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What To Expect From Abu Dhabi Art 2017

With a new director and some fresh programming, here's all that will unfold at the ninth edition of Abu Dhabi Art (8-11 November) in Saadiyat Cultural District

November 7, 2017, by KATRINA KUFER



Tarek Al Ghousein. (In) Consideration of Myths. 2012. Digital archival print. 60x90cm
Courtesy of the artist, The Third Line, Dubai, and Galerie Brigitte Schenk, Cologne

Over the last several months, Abu Dhabi Art (ADA) has hinted at a refreshed programme following the new directorship of Dyala Nusseibeh under the continued patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces. “I would like to enable strong curatorial content that engages with what is happening on the ground here artistically and contributes to it,” says Nusseibeh. “Abu Dhabi Art is a powerful vehicle for developing the local art eco-system and supporting local art professionals through providing an international network—we intend to

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develop this further. Finally in terms of outreach and community engagement, I would like to expand our local audience.” Embracing a selection of 48 galleries from 18 countries in its usual Modern, Contemporary, Bidaya and Solo Projects sections, there will be talks, workshops and performances alongside several special curated projects in city-wide events in the lead up to and throughout the duration of fair—itself receiving a facelift, thanks to architecture firm Nilsson Pflugfelder.

Beyond, the exhibition section for large-scale sculptures and installations located at the fair and throughout the city, has extended to include Beyond: Artist Commissions. The new off-site initiative will see works by Manal Al Dowayan, Magdi Mostafa and Nasser Al Salem pop up in Manarat Al Saadiyat, Abu Dhabi city as well as Al Ain, under the curatorship of artists Mohammed Kazem and Cristiana de Marchi. “As we are both primarily artists, our curatorial experience is always linked to our artistic practice,” the two say. “We curate projects that we feel can deeply enhance understanding of the art scene or group of artists we are focusing on, and we always start from research which delves into the texture we are aiming to highlight. As artists living in a specific context, we sometimes feel the urgency to deal with certain issues which are underestimated or misrepresented and to shed light on dynamics and artistic practices which might have been obscured or neglected.” In light of this, they are showcasing and helping to realise the talented UAE-based emerging artists who have received the opportunity to work with international professionals through a series of critical workshops over the past six months.



Tarek Al Ghousein. (In) Beautification. 2011. Digital archival print. 60x90cm. Edition of six. Courtesy of the artist and The Third Line, Dubai

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Chief curator and founding director of NYUAD Maya Allison will be curating the fair's Gateway section, which draws parallels and connections between the UAE and international artists. "I anticipate that this fair will help visitors see Abu Dhabi specifically as it is situated in an international art scene," says Allison. "In order to do so, one has to start with Abu Dhabi, and this is where Dyala took surprising and interesting steps. Through her curatorial invitations, she emphasises local activity, both emerging and established, alongside international commercial activity—and this is new—both emerging and established galleries. My hope is that the fair will continue to dialogue with museum-quality collections, while finding its unique voice centered on Abu Dhabi and the growing cultural sector here." Allison takes note of the growing family audience at the fair and the increased potential for conversations across generations in what she describes as "the art world talking to itself."

For Gateway, she will be "drawing connections among established artists from the UAE and abroad. Many curators and art historians may not be aware the extent to which the UAE has been home to several very serious art communities, dating back to as early as the 1960s, and particularly since the 1980s. However, our lack of knowledge about them does not mean they were operating in a vacuum. They were in active dialogue with contemporary art, from both 'the West' and 'the East' while developing a very Gulf-specific set of formal, political, and conceptual practices. I hope to draw out these mutual influences, and contextualise their practice alongside their international peers, whether from England or New York, India or Korea."

