

Bridging global north-south divide at 15th Art Dubai fair

Mumbai-based Nancy Adajania curates the Bawwaba section focusing on contemporary narratives from the western world



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Soghra Khurasani's works are on display at the Bawwaba section of Art Dubai. Credit: Tarq Gallery

The Bawwaba section at the 15th edition of the Art Dubai fair, that's on till March 13, is likely to generate interest for its spotlight on contemporary works that speak a global language yet are rooted in regions beyond the western capitals of art.

Curated by Mumbai-based cultural theorist Nancy Adajania, Bawwaba (Arabic for "gateway") highlights the divides that rig the art world, including its most substantial yet invisible one—the global north/ south, or the Euro-American/'offsites' duality.

In an interview on an earlier edition of Bawwaba (launched in 2019), Adajania described it as an invitation to annotate the 'offsites' of global contemporary art without creating a binary between art from the west and the so-called non-west.

Bawwaba 2022 will feature solo presentations by artists from Angola (Kiluanji Kia Henda), Chile (Ernesto Burgos), India (Soghra Khurasani, Ranbir Kaleka, Mona Rai, Vipeksha Gupta), Nigeria (Tonia Nneji), Pakistan (Wardha Shabbir), and Peru (José Luis Martinat).

"It's an invitation to slow down, to concentrate on the facture or the act of making; on techne as a form of resistance against the forces of authoritarianism," said Adajania about this year's edition. "By techne, I mean a haptic investment of the self in making and unmaking things, rather than a rhetorical affiliation of the self to cold, alienating conceptualisms."

There couldn't be a venue better than Dubai to bridge these strong yet indistinguishable divides, not just because of its geographical location at the confluence of the East and the West, but also because it emerged as a significant player in the art world in the past few decades.

Along with Abu Dhabi, which is about 100 km away and home to internationally important art museums, Dubai has made the Middle East a focal point of global art.

"I think the Middle East, Dubai in particular, is a wonderful meeting point for several perspectives," said Hena Kapadia, director of the Mumbai-based Tarq gallery that is presenting Soghra Khurasani's woodcut and etching prints at the Bawwaba section.

"There are several efforts underway to amplify voices from the global south, including the Dhaka Art Summit, Colomboscope and the Kochi-Muziris Biennale."

The discourse on the global north v/s global south becomes

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significant when the non-West world is increasingly attaining ascendancy in various fields of life. The shift finds representation in the artworks being created in cities outside the western hemisphere.

With dissolving borders, contemporary artists from Asia and Africa are no longer representative of their regional identities alone but an integral part of the multi-ethnic global village.

Among the Indian artists at Bawwaba, Khurasani's prints are part of her work since 2021 for the series, Shadows Under My Sky, said Kapadia. New Delhi's Nature Morte gallery is presenting abstractionist Mona Rai's works on paper, which have been referred to as "marks on paper." New Delhi's Vadehra Art Gallery is presenting multi-media artist Ranbir Kaleka's installation, Not Anonymous—Waking to the Obscure Fear of a New Dawn, while another New Delhi gallery, Blueprint12, is presenting works by the young artist, Vipeksha Gupta, known for her monochromatic and meditative drawings.

The works in the Bawwaba section will be on view at the Madinat Jumeirah Conference & Events Centre, Dubai, March 11-13.

The writer is a New Delhi-based journalist, editor and arts consultant.

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