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Alfred Tarazi Wins The Region's Most Prestigious Art Prize

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Thursday, October 20, 2016



The Sovereign Art Foundation, in association with START, is delighted to announce that Alfred Tarazi of Lebanon has won the very first MENA edition of its coveted Art Prize.

Following 12 successful years of Art Prize events in Asia, most notably Hong Kong, the most prestigious prize in the arts finally arrived in the UAE this year. The Grand Prize winner of the first MENA competition was recognised for his talent and received not only the highly respected title and trophy, but also US\$30,000 in prize money.

Mayasa Al Sowaidi of Bahrain was crowned winner of the Public Vote Prize and awarded a prize of US\$1,000 for her piece Tea Whisper.

LEFT/RIGHT: scheme for a temporary memorial by Alfred Tarazi (Grand Prize Winner 2016)

Alfred impressed the judges with his artwork LEFT/RIGHT: scheme for a temporary memorial - a work on paper mixing digital printing, cyanotype and various inking methods, all contributing to create a blueprint for a memorial dedicated to the victims of the Lebanese Civil War, the sole purpose of which is to bridge the divisions of the war by commemorating all of its victims on the same plot of land.

The main concept of the memorial is to create a physical manifestation of the number of victims (estimated around 250,000) in order to serve as a blank canvas to write the history of the war through the individual stories of those who were killed. Similarly to the history it represents, the work is split in half, each half presented in a separate stainless steel frame. The two frames are however stuck to one another enabling one to see the totality of the work should both frames be activated at once. However, when the boxes are scrolled through separately, depending on where one half of the drawing is positioned in relation to the other, new combinations are created. The artwork echoes the infamous green line that used to separate East Beirut from West Beirut, that division articulating its very structure, with the West being represented on the Left and the East on the Right. The piece dismantles the possibility of a war memorial and dispossesses it from monumental qualities, in the search of a more relational mode of engagement with deep traumatic memory.

Alfred was nominated into the Prize by Emirati national Dyala Nusseibeh. The former Fair Director of Istanbul art fair ArtInternational, Dyala has previously also worked as Head of Education at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

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To determine the Top 30 finalists of the competition, which had the theme 'Hope Takes Flight', an independent board of nominees, made up of over 20 of the region's independent art professionals, including Curators, Art Historians and Arts Writers from the top museums, galleries and universities nominated over 200 mid-career artists to feature in the competition. That talented pool of artists was then whittled down to just 30 finalists, by a panel of world class art professionals. Among them, Tim Marlow from the Royal Academy, Collector Fati Maleki, Alserkal Avenue's Abdelmonem Alserkal and noted curators David Elliot and Simon Njami.

Born in Beirut in 1980, Alfred Tarazi's entire body of work, ranging across painting, photography, drawing, digital collage, sculpture and installation, revolves around complex historical investigations into the ultimate event horizon of the Lebanese Civil War.

Mr Tarazi was delighted to be awarded the Grand Prize, and said:

"I refer to this work as my crazy, beautiful impossible blueprint and that is precisely what it stands for. This 1.5 by 10 meter mixed media on paper depicts the tenuous act of commemorating the dead in a country still living in a state of protracted civil war. It is fuelled by the task of remembrance and the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation. To have this work rewarded in Dubai where I first launched this project ten years ago enforces the belief that I will one day see it through and Lebanon will have a memorial commemorating all those who have been killed in those convulsive cycles of violence."

Howard Bilton, Chairman and Founder of The Sovereign Art Foundation, said of the shortlisted works: "This was our first prize in the Middle East region. Creating the Middle East and North African (MENA) prize was something that was very much in our minds for several years now so we are pleased that we managed to get this away so well. Our judges Tim Marlow, David Elliott, Simon Njami, Fati Maleki and Abdelmonem Bin Eisa Alserkal were all extremely impressed and pleased with the quality of the finalists, as indeed were we. Interestingly 14 of the 30 finalists were women.

The prize builds on the 11 successful prizes we run in the Asia region. And, of course, we hope and expect this will be an annual event from now on, which will grow in strength and importance. We believe that it is an exciting time for art in the MENA region. As in Asia, we hope that we can contribute to the growing success of the talented artists in the region whilst raising money which we will plough back into the art community assisting disadvantaged children in the MENA region."

Tea Whisper by Mayasa Al Sowaidi (Public Vote Prize Winner 2016)

Finalists artworks work were exhibited at Dubai's Warehouse 46, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz for four days from October 13, 2016. The public were given the chance to view all of the finalists' pieces and cast their votes. Mayasa Al Sowaidi, a self-taught artist from the Kingdom of Bahrain, was overjoyed to have received the most votes with her work Tea Whisper, a collage made from tea bags. Just as collage relies on the recycling of used materials, the tea leaves were given another chance at immortality by affixing them to canvas for the viewer to 'taste' in another form - to 'sip' art in a different way.

All of the finalists' artworks, with the exception of the first prize winning entry, were auctioned off on October 19 at the 2016 Sovereign MENA Art Prize, in associated with START, Gala Dinner and Art Auction held at Dubai's luxurious Armani Hotel.

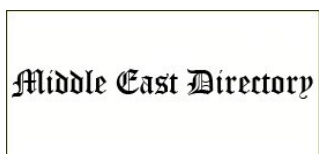
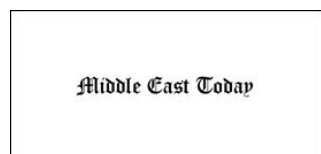
Over 300 guests attended the glamorous event, including prominent members of the art community. The theme of the art prize was carried through the elegant décor and a fabulous bespoke menu created by the Head Chef of the Armani Hotel. Guests also enjoyed entertainment from visual dance act and stars of Britain's Got Talent, Another Kind of Blue.

To date, The Sovereign Art Foundation has raised over US\$5 million for charities and artists worldwide. By presenting the inaugural MENA event in partnership with START - a non-profit organisation which runs art-based workshops for orphans, refugees and special needs children across the MENA region - the Foundation aims to raise funds to sustain existing START projects, in addition to helping in their mission to expand their reach to more vulnerable children.

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