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# Laure d'Hauteville and Joanna Chevalier

*Laure d'Hauteville & Joanna Chevalier*

*on MENART fair in Paris,*

*the Diverse Creativity of the MENA Region,*

*Art as a Tool for Dialogue, Communication & Bringing People Together*



*[Joanna Chevalier](#), Artistic Director and [Laure d'Hauteville](#), Founder & director, of [MENART FAIR](#) –  
©Irene de Rosen*

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*Venturing into a space filled with creativity, a landscape of discoveries, exploring multiple narratives through art, is what awaits in Paris this May at MENART fair.*

*MENART fair founded by Laure d'Hauteville and Paul de Rosen with Joanna Chevalier as Artistic Director, will feature 22 galleries with art from North Africa, the Levant, the Gulf, and Iran, for four days from 27th May to 30th May 2021 in the private mansion of the Cornette de Saint Cyr auction house in Paris, France.*

*The fair aims to highlight the impressive art that stems from the MENA region, showcasing its diverse cultural richness, the characteristic of each territory through the artworks on display and bring to light art that draws on both cultural heritage as well as contemporary notions.*

*A conversation with Laure d'Hauteville and Joanna Chevalier, is to feel their passion for art and for the MENA region, for willing the power of art to shine through and bring people together, and for MENART fair to be a source of communication and a dialogue between the different arts on show. Through their great understanding and empathy MENART fair promises to be a myriad of galleries and artworks that will feed our senses with artistic abundance.*

*This past year has been a particularly challenging one, art may nurture our souls, so what could be better than to delve into creativity with Laure d'Hauteville (LdH) and Joanna Chevalier (JC), as our conversation encompassed how MENART came about, what we can expect upon visiting the art fair, their thoughts on art and how their love for creativity began...*

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### *What first drew you both to art?*

**LdH:** I've always been around art, I'm unable to be without it, it's part of my DNA. My education was quite classical and my parents collected all types of art. As a child they would take me to museums which I must admit back then, I thought it was quite unfair, but now I really appreciate what was, and it so happens that it is the path I continued in, into art and with so much love for it.

**JC:** Art has always interested me, it formed part of my upbringing, I recall fondly being gifted a painting when I was a child and my mother was always surrounded by painters, musicians, composers, so I grew up around that field. The arts are part of what I love dearly. That has been brought forward as both my sons are also in creativity.

### *And how as a tool do you think art's power can be perceived?*

**LdH:** Art has many layers, it is a message, a witness of its time, a way to communicate and a friend in one's home.

For artists it is also a form of expression; as viewers, we may or may not receive the artist's message through their artwork, nevertheless, that communication between the art and the viewer exists. Artworks can bring about an exchange of ideas, prompt deep discussions on notions or start conversations amongst friends. There can also be a decorative aspect to art, providing much happiness and light, even if the subject matter is not always light, then it may bring about relief.

**JC:** We cannot ignore the importance of art and how as a tool it enables different communities to talk about their culture and heritage.

There are different types of art with many powerful aspects that draw us in, spurring a dialogue and highlighting concepts or ideas, but art doesn't necessarily need to be engaging to be appreciated or powerful.

Art is what stays with us, what crosses throughout the centuries and what we may refer to when referencing someone's life, for instance J. Paul Getty, it's the art and the museum we recall.

### *Laure you founded Beirut Art Fair which was incredibly successful, when did you become interested in Lebanon and the MENA region? Can you share with us a bit about this relationship?*

**LdH:** I was a journalist for about 10 years and went to Lebanon in 1991. There I met art collectors, lovers of art and discovered many Lebanese artists, as well as the richness of the country's culture and heritage—such as the first University of Law in the world was in Beirut Lebanon.

In 1998 I established ARTUEL, the first international art fair in the MENA region which ran until 2005. I then joined the team of Art Paris and installed Art Paris Abu Dhabi, now known as Abu Dhabi Art Fair. When I went back to Beirut in 2009, it was to recreate ARTUEL Art Fair but named it Beirut Art Fair. In Parallel, I had conceived JABAL, an art salon to discover young Lebanese artists in different cities across Lebanon. The name was a play of words, as J.A.B.A.L in Arabic means mountain and in French, it stood for Jeunes Artistes des Beaux Arts du Liban.

Beirut Art fair will be back at some point. It's truly heartbreaking what's happened in the country and it's significant to me to highlight the talent that comes from Lebanon. The drawing style, light and colours breathing out of paintings by Lebanese artists enchanted me.

