

# canvas

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

## TERRA FIRMA

Tarek Al-Ghoussein  
Shaikha Al Mazrou  
Farah Al Qasimi  
Alaa Edris  
Lamya Gargash  
Mohammed Kazem  
eL Seed  
Tomás Saraceno  
Lantian Xie

PLUS UAE National Pavilion  
UAE Unlimited  
Global Art Forum





## TERRA FIRMA

In this issue, we look at the topographies embedded in our constructs of 'home' – as body, locale and practice – in the context of artists who are rooted or based in the UAE, a place thrust into globalisation. Charting a changing cultural landscape through movement, memory and material, we glean retro-futurist imaginations, acts of mark-making, satirical juxtapositions and multi-layered narratives.

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## ONE-ON-ONE



Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath. Image courtesy of the National Pavilion UAE

# Sam Bardaouil & TILL FELLRATH

Lebanese-born Sam Bardaouil and German-born Till Fellrath form a curator duo and are known for their high-profile stints, not the least of which is the UAE National Pavilion for the 2019 Venice Biennale. Based between Munich and New York, the two are often on the road, but took a moment to speak to us about their multiple reference points and perspectives.

**Nadine Khalil: Your work can be arguably located within a regional focus on the Middle East and a cosmopolitan yet site-specific approach. Do you see your curatorial practice existing between these two markers?**

Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath: Our curatorial work centres around highlighting pivotal and insufficiently explored connections that

challenge the binary classifications of regional vs. cosmopolitan. Our research on Modernism has been focusing on several cities across the Middle East, resulting in exhibitions and publications which reveal the Transculturalism that permeated both the independent and collective strands of artistic production emanating from these highly heterogeneous places. The same thinking applies when

The Lebanese National Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2013. Photography by Marco Milan



we approach the contemporary moment, whether through our own exhibitions or our work as Chairmen of the Montblanc Cultural Foundation. Overall, our approach is deeply rooted in our advocacy for inclusion, whether geographically, economically, culturally or across various disciplines.

**NK: Looking back today, how do you feel about your very first shows?**

SB & TF: When we look back at the first two exhibitions we jointly curated as *Art Reoriented* ten years ago, we realise we had our fingers on the pulse from the very beginning. In *ItaliaArabia*, we exhibited leading modernists in New York such as Fateh Al Moudarres, Paul Guiragossian and Aref El Rayess alongside Gino Severini, Massimo Campigli and Renato Guttuso, to mention a few – this was in 2008. *Iran Inside Out*, which coincided with the Green Revolution of 2009, compared Iranian artists working in Iran and in the diaspora (56 in total), 30 years after the Revolution of 1979. It makes us proud that we were shedding light on such important yet lesser-known modern and contemporary aspects of art history and practice so early on in our collaboration. In many ways, this methodology set the tone for the work that we were to do in the years that followed.

**NK: Can you elaborate more on the title of your curatorial platform, *Art Reoriented*, and if it comments on the Orient or rather, orientations towards, and perspectives of, art.**

SB & TF: The decision to work as curators independently comes from our conviction that

there is a need for a revised understanding of art history on the one hand, and the way an exhibition links the artists with the audience on the other. We strongly believe institutionalised structures often limit the space for thinking outside the box. We uncompromisingly advocate the need to understand art, first and foremost, from an artist's perspective. As such we are aiming to reorient the way we think about art, and thus the name for our platform.

**NK: This isn't the first time you have curated a national pavilion for the Venice Biennale. What are you hoping to achieve with the UAE in 2019?**

SB & TF: Our aim for the Biennale in 2019 is to create an exhibition that offers the international art audience the opportunity to directly connect with creative practices in the UAE. We have been visiting the UAE regularly for more than a decade and a significant part of our work has been dedicated to the region at large. We think of the Pavilion as a truly unique platform for critical reflection on timely issues.

**NK: What thematic will you be considering for this pavilion?**

SB & TF: Our curatorial approach aims at shedding light on unexplored, multidisciplinary artistic practices. Our intention is to provide the visitors with an experience that allows for an engaging entry point into a presentation that is at once UAE-specific, yet stands firmly within the global discourse surrounding the current moment.