

BROAD BRUSH STROKES

Stylist explores the formidable female presence at Art Dubai

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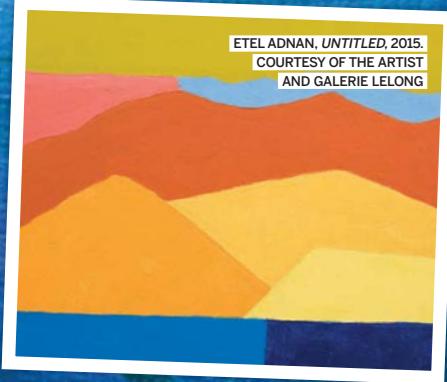
Those who know little about the Middle East but stereotype it all the same often speak of women's inequality in the region, particularly in the professional realm. But since the start of the 20th century (particularly in Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine) the Middle East art scene has been consistently populated by strong and successful female artists, dealers, and patrons.

The Guerilla Girls, an activist group of feminist artists, wear gorilla masks to hide their identities and protest the blatant gender bias evident in major Western museums and other cultural institutions. They drive home the point that in Europe and North America, painting has always been (and continues to be) a boys' club, in which women were chiefly objectified on the canvas, rather than empowered with the brush.

Women's powerful influence on the regional art ecosystem is reflected in Art Dubai's lineup this year, and Fair Director Antonia Carver has the stats to prove it. "At the fair in general, including the 76 galleries exhibiting in the contemporary section, around 45% of artists are women – this is extraordinarily high compared to other major international fairs," she says.

Art Dubai's modern section views like a who's who of the history of women in Arab art, with work by Samia Halaby, Etel Adnan, Maliheh Afrian, Samia Zaru, and others on display at booths directed by knowledgeable dealers who are happy to chat about the pieces, whether you're a Louboutin-clad collector or simply a curious visitor.

Here, *Stylist* previews the fair with seven of the female artists, curators, and dealers who are making waves this year... 





MARIA TANIGUCHI

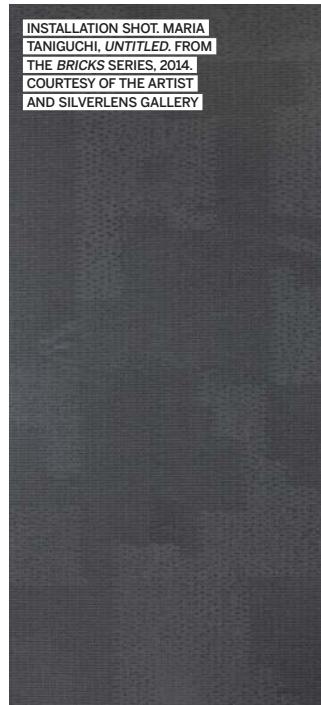


It's easy to see the influence that growing up in a family of sculptors has had on Maria Taniguchi, whose

ongoing series of 70 brick paintings feature stubbornly detailed masonry on broad swathes of canvas. The untitled pieces give the illusion of machine-printed walls, complete with nicks, inconsistencies, nuanced patterns and all.

"I like to think of all 70 as a part of a huge imaginary diagram just constantly recording and absorbing – I paint one brick and that's a few seconds in the life of the studio, or I finish one book and one painting at the same time," Taniguchi says.

The Filipino conceptual artist



INSTALLATION SHOT. MARIA TANIGUCHI, UNTITLED. FROM THE BRICKS SERIES, 2014. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SILVERLENS GALLERY

SASKIA PINTELON, IDENTITY CRISIS, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 2016. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SASKIA FERNANDO GALLERY



SAMIA HALABY, BLACK CROSS, EIGHTH CROSS, 1969. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND AYYAM GALLERY



"I NEVER THINK OF MYSELF AS A WOMAN-ARTIST – I THINK OF MYSELF AS AN ARTIST. BEING AN ARTIST IS WHAT DEFINES ME"

is also known for her minimalist video work. When it comes to generating fresh material, Taniguchi, whose practice was honored with the 2015 Hugo Boss Art Award for Emerging Asian Artists at the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai, won't be hitting a wall anytime soon. With work in some of the most prestigious institutions in Asia, this artist is a rising star to spot and chart.

Silverlens Gallery, Philippines, (Booth C1); Carlier | Gebauer, Germany (Booth A7)

LARISSA SANOUR

In Larissa Sansour's latest video piece, In the Future They Ate From the Finest Porcelain, the performance artist appears as a sci-fi heroine on a lonely planet as fragments of cracked Palestinian porcelain rain from above. The splintered kitchenware references the archaeological battle to uncover Palestinian artifacts on contested ground as a way to prove that Palestine has always

been a distinct civilisation.

The Jerusalem-born artist uses the sci-fi genre as a platform for discussing the tough issues that the region faces away from the tired, documentary narratives that typically surround the conflict.

Sansour will also participate in a group performance in collaboration with Art Dubai Projects and the Delfina Foundation, which will see 11 artists interpret a 10th century Arabic poem about love through a banquet meal.

The artist explains, "My course is about the beginning stages of love. You will be served Palestinian greens that can only be found through foraging the occupied wilderness – thorny artichokes, zatar, and dandelion roots. Palestinians have been preparing these dishes for thousands of years. Most of these things only grow on hilltops occupied by settlers and are slowly going extinct due to lack of access to Palestinians."

Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai/Art Dubai Projects



ANAHITA RAZMI, VIDEO STILL FROM HERE SCRIPTS. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CARBON 12 DUBAI

SASKIA PINTELON



The Sri-Lanka based artist Saskia Pintelon admits, "I never think of myself as a woman-artist. I think of myself as

an artist... As a woman I have many roles: I am a wife, a mother, a grandmother, but I am above all an artist. Being an artist is what defines me as a person and what makes me get up in the morning. Without it my existence would not make sense."

Passport photos and visa stamps are the hallmark of our globalised world, and Pintelon brings a series of curiously amended identity photos to the fair in a restrained palette. The works examine the inevitability

of the human life cycle and the way that intense experiences or even cosmetic surgery can transform a face until it is unrecognisably universal. The pieces will be shown in the Saskia Fernando Gallery booth, marking a first for contemporary art from Sri Lanka at the fair.

Pintelon, who largely stuck to figurative monochromes for





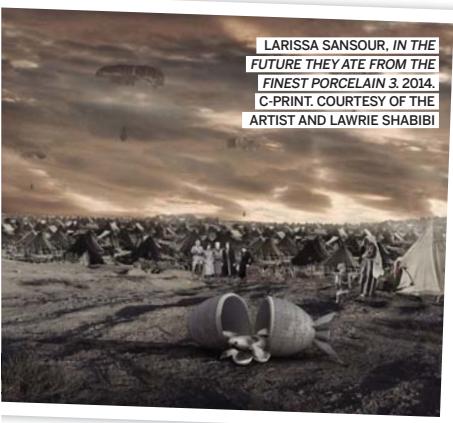
PHOTOGRAPH: SILVERLENS GALLERY, SASKIA FERNANDO GALLERY, CARBON 12 DUBAI

years, recently exploded with abstract color on the canvas as though she had emerged from a cocoon, proving it's never too late for an artist to take risks and innovate, even decades into a well-lived practice.

Saskia Fernando Gallery, Sri Lanka (Booth F6)

ANAHITA RAZMI

 Unless you have a sarcastic sense of humor and remember how to play, it's easy to miss several layers of meaning implicit in Anahita Razmi's work, which cleverly tackles stereotypes about the region. Her latest video, *Here Scripts*, makes a plot from individual lines gleaned from films about the Middle East, all set to shaky



THE WOMEN BEHIND ART DUBAI SOUND OFF

ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE REGIONAL ART SCENE:

"The arts in the Arab world is a field in which women shine through as leaders and game-changers – and there are such strong role models, not only in patronage, with figures such as Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi of Sharjah Art Foundation, Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who chairs the UAE Gender Balance Committee and also oversees The Cultural Foundation, but also in terms of gallerists, such as Andre Sfeir Semler [Sfeir Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg], Sunny Rahbar [The Third Line, Dubai], Janine Rubeiz and now her daughter Nadine Begdache [Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut], and many more."

Antonia Carver, fair director, Art Dubai

ON BEING A FEMALE DEALER:

"As a matter of fact, being a woman art dealer is more challenging in New York than in Dubai. While there are many legendary female art dealers in New York, it is very still very much a man's world. In Dubai, women rule the art world in a big way and have spearheaded so many amazing arts organizations, institutions and collections. I was very excited to open a gallery in Dubai in such great company. Also, our gallery's programme in Dubai prominently features many of the best globally renowned female artists including Ghada Amer, Zaha Hadid, Afruz Amighi, Hadieh Shafie, Rachel Hovnanian, and Shiva Ahmadi amongst others."

Leila Heller, founder of Leila Heller Gallery, New York/Dubai (Booth A5)

ON CURATING:

"The role of the curator, in general, has developed over the years, and wasn't formally employed throughout the region until the 1990s. Yet women have been involved in local art scenes for decades, as patrons, artists, academics, gallerists, and critics. The issue of gender representation in terms of how we curate shows is not as simple as it might seem. Curators working in the region, such as myself, have been hesitant to organise all-female exhibitions since that model has been overplayed in the US and Europe when it comes to highlighting Arab and Iranian artists, often with patronising political undertones."

Maymanah Farhat, creative director, Ayyam Gallery, Dubai/Beirut (Booths D9 & M13)

footage of vast swathes of rose-tinted sand and decaying traditional architecture.

The cosmopolitan artist with Iranian roots, who is based in Berlin, Germany, but spent time in Ouarzazate, Morocco earlier this year, explains: "The work is extracting script lines from movies that were shot at the Atlas Film Studios in Ouarzazate. This is quite an extensive list: *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Jewel of the Nile*, *Sheltering Sky*, *Kundun*, *Patton*, *Prince of Persia* – just to name a few." The decontextualised fragments take on a new life as they question which space is actually defined as "Here", poking fun at the way that Persia, Arabia, and even Tibet all get clumped together visually to stand for an imaginary Orientalist desert land.

While Razmi's practice investigates questions of identity – she often uses her own body

"IF PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO FIND THE BODY LIBERATION MOMENT IN MY WORK, I FIND THAT VERY TELLING"

as a material for proving a point, and the artist is fiercely adamant that there needs to be more equality in the representation of female artists in western institutions – her work is deliberately ambiguous. She says: "If people are trying to find the body liberation moment in my work, I find that in itself very telling."

Carbon 12 Gallery, Dubai (Booth B1)



The 10th edition of Art Dubai runs 16-19 March at Madinat Jumeirah, Al Sufouh, with a carefully curated selection of 90 contemporary and modern galleries from around the world and the largest array of Arab art in a fair globally accessible to the public; entry is Dhs50 for a one-day pass and Dhs80 for a three-day pass; artdubai.ae