

# canvas

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD



## WHOSE EAST IS IT ANYWAY?

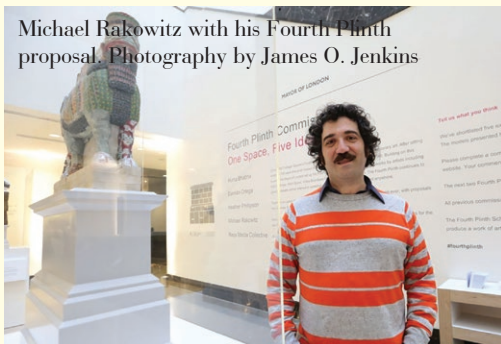
Art Basel Hong Kong • Sharjah Biennial 14 • Ishara Art Foundation •  
Jameel Arts Centre • Osage Art Foundation

Almagul Menlibayeva • Kamrooz Aram • Nikhil Chopra • Soundwalk Collective •  
Umber Majeed • Augustine Paredes • Seher Shah •  
Soraya Sharghi • Tuan Andrew Nguyen • Vivek Vilasini

Saira Ansari • Yaminay Chaudhri • Shumon Basar • Deepak Unnikrishnan



## New York



### RAKOWITZ TAKES A STAND

Seen as a touchstone for what's cutting edge in contemporary art, participating in the Whitney Biennial could invaluablely boost one's career. This year, however, Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz decided to forego this mark of recognition. In a leaked letter to the curators, he expressed solidarity with 95 Whitney Museum personnel who have called for the resignation of Warren B. Kanders, vice chairman of the museum's board and also the CEO of Safariland LLC., a manufacturer of military equipment being used against civilians seeking asylum across the US-Mexico border. Rakowitz's refusal puts artists and institutions in the spotlight when it comes to accepting funding from questionable sources and raises important questions. Could he have made a stronger statement by producing work for the biennial in the form of a critique, as the art collective Forensic Architecture are doing? Can Rakowitz only get away with such a move as an established artist, compared to emerging practitioners still building their careers? Given that this 79th edition will feature the youngest group of artists in the biennial's history, with the majority under the age of 40, it is a debate that rages on. So far, none of the 75 artists have pulled out yet.

## Dubai

Nadia Christidi. Image courtesy of Jameel Arts Centre



### OIL AND WATER DO MIX

The first Art Jameel Arts Writing and Research commission has been awarded to researcher and writer Nadia Christidi, whose winning proposal is part of a broader project focused on cities grappling with water shortages – Dubai, Los Angeles and Cape Town in particular. "My interest in water crises stems from a larger interest in resource economies and their management," she tells *Canvas*. "I am particularly interested in the ways in which climate change is forcing us to rethink how we have been consuming, managing and planning for the future of resources like water." This issue is particularly relevant to the GCC, where water consumption rates far outweigh supply. "And yet, in the GCC, oil (or energy more broadly) is the focus. Water remains largely peripheral compared to oil," she continues. Currently pursuing a PhD in History, Anthropology and Science Technology and Society at MIT, Christidi will complete a three-month residency in the Jameel writer's studio and library as part of the programme, then present her publication later this year. "My work is also about cities in the future, about the project of future envisioning and planning, and the role of art and design in that planning process and perceived future," Christidi also notes, which brings her research neatly in line with Jameel Arts Centre's current thematic focus on the UAE's cultural positioning and ideas of confluence.

## Dubai

### BUILDING NEW FOUNDATIONS

Though Alserkal Avenue has been part of the UAE's art scene for over a decade, it hadn't formally established itself as an arts foundation until March of this year, when founder and patron Abdelmonem Alserkal announced the launch of the non-profit Alserkal Arts Foundation, which includes four core initiatives: public art commissions, residencies, research grants and education programmes. Looking at the bigger picture, this move underlines the growth of cultural institutions in the country, including the launch of Sharjah Art Foundation's new Africa Institute and Art Jameel's Jameel Arts Centre in late 2018. While some of the foundation's initiatives have been in place for years - the commissions programme since 2015 and Alserkal Residency since 2017 – the research grants are an exciting new addition. Open to a variety of disciplines, from architecture to fiction writing and film to publishing, the programme will start accepting applications in October 2019.



## Paris

### BREAKING HOROLOGICAL CODES

Going beyond its artist-inspired high-end watch lines, the bespoke watch brand Richard Mille has now forged another link with art institutions after signing its first cultural alliance with Frieze in 2018. This time teaming up with the innovative Paris-based contemporary art centre Palais de Tokyo in a three-year partnership, the brand launched *Sensible*, a series of five concurrent solo shows (runs until 12 May) that thematically explore the interaction between man and uncertain environments. Chicago-based Theaster Gates' *Amalgam*, for example, looks at the forced exile of a mixed-race community from Malaga Island in the US circa 1912, causing the inhabitants to resettle in new, unfamiliar territories. Meanwhile, Angelica Mesiti's large-scale video installations *When doing is saying* question the idea of translation through recontextualized language – sign language that is 'sung' by a choir or Morse code adapted into music. Other artists represented include Franck Scurti, Julien Creuzet and Julius von Bismarck, who have transformed the gallery space with immersive and site-specific installations.



