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Weekend Lifestyle, Art & Culture

ART

New art fair in France to showcase MENA artists

MENART will feature work from 22 galleries from 13 countries

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At a time when cultural life in France has taken a hit, a new boutique art fair showcasing works from the Middle East and North Africa will arrive on the Parisian art scene between May 27 and 30. MENART Fair will feature works from 22 galleries hailing from 13 different countries.

"In Paris, you have an art fair dedicated to Asia and Africa, but you have nothing regarding the Middle East and North Africa," the fair's founder Laure d'Hauteville tells Arab News. A longtime Arabophile, d'Hauteville brings a wealth of knowledge to the fair after living in Beirut for 30 years and founding one of the Lebanese capital's leading cultural events, the Beirut Art Fair.

It was a year after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 that d'Hauteville arrived in Beirut, where she worked as a culture journalist and an advisor to art collectors. She established the Beirut Art Fair in 2010. But since the 2019 uprising, the Port of Beirut explosion, and amid the COVID-19 pandemic and Lebanon's ongoing dire economic crisis, the fair has been on hold, so d'Hauteville is continuing to promote regional art through her latest venture in her native France.

"Beirut Art Fair is now sleeping for a bit. I will wake it up when it's possible," she says. "I don't want to now because it's not good for the galleries and people's mood. It's not the right time. But MENART Fair is a baby of Beirut Art Fair and the baby will grow and cross the countries to say: 'We exist and maybe Lebanon will be in better health and we will be again back in Beirut.'"

Among MENART's participating galleries are two from Saudi Arabia — Mono Gallery and Athr Gallery. The fair will also, she says, welcome groups from notable museums including the Palais de Tokyo, Centre Pompidou and Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris. Complying with COVID-19 restrictions, the event will take place in an intimate setting at the Cornette de Saint Cyr auction house, which was founded in the early 1970s.

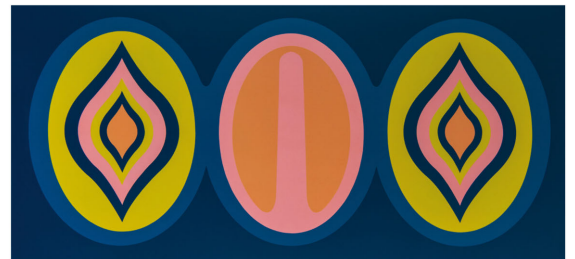


Work by Makkah-born Saudi artist Yousef Jaha (left), the late, great Baya Mahieddine from Algeria (above) and Morocco's Mohammed Hamidi (right) will all be on show at MENART, organized by Joanna Chevalier and Laure d'Hauteville (below, L to R). Images supplied



The elegant space, spread across three levels, is housed in a traditional building in the 8th arrondissement of the French capital. "People will see the way we took advantage of the architecture to highlight the artwork that we will exhibit," says d'Hauteville. It consists of white ornate walls, Art Deco windows, and grand fireplaces, providing an interesting contrast to the vibrancy and modernity of the art.

Through the free-access fair, d'Hauteville and her



colleague, curator Joanna Chevalier, aim to not only introduce the French public to artists from the region, but also erase misconceptions of the Middle East through culture and creativity.

"What I don't like here in Europe is when people talk about the Middle East, it's always about politics," d'Hauteville says. "We don't only have politics. We have art, music, and fashion design ... We are alive."

Female artists, then, are a crucial element of MENART, partly to counteract misconstrued views of how

women lead their lives in the Middle East. "It's important to know that many of the artistic and cultural initiatives are produced by women," d'Hauteville says. Works by Lulwah Al-Homoud, Nada Debs and Hiba Kalache, among several others, will be presented at the fair. A number of modern Arab masters, including Etel Adnan, Hussein Madi, Mahjoub Ben Bella and Baya Mahieddine, will also be represented at the show.

"We have some really fantastic artists that are known in their countries, but not in Europe. So, we would like to highlight their work to the European public," d'Hauteville says.