

stories over art

middle east & beyond

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#9

ART & DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | FASHION | INTERVIEWS | COMMENTARY | FILM | MUSIC | PERFORMANCE | PHOTOGRAPHY | FEATURES | REVIEWS



EDITOR'S NOTE



Art That Gives Back Ramadan coasters designed by children from Dubai Autism Center

As the holy month of Ramadan graces us with its presence, it invites us into a time of introspection, renewal, and spiritual connection. It is a period of discipline and devotion, but it is also one of gratitude and creative inspiration—a chance to slow down, seek meaning, and nurture both the soul and the mind.

Art, in its many forms, has always played a role in our personal and collective reflections. Through the intricate elegance of Islamic calligraphy, the mesmerizing patterns of traditional craftsmanship, or the profoundly evocative power of poetry and storytelling, artistic expression has long been a bridge between the tangible and the divine. It helps us navigate our emotions, find solace in beauty, and connect profoundly with the world.

This Ramadan, let us take a moment to embrace the arts as an aesthetic indulgence and a means of spiritual enrichment. Let us turn to the quiet pages of literature that inspire thought, the canvas that captures emotions beyond words, and the melodies that echo the rhythms of the heart. Let us explore the art forms that tell the stories of faith, culture, and human resilience, reminding us that creativity is also an act of devotion.

More than ever, this sacred month offers us an opportunity to rekindle our creative energies, seek

wisdom in tradition, and foster a more profound sense of community through shared artistic experiences. Whether attending an exhibition, reading poetry under the moonlight, or simply pausing to appreciate the craftsmanship in everyday objects, let us use this time to find meaning in art and art in meaning.

May this Ramadan bring peace, inspiration, and a renewed connection to the beauty surrounding us.

P.S: In an era of ChatGPT and Paywalls, we're daring to create original content and offer it to our readers without a fee. Your support would go a long way. Subscribe to the portal and meet us on social media as well.



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INTERVIEW

JAMAL A. RAHIM

“The Art Behind the Stars” is an exhibition that delves into the world of celebrity through the lens of artistry. The collection showcases compelling portraits of international stars from the world of entertainment, each offering a unique perspective on our culture, identity, own experience, and memories. The artworks provide a rare glimpse into the humanity behind the screen legends and cultural icons. Each portrait provides a window into our shared cultural memory, exploring how these iconic figures have shaped our collective identity and experience. This exhibition is Jamal A. Rahim’s homage to the artists who resonate with global audiences and leave their marks in our lives.

Jamal Abdul Rahim’s journey in the art world has allowed him the freedom to experiment and stretch the boundaries of conventional image-making. He spent years studying the works of portrait masters and honing techniques to bring a modern touch and a fresh perspective to traditional methods. His exhibition, running in Dubai, not only celebrates artistic expression but also fosters dialogue about the power of portraiture in bridging cultural divides, making it a significant contribution to contemporary art discourse. He is well known for his bright color palette and portraiture, especially his portraits of Umm Kulthum. Jamal A. Rahim has previously held exhibitions in Kuwait, Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the UK, Norway, Holland, Japan, Slovenia, Spain, and France, to name a few.



INTERVIEW

What's your earliest memory of creating art?

My memory goes back to my school days, as art was a main subject. But I can also remember when I returned to Bahrain after spending a few years in India and my early decision in 1984 to self-study and start a career in art.

If you could collaborate with any artist, living or dead, who would it be and why?

It would be Picasso. He represents a pivotal stage in the history of art. We can easily define the art movement before and after Picasso. Most of the artists in the 20th century were affected by him in one way or another as if he were the fuse that ignited it.

What's the weirdest thing you've ever used as a medium/tool/platform in your artwork?

I consider myself always in an 'experimental project stage', trying to use anything around me. I've used eggshells and straws to paint floor tiles, sand for printmaking, etc. Printmaking, in particular, is a renewable art that changes media, material, and tools daily.

How do you come up with the titles for your pieces?

Art is a spiritual and psychological state, the area through which I breathe. Sometimes, I don't give titles to my artworks; other times, I name them how I feel or think while working. My art is like a newborn baby; you may change the name you decide once it is accomplished.

What's the most unusual source of inspiration you've ever had?

The events that take place around us are the origin of the ideas. I am inspired by the Sufi dance (Tannoura) and the memory of the old black-and-white movies, old singers, etc. Our experience and imagination greatly enrich our inspiration.

If you could only use three colors/instruments/software for the rest of your life, which would you choose?

Art creation tools include colors, brushes, press machines, and stones. The colors are black, red, and blue ultramarine (Royal blue).

What piece of art do you take the most pride in and why?

