

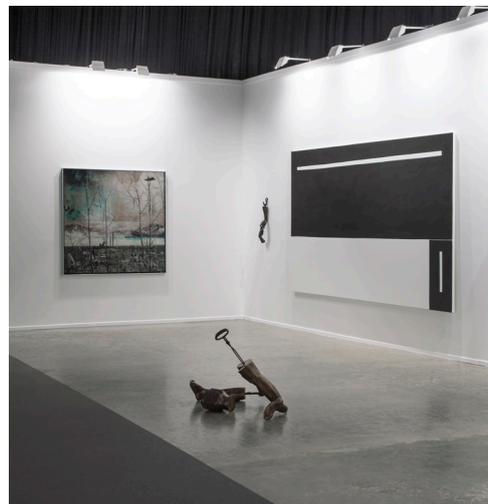
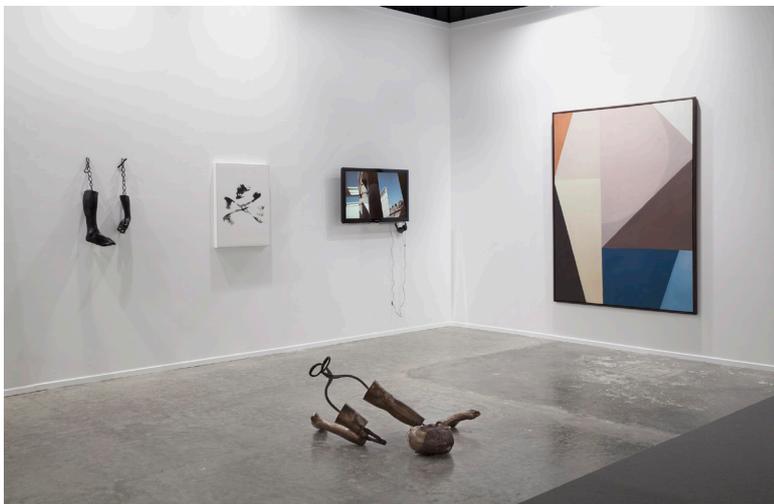
## art and signature

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# ART DUBAI 2016: Doldrums in the Arabian Gulf?

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### Doldrums in the Arabian Gulf?

It seems as if Art Dubai shifted down a gear this time: last year, 71 galleries from 35 countries were represented in the Contemporary section whereas this year there have been five more, but new countries were not amongst them. Nevertheless – and maybe rightfully so – the art fair is being advertised as the most global and multifaceted art fair worldwide. However less artists have been accepted into the Artist in Residence program and to the annoyance of a number of collectors, the VIP categories were split up and downsized. Is it possible that the art fair cannot keep up with the general acceleration of Dubai anymore? Especially on the last day of the fair one could sense the anxiety amongst galleries: “Sales are going slow” was rumored in every corner. Ursula Krinzinger from the well-known Vienna-based Gallery Krinzinger said one can feel that collectors from the region have become skeptical vis-à-vis big art investments, although the crisis definitely did not have the same impact as in Europe. Despite all this, Art Dubai has a big impact on the local economy. According to an independent study by Repucom, the fair has generated \$ 35 million solely last year.

### Futurism at the Global Art Forum

During the opening night, the Contemporary section was packed with visitors. His Highness Sheikh Rashid Al Maktoum visited the fair in company of his daughter, and the Global Art Forum had a first successful day. The Global Art Forum is a series of presentations, talks and performances, which dedicated this year’s session to “Futurism”. In a darkened tent on an island in the lavish Madinat Jumeirah hotel resort a space has been carved out for discussions, far away from the stressful gallery business. One of the invited guests was artist Hito Steyerl, whose work “Factory of the Sun” was recently exhibited at the Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna) in the exhibition “Political Populism”. Sophia al-Maria – or better known as “Sci-Fi Wahabi” – was also present and discussed with Global Art Forum moderator Shumon Basar the role and significance of desert landscapes in science-fiction movies and in portrayals of dystopian future.

### Modern Art Comes Alive

This year’s “Modern” section was also well positioned, showing modern art from the Near East, South Asia as well as from the African continent. To the detriment of the gallerists, however, the Modern section is always located in an isolated corner of the fair – hence only enthusiasts and connoisseurs of modern art from the aforementioned regions find their way to this part of Art Dubai.

The Dubai-based Lawrie Shabibi Gallery presented works by Malileh Afnan this year, who died in January 2016. Afnan had been born in 1935 to a Persian family in Haifa and spent some time in Beirut just before the Lebanese Civil War started. On view was her work “Wartorn” (1979) and other pieces from the late 1970s.

Participating for its first time was also a gallery from Nairobi, Cirlce Art Gallery, showing works of Geoffrey Mukasa, one of the best-known Ugandan modern artists. His work shows traces of Indian influences – Mukasa left Uganda after his father had been murdered during Idi Amin's 1971 coup and left to study art in Uttar Pradesh. According to the gallerist Danda Jaroljmek, Indian gallerists have shown quite an interest and recognized said influences in Mukasa's work and Art Dubai seems to be an important platform for selling East African art. On the second day, most of his works were already sold, with prices ranging from \$ 6 000 to \$ 15 000.

#### "Crapstraction" and the Art of Exhibiting

The Contemporary section – as opposed to the Modern one – drew many visitors on the second day of the fair as well. The Dubai-based Carbon 12 Gallery had a pole position at the entrance to Hall 1 and presented a varied program including new works by the Austrian artist Bernhard Buhmann, which were sold instantly. At times like these, when the art market is flooded with "crapstraction", as Nadine Knotzer remarks, it is good to see that artists such as Bernhard Buhmann attract so much international attention. Dubai-based galleries definitely enjoy a two-fold advantage: not only do some of them exhibit at the fair, but also their home-base, Al-Serkal Avenue in the industrial district Al-Quoz attracts more and more visitors. The Contemporary section also includes a special curated program called Marker, which invites curators and artists every year, this year showcasing art from the Philippines.

A number of Russian galleries can also be found at Art Dubai, such as the Pechersky Gallery from Moscow. Inquiring whether they will also be present at Art Basel in May, Anastasia Shavlokhova explains that despite several applications, it is increasingly difficult to get into Art Basel. She speculates this is more because of political reasons – in general it is easier to exhibit American artists than Russian ones. An affiliated gallery from Teheran that had existed only for 2-3 years, as she explains, had managed to get into Frieze London. Now that the economic sanctions on Iran are slowly being lifted, the art market, too, can breathe more freely.

At dusk, weary art collectors settle in the Abraaj Lounge, where we meet a Lebanese industrialist who acquired a work by the Ugandan artist Geoffrey Mukasa. Other visitors who still have enough energy move to the Elyx Bar near the Global Art Forum, where skilled bartenders mix unusual cocktails. This all takes place in the luxurious surroundings of the Madinat Jumeirah Hotel overlooking the Burj Al Arab hotel, which is lit in green colours today and strives to compete with the setting sun.

Although this year's edition of the art fair was not a great leap in development in comparison to last year's version, Art Dubai is definitely worth visiting. The absence of some blue chips leaves more room for diversity, and Antonia Carver, the director of Art Dubai, might after all be right to call Art Dubai a "fair of discovery".