

# canvas

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

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BRAZILIAN JOSEPH BEUYS

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A look at the **Nadour Collection** PLUS  
**Marwan Rechmaoui's** infatuation with Beirut,  
the multimedia practice of **Hassan Khan**,  
**Wael Shawky's** mix of past and present and  
the satirical world of **Hesam Rahmanian**.





# A MIDDLEMAN'S *PHILOSOPHY*

## THE NADOUR COLLECTION

In less than 10 years Nadour has become one of the most important collections in Europe for Contemporary art from the Arab world and Iran. **Marie-Cécile Burnichon** and **Christophe Rioux** meet with the collection's founder Rüdiger KWeng and its curator Diana Wiegiersma to discover the philosophy behind Nadour and how promoting artists and their *oeuvres* is just as important as purchasing an artwork.



CHINESE GERHARD RICHTER

F BALI

INDY SHERMAN OF ASIA

UISE BOURGEOIS

RENOIR OF SOUTH AFRICA

M KIEFER

MANUELL JEFF MOONS

KOREAN MARK ROTHKO



**I**n its first exhibition, *Come Invest in Us. You'll Strike Gold*, due to open in Vienna on 10 September at the Hilger Brot Kunsthalle, Nadour presents the work of 20 artists from the Middle East and North Africa. The show's title refers to a speech made by Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika after his first election in 1999 in which he extended his hand to foreign investors without perhaps weighing up the implications of his gesture.

Bouteflika's words are echoed in the work by Djamel Kokene after which the show is named, *Come Invest in Us. You'll Strike Gold*, a piece which highlights the pernicious effects of overseas economic interests in the region. In the same spirit, other artists in the show explore the geopolitical questions provoked by the influence of foreign companies in the Middle East, in the spheres of petroleum, gas, arms, construction and even luxury goods. Through their works they highlight the exploitation of local resources dictated by control and power, underlining how this yearning for dominance not only affects local society financially, but also from a cultural and aesthetic point of view.

Curated by Diana Wiegiersma, the exhibition reveals the meaning behind the word *nadour* – the term which German collector Rudiger KWeng gave to his project. The Arabic word *nadour* or *nathour*, which can be translated as 'binoculars' in the Palestinian dialect, carries the double idea of panorama and elevation, summarised in the notion of an 'observation point'. The use of the term was equally inspired by *Miradors*, a 2008 work by Taysir Batniji, in which Israeli military observation points in the West Bank were shot in black and white in the style of photographs by German artist couple Bernd and Hilla Becher. Combining fine art photography and war reporting, *Miradors* was one of the founding artworks of the Nadour collection at a time when the Palestinian artist was hardly known. Just one year later, Batniji would participate in the *Palestine c/o Venice* collateral exhibition at the 2009 Venice Biennale with his installation *Hannoun*, a work which then went on to be acquired by Nadour.

This spread, from left to right:  
Rudiger KWeng in front  
of a painting by Driss Ouadahi.

Leila Pazooki. *Moments of Glory*.  
2010. Neon installation with  
variator. Variable dimensions.

Diana Wiegiersma in Nadour's  
storage in Willich, Germany.



