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BUILDING A 'DIVAN' FOR ART

Interview with founders of ARTDIVANO; Ms. Marion Labani and Ms. Afaf ZainAlAbedin

The concept of art lounges was developed recently to encourage people to enjoy art in a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, compared to conventional gallery spaces. Bringing the wholesome goodness of such lounges to the Kingdom is –ARTDIVANO. Named after the “divan“, envisioning the traditional Majlis and the way of storytelling in the Arab world, ARTDIVANO spreads the story of Art by and from the region, carrying the tradition from the past into the present and the future. The founders of this place of passion for art, Ms Marion Labani and Ms Afaf ZainAlAbedin finally sat down with Bahrain This Week, sharing with us the DIVAN concept and the art scenario of this region.

You have been in Bahrain since the last 12 years. How did you land up here?

M: I came here for love, got disappointed by love until love found me again. I include in this also the love for art and having found Afaf as my dear friend and soul mate.

How did you get to associate with art and Marion?

A: I got to know Marion first by taking art classes with her as my teacher in one on one sessions at her studio artlounge08 in Saar. Soon we became very good friends and as we both share the same passion for art, we are now business partners too for good. We both had this idea of introducing Middle Eastern Art to international audiences through an e-commerce based gallery platform & an art consultancy concept as well as establishing our very own Archival Pigment Ink (Giglee) Fine Art reproduction Boutique. Then there came a time when I was looking for a change in my professional life and we decided to make our dream come true with ARTDIVANO.

Marion, Can you describe your association with the National Museum of Bahrain?

M: As part of my ART lounge project, I got the opportunity to curate an exhibition at the Bahrain National Museum promoted by the Ministry of Culture Bahrain and the German Embassy. It was named ‘Bilateral Relations’, which had works of Bahraini and German Artists on display.

How would you describe life as a curator?

M: I am currently ARTDIVANO’s art consultant and art director, which includes curating our own shows



and developing art programs for exhibitions as well as for corporate and private clients. A life of self motivated, self organized and self scheduled work is exciting and very satisfactory; and on the contrary sometimes very stressful and full of risks and pressure, which you need to be prepared to take. I love it and am very grateful to be able to live such a life full of personal freedom and self responsibilities; even if it can sometimes be a burden as well. The coin always has two sides.

Afaf! Even though an artist by passion, you had taken up a career in banking. Why?

A: As it may happen for many, I first went to study accounting and auditing, working with many established corporations and banks. In those times people could never accept Art as serious profession. However I continued educating myself with the developments in art and made paintings to free myself from the world of numerals. I guess meeting Marion changed my life and this seems like the perfect time and platform to combine my experience as an auditor and zeal towards art to lead ARTDIVANO to the next level in the art scenario of Bahrain and the Middle East.

You began ARTDIVANO with a vision. How much do you think you were able to achieve till date?

A: Formed in 2014, ARTDIVANO have already completed one year. We are happy to have successfully met the targets that we scheduled for this tenure. We are officially launching ARTDIVANO and our “myARTDIVANO” instastore (an online shop via our Instagram account) on 30th of May 2015 at our gallery located at the Reem Center in Riffa. It will be a warm welcome and introduction to art lovers, art enthusiasts and artists to celebrate our achievements. Everyone interested is invited to join us for the reception starting at 4pm. You can follow us @ artdivano on Instagram to stay updated on our activities.

With many different art galleries in the Kingdom, how do you stand unique?

A: We are an art consultancy, an Archival Pigment Ink Fine Art Print Reproduction (Giglee) boutique, and are art dealers using e-commerce channels like our website and instastore / Instagram. In total we are no gallery but an unconventional art space which also specializes in delivering highly customized art programs for corporate and private

clients. Our uniqueness is our professional approach to the client’s requests and our attention to detail with our commitment to excellence and quality. We are aware of time sensitivity in projects and deliver our services in the most reliable fashion.

Could we know some details of the art work that you recently did for Double Tree Hilton Hotel, Qatar

M: I developed this art program in close association with the interior designer at the DTH, considering their concept of Topography. The artworks were created in water color for different room types in matching colors, such as earth colors, blues and orange. They depict the countryside beauty of Qatar/Bahrain and the Arabian Peninsula in an abstract modern sense.

Tell us about your online gallery?

A: As part of enhancing the concept of Art Lounge, we decided on developing the online gallery as one of our e-commerce strategies to take well known and upcoming Middle Eastern artistic talents international.

We are working towards creating a collection of artworks including paintings, in-house fine art print reproductions, calligraphy, lithography, etchings, sculptures as well as free style works that reflect our culture, history and traditions. Our house shall be hosting artworks and art related services under one roof, offering our clients a wide range of comprehensive and intense experiences on artworks from the region as well as international artworks.

With both of your experience in the art market of this region, where do you think artists of Bahrain stand?

M: The art scene in Bahrain is very vibrant and even bohemian at some point.

Many young artists have great ideas and blend well into modern and contemporary approaches of art in fields such as video and installation art. The traditional art fields such as paintings, especially calligraphy, are very well practiced by recognized as well as upcoming painters. Also the art of sculpting is starting to kick off with more artists approaching it and learning from the masters in their field but combining it with their very own way of expression. Art “made in Bahrain” is interesting, has a high quality and carries the potential to inspire.

