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WEEKEND

Design Days Dubai

THE GALLERY

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Biggest and diverse design fair in its 3rd edition

Selma Roth

Saudi Gazette

The third edition of the Design Days Dubai is just around the corner. From March 17–21, over 30 galleries from all over the world will participate in the fair held right on the foot of the Burj Khalifa. The event will overlap with the Dubai Art Week, which takes place this year for the eighth time from March 19–22.

“We have 34 galleries from 20 different countries coming,” Fair Director Cyril Zammit told the Saudi Gazette, making the Design Days Dubai the biggest and most diverse design fair in the world. Last year the fair welcomed a total of 10,500 visitors, of which 21 percent were from the United Arab Emirates, and the organizers are expecting more guests this year as the fair will also open its doors on Friday.

Countries participating in the fair range from Pakistan to China and from Algeria to the US, as well as several Emirati designers. “It’s a big, new, strong hub for contemporary and modern design,” Zammit commented, stressing the diversity of exhibitors, from the well-established Carpenters Workshop Gallery from Paris and London to a young design studio from Pakistan that is participating in the event for the first time.

“I really love the idea of having these young architects melting and merging contemporary design and creations with sometimes old techniques of painting and carpentry,” the fair director, who travels a lot to discover young and promising designers all over the world, said about the latter.

The fair will also see the creation of a new section called “Discover”, which focuses on a single country and its contemporary design scene. This year, the organizers teamed up with the Institut Francais, an organization that promotes French culture and encourages cross-cultural exchange. As a result, four young French designers will be participating in the fair.

According to Zammit, the Design Days Dubai will mainly focus on contemporary design, although a number of galleries showcasing modern design from the 1950s and 1960s will be present as well. “Unlike Europe, the market in the Middle East is extremely

interested in contemporary design," Zammit said, justifying this by the setup of new cities in this region and the feeling of 'we're going ahead, we're building the future'.

"So they really want to have upcoming pieces in their houses," he said, adding that generally, people living north from the Gulf are more interested in design from the '50s and '60s.

On the other hand, design from the Arab world is still strongly rooted in traditional shapes and patterns, Zammit remarked, albeit less and less. The fair director explained this by the transformation the Arab world is going through: "The designers coming from this part of the world need to link themselves to an ancient world or traditional aspects and then move it forward. Unlike in Europe, there is no tradition in designing pieces" due to the nomadic way people lived historically.

It is no coincidence the Design Days Dubai is held in tandem with the Dubai Art Week. Both fall under the same mother company, Art Dubai Fair LLC, and for Zammit there is only a blurred line between art and design. This line will be crossed in the fair's several installations, which give the organizers "the chance to showcase design in a more artistic way, and not only the pure functional aspect", Zammit said, giving the example of an innovative installation from China of wooden flowers, which react to climatic conditions like humidity and heat and transform accordingly.

"We believe that collectible design goes very well with (...) nice artworks on your wall," Zammit said about the overlap of the two events. In fact, the idea to create a design fair was born out of the art week's success, with organizers realizing that people interested in art would also like to buy design furniture.

The design fair will include live performances, so visitors can experience the process of design and see the designers actually producing something, in addition to workshops, where different techniques will be taught to anyone interested. According to Zammit, some of the not-to-miss features of the fair are a talk by interior designer India Mahdavi, who is based in Paris and has designed the interior of numerous hotels and residencies, as well as a workshop by German designer Silvia Knüppel about carpets.

The Design Days Dubai will be held from March 17-21.

Entrance fee: 50 AED

For workshops, visitors need to register on the website. The program will be online mid-February.

Opening hours: March 17-20 from 4 to 10 p.m.; March 21 from 1 to 7 p.m.

Location: The Venue - Downtown Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Boulevard (next to Burj Khalifa)

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