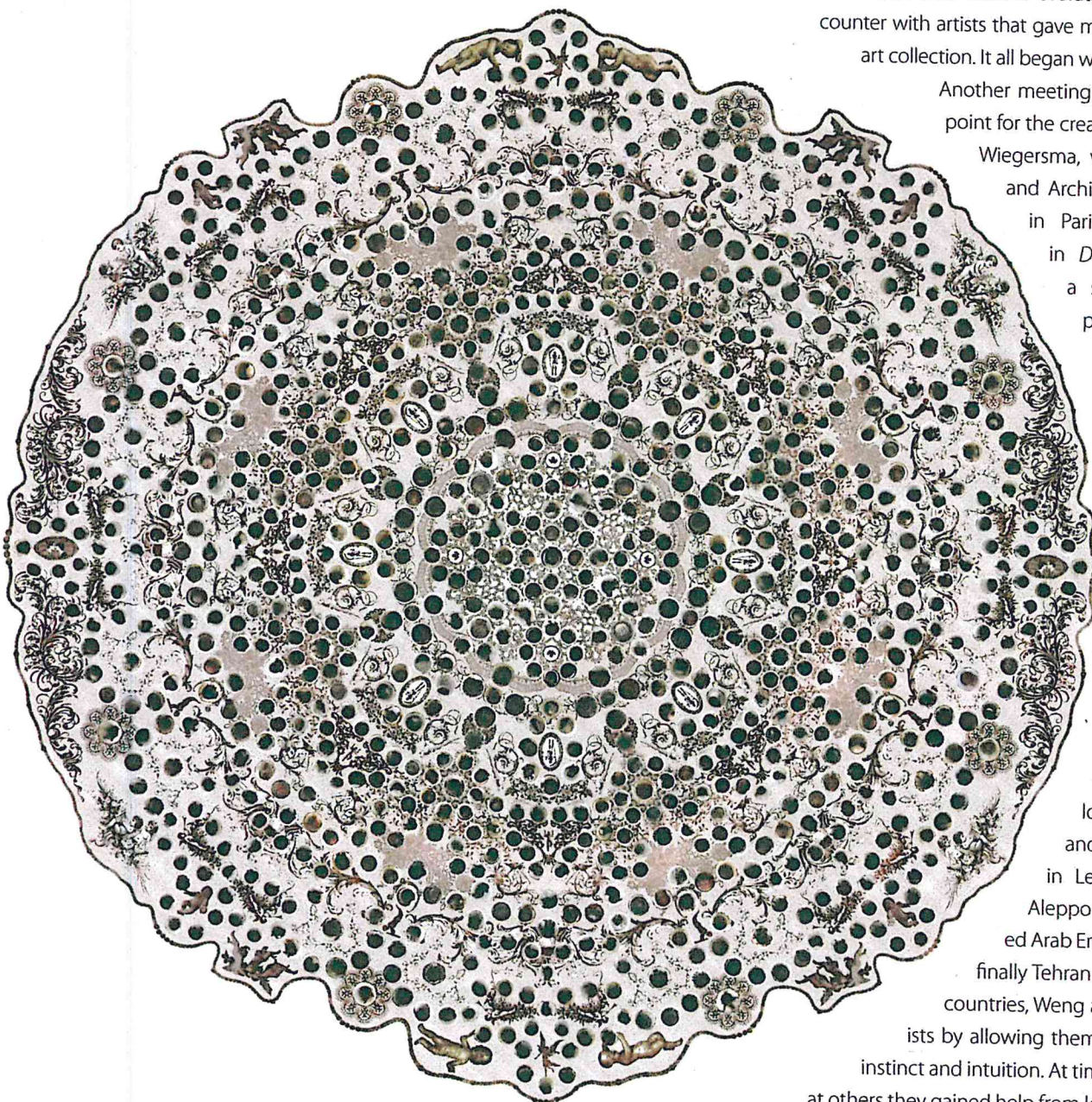
# "A collector today is a defender and an amplifier."