## New York



### LEILA HELLER GALLERY MOVES UPTOWN

Having run her eponymous gallery in New York for three decades, Leila Heller is well-established in the city's art scene. Initially set up on the Upper East Side, the gallery moved to the arty neighbourhood of Chelsea in 2010. In March, she returned Uptown in a move that could help map where the art scene is going. In recent years, international galleries such as Almine Rech from Paris, Boers-Li from Beijing and Mendes Wood DM from São Paulo have set up their outposts in this area, which is where most art collectors reside. Leila Heller's new space on 17 East 76th Street boasts two levels with a back garden. Its inaugural exhibition (ran until 20 April) featured an eclectic mix of artists, including big names such as Mark Bradford, Jeff Koons, Ed Ruscha, Richard Prince and Yayoi Kusama. This approach is different from Leila Heller Gallery's Dubai space, which typically runs solo or dual shows of large-scale works.

## Dhaka

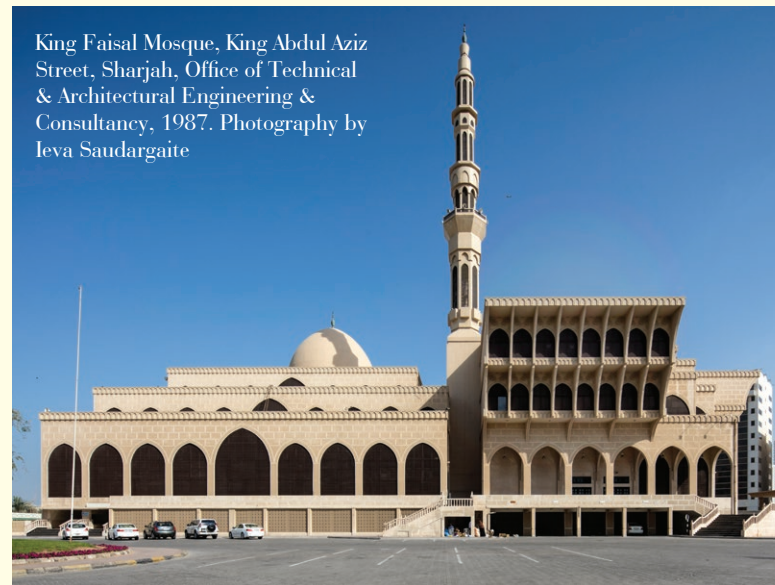
### PLANETARY PERSPECTIVES AT DAS 2020

For its upcoming fifth edition (February 2020), the Dhaka Arts Summit (DAS) seeks to break free from geopolitical markers by digging deep – right down to the tectonic plates that form land masses. The overriding theme *Seismic Movements* takes a geological perspective in order to expand on the idea of disrupting borders and timeframes, delving into the shared issues facing the countries that have come to be known as 'The Global South.' "I hope this summit will widen its view to look at historical layers of connectivity across Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean, becoming a platform where former colonial subjects can come together without a Western intermediary to imagine new futures from Dhaka," chief curator Diana Campbell Betancourt said. Working with advisors Sean Anderson (MoMA) and Nurur Khan (Muzharul Islam Archive), she will curate an exhibition that engages with the work of pioneering modernist architect-activist Muzharul Islam in new ways through contemporary artists. Another highlight includes a nine-day curated film programme by the Otolith Group entitled *To welcome the end of the world as we know it*, which references philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva's *Poetics of Blackness*.



## Sharjah

King Faisal Mosque, King Abdul Aziz Street, Sharjah, Office of Technical & Architectural Engineering & Consultancy, 1987. Photography by Ieva Saudargaite



### ARCHITECTURAL FUTURITY

The inaugural edition of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial this November will be looking ahead – decades into the future, in fact, with its ambitious theme *Rights of Future Generations*. Curated by Adrian Lahoud, Dean of the RCA's School of Architecture, the triennial will investigate how the state of the environment, and more specifically, climate change, is inherited by the next generation, examining the present through the long-term consequences on nature and existence. The Triennial will be centred around three main areas of research: housing, education and ecology, and promises to bring interdisciplinary perspectives as professionals from several fields, including architecture and urban planning, are expected to attend (including United Nations representatives and government officials). Tackling issues from the regions that make up the Global South, participating speakers – including Aga Khan Award for Architecture recipient Marina Tabbasum and academic Dalal Alsayer – will highlight a continuing dialogue between the Gulf and the rest of Asia, specifically South and Southeast Asia.