

Nauf Albendar

A touch of royalty

Nauf Albendar is a Saudi Arabian princess, an Imperial PhD graduate in clinical medicine, and the founder of Lahd Gallery in London. Known as H.H. Princess Nauf Bendar Al Saud, she, at the age of 20 in 2005, broke the royal tradition by not only working full time as an employed genetic researcher at the King Faisal Hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia but also single-handedly setting up a gallery, which was to become a focal point for women artists from the Gulf.

Behind every gallery is a passionate director. In the case of Lahd Gallery, its founder and the director, Prs. Nauf Albendar, has made it her mission to create a gallery that is both unique and special.

Founded in 2005 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Lahd Gallery represents emerging and established artists, bringing together some of the leading contemporary art works from the MENASA region (Middle East, North Africa and South Asia).

Originally set up as a focal point for women artists from the Gulf, the gallery soon became a well-known exhibition space on the contemporary art scene. In 2010, it moved to London and has, over the last 10 years, become the foremost gallery promoting exclusively contemporary MENASA art.

"There is some wonderful and beautiful affordable art available. In fact, I have seen more unique pieces that are affordable and from emerging or unknown artists than from the grand displays of works in museums, established galleries, and fairs," says Nauf. "It is a shame that MENASA art in particular became a marketing angle."

"As a result, people are often surprised by the prices of the artworks on display at Lahd. They are original, affordable, and accessible through our e-gallery."

Nauf's primary focus today is to exclusively promote the talents of the contemporary MENASA art by making it accessible to the public as well as giving women artists of the region a voice and a hub. Today, Lahd Gallery is considered as 'Pioneers in contemporary MENASA Art' and is involved with several charitable events and organisations including Bobby Moore Foundation, Not on our Watch, and Marie Curie.

"MENASA art is unique and booming and therefore deserves to be appreciated in all households and not as a bargaining tool. That is what I want to achieve."

Some of the talented artists on show at Lahd who have roots in the Middle East include Shukor Yahya, reputable for his distinctive approach to painting, Sadiq Toma, Noura Bouzo, and the world-renowned George H Lewis, the artist responsible for the highly anticipated portrait of Pippa Middleton.

The Lahd Gallery works on cutting edge ideas, none more so than the idea of selling pieces in its exhibit online, which Nauf sees as the future of the art buying world.

With a keen eye and great relationships with the artists her gallery represents, she believes that through providing a digital portal in which to buy art, and with a strong belief that you should buy the art you love, she is confident that this is the new way in which the art buying world should operate.

"Art online is definitely the next step," says Nauf, with the aim to becoming the art world's answer to Net-a-Porter. "Lahd has always been a pioneer in taking the next step forward in promoting MENASA art."

"Our mission since the beginnings in 2005, when local, contemporary art was unheard of



in the Gulf, was to make MENASA art affordable and accessible. Accessible being the key word for our online venture, and that is what we are trying to achieve with a shift to online art buying."

A firm believer in buying artwork that personally appeals more than other reasons, Nauf says: "I always advise a client if you don't 100 per cent love what you see, if it doesn't move you in some way and you can take your eyes off a piece, don't buy it."

"Forget about investments, or the portfolio of an artist, which makes me a terrible art dealer, but at least I know that when a client does buy a piece from Lahd he or she is in love. Now that to me is priceless."

In addition to her various ventures, Nauf has been featured in several outlets worldwide including MBC, Al Arabiya, Al Sharq Al Awsat, Korea Herald, The Brunei Times, Canvas Magazine, Modern Art Asia, Velvet, Arab News, The Guardian, and The Art Newspaper among others.

In 2011, she was shortlisted as the Woman of the Future in Arts, Media and Culture at the Women of the Future Awards. She has also staged popular exhibitions including Kuwaiti pop art, Sudanese paintings, Moroccan figures, Turkish art and sculpture, Arabic-Semitic calligraphy, and art installations of Greek/Arabic mystical objects.

Born in 1983 of Saudi and Tunisian parents in Paris, Nauf, with a BA in molecular genetics from King's College London and a PhD in clinical medicine from Imperial College has had publications on her topic of interest and considers herself an unconventional artist in her free time. Truly, a woman of many talents.



The Hearts Blossoming artwork by Saudi Arabian artist Anar Al-Olayan, whose work displays at Lahd Gallery, London