There is much variety in the arts of the MENA region, whether from the UAE, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and so forth, each possess their inspiring particularities and richness. When I started to grasp what the artworks were communicating, I became entranced and decided to dedicate my life to the arts from the MENA region.

***MENART fair will soon launch, how did the fair come about and evolve into what we will be experiencing this May? And what are its aims?***

**LdH:** For a while now I've been thinking about doing something in France to showcase the magic that stems from the MENA region. It's heritage, archeology, creation, design, cinema, thinking, food, everything is art.

The Levant was a passage to the Orient and a bridge for civilisations, a route to exchange merchandises on the silk road. The heritage from the Gulf countries is rich and extensive, they are bedouin and know how to survive in difficult climatical situations. The sand dunes with the wind coming in from the desert recall the art of calligraphy.

In the French language, when referencing numbers, we say "les chiffres Arabes" (Arabic numbers)—but I'm not sure if everyone knows why, and that should be addressed—with the cultural heritage and the contemporary art scenes of the region brought to the forefront. For instance, Petra is always a point of reference for Jordan, but a fabulous contemporary art scene with arts ranging from sculpture to design also exists there.

The importance to highlight the diverse creativeness in or influenced by the region and challenge any preconceived ideas is paramount. It irritates me when the MENA region is talked about on the news only in terms of politics or religion, why is not more mentioned regarding it being a remarkable area of inspiration and creation. It's filled with artistic vigour—with women playing such an essential role, unlike what some may presume, most working in the art world of the MENA region are women.

So when I started to think about MENART fair, it was to raise awareness on the region's creativity, with the aim to highlight the varied territories in their own light, the diverse richness of the region in their own words, accompany the art and the art galleries from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe and showcase the heritage, the contemporary art scenes, the young generation and create a dialogue through the arts.



***Alia Ali, Love series – N°3, 2021 fine art UV impression flat on aluminium Dibond, 107 x 388 cm,  
Courtesy of Alia Ali and 193 Gallery***





***Yoriyas, Street Prayer-Série Casablanca, not the movie, 2018, pigment print,40x60 cm,edition of 7,Courtesy of Yoriyas & 193 Gallery***





***Slimen El Kamel, Écoutez et appréciez, 2020, acrylic on canvas, 210 x 157 cm, Courtesy Galerie La La Lande, ©Firas Ben Khelifa***



**Hamid Ajami**, acrylic on canvas, 150x150 cm, 1387 (1 of 2) **SHIRIN ART GALLERY** (Téhéran / NYC)

*Joanna what was principal for you in regards to your artistic direction of the fair and what is it about art from the MENA region that entices you?*

**JC:** It was important for me that the galleries from the region that haven't yet shown in Europe, be featured. Each gallery curates their own display, but all of the galleries are within the context of the fair. Having a regional art fair gives the audience an idea of the vibe and energy found in the art scenes of the countries and communities being represented at MENART fair. It was key that the galleries at the fair reflect the creative variety of the region.

Much poetic and nostalgic sentiment will be felt throughout the artworks, with a mix of well known artists who live and show in Europe such as Etel Adnan, Simone Fattal, Youssef Nabil and so forth, established artists and emerging artists to come and discover.

Art in all its forms and from all parts of the world appeal to me. The MENA region has some really interesting and diverse art. Many artists have not yet been given the opportunity or framework to exhibit and have a voice beyond where they are from. Communicating the creative perspective is



crucial; geopolitical or religious problems seem to be more reported on, yet the region is filled with alluring art, depth in culture and intellectual sensibilities.

One of our objectives is for the arts to generate a conversation between the MENA region and Europe. The art fair consisting of about 22 galleries means the public can take the time to take everything in, speak with the gallerists and through art come across many destinations found in one space.



***Youssef Nabil, Say Goodbye, Self-portrait Alexandrie, 2009, 2009, Tirage gélatino-argentique colored by hand, series of 5, each unique, 74,4 x 100,5 cm, Edition 5/5, Courtesy of the artist and***

*the Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Brussels, © Youssef Nabil*

