



Main image: Heidi and Franz J. Leupi.

Photo: © AB43 Contemporary

Left: The new location. Photo: © AB43 Contemporary

Middle: The new gallery space.

Photo: © AB43 Contemporary

Across borders Art and cultural exchanges with the Middle East

As both an art gallery and networking platform, AB43 Contemporary develops an international stage for artists from the Middle East. Founded by Heidi and Franz J. Leupi, AB43 continuously exhibits exciting voices from this region and in that way promotes the cultural exchange between it and the western world.

TEXT: THOMAS SCHROERS

For almost 20 years, the Leupis have been professionally concerned with the art world. As art lovers they have helped artists around the globe, from Europe, to North and South America and also Asia. But it was in 2003 that they fell in love with

a very specific region in the world and decided to bring it home to Switzerland. "We had been actively observing the growth of the contemporary Middle-Eastern arts scene and were convinced it was time to showcase its potential

to European audiences who were yet unfamiliar with it." The couple did just that when they created the AB Gallery and its two locations in Lucerne and Zurich.

The abbreviation 'AB' stands for the term 'across borders', manifesting the core mission of the gallery. '43' is a personal statement by the Leupis and a number they hold dear. Among other things, the number four embodies the four elements, the four geographic directions and the four seasons, while the number three

connotes mind, body and soul. In that, both numbers describe aspects that all people have in common. Furthermore, the cross sum of the two numbers is seven, the ultimate number of humanity, characterising seven planets in the solar system and also a seven-year rhythm to life. After those seven years it is time for a new development. In August of 2016, the Leupis followed this idea, as they have made a big change for their gallery, bringing it to a new location in the historic park next to Zurich's train station Thalwil.

Across borders

The new location offers AB43 even more possibilities to live their motto and promote the art in question. On the one hand, the old orangery offers light-flooded exhibition rooms and, on the other hand, adjacent buildings make room for an open storage space and an artist's workshop.

For the Leupis it is important to not only move the cultural exchange in focus, but also directly support the artists. That is why the AB43 is working with a successful Artist-in-Residence programme, where artists from the Middle East are invited over to exhibit and also work on their pieces. Like host parents, the couple provide everything that is needed for the

stay and in that way move far beyond the regular concept of a gallery, enabling new artistic voices to strive and get an important springboard for their career.

Fereydoun Ave

On the occasion of their reopening, AB43 has invited the grandmaster of the contemporary Iranian art scene, Fereydoun Ave, to Zurich. Curated by art historian Peter Fischer, Ave will personally present his newest work cycle *Shah Abbas and his Page Boy*. In a series paintings, he is dealing with appearance and reality in Iranian society and the gap between public and private life. To connect these two aspects, Ave has physically interwoven them by painting on patchwork blankets. The exhibition will run until 8 October 2016.

Challenges and responsibilities

"We have a responsibility towards the artists," explains Franz J. Leupi. Especially in a social environment all over Europe, which is getting more and more tense, AB43 faces the challenge of turning wide-spread negativity into positivity and openness for a culture, which is being scrutinised in the media on a daily basis. But it is not only the preconceptions at home. The Leupis also feel the censoring of

government critical pieces that takes place in some of the artist's home countries. In that regard, they, together with the artist, have to be aware of the consequences to which an exhibition could lead.

In order to foster the artistic growth of the scene even more, Heidi and Franz J. Leupi found the ORYX Foundation in 2011. Based on the guiding principles of openness, curiosity and mutual respect, the non-profit organisation is continuing the work of AB43 by employing concepts for the concrete promotion of artists from the Arab world. "Sometimes it simply needs the bringing together of people from different backgrounds and getting them to know each other in order to destroy bias and allay suspicion." Through organising talks, lectures and discussions with specialists, the Leupis facilitate this exchange and once more transcend cultural and geographical borders.

www.ab43contemporary.com

Left: *Shah Abbas and his Page Boy*, Lahaf #3 detail, Fereydoun Ave, mixed media on patchwork of various fabrics. Photo: © Alexandra Wey

Bottom left: Artist Fereydoun Ave. Photo: © Malekeh Nayni

Right: *Shah Abbas and his Page Boy*, Lahaf #6 detail, Fereydoun Ave, mixed media on patchwork of various fabrics. Photo: © Alexandra Wey

