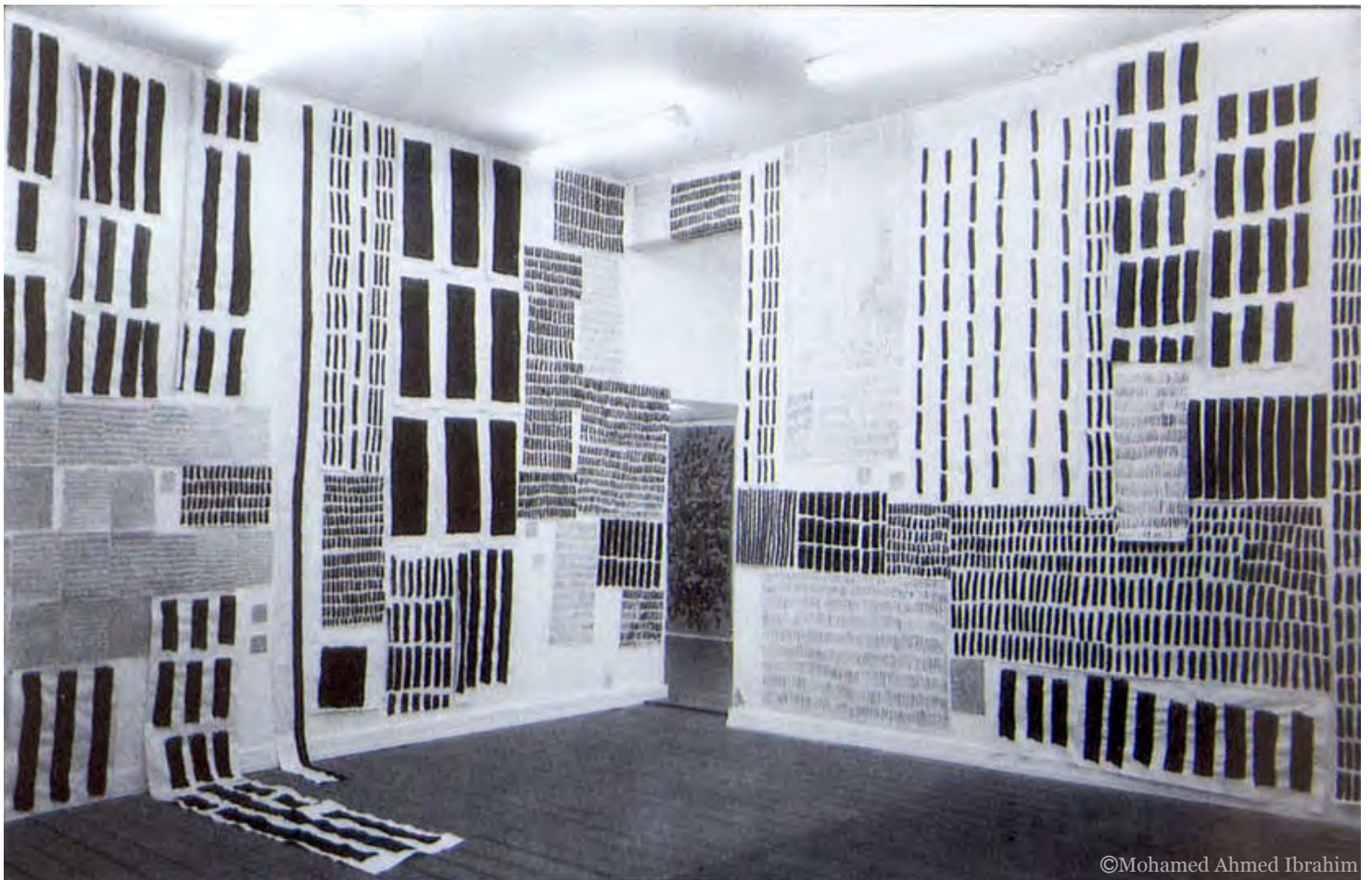![Esquire MIDDLE EAST]

UAE art collective "The Five" to feature in new exhibition

Celebrating the UAE's underground artistic community

Matthew Priest | February 15, 2017

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Lines (1995)

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Matthew Priest

The role of a community has played a key role in every modern art historical breakthrough. In art circles, communities of artists have a storied history of banding together around manifestos, or turning to one another for support when institutions rejected their innovations. This is the concept of the new exhibition from "the five", a community of artists at an intersection of visual artists, writers, and filmmakers based in the UAE.

Held at the NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery, the *But We Cannot See Them: Tracing a UAE Underground, 1988-2008* exhibition will survey one of the most important artistic communities in the UAE's history.

Its members - including Hassan Sharif, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, Abdullah Al Saadi, Mohammed Kazem, Hussain Sharif, Vivek Vilasini, Jos Clevers, and Ebtisam Abdulaziz - claim to identify with a "new culture" of encouraging radical, formal and conceptual experimentation.

The title of the exhibition is drawn from a poem written by a key member of the community, poet and filmmaker Nujoom Al Ghanem.

Founding Director and Chief Curator of the NYUAD Art Gallery, Maya Allison notes: "in the early 1990s, when curators came to the UAE looking for contemporary art, they concluded none was being made, because they could not see it. Yet contemporary art was actually flourishing. The particular artists in this exhibition developed what we might call an 'underground,' in spite of – or because of – the scarcity of public venues able to support conceptual and formal experimentation in the UAE at the time."

The exhibition officially opens to the public on March 2, 2017, and will coincide with the launch of an extensive book of new interviews with members of "the five". The gallery hopes that the exhibition and book will retrospectively help to place this movement as a pivotal artistic moment in the UAE's history.