

# stories over art

middle east & beyond

August 2024  
#2



ART & DESIGN | ARCHITECTURE | FASHION | INTERVIEWS | COMMENTARY | FILM | MUSIC | PERFORMANCE | PHOTOGRAPHY | FEATURES | REVIEWS

# EDITOR'S NOTE



Mona Biswarupa Mohanty / Sisters / UAE

This is only the second edition, and the love we're receiving for our work is overwhelming. At *stories over art*, we're driven by the thought that the lives of artists are challenging ones, and all it takes to encourage a creative soul to keep going is one tiny pat on the back, a heart on Instagram, or, in our case, words on the pages. Yes, we are aware of our limitations when bringing news and views from the world of art in the Middle East and beyond; at the same time, we are aware of and take pride in bringing your original content. As they say in 2024, accept our gratitude for all the likes, hits, downloads, and subscriptions.

This month, we bring you a unique theatrical production in Dubai, share our experience of the enlightening Raga Jazz in NYC, stir the debate on the value of recycled furniture, attend a jewelry course once again in Dubai, and delve deeper into the future of calligraphy in the era of digital writing tools.

If you want to write for us, connect with us. We're looking for diverse voices and fresh ideas that celebrate the richness and

diversity of the art world. You don't have to be an art historian or an art editor; we want to emerge as a space for more voices to share their experiences of what attending concerts, visiting exhibitions, or even coloring in an adult book means to them and more. These pages are yours; fill them up with.

P.S: In an era of ChatGPT and Paywalls, we're daring to create original content and offer it to our readers without a fee. Your support would go a long way. Subscribe to the portal, and meet us on socials as well.



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# TABLE OF CONTENT

MUSIC: RAGA JAZZ	4
FASHION: RETHINKING THE RETAIL LANDSCAPE	7
CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	8
THEATRE: REVIEW	12
DESIGN: COURSE	16
ART: RECYCLED	17
MUSIC: TUNING INTO DIVERSITY	18
DESIGN: ABSTRACT	21
SKETCHES: ON-LOCATION	22

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stories over art is a monthly magazine  
launched in July 2024



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# MUSIC: RAGA JAZZ

As Charu's fingers moved on the piano, the ambiance in the hall transformed into a serene spa as we sat in rapt attention and awe. Here's an artist who makes ragas relevant and relatable, and how?



The sense of calmness is almost surreal and eerie, too. Mostly, when you walk out of a concert, your energy levels are at another level, almost adrenaline-rushing. If you're driving back home, you instantly search (on Spotify and YouTube) for the numbers you've just heard and begin to sing along aloud and energetically. But this time around, 'attending a concert' has affected me differently, and how? I am in a beautiful, meditative state of mind.

It's a pinch-me-believe moment, as I am at Carnegie Hall, New York. How often do you get that chance now? For the uninitiated, Carnegie Hall opened its doors in 1891 and is located on the corner of 57th Street and Seventh Avenue. It is a national historic landmark that comprises three venues: Stern Auditorium / Perelman Stage, Zankel Hall, and Weill Recital Hall.

While that was enough to add to the charm of sitting in Weill Recital Hall, we also witnessed a performance by Charu Suri & Friends: The Art of Raga Jazz & American Songbook (April 2024). It may have been our first time, but it was Charu's fourth time at the historic venue! Charu, a multi-award-winning pianist and composer, is the first Indian jazz artist to return to the venue for the fourth time. She was joined by her talented friends — Max ZT, Hammered Dulcimer; Joe Lastie, Drums; J. Brunka, Double Bass; Ri Wolf, Vocals; Cassandra Kubinski, Vocalist; Danielle Erin Rhodes, Vocalist; Umer Piracha, Sufi Vocalist; and Kobi Arad, Soloist. And what they put together was an evening of what we'd like to call edutainment and humbleness for multiple reasons.

