

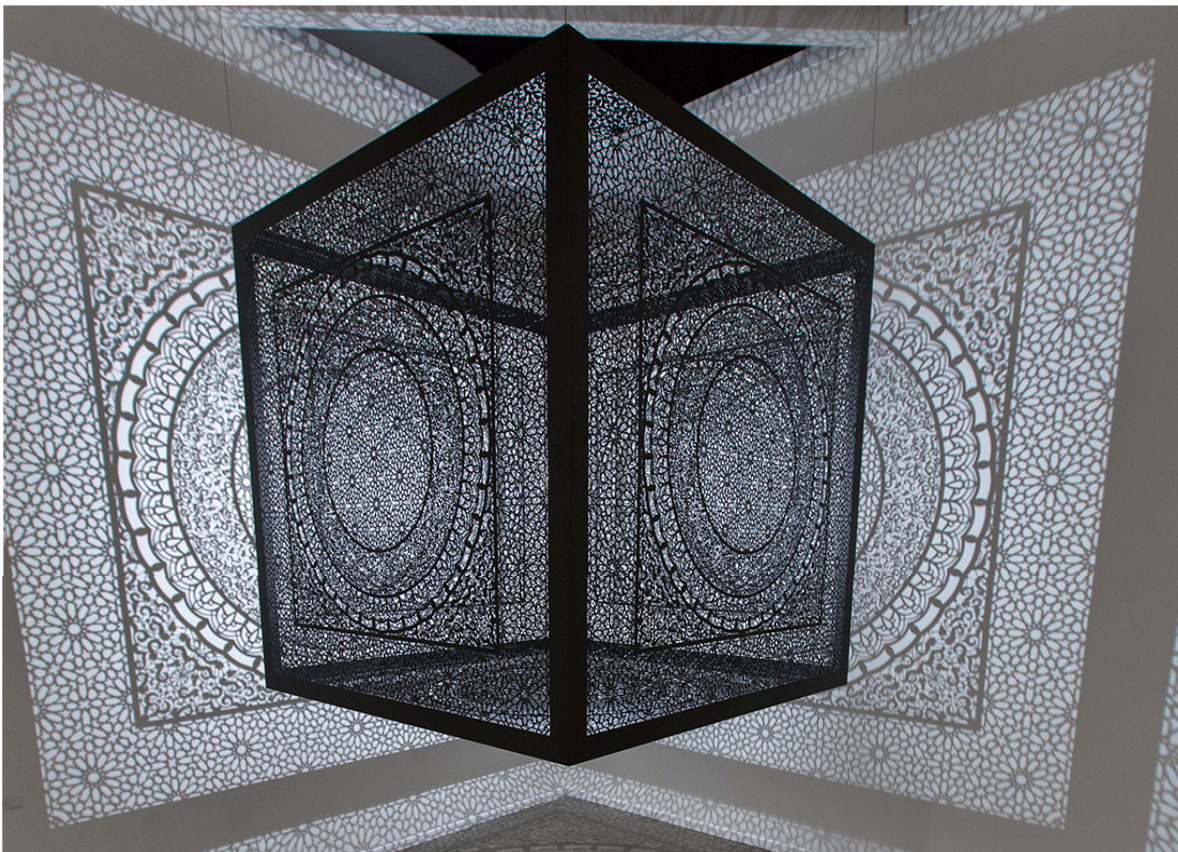
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Art Dubai Wards Off the Competition for Record-Setting 2015 Edition

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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One of Art Dubai's constant strengths has been its position between East and West, in a city neighbouring the emerging economies of Russia, China, and India, as well as being situated within the Middle East itself. Serving artists, galleries, and collectors alike from these territories, as well as providing a platform for international visitors to discover and build networks with these emerging art hubs, the fair has evolved over the past nine years into a crucial event. It has not only galvanised the UAE's fledgling art scene, such as it is, but has largely overcome the cynicism

(longstanding cries of “There’s no culture in Dubai!”), market wobbles, and maelstrom of social, cultural, and economic shifts that have defined this region in recent times.

