

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



Official Country Name
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Languages
ARABIC

Population
5,314,317

Median Age
30.2

GDP Per Capita
US \$48,500

Source: CIA World Factbook

Total Value of Art Exported
(UN Comtrade Database 2010)
US \$16,007,707

Arts Funding
(Khakeej Times)
US \$1,742,489,600

Art Programs
(University Level)
5

Student Enrollment
1,569

Source: National Bureau of Statistics and compiled by AAP (non-official)

Museums Exhibiting Contemporary Art
4

Contemporary Art Galleries
(Commercial)
49

Contemporary Art Spaces
(Nonprofit)
4

Art Foundations
(NGO + Private)
4

Source: Compiled by Carbon 12 (non-official)

Located between South Asia, Africa and West Asia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

is a key business center whose economy has grown rapidly in the past 30 years. Since the early 2000s, the UAE has also endeavored to become a center of tourism and culture, flaunting grand ambitions and lavishing outsized budgets on arts infrastructure and museum building. As a result, the UAE is now a regional destination for galleries, auction houses and art fairs, and also has a modest but notable community of Emirati artists.

The UAE's art scene is guided by a predominantly regional cultural sensibility that abides by Islamic customs. Arts leaders must negotiate between conservative attitudes and the enforcement of political censorship. In general, this is balanced by a progressive approach to exhibition-making, as well as support for the building of contemporary art institutions and the broadening of existing cultural and educational foundations.

The two largest emirates, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, compete for the title of cultural capital. Dubai, driven by real estate and tourism, has the majority of the UAE's galleries and auction houses; oil-rich Abu Dhabi is planning franchises of the Louvre and the Guggenheim museums on Saadiyat Island, a complex of museums, universities and resorts. Conservative Sharjah has traditionally been the intellectual and cultural capital, home to at least 17 museums and a 20-year-old biennial.

The art initiatives in Abu Dhabi suffered

more delays in 2012. Once considered the most financially stable emirate, Abu Dhabi has continued to scale back its ambitions. In late January, Abu Dhabi's **Tourism Development & Investment Company (TDIC)** announced that it will delay the opening of the Louvre and Guggenheim outposts until 2015 and 2017, respectively. Amid speculation that the museums had been canceled outright, the TDIC insisted the reasons for the delays were not financial but simply a marketing decision to allow each venue its own time in the limelight. Under a plan first announced in 2011, the Louvre will be built first, followed by the National Museum and then the Guggenheim.

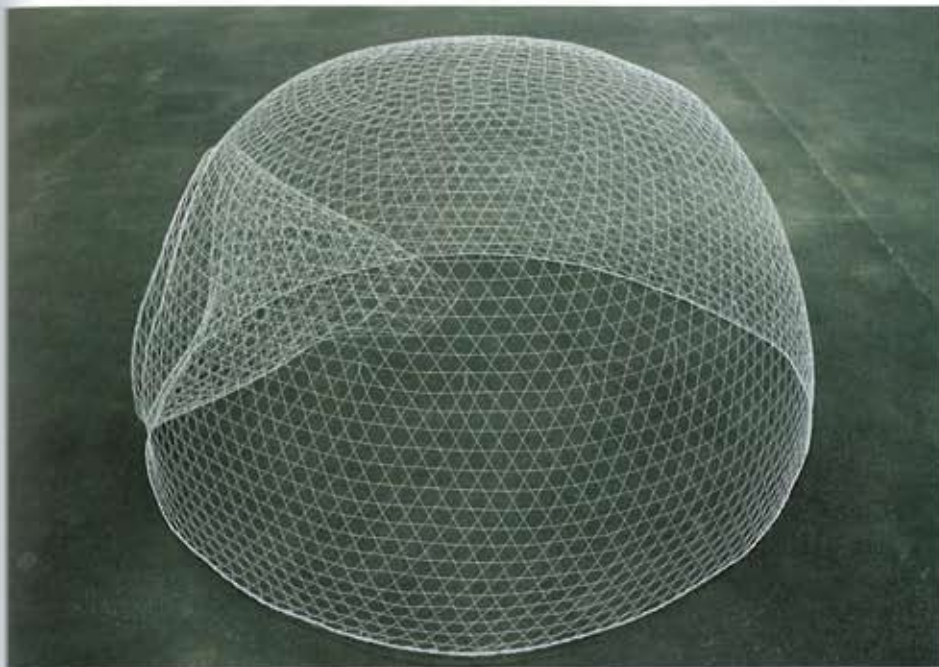
In February, in some bureaucratic reshuffling, the newly formed **Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority (TCA)** took on the employees, assets, roles and responsibilities of the former Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage and Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, which had included the Cultural Department of Tourism Development & Investment Company. The TCA's objective is to conserve and promote the heritage and culture of Abu Dhabi and develop a world-class destination for arts and culture. In November, it held the fourth edition of the art fair **Abu Dhabi Art** (11/7–10) in the Saadiyat Cultural District; the fair attracted international blue-chip galleries such as Hauser & Wirth and Gagosian, along with 50-odd regional and international galleries.

