

ART

Art Dubai: Art's New Frontier



Dubai architecture: The old and the new

During last week's Art Dubai fair, shopping in the city was all about acquiring (Shirin) Neshats and (Farhad) Moshiris rather than the customary Gucci and Chanel purchases. The event, in its second year, is boosting Dubai's credentials as the emerging epicenter of the Middle Eastern art scene.

Some 12,000 artists, collectors and curators from around the world congregated at what could well become the Arabian take on Art Basel Miami Beach. Some came to seek out the regional art scene while others, like Mexico City-based art dealer **Enrique Guerrero**, hoped to find a new market. "You see the same people at other art fairs," said Guerrero. "I've seen a few familiar faces here but it's a fresher market."

Art world figures such as William Lawrie of Christie's Dubai, Katherine Gass, curator of the Essex House collection in New York and Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri were amongst those who stopped in at the opening VIP bash at Madinat Jumeirah, the fair's headquarters. "Unlike at other fairs, the party takes place next to the art here," said art enthusiast **Claudia Paetzold**. Indeed, many guests seemed as eager to enjoy the evening's festivities as they were to return during the day to take in the art.



Moshiri in front of his work 'Love Letter'

The spotlight of the fair – which featured exhibitors such as Dubai’s Third Line Gallery, Albion from London and Zurich’s Kashya Hildebrand – was firmly on Arab and Iranian artists. Shadi Ghadirian, Lalla Essaydi, and Halim Al-Karim were among the featured artists. “Western artists have a lot more chances to display their work at European and American fairs than our artists,” said **Yasmin Atassi**, representative of Dubai’s Green Art Gallery of the local focus.

Visitors wanting to brush up on their knowledge of the region’s art got a chance at info booths set up by magazines such as *Bidoun*, *Canvas*, and *Eyemazing*. William Wells of Cairo’s Townhouse Gallery, MoMA director Glenn Lowry and Rem Koolhaas also addressed the current state of Dubai, Middle Eastern art and the art market in an accompanying lecture series.



Visitors pass artworks 'Women of Allah' by Shirin Neshat

Both Art Dubai and the fringe Creek Art Fair held across town in the historic Bastakiya district underscore Dubai's determination to act as the region's art patron and its global cheerleader. "There is a strong will on the part of the government and the people to promote the arts," said **Maneli Keykavoussi**, head of Middle Eastern markets for the Fine Art Fund Group, a private equity firm that invests in art. "Art makes a city fun and interesting." Farhad Moshiri, whose work *Eshgh* (a framed canvas of Swarovski crystals and glitter spelling out the word 'love' in Farsi) recently broke regional auction records when it sold for \$1 million, agreed: "Dubai is very addictive," said Moshiri. "Its energy is being felt worldwide."

-- [Yasmine Mohseni](#) for ASW magazine

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