

Laure d'Hauteville, Founder and Director of MENART Fair

[MENA News](#)

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Ahead of the 6th edition of the MENART Fair in Paris, the art fair devoted to art from the Middle East and North Africa, TLmag spoke with the fair's founder, Laure d'Hauteville, about her 30+-year career that has been devoted to supporting and promoting art and artists from the region.

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Text by [Blaire Dessent](#)

When she was 12 years old, Laure d'Hauteville visited the Louvre with her grandmother to see an exhibition about Egyptian Art. She was transfixed by the art she saw, not knowing at the time that the exhibition would "shape my destiny," as d'Hauteville explains. Later, in her early 20s, working at a gallery in Paris focused on mid-century art, she left with her then husband to move to Beirut, in 1991, for what was to be a 6-month stay. She stayed for thirty-years. It was in Beirut that she decided to specialize in art from the MENA countries, which includes the Middle East and North Africa, leading

to an extensive career that has included travelling throughout the whole region, from Syria (since 1995) to visit artist studios, as well as Jordan, Egypt, and UAE to the first Sharjah biennale in 1993. "Middle Eastern art is extraordinarily rich and diverse. It spans vast historical and geographical periods and is expressed through a wide range of forms and techniques," says d'Hauteville. "From monumental sculpture to delicate miniatures, from decorated ceramics to shimmering textiles, each era and region developed its own unique style. I found it all incredibly complete. Later, I gravitated toward contemporary art, which felt closer

to my own world."

While historically there had been biennials, art schools and museums devoted to modern & contemporary art, notably in Iran, Sharjah, Morocco and Egypt, there was not yet a concentrated art fair that brought the work into the art market. D'Hauteville launched the first modern and contemporary art fair in Beirut in 1998, calling it Artuel. She was met with a lot of resistance and ignorance, something she has come up against frequently in her career: sceptical observers unaware of the region's cultural

history and the extensive network of artists working across all mediums and in dozens of countries. Artuel ran until 2005, when the country experienced upheaval in the wake of the assassination of Rafic Hariri. In 2007 and 2008, she partnered with Art Paris Art Fair to launch Art Paris Abu Dhabi, now called the Abu Dhabi Art Fair which was a success, but in 2009, she brought her ideas back to Beirut, re-launching as the Beirut Art Fair, in 2010, and then, in 2014, she launched the Singapore Art Fair. "I wanted to create a new concept around Middle Eastern, North African, and South and Southeast Asian art – to create a better

understanding of the artists from these regions, which sit between the East and West and along the Silk Road," she explains. In 2020, between Covid, the port bombing and outbreaks of war, d'Hauteville put the Beirut Art Fair on hold (for now) and returned to Paris. "But," she says, "I didn't want to stop 30 years of research and work," and this led her to launch [MENART Fair](#) in 2021, in Paris.

The boutique art fair has emerged as an important voice in Paris's growing art fair circuit. This year, the 6th edition will coincide with Art

Basel/Paris, that will bring in an even bigger audience. The theme of the fair this year is an 'Ode to Softness', which follows the 2024 theme about women, that featured 100% female artists. "People thought I was crazy," she laughs, "and it's true. It was a big challenge, but I wanted to make a statement, without being political, to show the incredible talent of female artists from the region, to break any lingering stereotypes. And it was a success, including representatives from 62 museums and cultural institutions coming to see the fair." 'Ode to Softness' is a very interesting concept to convey in this moment

that is saturated by violence, war, and political divide. But the term is deeper than being a contrast to the times. "It's about subtlety, strength and the mystery that encapsulates the word, and it is about giving a space where we can think, speak and be empathetic," she states. The fair will feature 53% female artists from 40 galleries, 18 countries, 110 artists from 16 different nationalities. In addition to the fair, MENART includes MENART Friends, a non-profit side that helps finance artistic production, support residencies and serves as a platform to highlight art and artists.

The art market epicentre has shifted multiple times throughout the past century – from Paris in the early 20th century to New York in the latter half of the century to China in the early 21st century and, one could now easily say to the Middle East and North Africa. With the regular exhibitions, museum openings and cultural events happening throughout Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, including the upcoming Art Basel/Qatar in 2026, as well as in Morocco, Turkey and elsewhere, it can be said that the art tides have shifted – or perhaps, that the art world has finally caught up with what d'Hauteville has been saying for more than thirty-years.

MENART Fair runs from October 25-27, 2025

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