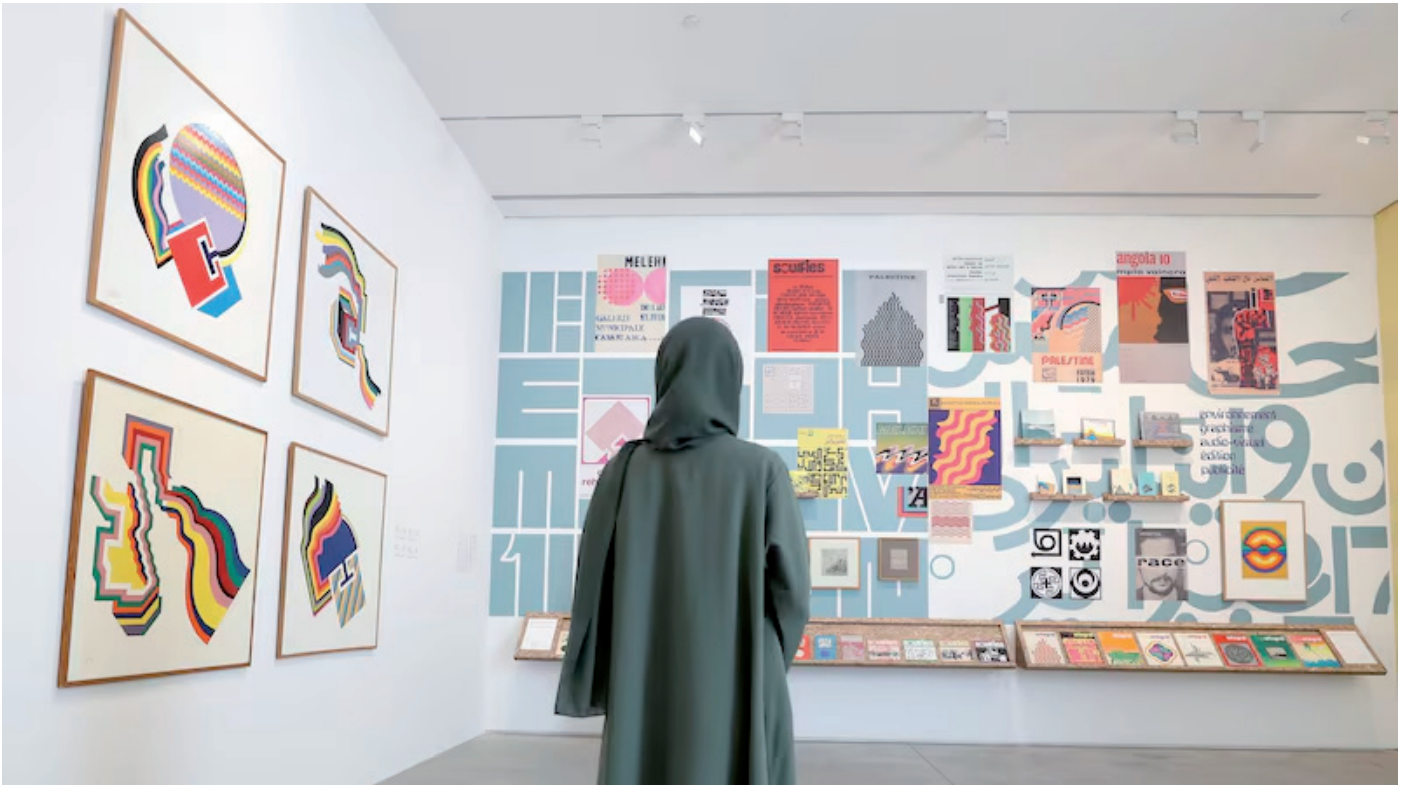


2024 in review: Nine of the best Arab art exhibitions around the world

From a resolute display of Palestinian art in Venice to a show exploring the evolution of abstract art in the UAE



The Casablanca Art School: Platforms and Patterns for a Postcolonial Avant-Garde ran between February 24 and June 16 at the Sharjah Art Foundation. Chris Whiteoak / The National



Razmig Bedirian
December 27, 2024

Art from the Arab world has been gaining significant international attention in recent years. However, 2024 has been particularly a strong year for Arab art with several landmark exhibitions.

