



Princess Nouf

LAHD AND PROUD

Velvet sits down with Lahd Gallery owner, Princess Nouf, for an exclusive interview about her passion and commitment to women artists in the Middle East. By Chere Morris

Princess Nouf bint Bandar Al Saud is a smart woman. Before anyone else she understood women in the Muslim world were rarely encouraged to express themselves through visual media. Intimidated by male curators and lack of support women artists received, she decided to promote women artists through her own gallery, and so the Lahd Gallery was born. Its success was so phenomenal, it sparked the launch of a sister gallery in London, which recently celebrated its first year by showcasing an exhibition featuring work from artists around the Gulf. It's a wonderful opportunity for Londoners to experience first-hand the diversity of styles and voices of Middle Eastern artists, from the wry satire on

femininity seen in Shurooq Amin's work to the Pop Art-inspired prints by Hamad and Ali.

You're clearly passionate about art. What sparked that passion? As a child, I had always been fascinated by colours, nature and the outside world. Art was a very natural thing for me, among many other creative hobbies. I was always looking at ways to broaden my horizons. This ultimately led me to establish a contemporary Middle Eastern art gallery in Riyadh in 2005, the first of its kind, to promote contemporary art from the region as well giving emerging women artists a safe place to expose their work. Following its resounding success, I expanded the gallery to

London, where a second gallery was opened in October 2010.

Arab art used to be limited to calligraphy and pattern, due to rules prohibiting iconography. What changed? Nothing has really changed in my opinion, as you will see it in our future exhibitions of 2011. Art is in many respects, cultural. While calligraphy and patterns are characteristics of Arab art, they are, after all, just a means of expression. What contemporary art does is that it opens new doors of looking at something that is essentially the same — it represents feelings and emotions, as well as events in one's life. All of this is represented artistically and contemporary art offers one



the freedom to do it in a nonconventional way.

The Lahd Gallery has shown some daring works in the past. How do you determine what you select to show? The question here is not whether the works are daring or not, but rather, the vision of Lahd Gallery is to give all artists the opportunity to show their art, regardless of their background. By creating a level playing field, Lahd Gallery welcomes artists who have something to say and who are unafraid to question societal norms.

What do you think Middle Eastern artworks can teach the West? Each country has its own unique culture, and as such, maybe it is all

these differences that make them stand out from one another. I think that all different cultures can learn from each other, and the artists have their individual touches. Art is something that everybody can relate to. Middle Eastern artworks may be based more on feelings and personal issues and emotions with bright and fiery colours; the West just has a different way of expressing it. I think that contemporary art brings different cultures together as it is really an open book — anyone who has something to say can write in it. It offers one the freedom to be different.

You're an artist yourself. Why do you paint? How would you describe your style? In all

honesty, I paint to escape from the more serious, academic side of my life. It is a way for me to release my energies. To me, art is a gift, as I never studied painting. My style is always changing, just like my life.

Is Middle Eastern art changing? Where is it going in the future? I envisage Middle Eastern art to boom just like its economy because at the moment, it is still in an evolutionary process. There are lots of artistic talents in this part of the world, and when they eventually emerge onto the world stage, contemporary Middle Eastern art will be global.