

LONDON

# ART13 LONDON

An estimated 24,735 visitors trooped to London's Kensington Olympia last February for the launch of London's newest art fair, Art13. Arsalan Mohammad was one of them.



A selected sample of some of the 24,735 visitors at Art13

Quick way to ensure the success of your brand, spanking-new international art fair in the heart of London? Easy. Take a team seasoned by a collective track record that includes launching or managing fairs at Art Hong Kong, Frieze and Singapore, add a prime location in London - say Kensington's Olympia - add a hefty shake of international galleries from traditionally under-represented territories (including the Middle

East) and add plenty of projects, talks, installations to divert the international collectors, curators and critics on the stellar VIP guest list. Add to that slick organisation, convivial clientele and One Direction pop sensation Harry Styles to the mix and you've just about got yourself a winner.

Well, whether by fortuitous accident or shrewd design, that is pretty much how the inaugural event known as Art13 came to London amidst the biting winds of late February. Having been in the works for some time now, one of the aims of the Fair was to bring a selection of galleries and artists to London who might not ordinarily have made it beyond the 'emerging' wunderkammers of Frieze, Basel etc. So, amongst those taking up the challenge from the Gulf region, we saw Lawrie Shabibi from Dubai, Athr Gallery from Jeddah, Dubai's XVA and Art Sawa and Artspace all pitching up with, in the main, well-curated, attractive and therefore enticing booths.

Will Lawrie and Asmaa al Shabibi of Lawrie Shabibi came to London - where both of them have strong connections - with a confident, dynamic selection, highlighting the work of LA-based Asad Faulwell, Iranian Shahpour Pouyan and Iraqi-born Sama al-Shaibi. Shahpour Pouyan's intricately designed 'missile' sculptures were painstakingly rendered and powerfully positioned as an eye-catcher in the centre of the gallery's (rather draughty) booth, and, along with most of the Asad Faulwells, sold to collectors from the US, UK and Middle East in one of the most-reported success stories of the event. Faulwell, who will be showing solo at Lawrie Shabibi in the near future, especially is a name to look out for - his 'Femme d'Alger #24' was a bracing confluence of collage, textiles and historical (in this case, the Battle of Algiers) narrative. Elsewhere, the irrepressible Maliha Tabari, whose Artspace had ducked out of Art Dubai this year in favour of Art13, presented an equally dynamic selection in her booth, finding new homes in Mexico and the US for works by Halim al Karim and a particularly eye-popping set of manipulated (and manipulating) painted prints by Jeffar Khaldi, the latter prepping for his upcoming joint show with Tarek al Ghussain in Artspace's London outpost this May. Nearby was London-based Selma Feriani whose mixed-media booth was slightly less immediately impactful, but nevertheless, featured some strong work from Sama Alshaibi and Amel Bennys, both of whom sold to existing clients of the gallery.

Jeddah's Athr Gallery stuck their necks out with a solo presentation of Hazem Harb, the multimedia artist whose star is rather in the ascendant these days. Harb, who is of Palestinian origin and grew up in Italy, showed a tightly-curated and powerful series of works including 'Inside-Outside,' 'Me and the Other





(Above) 'A' Salaam Alaykum: Peace Be Upon You' Zena el Khalil (2009) (Galerie Taniit) (Below left) Team Dubai at large: Maliha Tabari and Eileen Wallis braving the London winter (Above right) Shahpour Pouyan was a hit at Lawrie Shabibi (Images: Kitty Crash)



Half,' and the video installation 'Impossible Travel'. His practise begins in the privations and collective trauma experienced by Palestinians in occupied territories, however in the best of his work, his ideas take flight into the universal, resonating with metaphors of entrapment and escape. Harb had a good Art13 with a couple of major acquisitions paving the way for an exciting new phase in this artist's career.

Added to this healthy showing from the Middle East was a healthy smattering of international big names - October Gallery delivered a reliably colossal El Anatsui hanging over the entrance, a weighty statement of intent if ever there was one. Moreover, occupying the plum spot by the entrance was Hong Kong's Pearl Lam, with some fantastically sexy Su Xiaobai abstracts slapping visitors in the face upon entry.

A few creaky moments cropped up in the special projects. 'A' Salaam Alaykum: Peace Be Upon You', Zena el Khalil's rotating sculpture, a garish, colossal, glittering mirror-ball piece spelling 'Allah' in Arabic might have been a deeply-ironic work inviting us all to dance and forget all our troubles, but it clanged heavily, given its position amidst a concentration of Middle Eastern galleries. And Pearl Lam gallery's 'Boat', a colossal paper-crafted tunnel of an installation by Zhu Jinshi, which coursed down the

lower rear half of the hall, rather sucked much of the energy out of the place with its vastly bombastic, dry presence. Oh, and Harry Styles didn't buy any Middle Eastern art. Yes, no Arab selection by Mr One Direction.

Yet in the main, Art13 succeeded wonderfully, successfully captured the prevailing global art world zeitgeist - leaning towards scaled-down, more focused events, with a truly international composition. The packed halls thrummed with a respectable influx of new and established collectors, excited by the unusual line-up. Reflecting a new paradigm of success that in some part, owes its inspiration to the new wave of art fairs in the Middle and Far East, Art13 was a respectable commercial success, yet arguably more importantly, set a new standard for 'global' art, drawing deserving new talents and established names from outside the Western world into the mainstream, rather than being patronisingly relegated to 'satellite' or 'emerging' strands. As the minimal talks programme - touching cautiously, briefly, on topics such as new art from Saudi, private museums and China - demonstrated, organisers are clearly looking beyond the dated format that has been the case for much of the past decade or so in Western fairs. With Art13's successor, Art14 already in the works, the outlook for next year's fair is rosy indeed. **HBA**