From a resolute display of Palestinian art in Venice that made a statement against the scant representation of Palestinian artists in the city's biennale to a reflection on displacement in a Roman-era villa in France's Loupian, here is a look at nine of this year's best exhibitions of Arab Art.

Prints & Printmaking at the Dalloul Art Foundation in Beirut

Prints & Printmaking is one of the most unique and comprehensive exhibitions of its kind to take place in the region. It presents hundreds of fine art prints by some of the best-known Arab artists, including Samia Halaby, Marwan and Farid Belkhaia.



99 Heads (Ibn Arabi) by Marwan Kassab-Bachi, 1997-1998.
Photo: Dalloul Art Foundation

The star of the show, however, is paper – a medium that has long been underappreciated by collectors and institutions alike. The exhibition opened on September 5, and though the foundation closed to the public for security reasons due to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, it was still accessible virtually through the institution’s website. It is now running at the Dalloul Art Foundation until February 12.

Menart Fair at Galerie Joseph in Paris



Worn embroidered shoes from The Soleless Series by Aya Haidar.
Photo: Menart Fair

This year's [Menart Fair](#) in Paris was significant in the way it solely focused on female Arab creatives. The fair took place in September at Galerie Joseph, bringing together artists and designers from across the Arab world. Curated sections were dedicated to emerging talents, special research-based projects and artists known for their cause-driven work or academic background.

One highlight from the fair included a beautiful yet tragic series of works by Lebanese artist Aya Haidar, titled The Soleless Series. It featured several canvas and rubber shoes that had fallen apart, decorated with intricate embroidery. The series, as well as the shoes, reflect on stories of displacement and forced migration by Syrian communities across Europe.

Hudood: Rethinking Boundaries at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London

Hudood: Rethinking Boundaries was the Barjeel Art Foundation's first exhibition of contemporary art, running at London's School of Oriental and African Studies (Soas) from July 1 to September 21.

The exhibition presented more than 40 works by Arab artists that were produced from 1990 onwards. These include a number of notable names, including Mona Hatoum, Hayv Kahraman, Larissa Sansour, Ahmed Mater, Manal Al Dowayan and Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim.

Interestingly, the exhibition was curated by Soas students. After weeks of readings, classroom discussions and guest lectures, the students pored through the Barjeel Art Foundation's collection of contemporary artworks. The exhibition was a way to apply what they had learnt during the workshop. Highlights included Bashar Alhroub's Here and Now 2, which examines the tensions of being a Palestinian who has moved abroad; Concrete Block II by Saudi artist Abdalnasser Gharem; Die Wahrheit Ist Konkret (The Truth is Concrete) by Egyptian artist Ganzeer and Infinity by Hatoum.

Lens & Light: Moments in Focus at Ayyam Gallery in Dubai



Maximum Alert and La Strada from Lost Images 2 Series by Ammar al-Beik.
Photo: Ayyam Gallery

