

TUNISIAN MULTIMEDIA ARTIST NJA MAHDAOUI TAKES CENTRE STAGE AT BASSAM FREIHA ART FOUNDATION

Exploring the themes of heritage, innovation and the power of visual language, the foundation is proud to present four new thought-provoking exhibitions

ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, October 10, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Bassam Freiha Art Foundation](#) (BFAF) is welcoming the new season by presenting a dynamic programme of new exhibitions.

Founded by philanthropist and art collector His Excellency Bassam Freiha and the first and only private art foundation on Saadiyat Island, BFAF's four new collections combine historic collections, contemporary voices and leading modern Arab artists.

Providing a vibrant and inspiring platform for local and international artists and designed to further BFAF's ambition to grow and nurture the region's art scene, each exhibition is also accompanied by a revolving programme of community events, art workshops and more interactive art experiences.

Main Gallery Highlights

Nja Mahdaoui: the Choreographer of Letters



Untitled by Nja Mahdaoui, from the Azimuth series, 2012



Untitled, Graphic Research, 1968 by Nja Mahdaoui on display at Bassam Freiha Art Foundation

24 October 2025 - 25 January 2026

This landmark exhibition explores the work of Tunisian multimedia artist Nja Mahdaoui, one of the most influential figures in Arab modern art.

Co-curated by Dr Michaela Watrelot, head curator and director of exhibitions at Bassam Freiha Art Foundation and Nja Mahdaoui's daughter, Molka Mahdaoui, this focused retrospective surveys over six decades of practice by the Tunisian master who transcends Arabic calligraphy into a visual and abstract contemporary art form.



The Harem Promenade, undated, by Jean-Léon Gérôme (France, 1824–1904), will be on display at BFAF from 1 November

The exhibition bridges both tradition and modernity and explores how Mahdaoui's calligraphic abstraction has shaped global perceptions of Arab art. Bringing the notions of identity and heritage, it celebrates Mahdaoui's enduring legacy, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the foundation's role as a leading platform for Arab artistic excellence and cross-cultural dialogue.

"Internationally renowned as a 'choreographer of letters', Mahdaoui is widely recognized for his pioneering role in the development of calligraphic abstraction, freeing the letter from its linguistic constraints, to reveal its endless creative potential." said Dr Michaela Watrelot.

"As one of the leading modern Arab artists, it is an honour to bring his retrospective to Saadiyat Island to celebrate his artistic legacy, and cement our commitment to giving local audiences access to private art collections, with this collection from the Nja Mahdaoui Foundation. This is an unmissable exhibition for anyone interested in the MENA region's culture and heritage."

Molka Mahdaoui added: "The Nja Mahdaoui Foundation is truly honoured to collaborate with the esteemed Bassam Freiha Art Foundation on an exhibition celebrating both Mahdaoui's remarkable 60-year artistic journey and his long-standing connection with the UAE. Especially as the exhibition, presented in the heart of Abu Dhabi's cultural district, is designed to coincide with the launch of the first-ever catalogue raisonné project dedicated to a Tunisian artist, to be published by Rizzoli."

Constructing the Orient: Fragments of a Western Dream

24 October 2025 – 31 May 2026

Drawn from the private collection of His Excellency Bassam Said Freiha and key loans from the Ary Jan Gallery, this exhibition of Orientalist works includes outstanding paintings by Jean-Léon

Gérôme, one of the most celebrated Orientalist artists of the 19th century.

The exhibition unfolds across five thematic sections, each focusing on a central motif within Orientalist visual language and examining how artists shaped their subjects into recurring archetypes. From imagined interiors and bustling marketplaces to archetypes of men and women, the works on view invite audiences to reflect on how the “Orient” was constructed through Western eyes and how these images continue to shape perceptions today.

Annex Gallery Highlights

Nat Bowen: Chromology

7 October - 26 October 2025

Chromology is a contemplative exploration of colour’s psychological and emotional impact by British contemporary artist Nat Bowen. Known for her glossy, abstract resin works poured onto acrylic, Bowen creates luminous, aqueous fields that transform colour into a language of emotion and presence. Informed by the study of colour psychology, her practice has evolved into an internationally recognised body of work that fuses material innovation with emotional depth.

Through Chromology, viewers are invited into an intimate space of reflection, where colour is not simply observed but experienced as a catalyst for calm and psychological resonance. The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of artist-led tours and workshops.

The Art Circle Award: Story of a Dot

3 November - 12 November 2025

Hosted in collaboration with The Art Circle, the fifth edition of the annual awards takes inspiration from Bauhaus principles and Arab modernism, inviting artists to explore the transformative power of the dot. The group exhibition will showcase finalists alongside previous winners, underscoring the award’s important role in nurturing regional talent.

The Shape of Meaning - Al Burda Exhibition

18 November 2025 - 25 January 2026

In response to Nja Mahdaoui's retrospective taking place in the main gallery, this exhibition presents loans from the Ministry of Culture UAE’s Al Burda exhibition from 2008 - 2023, an annual exhibition where contemporary artists engage with the cultural and semantic power of the written word while experimenting with form and medium. This exhibition stages a dialogue between calligraphy as abstract form and as linguistic tradition, showing how artists today both inherit and reinvent tradition.

For more information, please visit the foundation’s website: bfaf.ae.

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