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New Ways of Art Collecting With Artvisor

BY

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Piero Tomassoni, of the new private online art advisory service Artvisor, gives his views to Bazaar Art on the Middle Eastern art market and artists of the moment

Harper's Bazaar Art: What are your thoughts on the Middle Eastern art scene?

Piero Tomassoni: I have been interested in the Middle East art scene since 2013, when I co-curated *[dis]orient*, a dialogue exhibition between displaced Iraqi artist Nedim Kufi, who lives in the Netherlands, and the Italian Ra

di Martino, who has worked across North Africa. At the time I had the opportunity to meet and explore the work of some influential artists from the Middle East and the Islamic world, and become more aware of the cultural dynamics of that region. From the outside, one can observe a difference between those countries that have a longstanding artistic tradition such as Iran and Egypt, which filters through and contributes to the character of the art made today, and those that started building a tradition in recent decades (Bahrain and Saudi Arabia), where new media and political content tend to dominate. At the same time, across the whole region one can see a distinction between "traditional" art, that draws upon classic forms of expression such as calligraphy or geometric patterns, and more westernised art, which tends to be multi-medial (using photo and video in particular) and heavily socio-political. The latter tends to draw the most attention in the West, both because it has more familiar aesthetics and because it deals with compelling themes such as war, terrorism, and immigration, which also impact the Western world.



Shahpour Pouyan. After 'Houm brings out afrasiab from the cave', Shahnameh by Ferdowsi, 16 century AD. Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London

HBA: What are your thoughts regarding the growth of the Middle Eastern art market?

PT: The market seems to be in good health and growing; many new price records were set at the last auctions in

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London, especially for Modern masters, with a work by Fahrelnissa Zeid achieving nearly £1million, and world records achieved for Bahman Mohasses, Fouad Kamel and others. There seems to be a greater attention from Western private and public institutions to make sure that Middle East avant-gardes are properly represented in their collections. Local buyers on the other hand seem to focus on art from their own countries, as the strong national identity and spirit tend to lead their purchases. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as it is always important for artists to have local support, in order to have a stable and healthy market and avoid becoming the subject of international speculation, which is rarely good for one's career.



Gal Weinstein. Rusted Planet, Mars II, 2012, Steel wool on plywood. 120 x 180 cm. Courtesy of Riccardo Crespi gallery and the artist

HBA: Who are the Middle Eastern artists (both emerging and established) and who should we be looking at and why?

PT: Of the internationally established Middle Eastern and Arab artists, I like the work of Ali Banisadr whose work combines the imaginative and dreamy feelings of Surrealism with the energy and instinctive brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism. In the emerging arena, some of the most interesting artists I have come across are Dana Awartani whose fresh approach to traditional and iconic art, focusing on geometry and nature, is bringing new attention to a style of painting that has been long neglected, especially in the West; Shahpour Pouyan, an Iranian who lives in New York and uses a wide array of media and techniques to explore the relationship between power and culture, a theme which is currently highly relevant in Europe and the US, as well as in Pouyan's home

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country; and Gal Weinstein whose polymateric work is a play between science and irony, and who this year represents his country at the Venice Biennale with a vast sculpture simulating the cloud produced by a missile launch, as well as moulds pervasively growing on the walls and floors of the pavilion.

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