

# THE POWER 50

Welcome to the second annual *Power 50* feature. In carefully selecting the most influential cultural protagonists of Middle Eastern art and culture, *Canvas* engages in a comprehensive survey of their achievements across the regional art scene. The process is a fascinating reminder of the wealth of talent and intellect we have at our fingertips. The 50 who make it onto our list are those who, over the past year, have made a positive impact on the Middle Eastern art scene, strived to make it grow and contributed to its mounting influence the world over.

## NEGAR AZIMI

New York-based Negar Azimi is famous for her multi-layered writing style, which contextualises Middle Eastern art within political and art-historic frameworks. Always interesting and educational for enthusiasts on either side of the pond, her articles and essays on Middle Eastern art also offer Western audiences an introduction into a largely unknown milieu. Her strategic perspective stems from her degrees in politics from Stanford and Harvard, but her familiarity with Contemporary Middle Eastern art is also deeply rooted in her capacity as Senior Editor of *Bidoun*. Although primarily a publication that covers art and culture from the Middle East, *Bidoun* has been positioned by Azimi and her team as a general arts platform that presents books, talks, educational programmes, a comprehensive library and other related events. Azimi herself has contributed to *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *Harper's*, *The Nation* and *The New York Times Magazine*, in addition to books such as the *Vitamin P* series. Her articles weave historical fact, political ramifications, economic issues and Contemporary art concepts in a way that begins with a macro outlook but slowly zooms in on a multitude of micro elements.



## DINA NASSER-KHADIVI

If asked to check her occupation on a form, ticking one box is near impossible for Dina Nasser-Khadivi. Though officially an art consultant, her many roles include engaging in philanthropic activities and supporting cultural education programmes. Even if her plate is full – which it always is – Nasser-Khadivi will seldom refuse opportunities to promote regional art to wider audiences. One of her distinctive traits is the fierce pride she takes in her Iranian heritage – a passion she channels through the many hats she wears and her unwavering belief in art's power to transcend barriers. This year, Nasser-Khadivi makes her debut as a curator with Baku-based non-profit organisation YARAT at the Venice Biennale through a collateral event that will present art from the Caucasus – Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Georgia. Since the inception of Christie's Middle East in 2006, hers has been a regular face at the Dubai auctions, manning the phones for the many artworks which she has consigned and found buyers for. In 2008, after years with Christie's, she founded DNK Art Consulting, through which she advises international clients (Christie's included) and manages the collections of established patrons. Nasser-Khadivi is credited with inspiring a younger generation of collectors – many of whom have been featured in this magazine through its *Young Collectors* editions.

## HRH PRINCESS WIJDAN ALI

She may be a member of Jordan's royal family, but HRH Princess Wijdan Ali is also a celebrated artist, prolific author, eminent art historian, ex-diplomat and founder of Jordan's National Gallery of Fine Arts as well as the country's Royal Society of Fine Arts. A strong advocate of empowerment through education, HRH Princess Wijdan completed her PhD in Islamic studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, going on to found the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design at the University of Jordan, of which she is now Dean. Her art, found in the collections of reputed institutions across the world, fuses calligraphy with elements of Islamic art. She has also donated her own collection of 77 works to serve as the core of the Jordan National Gallery. Founded in 1980, the collection now includes over 2000 works, predominantly by artists from the Arab world, but also by some from Europe, the USA, Asia and Africa. Since its inception, the gallery has staged exhibitions both on its premises and also abroad, in the USA, China, Yemen, Spain, Australia, France and beyond. In 2012 it exported the show *Reflections from Heaven, Meditations on Earth*, which showcased 72 Modern calligraphic pieces by Arab artists, to the Mercati di Traiano in Rome and later to the Museo Valencia de la Ilustracio I de la Modernitat. Last January, the gallery presented *Between Desert and Sea*, an exhibition of 55 works by Arab artists at Istanbul's Pera Museum. The gallery's ongoing mission was outlined in an interview given by HRH to the online magazine *Nafas*: "My greatest challenge is facing ignorance, be it in my society regarding the importance of art, or abroad regarding my religion and culture."



Image courtesy Sharjah Art Foundation.