My handmade art books. I have over 40 handmade books; amongst them is Tareeq Al-Hajj



(Pilgrimage Path) because it has a special memory with my friend, the late Bahraini writer and novelist Fareed Ramadan. It was collaborative work, but fate did not give him long to finish it. It contains 82 handmade prints with Fareed's profound script about life and death.

Do you have any quirky rituals or habits when you're in your creative zone?

No, nothing in particular. I need silence with the sound of the radio in the background.

If your art had a soundtrack, what would be the top three songs on it?

Any song for Om Kolthoum, Fairouz, or jazz music.

What's your favorite art-related joke or pun?

I don't have any.

How do you deal with a creative block?

This is a nice question. I recharge my battery. I read books and travel to places where I can see museums; I try to mingle with life to restore my activity and passion and brainstorm my thoughts.

What's the most memorable reaction someone has had to your work?

I have nothing in mind, but I remember that people were fascinated by my sizeable handmade art prints measuring up to 6 meters x 3 meters. As you may know, it is difficult to print this size, especially in our area.



If you could turn any book into a piece of art, which one would it be?

I have done it many times in my handmade art books. Although I have worked on Al Mutanabbi's poems many times, I still feel that his poems are worth more. I would love to work on "Thus Spoke Zarathustra."

What's one piece of advice you'd give to ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE aspiring to replace ARTISTS?

The name explains it all. Artworks are called originals, full of emotions and symbols. On the contrary, I think "artificial" intelligence is soulless, and art is a process of sensation, spirituality, and technology. AI art will be more beautiful and mastered without a spirit distinguishing one artist from another.

What would you be doing if you weren't an artist?

I would have been a fisherman; I am so attached to the sea.

What's the strangest place you've ever found inspiration for a piece?

My mind doesn't stop working; while sleeping, I see ideas flying here and there, so I sometimes wake up very early and go directly to my studio to work.

Can you describe your art in three words?

My art is my passion's experimental project.

What's your favorite part about the process of creating art?

The first smile of satisfaction after accomplishing an artwork and being ready to put my signature on it.

If you could have your artwork displayed anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Any place where my artwork can be respected and displayed correctly.

What's one thing people would be surprised to learn about you as an artist?

I was passionate about art but didn't think to be an artist when I was young. It all started as a challenge. The more I got involved, the more I wanted to know more. I taught myself through books of art, drawing, and visits to different museums abroad. I had supervision from artists in Bahrain when I was young, and they opened the way I went through all my life. Art is the air I breathe, and that may be why I always go for new techniques in my fields – painting, handmade print, and sculpture. It's my fate and my lifetime journey.

Kutubna Cultural Center, an independent bookstore and cultural center in Dubai, recently launched "The Art Behind the Stars," an exhibition that bridges the glamour of international stars from cinema and music and the depth of fine art portraiture. The collection presents 22 artworks by Bahraini artist Jamal A. Rahim. It features portraits of legendary figures from Hollywood and the Arab world, including Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Umm Kulthum, Abdel Halim, and others. The exhibition opened on February 15, 2025, and runs until March 16, 2025.

CELEBRATION OF THE POETIC VOICES IN THE ARAB REGION



The Mohammed Bin Rashid Library, Dubai, organized an exceptional poetry evening entitled ‘She, The Poet,’ featuring a constellation of prominent contemporary poetic voices in the Arab region and live musical performances on the oud and violin. The event supports the library’s vision and strategy to promote poetry, the Arabic language, and art in cultural circles. The evening started with Emirati poet Amal Al-Sahlawi’s emotional poems on patience, pain, and love. On the other hand, Tunisian poet Amani Al-Zaibi addressed the themes of creativity and existence in her poems, combining symbolism with lively poetic language. As for the Syrian poet Qamar Al-Jassem, she expressed her feelings toward Arab identity through emotional depth and contemplation on human relations. The last performance for the evening was by the Sudanese poet Rawda Al-Haj, who depicted complex human emotions such as homeland, loss, and female identity in a simple yet powerful poetic style. Her poems shed light on women’s suffering and discuss the conflict between their social image and emotions. During the evening, composer

Wassim Jaloul performed a musical piece on the violin that he composed primarily for this evening. The piece’s title, “The Lighthouse,” was inspired by the library’s slogan, “We are building a lighthouse of knowledge, culture, and creativity.”. Finally, the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library honored the participants, thanked them for enriching the cultural scene, and wished them continued career excellence.

Since its establishment, the Mohammed Bin Rashid Library has sought to stimulate a passion for knowledge among individuals, especially the youth, and to support the Arabic language and poetry. To do this, the library organizes literary and poetry evenings and workshops that nurture cultural communication between individuals.