But I digress, back to the calmness I spoke about. As Charu's fingers moved on the piano, the ambiance in the hall transformed into a serene spa as we sat in rapt attention and awe. Did I close my eyes to soak in Charu's talent and renditions? Yes, I did. Here's an artist who makes ragas relevant and relatable, and how?

She presented her latest album, RAGS & RAGAS, uniquely with the troupe. Their little introductions between each performance were simple, and we were soon breathing in Cinnamon Morning, Aint' No Sunshine When She's Gone Backporch Blues, Burn it Down, and more. The evening also marked the world premiere of Charu's new song, Lately, co-produced with singer Cassandra Kubinski. Cassandra's energy and charm were almost infectious. Why Don't You Go Down to New Orleans, featuring Joe Lastie, made us want to leave behind our seats and break into a dance — mainly as Joe, a much loved senior artiste, spoke about the days of his early career. He took over the stage in the most unassuming stature, standing casually as if

performing for his family on Christmas Eve in the living room. No airs. No drama. The fun and content on his face were enigmatic. Umer Piracha, with his powerful vocals, transported us to another space. What was also beautiful to witness was how, while one of them performed, the others looked smitten with the talent on display.

After the concert, everyone who was at the concert was invited to join the talent on stage for an after-party at Trattoria Dell'Arte (right opposite the hall, a few minutes walk away), and I, for one (and others too), were not going to miss a chance to see the stars off stage; little did we know that they would leave us impressed with their after-party spirits as well.

As we waited for them to reach the after-party venue, my mind rushed to how the evening had piqued my interest in ragas — I'll confess, in our growing up years, we all wanted to be associated with only the 'so-called' cool stuff — especially when it came to music — hence ragas never featured on our playlists. Yes, a few of us Indians were fortunate to learn them at school or grew up in environments where it was part of our lives — but many of us did live under the faulty impression that ragas are for the old, for the boring, and labeled them as 'traditional' — but one evening of watching Charu in action, and all the presumptions seemed baseless. Sitting at the restaurant, I was googling (and curiously enough) about Bourbon Street Stroll (Raga Hemant), Jackson Square Waltz (Raga Kalyani), French Quarter (Charukesi raga), Bhairavi Blues (Raga Bhairavi), Raga No.1 (Bhimpalas/Kirwani) and Raga Kalyani. And

just like that, I knew my playlist had been enhanced by a notch at the Carnegie level, courtesy of Charu Suri & Friends.

When Charu walked into the after-party, I wanted to congratulate and thank her for this 'lesson' and share how excited I was to see her adorn an Indian outfit for the concert. As a fellow Indian, I am biased toward our fashion, of course. Before I could do that, she instead remarked on how she loved my choice of a 'desi' nosering, and from there on, the conversation flowed like we'd known one another for a while. She was humble enough to speak of her journey, one that encompasses taking ragas to one and all.

Charu has the Middle East on her mind so we will welcome her to the UAE soon. So, what do I know about ragas post-show? I know they calm me down as much as they lift my spirits. I know that ragas are now part of my playlist. Also, since we attended the post-concert party, we learned that serious, passionate music practitioners are humble and fun people to hang out with over a beverage. The world of ragas will keep shining brighter, for Charu and her talented associates are at work, and I can't wait to taste what they do next.



Purva Grover is an author, journalist, and creative entrepreneur. She is the founder-editor of *storiesoverart.com*, a sanctuary for all who find solace, inspiration, and purpose in art. In a world that often overlooks the significance of art, she stands firm in her belief that it is essential, more so than anything else.



## FASHION: RETHINKING THE RETAIL LANDSCAPE

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In Dubai, where everything is up for 'free' delivery and return, can one reverse the trend or tweak it to drive people back to the malls?

The pandemic, social media, influencers, and more have changed how we shop. E-commerce is our go-to preference, making it super easy to buy just about anything with a few clicks. I have to admit, I love the ease. But as with everything, there's a flip side to this convenience — return rates have skyrocketed. According to the National Retail Federation, the average return rate for online purchases is now 20.8%, almost double what it was in 2020.

