Leila’s “Lay of the Land”

Leila Heller, New York contemporary art dealer, dished with Lau’a Stewart on her “Hot” artists and reveals some of her future projects.

Laura Stewart: How many years have you been participating in Art Dubai?

Leila Heller: We first participated in Art Dubai in 2006 with a solo presentation of video paintings by our artists Shirin Azadi and Shahram Karimi. They presented seven video paintings of Buring Oil fields all shown together in a dark room. It was called the highlights of Art Dubai that year! Since then we have even with group presentation. Last year we had an amazing three-person show of new works by Shiva Ahmadzai, Ayad Alkadhi, and Nazanin Area Baradari which was very well received.

LS: What artists are you exhibiting this year, and why?

LH: This year we will be presenting one of our most ambitious shows to date. We want to show the depth and variety of our artists, not just in terms of their medium and style, but also in terms of the diverse themes present in their work. We have carefully selected a group of artists who we know deeply engage with one another on a variety of levels. Ayad Alkadhi presented a new four-panel painting masterpiece specifically for Art Dubai which explores the reoccurring themes of war and the collective memory of the Iraqi nation. Rashid Al Khatti’s works on convex canvases continue to explore the reflective polygons formed from color and space. His works converse with husband and wife duo, Kait/Eric’s paintings of trailing color and movement depicting the constant interplay between light and dark matter through layers of slow morphing forms in a cosmic environment. Such contemplation of the self in space is also what one finds in the works of Emael’s LaShai, whose intricate video painting installations will be showing both in our booth and at the public space in Art Dubai. LaShai is one of the most central and groundbreaking female figures in contemporary Middle Eastern art, and we are also honored to be exhibiting her solo show at our New York Gallery this March.

Faraz Lehman has added a new dimension to her Reflections and Mothershadows specifically for Art Dubai, now the her signature mysterious figures have been created in 24 karat gold! The new series of Reflections and Mothershadows are absolutely breathtaking. Hadih Shafee, whose elaborate paper scroll paintings have captivated its viewers time and again, will be revealing new works in which she has dipped the scroll in black and white ink to further add depth to her striking colors. Finally, we will be showing four paintings from Ali Hadi Ganos’ series.

LS: What Changes Have You Seen?

LH: There is no doubt that each year the fair becomes more and more professional. Under Antonio Carner’s direction, the fair has reached a new high in terms of the quality of the curatorial staff and the highly dynamic and engaging public programs they have initiated. As a result of this, I believe the fair has succeeded in gaining the attention of pivotal international curators, collectors, and press. I eagerly anticipate to see the thrilling evolution of Art Dubai in the years to come.

LS: As you were one of the first dealers to specialize in Middle Eastern Contemporary art are you in a unique position to judge what is of value on the market and what is lightweight, or manufactured to take advantage of speculation. Amongst the newer artists to enter the market, who do you think has staying power?

LH: As a gallery owner, it is essential not to blindly follow market trends and raise the price of your artists’ works simply because he/she has done well in one sale. I work closely with my artists to develop a strategy for...
I work closely with my artists to develop a strategy for their market, and more importantly, to focus on getting their works into significant private and public collections, especially Western museums. This is what will help them gain international recognition and staying power in addition to further shifting the attention of the West on art emerging from the Middle East. Hadjide Shalja currently has a waiting list of collectors who want to buy her work and auction houses who want to include her works in every sale. But we are being cautious and not raising their prices too high or too quickly. There is no doubt that she has staying power and we are thrilled that one of the important museums has just confirmed that they are acquiring her work.

LS: Have you seen a change in the geographic background of your clients? Have they become more international? In short, are some of the best contemporary artists now becoming "international contemporary", rather than pigeon holed as "Middle Eastern Contemporary"?

LH: We have a very international client base which is becoming more and more diverse each year due to several factors. Last year, we moved the gallery to the one of the best streets in Chelsea, and this has helped showcase our artists to a new clientele. Also, by participating in several art fairs such as Art Basel in New York City, Masterpiece London, and various online platforms, we have been able to gain exposure to collectors from around the world. I believe that online platforms are a beginning to play a central role in the art market, and I intend to keep up with the way in which they evolve.

