



SHE REVELS IN her new space - 1200 square metres of pure art bliss. Amel Makkawi has been dreaming of opening her own art gallery for years, and after a struggling journey her dream has finally been realised. ArtSawa (Arabic for Art Together) is a staggering former warehouse that dwarfs the bright colours and tall monuments that adorn its walls and floors. It is incomparable to anything that has been done in Dubai, and is meant to stand as a testament to the true vision of turning the city into the region's premier cultural hub. Makkawi, a true art aficionado and promoter of diversity, is the quintessential by-product of what Dubai aims to become. Poised, confident, and warm, she is opening her doors to the public in hopes of bringing people together through the power of ideas.

**How long have you been working towards the dream of having your own art gallery?**

The truth is it was not easy but I kept going and believing in it. It was a long journey but I am happy with the result.

**What were you involved in before founding this gallery?**

I was doing frescoes in Lebanon for a time, and involved in a French school here in Dubai. The kids and family were taking a lot of my time, but once I found the perfect space for my gallery, I was set. The truth is when my husband settled with his company, I felt that we were finally anchored here so I could finally set the course for this dream. I have spent my life being an expat, living in South America, Africa, Europe, and of course the Middle East.

**Why did you decide to open an art gallery in Dubai?**

With my education, we were always involved with the fine arts school. Since I was a teenager I have been exposed to art and continued to expose myself to the art world. Art is my pilgrimage. I have been in contact with a lot of artists and I like to be around them because it gives me a sort of oxygen. They are freethinking and always developing new concepts.

**Who will you be featuring here at ArtSawa?**

Initially we are featuring 13 artists who have believed in me and supported me. They are from all over the region and there will be much more to come. I'm always looking for excellent quality art and talent, not only the well-known in Dubai. I like introducing fresh blood, those artists who have not had the opportunity to really showcase their talents. My vision is to make you think and see a different point of view.

**You have lived in Dubai for almost a decade. How have you seen the art scene evolve and change?**



It has changed dramatically in the good sense. I got this feeling a few years ago when I wanted to open up my gallery, but I think Dubai was not ready for it at the time. A lot of things are changing here. I think that Dubai now has the vision to become the art centre of the region. People change, mentalities change, and Dubai is changing with it. I don't know if it is a real factor, but when people no longer have the feeling of being a temporary expat, your vision and concept of being an expat is completely different. When you are living somewhere and you know you have to leave in two or three years, you don't demand as much from your city. But when you get the opportunity to settle, your vision changes. Something is changing dramatically in this city because we no longer feel forced to live in transit.

**Why do you see Dubai developing as the centre of culture in the region?**

Unfortunately for the older countries they are losing a lot due to political and economic problems. The UAE in general is gaining an important reputation in promoting arts and culture. We have seen this happen in many civilisations when a country or city becomes wealthy, they seem to always attract thinkers. This place is like a magnet because Dubai is the light of the region.

**How do you feel about what Abu Dhabi is doing in the art world with the construction of world famous museums on Saadiyat Island?**

Personally I think it's great to have museums and galleries, but I would like to see a school of fine arts here in the UAE. Every country that became an art capital began with such institutions. I am not sure if it is in their plans, but I think it will complete the vision they have. I will always be an appreciator of art and will always support people opening their eyes, because I think the more you see the more you learn to appreciate.

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**What is your reaction?**

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