

It's official: **100 issues of Canvas**, covering the myriad twists and turns of the kaleidoscope that is Middle Eastern art since our launch in 2003 and first issue a year later. In that time we've spoken to countless artists, curators, galleries and creative institutions of all kinds across the MENA region, documenting their groundbreaking work and impact on the course of art history in this part of the world. Now we celebrate our 100th issue by reflecting on the history that has been made, on its influence over the present, and on the seeds that have been sown for what promises to be a glittering future.

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FUTURE

What lies ahead, especially in the wake of the pandemic still affecting our lives, is a constant unknown. Yet many upcoming events show us moving in a direction where art and artists are continuing to innovate, exploring new media and embracing technology as the dramatic narrative of Middle Eastern art continues to unfold.

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THE 1000TH ISSUE

Tushar Jiwarajka

Volte Art Projects recently opened a flagship gallery space in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. Founder and director Tushar Jiwarajka speaks to *Canvas* about the gallery's beginnings, the intersection between art, nature and technology and his big plans for the future.

Q How did you get started on the art scene?

Tushar Jiwarajka: I spent about 10 years in the corporate world and then decided to take some time off to figure out what I really wanted to do in life, something that makes me excited to get up to go to work every day. I always knew I enjoyed going to exhibitions, visiting museums and galleries around the world. I really felt that there was a need for art, especially art going beyond the traditional paintings that one would see in galleries in India. That's what kind of excited me to move into that space.

Tell us the story of how you came to represent William Kentridge when your gallery was only a year old.

When I started, we were working with mostly very young and experimental artists. A friend of mine brought me a DVD from New York called *Anything is Possible*, a documentary about William Kentridge,

his studio and practice. I was watching it late one night, when the gallery should have been closed, and someone walked in. I was wondering who would be visiting a gallery at 8.30pm on a Saturday evening, but it was William Kentridge and his wife! They just happened to stumble upon us while they were passing through Mumbai. So, I very naively said that I was dreaming about having a show by him in the gallery and what he said next really stunned me. He explained that he was very keen to showcase his work outside Europe and America, so let's make it happen!

It was a big turning point for the whole gallery and felt way beyond a mere coincidence – more like a sign from the universe that if William Kentridge feels that he would like to showcase his work here, then maybe others of my most admired artists from around the world would feel the same way. So, from there I went and pursued many of my other favourites and started working with them.



Tushar Jiwarajka.
Founder and director
of Volte Art Projects.
Image courtesy of
Volte Art Projects



Installation view of *Sublime Convergence* at Volte Art Projects, Dubai. Image courtesy of Volte Art Projects

So you reach out to represent artists who you admire?

I find that most of my favourite artists are not really shown or represented by anyone in this part of the world, whether India or the Middle East. I perform the role of being the person on the ground for those people, organising exhibitions, making sure their works go to museums and collections. Almost 80 per cent of the artists I work with are international.

How does the art scene differ between Dubai and Mumbai?

Art tends to reflect real life. I find that in India it is mostly people looking at Indian art and they are still very much focused on traditional paintings. Whereas in Dubai, it's like the city – very cosmopolitan and very

global. People here in the UAE appreciate all kinds of art, it's not like they're only looking for art from their region.

Your gallery space here is huge. Was that an important consideration when choosing a location?

I was initially looking at doing pop-ups, but last year things changed. Warehouses in Alserkal Avenue started filling up again and this was the last unoccupied space, so it just felt like the right moment. I thought why not make this our headquarters and a place from where we do projects, so it functions in many ways. We do a lot more than a traditional gallery, including finding places where we can do large-scale public artworks such as projections on buildings or partnering with art institutions and museums.



Nalini Malani. *Can You Hear Me*. 2020. Animated sketches projected on the walls. Room size variable, approximately 800 x 1600 x 350 cm. Image courtesy of Whitechapel Gallery, London

What are some recent partnerships or projects that you've worked on?

We worked with Nalini Malani, one of India's leading artists, and did a few projects with her in 2021, including a large-scale installation at Whitechapel Gallery in London. We also held an exhibition for our tenth anniversary at the Taraporewala Mansion in Mumbai, where we showcased the artist studio, *Based Upon*. Their metal works took over the nearly 1400m² space and temporarily transformed the mansion into a gallery.

For the launch of the gallery in Dubai, your exhibition *Sublime Convergence* looks at the merging of art, nature, science and technology. What does this say about the current state of the world?

We are slowly losing touch with each other and ourselves. Everything's become very theory-driven, even in the art world, full of theories and jargon that most people cannot relate to. It's very important to have art that you can connect with and I find that I respond best to art that has a

strong connection to nature. One of the most powerful artworks I ever saw was at *Burning Man*, this all-night art party that goes on deep in the Nevada desert. Suddenly around 3am the music stopped. Everyone was wondering what was going on when someone started to play the piano and then we saw lights come on in the distance and come towards us. Then they went off and the piano started to play again, slowly. The lights come back on and we saw 600 drones mimicking a murmuration of birds. The artists were Studio Drift and it completely blew me away. I feel that I connected to the work because, even though they were drones, as humans we are familiar with patterns in nature and so can keep watching things like that without getting bored.

Do you have any upcoming plans you can share?

We're planning a solo show with Nalini Milani and featuring new paintings, as well as a large wall drawing and several other works.