In Dubai, this trend is even more pronounced. The lure of 'free' delivery and returns has made online shopping almost too tempting. It's easy to order multiple sizes or styles, knowing you can return what doesn't work without any extra cost. While this is great for convenience, it's causing problems. High return rates are making things tricky for retailers, who have to handle the logistics and costs of these returns. Plus, there are environmental concerns — more packaging waste and increased carbon emissions from all that shipping back and forth.

How can we shift this trend and get people excited about returning to stores and malls? For starters, malls in Dubai need to offer something you can't get online — unique, immersive shopping experiences. Think personalized styling sessions or exclusive in-store events that make shopping feel special again. High-end stores, smaller boutiques, and retail shops could offer the same luxury experience. We need to make in-store shopping more appealing. Offering exclusive discounts, loyalty points, or complimentary services for in-store purchases could draw people back to the malls.

Detailed product descriptions online would also be a big help. When people know precisely what they're getting, they're less likely to need to return it. High-quality



images, videos, and detailed descriptions can make a difference. And how amazing would it be if more retailers used virtual try-ons or augmented reality? Imagine seeing how clothes fit or what furniture looks like in your home before buying it.

Raising awareness is also vital. Many shoppers don't realize the impact of their returns — on the environment and the prices they pay — and educating customers about these hidden costs can encourage more mindful shopping.

While free returns are convenient, it's time to rethink this. A small fee for returns or offering store credit instead of cash refunds might make people think twice before ordering multiple items and sending most of them back. It's not about eliminating online shopping — it's about finding a balance. By making in-store shopping more enticing and online

shopping more mindful, we can reduce return rates and breathe new life into our malls here in Dubai.

So, let's start making more thoughtful shopping choices and support a more sustainable retail environment. After all, every little bit helps!

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The pandemic caused a spike in e-commerce shopping rates. However, customers are also returning a more significant portion of purchases, with 20.8% of goods now returned on average, according to the National Retail Federation — up 96% since 2020. In Dubai, where everything is up for 'free' delivery and return, can one reverse the trend or tweak it to drive people back to the malls? Leisha Naik, a Dubai-based stylist, contributes an exclusive on how to raise awareness and sensibilities.





# CALLIGRAPHY IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI might be capable of creating flawless calligraphy, but it will lack the spirit and serenity that a calligrapher imparts to their work. Simply put, consider a perfectly crafted artificial flower that matches a natural flower in every detail, yet it will never possess the natural delicacy of a real flower, which you can feel and that cannot be adequately described.

As a social phenomenon, calligraphy has undergone numerous transformations throughout human history. Initially, it served as a method of communication and information dissemination. Later, it was used for writing various books, followed by its use to create artistic works. With technological advancements, its application has diminished in each era. For example, after printing machines and computers were invented, writing books did not have the previous prosperity, and only specific books were written by calligraphers.

In recent years, the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought significant transformations in various fields. AI's impact on daily life is becoming increasingly evident. Nowadays, most people use their smartphones or laptops for daily writing; sometimes, they don't even type and send

voice messages. In my opinion, the word "handwritten" is of great importance. This is because writing should not be done for others but for ourselves and our mental well-being. Numerous studies have been conducted in this area, and psychologists emphasize the importance of writing. They believe writing is a tool for emotional release and stress the value of putting our thoughts on paper, even in moments of anger or when we have things we cannot express to others. Writing brings a more natural internal communication process and helps us feel closer to ourselves. The tranquility of this type of writing is vastly different from pressing laptop keys or tapping on a phone screen.

