

# SELECTIONS



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**# 51 SHOW AND TELL**  
WINTER 2019 - LBP 30,000/AED 74

# Art Paper – Tabari Artspace

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GALLERY  
FOUNDER

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Tabari Artspace opened in 2002 and was rebranded in 2018. Our seminal moments include the acquisition of works by museums and institutions that reflect not only the international interest in the narratives of the Middle East, which is always refreshing and reassuring to witness as it reinforces our missions, but also the quality of the artist's work and its significance in the visual recording of history. We are also now encountering a fresh interest in the art of the

Middle East from Asia, with works by Hazem Harb recently exhibited in Korea for example. Beyond this, we are now reaching a new and diverse demographic via our digital presence, which is exciting to witness and interesting to watch grow.

*What did you do before you opened your gallery in Dubai in 2003?*

Following 15 years in Saudi Arabia, I moved to the United States in 1999 to study art, first at the Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles and later at the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. Working predominantly in sculpture, my practice was greatly inspired and influenced by my years in the Middle East. I examined the dualities that surrounded me during my formative years – good and bad, right and wrong, order and chaos. Art was a meditative process for me and an opportunity for exploration and reflection.



Gallerist Maliha Tabari and visual artist Hazem Harb photographed inside Harb's El Beit installation (2018). Photo from Laura Beaney.



Left Hazem Harb, Tebariya, 2017. 'El Beit (2018) exhibition'.

Right Sliman-Mansour, The-Martyr, 1993. 'El Beit (2018) exhibition'.  
Courtesy of Tabari Artspace.



'El Beit (2018) exhibition'. Image courtesy of Tabari Artspace

Could you tell us about your first exhibition, which acted as a statement for your programme? We're one of the longest standing galleries in the region, and if you trace our history you can understand the evolution of Middle Eastern art over the last 17 years. We have taken much pleasure in representing and exhibiting some of the greatest success stories dating back to Farhad Moshiri in 2004. Each exhibit is reflective of a specific moment in time and climate, from Zaki's *Resurrection* series exhibited in the wake of the Arab uprisings, to Abla's *Silk Road* series that came at a time when renewed interest in the Silk Road routes started to be explored both academically and politically. As such, none outweighs another in terms of pertinence, however I would say that *El Beit* was a show completely aligned with our focus after the rebrand. Translating from Arabic to English as "home," *El Beit* held much significance for me. Featuring the work of three artists – Hazem Harb, Mohammed Joha and Sliman Mansour – the exhibition reflected upon the collective experience of lost identity and displacement in Palestine. For me, as a member of the Palestinian diaspora, the notion of home holds loaded meaning but beyond this collective showing of contemporary and

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modernist Palestinian artists was a chance to open up new discussions surrounding my country's reality on a global platform – through painting, photography and sculpture – whilst applauding its impressive talent all at once.

*You recently changed your gallery name from Artspace to Tabari Artspace. What does sharing your name with the gallery mean to you?* For me the decision to rebrand was a big thing – it extends far beyond my family name embodying greater significance that I felt we had a duty to represent. The year 2017 was

a pivotal time, when many socio-political changes were happening in the Middle East, and as such we wanted our identity to reflect the artists operating within this climate and narrative – the artists who challenge the status quo and interrogate their surroundings. The term Tabari actually stems from Lake Tiberias, a place that brings into focus our understanding of borders, space and identity – just some of the universal topics that are tackled by the contemporary Middle Eastern artists we represent.

*Why did you feel it was important to open your gallery in the UAE?*

During my time in the United States, I became increasingly aware that there was a gap, not only in the Western

#### GALLERY STATEMENT

Tabari Artspace, formerly Artspace Dubai, was established in 2003 by art collector Maliha Tabari, with the aim of promoting Middle Eastern art to a global audience. Strategically located in Dubai, the gallery embarked 17 years ago upon an ambitious programme of exhibitions with the aim of cultivating an international community and creating fresh discourses centred around contemporary Middle Eastern art. As a pioneer of this movement, Tabari Artspace played a pivotal role in building the careers of Middle Eastern masters, including Adam Henein, Mohamed Abla, Adel El-Siwi, Hussein Madi and Khaled Zaki, who are today exhibited and collected by such institutions as the British Museum, the Guggenheim (Abu Dhabi) and the Barjeel Art Foundation. Today, Middle Eastern artists are increasingly gaining international recognition with institutions such as LACMA, MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Centre Pompidou collecting and exhibiting their works. As the regional art scene evolves rapidly in front of this new global audience and in line with advancements in technologies, globalisation and shifts in the socio-political climate, so too has Tabari Artspace's programme and focus. In 2018 the gallery rebranded from Artspace Dubai to Tabari Artspace.

