

# WEEKEND REVIEW

IN THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

## Art Dubai 2013: A diverse affair

Galleries from 30 nations converge on the city for Art Dubai 2013 and raising awareness is top priority

By Jyoti Kalsi Special to Weekend Review

Published: 21:30 March 14, 2013

GULF NEWS



Image Credit: undefined

A spotlight on West African art, an open-air sculpture gallery by the sea, and an in-depth look at MENA (Middle East Nervous Anxiety) — these are some of the highlights of Art Dubai 2013, to be held at Madinat Jumeirah from March 20 to March 23. The seventh edition of the art fair, which is presented in partnership with the Abraaj Group and sponsored by Cartier, will feature 75 galleries from 30 countries, showcasing latest works by more than 500 artists. Among the booths to look out for is Arndt Gallery's (Berlin) recreation of Belgian artist Wim Delvoye's recent exhibition of Gothic sculptures at the Louvre in Paris; London gallery Victoria Miro's solo show by legendary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama; and a group exhibition of kinetic art by Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta.

"The fact that we have galleries from 30 countries makes us the most global art fair. But we are also proud to be the largest showcase for artists from the Arab world," Fair Director Antonia Carver says.

This year, the fair's Marker section is focused on West Africa and features galleries from Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Ghana and Senegal. The theme of these concept stands, curated by Lagos-based curator Bisi Silva, is the rapidly evolving nature of West African cities and the impact of these changes on urban society. "Marker exemplifies our aim of making Art Dubai a place of discovery and cross-cultural exchange. Last year, our focus on Indonesia led to the start of many long-term exchanges between Indonesia and the Gulf region, including a section on the Arab art world at the Biennial in Yogyakarta. This year we chose to look at West Africa because we have seen that there are extraordinary artists and art centres there. We want to create awareness about art from that region and encourage cultural interactions and greater synergies that build on the historic and present links between Africa and the Middle East," Carver says.

Although it is a commercial event, Art Dubai has also played an important role in creating awareness and understanding about contemporary art and engaging the local community with art through its extensive non-commercial programme of curatorial and educational projects. These include free public seminars and talks, art workshops and tours, and various commissioned projects. New curatorial elements added this year are a mobile art gallery located in a truck that will visit different areas of the city; and Sculpture on the Beach — an exhibition of large-scale artworks located on the Mina A'Salam beach. The artworks selected by curator Chus Martinez range from Iranian artist Bitta Fayyazi's quirky figures, made from pipes and broken porcelain, to Mexican artist Gabriel Kuri's steel creations. "This picturesque location gives our galleries the freedom to think beyond the confines of their booths and to display large-scale artworks," Carver says.

The educational programme has also been extended this year to include the Sheikha Manal Little Artists Programme for children and Campus Art Dubai, an intensive six-month programme for artists and curators. "We have expanded our educational activities because there are few art courses available here and we are aware that Art Dubai has a role to play as a catalyst in developing the art scene. Campus Art Dubai is a structured course designed and conducted by experts to teach every aspect of creating and exhibiting art, ranging from practical aspects such as shipping artworks to creative ones such as conceptualising and curating a show," Carver explains.

The fair is honouring renowned Iranian artist Farideh Lashai, who passed away recently, by dedicating Art Dubai Projects 2013 to her memory. Under this not-for-profit initiative, Art Dubai has commissioned 12 artists to create performances and site-specific works that explore the fabric, economy and theatrical nature of an art fair. Lashai has a strong presence at the fair through a video installation titled *Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the Shadow*. The work occupies an entire room and comprises a series of epigrammatic film shots taken from commercial Farsi cinema of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The images evoke the popular vernacular culture of cafés and symbolise the typical nightlife in Iran during that period. And they are projected on opposite walls, making viewers a part of the entire experience of a bygone era.

## Related Links

Laura Egerton talks about loving her career

Events Calendar: March 2013

The other projects range from Chinese artist Shi Jinsong's *The Inner Garden*, created with trunks of felled ghaf trees and found objects from around the UAE, to Pakistani artist Ehsan Ul Haq's lifesize sculpture of a herd of donkeys that comments on ideas of control, force and meek acceptance of authority.

While Hind Bin Demaitan is posting video blogs about her experiences as an Emirati studying in the United States, Lebanese artist Joe Namy has created a performance inspired by unique Emirati traditional dance and music that was once used for ritual healing. And Kuwaiti artiste Fatima Al Quadiri's "The official soundtrack of the fair", a remixed piece of music that will be played at predetermined times at the fair venue, is an innovative way of communicating with visitors.

As usual, Art Dubai visitors will get the first look at the new artworks created by the winners of the Abraaj Group Art Prize. This year's winners — Lebanese artists Vartan Avakian and Rayyane Tabet, Eman Essa from Egypt, Huma Mulji from Pakistan and Syrian Hrair Sarkissian have been working alongside guest curator Murtaza Vali for several months, and will unveil their ambitious projects on the opening night of the fair. This year, the work of the winners of the Hamdan International Photography Award will also be unveiled at Art Dubai.

