SIGNING ON MIDDLE EAST
MUHAMMAD YUSUF HAS THE DETAILS ON AN EXHIBITION OF ARAB CONTEMPORARY ART THAT OPENED IN NEW YORK YESTERDAY

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iego Contemporary Arab Art, a groundbreaking art exhibition from Sundaram Tagore Galleries, New York, ran from October 14 – November 14, offering a rare glimpse into the Arab art world. The first of its kind in New York, the exhibition presents the work of seven influential artists from various countries in the Middle East.

Curated by noted art historian and curator Karim von Roques, it explores the role of traditional Islamic calligraphy and symbols in the contemporary Arab consciousness. Grappling with aesthetic philosophy, mysticism, tradition, and issues of everyday survival and existence, all seven artists challenge conventions and create new visual language.

Once the cradle of ancient civilizations, the Middle East has an enviable artistic history. For centuries, the written word has played a defining role in Islamic visual culture—a legacy that persists even today. Working with differing media, including print on canvas, collage, ink on paper, wood, and gold leaf, the innovative artists take traditional Arabic script and symbols as their point of departure.

Qatari artist Youssef Aljohar translates Arabic letters into abstract shapes and gestural marks that sweep across dream-like minimalist surfaces. Syrian artist Khalid Al-Mouailef (Syria), Ayman El Semary (Egypt), Hassan Massoudy (Iraq), Ali Hassan (Qatar), Georges Fakry Ibrahim (Egypt), and Youssef Aljohar (Qatar).

Established in 2000, Sundaram Tagore Gallery is devoted to examining the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western cultures. It focuses on developing exhibitions and host not-for-profit events that encourage spiritual, social, and aesthetic dialogues.

In a world where communication is instant and cultures are colliding and melding as never before, it says its goal is to provide venues for art that transcends boundaries of all sorts. With galleries in New York, Beverly Hills, and Hong Kong, its interest in cross-cultural exchange extends beyond the visual arts into many other disciplines, including poetry, literature, performance art, film, and music.

Von Roques is a noted German curator and art historian, having studied Islamic art, specialists in contemporary Arab and Iranian art. From 1997 to 2000, he was the director of the Hermitage Museum in Lugano, Switzerland. She has curated exhibitions for numerous institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the United Nations. In 1999, he was nominated by Avenue magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential Asian Americans in the United States and was recently the subject of a 30-minute interview on CNN’s Talk Asia.