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# Christie's Middle East is auctioning works by Etel Adnan, Mohammed Kazem and more

► The collection is being partly exhibited at the auction house's DIFC location until Tuesday



Christie's Modern & Contemporary Middle East sale at Dubai International Financial Centre. Photo: Chris Whiteoak / The National

Feedback



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**C** [hristie's Middle East](#) has reprised its Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern art auction, a category it has not run since 2019, by bringing together 63 works by some of the region's most influential artists.

The collection, which is available to view and bid for online, includes paintings, sculptures and photographs that were produced by artists from the Middle East and North Africa between 1963 and 2021. A large portion of the sale is being exhibited in Christie's at Dubai International Financial Centre until Tuesday, when the online sale concludes.

Leading the sale is *Wilde* by Moroccan artist [Mohammed Melehi](#). The painting is an early example of Melehi's undulating motifs and squares, evoking a dynamism within the contrast between its earthy tones and its deep blues and yellows.

"It is a rare 1963 painting," says [Suzy Sikorski](#), a specialist of post-war and contemporary Middle Eastern art at Christie's. "It comes from the collection of the second wife of the Moroccan modernist Toni Maraini. She was an art historian and teacher, collaborating with Melehi on several artistic publications.



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Wilde by Mohamed Melehi. Photo: Christie's Middle East

“It is very rare to find these types of works that were produced in New York while Melehi was studying in Columbia. They were influenced by Bauhaus

or hard-edge painting, they were also integrating and responding to local, Amazigh, designs and architecture. What's iconic is his wave motif, which is very sought after and also these squares, which you don't get to see a lot."

*Wilde* is one of the pricier lots of the collection, with an estimate between \$100,000 and \$150,000.

A 1986 leporello book by [Etel Adnan](#) is another highlight of the sale. Titled *Khat wa Rasm* (Line and Hand-drawing), the work is signed and dated by the Lebanese-American poet and artist. The work weaves *Stations Beyond Death*, a poem by Iraqi writer Shawqi Abdel Amir with Adnan's handwriting, watercolours and ink marks. As with Adnan's other leporellos, the 28-page accordion-style book has covers that have been left bare, except for a label with an inscription of the work's title.



The Christie's Modern and Contemporary Middle East auction will run until Tuesday. All Photos: Chris Whiteoak / The National

The work is estimated at \$70,000, though the lot has been subject to competitive bidding that is listed at \$75,000 at the time of this writing.

Works by luminary UAE artists [Mohamed Ahmed Ibrahim](#) and [Mohammed Kazem](#) are also part of the auction. Ibrahim's painting *My Garden's Details* features vibrant potted forms that have become idiosyncratic of the artist. The painting takes its cue from Ibrahim's *Between Sunrise and Sunset* installation at the 59th Venice Biennale, rendering the unique shapes in

two-dimensional form. The painting is estimated to sell between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

Acrylic on Scratched Paper by Mohammed Kazem. Photo: Christie's Middle East

Kazem's 2021 work *Acrylic on Scratched Paper*, meanwhile, continues a series the artist began in 1989. The work was created through repetitive scratches on paper with the edge of scissors. When exposed to light,

shadows move across the textured surface, giving a three-dimensionality to the canvas. *Acrylic on Scratched Paper* is estimated to sell for between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

“His scratching series are works that have been part of the Guggenheim,” Sikorski says. “It’s a nice step to see Mohammed’s work here, outside of a traditional gallery setting. Many collectors internationally are starting to look at the GCC, specifically the UAE and Saudi. We want to make sure that we focus on artists from the region.”

A 2010 painting by celebrated Palestinian artist [Samia Halaby](#) is also being auctioned. The work is a seminal example of what makes Halaby a pioneering female Arab artist of abstract expressionism. As with most of her 2000s works, the painting is a departure from the clear geometric shapes and smaller brush strokes of her earlier pieces to explore the complex geometries of nature. The work is estimated at between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

The sale also includes works by [Dia Azzawi](#), [Hassan Hajjaj](#), Reem Al Faisal, Behjat Sadr, as well as [Ali Banisadr](#), Reem Al Faisal, [Thameur Mejri](#), Jawhara al Saud, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Dana Awartani and [Shirin Neshat](#).

Kurdish Women by Hayv Kahraman. Photo: Christie's Middle East



The sale includes two commissioned works on paper by the Iraqi artist Hayv Kahraman. *Kurdish Women*, made in 2009 and estimated between \$25,000 and \$35,000, depicts a group of women from Kurdistan bird-watching. They wear unique colourful patterned dresses, each of which references traditional elements of Kurdish clothing. They stand in vibrant contrast to a stark background and the silhouettes of birds perched on a leafless tree.

Contemporary works also include *Table Trouble* by Tala Madani. The painting depicts a man's head and limbs emerging from a wooden table. The work is replete with the humour and absurdity that Madani's work is known for. The work is estimated between \$12,000 and \$18,000.

There has been a rise in demand for modern and contemporary works from the region in the past few years, Sikorski says, especially since sales shifted online in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our sales shifted online since 2020," she says. "We broke the record for a Samia Halaby sale that season, reaching \$500,000. We had really good sales, and [going online] has only expanded the outreach of who are clients are. That, coupled with more international galleries and institutions that are integrating and celebrating Middle Eastern arts."

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This surge of interest makes it the right time for Christie's to reprise its Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern Art auction. Though the auction is online, the lots are exhibited in Dubai.

"We're introducing this sale back to Dubai after not having auctions here since 2019," says Sikorski. "It's a practical way for us to deal with local collectors. It's a platform we're trying to make a little bit more contemporary, a little bit fresher."

Local collectors make up a sizeable segment of London-headquartered Christie's auctions of Middle Eastern art. They are also expected to vie over the lots being exhibited in Dubai.

"I think the clients that transact with us in London are also going to transact with us here. I think it makes it easier because of taxes and logistics to sell here as well. That's a big benefit," says Sikorski.

# *The Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern Art exhibition is at Christie's DIFC until Tuesday*

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