

Art Dubai, a 'warchestra' and a show called NO

Art Dubai has become such a synergistic, multi-platform, full-spectrum affair it's difficult to tell where it ends and the ordinary springtime art season begins. The fair arrives this week, surfing on a wave of supporting events, fringe exhibitions and coincidentally simpatico shows. The crux of it all is pretty simple, though: from March 17-20 the Madinat Jumeirah will be hosting more than 70 contemporary galleries from around the world. That's it. Oh yes, and the biggest art award on the planet gets its big day, when the three recipients of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize present the works their winnings allowed them to make. And the jeweller Van Cleef & Arpels is back, bringing a show about its years in the watch business. And on that note I'm calling time on any further discussion of Art Dubai in this column. There's too much going on in its shadow

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Mohamed el Baz's Murnoons, at Bastakiya Art Fair. Courtesy Mohamed El Baz

This year's Bastakiya Art Fair, the edgier cousin to the main event, includes a number of intriguing shows. There's a joint exhibition by the emerging Middle-Eastern artists Adel Abidin, Najia Mehadji, Yazid Oulab and Mohamed el Baz, all of whom have roots in the Arab world and homes in

Europe. El Baz's luminous photographic work is especially appealing. Meanwhile, Bastakiya promises what ought to be a very worthwhile group show about Iraq. Titled They Welcomed Us With Flowers, it features painting, video art, installations and photography. Among the artists involved are Hanaa Malallah, Sundus Abdul Hadi and Sama al Shaibi. There's a semi-musical work involving something called a "warchestra", which sounds intimidating. A portion of the sales proceeds go to the humanitarian group KF Iraq, a reassuring guarantee. If in an expansive mood you find yourself splurging on a Humvee covered in kettle drums

and curlicues of brass (in slightly disappointing reality Hadi's *Warchestra* is a series of paintings with a soundtrack, but go with me here), the charitable dimension to your purchase might serve as a bulwark against buyer's remorse.

At Art Sawa this week there's a competition for Palestinian artists: 45 professionals and 11 amateurs have entered, the prize is decided by jury and the award ceremony takes place this evening. Courtesy of the Dubai Community Theatre and Arts Centre, the Gallery of Light is presenting a show called MinD ("Made in Dubai") in which UAE-based artists showcase experimental and site-specific

works with an urban theme. The exhibition is billed as a sort of antidote to the slickness of Dubai's mainstream art scene, but sounds rather of a piece with it. Doesn't The Jam Jar do this sort of stuff all the time? Still, the more the merrier. If Dubai manages to find an answer to the age-old question "What happens when a city has too much experimental, site-specific urban art?", its name will truly resound through the ages.

And then there are the usual openings. The pick of them this week are probably Ramin Haerizadeh at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde (formerly B21). His subversive, sinister photo collages put him up there with the most important artists working out of Dubai. The new show, I'll Huff and I'll Puff, finds him in an unusually combative mode, which has got to be worth seeing. Shirin Aliabadi, an Iranian artist celebrated for her cleverly satirical Tehran society-girl portraits, is having her first international solo show. Eye Love You opens at Third Line tomorrow and is about the decorated female eye. And finally, Bose Krishnamachari, one of India's hipper young artists - his work conjures scenes in a paint factory where the gravity has just been turned off - has a show at 1x1 gallery. You'd remember it if you received the e-mail press release about it that I did: it bellowed the title of the show in 60pt sans-serif. "NO", it says. The only possible response is "yes".

* Ed Lake

the details

Art Dubai
 March 17-20,
 Madinat Jumeirah,
 Dubai

Bastakiya Art Fair
 from March 15,
 Bastakiya,
 Dubai

Creative Palestinian Art
 March 14-April 16,
 Art Sawa,
 Dubai

MinD
 March 14-21,
 Ductac,
 Dubai

I'll Huff and I'll Puff
 March 15-April 16,
 Gallery Isabelle van den
 Eynde,
 Dubai

Eye Love You
 March 15-April 22,
 Third Line,
 Dubai

NO
 March 18-April 17,
 1x1 gallery,
 Dubai

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