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Harper's

ARABIA

# ART

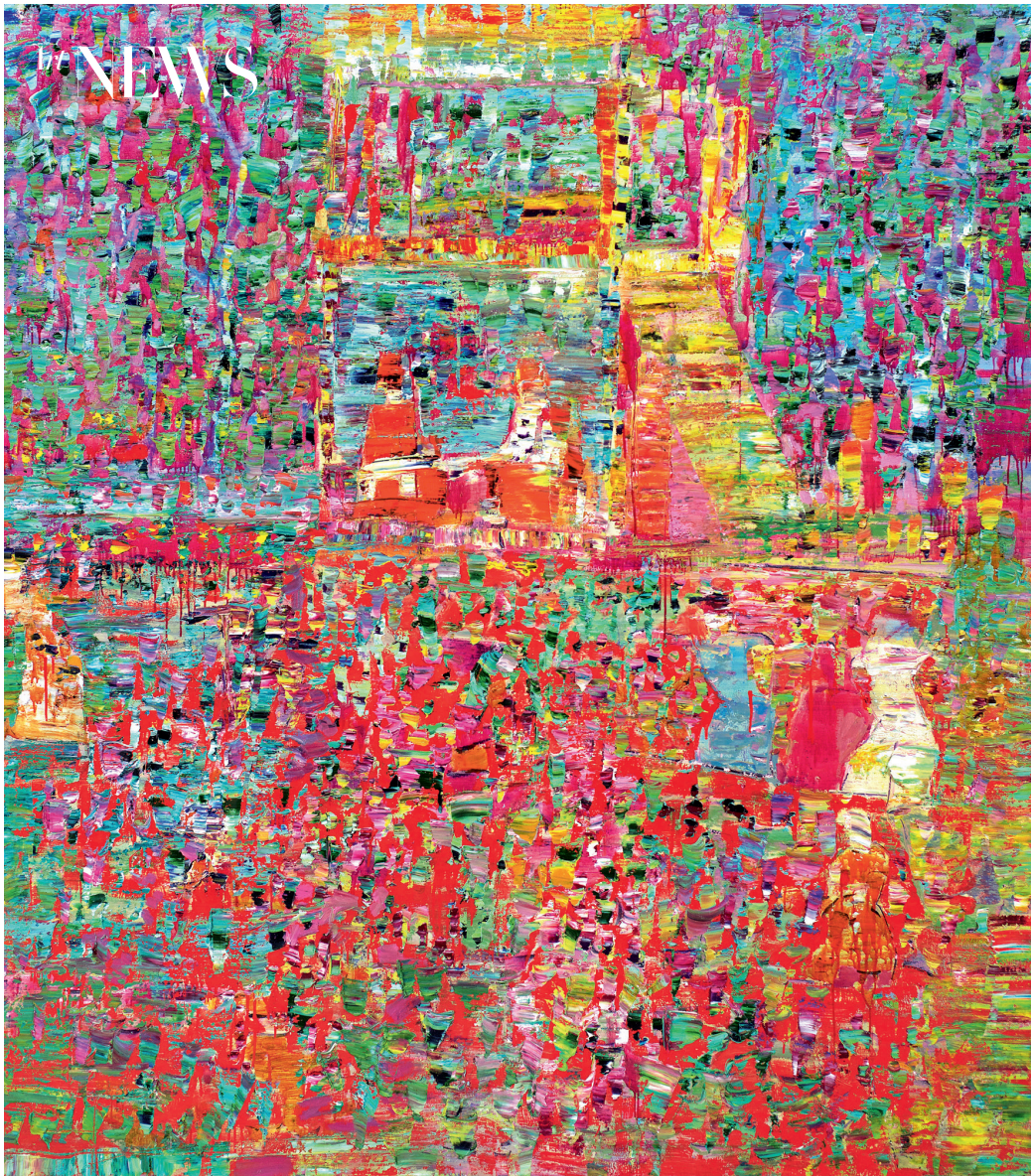
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## MIDDLE EASTERN ART IN HONG KONG

**Sotheby's** holds its first exhibition of Middle Eastern art in Asia with a presentation of works by Reza Derakshani and Alfred Basbous

PRESENTED FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ASIA, from 3-17 November Sotheby's will exhibit the works of two iconic Middle Eastern artists: Iranian painter Reza Derakshani (b. 1952) and Lebanese sculptor Alfred Basbous (1924-2006). Titled *Two Moderns from the Middle East*, the selling-exhibition provides Asian collectors with the opportunity to discover artwork by these pivotal artists as well as introduce art from the Middle East region to a wider audience. Guest-curated by international art advisors Arianne Levene Piper and Eglantine de Ganay-d'Espous, the show will present 12 bronze and marble sculptures by Basbous alongside 15 new oil on canvas works by Derakshani.

Piper and de Ganay-d'Espous have worked

together on exhibitions of Middle Eastern and Asian art for over 10 years, with their first joint exhibition, *Made in Iran*, taking place in 2008 at Asia House in London. "Our brief was to introduce something fresh and new that local collectors could identify with because of a shared aesthetic," says Piper. "I wanted to focus on artists who have chosen a more classic approach to painting and sculpture; over the last 10 years people have been showing political art [from the region] or art that refers to religious iconography. I thought it was important to look at other artists whose works are perhaps more subtle in this context." As Piper notes, traditional Chinese painting also incorporates calligraphy similar to traditional Persian painting. "Collectors will be able to identify

with this shared aesthetic," adds Piper who first met Derakshani in Tehran during 2007 and was immediately taken by his poetic work. "Moreover, in Asia there is a great appreciation for Impressionist painting, and there are lots of references to Impressionism in the work of Derakshani, whether conscious or subconscious. His use of paint and appreciation of paint as a medium and his choice of colour is rich and abundant in the same way as 19th-century European painting."

