

# the guardian

## Don't be sniffy about oil-rich states, Art Dubai funds the world's most radical art

Jonathan Jones

It's not all super-yachts and spending binges: Art Dubai, which begins this week, is opening doors for some of the most marginalised voices in art



The crown prince of Dubai, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed al-Maktoum (left), takes a picture at Art Dubai 2015. Photograph: Ali Haider/EPA

[Art](#) fairs. They are all about money, super-yachts and spotting Jeff Koons, right?

[Art Dubai](#), which starts on 18 March, certainly does have a lot to do with cash. The oil states of the Middle East have recently made some of the most expensive art deals in history. In February, Qatar bought [Gauguin's Nafea Faa Ipoipo \(When Will You Marry?\)](#) (1892) for \$300m, setting a new world record that topped its massive Picasso and Cézanne purchases. What with all these mega-sales and enterprises such as the [Louvre Abu Dhabi](#), it's clear that art and money are having a great get-together centred on Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Clearly Art Dubai reflects that. Yet this splurge is to be celebrated, for it is opening doors to artists across the Arab and Muslim world. At a time when cultural frontiers are closing and horizons narrowing, Art [Dubai](#) is broadening the international conversation about art. For that reason it is the world's most important and radical art fair.



Detail from *Breath of the Compassionate IV*, 2014 by Waqas Khan. Photograph: Courtesy of Sabrina Amrani Gallery and the artist

I recently [interviewed Waqas Khan](#), a brilliant Pakistani artist who creates almost hallucinatory abstractions rooted in traditional Islamic styles. Showing at Art Dubai was a turning point for Khan – it enabled him to get international gallery representation and become globally known.



Artist Alfred Tarazi with one of his photomontages. Photograph: Clemens Fabry/Die Presse

This is also true of Alfred Tarazi, who lives and works in Beirut. The Lebanese civil war haunts Tarazi's provocative art. In his latest [series of photomontages](#), he tells stories about that brutal war: some are true, some may be apocryphal, all have the power of bloody folk tales. To “read” these visual stories you have to wind a wheel, unspooling the story. Gory black and white images of a city and country being torn apart flicker past in a slow, handmade, nightmare of bad memories. Children play with bombs and bullets. Soldiers collect heads. Tarazi is a very important teller of the histories of the marginalised. His art is sharp like an inconvenient truth – you could choke on it. Yet, he told me, he initially found it hard to get these works taken seriously in Beirut, because older artists had already “covered” the civil war (during which he

was a child). Art Dubai, he explained, has been an absolutely crucial platform for him to get his art seen. Because of it, he has an international career.

So it's wrong to think Art Dubai is just a splurge of spending. The money that makes it happen also allows an original and exciting artist like Beirut's Alfred Tarazi to spread his [shocking vision of modern history](#). I wish I was going to Art Dubai – it is the art fair that makes a difference.



## 10 Artists to watch out for in Art Dubai

Delna Prakashan  
TRAVEL IDEAS | February 16, 2015

When the ninth edition of Art Dubai kicks off on 18 March 2015, it will bring together the opulent, the cryptic and the contemplative in one place. One of the most important cultural events in the Gulf, Art Dubai features exhibitions, workshops, interactions and more. Over 90 galleries from the UAE and elsewhere will feature some of the finest works from Asia and beyond. Here are 10 artists to keep an eye out for this year:

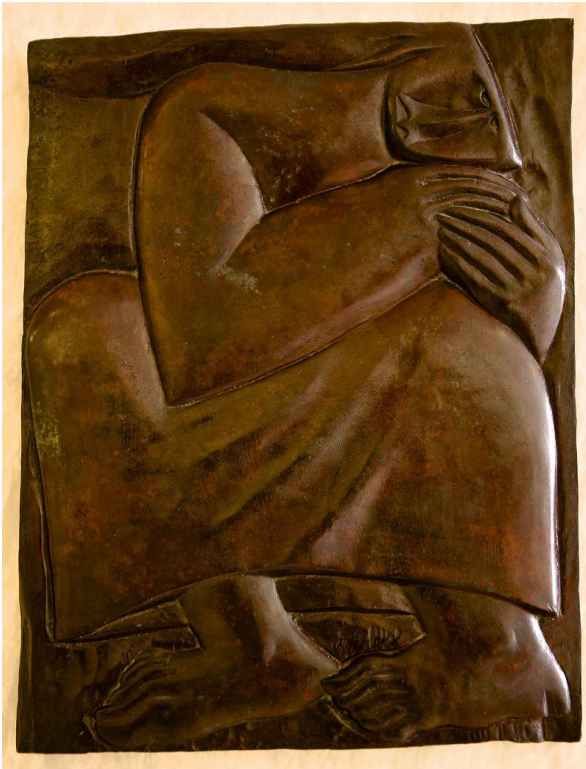
### Abdullah M I Syed (Pakistan)