Ahead of the fair’s official opening this week, the city set out to further combat that cynicism. On Monday morning, Dubai’s Alserkal Avenue studio complex announced a vast new expansion programme in the heart of Dubai’s industrial Al Quoz district. A number of local galleries and New York’s Leila Heller Gallery will soon launch spaces in the district, a fact which was fêted with a fabulous open-air dinner party. Heller’s move to open her first gallery outside the U.S. in Dubai is a resounding vote of confidence in the Emirati art market.

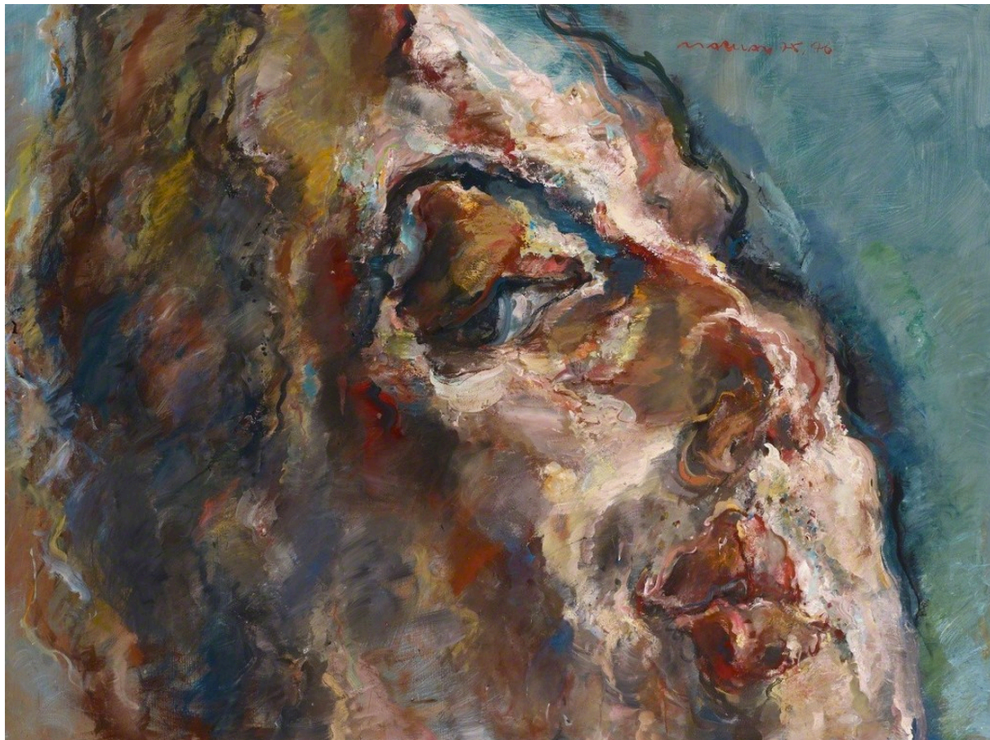


HH Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum opens Art Dubai 2015. Courtesy The Studio, Dubai.

The fair has upped its game, too. Today, the fair appears slicker, shinier, and—perhaps as a result of its wildly successful sister fair Design Days Dubai—much more, well, designed than before. The rather blingy surrounds of the Madinat Jumeirah venue, which has hosted the fair since its inception, have been softened and styled with a spacious and appealing layout. An Absolut Art Bar installation by Yazan Khalili (in

collaboration with Arnar Ásgeirsson) sees a comically-grandiose mountain range added to the synthetic backdrop and there are wooden palettes and potted plants *everywhere*.

