

# arts&life

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A man wearing a white thobe and ghutra is kneeling on a large, white canvas spread on the floor. He is holding a red-handled brush and painting a large, abstract, golden-brown pattern on the canvas. The background shows a studio setting with various art supplies and a large, abstract painting on the wall.

A place  
to create

With the support of the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan  
Emerging Artists Fellowship, 15 aspiring artists are  
inspiring each other to new imaginative heights **a108**



'One of the challenges here is that many girls don't want to become real artists, because they think their chances of getting a good marriage will be reduced. They are still trying to be perfect wives' — **May Rashed, one of the 15 artists chosen for the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Emerging Artists Fellowship**



Clockwise from top left, Hamdan Buti, Amna Al Maamari, Salama Nasib and Farah Al Qasimi are among 15 artists benefiting from new studios provided by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Emerging Artists Fellowship. They are also being mentored by professors from the Rhode Island School of Design. Mona Al-Marzooqi / The National



# Comfy outside comfy



'All of us locals wear and love it, so I thought I would have fun with it' — **Farah Al Qasimi, a photography teacher at Sharjah Women's College**, on the Tom Ford perfume she chose to sketch as part of an exercise during the fellowship programme



## Fifteen up-and-coming artists are branching out to find their creative voices together, thanks to facilities provided by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Emerging Artists Fellowship, **Jessica Hill** writes

Hamdan Al Shamsi's mother used to call him Qurtas (sheet of paper) because as a child, he went straight for the colouring books when she sent him to the grocery shop.

"When I was growing up, my friends liked football and car racing but I wasn't into all that. I always loved art," says Al Shamsi. "I fought it a lot, not to be an artist. But this is who I am."

Now, the 32-year-old organisation and development analyst from Al Ain is finally getting a chance to channel his creative energies. He has been chosen for the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Emerging Artists Fellowship (SEAF), a year-long programme aimed at supporting 15 young artists in the UAE.

The fellows, 14 of whom are Emirati, have just completed their first week-long module at a studio facility designed especially for them in the Qasr Al Hosn Visitors Centre, supported by art professors from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD).

### Art in all things Emirati

Art has been part of Emirati traditional culture for hundreds of years. Men had their handicrafts in making gargoor (fishing nets) and women made clothing items such as the talli (embroidery/braiding threads lined up to decorate clothing) and the abaya. But as Khulood Al Atiyat, the programme manager of the fellowship, explains: "Emiratis didn't consider themselves as artists until the first generation of established artists, in the 1970s and 1980s – Najat Makki and Abdul Qader Al Raes. Some of the fellows are inspired by those first artists, who went out of the norm to study art and make a career from it."

The programme is being run by the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation and one of its core priorities is supporting the next generation of artists.

"We asked young artists how we can support them to become more established," explains Al Atiyat. The lack of space came up, so we wanted to provide that. We relied on the RISD experts to recommend what tools and equipment the artists would need. So we spent days and nights trawling arts stores, hardware and furniture shops for plaster, canvas and paintbrushes. It's been a learning experience for us at the Foundation."

### Freedom to experiment

From now on, the studio will be made available at any time of the day for the artists. They also told the

Foundation they wanted to have the ability to create without having the pressure of a deadline and to have the freedom to experiment with their art. So RISD professors have been on hand to show them how to use new materials and get out of their habits of working in a particular medium.

"It's been great, because we haven't had to think about the purpose of producing work," Al Shamsi says. "Before, when I have been doing art I have been always thinking about the final piece but this week, we have been understanding the importance of the process."

Another thing the artists said they wanted was constructive criticism, which RISD professors have been dishing out. Walid Al Wawi is a Jordanian-Palestinian who had previously focused his skills on performance videos. "The teachers have been very critical, which is important, and the lectures have been

quite powerful. I am trying to move my focus to actual paper which is something I wasn't able to understand before, but now it's becoming a bit clearer."

### Building a community

The artists had also voiced concerns that they missed the sense of community they had felt when they were students.

"They felt a sort of sadness and isolation that the community didn't exist anymore," Al Atiyat explains. "Here, they have started to develop friendships. It's about creating a support system for each other."

Three of the artists, Al Anood Al Obaidly, Amna Al Maamari, and Salma Al Hashmi had been close friends when they were at Zayed University and were delighted to be reunited as fellows.

Al Hashmi is an abstract artist who also writes Arabic poetry. She says: "I missed my close mates, and right now I have them with me again. We all have our own style and we are really learning from each other. We are planning to come here at least five days a week from now on."

"After working on my final piece for university, I had an artist's block and I couldn't work on anything, until now. The good thing about this is it satisfies my own purposes, I'm not doing the art just to get a grade. We have been really lucky to have this opportunity to focus on creating a body of work."

### Career decisions

Another fellow, May Rashed, is a self-taught artist who quit her job in quality management after a trip to Venice in 2011.

"I took a leap of faith and decided to become a full-time artist. It's not easy, but it's better than being stuck in a job I feel miserable in. I am lucky to have savings to get me through the tough times. But it's worth it. I am more satisfied as I am doing what I enjoy. I have enjoyed leaving my comfort zone. I usually paint faces but right now, this is the first time I have created a video. The teachers really enjoyed my video, so I am pleased."

The next module for the fellows will be in February when two RISD faculty members will return. In May they will visit RISD and New York. In the meantime, the fellows will have monthly online video conferences with RISD faculty who will be available for mentoring, and the use of their new studio space to create their masterpieces.

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art zone