*Hand-stitched white skull-caps, perspex dome and neon light. Courtesy: Abdullah M I Syed*

The artist uses complex political satire as his inspiration for communication through a variety of media and techniques. Born and raised in Pakistan, Syed's political commentary tackles controversial topics such as the war on terror, immigration, and western attitudes towards the east. The artist's residencies have been predominantly in Australia—Blacktown Studio's Artist in Residence, Blacktown and College of Fine Arts, Sydney. Syed has co-curated several exhibitions, notably Michael Esson: A Survey of Drawing, Michael Kempson: A Survey of Prints, Aboriginal Dreams and Let's Draw the Line in Karachi, Pakistan.

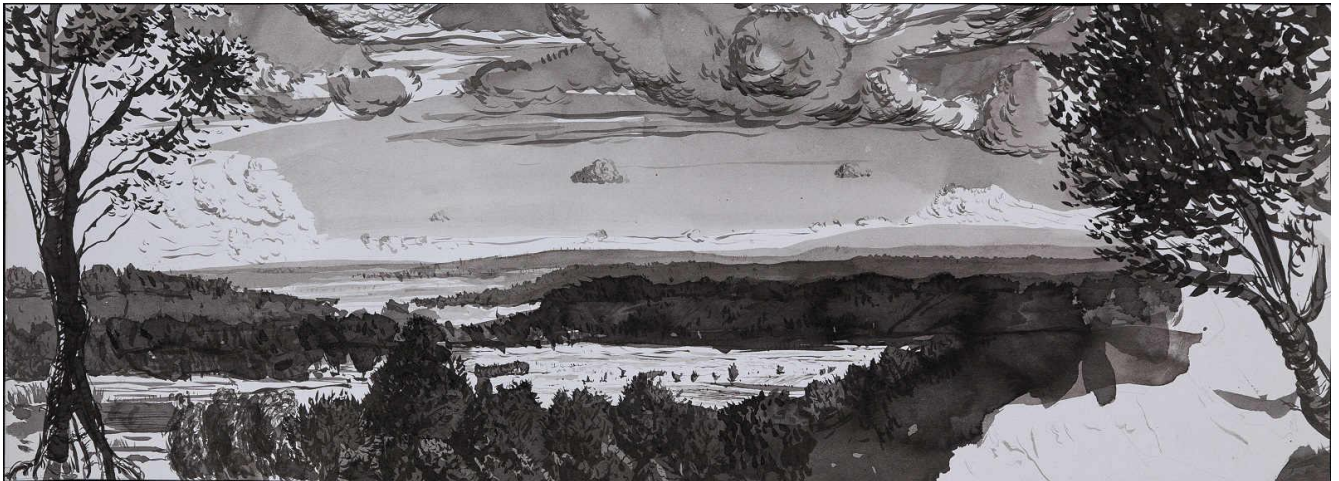
## Shahid Sajjad (Pakistan)



*Seated Woman (Shahid Sajjad). Courtesy: ArtChowk and the family of the artist*

When Shahid Sajjad passed away in 2014, he left a legacy of great sculpture. He was known in the artist community for his bohemian lifestyle. In early 1950s, Sajjad gave up a career in advertising to travel the globe. On a trip to Japan in search of adventure, Sajjad saw artists carving wood and took up sculpting. He returned to erstwhile East Pakistan and settled among the tribal groups in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now Bangladesh). Among his most noteworthy works is a bronze mural commissioned by the Pakistan Army, titled 'Cavalry through the Ages'. For this, Sajjad was awarded the national prize for sculpture in 1982.

