the themes of connection, continuity, and presence, transforming the exhibition space into a living dialogue between art and community.





Located within the Community Partners Space, Evident Presence was designed as an open installation, positioning NMSS as a point of engagement for visitors moving through the space.

NMSS was honored to welcome His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Her Excellency Dr. Fatima Al Kaabi, Abdul Qader Al Rais, and other distinguished guests to the installation.

Over the course of the fair, the space welcomed over 1,600 visitors, many of whom engaged with Evident Presence through viewing, conversation, and facilitated interaction.

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE



# MEDIA AND RECOGNITION

SARA AL MHEIRI, NMSS ➤  
Abu Dhabi TV



The installation generated wide media engagement across broadcast, print, online, and social media platforms. Representatives from Abu Dhabi Media Office, Abu Dhabi TV, Al Etihad, and Zahrat Al Khaleej visited the installation to capture on-site footage and interview NMSS spokespeople, while the Emirates News Agency (WAM) featured the project through official coverage of NMSS's announcement.

Together, these platforms amplified the project's message of empathy and inclusion, highlighting how art can serve as a bridge between health, community, and culture.

**HESSA AL NUAIMI, DIRWAZA CURATORIAL LAB** ➤

Zahrat Al Khaleej







## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NMSS extends its heartfelt  
gratitude to all who made  
Evident Presence: A  
Community of Care possible.

We thank our partners whose  
belief in art and community  
shaped this work:

The Authority for Social Contribution – Ma'an, for their partnership and support in bringing this vision to life, Dirwaza Curatorial Lab, whose curatorial vision guided this journey, and Triplets on Set, for capturing each story with care and sensitivity.

Our gratitude also goes to our Art Apprentice, Ciba Sanno, for sharing her story and perspective with the performers, helping to shape the live activations.

We extend our appreciation to the performers Maitha Al Omaira, Shahad Al Saqqaf, and Carlos Pérez for bringing the stories to life through movement, sound, and presence.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Abu Dhabi Art for fostering a cultural ecosystem that celebrates reflection, connection, and community.

To our MS Ambassador volunteers, Salma Said and Ahmed Al Romaithi, thank you for your time, dedication, and continued support throughout the fair.

And to the individuals living with MS who entrusted us with their voices - Abdulrahman Al Blooshi, Afara Al Nuaimi, Arifa Thawer, Betoul AlAbsi, and Hajar Essahyaoui - your stories are the heart of this installation. Each one distinct, together forming a single, shared presence.

