



Ángeles Agrela. (Left to right) *Martina*; *Dafne* and *Filomena*. 2021. Acrylic and pencil on paper. 150 x 120 cm
Images courtesy of Galería Yusto-Giner

ART DUBAI RETURNS WITH FRESH AMBITIONS

Art Dubai, the Middle East's leading international art fair, has been a major catalyst for global conversations on art since its inception. This year's edition will run for an extended six days at the new location of Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC). A purpose-built facility will house around 45 galleries and a new live artist-led programme will be held at outdoor locations across the emirate.

Words by Vamika Sinha

Over the past 14 years, Art Dubai has cemented its position as a groundbreaking meeting point for collectors, artists, curators and art lovers worldwide. The fair is held under the patronage of HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, in partnership with the Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture) and A.R.M.

Holding, sponsored by Julius Baer. Given the current public health situation, special protocols will be in place at this year's fair to ensure the safety of participants and fair-goers alike. For the first time, a Remote Participation Programme will be put in place where galleries will be able to present their exhibitions virtually, while simultaneously allowing visitors in Dubai to engage with the physical works.



Summer Wheat. *Two Jugs*. 2020. Acrylic on aluminum mesh. Diptych. 172.7 x 238.8 cm. Image courtesy of Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery

Art Dubai 2021 will have three gallery sections: Contemporary, Modern and Bawwaba. In its largest edition to date, Art Dubai Modern will feature distinct solo presentations, with each gallery presenting works by a leading regional modernist artist. Curators Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath are taking a fresh approach, showcasing a selection of both archival and didactic material in parallel to the artworks. Meanwhile, an exciting selection of over 55 galleries will be featured in the Contemporary section, including Addis Fine Art (Addis Ababa / London), Gallery 1957 (Accra) and Experimenter (Kolkata). It will also be welcoming first-time participants +2 (Tehran) and Mono Gallery (Riyadh). Lawrie Shabibi (Dubai) will be exhibiting Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, who has been selected to represent the UAE in its National Pavilion at next year's Venice Biennale. Saudi-based artist Fahad bin Naif's work *Rakhm*, winner of the 2020 Ithra Art Prize, will also be revealed at the fair.

Following its launch in 2019, this year's renewed edition of Bawwaba – meaning 'gateway' in Arabic – is curated by Bombay-based cultural theorist and curator Nancy Adajania and features solo presentations either created within the last year or conceived specifically for the fair. Bawwaba will be showcasing alternative perspectives from varied international hubs of culture, trading and art, acting as a discovery portal into recently made works and affirming the fair's aim to present current artistic developments across the Global South. Adajania interprets the section descriptor 'Bawwaba' as an entry point for exploring the 'offsites' of global contemporary art, challenging the often harmful binary between art from the West and the so-called 'Non-West'.

A total of 11 galleries from the UAE will be represented at this year's fair, including Leila Heller and Meem. "Art Dubai is central to the cultural ecosystem of Dubai, whatever format the fair is in," stated Charles Pocock, managing partner of Meem. Meanwhile, the fair's artistic director Pablo del Val commented that "Art Dubai is delighted that we have more than 90 per cent of our galleries returning for the 14th edition, and proud of the diversity presented amongst the participating exhibitors. We believe in the importance of bringing communities together at physical events and as [one of] the only international art fairs going forward in the first quarter of 2021, we believe that our platform offers a unique opportunity to visitors who are keen to explore, discover and re-engage with the global art world."

This year, there will also be a new artist-led programme designed and guided by the artists participating in the fair, with live art events and site-specific activations around Dubai. These public experiences will be driven by human interaction and interconnection, highlighting and interrogating the ways in which we engage with and relate to our surroundings. Ultimately, the initiative's goal is to disrupt conventional ways of meeting, viewing and engaging with an artist's work and practice, even within a pandemic, and to offer insights into the artist's creative workflows and processes from conception to execution. Gatherings will take place in various areas across the city, from beach performances and guided tours of the historic souks to boat rides around islands and a variety of other themed encounters. Participating artists include Lawrence Abu Hamdan (Jordan), Kristoffer Ardeña (Philippines), Tsedaye Makonnen (Ethiopia / USA) and Serwan Baran (Iraq), among others. ■ Art Dubai runs from 29 March–3 April.