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(e)merge art fair Expands International Outreach with New Middle Eastern Gallery

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Now in its fourth year, the (e)merge art fair continues to expand its international offerings by welcoming its first-ever gallery from the Middle East. Naila Art Gallery, based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia will make its American debut here in Washington, DC this week with three contemporary Saudi artists. East City Art recently reached out to Naila Gallery's development manager Wided Khadraoui to find out more about the gallery and what they have planned for fair visitors.

Founded in 2012, Naila Art Gallery is itself a new venture and according to Ms. Khadraoui works to, "highlight and support the emerging talent in Saudi Arabia." While the gallery has worked quickly to establish a critical roster of represented artists, it also strives to be a creative nexus in a society increasingly interested in contemporary art. To that end, the gallery presents not only exhibition-related artist talks, but also creates educational programs and co-hosts artistic events with international organizations such as the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, France and the British Council.

Participation in art fairs is one method that Galleries increasingly rely upon to engage wider audiences and Naila is eager to interact with an American public that may be unaware of the contemporary artistic zeitgeist in the Middle East. The staff selected (e)merge as their debut outlet due to its focus on developing connections between exhibitors and the public at large. Khadraoui notes that "there has always been an international interest in Saudi Arabia, usually for political or macabre reasons," and major media reporting on the Kingdom in the US adds credence to her observations. Naila plans to upend that paradigm by displaying a facet of Saudi Arabian culture not normally on view here in Washington.



Untitled, Ayman Zedani, Print, 100 x 100 cm, Image courtesy of Naila Art Gallery

myriad of unknown outcomes. While there are elements of realism—distinct facial features are observed—washes of muted colors lend the works a definite abstract quality.

Fahad AlNiymah may also be broadly described as a portraitist, but he approaches his work from a starkly different viewpoint. AlNiymah is a self-taught artist whose upbringing in a rural setting greatly impacts his view of the human form. The gallery's exhibition materials point out his Bedouin background but what viewers see are frenetically-paced portraits awash in vibrant color. There is a fauvist quality about the work and its naiveté actually works to heighten a sense of emotion. Indeed, the artist is not interested in capturing realistic likenesses so much as examining the emotions behind the façade.

Where AlNiymah and Zedani document and describe our public appearance, Marwah AlMugait delves deep into the psyche to examine how we reconcile combative elements of our personality. Ms. AlMugait received an MA in photojournalism but quickly made a leap from commercial to conceptual photography. Her work documents intimate, internal stories that unfold as we develop our personalities. For (e)merge, AlMugait will be exhibiting photographic stills from a video work titled *Oudah*, meaning “revisiting” in Arabic, that examines how we cope with, and eventually integrate, traumatic emotions or memories within our psyche. The images

The gallery's curatorial theme for (e)merge is described by Khadraoui as the “process of intrinsic searching.” That is a very open-ended concept, but in reviewing the three artists chosen, a common theme of searching for identity rises to the forefront. All three artists hail from Saudi Arabia but approach their art from very different paths. Ayman Zedani has an undergraduate degree in biomedical science—a background which has had a profound impact on his artistic expression. His photographic works exhibit a search for self-identity impeded, or perhaps enriched, by a

are hazy and where the former artists are somewhat focused on facial expression, AlMugait appears more interested in the body as a repository for both pain and joy. While on public display, the experience of the woman pictured above is powerfully personal.

Three intriguing approaches to questioning identity when taken together show that notions of the self—the desire to better understand our complex emotional landscapes—know no arbitrary dividing lines drawn on a map. Naila Art Gallery will be a notable addition to the (e)merge gallery platform and a booth you will not want to miss!



Untitled, Fahad AlNiymah, Mixed Media on Canvas, 200 x 150 cm, Image courtesy of Naila Art Gallery

For more information on Naila Art Gallery, visit their website [here](#).

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