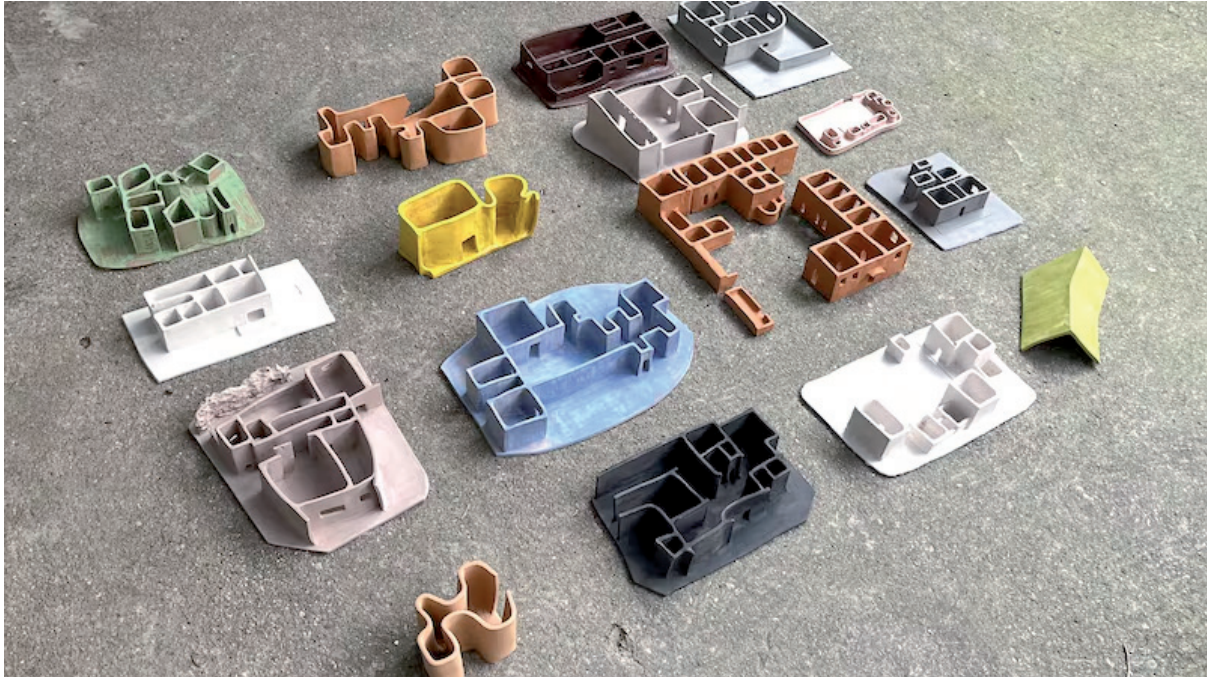
Arab artists from across the region showcased their varying styles through the medium of photography in Lens & Light: Moments in Focus, which ran at Ayyam Gallery between July 10 and August 31.

The exhibition featured the works of Syrian filmmaker Ammar al-Beik; Iraqi conceptual artist Sama Alshaibi; French-Syrian journalist and photographer Ammar Abd Rabbo; Syrian artist Tammam Azzam;

Saudi artist Huda Beydoun, Iranian contemporary photographer and visual artist Majid Koorang Beheshti, Palestinian photographer Rula Halawani; Saudi artist Faisal Samra and Syrian photographer and visual artist Nassouh Zaghloleh.

Large-scale, mostly black-and-white photographs are thoughtfully arranged in the two spaces of the gallery at Alserkal Avenue. The curation underscored the play between light and shadow, alongside arresting, delicately composed narratives and surreal photo-manipulated scenes. The works spanned various styles and subjects, but there was a commonality in the way they explored existential themes connected to identity.

Floating Homes at the Musee Gallo-Romain Villa Loupian



With transcribed interviews and models crafted out of clay and soap, Floating Homes detail stories of displacement dating back to the early 20th century. Photo: Sammy Zarka

Floating Homes ran between June and October at the Musee Gallo-Romain Villa Loupian in France. In the exhibition, Syrian architect Sammy Zarka examined how displaced persons carry within them vestiges of the homes they left behind, and how this influences the ways they adapt to and rebuild in their new surroundings.

The exhibition does so using model homes, crafted from clay and soap, following interviews with the Syrian community in Loupian, transcribing their stories of displacement that date back to the early 20th century.

