

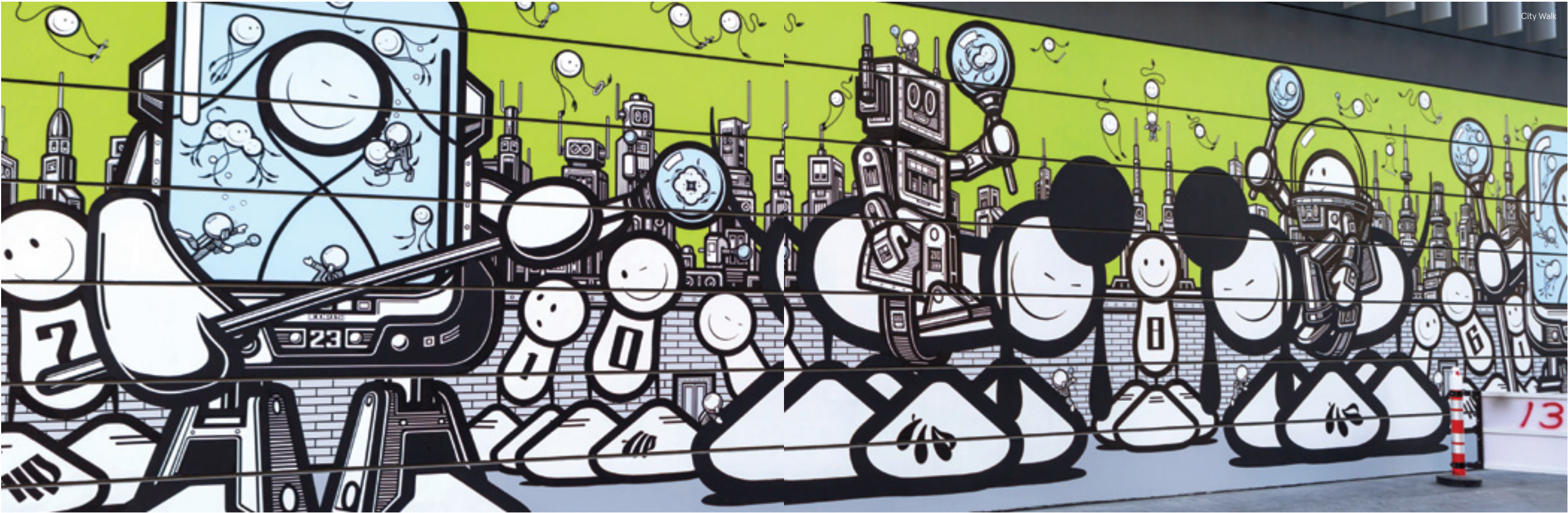


OFF THE WALL

Between March's Art Season and the new Street Museum Project, there's never been a better time to immerse yourself in the larger-than-life world of open-air **art** in Dubai

Art is quite literally everywhere in Dubai right now, as the world's creative community descends on the city for a month-long festival of dedicated shows and events. Our highlights are on page 65, but away from Dubai Art Season, there's plenty to be discovered just by getting outside – and looking up. Because in almost every corner of town, the streets are coming alive with giant murals spilling forth from the walls of malls, promenades and public buildings new and old.

These supersized works of art have been popping up across the city more and more over the last few years, and it's a trend that's certain to continue, thanks to the Dubai Street Museum project. This public-art initiative will see Dubai transformed into an open-air art gallery over the next five years, with the aim of preserving the UAE's rich heritage in the most public way possible. The first phase burst into life earlier this year in the shape of 16 colourful murals splashed over the walls of the historic 2nd December Street in Satwa – but that's just the beginning. Arm yourself with our guide to the city's most spectacular open-air canvases, and prepare to be inspired... ►



2ND DECEMBER STREET

The city's already rich landscape of public art has gained a powerful new addition. The first phase of the Dubai Street Museum project was unveiled in January, and it's a bold, joyful tribute to the Emirates' history and heritage. Take a walk down 2nd December Street in Satwa and you'll be able to spot 16 striking murals, each inspired by an aspect of the country's culture and traditions. The choice of canvas is no coincidence – named in honour of UAE National Day, 2nd December Street is also the home of Union House, where the UAE was officially established on 2 December 1971. Taking their lead from the area's historic roots, 12 artists from around the world have filled the walls with painterly odes to all things Emirati – from henna rituals to national dress. Look out for Parisian street-art star Seth's curious children, photorealist pioneer Case Maclain's qahwa (Arabic coffee) close-up and Germany-based 1010's 'hole in the wall' (pictured, right), which symbolises the country in both shape and colour: yellow for sun and sand; blue for sea and sky.

CITY WALK

Get your cultural fix with a side of shopping at the open-air urban oasis that is City Walk. It houses high-end boutiques, stylish cafés and excellent entertainment for all the family (indoor rainforest, anyone?), all woven together with an eclectic mix of art. Fifteen of the world's best-loved street artists have stamped their signature on everything from the walls to the palm trees – the latter given a cosy makeover by yarn-bomber Magda Sayeg. Amid the uber-cool designer names (think Rag and Bone, Maje and Sandro) are a kaleidoscope of works ranging from the playful to the poetic. Australian provocateur Rone covers off the latter (pictured, opening page), and there's no shortage of the former. We love ROA's super-rat, Brit-art icon Nick Walker's spray-painting unicyclist and The London Police's robot universe (pictured, above), but keep your eyes peeled, too, for Slinkachu's miniature masterpieces (you'll know them when you see them). From 1 to 7 March, you'll also be able to interact with 25 3D pieces on show as part of the Dubai Canvas 3D Art Festival.

