

ECLECTIC AVENUE

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WITHIN THE GRITTY ALLEYS OF AL QUOZ, A LUSH ARTS QUARTER CONTINUES TO UNFURL

Is Alserkal Avenue an ingredient in Dubai's emergence as an art hub within the Gulf States? Many are saying yes, especially as 2015 will see its creative area double in size.

"I personally believe that in the next 35 years this cultural hub can become a magnet for high-level international people," says Nadine Knotzer, director of Alserkal resident Carbon12. Forty creative organisations are about to join the likes of Carbon12, Lawrie Shabibi, Ayyam Gallery, Green Art Gallery, Grey Noise and Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde in this dusty corner of Al Quoz, where contemporary art galleries represent emerging as well as established artists.

"Despite its organic feel, there is over five years' of expertise and hard work invested in this 'district' to make it a key meeting point, whether you are a visual artist, an art collector or an art enthusiast," adds Knotzer.

Alserkal Avenue is set very much in an industrial landscape. There are plenty of cement, glass and marble warehouses nearby amidst the scores of garages and car showrooms, but audiences are finding it an agreeable milieu. Cases in point: September's Galleries Night, the post-summer opening of the Dubai art season; and November's day-long Quoz Arts festival. Hundreds of visitors spilled into the streets where light installations and live music augmented the works on show.

Perhaps the alleyway vibes in this quarter are partly responsible for letting it sit alongside other oft-referenced totems of creativity: the Meatpacking District in New York, Shoreditch in London and Mitte in Berlin have been name-checked as models for Alserkal.

This year, Alserkal's resident galleries have been noticeable abroad at the likes of Art Basel, Art Basel Hong Kong and Art Brussels. Asmaa Al Shabibi, co-founder and director of Gallery Lawrie Shabibi, says: "What started as a grassroots gallery precinct has grown incredibly in terms of international recognition and quality of art and exhibitions."

Representing too at these events has been Abdelmonem Bin Eisa Alserkal, the visionary behind the reinvigoration of what was once a marble factory. His family have owned the property for years and he describes next year's extension as "a natural response to the ever-growing art scene."

This patron's architectural plans delineate a considered structure with community, environment and the interplay of indoor and outdoor as pillars enabling an array of cultural events. The new residents should also bring further diversification, with more architecture and media ateliers expected, as well as addressing a weak point: places to refuel. "We see the next phase as a welcome addition that will diversify the audience as well as introduce some much needed cafés," says Al Shabibi.

With political tensions in the region continuing to send galleries towards Dubai, Alserkal and Dubai International Financial Centre (the other magnet for galleries in this city), there's a balance struck between the gritty locale and the lofty skyscrapers. Add the increasing participation and recognition for events like Art Dubai to the mix and Dubai is sitting snugly as a hub for this part of the world. ●