The presence at Art Dubai of leading gallerists, artists, collectors, curators and art experts from around the world has encouraged galleries and art institutions in the UAE and the region to plan other major art events during this time. The array of exhibitions, projects and events taking place this month are all being promoted under an umbrella initiative titled Art Week. Besides Art Dubai, other Art Week events include Design Days Dubai, the only product- and furniture-design fair in Asia (March 18-21 in Downtown Dubai); Sikka, a fair organised by Dubai Culture and Arts Authority to showcase work by UAE-based artists (March 14-24, in the Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood); and museum shows and other events in the UAE and Qatar. Most Dubai galleries have planned major shows by their top artists during this month, and the city's developing art districts such as Alserkal Avenue in Al Quoz and the Dubai International Financial Centre have organised "Galleries Nights" to celebrate the simultaneous opening of new shows at several spaces.

For art lovers, Art Week and Art Dubai 2013 offer a great opportunity to view and buy the best contemporary art from the region and the world, to discover new artists and art genres, to attend stimulating talks and discussions by art experts and to interact with artists and art professionals from every corner of the globe.

## Global Art Forum

The Global Art Forum, held in Doha and Dubai, is a key element of Art Dubai's non-commercial programme. It brings together leading international art professionals as well as experts from various other fields to discuss

contemporary artistic and cultural issues. The Forum is presented by Dubai Culture and held in partnership with Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Qatar Museums Authority). It will open in Doha on March 17 and 18 and then move to Madinat Jumeirah from March 20 to 23.

The seventh edition of the forum is titled "It Means This", directed by Istanbul-based writer and editor H.G. Masters, and commissioned by writer Shumon Basar. The forum will look at the vocabulary of the contemporary art world by exploring the concept of "definitionism" and investigating the words, terms, clichés and misunderstandings that proliferate in the art world and beyond. The focus will be on defining (or redefining) words, phrases and ideas we think we know, and those we need to know, to navigate the 21st century. Each session or element of the forum will discuss a keyword ranging from familiar ones such as Heritage, Free Zone, Score and Place to less familiar terms such as Academese, Drone Fiction and Neologism. The participants will analyse, dissect and interpret the term through talks, debates, performances, TV clips, new publications, films, music, and much more. The session on MENA (Middle East Nervous Anxiety), which will look at why a lot of people have this anxiety about the region, promises to be particularly interesting.

More than 40 prominent personalities are slated to participate, such as political scientist Dr Abdul Khaleq Abdullah, poet and author Mourid Barghouti, former REM lead singer and artist Michael Stipe, writer-editor Charles Arsene-Henry, artist Manal Al Dowayan, Dar Al-Ma'mun founder Omar Berrada; curator Reem Fadda, anthropologist Uzma Z. Rizvi, composer and musician Andre Vida, art patron and commentator Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, and art critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie. The forum also includes several commissioned projects and publications.

"A recent survey indicates that the Global Art Forum is now the biggest annual art conference in the world. And we are trying to expand it beyond the art world by inviting experts from various fields. But our aim is to tackle big subjects in an accessible and interactive way," Carver says.

#### Other elements

**Artists-in-Residence (A.i.R) Dubai:** The six artists selected this year for the annual residency programme run by Art Dubai, Delfina Foundation, Dubai Culture and Tashkeel are Emirati artists Ebtisam Abdul Aziz, Reem Falaknaz and Ammar Al Attar, and Dina Danish, Joe Namy and Yudi Noor from Asia and the Middle East. They have been working with curator Bérénice Saliou since January to create new works that will be displayed in their studios in the Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood at an Open Studios exhibition, running alongside the Sikka fair. The international artists have also been commissioned to create site-specific works.

**Shaikha Manal Little Artists programme:** This is a newly launched art education project for children and teenagers aged 3-14. It includes workshops led by Zid Zid Kids, the Morocco-based trilingual children's art education specialists, plus sketchbooks and discovery tours led by UAE-based artists. A highlight of the

programme is a workshop where children will create a shadow puppet theatre. This programme is held under the patronage and guidance of Shaikha Manal Bint Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, president of Dubai Women's Establishment, wife of Shaikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs.

Radio Station: London-based radio producer and presenter Fari Bradley has created a dedicated radio station located on site at Art Dubai that will do local and worldwide broadcasts of interviews with artists, curators and others.

The Hatch: This is a stairwell transformed into an intimate space for screening films and videos. Curated by Egyptian artist Maha Maamoun, the screenings will include recent work by four upcoming artists. The video programmes are screened in collaboration with The Pavilion Downtown Dubai and will be shown there throughout April.

dXb Store: This pop-up store selling limited-edition objects, jewellery, scarves, portable furniture, stationery, clothes and other products created by UAE-based designers and artists can be found at Sikka, Design Days Dubai and Art Dubai.

Art Dubai's VIP programme: This is for collectors and museum groups and includes trips to Doha, Abu Dhabi, the Sharjah Biennial and other places in the region; visits to local artists' studios and homes of local collectors; and other activities such as guided tours of the fair and an architect-led tour of Burj Khalifa.

Guided Tours for visitors: Guided tours by artists and curators have been organised for visitors who wish to learn more about the Abraaj Group Art Prize exhibition, gallery displays, Art Dubai Projects and the Sculpture Park.

*Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.*