

# Art Dubai 2021: These are some of the most eye-catching works at this year's fair

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From portraiture to textile, here are a few of the standout art pieces worth taking a look at



A piece by Abdoulaye Konate at Gallery 1957, Art Dubai 2021. Chris Whiteoak / The National

Art Dubai has returned with 50 galleries from more than 31 countries.

Paintings abound at the fair this year, with many figurative works by African artists, including an arresting portrait by Kehinde Wiley at Galerie Templon from Paris. The artist behind Barack Obama's presidential portrait from 2018, Wiley uses portraiture as a way to reframe the traditions of classical European painting. Typically featuring black subjects against floral or dramatic landscape backdrops, he recasts the depictions of people of colour in a new light.



Elsewhere, a 2020 pentptych by Ibrahim El Dessouki titled *Series of Gated Communities – Looks Like Bananas* at Hafez Gallery are filled with unrelated objects – potted plants and the front of a motorcycle, for example – flatly painted in clear, vivid forms against a monochrome background.



Meanwhile, more playful and energetic works can be found at the booths of Athr Gallery from Jeddah and Dastan's Basement from Tehran. The latter includes a memorable work by Iranian artist Farrokh Mahdavi that shows a thick slathering of pink paint on canvas with eyes and lips added to create a face.



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Eye-catching works (and unsurprising selfie magnets), including a Takashi Murakami *Flowers* wall sculpture and Anish Kapoor's *Monochrome (Blue Matt)*, are presented at Galerie Perrotin's booth, alongside works by Bharti Kher, Lee Bae and JR.



Across from it are the more serene, contemplative paintings of Ayesha Sultana, who has captured the subtlety of the sky's shifting appearance in the series *11:58*. Her new works, along with pieces by Praneet Soi, Radhika Khimji, Prabhakar Pachpute and Biraaj Dodiya are on view at Experimenter gallery's booth.

Here are some other highlights from the fair that are worth a look:

### **Afifa Aleiby's enigmatic portraits of women**

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Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery has dedicated its booth to Iraqi artist Afifa Aleiby, who studied monumental art in 1974, in what was then the Soviet Union, and taught at the Institute of Fine Arts in Aden, Yemen before gradually settling down in the Netherlands.

Her paintings often portray melancholic characters, including solitary women wearing serene or sombre expressions as they look away from the viewer. Aleiby also employs tones from Renaissance paintings, giving the impression that the subjects belong to the distant past or another reality. Her painting *Sunset* from 2017 sold at the fair on the first day.



Afifa Aleiby, 'Yasmin'. Courtesy the artist and Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

## A personal colour map of Dubai

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What are the colours of bakhoor ashes, tree spores, marigold and hibiscus? Nahla Tabbaa explores these pigments in her work *Fleeting Stains*, a colour study of various objects encountered around Dubai.

Her presentation, part of this year's Campus Art Dubai, serves as a kind of diary, mapping out moments in Tabbaa's life through dyed fabric and coloured paper that are arranged on the wall. The artist has then added handwritten notes on the side of the objects, recounting the inspirations behind the colour or where it was extracted from: "Jebel Jais sandstone"; "with rust from Nana & Nanu's spoon"; "1 year's worth of bakhoor... as if a stick of incense a day was going to burn away my anxiety".



