

A date to celebrate

Irthi explores date-palm-based biotextiles at Fashcultivate, Sharjah

2 November 2019 – 8 February 2020



Date palm being used for construction, Liwa Oasis, UAE, 1948 Sir Wifred Thesiger © The Pitt Rivers Museum. Courtesy of Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

Phoenix dactylifera – aka the date palm – has played a rich and varied role in the cultural history of the United Arab Emirates. Now, Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council believes it may also be key to its material future, as a new exhibition, Fashcultivate, is set to demonstrate.

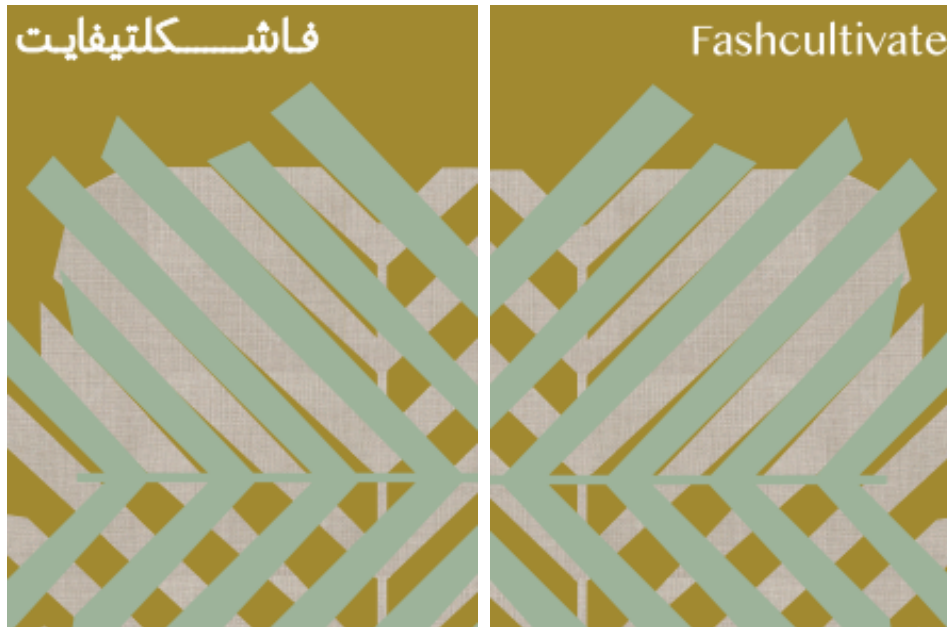
First cultivated in the UAE 7,000 years ago, there are now more than 40 million date palms in the country – roughly four to every person. As well as producing dates for food, the trees have historically provided wood for construction and leaves for flooring and basketry. Recent research funded by Irthi suggests that date palm may have another application – as the basis for the textiles of tomorrow.

Given the increasingly widespread understanding of the global climate crisis and a growing urgency to develop sustainable design solutions, Irthi commissioned Dr

Sandra Piesik, an award-winning architect, author and academic, to conduct research into the possibility of creating bio-textiles from date-palm leaves, a by-product of date farming in the UAE usually consigned to waste. Working in collaboration with Brunel University, London and the Department of Innovative Textile Technologies at the Institute of Natural Fibres and Medicinal Plants in Poznan, Poland, Dr Piesik is developing a prototype of a bio-fabric formed from date palms – the first step towards a circular economy centred on palm waste.

On 2 November, the process of Dr Piesik's research will be unveiled by Irthi at Fashcultivate, a new exhibition devoted to the date palm at the 1971 Design Space in Sharjah, from which the research concept originated.

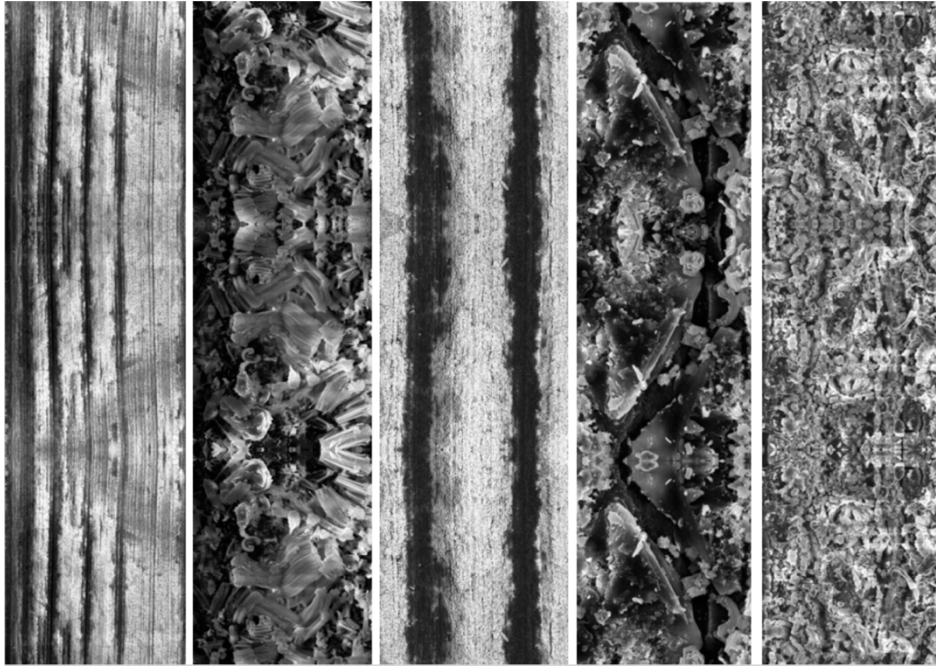
Curated and developed by Emirati fashion designer Khulood bin Thani and head of 1971 Design Space Fatma Al Mahmoud, with set designed by Alya Al Ghfel, Fashcultivate will present Dr Piesik's work alongside specially commissioned pieces exploring and celebrating the historic and potential role of date palm in design, from seven Gulf-based designers: Asma Al Mazrouie, Faissal El-Malak, Hala Kaiksow, Hessa Al Suwaidi, Khalid Mezaina, Maryam Omaira and Shahd Al Shehail.