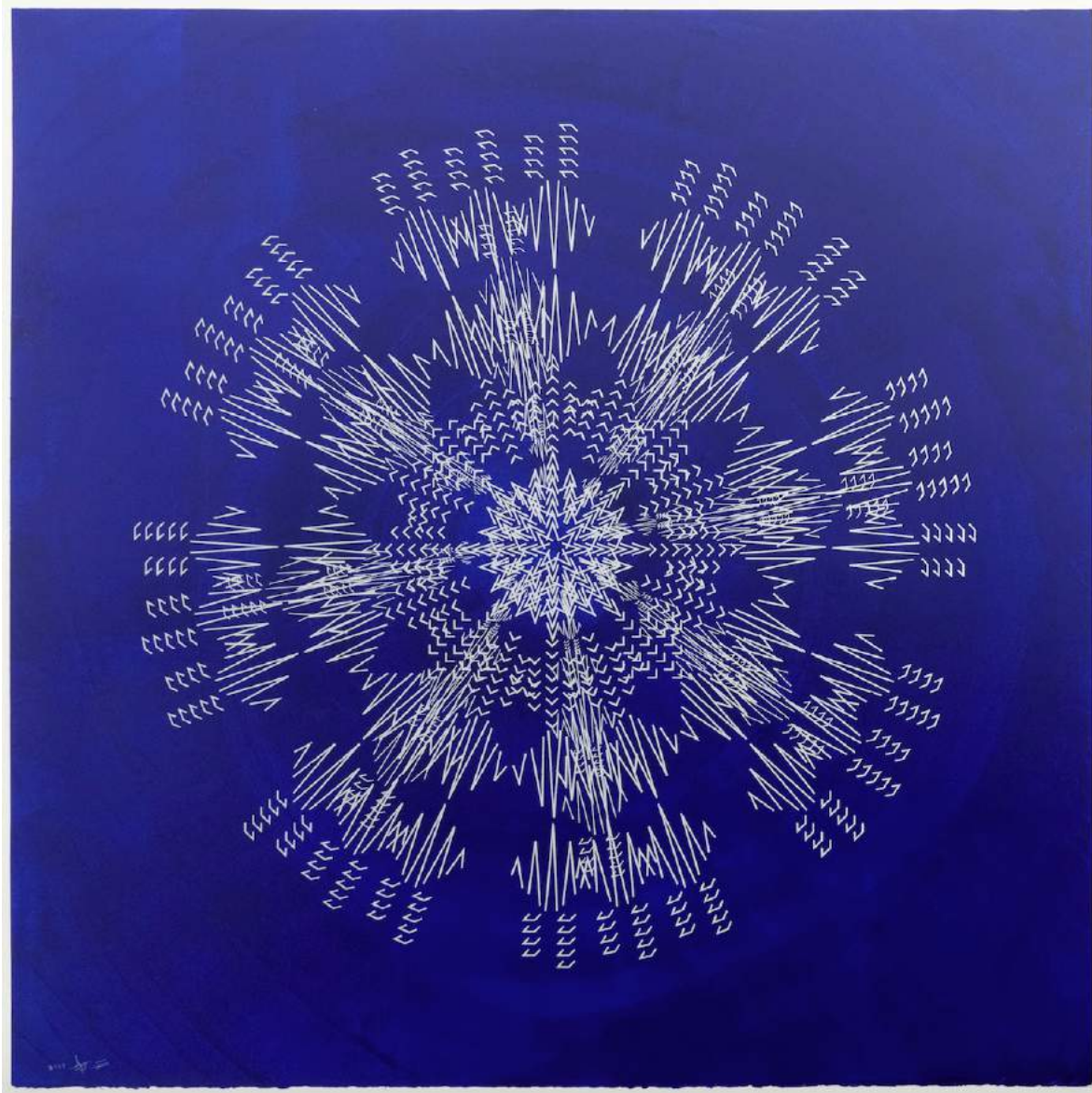


***Simone Fattal, oil on canvas, 171 x 121 cm Galerie Tanit (Beyrouth / Munich)***



***Serge Najjar, Blue Escape, 50x50cm, 2013 - @Galerie Bessières***





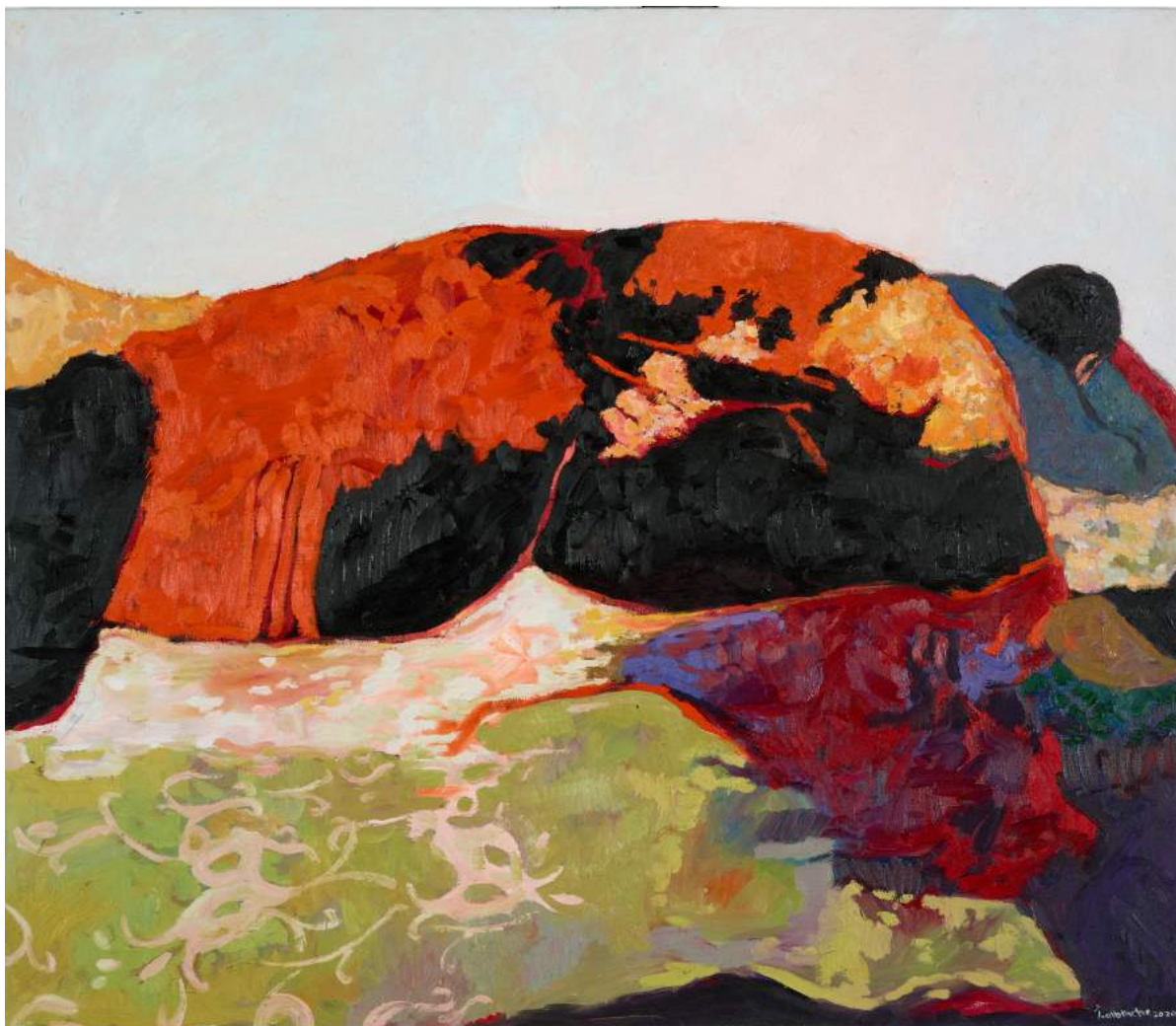
**Lulwah Al Homoud, *Al Shakoor*, 2019, Mixed media on Paper, 110 cm x 110 cm Mono Gallery (Riyadh)**

***Will there be talks and round tables parallel to the art fair?***

**JC:** Compelling discussions form part of the program that accompanies the fair, and a variety of institutions and partners will hold talks on art regarding Europe and the MENA region, deep in dialogue around engaged artworks.

A talk on how artists, who work in war zones or troubled areas, can obtain a visa and receive help towards an art studio in Europe, I will also be organising. Panels are being created with associations, hopefully a representative from the Ministry of Culture, and different entrepreneurs who could offer support to artists in exile.

**LdH:** The talks will be both online and offline on an exchange of ideas, topics ranging from the arts in Algeria, Morocco to Yemen, on how the French Government can help highlight art from the MENA region, and our first talk will be dedicated to the UAE.



**Anas Albraehe, *Untitled*, 2020, oil on canvas, 120 x 140 cm Saleh Barakat Gallery (Beyrouth)**





**Hamza Bounoua, *Untitled*, 2009, mixed techniques on paper, 78 x 75 cm Wadi Finan Art Gallery (Amman, Jordanie)**





*Baya Mahieddine, Les musiciennes, 1988, gouache & watercolour on paper, 73 x 98 cm Elmarsa Gallery (La Marsa / Dubai)*

*How has art from the region changed or evolved? And has art become more engaging?*

**LdH:** Looking at how influences in art have evolved, changed or interlinked is interesting. An amalgam of artistic styles can occur.

