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OASIS OF CALM IN SHATTERED REGION, DUBAI STEPS OUT AS ART HUB

As traditional centers of modern Arab art in Damascus and Baghdad have imploded amid disastrous wars, the sheeny city-state of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates has stepped into the vacuum as a major hub for art sales. But at the annual Art Dubai fair this week, some Mideast artists among the scores of worldwide participants channeled in paint the chaos swirling around this bubble of calm luxury.

seek to dwell on the region's miseries, but noted that as Dubai's star has risen in the art world the art on offer cannot flinch from harsh realities.

"The sad reality is that as Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus and even Cairo have suffered due to political and economic strife, the UAE is in a position to build on its openness and multicultural aspect to lead in the art scene." "Conflict and problems aren't all there is to art in the Middle East and our exhibition celebrates modernists and visionaries from here and all over the world ... artists do make incredible historians and documentarians,

"I turned images from the TV into oil on canvas **"**

though", Ayad added.

While she declined to name precise target for sales in the three-day event, she noted that works were on offer for between a few hundred and a few hundred thousand dollars: "There's something for every pocket!" Ead Samawi knows that well. A partner from the Ayyam Gallery, he has sold most of their handful of war-themed canvases for between thirty and fifty thousand dollars each to clients ranging from the United States to Lebanon, and insists profit and painful subjects can go together.

Arranged in a tense jumble of colorful shapes and splotches forming the rough shape of buildings and people, the work of Syrian artist Tammam Azzam evokes the broken cityscapes and refugee throngs from his homeland. "It's not commodifying, this is human life: there's war and migration that happens all over. Artists have always had their distinct, creative way of presenting it that people have been attracted to," Samawi said.—Reuters



Tucked among the mostly apolitical photography, sculpture and installation art adorning the vast open-plan space, black-and-white paintings of war scenes in the Gaza Strip- devoid of people and any sharp detail-stand out. "It's like a monster, isn't it?" says Palestinian artist Aissa Deebi, holding his arms menacingly above his head in the rough shape of a fireball from an Israeli war plan he painted exploding on top of building.

"I turned images from the TV into oil on canvas, which has its history in this tradition going back to Goya and Picasso," he added, alluding to the latter's iconic image of chaos brought on by a bloody air raid on the Spanish town of Guernica. Myrna Ayad, Art Dubai's director, said the event featuring artists from 48 countries does not



Visitors look at artwork on display during the 12th edition of Art Dubai, in Dubai's Madinat Jumeirah. —AFP/Reuters photos

Flower power Chinese artist hails east-west dialogue with petals



The sweeping fields of flowers that fill the canvases at Zhuang Hong Yi's new London exhibition are more than just depictions of the natural world - he says they are a dialogue between the cultures that have shaped his work. For "Radiance", which opened in London this week, Zhuang, 55, has created dozens of floral scenes by mounting thousands of flowers made from rice paper onto canvas and then painting them to add color and texture.

The works change color depending on the angle from which they are viewed. Zhuang's floral creations are influenced by materials from his native China - rice paper - and the flowered landscape of his adopted country - the Netherlands. "I am from China and

then I studied in Holland, I got a lot of influence from Western culture. So my work always contrasts two cultures and also the composition of the painting also is in contrast," Zhuang said.

Zhuang's creations have won him increasing critical and commercial success: he has exhibited at galleries and art fairs across Europe and the United States and is described by the exhibition organizers as the top-selling Asian artist in Britain. "Radiance" runs until March 24 at the House of Fine Art (HOFA) gallery in London's St. James district, before moving to a separate HOFA gallery in Mayfair from March 26 to April 8. — Reuters

Claudia Cardinale stars as Tunisia opens City of Culture

Claudia Cardinale, the Tunis-born Italian movie star, was the guest of honor on Wednesday as Tunisia inaugurated a long-awaited complex to showcase its cultural wealth. The richly equipped City of Culture complex, launched a decade ago but long stalled, incorporates a modern art museum, a 1,800-seat opera, two theatres, a cinema, library and studios to host festivals.

"Every Tunisian should be proud of this project, culture is the main tool with which we will fight terrorism," President Beji Caid Essebsi said at the opening ceremony. "Tunisians have to dream and have confidence in themselves." The project was initially launched under president Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, who was over-

thrown in a 2011 revolution. Located in central Tunis, the nine-hectare Cite de la Culture with its iconic glass globe is estimated to have cost 130 million dinars.

Culture Minister Mohamed Zine el Abidine told reporters at the opening that it is "the largest cultural complex in the Maghreb, the Arab world and Africa". The project, held up by financial disputes, had been abandoned after the revolution but was revived in March 2016. The newly formed orchestra of the Tunis Opera was to play music from Carmen's Bizet sung by three Tunisian artists, accompanied by a choir and orchestra from Ukraine.—AFP



A picture shows a general view of the theatre inside the arts and culture complex of 'Tunis the City of Culture' during the official opening ceremony in Tunis. — AFP photos



A picture shows a general view of the arts and culture complex of 'Tunis the City of Culture.'



A picture shows a general view inside of the arts and culture complex of 'Tunis the City of Culture.'