If I were to talk about the future of calligraphy in the age of AI, I would draw a parallel with the advent of printing machines, which led to a new movement

## stories over art

in art. In that era, many painters moved away from illustration: Jackson Pollock, for instance, conveyed the emotion of autumn on his canvas instead of painting a picture of it. Other artists of that era turned to abstract and conceptual works. In my view, calligraphy faces a similar fate in this era. AI might be capable of creating a flawless piece of calligraphy, but it will lack the spirit and serenity that a calligrapher imparts to their work. This unique experience is born from the artist's emotions, experiences, and all the moments and thoughts they have gone through. These feelings occur in the moment and cannot be replicated, which adds to their significance. Simply put, consider a perfectly crafted artificial flower that matches a natural flower in every detail, yet it will never possess the natural delicacy of a real flower, which you can feel and that cannot be adequately described.

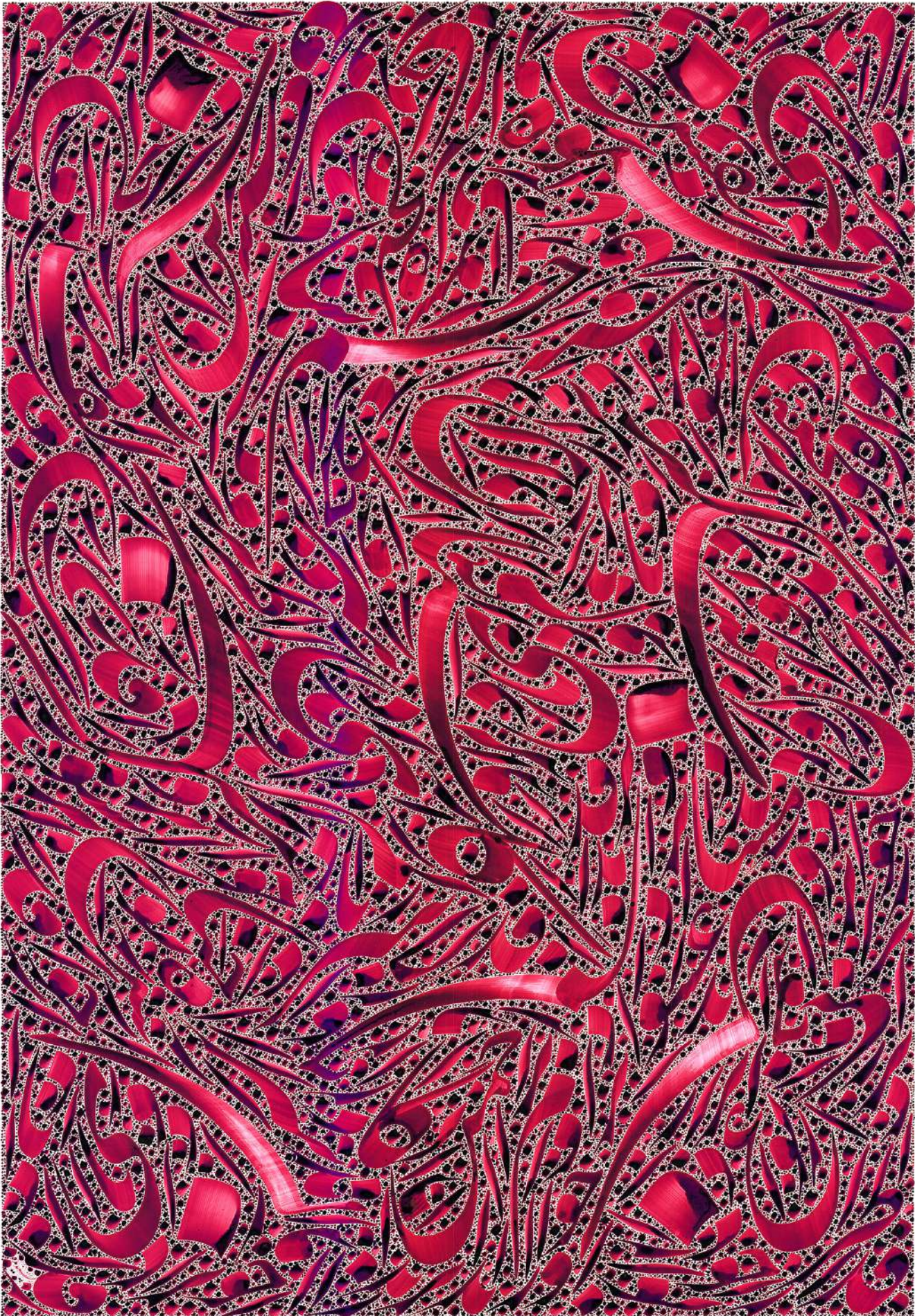
In such circumstances, we should not oppose technology but rather use it to advance artistic endeavors, as many digital artists and calligraphers do. We can create works using AI and blend them with