A RICH VISUAL COLLECTIBLE: 459 STAMPS, 37 COINS, AND 12 BANKNOTES

This collectible is a rare and meticulously curated compilation of legal coins, stamps, and banknotes issued by various countries, all featuring threatened and endangered parrot species from around the globe.

Mintage World, the world’s first online museum dedicated to vintage and modern coins, stamps, and currency notes, recently launched a unique Coffee Table book titled “Endangered Parrots of the World on Stamps, Coins and Banknotes.” This exclusive compilation celebrates the vibrant beauty of parrots while shedding light on the critical conservation challenges these beloved birds face.

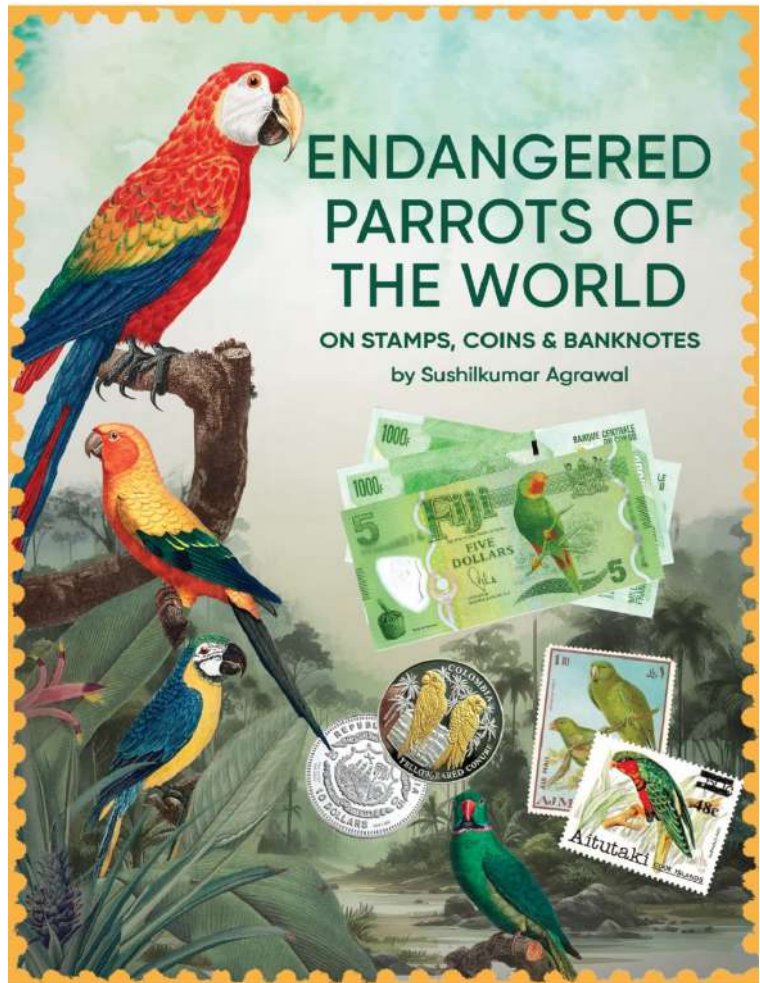
This collectible is a rare and meticulously curated compilation of legal coins, stamps, and banknotes issued by various countries, all featuring threatened and endangered parrot species from around the globe. Drawing from the latest data from the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (July 2024), the book showcases the legacy and diversity of parrots. It highlights the urgent need for their conservation.

The book offers a rich visual experience, featuring over 459 stamps, 37 coins, and 12 banknotes worldwide, each representing a different parrot species. Among the featured species are the rare Imperial Amazon from Dominica, the African Grey Parrot, the Cockatoo from the Philippines, and Lear’s Macaw from Brazil. Each stamp, coin, and banknote is accompanied by a detailed historical and geographical context, making this Collection an artistic masterpiece and a valuable resource for bird enthusiasts and collectors.

“Endangered Parrots of the World” goes beyond being a mere collectible. It is a powerful tool for raising awareness about the serious threats parrots face, including

illegal pet trade, deforestation, climate change, and habitat loss. By categorizing the species into five major groups—Extinct (EX), Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), and Nearly Threatened (NT)—the book provides readers with a clear understanding of the various levels of risk these birds face.

The stamps, coins, and banknotes featured in the book are more than just collectibles; they are a testament to the global effort to preserve our avian heritage. Crafted in silver, nickel, gold, copper, and bronze, the coins showcase intricate designs reflecting parrot species’ diverse habitats and unique characteristics. The stamps, with their vibrant colors and exquisite details, capture the essence of these birds, while the banknotes highlight the importance of biodiversity and the global commitment to conservation.