The event that originally put Dubai on the map as a commercial center for art is the art fair **Art Dubai** (3/21–24), inaugurated in 2007. Held in the lavish Madinat Jumeirah Resort, Art Dubai lured 75 galleries from 32 different countries in 2012, with the fair broadening its scope beyond a regional



EHSAN UL-HAQ, *Rooster II*, 2011, inkjet print on photo rag, 76.2 x 114.3 cm. Courtesy Grey Noise, Dubai.

Acknowledgments: Mandy Merzaban, Salwa Mifdadi, Kourosh Nouri, Angelle Siyang-Le



NADIA KAABI-LINKE, *Smooth Criminal*, 2012, lobster trap, 120 x 230 cm. Photo: Bassem Eskander. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai.

focus. This year it hosted several galleries from Indonesia in its Marker section. It was the second year for director Antonia Carver, who has notably expanded Art Dubai's noncommercial programming since her tenure began, and fair welcomed 22,500 visitors and it reported rising sales among a wider demographic. The fair also hosts a display of the winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize: this year, Taysir Batniji, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, Wael Shawky, Risham Syed and Raed Yassin, with guest curator Nat Muller.

Art Dubai supplements commercial activity with the Global Art Forum (3/18–24), a series of talks, commissioned projects and video and performance programs, which kicked off at Mathaf in Doha before traveling to Dubai. The fair also runs a residency program for local and international artists and curators, A.i.R. Dubai, in partnership with Dubai Culture & Arts Authority, London's Delfina Foundation and Tashkeel. In January 2013, the fair will launch Campus Art Dubai, a series of educational workshops for UAE-based artists and curators.

Coinciding with Art Dubai is the **SIKKA** art fair (3/15–25), an initiative by Dubai Culture Arts Authority, officially rebranded in 2009 as **Dubai Culture**; the fair featured works by UAE-based institutions and emerging artists, alongside an array of complementary educational and experimental public programs.

To date, there is no contemporary art museum in Dubai, but on March 21, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, UAE vice president, prime minister and monarch of Dubai, revived discussions about the Dubai Modern Art Museum and Opera House District, a new cultural destination

to be located in developer Emaar's flagship development Downtown Dubai—though no further details or estimated completion date has yet been announced.

The foundation of Dubai's art scene remains its commercial galleries, many of which are clustered in the al-Quoz industrial district. **The Third Line** gallery, now in its eighth year, continues to be chief among them, and held notable exhibitions for Lebanese artists and filmmakers Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (3/19–4/19) and acclaimed Moroccan photographer Hassan Hajjaj (9/12–10/18), before concluding the year with the products of Emirati artist Ebtisam Abdulaziz's interest in abstract "system art" (12/5–1/16/13).

The warehouse complex **Alserkal Avenue**, in the heart of the al-Quoz district, contains more than ten galleries, the Salsali Private Museum and a handful of creative spaces. In March, the developers of Alserkal Avenue announced a USD 13.6 million expansion, which will see the area increase by 250,000 square feet, to accommodate 62 creative spaces.

In the meantime, among the newly arrived residents of al-Quoz is **Grey Noise** gallery, formerly based in Lahore, which launched its gallery with sculptures by a pair of young Pakistani artists, Ehsan ul-Haq and Iqra Tanveer (3/19–4/22), followed later by presented moving-image works and photographic prints by Irish artist Michael John Whelan (9/10–10/20). **Lawrie Shabibi** gallery presented Nadia Kaabi-Linke's site-specific sculptures (3/19–5/16) and later a generation of emerging Pakistani artists in the mixed-media show, "Stop, Play, Pause, Repeat" (9/24–10/31). **Green Art Gallery** started the year with an exhibition featuring

semi-erotic work by Turkish photographer Nazif Topçuoğlu (1/11–3/13), followed by a joint exhibition of two New York-based abstractionists, Kamrooz Aram and Seher Shah (3/19–5/5), and Syrian photographer Jaber al-Azmeh (9/10–10/29).

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde presented Iranian artists Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmanian's installation-based show re-creating the visually eccentric ambience of their joint home and featuring artworks as well as objects from their personal art collection (3/18–5/17). The gallery later showcased paintings by Ahmad Amin Nazar, a former teacher for the Haerizadeh brothers (12/11–1/10/13). **Carbon 12** gallery continued its program of regional and European contemporary art with Austrian artist Birgit Graschopf (1/10–2/11), Iranian artist Farzan Sadjadi (6/19–9/5) and Dubai-based James Clar's light sculptures (11/5–12/8).

Also at Alserkal is the flashy Damascus-based Ayyam Gallery, which relaunched its space as the **Ayyam Art Centre** in 2011 and holds biannual auctions of regional art and exhibited works from the owner's collection (3/12–4/26). The gallery also operates a space in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), where it presented photojournalist Ammar Abd Rabbo's pictures of Arab and international leaders (6/18–7/12).

Elsewhere in al-Quoz, former design gallery and then commercial art gallery **Traffic** relaunched in 2010 as a noncommercial creative space, hosting events and exhibitions. In September, Dubai's Media Office banned the sale of Lantian Xie's paintings duplicating official portraits of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum. **Meem Gallery** exhibited Moroccan modern masters Mohammed Melehi, Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Gharbaoui in "Art Morocco" (3/12–4/30).



KAMROOZ ARAM, *Palimpsest (for Beirut)*, 2011, oil on canvas, 215 x 168 cm. Courtesy Green Art Gallery.