

Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

Preview: art fair as cultural think-tank – Art Dubai 2018

Posted on **20/03/2018**



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In its 12th year, Art Dubai runs from 21 to 24 March 2018, offering a meeting ground for artists from the Middle East and North Africa.

The UAE's most prestigious art fair will feature a record 104 galleries from 47 countries, focusing on budding technologies, social engagement and diversified recognition.



Victor Ehikhamenor, 'Isimagodo', 2017, sculpture, 457 cm (height). Image courtesy the artist.

For more than a decade, the annual **Art Dubai** fair has played a key role in the Emirate's journey towards becoming a leading global destination for arts and design. The collaborative venture showcases a broad programme of creative exhibitions and events, positioning Dubai as an international destination of culture, partnership and social engagement.

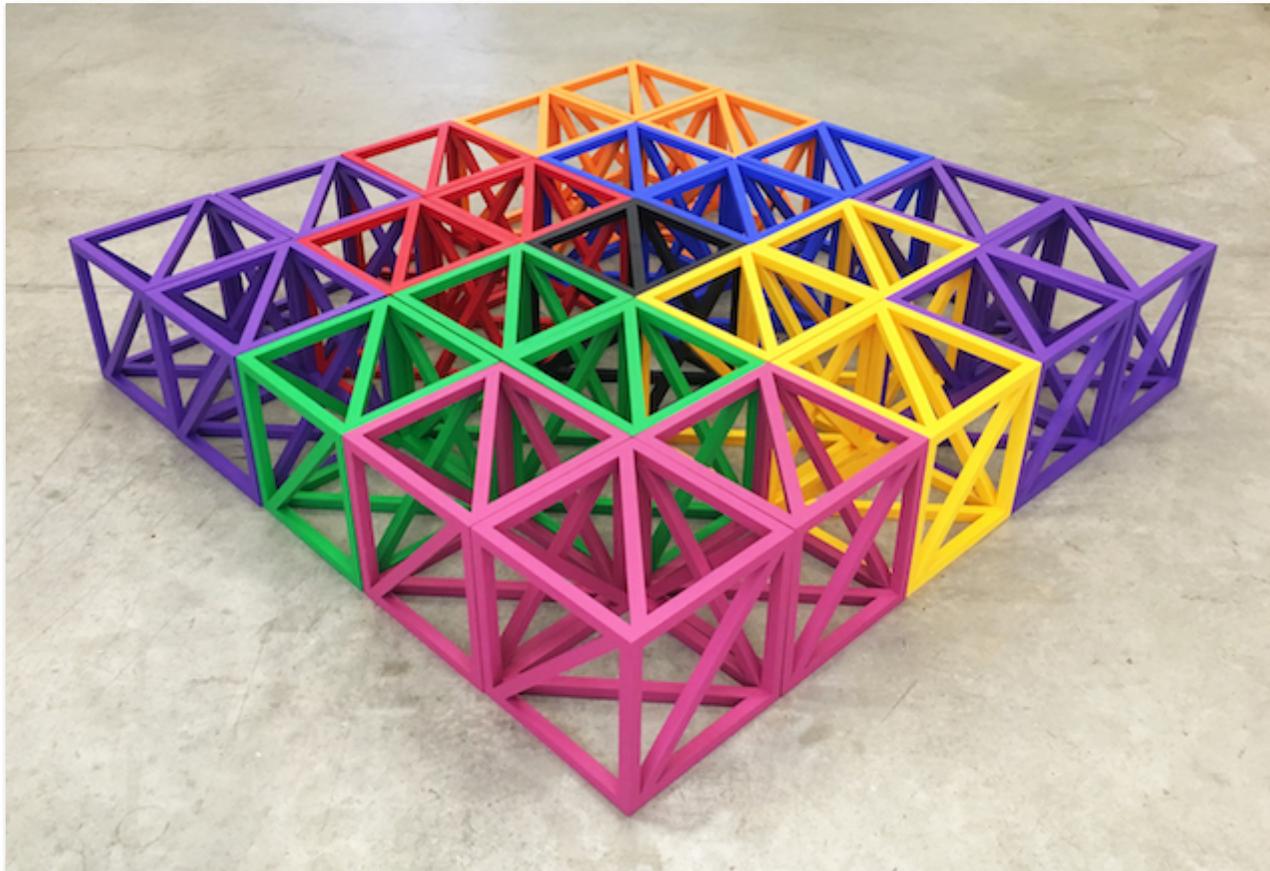
Held under the patronage of **HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, and in partnership with **The Abraaj Group**, Art Dubai 2018 will feature a record 104 galleries from 47 countries, making the coming edition the fair's largest and most globally diverse to date. Alongside 77 returning galleries, the fair will welcome an international array of 27 first-time exhibitors.





