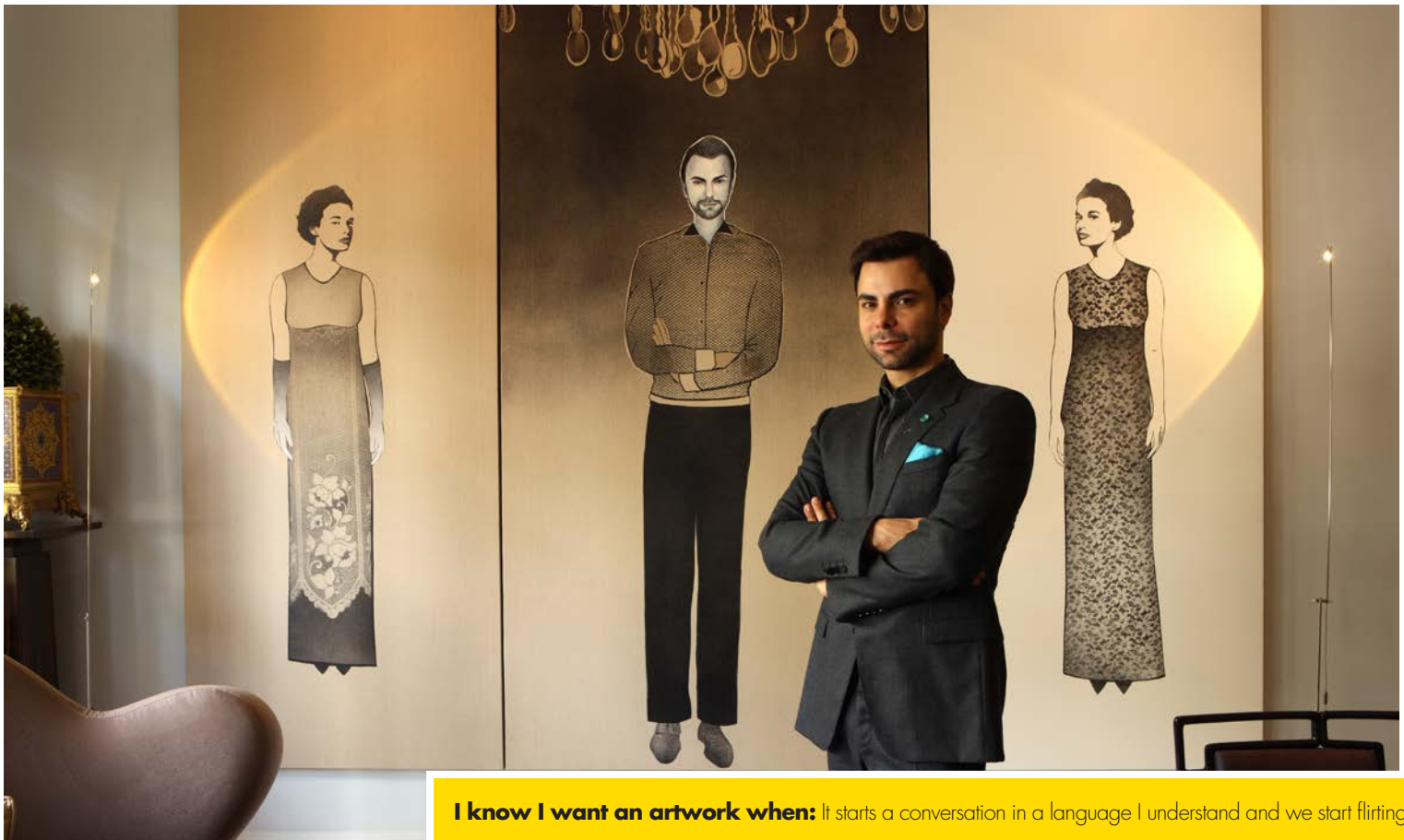


RAMY BOUTROS



I know I want an artwork when: It starts a conversation in a language I understand and we start flirting.

The work I could stare at for hours is: *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt.

Wish list: Kees van Dongen, Takashi Murakami and Anish Kapoor.

The Middle Eastern art scene is: Pulsating.

My earliest art memory is: My grandfather telling me stories about his art collection when I was five.

The artwork that got away was: A painting by Shafic Abboud.

