

WHAT'S **JEDDAH** UP[®]



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Lina Gazzaz: An Icon in the Saudi Art Movement

What's Up Jeddah is proud to interview the first Saudi artist to have her own private exhibit in Beirut (Lebanon) thus taking her first steps into the international art arena. We met Lina Gazzaz to take a closer look at her philosophies, her experience, and her dreams.

Since you're such a recognized artist, I think people would like to know a little more about how it all started, how did you get into art, was it a hobby?

It was a hobby, and since my father paints as well, that helped. Guess I got it from his genes. Back in his time, it was harder for him to express that to the fullest, so when I showed interest in art at a young age, he helped me nurture that.

My mother was gifted with poetry aside from being a painter as well, so I was raised in what you can consider an artistic household. When I completed high school, I went to the US to get my Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts. I came back and decided to pursue my artistic career as a professional artist.

Wasn't it hard for a Saudi female to take art as a profession? Or was it a smooth ride for you?

It wasn't smooth at all. At the beginning, I tried to learn more, either by teaching myself or getting tutors. I had a goal in mind, and I wanted to accomplish it. Unfortunately, what you can learn here are the basics, but you have to acquire more to develop yourself.

Saudis have good taste when it comes to classical art, but everyone should develop their senses when it comes to other art movements, like Impressionism, Expressionism, or even Abstract art. You see fine art is fine art, but it is all in the eyes of the beholder to process it and get moved by it. When I display a piece of art, I want to see the reaction on the observers and how they react to it; this is very important to an artist to hone his or her skills even more, and grow.

How did you get your first exposure?

My first exposure took place when I was studying at Meredith College, North Carolina in the US, at one of their art exhibitions. Back then, they picked one of my pieces to exhibit, after that I was contacted by many art curators from all around the US to display my work at their galleries. I displayed some of my art collection at the Lincoln Center in New York.

What specific artistic movements inspire or describe your work the most?

Most of my work falls under the Expressionism art movement.

Since your return to Saudi Arabia, how many collections have you finished?

Two main collections so far. The first was called "The Prophet Mohammed's - May peace be upon him - Mosque and his message"

and the second was "The Figures". Although there are some small collections in between, those two are the main ones, yet I like to experiment with every collection to see how far I can master it, I see that as a challenge.

Isn't there a dedicated gallery where people can come and enjoy your work of art?

Not at this stage, but I have always wanted to own a café, where people can gather, socialize, and enjoy art. This café won't be displaying only my work, I'd showcase every artists' work there, we could even create events where artist can come to display their work. Think of it as a sophisticated environment, where people who have taste for fine art can come and enjoy their time in such a delightful surrounding.

Any thoughts on how to improve the artistic scene in Saudi Arabia?

Organizing more events and encouraging people to attend would help a lot, since this will get people to enjoy and understand art better, plus it will get them to explore and sample different schools of art. Another thing would be arranging art exhibits that showcase notable icons of art, to enhance the artistic knowledge in Saudi Arabia.

Tell us more about your first art gallery in Jeddah?

In this gallery I narrate the aspects of Prophet Mohammed's - May peace be upon him - life and his message through the universal language of art, so that everyone can enjoy and relate to.

I have also designated 20% of my exhibit's revenue to charity, 5% will go to Madinah's orphans, 5% for cancer victims to pay for their medication, 5% for Palestinian orphans, and the last 5% will go to aid the hunger crisis in Africa.

What are your goals?

My main goal is to draw a new line in art, where other artists could one day benefit from my work and experience in developing their own art.