

BAZAAR^{Harper's} ARABIA

Global Ambitions: Art Dubai Comes Of Age



Courtesy of Art Dubai

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Anna Brady previews the 11th edition of Art Dubai, and interviews the fair's new director Myrna Ayad about the Middle East's growing art scene and her plans for the event

Anna Brady

For an art fair, the 10 year barrier marks a tipping point from juvenile to mature, particularly when that event is the totem of a still emerging market such as Dubai. So it is with Art Dubai (15-18 March), now in its 11th year. This week in March, sandwiched between New York's The Armory Show and Art Basel Hong Kong, is Dubai's one moment on the international art market stage as galleries from across the globe alight. Art Dubai starts its second decade with a new director in Myrna Ayad, replacing Antonia Carver, a shiny new website, its first Modern symposium and ever broadening exhibitor list. In her former career as a journalist and editor of Canvas magazine, Ayad was an ardent advocate of the region's art scene. Her central aim in her new, hands-on role is simply to "continue to make Art Dubai a nucleus for art in the region, a one-stop shop."



*Wijdan. Telal Sahrawyeh. 1981. Oil on Canvas. 85 x 135 cm. The artist and
Wadi Al Finan Gallery*

Journalists turning fair directors has become a trend: Benjamin Genocchio at The Armory Show, Marc Spiegler at Art Basel and Antonia Carver, Ayad's predecessor, at Art Dubai to name a few. They possess a canny, worldly view, and crucially can speak to the press as one of their own, so important in the choppy, competitive waters of the art fair world. Ayad thinks her journalistic background helps in the new job, lending a broad knowledge of the landscape of the art world accumulated over the past 15 years. The two roles are not so different. "One of the common denominators between being a fair director and being a journalist is that we are essentially talking to the same people, to artists, collectors, galleries and institutions. But the conversations are different." Both are, in essence, about connecting dots. "If I come across a great artist in Tunisia who is unknown in the Levant then I will think about how to bring them to the fair. Or if I meet an international collector who is thinking about starting to collect Middle Eastern art, I will invite them to the fair."

Ayad disagrees with the suggestion that the centre for the market for Middle Eastern art is in London, stressing, "The quantity and the variety is here in the Middle East, both by emerging and established artists." Artistic centres extend beyond Dubai. "Of course there's Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, where there is so much going on culturally and it's a very dynamic time for both. But I think Jeddah is a very exciting platform too. It's home to a number of fantastic Saudi artists, has a great collector base and also some progressive galleries, like Athr Gallery and Hafez Gallery, which both exhibit at Art Dubai. Also there's the annual 21,39 Jeddah Arts initiative, which takes place each February."



*Marina Abramovic. The Kitchen VII. 2009. Photograph. 136 x 136 cm.
Courtesy of Galleri Brandstrup and the artist.*

Art Dubai's exhibitor list can now claim to be truly international, with 93 galleries from 44 countries. It's a mix of smaller regional set-ups and some big galleries well known on the fair circuit, such as London's Victoria Miro gallery, whose presence elevates a fair, a sign it is being taken seriously on an international level. The fair has done away with the Marker section, a curated programme of galleries that focused on a different theme or region each year in favour of, says International Director Pablo del Val, encouraging galleries to create "more tightly curated presentations" overall. "The exhibitions will be split between solo or two-artist exhibitions, allowing a more focused contemplation, and multi-artist shows, enabling an overview of different works," he says. The approach echoes a wider trend at art fairs for galleries to create the more considered, themed-booths.

Ayad is particularly proud of the fair's inaugural Modern Symposium, which will look at the cultural impact of 20th century masters from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia. "There's a dearth of information about the Modern art history of the Middle East and MENA. So the symposium is in line with our intention to further add to the dialogue and learning in the area, which will complement the Modern section of the fair." The three-day programme takes place at the fair on 13 and 17 March and at Concrete in Alserkal Avenue on 18 March. The other educational event, the Global Art Forum, is at the fair's venue, the Madinat Jumeriah. The largest talks programme in the Middle East and

Asia, the forum is commissioned by Shumon Basar, with Antonia Carver and Oscar Guardiola-Rivera as Co-Directors. It will feature around 50 speakers from around the world, including artist Sophia Al Maria and Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, founder of the Barjeel Foundation, concentrating on the theme Trading Places, looking at the interchange of both material objects and ideas.



