

VOGUE

ARABIA

NOVEMBER

FOR REAL

The red-carpet lives of Yousra, Nelly Karim, and Dorra Zarrouk

Glamour
galore
*Velvet, ruffles
& feathers power
up the season*

RIHANNA

PAYS HOMAGE TO NEFERTITI

MALIHA TABIRI, THE
ENTREPRENEUR
BEHIND TABARI
ARTSPACE IN DUBAI
BELOW AFRICAN
PRINCESS BY
ADEL EL SIWI



TICKET

Maliha Tabari is one of the region's first champions of Middle Eastern art. Fifteen years after opening her Dubai-based gallery, she is now ready to give it her name

Words **CATERINA MINTHE**

m eet Maliha Tabari and her sun-kissed skin and long, wavy blond hair give the impression that the mother of two spends her time knee-deep in the ocean. She glows. But when she speaks, her muffled voice reveals a very different reality. Fighting a cold in 35° Dubai fall weather, Tabari says, "I don't stop. I'm always pushing myself. To the point where I become ill."

Tabari is one of the region's most prolific visionaries, who anticipated the growth of the Middle Eastern art market long before Christie's and Sotheby's opened their doors and Bonhams auction house witnessed the first regional artwork achieve a sale of more than one million dollars – Farhad Moshiri's mixed media work "Eshgh" in 2008. Sotheby's recently released a report on sales of Middle Eastern art increasing 41% in the value spent by clients in the region from 2015-2016 alone. Tabari, who is one-third of a tribe of overachieving sisters (along with Mochi founder, Ayah Tabari), is the owner of the formerly named Artspace Dubai gallery, which specializes in modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art. To celebrate the gallery's 15th anniversary, it has been renamed Tabari Artspace. The gallery owner recalls her venture's earlier days: "It was successful from day one." One of her first shows featured works by Picasso, Mirò, and Warhol, before her focus turned to Middle Eastern art. "I started traveling and noticed



that there were so many amazing artists in our region," she recalls. "When I would look at the different art movements around the world, no one was focused on the Middle East."

A former art student at the Otis College of Art and Design in California, and a trained sculptor and painter, Tabari knew she had an eye for art. Born in Jordan and raised in Saudi Arabia, the Middle East is her home. "I understand the region very well – and the artists. Their work speaks of politics and our experiences. They are emotional people and their work reflects this." At 21, Tabari knew she wanted to open a gallery in Dubai. She also met her business partner, a London-based real estate developer who shared her passion for art and who

would become her husband. “At the beginning, I was very nervous. Would people even understand what it was?” remembers Tabari of the gallery’s early days at a time when everything in Dubai was so new that the only hotel on Sheikh Zayed Road was the Fairmont. “People were decorating their homes, but they weren’t really buying art. I was one of the first to talk about why art is worth the investment.” Tabari considers that she was fortunate to open her gallery so early, which afforded her time to grow long before galleries such as The Third Line and Leila Heller opened. She speaks with admiration of her industry colleagues and the burgeoning art scene in the region. “The Third Line has an excellent program and shows in many international art fairs, while Leila Heller is helping to introduce the international art scene to Dubai.” She adds that the Alserkal family has produced many galleries and spaces, including the new Concrete space. “Local families are pushing the cultural art hub in this region, not just the commercial.”



“KING AKHNATON” BY EGYPTIAN ARTIST ADEL EL SIWI, WHO HAS HELD SOLO SHOWS AT TABARI ARTSPACE

“I was one of the FIRST to talk about WHY ART is WORTH the investment”

Like her peers, Tabari also invests in the artists whose work she sells, listening to their struggles and advising them on how to branch out globally. Many artists who went on to become household names in the art world first showed at her gallery. Ahmed Mater showcased at Artspace in 2007, before Edge of Arabia started working with him in London, and Farhad Moshiri showed at Artspace in 2004, four years before he was breaking world records

at international auction houses. “I remember when Lebanese artist Khaled Zaki’s work was selling for US\$5 000 p/m. Now it’s selling for US\$ 49 000 p/m,” she comments, adding that the artist’s work is at the Venice and Beijing Biennales. Zaki is one of the many Middle Eastern artists whose work Tabari and her husband personally collect. Some others include Egyptian painter Adel El Siwi and Iraqi visual artist Dia Azzawi, regarded as a pioneer of contemporary Arab art. The couple also own pieces from Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein, and edition VII of the Magnet Series by the young and wildly influential Saudi conceptual artist Ahmed Mater.

With a day-to-day infused with art – an area that many turn to for some form of escapism along with the promise of a high return on investment, Tabari herself goes outdoors to disconnect. “Being Palestinian, home is where my family is. But I love to leave the country to be in nature.” Even with 15 years of success behind her, she insists on being the ever-present face, force, and now name behind Tabari Artspace. “The nature of our business is connecting with people. We’re still in a market where we are educating. It’s like buying a house; you need to trust the person. And now, the art you hang on your walls has become a symbol of status.” □

The Silk Road exhibition by Egyptian artist Mohamed Abla is on at Tabari Artspace until November 30. Tabariartspace.com

Maliha Tabari’s FALL SHOPPING LIST

“I consider my fashion sense fun and quirky yet elegant and glamorous. I never plan what to wear, it all happens at the last minute, and according to my mood. I like to be ready for any occasion so my outfit usually works from day to night. I hate being repetitive and lately I am channeling the 1980s – big hair and bangs.”



MINIDRESS, ATTICO

PRADA

BOOTS, FENDI

SKIRT, GUCCI

COAT, SARA BATTAGLIA

VOGUE

العربية

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مشهد حقيقي

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كريم ودرة في عالم
السجادة الحمراء

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