# Dubai’s art scene evolves beneath the city’s luxury veneer with a focus on digital disruption and local voices



It’s dawn in Dubai, and as the sun begins to emerge over the horizon, the intoxicating scent of jasmine mingles with the lingering effects of jet lag. From the luxurious confines of the Jumeirah Al Arab, the view unveils an expanse of pristine white sand and the iconic Burj Al Arab rising majestically on its artificial island.

Dubai is renowned for its superlatives—tallest skyscrapers, fastest elevators, and extravagant dining experiences. Yet, beneath this glitz lies a dynamic and unexpectedly rich art scene that many visitors overlook. As I indulge in a lavish breakfast that includes anything from saffron croissants to shakshuka, I prepare to delve into this burgeoning artistic landscape.

My exploration begins in Alserkal Avenue, a hidden gem nestled within the industrial district of Al Quoz. This creative precinct, founded in 2008 by Emirati patron Abdelmonem Bin Eisa Alserkal, serves as a counterpoint to the city’s penchant for luxury, flourishing into a hub of contemporary art and creativity. Once home to warehouses and mechanics, it now boasts 25 galleries alongside a variety of creative venues, reflecting a vibrant community that thrives beyond the usual glitz.

This transformation is profound; Alserkal Avenue has become a sanctuary for a younger generation of artists and art lovers. With its creative atmosphere, the area is home to an eclectic mix of Gen Z individuals sporting paint-splattered attire, who flock here not just to view art, but to experience a community that promotes inclusivity and innovation. As I stroll through, I encounter Chafa Ghaddar at her 8th Street Studio, where her contemporary frescoes weave the past and present together, illustrating the female perspective within modern narratives.

Next, I meet Rami Farook in his studio, a personal space filled with self-portraits and found objects. “This,” he emphasises, “this is Dubai. Not the malls.” His perspective reinforces a growing sentiment among artists in the city: that Dubai is not a blank canvas but a rich tapestry awaiting more layers of creativity.

During my visit coincides with Art Dubai, the city’s prominent art fair held annually at the Madinat Jumeirah. In 2023, the event expanded significantly to feature over 130 galleries from more than 40 countries, showcasing contemporary and modern art, with fresh sections like Art Dubai Digital underlining the fair’s commitment to showcasing innovation.

As I navigate the sprawling exhibition, Caroline Spinks, a curator deeply embedded in the UAE’s art scene, articulates the need to challenge conventional narratives. Her work, particularly with digital art, strives to confront the complexities and dilemmas posed by an increasingly digital world. “We’re not here to entertain,” she asserts. “We’re here to disturb the algorithm.” Her words resonate, especially as I encounter a digital artwork that features a hyper-realistic butterfly, blurring the lines between natural beauty and artificial representation.

One particularly arresting piece comes from Iranian artist Mohsen Hazrati at the Inloco Gallery. His interactive project "Fãl," inspired by traditional Iranian fortune-tellers, incorporates AI, allowing viewers to engage with art on a deeply personal level. The experience is both enchanting and thought-provoking, highlighting the intersection of technology and culture in a city that thrives on innovation.

Throughout this whirlwind visit, it becomes clear that Dubai’s art scene juxtaposes tradition with disruption, fostering a complex dialogue about identity and creativity. An artist I spoke to encapsulated this sentiment perfectly: “We’re just adding layers.” As I absorb the city's magnetic confidence and diverse artistic expressions, I find myself reflecting on the deeper narratives woven into Dubai’s fabric.

Ultimately, my journey through this vibrant art ecosystem reveals that while Dubai may be known for its luxurious lifestyle, it also harbours a multitude of creative voices daring to challenge and redefine the contemporary landscape. Yes, I think I’ve truly grasped the layers beneath the surface—each telling its own unique story.

Sara Darling was a guest of Visit Dubai and Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab.

