

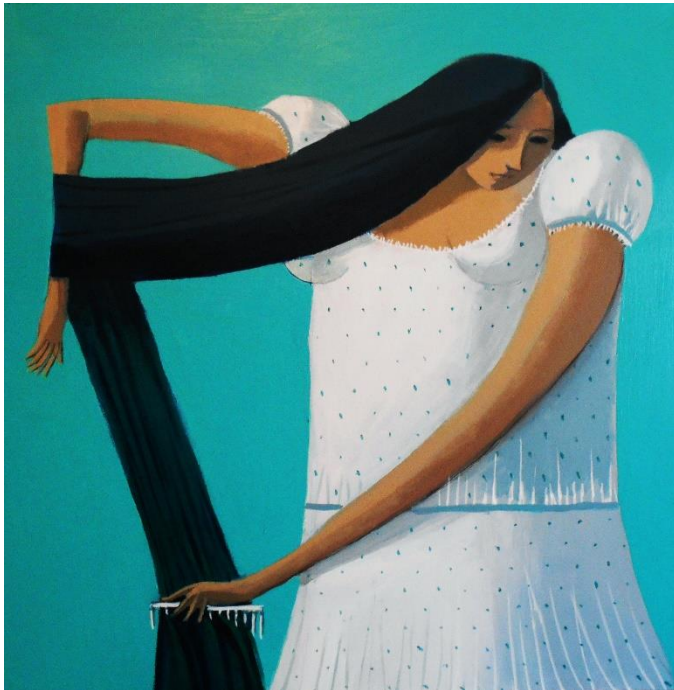
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Buy them in-stantly, own them later, love them for-ever

By Muhammad Yusuf

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DUBAI: Fann A Porter gallery, Dubai, has begun an initiative called AFA (Art For All) Collective aimed at making art more accessible for art lovers, with bespoke instalment payment plans for artworks.

Serving as both an exhibition and a concept, AFA Collective offers artworks by emerging, mid-career and established artists from the Middle East, Iran and Europe who shine light upon a pocket of contemporary production.

According to Ghada Kunash, Founder and Managing Director of the gallery, the initiative is modelled on transparency for collectors and to make art more accessible through bespoke instalment payment plans and membership benefits.

“AFA Collective refocuses art making around the tenets of artistic production, collecting, and its pivotal role in knowledge building and public education”, she says. “AFA proposes an antithetical model to combat collector fatigue and promote arts awareness and education”.

Exhibiting artists include Annie Kurkdjian, Alaa Sharabi, Houssam Ballan, Khalad Najad Paez, Jordi Prat Pons, Othman Moussa, Majd Kurdieh, Omar Najjar, Amirhosein Zanjani, Sasan Nasernia, Juhayda Bitar, Azad Nanakeli, Mukesh Shah and Yousuf Yousuf, among others.

Physically bridging artistic understanding through multifaceted cultural exchange locally and internationally, the exhibition signifies the formal launch of the gallery's collaborative initiatives. The exhibition's vision is rooted in the idea of bringing together talented artists, and making their works accessible to younger and established collectors.

Also, it aims to empower people to buy art, support artists and develop a sustainable creative economy by providing an interest free installment plan (mostly between 2-3 installments).

While geographical spread is key to Fann A Porter's outreach efforts, AFA Collective takes a people-centric philosophy one step further. It's programme includes open-for-all artist tours, studio visits, travel to explore global art institutions as well as artist-hosted special events. The goal is to develop a more comprehensive sustainable and visitor-friendly creative economy, blurring the boundary between the commercial and non-commercial.

AFA Collective thus represents an art market evolution, responding to the needs of today's increasingly varied public tastes. The exhibition and programme illuminates a niche in the market that is all-inclusive, instead of unilateral ("buyers' side", "sellers' side" and "artists' side").

Exposure to collectors, transparent commercial practices, an interest-free installment plan and art and business education facilitated through hands-on experience-driven programming, will also help the career growth of artists.

The initiative represents a humble and honest tackling of the art world The initiative represents a humble and honest tackling of the art world through egalitarian, people-focused means. It reaffirms that art should, and can be, for and about people.

The gallery plans to expand AFA Collective to a members' programme that would give access to various artist studio visits, regional cultural tours, artist/gallery hosted special events, etc.

Batool (one name only), was one of the guests at the inaugural. She was impressed by the artwork on show and happy that the campaign was about making art affordable to everyone.

"Sustainability is the bottom line!" said Kunash on the sidelines of what must have been a very tiring day for her. "The art scene or movement has three main components: artists, galleries and buyers (or collectors). If one disappears, the scene collapses.

"Artists need galleries to represent them. Collectors need galleries to see, appreciate and judge the art market and buy art. If they don't buy, the artist's work and the gallery's business, die".

She said that the problem was not only that people need to learn more about art, but those who have entered the art market are put off by the prices. "AFA'S idea is to facilitate their interest", she said. "Art lovers can pay in instalments. People take loans for plastic surgeries and for holidays. Why can't they pay for art in instalments?"

She said that holidays will vanish, but art does not. When artists get their rightful rewards, they will work harder and improve themselves. The gallery will also be able to pay bills at the end of the month.

AFA works like this: at the first instalment, the artwork is reserved for the buyer. When the whole amount is paid, the buyer can take it home. In the interregnum, when the instalments are being paid, the artwork will be displayed free of cost or warehoused.

Kunash pointed out, however, that while the business of art had its place, the importance of education could not be overstated. "Education has to be there", she said. "We are looking at running more talks and to make this a membership based movement. I believe in the artists I support and in my team, who work very hard".

Nour Rifai, daughter of renowned Syrian origin artist Ismail Rifai, who was among the attendees during the inaugural, said that "it is a great way for art lovers to start owning and collecting what they are passionate about; it is about time to start this initiative here".

As a bonus, she found the varieties of colours, figures and styles of the exhibits enriching and interesting.

"When you enter the exhibition you will see a colourful artwork on your right side that was produced approximately ten years ago. Facing it is a big blue painting by the young artist Alaa Sharabi 'the blue mother', which is a recent production. This variety brings the viewer an art ultimate experience. The place, the atmosphere and the vibes are amazing!" she said.

Speaking of the relationship between artists and galleries, she said that "I cannot say it is ideal; it is definitely not the best. The galleries can make the most of the artist's work when it is a win-win situation".