



PREVIEW
RAMIN SALSALI



Private Passions

Apollo talks to Ramin Salsali, founder of the Salsali Private Museum in Dubai, and one of the most passionate advocates of modern and contemporary work in the Middle East

Born in Tehran in 1964, the Dubai-based patron and collector Ramin Salsali opened the doors to his private museum in 2011. Drawing on his extensive holdings of modern and contemporary work, more than 700 paintings and photographs are on display, alongside sculpture, video art and installation – with plans to further develop the museum in the pipeline. He is on the advisory board of Art14 London (28 February–2 March).

What are the aims of the Salsali Private Museum?

The Salsali Private Museum (SPM) is the realisation of a long-term vision, which is to create a museum for contemporary art in the Persian Gulf – and specifically the United Arab Emirates. It provides a platform for collectors from the UAE, or who are travelling through the region: we've allocated space in the museum for meetings where they can share their experience and ideas.

How do you see the SPM evolving?

The SPM will eventually transform into a public museum, the Dubai Museum of Contemporary Art [DMOCA], and the final step will be to establish a museum for Middle Eastern contemporary art in Berlin. But these things take time: you shouldn't try to change

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1 Ramin Salsali photographed at the Salsali Private Museum, Dubai

2 Interior view of Art13 London, the modern and contemporary fair's inaugural edition at Olympia last year
Photo: Ashley Bingham

the landscape of such a young country overnight. And to begin with, DMOCA will be a small, human-sized museum, focusing on artists from, say, five countries in the region. We don't need to compete with the large institutional museums that are coming to Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

The SPM is a very personal project, isn't it?
The Salsali Personal Museum! I wish I could use the word 'personal' instead of 'private'. The beauty of a private museum is that a collector has the freedom to create exhibitions, as well as a personal dialogue with artists and visitors. My collection reflects who I am – I'm not an engineered collector who goes to the market with 10 advisors. I like to wake up in the morning and enjoy the artwork I've bought, regardless of whether its value is growing or decreasing.

Has the museum changed your collecting habits, or how you think about collecting?
While the collection is still based on the fact that I collect what I like and enjoy, I've refined my approach and feel more responsibility when I select artworks. I can't be chaotic and anarchistic, as I perhaps was before, especially now that young collectors are asking my advice. Maybe my age has an impact as well!

What aspects of the collection are you looking to build?
I want to create more vertical depth, looking into 10–15 artists who have grown with me. I currently have an idea to bring Jewish and Palestinian artists together – using their work as a platform to communicate with each other.

Which other private museums did you look to for inspiration?
I studied public museums first, and looked at what disturbs me about some of them: being oversized or stressful. But the SPM was really a response to a question I was asking at a certain period in my life: why, in the Middle East, can we not contribute to the evolution of our civil societies, regardless of our nationality and geographical belonging?



This year Art14 London hosts the second edition of the Global Private Museum Summit. What are you hoping to discuss with the other participants?
I want to thank the fair director, Stephanie Dieckvoss, and Philip Dodd, who chairs the advisory board, for their vision in bringing owners of private museums together. I'd like to discuss the idea of creating an association between these collectors to pool our resources and serve the global art community.

The global scope of Art13 London gave it a fresh approach. What most impressed you about last year's fair?
Art13 was truly different from other art fairs in the way it offered young galleries a space to introduce artworks from non-typical countries such as Saudi Arabia. It felt very versatile and of course international, with contemporary art from the Middle East and Africa. Its balanced programme impressed me tremendously.

You've done a lot to promote contemporary artists from the Middle East. Are they now gaining a real foothold in the global art market? And which emerging talents should we look out for?
I believe that art and culture provide a global platform for peace. Based on this belief, I've tried my utmost to introduce artists from the Middle East to other regions and cultures. Interest in contemporary and modern art from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt as well as Turkey is increasing, and artists such as Amir Hossein Zanjani, Reza Derakhshani, Pantea Rahmani, Sara Rahbar and Hazem Harb are just a few to have been bought by international collectors and museums. **A**

For more information on the Salsali Private Museum, go to www.salsalipm.com.
Art14 London, sponsored by Citi Private Bank, is at Olympia from 28 February to 2 March (www.artfairslondon.com).