




A visitor experiences an installation by the Indonesian artist Setu Legi at Madinat Jumeirah during Art Dubai last year. Jaime Puebla / The National

Lifting the curtains on 2013's Dubai Art Week

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Jan 29, 2013

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It's almost that time of year again. For more than six years, the art world has taken a special interest in Dubai and the UAE in March due to its ever-expanding schedule of artistic events. This year will be no different. As revealed yesterday, Art Dubai 2013 will feature 75 galleries from 29 countries and will host a string of not-for-profit curatorial and educational projects. Alongside the region's biggest art fair will run Design Days Dubai (DDD), the only fair in the world to focus solely on contemporary objects of design from six continents, as well as the Sikka Art Fair, dedicated to showcasing the work of Emirati and UAE-based artists.

Art week

Often referred to as the most dynamic cultural week in the regional calendar, Art Week is actually 10 days of activities spanning all aspects of the arts and involving all members of the community. The schedule begins on March 14 with Sikka, in the newly named Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood (formerly Bastakiya). "Sikka is an unparalleled artistic and cultural experience and highlights the rich local talent in the city," says Khalil Abdulwahid, the manager of visual arts at Dubai Culture and Arts Authority (DCAA). On March 18, the second edition of DDD will launch in a temporary venue at the base of Burj Khalifa and will showcase works from 29 design galleries, with nine being from the Middle East region. Finally on March 20, the seventh edition of Art Dubai will start at the Madinat Jumeirah and according to Antonia Carver, the fair director, it will host "the most extensive programme" yet.

New galleries

Among the new entrants for Art Dubai 2013 are Victoria Miro, a well-known London gallery that inhabits a converted Victorian factory and represents the Turner Prize winners Chris Ofili and Grayson Perry. Also making its debut will be Yvon Lambert Gallery from Paris and New York, which has been exhibiting conceptual and minimalist art since the 1960s. From the region, Rampa - a

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leading contemporary space in Istanbul - will be one of five galleries participating from Turkey, indicative of the burgeoning scene there.

For DDD, pieces from all over the world will congregate under one purpose-built roof. Cyril Zammit, the DDD fair director, says that highlights include pieces from British craft galleries, from Australia and regionally from Mustafa Ali in Damascus (shown by Majlis Gallery in Dubai) and Cheikh Diallo from Mali (represented by Perimeter Gallery in London and Paris). "Production is, more than ever, a big challenge [in Mali] at the moment, so I am very happy to have contemporary design from there at the fair," Zammit says

A local view

One of the key reasons that Art Dubai is now becoming accepted onto the global arts calendar, says Carver, is the fact that it maintains its local focus. "By concentrating on taking on the identity of the UAE, we are presenting something different from other fairs around the world and keeping our identity has attracted interest. Globally, Dubai is seen as a gateway to Asia and [the fair] is now an international meeting point."

Education

Always keen to involve the community, all three events have strong educational elements including a new initiative Campus Art Dubai that, in partnership with the DCAA, is providing courses for artists and curators. DDD will also host a public programme of talks and workshops and Sikka will encourage performance and an open-studio exhibition.

On the fringe

Concurrently with the main fairs will be an exhibition of the winners of the Hamdan International Photography Award, launched last year under the patronage of Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum with prize money of US\$120,000 (Dh441,000). There will also be the Global Art Forum, which engages discussion on a number of subjects and will take place at the Mathaf Modern Art Museum in Doha before concluding in Madinat Jumeirah. The winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize, who were announced in August, will unveil their works and there will be an exhibition of jewellery from Cartier, the Art Dubai fair sponsors.

"Art Week is the finest showcase of Dubai's art, strengthening the city's cultural fabric and providing year-round inspiration for artists all over the country," says Abdulwahid. "We are very proud to play a role in creating the dynamic culture of the UAE."

Visit www.artdubai.ae, www.sikka.ae and www.designdaysdubai.ae for more information

Events

March 14-24 Sikka Art Fair, Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood

March 15-24 Hamdan International Photography Award, various locations

March 17-18 Global Art Forum, Mathaf, Doha

March 18 Galleries Nights, DIFC

March 18-21 Design Days Dubai, Downtown Dubai

March 19 Abraaj Capital Art Prize unveiling, Madinat Jumeirah

March 20-23 Art Dubai, Madinat Jumeirah

March 20-23 Global Art Forum, Madinat Jumeirah