The special Galleries section called Focus: Beyond Territory, under the curation of Dr Omar Kholeif, Manilow Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, acts as an indicator of what the future of the fair might look like. Introducing the public to seminal cross-generational artists and projects in the region for the first time, "I am excited to see it evolving more curatorial platforms and with it more diverse and broad audiences, something which I am hoping this edition will bring with the new changes that have been brought forward by Dyala," says Kholeif. "People are taking the fair more seriously as a curatorial platform, and that to me is very exciting." His section will include artists who explore the concept of landscape and territory in the broadest sense—formally, socially and politically. "I am particularly excited to be welcoming Sprueth Magers gallery to the region for the first time with a beautifully curated solo booth by Otto Pienne. I am also thrilled that Marian Goodman Gallery will be bringing a beautiful presentation of Giuseppe Pennone's work," shares Kholeif. "Beyond that—Jhaveri Contemporary will be showcasing an incredible project, a collaboration between Indian

GALERIE BRIGITTE SCHENK

artist Nalani Malani and Pakistani artist, Iftikhar Dadi, which is so pertinent at this moment in time!”

Nusseibeh points out that this edition will have a renewed focus on local and regional art histories, including the Munira Al Sayegh-curated Talks Programme, which will hone in on debating and documenting GCC art histories. Topics include The Role of Private Foundations and Public Collections, featuring speakers such as Venetia Porter of the British Museum; Connecting Collections: Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Zayed National Museum in Conversation with Ahmed Mater; {Mis}interpretation: Critical Thinking in Arab Contemporary Art Practice; and Negotiating Borders, among others. Additionally, Tarek Al Ghoussein’s series of photographs documenting the Saadiyat Cultural District over the last seven years is being used for ADA’s advertising and branding campaign. He will also be hosting photography workshops.

Tarek Abou El Fetouh returns to curate the fifth edition of Durub Al Tawaya, which addresses contemporary performance. “I am hoping it will develop in the future to be a season of performances that starts during ADA and continues throughout the year,” expresses El Fetouh, adding, “I think ADA is developing according to the desires and nature of the audience in Abu Dhabi and the UAE. One of the things that developed in the programming of Durub Al Tawaya, and learned from the audiences of Abu Dhabi, is the popularity of participatory performances. The audiences in Abu Dhabi really like to share experiences together and performances in public spaces are very appealing to audiences here—more so than performances in closed spaces and theatres.” This year focuses on language, gesture and the history of sound, explored through international artists, with a special public commission at Mina Zayed, a standup comedy night and a book launch of SSS – How to Imitate the Sound of the Shore Using Two Hands and a Carpet. He remarks that it is key to balance what the curators would like to show to the audience, what the artists desire to present, as well as the intellectual propositions in place to generate discourse. “The artists are invited to participate with their creations and imagination within a city that has endless future possibilities,” says El Fetouh.

Meanwhile, Fabrice Bousteau will oversee the second year of the Street Art programme which will see new commissions in urban zones, and in late October, ADA revealed the winners of its inaugural Abu Dhabi Art Pavilion Prize, for which university students and recent graduates across the UAE propose an architectural design for a pavilion and social hub at the fair. Partnered with the British Council as part of the UK/UAE 2017 Year of Creative Collaboration, the winners are Salwa Al Khudairi and Nada Al Mulla. It builds upon a previous version open to established architects and artists under the name Abu Dhabi Art Architecture Statement.

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“I think it key to be experimental and open-ended in initiatives, to enjoy the process of ideas taking form and then changing form over time,” says Nusseibeh. With the artist commissions creating a unique mapping of key areas of importance throughout the UAE, Nusseibeh aims to raise awareness and foster cultural growth. “Nine years ago Abu Dhabi Art had 10,000 visitors—last year it was well over 20,000,” she shares. “Public interest in the event has increased significantly. We’ve seen higher numbers of school visits, which is important for us, as well as an increase in the number of people collecting art, which is key for the local art eco-system.”

Abu Dhabi Art runs from 8 to 11 November. For more information, visit Abudhabiart.ae

<http://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/art/fairs-and-events/preview-of-abu-dhabi-art-2017>