SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

BIENNIAL & MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS ISSUE
“They were expecting to see an art object, not realising that they had become an art object for the remote audience and vice versa,” says Rana. “So there is an absence of any art object and the viewers on the two sides become the work themselves. But the entire project is about questioning the border lines that exist in our minds, not the physical borders per se, but their understanding of time and location is sort of challenged.”

The inaugural Lahore Biennale, Pakistan’s first, is currently on Rana’s mind, and he has cleared his schedule to focus on it ahead of its November opening this year. His serving as its artistic director last year is yet another credit to his title that extends beyond artist to academic and curator. He sees all of these activities as offering different means to express ideas.

“I am open to any kinds of things that interest me,” he says, and elaborates on what he will bring to his position as artistic director. “Since I am interested in dismantling the idea of linearity of time, I’m doing that for the curatorial project in a different way – encouraging artists to think of real life actions, transactions or functions — it can be a financial function, social function, political function, or things that we do in life. And what if we don’t do those things in life? It can even be a business but using that as a medium to express your ideas,” he says. Ultimately, he aspires for the Lahore Biennale to be a forum for “pushing the idea of what expression is, and whether it should even be called art, as art is a condition of history as we know it.”
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, co-founders of multi-disciplinary curatorial platform Art Reoriented, share a selection of artworks that have inspired their curatorial approach with Selections.

Going beyond conventional art historical and geographical classifications is one of the core concerns of our curatorial practice. As independent curators, we are at liberty to choose our projects, which range from curating exhibitions at large institutions such as Centre Pompidou in Paris, international biennales including Venice and Sydney, small art centres such as the Mosaic Rooms in London and serving on the jury of Video Baltic, to being the chairman of the Montblanc Cultural Foundation. In the past ten years, we have curated exhibitions in museums and art institutions in Korea, Australia, the United States, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the UK and Belgium. What all these projects have in common is our deepening conviction in the central role that artists play in enabling us to re-imagine, and therefore re-invent, our reality.

The context in which a particular artwork is shown fundamentally changes its perception by the public. Firstly, the geographic location plays a major role in how a viewer would relate to an artwork, such as Rabei Sadek’s seminal surrealist work being shown in Paris – the birthplace of Surrealism – or Raed Yassin’s work being shown in Korea. Secondly, the exhibition format may contribute to the impact of a particular artwork, an example of which is Akeem Zaatari’s film being shown as part of a National Pavilion in what is arguably the most global Biennale. Walid Bitar’s impressive performance, which was commissioned for the opening of Mathaf in Doha, is another such example. Thirdly, solo exhibitions and retrospectives, such as we curated for Paul Gueragossian or Mona Hatoum, provide the broader context for the artistic oeuvre of an artist at large. Finally, group exhibitions can examine the formalistic aspects of an artwork, such as Lee Ufan’s paintings within the context of the Korean monochrome movement Dansaekhwa, or Wu Tsang’s installation being presented within a survey of spatial concerns in video art. Group exhibitions can equally highlight thematic contexts, such as with Markus Schinwald’s paintings, or with Hans-Peter Feldmann’s version of the famous bust of Nefertiti.

For our contribution to the “Curated by...” series, we have chosen artworks from some of our previous exhibitions, which have inspired our curatorial approach. These artworks tell manifold stories of how an artist has chosen to break existing boundaries. They are united in their ability to convey their subject matter’s formalistic appeal – irrespective of when, how, and by whom they were created. Last but not least, with all the theoretical discussion around an artwork, we should always remember to be seduced by its magical capability to communicate those things that simply cannot be expressed in words.
2. Lee Ufan
From Line
1979

One of Lee Ufan’s most iconic series from the 1970s is entitled From Line. While the medium resembles a ‘traditional’ painting, the artwork is rather the record of a performative act. The artist applies paint on a thick brush, and paints a blue stripe from the top of the canvas all the way to the bottom until the paint almost disappeared. This movement is repeated along the entire canvas, and the viewer can distinctly trace the artist’s gestures. The artwork becomes at once an abstract painting and the recording of the artist’s performance. This process-driven approach is the core characteristic of the artists working at that time in a style that is now described as Dansaekhwa.

Lee Ufan
From Line, 1979
Exhibition at the National Museum of Korea: "Dansaekhwa, Korean Minimal Art. Research and Collections.”
February 20 – April 17, 2015
Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul / South Korea,

Wu Tsang’s practice as a video artist and filmmaker is characterised by a distinct and current visual language. Central to his artworks is the consideration of space, which constitutes an integral part of his installations. His two-channel work The Looks is about Bliss, a pop star by day and underground performer by night, and employs a vertical orientation. Upon entering the space, we are confronted by a first screen, placed at the centre of the room, showing Bliss off-stage in her personal space. Crossing from either side to the remaining part of the gallery, we are engulfed in a wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling projection of Bliss in one of her performances. This presentation reinforces both the dichotomy and interdependence between the private and the staged, the intimate and the overt.

