

Western galleries eye Middle East as Arab art sales soar
By Claire Ferris-Lay



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ART DUBAI: Gil Heitor Cortesao's Double Bed will be on display at Art Dubai (supplied)

A surge of investor interest in contemporary Arab artists is behind a rise in the number of galleries exhibiting their collections in the Middle East, regional art experts have said. Organisers behind the fifth Art Dubai show said western galleries are waking up to Arab talent and increasingly looking to sign young artists. The four-day show will feature 82 galleries sourced from 34 countries, including the Marianne Boesky Gallery from New York and the South Africa-based Goodman Gallery. "Part of the reason the show is able to attract such

established galleries is due to not just the increasingly popularity of Arab art but also the high quality of local galleries and artists," said Antonia Carver, Fair Director of Art Dubai.

"We wouldn't get the numbers of visitors, critics and international galleries coming if they didn't feel that the galleries from this region were their equivalent. These days there are artists working in every kind of medium, very kind of style and approach and I think that's something that bears witness to what's happened in the region in terms of quality of the artwork we are seeing," she added. Christie's contemporary art sale in Dubai made a record \$14m in October. The sale, which featured works by the Egyptian artist Mahmoud Said and the Iranian artist Mohammed Ehsai, far surpassed the pre-sale estimate of \$6.7m.

Art Dubai plans to showcase work from more than 500 artists as well as the works of the five winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize; Hamra Abbas, Jananne Al-Ani, Shezad Dawood, Nasia Kaabi-Linke and Timo Nasser.

Around 25 of the exhibiting galleries will concentrate on work from one artist providing visitors with "a museum quality display of works. The popularity of Arab art is not just endemic to the region, said Carver. "If you look at the profile of Arab artists internationally and what's happened over the last ten-fifteen years with the Arab art movement [you will see the change.] At the moment you have Walid Raad and Mona Hatoum both with major exhibitions in London. These are Arab artists that are exhibiting on a par with their western equivalents all over the world," she said.

"What's remarkable is looking back over the last few years... is that many of these artists are from this region but are world renowned. They have a global following but their home base commercially is in Dubai and that's how they reach international art community," she added. Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi, a leading Emirati commentator and patron of the arts, said he had also seen a rise in the interest in Arab art.

"After a slight dip in interest we saw it recover very strongly in 2010," he said. "I think in 2011 its going to be more important, cementing the rise of the art from the Middle East in the international market." Art Dubai will be held at the Madinat Jumeirah from the 16 to 19 March.