Sushilkumar Agrawal, the visionary CEO of Mintage World and a life member of the Bombay Natural History Society, shared his thoughts on the project: “In India, parrots hold a special place in our cultural and historical narratives, from ancient texts and paintings to popular epics and folktales. This book is not just a collection but a heartfelt mission to raise awareness, combining my passion for nature with the storytelling potential of Mintage World. This book aims to pay tribute to these cherished creatures and raise awareness about their challenges.”



AS THE SUN APPEARS FROM BEYOND

The exhibition at Louvre Abu Dhabi focused on the concept of “light,” which explained its title and tied into the core theme of this year’s Al Burda Award. This theme drew inspiration from Surat Al-Ma’idah, verse 15: “There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book.”

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Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and as part of the activities surrounding the ceremony to honor the winners of the 18th edition of the Al Burda Award 2024, the Ministry of Culture organized an art exhibition titled “As the Sun Appears from Beyond” at the Louvre Abu Dhabi museum, which concluded in January 2025. The exhibition offered a rich visual journey spanning over two decades, celebrating Islamic art throughout the ages. It highlighted prominent pieces owned by the Ministry of Culture, including works that had won the Al Burda Award. These pieces demonstrated how Islamic art blends traditional methods with contemporary innovations, reflecting the UAE’s pioneering role in supporting arts and culture globally.

The exhibition focused on the concept of “light,” which explained its title and tied into the core theme of this year’s Al Burda Award. This theme drew inspiration from Surat Al-Ma’idah, verse 15: “There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book.”

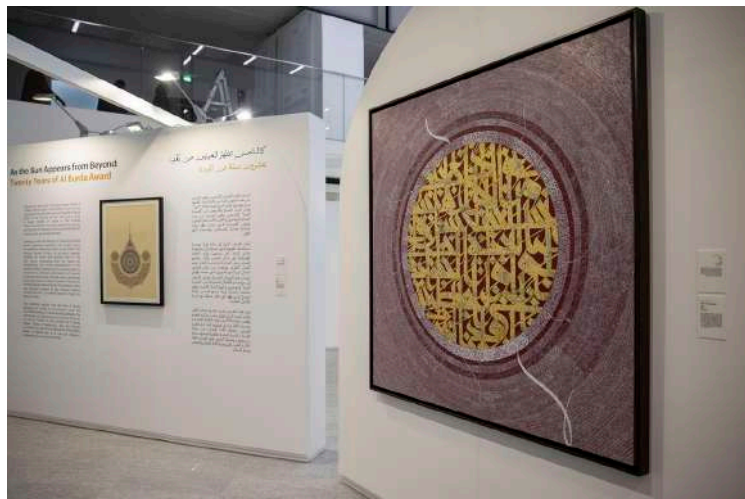
Visitors embarked on a journey through more than 60 unique works of art spanning various artistic fields, including Arabic calligraphy, ornamentation, and poetry. The exhibition provided an immersive, interactive experience that brought to life the ability of Islamic art to combine classical expression with modern creativity, creating a unique harmony.

The exhibition resulted from the first edition of the Al Burda Grant Program and the “Capacity Building Program,” and it marked the collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, based on a memorandum of understanding between the two institutions. The works showcased in the exhibition illustrated the evolution of Islamic arts over time, from traditional pieces to contemporary interpretations.

The Al Burda Award, launched by the Ministry of Culture in 2004 to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH), represents a global platform that celebrates Islamic art, poetry, and culture. The exhibition paid tribute to those who have contributed to Islamic art and highlighted works that reflect the concept of “light,” central to the 18th edition and the 20th anniversary of the prestigious award.

For contemporary art enthusiasts, the exhibition’s upper floor featured works from the Al Burda Collection, blending physical and spiritual interpretations of Islamic art. The exhibition’s visitors began their journey in the Archive Section, which documented the development of the Al Burda Award over the past two decades, offering a visual historical perspective with photographs and videos. In the Poetry Section, visitors encountered winning works from various editions of the Al Burda Award, celebrating poetry as a central form of Islamic artistic expression. The exhibition’s forum area, on the lower floor, was dedicated to exploring the Hilya, a distinctive type of Arabic calligraphy that emphasizes the attributes of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH). The exhibition also featured the “Holy Qur’an: Noor Ala Noor” section, showcasing calligraphy and decorative arts from key Qur’anic chapters, as well as the “Hadith and Khutbat Hijat Al Wadaa (Farewell Sermon)” section, which explored the values of unity, mercy, and spiritual guidance taught by the Prophet.

The Ministry of Culture of the UAE launched Al Burda Award in 2004 to celebrate the anniversary of the Prophet’s birth. In its eighteenth edition, the Award’s activities this year will be held under the title “Light,” as a theme that embodies guidance and direction toward the path of truth and goodness, taking its theme from Surat Al-Ma’idah, verse 15: “There has come to you from Allah a light and a clear Book.”