The model homes were displayed across the archeological site of the Roman-era farm villa. One of the works, Disturbed Maps, featured 15 hand-drawn maps stacked on top of each other. The work is not displayed at the Gallo-Romain Villa, but rather on the exterior wall of Espace o25rjj, the residency in Loupian where Zarka developed the project.

The Casablanca Art School: Platforms and Patterns for a Postcolonial Avant-Garde at the Sharjah Art Foundation

This exhibition by Sharjah Art Foundation delved into the significance and impact of the Casablanca Art School, charting its development from 1962 and 1987.

The Casablanca Art School: Platforms and Patterns for a Postcolonial Avant-Garde ran between February 24 and June 16 at the foundation's Al Hamriyah Studios and Old Al Diwan Al Amiri.



Mohamed Melehi's Vintage Prints: Documenting Modernity.
Chris Whiteoak / The National

The exhibition was considered one of the first proper surveys of the school and its legacy. It first opened in 2023 at Tate St Ives, before travelling to Sharjah. The show featured the works of several artists associated with the school, including Belkahia, Mohammed Chabaa and Mohamed Melehi.

Foreigners in their Homeland: Occupation, Apartheid, Genocide at the Palazzo Mora in Venice



Samia Halaby, Massacre of the Innocents in Gaza, 2024.
Photo: Palestine Museum US

Foreigners in their Homeland, an exhibition by Palestine Museum US, took place in Venice between April 20 and November 24. It shared the same opening and closing dates as the city's biennial.

The exhibition was important, especially as it ran despite a rejected proposal by the Venice Biennale and in the face of the event's scant representation of Palestinian artists. It brought together the works of 26

Palestinian artists, both from within Palestine as well as its diaspora. It explored more than a century's worth of culture and history at a time when the Palestinian experience is especially marked by heartbreak.

Highlights included a new painting by Halaby titled *Massacre of the Innocents in Gaza*, as well as *I'm still Alive* by Maisara Baroud, both of which brought attention to the continuing war in Gaza.

Hour Eternal: 20 Years of Emirati Abstraction at the Bassam Freiha Art Foundation in Abu Dhabi



Sculpture by Noor Al Suwaidi on display at the Bassam Freiha Art Foundation in Abu Dhabi. Pawan Singh / The National

Hour Eternal opened at the Bassam Freiha Art Foundation on October 13 and will run until February 15. The exhibition explores the evolution of abstract art in the UAE over the past 20 years. It brings together works by 14 Emirati artists, each of whom has delved into abstraction in an idiosyncratic way, evoking emotions and concepts that can be difficult to express in figurative terms. These include Hassan Sharif, his brother Hussein Sharif, as well as Abdullah Al Saadi, Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim, plus Noor Al Suwaidi, Najat Makki, Shaikha Al Mazrou and Abdul Qader Al Rais.

