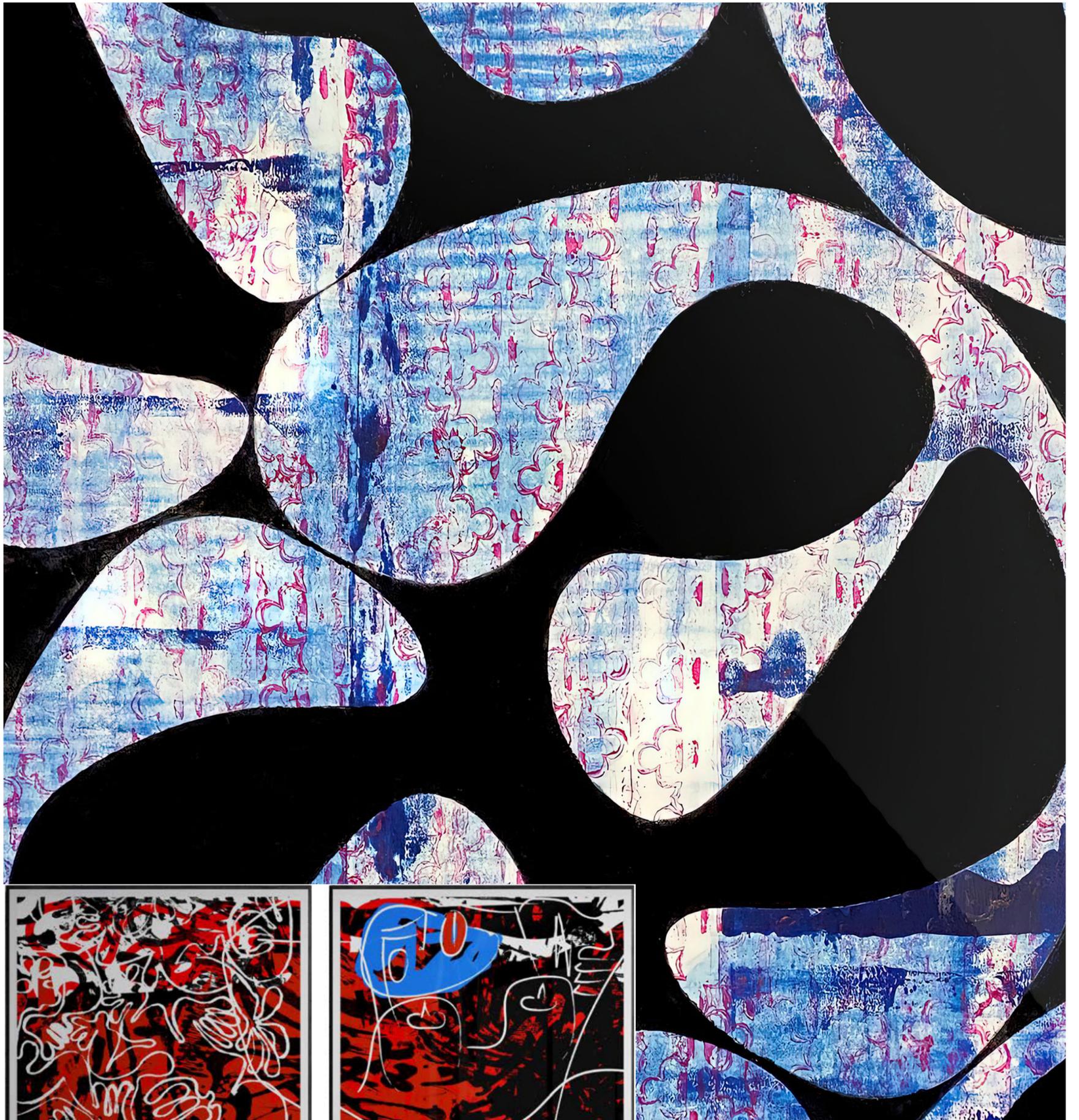


# ARTS & CULTURE

## From the individual to the universal: Firetti Contemporary's double delight



**DUBAI:** Providing a double delight, Firetti Contemporary, the Dubai gallery where art, creative concepts and collections from the region and beyond align, is hosting simultaneously the works of American artist Robert Santore (Sept. 1 – Oct. 10) in Timeless along with the creations of British artist Josh Rowell in Moral Codes (Sept. 7 – Nov. 11). Timeless, curated by Mara Firetti, invites viewers into the captivating world of Santore, whose artistic journey defies conventional boundaries. Born in California and hailing from a Texan lineage, his formative years were marked by a nomadic lifestyle, with experiences spanning the United Kingdom and California. The encounters left an indelible mark on him, compelling him to channel his emotions and reflections into art from a tender age. Even at the age of six, he created a piece that resonates with timelessness – intended – relevance to this day.