LOVE, BALLET, AND LA BAYADÈRE: AN EVENING OF ROMANCE AT DUBAI OPERA



Love was undoubtedly in the air on February 14, the perfect occasion to indulge in an evening of ballet at the Dubai Opera. But even before we stepped inside, romance had already found its way to us. As my friend sipped her red grapes at Bisou, Dubai Opera Plaza (a charming restaurant in the same building), she became an unexpected part of a grand romantic gesture—a gentleman asked her to play ‘camerawoman’ while he proposed to his beloved. She said yes, and my friend captured this beautiful

moment for the couple—just like that, she became part of their love story! With hearts already warmed by this display of love, we settled into our seats for *La Bayadère*, ready to be enthralled.

Set against the opulent backdrop of ancient India, *La Bayadère* narrates the poignant story of Nikiya, a sacred temple dancer, and Solor, a noble warrior bound by devotion yet torn apart by fate. The production was visually and emotionally rich with Ludwig Minkus’s evocative score, choreographed by



the legendary Marius Petipa and reimagined by Jaroslav Slavický. The set and costume designs by Marek Holly and Josef Jelínek further enhanced the grandeur of the performance.

Ballet is synonymous with grace and grandeur; this performance was no exception. The dazzling costumes, breathtaking choreography, and sheer skill of the dancers made for an unforgettable experience. The artist portraying Nikiya was phenomenal—one could watch her for hours and still be mesmerized. Solor was charming, exuding grace, precision, and poise, while the princess was equally captivating. The ballerinas dressed in white delivered a sequence that was simply jaw-dropping. Their stillness, at times, was pure poetry in motion, while the minimal yet aesthetically rich set design effortlessly transported us to another era.

However, while the dancing was undeniably exquisite, the storytelling fell short. The transitions between scenes felt rushed, leaving gaps that could have been filled with better narrative coherence. Without prior knowledge of the storyline, one might have struggled to follow key moments, such as the dream sequence or the sinister undertones of betrayal. The performance, unfortunately, came across as a collection of stunning dance pieces that did not seamlessly weave together into a compelling whole.

Another disruption came from late arrivals. It was disappointing that the performance was paused between acts to allow latecomers in, disrupting the experience for those who had arrived on time. Additionally, the fusion of Western and Indian outfits on stage felt disjointed, lacking a clear artistic rationale. If the intention was to merge different cultural aesthetics, it needed a more thoughtful execution.

Furthermore, the frequent regrouping of dancers often left us questioning whether an act had concluded. The numerous curtain calls throughout the 2-hour 30-minute performance were puzzling, as these are traditionally reserved for the final bow. The lead performers would present a duet, bow to the audience, then return shortly for another—perhaps allowing them a moment to catch their breath, but ultimately adding to the disjointed pacing of the show.

Despite these shortcomings, the classical ballet made for a visually stunning display of outstanding choreography and a testament to those on and off the stage's devotion, dedication, and talent. The orchestra, in particular, was the highlight of the evening, elevating the experience with its powerful and evocative performance.



Purva Grover is an author, journalist, and creative entrepreneur. She is the founder-editor of storiesoverart.com, a sanctuary for all who find solace, inspiration, and purpose in art. In a world that often overlooks the significance of art, she stands firm in her belief that it is essential, more so than anything else.





MY KINGDOM: A CELEBRATION OF SAUDI HERITAGE THROUGH FASHION, ART, AND INNOVATION

“Mamlakati” by DAUM transformed the essence of Saudi culture and history into wearable art, celebrating the Kingdom’s unique identity. In an exclusive event, Femi9 invited guests to embark on a journey through this year’s DAUM collection—where fashion, art, and technology seamlessly merged to narrate a captivating story under the theme Mamlakati (My Kingdom). The collection launch coincided with Saudi Foundation Day, paying tribute to the nation’s rich heritage and proud legacy.

