

DOWN BY THE CREEK

Bastakiya Art Fair runs alongside Art Dubai from 15–21 March and brings together artists, galleries and curators from around the region and beyond.

Taking place in Dubai's historic Al-Bastakiya area, 2010 marks the Bastakiya Art Fair's (BAF) fourth year. A combination of curated spaces, galleries and individual participants, BAF is organised by Mona Hauser and Rosie Hayes of XVA Gallery. The independent fringe fair runs alongside Art Dubai, bringing together talent from the Middle Eastern region. "This is very much in line with our long-term aims for the fair," explains co-director and fair organiser Hayes, "BAF's principal agenda is to promote Dubai as a hotbed for emerging Middle Eastern art."

The strength and appeal of BAF is evident in the number of repeat exhibitors, from galleries to individual artists, and the variety of work on show. Indeed, what BAF offers this year is an interesting mixture of curated spaces – including national houses showcasing art from Iraq, Pakistan, the UAE, Russia, Iran and Lebanon – local and regional galleries, as well as individual artist exhibitions. Curated spaces by **Janet Rady Fine Art**, **Sauce** and **Leo Lefort** sit alongside gallery spaces such as Bastakiya's own **XVA** and **Majlis** galleries, as well as **The House of Art** (previously Waqif Art Centre) from Doha, Sharjah's **Al-Maraya Al-Qasba Gallery**, and Lebanese **Running Horse Gallery** and London-based **Rose Issa Projects**, among others. Artists such as **Laudi Abilama**, **Rania Ezzat** and **Jane Beveridge** have individual participation and a series of brunch talks chaired by Rose Issa brings together big names from the art world such as the Serpentine Gallery's **Hans Ulrich Obrist**, **Anna Somers Cocks** of *The Art Newspaper* and the British Museum's **Venetia Porter**, to name a few. Book readings and film screenings round off the evenings, including a fundraiser for Haiti.

Some of the galleries participating at BAF also have booths at Art Dubai, such as Rose Issa Projects and **Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde** (IVDE – formerly B21 Gallery – which is showing works by **Arnaud Rivieren** and **Nadine Kanso**). **Tashkeel** has a presence at Art Dubai, as well as a space at BAF. If anything, rather than doubling up, participants feel the presence of BAF allows them to present different artists to different audiences, showcasing a much wider spectrum of talent than perhaps otherwise possible. "This is the third time we've participated at BAF," says IVDE's Tessa de Caters. "Because it is a fringe event and the beating heart of Dubai, BAF is often a more informal event and takes place in an authentic part of old Dubai. In the centre of the city, we can get a genuine interaction with the people." This is echoed by Rose Issa Projects, which is showcasing smaller works by Egyptian **Chant Avedissian** to the mammoth triptych on show at Art Dubai. Furthermore, BAF sees work by emerging Iranian artists **Farhad Ahrarnia**, **Parastou Forouhar**, **Bitva Ghezelayagh** and **Taraneh Hemami**.

There are also first-timers taking part, such as Beirut's **Running Horse Gallery**, run by the indefatigable Lea Sednaoui. "BAF is our first art fair," she says, "and although The Running Horse is quite young, I think it's good to get out there. BAF is a comprehensive yet diverse fair that encourages emerging galleries to come forward and the informal set-up of Bastakiya makes the experience even more accessible." This is something echoed by Lebanese artist Abilama, who is taking part for the second time, this year with a selection of new works focusing on prominent political figures. "BAF is not intimidating and people come by just to have a look at the artwork without feeling pressured to buy anything or even pretend to. It also

gives the public a chance to meet the participating artists and hopefully feel inspired by what they are doing," she explains. Having curated Al Braithwaite's exhibition at XVA at last year's BAF, Janet Rady is curating a show of works by young Iranian photographer **Nilu Izadi** at this year's edition. "I was keen to participate again and I was offered a house at the fair, which presented me with a great opportunity to develop the curatorial projects I have been working on throughout the year in Europe." Undertaking a camera obscura project and photographing the former Barakat house in Beirut, Izadi's images strike a chord with the very space in which they are hung. Her poignant shots of the old house are interestingly juxtaposed with the traditional architecture of Al-Bastakiya.

