

CULTURE & LIFESTYLE

## MENArt Fair 2024 Shines a Light on the Female Gaze From the Arab World

Women are calling the shots in the MENA art scene and the female creatives presented at this Paris exhibition offer a window to the rich cultural fabric of the region

By Maghie Ghali  
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MENArt Fair is back for its 5<sup>th</sup> edition in Paris this week, with a special edition focused solely on female artists and designers from the MENA region, spotlighting the legacy of pioneering modern artists and new works of contemporary and emerging female creators.

Running from 20-22 September at Galerie Joseph Saint Merri – a vast space in the charming Le Marais district, and formerly home to the Musée Pierre Cardin – the fair has gathered 29 galleries from 12 countries; all celebrating the creativity and resilience of female artists and designers, tackling everything from social issues and disappearing heritage, to the effects of war on the region and gender inequality. Here are AD's must-see showcases at 2024 MENArt Fair Paris.

## Microcosmic Table by Xena Kalouti



Xena Kalouti, Microcosmic console, 2023, recycled and solid wood, mother of pearl, wooden mosaic, brass, mirror, glass, 100x33x85cm. Image courtesy of the artist



Xena Kalouti, Microcosmic table, 2023, recycled and solid wood, mother of pearl, wooden mosaic, brass, mirror, glass, 110x120x48cm. Image courtesy of the artist

Jordanian designer Xena Kalouti's interests include exploring the aesthetic and structural potentials of different materials. With a particular focus on reviving local heritage, she has engaged in hands-on crafting, using material fusions to invoke the past. Her 'Microcosmic Table' is made from recycled and solid wood, mother of pearl, wooden mosaic, brass, mirror and glass, taking the materials found in traditional regional craft, and using them to create a modern, almost minimalist coffee table. The different materials form concentric, organically-shaped circles embedded in a clear glass top, with a detailed wooden mosaic base. [@xenakalouti](https://www.instagram.com/xenakalouti)

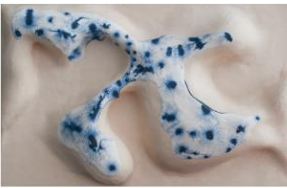


## The Shape of Water series by Zineb Mezzour

Myriem Himmich Gallery



Zineb Mezzour, Shape 2, from the series The Shape of Water, 2023, mural work in chamotte and porcelaine, 36x67x8cm. Photo: MYRIEM HIMMICH / Image courtesy of the artist



Zineb Mezzour, Shape 1, from the series The Shape of Water, 2023, mural work in chamotte and porcelaine, 36,5x23x5cm. Photo: MYRIEM HIMMICH / Image courtesy of the artist

Zineb Mezzour is a Swiss-Moroccan painter, ceramist, photographer and poet based in Marseille. She explores the creativity of nature in all its aspects, working with paper, ink, chamotte stoneware and porcelain. Her influences come from the work of Benoit Mandelbrot on fractals, and Theodor Schwenk and Zulma Carraud on the form and journey of water. Her recent series 'The Shape of Water' is a collection of rough square chamotte stoneware tiles with mountain-like rises and falls,

with splashes of azure glaze flowing over patches – recreating the natural way water moves over a landscape. [@zinebmezzour](https://www.instagram.com/zinebmezzour)



Zineb Mezzour, Square2, from the series The Shape of Water, 2023, mural work in chamotte and porcelaine, 20x20x5cm. Image courtesy of the artist



Zineb Mezzour, Shape 3, from the series The Shape of Water, 2023, mural work in chamotte and porcelaine, 62x62x7cm. Photo: MYRIEM HIMMICH / Image courtesy of the artist

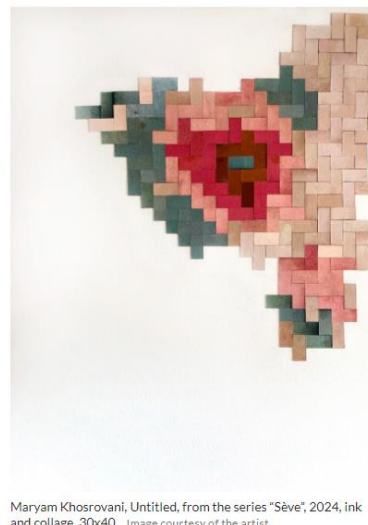


## The Seve series by Maryam Khosrovani

Galerie Écho 119



Maryam Khosrovani, Untitled, from the series *Sève*, 2024, ink and collage, 30x40cm. Image courtesy of the artist



Maryam Khosrovani, Untitled, from the series *Sève*, 2024, ink and collage, 30x40. Image courtesy of the artist

Born in Tehran in 1981, Maryam Khosrovani is an Iranian conceptual artist, graphic designer and teacher currently living and working between Paris and New York. Farideh Lashai was her first major artistic influence and her work is focused on research-based projects representing contemporary social issues. Her eye-catching 'Seve' series is made from a collage of paper strips dyed in pastel inks, woven together to create large pixelated images of botanical-style renditions of plants and flowers. [@khosrovanimaryam](https://www.instagram.com/khosrovanimaryam)

## Rej3a Ya Mama series by Katya Traboulsi

Comptoir des Mines Galerie



Katya Traboulsi, *Rejaa ya mama (Maman, je reviens)*, 2023, wall installation, hand painted iron, 160x120cm. Image courtesy of the artist