## Nikhil Chopra (India)



Chopra's work spans the domains of live art, installations, photography, theatre, painting and sculpture. The artist is known to comb through the everyday rituals of life and collective history for inspiration. He arrived on the international art scene in 2008 with a series of performances titled *Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing Series*, which first opened at Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai. Recently, the artist co-directed a film *Man Eats Rock*, in collaboration with Munir Kabani. It was presented at the Artsonje Center in Seoul, at the Today Art Museum in Beijing and at the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou.



## Sudarshan Shetty (India)



*No Title, from "Every broken moment, piece by piece". Courtesy: Sudarshan Shetty*

While Shetty is considered by many as a social recluse, his work is inspired by the scattered fragments of daily life. Though formally trained as a painter, Shetty's interest gradually was drawn towards sculpture and installations. He often thinks of his art as a medium of entertainment, and moves away from galleries to public spaces to facilitate engagement between art and the common man. Some of his solo shows have been at the Holland Art Gallery, Rotterdam, 'Paper Moon', at the Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, 'Tryst with Destiny', Singapore Art Museum, 'Art in the World', hosted by Beaux Arts Magazine, Paris and 'Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis', Tate Modern.

## Adel Abidin (Iraq)

Coming from a country with an chequered past, Abidin's projects focus on global, social and political issues with crossover themes related to identity, exile, memory, violence and war. His video and sculptural installations draw references from racial stereotypes, pop-culture and traditional icons to provoke a dialogue. His works feature in collections of public institutions and major private collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia; Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; Espoo Museum of Modern Art (EMMA), Helsinki, Finland; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan and others.

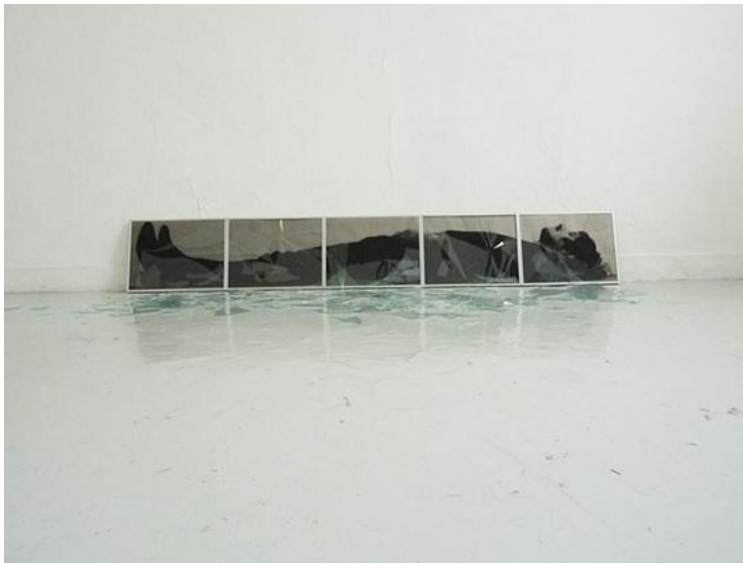
## Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh (Iran)



These siblings draw their creative strength from idiosyncrasies of Iranian society. Rokni Haerizadeh uses his canvas to amalgamate the hedonism that hides behind public gatherings in Iran: weddings, funerals and festivals. Brother Ramin, meanwhile, predominantly uses collages to communicate the everyday debris of imagery. Both artists have exhibited at prominent galleries including the British Museum, the Devi Art Foundation, and the Rubell Family Collection. The Haerizadeh brothers have staged two collaborative exhibitions in Dubai with artist Hesam Rahmanian and in 2014, the trio participated as a collective in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation residency in Captiva, Florida

*Untitled work. Courtesy: Ramin Haerizadeh and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde.*

## Charbel-Joseph H. Boutros (Lebanon)



Boutros's work blends romanticism with obscurantism—a form of art that relies on obscuring detail—to explore the dull and delight of daily life. Boutros is part of the new generation of Lebanese artists born in midst of war whose art eludes accurate notes of the political and historical replications. His work has been exhibited at several leading international venues such as the International Istanbul Biennial; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Bahia Biennial, Brazil among others.

*No Occupation. Courtesy: Charbel-Joseph H Boutros*

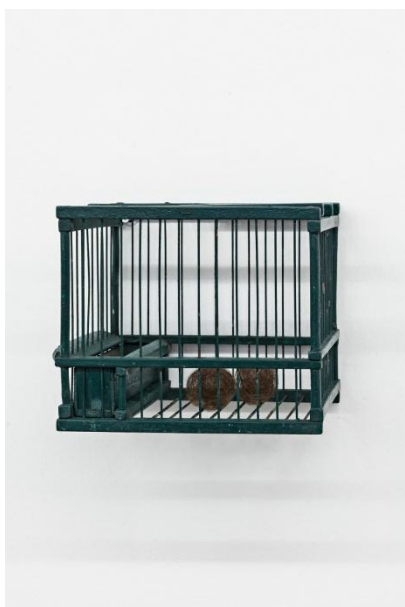


*Soumaya Syndrome. Courtesy: Mohamed A Mazrouei*

## Mohamed Al Mazrouei (UAE)

Mohamed Al Mazrouei is an eminent writer, artist and cultural commentator from the emirates. His creative process draws heavily from Egypt, his birthplace and Abu Dhabi, where he grew up. The two stark cultural experiences he has had have led to an almost autobiographical body of work. While the human face and figure are Mohamed Al Mazrouei's most preferred routes, his non-linear training compels him to approach the abstract that involves black and white in their absolute purity.

Al Mazrouei has participated in several solo and group exhibitions in the Middle East and abroad. His art exhibitions include 'Maidens of Fair' at the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Cultural Authority, and his works have been featured in the 'MinD/Body' Exhibition at the DUCTAC Gallery of Light in Dubai and the 30th annual EFAS Exhibition in Sharjah.



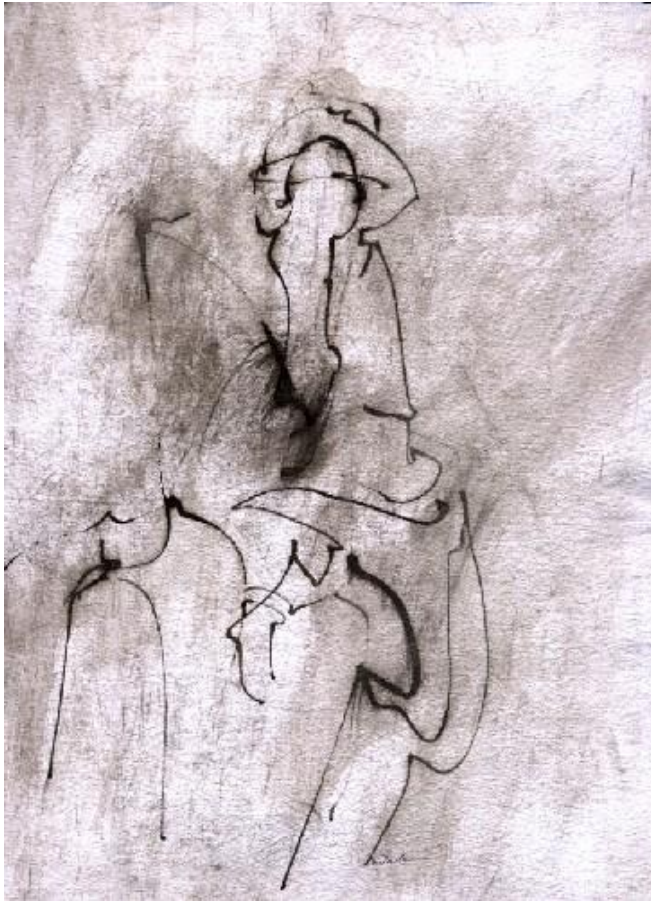
## Mona Hatoum (Palestine)

Hatoum was born into a Palestinian family in Beirut and now lives and works in London and Berlin. Performance and video dominated the artistic side of her work through the '80s. At the turn of the decade, she started focusing on installations. Hatoum created a number of works using metal grids—notably *Light Sentence* (1992)—which allude to physical violence and imprisonment. Her art often expresses confrontational themes such as oppression, voyeurism and violence, usually in reference to the human body. Notable solo exhibitions of Mona Hatoum over the recent years include Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice (2009); Arter, Istanbul and Joan Miró Foundation, Barcelona (both 2011).