### How to visit

Rooms at Jumeirah Marsa Al Arab are priced from £371 per night.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/discovering-dubai-s-surprising-art-scene-b2763599.html), [[2]](https://www.alserkal.online/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/discovering-dubai-s-surprising-art-scene-b2763599.html), [[2]](https://www.alserkal.online/), [[4]](https://www.gulfnews.com/uae/art-dubai-unveils-extensive-programme-for-2023-1.92561647)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.gulfnews.com/uae/art-dubai-unveils-extensive-programme-for-2023-1.92561647), [[5]](https://www.artafricamagazine.org/art-dubai-partnerships-and-programmes-for-2023-edition/), [[6]](https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/culture/art-dubai-2023-exhibition-guide)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/discovering-dubai-s-surprising-art-scene-b2763599.html), [[3]](https://www.artdubai.ae/), [[7]](https://khaleejesque.me/2023/03/05/art-dubai-2023-the-most-extensive-and-ambitious-edition-yet/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.artdubai.ae/), [[6]](https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/culture/art-dubai-2023-exhibition-guide)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.gulfnews.com/uae/art-dubai-unveils-extensive-programme-for-2023-1.92561647), [[5]](https://www.artafricamagazine.org/art-dubai-partnerships-and-programmes-for-2023-edition/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://www.artafricamagazine.org/art-dubai-partnerships-and-programmes-for-2023-edition/), [[7]](https://khaleejesque.me/2023/03/05/art-dubai-2023-the-most-extensive-and-ambitious-edition-yet/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/discovering-dubai-s-surprising-art-scene-b2763599.html), [[3]](https://www.artdubai.ae/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/north-africa-middle-east/uae/dubai/discovering-dubai-s-surprising-art-scene-b2763599.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.alserkal.online/> - Alserkal Avenue is Dubai's leading arts and culture district, housing over 60 art, design, and creative venues, including 25 contemporary art galleries. Founded in 2008 by Emirati patron Abdelmonem Bin Eisa Alserkal, it has transformed from an industrial area into a vibrant hub for emerging and established artists, offering exhibitions, talks, and community events.
3. <https://www.artdubai.ae/> - Art Dubai is an annual international art fair held every March in Dubai, showcasing contemporary and modern art from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. The 2023 edition featured over 130 galleries from more than 40 countries, including new sections like Art Dubai Digital, highlighting the fair's commitment to innovation and global representation.
4. <https://www.gulfnews.com/uae/art-dubai-unveils-extensive-programme-for-2023-1.92561647> - Art Dubai's 16th edition, held from March 3 to 5, 2023, at Madinat Jumeirah, featured an expanded programme with over 130 galleries from 43 countries. Highlights included site-specific commissions, a transdisciplinary conference, and the first Dubai edition of Christie's Art+Tech summit, reinforcing Dubai's emergence as a global art and cultural hub.
5. <https://www.artafricamagazine.org/art-dubai-partnerships-and-programmes-for-2023-edition/> - Art Dubai's 2023 edition expanded its Campus Art Dubai initiative to include placements with local partners like Alserkal Avenue and Jameel Arts Centre. The fair also introduced the first Dubai edition of Christie's Art+Tech summit, fostering dialogues on the intersection of art and technology, and highlighted the role of collectors in developing the region's cultural infrastructure.
6. <https://www.gqmiddleeast.com/culture/art-dubai-2023-exhibition-guide> - Art Dubai 2023, held from March 1–5 at Madinat Jumeirah, showcased over 130 galleries from more than 40 countries. The fair featured four sections: Contemporary, Modern, Bawwaba, and Art Dubai Digital, with a particular focus on art and artists from the Global South, reaffirming Dubai's position as a leading marketplace for regional art.
7. <https://khaleejesque.me/2023/03/05/art-dubai-2023-the-most-extensive-and-ambitious-edition-yet/> - Art Dubai's 16th edition, held from March 3 to 5, 2023, at Madinat Jumeirah, was the fair's largest and most extensive to date. It featured over 130 galleries from 43 countries across four sections: Contemporary, Modern, Bawwaba, and Art Dubai Digital, offering exciting new global perspectives and broadening conversations about art beyond traditional Western narratives.