

November 14, 2016

‘Abu Dhabi Art 2016: Focus on Quality Over Quantity.’

By Anna Seamen



Asheed Araeen's Opus AA 1. Courtesy Custot Gallery

With only 35 galleries exhibiting at this year's edition – five fewer than last year's – Abu Dhabi Art is smaller than most in the world, but the quality of the art has not been compromised.

It has the feel of a boutique fair, where visitors and collectors can take their time to explore the gallery booths, and perhaps even find time to return and widen their knowledge and experience of art.

Some gallery directors say this intimate climate is extremely beneficial. Stéphane Custot, founder of Dubai's Custot Gallery and co-director of London's Waddington Custot, says he has worked with several larger art fairs and the bigger they get, the greater the risk of losing their essence.

"I love art fairs," he says. "They are my area of expertise – and when I see a small fair like Abu Dhabi Art, I see a lot of potential."

Custot Gallery is participating in Abu Dhabi Art for the first time this year. It will showcase a variety of works, from established names, including James Rosenquist and Marc Quinn, to emerging artists such as Richard Höglund, who recently opened his first exhibition in the region at Custot's gallery in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue.

Lisson Gallery, which has been participating in Abu Dhabi Art since 2011, represents heavyweight artists, including Anish Kapoor, whose work they will be showing. Nayrouz Tatanaki, Lisson's director, describes Abu Dhabi Art as "a very niche art fair", which offers "an opportunity to participate in the growth and development of a vital geostrategic cultural beacon in the world".

Aicon Gallery, a New York space that focuses on South East Asian art in particular, will bring works by Rasheed Araeen, Saad Qureshi and Irfan Hassan to the capital.

The gallery also participates in Art Dubai, but sees the proximity to the museums in the capital as an important reason also to attend Abu Dhabi Art.

"We have greatly enjoyed our participation at Abu Dhabi Art," says Harry Hutchison, Aicon's director. "We look forward to expanding our collector base in Abu Dhabi and supporting the fair into the future."

Gazelli Art House, a gallery with venues in London and Baku, is taking part in the fair for the third time. Among others, they will be showing the work of Dubai-based artist Owais Husain, and a seven-channel video installation titled Time of the Empress by artist duo Aziz + Cucher, which will be shown as part of the Gateway programme.

"At Abu Dhabi Art, there seems to be genuine interest in contemporary arts and a great combination between novice collectors and those that have been collecting for some time," says Mila Askarova, the gallery's founder and director. "Due to our mixed programme, it works out well in that we can offer advice to both of these groups of people and suggest works fitting their interest, both in terms of exposure and price."

One of the most interesting booths is that of AB43, a gallery from Zurich that is dedicating its presentation to three Emirati artists – Karima Al Shomely, Mohamed Al Mazrouei and Hashel Al Lamki. Founders Heidi and Franz J Leupi have been championing Emirati artists in Europe for years and it is refreshing to see such enthusiasm for UAE talent among these Swiss art dealers.