## HE SHEIKHA HOOR AL-QASSIMI

In her capacity as President of the Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF), member of the board of directors of New York's MoMA PS1 and trustee of Beirut's Ashkal Alwan, HE Sheikha Hoor Al-Qassimi has a hand in promoting Middle Eastern art all over the world. Under her directorship of SAF, Sharjah continues to strengthen its position as a platform for Contemporary artists through the residencies, commissions and public programming that the emirate offers. Al-Qassimi has led the Sharjah Biennial since 2003, steering it in a new direction, one focused on catering to the younger generation of artists and on supporting their works. An artist in her own right, she has also co-curated Sharjah Biennial editions alongside Peter Lewis, Jack Persekian, and this year, Yuko Hasegawa. Al-Qassimi carefully straddles the balance between her dual roles – she has recently showcased her work at the Nevada Museum of Art and was a member of the selection committee for the 2012 Berlin Biennial.



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## AHMAD & ABDUL MONEM ALSERKAL

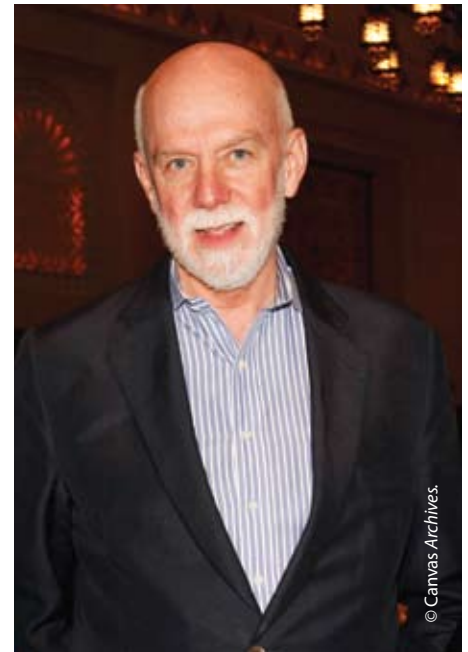
Only six years ago Dubai's Al-Quoz wasn't known for much more than its industrial capacity, a place where trucks and warehouses populated a barren neighbourhood. Although a cultural scene had begun to flourish with the likes of The Courtyard, The Third Line and B21 (now known as Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde), no one really knew what the fate of a few galleries in warehouses would be. Fast forward to the present and with a little navigational proficiency, one will find one of Dubai's most important cultural districts. Alserkal Avenue, a block of warehouses housing some of the city's most prominent art galleries, is the brainchild of brothers Abdul Monem and Ahmad Bin Eisa Alserkal – art patrons and collectors who are passionate about seeing their endeavour grow. Since 2007, the Emirati brothers have given Dubai's cultural landscape the space to mature organically. Alserkal Avenue is slated for a 2014 expansion, which will include more space for galleries already scrambling to make it onto the waiting list. The additional 46,000 square metres will also include artist studios and event facilities. With the brothers always tirelessly supporting the local art scene, it is a rare occasion when they and their father, Eisa, are not attending an exhibition opening.



Above: Ahmad Bin Eisa Alserkal. Below: Abdul Monem Bin Eisa Alserkal. Photography by Sofia Dadourian. Images courtesy Alserkal Avenue, Dubai.

## NAGUIB SAWIRIS

When Van Gogh's *Poppy Flower* – worth an estimated \$55 million – went missing from the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum in Cairo in 2010, it was Orascom Telecom tycoon Naguib Sawiris who stepped up to the plate and offered \$175,000 for information that could help track down the stolen painting. The art patron, whose art collection includes pieces by Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar, Ferdinand Parpan, Gérard Leroux and Mohamed El-Sharkawi, among others, is also a philanthropist. He established the Sawiris Foundation in 2001 to provide economic and social aid to Egyptians, and also runs the prestigious Sawiris Cultural Award, established in 2005, which grants prizes rewarding artistic creativity totalling over \$100,000 each year. With plans to build a museum to showcase his collection, Sawiris is a man to watch.



## RICHARD ARMSTRONG

The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi is one of the UAE capital's most hotly anticipated Saadiyat Cultural District projects, and the man at the helm is a highly respected and influential figure on the international art scene. A former curator, Richard Armstrong is described by many as a modest, inspiring and honest mentor. In his capacity as Director of the Solomon R Guggenheim Foundation, Armstrong oversees the organisation's international programmes. Receptive to the region's Contemporary and Modern artistic production, he is a regular at Art Dubai and Abu Dhabi Art, often spotted visiting stands and bringing curators along to discover what the region has to offer. Armstrong recently established the Middle East Guggenheim Circle, a group dedicated to organising conversations, private gatherings and visits. He has also been instrumental in the appointments of Reem Fadda, the Guggenheim's Associate Curator of Middle Eastern art, as curator of the UAE Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale, and of Suzanne Cotter, curator of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project since 2010, as co-curator of the 2011 Sharjah Biennial. No doubt once the 450,000 square foot Guggenheim Abu Dhabi – the largest Guggenheim in the world – opens its doors, Armstrong will be there to encourage the development of Abu Dhabi as a cultural destination.

