

# Khalid Zahid: Transforming Saudi Art

Internationally acclaimed artist Khalid Zahid has made waves in Saudi Arabia and beyond. Speaking to him at his home in Jeddah, his innate passion for art becomes apparent: his home is filled with rare, centuries-old artworks and artefacts from across the Middle East. Each piece has its own special story.



Similarly, Zahid’s simple yet striking art is laden with profound messages. *The Holy Decibel*, which he created in collaboration with renowned artist Ali Chaaban, has won a place at the upcoming Sharjah Biennale. “It’s an honour for me and Ali Chaaban to be part of the Sharjah Biennale,” says Zahid.

Featuring the dome of a mosque covered with speakers, *The Holy Decibel* highlights the centrality of sound in Islamic imagery. Representing the Koran’s frequent references to the heart and aural imagery, it evokes the Koranic verse, “So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear?”

By expanding the parameters of Islamic art, artists like Khalid Zahid shift the conversation to often overlooked but important aspects of the metaphysical: the power of words and sounds, the mysteries of the heart. Just as calligraphy conveys the sonic power of Koranic verses, artists are exploring new and original ways of expressing the Koran's literary majesty.

This is not the first time that Zahid's exploration of Islamic issues has elicited interest: his artwork featuring a bearded sheikh jumping on a trampoline provides an alternative perspective showing the human, light hearted side of people, regardless of faith. "I wanted to show the positive side of these people," says Zahid.



Moreover, his art provides an interesting social commentary on the transformative changes taking place in Saudi Arabia. His *Amal* art piece features a Barbie doll dressed in an abaya with wings in the shape of car doors symbolising the dreams and aspirations of Saudi women.

Similarly, his art installation entitled *The Beginning of the End* was exhibited not only in Saudi Arabia but also in New York, Utah and Moscow. It features a dismantled petrol pump highlighting Saudi Arabia's shift away from oil in line with the Kingdom's 2030 vision.

By providing a more authentic perspective on Saudi Arabia, Zahid has caught the attention of the international art scene. "It's very important to bring something the world hasn't seen. People want to see what Saudi is," he says.

Khalid Zahid is no stranger to success. After establishing a noteworthy

corporate career, his foray into the art world has won him international recognition. At an earlier stage in his career, he created pop art T-shirts which were very popular with the rapper Lil Wayne as one of his customers.

However, it took time for the galleries to understand his vision but with dedication and persistence, Zahid has redefined art in Saudi Arabia, providing a simple and modern outlook on often contentious subjects.

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