At the end of the 19th century artists were influenced by the Italian School of Art and later, modern artists like Hussein Madi were too. Subsequently modern artists from the MENA region were drawn to the Paris School of Art, whilst on the other hand, French artists like George Cyr—an art teacher in Lebanon, was inspired by the Lebanon for his own artworks.

It's essential to note that in Europe the modern period started after WWII, whereas in the Middle East, we could place it from the 1950's, that variation in date impacts how art evolves.

In contemporary art, an artist such as Mohamad Said Baalbaki, whilst keeping his own uniqueness in his work, nonetheless, absorbed references from Berlin when he did his art residency in the Studio of the artist Marwan. Artists can refer to a variety of schools, techniques, cultures, yet still develop an

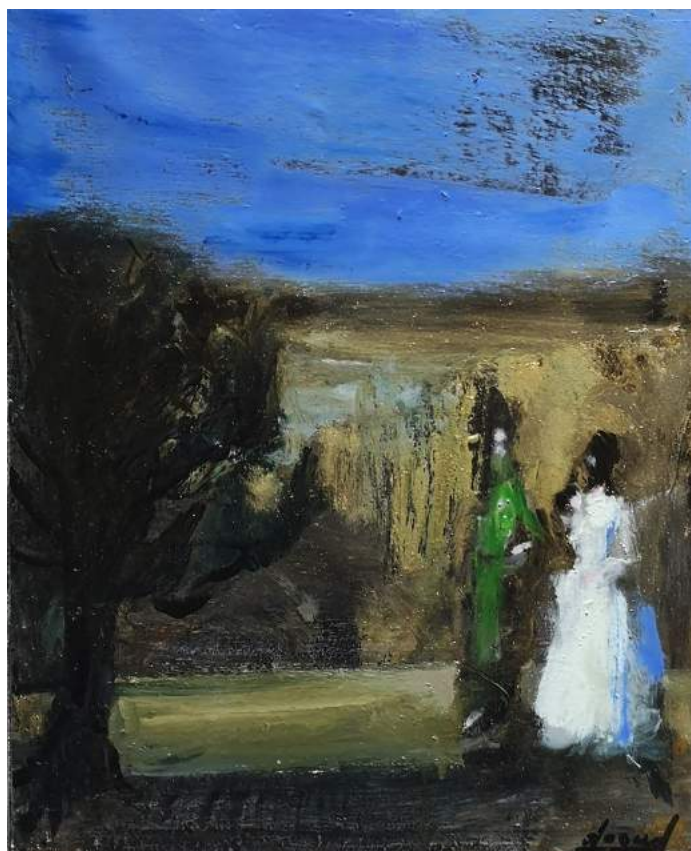
artistic style of their own. It's riveting to see how all these different perspectives can connect through art.

Some artists may reflect, document and engage with what is happening in society, around them or in their lives, whatever that may be, whether it is in regards to gender, history, environment, expression, their heritage, the meaning of technology and so forth.

It has to be said that in general, when countries want to make peace, they start with football and art.

**JC:** The fair is a real space to start a dialogue on contemporary notions as well as relay the value of heritage within the art discourse. There will be artworks at the fair that are aesthetically beautiful that depict artist's statements on society or their everyday life.

It's interesting to note that though an artist has several influences and may be concerned too with what is happening in their surroundings, at the same time artists want to expand from what they are referenced with. Lebanese artists are engaged artists, they have produced much on the heartbreaking situation they have been in this last year, their art is a voice for what is occurring, and at the same time, they want to present different facets of themselves and of their work. For artists from Saudi Arabia it's paramount to have creativity depict their heritage because many may not know about all the cultural abundance they possess.



**David Daoud, Nocturne, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm Galerie Cheriff Tabet (Beyrouth)**





***Abdul Rahman Katanani, The Shadow, 2019, acier ondulé, 205 x 223 cm Saleh Barakat Gallery (Beyrouth)***





*Reem Al Faisal, Only the Lonely, analog print, 60 cm x 50 cm Mono Gallery (Riyadh)*



*Hussein Madi, Untitled, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 65 x 75 cm MARK HACHEM (Beyrouth / Paris / NYC)*





**Ahmad Nouh, Untitled, mixed techniques on canvas, 35x35 cm (édition de 4) Eiwan al Gassar**



**Gallery (Doha, Qatar)**

**Mohamed Hamidi, Sans titre, 2020, Cellulose paint on canvas, 200x150cm, Courtesy LA GALERIE  
38, ©Fouad Maazouz**



**Rebecca Brodskis, *Jeu de main*, 2021, huile sur linen, 190 x 130 cm By Lara Sedbon x Durazzo Projects**

*What are your thoughts on art and technology?*

*Technology has entered the realm at a speeding rate, recently with the rise of NFT's and during the pandemic for many it has been a saving grace, do you project art will be communicated more through technology?*

**LdH:** When the galleries and museums were (or are) shut throughout lockdown, many became incredibly upset. It really demonstrates how crucial art is to us all; it's food for our soul.