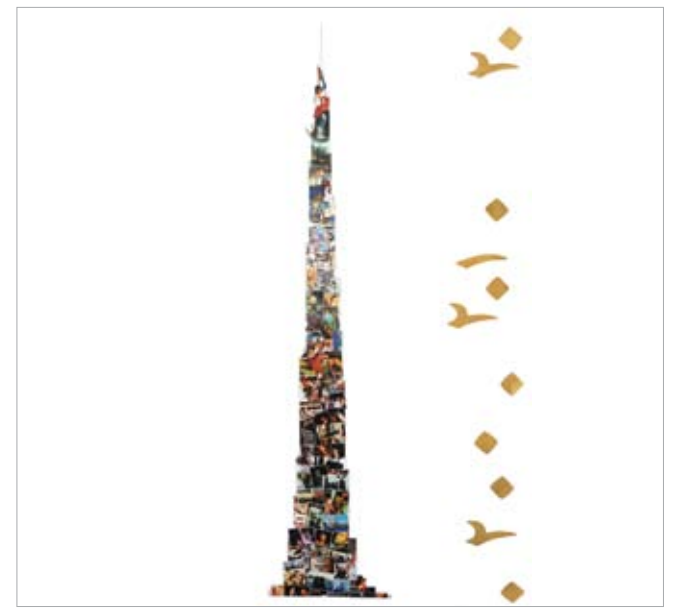
Striking the right note and working with the architecture of the space is something that Sednaoui has also been conscious of. "The choice of artists was tricky because we are also here on an introductory note," she says. "One element that really pushed us to do such a varied show was the architectural properties of the Al-Bastakiya house." Bringing artists such as **Alfred Tarazi**, **Sigrid Glöerfelt**, **Clara Gebran** and **Katia Traboulsi**, among others,



Laudi Abilama. Abdel Nasser from the series Arab Heroes. 2009. Silk screen on canvas. 94 x 86 cm. Courtesy the artist.


Sednaoui's selection worked naturally with the space available. "The traditional Al-Bastakiya houses look large from the outside, but boast an incredible amount of small rooms inside giving off to a beautiful internal courtyard," she explains. "Each small room will represent an artist, video or contextual project... I think this partition makes it easier for viewers to assimilate the works and take it all in." For de Caters, "Al-Bastakiya's outstanding courtyard means works by Rivieren are very well-suited outdoors, almost as though the works belong there. Kanso's works operate in a self-contained manner, and the Al-Bastakiya houses offer such a contained space."

With presence from a variety of entities, from Dubai-based Sauce boutique – curated by **Zayan Ghandour** and showcasing works by **Polly Becker** – to a space for **Saatchi Online** for the third year running, curated in 2010 by **Ana Finel Honigman** and **Arsalan Mohammed**, BAF offers range of artistic platforms for audiences to interact with. "BAF is concerned with promoting all



Nadine Kanso. Dar El-7ay – Dubai. 2010. Mixed media on photo paper. 180 x 122 cm. Unique edition. Courtesy Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde, Dubai.

forms of creativity and we believe the appeal of BAF is greatly increased by the variety of its exhibitions," stresses Hayes. One of the local participants, Tashkeel, is not only showcasing works by artists from diverse backgrounds, but is also raising money for Haiti. "The public reaction last year was great," says Tashkeel's Director Lateefa Bint Maktoum. "Through BAF I hope to reach audiences who have not heard about Tashkeel. I hope for more interest to grow for the studios and I hope there will be interest in our artists' work." Showcasing works by artists from the USA, The Philippines, India, the UK and the UAE, a fundraiser on 17 March sees proceeds from an auction of American artist **Joshua Watts**'s works go to Haiti relief.

Similar but different, BAF promises to bring the streets of Al-Bastakiya to life in an explosion of emerging artistic talent, just as Art Dubai is doing for established artists up the road. "The two art fairs most definitely complement each other," agrees Hayes. "Art Dubai is a fantastic platform for established artists to showcase their work, furthering the rise in popularity of Middle Eastern art in recent times and BAF complements this agenda, highlighting emerging talent within the same oeuvre." 

Anna Wallace-Thompson, Canvas

For more information log onto www.bastakiyaartfair.com



Farhad Ahrarnia. (Detail) From the Miss Iraq series. 2008–9. Digital print on cotton canvas with embroidery. 38 x 49 cm. Courtesy Rose Issa Projects, London.