



Above: Untitled by Fatch Mouscoris, oil on canvas, 60 cm x 62 cm

Artistic inclinations

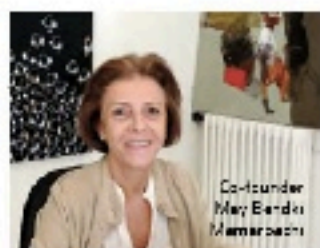
MENA platform lets you buy and sell fine art online *By Pamela de Leon*

With annual art fairs like Art Dubai and Galleries Night, plus cultural districts such as Alserkal Avenue bringing in visitors to see regional and international artists and showings, there's evidently a great interest in MENA artists and artwork. It's an ideal time to start investing in hallmark works, but when we think of buying art, admit it, what comes to mind? Quiet hallways and elitist artsy

types. This is where Artscoops comes in, an online platform specializing in buying and selling art from MENA artists and commercial galleries. Being an online avenue, it can reach the niche of art buyers who are more comfortable browsing collections in the comfort of their homes sans the intimidating mise-en-scène of a gallery. When asked about establishing an online art space instead of having an

offline presence, co-founder Raya Mamarbachi pointed how there's already major galleries doing that effectively across the Middle East. With online art platforms becoming more familiar internationally, there's a need for a platform dedicated to MENA buyers too, adding that Middle Eastern buyers, "especially young buyers", are busy and would likely take advantage of browsing online. With access to an online global market, lesser-known artists can have a wider reach, and first-time buyers can take the initial step in acquiring their first piece, which will be a step toward art-buying becoming a mass adopted cultural movement.

How did Artscoops get started? Growing up in a household with collector-parents, Raya Mamarbachi—whose background is in digital and traditional marketing and online ventures—always had a penchant for galleries and museums, believing art to be a better investment than stocks. While helping a charity auction for Syri-Arts in October 2013, Mamarbachi checked with organizers to determine the ratio of pieces that were bought physically in Lebanon compared to the ones purchased online. The result? "It was something like 30:70 with the majority being bought on the Internet. This proved there is a market for an online art business." Mamarbachi decided to set that up with her mother, May Mamarbachi, an art collector and seasoned entrepreneur, who has represented The Victoria & Albert Museum of London for The World Ceramics Show in Damascus. As a mother-daughter



Co-founder May Mamarbachi

team, their "start was challenging, but as our roles and skills are complimentary; the dynamics work well." Raya is responsible for the overall day-to-day management of the company, while May handles managing Artscoops' relationships with artists and galleries featured on the site. "When you work with a family member, [the] most important [thing] is to not mix personal and business life." As art enthusiasts venturing into the business side of a creative industry, legal agreements with artists and galleries took time. Another challenge? Their online payment gateway proved to be difficult since they wanted to be transparent to their user base. Mamarbachi also stated that there's still the "fear when buying art online", referring to people's doubts about the artwork authenticity and seller reputation. No need to worry though, all of the works on Artscoops comes with a Certificate of Authenticity provided by the gallery or the artist.

The numbers are looking positive for them too. In an art and finance report released last year by Deloitte, it was found that 79% of art collectors and 69% of art professionals think that the online art auction market will become a successful business model. Artscoops' revenue streams include a mix of commissions from the website's sales, having an art advisory/consultancy arm for corporations and individuals and online auction and offline themed pop-ups— the Holiday Pop Up event, being the most recent. When they first started, their selection consisted of artists they knew and recognized. Currently, they are looking for artists that are "analytical about our world, its turmoil and try to express this in their art", while also considering their educational background and issues expressed in their art. In terms of their criteria for artwork to be sold, it is



Co-founder Raya Mamarbachi

based on the subject and engagement with their mediums— be it photography, oil and acrylic paint, video or installations. As of December 2014, the most affordable piece you can get is Maya Hage's oil painting of *Radiographie* at US\$800. The most expensive one is Hussein Madi's *Untitled 1* and *Untitled 2* individually priced at \$57,000. Despite being a young site (they launched in September 2014), their "multi-phase" marketing approach helped them gain momentum. Artscoops were initially (and still presently) using online media and mass marketing, building followers through their own networks and social media and by physically attending global art events. They also welcome competition, confident that what sets them apart is "continually updating their database, offering additional features on the website, independent content/weekly editorials and our contacts both with galleries and artists alike."

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What's on their agenda? Besides looking for partners, artists and galleries from the MENA region (and abroad), they're planning to offer additional features for the website and there's an app in the works too. The founders are also looking into introducing other mediums such as video, installations, art books and design objects.

ARTSCOOPS IMAGES | ARTISTS © ARTSCOOPS

NOTABLE MENTIONS

FARHAD MOSHIRI

This Iranian artist is famous for his distinct jars and bowls painted with calligraphic texts consisting of poetry snippets or everyday terms from daily life in Tehran. A regular in contemporary Middle East and Arab art auctions over the last couple of years, his work is part of The British Museum's collection.



KHOSROW HASSANZADEH

One of Iran's leading artists, Hassanzadeh creates figurative paintings in different mediums including ink, collage, silk screens and ceramic tiles. His work is part of public collections at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the Tehran British Museum or the London KIT Tropen Museum.



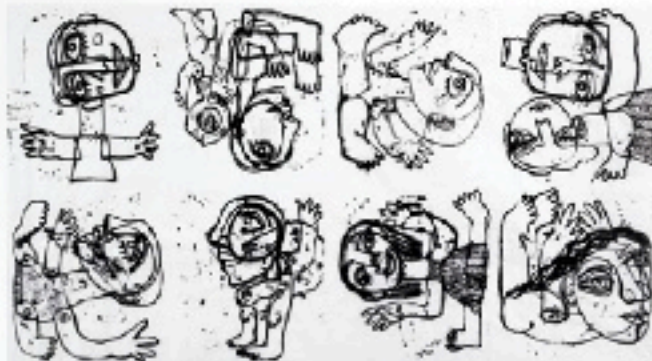
HUSSEIN MADI

Born in Lebanon, Madi created his first alphabet-themed composition in 1973. He's since moved on from graphic work and sculpture, focusing on individual letters, rather than words or sentences. His work has been exhibited at the Venice Biennale, the British Museum and Tokyo's Ueno Museum.



NUMBERS "Artscoops' portfolio comprises of more than 160 works from 45 artists from the MENA region."

MEDIUMS "Photography has, so far, been the favorite medium of Artscoops purchasers. Selling sculptures online is very difficult as a medium. Buyers prefer to buy up-and-coming names or well established artists than 'unknowns'. Furthermore, price point is important online."



Above: Untitled by Fadi Young Moadi Madi, 70 cm x 140 cm

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FEATURED ARTWORKS

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| <p>Ulfah Living Time Sahar, Saudi \$ 6,000</p> | <p>Gachouan Photography \$ 2,000</p> | <p>Farhad Moshiri Photography \$ 1,000</p> | <p>Khosrow Hassanzadeh Photography \$ 4,000</p> | <p>Hussein Madi Photography \$ 57,000</p> |
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