*Green Cage. Courtesy: Mona Hatoum and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano/Beijing/Les Moulins*



## Abdallah Benanteur (Algeria)



*Algéroise. Courtesy: Abdallah Benanteur*

After completing military duties in Kabylia, Abdallah Benanteur moved to Paris and began his career as a painter. Down the road, he turned to engraving, and has produced over 1,300 livres d'artiste (books of art) showcasing Persian American, German, and English poetry, as well as works of contemporary Algerian writers. Benanteur's works have been applauded for their strong visual language that is neither figurative nor abstract. Displays of Benanteur's work have been held at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, 1970, and the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 2003.

## Art in Dubai

Quddus Mirza March 29, 2015

At the Art Dubai 2015, Pakistani artists in significant numbers sought to introduce different facades of social, political and religious realities



(Left to Right) 'M. A. Jinnah'; 'Michael Jackson' — Ayaz Jokhio.

*"You must not scorn geography — perhaps it's not less important than psychology"* — Jorge Luis Borges

The ninth edition of Art Dubai held from March 17-21, 2015 was both different than and similar to other such events held there in the past. Although the recent Art Fair, like last year, was split into sections of Modern and Contemporary (a divide that needs to be defined objectively and rationally), the presence of Pakistani artists was strongly felt this time.

To start with, a Pakistani gallery (Canvas Gallery from Karachi) for the first time participated in Art Dubai's Contemporary section. Another gallery, Art Chowk like last year had a booth in the Modern section, showcasing works of Shahid Sajjad. Besides these, a number of galleries from South Asia, Middle East, Far East, Europe and USA participated with several Pakistani artists displaying in their spaces.

Canvas Gallery represented a single artist — Ayaz Jokhio. The act of displaying one artist in an international art fair, visited by viewers of multiple tastes and preferences, could be risky. But it reflects a sign of maturity where the art fair is viewed not as a market selling various goods but an exhibition space in which a single individual is in focus.

Ayaz Jokhio has painted the rear heads of known personalities in varying shades of greys. The real puzzle, engagement and excitement was to identify the face turned towards the wall. All of these figures being famous, it was not impossible to decipher their identities.

Often in our ordinary lives, we come across these larger than life figures —film stars, singers, sports personalities, politicians, popular painters, bestselling writers, religious leaders and public intellectuals — whom we claim to know but certain aspects of their lives remain concealed from public view. In the media and the shared discourse, only one side of their personalities is highlighted that suits the consumerist society or a political or religious agenda. Hence, they become sacred entities, with one-dimensional personalities entirely devoted to their cause, creations or cults.

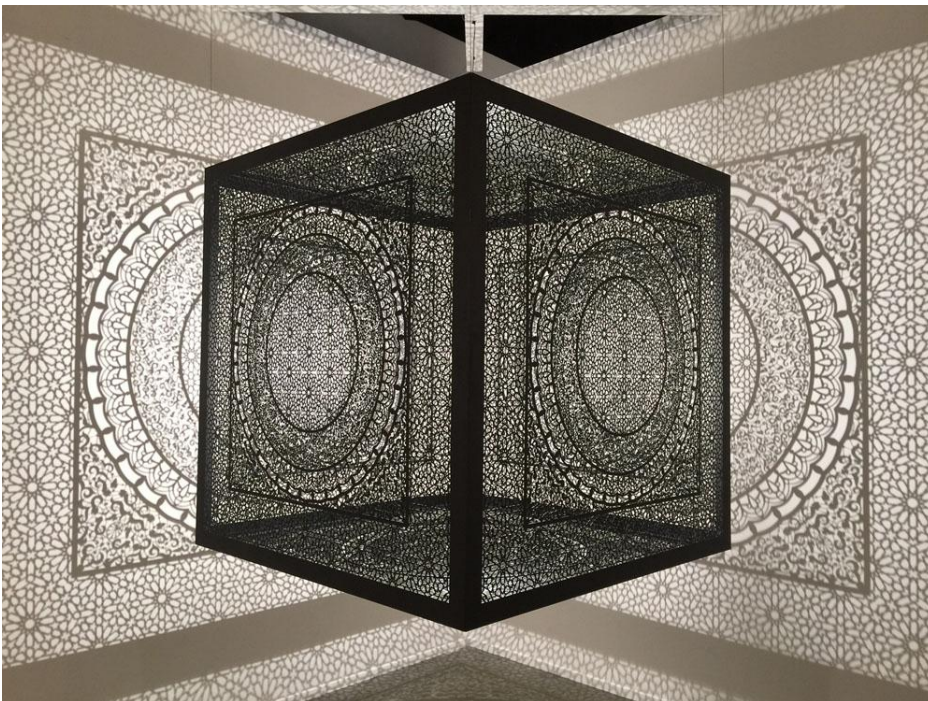
*Ayaz Jokhio has questioned this process of eliminating the 'Other' in one's personality and, using a basic device, rendered the hidden side of some of the most recognisable faces.*

