

## 'We all have 24 hours in a day. You just do the best that you can'

There are many royal women leading the way in the art world. Why is this?

"Titles matter in this region; therefore, you have a lot of cultural initiatives being set up by women who have them. This royal patronage is both influential and diverse: Sheikha Mayassa chairs the Qatar Museums Authority; Sheikha Hoor heads the Sharjah Art Foundation; Shaikha Mai was the region's first Minister of Culture and driving force behind many projects in Bahrain. There are a few others also taking the lead."

Who inspires you?

"Photographer Sheikha Lateefa Bint Maktoum is an inspiration. In 2008, she opened Tashkeel, an arts centre that offers a network of support and a variety of art classes."

Who is your all-time favourite artist?

"I find this question impossible to answer..."

How important is it for you to continue to try and bridge the gap between East and West through art?

"Artists help us understand our cultures, offering interesting perspectives on the beauty and complexities of life. In this respect, art breaks down barriers and increases tolerance. The East and West are often viewed as divided spheres, which is simply a construct."

In terms of Middle Eastern artists, who do you feel has the ingredients to become a success in the West?

"The list is long. Of the artists who do not already have outside representation, I would say Lebanese artist Taghreed Darghouth, Iranian artists Mohammad Rahimi and Shahpour Pouyan, and Saudi artist Manal Al-Dowayan. These are emerging artists worth watching due to their technical skills and original concepts."

Why did you choose Kuwait to set up JAMM and hold your first auction?

"As I am from Kuwait, I have a vested interest in contributing to the local art scene. In 2010, we held the first contemporary art auction, featuring 50 artworks under US\$20,000. Thankfully, people responded and it is now an annual event. Our next auction will be in November 2012."

So you have seen a lot of changes in the Middle East's art scene in recent years?

"The Gulf region is certainly flourishing. Qatar hosts museum-quality art exhibitions. In Kuwait, there is an increase in the number of galleries and gallery-goers. Dubai, the hub of the Middle East art scene, is thriving (not to mention the impressive Museum initiatives in Abu Dhabi). And in Saudi Arabia, with the establishment of Athr gallery and the recent success of the Edge of Arabia show in Jeddah, shows some promise. I think the future is bright."

Why do you think the Middle East has experienced this amazing art boom?

"Countries such as Qatar and the UAE want to be serious players in the global arena and one way to achieve this is by promoting cultural

tourism and instigating significant cultural initiatives. Their investment in the arts benefits the region as a whole. Since 2001, the Middle East has dominated global headlines and that has also shifted the Western gaze towards Middle Eastern art."

What made you decide to bring JAMM to Dubai and why now?

"We chose Dubai because it is the heart of the Middle East art scene. We chose March to coincide with Art Dubai, which is my favourite art fair."

And why choose photographer Michel Haddi for the inaugural exhibition rather than an artist from the Middle East?

"Michel Haddi is part Algerian and part French. As JAMM's inaugural exhibition in Dubai will also mark the launch of Toby Art Projects, we sought a medium that combines both fashion and art. Haddi has lived an extraordinary life; having been raised in a Paris orphanage until the age of nine, he grew up dreaming of becoming a photographer, and through sheer will and determination, became an exceptional photographer, shooting for French *Vogue* by the age of 24."

You have also collaborated with Toby, Saudi fashion designer Hatem Alakeel's brand for the Toby Art Projects...

"Yes. Hatem and I have been friends for over 15 years and have great respect for each other's work in our respective fields - fashion design and contemporary art. We felt it was time to collaborate on a project that will give us an opportunity to showcase what we are passionate about."

So will Toby Arts just be another gallery in Dubai?

"No it will be more than that. It will be a space where creative minds can meet and ideas can be shared. As well as [for] exhibitions, the space will be used for education and also rented out for fashion shoots."

So would you say fashion and art are closely linked?

"Absolutely! Recently, Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri was commissioned by Louis Vuitton to create four artworks for the windows of their shops in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. German artist Anselm Reyle teamed up with Dior to create a line of limited edition purses. In terms of fashion photography, a number of extraordinary photographers - Cecil Beaton, Richard Avedon and Horst P. Horst, to name a few - have succeeded in elevating fashion photography into an art form. There are many ties that bind fashion and art. As Yves Carcelle, CEO of Louis Vuitton, stated: 'Art inspires luxury and luxury inspires art.'"

What is so special about Haddi's celebrity series?

"The photographs are quite intense and intimate, indicating a level of trust between the subject and photographer. In the photographs of Angelina Jolie, Isabella Rossellini, Kate Moss, Keanu Reeves, Denzel Washington and Nicolas Cage, they are all looking directly into the camera



and into the eyes of the viewer. The result is so direct that it appears they are looking at you, rather than the other way around."

And what about the photographs of Jean-Paul Gaultier, Marion Cotillard and Martin Scorsese?

"They stand out for their expression of high drama and their ability to capture the subjects in ways never seen before."

You will also be exhibiting Haddi's Youth of Morocco series...

"Yes, these are equally bold and poetic. Some of the images, such as the boys on the beach, capture the innocence of youth while others portray their aspirations to emulate the West in fashion and style."

Where do you see the Middle East's art market in another five years?

"I see it growing in more dynamic ways, as a result of the increasing

number of specialists involved. These professionals in the field, scholars, art publishers, art journalists, curators and critics, will help shape the Middle East art market in future."

You must have a great art collection. What is the last piece of art you purchased?

"It was at Art Dubai last March, from Galerie El Marsa. It is a painting by Thileli Rahmoun that depicts a roundabout in Algeria. I didn't know anything about the artist. I simply fell in love with the work. After coming back to it six times and speaking to the gallerist many times over, I decided that I had to have it."

INTERVIEW: SOPHIE JONES-COOPER



Sheikha Lulu Al Sabah has teamed up with fashion and celebrity photographer Michel Haddi and Saudi fashion designer Hatem Alakeel for her first exhibition in Dubai. Michel reveals his stunning shots of celebrities including Angelina Jolie (above left) and Jean Paul Gaultier (above right)