

Art Dubai brushes away the blues, set to paint town red

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Ayyam Gallery (Dubai), Art Dubai Contemporary, at Art Dubai 2019.

Muhammad Yusuf, *Features Writer*

Art Dubai, whose 14th edition is taking place March 29 – April 3 at Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) has announced an updated gallery list for its 2021 edition. Held in the strategic partnership with Dubai Culture, Art Dubai 2021 will feature 50 leading Contemporary and Modern galleries from 31 countries, showcasing a diverse selection of artworks, artists and practices, reflecting the multicultural identity of the city. “It reaffirms the fair’s commitment to providing a physical platform and marketplace for artists and galleries from across the Global South,” say fair authorities.

This year, Art Dubai has moved to a new location at DIFC, in a purpose-built venue that ensures COVID-19 safety protocols. Alongside galleries from major and emerging international art centres, visitors will encounter galleries from across the Middle East and South and East Asia, including from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, India, Vietnam and Philippines and a strong representation from across the African continent, including galleries from Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco and Tunisia. Ten of Dubai’s top galleries will also take part.

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Art Dubai's Artistic Director, Pablo del Val, said that "in-person events are the heart and soul of the art world and ours is a sector that has – like so many others – been significantly impacted by the events of the last 12 months. "As we begin to navigate our way out of the pandemic, we feel a keen responsibility to do everything we possibly can to support the artists, galleries and many service providers who depend on a vibrant and dynamic global commercial art sector." He is an art professional and enthusiast with decades of experience as a cultural manager, curator and director of contemporary art galleries around the world. Joining Art Dubai in 2015 as Creative Director, he is responsible for developing Art Dubai's programme and the fair's relationships with collectors, institutions and partners.

Prior to joining Art Dubai, he was Director of ZONA MACO. He also was the founding director of 'La Conservera' Center of Contemporary Art in Murcia, Spain. Art Dubai has announced a number of innovations for the 2021 fair. They include a collaborative new partnership with exhibiting galleries, where participation costs are partly based on sales, and a Remote Participation Programme that supports galleries who are unable to travel to Dubai in person, by using new technologies to connect them digitally with fair visitors who are discovering their artworks in person.



Art Dubai @ DIFC.

Isabelle van den Eynde, founder of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde (Dubai), said that “I have always believed in the energy of Art Dubai and, in spite of everything, this year is no exception.

“Art Dubai has remained faithful to its vision. They have persevered. I am confident the upcoming event, in its new format, will dynamise the scene yet again.” Kristin Hjellegjerde, founder of Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (London, Berlin, Nevlunghavn, Norway) commented: “In these times we have to find alternative ways to keep growing.

“Having taken part in many previous editions of the fair, we trust the team to make this a great success, whether circumstances mean we can be there in person or not.”

Nathalie Obadia, founder of Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Paris, Brussels) said that “the city of Dubai has strengthened its position as a strategic crossroads thanks to ambitious fine art projects in the Middle East. As Art Dubai has become an essential fair in the region and one of the few to be held this spring, it was vital in relation to the promotion of our artists to be at this rendezvous.”

Art Dubai is one of the Middle East’s leading art fairs for the local, regional and international art world. Since 2007, it has championed art and artists from across the Middle East, MENASA (Middle East, North Africa & South Asia) and the Global South, broadening conversations about art beyond traditional Western-led geographical scopes and narratives. It features contemporary and modern gallery sections, annual artist-driven commissions, collector and education programmes and artist residencies. Art Dubai 2021 is sponsored by Julius Baer.

Benedetta Ghione is the Executive Director of Art Dubai. With over fifteen years of experience in art business, she holds a BA and MA in History of Art and Contemporary Art Theory, respectively. She joined Art Dubai in 2015 and leads a team of fifteen staff to deliver the strategy and implementation of the fair. Among other responsibilities, she focuses on institutional engagements, nurturing artistic practice and public educational engagement. Chloe Vaitso, International Director, Art Dubai, is an art professional with over fifteen years of experience, specialising in strategy building and implementation of cultural projects. She joined Art Dubai in 2018 as International Director and she spotlights developing the global profile and international positioning of the fair. Prior to joining Art Dubai, she held the position of Head of Audience Development for Frieze Fairs, where she oversaw the strategic development and execution of the global VIP strategy for Frieze London, Frieze Masters & Frieze New York.

She holds a BA from Brown University, US, and obtained her MA in History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. Hala Khayat, Regional Director, Art Dubai, is a Middle East art specialist, writer, curator, art collector and philanthropist, with a background in fine arts and design. Her main role as a senior art specialist for Arab, Iranian and Turkish art, was to curate and manage the auctions, from finding works of art in many places regionally and with collectors internationally, to overseeing the production of catalogues. In an area where written data is probably scarce, she established the research criteria for the Middle East's top modern artists, establishing key relations with artists' estates.

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