

Press Release

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Louvre Abu Dhabi Welcomes National Cultural Treasure of the Philippines: *Una Bulaqueña*

An emblem of cultural pride and artistic mastery by Filipino artist Juan Luna now on display until June 2026



From left to right: Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi; Mr. Jorell M. Legaspi, Deputy Director-General of the National Museum of the Philippines; His Excellency Alfonso A. Ver, Ambassador of the Philippines in the UAE; His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi; and H.E. Saood Abdulaziz Al Hosani, Undersecretary of DCT Abu Dhabi

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Abu Dhabi, [17 June, 2025] — Louvre Abu Dhabi and the National Museum of the Philippines proudly announce the unveiling of *Una Bulaqueña*, an iconic oil painting by Filipino artist Juan Luna, within the museum's permanent galleries. The unveiling ceremony was attended by His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi, alongside His Excellency Alfonso A. Ver, Ambassador of the Philippines in the UAE and Mr. Jorell M. Legaspi, Deputy Director-General of the National Museum of the Philippines. This historic event marks the museum's first direct collaboration with the National Museum of the Philippines and underscores a growing cultural dialogue between the two nations.

Declared a National Cultural Treasure in 2008, *Una Bulaqueña* is an exceptional loan and a rare display of the masterpiece outside of the Philippines. The artwork will remain on view at Louvre Abu Dhabi for one year, offering visitors a profound insight into Filipino identity, history, and artistic expression.

His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "The showcasing of this very special artwork at Louvre Abu Dhabi is a testament to the museum's vision of universality and global cultural exchange. Culture is what connects us, highlighting our shared humanity and fostering greater understanding between diverse people and societies around the

globe. With this display of *Una Bulaqueña*, Abu Dhabi audiences will have the opportunity to discover a great deal about its cultural and art historical context, thereby learning more about the rich and fascinating history of the Philippines.”

His Excellency Alfonso A. Ver highlighted the event as a testament to the strengthening of the bilateral relations between the Philippines and the UAE. "The loan of *Una Bulaqueña*, a National Cultural Treasure painting by Juan Luna, shows the ever-deepening and dynamic bilateral relations of the two countries. This significant cultural exchange reflects our shared commitment to fostering understanding and cooperation through art. The Philippine Embassy is truly honored to witness this momentous occasion and reaffirms its commitment to promoting cultural dialogue between the Philippines and the UAE," Ambassador Ver said.

Painted by Juan Luna, one of the Philippines' most celebrated artists, *Una Bulaqueña* reflects his unique ability to merge European academic traditions with a deep sense of Filipino identity. Created in 1895 during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines, this masterpiece captures a poised young Filipina woman from Bulacan—a province known for its wealth, cultural refinement, and strong nationalist sentiment.

Dressed in traditional attire—camisa, saya (long skirt), pañuelo (neck cover), and tapis (knee-length overskirt)—the subject holds a fan and handkerchief, visual cues of dignity and social stature that reflect Spanish colonial influence. Her contemplative gaze and upright posture speak volumes about the pride, grace, and strength of the Filipino spirit. Luna's choice to centre a Filipina—rather than a European noblewoman—challenges conventional notions of artistic hierarchy and reclaims representation during a time of colonial rule.

The painting's presence at Louvre Abu Dhabi strengthens the museum's commitment to cultural universality. Displayed between Auguste Renoir's *La Tasse de Chocolat* (Cup of Chocolate), which features another enigmatic female figure, and Edouard Manet's *The Bohemian*, *Una Bulaqueña* broadens the gallery's display of modernity and portraiture.

Manuel Rabaté, Director of Louvre Abu Dhabi, said: "Una Bulaqueña is more than a portrait—it is a powerful symbol of national identity and cultural pride. At Louvre Abu Dhabi, we are deeply honoured to bring this treasured masterpiece to the Arab world for the first time, in collaboration with the National Museum of the Philippines. Juan Luna's painting, with its quiet dignity and rootedness in Filipino heritage, resonates deeply with our mission as the cultural flagship of the UAE—to tell stories that cross borders, uphold identity, and expand understanding through art. This exceptional loan strengthens our universal narrative by placing Southeast Asia's voice at the heart of our global dialogue."

