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Sotheby's

CULTURAL CROSSROADS

Tale of Three Cities

BY [ROXANE ZAND](#) | 20 NOV 2015

It has been an exceptionally busy time for the Sotheby's team in the Middle East. Starting on 14 November when we arrived to winding queues for the opening of the 10th anniversary edition of *Contemporary Istanbul* (CI), there was not an idle moment between fair-related parties (Sotheby's hosting one alongside CI), and a well-received CI Dialogues panel talk featuring the British Museum's Venetia Porter, Shirin Gallery, collector-publisher Ali Bakhtiari and myself.



INSTALLATION VIEW OF CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL 2015.

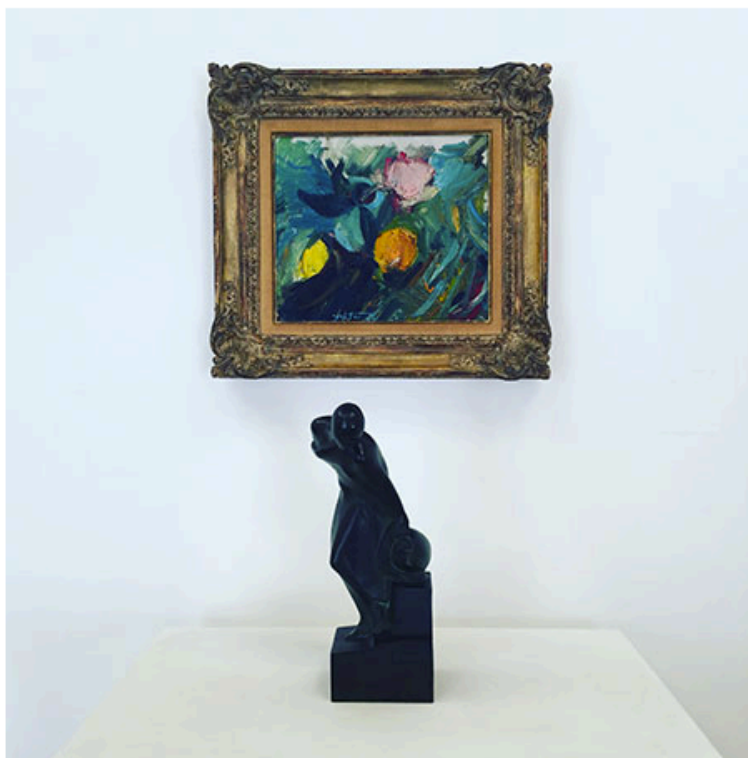
This 10th edition of CI was something of a landmark, with 102 galleries and 790 artists represented, and an overall attendance figure of 86,000 resulting in 64 percent sales. The highest sale was a Jannis Kounellis at €1,040,000, and the focus of the fair being Iranian art, a cluster of Tehran galleries (Shirin, Assar, Aaran, Dastan and Lajevardi Foundation) also put in a good presence. The excellent non-selling Mobargha Foundation exhibition showcasing superb Iranian modern works was a welcome initiative by Maryam Majd.

Hardly pausing to catch breath, the team migrated to Dubai on 15 November where a small, but high quality travel exhibition at JAMM Gallery (a space generously lent by Lulu Al Sabah and Farhad Bakhtiar) of Arab, Iranian and Turkish abstract modernism from our London 2 December sale of **20th Century Art – A Different Perspective**, drew a crowd of art lovers from Bahrain, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Iran and North Africa and Europe. With works either fresh to the market or rare to find, the sale caught the visitors' attention.



A CONTEMPORARY ISTANBUL: DIALOGUES PANEL DISCUSSION. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ROXANE ZAND, VENETIA PORTER, ALI BAKHTIAR AND SHIRIN PARTOVI.

From Dubai we rushed to Abu Dhabi where the 7th edition of its art fair attracted a large audience of both Emirati and international visitors, all of whom are eagerly anticipating the museum openings. A smaller fair than CI (40 galleries, closer to 10,000 visitors), ADA amply makes up for size through the quality of its offerings and the high-level gallery presence (Ropac, Acquavella, Krinzinger et al). At the time of writing ADA is still ongoing so final figures are not available, but I can reliably relay that several important galleries have announced sales of major works at undisclosed prices, with Zwirner selling five works by James Welling, Gallery One selling two works by Sliman Mansour for approx \$180,000 and \$120,000 to Guggenheim AD, and all galleries reporting healthy mid-level sales. The regional fairs have now forged a strong brand, and while not in direct competition with the giants that are Basel and Frieze, they aim to address the international vernacular with a regional interpretation, and for this we will always continue to support and enjoy them. This year, as before, we were lavishly hosted by HH Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan UAE Minister of Culture, at his Majlis for our 7th Sothebys Abu Dhabi Art Collectors' Lunch.



INSTALLATION VIEW OF HIGHLIGHTS FROM 20TH CENTURY ART – A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

Back to Dubai on 18 November for some of us to attend the big-bang opening of the Leila Heller Gallery - an extraordinary space in Al Serkal, which featured two important shows by Ghada Amer and Wim Delvoye. The force of nature that is Leila had managed to secure the presence and patronage of HH Sheikh Zayed bin Seif Al Nahyan, and his uncle HH Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan – a rare occurrence for both to appear at the same occasion. Followed by a lavish dinner at the Jumeirah Beach Cove, this event will stay in our memories for a while!

Early the next morning I was privileged to be invited to speak at an ArtExperts+ Breakfast for art professionals at A4 Project Space in Al Serkal. This newly-founded organization connects local art professionals, collectors, scholars and students who are emerging art specialists. With authorities such as Giovanni Aloisio present, the questions and discussions were most enlightening - ending only in time for lunch!

Now back to London for our exceptional upcoming jewellery sale and, of course the **20th Century Art – A Different Perspective** on 2 December.