

Artist Biography - Khalid Al Banna

Khalid Al Banna was born in 1975 in Sharjah, where he currently lives and works. He is a contemporary Emirati artist who has staked his place in the local art scene since the early 90s, renowned now for using collage as a primary technique to explore subject matter pertinent to the history and rapid transformations of his home country.

Initially dabbling in drawings and sketches, he was a wunderkind of sorts. His passion for artmaking manifested at school, when his love for and dedication to improving his drawing technique caught the attention of his teachers who nominated him to partake in several drawing competitions. Later, and in the absence of formal Visual Arts education in the Emirates of the 1990s, Al Banna graduated with a BA in Architectural Engineering from UAE University in Al Ain where he learned the principals of dimension, form and space, which premise his practice both visually and structurally today. What he learned theoretically in the halls of higher education guided his explorations in the studio and propelled him to join extracurricular student clubs which led to early exposure and participation in student-organized exhibitions and initiatives. It is during these formative years that Al Banna's identity as an artist was crystalized, further refined by his bold explorations of diverse media and material and a hellbent attempt at emancipating his technique from the confines of the modernist approach.

By 1997, Al Banna joined the Emirates Fine Arts Society which served as a springboard for national recognition and institutional support. As a result, he participated early in his career in several prominent exhibitions in Abu Dhabi's Cultural Foundation (*Emirates in the eyes of its artists*, 1989) Sharjah International Arts Biennial's 4th Session (1999) and was one of the artists representing the UAE during Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany (2000) amongst many.

Al Banna's work is a reflection of his world view. Drawing primarily from elements of design, his canvas is the negative space and his art is life projected against it. His fascination with world-building, borrowed from the field of architecture, gave rise to his hallmark *Black and White* collages: a diaristic series of abstract paper works using ink and collage which foreground process. In these greyscale mosaics, the artist imposes color constraints to excavate the endless possibilities of two opposing elements and to execute delicately dynamic drawings that freeze-frame a moment in time. He weaves together vague depictions of his landscape, the past and the present as well as blurry scenes from world affairs as experienced through his status quo. In repeated layers, he rips his paper with his hands, establishing connection with the medium, each time at random angles, then reattaches it to the source, so as to

have each cut form a unique shape in endless permutations. This unpretentious haptic process strips the work of its inscribed meaning and turns it into raw matter, reengineered through color, shape and form.

After a decade of *Black and White* collages, he moved on to expanding the limits of his practice and perception. By 2009, after wandering into an old souq by his studio at Bait Al Shamsi, he stumbled upon an abundance of textile shops. The quaint storefronts, the fast-paced mercantile spirit and the muffled cacophony of overlapping cries for attention by the sellers, beckoned him into a new world – one in dizzying motion. Enter, his sculptural fabric collages which are both the medium and the message. These kaleidoscopic textile formations are nonlinear journeys through recent history — one that is deeply personal, conjuring up the hazy memory of his grandmother in hues of jovial pink, yellow and red, overlaid with golden threads and beads, — yet global, tapping into the shared histories of The Silk Road, when trade with neighboring countries in the UAE was at its onset. In his textile compositions, Al Banna addresses tradition as an agent in constant flux, using artifacts of a bygone period through a contemporary lens. Fabrics, crystals, beads and mirrors are worked and reworked in cathartic repetition, calling upon practices prevalent in Islamic ritual such as prayer and ablution, as well as the shapes of sacred geometry. He shreds the textiles and rearranges them onto his globular canvases of variant sizes, creating entire spheres of interlocking narratives, rooted in personal nostalgia, and binding the past, present and future.

Al Banna has participated in several prominent exhibitions, including *Al Burda Endowment Exhibition* at Manarat Al Sadiyat, Abu Dhabi (2019), *Portrait of a Nation*, Abu Dhabi Festival, (2016) which traveled to me Collectors Room Berlin / Olbricht Foundation, Berlin (2017) as well as Kennedy center, Washington DC (2010) in addition to group exhibitions in France and Austria. He took part in the Emirates Fine Arts Society's annual exhibitions since 1998 where, in 2006, he staged his first solo exhibition.

His works are held in the collections of the Sharjah Art Museum, Barjeel Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi Music & Art Foundation (ADMAF), UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Knowledge Development, the Culture Department of Sharjah and the UAE embassy in the USA, amongst many.