traditional calligraphy to produce remarkable pieces. Of course, this does not apply to all artists, as each has a unique approach. For instance, I currently prefer to create my works with traditional ink on paper, incorporating modern elements without digital tools, and use AI solely for acquiring artistic information, gallery updates, and current art conditions. AI acts as a consultant for me, which I go to whenever I encounter a problem or have a question in my mind that I don't know the answer to.

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Ali Pasandideh officially started his professional career at the age of 21. He has received many honors and awards for more than twenty-four years of professional activities. In 2005, he won first place in calligraphy in the Nastaliq script in Mashhad (Iran). Since 2007, he has been teaching at the Iran Calligraphers Association. Some of his works can currently be seen at Kutubna Cultural Center, Dubai. He contributes an exclusive piece on the future of calligraphy in the world of AI.







## THEATRE: REVIEW

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Cardboard Stories: What can we say if you missed the show in July 2024? We're sorry! Dubai, UAE, met up with a fully-clad man and a swimming trunks-clad man on a stage dotted with cardboard boxes, scrolls, and more and laughed unabashedly.



Because this theatrical production is fantastical and uncanny (in the good ol' silly, happy way), we were also tempted to share our experience uncannily. We love making lists, so we made a few after watching the show. Also, listicles work when convincing many readers to read, so here we are.

### List No.1. The roll call.

- Pierre Guillois & Olivier Martin-Salvan: creative minds behind the production.
- Presented by Complices Theatre, Outside The Box Events, Théâtre by QE2 & Alex Broun
- Actors: Sadiq Saboowala & Patrick Albrecht
- Director: Matthew T Corbett
- Prop Master: Lina Younes
- Production Manager: Kehkashan Anand
- Prop Master Assistant: Ketki Bhosale and Kehkashan Anand
- Stage Hands: Manasi Goyal, Saif Hiyasat and Uttaraa Siingh

### List No. 2. Our experience in #numbers.

On a hot, humid afternoon on July 6, 2024, we went to watch the play *The Ice Hole—A Cardboard Comedy*, Theatre by QE2, Queen Elizabeth 2, Port Rashid, Dubai, UAE. Described as a “cardboard comedy,” the play revolves around a man in a three-piece suit fishing in the plains of the Great North when an accidental encounter with a mermaid



changes his destiny. He embarks on an enigmatic and crazy journey narrated—with cardboard!

**Numbers we knew before we went for the show.**

- Number of sold-out shows: FOUR in Dubai in May 2024
- 2022: The 2022 Moliere Award
- 2023: Hit at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2023, where it received glowing 5-star reviews

**Numbers we cared for after we saw the show.**

- Minutes: 75 minutes duration (no intermission)
- The number of sold-out shows: FOUR in Dubai in May 2024 (we repeat, this is a big one for us, for this is Dubai, where theatre is still a growing industry, and sadly, the awareness and appreciation for this art form is proving to be a slow, long process; kudos to the sold-out shows!)
- Number of shows as they returned: TWO (July 5 and July 6; can only hope for a re-return)
- Number of HANDMADE cardboard

props used: 400 +

- We don't want to know the number of steps Patrick covers in each show. We barely manage to do 10,000 a day. His will put the fitness app to shame.
- The number of times we looked at our phones (during the show) was ZERO (rare, in 2024, look around!).
- Number of pieces in Sadiq's clothing: Three (a suit!)
- Number of pieces in Patrick's clothing: Two (pair of swimming trunks and a swimming cap)
- Number of characters Patrick plays: We lost count
- Number of laughs promised, rippled, recorded: We lost count

