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ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

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KHALID AL-BANNA

After studying Architectural Engineering at Emirates University, **Khalid Al-Banna** sought informal training in painting and sculpting from established artists at the Emirates Fine Arts Society. When he completed an apprenticeship in etching with the late artist Yassir Dweik, Al-Banna began a career that married the methodical precision of engineering with the heuristic nature of multimedia art.

At first, he produced etchings – a laborious and structured process that required the kind of exactitude he had mastered as an architectural student. Etching also allowed Al-Banna to refine the ability to craft abstract patterns by carving intricate peaks and recesses. “The interweaving of positive and negative space led me to explore the balance between dark and light through another medium,” he says. For nearly a decade, between 2005–14, Al-Banna produced a body of work entitled *Black And White*. The works, composed of basic materials such as white paper and dark ink, were duo chromatic collages of varying sizes that form a haunting mood as much as a compelling image. Some pieces stretch nearly 10 metres; narrating interlaced symbolism across every inch and reaching a saturated completion that required the viewer to decipher as much as observe. The collages embody the artist’s unspoken reaction to the shifting political landscape of the Middle East, including the Gulf War, the events of 9/11 and the Arab Spring. In his newer works, Al-Banna draws on historical figures who have been caught up in war and conflict, in particular those who have been martyred and have sacrificed for the lives of others. Much like the positive and negative qualities of an etching, the collages left no room for grey. “Each work gave light and absorbed it in a rhythmic tension, paralleling the surge of both socio-political transition and individual evolution,” says Al-Banna.

In 2006, he received his first opportunity to exhibit as an individual artist at the Emirates Cultural Week in Berlin, Germany. The following year, Al-Banna sought to experiment with both technique and medium. His consequent body of work, aptly referred to as *Color*, consisted of Emirati fabric swatches layered as abstract arrangements. The pieces, almost sculptural, bore the cultural fingerprint