*Diana Wiegersma*

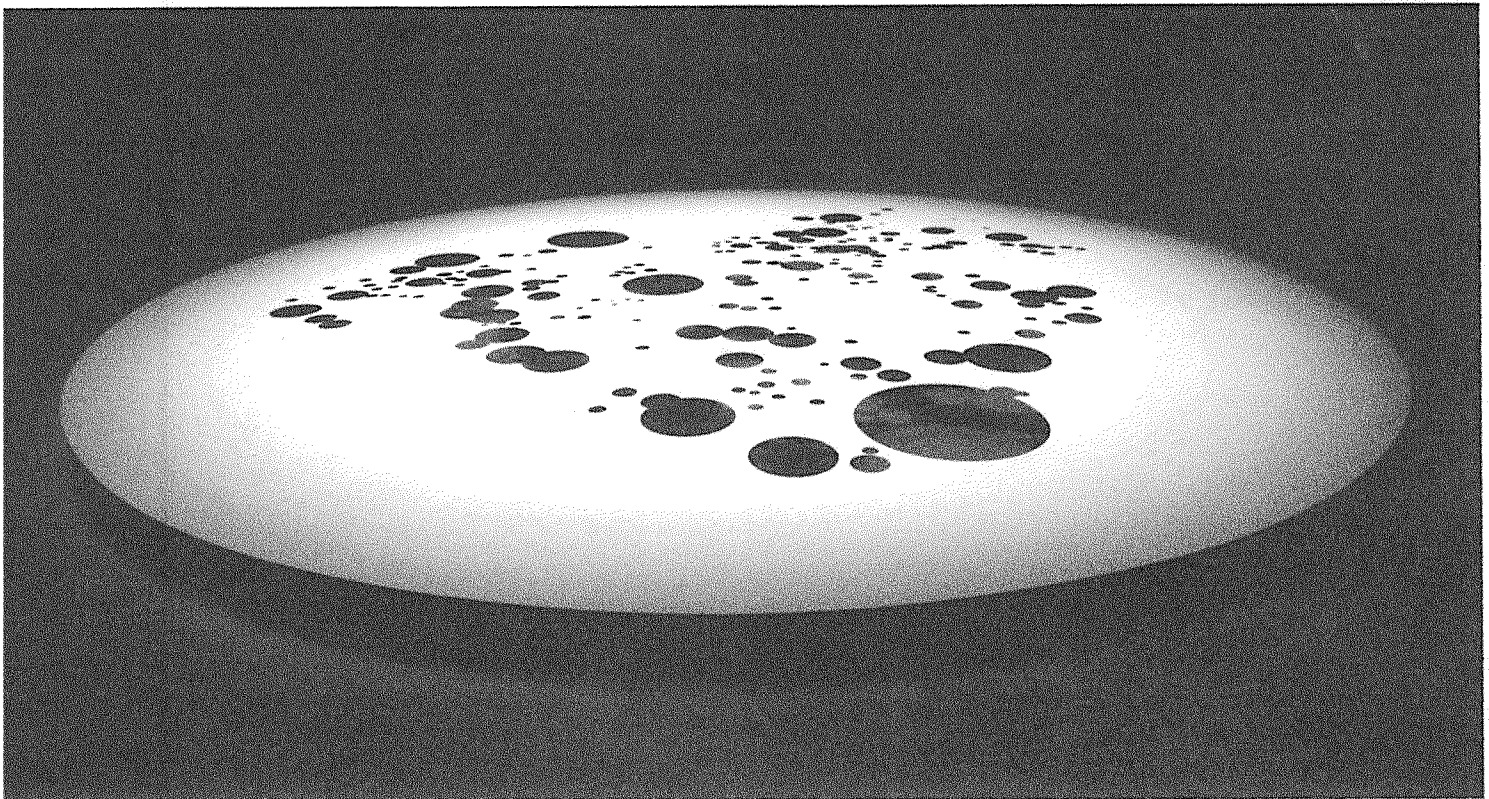
## THE COLLECTOR-DISCOVERER

Founded almost a decade ago, the Nadour collection now boasts over 250 works by around 60 artists from Iran and the Arab world that it acquired long before the recent uprisings in the region. A strictly non-commercial platform, it was established by Weng – a great lover of art from antiquity to the present day – during a trip to North Africa and the Middle East, when he experienced the region's rich cultural landscape, and in particular, the powerful Contemporary creations emanating from its artists. "What I really loved was getting to meet the artists, learning about their backgrounds and exchanging ideas," he recalls. "I was really taken with their creative evolution. It was largely this encounter with artists that gave me the impetus to start an art collection. It all began with them."

Another meeting also served as a turning point for the creation of Nadour: that with Wiegersma, who studied Art History and Architecture at the Sorbonne in Paris, and also took part in *De Appel* in Amsterdam, a specialised international programme for curators. Originally from The Netherlands, she soon became curator of Nadour and embarked with Weng on a series of trips arranged systematically throughout the Middle East. They began with Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt; Tangier, Rabat, Tétouan, Casablanca and Marrakech in Morocco were to follow; then Carthage, Sfax and Tunis in Tunisia; Beirut in Lebanon; Damascus and Aleppo in Syria; Qatar; the United Arab Emirates; Saudi Arabia and finally Tehran in Iran. In each of these countries, Weng and Wiegersma met artists by allowing themselves to be guided by instinct and intuition. At times they used Facebook, at others they gained help from local contacts and would







en also follow word-of-mouth recommendations. Together they defined the personality of Nadour: a collection of discoverers, middlemen and catalysts.

From the start of their collaboration Weng and Wiegiersma agreed on the prospective extension of Nadour. "Today's collector is a discoverer who often finds talent before art institutions or even galleries and, if necessary, assists in helping artists escape from their anonymity," emphasises Wiegiersma. "A collector today is a defender and an amplifier." Thanks to its small structure (a collector and a curator), works can be bought quickly and artists are tracked down early and followed closely, as with Saudi artist Ahmed Mater and Algerian painter Driss Ouadahi – Nadour holds one of the largest collections of Ouadahi's work.

The dialogue between Nadour's two protagonists, their frequent trips to the region as well as their numerous meetings with artists, were facets of their artistic exploration and were implemented by their knowledge of Western art. Applying such expertise in Iran and the Arab world quickly guided them towards promising

artists. Among them was Leila Pazooki, a young Iranian whose work Weng and Wiegiersma began collecting very early on. In her 2010 neon installation entitled *Moments of Glory*, the artist reworks descriptions she finds in the European press, qualifying the works of non-Western artists and reappropriating them by placing the names of renowned Western artists within the same context; such as "Iranian Jeff Koons"; "Indian Damien Hirst" or "Cindy Sherman of Asia." These comparisons reveal how the media struggles to present the artistic creation of these regions without falling prey to socio-cultural prejudices.