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or Lebanese interior architect Ramy Boutros a sense of wonderment at what could be, instead of what is, can be traced back to some of his earliest memories: as a five-year old, he designed imaginary cities. On graduating from the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts (ALBA) in 2000 with a degree in interior architecture, Boutros found himself thirsty for knowledge, so took himself to Paris. It was here that he spent three years taking courses in furniture design, visiting ateliers, hunting through galleries for art and antiques, attending fairs such as TEFAF, the Armory Show and PAD, and learning how curators acquire and exhibit work. In 2005 Boutros launched his eponymous company and, three years later, first exhibited his furniture collection, followed by his jewellery designs. "My grandfather was an avid collector," he explains. "He collected art that spoke to him and when I asked him questions he was always happy to share the stories behind the pieces he collected. I loved these stories and they helped me to understand and appreciate the works." Today Boutros's collection includes works by Nabil Nahas, Nadim Karam, Safwan Dahoul, Samia Halaby and MF Husain, among others.

This page:
Ramy with Khaled
Takreti's *Ramy*. 2013.
Oil on canvas.
260 x 331 cm.

Facing page:
Hussein Madi. *Coupe de
Cavaliers*. 2012. Oil on
canvas. 82 x 135 cm.



YOUR ARCHITECTURAL AND DESIGN PRACTICE CLEARLY OVERLAPS WITH YOUR LOVE OF ART, BUT WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I'm inspired by the exotic – and I don't limit this to just Contemporary art. I collect Modernist pieces, as well as works from the 18th and 19th centuries. There has to be an inexplicable quality in a work, object or design idea to attract me – I love periods such as Neo-Greek, Japonism and Egyptomania, to name a few. My interiors and furniture, while inspired by the exotic, are not designed to be trendy or just for show. They incorporate the latest in modern comforts, technology and function so they can withstand the test of time.

WHEN DID YOU REALISE YOU HAD BECOME A 'COLLECTOR'?

I don't consider myself to be a collector! I buy art because I cannot do otherwise, it is as compelling to me as breathing. I don't know what I will buy tomorrow, I just know that I will. I don't buy to put together a collection.

The idea of being a collector seems so limited, yet art to me is limitless.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST PIECE YOU BOUGHT?

I must have been 22 or 23 and came across a portrait of an Englishman wearing a maharajah costume, painted at the turn of the 20th century. The painting just drew me in, this Englishman with his blue eyes, wearing a turban with fantastic jewels, sitting on a red couch during the times of the British Raj – he had a story that I had to hear and retell.

AND THE FIRST CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN PIECE?

A work by Safwan Dahoul. I'm in love with his paintings and his style because he has created an identity for himself. You can't look at his work and say it's after the style of somebody – Dahoul's work is uniquely his. What I love about it is the Gioconda effect it has – his portraits' eyes always seem to follow you around the room.

"I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF TO BE A COLLECTOR! I BUY ART BECAUSE I CANNOT DO OTHERWISE, IT IS AS COMPELLING TO ME AS BREATHING."



"AN ORGANIC APPROACH IS ALSO IMPORTANT AS TASTES EVOLVE OVER TIME, SO IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE SPACE BE TIMELESS AND FLEXIBLE."

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SPATIAL DESIGN AND ART?