Ahmad Nawash. Rajol Al Moroor. Wadi Finan. 1974. Oil on canvas. 60 x 60cm. Courtesy the artist and Wadi Finan Gallery.

The fair's commissions programme is entirely devoted to performance art this year with five performances, curated by Yasmina Reggad and presented by Manuel Pelmu, Lana Fahmi, Egle Budvytyt, Iván Argote and Pauline Bastard. "I'm super excited about that as I like the idea that you can be strolling around an art fair and boom, suddenly, your experience is disrupted by a performance," says Ayad. Also an uncommon experience is *The Room*, returning for the second year with the title *Cooking Liberty*. "We are doing the same dining concept as last year," says Ayad, "This year it will be an immersive Surrealist dining experience by the Beirut collective Atfal Ahdath, inspired by Salvador Dali's cookbook, *Les Dinners des Gala*." By night, the collective will serve up "edible dreams in an immersive setting reminiscent of a grandiose banquet."

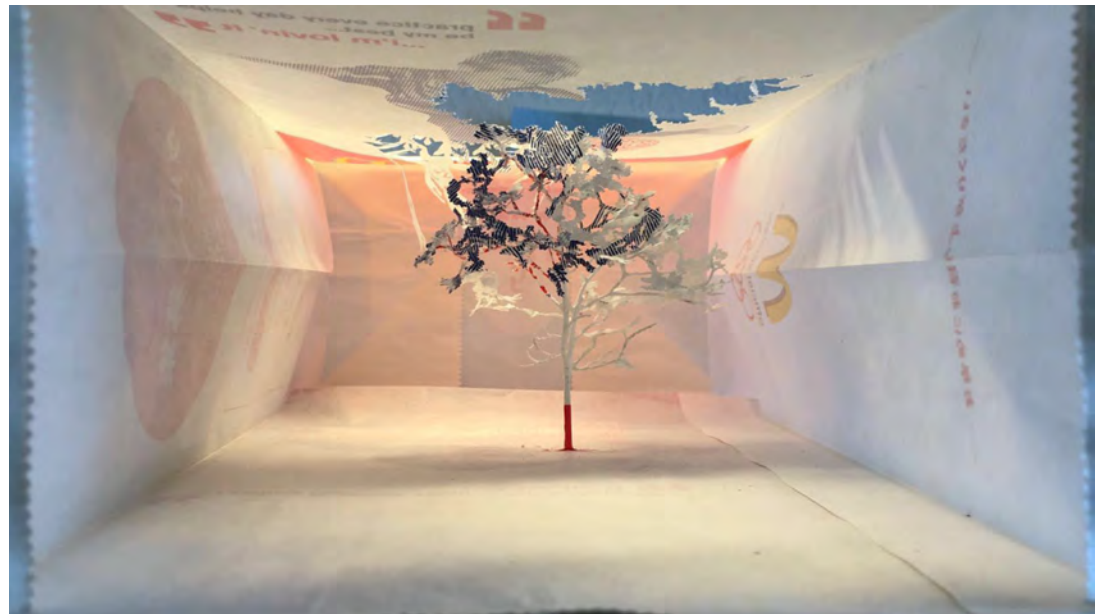
There are two new members on the selection committee: Isabelle van den Eynde of the namesake Dubai gallery and Glenn Scott Wright from London's Victoria Miro. Ayad adds, "The Art Newspaper will also publish

daily papers at Art Dubai, the publication's first venture in the region."= Julius Bar, the Swiss private bank and sponsors of the fair, will pay= homage to the late Emirati artist Hassan Sharif through an exhibition= showing the work of artists who have been mentored, influenced and= inspired by Sharif's practice and teaching. Yasmina Reggad and Lana= Fahmi will also perform a dance piece based on Sharif's diagrams,= instructions and performance archive. Rounding off the supporting= programme, for the Art Dubai Commission, Moroccan-born, Brooklyn- based artist Meriem Bennani, will create an interactive bar installation= titled *Ghariba/Stranger*, and the fruits of the 2017 Abraaj Group Art Prize= will be unveiled. The winner, London-based Bangladeshi artist Rana= Begum, will show her commissioned work alongside an exhibition of= works by shortlisted artists Doa Aly, Sarah Abu Abdallah and Raha= Raissnia under the curatorship of Omar Berrada

For a taste of this year's fair, including the strong contingent of Iranian= galleries, Modern Masters and selection of Latin America art, read on.

