

For immediate release

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ABRAAJ CAPITAL ART PRIZE TO ANNOUNCE FINALISTS OF FIRST COMPETITION

*Three international Curator/Artist teams set to push artistic boundaries
and take centre stage at Art Dubai*

Dubai, London – The selection committee of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize today announced the three recipient curator/artist teams of its first competition: **Cristiana Perrella & Kutluğ Ataman**; **Carol Solomon & Zoulikha Boubadellah**; and **Leyla Fakhr & Nazgol Ansarinia**. Their projects, which are being created this very moment, will be unveiled during Art Dubai of March 2009. As Art Dubai is the Middle East's largest modern and contemporary annual art fair, the unveiling during this event will offer the winning artists an unparalleled opportunity to widen their global reputation and network. The works will become part of the Abraaj Capital corporate collection.

“By supporting artists from the MENASA region in this way we aim to empower them as important agents of cross cultural respect,” explained Frederic Sicre, Executive Director of Abraaj Capital. *“With increasing awareness of our region’s rapid rate of economic development around the world, the time is right to also promote understanding and appreciation of the burgeoning art community as another important pillar of societal development,”* added Sicre.

“The spectacular reception that this inaugural Abraaj Capital Art Prize received within the art community exceeded our most ambitious expectations,” said Savita Apte, Chair of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize. *“The 97 applications received from artists from the MENASA region in collaboration with curators from such diverse locations as Santa Barbara and Japan and almost every country in between, reflected a truly global world of innovation, inspiration and creativity. . We are thrilled that the main aim of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize – offering a platform which reinforces creative collaboration – has been so wholeheartedly embraced by the artistic community and it is with enormous anticipation that we await the unveiling of the works in March of next year.”*

The Abraaj Capital Art Prize, one of the most generous art prizes in the world, provides an exciting opportunity for creative collaboration between international curators and artists from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region. Almost 100 curator/artists applications were received, evaluated and discussed by the Abraaj Capital Art Prize selection committee. The committee looked for innovative ideas and use of medium; a reflection of regional and local cultural principles, experimental art production techniques; and a balanced application which showed the curators' strength and ability to push the artists' boundaries.

The Recipients

Cristiana Perrella (b. 1965, Rome) is curator of the Contemporary Arts Programme at the British School in Rome where she has developed a series of events focused on the dialogue between the British and Italian art scenes. She curated several one-man shows and published a number of monographs. She is working with Kutluğ Ataman (b. 1961, Istanbul), who studied at UCLA in Los Angeles and has pursued successful careers in both feature film-making and contemporary art. His works primarily document the lives of the marginalized individual, examining the way in which people create and recreate their identities. In 2003 the London Observer named him 'artist of the year' and in 2004 he was short-listed for the prestigious Turner prize. Ataman's movies include *The Serpent's Tale (Karanlık Sular)* (1994); *Lola+Billidikid* (1999); and *2 Girls* (2005). Cristiana Perrella saw Ataman's first work *Semiha Unplugged* in 1997 and has followed his career ever since. In 2006 his work was included in a Perrella-curated show and in 2007 she invited him for a residency program at the British School in Rome.

Carol Solomon (b. 1953, Pennsylvania) is currently Visiting Associate Professor of Art History at Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylvania. She was Curator of European Art at the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College in Massachusetts, worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and has taught at several prestigious universities in the US and Canada. Video and installation artist Zoulikha Bouabdellah (b. 1977, Moscow) who was raised in Algeria and who studied in Paris will work alongside Carol Solomon. Since finishing her studies in 2002, Zoulikha has been widely exhibited and major shows include *L'art au féminin* (2008) in Algiers and *Airs de Paris* (2007) in Paris. In 2007 her work was featured in the African Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale. Carol Solomon first encountered Zoulikha Bouabdellah in 2007 in Paris during the *Airs de Paris* show. In 2008 she included two of Bouabdellah's works in the *The Third Space: Cultural Identity Today* at the Mead Art Museum in Amherst College and invited her to be a visiting artist in residence during the same time.

Leyla Fakhr (b. 1979, Isfahan) studied in London and Tehran and is assistant curator at Tate Britain and independent curator in Tehran. In 2006 she curated *Untitled (do not give your opinion)*, an exhibition of works by Nazgol Ansarinia (b. 1979, Tehran) with whom she will collaborate for the Abraaj Capital Art Prize. Nazgol studied graphic design in London, followed by an MFA in San Francisco. After having worked in the US and Europe, she returned to Tehran where her work focuses on everyday objects and their relationship to a larger social context. Dissecting the daily and piecing it back together to make other structures and patterns apparent often forms the core of her work. Leyla Fakhr and Nazgol Ansarinia met while working at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Since then a strong artist-curator relationship as well as a profound friendship has underpinned their collaborations. In 2007 Fakhr curated Ansarinia's first solo show at the Ave Gallery in Tehran.

The three projects will be unveiled shortly ahead of the opening of Art Dubai on Fort Island and will be showcased at Art Dubai from March 19 through 21. The works will be part of the Abraaj Capital corporate collection.

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Notes to Editors

Artist and curator biographies and headshots are available upon request.

About Abraaj Capital Art Prize

The Abraaj Capital Art Prize was established in April of 2008 and is designed to create a viable platform for individual artists who are revered in their local communities but lack international critical and commercial exposure. ACAP provides them with the opportunity to hone their talents working alongside international curators and to reach a global audience through the display of their work at Art Dubai. The Abraaj Capital Art Prize is the world's largest art competition endowment, worth a total of US\$1 million. The selection committee of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize consists of Savita Apte (Chair); Antonia Carver; Ali Khadra; John Martin; Elaine Ng; Jack Persekian; Daniela da Prato; Maya Rasamny and Frederic Sicre (bios available upon request).

About Art Dubai

For further information about Art Dubai, participating galleries, art projects, events and the education programme please visit www.artdubai.ae

Art Dubai is a subsidiary of the Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) and is held in partnership with Abraaj Capital. Madinat Jumeirah is the exclusive hotel partner for the event.

About Abraaj Capital

Based in Dubai, Abraaj Capital is the premier investment firm specializing in private equity investment in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region. The management team has brought together some of the most compelling and successful transactions in the history of leveraged acquisitions across the region."

With US\$5 billion of assets currently under management, Abraaj has pioneered institutionalizing private equity practice in the region and is setting trends and benchmarks for others to follow.

Winner of industry awards including 'Middle East Private Equity Firm of the Year' from Private Equity International (2005, 2006 & 2007), the Banker Middle East Award for 'Best Private Equities Institution' in 2006 and for 'Outstanding Contribution to Financial Services in the Middle East' in 2007 and 'Best Private Equity House' at the World Private Equity Awards, MENA in 2007. Arabian Business recognized Abraaj among the 50 Most Admired Companies in the GCC in 2007. Abraaj is also the first pure private equity firm to be registered by DFSA to operate out of Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC).

Apart from managing its five private equity funds, Abraaj Capital Holdings Limited (ACHL) itself is extremely well capitalized, with an issued share capital of US\$ 1 billion. Its 135 professionals come from 27 nationalities and achieve a coverage that spans the MENASA region. For more information please visit www.abraaj.com