Wu Tsang
The Looks
2015

Lee Ufan
(1936–)

Brussels / Belgium
April 24, 2016, Boghossian Museum of Art, Brussels

Dansaekhwa and Korean Art, January 29 – April 17, 2015, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul / South Korea,

Wu Tsang, The Looks, 2015, @The artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

Curated by

Suprasetter
Million Plate Huber
V1.0g (pdf)
Lin+
Process
Saphira

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Brand_Two / 100.0 * 63.0 cm / 2 (matt coated) / 0.1000 mm / 115 g/m²

Paper Width 100.0 cm
Paper Height 63.0 cm
Paper Center Offset 0.0 cm
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13.8 cm

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Hans-Peter Feldmann has throughout his career focused on overcoming the traditional confines of art. In this 2012 artwork, \textit{The Bust of Nefertiti}, the artist offers us a satirical take on the Queen’s name which translates into “the beautiful one has come.” Unlike the original bust, this plaster cast version is fully painted and includes some ironic additions. Upon closer inspection, the viewer realises that the bust now has both eyes intact, yet they are painted in a cross-eyed position. This artwork challenges the lines between “high” art and crafts, and between the familiar and unfamiliar. Through this de-contextualisation, the artist prompts us to reconsider fixed ideas about artworks that may all too often be frozen in time.
Mona Hatoum’s seminal installation Impenetrable confronts the viewer with a delicate and precariously suspended cube, a light and airy structure that physically possesses the gallery space. It hovers about 10cm above the floor, as if levitating. On closer inspection, however, this minimal form, which appears so delicate from a distance, reveals its原材料: rods of sharp barbed wire, a material that is heavy with connotations. The title of the work refers to Jesús-Rafael Soto’s Penetrables, but this threatening avalanche of pointed metal stems is closed off to the viewer and impossible to enter. Typical of Mona Hatoum’s oeuvre, this artwork challenges traditional classifications of art history and explores contradictory sentiments such as lightness and harshness (cited from the catalogue accompanying the exhibition).
6. Akrham Zaatari
Letter to a refusing pilot
2010

Akrham Zaatari’s film Letter to a refusing pilot was specifically commissioned for Lebanon’s representation at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. The film is an autobiographical take on the artist’s childhood memory of the bombing of a school in Saida by the Israeli army. Formally, the film is a sequence of various scenes, showing for example, the artist’s hands going through the pages of the novel The Little Prince, a sculpture in the garden of the school, and an adolescent boy walking to play with his friends by giving a human face to the story. Zaatari allows viewers to connect with the main character wondering what might have been. The film goes far beyond a simple projection, and was presented in a stage-like setting with floor-lit walls and an empty movie chair turned away from the film, facing a looped 16mm film showing the bombing of Saida in 1982. This staging is an invitation for the real protagonists to take a seat and contemplate the scene.

Akrham Zaatari, Letter to a refusing pilot, 2010, 16mm film, color, sound, 9 minutes, From the exhibition: From the time of Modern Art, Doha / Qatar 2011, Mathaf, Arab Museum through Time and Place, 1 – November 20, 2013, Video, Saphira, Venice, Italy

7. Wafaa Bilal
The 3rd
2010

The 3rd was commissioned for the opening exhibition of Mathaf in Doha, and is perhaps one of the most radical performance pieces of our times. The artist had a camera surgically inserted onto the back of his head to record everything that was happening around him for an entire year. This “third eye” was taking footage of daily life, as well as scenes, showing, for example, the artist’s hands inserting plastic surgery, the artist was readily endorsing plastic surgery, the artist was continuously prompted to defend his personal choice. The performance and interactive installation successfully raised questions of privacy in the age of social media, the transience of memory and created a valuable discourse that was an integral part of the artwork itself.

Wafaa Bilal, The 3rd, performance, From the exhibition: From the time of Modern Art, Doha / Qatar 2011, Mathaf, Arab Museum through Time and Place, November 23, 2010 – May 26, 2011, Mathaf, Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar
B. Rateb Seddik
Untitled

Rateb Seddik completed his formal artistic education both in Cairo and in London. His seminal oil-on-
wood painting from 1940 combines his passions for opera and ancient Egyptian art. The artwork depicts
a group of diversely featured human beings who are all equally united by a white cloth symbolizing
death or suffering. While the scene resembles a Turkish bathhouse, it also references Stravinsky’s
opera of the tragedy of Oedipus Rex. This surrealist masterpiece is a prime example of an artwork that is
at once locally rooted and universally informed.
In the background, vertical bundles of abstract figures, huddled together and sheltering one another, can be seen. These bear no faces or distinct features, reminding us that all human beings are ultimately united.
Markus Schinwald uses paintings that mostly date back to the Austrian Biedermeier style. He then paints on them incongruous elements that resemble prostheses, medical instruments, or tools of confinement onto the paintings. In doing so, he subtly evokes the stern 19th-century context in which they were originally created, and the correlation between Vienna and the discipline of psychology and Freudian psychoanalysis. Schinwald’s formalistic interventions, which imbue his paintings with an anachronistic ambiguity, propel the viewers to thoroughly look at the artwork before them as they try to locate them within a clearly defined period or genre. 

© Markus Schinwald 2015, Oil on canvas, 61 × 50 cm (24,02 × 19,69 in); 70 × 59 cm, Courtesy...