

Friday

SEPTEMBER 19-25, 2008

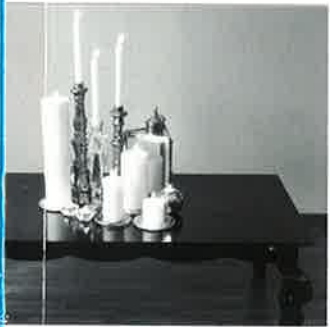


Table top art 48



Fast food 78

Bags of style

Statement totes 54





Different strokes

EMIRATI ARTIST ABDUL RAHEEM SALIM talks to **Veethika Jain** about his work, his magical inspirations and why he likes to shake people up with his art

Sitting in the Total Arts Gallery surrounded by Abdul Raheem Salim's paintings, one can sense a connection between the artist and his work.

A painter and sculptor by profession, he holds a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Cairo University and has had more than 10 solo exhibitions in the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Cairo.

"I was born in Dubai, and my father was from Sharjah," he says. "When my parents separated, I moved to Bahrain with my mother, but I did shuttle between Bahrain and the UAE quite a lot."

The biggest influence in his life was his grandmother who pushed him to take up art. "I joined the art class in school and the teachers were very encouraging, but it was my grandmother's constant resolve to teach me different art forms that had a major influence on me. She wasn't a professional, but she had a natural flair for it. She always corrected me, gave me money to buy colours and always encouraged my work. I took part in many art competitions in my school days on my grandmother's insistence."

Abdul's parents were quite liberal in terms of letting him choose what he wanted to do in life. Having done a few odd jobs, he finally understood that art was his calling.

Over the years he's moved from one

style of painting to the other and is currently mixing abstract art with figuration. He's won many prizes since 1980, starting from his university days in Cairo. Among others, he has to his credit the Prize of the Jury at the Biennial exhibition in Cairo in 1992 and first prize in the same exhibition in 1993 held in Sharjah. He also won the first prize at the Dubai International Exhibition in 1994 and more recently the third prize in a competition titled 'Al Bahar' in Saudi Arabia in 2007.

As an Emirati, he has his work permanently displayed at the Sharjah Museum of Arts, ADNOC, Shaikh Hassan Al Thani Private Museum in Qatar and at the Secretariat General. His current Dubai exhibition is called the *Magical Appeal*, which showcases his paintings from 2006 to 2008.

I was 10 years old when I started working. My first job was as an office boy and then I moved on to working on my uncle's ship: cleaning, and learning all about boats. Starting to work at such an early age taught me the value of money and the meaning of life.

I was challenged at the age of 14, when the Bahrain National Exhibition saw my

PHOTOS BY KISHORE KUMAR

I, ME, MYSELF

sculptures made out of stone and invited me to display my work for their show. I told all my friends and family to come on the opening night and see my work, but when I arrived I found that not one of my sculptures had been included in the exhibition. The organisers later said that my work wasn't good enough to be showcased. I felt terrible, but I decided that I was going to work hard to make my art worthy of exhibitions like that one.

I want to be the first painter whose work can be seen from space. I want to paint on a huge rock with different colours. I would use blue, red, yellow and black and make it so vibrant that it's visible from the space. I don't want to just paint a car or a house to show my contemporaries; I want those living on other planets to see it.

I don't get bothered if the audience or the viewer of my painting doesn't understand my art. I empathise with them. I know that a lot of people have to go through a learning process of trying to get under an artist's skin. I have seen a lot of people looking at my work with a big question mark on their face. It's like they are looking for a key to open the painting. I see this reaction as a positive one as my art is

making them think. If I create something which is easily understandable then it's mundane, I want to shake people up with my art. It's like waking them up from their slumber, making them ponder over something, making them think in a new direction.

I am driven by today. I take one step at a time and if I have got today, then it's another step towards the future. I do prepare myself for tomorrow, but I don't waste my today for that. I do whatever I can in the day that I have been given. Each day has been given to me to create more art, to express myself in paintings. If I get tomorrow, it's a bonus, but I don't depend too much on it. I take life as it comes.

