

culture

Hassan Meer: The Mentor

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Hassan Meer was just 12 years old when he created his first oil painting. The feat made him immensely happy and helped him realise his attachment to art. "On that day I found a medium to express myself.

It ignited my passion to learn more about art, and led me to Omani Society for Fine Arts and later to Savannah College of Art and Design in the United States where I earned my Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Arts," said Hassan Meer, Oman's finest contemporary artist, while taking a trip down memory lane.

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Meer's artistic life began with paintings and drawing, but he turned to video and installation arts to express his ideas, during his studies. "My works were inspired by personal experience and childhood memories. I always wondered about the powerful effects of mysterious legends in controlling and directing the course of people's lives."

His tryst with photography began seven years ago. Since then he has been celebrated for series of photos about life in Oman during the 1960s and 70s. "I focus on conceptual photography. I get concepts when I interact with people, travel to different places, read articles, and watch television shows."

Though he made a mark in three different genres, Meer believes that art is quintessentially a language for communication. "Art is a medium through which I seek to discover the state of human mind and the contradiction he undergoes in the midst of cultural and civilisational conflicts. I attempt to link some of these elements and symbolic concepts among the various cultures."

Even as he exhorts young artists to re-interpret and experiment, Meer finds the state of art affairs in the country doesn't promote upcoming artists. "Art prospered in Oman in the early 70s, and between 2000 and 2008. It has been remaining stagnant for the last five years. Oman has plenty of art students but someone should give them proper guidance.

" Meer himself took the lead as a mentor early this year with an aim to reinvigorate the art scene. He aims to produce more than 20 good artists and help them showcase their skills all over the world, in next two years.

His action plan is simple. He directs the artists and gives them exercises.

He also advises them the importance of communication and networking with others. "I am happy with the progress of the mentoring programme. I want to see them organise shows in different parts of the world."

And Meer is confident of producing talented bunch of artists.

"Budoor Al Riyami, Issa Al Omfarji and Abdulrahim Al Hooti are the artists to look up to and I am sure that they will take Omani art to new heights."

He believes that Stal Gallery, which he set up in 2013 at Al Khuwair, is an ideal platform to groom the artists.

The gallery became a reality when Ahmed Al Serkal, who owns the UAE-based Al Serkal group,

approved Meer's proposal. "Al Serkal has a vision to support Omani culture through art and talented Omani artists. Stal is the name of the village near Wadi Bani Kharus in the Dakhiliyah Region where intellectuals used to gather.

So Stal provides the best location for creation, exhibition and engagement," said Meer, who is the Artistic Director of Stal Gallery. The new season will begin at Stal Gallery with a show in October. It will host a competition and show for upcoming artists in November.

HASSAN MEER'S RECENT EXHIBITIONS

Sharjah Calligraphy Biennale (Sharjah Museum, UAE)

View from Inside - Contemporary Arab Video, Photography and Mixed Media Art

Fotofest (Houston, Texas)

"...all silent but for the buzzing..." (Royal College of Art Galleries, Kensington, London)

Arab Contemporary Architecture, Culture and Identity (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark) 2013

Ikono On Air Festival (Berlin, Germany)

Sovereign Asian Art Prize Exhibition (Hong Kong)

25 years of Arab Creativity (Emirates Place, Abu Dhabi, UAE) 2012

25 years of Arab Creativity (Institute du Monde Arabe, Paris, France)

Arab Express (Mori Museum, Japan)

Work Marry Remember (AB Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland)

ACCOLADES: Sovereign Asian Art Prize for Top 30 Artists in Asia, Hong Kong, 2013

Grand Prize - National Day Competition, Oman, 2010

STAL GALLERY

Stal Gallery and Studio is a purpose designed visual arts studio and exhibition space in Al Khuwair. It aims to promote the creation, appreciation and engagement of visual arts in all media in Muscat and the surrounding region. Visit stalgallery.com, for details.

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