This phenomenon is best represented in the way their images are portrayed and projected. Often a standard portrait is circulated which replaces the real self of the person. The image dominates and blurs the actual person. Ayaz Jokhio has questioned this process of eliminating the 'Other' in one's personality and, using a basic device, rendered the hidden side of some of the most recognisable faces.

Whether it is Chairman Mao, Marilyn Monroe, Gandhi, Jinnah, Warhol, Einstein, Kafka or Michael Jackson, each is identified through the back of their heads. Jokhio's idea of rendering these in black and white imbibes a detached, almost passport-like, quality to images which not only belong to single person but reflect the aspirations of a silent majority which is forced to see the other side of reality through art.

The other Pakistani artists at Art Dubai also sought to introduce different facades of social, political and religious realities through their works. At the Aicon Gallery, Anila Quayyum Agha constructed a large cube with filigree of Islamic geometric patterns laser cut in steel and casting light in its surroundings. The relationship of religion with light, its connection to patterns, and its elementary shape reminding of one of the holiest structures in the Muslim world, indicate a new interpretation of the Muslim past for the sake of a present that includes both Eastern and Western ways of thinking.

At the same booth, Abdullah M. I. Syed created works with almost similar sensibilities. *Aura 1* comprises crochets prayer caps daubed in black and emanating light from within, signifying how a faith has been misrepresented and misread both inside and outside. In addition, Syed deconstructs the imagery of miniature painting through cutting shapes in the UAE currency. The two series *Courting Falcon* and *Assembly* offer a critique on the popularity of miniature painting in art market, in addition to seeing Art Dubai and any other art fair converting art into commodity instead of being something for purely pictorial pleasure.



*'Sublime Light'; Anila Quayyum Agha.*



Interestingly, miniatures were shown at another gallery, Jhaveri Contemporary from Mumbai, but those were not painted by Indian or Pakistani artists. Instead, Alexander Gorlizki from Britain in collaboration with traditional painters from India had created works based upon the imagery of miniature paintings, which shared the same scale and decorative/geometric motifs. His involvement in a conventional art practice from another time and region certifies how the world is not confined to historical territories or national boundaries.

This idea was enhanced by looking at works of other artists from Pakistan who had a fair share at the Art Fair. For example, Ali Kazim also at Jhaveri Contemporary displayed his paintings and works on paper. Both in oil on canvas and graphite on paper, Kazim confirms a unique approach towards the notion of simple representation which, due to the selection of subject and the scheme of rendering, turns into a symbol of experiences shared by a large part of humanity. Immaculate painting of a man lying on the floor, head submerged in clouds and disintegrated clay utensils suggest a basic narrative of survival against forces of nature (both outside and inner).



