

# The highlights of Abu Dhabi Art 2016

Giant grass and a room filled with rotting bananas are two of the more unusual offerings at this year's Abu Dhabi Art. We look at some of the highlights.

[Anna Seaman](#) November 14, 2016 Updated: November 14, 2016 04:00 AM



Gu Dexin's work consisting of thousands of fresh bananas arranged on the floor. Courtesy Galleria Continua

Giant blades of grass made from galvanised iron, a room full of rotting bananas and a spring-mounted fibreglass donkey bearing a model of a Sufi dervish are just a few of the more peculiar artworks that will go on show when the eighth edition of Abu Dhabi Art opens tomorrow.

The art fair will feature booths from 35 galleries, which means the event is significantly smaller than most regional rivals – three times as many galleries participate in *Art Dubai*, for example. However, the emphasis is

very much on quality, and with several curated sections, there are plenty of memorable artworks to seek out.

The giant grass, for example, is an installation from Salwa Zeidan Gallery, the only Abu Dhabi venue on the roster. Titled *Spaces of Gravity. Grass*, it is the creation of Ukrainian artists Petro Bevza and Oleksiy Lytvynenko.

The donkey sculpture – which is officially titled *Molla Nasreddin, The Antimodern* – is presented by Dubai's The Third Line gallery and is the work of artist collective Slavs and Tatars.

The duo have placed the dervish, or “molla” facing backwards, meaning that anyone who sits on the donkey has to hold its belly instead of its back.

In a tongue-in-cheek artists' statement they say: “The Sufi superhero faces the past but trots into the future on his donkey, like any wise man would and should... [He] offers lessons on time, progress, and history at no extra cost for those looking for a simple ride.”

## **Look beyond the gallery**

Both of these pieces are part of Beyond, a section of the fair dedicated to bringing art to public areas. Under the guidance of curator Fabrice Bousteau, Beyond features 10 large-scale sculptures and installations that will be dotted around Manarat Al Saadiyat. This is a definite plus for audiences looking for something different to see and experience outside of the confines of the gallery booths in the exhibition halls.

## **Born-again art**

Bousteau is also curating an exhibition called *(Re)-Birth*, a group show featuring four thematic strands based on a series of questions about reclaiming past cultures, the reformulation of cultural references by the new generation, and how migration is affecting contemporary art.

The artists include: Faig Ahmed, an Azerbaijani who has taken the tradition of carpet weaving to a fresh and contemporary level; Mona Hatoum, who had a notable retrospective at London's Tate Modern this summer, and whose Palestinian roots inform her work although she is now considered a global artist; and Zeinab Al Hashemi, a rising Emirati talent whose most recent sculpture, *Hexalite*, was the glittering centrepiece during this year's Dubai Design Week.

## **Gate expectations**

*(Re)-Birth* falls under the banner of Gateway, an umbrella term given to all the curated sections of the fair.

Also under this banner is an installation by Gu Dexin, an influential artist from Beijing, whose work consists of thousands of fresh bananas arranged on the floor in a precise rectangle, marked out by urns set on marble pedestals.

During the course of the exhibition, visitors are invited to take a banana, eat it, and throw the skin into one of the urns. Over time, the bright yellow fruit will turn into a mass of rotting organic rubbish.

Gu has achieved global acclaim for his use of perishable materials as a statement about his pessimistic view of humanity. He does not title any of his pieces, which is a reflection of their ephemeral nature.

This presentation is curated by Alexandra Munroe, a prominent curator of Asian art and senior adviser of global arts at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

## **Best of the rest**

Other notable additions at this year's fair include *Majlis Fann*, which takes the form of a cultural salon.

Talks and panel discussions, for which the fair has built a strong reputation, will fall into this section, as will several more intimate artist conversations that have been curated by Reem Fadda, the associate curator, Middle Eastern art, for the Abu Dhabi Project of Solomon R Guggenheim.

Also on the agenda is a robust street-art programme, as part of which local and international artists will paint on shipping containers at locations across the city.

American artist Cleon Peterson will be stationed At Warehouse 421 in Mina Zayed, while at the fair's base on Saadiyat Island, several artists – including Anpu Varkey, a Delhi-based painter – will render their works live.

On the Corniche, meanwhile, Dubai-based artists Sya & Bow will show their spray-painted works.

Performance art has played a key role in Abu Dhabi Art for the past four years and this time is no different, as the Durub Al Tawaya programme, curated by Tarek Abou El Fetouh, will present a series of live performances.

Italian artist Anna Rispoli will take audiences on a boat trip each evening along the city's waterfront, where they will see a light show.

Musician Raed Yassin will perform an acoustic concert with traditional Emirati musicians. Yassin, who also has a solo exhibition at Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde in Dubai, has collaborated with The Youth Group for Lewah Art from Al Ain for the performance, which will take place on the Abu Dhabi Corniche.

- Abu Dhabi Art runs from tomorrow until Saturday at Manarat Al Saadiyat and across the city

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