Technology has enabled us to continue connecting with each other or working, and in that, perhaps we are more efficient, no time is spent on public transport or on work breaks. But, that's a little bit regretful, we need contact with each other without a screen in between us. That's perhaps also why there's been such a calling for art throughout the pandemic.

As we all move forward, I think the duality of seeing art both in person and online will progress. Artists are now able to show via digital means, but that doesn't necessarily provide the same effect

as seeing artworks in person. That's why having a small art fair dedicated to one region like we are doing, enables the audience to take their time to engage with the works of art and have an added connection with the artists and gallerists.

In terms of the actual art, different tools and materials are still being used; a resurrection of painting in Europe and much photography and video art in the Gulf. What we can notice from the MENA region is the link between fine art and poetry. Etel Adnan is an artist, but she is also a poet. Khalil Gibran was a poet, but he was also an artist. Art evolves with time, tools change, but the need to communicate ideas and notions remains the same. From calligraphy to photography, capturing pictures to video art, and so forth, today artificial intelligence is infused in art, yet painting is still prevalent.

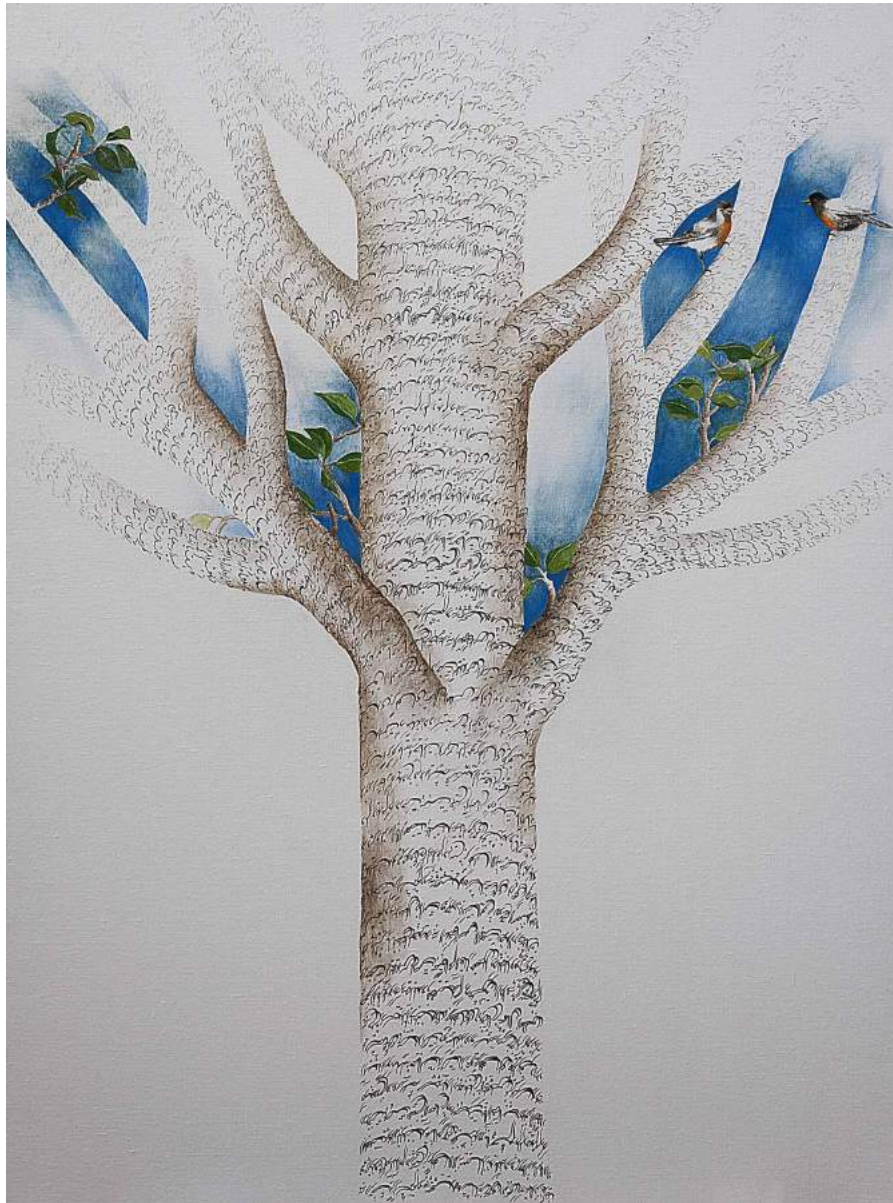
**JC:** Technology opens new doors into exploring creativity and creating new art. Every so often when new tools come into the realm, they can form part of a trend until they become a norm. We can refer for instance to video art, it was viewed as extremely cutting edge, and now with each year passing, it is ever more incorporated within the field. The same can be said with the digitalisation of art and the recent extensive price point of the NFT'S.