Art Dubai 2017 runs from 15-18 March at the Madinat Jumeirah. [Artdubai](#)

Pablo De Val, International Director of Art Dubai, on Latin= American art



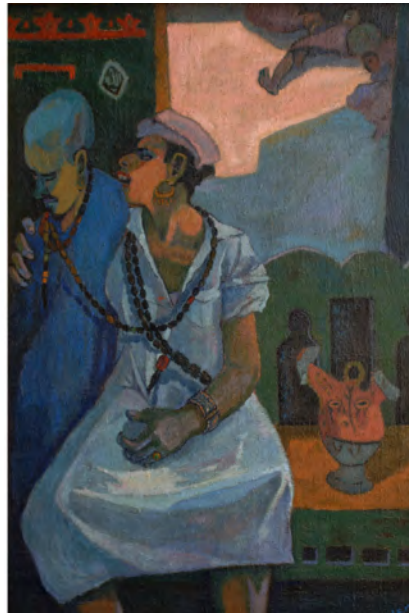
*Yuken Teruya. Notice Forest. 2016. McDonald bag. Variable dimensions.
Courtesy of Piero Atchugarry gallery and the artist.*

Geographically it might seem odd that Art Dubai should play host to a wealth of Latin American art. But then, this is hot area of the art market at the moment and its rise at Art Dubai is largely due to the arrival in 2015 of Pablo De Val. Formerly artistic director of the Zona Maco contemporary art fair in Mexico and now Art Dubai's International Director, he is an exponent of Latin American art. This year, there are 15 Central and South American artists on the stands of 12 galleries, and four exhibitors from South America, who will show solely artists from the continent. The latter number Piero Atchugarry Gallery of Pueblo Garzón, Uruguay; D21 Proyectos de Arte of Santiago, Chile; Revolver Galeria from Lima, Peru and, from Sao Paulo in Brazil, Vermelho.

"Since I started at Art Dubai, one of my primary points of focus has been to encourage more Latin American galleries to participate," says de Val, "It's nice to see this happening this year and hopefully there will be even more galleries attending in 2018." Arriving in Dubai in October 2015 was De Val's first contact with the region, but "It instantly felt like home. Dubai and Sharjah reminded me so much of the South of Spain-I'm originally from Madrid-and of cities like Mexico City and Sao Paulo. The art scene in a way is very similar. Both Dubai and Mexico City concentrate the energies of the art community and have become a must to understand what is going on in their respective regions." In both cases, private collecting, rather than public institutions are what is preserving heritage and memory.

De Val also points out that Latin America is home to large Arab diaspora, and some of the best Latin American collectors are of Arab origin, generally Syrian or Lebanese. For him, one of the most exciting aspects are the parallels that can be seen between Middle Eastern and Latin American art. "There is a very similar vocabulary in terms of style, pictorial language and materials used as well as issues that both are interested in: Post colonialism, Social-political situations, material, subtlety and poetry." And, on the art being shown at the fair this year, expect "a very strong trend in sociological matters, such as identity and language as well as displacement as a personal and social issues."

Art Dubai Modern: Contextualising the Present



Mamdouh Ammar. In the Kingdom of Woman-Fi Rehab el Set. 1952. Oil on Canvas. 120 x 80 cm. Courtesy of ArtTalks Egypt.

