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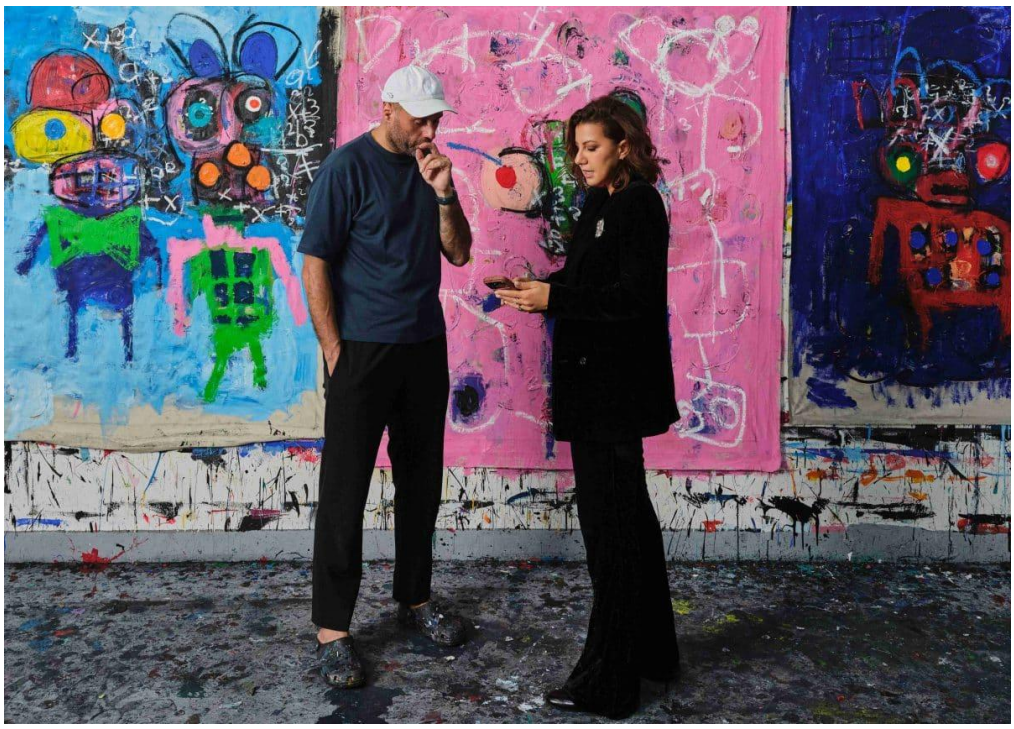
The Nuance of Home at MENART Paris

Two artists explore the idea of belonging through calligraphy and mathematics, presented within Amal Rakibi's imagined home of a collector.



This year's MENART Paris theme asks a single, but not simple, question: where is home? For most people, there's a complex answer. It might be a geographical place; a city, a house, a border crossed once and never returned to. It might be a person; a soul mate or a child. Or it might be a memory; a smell, a flash of nostalgia. For Amal Rakibi, founder of Amal Rakibi Gallery, it's a question that sparks multiple responses, explorations and, ultimately, great art.

Rather than hanging art in a conventional white cube for the fair, Rakibi's curatorial approach is recreating the home of an imaginary collector, layered with the kind of furniture, books and objects that make a space feel authentically lived in. "I've always believed that art changes when you live with it," she says. "In a traditional gallery booth, you look at an artwork almost in isolation. I wanted to remove that distance and create a space that feels inhabited, a home rather than a display." As a Moroccan, based in Dubai, Rakibi is fascinated with presenting artists whose home is experienced in different ways, reconstructed through culture, memory and the environments we create around ourselves.

Rakibi brings together Taher Jaoui and Kamyar Bineshtarigh, two artists with distinctly different ways of exploring the theme. "I wasn't looking for artists whose works matched visually," Rakibi says. "I was looking for different voices that could coexist and create a conversation."

