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## Beirut Art Fair 2019

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The 10th edition of BEIRUT ART FAIR, the international modern and contemporary art fair with a focus on the scenes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region), will take place from 18 to 22 September 2019 in Beirut.

A space for artistic revelations, BEIRUT ART FAIR celebrates its tenth anniversary this year and entrusts its artistic direction to Franco-Lebanese curator Joanna Abou Sleiman-Chevalier.

After a steady decade of growth, BEIRUT ART FAIR has become a major event in the art fair calendar, attracting every year a growing number of visitors from around the world.

For its 10-year anniversary, BEIRUT ART FAIR reaffirms its commitment to the discovery of the local and international contemporary scene and wishes to celebrate Lebanon and its sometimes little-known treasures by presenting exceptional and never-exhibited-before works from private collections.

## **A FAIR CENTERED ON CONTEMPORARY CREATION**

BEIRUT ART FAIR reaffirms its commitment to highlight the creations of emerging artists and to shed a new light on scenes sometimes overlooked by the public.

Thus, the brand-new PROJECT space gives selected galleries a young and dynamic platform to put the spotlight on their promising artists, endorsed by the fair's selection committee.



## **AN ACTIVE AND ENGAGED FAIR**

BEIRUT ART FAIR places great emphasis on freedom of expression, the dialogue of cultures, and tolerance, which constitute its core values.

For this 10th edition, the founder and director of the fair, Laure d'Hauteville, is committed to promoting openness to the world and innovation, notably through a renewal of the artistic program and by showcasing new trends.

Joanna Abou Sleiman-Chevalier, the fair's artistic director, backed by the selection committee, will unveil the list of around fifty participating galleries from 18 countries, representing the vitality of the contemporary scene.

## JOINT INTERVIEW

Laure d'Hauteville, founder and director of BEIRUT ART FAIR and Joanna Abou Sleiman-Chevalier, artistic director of BEIRUT ART FAIR

This edition celebrates 10 years of discoveries. How do you plan to fulfil this promise, and what to expect from this milestone event?

Laure d'Hauteville:

More than ever, the BEIRUT ART FAIR remains committed to lifting up walls – not only artistic ones but also interpersonal, psychological and societal ones. In parallel with the gallery booths, we plan a diversity of artistic experiences, reflective of the Fair's spirit of openness and innovation, across time and space. For instance, we exhibit simultaneously global emerging artists, in our REVEALING by SGBL section, and icons of international historical and Modern art, with a museum-level exhibition of Lebanon-themed works, and another one revealing for the first time never-seen-before-works of major Lebanese modern artist Hussein Madi. The Fair is also tightly connected with Beirut's urban fabric thanks to an extended program of Art Week events, a celebratory journey coupling contemporary art and the discovery of the city. Furthermore, this 2019 edition aims to draw stronger-than-ever bridges between countries and continents: the international community – from the MENA region, to Europe, Africa and the United States, among other places – looks forward to September. 2018 welcomed 53 galleries from 22 countries. For this tenth edition, we plan to broaden our horizons and present an even wider panel of renowned and promising artists to a artists an ever-growing internationalpublic.

Joanna Abou Sleiman-Chevalier:

BEIRUT ART FAIR is devoted to the discovery of the young international contemporary art scene, and to the rediscovery of artists whose work might unfairly be less acknowledge: this curatorial direction gives its meaning to the fair. We are very happy to present a number of young galleries, some of whom have been operating for less than a year, such as ArtSpace (Casablanca), Hors Cadre (Paris), and Essa Muhammad (San Francisco). Other, well-established, such as kamel mennour (Paris and London) and Galleria Continua (Beijing, Les Moulins, San Gimignano, La Havane), Primo Marella



(Milan), and Out of Africa (Barcelona) will too be unveiling their discoveries.

As artistic director for this 2019 edition, I am focusing on the emerging scene. We do not focus on a specific region: the fair is part of an interconnected international scene of discoveries. At the fair, the public will have the opportunity to discover international artists that might not be, or rarely be, seen in the Middle East or in other fairs.

You present the city of Beirut as a major artistic hub for the Middle East. Could you tell us more?

