



Jeffar Khaldi's The Infinite and Beyond. Courtesy The Auction Room

## Middle East art comes home: London auction house's online sale dominated by local buyers

Ben East

October 5, 2014 Updated: October 5, 2014 05:23 PM



### Related

It may not have had the high theatre of an auctioneer's gavel signalling a record-breaking sale to an excited throng of art lovers, but when bidding closed on London-based The Auction Room's online Middle Eastern Contemporary Art sale last Wednesday, the ripples were felt across the art world.

It wasn't the prices that works by the likes of the Iraqi artists Hayv Kahraman or Dia Azzawi went for that created a buzz – The Auction Room doesn't reveal its results, for reasons we shall discover.

Much more interesting were the people buying the work. For, after years in which faceless western collectors snapped up Middle Eastern art for investment purposes, the majority of the activity in this auction was from the Arab world.

"And that's so encouraging," says Janet Rady, the curator of the auction and

The hunt is on for modern Middle East art

Middle Eastern art help bridge gap between region and the West at Sotheby's auction

Dubai auction expects

to break records, as sales of Middle East work attract more collectors

How do you put a price on Middle East art?

Tracking the auction evolution online with Barnebys

Topics: [Artists](#)

a specialist in contemporary art from the Middle East.

"Arab people are getting excited about art from their part of the world and we're finding that it's not just for investment purposes, but because they love the work and want to put it on their walls. It's for the right reasons and that's really pleasing."

Headline news was the sale of Hayv Kahraman's oil painting *Flaying the Lamb*, which went, says Rady, for more than a work from the same series at Sotheby's Contemporary Art auction in Doha last year. That created headlines at the time by going for double its list price of US\$60,000 (Dh220,377) – so why doesn't The Auction Room celebrate its big sellers in the same way, by revealing the selling prices?

"We find that buyers and sellers don't necessarily want people to know the price tag," explains Rady. "Galleries don't publish their results when they sell a work, so why should auction houses? Really, it's only the press that get worked up about publishing the results. We're just happy that it indicates the market for Kahraman's work is incredibly strong. She's a fantastic artist, it's as simple as that."

Kahraman, who is represented by The Third Line gallery in Dubai, is in many ways the success of the contemporary Middle Eastern art scene in microcosm. Technically beautiful, her work can be read on many political, feminist, social and religious levels. Shortlisted for the Jameel Prize in 2011, *Flaying the Lamb* was also in Saatchi Gallery's critically acclaimed *Unveiled* exhibition – as was work from many other artists in the auction, including the Dubai residents Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh. Five years on, it's tempting to suggest that Saatchi's survey, subtitled *New Art from the Middle East*, was a turning point.

"The Saatchi exhibition was very carefully curated," agrees Rady. "Almost all the artists have gone on to do very well, because they got that reputation from *Unveiled*. Who knows? The exhibition *Here and Elsewhere* that's just finished at New York's New Museum, may have the same impact in years to come. Big group exhibitions are still really important to the development of Middle Eastern art."

Rady mirrored that same sense of careful curation for the auction. It's not, she says, about being a clearing house for "stuff" that's for sale, but choosing works that are impactful, accessible and have a strong message.

"It's why we had 42 lots when we could have had more than 80," she says. "But I think with Arab artists in particular, it's important to celebrate what they're really good at."

"Time and time again, the artists tell me they are storytellers and they have passions they want to express in art. Growing up in a war-torn country or living with restrictions about what they can do – it's what makes their work very powerful."

So the auction struck an encouraging note for the future of contemporary Middle Eastern art. Rady is cautiously pleased by how the market is maturing into 2015.

"I would say there possibly isn't as much interest from the West as there was two or three years ago, but that's fine," she says.

"You have contemporary art in Dubai from the diaspora artists such as Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh. There are young Arab street artists, political artists, Arab modern artists, and the Middle Eastern collectors themselves are really focusing on modern and contemporary works.

"The market is layering – and then you get someone like Hassan Hajjaj, who is really taking off, doing extraordinary work."

Or the "Andy Warhol of Marrakech", as he's been dubbed.

One thing's for sure, Middle Eastern artists are now enjoying much more than 15 minutes of fame.

• [www.theauctionroom.com](http://www.theauctionroom.com)

• [www.janetradyfineart.com](http://www.janetradyfineart.com)

[artslife@thenational.ae](mailto:artslife@thenational.ae)



[Add your comment](#) | [View all comments](#)

## Related



The hunt is on for modern Middle East art



Middle Eastern art help bridge gap between region and the West at Sotheby's auction



Dubai auction expects to break records, as sales of Middle East work attract more collectors

How do you put a price on Middle East art?

## More Art

### MOST VIEWED

[ARTS & LIFE](#) | [ALL](#)

1. Shah Rukh Khan fumes over Ramez Galal's Ramadan TV prank

2. 2017 Uefa Champions League Final: