

## Inaugural Art Basel Qatar opens in Doha, launching a new chapter for the global fair Monumental Jenny Holzer commission unveiled at the Museum of Islamic Art



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Art Basel today opens its first-ever fair in the MENASA region (Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia), marking a significant new chapter in its global evolution and for the international art market. Art Basel Qatar, presented in partnership with Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) and QC+, takes place across Msheireb Downtown Doha and runs through 7 February. The inaugural edition of Art Basel Qatar brings together 87 international exhibitors, presenting the work of 84 artists – more than half of whom hail from across the MENASA region. Taking place across M7 and the Doha Design District in Msheireb Downtown Doha, the fair is structured around solo artist presentations rather than a traditional booth model, offering a more open and focused way to experience the work on view. Under the artistic leadership of Vincenzo de Bellis, Art Basel's Chief Artistic Officer and Global Director of Fairs, and Wael Shawky, Artistic Director of the inaugural edition, the fair is shaped by the theme *Becoming*, reflecting a format designed to encourage deeper engagement and to grow in dialogue with its context over time. On the eve of the fair's first VIP Preview Day, Art Basel and Visit Qatar, the fair's Lead Partner, celebrated by unveiling *SONG*, a new site-responsive work by Jenny Holzer and the tenth work in the fair's Special Projects program, at a welcome event at Doha's Museum of Islamic Art (MIA). The work activated the

museum through two simultaneous projections across the main façade and inner courtyard, accompanied by a single, choreographed performance of over 700 drones in the night sky. Using poems by Mahmoud Darwish, the celebrated Palestinian poet whose lyrical voice has profoundly shaped modern Arabic literature, and Nujoom Alghanem, the acclaimed Emirati poet and filmmaker known for her intimate and incisive writing, Holzer brings Arabic and English text into public space as illumination, rhythm, and interruption. Following its debut, the work remains on view to the public nightly as a projection on the museum's main façade throughout the fair.

Representing a defining moment in Art Basel's 55-year history, the new fair responds to Qatar's long-standing investment in culture by establishing a platform that connects the region's burgeoning artistic production with Art Basel's global network, nurturing long-term growth and exchange across the art market. To learn more about the fair and related programming, including the Galleries sector highlights, Special Projects commissions, Conversations series and more, please visit our press dossier. Art Basel Qatar will take place from February 5-7, with preview days on February 3 and 4. All visitor information can be found [here](#). Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums said: "Today marks a special moment—one that connects talent and industry, by welcoming the establishment of Art Basel in the Middle East. This is the beginning of a bold, exciting, and truly unique undertaking—

one that merges with and amplifies the cultural and artistic ecosystem we have been building, piece by piece, for the past fifty years. We are here not just to present yet another art fair, but to curate a platform that uplifts the creativity of an entire region, remaining deeply human-centered and humane, and inviting the world to be curious about who we really are, and engage in meaningful conversations.” His Excellency Nasser bin Ghani AlKheleifi, Chairman of Qatar Sports Investments said: “The launch of Art Basel Qatar marks a historic moment, showcasing Qatar and the Arab world as a place where the world comes together to exchange ideas and be inspired. It also reflects our national vision rooted in creativity, culture, innovation and openness. We are very proud that Art Basel Qatar continues the great legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, alongside many other leading global events in Qatar every year – art and culture; and inspiring positive cultural change uniting people through sports, and understanding all around the world.” His Excellency Saad bin Ali AlKharji, Chairman of Qatar Tourism and Chair of the Board of Directors of Visit Qatar, said: “The arrival of Art Basel Qatar marks an important milestone in Doha’s evolution as a global cultural destination, building on years of investment in museums, creative districts, and international events. As Lead Partner, Visit Qatar is proud to support a platform that places culture at the heart of the destination experience, inviting the international arts community to engage with Doha as a place of dialogue, inspiration, and

exchange. This partnership reflects our shared ambition to strengthen creative industries and position culture as a bridge between Qatar and the world.” Andrea Zappia, Chairman and Group CEO, MCH Group to fruition – , said: “I’m incredibly proud to see Art Basel Qatar come a hugely important milestone for the Art Basel business and for MCH Group’s wider work across the region and globally. Qatar’s vision and longstanding investment in culture have created fertile ground for entrepreneurship, partnership, and cultural collaboration, and we see extraordinary opportunities across the board. We are honoured to have worked with QSI and QC+ to bring Art Basel’s platform to Doha at this moment and excited for both this inaugural week, and what is to come.” Noah Horowitz, Chief Executive Officer, Art Basel, said: “Art Basel Qatar represents a pivotal moment for our platform and for the global art market. Conceived specifically for this place and developed in close partnership with our Qatari collaborators, the fair reflects the region’s extraordinary cultural ambition as well as our commitment to building platforms that are both locally and globally resonant. By connecting the broader MENASA region more deeply with Art Basel’s international ecosystem, we are creating new opportunities for artists, galleries, and audiences – while advancing a model of growth that is entrepreneurial, inclusive, and built to last.” Vincenzo de Bellis, Chief Artistic Officer and Global Director of Art Fairs, said: to rethink how an art fair is structured and experienced. The multi “With Art Basel Qatar, we wanted site

format across Msheireb and the decision to work exclusively with solo artist presentations create a slower, more deliberate rhythm – one that prioritizes focus, context, and return over speed and accumulation. This approach reflects how we believe art fairs can evolve: as platforms that remain commercial, but also offer deeper, more sustained engagement with artistic practice.”

Wael Shawky, Artistic Director of the inaugural edition of Art Basel Qatar, said: “What interested me about this role was the possibility of an art fair that doesn’t separate the market from education, but understands them as part of the same ecosystem. The open format of Art Basel Qatar allows artists to present complete thoughts rather than fragments and invites audiences to truly encounter the work. In that sense, the fair is not only a place to acquire art, but a cultural platform that can generate longterm knowledge, dialogue, and opportunity for artists.”