# SAM BARDAOUIL & TILL FELLRATH

Nothing beats a good story – a tight, thoroughly researched, well-presented narrative punctuated by historical facts, minute-but-essential details and new information all packed with a punch. Imagine saying all that through exhibitions, and consistently too, not to mention accompanying rich texts savoured by academics and enthusiasts alike. This is the stuff that Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath are made of. Among other things, the duo's curatorial strategy offers viewers new ways of looking at art, which in turn, contest prevailing perceptions. Now that's power: the ability to change minds. Take for example, their small-scale exhibitions, such as *Rock, Paper, Scissors* at Leila Heller Gallery in New York last July. Here, they juxtaposed the works of nine very different artists – including Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock (rock), Contemporary Iranian Hadiéh Shafie (paper) and 'Spiderwoman' Louise Bourgeois (scissors) – through an artistic take on the popular hand game. Then there is, of course, their groundbreaking *Tea With Nefertiti*, which debuted to strong critical acclaim at Doha's Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art last November. It is also the first museum show exported from the Arab world to tour internationally (visiting the Institut du Monde Arabe, the Valencia Institute of Modern Art, and Bozar: Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels this year). This curatorial powerhouse will also curate Lebanon's second Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, presented through the works of Akram Zaatari. As Bardaouil and Fellrath travel the world excavating hitherto undiscovered information, they strengthen their roles as cultural diplomats with good stories to tell.



Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath. © Canvas Archives.



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## JESSICA MORGAN

The Daskalopoulos Curator, International Art at the Tate, Jessica Morgan has organised some major shows during her time at the London institution: John Baldessari, Martin Kippenberger and Gabriel Orozco, among others. This year, she's gone East and brought a pioneering Lebanese Abstractionist to the Tate – Morgan has been an instrumental figure in bringing the Saloua Raouda Choucair retrospective to Europe, signalling the first time a Middle Eastern artist has been the subject of a major survey at the gallery. Morgan is on the Art Dubai Curatorial Advisory Board and on the Abraaj Group Art Prize selection committee. Her passion for Middle Eastern art goes back to her time as a curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where, in 1997, she organised the first US survey of the work of Mona Hatoum – an artist considered to be one of the most important Contemporary practitioners from the region. Since joining the Tate in 2002, Morgan has also become a member of the Middle East and North Africa Acquisitions Committee, which aims to increase the institution's collection of Middle Eastern art spanning from 1960 to the present. Today, the Tate's holdings include works by Hatoum, Akram Zaatari, Hani Rashid and Walid Raad among others. Often spotted making the rounds at all the major regional art exhibitions and fairs, Morgan has her ear firmly to the Middle Eastern ground.



## MANAL AL-DOWAYAN

It is something to drum up enough interest on social networking sites and encourage hundreds of people to contribute to an artwork, but Manal Al-Dowayan did just this and more across three cities in Saudi Arabia. *Esmi (My Name)*, a large-scale installation of prayer beads that features the names of Saudi women who participated in Al-Dowayan's call for action, was inspired by a Saudi custom forbidding the very utterance of a woman's name. Even men lined up to write their daughters' names on the maple wood beads. *Esmi* premiered at Edge of Arabia's *We Need to Talk* exhibition staged in Jeddah last January, where it stood out – bold, proud and poetic, much like the artist behind it. An excellent orator, Al-Dowayan has spoken at various venues over the last year and has also completed several residencies. Her works – all imbued with nostalgia, nationalism and feminism – have jetted between museum and gallery shows in Jeddah, Riyadh, Dubai, London and Lucerne in 2012 alone. She is not a fan of being exoticised as a Saudi female artist in the media; rather, for her, being Saudi is one thing and being a woman is another – a delicate balance which she treads well. This skill came through powerfully in her talk last December at the conference *Harnessing 21st Century Solutions: A Focus on Women*, hosted by the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. Fittingly, photographs from Al-Dowayan's *I Am* series, which features Saudi working class women, currently hang in the William J Clinton Presidential Library.

