

## Culture

## Hundreds of publishers attend Abu Dhabi Book Fair

The Arab Weekly staff

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The 2017 Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (ADIBF) brought together publishers and authors from across the globe in what has become one of the region's premier cultural events.

The 27th edition of the fair featured 1,320 exhibitors from 65 countries as prominent novelists, poets, graphic designers, essayists and social leaders from the Middle East, Europe, Asia, North Africa and North America participated. More than 500,000 titles were on display, written in more than 30 languages.

■ An agreement was signed to establish the first joint UAE-Chinese publishing house.

China, this year's special guest, was celebrated with cultural programmes and talks. Eugene Yun, one of China's most prominent literary voices; Cao Wenxuan, best known for his children's literature and as vice-president of the Beijing Writers Association; and Xu Zechen, deputy editor of the Chinese People's Literature magazine, were among the participants.

An agreement was signed to establish the first joint UAE-Chinese publishing house, aiming to "bridge between Arab and Chinese cultures and... facilitate a flourishing cooperative relationship between China and the UAE," a statement said.

Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan said the United Arab Emirates provides "great support for culture, literature, science and knowledge,



Books, films and cultural events. Visitors look at books at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in the Emirati capital. (ADIBF 2017)

placing them among its priorities while encouraging authors and cultured people from Arab countries and all over the world."

Sheikh Mohammed said that "culture and intellect will continue to be the primary standard for measuring the advancement of nations and their civilisations and the extent of their ability to develop."

Mohammed al-Masoudi, the director of cultural affairs at the Saudi Embassy in the UAE, said the kingdom "aims to benefit through its

participation in the book fair from the international cultural demonstration presented by the UAE."

The Sheikh Zayed Book Award named Moroccan historian and scholar Abdallah Laroui as the Cultural Personality of the Year.

Lebanese author Abbas Beydoun, 72, won The Literature Award for "Khareef al Bara'a" ("The Autumn of Innocence"), and the Contribution to the Development of Nations Award went to Syria's Mohammad Chahrour for "Al Islam wal Insan"

("Islam and the Human Being").

The Sheikh Zayed Book Award was launched in 2007 to promote creativity in Arab culture. The winners received cash prizes totalling close to \$2 million.

Film-making was also celebrated at the event with Emirati filmmaker Nawaf al-Janahi's Black Box Cinema project showcasing a diverse selection of Emirati and Arabic short films.

Fifteen films from the UAE, Qatar, Jordan, the Palestinian territo-

ries, Tunisia, Lebanon and Egypt were featured. The films, which ranged from 9 minutes to 26 minutes in length, showcased international collaborative efforts, including a Qatari-Lebanese-Canadian production "Turtles Are Always Home," which tackles the meaning of home.

A Jordanian/Palestinian short film called "Five Boys and a Wheel," an Arabic-language adaptation of Raymond Carver's "Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes," also premiered.

## I AM, an exhibition by Arab women artists

Roufan Nahhas

Amman

An inspiring visual art exhibition narrating the timeless and thought-provoking contribution of female Arab artists opened at Amman's National Gallery of Fine Arts in the old and winding streets of Jabal Weibdeh district.

I AM, a peace-building exhibition, which includes works from 31 acclaimed female artists from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, Bahrain, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates and the Palestinian territories, showcases the women's vision for a peaceful and harmonious future.

Organised by CARAVAN, an international NGO that works to build bridges between the creeds and cultures of the Middle East and West through art, the exhibition celebrates the ingenuity of Middle Eastern women. After its May 3-June 14 exhibition in Amman, CARAVAN plans to take the exhibition to London and Washington.

■ After Amman, the I AM exhibition is to travel to London and Washington.

The Reverend Paul-Gordon Chandler, founder and president of CARAVAN, said the exhibition was aimed at highlighting the contributions of women.

"It originated from a desire to creatively and positively build on the message of the highly acclaimed book written by former

US President Jimmy Carter, who is much loved and respected in the Middle East, titled 'A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power,'" Chandler said in a podcast posted on the the artist next level web site.

■ The exhibition showcases the experiences of Arab women as they confront issues of culture, religion and social reality.

"In this regard, the I AM exhibition focuses not on what women are missing and often do not have (such as equal rights) but rather on what they inherently do have and how fundamentally essential their contribution is in freeing our world from sectarian strife of any kind," Chandler said.

Chandler said the simple depiction of the words I AM signals so much.

"I AM, as the title implies, shows the uniqueness of the individual, as well as one's identity within the community and the world," he said on the podcast. "It thus expresses the tension between the unique and the shared – unique beliefs, values and methods of worship paired with shared goals and desires for oneself, one's community and the world."

Bahraini artist Nabeela al-Khayer brought her work to life after receiving guidance from Bahrain's rich heritage which dates to 3000BC.

"I am a painter; I love the impressionist style and love to have women as the main subject in most of my paintings. The presence and



Celebrating ingenuity. One of the paintings by Manal Deeb of the Palestinian territories in the I AM exhibition at the National Gallery of Fine Arts in Amman. (CARAVAN)

role of Bahraini women in our society played a big part in my work," Khayer said.

The use of fabrics to highlight the colours and impressionist style, in addition to acrylic and watercolours, makes Khayer's work unique.

Using gouache and ink, Helen Zughuib, an Arab American based in Washington, said she took inspiration from the strength and resilience of women.

"It was very important to me to take part in this exhibition as an

Arab-American woman, living in America, to be able to show solidarity with many women in the Arab world," the Beirut-born artist said.

"Much of my work promotes the beauty and strength of Arab women and women in general. It is meant to express the solidarity and compassion I feel for women and children, especially those facing hardship of any kind. To let them know I am thinking of them, I am trying through my work to let their

voices be heard," said Zughuib, who has exhibited her work in New York, Paris and Washington.

The exhibition features Janet Rady, a specialist in contemporary Middle Eastern art with more than 25 years of experience of the International Art Market, as guest curator.

With issues of women's rights coming to the forefront around the world, Chandler said the time is right for I AM to showcase the insights and experiences of Middle Eastern women as they confront issues of culture, religion and society in "a rapidly changing world, both in the Middle East and the West."

"We really believe it couldn't be timelier for this strategic East-West artistic peace building initiative," Chandler said on the podcast.

"The I AM exhibition celebrates the unique voice of women in shaping a harmonious world. While hundreds of governmental and non-governmental entities are strategically addressing the challenges women face around the world, this initiative highlights what women contribute towards healing our world, because of their inherent connection to the sanctity of life, and their ability to nurture and protect it, thereby inspiring a legacy of harmony."

"The exhibition also aims to address stereotypes and challenge misconceptions of the 'other,'" he added.

The exhibition, shown in Amman under the patronage of Jordanian Queen Rania Abdullah from May 3-June 14, is scheduled to move to St Martin-in-the-Fields in London from July 3-August 20 before premiering in Washington on September 5 at the Katzen Arts Centre at the American University.