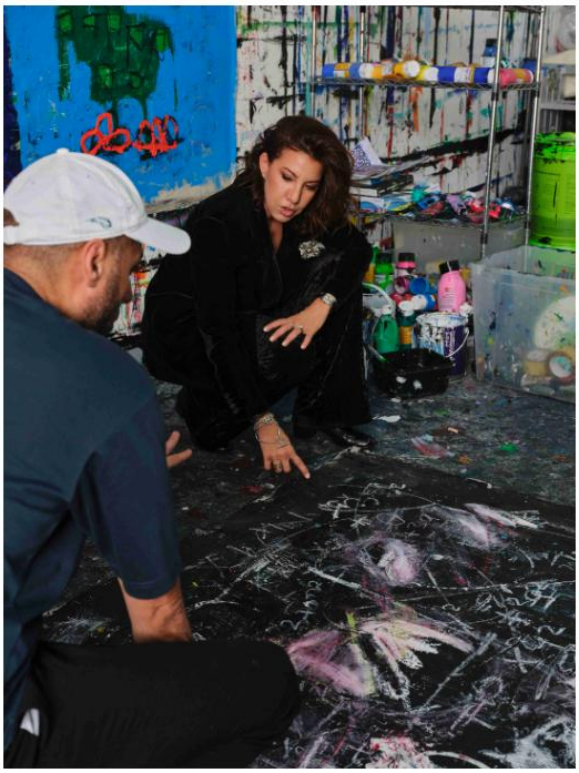
Taher Jaoui

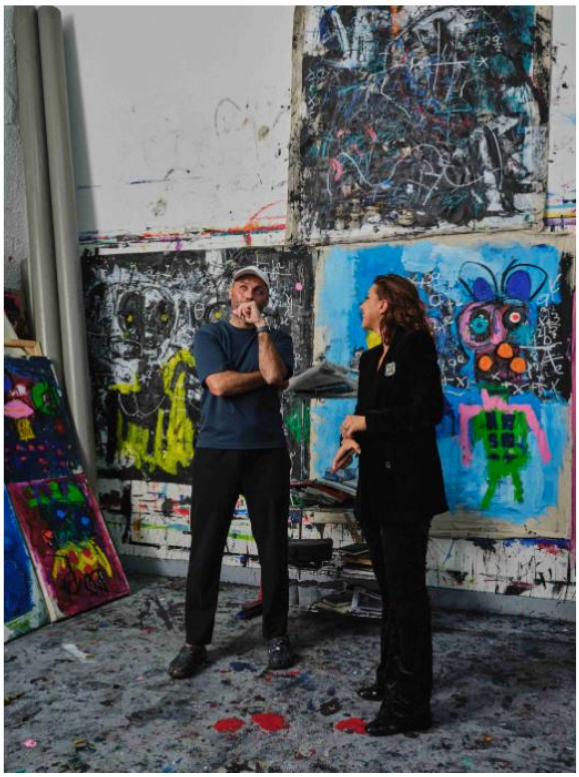
Tunisian artist Taher Jaoui trained as a financial engineer before turning fully to painting. Based in Dubai, his richly layered compositions reflect his background in mathematics and science. "I often approach a composition almost like an equation," he says, "how do I combine the right quantities, tensions, forms, colours, and gestures to arrive at a certain balance." His work suggests that belonging cannot always be rationally defined or resolved.





It's the closest language he has for describing something he insists is never fixed. "[Home and belonging] are constantly evolving, much like an equation whose variables keep changing as we move through life," he says.





Having a child shifted that equation for Jaoui again. "Becoming a father added another layer of complexity to everything I had already experienced and to my understanding of what 'home' means," he says. It's not a physical place, he explains, but "an inner space that we carry with us. A final refuge for imagination, freedom, resilience, and prosperity."

Kamyar Bineshtarigh

For Iranian artist Kamyar Bineshtarigh, identity and home can be explored through calligraphy and language. He left Iran for South Africa at fifteen, and calligraphy was something that travelled with him across the border. "I was carrying something very familiar with me to an unfamiliar place," he says.





And while Bineshtarigh recognises that home can exist beyond a physical place, it doesn't mean the pain of watching it suffer goes away. "Seeing [Iran] being bombed, becoming disconnected due to the internet blackout, this was deeply, profoundly disturbing," he says. "I have realised how much home matters to me, more than before."



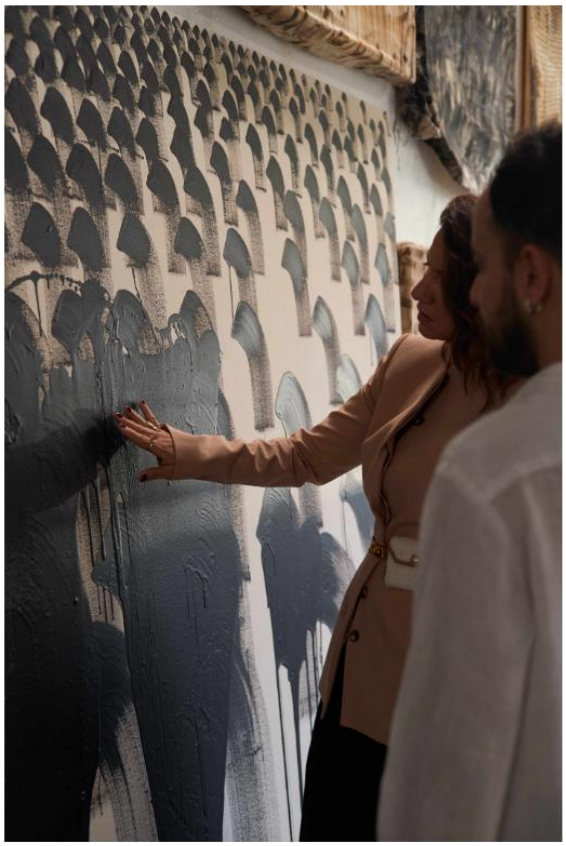


Image courtesy of Inge Prins.

Working from Woodstock in Cape Town has put him at odds with easy categorisation. "How do I describe myself as a South African artist? How do I describe myself as an Iranian artist?" he asks. "How can I describe myself as both — or why should I describe myself as either?"