

## The big draw

From Picasso and Warhol to Dali and Miró, Chris Lord digs into the Farjam Collection's stable of modern masters [Discuss this article](#)



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At the age of 88, something took hold of Picasso. Though prolific right until the end, 1969 marked an all-consuming burst of productivity in the ageing Spanish painter. Just four years before his death, Picasso turned out no less than 211 pieces in the space of a year.

Some of that crazed proclivity for productiveness can be seen in the wild eyes of the 'Tete d'homme', one of his 46 works on paper from 1969, which now sits amid the [Farjam Collection](#)'s vast assembly of the biggest names in modern art. Picasso's signature crystalline eyes are, somehow, even more fixed in this startling work, housed in a gnarled, decrepit face that appears too intent to sag.

Like the majority of pieces in this exceptional show, 'Tete d'homme' is an indirect but no less fascinating flash of a pivotal moment. Created when Picasso was on his way out, it seems to be a search for the most stripped-away form of figurative representation. With its snake-like nose and powdery crayon-blue slash for a smile, Picasso's 'L'homme Au Beret' represents the artist's experiments to achieve the directness of expression of being a child. In contrast, the single figurative work by Miró, a spindly stick figure surrounded by asterisk stars and an imperfect

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moon, is more blatant in its scratchy means to get at the essence of the forms. Together, the works illustrate two divergent yet entwined projects of passing Masters.

In a move away from the Qur'ans and Kaaba curtains that have dominated the [Farjam Collection](#)'s space since it opened last year, *From Matisse to Warhol: Works on Paper* by Modern Masters delves deep into Dr Farjam's private collection. It feels very carefully curated and is packed in across the two floors. A stunning drawing by Klimt, a study for a dancer that would form part of his last great mural, sits alongside one of Matisse's late drawings from the mid-'40s: a joyful yet unknowable woman's face.

Refreshingly, there's no sense of obscurity about these pieces – equal balance has been given to preparatory sketches and complete works. While Picasso and Miró's works on paper are a highlight, there are also some incredible painted pieces. Willem De Kooning's 'Untitled (woman)' presents a woman's form falling apart. Smears of medicinal pink, exaggerated hips and a vaguely affronting perspective build to an air of subtle violence and clunking sexuality. It's an exceptional piece, possibly the best in here, and certainly a reason to see the show.

Downstairs, the focus falls perhaps a little too heavily on Dali, including several large-scale watercolours and sketches. The latter are a good introduction to the greater idiosyncrasies that occupied Dali: designs for a 'flesh-barrow' (a sickly bodily wheelbarrow) and even instructions on how to use a sea urchin to perfect the painter's eye.

To give the Dali works some shape, the [Farjam Collection](#) includes one of his most obscure pieces – a meticulously painted interior showing how he intended the Desert Trilogy, produced to market a perfume, to be displayed. This rather unapologetic, and very Dali-esque, form of commercialism is no less fitting for the show. If Picasso and Miró were consumed with the essence of forms, then the incoming ideology – the art-celeb cult of pop art – was just around the corner. Andy Warhol is represented in two pieces executed in muted watercolours, created while he was still a commercial illustrator. 'Shoe of the evening, beautiful shoe' (inset) captures the cold, commodifying eye and graphical cleanliness that would dominate pop.

There are many more highlights here – Man Ray's sensuous depiction of a hand submerged in water, or Marino Marini's painting of an archetypal caballero. Then there's Picasso's silver plate, with hammered rivulets to evoke the shape of a smiling face. In its entirety, *Works on Paper* reflects a strong curatorial thrust, a worthy (and cleverly angled) sweep over artistic evolutions in the past 150 years and an insight into one of the most dizzying collections housed in the region. Highly recommended.

*From Matisse to Warhol: Works on Paper* continues until March 1 at [The Farjam Collection, DIFC](#).

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