The Firetti exhibition is a testament to his evolution as a visionary painter and printmaker,

tracing his trajectory from his early years of artistic study in the vibrant realm of New York City, to his relentless pursuit of new techniques and expressive styles. The works on display emphasise his bold colour palette, the immediacy of his *alla prima* ("at first attempt") technique, and the interplay between abstract figures and iconic symbols that permeate his art. Santore speaks directly to the universal human experience, fostering a connection that makes time and place irrelevant.

His mastery of various mediums, ranging from monumental word paintings to textured reliefs, are celebrated here. He deftly employs diverse materials, including oil, encaustic, acrylics and watercolours, to bestow his compositions with depth and dimension. The viewer will find him-

self captivated by the enthralling landscapes, enigmatic figures and evocative memories that emerge from Santore's extensive travels in Europe and the South Pacific, transporting him to a realm where reality intertwines with artistic interpretation.

Santore's unwavering passion, relentless innovation and steadfast commitment to pushing the boundaries of contemporary painting, serve as reminders of the transformative power of art. He fearlessly traverses various mediums, including sculpture, portraiture, landscape and mixed media, each serving as a vessel for artistic expression. His creative process reflects a harmonious dialogue with the ideas themselves, allowing the medium to dictate its own manifestation – which is the embodiment of genuine artistic intuition.

Attention to detail is an element of each artwork. Their inter-connectedness – reminiscent of a family of siblings – with each layer

Robert Santore's work titled *French Laundry No 1*.

building on a previous one, creates a cohesive narrative that transcends time. The palimpsest encompasses a wide range, blending memories from Santore's eclectic childhood with influences from historical events and pop culture of the era. Recurring themes, shapes and colours distinguish his work, forging an intimate familiarity for the viewer. Recognising the echoes across different pieces evokes a sense of warmth and closeness, forging a profound connection with the art no less than the artist himself.

Moral Codes, curated by Celine Azem, is the first solo exhibition of Josh Rowell in the Middle East. It presents a trajectory of the artist's work, featuring his renowned series such as *Painting Language*, *Virtually Fragile* and *Mosaics*. The exhibition delves into the realms of ethics, communication and the evolving digital landscape, inviting viewers to contemplate the moral codes that shape our society.

At the heart of the show is an installation of Rowell's *Painting Language* series, inspired by Aesop's fables. The timeless tales, originating from ancient Greece, have traversed cultures and generations, imparting valuable lessons and moral teachings. Rowell's interpretation of the fables serves as a reminder of the enduring importance of moral values. Through his intricate and captivating artworks, he invites the viewer to reflect on the significance of ethical principles in shaping our individual and collective actions. Other works from the *Painting Language* series reflect on ancient mathematics and geometry. Rowell merges art, technology and language, blurring the boundaries between the digital and

the tangible. By meticulously hand-painting passages of text, he creates intricate systems of colour coding, symbolising the complex coding systems that underlie the interconnected digital realm. The artworks not only explore the aesthetics of digital communication but also emphasise the value of hand-made objects in an increasingly digitised world.

Venturing into the realm of the Internet and the culture that it brings in its wake, is Rowell's *Mosaics* series. The artworks draw inspiration from trending comments found on various social media platforms – which range from comical to bizarre, and sometimes even alarming. Just like the fate of comment memes that enjoy fleeting popularity before being replaced by others, the mosaics reflect the ephemerality of online phenomena. Through their creation, the artist invites us to ponder the nature of social media feeds, unearthing as he does as an archaeologist, forgotten fragments that offer a glimpse into the ever-changing landscape of Internet discourse.

The *Virtually Fragile* series sheds light on the fragility of digital connectivity. The artworks capture the pivotal moment when the connection to the virtual world is severed, plunging people into a realm of abstract chaos. By depicting the loss of connectivity and the disarray that ensues, Rowell prompts the viewer to contemplate his dependence on the digital realm and the potential consequences of its disruption. *Moral Codes* questions and explores ethics, connectivity and the tapestry of digital existence. Rowell invites us to engage with these serious themes and embark on a journey of introspection, challenging the moral codes that govern our lives.

Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer