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A Virtual, Visual Feast

Raya Mamarbachi's Artscoops initiative is fast carving a niche as the Middle East's must-visit, online art hub

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Raya Mamarbachi and her mother May Mamarbachi with a piece by Bahram Hajou in the background. Courtesy: Raya Mamarbachi.

By: Ahmad K. Minkara

Many of those who have changed careers can identify a defining moment in their professional lives that steered them in a new direction.

For Raya Mamarbachi, that moment came at an art auction in late 2013, organized by Noura Jumblat to raise funds for Syrian refugees living in Beirut.

"People were seeing the art work online and buying it!" Mamarbachi, of Syrian-British descent, notes. "Therefore, I deduced that there is a gap in the market."

Mamarbachi wasn't necessarily looking for a new project, having built a successful, decade-long career in advertising, after graduating in management and Spanish from [St Andrews University](#) in Scotland. Yet she couldn't quite let the idea of a digital gallery go. Convinced that there was demand for a Middle Eastern online art platform, she decided to embark on a collaborative venture with her mother, May Mamarbachi, who was herself an avid art-collector.



Raya Mamarbachi with a piece of Maya Hage work in the background. Courtesy: Raya Mamarbachi.



Raya Mamarbachi

The result of their efforts was [Artscoops](#), a groundbreaking, digital platform launched in September 2014. The Dubai-based website, Mamarbachi explains, has been designed to facilitate the process of buying art from leading international galleries.

Reaction to the website was certainly positive, with galleries welcoming the opportunity to collaborate, rather than viewing the site as competition. To date, over 20 galleries from around the worldwide have signed up to the virtual platform, with participants including [Janine Rubeiz](#), [Agial and Artspace Hamra](#) in Lebanon, [Magic of Persia Gallery](#) in London, UK, and Canada's [Artclubb Gallery](#), Toronto. One year on, the digital gallery has handled 480 pieces of art by 110 artists, including Alfred Basbous, Simohammed Fettaka, Dia Azzawi and Fereydoun Ave. Alongside the buying and selling of art, the platform also offers live auctions and advisory services.

Part of Artscoop's appeal is certainly its innovation and collaborative dimension. Mamarbachi is also keen to highlight the site's "full transparency" and secure payment facilities.



Raya Mamarbachi and her mother May Mamarbachi with a piece by Farouk Kondajki in the background. Courtesy: Raya Mamarbachi.

Avant-garde initiatives include an annual pop-up show, held at the business's Achrafieh office. This year's event will run from November 24th to December 23rd on the theme naïve art, according to Mamarbachi. Artscoops also showcases a monthly online art show, covering a broad range of topics such as photography and calligraphy. The current theme is Iranian art.

Mamarbachi is now eyeing expansion across the Gulf, supported by financing in the form of online crowd-funding, which is giving investors the opportunity to buy equity online at [Eureeca.com](#). Doubtless, there is added satisfaction to be had from helping to generate confidence in the process of buying art online and highlighting its investment potential.

<http://www.artscoops.com/>

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