

LAWRIE SHABIBI (Dubai)

Young, but daily growing, Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi hit the ground running at launch and have already racked up an impressive global track record of fair appearances. Co-director Asmaa Al Shabibi previews what we'll be seeing at their debut Art Dubai appearance...

You've qualified for Art Dubai 2013 this year. Do you think it makes sense to have this stipulation that galleries are at least two years old before joining?

Asmaa Al Shabibi: You know I think that in some way it does make sense because I think that there needs to be some track record for the gallery in terms of consistency and also continuity. My experience is that displaying and selling art from a booth is a totally different ball game to doing so from the gallery and requires some experience that you gain only through time. I think that having done three satellite fairs we're now ready to take on the main fairs.

How has Art Dubai benefited the local art landscape in your opinion?

It has succeeded in bringing some excellent groups of collectors and art professionals to the region and has also raised the profile of Middle Eastern art as well as introduced art to the general public. It has also been a great platform for encouraging non-collectors to dip in and buy artworks as part of a once-a-year event. My only concern is that it has become such a key event in the calendar that everybody is timing their shows and events around this one week and there is just so much to see and do! I wish that things would be more spread out throughout the year and have enough pulling power to create a similar buzz. This is also the perception of some artists, who only want to have their exhibition 'during Art Dubai'. I believe that there is still not much trust in the market or the audience for great exhibitions to take place throughout the year, which is a shame.

Who are you bringing to Art Dubai and why have you chosen these artists?

We will present a curated booth entitled 'Process and Performance', with a selection of works that explore the contradictory themes of beauty and violence by artists who employ sculpture within their artistic practice. We are going to show four artists two of whom - Wafaa Bilal (Iraq) and Yasam Sasmazer (Turkey) will debut at the fair. They will show alongside Nadia Kaabi-Linke and Hamra Abbas who are two names who are known in the region, partly because they are both previous winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize and also because they have been shown at the fair previously with their respective galleries and also, in the case of Nadia Kaabi-Linke, had a solo at the gallery during Art Dubai last year. So we chose two artists who will be new to the scene and two who collectors will be familiar with. Additionally in March, Wafaa Bilal will inaugurate the Maraya Art

Park with his new sculptural work 'The Hierarchy of Being' curated by Sara Raza. It will open on March 20th and has been commissioned by Maraya Art Centre. We thought it would be important to show another series of his at our booth as it is an opportunity for the audience to see the breadth of his work. Interestingly our exhibition at the gallery - a solo entitled 'Symphony' by Adel Abidin - is also sculptural and so I guess that's what our overall theme for Art Dubai is this year!

Can you tell me something about the works?

The booth is designed to revolve around a life-size wooden statue by Turkish sculptor Yassam Sasmazer, commissioned especially for Art Dubai. Sasmazer's sculptures explore the polarised opposites of good and evil, sacred and profane, and darkness and light, played out through her figures of children and young people. Corresponding with Sasmazer's works, Tunisian artist Nadia Kaabi-Linke brings together a ceramic installation using the imprints of the insides of a cow's stomach. In contrast Pakistani artist Hamra Abbas and Iraqi new media artist Wafaa Bilal combine the practice of sculpture and photography to create images ranging from the everyday to brutal conflict. Hamra Abbas' photographic works are based on the snapshots of people living and going about their daily business in Boston and Istanbul. From these images, she moulds miniature plasticine 'heads' before being photographed on a much larger scale. Bilal will show for the first time a selection from his new series 'Ashes'. In this series Bilal uses photojournalistic archives to reconstruct three-dimensional models of bombed architectural sites in Iraq, which are then photographed to recreate, extending the life of an ephemeral moment and demonstrating the destructive effects of war on private spaces. The booth will take the viewer through a range of visual possibilities of contemporary sculpture.

Do you think in coming years art fairs will be increasingly important for galleries such as yourself?

I believe that for galleries in Dubai participating in art fairs globally is key to our survival. We have seen no growth in the market in the last year and hence it's important that we market the gallery and our artists abroad. Increasingly our clients are from overseas. In addition given that Dubai does not have many institutions or art professionals - such as museum directors, writers or curators - the only way we can meet other professionals is by meeting them at fairs.

How do you survive three days in a booth - any tips?

Flat shoes, iPad to hand, chocolate, charm and dancing the nights away!

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'Crowds at the opening of Art Dubai 2012' (Courtesy Clint McLean/Art Dubai)



NOAH HOROWITZ
'Speaking more globally we have made an effort to bring a more international set of galleries that can work with the Armory. I think people will react very positively here - New Yorkers are very curious'

In a way, it's expanding the fair out of the main halls and taking in a little bit more of the environment of Jumeirah. And then we're expanding the Artists Projects section, with 14 artists this year. A number of projects are roving through Dubai as well as being at the Fair. And then we are also expanding the focus we have on education and doing projects and programmes through the year in the UAE, like Campus Art Dubai - a Saturday school with curators and artists and that's been a general theme of the fair the last couple of years, how we can impact on the local art scene beyond that time in March. And I think all these things are very relevant to a very particular context of the fair.

AM: Noah, I was going to ask the same question - what are the headlines for Armory this year. But in light of what Antonia's just said, I'm really interested in getting your impressions on what Art Dubai are doing.

NH: Well, I'm looking at MARKER right now on the website and I am completely jealous. West Africa seems completely fascinating to me and totally exotic. Our fair was founded in the