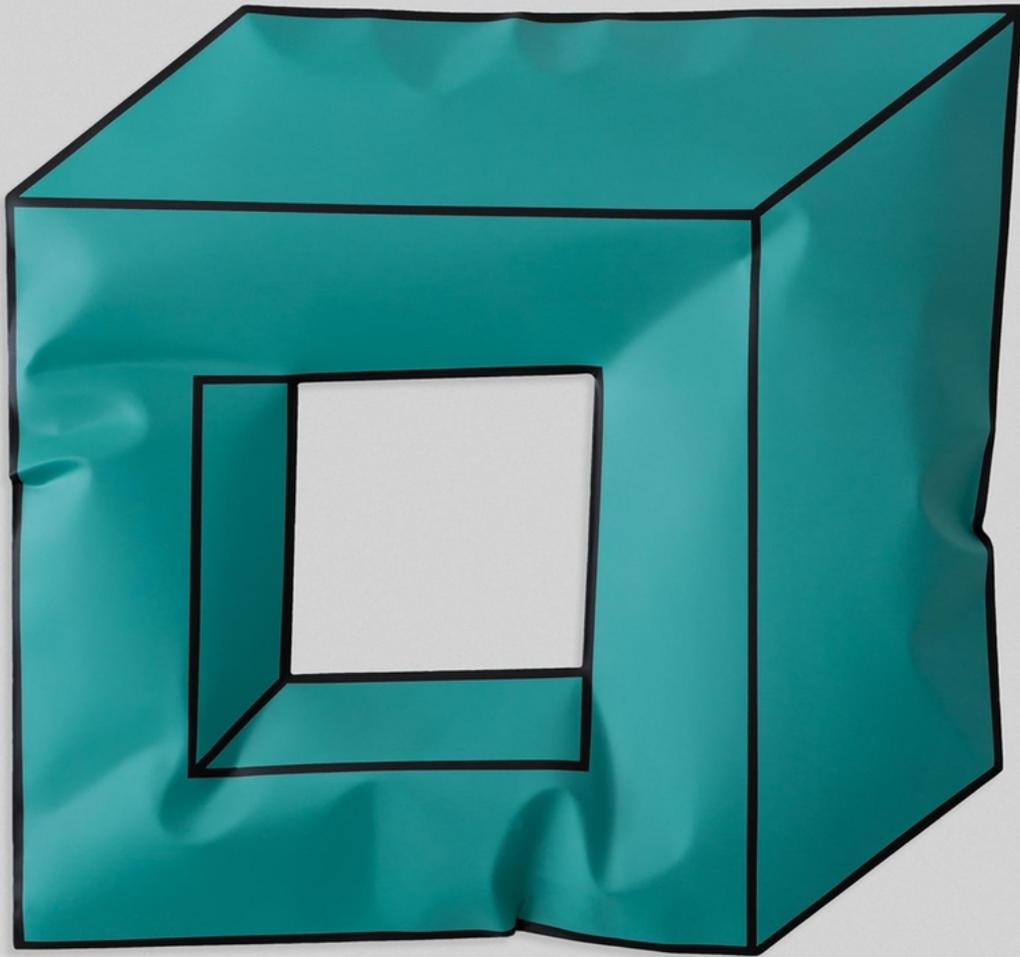
'Fleeting Stains' by Nahla Tabbaa at Art Dubai 2021. Chris Whiteoak / The National

## Shaikha Al Mazrou's graphic shapes

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After experimenting with cyanotype and pigment blocks last year, Shaikha Al Mazrou returns to her colourful steel sculptures at Lawrie Shabibi's booth. This time, however, the Emirati artist has added bold lines to accentuate shape, which also lends a more graphic style to the 2021 works.

Al Mazrou gives the sculptures a matte finish by wet coating the steel, and the deliberate dents underneath make the material appear soft and pliable.



Shaikha Al Mazrou, 'Open Window', 2021. Courtesy the artist and Lawrie Shabibi

## Seeing the sunrise in James Clar's light work

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Under the bright lights of the booth, James Clar's *A New Dawn* loses some of its magnetism. In a dimmer setting, however, the LED tubes cast a glow reminiscent of a sunrise.

Another work, *Taking A Ride With My Best Friend*, includes a wall-mounted car door that has been stripped of its lining, revealing its mechanical skeleton. Swirling lights projected from above dance on the door's frame.



James Clar, 'A New Dawn', on view at Silverlens' booth. Courtesy the artist and Silverlens

Clar's works are presented by Silverlens, a gallery from Manila, Philippines, alongside an untitled painting by Nicole Coson. The abstract work features light and dark shapes, almost like Rorschach test blots, against a luminous orange background.

The booth also includes a work by Pio Abad titled *My dear, there are always people who are just a little faster, more brilliant, and more aggressive IV*. Modelled after a Hermes scarf, the fabric piece comments on the colonial depictions of native and indigenous people in western cultures.

## Weaving image and textile

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Joana Choumali transforms her photographs into richly textured pieces by embroidering directly on to her images. Through these interventions, her works, shown at Gallery 1957's booth, become more dream-like and meditative.

Choumali, who lives in Cote d'Ivoire and studied graphic arts in Casablanca, Morocco, has previously shown in the Venice Biennale.



Joana Choumali's 'We Should Have Never Stopped Swinging'. Courtesy the artist and Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957 is also presenting the work of Malian artist Abdoulaye Konate, whose pieces draw from West African textile traditions. By cutting and layering the dyed strips of fabric, the artist creates the effects of shadows and gradient colours much like a painting.

*Art Dubai takes place until Saturday. More information is at [artdubai.ae](http://artdubai.ae)*

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