

BEYOND BORDERS

After Nyne meets ArtBAB Founder
Kaneka Subberwal

— **ArtBAB** (Art Bahrain Across Borders) fosters excellence in the visual arts through exhibitions and educational programmes that serve as catalysts for the future of Bahraini and Middle Eastern Art. For its third edition last year, ArtBAB hosted an eclectic list of worldwide participating galleries with a focus embracing Bahrain's cultural heritage as an intimate marketplace.

ArtBAB continues to expand every year, the third edition in 2018 having included an impressive line-up of 15 galleries and 13 independent artists from 11 countries. This year saw total sales increase by 38% over the previous year as the fair continues to grow and develop.

The event aims to reinforce Bahrain's position in the Gulf as a regional arts hub, inspiring entrepreneurship, art education and local skills development. The 2019 fair will take place from Wednesday 6th to Sunday 10th March 2019.

After Nyne are media partnering ArtBAB through the 2019 event. We went to meet Kaneka Subberwal, the founder of ArtBAB while she was in London for Bahrain Art Week to find out more about the latest edition of this international event.

Kaneka tell us how you came up with the idea for ArtBAB

I conducted an on-the-ground assessment over a period of eight years spent in Bahrain. I felt that the deep-rooted legacy, that translates into artisanal wealth which grows with each generation to form a community of talent, needed communication. I founded a platform that brought the global art world to Bahrain and took its artisanal wealth across borders.

How has your business background enabled you to bring skills to running ArtBAB?

One of the key features to being an entrepreneur is the willingness and ability to take a risk based on faith in the cause. You have move out of your comfort zone to unknown territory. Another factor



is the bottom line as very often we skirt from the basic premise which is in effect a starting point. An artist gives all he has to his creation that needs to be gratified, positioned, communicated. This is imperative for his growth and is directly proportional to the strengthening of a creative economy. In my view, the business of art is important and essential and a pre-knowledge of it is an advantage.

How would you describe the essence of ArtBAB to those who are not familiar with it?

Art Bahrain Across Borders is a step towards connecting the global artisanal community. It is the exchange of diverse tradition, cultural dialogue and education, traversing across lines and borders, joining the world by a thread of talent.

What can we expect from the 2019 edition of the fair?

After three successful editions, we will launch our 'artisans across borders' section at the fourth edition of ArtBAB through 'The Bahrain Room' which will have elements of traditional craft conversing with new age design. Our talks programme this year will bring together over 35 speakers from all around the world who will touch on topics from legacy to finance in art. Our Bahraini artists pavilion will see an 'emerging artists' section communicating with various forms of technique. And, finally, our galleries arena will bring together the latest collections from our previous exhibitors and welcome a host of new galleries

What does it mean to you to have the support of HRH Princess Sabeeka bint Ibrahim Al Khalifa?

In 2015, HRH Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim al Khalifa, Wife of the King Of Bahrain, lent her patronage to ArtBAB which gave it the foundation and integrity in its nascency. Needless to say it is an honour that we are proud of and continuously endeavour to be worth of. What makes this even more important is the fact that HRH is inclined to the arts herself and over the years has unilaterally supported the growth of the artists and the artisanal community, identifying its importance.

What makes ArtBAB different to other international art events?

One of the key emphasis of ArtBAB is providing equal opportunity to all artists. This is a guiding force that we have tried to accomplish over the years, both in our international artists programme and at the fair. To date, the artist's programme has visited the UK, Paris, India, Moscow and Singapore showcasing works from over 50 artists over a period of two years. This programme was launched at London's Victoria & Albert Museum in 2016.

The art fair on the other hand has consistently increased in artist participation and sales that go back to the artists strengthening their roots and growth. We are indeed grateful for the guiding principles that give ArtBab a niche identity of its own.

Who are key figures who are involved in the 2019 edition of the fair - artists, patrons and administrators?

Added to the patronage of HRH Princess Sabeeka Bint Ibrahim al Khalifa, we have a strategic partnership with Tamkeen who are Bahrain's largest funding agency, running across multiple sectors to foster growth and the strengthening of human resource capital. Their support, expertise and magnitude of experience solidifies our trajectory. Our artists and galleries for the year will be announced in January.

What do you feel Bahrain has to offer the art world above all other?

Artists worldwide are an important wealth that cannot be replaced. Bahrain has a history that dates back 5,000 years; art is a legacy that has been handed down generations. Therefore you will see that cultural identity and integrity run through the various form and techniques of the artists who today are growing in number. When you collate these people together, you get a niche community who are specific to their country and its heritage.