Lebanese multimedia artist Katya Traboulsi has developed a body of work forged by her experiences of the 1975-1990 Civil War. Known for her vibrant and beautiful sculptural installations, often at odds with the serious subject matter, her artwork can be seen as a form of artistic activism, exploring topics sometimes overlooked. Her 'Rej3a Ya Mama' (I'm coming back mum) series recreates the colourfully decorated truck facades – often covered in words and symbols of blessings and wardings against harm, like the protective blue eye symbol – that can be seen driving up and down the country. Through the theme of travel and migration, the work also looks at the countless young people forced to leave during the war, hoping to return to their families and homeland one day. [@katyatraboulsi](https://www.instagram.com/katyatraboulsi)



Katya Traboulsi, Malikeh, 2023, wall installation, hand painted iron, 140x160cm. Image courtesy of the artist



## *I Reminisce in Colour* by Salmah Almansoori

Firetti Contemporary



Salmah Almansoori, *I reminisce in colours*, (1), 2024, watercolour on paper 38x56cm. Image courtesy of the artist



Salmah Almansoori, *I reminisce in colours*, (2), 2024, watercolour on paper 38x56cm. Image courtesy of the artist

Emirati multidisciplinary artist Salmah Almansoori's practice delves into the intersections of place and memory, with a focus on the concept that a place isn't just a geographical place, but an amalgamation of thoughts, emotions, and memories. For her, a place can either connect us more deeply to our roots or lead us to question our identity. Her work 'I Reminisce in Colours' delves into the diverse landscapes of her hometown Ghayathi, from the expansive desert to the evolving urban environment, capturing the essence of the city that has shaped her identity. Inspired by her experiences of moving to Abu Dhabi and embarking on weekly round trips, she began to view Ghayathi from an outsider's perspective, sparking her curiosity about the origins of the city's name and its significance. Her paintings are part of this rediscovery. [@visualsalmah](https://www.instagram.com/visualsalmah)



Salmah Almansoori, Who I became Within these walls, photo transfer on tiles, installation. Image courtesy of the artist

## Leave Me Alone and No One's Ok by Sama Beydoun

Shams Collective



Born and raised in Beirut, Sama Beydoun is a multi-disciplinary artist, currently based in Paris. Her practice spans graphic design, photography, typography and painting as means of expression. Her inspiration is drawn from the streets and its people, gravitating around topics related to visual culture, social causes and collective narratives. Her project Beirut Street Museum was the recipient of various international awards and continues today as an ongoing research and project. Both these artworks are graphic printed inspirational posters, similar to a street advertorial, but with a more introverted request to be left in peace, juxtaposed with the bright, graffiti-style flowers and lettering of the piece. Her work contrasts the internal chaos and sorrow over the state of the world around her with beautiful imagery, as a form resistance. [@sama.beirut](https://www.instagram.com/sama.beirut)

**Article 46, Pillars by Nazgol Ansarinia**

FAMM



Nazgol Ansarinia, Article 46, Pillars, 2014, Cast resin & paint, 62x32x32cm. Photo: Nadine Khoury / Image courtesy of the artist



Iranian artist Nazgol Ansarinia is known for exploring the systems and networks that underpin her life, dissecting and interrogating objects and events to tease out their relationship with contemporary Iranian society. Her work has been shown at venues such as the British Museum and Sharjah Biennale; she uses a variety of media including video, photography, installation and drawing. Her sculpture 'Article 46, Pillars' is inspired by the post-1979 Iranian revolution and the reconstruction period after, which saw a wave of new buildings that emulated the architectural styles of ancient Persia. Her Pillars series takes the form of these ancient columns but, cross-sectioned to reveal economic articles from the Iranian Constitution at their hearts. [@nargolanarinia](#)

## *Special Worlds* by Sabah Naim

Mashrabia Gallery of Contemporary Art



Sabah Naim, *Special worlds*, 2021, knit/wear, 290x300cm. Image courtesy of the artist.

Egyptian artist Sabah Naim's work is characterised by a unique perspective that challenges traditional norms, spanning from the reworking of images to embroidery. Showcased in numerous exhibitions both in Egypt and internationally, Sabah Naim's diverse body of work has been exhibited in prestigious institutions and has become part of the permanent collections of esteemed institutions, such as the British Museum in London and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art in Cairo. 'Special Worlds' is a massive woven tapestry in red and black with a central beige and blue sphere. The striking piece is her attempt to reconcile contemporary art with traditional creation. [@sabah.naim](#)

## Shuhud by Cynthia Zahar

ZAAT



Cynthia Zahar, Shuhud, 2023, book, picture, map, acrylic, cardboard, fabric, paper, 45x70cm. Image courtesy of the artist



Cynthia Zahar is a multi-disciplinary artist, set designer and interior architect who grew up in Lebanon, with a ten-year stint in France before returning to her homeland. Her first creations recycled objects from Beirut destroyed by the civil war, and her practices took off again when she started working as a film set designer. Her career in set design led her to own an extensive collection of objects, dealing with memory and identity, often found at antique flea markets. Her 'Shuhud' series, meaning "Witness," is a series of 3D artwork installations made from layers of found objects, antique photos, packaging, ID documents and scraps of fabric and carpet – all stacked together as a testament of collective memory, the various parts of a person's identity and the precious belongings taken by refugees and the displaced when they leave. [@zaharcynthia](#)



Cynthia Zahar, *Shuhud*, 2023, book, paper, acrylic, Chinese ink, carpet, wood and metal hanger, 54,5x36,5cm (image courtesy of the artist)