## ANTONIA CARVER

In a feature she penned for Artinfo.com last year, Antonia Carver noted: "Today's art world is also resolutely global – and this is a new reality for many in the West – which means that time zones never sleep, that it's as important to attend biennials and fairs in Gwangju, Dubai, Hong Kong and Kochi as it is those in London, New York or Paris." If Carver's schedule is anything to go by, travelling the globe to attend fairs and biennials, meeting artists at myriad exhibition openings and putting together the region's biggest art fair, it sounds like the Art Dubai Fair Director has adapted well to the reality of today's art world. A mother of three, Carver is at the helm of the Middle East's most eagerly awaited and often-over-subscribed art fair, which, in its last edition, attracted the attendance of 75 museum groups. Since she was appointed Fair Director in August 2010, Carver has introduced more non-commercial activities to Art Dubai, such as the country-focused curated section, *Marker*, and the A.i.R Dubai project for artists in residence. Despite holding one of the busiest jobs on the regional art scene, the soft-spoken former editor-at-large of *Bidoun* is the incarnation of grace under fire.



Claudia Cellini and Sunny Rahbar. Image courtesy The Third Line, Dubai.



## CLAUDIA CELLINI & SUNNY RAHBAR

Their founding mantra was to establish a space to broaden the platform of Middle Eastern art. Its name – The Third Line – is a formulation from a poem by Iranian Sufi mystic Shams Tabrizi and was chosen as a metaphor for what remains to be. In the almost eight years since its inception, Claudia Cellini and Sunny Rahbar have promoted their artists through their gallery's participation in numerous international art fairs – often being the first and only gallery from the Middle East at fairs such as Artissima, Art Basel Miami Beach, Art Cologne, FIAC, Frieze New York and Frieze London. This year, The Third Line is the only gallery from the Gulf to participate in Art Basel and it does so through the works of Laleh Khorramian. With a sharp eye for talent, Cellini and Rahbar have assembled a star-studded roster featuring some of the region's hottest names – Youssef Nabil, Hassan Hajjaj, Monir Farmanfarmaian, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige and Farhad Moshiri – all of whose careers The Third Line has propelled through shows, the strategic placement of their works in reputed institutions and the publishing of monographs. These unstoppable women have gone beyond the pure gallerist role and extended their efforts as consultants to organisations such as the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority and the UAE Pavilion for the Venice Biennale.



## FADY JAMEEL

While efforts have been made in recent years to highlight the treasure trove of public artworks on Jeddah's corniche, none are as magnanimous as a project steered by Fady Jameel. Under the auspices of the Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiative (which sponsors Edge of Arabia, patronises the Jameel Gallery at the V&A and the Jameel Prize), he brought in London's Plowden and Smith in early 2012 to commence restoration on sculptures by some of the world's most celebrated artists – Moore, Vasarely, César, Calder, Pomodoro and Miró. The port city's open-air museum comprises some 400 works acquired between 1970–80 as part of an initiative steered by then-Mayor of Jeddah, Dr Mohammed Said Farsi. Decades of wear and tear have left these masterpieces, locally recognised as landmarks, in poor condition. Approximately 40 of these works will be placed in a sculpture park set to open later this year. In addition, two books on Jeddah's public art collection – in separate English and Arabic editions – are scheduled for release in October, to be published by Booth Clibborn.



Image courtesy: The Third Line, Dubai.

## WALID RAAD

He may be notorious for not wanting to have his photo taken, but it has become increasingly difficult for Walid Raad to remain incognito. The Lebanese-born artist has just staged an impeccable solo show at Beirut's Sfeir-Semler Gallery and another at the Louvre – the first in a series of projects over a three-year period. *Preface to the First Edition* is a specially designed installation that sees Raad tackle the concept of the 'universal museum'. He also took part in *DOCUMENTA (13)*, elaborating on a body of work that has been in progress since 2007; *Scratching on Things I Could Disavow* focuses on the continuous theme of how political traumas in the Middle East affect artists' abilities to collect and remember their cultural heritage, thus erasing a reference. With his works in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Centre Pompidou and numerous other institutions, Raad is admired for creating art out of historical events in the Middle East, whilst analysing the infrastructure for the arts in the Arab world.

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