

Reasons to be excited about art in the Middle East

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Words By Chris Mugan

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As Art Dubai celebrates its 10th year with its largest and most diverse line-up yet, we speak to experts on art in the Middle East to pick out key trends, artists and galleries that highlight how the market continues to grow and transform



Faiq Hassan, *Bedouin Tent*, 1950, Courtesy of the Artist and [Meem Gallery](#)

- Suheyła Takesh
Curator, Barjeel Art Foundation

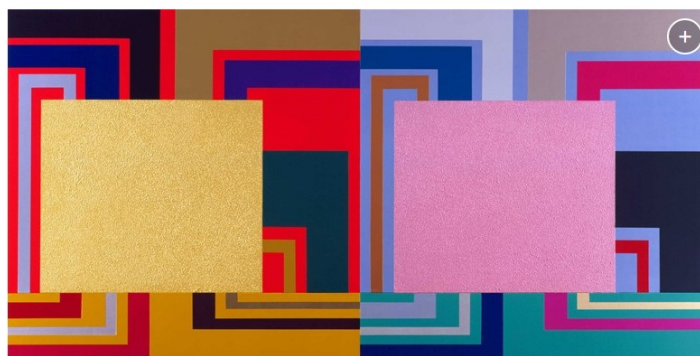
At Art Dubai Modern I am excited about exploring the work of Arab modernists, particularly pieces by Lebanese artist Huguette Caland and Iraqi artist Faiq Hassan. Discourse around comparative modernities, especially in North Africa and West Asia, has grown steadily, with 20th century pieces by Arab, Turkish and Iranian artists increasingly shown in global venues, and scholarship being conducted on regional art histories. The market was quick to mirror this trend, with Art Dubai Modern opening up in 2014 and international auction houses conducting specialist sales of modern Middle Eastern art.



Huguette Caland, *Untitled*, 1994. Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Janine Rubeiz

- Bibi Zavieh
Specialist at Christie's

Major exhibition openings reveal the extraordinary extension project of the infamous Al Serkal Avenue in Dubai where international galleries Leila Heller and Custot (see below) are showcasing Michelangelo Pistoletto, Marc Quinn and others, revealing the growing globalisation of art in this region. What impresses me most is how the district has shaped the Dubai art scene: it has become the hippest neighbourhood in town, with cultural events — outdoor screenings, concerts, performances, art and fashion pop-ups — bringing together thousands of people looking for inspiration.

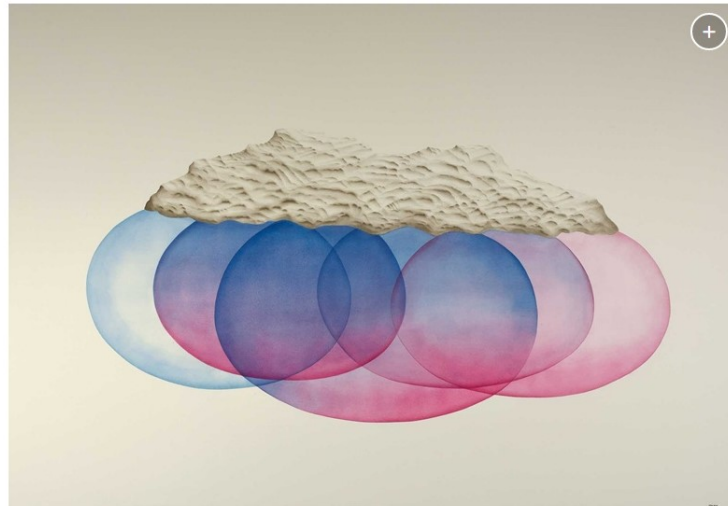


Peter Halley, *Ancillary Control*, 2001. Acrylic Day-Glo, pearlescent and metallic acrylic, and Roll-a-Text on canvas. 185.4 x 365.8 cm. (73 x 144 in.). Courtesy of Custot Gallery

- Rashid Rana
Artist and founding member of the Lahore Biennale Foundation

I'm looking forward to Risham Syed's solo booth at Art Dubai with [Project 88](#). She has been working with an interesting idea of reinterpreting painting as a tool to refer to history; treating painting as an object — playing with its inherent nature — and contextualising or framing it within a certain narrative of found objects that carry history. Their relationship blurs the boundary between fiction and reality, oscillating between the two and connecting history with the present in a unique way.

Rashid Rana is in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist as part of [Art Dubai's Global Art Forum](#)



Nima Zaare Nahandi, *Kapler's Dream*. Courtesy of the artist and [Dastan's Basement](#)

- Lili Jassemi
Co-founder and manager of [Sophia Contemporary Gallery](#), London

Tehran-based gallery [Dastan's Basement](#) has been taking part in the art fair for the past two years. We've collaborated with its founder Hormoz Hematian and acquired several artworks for our personal collection. I particularly appreciate the pioneering role of Dastan's Basement within the Iranian contemporary art market, its staff's forward-looking vision and their enthusiasm for showcasing emerging Iranian artists internationally. They always surprise me with their original and relevant curatorial program.

Sophia Contemporary Gallery, London, opened this month to show contemporary art from the Middle East alongside western artists

- Arianne Levene Piper
Art consultant

Looking at the works that are going to be Art Dubai, we can see a real mix between emerging and blue-chip Middle Eastern and African artists of a very high standard. This is exemplified by the [Marianne Boesky Gallery's](#) solo booth of stunning work from the Syrian artist Diana al-Hadid, as well as by the return of established older generation artists such as the Lebanese-American Etel Adnan and Sudanese painter Ibrahim El-Salahi. They have recently been experiencing revivals with major international solo shows.

[Art Dubai](#) takes place 16-19 March, at Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai, UAE