

ART

# ART OF THE MOMENT

EMIRATI MULTI-DISCIPLINARY ARTIST LATIFA SAEED'S EXHIBITION *BLACK SILHOUETTE* IS A TESTAMENT TO HOW ART AND ARTISTS IN THE REGION HAVE EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS

BY ASHA IYER KUMAR

“I want the exhibition to be about my works, not me,” says Latifa Saeed, Emirati multi-disciplinary artist, to Valeria Ibraeva, art historian and curator, while planning the former’s groundbreaking exhibition titled *Black Silhouettes* that opened on June 16 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. These words reflect the earnest intentions of a grounded artist whose mission is to take her art beyond the realm of technique and materials, and create transformative human experiences set within cultural contexts.

At a time when contemporary art is still inaccessible and incomprehensible to the layman, Saeed’s artistic explo-

rations are creating waves among not only aficionados, but also the general population, as vetted by the response her exhibits are currently receiving at Almaty. Her philosophies and processes go beyond the mundane. They break down ephemeral concepts into tangible artistic experiences. It is this unique dimension that makes Saeed’s expressions wholesome and easily comprehensible to people to whom contemporary art is beyond their ken.

### Art Beyond Boundaries

A quick deconstruction of the multi-disciplinary art form is in order for the uninitiated. “It is an art form where the artist has a knowledge base in-

vested in a range of materials and disciplines. The artist processes these materials in diverse ways which also includes a lot of research,” explains Saeed.

An artist drawn to the science of art, she emphasises on the significance of connecting different disciplines and collaborating with other streams like science, engineering and mathematics to create processes that transform life. “Art has the power to share and engage with knowledge. The merging of facts and imagination has a powerful, transformative effect,” she avers. This, she insists, can also build bridges between people and nations, which is precisely what her current exhibition seeks to accomplish.

When art crosses boundaries and reaches the masses, it brings new perspectives to people, and reinforces the similarities between them. In the open-house interactions with the public at Almaty, Saeed demystified the misconceptions people had about her country, the United Arab Emirates. It was an opportunity for her to let the world know that her country is a flourishing ground for art and culture, a fact, she says, is not known to many outside the Arab world. “Most questions were about my native city, Dubai. People only knew it as a jungle of alu-



An artwork titled *Braided* (2013)





(Above) Latifa Saeed (centre) with Ammar Albreiki and curator Valeria Ibraeva; an artwork titled *Nomads* (2021)

minium and glass, and I had the opportunity to tell them what the real Dubai is.”

**Driven by Truth, Culture and Curiosity**

In Saeed’s view, art must speak the truth, regardless of whether it is good or bad. “Al Haqq,” she says, which means “the right thing.” And, in her words, “we are living in the best times in the UAE’s history. We have the best leaders; they have created a landscape where creativity thrives.”

Saeed is closely aligned with her immediate environment for inspiration, and she ventures to find themes that “explore the transience of land within an evolving country”. She is strongly influenced by her leanings to her homeland and its rapidly changing tapestry. Bridging the past and the present in a subtle-but-uplifting manner, she traces its transition from a nomadic landscape to a modern society that offers the best human experiences to the world. The materials she uses are often drawn from

anything that fills a domestic canvas to modern scientific tools with futuristic elements. In her work titled *Nomads*, she uses wool fringe with which the cloth of bedouin tents were woven, while in the kinetic sculpture *Functional System*, she has used mechanical gears to put together a crude machine that testifies her penchant for unique content and media.

“I am constantly curious about things. I am driven by the questions of ‘what’ and ‘how’ about everything that I witness around me,” she says. It is then no surprise that she uses ‘sand’ as a recurring motif in her works and makes it a backdrop to delineate the ‘dynamic nature of our planet’. For instance, the intricate work titled *The Sand Route*, currently on display in Almaty, is handcrafted from the sands of the desert that is representative of her native background.

“To me, sand represents both poetry and geology. I am intrigued by the question

– what is sand? It is the transformation of rocks over a billion years that creates beautiful and diverse landscapes,” says Saeed.

Furthermore, her works are immersive experiences that convert abstract concepts like time, space, memory, and evolution to material form. She explores what she sees around her, weaves her philosophies into them and creates three-dimensional art forms that aim to bring impact.

When asked about the quintessence of art, she succinctly says, “Art is an exploration of our internal and external worlds. It combines the intricacies of the internal world with the vastness of the universe.”

(The exhibition, titled *Black Silhouettes* running in Almaty till July 8, is supported by Dubai-based Scalco Group, which comprises tech venture company Scalco Technologies and Scalco Properties, as part of its commitment to fostering cultural, art, and community activities)