Just over 90 galleries are spread across its Contemporary, “Marker” regional spotlight section, and Modern programme. By the fair’s third day, dealers were reporting generally favorable experiences at the 2015 edition. L.A.’s Honor Fraser did roaring trade with their solo booth of New York’s KAWS. Beirut/Hamburg’s Sfeir-Semler, (whose Andrée Sfeir-Semler sits on the selection committee of the fair) cited this year’s edition of Art Dubai as their best yet, a view echoed by Paris’s Galerie Chantal Crousel. Dubai’s Meem Gallery also reported a healthy result from their participation in the Modern section.

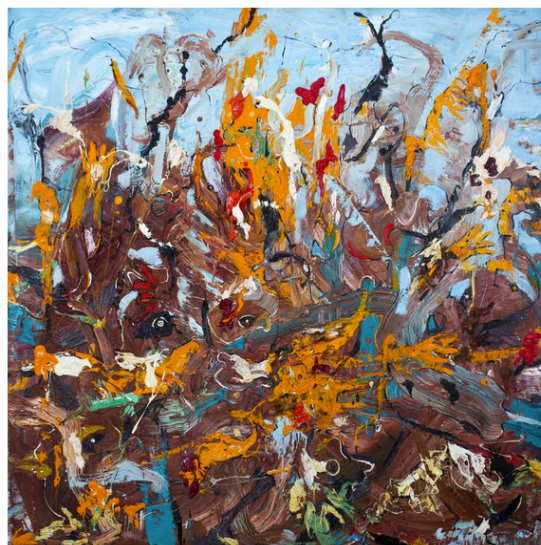


Marwan
Untitled (Kopf), 1975-1976
Meem Gallery

A newcomer to the fair from Tehran, Dastan’s Basement, sold 10 works by Iranian artists Mohammad Hossein Gholamzadeh, Nima Zaare Nahandi, and Amin Montazeri to collectors from London and Dubai. Dubai’s The Third Line gallery, a stalwart of the fair, sold work by Sara Naim and Pouran Jinchi for undisclosed prices.

Other participants, such as collaborators In Situ - Fabienne Leclerc (Paris) and CRG Gallery (New York), acknowledged the impact of New York's Armory Show and last week's Hong Kong fairs on collector turnout in Dubai. Though he also noted the other fairs' impact, Franz Leupi of Swiss AB Gallery—which had a solo booth of wonderfully raw, semi-abstract paintings by Emirati-born Mohamed Al Mazrouei—was nevertheless delighted with his six confirmed sales to new collectors from the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East. Equally thrilled with the response was London's Kashya Hildebrand, who practically sold out her solo presentation of Lebanese painter Marwan Sahmarani on the opening night.

The impact of Art Basel in Hong Kong's decision to reschedule their event meant many who attended Art Dubai had to fly straight from Hong Kong this year. It created potentially serious competition for key Asian collectors. But few dealers reported that the fair had suffered from the proximity to ABHK. In fact, a significant number of institutions and collectors still made the Emirates event. Tate's Chris Dercon—never one to miss an opening night if he can help it—jetted to Dubai as soon as Hong Kong released him from her bosom. Meanwhile, legendary Parisian dealer Daniel Templon came to Dubai immediately after participating in Hong Kong. “In Dubai, there is a small market,” he told me. “But if you come to Dubai to make business you will be disappointed. It is a place to make connections.”



Marwan Sahmarani
The Trenches, 2014
Kashya Hildebrand

Noticeably absent are those blue-chip brands: the Gagosians, White Cubes, Zwirners, *et al.* These days, that cohort tends to gravitate towards November's Abu Dhabi Art, where six-figure sales are more prevalent. Instead, Art Dubai's selection committee takes in a globalized selection of mid-range and young galleries. Conceptual work abounds and booths offer up a dynamic swath of contrasts and styles. It's work that tends to sell less impressively than painting at sub-\$75,000 price points, which has consistently done well here this year—as especially evidenced by AB Gallery and Hildebrand. But, with near-simultaneous 2016 editions of Art Basel in Hong Kong and New York's Armory once again, Art Dubai will have to double down on its efforts to continue to tempt collectors.

—Arsalan Mohammad