

A new future for art fairs? Highlights from Art Dubai's first digital program



- In lieu of a physical art fair this March, Art Dubai is showcasing more than 900 works online by approximately 90 participating galleries

DUBAI: Back in February as the rapid spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) threatened the global art calendar, Art Basel Hong Kong was the first to go.



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Day by day, the art world watched as fair by fair was either postponed or cancelled. Frieze New York, 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair, Milan's Salone del Mobile, Art Paris and the list goes on. As of early March, Art Dubai originally

planned to still stage a slimmed down program of events and talks for UAE-based galleries and arts organizations and the Residents section, which has had artists from the African continent working on specially commissioned artworks for that past six weeks.

Most recently, after more stringent measures of precaution have been enforced in the UAE, Art Dubai decided to showcase various aspects of its programming through curated online and digital experiences. These include the second edition of its Online Catalogue comprising approximately 90 galleries from, primarily, the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia region, a live-broadcast condensed version of the Global Art Forum, titled “Do You Story? Newshour Special,” and Online Performances curated by Marina Fokidis.



Shaikha Al Mazrou, *Untitled*, 2019. (Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi)

“Digital and online experiences are coming rapidly to the fore because of the unprecedented global situation,” Art Dubai’s Artistic Director Pablo del Val told Arab News. “This is the second year that Art Dubai has launched an online catalogue, and while it is an initiative we intended to continue, for now it is a

way of keeping things online and adapting to the current situation to support our participating galleries, connecting them with visitors and clients while things are being shut down throughout the world.

“In these strange times, we have to adapt and cooperate,” said William Lawrie, co-founder of the Lawrie Shabibi art space in Dubai’s artsy Alserkal Avenue. “What Alserkal Avenue and its community has managed to do in almost no time has been incredible — to put all of these exhibitions online in 3D in time for the slated opening date. We are showing an expanded version of what we had planned for our presentation in Art Dubai, artists’ responses to Op-Art. Our planned March gallery show — Peruvian/American sculptor Ishmael Randall Weeks — will come to the gallery in autumn.”



Tadesse Mesfin, Pillars of Life Grace III, 2020. (Courtesy: Eyerusalem Jiregna)

There's doubt among many art world professionals that online viewing can replace the beauty of physical interaction with a work of art. "Nothing can compare to being physically in front of an artwork or conversing in person with art collectors," said a gallerist from the Middle East on condition of anonymity. "But in times like this we need each other more than ever. Viewing works of art and performance digitally is a gift and a reprieve from the current state of world affairs."

In the following list we've placed a spotlight on highlights from seven galleries from across the Middle East and Africa participating in the Online Catalogue of this year's Art Dubai. For collectors eager to buy, you can browse works and filter through a range of criteria as well as place purchase enquiries directly with the galleries.

Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai



Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, Untitled, 2019. (Courtesy of the artist and Lawrie Shabibi)

Dubai-based gallery Lawrie Shabibi features a group showing entitled “Upsurge” showcasing the diverse practices of a multi-generational group of artists, including works by Mohamed Melehi, Mona Saudi, Hamra Abbas,

Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, Shaikha Al Mazrou and Vivien Zhang. The works on view explore notions of perception within abstract art, particularly in how form, contrast and color enhance one's visual experience.

Addis Fine Art, Addis Ababa and London



Tesfaye Urgessa, No Country for Young Men X, 2020. (Supplied)

For the gallery's third participation at Art Dubai, Addis Fine Art is showing works by a group of prominent Ethiopian artists, including Tadesse Mesfin — known for his contemporary interpretations of female figures in elegant columnar depictions, included by local women and Egyptian sculptures — Addis Gezehagn, whose abstract cityscapes portray Addis Ababa in a range of colors and expressions, abstract sculptor Adiskidan Ambaye, Tesfaye Urgessa — revered for his figural abstraction and social commentary — and abstract painter Tizta Berhanu, currently participating in the Residents section.

Akka Art Project, Dubai and Venice



The architect of the continents, 2020, Goncalo Mabunda, Akka Project. (Supplied)

First time participant Akka Art Project, a gallery focusing on artwork from the African continent, showcases a group showing of work by artists from Mozambique, including Filipe Branquinho and Goncalo Mabunda. “Both artists explore the social condition of the people, not only in their own country but globally,” said the gallery’s director Lidija Khachatourian. “While Mabunda works with decommissioned weapons and scrap metal to create beauty from former objects of war, Branquinho analyzes the impact of the petrol market on everyday people in Mozambique and beyond.”

Zawyeh, Ramallah



Zawyeh has painting 'Picasso in Palestine #3.' (Supplied)

Founded by Ziad Anani in 2013 and based in Ramallah, Palestine, Zawyeh's mission is to promote contemporary and modern art by emerging and established Palestinian artists. A longtime participant at Art Dubai, this year the gallery showcases works by Palestinian artists Khaled Hourani, Slimane Mansour and Wafa Hourani, each exploring various ways to portray confinement, borders and connection in Palestine.

The Third Line, Dubai



Hassan Hajjaj, Mashrou Leila, 2017. (Supplied)

The show goes on for The Third Line, one of Dubai's oldest galleries, which presents revered Moroccan artist and designer Hassan Hajjaj's solo exhibition online. He's often referred to as the "Andy Warhol of Marrakech," known for his iconic portraits made in his unique and dynamic pop-art photography style, incorporating everyday items such as Coca-Cola bottles, matchboxes and olive cans.

Athr Gallery, Jeddah



Saudi contemporary art gallery Athr is showing works of artist Sultan bin Fahad, Ayman Yossri Daydban, Muhannad Shono, Moath Alofi, Mohamed Monaiseer and Sarah Abu Abdallah. (Supplied)

Saudi contemporary art gallery Athr returns to the fair this year with a group showing of works by Saudi contemporary artists, including Sultan bin Fahad, Ayman Yossri Daydban, Muhannad Shono, Moath Alofi, Mohamed Monaiseer and Sarah Abu Abdallah. “I chose these works for their meditative qualities, others for their humor and their affordable prices (some being under \$1,000),” said director Alia Fattouh. “In times like these, art can be a source of healing, one that allows us to think mindfully and to be with ourselves. Indeed, it now appears how important it is to surround ourselves with comforting and uplifting things and adorn our homes with inspiring works.”

Dastan's Basement, Tehran



Mohammadreza Yazdi, Ataraxia, 2018. (Supplied)

Known for his theatrical booths showcasing a mix of emerging and established works by Iranian artists, Hormoz Hematian returns his Tehran-based Dastan's Basement to Dubai for its sixth showing with an online presentation of works. "These include Mohammadreza Yazdi's kinetic sculptures, Fereydoun Ave's most recent works from his 'The Rostam Puzzle series,' three abstract paintings by veteran artist Seroj Barseghian as well as works by younger generation artists such as Yousha Bashir and Maryam Eivazi," said Hematian. "Amin Montazeri's small elaborate illustrative drawings and Taba Fajrak and Shokoofeh Khoramroodi's small paintings are showing alongside Navid Azimi Sajadi's tiles and Mohammad Piryaee's ceramic cubic sculptures."
