



FOTOFEST INTERNATIONAL | www.fotofest.org

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For Immediate Release:

VIEW FROM INSIDE

Contemporary Arab Video, Photography and Mixed Media Art

FOTOFEST 2014 BIENNIAL
March 15 – April 27, 2014
Houston, Texas U.S.A.



Faisal Samra (Saudi Arabia), *Performance #13, Triptych #01 (detail)*, 2007

HOUSTON, TEXAS - OCTOBER 7, 2013 - With more than a 100 exhibitions and events, FotoFest launches its fifteenth consecutive Biennial of Photography and Photo-related Art March 15 – April 27, 2014 in Houston, Texas.

The centerpiece of the 2014 Biennial is four newly created exhibitions on Arab Video, Photography, and Mixed Media Art – **VIEW FROM INSIDE** – presenting a broad and diverse vision of Arab art, society and politics.

The exhibitions present **works from 50 leading Arab artists from the Middle East and North Africa** – a generation of artists who turned from traditional forms of visual art in the late 1990s to begin experimenting with video, photography and mixed media. Their works coincided with the widespread presence of satellite television, new forms of film, the Internet and social media over the past 15 years. The effect of these combined technologies, with more immediate access to people and ideas around the world, has had a profound impact on Arab art.

FotoFest's Arab exhibits are accompanied by **six weeks of Arab programs, including artist roundtables, forums, academic symposia, Arab films, musical concerts, poetry readings, informal discussions between artists and curators, and programs on Arab culture for schools.** FotoFest is partnering with the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH)**; the **James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy** and the **Humanities Research Center at Rice University**; and the **Arab-American Cultural and Community Center of Houston** on a number of these programs.

Other Biennial programming features FotoFest's famous **International Fine Print Auction** and the sixteen-day international **Meeting Place portfolio review for artists.** **One hundred independently organized art exhibitions and events will take place at spaces across the city,** including: the MFAH, the Menil Collection, Holocaust Museum Houston, and the Station Museum of Art.

A new program in 2014 is the **Collectors Weekend**, a three-day event featuring two panels on collecting with international experts, exhibition tours with Arab artists, and a visit to the MFAH's photographic print collection with **MFAH photography curator Anne Wilkes Tucker and her newly appointed successor Malcolm Daniel**. Attendees also receive reserved seats at the Biennial Fine Print Auction, with **Sotheby's Vice President Denise Bethel as auctioneer**.

The quality and wide-ranging character of FotoFest's programs have led Houston's Mayor Annise Parker to say: "Its sheer magnitude... provides the opportunity for photographers and video artists from around the globe to exhibit and share their creativity."



Huda Lutfi (Egypt), *Cactus Walk*, 2013

VIEW FROM INSIDE features Arab artists from 14 countries and promises to be the largest presentation of contemporary Arab photography and mixed media art presented in the United States in many years. Over the past five years, FotoFest Senior Curator Wendy Watriss has been looking at the work of Arab artists with **Karin Adrian von Roques**, a German curator with over 20 years experience working in the Middle East and North Africa. An expert in classical Islamic and contemporary Arab art, Ms. Von Roques has been commissioned by FotoFest as Lead Curator for the Arab exhibitions.

"The diversity of these artists work is remarkable, with the artists manifesting deeply personal, intimate views of their cultures," says Ms. von Roques. "They are exploring issues such as the role of religion in an increasingly commercialized secular world; the complex cultural interconnections between the West and the East; the role of women in society; and the rapidity of social, political and economic change in the past 10 years."

"New technologies and communication platforms have given artists in the Middle East and North Africa unprecedented access to the global community," says FotoFest Senior-curator and Co-Founder Wendy Watriss. "These artists have already risen to prominence in their own countries and across the Arab world. Many are prominent in the European art world as well. But only a few of these artists have been seen by audiences in the United States. We hope the Biennial will build new and lasting bridges." **A full list of the artists featured in the FotoFest 2014 Biennial will be made available in January 2014.**

With the Biennial catalogue, **a hardcover book will be done on the Arab exhibitions with essays by four European and Arab scholars and art experts**, over 150 color reproductions of Arab artworks, an introduction by FotoFest Senior Curator Wendy Watriss, artist and curator biographies, and a bibliography. The book is being designed by HvAD Design in New York and is being published by Schilt Publishing in Amsterdam, with FotoFest.

ARAB PROGRAMS

With the Arab exhibitions, FotoFest is sponsoring a series of lectures, conferences, symposia, and films with the participation of more than 25 prominent Arab scholars, artists, critics, and arts administrators.

On **Saturday, March 29, 2014**, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Museum's **Arts of the Islamic World Initiative** join FotoFest to present a day-long **conference on the history and practice of contemporary art in the Middle East**. The Biennial's principal curator, Karin Adrian von Roques, will participate in the March conference along with artists and arts professionals from the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and the U.S.

In early April, a day-long symposium, organized in partnership with the Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy, and the Humanities Research Center at Rice, explores contemporary politics, the rise of sectarianism across the region, and the phenomena of “Arabaphobia.” Arab historian **Dr. Ussama Makdisi, Professor of History and Arab American Educational Foundation Chair of Arab Studies**, and **Farès El-Dahdah, Professor of Architecture and Director of the Humanities Research Center**, are organizing the symposium with FotoFest.