*Abdullah M. I. Syed.*

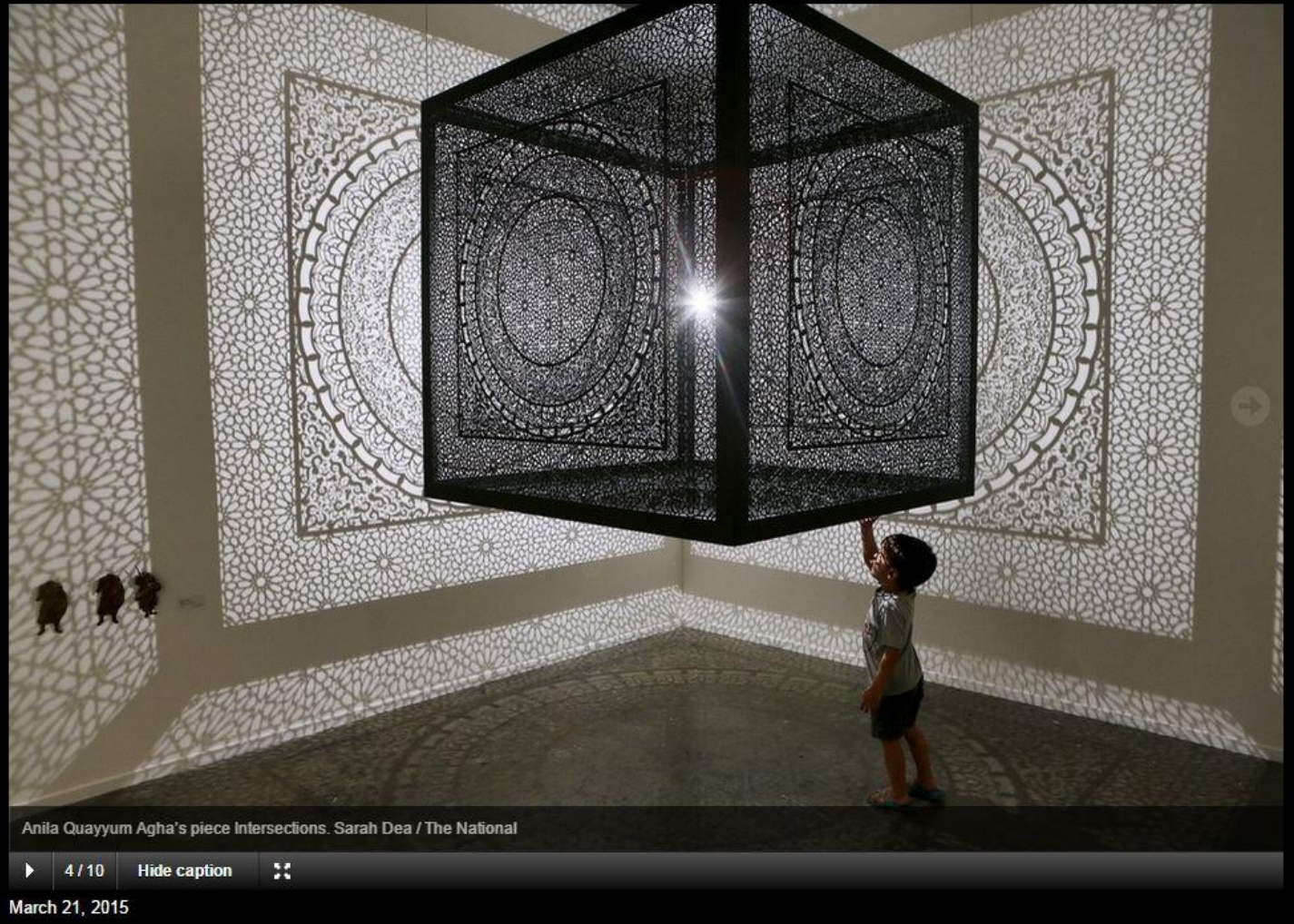
Like Kazim, Noor Ali Chagani chose to rely on something mundane and familiar. His tiny bricks, shown at the space of Leila Heller Gallery, New York, were joined to construct a tapestry with a few twists and turns. In one of the works, small bricks were painted with letters and texts as if emulating the graffiti in our urban scenarios. The link with brick and the weave of textile was more evident in another work in which bricks were composed in the scheme of a jute mat.

Other artists from Pakistan, such as Rasheed Aareen, Hamra Abbas, Adeela Suleman, Bani Abidi, Lala Rukh, Masooma Syed, Fahad Burki, Faiza Butt, Mariam Suhail and Mehreen Murtaza, also displayed their works at various galleries. But one aspect that became obvious at Dubai was their connection to a national boundary or identity. This in some cases serves as a chain like mixing with each other and posing each other's pictures on the social media.

Hopefully, a gain of Art Dubai will be that in future the artists would move away from limitation of nationhood because the whole concept of geography may change in the coming years. Instead of political countries, it could be more like artists' personal territories or domains or republics which become a dominant feature in international art fairs.



