

Celebrating Saudi art at the 2017 Shara fair

In a celebration of color and creativity, the Shara Art Fair showed off the best of the local art scene

Arab News · 9 Jun 2017 · RAWAN RADWAN

FOR the third year running, the Shara Art Fair in Jeddah has shown off works by some of the Kingdom's finest artists in what was a celebration of color and creativity. Organized by the Saudi Art Council and held under the patronage of Princess Jawaher bint Majed bin Abdulaziz, the fair ran from June 1-5 and saw myriad galleries take part. Participating galleries included the Athr Gallery, Al Mashreq Gallery, first-timers 20 Icons of French Design and the Al Mansouria Foundation's silent auction gallery.



It was a one-of-a-kind gathering which sought to empower artists and propel along Saudi Arabia's progressive art scene. According to organizers, all proceeds will go toward funding art programs in government schools.

One highlight from abroad was the 20 Icons of French Design booth which presented 20 examples of French creativity which have been praised for breaking conventions and being ahead of their time. The objects on display ranged from the first plastic stool and the first ballpoint pen to a pressure cooker and images of a supersonic turbojet-powered Concorde. The exhibit's intention was to show how a simple object was able to become a significant symbol due to commercial success, notoriety, functionality and innovation.

Of all the pieces on display, many had underlying messages that spoke to one's spirituality, to the inner artist hidden within us all.

The pieces on show included photography, such as Moath Al-Ofi's "The Shepherd" which is a large photograph portraying the sun-beat and wrinkled face of a shepherd living and herding livestock in the vast land masses near Madinah. Also on show were installations by Zaman Jassim that fuse together calligraphy with stainless steel on wire, Osama Esid's original negatives of the old tradition of carrying the Kaaba's kiswa, an original Nasser Al-Salem calligraphic piece on white painted wood and many more exquisite pieces.

Ali Cha'aban, an artist with a background in anthropology, has been a keen visitor to the fair in the past and took part for the very first time this year. His piece "Broken Dreams" shows the true essence of the artist, he told Arab News. "This piece is a mix of my childhood and my adulthood. I wanted to find an aesthetic that linked all of this together and what better way than to display my childhood idol, Superman, on a simple yet essential item in every single Arab household, the rug. Superman is the epitome of my childhood and many others' as well. I specifically called it 'Broken Dreams' because I'll never be Superman."

Many of the visitors agreed that the pieces on display were not only quite beautiful but intriguing as well. Visitor Ahmed J. admitted that this was his first visit to an art gallery of this magnitude. "I never understood art, I've never dwelled on it, thinking it's just for the elite but coming to Shara, I've changed my mind. There's more to it that meets the eye, I understand the image before me and it is mind boggling how I once thought of art as something boring and dull. It won't be my last visit either," he told Arab News.

Khalid Zahid, another contemporary artist with a quirky but simple installation, shed light on his piece.

When asked about his Barbie dolls with car wings, the artist smiled and said: "Anyone who walks into a toy store is elated with a feeling of nostalgia and glee. It doesn't matter if you're an adult or a kid, it's the colors, the vast amounts of toys and all the trinkets that make this happiness. The Barbie installation is a representation of that joy ... But once you notice her wings, the observer's view is morphed into a deeper (understanding). The name Amal (Arabic for hope) allows the viewer to connect the dots, to give a sense of hope to this Barbie that she may one day have an opportunity to drive." It may be a controversial issue but the artist has chosen to depict it through his creativity. The art on show was truly emotive and thought-provoking and many visitors professed their desire to return to the event. So, until next year, Shara.