The experience began at the entrance, where a dynamic laser show introduced the Mamlakati collection, setting the stage for an evening of creativity and discovery. Inside, the collection came to life in a curated art gallery, showcasing designs inspired by the heritage and modern spirit of three iconic Saudi cities:

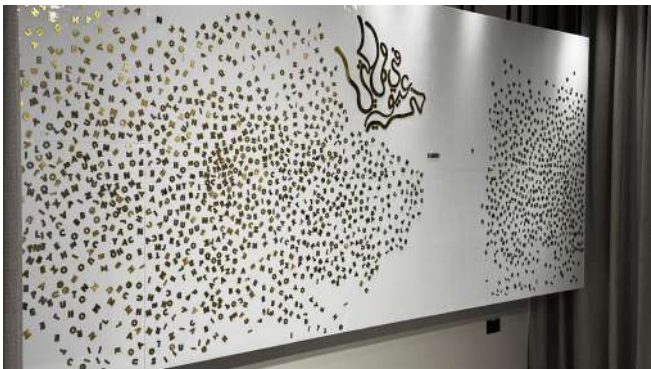
- Jeddah Capsule – Reflecting the city’s vibrant coastal energy through fluid silhouettes and dynamic movement.
- Diriyah Capsule – Embodying tradition with structured designs and timeless elegance.
- Al Ula Capsule – Capturing the beauty of nature with earthy tones and artistic textures.

At the heart of the event, artist Taim Mashat brought the collection’s inspiration to life through live artwork, expressing a deep passion for Saudi Arabia. A dedicated interview lounge hosted engaging conversations, while Saudi celebrities, influencers,

and fashion personalities graced the occasion—many adorned in pieces from the new collection, adding to the glamour of the reveal.

Guests also immersed themselves in a digital journey, exploring the landscapes and cultural influences behind the collection. Interactive experiences, including a magnetic board and a themed photo booth, allowed attendees to engage with the creative process and capture unforgettable moments.

The Mamlakati collection launch was more than just a fashion event—it was a celebration of heritage, innovation, and the ever-evolving spirit of Saudi Arabia.





RAS AL KHAIMAH'S SUWAIDI PEARLS, THE FIRST ARABIAN PEARL FARM IN THE WORLD

As the region's first cultured pearl farm and the only traditional pearl farm in the UAE, Suwaidi Pearls is a leading national institution in Ras Al Khaimah and the nation's only remaining pearl farm that provides locally sourced pearls to jewelers across the world.



Abdulla Rashed Al Suwaidi belongs to the esteemed Al Suwaidi family, whose history is deeply intertwined with the pearling era of the Gulf, tracing back to the 12th and 13th centuries under the Julfar dynasty. Pearling was not just an industry but an integral part of the culture and traditions of the Julfar villages, his family's ancestral homeland. The Al Suwaidi lineage has been connected to the jewel of the ocean for over 7,000 years, with generations dedicating their lives to the art of pearl diving. This legacy continued into the 20th century with Abdulla's grandfather, Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al Suwaidi, among the last pearl divers of the family's storied history. For centuries, countless diving families relied on pearling as their primary source of livelihood and wealth, shaping the identity and heritage of the Gulf region.

"I have a symbiotic relationship with pearls, and my pearls symbolize wisdom, and I believe this organic gem is the subject of many myths and legends. I narrate pearls as the mystical treasure of the earth and represent the purity, generosity, integrity, and loyalty of the people who have them. Therefore, the history and legacy of my ancestors and their intimate relationship with the pearls has inspired and made me who I am, whilst my high esteem for these oceanic gems has driven me to secure their heritage and future," said Abdulla Rashed Al Suwaidi.

Excerpts from an interview with Abdulla Rashed Al Suwaidi.

What makes the pearls from Ras Al Khaimah extraordinary compared to those from other parts of the world?

Our pearls are unique because they come from the first Arabian pearl farm in the world. For the first time in the Gulf's pearling industry, Arabian cultured pearls—known as Suwaidi Pearls—are being cultivated in the Gulf seas. This initiative bridges the past and the future, carrying forward the region's legacy from natural pearls to cultured pearls.

We began our cultured pearl journey in 2005 and have since cultivated some of the finest pearls

from the Arabian seas. Mastering the intricate techniques of pearl cultivation, I have personally overseen the growth of over 100,000 pearls on our farm in Al Rams, Ras Al Khaimah.

The Arabian pearl oyster is highly sensitive to disease and extreme weather conditions, making every pearl a true miracle. Unlike synthetic gemstones, cultured pearls require a delicate balance of natural conditions, expertise, and sustainable farming practices. Achieving high-grade pearls with exceptional luster demands knowledge, patience, and a long-term commitment to environmental responsibility.

Arabian pearls have historically been revered for their unparalleled beauty. Their reputation for perfection spans centuries, yet the industry experienced a pause in the late 1920s. In 2005, I took it upon myself to revive this lost heritage, reinstating the Arabian pearl industry to its rightful place. Our oysters share the same genetic traits as the legendary Arabian natural pearls, producing 13 exquisite colors—from radiant white to deep blue, along with shades of gold, pink, green, and more.

For discerning clients, owning a Suwaidi Pearl is not just about luxury—it's an investment in history, sustainability, and cultural preservation. I do not see my work as creating something new; rather, I am continuing the timeless legacy of my ancestors, ensuring that the story of Arabian pearls lives on for generations to come.