Viktor Ekpuk, 'Composition #14 (Santa Fe Suite)', 2013. Image courtesy the artist and TAFETA.

Alongside the fair's bustling modern art section and lecture series, the curatorial team has made great strides in expanding the 2018 Contemporary segment. This year, 11 African art-specialised galleries from Africa, Europe and the Americas will represent multidisciplinary artists from Cameroon, Nigeria, Ethiopia and the like.

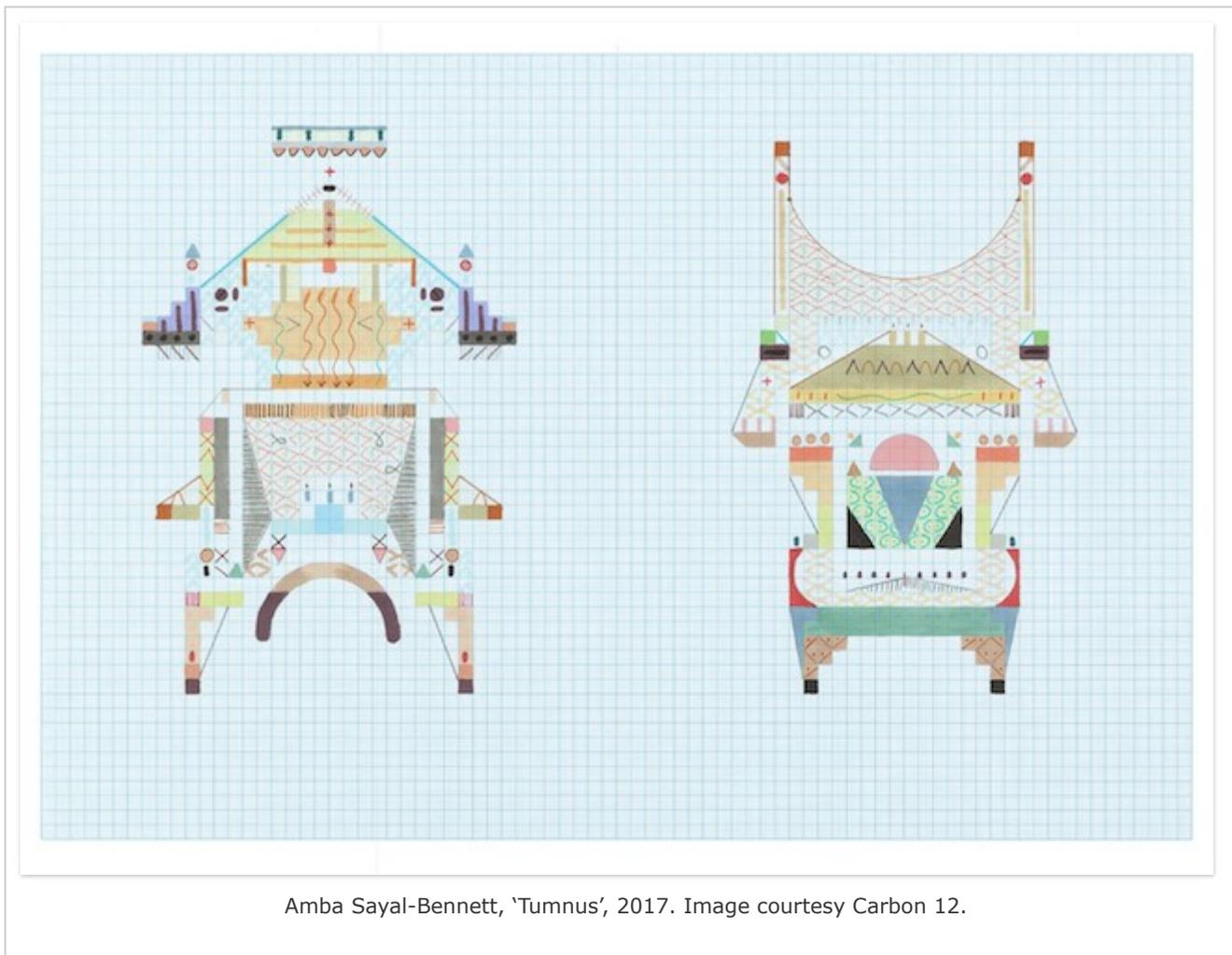


Rasheed Araeen, 'Rainbow on the Ground Surrounding the Black', 2016. Image courtesy Aicon Gallery.

Art Dubai Contemporary

Confirming its unique identity as a place of discovery, Art Dubai's **Contemporary** halls will feature 78 galleries from 42 countries this March, including first-time participations from Iceland, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan. Here, the commercial fair puts its spotlight on female artists, African art, sculpture and work that explores active social engagement.

Likewise, the artists range from emerging and upcoming practitioners from lesser-known art capitals to household names. The works they will present cover all artistic media – including painting, drawing, sculpture, installation, video, photography and performance.



Amba Sayal-Bennett, 'Tumnus', 2017. Image courtesy Carbon 12.

1. Carbon 12 & Amba Sayal-Bennett

Represented by **Carbon 12**, Amba Sayal-Bennett is inspired by the never-ending compositional possibilities of simple geometries. The artist, currently based in London, erects sculptures and installations from common materials that resemble architectural plans, building blocks and modernist altarpieces. Her contributions to Art Dubai's exhibition space

highlight a deep sensitivity to and curiosity about shapes: how spaces are erected, how outlines are mediated and how human bodies are oriented around and within them. After arranging hard-edged shapes in intricate drawings, the artist translates her compositions into three-dimensional forms of all shapes and sizes. Using construction paper, cardboard, overhead projectors and detritus found on the street, Sayal-Bennett creates detailed and colorful compositions that enter into and overtake the viewer's physical space.

Active in an international arena, Carbon 12 introduces and promotes both established and emerging artists to the UAE contemporary art scene, supplementing a series of annual exhibitions with diverse contextual activities including a series of publications, workshops and talks. The playful, organic process that constitutes the creative production of Carbon 12's artist base is facilitated and mirrored by its location in Al Quoz, Dubai.