Art Dubai is divided into two main parts within the Madinat Jumeirah; the main Contemporary section, with 78 galleries, and the smaller Modern section, featuring 20th century works from 15 galleries. The latter, though smaller, is no afterthought; this is where you will find many of the most devoted and knowledgeable collectors and the art on the walls reads as 20th century Arab history lesson. So be sure to seek it out. Contemporary art does not exist in a vacuum; so much is informed by what has gone before and so the Modern section, with its quieter, more contemplative air, adds context. This year, the Modern section is complemented by the inaugural Modern Symposium, which Myrna Aya d hopes will help right the dearth of material available currently on the history of Modern Middle Eastern art, while also looking at the cultural exchange between Middle Eastern and Western artists in the 20th century.

It is particularly rich in paintings, by Middle Eastern, North African and South Asian masters. Take the painting by Egyptian Modernist Mamdouh Ammar (1928-2012), *In the Kingdom of Woman-Fi Rehab el Set*, exhibited by ArtTalks Egypt from Cairo. This early work was painted in 1952, the year of both the 23 July Revolution and Ammar's graduation from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo. He then joined the Contemporary Art Group, and became a key figure in the development of a politically engaged Egyptian Folk Realism movement, felt in the Socialist Realist style and subject matter of this oil on canvas.

Jordan's Wadi Finan Gallery show *Rajol Al Moroor*, painted in 1974 by the Jerusalem-born artist Ahmad Nawash (born 1934), as ever in his work,

the human figure is central here. A graduate of the Accademia di Belle= Arti in Rome and Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux, Nawash now lives= and works in Amman and has had numerous exhibitions in Amman,= Baghdad, Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus and across Europe. London's Grosvenor Gallery launch a major catalogue raisonné of the late= Indian painter Sayed Haider Raza (1922-2016) at Art Dubai this year and= will also exhibit his paintings on their stand in the Modern section.= Among them is this typically vibrant oil and watercolour on paper, titled= *Vieilles Maisons, Rue de Bercy*, and painted in 1960, a decade after he= moved to France. Many of the galleries in the Modern section, like= Grosvenor Gallery, are contributing to the literature in the under= recorded fields of Indian and Middle Eastern modern art history.= Grosvenor Gallery director Charles Moore says the primary aim of the= Raza catalogue raisonné is to establish beyond doubt the works that= belong to his output, but it's a work in progress. "At present we have= around 2000 works on file in various stages of completion. However,= with an artistic career of over seventy years, the process of completing a= comprehensive listing of all known artworks will be a rewarding but long= one."

The Iranian Contingent



Hadi Hazavei. Untitled. Hadi Hazavei. 1962. 120 x 200 cm. Mixed media on canvas. Courtesy of the artist and Shirin Gallery

The dynamism of Tehran's gallery scene remains largely hidden from the outside world, certainly in the West. There are literally hundreds of commercial galleries on the city's streets. Giving a sense of the Tehran's

cultural richness and the sheer number of talented Iranian artists both in the country and across the diaspora, is the contingent of nine Iran-based galleries at Art Dubai, including Mohsen Gallery, Dastan's Basement, Khak Gallery, O Gallery, Khak Gallery, AG Gallery and Ab-Anbar.

In the Modern section, Shirin Gallery, which is based in both Tehran and New York, will show a large early *Untitled* painting from 1962 by the older Iranian artist Hadi Hazavei (born 1940), figurative piece rather than the compositions of bricks that he is known for. Mohsen Gallery exhibit a hauntingly dark work from 2014 titled *Khaigh Aviz* and made from burnt wood, iron, rope and lead by the young Iranian artist Mojtaba Amini. The site-specific installation was inspired by the 18th century artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi's series of drawings of subterranean prisons.

"Instruments of torture and death can also be seen on the floors," says Amini of Piranesi. "After these designs, I made pendants reminiscent of those hanging from the ceilings of churches, temples and mosques."

Also taking his cue from dark source imagery, this time recent mass media imagery of violent conflict, is Reza Aramesh's *Action* series. Ab-Anbar will exhibit one of this ongoing series, titled *Action: 165*, from 2016. As with many of Aramesh's unsettling works, it takes a beautiful material, finely hand-carved Carrara marble, to depict an act of violence, in this case a decapitated, blindfolded head.

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