I see awards in a very different light. I once got an award in Bangladesh and when I came home, no one recognised the achievement. I was very hurt and wanted to burn all my paintings. Then a journalist told me, 'Why bother about people? They'll understand art and your work in time'. From then on, prizes and awards for me are just recognition of my work.

"I have come into this world for a reason and I think that reason was to be an artist."

I don't paint to get an award and at the same time if I get an award for one painting, I believe that my entire body of work has been appreciated and not just one painting. I don't value my art by comparing it to the number of awards I have got. And even if I get one it doesn't mean that I am the best, it makes me

more responsible as an artist. It keeps me motivated to do better.

I can and cannot be a commissioned painter. There was a time when I did take on commissioned work as the client wanted me to. I must have done maybe four or five pieces. But once I was asked to paint a wall in someone's house according to the existing theme and décor. I spent a month trying to come up with something but I couldn't. From then on, I decided I could be a commissioned painter as long as the client wants the painting in my style. I can give you something to do with culture, history or whatever your interest is, but I can't custom make it according to your colours, figures and so on. It has to be with my imagination and my feeling. So I don't take orders anymore.

I appreciate honesty. My art comes from my heart and soul. It's not like I am copying someone's art; I am true to my style. Apart from that, I'm also a very honest person. I always put myself in the other person's shoes and see things from his/her perspective. I do try and put myself in situations where I can help someone. I am honest to the point of being cut and dry sometimes, but I believe if you are honest to others and to yourself, then life is simple and easy. I practise honesty with my work as well; I care for honest opinions and give honest deadlines to myself. I see my life as a really beautiful one.

Abdul doesn't value his art by the number of awards he has received. Rather than rest on his laurels, they keep him motivated to do better.



Barclaycard



More choices this Ramadan with Barclaycard.
Ramadan Kareem! Win nearly AED 1 million worth of gifts*.

- For every retail spend worth AED 100 on your Barclaycard get one entry into the draw for a BMW X5
- Apply now for your Barclaycard and get two entries into the draw once approved, for the BMW X5
- Choose to spend at our partner outlets** and win up to AED 500,000 worth of vouchers
- Earn Double Reward points on all retail spends during the Ramadan promotion period

For more information call 800 BARCLAYS (800 22725297) or visit www.barclaycard.ae

BARCLAYS
Banking reinvented

Barclaycard is the credit card division of Barclays Bank PLC. Registered in England 1026167. Registered office: 1 Churchill Place, London E145HP. ©2007-2008 Barclays Bank PLC.

***Terms and Conditions:**

- This promotion is valid from 1st September to 20th October 2008
- Weekly draws at partner outlets during the month of Ramadan
- E 70 BMW X5 3.0i, winner will be announced on 26th October 2008
- Only retail spends will qualify for the raffle draw
- New Barclaycard bundles – Priority, Prestige, BPL and SME get two entries into the draw and Preferred bundle gets one

Choose what you pay
Choose what you get
Choose what you earn



ME

Me and my influences

When I was 14 or 15 years old, I was deeply influenced by Michelangelo's work. His sculptures and figures left a mark on me and I was always trying to find a Michelangelo in me. Later on as I studied art in detail, I moved to my roots and started painting to depict my culture. One very big influence that I have always had is magic. I have always wondered about magic.

Me and my family

I do everything for my family – whatever they ask for – because they are very important to me. I have five children and I want them to be educated. I teach them how to see life and not depend on me. I also tell them that they can do what they want in life as long as they don't hurt anyone or themselves in the process. I don't push my children to do something; I give them their space. I like to be in touch with them, even when I am travelling.