How have pearl cultivation techniques evolved in Ras Al Khaimah over the years?

Pearl cultivation is a meticulous process, shaped by the unique environmental conditions and the delicate nature of the oysters. The process can be broken down into six key steps:

1. **Breeding** – We breed natural oysters on the farm for 3 to 6 months.
2. **Preparation** – Adult oysters are carefully prepared for the seeding operation, which takes about 6 months.
3. **Seeding** – A nucleus is implanted into the oyster, initiating the pearl formation process.
4. **Post-Operation Monitoring** – The oysters



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are closely observed for 30 days to ensure successful adaptation.

5. **Growth & Nurturing** – Over the next year, the oysters develop nacre around the nucleus, forming the pearl.
6. **Harvesting** – After one year, the pearls are harvested.

In the past, pearl diving was a labor-intensive and uncertain endeavor. Divers would collect hundreds of thousands of oysters, yet only 1% would yield pearls. For every 100 oysters harvested, perhaps one small pearl would be found; for every 1,000 oysters, only about 10 pearls, with just one possibly achieving the ideal luster and size.

Today, our cultivation techniques have significantly improved these odds. When we seed 1,000 oysters, we achieve a 60% success rate, harvesting around 600 pearls of varying grades. These advancements have helped revive the Arabian pearl industry while preserving its historical essence.

Could you share a story that highlights the significance of pearls in the local community? What role do pearls play in Ras Al Khaimah's cultural identity and heritage?

Pearls have always been deeply intertwined with the identity and survival of the people of Al Rams in Ras Al Khaimah. The pearl divers and their families endured immense hardships, driven by faith and an unbreakable spirit.

In the past, divers would set out to sea for months at a time, braving marine hazards, illnesses, and encounters with dangerous sea creatures like jellyfish, sharks, barracudas, and sawfish. Their diet consisted of dates, coffee, fish, and oyster meat, sustaining them

through grueling expeditions. Despite these hardships, they remained hopeful, singing folklore songs and chanting as they navigated by the sun and the sea's depth.

On land, the women of Al Rams played an equally vital role. They managed households, cared for the elderly and children, and took on responsibilities left behind by the men. They prepared musk, saffron, and amber in anticipation of welcoming their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons home. Each evening, they gathered to sing songs of the sea, pearls, and the journeys of their loved ones, praying for their safe return.

The moment of homecoming was bittersweet—some never returned, but those who did brought stories of resilience and hope. As their boats approached the shore, their chants would echo in rhythm with the oars, marking the end of one voyage and the beginning of another.

This enduring legacy remains alive in the hearts of our people. For me, pearls are more than just gems; they symbolize wisdom, purity, and the resilience of our ancestors. Their story inspires me every day, and my commitment is to ensure that the heritage of Arabian pearls continues to thrive for future generations.

What sustainability measures are in place at your pearl farm to minimize environmental impact?

Sustainability is at the heart of our pearl farming practices, as the environment plays a crucial role in pearl growth. The lagoon in Al Rams benefits from fresh rainwater cascading down from the mountains, enriching the seawater with oxygen and enhancing oyster health. Cultured pearls are a natural product,







relying on the same biological processes as their wild counterparts. A clean and unpolluted environment is essential for healthy oysters and high-quality pearls.

Our oysters act as natural water filters, continuously purifying the surrounding waters. Each oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day, removing pollutants such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which contribute to marine pollution. This process improves water quality, benefiting the entire ecosystem.

Our farm is also deeply committed to marine conservation and education. Through visitor programs and outreach initiatives, we raise awareness about the importance of protecting our oceans. We aim to inspire people to become advocates for marine conservation, fostering a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

Additionally, oyster reefs play a vital role in coastal protection. They act as natural buffers against storm surges and erosion, helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change. By maintaining and restoring these reefs, we contribute to the resilience of coastal ecosystems.

In all our operations, we minimize the use of plastic and avoid harmful chemicals, opting for recyclable materials whenever possible. Our farm runs on solar power and green energy, reinforcing our commitment to sustainable and responsible pearl farming.

By prioritizing sustainability, we ensure that Arabian pearls remain not only a symbol of beauty and heritage but also a testament to our dedication to preserving the environment for future generations.

The Al Suwaidi family's history with pearls dates back to the 12th and 13th centuries and is deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of the Gulf. Al Suwaidi's ancestors, part of the Julfar dynasty, were renowned pearl divers, a legacy carried forward to the 20th century by his grandfather, Mohammed Bin Abdulla Al-Suwaidi. This rich heritage has been the foundation of Al Suwaidi's profound connection with pearls and his dedication to preserving this ancient tradition.

