

Two of the contenders for MOPCAP 2013: 'Ekbatan West Of Tehran' Behnam Sadighi(right) and 'Conference Of The Birds (Stillframe)' Azin (Images courtesy Magic of Persia)



MOPCAP Strikes Back!

THE LONDON-BASED ARTS CHARITY AND ARTS PRIZE RETURNS TO DUBAI THIS MARCH PROGRAMME OF EVENTS THIS MARCH...

SHIRLEY ELGHANIAN, SURELY ONE OF THE most vivid characters in the Middle Eastern art scene is back for 2013 with an overhauled Magic of Persia Contemporary Art Prize and award ceremony during Dubai's 2013 Art Week. As in previous

editions, this is to be the final stopgap before the prestigious prize announces its 2013 winner in London this October.

Focusing as ever on emerging talent from across Iran and the Persian diaspora, MOPCAP this year has evolved its format slightly to reflect the diversity and sheer numbers of potential candidates involved. This has seen a long-list of 287 applications whittled down by a dedicated selection committee (working eight hours a day! according to Elghanian) who each presented nominations to go forward to the next round. This year, those 19 candidates will be presenting work at The MOPCAP 2013 Shortlist Exhibition at a new, purpose-designed venue in Dubai, a dramatic location, co-hosted by ENSHAA on the cylindrical 16th floor atrium of the Emirates Financial Towers in DIFC, Dubai, between March 18th and 23rd.

Here, a new panel of judges will get busy whittling down contenders to a final selection of seven, which will be announced at an event on the evening of March 18th, in the presence

of HE Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al Nahayan. The judging panel includes Philippa Adams, (Senior Director of the Saatchi Gallery), (Dr Ziba Ardalan, Founder, Director and Curator of Parasol Unit), Mat Collishaw (artist), Dr Anthony Downey (Programme Director, MA Contemporary Art, Sotheby's Institute), Irit Rogoff (Writer, Theorist and Professor of Visual Cultures, Goldsmith's College) and Payam Sharifi, (Co-Founder of Slavs and Tatars). From resulting lucky seven candidates, an overall winner will be announced at the finalists exhibition in London, during Frieze in October 2013.

It's a long process, but the regular rounds of assessment and judging have led to a system that aims to give added value to the Prize by offering all shortlisted candidates considered feedback and critique, throughout the judging process. Equally, the length of the selection process allows for significant critical engagement on the part of the judges in assessing and debating the submitted works. Given the top prize is a year-long engagement with a curator and a subsequent solo exhibition in London in 2014, this in-depth filtering and careful consideration makes sense all round. Previous winners, Shirin Sabahi (2011) and Mahmoud Bakhtshi (2009) enjoyed solo shows at London's Saatchi Gallery and international exposure as a result of the award.

Alongside the opening of the MOPCAP 2013 Shortlist Exhibition comes a panel discussion on at 4.30pm on March 18th, entitled 'What Does Art Do: The Production Of Knowledge In A Globalised Economy'. Bringing up themes of curatorial and institutional interest in art dealing with conflict and upheaval across the Middle East, a panel, including Zeina Arida, (Director of the Arab Image Foundation), Negar Azimi, Dr Anthony Downey, Payam Sharifi and artist Michael Rakowitz will debate the exchange developing between artists from the region and wider audiences who seek reaction from them, around the world. www.magicofpersia.com