

Art Dubai was online only this year, and there were 53,520 visits

The annual art event developed its online catalogue and programmes after the coronavirus pandemic rendered a physical fair impossible



Hassan Hajjaj, 'Le Tour de Maroc'. Courtesy The Third Line and Art Dubai



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After turning its annual art fair into an entirely digital affair due to the coronavirus pandemic, Art Dubai says it received 53,520 unique page views on its website during its digital programming, which ran from March 23 to 28 (the same days the physical fair would have run).

According to fair organisers, the online catalogue, which features 500 works from more than 70 galleries, was the most visited page, with 12,441 page views, followed by the homepage with 6,360 page views.

Earlier this month, the 14th edition of the physical fair was cancelled, as a result, fair organisers swiftly put together an online alternative that would allow participating galleries to showcase artworks for sale.

The online catalogue presents works that the galleries had intended to show during the fair, along with additional works from their roster. Among the participants, Galerie Kornfeld from Berlin received the most views, showcasing works by Tammam Azzam, Farshad Farzankia, and Nick Dawes.

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Following in the ranking was Addis Fine Art, which has locations in Addis and London, and Dubai's The Third Line. The former features figurative paintings by Tesfaye Urgessa and sculptural works by Adiskidan Ambaye, while the latter boasts Hassan Hajjaj's colourful mixed media portraits of musicians such as Yasiin Bey.

Rakeb Sile, founder and managing director of Addis Fine Art, says that the online alternative was able to bring some interest to the gallery. "I must say, responses we got in terms of enquiries were very good. We did manage to close a couple of sales which was above our

expectations for the online-only situation, but of course well below the target we had for Art Dubai, if we had physically exhibited," she says, adding that the artists Tadesse Mesfine and Addis Gezahegn received the most attention.

For Meem Gallery founder Charles Pocock, the differences between the virtual and physical fairs are stark. "Clearly, an online catalogue does not replace the fair... Just as going to *Harrods.com* is not the same as visiting Harrods in Knightsbridge," he says.

Another key contrast, according to Pocock, is how visitors and collectors engage with newer or lesser known artworks. "[Collectors] are not being given the chance to discover new works by new artists as this needs to be seen in the flesh, so to speak. They are focusing on what they know, which is understandable."

The gallery's online selection features modernist names from the Arab world. "We have had 14 strong enquiries for the works of Dia Azzawi, Kamal Boullata, Marwan and Etel Adnan, however no actual sales, which is understandable, but not ideal."



An untitled work by Marwan. Courtesy Meem Gallery and Art Dubai

Nevertheless, Pocock acknowledges the challenge faced by fair organisers amid the circumstances. "The turnaround of such a solution by Art Dubai is impressive and they are doing all they can to support their clients – both the exhibitors and the audience that would have attended the fair. I really do believe they are doing all they can in a nearly impossible situation," he says. "This is the only solution, and it is being done fairly and all are being treated equally, which is how it should be."

The online catalogue will be accessible to the public for the next few months.

The annual Global Art Forum, led by commissioner, author and curator Shumon Basar, had 2,198 page views on its website. To replace the panel of discussions, the organisers put together a 'Newshour Special', or a livestream of Basar speaking to artists and curators. On Facebook, the livestream received 60,000 views and achieved a reach of 162,000 across all of Art Dubai's online channels.

Art Dubai's performance programme, curated by Marina Fokidis, has also been reformatted for the screen and features video works by artists Angelo Plessas, Bahar Noorizadeh, Imaad Majeed, Tabita Rezaire and Tiago Sant'Ana.

The programme's online page received 1,135 page views from March 23 to 28.

The next Art Dubai will take place in March 2021.

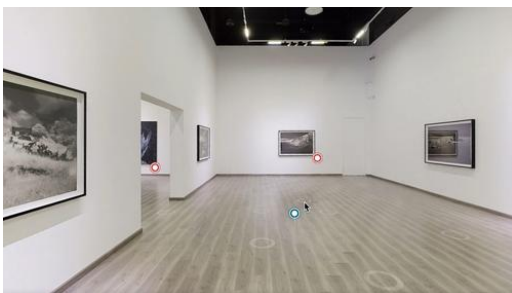
To view the online catalogue, performance programme and recording of the Global Art Forum livestream, visit artdubai.ae

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