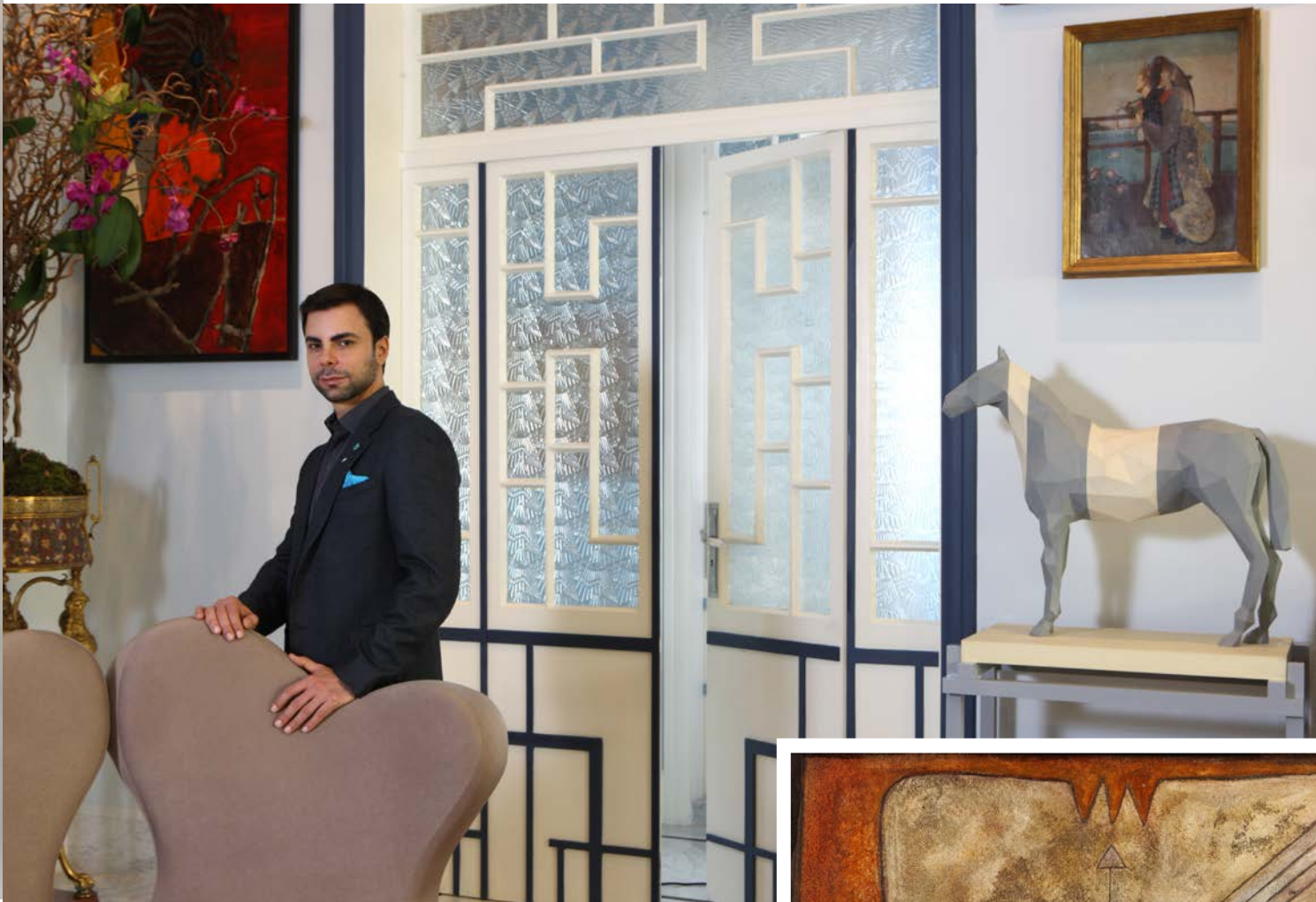
Very! The importance of displaying art correctly – as well as creating a space for it – is an art in itself, and I am as interested in designing space for art as I am interested in it. Finding out a client's particular dream for their home and then collaborating to make it come true is a process that gives me great joy. The architectural concept, lighting, layout, flow and proportions must be harmonious. An organic approach is also important as tastes evolve over time, so it is important that the space be timeless and flexible.

YOU TRAVEL A LOT – DO YOU FIND ART IN LOCAL MARKETS?

Yes – I'm constantly running from country to country in search of art in all its forms. I believe you can find art in every market and in the most surprising of places. I visit as many galleries, exhibitions and museums as I can. I also believe that there are many artists still to be discovered.

DO YOU EVER BEFRIEND THE ARTISTS?

I am naturally curious and love people, but I don't buy art because I am friends with the artist: I prefer the work to speak for itself. At the



This page:
 Ramy with (on the left wall) MF Husain. *Maya V*. 1973.
 Oil on canvas. 29.5 x 86.5 cm; (On the right wall) Gyula
 Tornai. Untitled. Undated. Oil on canvas. 65 x 47 x
 7 cm; (On the table) Xavier Veilhan. *Monceau*. 2008.
 Polyurethane elastic painted wood.
 170 x 85 x 50 cm.
 Inset: Farid Belkahia. (Detail) *Arbre de vie*. 1989. Oil on
 canvas. 63 x 83 cm.

Facing page:
 Nabil Nahas. *Fractals*. 2012. Acrylic on canvas. 135 x
 216.5 x 11 cm.

Photography by Mansour Dib.
 © Canvas Archives.



same time I understand that most artists value their privacy, space and time to create. An artist whose work I have been fortunate to acquire is Nabil Nahas. We live in the same apartment building, yet I used to go to various dealers to learn as much as possible about his work. He found out and approached me one day and said, "I'm your neighbour! Come and ask me anything you want about my work, don't be shy." So we became really good friends. Another artist whose friendship I greatly cherish is Khaled Takreti – I'd fallen in love with some of his pieces at Ayyam Gallery. I literally made them open the gallery on a weekend so I could purchase his works. This piqued Takreti's curiosity, and he ended up visiting me in my home in Beirut and surprised me

with one of his pieces. He'd said he wanted to create a Japanese screen – but it was in fact a painting of me!

HOW HAVE YOU SEEN THE REGIONAL ARTS SCENE DEVELOP?

The boom that we've seen, especially with all these museums under construction, has given the artists a boost of energy and creativity to do something and be part of this movement. I think that is important. The Middle East has not promoted and encouraged local artists the way artists are promoted in the West. We began a little later, so I find it really encouraging that there is so much innovation taking place now and how beautiful and amazing it all is. 🇱🇧