

## **ArtBahrain 2015 October Newsletter**

**Although Bahrain is well-known internationally as home of the Bahrain Grand Prix Formula 1 race and its capital city Manama was awarded the Arab Capital of Tourism in 2013, its contemporary art scene is just beginning to gain regional and international attention. How could the Fair potentially change the perception of contemporary art in Bahrain and its relevancy in the region?**

This is the first art fair *ever* to be held in Bahrain. It is a great opportunity for both international visitors and local residents to view a carefully selected range of works by established and emerging artists, with which they may not be familiar. Visitors will discover new talent and learn more about Bahraini artistic culture. Bahrain has for centuries been known as a hub for Arab art and by putting Bahrain on the contemporary art map, the fair will strengthen its unique profile in the region.

**How would you explain the Bahraini art scene to someone who is new to the country and its creative traditions?**

As early as the 1930's, Bahrain had established a House of Art Talents, with the aim of bringing together people who love arts and literature. Bahrain's Modernist art movement was formalised in 1952 with the establishment of an Arts and Literature Club. Later in 1983, the Bahrain Arts Society (which will be participating in the Fair) was initiated by HE Sheikh Rashid bin Khalifa Al Khalifa as a non-profit cultural organisation. Today, it has 150 members and offers training in the arts of sculpting, pottery, calligraphy, painter, interior design and photography. It holds regular workshops, lectures and cultural events at the Bahrain Art Center. In addition to the Society, there are many well established commercial galleries in Bahrain showing local and international artists.

**Please introduce us (and their art) to participating Bahraini artists Ali Al Mahmeed, Sheikha Marwa Bint Rashid Al Khalifa, Sheikha Lulwa Bint Abdulazia Al Khalifa and Jamal Abdul Rahim. Any unusual mediums or techniques that these local artists are employing?**

Whilst these artists are (with the exception of sculptor Ali Al Mahmeed) all painters, their practices and visual content are all very different. For instance, Sheikha Marwa Bint Rashid uses acrylic on canvas to portray abstract composition and Sheikha Lulwa Bint Abdulazia depicts expressive figural representations. These artists all come from Bahrain but have followed different paths, resulting in different moods being apparent in their work.

**British artist Sacha Jafri's 18 year retrospective is kicking off the artist's worldwide tour at the Fair. The artist is credited with re-introducing the genre of "magical realism" in his work.**

**What is "magical realism"?**

Inspired by magical realist writers and filmmakers (including Marquez, Kafka, Mistry, Gibran, Coelho, Mendez, Kubrick, Burton), Jafri's work uses reality as the starting point from which he explores the transitional dream-world, allowing us to at once escape from and also to reflect upon our inner selves.

**Please tell us more about the educational programmes that will be held during the Fair.**

ArtBahrain Talks will be held on three days throughout the fair, 13 - 15 October 2015 and consist of panel discussions, artist's presentations and smaller workshops.

**How are the programmes (presentations by artists and curators, forums) being developed to address specific interests from artists, collectors and buyers of contemporary art?**

Focusing on the world of collecting art, the talks and workshops range from the starting point of how an artist creates his / her work and the processes involved in its sale either through commercial entities such as auctions or galleries and how it may be acquired whether by private collectors, museums and non-profit institutions. Finally we look at how a collection should be maintained and managed.

**Tell us more about the interactive workshops that are being developed for the Fair.**

These will continue on from the themes of the panel discussions and will give the audience, whether they be new or established collectors, the opportunity to engage with the speakers and gain first hand knowledge from them, in small interactive sessions.

**Describe the "collaborative platform" surrounding the event and how the Bahrain Arts Society will be participating in the Fair.**

As one of the most important and well respected cultural foundations in the Middle East, we are delighted that the Bahrain Arts Society will be participating. They will be bringing twelve artists to the Fair. In addition, the President of the Society has been invited to participate in the ArtBahrain Talks programme and will be hosting a visit to the Society's premises as part of the VIP programme.

**Galleries from the Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the UAE will be present. Any emerging artists in particular that demand a closer look?**

It would be too biased if I were to highlight specific artists as each artist showing, whether they be emerging or established, will be worth looking at. My advice would be to talk to the gallerists and artists about the works they are exhibiting. They will be pleased to give you further details, to explain the meaning of each work and how it fits into the artist's practice.