



Press Release

ART DUBAI ANNOUNCES NEW SECTION OF THE FAIR, UAE NOW, DEDICATED TO THE COUNTRY'S EMERGING INDEPENDENT ARTIST-RUN PLATFORMS

- New segment spotlights independent home-grown subcultures and contributes to the mapping of the UAE's evolving and diverse cultural landscape
- 5 platforms showcase their respective initiatives, with a daily programme of talks, workshops and performance open to all Art Dubai visitors

March 13, 2019 | Dubai, United Arab Emirates – Art Dubai today announces UAE NOW, a new segment curated by Abu Dhabi-based **Munira Al Sayegh** exploring the country's emerging independent local artist-run platforms and putting the spotlight on youth and independent home-grown subcultures. UAE NOW launches as part of Art Dubai's 13th edition which opens next week on March 20 through to March 23 at Madinat Jumeirah.

Existing outside the structures of government and private galleries, these self-organised collectives and community groups offer a crucial counterpoint to the public and commercial sectors, and add an essential layer to the local contemporary art ecosystem. UAE NOW highlights the depth in these organisations and their place in the evolving landscape, bringing to the fore the important contribution of grassroots platforms and the underground in creating new ways of thinking, theory and artistic movements.

The five platforms invited to participate and showcase their respective initiatives in the way of their choosing are: **Bait 15**, an artist-run studio and exhibition space in Abu Dhabi and the only platform to have its own physical space; **Banat Collective**, a creative online community to discuss womanhood in the Middle East and North Africa; **Daftar Asfar**, a 'travelling sketchbook' which invites artists to create an interesting collection of artworks within its pages; **Jaffat el Aqlam**, a platform for the written and spoken word; and **PAC** (Public Art Collective), a research based organisation dedicated to the question of the role of the artist in the public realm in the UAE.

The exhibition brings a counter narrative into the fair, creating a symbiotic 'push and pull' between institutional and non-institutional thinking and action; and it is hoped that through this introduction to the UAE's grassroots platforms at Art Dubai, the understanding of the spectrum of the art scene in the country will be furthered.

"Art Dubai, with its values of community building, inclusivity and promoting new and alternative perspectives, has always been a meeting point for cultural dialogue and the exchange of ideas. UAE NOW maintains Art Dubai's sense of place and grounding within the UAE's vibrant creative community and atmosphere of prolific production and unites some of the local subcultures with the country which together add a vital voice to the discourse on contemporary art," said Artistic Director of Art Dubai, **Pablo del Val**.

UAE NOW is curated by independent curator **Munira Al Sayegh** who has dedicated much of her recent thinking to the subculture in her native UAE and who is also co-curating Art Dubai's Residents section and lead tutor of Campus Art Dubai, a six-month education programme for early-career artists. UAE NOW is vital to crystallise what she calls a "unique time" in the history of the UAE.

"We are witnessing a surge of institutions in the UAE but with that it's unclear what to institutionalise for the future as there is little sense of what is on the ground today. At UAE NOW we attempt to document this. Visitors will be able to see the real story of the nation's creative atmosphere, one that is unhindered by commercial obligation, reliant on collaboration and establishing networks in order to create a voice that can elevate itself internationally," said Al Sayegh.

UAE NOW DAILY PROGRAMMING

The programming for this segment will be one that reflects the organic nature of these self-organised platforms. Bait15 will act as the nucleus for the programme to encourage an open dialogue on fundamental topics within the art scene and its practice in the UAE. These topics include: critical discourse within an artist's studio practice, surviving within the booming art scene, understanding reoccurring trends in the region, the importance of the role of a collector at the start of a new art movement, and exploring the role of the public realm as artists.

Within UAE NOW, a clear network will be built through the participating groups; one that is reliant on collaboration, conversation and community. The participants will exist individually within their allocated spaces in this segment but will come together to activate the overall space for a programme that will include workshops, talks and other forms of programming, all open to Art Dubai visitors.

Highlights of the programme are:

- March 20, 6.30pm: 'Me(dusa)', performance/poetry with **Sarah Al Agroobi**
- March 21: Talk on the role of language in the arts with **@Bymajhool**
- March 22, 1pm: 8 Fold Zine Workshop with Jaffat El Aqlam
- March 23: Talk on Vulnerability and Shared Voices, lead by Banat Collective's Sara Safwan, with Sarah Al Agroobi (Letters Project), Malda Smadi (In Transit Archives), Tara Aldughaiter (Tara Talks, Nota) and Munira Al Sayegh

UAE NOW takes place in the Mina A'Salam building which will also house Campus Art Dubai's group show and Residents to become Art Dubai's 'Think Tank' and 'Making Space'.

THE PARTICIPATING PLATFORMS ARE:

BAIT15

BAIT 15 is an artist run studio and exhibition space located in a residential neighbourhood of downtown Abu Dhabi. It was founded in late 2017 by **Afra Al Dhaheri**, **Hashel Al Lamki** and **Maitha Abdalla**. The space includes; studios, one for each of the members, a dedicated studio for the use of visiting artists, and an exhibition space. The founders have disparate studio practices encompassing a variety of media including painting, sculpture, digital media, and performance.

