

PAPERING THE TOWN...

Sifting through a canvas totebag-full of miscellaneous paper ephemera amassed over the course of one hectic week in March, Dubai's award-winning cultural blogger Hind Mezaina (www.theculturist.com) talks us through a pick of her papers...

In my opinion, this year's Art Dubai was one of the best editions so far. It had something for everyone, collectable art for the serious buyer and art enthusiast, and something for the casual observer to browse and view. More importantly, there was less cliché art and more work that addressed challenging subjects and themes. Of course, there's tons more to Art Dubai than just the fair - from a great programme of commissioned projects to talks and performances, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The Global Art Forum_6 had a series of very engaging talks featuring an esteemed line up of speakers that included novelist and artist Douglas Coupland; Serpentine Gallery Co-director of Exhibitions and Programmes and Director of International Programmes Hans Ulrich Obrist; Egyptian artist (and recent Abraaj Capital Art Prize winner) Wael Shawky; Amin Maalouf, Lebanese-born French author of *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*; Georgina Adam, Financial Times art market correspondent and Editor-at-Large of the Art Newspaper; journalist and Bidoun senior editor Negar Azimi to name a few.

During the course of the week, moving about the Fair and through its myriad peripheral events, I also loaded up on mountains of paper ephemera, which I will keep. To review the event, I'm going to give you an overview of Art Dubai through my eclectic collection of print, paper and promotional paraphernalia. Who said print is dead!

So, here goes...

ART DUBAI 2012 CATALOGUE AND GUIDES

The floral theme that was found on the catalogues and guides was in celebration of spring, which looked pretty elegant. I particularly liked the printed guides for the events and projects like the **Global Art Forum_6 Medium of Media**, the **Terrace Talks** and **Trace Performance Night**. Each was in a *delicious* pastel colour. The guides had a very old-school feel to them, each one being bound by an old-fashioned file binder. They make good memorabilia (I normally like collecting materials from events I attend to add in my ever growing scrap book, a record of events and places I've been to). Seeing some of the very polished and brand heavy catalogues and brochures around the fair, these humble looking guides were definitely the indie version, a far cry from the high budget production you can see across the fair. In my books, humble and indie get two thumbs up. My copy of the Global Art Forum_6 Medium of Media guide is looking quite weathered, as I attended almost all the talks, referring to it constantly. It will always serve as a reminder of my favourite part of this year's fair. Some pundits have it that the Global Art Forum is the brain of Art Dubai, I rather think it was the heart of the fair.

FORUM-FORUM

This was a multi-media repository that included commissioned publications, projects, research and art-works. It was part of the Global Art Forum, which, under the direction of sparky Shumon Basar was titled 'The Medium of Media'. The line up of speakers was outstanding, it included local and international speakers from the world of art and culture. Some presentations and talks were academic, some were an exploration and some were just lighthearted fun. Sadly, the early afternoon slot made it difficult for people who have day jobs to attend. Nevertheless, majority of the talks had a full house, and I believe the video recordings will be available online and accessible to anyone that missed out.

Here, two publications stood out for me from Forum-Forum, the very bright coloured pocket sized books:

'TL; DR Some Medium Stories' (edited by Michael C Vazquez). The seven essays in the book 'consider contemporary communications media and individual consciousness'. I particularly loved this line from the introduction, written by Shumon Basar and Michael C. Vazquez, 'In this homage to the pamphlet hopefully, you will lose yourself for a moment, despite - or perhaps because of - the marriage of media, old and new.'

One of my favourite essays from the book is TELEVISION WITHOUT PITY | Afghanistan by Satellite by Tom Francis. It's about the role and influence of satellite TV in Afghanistan. "To the *National Geographic* reader, Afghans are a 'conservative people'. They are said to prefer the 'traditional arts and leisure pastimes', carpet weaving, calligraphy, beard growing." Tom Francis then goes on to say he discovered after arriving in Kabul that "many an Afghan would happily trade their kites for a *Red Dwarf* box set."

'The Gulf Colloquy Compendium' by Sophia Al Maria, a tongue-in-cheek book that is a 'vernacular digest of words from the past and phrases from the future'. It's a 'lexicon of new and archaic Gulf phraseology' and readers are invited to contribute their own entries at gulfcolloquycompendium.tumblr.com.

I'm not aware of any written material that looks at "Gulf phraseology" in this manner. Language evolves, and this book is an example of how Arabic from the Gulf region is changing, how it is mixing with English to create a new vocabulary based on lifestyle and popular culture. Here are some examples:

ARAB HOSPITALITY | Popular brand concept.

BB ROULETTE | BBMing while driving on Sheikh Zayed Road.

EXPAT EXEC | Underqualified, overpaid.

FALCON | Bank mascot.