**List No. 3. What we advise.**

- Saturdays can be spent watching theatrical shows over brunches.
- Saturdays can be spent watching theatrical shows over brunches.
- ... on loop (repeat until we convince you)

**List No.4 What intrigued and amused us at the show?**

- The restless audience will be amused by

Patrick's appearance to keep changing the sign, denoting the number of minutes left for the show to begin. We'd go back to watch this 'act' too simply.

- Can you even have a script without a language? Yes. Here's one. It's a non-verbal script, which can be called a play in a universal language for ease. So, not just music but even theatre can transcend language barriers. Also, ICELANDIC is a language, but their version sounds better!
- The combination of gibberish meets language as we know it, showcased via words scribbled on the cardboard props, perfectly reflects the current times.
- Your kids will learn to say Please, Sorry, and more (even show the finger, ouch, no) as part of the show. All in favor of the value education class, just as they will practice their reading as the show progresses. Yes, they know the F word, but let's not garb it in the wrapping called fun; they can grow up and discover it later.
- Seagull, whale, sheep, dog who does what and how. Let Patrick teach the kids. Hail, snow, splat. Once again, let

them learn via the show. And yes, you revise alongside.

- You will constantly interact with the actors and participate in the dialogue, reading aloud the words that appear on cardboard props.
- The attention to detail will make the OCD in you jump off the seat. The 'Made in China' on the life vest, the Card Machine, the bagpipes and kilt, et al. Cardboard artistry gets a new meaning here.
- Sadiq can sing, dance, act, and flirt (with the audience!), all while sitting in one spot. And you don't want to miss him seeing do all of the above and more.
- How do you depict distance, echo, etc., on a stage? Learn it from them.
- There is a goat that poops on the stage, don't ask us why, but we're still giggling.
- The cutest love story ever can occur in the most unexpected places.
- And more. We can't reveal it all. Just buy the ticket when the show returns.

**List No. 5. Reasons you should watch this show or any theatrical show.**

- Theatre is a live performing act, and while you have a Netflix, Amazon, OSN, etc., subscription, it can never come close to this experience of no takes or re-runs!
- Visiting art galleries seems intimidating to a few of us, who think we must understand the strokes, period, etc. Theatre demands nothing of you. Just put your phones on silent; that is what they ask of you.

**List No. 6. Rhetorical questions we have for the team.**

- Can we have a copy of the script? What is on those pages? Gibberish has never looked more fun and challenging.
- Sadiq, who speaks ICELANDIC: Did you mess up a dialogue? Would anyone ever know?
- Patrick, what do you eat for breakfast, and where do you get that energy? There is not a second when this actor takes a breath in between! At one point, we saw the backstage staff wipe off the sweat on his face as he hopped and entertained!
- Coco-Cola. Can you ask them to sponsor the arts?
- Addendum to the point above: Coco-Cola. Was it just us, or was the last scene with Coca-Cola cans in the sea a remark on the trash humans are responsible for?



- Who is Richard? Sshh...go figure it out!

**List No. 7. Our takeaways.**

- We love Serena. A mermaid never looked as pretty as Patrick made it look. Oh, and Patrick looked terrific in a microskirt, too.
- A hall full of laughs is just what the doctor ordered.
- This is the most creative show you'll ever see in terms of props, concept, script, dialogue, interactivity, physical theatre, and more.

**List No. 8. Favourite prop.**

- Come on, don't make us do that now. We're divided between goat poop, beating heart no, we can't pick one.

**List No. 9. Words we'd use to describe this play.**

- Clever and sharp.
- Subtle messaging.
- Complex (for the actors)
- Inventive and funny.

