

ART & PATRONAGE

THE MIDDLE EAST

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Art Sawa – Amel B. Makkawi

Algiers | Paris | Dubai

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top right: Ziad and Amel Makkawi at Art Sawa, Dubai, 2010

above: Amel Makkawi at Art Sawa, Dubai, 2010

right: Sheikh Nayef bin Mubarak AlMajid, Patron of the Art Sawa Awards, and Amel Makkawi at the 'Creative Palestinian Art' exhibition

left: Art Dubai, 2010

Art Sawa – Amel B. Makkawi

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'We like people to be at first touched by the art and then, if necessary, we try to explain it.'

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The founder of Art Sawa in Dubai, Amel B. Makkawi, is passionate about art and art education. Her credo is that contemporary art should be accessible, something for everyone to enjoy: 'Unlike other businesses, the art world is about emotions, ideas, expression, communication, entertainment, creativity, innovation. It is rich and complex, there is clearly a material and business aspect to it, but there is so much more,' she says.

Based in a converted warehouse space in the increasingly culturally vibrant Al-Quoz district, Art Sawa, with its more than 12,000 square feet, hosts up to fifteen exhibitions per year, runs education programmes (talks and workshops) for art, music and film appreciation classes (voice training is also a part of the education's repertoire) and has a policy of donating part of its proceeds to charity. It is a completely independent and self-funded organization. Since opening in 2008 it has built a reputation for promoting contemporary art: 'Arab artists all have extraordinary and individual stories to tell through their art.' The gallery has hosted group exhibitions for Egyptian, Palestinian and Iraqi artists, and it is showcasing the first solo exhibition in the UAE of Egyptian artist Wael Darwesh. Other solo shows include the Lebanese artists Mohammad Al-Rawas and Zena Assi, as well as French Algerian sculptor Rachid Khimoune, whose *Children of the World*, a collection of twenty-one bronze casts, was initially shown in Paris and now, thanks to the efforts of Amel, has found a home as public sculpture in the UAE.

A 'child of the world' herself, Amel lived in Argentina, Peru, Senegal, Algeria, France, Switzerland and Beirut before settling in Dubai. She graduated as an architect in Algiers and did postgraduate studies in acoustics in Paris, where she later met her husband. Amel sees involving children in Art Sawa's activities as vital to her mission towards art education: 'Everybody says "Yes, but this doesn't make money." I don't care. For me work starts when the weekend comes, when you have the small child, five years old, who comes with his dad, and explains to him what culture is and what he has been exposed to. This is my thing ... when I see this little child, who had a workshop with his class at Art Sawa, and then brings his father back with him; what a joy!'

Amel spent much of her childhood in galleries and museums with her father, as her parents were art collectors. Art was 'something that you have to share with your loved ones that you both understand, and appreciate ... this is my

thing'. It was with her father that she bought her first painting, which inspired her to become a collector. Being around art from an early age has influenced Amel's vision of what a gallery should be. Art Sawa is intended to establish a different way for people to come together through art in the region and is part of what she sees as a gradual shift away from the way art has been commercialized in Dubai: 'The earlier model of clusters of collectors and art dealers who had a stranglehold on the circuit is slowly giving way to a new breed of young professionals who are not so influenced by the standards set by their predecessors. ... Art collecting is hot among young professionals, and it doesn't matter where you are located any longer. This democratization of art collecting is what is expected to fire up the local art scenes. The collectors will in turn support and promote the arts they invest in. This means social functions and a fusion of music, entertainment and gallery space into a multi-purpose environment that speaks back to the salon days of the eighteenth century.'

This social 'fusion' rather than commercialization of art for the 'elite' is the aim of Art Sawa (which translates as 'Art Together'). The venue fosters interaction between artists and the public, intended to 'demystify art for everybody', to show artists who are 'creating for the public'. To allow freedom of expression: 'A space where people can freely interact and discuss the issues raised through art.'

Amel came to Dubai in 2000 after working as an architect and freelancer in Geneva, Algeria and France. Her own art education was hindered by political and religious conflict (the director of her architecture school and the director of her fine art school were murdered) and the lack of freedom of expression. 'Having a brain was quite dangerous,' she says: 'that is why many of us have been exiled from our countries.' For Amel, art is an amazing form of expression but it is not only political: 'An artist who only shows the violence and the worst that he has in his country is considered a 'good' artist - it's not only about that - art can express beauty and humanity. ... Art comes from the soul and is key to documenting the story of the individual artist's real life experiences. It is a reflection of our society. Art Sawa's mission is therefore to give artists from the region a voice so that they may participate in the global cross-cultural dialogue which our world so badly needs.'



(top) Rachid Khimoune, 'Les Enfants du Monde' exhibition
Courtesy of Art Sana

(above) General view from mezzanine. Works by Saouf Merouf on the main walls and Ahmed Al-Bahmani (sculptures)
Courtesy of Art Sana

(left) Amal Makkawi and her youngest son in the Art Sana office



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A UNIQUE & COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF LEADING COLLECTORS,
PATRONS & INSTITUTIONS RELATED TO THE ARAB WORLD, TURKEY & IRAN