Fashcultivate exhibition design, images courtesy of Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

Against this backdrop of creativity and innovation, Irthi and Dr Piesik will present an insight into the journey from research to reality, telling the story of prototype

development and presenting large-scale images of four palm varieties (Lulu, Sultana, Khalas and Farthin) as they appear under the microscope, revealing the intriguing details of fibres invisible to the naked eye.



Morphology images, courtesy of Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

The Irthi-directed research is intended to be the first phase in an ambitious ongoing project to create a women-led micro industry in the UAE, which – as well as demonstrating the environmental, economic and social potential of date palm as a circular biotextile – will also provide a sustainable income for the female artisans working within it – an integral part of Irthi's mission.

"Fashion is one of the world's industries that has a large negative impact on the environment, and research such as the one Dr Sandra Piseik is conducting, is vital if the fashion industry is to have a sustainable, environmentally friendly future. As a material, date palm has been integral to the development of the Gulf, with a seven thousand-year history as a source of building materials, household items, and food. At Irthi, many of our artisans are experts in traditional palm frond weaving, and our debut product collection draws on this heritage. Given its history, it is very special that this humble but versatile material could hold the key to transformative change in the fashion and the textiles industries. This research exemplifies our mission to build sustainable

markets by merging new technologies and craft while preserving cultural heritage for future generations."

– Her Excellency Reem Bin Karam, Director of NAMA Women Advancement

Notes to editors

Fashcultivate runs from 2 November 2019 to 8 February 2020 at 1971 Design Space, The Flag Island, Sharjah, UAE.

1971design.ae/en/exhibitions/2506/fashcultivate

About Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council

Based in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, and representing both traditional and modern crafts across the MENASEA and Central Asia region, Irthi exists to support the professional and social empowerment of women through craft.

Working with partner organisations around the world, the Council aims to provide a fresh narrative for women, by developing new market opportunities and sectors, delivering social development programmes and vocational training, as well as preserving the skills and rich cultural heritage of the UAE for current and future generations.

Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council is an affiliate of NAMA Women Advancement Establishment, a UAE-wide drive dedicated to the societal and economic elevation of women established under an Emiri decree by His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah. NAMA has three affiliates: Sharjah Business Women Council, The Badiri Education and Development Academy, and Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

Irthi.com

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About Dr Sandra Piesik

Dr Sandra Piesik specialises in the adaptation of traditional knowledge, urban - rural dynamics and the implementation of global sustainable legislation. She has worked

extensively in the Middle East on projects that reconnect traditional knowledge systems with modern applications and, since 2004, has pioneered date-palm leaf technology transfer in architecture and product design.

She is the founder of 3 ideas Ltd; a policy support consultant on rural-urban dynamics to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); a Visiting Professor at the UCL Global Institute for Prosperity, London; and the initiator of several RD&D groups and consortia including HABITAT Coalition.

Sandra is a stakeholder and network member in several organisations, including UN-HABITAT and UNFCCC. Since 2012, she has been actively engaged in climate-change dialogues and regularly participates in United Nations events.

Her published work includes *Arish: Palm-Leaf Architecture* (Thames & Hudson 2012) and she is the general editor of the encyclopaedia, *HABITAT: Vernacular Architecture for a Changing Planet* (Thames & Hudson, Abrams Books, Flammarion, Editions Detail and Blume 2017).

3ideasme.com
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About 1971 Design Space

1971 is a multi-functional design space dedicated to the display and discussion of all forms of contemporary design ranging from graphic, furniture to interior, interactive design and new technologies. With a variety of curated exhibitions and public programmes, 1971 Design Space aims to become a regional and international design hub in the UAE. Working in close proximity with local designers, architects, schools and universities, 1971 Design Space also serves as an informal meeting point and includes a fully serviced cafe for the enjoyment of the public.

1971design.ae