

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Laster, Paul. "The Best Art In The World." *Whitehot Magazine*. (February 2018).



Gallery Going in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue



Arrow sculpture, designed by Penguin Cube, in The Yard of Alserkal Avenue

By **PAUL LASTER**, Jan. 2018

An oasis for contemporary art and design in the heart of the Middle East, [Alserkal Avenue is one of the United Arab Emirates cultural hotspots. Established in 2005 and expanded in 2015, Alserkal Avenue is a cluster of architect-designed warehouses housing galleries and creative businesses in an industrial area of Dubai.](#)

Not unlike a stroll through Chelsea, Alserkal Avenue is a captivating destination with dynamic galleries and non-profit institutions, as well as cafes and lounge areas for breaks in art viewing. On a recent tour, Whitehot dropped by eight galleries and two institutional spaces, with all of them showing highly engaging work.

Concrete, Alserkal Avenue's art center, presented *While We Wait*, a project by Palestinian architects Elias & Yousef Anastas. The installation featured a tower constructed from interlocking bricks made with digitally cut stones from the politically controversial Cremisan Valley, a historical area that's being culturally divided by a security wall built by the Israeli government. After the exhibition, the tower is being returned to the valley, where it will become a monument to the durability of the people as they wait on the return of their land and also serve as a communal gathering space.

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Exploring the relationship between art and architecture, *Theatre of the Absurd* at Green Art Gallery offered an international mix of paintings, sculptures and installation art by artists Farah Atassi, Ana Mazzei, Nika Neelova, Hemali Bhuta and Elena Alonso, while the Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation for Contemporary Art presented large-scale, abstract canvases from the mid-1960s to the present by the renowned Swiss minimalist painter Olivier Mosset.

Lawrie Shabibi mounted its third solo show of Tehran-born, New York-based artist Shahpour Pouyan, who exhibited 33 ceramic sculptures based on dome-like architectural structures related to the 33 countries identified in his DNA. Displayed on a minimal, steel structure in the center of the gallery, the finely crafted ceramics were surrounded by a series of hand-modified photographs culled from Byzantine, Nordic, Mesopotamian and Persian sources.

Leila Heller Gallery had a doubleheader with solo exhibitions by New York-based artists Jacob Hashimoto and Enoc Perez. Hashimoto simulated the prismatic effect of digital technology through his clever use of paper, paint, thread, wood and bamboo in his beautifully layered wall works and captivating installation, while Perez painted architectural wonders—in this case significant structures in the Gulf Region—with a mix of realist and expressionist panache.

Similarly, Ayyam Gallery had two simultaneous exhibitions in its side-by-side spaces. Syrian painter Kais Salman was showing his expressionistic *Cities* series of canvases, which were bursting with urban characters that revealed a variety of emotions at 12 Alserkal Avenue contrasted with Lebanese artist Nadim Karam's crushed sculptural cubes made with rusted steel rods that he compellingly calls *Compressed Thoughts*, which are part of the latest development in his ongoing *Stretching Thoughts* series, on view at 11 Alserkal Avenue.

British artist Ian Davenport presented his seductive stripe paintings at Custot Gallery Dubai in the exhibition *Cascade*, which displayed abstractions with colorful rows of paint that ran down the face of the canvas and gathered in gorgeous puddles on the floor. Nearby, The Third Line offered *Al Sawaber*, Kuwaiti-Palestinian artist Tarek Al-Ghoussein's third solo exhibition with the gallery, curated by Salwa Mikdadi. Featuring the artist's photographs of abandoned spaces and objects from a government-housing complex in Kuwait that's slated for demolition, the exhibition provides a ghostly look at a bygone era of the Gulf Region's rapidly changing environment.

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Wrapping up the tour, Carbon 12 was showing German artist André Butzer's meditative, monochromatic paintings—his third one-person show with Carbon 12 and the gallery's 60th exhibition since opening in 2008—while Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde presented its second show with the Turkish artist duo: mentalKLINIK. Titled *Truish*, the exhibition explored the invisible politics and dynamics that shape our everyday lives with such artworks as a neon sign that read "Are You Popular Enough?," covers of *Time* magazine overlaid with trendy stickers and Emojis, robotic vacuum cleaners that moved glitter around the floor and shiny artworks that coolly captured the viewer's reflection in the show's provocative realm.

Seeing so much memorable work in a three-hour period is what makes Alserkal Avenue a major destination for contemporary art, and for design—which is prevalent in all of the public spaces and in other galleries here, and touched upon in our pictures—but that's a story for another report and another reason to return to this cultural delight. **WM**

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Jacob Hashimoto: The Eclipse at Leila Heller Gallery



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Enoc Perez: The Desert Bloom at Leila Heller Gallery

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