LdH: Beirut, and Lebanon, enjoy 6,000 years of History! The city sits at the heart of the Fertile Crescent, the cradle of civilization, and its strong cultural tradition has withstood the vicissitudes of History. Today, Beirut is a key cultural node not only in the MENA region, but also on the transversal Silk Road, bridging East and West. A cosmopolitan city, a melting pot of ethnic and religious communities, Beirut symbolizes cultural and linguistic blending. Its freedom, openness, tolerance and generosity are unique. In a way, BEIRUT ART FAIR carries all such positive values embodied by the city of Beirut, as well as its historical embracing of cultural diversity. Moreover, artistic projects are multiplying here, be it at the level of institutions – museums, contemporary art centers, foundation – or at that of the very active galleries and collectors.

BEIRUT ART FAIR is a catalyst of the country's artistic and cultural life, with numerous other events taking place around it in September.

JAC: Beirut is a cosmopolitan, moving city, a city that constantly reinvents itself, an energy that builds, deconstructs and reconstructs in different ways. This mindset applies to all kinds of creativities, from architecture, to music, to the fine arts and design. Moreover, the freedom of speech that reigns in Beirut is without equal in the Middle East. This cultural wealth allows it to be an artistic hub, for regional artists

(from Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Iran) as well as for international ones and especially ones from emerging territories (such as India, Africa, or Pakistan). Beirut offers endless opportunities for encounters and discoveries.



Lebanon's creativity is impressive, a fact that the international press and art professionals like to acknowledge. For instance, this year, the Venice Biennale welcomed a dozen of Lebanese artists, even though the country didn't even have a national pavilion! There were for instance Simone Fattal and Etel Adnan at the Lugo e Seigni exhibition at the Punta de la Dogana, as well as Zad Moultaka in dialogue with a piece by de James Lee Bayers, and Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige at V- A-C Zattere, to cite but a few. The cultural rise of Lebanon might have been interrupted by the war, but its cultural identity reemerged stronger than ever. The Lebanese talent to adapt and to be resilient are unique. War imposed pragmatism and the need to bounce back. It is only legitimate that

Lebanon reclaims its international cultural stature.

What is the importance, the influence, of Beirut Art Fair on the Lebanese and regional artistic scenes?

LdH: In a decade, BEIRUT ART FAIR has grown into one of the most important events of the regional cultural calendar, and enjoys international recognition. It has considerably expanded in artistic scope and global reach. Attendance numbers have steadily increased, reaching 32,000 last year, rising from 3,500 in 2010! This evolution parallels the undeniable growth of the MENA art market, as well as the visible rise of the public's interest in contemporary art and appetite to discover new territories, as part of a broader, global, cultural trend. We are proud to build strong relationships with international art institutions and museums, and to enable collectors to discover what makes the Land of the Cedars unique. Most of all, I am passionate about discovering new talents, following their careers and watching

them blossom. I remain close to many artists whom I met at the very beginning of my career; it's an honor to count them as my friends.

Art in many ways plays a role as a vector of peace. In a world where people, communities and countries increasingly close themselves up to others, art creates human bonds, instead of breaking them. Artists are witnesses to their times. They cull from past experiences to spur the public to envision alternative, hopeful, futures.

Tell us about your personal, and fruitful links, with Lebanon.

LdH: I have been present in Lebanon for 28 years, and launched the first modern and contemporary art fair in Beirut in 1998, the ARTUEL Salon, the precursor to BEIRUT ART FAIR. I lived through Lebanon's ups and downs, and saw artists react to and reflect on their country's and the region's situation all throughout. I witnessed the transformation of the local art world from an embryonic scene to a full-fledged one, spanning several museums, contemporary art centers, and dozens of galleries, each with its distinctive identity, among many other initiatives

– and of course, the dramatic international opening up of Beirut's artistic scene, which this year's Fair epitomizes.



JAC: I am French-Lebanese. I have a visceral link with Lebanon. In 2015, I organised in Beirut an exhibition called « Territoires d'affects » (affective territories), which explored the symbolic links that artists entertain with Lebanon, whether they live there or abroad. Mona Hatoum, Etel Adnan, Nabil Nahas, Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Simone Fattal and many others participated. I have to add that I have been passionate about contemporary art since childhood. My mother gifted me my first

painting when I was nine. My passion was not born yesterday, but developed through the years. I curated several exhibitions, among them «

Art in Sport » at the Shanghai contemporary art museum for the 2007 Olympic

Games, and « Qui es-tu Peter ? » (Who Are You Peter?) at the Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton in Paris. In the context of « La Nuit des Musées » (The Night of the Museums) in Paris, I produced and programmed movies at the Museum of Hunting and Nature, which brought together classical music and video art.

Interview by Dr. Marie Tomb, art historian and specialist of the Middle East.

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