

# New frontiers

ABU DHABI'S ART SCENE HAS BEEN DEVELOPING IN FITS AND STARTS, BUT THIS YEAR SEES THE ADVENT OF SOME PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS SET TO GIVE THE CAPITAL'S ART WORLD AN ORGANIC EDGE

WORDS | JESSICA GLIDDON



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Granite Popeye; Akar Poem by Mahmoud Darwish; Tini Meyer's studio; Akhavan's Untitled III; Tini Meyer at work; Hassanzadeh's Ya Ali Madadi

All it takes is the right individual. One person with passion. In the case of Abu Dhabi, it was an entire government that set Saadiyat Island whirring off on its journey into art world notoriety. But in every emerging art capital, it is still the smaller players that will eventually come to define a city's artistic character.

Take some of Abu Dhabi's cases in point: Tini Meyer, Salwa Zeidan and Emily Doherty. Each of these women have made, or are working on making, an impact on the art scene, shaping it from the ground up.

"The art scene is small here," Tini Meyer says, sitting in Abu Dhabi's gourmet eatery, Jones the Grocer. "Don't get me wrong, the programmes they have with TDIC at the Emirates Palace are great. And the Guggenheim programmes have brought big artists here, offering a unique

opportunity you might not get elsewhere. In most places, there's lots of government support at the low level – here it's at the high level."

Consequently, the numbers of new artists in Abu Dhabi are still low. Part of the reason for this, Tini thinks, is that the art world needs affordability – as artists don't often make a lot of money when they're starting out, finding somewhere to work can be a problem.

"I chose Abu Dhabi because I saw what they were doing long term – I was excited to be in a city with this sort of plan," Meyer says. "But the past year I was living in chaos – I realised I was going to need a studio. But the rents were too expensive."

Tini was getting to the point where she was thinking she might have to return to Vancouver, where she had been studying. Then, the half-Spanish half-German artist started exploring

Abu Dhabi's industrial area, Mussafah, and found the answer. "Most people thought I was crazy," she says. "Then I caught the interest of someone working with warehouses." The idea of warehouses galleries and studios is long established, from Chelsea in New York to Al Quoz in Dubai, due largely to their cheap rents. And so the dream of Art Hub was born.

Built by the OSAN Group, Art Hub will have a top floor of studios and mixed use lofts, while the ground floor will have a non-profit exhibition space that will host charity and education events as well as artist's works, plus a store and café. The project is expected to be finished next year.

Similarly, Zayed University art teacher Emily Doherty has created Fringe Abu Dhabi, a festival looking to give the Abu Dhabi arts scene true independence and international credo. But for ➡