



For Immediate Release:

FotoFest Announces Theme and Dates for the 2014 International Biennial

CONTEMPORARY ARAB PHOTOGRAPHIC ART

Photography,
Video and
Mixed-Media Art

March 15 –
April 27, 2014

Houston, Texas
U.S.A.



Khaled Hafez (Egypt), *The A77A Project: on Presidents & Superheroes* (still from video), 2009

HOUSTON, TEXAS - MAY 1, 2013 - FotoFest International announces **Contemporary Arab Photographic Art** as the theme for its **2014 Biennial Exhibitions** of photography, video and multi-media installations. The Biennial is showcasing **more than 40 contemporary Arab artists** addressing a broad range of aesthetic and cultural values impacting Arab culture. The FotoFest 2014 Biennial, the **Fifteenth International Biennial of Photography and Photo-related Art**, takes place **March 15 through April 27, 2014, in Houston, Texas.**

ARAB PROGRAMS

“The FotoFest 2014 Biennial will present a focused selection of the best contemporary photography, video and photo-based installation art being done by Arab artists in the Middle East and North Africa,” says **FotoFest Senior Curator and Artistic Director Wendy Watriss**. “The Biennial emphasizes ideas and subjects important to contemporary Arab artists working with these media.”

FotoFest has commissioned one of the world’s leading experts on contemporary Arab art, **Karin Adrian von Roques**, as the principal curator for these exhibitions. Ms. von Roques has worked for over 20 years in the Middle East with exhibitions and publications on contemporary Arab art. She is one of the first curators in Europe to have initiated a series of exhibitions strategically aimed at **bringing the work of Arab artists to the attention of a broader, international public.**

“**The FotoFest 2014 Biennial will be the first presentation of contemporary photo-based, video and mixed-media art from Arab countries to be done in the United States in recent years,**” says Ms. von Roques. “We are presenting work from some of the most important Arab artists working today.”

Photography and video are particularly important mediums for creative expression in contemporary Arab societies. With the expansion of the Internet in the 1990s, a whole generation of younger people took up photography and video as a way to present artistic ideas.

“In looking at the works of many contemporary Arab artists working with photography, we have seen a number of common themes,” says Ms. von Roques. “The FotoFest 2014 Biennial will feature these recurring subjects. They include: the emergence of secular art and culture in modern societies; the desert as metaphor; religion and faith in everyday life; a sense of belonging and feelings of estrangement; the complexities of East-West relationships; the rapidity of social, economic and environmental change, particularly in the Gulf region; the position of women in Arab societies; and the recent political changes in so many Arab countries.”

The exhibitions feature Arab artists living and working in 14 states and territories, including the **Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Morocco, Algeria, Syria** and **Iraq**. Among the artists are **Ahmad Mater, Boushra Almutawakel, Steve Sabella** and **Khaled Hafez**. A full list of artist names will be released in January 2014.

FotoFest’s Artistic Director and Senior Curator, Wendy Watriss, known for her expertise in international photography and close working relationships with artists throughout the world, is collaborating with Ms. von Roques on the selection of artists and artworks for the biennial exhibitions.

“We are very pleased to be working with Karin von Roques,” says Fred Baldwin, FotoFest Chairman. “Having curated exhibitions worldwide with contemporary Arab artists, she is a respected and knowledgeable authority on the region and its cultures. She is one of the world’s major consultants on contemporary art in this field.”

Additional Arab programs organized by FotoFest for the Biennial include Lectures and Forums with Arab artists, curators, scholars and cultural activists; artist and curator Tours of the Arab exhibitions; and a Student Curriculum for grade schools about Arab art and culture. FotoFest will produce a four-color hardcover book on the Arab exhibitions with scholarly essays, artist biographies and related information on contemporary Arab photographic arts.

OTHER 2014 BIENNIAL PROGRAMS

As one of the world’s best known and respected photography festivals, the FotoFest Biennial will feature over 100 independent exhibitions and events organized by participating museums, art galleries, non-profit art centers and corporate spaces across the city of Houston and adjoining areas.

FotoFest’s contemporary Arab programs will be accompanied by FotoFest’s renowned 16-day international portfolio review for artists, **The Meeting Place, March 15–April 2, 2014**. FotoFest’s international fine print benefit auction, done with Sotheby’s New York, is scheduled for Monday, March 24, 2014, with a weekend of special programs for collectors.

