

IF HORSES COULD FLY

Sophie Kazan meets Lea Sednaoui, founder and director of The Running Horse, one of Beirut's most exciting young art galleries.

UPON MEETING LEA SEDNAOUI, you quickly realise that you are in the presence of an inspiring and determined young gallerist. Since launching, the gallery has burst onto the international art scene, characterising the young, edgy and confident attitude of a new wave of Beirut art professionals. And in The Running Horse gallery, idiosyncratic name aside, she has, in the space of three years, managed to carve out a niche at home and on the art fair circuit for showing promising young talent from Lebanon and beyond.

Having herself obtained a Fine Art degree from Central St Martin's College in London in 2008, Sednaoui returned to Beirut and after discovering a studio space in the new art territories of Karantina, amidst former industrial warehouses, founded The Running Horse in 2009. With a packed calendar of exhibitions - The Running Horse represents 15 'emerging' international artists and shows, at varying times, the work of 38 others - Sednaoui has worked relentlessly on pushing her brand globally by taking booths at SLICK art fair in Paris, MENASA Art Fair in Beirut and Art Gwangju in South Korea amongst others. And as one of the lucky dealers who sold out at Art Dubai this year, it's clear that this intuitive and focused gallery is set for big things. How did Sednaoui do that? 'Never EVER compromise!' she laughs...

Your first exhibition was 'Somewhere... Elsewhere...' in 2009 by Sigrid Glöerfelt, a Swedish artist. You said Sigrid's paintings 'gave you goosebumps'. Is it essential for you to have a vivid, physical feeling about your artists?

The artists and the shows I decide to curate are important to me. [They]

speak to me, I hope the audience of the gallery is receptive to that. I love being in contact with the visitors of the gallery, it is important as it also breaks the austerity and uneasiness that resonates in peoples' mind when they enter any gallery space. But at the same time, I sometimes stay at my desk. Many people like to experience an exhibition in their bubble. The gallery is an open and transparent space, people usually feel comfortable walking around ...

How did you come up with the gallery's name?

The gallery's name The Running Horse, is a metaphor for a movement in perpetual evolution. If you close your eyes, you could see it run free, and I bet it would make you smile. This physical embodiment of freedom and expansion can be applied to the gallery space, the artists I work with, the audience...

You were recently quoted in the Beirut press as saying that owning a gallery is not just about selling paintings, and if it were, you would rather sell bread! What is your ethos for running a successful gallery?

Always exhibit artists you believe in and works you are passionate about. Work with a passionate team. Never, ever compromise! My aim in setting up this gallery was to bring art to people and draw people to art. When I opened The Running Horse, the Beirut Art Center had just opened its doors. And since then, it has bustled with more galleries opening. Ashkal Alwane (The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts) is expanding with its school and a specific programme allowing Beirut to come forward through a specific standpoint. APEAL (Association for the Promotion and