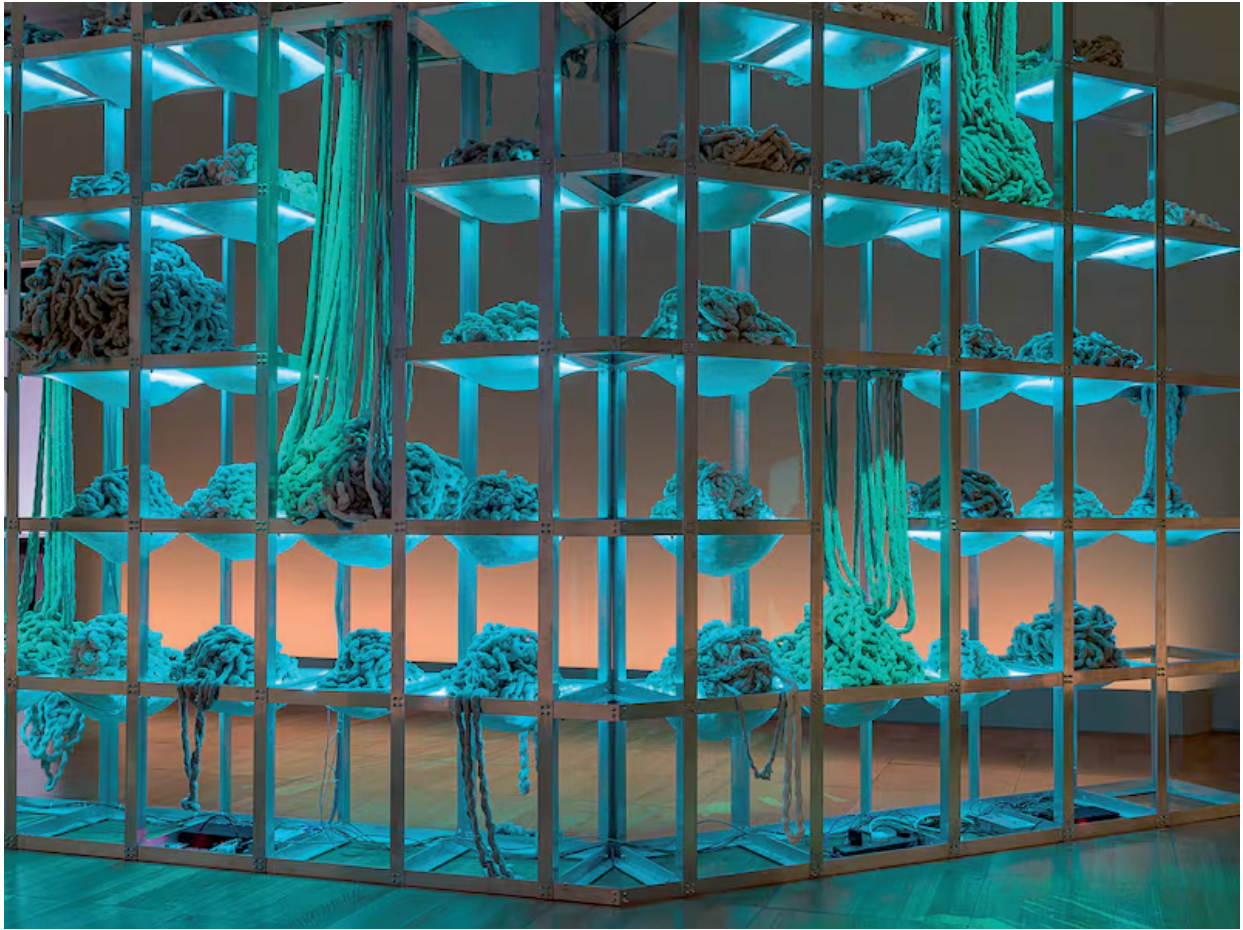
The works come from a number of varying collections and sources, including the UAE Ministry of Culture. Several works have also been lent out by the artists themselves.

Between the Tides: A Gulf Quinquennial at the NYUAD Art Gallery

Between the Tides reflects upon the changes in the art scene in the Gulf since 2019. The exhibition features 21 artists, architects and collectives from the region, showcasing the breadth of the region's artistic output.

Those exhibiting include Alia Ahmad, Abdulrahim Alkendi, Mohammad AlFaraj, Noor Al-Fayez, Afra Al Dhaheri, Mohamed Almubarak, Vikram Divecha, Faissal El-Malak, Hazem Harb, Aziz Motawa, Sophia Al Maria, Mariam M Alnoaimi, Christopher Joshua Benton, Sarah Brahim and Ayman Zedani, among others.

The exhibition is set to recur every five years, reflecting on significant artistic moments in the Gulf. Between the Tides opened at the NYUAD Art Gallery on October 1, and will be running until April 20.



Afra Al Dhaheri's *Collective Exhaustion* at the NYUAD Art Gallery.
Photo: NYUAD Art Gallery

Updated: December 27, 2024, 3:53 PM