Soheila Shokhanvari, 'Dark Horse', 2017. Image courtesy Kristin Hjellegjerde.

2. Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery & Soheila Sokhanvari

Soheila Sokhanvari is an Iranian-born artist whose multidisciplinary work weaves layers of political histories with bizarre, humorous and mysterious narratives that are then left up to the spectator to complete. Sokhanvari is drawn to traumatic memories that linger in the collective consciousness or cause mass amnesia, and, inevitably, resist conventional representation. Playing with the relationship between medium and locale, Sokhanvari severs the tie between signifier and referent so that the resulting piece functions as a visual shell over a complex, buried issue.

Sokhanvari is also interested in the use of metaphor to speak about the inexpressible events, particularly in reference to Iran's recent past. Her work at Art Dubai 2018, hosted by **Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery**, explores how magic realism and metaphor historically offer writers and artists the power to escape limitations, be they physical, theoretical, historical or emotional. Sokhanvari's work is thus both a gesture of protection and an arena for artistic and political investigation.



Raed Yassin, 'Manual for Disasters', 2017. Image courtesy Kalfayan Galleries.

3. Kalfayan Galleries & Raed Yassin

Lebanese **Raed Yassin** is an artist and musician, living and working in Beirut. Much of Yassin's work originates from an examination of personal narratives and their position within collective histories, consumer culture and mass production. One of the organisers of Irtijal Festival – Beirut's experimental contemporary music festival – Yassin has released several albums and founded the production company Annihaya (2009). He is also a founding member of **Atfal Ahdath**, a Beirut-based art collective.

Raed Yassin is brought to the 2018 fair by Greece's **Kalfayan Galleries**. Working with both emerging and established artists, the Kalfayan Galleries strive to support ongoing intellectual and visual dialogue about post-war visual artwork both in Greece and abroad. It is this creative interchange between contemporary and post-war art that distinguishes the gallery's philosophy and therefore its contribution to artistic research and discourse. At the core of the gallery's objective, and therefore its participation at Art Dubai, is the aspiration to serve as a platform of inspiration through collective exchanges, collaborative projects and multimedia art that disregards aesthetic and/or authoritative boundaries.