## TRANSMITTING DISCOVERIES

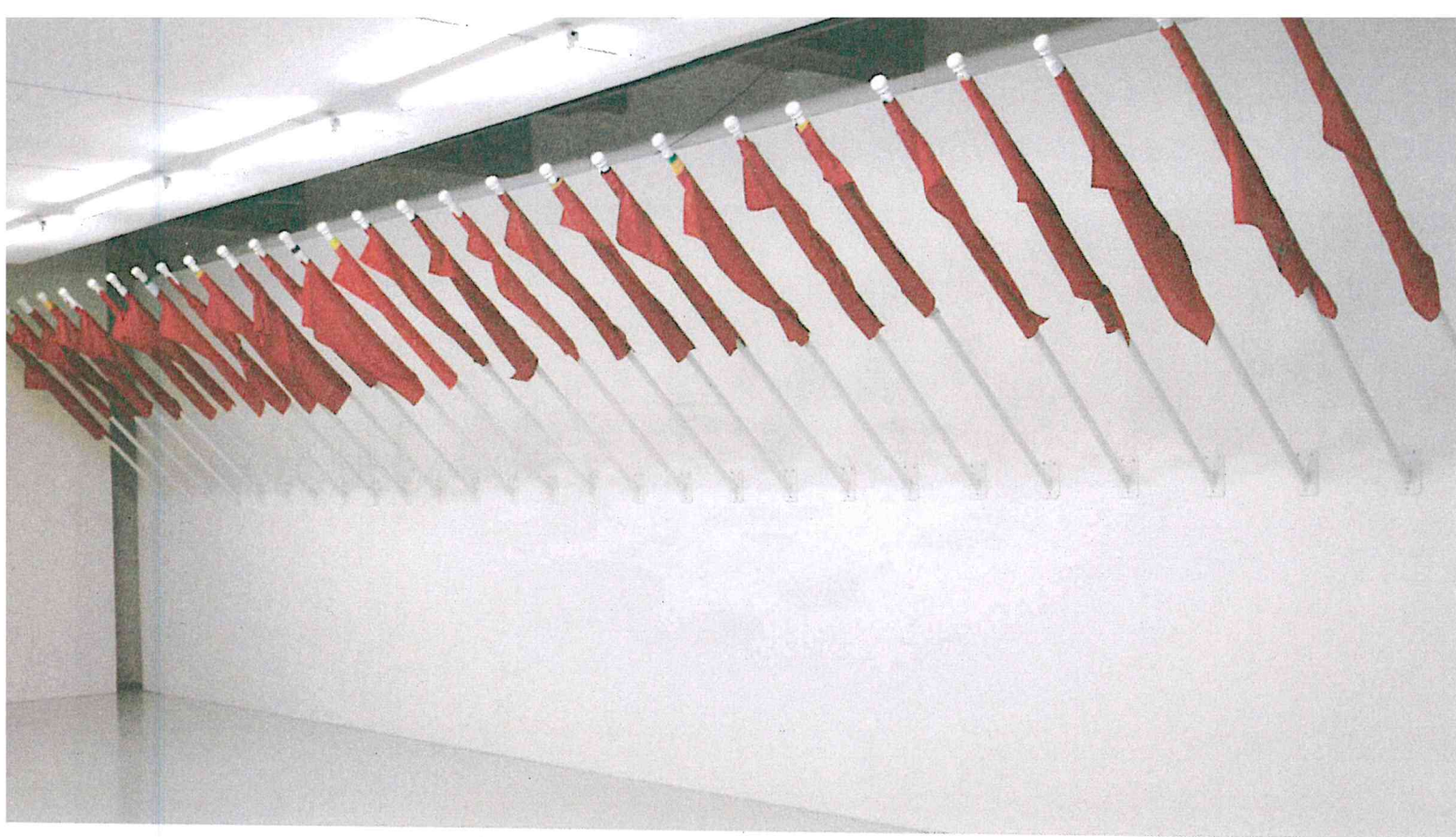
The intellectual and aesthetic dichotomy often encountered between European artistic creation and Contemporary North African art in particular is a characteristic of Nadour, and one that can be traced easily in works throughout the collection. The work of Fayçal Baghriche is a typical example. Born in Algeria but based in Paris (like Pazooki, who lives outside her native Iran, in Vienna), in his 2010 video *The Message Project*, Baghriche juxtaposes

Facing page: Lara Baladi, *Rose*, 2010. Digital collage, permanent print on somerset paper or gesso. 410 x 410 cm.