BAIT was conceived from a shared need for studio space and a mutual desire to establish an artist run gallery. By being artist managed and funded, BAIT's mission is open and flexible and can continuously adapt to the emerging art scene of the UAE. It is guided by the work made in the studios, the exhibitions, and the artists, curators, and communities who converge and engage there.

www.bait15.com | Instagram: @bait_15

BANAT COLLECTIVE

Banat Collective is a creative community founded by **Sara Bin Safwan** in response to the lack of artist spaces for women and related discussions about womanhood in wider MENA region. The collective seeks to rethink the ways which women of colour are perceived through showcasing contemporary art, poetry and writings as online content, printed matter, exhibitions and events.

The collective also offers a space for discussion and creation, to address questions of intersectionality, feminism, gender and identity politics from a regional perspective as well as other issues that course through our everyday lives. Despite its name, it is inclusive towards all nationalities and genders seeking to support those who wish to produce, collaborate and share their work with the world.

www.banatcollective.com | Instagram: @ banatcollective

DAFTAR ASFAR

Daftar Asfar is a collaborative, travelling sketchbook, inspired by the large collection of sketchbooks in the Brooklyn Sketchbook Library in New York and founded by **Sarah Hatahet, Lena Kassicieh** and **Nahla Tabbaa** in 2017. While process-based sketches, doodles and ephemeral thoughts often take the back burner in galleries and museums, this library paid homage to the intimate, explorative moments found in an artist's practice. This notion sparked the concept of Daftar Asfar: a sketchbook that would allow artists to explore their own practice while synchronously connecting and interacting with other artists' work – often artists they had never met before. Daftar Asfar has pioneered a new approach to creative expression and the platform has grown organically to celebrate and encourage interdisciplinary creative collaboration.

www.daftarasfar.com | Instagram: @daftarasfar

JAFFAT EL AQLAM

Jaffat El Aqlam is an independent platform that celebrates artistic creations in the wider MENA region. Established in 2014 by **Sarah Ahmed**, Jaffat El Aqlam has grown to become a digital platform and an open space for artists, designers, writers, musicians, poets, start-ups and researchers to feature their work and contribute to the exploration of identities. In addition to the digital presence, the collective publishes zines, conducts workshops, and sells merchandise produced by contributors. It is a self-sustained project with 100% of profits going towards its continuation.

**Jaffat El Aqlam is an Arabic phrase that loosely translates to 'Dried Out Pens', a name derived from the gradual disappearing use and consumption of traditional media.*

www.jaffatelaqlam.com | Instagram: @jaffatelaqlam

PAC (PUBLIC ART COLLECTIVE)

The Public Art Collective (PAC) is a collective dedicated to the research, advancement, and implementation of art in the public realm within the UAE. PAC seeks to enrich the public art landscape by generating a dialogue about public art amongst artists, art professionals, implementors and the public. The collective is currently exploring current public art practices in the UAE, as well as sparking discussions about the role of the artist in the public realm, and empowering studio-based artists to become a part of the public art conversation.

<http://www.publicartcollective.ae> | Instagram: @publicartcollective.ae

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Munira Al Sayegh (UAE, 1989) holds an undergraduate degree from University of London's School of African and Oriental Studies in History of Art and Archaeology, with a focus on the Middle East. After graduating, Al Sayegh interned with the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in the Educational and Developmental departments. Once she moved back to Abu Dhabi, Al Sayegh worked with New York University Abu Dhabi as an assistant producer on the FIND project in 2012. From that she continued on, as co-curator of Art Dubai Projects 2014, assistant curator of *Emirati Expressions* 2015, and curator of *Bayn: the in-between*, the third edition of U.A.E Unlimited 2017. Al Sayegh worked on the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi project as a programmes officer from 2015-2017 and curated Abu Dhabi Art Talks program 2017. Al Sayegh sits on the advisory council board of the NYUAD gallery. She has participated in various panels, lectures and has published articles on the contemporary art scene of the region.

About Art Dubai

Art Dubai is a leading international art fair as well as the world's leading platform for Contemporary and Modern art from the MENASA region.

Mirroring Dubai's position as a centre of trade and junction between different cultures, Art Dubai further acts as a place of discovery for art from centres that are usually omitted from the Western mainstream dialogue on art; in geographical terms referring to a region, which has recently become known as the 'Global South'.

Art Dubai promotes regional art and artists by featuring a unique mix of programming and commissioned works, often in partnership with other regional institutions. Redefining the role an art fair should play, Art Dubai cultivates an ecosystem for art, education and thought leadership beyond the commercial aspects of the fair. Two examples of this are the fair's critically acclaimed Global Art Forum, the largest arts conference in the Middle East and Asia, and Campus Art Dubai a one-of-a-kind educational programme in the UAE.

The fair further acts as a grassroots-type institution for art and art production through initiatives such as Residents, a programme-cum-gallery section for international artists, who are invited to the UAE for a 4-8 week residency to immerse themselves in the local scene.

Acting as a digital extension of Art Dubai's offering, Art Dubai Portraits is a commissioned film series profiling artists that are connected to the fair through its programming or participating galleries. This

serves as a one-of-a-kind resource for curators and researchers working with art and artists from the region.

The fair is sponsored by Julius Baer and Piaget, with Madinat Jumeirah as the home of the event. The Dubai Culture & Arts Authority (Dubai Culture) is a strategic partner of Art Dubai and supports the fair's year-round education programme. BMW is the exclusive car partner of Art Dubai.

www.artdubai.ae

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