Meanwhile, **Jorell Legaspi, Deputy Director-General for Museums of the National Museum of the Philippines** said: "While we at the National Museum feel a measure of wistfulness as we part with this beloved painting for the time being, the opportunity to share it with the diverse and vibrant audience of Abu Dhabi brings far greater joy. This city, a global crossroads of ideas and cultures, offers a fitting setting for the appreciation of Luna's genius—and of the broader contributions of Southeast Asian and Filipino art to the world's cultural heritage. Beyond this, we are heartened by the thought that this painting will bring a sense of familiarity and belonging to thousands of Filipinos across the United Arab Emirates and the greater Middle East."

Una Bulaqueña was acquired by the National Museum of the Philippines and safeguarded through the tumultuous period of World War II, making its arrival in Abu Dhabi both an artistic and historic milestone. This remarkable oil painting will remain on display at Louvre Abu Dhabi until June 2026, providing visitors a unique opportunity to experience this masterpiece firsthand.

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ABOUT LOUVRE ABU DHABI

Created by an exceptional agreement between the governments of Abu Dhabi and France, Louvre Abu Dhabi was designed by Jean Nouvel and opened on Saadiyat Island in November 2017. The museum is inspired by traditional Islamic architecture and its monumental dome creates a rain of light effect and a unique social space that brings people together.

Louvre Abu Dhabi celebrates the universal creativity of mankind and invites audiences to see humanity in a new light. Through its innovative curatorial approach, the museum focuses on building understanding across cultures: through stories of human creativity that transcend civilisations, geographies, and times.

The museum's growing collection is unparalleled in the region and spans thousands of years of human history, including prehistoric tools, artefacts, religious texts, iconic paintings, and contemporary artworks. The permanent collection is supplemented by rotating loans from 19 French partner institutions, regional and international museums.

Louvre Abu Dhabi is a testing ground for new ideas in a globalised world and champions new generations of cultural leaders. Its international exhibitions, programming and Children's Museum are inclusive platforms that connect communities and offer enjoyment for all.

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PHILIPPINES

The National Museum of the Philippines (NMP) is a trust of the Philippine government that was established by royal decree on August 12, 1887, and has served as the country's premier educational, scientific, and cultural institution. Originally founded as the Museo-Biblioteca de Filipinas, it now stands proud with a vision of safeguarding the Philippines' rich heritage and promoting a deeper understanding of its diverse cultures and histories. The NMP has since expanded in its reach through its nationwide network of various regional component museums spread across the archipelago.

The National Museum of the Philippines, through its mission of acquiring collections, showcasing exhibitions, fostering research, and conducting various public programs, remains steadfast in its commitment to inspiring, educating, and enriching all those who visit its galleries, and preserving the legacy of the Filipino people for generations to come.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND TOURISM – ABU DHABI

The Department of Culture and Tourism–Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) drives the sustainable growth of Abu Dhabi's culture and tourism sectors and its creative industries, fuels economic progress and helps achieve Abu Dhabi's wider global ambitions. By working in partnership with the organisations that define the emirate's position as a leading international destination, DCT Abu Dhabi strives to unite the ecosystem around a shared vision of the emirate's potential, coordinate effort and investment, deliver innovative solutions, and use the best tools, policies, and systems to support the culture and tourism industries.

DCT Abu Dhabi's vision is defined by the emirate's people, heritage, and landscape. We work to enhance Abu Dhabi's status as a place of authenticity, innovation, and unparalleled experiences, represented by its living traditions of hospitality, pioneering initiatives, and creative thought.

ABOUT SAADIYAT CULTURAL DISTRICT

Home to Louvre Abu Dhabi, Berklee Abu Dhabi, Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abrahamic Family House and the soon-to-open Zayed National Museum, teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi, Saadiyat Cultural District is one of the greatest concentrations of cultural institutions.

Saadiyat Cultural District is a global platform, emanating from a rich cultural heritage, celebrating traditions, and advancing equitable culture. It is an embodiment of empowerment, showcasing museums, collections, and narratives that supports the region's heritage while promoting a diverse global cultural landscape.

Saadiyat Cultural District is a testament to Abu Dhabi's commitment to preserving heritage while embracing a forward-looking vision. The District invites the world to engage with diverse cultures, fostering dialogue exchange, and offers a global cultural space that supports the region and the global South.



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