

## Salsali Private Museum - SPM



**André Fuchs Butzer**, *Du hast Die Gans Gestohlen*, 2009, oil on canvas, 230x280cm - Courtesy of SPM.

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Located in the Al Quoz industrial district of Dubai, This private museum is the realization of a twelve-year dream of Ramin Salsali to open a Museum of Contemporary Art in the Middle East. SPM was founded in 2011 with the vision to encourage growth and diversity within the art scene in the UAE through creating a space for artists, the public and collectors to meet, connect and collaborate.

Dubai has fast become a hub for international and regional art, yet until SPM opened its doors in November

2012, there was no museum for Contemporary Art in the city. If art is fundamental to a country's cultural infrastructure then art collectors play an integral role in supporting and encouraging growth within that infrastructure. Whether a collector considers his art collection to be purely an investment or not, they should not forget that they have a social responsibility. SPM is the first regional collector's center aiming to provide a neutral space (with no commercial agenda) in which collectors can meet, connect and collaborate. This is done through offering educational support for young





**Amir Hossein Zanjani**, *Mass Parade*, 2012, oil on canvas, - Courtesy of SPM

collectors in the region, any person interested to start to collect and if a collector wants to share his collection with the wider public. A rise in the number of private museums in the region will offer more opportunities for public participation in the arts bringing more variety to the art scene and contribute to the kind of creative sphere that the public can engage and interact with. There are always challenges for pioneers within any field and this was the case in SPM. To start with, The UAE does not have the traditional museum culture of the western world since the concept of displaying art in a space where there is no commercial agenda is very new. Another hinder faced was creating an effective communication platform within this non-museum going culture.

Aiming to exhibit works from both cultures (regional and international) to bridge the gap between civilizations through art. The first show called “Show Off!” curated by the founder himself featured artworks from the his private collection. He put works by artists such as Andre Butzer and Amir Hossein Zanjani alongside each other and showed creating a dialogue between each of them thus representing the ideology of collecting that he advises young collectors: “Collect art that you feel a connection to. Pieces that speak to each other and form a coherent body. Don’t try to engineer a collection for investment purposes.”

Another goal of the space is to create a residency program; Iranian artist Amir Hossein Zanjani is just one of the many artists that the institution supports and



**André Fuchs Butzer**, *Du hast Die Gans Gestohlen*, 2009, oil on canvas, 230x280cm - Courtesy of SPM.

who has just finished long term residency producing large-scale paintings such as “Mass Parade” and the smaller ‘Oil Workers’ series that will be shown to the public in a future. Salsali states “Adding to your collection should be a positive experience. Often I will know the artist already or a gallery has recommended them to me. The experience of discovering an artist whose work I feel a connection with is incomparable. It is all the more rewarding if I have a personal relationship with the artist.” Zanjani’s time at SPM was one of the first steps towards establishing this residency program at the museum and SPM hopes to further pursue this type of initiative.

Development of long-term supportive relationships with the artists in his collection is something that is fundamentally important to the concept of the space. Upon first meeting the Iranian artist Pantea Rahmani in Tehran, during a visit to her atelier, Salsali was fascinated

by the artist’s character and honesty. Often citing the need to feel an emotional link to an artist whose work he is considering adding to the permanent collection of the museum. The artist’s magnificent panoramic landscapes of Tehran was kind of a “paralyzing experience” , “The precision in the way in which she paints a city full of contradictions and social disorder in such harmony is incredible,” states Salsali. This purely emotional response sums up the methodology approach of building to space’s collection.

With three official SPM exhibitions to date and many note-worthy shows planned for the future, it is important to note that the museum takes its position as a role model for others in the local and international communities seriously and has generously sponsored a number of charity events in it’s space. The London based charity Magic of Persia exhibited works by a range of both emerging and established Iranian





**Pantea Rahmani** , Tehran 2, 2012, Gesso, ink and acrylic on unprimed canvas, 175x500cm - Courtesy of SPM

artists during Art Dubai 2012 and the first edition of Conversations at Alserkal Avenue took place there. The institution also supported the community outreach project which displayed artworks by young children with learning difficulties from Manzil School in Sharjah in a professional exhibition before being auctioned off during a special event to raise money for the school.

Always eager to introduce new artists and projects to the wider arts community, SPM has sponsored a number of publications to date. ‘Tehran Art: A Popular Revolution,’ compiled by Ehsan Lajevardi was launched during Art Dubai 2012 and is the result on an on-site research project of a city “in constant change.” This project aims to give readers a comprehensive introduction to contemporary artists working within Tehran today.

Despite SPM being barely one year old, the space is already planning more ambitious projects, a museum for contemporary Middle Eastern art in Berlin will be

realised in the coming year when SPM Berlin opens its doors to the public.

About the founder of the museum:

Born in Tehran in 1964 and educated in the UK and Germany, Salsali did not return to his country of birth until the 1990s. Upon his return, he was introduced to the burgeoning contemporary art scene within the city that Lajevardi refers to as an “endless performance.” Recent decades have seen this scene develop and progress within Tehran, building on the rich cultural history of the country whilst engaging with contemporary social politics of daily life in Iran. Lavjevardi best summarizes the complex relationship that many Iranians have with the city in his statement, “Tehran is the most beloved, but least likeable city in the world.” A large part of the SPM Collection is comprised of Iranian Art and the museum is very focused about bringing Iranian Art



**HARB Hazem**, *Transit*, 2011, mixed media, 150x50cm - Courtesy of SPM.

in all its diversity to public attention. Despite having spent a great deal of his life outside of the country of his birth, Salsali has many fond memories of Iran and a true appreciation for all of the country's cultural history. Iran's more recent popular music and cinema history is no exception. This passion and belief that all aspects of cultural history must be preserved for future generations prompted Salsali to sponsor the IRAN : RPM project. As Salsali states "Art is the peaceful and universal language for individual and global commitment, a museum of Art is the responsive tool and a supportive platform in this context. It is a modern temple for tranquillity, love and inspiration."

This belief in the democratic, universal language of art is at the heart of Salsali's proposal for the Dubai Museum of Contemporary Art (DMOCA) that will

be presented to the rulers of Dubai in the near future to be the first public museum for Contemporary Art in the United Arab Emirates, DMOCA will be financed based on a Public Private Partnership with residents and public/private institutions able to buy no more than ten shares each. Shares may be gifted to others but the true democracy of art will remain at the centre of the project. A long time arts patron, Salsali's sustained support of the art community in Dubai is recognised by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai who has honoured him as a Patron of the Arts for the consecutive years, 2010, 2011 and 2012.



