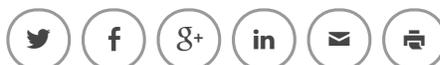


Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's Untitled. Courtesy Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and The Third Line

Our pick of the best fairs, gallery openings and exhibitions of 2016's art season

Danna Lorch

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With January nearly upon us, 2016 is shaping up to be a banner year for the local art scene.

Although market insiders are forecasting that – due to falling oil prices and a threatened slowdown – sales will be down worldwide next year, long-standing UAE galleries are responding with a more optimistic view.

They are upping their curatorial programmes to present strong shows all-year-round, rather than timing them to coincide with the infusion of international collectors and critics around Abu Dhabi Art in November and Art Dubai in March.

That's a sure-fire sign that the local art ecosystem is growing more sustainable and is no longer entirely dependent upon international collectors and overseas press to advance.

New galleries that opened towards the end of this year, including Leila Heller at Alserkal Avenue and Sconci Art Gallery in Dubai Design District, have brought an infusion of high-end works from Europe and North America, with a particular trend towards modern art. This means that competition between galleries for collectors is only likely to grow in the coming year, forcing established spaces to stay on their toes, in terms of pricing and programming.

A challenging sales year will make it a buyer's market for the savvy

collector – and a great time for young collectors wanting to invest in regional art to make their first purchases at more realistic prices. Whether you are a serious collector with a generous budget or a university student with Dh20 in your back pocket and a passion for street art, 2016 is your year for investing.

Here is our preview of the not-to-be missed exhibitions, events and festivals during the first quarter of the new year. Mark your diaries.

Returning favourites

Quoz Arts Fest '16

This popular community arts festival returns to Alserkal Avenue in Dubai on January 22 and 23, from 10am to 6pm. It promises to have plenty to interest the entire family (even the pickiest teenagers), including gallery exhibitions, whimsically interactive installations, and another edition of the popular Good Vibes Market – a platform for artisanal local food, sounds and fun.

• www.alserkalavenue.ae

Art Dubai

The city's art fair, which has built a solid global reputation, is back for its 10th edition from March 16 to 19 with a more international line-up than ever before – 94 galleries from 40 countries. Although the fair is the largest showing of Middle Eastern art, this year's event will include pieces by more than 500 artists with roots in about 70 countries.

Art Dubai director Antonia Carver lays out the 2016 highlights as follows: "In terms of exhibited artworks alone, fair visitors will get to experience rare, 20th-century works from Middle Eastern, African and Asian modern masters, alongside the newest pieces by the most contemporary artists of today.

"Then there's Marker, the gallery halls' curated programme, which focuses this year on the Philippines and its new generation of independent, artist-run spaces.

"This is in addition to the fair's range of family programmes, performances, film, music and more – all part of the fair's extensive not-for-profit and educational programming."

• www.artdubai.ae

Design Days Dubai

Dubai is rapidly establishing itself as a Middle East design nexus. The city plays host to the fifth edition of Design Days Dubai from March 14 to 18, which will present local emerging names such as Aljoud Lootah alongside some of the trendiest international galleries, all under one tent in the shadow of the Burj Khalifa.

Fair Director Cyril Zammit says: "This year, Design Days Dubai will continue to bring together the world's established galleries and newcomers from France, Italy and Switzerland; UAE and regional debuts of local and regional designers from Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia; and our strong public programme of talks and workshops."

For those with progressive tastes and a blank slate of a room in need of a statement piece, this is your perfect event.

• www.designdaysdubai.ae

Christie's Dubai Sale of Modern and Contemporary Art

The auction house celebrates 10 years in the UAE with its annual sale of Modern and Contemporary Art in Dubai on March 16.

"It's been our intention since 2006 to create an international platform for artists from the wider region, and the forthcoming sale format will reflect and amplify the acclaim and steady increase in demand for works from across the Middle East and Iran," says Michael Jeha, the managing director of Christie's Middle East. Expect to see emerging regional talents showcased alongside legendary modern works and significant contemporary contributions.

• www.christies.com

Intriguing newcomers

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Global Perspective on Photography

Camera buffs will be enthralled by Global Perspective on Photography, one of the world's largest photography exhibitions, which is scheduled to run in a temporary museum space at Dubai's D3 from March 16 to 19.

Organised by the Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum International Photography Award, in collaboration with the World Photography Organisation, this new event is at the forefront of the new Dubai Photography Season, which aims to position the emirate as a global centre for photography. The exhibition will celebrate commonality and plurality in the development of the medium through images selected by 19 curators from 25 countries. Dubai Photography Season will also include a prestigious award and educational workshops.

- www.hipa.ae/en/

Alserkal Avenue Expansion

The buzzing arts district tucked away in Dubai's industrial area of Al Quoz is on the verge of getting even hipper as it doubles in size and introduces new galleries, creative spaces, performance venues, restaurants and an artist-in-residence programme.

New spaces opening next month include Custot Gallery, the latest venture of noted European dealer Stéphane Custot, which will add an element of modern and contemporary works by the likes of Frank Stella and Robert Indiana into the mix.

Also look out for Arabic calligrapher artist eL Seed's new studio and gallery for street art-inspired prints and sculptures with a message of peace and unity.

- www.alserkalavenue.ae

Notable exhibitions

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian at The Third Line

Iranian artist Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's practice spans more than five decades, and in March the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum in New York presented the artist's first comprehensive exhibition in the United States. She is best known for conceptual art that brings together principles of Islamic geometry with reverse painting on mirrors, as well as mosaics.

Long-standing Dubai gallery The Third Line reopens on January 5 in a larger, sensational new space on Alserkal Avenue, with Farmanfarmaian's *Infinite Geometry*, which will display new work by the artist alongside older drawings and textiles from the 1990s that have not been exhibited before.

- www.thethirdline.com

Do It at Sharjah Art Foundation

This highly interactive exhibition is an iteration of a 1993 project by influential Swiss critic and London's Serpentine Gallery's co-director Hans-Ulrich Obrist.

The Foundation has commissioned about 60 artists to write instructions, which visitors will then read and follow to creating works of original art.

The project, running from January 23 until April 23, will include collaborations with community workshops, school pupils and other local organisations, and will run in tandem with do it initiatives run by partners across the region.

This show will make for a great family afternoon in the heart of Sharjah and might make you question the notion of art itself – as well as whether or not we are all in fact artists at heart.

- www.sharjahart.org

Zhivago Duncan at Meem Gallery

"This body of work is like a clear, cold glass of water," says Syrian-Danish artist Zhivago Duncan about the new, large scale silk-screened prints with handwork that he will be showing at Meem in March.

The mixed-media artist has lived in several countries, from Jordan's Wadi Rum deserts to Bulgaria, and speaks seven languages.

Yet despite this cosmopolitan attitude – or perhaps because of it – he still

struggles to answer the basic small-talk question: "Where are you from?"

His practice consequently probes at notions of boundaries, freedom and origins.

• www.meemartgallery.com

artslife@thenational.ae



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