From Kevork Mourad's show. Credit: Sue Raya Shaheen. Courtesy of Tabari Artspace.



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Hazem Harb, Tebariya, detail, 2017. 'El Beit (2018) exhibition'.  
Courtesy of Tabari ArtSpace.

understanding of Middle Eastern culture, but also in the representation of the artists from my region. It was this understanding that really shaped my ambitions and drove me to create cross-cultural bridges through my work. At just 21, I returned to the UAE in 2002 to open Artspace, one of the region's first galleries with this mission at its heart. It was an exciting and unpredictable time namely because there weren't any other galleries in the region at that time. We were breaking new ground and didn't have a framework to fall back on, so it was really a period when we had to figure things out for ourselves and learn lessons. Driving this was the belief that we were contributing to a new and necessary movement. We were offering the talent of the region a platform from which to show their works and for the community to enjoy them. I spent a lot of time navigating the galleries of Damascus, Beirut, Cairo and beyond, meeting with artists like Hussein Madi, Khaled Zaki and later Mohammed Abla. These were the first artists we represented and it's interesting to see how the works of Zaki and Abla continue to develop, pushing the boundaries of their various techniques.

*How do you see the art scene today and your relationship with it?*

I'm constantly impressed and inspired by the young artists who come from our region: they are today's visual history makers and recorders, and they boldly detail the reality of their lives and



## ALL OF OUR ARTISTS OFFER SOMETHING UNIQUE THROUGH THE HUMAN TOUCH, WHICH IS CRITICAL TO OUR MISSIONS.

spark conversations that might not otherwise be heard. Hazem Harb, for example, tirelessly recovers Palestinian artefacts and represents them in a way that can be understood and appreciated by international audiences, thus opening up fresh dialogues about Palestine, its culture and society. Tagreed Darghouth is another powerful female artist who breaks down gender preconceptions through her bold and dynamic paintings, which deal with arresting elements from butchers' meat to skills and the critique of her society, from plastic surgery to the proliferation and abuse

of female domestic workers. Yet her work goes deeper, linking complex ideas from history, music, current affairs and psychology to the topic at hand. Most recently we've exhibited Kevork Mourad, a Syrian-Armenian artist who connects music in art in a fluid manner, uniting disciplines in an unprecedented way and reconfiguring our ways of knowing migration. In short our artists are full of surprises – I'm very excited to see what their future holds.

*How would you define the identity of your gallery?*

Whether from the modern period or contemporary, there's one factor that unites our artists and that is fine art technique. All of our artists offer something unique through the human touch, which is critical to our missions, whether it be through fabric in the intricate collages of Mohammed Joha or sculpture in bronze, marble or granite as in the case of Khaled Zaki or through the striking hyperrealist sketches as is the case of Samah Shihadi.

*What can you tell us about the roster of artists you represent?*

Our programming reflects my belief that art is a powerful tool to unite and ignite greater cultural understanding. As such we honour the masters we built during our early stages, while introducing a new generation of artists who push boundaries and break down borders while exhibiting the same level of technique and quality. Examples of some dynamic new names we represent include Palestinian hyperrealist Samah Shihadi; Lebanese painter Tagreed Darghouth; and Palestinian visual artist Hazem Harb, as well as our current exhibition Syrian-Armenian Kevork Mourad.

*Could you tell us about your programme for 2020?*

We are delighted to share that we will be opening in Cromwell Place, London, in May 2020. For us that platform made total sense: it's a space that showcases international talent in a very bespoke way that works for the artists.