## Top 10 things at Art Dubai- in pictures



**March 21, 2015**

One of the high points of Art Dubai 2015 was the effort that some galleries put into curating their booths. Rather than crowding the small space with work from lots of artists, Agial Gallery from Beirut chose only three: Abdulrahman Katanani, Hiba Kalache and Ayman Baalbaki. "We always curate our booth because, in the end, this is not just about selling, it is about art, and the artists always want to portray a message," says Carol Chehab, the gallery's creative director. "These artists are Lebanon's war generation and have really powerful work."

### **Nasser Al Salem and Dana Awartani's collaboration**

An exciting new collaboration from two of Saudi Arabia's most promising young artists was on show in Athr Gallery's booth. The hour will not pass until people are seen competing in lofty mosques is a work by Al Salem, a trained architect and calligrapher, and Awartani, who concentrates on geometric patterns. This was the first time they had worked -together and I hope it is the sign of great things to come.

### **Art Dubai's Modern**

Dedicated to historically important artists whose work spans the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, Art Dubai's Modern is a fascinating history lesson. The 15 galleries, showing single or two-person shows, were carefully selected. Highlights included: Shahid Sajjad, a self-taught Pakistani artist showing at Artchowk Gallery from Karachi; the Nigerian artist Bruce Onobrakpeya, with Mydrim Gallery from Lagos; and Le Violon Bleu, a Tunisian gallery showing pieces by the Moroccan master Farid Belkahia.

## **Anila Quayyum Agha sees the light**

After Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid posted a picture of this beautiful work on social media, it quickly became the fair's most photographed piece of art. The suspended black cube, laser-cut with Islamic patterns that cast shadows on the wall from a single light bulb within it, is a 2014 piece by Pakistani artist Agha and was exhibited by Aicon Gallery from New York. Throughout the event, streams of people -gathered around it to catch it at the best angle.

## **Alexander Gorlizki at Jhaveri Contemporary**

One of the best things about art fairs is that you can discover the work of artists you have never seen before. Gorlizki, on show at the Jhaveri Contemporary booth, is a British artist with a fascination for Indian miniature paintings. His works are all produced from a studio in Jaipur and they poetically fuse eastern and western narratives.

## **The RCA Secret Project**

More than 1,000 postcards created by artists ranging from students to world-famous names were exhibited anonymously at the fair and then on Saturday, they were sold off at Dh500 each, with the proceeds going to scholarships at London's Royal College of Art. The buyers didn't learn the identity of the artist who created their postcard until after they bought it. Part treasure hunt, part charity project, this art sale was one of the best parts of the fair.

## **Pulse Index by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer**

Interaction with the artworks on more than a simply visual level can make an art fair all the more memorable. London gallery Carroll/Fletcher transformed its booth into an installation by Mexican-Canadian artist Lozano-Hemmer. Pulse Index records the fingerprint and the pulse rate of each visitor, -projecting them onto a large screen inside the booth.

## **Whatiftheworld Gallery from Cape Town**

African art played a huge role in the fair, appearing in all sections and widening the scope of the event. Whatiftheworld Gallery from Cape Town drew many people to see its works including Shatter by Lyndi Sales – an oval of radiant Perspex that explores how light reflects within the eye.

## **Mohamed Al Mazrouei at AB Gallery**

The entire booth from the -Switzerland-based AB Gallery was dedicated to Al Mazrouei. The Emirati artist's expressionist paintings have not been widely exhibited in the UAE, so it was interesting that this Swiss gallery chose to bring them. "We believe in him totally," says Heidi Leupi, co-director. "It is important to support him as much as -possible, especially in his own country."

## **Art Dubai projects**

The fair's non-profit programme grows every year. An honourable mention this year goes to Mohammed Ahmed Ibrahim, whose Fresh and Salt sculpture is brilliant and entirely home-grown. Land artist Ibrahim "exchanged a piece of land from Oman with a piece from Dubai", collecting two types of stones from the coastal region and from inland, tying them together with wire and placing them in the Madinat Jumeirah. Ibrahim also has an important solo show in Cuadro's Fine Art Gallery, which extends his practice.

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