

extending frontiers

galerie kashya hildebrand

Using strong personal relationships and a deep empathy with the Middle East and its legendary trials and tribulations, Kashya Hildebrand has established herself and her gallery at the forefront of the region's Contemporary art scene.





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COURTESY OF GALERIE KASHYA HILDEBRAND

Walking into Galerie Kashya Hildebrand in the heart of downtown Zurich, near the famous shopping street, Bahnhofstrasse, one is immediately struck by the warm and inviting gallery. Large windows give passersby a tempting preview of the eclectic and ever-changing collection of art. Not many galleries in Zurich have such a variety of Middle Eastern, Asian, European and American artists. Galerie Kashya Hildebrand strives to forge cultural connections with its artists and this intercultural dialogue is one of its most distinguishing characteristics. It is a testament to the owner, Kashya Hildebrand, that she brings this warmth and these connections to life.

The Road to Art

Hildebrand has an eclectic history. She was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, to a Pakistani father and an American mother. At the age of four, when her mother was widowed, the family moved to the USA, settling in Connecticut. After completing her education in economics and finance at Boston College in 1983, Hildebrand worked on Wall Street for a prominent hedge fund for the first 16 years of her career. The shift from finance to art came when she moved with her family to Switzerland. "The art world intrigued me. I had had so many wonderful encounters in galleries and museums around the world and thought it would be an extraordinary adventure to get involved

in. Given my success with my former career on Wall Street, I had enormous enthusiasm, self-confidence and ambition, and felt that this new aspiration was realistic. Clearly, this confidence was a little naïve on my part, as I soon learned how much I did not know. Yet despite the learning curve, I realised that this is where my passion lies.”

Hildebrand's initial gallery presence was in Geneva, where she opened a gallery in 2001. She then expanded with a space in New York in 2003, but quickly learned that it was difficult to run a second venue on another continent, whilst balancing family life with her work. Hildebrand also recognised the value of her personal relationships with her collectors and found that it was not easy to sustain this relationship given the geographic constraints and distances involved between the two galleries. She closed the New York gallery in 2006 but maintained the presence in Switzerland. Galerie Kashya Hildebrand was born when she moved with her family to Zurich in 2004.

When looking at Hildebrand's programme, one cannot help but notice the striking aestheticism in all the artists' work, whether they are from North America, the Middle East, Asia or Europe. The artworks have a tendency to be eerily beautiful, distinguished and skilful, with a cinematographic perspective. When presented with these observations, Hildebrand reveals her admiration for when “the artists literally weave a narrative with a fine tapestry of materials and media and make reference to their ancestral past in a contemporary way.” In particular, she loves the resulting tension and beauty. There are also synergies that exist between the artists that she represents,

in that they all have a strong conceptual narrative and a focus on craftsmanship, refinement and composition. Turkish artist Gülay Semercioğlu (see page 148), Korean artist Ran Hwang and Iranian artist Sissi Farassat all exemplify this in their tactile use of materials, whether they be wire, threads or sequins. The materials make reference to age-old techniques while simultaneously offering a contemporary perspective.

Hildebrand points out that with many of the artists, one

inevitably finds that factors such as their political context, upbringing or migration away from their home country play a major role in their art. “Russian artist Andrei Molodkin, who presented at the Russian Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Iranian artist Gohar Dashti, Korean artist Jung-Yeon Min and Chinese artist Tianbing Li all illustrate this.” Making connections with artists such as these, as well as with collectors is a great thrill for Hildebrand. “The gallery takes real pleasure in finding young emerging artists to help them develop their careers. It is important that

collectors also have a ‘ground-floor’ experience, growing with their artist, alongside his or her aspirations, vulnerability and development. For me, this is the most enriching experience of being a gallerist, and for a collector, the process of discovery is the ultimate experience.”



Previous spread: Kashya Hildebrand with works by (left to right): Li Tianbing. *File #2*. 2007–8. Oil on canvas. 200 x 160 cm; Andrei Molodkin. *S*. 2006. Acrylic sculpture filled with crude oil. 93 x 56 x 9 cm. Edition of five plus one artist proof; Cheng Guang. *New Cultural Series – People's Victory*. 2005. Acrylic on canvas. 220 x 100 cm; Valay Shende. *Scooter*. 2007. Gold-plated metal discs. Edition of three. 112 x 178 x 70 cm.

Facing page, left to right: Jung-Yeon Min. *4 Minutes*. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 200 x 150 cm; *Cyrille et Chronos*. 2008. Acrylic on canvas. 150 x 300 cm; *Hibernation*. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 114 x 195 cm.

Above: Osama Esid. *Cairo Street Workers*. 2006. Photograph and mixed media. 111 x 81 cm. Edition three of five.



