

## CHRISTIE'S CELEBRATES 10 YEARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

This March Christie's, the world's leading art business will celebrate 10 years in the Middle East, having set up as first international auction house in the region in 2005. The 10th anniversary also signifies 20th consecutive sale seasons of the auction house, which has played a pivotal role in not only establishing, but enhancing a platform to promote Middle Eastern art to a global audience. The traditional painting sale on March 16, will celebrate the best of Middle Eastern art by integrating a 40 lot strong curated section entitled 'NOW AND TEN' followed by the traditional painting sale presenting works of art from all over the region. For the first time

the Important Watches auction will open the sale season on March 15th with vintage, special edition and contemporary timepieces. Having played a part in nurturing the current established market, as part of the 10th anniversary, Christie's is introducing a new sale to their format: Elements of Style, for the first time in the Middle East. The 40 lots offered in the section NOW AND TEN will be highlighted by a nearly 11 meter long and 3m high triptych, entitled Sarajevo by Omar El-Naqdi (Egyptian, b. 1931, illustrated above), painted in April 1992. A museum-masterpiece, Sarajevo, became part of the prestigious collection of Her Excellency Ambassador Francine

Henrich in 1993 and is offered for the first time at auction with a pre-sale estimate of \$400,000-600,000. Although the most condensed number of lots to date, these works showcases the highest pre-sale estimate of \$8.5-12.0 million for the past 10 years, showcasing the development of the regional art market including such artists as Farhad Moshiri, Kadhim Haider, Mahmoud Said, Shafic Aboud, Azade Koker, Bahman Mohasses, Hadie Shafie, Hamed Ewais, Louay Kayyali, Omar El-Naqdi, amongst others. The Sarajevo triptych is undeniably the most important and the most ambitious work produced by El-Naqdi in terms of

complexity, monumentality, expression and subject matter. El-Naqdi, an Egyptian painter represents the slaughter of his Bosniak brothers in Sarajevo on the traditionally Christian format of the triptych, a theme that no other artist has ever dared to paint on such a vast scale. El-Naqdi's Sarajevo is without doubt one of the most poignant depiction of the horrors of war ever painted since 1937, when Pablo Picasso realized his iconic piece Guernica. Cafe de Verre, Cafe Hajj Daoud, Cafe Palestine, Cafe Al Bahrein by Shafic Abboud (Lebanese, 1926-2004) is comprised out of 130 individually painted tempera on panels in 1990, all paying tribute



Omar El Naqdi, Sarajevo, 1992, acrylic on canvas, 300x1100cm. Courtesy of H.E Francine Henrich.

to the 'cafes enqloutis' of Abboud's beloved city, Beirut. Coming directly from the artist's estate, these temperas used to hang on the wall of the artist's own bedroom in his Parisian apartment where lived from 1977 until his death in 2004.

Literally translated as the: 'engulfed cafes', the 'cafes enqloutis' refer to the vanishing cafe-culture that had been widely popular in the Arab world during the 1950's and 1960's. These cafes were submerged by the civil war in 1975 and slowly disappeared along with the effervescent intellectual, political and artistic circles that had developed from them, at the core of Modern Lebanese art and literature (estimate \$300,000-400,000).

"Christie's has truly internationalized the market for the major artists from the region," says Michael Jeha, Managing Director, Middle East. "The last sale result was a sign of the continuing strength and maturity of this market and confirms that, alongside the other great art cities of the world, Dubai has earned its place in the international art calendar."

Published in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's infamous book on Iraqi art, entitled *The Grass Roots of Iraqi Art* (1983), and originally part of the art critic and writer's private collection, *Al Buraq* is an outstanding example by Kadhim Haider (Iraqi, 1932-1985), (estimate: US\$200,000-250,000, illustrated right). *Al Buraq* relates to the themes tackled in his most renowned body of work known as the *Martyr's Epic* ('*Melhamet Al Shahidi*' - 1965), based on a poem he wrote which refers to episodes from the martyrdom of Imam Al-Hussein at the Battle of Karbala.

Hala Khayat, Director Modern & Contemporary Art says, "As a student of the acclaimed artist Fateh Moudarres (Syrian, 1922-1999), I am very pleased that this important work is part of the curated auction NOW AND TEN. Dating from the 1980's it shows the artist's mastery and craft in shaping what has become an art history rich with deep rooted symbolism."

With an estimate of US\$200,000-250,000, this is one of the few rare works by Moudarres of this size and scale, it exemplifies the artist's ability to delve into thousands of years of civilisation to rewrite a new chapter of history whilst creating a modern visual language. The top three world records for the artist's work at auction are of a similar size, yet none are as full in composition or as vibrant as the present work in a horizontal format.

Christie's will also present a museum-quality masterpiece by the Father of Modern Art in Lebanon, Paul Guiragossian (Lebanese, 1925-1993). This work is filled with references to the social realities of his time, evoking the difficulties and anguish witnessed during the Lebanese Civil War. *Souk* is one of the most textural and complete versions of Guiragossian's favoured subject matter (estimate:

US\$200,000-250,000, illustrated right). The mother figure, another favoured subject matter that is visible throughout Guiragossian's oeuvre, is repeated throughout the composition and accentuated with the abstracted depiction of an infant in the far right of the composition: the proximity of the figures allude to the presence of a family and the hope for unity, the rough brushstrokes create a sense of torment while the colorful palette infuses a feeling of positivity.

Michael Jeha, Managing Director, Christie's Middle East said after the 2008 sale season: "Tonight clients from the Middle East competed with buyers from around the world at the highest level in order to secure these 'must-have' pieces, demonstrating that in the space of just under two years the Middle East art market has received the international attention it has long deserved. The last sale result was a sign of the continuing strength and maturity of this market and confirms that, alongside the other great art cities of the world, Dubai has earned its place in the international art calendar." Jussi Pylkkänen, Global President Christie's says "I clearly remember the moment just before our first auction in Dubai....we all knew it was a risk. At the time there were only a handful of galleries in Dubai, none of the great Museums had been envisaged, we were even unsure if the auction concept and the bidding process would be embraced by our new clients. But what we did have was great art and that is always the secret wherever we do business".

#### THE START OF THE 2016 ART SEASON

The 20th sale season runs from 15-17 March with a public preview exhibition starting on Sunday 13 March 2016, and the Watch Sale on 15, Art Sale on the 16, followed by the newest sale category to be introduced: *Elements of Style* on the 17 with a large selection of luxury items such as watches for ladies and men, limited edition fountain pens and vintage trunks and luggage pieces. The Art Sale's section 'NOW AND TEN' will be marking the decade of trading with art from the region by presenting a highly curated section, offering the best 40 works by leading Middle Eastern artist from private collections to be found in the market. The entire art auction on 16 March will be offering a total of 125 strictly selected works of art to endorse the artistic talents of the region. At the same time this reduced offering bears the highest pre-sale estimate of \$8.5-12.0 million for the past 10 years, an indication of the strong developments of the regional art market as well as an evaluation of the international appreciation of art from the Middle East. "Christie's has truly internationalized the market for the major artists from the region," says Jeha. "And we are proud to have played a part in promoting and celebrating art in the region and in developing the Middle Eastern art market."



Shafic Abboud, *Engulfed Cafes*, 1990, 130 small artworks. Courtesy of the artist's estate.