We also represent a group of international artists in addition to our Middle Eastern artists, we have others who are American, Korean, Nigerian, and so forth. We would never want to pigeon hole our Middle Eastern artists into structured categories and I think it can be dangerous to sometimes use these labels, although they are necessary to some degree. In my opinion, one of the best ways to counteract the tendency to pigeon holes is by making Middle Eastern contemporary art more accessible to a Western audience through museum shows, academic programming, or online platforms that place Middle Eastern artists in conversation with other prominent contemporary artists. This is undoubtedly the direction in which this emerging market is going. However, there is still much work to be done. Artists should be understood on their own terms and be judged for the quality of their art, not for their national identities.

LS: Tell me some of the exciting things that have happened and will be happening in the coming year at the Leila Heller Gallery?...

LH: Not only are we participating in Art Dubai this month, but we will also be participating in The Armory Show in New York City and the MIA Art Fair in Miami this year. The Armory Show is an event at which we explore the process of capital accumulation through the various political, social, and economic factors surrounding the creation, valuation, and sales of artworks. Telecommunications, media, and exhibitions are some of the key issues that have come to prominence in the art world in recent years. Since the Art Fair began in 2006, HS has turned into a key event in the international art market, and we are excited to be a part of it.

The show will include a selection of works by leaders in the contemporary art scene, including paintings, sculptures, and installations. We will also be exhibiting new works by artists from the Middle East, as well as works by emerging artists from other parts of the world. We are particularly excited to present works by artists who are making significant contributions to the contemporary art scene in the Middle East and beyond.

The Armory Show will be held from February 21 to 24, 2013, at Pier 94 in New York City. We encourage you to visit the show and see for yourself the exciting art being created today.
Leila Heller Gallery

at The Armory Show, New York
March 7 – 10, 2013
Booth 734, Pier 94

6 – 9 March, 2013, The Armory Show, New York. Leila Heller Gallery will present works by Amikam Toren, Rose Aronson, Rachel Lee Hovnanian, Leila Perdikis, Haluk Şimşek, and will feature a new video work by Fadi Al-Hashimi

New York City-based artists Amikam Toren and Rose Aronson will exhibit monumental paintings from their new body of work in which they explore the process of visual reconstruction through the radical political and social-economic changes that are occurring in their own countries,ลากรส, and the world. Aronson's deconstruction of Arabic calligraphy, halals, and onomatopoeia, while being contrasted with the rectilinearity of the Arabic Spring in 2011. The video work of Fadi Al Hashimi makes bold statements in both the familiar and the unfamiliar, linked to the historical and contemporary issues in Levantine, the language of the ancient civilizations.

LS: Tell me some of the exciting things that have happened and will be happening in the coming year at Leila Heller Gallery?... 
Leila Heller, a prominent figure in the contemporary art world, is celebrating her 10th anniversary in the gallery. Her recent acquisitions include works by emerging and established artists from around the world, expanding the scope of gallery's offerings.

In April, we will be presenting a special exhibition of works by Shirin Abu-Khader. The exhibition will feature a range of paintings and sculptures that reflect her exploration of contemporary themes, including the role of women in society, cultural identity, and the impact of technology on human interaction.

Following this, we will be having an exciting group show curated by Amie Shatari featuring Rachel Lee Hovnanian as well as Raphael Danke, Shereen Horovitz, and Raheam Raissia. Alongside modern masters including Claude, a new body of work by Rachel Lee Hovnanian, a solo exhibition of Leila Perdikis, and a new series of paintings by Haluk Şimşek.

Our next show will be an exhibition of works by Amikam Toren, Rose Aronson, and Rachel Lee Hovnanian. The exhibition will showcase their unique perspectives and approaches to art-making, highlighting the diverse range of talent that Leila Heller Gallery presents.

Finally, in the summer, we will have a Pop Art show group c"