FILM HINDI | When minor drama spirals into a major show of emotional pyrotechnics

LEXUS | \lek-us\ Choicest polyester Abaya fabric; choicest family sedan.

MACAROONS | Little sweet hamburgers from France.

SEXT | A love letter.

STILL LIFE | Art form popular among teenage girls possessing SLR cameras. Usual subjects, manicures [Macaroon], mobile phones.

TURKEY | The land of raki and honey.

VIAGRA | Panadol.

MARKER

Marker was a curated section of 'concept stands' found across Art Dubai. The focus this year was art from Indonesia, curated by Alia Swastika. We're not exposed enough to art from the Far East, so it was very refreshing to see art by young Indonesian artists addressing "Self/Faith". The work was a reflection of the tensions between public and personal spaces, "the artists explore spirituality and religion itself while simultaneously working towards modernism, cosmopolitanism and consumerism in the global world". I picked up the Marker catalogue which had an introduction to the this year's theme of "Self/Faith" featuring the artists and their work. I quite related to the work and words, and found it quite relevant to this part of the world.

I particularly liked the photos by Wimo Ambala Bayang who documented places in which he found replicas of the Ka'aba used for Hajj trainings. The "fake" Ka'abas "question what is sacred and what is manmade" - he explores the "contradictions within what is natural and what is interpreted vis-a-vis belief in God". It was very intriguing to see art with a Muslim point of view from outside this region.

YTO BARRADA AND ZID ZID KIDS: MOROCCO TO THE MOON

This was a mixed media installation and educational workshops conducted by renowned artist Yto Barrada and designers Zid Zid Kids from Marrakech. They created a 1950s sci-fi universe of astronauts, aliens and space robots, which featured workshops, film projections and served as an exploration area for children and adults. I adored this project and attended a talk with Yto Barrada and Zid Zid Kids who explained their art education project in Morocco which teaches children the art of the handmade object, the joy of playing and creating. I ended with my copy of a fun looking fold out colouring sheet, a postcard and a sticker.

ABRAAJ CAPITAL PRIZE 2012 'SPECTRAL IMPRINTS'

The official ACAP guide included a statement from this year's curator Nat Muller in which she said "*Spectral Imprints* explores the very moment when the narrated past becomes tangible and present, and then risks disappearing again like a phantom. This process of embodiment and materialization - however short and subtle, or however distinct - speaks as much of the imaginary, as it speaks of history, politics, memory, and love." The guide also featured the artists and their work, Raed Yasin's 'China', Taysir Batniji's 'To My Brother', Wael Shawky's 'A Glimpse of Clean History', Risham Syed's 'The Seven Seas', Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige's 'A Letter Can Always Reach Its Destination'. I particularly liked the booklet accompanying Hadjithomas & Joreige's utterly brilliant video installation. The video is based on a collection of spam emails the artists collected for over a decade, narrated by non-professional actors. The emails are transformed into monologues making the viewer almost believe the actors on the screen and feel sorry for them. The accompanying book has extracts of these spam emails, which I found very interesting to read in a different context.

'ART IN THE CITY' ART MAP

This comprehensive guide to arts and culture across the UAE – with exhaustive event and exhibition listings, produced by the elite crack team behind artinthecity.com - was first published in 2007. This is their 15th edition. The guide is published three times a year and has evolved from a simple, fold-out pamphlet to now a comparatively opulent 80-page production, reflecting the commensurate growth of the region's art scene. Serving the influx of first-time tourists, old hands and of course, Dubai's increasing cabal of art lovers, this pocket-sized reference was my indispensable, friendly guide.

'THAT MAGAZINE'

An independent from Istanbul that invites you to 'CONNECT, CREATE, EXPLORE, and LIVE GOOD!' Well, I like doing all those things so despite this being the only issue I've seen so far, I really like its style and aesthetic. There's often something special about independent magazines and I was glad to randomly come across this one.

'PORTRAIT OF A TERRITORY' BY ZIAD ANTAR

This book contains a beautiful series of photos taken between 2004 and 2011 by Ziad Antar who drove around the UAE following its coastline and documented the coastal landscape. The book makes me want to get into my car and go on a road trip across the country to create my own series of landscape photography using my analogue cameras.

'DO YOU OFTEN CONFUSE LOVE WITH SUCCESS AND FAME?' BY SHUMON BASAR

Printed in a book that resembles old fashioned phone/address books with gold borders, Basar's covetable tome is actually a series of rather Zen-like questions, each one provoking, I discovered, a chuckle, giggle or furrowed brow and few minutes distant contemplation. You can ponder it all for hour or, if you follow Basar's intentions, you can polish it all off in a few minutes. I recall him saying to me it's a book he guarantees *anyone* will finish reading.