In addition to its partnerships with the MFAH and Rice University, FotoFest is working closely with prominent Arab organizations, regionally and nationally, particularly the **Arab American Cultural and Community Center in Houston (ACC)**; the **Middle Eastern Studies Department at the University of Texas at Austin**; and two New York-based art groups, **ArteEast** and **Alwan for the Arts**. FotoFest is collaborating with the MFAH film program and Alwan for the Arts on the Biennial’s **Arab Film Program**.

Among galleries representing artists in the Arab exhibitions are: **Athr Gallery** (Jeddah); **Ayyam Gallery** (Dubai and Beirut); **Berloni Gallery** (London); **Cuadro Gallery** (Dubai); **Edge of Arabia** (London); **The Empty Quarter Gallery** (Dubai); **Rose Issa Projects** (London); **Side by Side Gallery Akim Monet** (Berlin); and **The Third Line** (Dubai).

Media partners for the 2014 Biennial and the Arab programs are: **Art in America Magazine**, **Contemporary Practices Magazine** and **Houston Public Media**.

NON ARAB PROGRAMMING

The 2014 International Fine Print Auction takes place Monday, March 24, 2014. Described as “**the best international contemporary Auction of its kind in the United States**” by acclaimed curator Anne Wilkes Tucker, the FotoFest Auction is attended by national and international collectors. **Presiding over the auction is Denise Bethel, Senior Vice President and Head of the Photography Department at Sotheby’s, NY.** Collectors groups from a number of prestigious national institutions will attend the Auction. The Collectors Weekend programs will include the Live Auction and related activities.

The **Meeting Place Portfolio Reviews for Artists, March 15 - April 2, 2014, is the largest program of its kind in the world**, bringing together over 500 artists from 34 countries, and over 150 international professional decision makers (curators, gallery directors, editors and others) for one-on-one meetings over the course of 16 days. The system established by the FotoFest Meeting Place has become the model for portfolio review programs globally, influencing portfolio review events in over 30 cities around the world. **ArteEast and FotoFest will provide scholarships for U.S. based Arab artists** to participate in the Meeting Place.

Among the artist **Workshops** open to the public are: ***Inside the Collector’s Mind***, with well-known New York-based **photography collector and consultant, Alice Zimet, March 19, 2014**; and ***Artist Books and Books on the Internet***, with well-known San Francisco artist and founder of Malulu Editions, **Luis Delgado and Steve Woodall**, Director of the Center for Book and Paper Arts at Columbia College Chicago, **March 24, 2014**.

Four afternoon **Artist-Curator Dialogues** will provide Meeting Place participants and the general public with an informal and intimate look at the contemporary Arab art worlds with Arab artists and arts professionals. Dialogues take place **March 16, March 21, March 26, and March 30**.

The popular **Evenings with the Artists** will again provide photography lovers and the general public with the opportunity to meet artists, see their artwork, and buy prints directly from the artists. Evenings with the Artists follow the Artist-Curator Dialogues, **March 16, March 21, March 26, and March 30**.

The FotoFest Biennial takes place over the course of six weeks, including the ACC organized Arab-American Heritage Week at the beginning of April. Additional programs include concerts, films, poetry readings, bike scrambles, and free curator-artist exhibition tours for families, students, and the general public. Most activities are free and open to the public.

A full list of activities and events will be published in the FotoFest Map and Calendar, available citywide, and online on the FotoFest website, in February 2014.

FOTOFEST 2014 BIENNIAL SPONSORS

Early Major 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 Crane Foundation; The Levant Foundation; The Wortham Foundation; Texas Commission on the Arts; Doubletree Hotel by Hilton Houston Downtown; HexaGroup; iLand Internet Solutions; Judith and Gamble Baldwin; FotoFest Board of Directors; Berloni Gallery (London); Brookfield Office Properties; Williams Tower Gallery

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 2014 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 34 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.

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.

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.

WENDY WATRISS

Wendy Watriss is a Co-founder of FotoFest and has served as Artistic Director and Senior Curator since 1991. She has developed over 60 international exhibits for FotoFest, including path-breaking exhibits on Photography from China 1934-2008; *AMERICAN VOICES - Latino photographers in the U.S.*, Photography from Latin America 1865-1994; photography from Central Europe; contemporary Mexican photography; the visual history of Kurdistan with Susan Meiselas; contemporary Korean photography; early 20th century and contemporary Russian photography; multi-media/new technology installations; and subjects such as the Global Water Crisis, The Global Environment, Guantanamo; Artists Responding to Violence; and Contemporary U.S. Photography. In 2009, she was the invited curator for international exhibitions of the Guangzhou 2009 Photo Biennial at the Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China. From 1970-1991, Wendy Watriss worked as an award-winning international photojournalist and independent documentary photographer. She won the World Press Photo Award for Feature Stories and the Oskar Barnack Award - Leica in 1982; Interpress Photo in 1983; and Mid America Arts/National Endowment for the Arts in 1985.