Maha Malluh, 'Food For Thought 7', 2017. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Krinzinger.

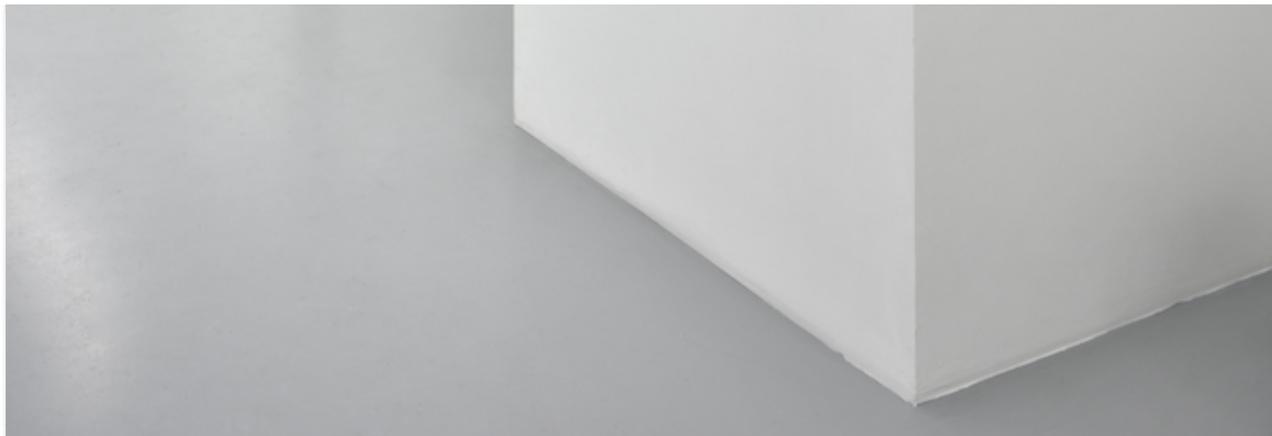
4. Galerie Krinzinger & Maha Malluh

Founded in 1971, **Galerie Krinzinger** focuses its programme agenda and exhibitionary practice on performance and body art. In conjunction with their main gallery space, the Krinzinger Projekte invites young domestic and international artists to take part in their artist-in-residence programme, which currently includes destinations in Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Sri Lanka. The gallery's contributions to Art Dubai's 2018 fair include the multimedia work of Saudi artist Maha Malluh.

Born in the region of Najd, Malluh explores the challenges of modernity and progressivity that loom overwhelmingly above many Saudi residents. Continuous in her artwork, which started with collages and developed into photograms, is her use of dreamlike, symbolic and reality-based imagery to express her opinion about life as a woman in contemporary Saudi Arabia. In an interview with Edge of Arabia, **Malluh notes:**

My inspiration for art comes from my country, a land of contrasting images and ideas. Good art... forces you to pause, to contemplate and think harder about your surroundings.





Sara Ouhammadou, 'Wassalnalilou #2', 2016. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Polaris.

5. Galerie Polaris & Sara Ouhammadou

Galerie Polaris plays an active role in Art Dubai Contemporary's 2018 mindset with a selection of emerging female artists taking part in this year's fair. A major component of Polaris booth will be Sara Ouhammadou, a French-Moroccan artist who brings the intimate feeling of her studio to the commercial fair. A frequent collaborator, the artist uses unconventional materials in her textile installations, offering them new life and "impregnating [them] with significations". Under Ouhammadou's manipulation, each material becomes less familiar, given an autonomous life and a mysterious presence that directly refers to a primitive artistic language.



Portrait of The Abraaj Group Art Prize winner Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Image courtesy Abraaj Group.

The Abraaj Group Art Prize

Each year, **The Abraaj Group Art Prize** awards US\$100,000 to a winning artist to realise a 'dream project' and US\$10,000 each to three shortlisted candidates. Though the 2018 edition has seen applications from a record number of 65 countries, the panelists – which included guest curator Myrian Ben Salah – unanimously selected **Lawrence Abu Hamdan** as the recipient of this year's prize. Based between Lebanon and Jordan, Abu Hamdan's work cannot be pinned down to a single practice, his project-oriented work taking the form of audiovisual installations, performances, photography, Islamic sermons, musical compositions, essays and lectures.

