

# Art & Culture

art@timeoutbahrain.com

## Expanding artistic horizons

Through her passion for the local art scene, Artdivano co-founder Marion Labani has come up with three ways to take the Bahrain's creativity to the world. We find out more from this savvy businesswoman

Immediately upon meeting Artdivano co-founder Marion Labani, it's clear she knows what she's talking about when it comes to art. After 20 years of immersing herself in the international world of creativity, putting herself through art school in Germany, continuously painting, and founding Bahrain's very own ArtLounge in 2008, Marion has certainly seen a thing or two.

Interestingly, however, she started her career in the medical field and began life in the restrictive German Democratic Republic, where art and books were a precious commodity. But art was too important to her, as was travel. 'Even when I was a teenager sitting in this closed up country, where we couldn't travel anywhere, and it wasn't clear that we ever could... I had all these travel books from my parents and grandparents,' she explains. 'I saw all these pictures from Egypt and Morocco and these were the first places I travelled to when the wall first came down.'

It was 12 years ago that she first arrived on Bahrain's shores and, back then, she says, the island's artists were seriously underrepresented. That's when she decided to set up ArtLounge, a brand which was in the business of setting up exhibitions to promote the country's talents. 'I thought Bahrain was the right place for me to be at the time, for pursuing a life in art, and leaving the rest behind in my first part of life,' she tells us.

Soon, as the hotel industry in the country started to boom, she was contacted by companies looking for an expert on regional art to curate the properties' art programmes for guest rooms and public spaces. Her first client was Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea



Artdivano founders  
Marion and Afaf

& Spa, followed by Majestic Arjaan by Rotana and then, in the early stages, Amwaj Island's Art Rotana.

At the same time, Marion started offering painting lessons to the community. It was through this that she met her current business partner, Afaf Zainalabedin. 'She came to me at a time in her life when she wanted to go back to her art interests,' Marion says. 'She wanted to free herself from all these numbers and realism around her.'

Afaf, Marion explains, had been a banker but had also always been attracted by the arts. When the two of them finally met, their path was clear. Afaf left the bank and joined Marion to found Artdivano, their new three-tiered project which officially launched just last month.

The first part of Artdivano focuses on art consultancy for hotels and interior designers. As of May 30, however, they've also rolled out the second part of their business – the fine art reproduction studio. Marion

explains: 'We issue limited editions of fine art or photography in the highest print quality available. It is basically a museum quality print technique we are using.' This is done using their very own machines in their in-house workshop.

She's careful to explain that this does not mean 'copying', particularly as many of the originals have been designed exclusively for Artdivano. 'One of the finest Bahraini calligraphers, Abbas Yusuf, has been so kind that I've commissioned a series of beautiful calligraphy depicting verses by famous Arabian poets,' she explains. A portion of this collection was revealed at their launch ceremony last month but two more reveals are yet to come later in the year.

They've reproduced Abbas' works in different sizes. 'It's a 40x40 piece, calligraphy, black ink on fine art paper. We are producing limited editions in 30x30 and 20x20. We print with archival ink on acid-free fine art

paper, colour managed. Your goal is that your reproduction looks at least 90 percent the same as the original.'

But, when you can have the original, why reproduce it we ask? 'To find your way into art, even if you're interested, you're always hesitant to spend BD200 or BD300 to start with,' says Marion. 'We don't want to only serve collectors – there are too few in this world. Collectors who are soaking up everything which is prestigious, which is probably not even good but expensive.'

'We'd like to make art a little bit more affordable and open up works of established artists to the wider public.'

Which brings us to the third pillar of Artdivano – an online gallery. 'We're starting to develop a website that's worldwide accessible where people can buy these arts with a click and a credit card,' explains Marion. On the site, they'll have originals and fine art reproductions, as well as sculptures, and they want to start off by promoting Bahrain's artists.

What really intrigues us about Marion is her passion for this island's art landscape despite growing up in a very different setting. But it was here, in Bahrain, where she discovered her lifelong ambitions and made her dreams a reality.

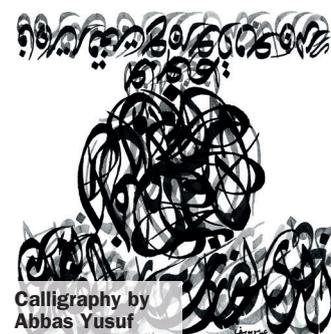
How, you ask? 'You need to want it otherwise it would not make sense,' she advises. 'There's a lot of risk involved but if you want to work on what you want to work on, you have to be persistent in what you want to achieve.'

Artdivano is based in Reem Centre, Riffa. Call 3921 2060.

### myPHOTObox

Marion spent three months developing a new product called myPHOTObox which makes home photos look stunning. All they require is for you to send in a photograph – whether it's of a new baby, graduation, wedding and so on – and they'll put it on a six-centimetre box using archival ink printing on high quality exhibition canvas.

It can then be displayed beautifully on the wall or perched on a coffee table or sideboard. For more information visit @artdivano on Instagram.



Calligraphy by  
Abbas Yusuf



myPHOTObox  
by Marion



IMAGES: D. ANANJI