



Bazaar

Harper's

ART

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COMPLIMENTARY COPY

ART DUBAI | DANA AWARTANI | SHARJAH BIENNIAL | KAMROOZ ARAM

RICH fabrications

*A visit to
**Khalid Al
Banna's** studio
in Sharjah has Suzy
Sikorski reveling in the
artist's orchestrated use of
colour and textured layerings
of objects and paint*

Photography by Rajesh Raghav





Khalid Al Banna
in his studio
surrounded by
his expressionistic
artworks



The artist's mixed media dolls and objects made with embroidered textiles add life and expression to a space



amidst the dirt, unpaved paths and rusted buildings deep into the farmlands of Sharjah, I uncovered Emirati artist Khalid Al Banna's oasis: a single room, glistening with colour, bookcases, sofas and objects arranged in careful precision. An avid collector of objects, Khalid greets me on his sofa, surrounded by a menagerie of porcelain miniatures, rusted key locks and standing dolls. Juxtaposed against him is a bookcase, with genres

ranging from history to interior design and

engineering, so neatly arranged in colour, size and subject. Khalid orchestrates his ability to build, design and Feng Shui not only this room, but also his carefully crafted artworks that hang on his studio walls. Colourful fabrics blend themselves into the entire space, challenging me to differentiate between what is art and that which is merely decoration.

Receiving his degree in Architectural Engineering at the UAE University in Al Ain, Khalid revolutionised his art practice by treating his work as if he were constructing a lived-in environment, paying attention not only to its aesthetics, but also in its basic foundations in dimension, space and form. Emancipating himself from traditional modernist techniques, he exhausts his practice with painting, sculpture, mixed media and etching to symbolise his eternal quest to recover memories through simple materials and techniques. Khalid does not have a preference for any medium; he looks at his artwork as a part of a larger search to establish connection with his Emirati roots, finding aspects from pre-oil years that are still present in the vibrant, commercial and old city centers.

While Khalid's studio entices through its rich and colourful palettes and bohemian assemblages, it is hard to believe that for many years he adorned his canvases with only black and white. Finding solitude and comfort in the process, Khalid sought to materialise the rapid, frenetic changes undergoing the UAE and the larger Arab world during the past 30 years, as it transformed after two Gulf wars, 9/11 and the Arab Spring. Meditative in process, yet alarmingly unsettling to the viewer, his works have

bold, impastoed cursive strokes and patches of obsessive scribble in black acrylic and ink along with a combination of cut-out and pasted shapes with jagged edges and supple curves. Khalid's Black and White series fully orchestrates his ability to build and design and find the versatility of a single material. He reconciles the frenzied nature of his mind with his carefully arranged patterns and experimentation in the texture, luminosity and sharpness of the ink medium.

Expanding on his paper collages to that of fabric collages, Khalid began to incorporate the vibrancy of his UAE landscape into his work, most notably by using the embroidered textiles sold in the old souqs. Observing the hodge-podge of mixed fabrics and textures, Khalid appreciates the dynamic social atmosphere of the UAE and challenges himself to find the organisational elements of the material. His fabric collages blend perfectly within his natural environment, as he uses textiles rich in turquoises and coral reds. Khalid shreds the textiles he buys in the Sharjah souqs and glues the pieces together in fragile arrangements against a circular shaped wooden base. The array of cut fabrics and their positions petrified by the glue create a psychedelic, swirling motion on the backdrop of the circular frame. "The circular shape symbolises a wheel doused in rainbow paints and spinning so fast it morphs into a single color," says the artist. "Just as life, I want to feel as if my circle never stops blending, and other people around me never stop moving." His larger circular works combine the glued fabrics with an overlay of a single line of black upholstered string, connected to form a larger shape whose bumpy terrain creates a three dimensionality to the surface. Khalid's fabric collages are designed in such a way that their form, colour and material feel as if they are moving parallel to the changing infrastructure and circuits of people around him.

While Khalid continues to experiment with simple materials and methods in the visual arts, a part of his thirst for interior design and architectural engineering has remained. Inspired by Zaha Hadid's intersection between painting and architecture, Khalid hopes to see his works materialise into a building. He clutches a thick, orange bound book, filled with pages of intricate small-scale, pasted collages he envisions as potential 3D shapes. Never letting go of his early passion to find the simplicity within the chaotic, we might just be seeing someday one of Khalid's delicate collages pop up in the UAE cityscape. ■



Khalid Al Banna reading in his studio and surrounded by his mixed media art