

Beirut Art Fair reinvigorates contemporary art scene in the region

Rania Khallaf, Wednesday 14 Aug 2019

A major regional and international event, the Beirut Art Fair runs 18-22 September



The 10th edition of the Beirut Art Fair (BAF) will be held 18-22 September under the patronage of Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, announced Laure d'Hauteville, the BAF's founder and director. D'Hauteville together with Joanna Abou Sleiman-Chevalier, artistic director for the BAF, Marie-Mathilde Gannat, VIP coordinator, and Marie Tomb, editorial director, unveiled the fair's programme during a press conference recently held in Beirut.

A revealing event in the Middle East, the BAF acts as a catalyst for the artistic and cultural life for Lebanon. D'Hauteville reaffirmed the fair's commitment to the discovery of the contemporary art scene, both regional and international. The event also wishes, for this anniversary, to pay tribute to Lebanon through exhibitions of exceptional works from Lebanese private collections.

Lynn Tehini, representing Mohammad Daoud, Lebanon's minister of culture, said that "The BAF enjoys a great prestige and is considered a significant event for the cultural, touristic and economic scene of the country. The fair is one of the pillars of the promotion of Lebanon on the international scene of contemporary art. The ministry actively supports BAF and we are proud to celebrate together its tenth anniversary."

D'Hauteville reiterated her commitment to promoting openness to innovation by relying on a reinvigoration of artistic programmes and setting new trends. She reaffirmed the core values of the fair: freedom of expression, dialogue of cultures and tolerance. "BAF remains more than ever committed to breaking not only artistic walls, but also interpersonal, psychological and social ones. The fair will present various artistic experiences in parallel with what the galleries stand for — a spirit of openness and innovation."

With 50 renowned Lebanese and international galleries showcasing emerging artists alongside recognised talents, BAF confirms its image as a cultural incubator. Coming from 18 countries, it will reflect the rising scene of regional and international contemporary art.

Abou Sleiman-Chevalier explained that "The BAF is devoted to discovering the young contemporary art scene, and rediscovering artists whose work might unfairly be less acknowledged. It is this curatorial direction that gives meaning to the fair. This year, the fair will be more contemporary than ever. We are very pleased to present a number of promising young galleries, some of which have been operating for less than a year. We do not focus on a specific region, since the fair is truly part of a global interconnected scene."

The BAF relies on a selection committee comprising important figures of the international art scene: Olivia Bourrat, scientific director of Agence France-Muséums, Jean-Marc Decrop, specialised expert in contemporary Chinese and Middle Eastern art, Tamara Inja Jaber, artistic advisor to major collectors and Arab governmental institutions, and Lyne Sneige, arts and culture director at the Middle East Institute (MEI) in Washington, DC.

On the occasion of the 10 year anniversary of BAF, the organisers invited Rachel Dedman to curate an exhibition. She has selected 10 promising artists from the MENA region following an open call to which more than 400 candidates responded.

In addition, the exhibition "Unexpected Trove: The Unseen Works of Hussein Madi" will present a series of paintings from the collection Mazen and Loulia Soueid, which has never been exhibited, including rare landscapes by the renowned Lebanese artist Madi (b. 1938). Painted between 1965 and 1970 during his early years in Rome, the collection, representing a significant phase in the artist's career, was presumed lost for almost 40 years and only recently rediscovered.

Curated by Abed Al-Kadiri, the exhibition is taking place under the patronage of the Italian Embassy in Lebanon, and is produced in collaboration with Christie's.

"A Tribute to Lebanon" is the title of another inspiring exhibition that explores Western creations inspired by Lebanon from the 18th century to the present day, through works and historical objects from the eclectic and fascinating collection of Philippe Jabre.

Gaby Daher, exhibition curator and collector, said: "The exhibition is a journey through time and space. It will invite visitors to discover the image of Lebanon filtered through the Western eye. It will unveil more than 100 exceptional works of art and artifacts, including automata, dolls, photographic albums, historic Orientalist paintings and rare pieces by major 20th century artists, including Andy Warhol, David Hockney, AR Penck, and photographs by Don McCullin taken during the war in Lebanon in the 1980s."

Marie-Mathilde Gannat, BAF VIP coordinator, added that "Many museums, private collections and Lebanese foundations will open their doors to VIPs for extraordinary and confidential visits, including the Surssock Museum, Beirut Art Centre, Dar El-Nimer, the MACAM museum, and the art galleries of the American University in Beirut. Important private collections, such as the Ramzi and Saeda Dalloul Foundation, Nadim Karam's A.MUSE.UM, and Philippe Jabre, will also welcome VIPs. These artistic excursions will be punctuated with convivial moments, dinners and unforgettable evenings which characterise the Land of the Cedars."

The five-day fair will offer multiple opportunities for cultural exchange with a rich programme of conferences and roundtables on modern and contemporary art, with a focus on the MENA region. Among topics will be the role of cultural institutions, the factors that shape art and the artist, and the question of "Arability."

The fair's satellite event, BeirutArtWeek (17-24 September 2019), electrifies the Lebanese capital by offering a journey to new experiences throughout the city. From an ephemeral exhibition in a building marked by the war, to a Cuban evening in an abandoned factory, to intimate get-togethers in palaces evoking 1,001 Nights, this series of events mixes contemporary art, dance, and traditional music in atypical places, highlighting the architectural and cultural heritage of the city.

Children are equally encouraged to join the festival of colours. The Beirut Museum of Art offers children visiting BAF several workshops led by artists Chantale Fahmi, Soraya Gezelbash and Galeb Hawila.

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