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CULTURE

Team of three: A gallery, a brand and artists come together for Art

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An installation by Sawsan Al Bahar.

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After a successful event at the Gaggenau Galleria Dubai featuring an exhibition in support of young Emirati artists, Firetti Contemporary, the art space located at Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, and the luxury home appliances icon Gaggenau, hosted an evening of art festivities on October 25. Titled Emirati Expressions: A Gaggenau-Firetti Art & Heritage Celebration, the occasion showcased the works of emerging Emirati artists, culinary delights, and a display of luxury design. To run for a week, the gala features UAE artists Afra Al Suwaidi, who presents breathtaking sand sculptures sourced from each of the seven Emirates; Asayel Abdulla, who captivates the audience with her one-of-a-kind plexiglass paintings that depict Emirati heritage and Salmah Al Mansoori's exploration of how the environment shapes identity, displayed through a compelling collection of documented images.

“Gaggenau continues to champion the values of artistry and craftsmanship,” said its spokesperson. “Our recent initiatives serve as a testament to our unwavering dedication to visionary design and the preservation of artistic excellence. The occasion is a rousing blend of heritage and modernity, with each exhibit showcasing a mastery of expression. The masterpieces, by Emirati women artists, underlines the brand’s dedication to the nation’s people and culture.”

“Both Gaggenau and Firetti are taking this opportunity to convey their limitless adoration, respect, and humility towards Emirati heritage, which is both storied and profoundly iconic,” said a spokesperson from Firetti. “This event marks the beginning of a lasting friendship between a brand and a nation, both firmly rooted in heritage and driven forward with an unbreakable promise of shared admiration and respect.”

Firetti Contemporary is also currently commemorating the recent success of Syrian-Palestinian architect and artist Sawsan Al Bahar, by presenting a collection of her works. Trained in architecture and visual media, Al Bahar approaches art and printmaking as a cross-disciplinary practice, through which she gears her past influences from her architecture background towards the production of art, combining contemporary architecture production processes and traditional art production techniques.

She interrogates the ways history has influenced culture in the region. Her subject matter lies in looking at the meaning of Time to the people of the Middle East, often by referencing the past and addressing the issues and events of the 19th and 20th century. She is inspired by themes of time, politics and history in the Middle East, and aims to record history through her work and document the states that are particular to this region. Born in Damascus and raised in the UAE, she is a multifaceted talent, also wearing the hat of a researcher. Following the completion of her Bachelor of Architecture at the American University of Sharjah in 2013, she established her artistic practice in Dubai, focusing on the concept of home as a myth.



Sawsan Al Bahar with aspiring artists.

Her work explores the subtle ways in which history shapes personal narratives, often centering on her own life and family history. Her creative portfolio includes drawings, prints, installations, digital scans and text, which she employs to establish a connection with her past, her homeland, her culture, her language, her family, and ultimately, her identity. An intense draftsmanship is the basis of her work and she employs digital-scanning to access and depict her subjects. Her lyrical entanglements which barely hide the tragedy of her Palestinian heritage, are located at the crossroads of a glorious past, a dim present and the possibility of a bright future. In September 2022, she held her first solo exhibition, Talaliya, at Firetti Contemporary. Here she offered a series of drawings and a large-scale installation that spoke of her preoccupation with intangible traces and remains.

The following month, in October, she won recognition by winning the Massimiliano Galliani Prize for Drawing under 35 at Art Verona. The award was granted in collaboration with Firetti Contemporary and was showcased in the booth section, featuring an exhibition titled The Continuous Line That Binds Us Together, curated by Sonya Stepyan. The accolade subsequently led to a bi-personal exhibition at the esteemed Casa Cavezzi in Montecchio Emilia, Italy, held in May 2023. Presently, Al Bahar is the featured artist with her solo exhibition, 33 Songs, 99 Words, at Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah. It runs till January 11, 2024. Her work at Firetti Contemporary is part of their showcase, Breaking Boundaries II, in partnership with Dubai Culture for the Dubai Calligraphy Biennale.

Al Bahar's upcoming exhibitions include Art Abu Dhabi, scheduled for November this year, and a forthcoming group exhibition at the Louvre Abu Dhabi, featuring artists shortlisted for the Richard Mille Art Prize. Gaggenau is the place where "home appliances are not just functional but exquisite works of art," says the appliance maker. "Our home appliances are not just practical; they're beautiful pieces of craftsmanship." Gaggenau aims to treat design as artistic engineering, to purpose metal for creating soulful products, striving to be "digital artisans".

Firetti Contemporary represents both established and emerging artists from all over the world, attempting to build a multidisciplinary art space with the strong identity of an international platform. Drawing crowds of aspirant artists and art pioneers, the gallery has a curation of works that encourages the importance of individuality. It has also established a collective alignment for building sustainable collections. A network of collaborations allows it to play a substantial role in sustainability and social issues, become a vehicle for social change and aiming to instill social values through the inspirational power of art.