

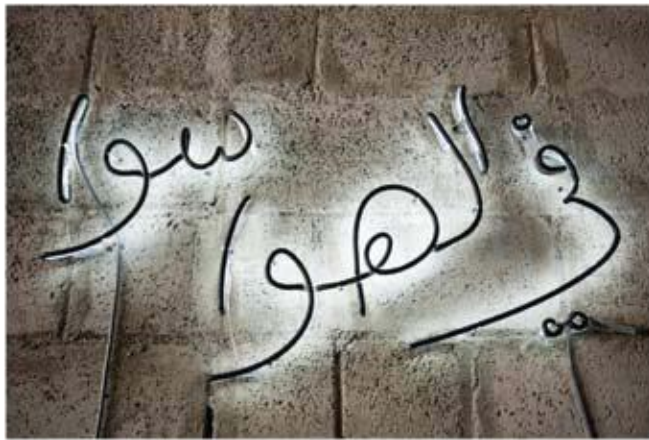
SAUDI GOING FORWARD

Contemporary Saudi art continues its ascent in the regional art market.



LONG BEFORE EDGE of Arabia (EoA) rolled out its series of globe-trotting exhibitions that promoted Contemporary Saudi art, an organisation initiated by a member of the Saudi royal family had driven the field through specialised publications, exhibitions and residencies. Al-Mansouria Foundation, headed by HH Princess Jawaher Bint Majed Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, is now 13 years old and continues to work closely with Saudi artists; even going so

Manal Al-Dowayan. *Suspended Together*. 2011. Neon with matte black paint. 100 x 100 cm. Image courtesy AB Gallery, Luzern/Zurich.



far as to acquire a studio, the Al-Mansouria Atelier at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, where Saudi artists Sami Al-Turki and Ibrahim Abu Mismar are slated to complete residencies next year. Both are represented by Jeddah's Athr Gallery (1M8/B1) – a catalyst in the growth of Contemporary Saudi art both in the Kingdom and abroad. Its co-founder Mohammed Hafiz curated EoA's *We Need to Talk* earlier this year in Jeddah – a show which many have said was the platform's best, following exhibitions in London, Venice, Dubai, Istanbul and Berlin. Hafiz and gallery co-founder Hamza Serafi will be going to Artissima to carry the torch for Saudi art in Turin, while gallery director Maya El-Khalil covers Athr's debut participation at Abu Dhabi Art.

Last month saw the inauguration of a new gallery in Riyadh, Alaam Art Space, which showcased the work of two emerging Saudi artists alongside an epic work, *Esmi*, by Manal Al-Dowayan – a neon work of hers hangs in AB Gallery's (2P19/1S2) booth at Abu Dhabi Art and photographs by the leading Saudi artist will be showcased, at the V&A's *Light of the Middle East* exhibition this month. Al-Dowayan believes the Saudi art scene "has not reached its potential but is on the right path," – a direction, she says, which needs the endorsement of spaces in which to showcase art, a culture of patronage and most importantly, a nurture of the next generation of artists. "These factors will contribute to a sustainable movement," says Al-Dowayan. Some of these issues

Ayman Yossri Dayban. (Detail) *Abyssinia (The Message)* from the *Subtitles* series. 2012. Lambda print mounted on dibond. 210 x 416 cm. Image courtesy Athr Gallery, Jeddah.

are being covered, but are in their nascent stages of development. Hafiz concurs. "You can't build an art movement with just one platform," he says. "Saudi art is a movement that lacks some fundamentals including galleries and education. It is an artist-driven movement essentially." The field made headlines with the Kingdom's inaugural participation at the 2011 Venice Biennale with sisters Shadia and Raja Alem. A great deal of publicity was also generated with the sale of Abdunnasser Gharem's *The Message/Messenger*, at a Christie's Dubai auction for a record \$842,500. "That was an anomaly," says EoA co-founder Stephen Stapleton. "What people don't know is that we have been pushing Saudi art since 2003 with the placement of works in major institutions such as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the François Pinault Foundation and The British Museum." Indeed, institutional interest has piqued for Saudi art – London's Selma Feriani Gallery recently held a show for Maha Malluh, which saw the Tate reserve a work. "It's very simple – if someone is into Saudi art for speculative purposes, I'd advise them to stop immediately," underlines Hafiz. "Either they're in it for the real reasons – cultural, social and society-enriching, or not at all. Rest assured, Saudi art is staying and will only get stronger." [\[1\]](#)

ISLAND FEVER

The fifth edition of *Art, Talks and Sensations* recalls once again the theme of an island bringing together a mix of performance and artistic collaborations.

FRENCH CURATOR FABRICE Bousteau revisits the theme of the island for Abu Dhabi Art's *Art, Talks and Sensations*. The idea not only reflects on the island of Saadiyat where the fair takes place, but also to its reference throughout history as a place of utopia, but also struggle and hardship. "This year, the venue reflects the idea of the island as having two sides: the positive one of freedom, beauty and paradise, and the negative one of loneliness and challenge," says Bousteau. Contrary to last year's rendition which took place in the form of a promenade, this year's event is more of an exhibition highlighting various performances. In addition, *Art, Talks and Sensations* takes place indoors within Manarat Al-Saadiyat instead of outdoors as it did last year. Visitors are invited to explore a new experience of the island through the works of Marc Quinn, Camille Zakharia, Abbas Akhavan, Fabrice Hyber, Camille Henrtand and Subodh Gupta, among others.

The event is staged to give guests a multi-sensorial and intellectual experience of the multifaceted idea of the island. Bousteau explains how before entering, visitors will place their hand in a box and select a black or white card, and depending on which card they select, they'll enter through either the black

entrance or the white entrance. The two entrances encompass different experiences and reflect on the two sides of the idea of the island: the negative and the positive. Yet no matter which door one enters through, they will all eventually arrive in the centre of the island, which showcases live performances as well as numerous documents and artworks regarding the geographic and cultural importance of an island. "One of the most important cultural projects in the world is developing on Saadiyat Island," says Bousteau. "I want this exhibition to invite people to truly discover the energy of this island and reflect on the meaning

behind its importance."

For Bousteau, the concept of the island is a universal idea. Throughout history, countless philosophers and intellectuals have romanticised about it as a place of unknown territory and freedom. "For me, islands are models of new worlds within the world," says Bousteau. "In this special place far away from everywhere, people have to think, dream and experiment more." And so this project is for everyone, art connoisseurs, intellectuals, families and even children – it delves into the imagination and opens the visitor up to something new. [\[1\]](#)

"I want this exhibition to invite people to truly discover the energy of this island," Fabrice Bousteau



Left: Curator Fabrice Bousteau. Image courtesy Canvas Archives. Right: Visitors at this year's *Art, Talks and Sensations*. Image courtesy TCA Abu Dhabi.