It was in London at Sophia Contemporary that Piper discovered the sculptures of Alfred Basbous. The artist, who is well known in Lebanon, hasn't had much recognition abroad. His anthropomorphic shapes are endowed with a lyricism akin to those of Modern European sculptures. "He worked in a universal language and it seemed like a good opportunity to show his sculptures in a new light," adds Piper, who has purchased his work for several clients. "It's quite hard for collectors from mainland China and Hong Kong, whether they are Chinese or Western, to have the time to travel to the countries such as Iran, the UAE or Lebanon to see these works. These are works that are not on everyone's radar—unless you go to specific galleries or specific fairs you don't see their work."

*Two Moderns from the Middle East* enhances the dialogue between two regions through art. The coupling of works by Derakshani and Basbous offers a renewed appreciation for modern masters—a universal language, rich in poetry and lyricism of form, resonating with a similar modern Asian aesthetic. The exhibition marks the first time each artist will show in China. "I don't feel like they have had the recognition they deserve," adds Piper. "This is an opportunity to introduce new art to Asia." [sothebys.com](http://sothebys.com)

Left: Alfred Basbous. *Femme Assise*. Bronze. 1983. 120x70x40cm. Edition one of eight.  
Right: Reza Derakshani. *Garden Party*. 2017. Oil on canvas. 198x178cm.



# A SCULPTURAL GARDEN IN RACHANA

*The Basbous Foundation in Lebanon houses the collection of renowned sculptor Alfred Basbous. Rebecca Anne Proctor speaks with Fadi Basbous on the foundation's regional and international initiatives and preserving his father's legacy*

JUST A SHORT DRIVE OUTSIDE OF BEIRUT is the village of Rachana, a small town overlooking the Mediterranean in northern Lebanon's Batroun district. Known as the "museum village", as soon as one enters they are greeted by a towering sculpture—human-size and portraying such energy that the artwork nearly appears to be alive. A few more steps inside and dozens of abstract sculptures proliferate in the gardens and nearby churchyard. The sculptures of the Basbous brothers—Michel, Alfred and Youssef—dance before the visitor decorating the outdoor scene as if attendees to a party. Pioneers of Lebanese modern sculpture, their work has earned Rachana its fame. In 1997, UNESCO named the village the World Capital for Open Air Sculpture.

Nearby the Alfred Basbous Foundation, established in 2004 by the artist just two years before his death, is filled with his gentle, curvaceous sculptures. Founded as a way to foster an environment receptive to the artist's work and as a means to further the attention of modern art to a growing public, it is now spearheaded by the artist's son Fadi. "Alfred Basbous introduced Middle Eastern society to modern art," says Fadi. "He freed it from classical and traditional forms." In 1960, Basbous received a scholarship from the French government and became a pupil of the sculptor René Collamarini at The National Fine Arts School in Paris (L'École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Paris). During his time in Paris he worked in the tradition of sculptors such as Jean Arp, Constantin Brâncusi and Henry Moore, mastering such noble materials of bronze, wood and marble to express the sensuality and purity of the human form and combining it with the spirit of his native Lebanon. "Alfred came from a European training and represented the woman in a natural and abstract way—one which was very new to the Middle East and to Lebanon at the time," he

continues. "Many of his sculptures portrayed women or the mother and child with a great sense of avant-garde and minimalist abstraction." From 1994 to 2004, Basbous organised the International Symposium of Sculpture in Rachana, Lebanon, an event that brought renowned sculptures from all over the world to create and exhibit their works alongside his own. Today Fadi is continuing his father's legacy through a variety of regional and international cultural initiatives. The outdoor sculpture garden is open year-round, while the museum stages one annual exhibition around August and September during the time of the Beirut Art Fair showcasing work by a mix of regional and international artists. The studio of Alfred Basbous is accessible by appointment only. "Part of our job is to promote the work of Alfred Basbous worldwide," says Fadi. "We started in Dubai showing Alfred's sculpture with Maliha Tabari at Tabari Artspace. We've auctioned several pieces at Christie's Dubai and we also show Alfred's sculpture with Sophia Contemporary in London. Beirut and Paris-based gallery Mark Hachem has also sold several sculptures." Most recently, the Ashmolean in Oxford have acquired three Alfred Basbous sculptures and Sotheby's Hong Kong will soon exhibit the sculptor's work in a selling exhibition alongside the paintings of Reza Derakshani. Basbous sculptures can also be found in major collections in Lebanon, including Villa Audi, KA Collection and the collection of Basel and Ramzi Dallou.

"When you see his work you fall in love with it. You immediately want to touch it," says Fadi. "He treated each material differently—bronze, marble, wood and even his research in plastic—into each he encapsulated the soul of the society." Fadi also underlines the Foundation's support for philanthropic activities. "We donate sculptures for auctions that benefit Saint Jude's Children's Cancer in Lebanon and the Heartbeat Association," he says. "We believe the aim of art is to bring balance to human life and to make it better with more value. These are the values that Basbous believed in and which we continue to support." [alfredbasbous.com](http://alfredbasbous.com)

