

THE NATIONAL

eL Seed's Dubai exhibition Declaration gives calligraffiti a whole new dimension

► eL Seed has spent the last year at Tashkeel studio hub in Dubai working on a new show of three dimensional letters.



The Tunisian artist eL Seed says his latest exhibition is a statement of love for calligraphy, an ageing art that he says deserves to be honoured. Satish Kumar / The National

Anna Seaman
Nov 17, 2014

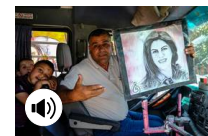
 Listen In English  Listen in Arabic

Beta V.1.0 - Powered by automated translation

With the sweeping curves of his letters painted impressively in freehand using bold colours, eL Seed has managed to reclaim the Arabic language for his generation – something Arabic teachers have been trying to do for years with limited success.

Since he painted the minaret of a mosque in Gabes, Tunisia, in 2012 with his now trademark calligraffiti style, his profile as an artist has been on the rise. His words, executed with the kind of accuracy not normally achievable without some kind of precision instrument or digital programme, are not only enticing to the eye but also

EDITOR'S PICKS



Shireen Abu Akleh, new Cairo airport, George W Bush - Trending

TRENDING MIDDLE EAST



Life in a Houthi jail: Luke Symons' brutal eight-hour

UK



Nine tips to help you save on fuel costs in the UAE

MONEY



George W Bush confuses war in Ukraine with Iraq invasion

IRAQ



Davos has a rich history of building a better future

COMMENT

powerful in their meaning.

The mosque bore a verse from the Quran encouraging us to celebrate our differences, and another common phrase on the murals that pop up on walls as he travels is "love is the miracle of civilisation".

For the past year, eL Seed has been in Dubai completing a residency at Tashkeel studio hub and tomorrow, the results of his stay in the UAE will go on display to the public.

In an exhibition titled *Declaration*, sponsored by the Sheikha Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation, eL Seed has taken his art quite literally to another dimension. Formed in very large, three-dimensional shapes, the letters and words of his script-based art cascade down the walls and bend around the corners so that visitors will be forced to step over, under and around them.

True to form, the sculptural installation is visually stunning and it has a hugely romantic meaning. The words are taken from a poem by Nazir Qabbani, a Syrian poet famed for his sensual compositions, who wrote to his wife telling her no matter how much she aged, she would always be beautiful to him. The artist took those words to make a similarly emotional testimony to his art.

"This show is a love declaration to calligraphy," says eL Seed. "It is an ageing art and it deserves to be honoured – this poem perfectly matches that idea."

The creation of the show was a massive project, which eL Seed began planning for in April and has been working seriously on the execution since June.

After coming up with the concept, he enlisted the help of Bahar Al Bahar, a designer and 3-D specialist, and Dima Masoud, an exhibition designer, plus up to 30 carpenters and on-site engineers to help with the installation.

"It was a big struggle and it was a learning experience," says eL Seed. "This is my first try, so it is really experimental, but I will definitely continue it."

The exhibition marks the end of his residency and the beginning of the next stage of his career.

"When I started this residency, I was very aware of the labels already placed upon me as an Arab street artist, so the goal, ultimately, is to break free of those names," he says. "I don't think I have achieved it yet, but this exhibition, where I have not used spray paint or a brush but created an installation, which is something that I have never done before, is one of the steps.

"The end of this residency marks a new turn in my artistic career."

The mark of a true artist is one who never stops trying to progress and who experiments with new media and styles, which is something we can clearly see in this exhibition. The brilliant thing about eL Seed is that he remains refreshingly humble about his talent and is really true to himself.

"My art represents me," he says, referring to the fact that he was born to Tunisian parents in 1981 in Paris. "If I hadn't been born and raised in France I would never have had to reconnect with my roots and express my Arab identity or rediscover the Arabic language."

Whatever the circumstances that led up to it, eL Seed is now one of the most respected artists of his generation and is only becoming more prominent.

As well as working on his Dubai show, this year he painted a mural on the side of L'Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris to mark the launch of his book, *Lost Walls*, which is a travel journal and cultural commentary on his native Tunisia. He also travelled to Brazil,

where he painted in the favelas; to Jeddah for the annual art week to make his mark along the facade of a building in the old town; and to the Tunisian island of Djerba, where he took part in a street-art project called *Djerbahood*.

His work, he says, is part of a resurgence of Arab pride that has taken place over the past few years.

"I can't say that my work alone has had any impact," he says, "but it is part of a general movement."

- **Declaration opens on Wednesday, November 19, at 7pm and runs until December 27 at Tashkeel Studio Hub, Nad Al Sheba, Dubai. For more information, visit www.tashkeel.org**

aseaman@thenationalae

MORE FROM THE NATIONAL



'Jealous, controlling, drunk' Johnny Depp's ship was already sinking

us

UAE

Courts Government Education
Heritage Health Transport Science
Environment Megaprojects
Expo 2020 UAE in Space
Saudi Arabia Bahrain Oman

MENA

Egypt Iraq Iran Jordan Lebanon
Syria Tunisia Captagon Crisis

About Us Contact Us Newsletters Sign Up Work With Us Privacy Policy Advertise With Us Terms & Conditions

Sitemap Archive



UAE artists pay tributes to Sheikh Khalifa and honour President Sheikh Mohamed

ART

World

UK US Africa Asia Australasia
Europe The Americas Arab Showcase

Business

Aviation Economy Energy Money
Cryptocurrencies Property Banking
Technology Markets
Travel and Tourism Start-Ups
Road to Net Zero Future Comment



Hollywood's legendary Viper Room to be demolished

us

Opinion

Comment Editorial Obituaries
Cartoon Feedback

Lifestyle

Fashion Food Motoring Luxury
Family Home Wellbeing Things to do
Arts & Culture
Comment
Art Books Film Music On Stage
Television Comment



What the Saudi Film Commission is doing at Cannes this year

FILM

Travel

Hotels News Airlines Destinations
Responsible Tourism Covid-19 Travel
Coronavirus

Sport

Football Cricket IPL F1 UFC Golf
Rugby Horse Racing Tennis
Other Sport