Marking the occasion of the 2018 award, Frederic Sicre, Managing Director of The Abraaj Group **comments** (PDF download):

Being part of the art scene in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia this last decade has been an incredibly creative and inspiring journey for us. As investors in these markets, it is our responsibility to positively impact communities, be it through business, entrepreneurship or innovation and the arts. Ten years ago, the Prize was established with the aim of nurturing homegrown artistic talent. Today, the Prize is a platform for artists to shine and leave their footprint on a global stage. We've seen lives transformed and careers catapulted. We are proud to help these gifted artists to flourish and make their mark in the art world. This is a success story we couldn't be happier to be part of.



Lawrence Abu Hamdam, 'Earshot', 2016. Installation view at Portikus Frankfurt. Image courtesy the artist.

Art Dubai Residency Programme

For its 12th edition, Art Dubai introduces a new gallery programme dedicated to solo presentations from galleries whose artists are taking part in a short residency programme. The in-house opportunity encourages artists to immerse themselves in the UAE's local art scene and to create a body of work that merges distinct practice, tradition, identity and

newfound surroundings. The final works will be on show in the new section of the fair, presented by the artists' respective galleries. Framed within a unique geographical and cultural context, the Residents section further aims to facilitate exchange and dialogue between artists, local communities and the broader cultural landscape.

Pablo del Val, Art Dubai's Artistic Director **states** (PDF download):

With every edition, Art Dubai asserts itself as the world's most international art fair and the diversity coming through participating galleries from 47 countries is testament to this. For our 2018 edition, we will be launching Residents, a pioneering and unique platform that brings together different energies, synergies, geographies and artistic practices, which one doesn't usually see together in one place.





Poonam Jain, 'Shopping', 2016. Image courtesy 1×1 Art Gallery.

1. Poonam Jain

As part of her Art Dubai residency, Bombay-based artist Poonam Jain investigates her inhabited spaces using delicate intricately-rendered structures. She blatantly comments on issues that concern a young woman in a sprawling urban environment, combining personal narratives, socio-political concerns and art historical references to do so. Her stint in the residency programme adopts **"a numerical vocabulary that manifests itself in delicate architectural forms"**.

As such, metaphors and synonyms are mathematically dissected to form sentences that reflect an innate need to express a feminist agenda. For Jain, artistic and architectural critique exists as an intimate relationship that she shares with her neighbours and the utter lack of privacy in crowded city spaces. Jain proposes a feminism that does not depend on an animosity; rather, she proposes an intellectual argument that is precise and mathematical in its opposition to the inherited understandings of feminism.





Poonam Jain, 'Chanting', 2016. Image courtesy 1×1 Art Gallery.

2. Victor Ehikhamenor

Another featured resident is the Nigerian practitioner **Victor Ehikhamenor**. The multi-faceted artist, whose practice encompasses painting, drawing, photography, sculpture and installation, hails from a small village in Edo State, the historic seat of the Benin Empire. His contribution to the Art Dubai 2018 scene draws inspiration from the dual aesthetic and spiritual traditions which infused his upbringing. He plays with imagery and motifs from both Edo religions and Catholicism, resulting in a frenzied concoction of gestural abstraction and schematised forms. This stylisation is used in everything from paintings to photographs to immersive installations, producing an encompassing experience, a sense of both meditative repetition and an ongoing, abstracted narrative.



Victor Ehikhamenor, 'Wealth of Nations', 2015, installation, variable dimensions. Image courtesy the artist.

The preeminent platform to interact with art from the Middle East and North Africa, Art Dubai mirrors the cosmopolitanism and diversity of its locale and the wide variety of its international collaborators. While previous years have documented growth in sales and participation, the 2018 edition offers itself as a cultural think-tank where socially-committed expansion, diversity, education and communal support are not only present, but in abundance.

Megan Miller

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The Art Dubai 2018 fair is open from 21 to 24 March 2018 at Madinat Jumeirah, Al Sufouh Road, Umm Suqeim, Exit 39 (Interchange 4) from Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai, UAE.

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