THEATRE OF POSSIBILITIES

World Stage Design is the only exhibition globally to showcase performance designs from individual designers. After successful shows in Toronto, Seoul, Cardiff, Taipei, and Calgary, the sixth edition of the event – WSD25 Sharjah, UAE, is its first time in an Arab country.



The Theatre Architecture Competition (TAC), one of the three competitions during World Stage Design (WSD) 2025, is open for entries from students and emerging architecture practitioners worldwide. ‘Theatre of Possibilities’ is the motto for this TAC issue, and the competition invites innovative ideas for a performance space that can maximize the use and value of a cultural site.

For this edition, the site is the courtyard of Bait Obaid Al Shamsi, a merchant’s home built in 1845, located in Sharjah, UAE. The deadline for applications is 14th April 2025. Submissions will be evaluated on how they encapsulate the site’s heritage and the region’s culture, incorporating sustainability, accessibility and inclusion, and its overall practicality. Three winning entries will receive cash prizes, and the best entries will be displayed at Bait Obaid Al Shamsi during WSD2025, from 18th – 25th October 2025, in Sharjah, UAE.

This year is the 12th edition of the competition organized by the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT) along with Sharjah Performing Arts Academy (SPAA) and the OISTAT Architecture Commission with support from Sharjah Art Foundation (SAF) and Sharjah Architecture Triennale.

“The venue of a performance also plays a key role in it. It is a part of the storytelling and contributes

to the overall experience for an audience. This competition encourages collaboration between established and emerging architects and theatre practitioners such as directors, designers, technicians, actors, dancers, and musicians. There is massive interest from international and local universities offering architecture programs, keen on getting students to participate in TAC. I am excited to see the ideas submitted for this competition,” said Jacqui George, Project Director, World Stage Design 2025.

Conducted quadrennially, WSD is the only exhibition globally to showcase performance designs from individual designers. After successful shows in Toronto, Seoul, Cardiff, Taipei, and Calgary, the sixth edition of the event – WSD25 Sharjah, UAE, is its first time in an Arab country. The event is co-produced by the Sharjah Performing Arts Academy (SPAA) and the International Organization of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT).

Sharjah Performing Arts Academy (SPAA) is the only dedicated performing arts academy in the Middle East that offers comprehensive performing and production arts education. SPAA trains students for various roles, from actors and dancers to stage managers and scenic designers, preparing them for success in the competitive global industry.



CONCERT

Proudly brought to you by BRAG and Live Nation Middle East in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, and Miral, creator of immersive destinations and experiences in Abu Dhabi, Club Social is back and better than ever. Infusing Etihad Park, Yas Island, with great vibes and pop icons from April 18 to 20, delivering a dynamic mix of pop genres, the festival promises something to captivate every generation. Beginning on a high note, The Kooks will light up the Club Social stage with their signature sound, followed by the legendary Northern Irish–Scottish group Snow Patrol. As one of the festival highlights, the iconic Usher will take the stage on the 19th, thrilling fans with his signature style and high–energy performance. Known for hits like ‘Yeah!’ and ‘DJ Got Us Fallin’ In Love,’ Usher is set to deliver an unforgettable show. Rounding out this epic lineup, British dance–pop star Raye takes the feel–good energy to a new level on day 3 alongside indie pop sensations London Grammar. Can’t pick just one day? Get the ultimate festival experience with the Weekend Pass and enjoy every moment of the Club Social magic.



MAGIC

Imagine stepping into a world where reality bends, the impossible becomes possible, and magic isn't just an illusion—it's an experience. This March (21–23) UAE audiences will witness Rob Lake, one of the world's most celebrated illusionists, make his grand return to Dubai World Trade Centre with DXB Live in strategic partnership with The Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), delivering a series of five mind-blowing performances. Dubbed "The World's Greatest Illusionist" by NBC, he has dazzled millions in Times Square and the Las Vegas Strip, leaving Hollywood, Atlantic City, and the Dubai Opera House in awe. He has captivated audiences across more than 60 countries. The Magic of Rob Lake promises to transport audiences into a realm of wonder, where physics-defying tricks and grand theatrical effects create moments of pure astonishment. Remarking on his upcoming performance in Dubai, Rob Lake shares, "I am thrilled to be back in Dubai after three years. This city is a beacon of innovation and creativity, making it the perfect place for my illusions to come to life. My show isn't just about illusions—it's about creating an immersive experience that transports the audience into a world of limitless possibilities. I am ready to astound Dubai."

stories over art

middle east & beyond

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Street art is visual art created in public locations for public visibility. Where in Dubai have you witnessed street art that you've loved and why? Send your responses to hello@storiesoverart.com with the subject line "Street and Arts."

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