I do think that the internet to a certain extent saved the art world during the pandemic, even though we may all have zoom fatigue, at least there is a tool that kept us informed. It is so frustrating for all the amazing curators who had executed such beautiful exhibitions, not to be able to show this last year, viewing artworks or installations in person is a more profound experience. But technology is neither a bad or a good tool, it depends on how one uses it.





**Sara Abdu**, *Loop interactive video work "For the love of the unknown" / « Pour l'amour de l'inconnu »*, 2020 - Courtesy de l'artiste et de **ATHR Gallery ATHR** (Jeddah)



***Katayoun Rouhi, Causa Sui, 2018, oil on canvas, 1.30 x 97 SHIRIN ART GALLERY (Téhéran / NYC)***



**Hamid Ajami, acrylic on canvas 150x150 cm SHIRIN ART GALLERY (Téhéran / NYC)**

***What are your hopes for the future of art from the MENA region?***

**LdH:** That the arts from the region be appreciated with all its richness and diversity; for the variety of territories immersed in all forms of creativity be brought to the forefront, for artists to gain more exposure and for everyone to have the opportunity to communicate with the enchanting art and culture there is.

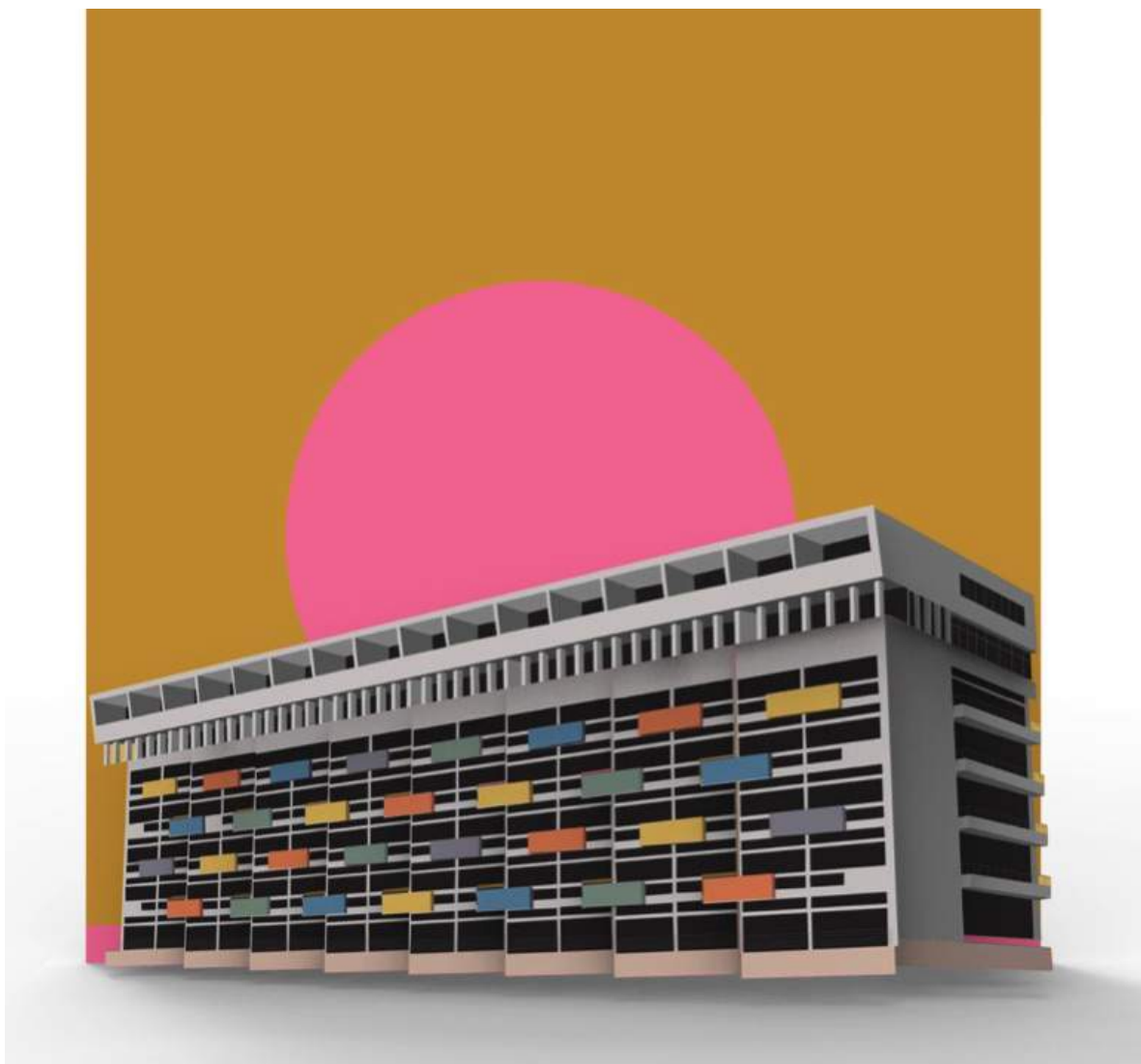
**JC:** There are incredible artists and a wide range of creativity that exists in the MENA region. The many layers of art whether engaging or ornamental from emerging or established artists, for that to continue creating a dialogue, highlighting the captivating art and creative variations from each region to shine.