Above: Walid Raad, *The Atlas Group, I Was Overcome With A Momentary Panic At The Thought That They Might Be Right*, 2005. High density foam. Diameter: 300 cm.

and merges the Arab and American versions of the epic 1977 film, *The Message*, about the history of Islam. His work demonstrates how the formatting of cultural products is so often influenced by their ultimate destination or audience.

Another facet of Nadour's identity is its desire to share and transmit its discoveries to the wider public. This includes younger audiences as much as established collectors. "We avoid showcasing works by artists on which there is speculation," says Wiegiersma, "and we generally buy more from biennales than from art fairs." For Weng, the ultimate pleasure lies in "participating in the evolution of an artist and buying a work that I find pertinent." In addition to emerging artists, the collection also features works by some of the region's



[Nadour] operates by allowing museums and art institutions to borrow its works freely.





most revered names. These include Lebanese artist Walid Raad, by whom Nadour possesses the rare and major 2005 work *I Was Overcome By A Momentary Panic At The Thought That They Might Be Right*. Also part of the collection are pieces by other renowned artists such as Adel Abdessemed, Mounir Fatmi and Kader Attia, who will present his 2007 work *Oil & Sugar #2* in Nadour's upcoming Vienna exhibition – a video presenting white sugar cubes which are destroyed within seconds by thick spurts of petroleum.

Since its foundation, Nadour has always aimed to display a diversity of artistic media and is only marginally composed of works on canvas. This reflects not simply the multifaceted nature of Contemporary art, but also the constant and complex cultural dialogue between East and West – a principal ingredient within the work of Nadour's artists, as well as a defining trait of the collection itself.

It is worth noting that Nadour has never invested in an exhibition space. The collection operates instead by allowing museums and art institutions to borrow its works freely. Acquisitions and loans are regularly revealed on the Nadour website, a tool which the collection's founders are particularly proud of, as it provides the viewer with an interesting educational tool. In line with Nadour's mission to create a platform for dialogue and to provide means for a better comprehension of the artworks, international writers and critics are regularly invited to write texts on selected artworks in the collection. Accessible in English, French and Arabic, the website also shares information on the collection's activities and on the artists represented within it.

## THE COLLECTOR AS CATALYST

For Weng, the mission of Nadour is defined by its catalytic role and long-term support for its artists, a view shared by Wiegiersma. "The collector must help the artist, and not just financially," she says. "The collector can intervene at various points, from the production of the work to the editing of catalogues. They can also open up



professional networks for the aspiring artist, assist them in finding a gallery, as well as widen their international appeal. There are many ways in which a collector can help in the evolution of an emerging artist." Nadour's forthcoming exhibition in Vienna reflects this intention precisely: it promotes the collection's artists while also providing them with the means to create new work. On display are works by artists including Jordanian Oraib Toukan, who Nadour discovered at the Istanbul Biennale in 2009. She presents her 2007-09 project, *The Equity is in the Circle*, which offers to auction off nation states in the Middle East under a 100-year lease. In order to create this fictional story, Toukan consulted real-life experts on the logistics of auctioning off countries as opposed to objects. Lebanese artist Ninar Esber was commissioned to create a new work for the exhibition. *Torso* reappropriates the names of various military operations that took place in the Middle East – such as operation Desert Storm and Odyssey Dawn – and transforms them into large-scale golden 'message' necklaces.


Nadour's forthcoming exhibition in Vienna therefore presents not just a representation of the breadth of the collection, but also a special moment in which to marvel at the organisation's

Facing page, above: Fayçal Baghriche. *Envelopments*. 2010. Flags from 23 countries, flagspoles and hardware. Variable dimensions.

Below: Oraib Toukan. *The New(er) Middle East*. 2007. Magnets, plastic, iron sheets and panel. Variable dimensions.

This page: Kader Attia. *Big Bang*. 2005. A motorised polyurethane sphere with mirrors. Diameter: 180 cm. Photography by Laurent Lecat.

All images courtesy the Nadour Collection, Krefeld/Paris. Text translation by Rebecca Anne Proctor.

commitment to its many artists. Depicting a world far removed from the erroneous notions of a homogenous Arab art scene, Nadour is a real point of reference for anyone eager to improve their understanding of Middle Eastern art and culture. As Wiegiersma put it, "*Come Invest in Us. You'll Strike Gold* is a real thematic show, which I hope will avoid snap judgments and will instead initiate some real questionings about the MENA region." 

*Come Invest in Us. You'll Strike Gold* runs from 10 September–3 November at Vienna's Hilger Brot Kunstthalle. For more information visit [www.nadour.org](http://www.nadour.org)