The Eastern Contingent

While Hildebrand did not consciously begin collecting and showing Middle Eastern art *per se*, she has always related to artists from this region and to their work. Her passion for Middle Eastern art comes partly from familial ties to the region, as well as from her travels. Having lived on three different continents, she has a strong connection to artists who address the displacement and adaptation required by the negotiation and straddling of different cultures and languages. One of the first Middle Eastern artists to exhibit at her gallery was Iranian Farhad Moshiri (*Canvas 1.5*). After giving him a solo exhibition in her Geneva gallery in 2003 and another in her New York space in 2004, she then invited him to curate the exhibition *Welcome*, which included a select group of Iranian artists, for her New York gallery in 2005. This followed with a strong presentation of his work during the inaugural Gulf Art Fair (now Art Dubai) in 2007. This introduction to the Middle East has led her to pursue a relationship with many other Middle Eastern

and Iranian artists over the years. The gallery has presented Shirin Aliabadi, Khaled Al-Saai (*Canvas 3.3*), Haleh Anvari, Fereydoun Ave (*Canvas 3.4*), Gohar Dashti, Osama Esid, Lalla Essaydi, Sissi Farassat, Shadi Ghadirian (*Canvas 3.1*) and Ahmad Moualla, among others.

Hildebrand also works to connect Middle Eastern artists with Switzerland by curating at least one Middle Eastern-focused exhibition in her Zurich gallery each year. Last year, guest curator Karin Adrian von Roques presented the exhibition *Beyond Words, Contemporary Calligraphy from the Middle East*. In April, the gallery will host the exhibition *Staging Identity: Performance and Irony in Contemporary Arab and Iranian Photography*, which will focus on the ways in which Arab and Iranian artists use photography's ironic and performance-based aspects for constructing identity in order to stage a particular experience. The exhibition aims to explore how the theatricality of the photographs affects the viewer and creates a space in which the artifice is laid bare. The results



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are innovative and daring statements about authenticity and the tensions between individual selves and their cultural contexts. Theatricality and irony reveal themselves to be effective methods for social critique, as well as being ‘safe’ ways to imagine other realities.

Hildebrand is frequently in the Middle East for both business and pleasure and has become a regular participant in the region’s art fairs, which enables her to strengthen her contact with the area’s artists and collectors. “Our gallery programme’s ethnic diversity is a result of my own ethnic

diversity, along with the experiences I have had. Although I was raised in a Western household, I was always keenly aware of my Middle Eastern and Asian roots and heritage. This recognition has always inspired me to have a global perspective about my programme.” The gallery has participated in numerous international art fairs, developing an assorted network of collectors, an aspect that Hildebrand feels is just as important as the diversity of her collectors. In recent years, the gallery has participated in fairs in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Cologne, New York, Miami and Basel. The artists appreciate having their work geographically placed around the world, not confined to one major city or country.

Facing page: Andrei Molodkin. *Hope*. 2009. Acrylic sculpture filled with crude oil. 56 x 20 x 11 cm.

Above: Haleh Anvari. *Chador-dadar – London Piccadilly*. 2006. Photograph. 90 x 135 cm.






Cultivating the Scene

Galerie Kashya Hildebrand is the only Swiss gallery to participate in the upcoming Art Dubai fair in March. Attending for her fourth consecutive year, Hildebrand has commended the fair's organisers and media, "for the enormous effort put into creating an exciting cultural platform and venue for art." With the number of activities and programmes increasing each year, she understands the tremendous efforts made by the organisers to attract a diverse mix of collectors. "I feel cautiously optimistic, given the current economic cycle," explains Hildebrand, "however, I am very encouraged by the Middle Eastern community, which has made a great effort to diversify their art collecting. The geographic range of galleries is clearly very hopeful and suggests the fair will be very well-received."

Meanwhile, Hildebrand has noticed how collectors in the region are now starting to look at developments in Contemporary art after firmly embracing their rich traditional history. For her, "one gets the impression that the Western collectors were the

first to focus on the Contemporary art scene in the Middle East and now the locals are dominating this movement – as one would hope. Reacting to the ever-changing social and political environment, regional artists clearly have a lot of material to work with." Last year was also a groundbreaking year internationally, given the vast number of exhibitions on Middle Eastern art that were presented in the West. It is a direct outcome of the region's burgeoning Contemporary art scene.

An introduction to Hildebrand's exhibiting and collecting philosophy would not be complete without a personal tour of her home, which she opens up on a bimonthly basis for art events. As she leads us through the various rooms regaling us with stories about the artists and their works, one can see not only her warmth and hospitality, but also how contagious her passion for art is. This openness allows her collectors to see the way art enriches and fulfils her own life. The myriad influences and experiences of Contemporary, classical, kitsch, and Modern combine to uncover the eclectic nature of her own collection, reminding one how pleasurable it can be to cross boundaries and borders if you dare. 

Facing page: Li Tianbing. *Autoportrait Devant la Foret*. 2007. Oil on canvas. 200 x 160 cm.

Above: Sissi Farassat. 2006. *Mosque*. Colour photograph with sequins. 57 x 85 cm.

For more information visit www.kashyahildebrand.org