FotoFest will also present the non-thematic, biennial *Discoveries of the Meeting Place* exhibition of works by 10 artists selected by multiple curators from the FotoFest 2012 portfolio review.

For more information or visuals, contact: Vinod Hopson, Press Coordinator, +1 713.223.5522 ext 26, press@fotofest.org



Manal Al Dowayan (Saudi Arabia) , *Landscapes of The Mind VI*, 2009

ABOUT KARIN ADRIAN VON ROQUES

For the past twenty years, Karin Adrian von Roques' professional focus has been modern and contemporary art from the Middle East. Upon finishing her studies of Islamic Art in Bonn, Germany, she became interested in modern and contemporary art from Arab countries and pioneered academic exploration and exposure of outstanding artists in this field. She began a series of strategic programs to bring concepts central to the works of contemporary Arab artists to the attention of a broader public by means of museum and gallery exhibitions. Aware that contemporary art from Islamic countries takes place within a wider socio-political context and dialogue, Ms. von Roques has organized and participated in seminars, interviews, publications and auctions throughout the world to generate intercultural dialogue on the subject of Arab culture.



FotoFest 2014 Biennial Curator, Karin Adrian von Roques.
Photo by Franz Fischer

Ms. von Roques has been an art advisor and art historian to numerous museums and has worked as a special consultant for Islamic exhibitions such as *From Bagdad to Isafahan — Islamic Manuscripts and Miniatures*, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris, 1994–95. In 1997 she became the Founding Director of the Hesse Museum in Lugano, Switzerland focusing on programs about ethics and intercultural dialogue. She has curated more than twenty international museum and gallery exhibitions, among them: *Written Cosmos — Arabic Calligraphy and Literature throughout the Centuries*, Museum of Applied Arts, Frankfurt, Germany, 2004; *Languages of the Desert — Contemporary Arab Art from the Gulf States*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (Kunstmuseum) Bonn, Germany, 2005 (traveled to the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France, 2006; the Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 2007; and Galleria Metropolitana, Barcelona, Spain, 2006); *The Present Out of the Past Millennia — Contemporary Art from Egypt*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (Kunstmuseum) Bonn, 2007; and *The Art of Writing — Contemporary Calligraphy from Three Cultures*, Art Forum, Kurhauskolonnaden, Wiesbaden, May 2011.

Among Ms. Von Roques' writings and publications are: *The Situation of Contemporary Arab Art*, catalogue essay for the exhibition *Languages of the Desert*, Dumont Verlag Cologne, 2005; *The Present Out of the Past Millennia — Contemporary Art from Egypt*, catalogue essay for the exhibition of the same title, Wienand Verlag Cologne, 2007; and *Perfect Harmony — The Calligraphy of Khaled Al Saai*, catalogue essay for the retrospective of Khaled Al Saais work at Centre Culturel Francais de Damas, Syria, 2009.

ABOUT FOTOFEST INTERNATIONAL

Founded in 1983, FotoFest International was established to promote international awareness of museum-quality photo-based art from around the world. FotoFest is a non-profit photographic arts and education organization based in Houston, Texas. The first FotoFest Biennial was held in 1986. It is the first and longest running photographic arts festival in the United States. It is considered as one of the leading international photography Biennials in the world.

As an international platform for serious photographic arts exhibitions, the FotoFest Biennial has become known as a showcase for the discovery and presentation of important new work and new talent from around the world. The Biennial takes place citywide in Houston with participation from the leading art museums, art galleries, non-profit art spaces, universities and civic spaces. The Arab exhibitions will take place in FotoFest's headquarters gallery and three to four additional FotoFest art spaces.

The Biennial has an audience of 275,000 people from thirty-one countries. This audience includes a select group of 150 museum curators, gallerists, publishers, editors, photography collectors, directors of non-profit art spaces and international festivals from Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada and the United States.

FOTOFEST 2014 BIENNIAL SPONSORS

Early institutional supporters of the FOTOFEST 2014 BIENNIAL are The Brown Foundation Inc., JP Morgan Chase Foundation; the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance; Houston Endowment, Inc.; The Wortham Foundation; and Texas Commission on the Arts.