EMAAR BOULEVARD

It's inevitable you'll find yourself Downtown while in Dubai – it's the home of the world's tallest tower and largest mall, for starters. The pretty horseshoe-shaped Boulevard loops around both icons, taking in the majestic Dubai Opera en route, and makes for a lovely stroll, day or night. Come evening, your path is lit by rows of twinkling palm trees, but get there before dark to enjoy an impressive collection of sculptures in all their sun-soaked glory. The works, dotted all along the way, embody Dubai's strong multicultural community. There are camels and horses from Donald Greig and Vincent Da Silva respectively – both fond emblems of Arabia – but there's also a Stonehenge-like rock formation from Spanish sculptor Xavier Corbero and an imposing wooden torch inspired by Jaeyho Lee's native South Korea. Perhaps the most distinctive piece is Syrian artist Lutfi Romhein's Together: a pair of tall, graceful Arab figures – a man, crafted from white marble, and a woman, in black granite – standing proud at the foot of Burj Khalifa. ►





18B Street



Alserkal Avenue

18B STREET

Wander a little off the tourist trail and you'll discover one of Dubai's most treasured – and most vibrant – gems. Bustling Karama, best known for its fragrant curry houses and vivid fabric stalls, is an area of the city like no other. Now there's another reason to visit, aside from fabulous eats, bargains and people-watching. Bubbling up from the street-level melting pot are 24 huge works by a range of artists including Dubai-based Fathima Mohiuddin. The exuberant murals depict everything from parrots to pearls via faraway galaxies – in perfect harmony with the colourful scenes below.

ALSERKAL AVENUE

Another distinct pocket of Dubai life can be found in the city's industrial quarter. Housed in the string of converted warehouses that make up Alserkal Avenue are some of the coolest art galleries around, all of which are free to enter. But the creative capital here isn't confined to the gallery wall; the walkways between warehouses are punctuated by all kinds of fun diversions – from quirky light installations, murals and 3D structures to pop-up concerts and screenings. There's also a healthy dose of café culture, should you need a pit stop.

MEET THE STREET ARTIST

Fathima Mohiuddin

The creator of some of the city's most eye-catching murals talks public art in Dubai

What drew you to street art?

When I lived in Toronto I was drawn to art projects that interacted with the community. I painted my first mural there 15 years ago. I love that street art makes art accessible and puts it in a context where it interacts with and impacts everyday people. I'm a big believer in the power of art and creativity to change lives and the world, and street art can do just that. It makes places of spaces and interrupts the mundane. I also love that you often encounter it rather than visit it, like a nice surprise.

How has the public art scene in Dubai changed over the years?

On some level there's always been public art in the city but the actual discussion around street art has really taken off in the last five years. We've suddenly got some of the world's biggest artists coming to town to paint walls, which is great. But it's really important to make sure there is engagement with the local scene, to make sure we're not just borrowing the impact and aesthetic and trend of street art but actually nurturing a real meaningful and appropriate culture that is home-grown.

Where do you look for inspiration?

I love texture, be it street noise, old dirty walls or stickered phone booths. In that regard I love older parts of the city like Satwa, Karama and Deira, where I lived when I was younger. More than that, though, I love to drive out of the city and through small towns. A lot of new Dubai can be a little too clean for me.



Fathima unveils a recent mural at JBR

Where are your favourite places to see local street art in Dubai?

I like the work along JBR because we had an opportunity to see it being painted and interact with the artists. It feels a bit more organically growing as a locale for street art and there's great street life around it as well. I love some of the artists at City Walk, ROA being my all-time favourite, and some of the new pieces along 2nd December Street are great too.

What's your main goal when producing a piece of public art?

Partly escape, which I think is a big goal for a lot of artists. Not necessarily escape from a reality that is uncomfortable – I have a great life – but rather escape to a place where you're free to imagine beyond the boundaries of the society you live in and its norms. And in turn

I hope that provokes the same desire or sensation in people who view the work.

What are you most proud of?

I think being an artist can sometimes come with a lot of angst: having confidence in your work; being brave enough to put it out there. Going from a piece of paper to a 12m wall was pretty daunting at first! So I'm proud that I've persevered and aimed higher and kept moving forward.

What are you most looking forward to about this year's Dubai Art Season?

I just love the buzz. I love how many people get enthusiastic about art for the month and really make the effort to go out and see it and interact with it. It feels like a long party and a celebration of something I love best.

DUBAI ART SEASON

SIKKA Art Fair 5–11 March

A stalwart of the Dubai art scene, this annual fair in the heart of old Dubai showcases the UAE's emerging artistic talent – from Arabic 'calligraphiti' to live music – against the authentic backdrop of Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood.
dubaiculture.gov.ae

Art Week 13–18 March

Surround yourself with all things arty during this city-wide celebration of art, design and culture. Bringing together the creative achievements and ambitions of the emirate through more than 350 events, there's truly something for everyone.
artweek.ae

Design Days Dubai 14–17 March

This is the place to come for cutting-edge interior design from around the globe. Held in the city's creative hub, Dubai Design District (d3), expect limited-edition furniture, design pieces and installations alongside a packed programme of workshops and talks.
designdaysdubai.ae

Art Dubai 15–18 March

The region's leading international art fair is also the liveliest. By day, tour a diverse selection of galleries; by night, join the after-party at Madinat Jumeirah. Stop by the Global Art Forum, too, for a top-class debate on the landscape of contemporary art.
artdubai.ae

World Art Dubai 12–15 April

Pick up a souvenir with a twist at the 'affordable art fair with a difference'. Featuring artworks to suit every budget, as well as a contemporary craft market, there's no better way to ensure lasting memories of a holiday well spent.
worldartdubai.com