

JAMM gears up to host second art auction in Kuwait

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KUWAIT: Another week to go before JAMM holds its second auction in Kuwait, where over 90 top-quality artworks by contemporary international artists will be featured at the Avenues. On February 9, works of art by renowned artists such as, Nabil Nahas, Rokni Haerizadeh, Rahim Sharif, Reza Derakshani, Damain Hirst, Hassan Meer, Ahmed Alsoudani and Farideh Lashai will be auctioned off to provide an opportunity for both new and existing clients in the GCC region and beyond, to add to their collections of contemporary art.

Al Watan Daily got together with the co-founder of JAMM, Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah, to get an inkling of what can be expected from this mega event, which promises to bring together cultures, trends, collectors and private individuals, without geographical restriction, who are shaping the contemporary art market today.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to present the works of the top contemporary artists from Kuwait, and to showcase the best of the best from across the Middle East and beyond," shares Al-Sabah, who has always patronized the arts. "My mother has been a contemporary art collector, so I grew up surrounded by the arts. Not just paintings, but dance and music as well," informs Al-Sabah.

Being brought up having great appreciation for art, Al-Sabah went on to study history with a focus on art and then worked as a consultant for Christie's International, the auction house in London. While there, she met Lydia Limerick and the two conceived and curated an exhibition of Arab and Iranian Modern Masters, in collaboration with Saatchi's breakthrough exhibition, of Middle Eastern contemporary art, in Dubai. "We planned to do something similar in Kuwait but because of the recession,



Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah.

we held off. However, so much was happening in terms of art in Kuwait, we decided to start our own company in 2009, named JAMM after our three children's initials-Lydia's two boys, Jack and Mathew and my daughter Amaya," explains Al-Sabah.

Therefore, last year, JAMM hosted its first auction with about 53 works by Arab, Iranian and Western artists. "We weren't sure then, if we were going to make it an annual event but when the feedback received was so positive, we decided to hold one auction every year in Kuwait and another in London. A lot of collectors from Dubai, Qatar and even Kuwait patronized the event," shares Al-Sabah, "In fact, the event was positively buzzing. We set about 150 seats and we were worried that there would be many left empty, but a lot of people ended up standing."

This year, however, about 80 local works and 20 pieces from as far flung regions as Tanzania, Bolivia, Pakistan and Cuba, will be making an appearance. "Some of the artists



FILE - Some of the artwork displayed in JAMM is seen in these handout images.

I contacted directly because I have been in the art business for so long now, it was easy. While other works, I actually sought out. I also contacted private collectors and young emerging artists. So the works you'll see will be a mix from certain galleries in the Middle East, private collections, foreign galleries and artists," informs Al-Sabah.

Keeping in mind the fast growing appetite and appreciation for quality artworks at the right price, all pieces at the auction will be under 14,000 KD. A public exhibition of the artworks will take place at the Avenues on February 8, so that the preview will provide an opportunity for the public to visit and enjoy the art that will go under the hammer on February 9. "We wouldn't want to have a big auction house with a long table where languages from all over the world are spoken and a feeling of intimidation lies in the air. Our aim is to encourage young people to collect. The idea is to offer good works of art at affordable prices, so that young collectors

can purchase as well," insists Al-Sabah.

As to why she thinks art is booming in the state of Kuwait, Al Sabah reasons that like the global market, art rides the wave of global capitalism. "Western art has always been a benchmark. But now with the spotlight shifting to the Middle East, people want to understand the culture behind the headlines. In five years, we had about 40 galleries mushrooming in Dubai.

Qatar and Abu Dhabi are also pushing programs for the arts, and Bahrain has a history of talented artists. In Kuwait itself, during the 1960's, we had the Sultan Gallery and our government used to send artists on scholarships, so that artists had a job by day and painted at night. I hope that with contemporary art too, the government will be more supportive," says Al-Sabah. So what entices her about a painting? "It should evoke an emotional response! Like certain works, you just can't explain why you are drawn to them. And an intellectual provocation-artworks



that make you think. Ultimately, it's the involvement of both the heart and the mind. There is a lot of decorative art which is pretty to look at but doesn't move you emotionally. A multi layered, multi meaning image tends to stay in your head," shares Al-Sabah, who still retains fond memories of the first paintings she bought. "It was a Picasso print that I picked up in London and I paid for, in installments. It still hangs in my bedroom and another of an angel by Arab artist, Thuraya Al-Baqsam." The auction by JAMM will be conducted by renowned auctioneer, Aileen Agopian, who has been instrumental in the successes of many evening sale auctions of private collections, as well as setting new records for artists such as Richard Prince and Julian Schnabel, to name a few.

Also, 10 percent of the proceeds from the auction sale will benefit, KAACH, the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals.

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