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***MENART fair runs from 27th May to 30th May 2021 at Cornette de Saint Cyr  
6, avenue Hoche, 75008 Paris <https://menart-fair.com/paris/>***

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***Ali Kandil & Atelier Relief , Shams (Sun) , 2021, Diasec print, brushed aluminum, solid laminate,, 120 x 120 x 12 cm, edition of 5 ATELIER RELIEF***

***Laure d'Hauteville has been active for thirty years between France and the Middle East. Her passion is to promote intercultural dialogue between the Middle East and the West. After having been a cultural journalist and artistic advisor to collectors, Laure d'Hauteville founded in 1998 in Beirut the first international modern & contemporary art fair in the region, ARTUEL, before launching the first two editions of Art Paris in Abu Dhabi in 2007 and 2008. Laure d'Hauteville has curated more than twenty exhibitions all over the world (Paris, Beirut, Dubai, Moscow, Las Vegas ...). Very involved in the artistic scene in Lebanon, in 2010 she created BEIRUT ART FAIR, followed in 2014 by Singapore Art Fair. In 2012, she created a Prize for Lebanese Photography, whose animation for 7 years, has installed many photographers on the international scene. Laure d'Hauteville, is the founder & director of MENART fair.***

picture ©Irene de Rosen



**Joanna Chevalier is curator and contemporary art consultant since 2008. In 2005, She founded Talents Video, a company that produces and distributes art films. From 2008 to date, she was curator of the digital art section Art in Sport, at the Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, followed in 2010 by Qui es-tu Peter? at**

**the Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton in Paris, and produced a dozen films screened during the Nuit des Musées in 2010, at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, Paris. In 2012, she installed two installations for the Nuit Blanche in Paris, a screening of La Mer by Ange Leccia in the premises of the RATP, and an installation of L'Homme d'Eau by Patrick Corillon, place Baudoyer. In 2015, she curated the exhibition Territoire d'Affects, at the Beirut Exhibition Center as well as in 2017, Patterns and Forms in partnership with Beirut Design Fair - paintings by Pierre Malbec and ceramics by Hala Matta - with the fashion house Rabih Kayrouz. She was appointed Special Advisor of BEIRUT ART FAIR in 2018 and Artistic Director in 2019. In 2020, Joanna is curator of Beirut Art & Design Scene auction at Piasa auction house and is curating the upcoming exhibition, La Valise d'Orphée, at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in 2021. Joanna Chevalier is the artistic director of MENART fair**

<https://menart-fair.com/paris/>

**MENART FAIR**  
Middle East & North Africa Art

Cornette de Saint Cyr  
6 av Hoche, 75008 Paris,  
France

20 galeries internationales  
Artistes du Moyen-Orient &  
Maghreb

27 - 30 Mai 2021



**Nada Debs, Pebble table, blue lacquered wood tops and brass base, 270 x 45,5 x 52 cm Studio Nada Debs (Beyrouth)**

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