Me and my philosophy

I have come into this world for a reason and I think that reason was to be an artist. My philosophy is "make something good to be good". Accept what you have; don't change what cannot be changed. I believe in patience as a virtue and life demands that you be patient through the ups and downs. With this philosophy, I have embraced life as it comes. By being honest and true to myself and others, I make sure that my life remains hassle free.



Abdul has experimented with many styles of painting over the years and is currently mixing abstract art with figuration.

Me and my art

My style is focused on time and movement. I started my art drawing figures in pencil and moved on to coloured abstracts. Then came the geometric designs: the triangle is the most powerful of all shapes as it has the most power at the top. I try to paint everything in a triangular fashion. I use a lot of black and white as it also shows both sides of magic and personality.

Me and my critics

As for critics, everyone has a certain way of looking at things. I am very critical of my work. When I start a piece, I'm engaging in a love affair: I tend to it in every possible way, and I am gentle. When it's over, I know that it will be with me forever. I'm not afraid of destroying my work and re-doing it completely if I feel that I have not done it justice, but the destruction should be justified.

Me and my spare time

My spare time is always spent creatively. I love listening to music – it relaxes me. Tango is my favourite style. I also like Mozart and other Western classical music composers. Another thing that I absolutely love doing is watching movies. My taste in movies is a little different: when the director tries to show something that's unique or represents someone's life in its form, I get intrigued. I always assess a movie from a director's point of view and try to understand what he or she really wants to show.

MYSELF

Do you spend a lot of time in introspection?

I do introspect a lot and I find myself wanting. I feel sad when I think about the time I've lost by not focusing on my work. I'm very afraid of wasting time. I spent a few years doing odd jobs, looking after family and experienced the everyday struggles and woes of life. I berate myself for not focusing on art right from the very beginning.

How do you deal with a problem?

When I was young, I was scared of dealing with them. I used to go to the seaside and scream and shout in a bid to alleviate the pressure and turmoil

HOW HAS UAE AFFECTED YOU AND YOUR ART?

This is where I belong. These are my roots. When I moved to Bahrain and came to the UAE on visits, I always felt sad – probably because my parents separated here. I find it very beautiful now. I like the progress it has made,

the eclectic mix of nationalities, the pulse and race of the city and the fact that it makes me feel at home. Times here have changed and they have changed me too. In the past, I used to only picture the UAE in shades of black, but now I am infusing white and other colours as well. All I want to do is continually raise the bar for myself, both personally and professionally.

I always felt inside. Then I made friends with an Indian artist who told me that if I had a problem, thinking about it would only add to my state of depression. He said I should try to work out a solution, think it over and see if I could go about solving it. He went on to tell me that if I was unable to find a solution, then I should simply leave it. I followed his advice, and started practising his approach and now I can deal with a problem in a few minutes.

What would your self-portrait look like?

I've never thought about that! But now that you've posed this question, I think it will be in black and white, as I would like everything to be clear and honest right from the beginning. My self-portrait would be more abstract than figurative, because that's what I represent: a mix of sorts. I want it to generate a happy reaction from people unlike most other self-portraits by artists. Being an abstract self-portrait, I would compel the viewer to understand my feelings, ideas and expressions through it. I wouldn't want it to be explained; I would want the audience to interpret it according to their own imagination.

What legacy would you like to leave behind?

I would leave behind my work as a legacy. I would leave my art for my children and hope that my paintings would fetch them money if it were what they wanted. I want my children to be proud of me. Professionally, I would like to have a museum of my work. It might be a small museum – size doesn't matter – but I would like new artists, art students and whoever's interested in art to come to this museum. I don't want to leave behind money or property; I want my art to be there as that's what I want to give back to society.

– Veathika Jain is a Dubai-based freelancer

DEEPLY MOVING.
That's
VIERA EXPERIENCE.



Go deeper and deeper..
Unexpected Discoveries

You will discover something extraordinary deep inside the subtle variety of shades of black produced by VIERA's Mega Contrast technology (1,000,000:1)



DEEPLY MOVING
VIERA