Don't worry; this review is almost over! At some point in the show, when the actors realize you are losing patience, they hold up a sign saying just that (it's

almost nearing the end), and despite your kid getting cranky or you (adults have far limited, fading patience), you end up laughing and play along. Can it be tighter by a few minutes? Yes. Are we still in awe of what we witnessed? Yes. Will we return? Yes.

**A hashtag we thought we'd never use.**  
#cardboardislife

**List No.10. What shall we call this play?**

- Dumb charades
- Comedy
- Clowning
- Physical theatre
- Phenomenal.

All of the above.



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## DESIGN: COURSE



Timeless elegance and exquisite craftsmanship are the hallmarks of high jewelry. Each piece is a fine specimen of art crafted by skilled artisans who bring their expertise and experience to life. Making such masterpieces involves intricate processes and techniques, often taking more than ten artisans to complete a single piece. Making such amazing jewelry consists of a lot of behind-the-scenes work. L'École, School of Jewelry Arts, Dubai Design District (d3) Dubai, opens up this fascinating world with courses that cover everything from the history of jewelry and the world of gemstones to the art of making it.

I enrolled in the “Trying Jeweler’s Techniques” course, which gave me a taste of the skills needed to make high jewelry. Walking into L'École, I was warmly welcomed at the reception and immediately noticed a small, charming library filled with books about ornaments.

Dressed in a lab coat, I joined the workshop, where we got a quick history

lesson on the evolution and creation of fine jewelry. Learning about the many techniques involved and how these skills are passed down through generations was intriguing. I was amazed by the level of detail required, even on the back of each piece.

After the introductions, we headed to the workstations to see demonstrations. We then tried some of these techniques, gaining a tactile understanding of the jewelry-making process. Although we only scratched the surface with the basics, it was enough to open our eyes to the complexity and artistry involved.

By the end of the course, I had a certificate and the wax model I worked on. Before leaving, I checked out the in-house exhibition, Gold and Treasures: 3000 Years of Chinese Ornaments, which was the perfect end to an incredible experience.

I wasn't sure what to expect from the course, but I came out with a new appreciation for the art of high jewelry making.

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Masarratfatima Sulaimani is a UAE-based papercut artist. She is a visualizer and designer and the founder of Artyzen Design. Get social with her on Instagram @artyzendesign



## ART: RECYCLED

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You never know that an old tire or unwanted wood could become a future work of art

Recycling household and industrial waste and transforming it into works of art is a growing international trend. Glass, plastic, wood, and other waste that would otherwise end up in landfills or floating in the sea can, with creativity and imagination, be repurposed into unique pieces that create a focal point for the home but also help the environment.

Humans and various industries generate vast amounts of waste; hence, recycling is essential to protecting and preserving our planet. A fast-emerging artistic movement seeks to transform paper, cardboard, wood, glass, plastics, metals, rubber, and other items into works of art. The concept goes beyond the conventional recycling of materials by creating objects that often exceed the original product's economic, cultural, and social value.

This artistic expression is familiar: collages by Pablo Picasso or George Braque were created from old newspapers or magazines at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, several artists and designers are committed to sustainable art. German designer Gerhard Bär has made art from plastic rubbish for over 20 years. Martha Haversham, a multidisciplinary artist from London, creates images and collages from waste related to women's fashion. English artist Michelle Reader makes sculptures with mechanical elements recycled from toys and watches she collects from landfills, roadsides, and second-hand shops. In contrast, Belgian conceptual artist Wim Delvoye uses tires and sculpts figures inspired by nature.

At DulSCO Environment, we proudly create a broad and diverse range of recycled products for our New Old and Reloved (NOR) online market. NOR is one

of DulSCO Environment's many initiatives to innovate and educate on how we can all do our bit for the environment.

Of course, one doesn't need to be an artist, engineer, or inventor to do the basics of recycling art. Old picture frames can be used again or put in the recycling bin rather than thrown away, while unwanted paper and drawings within the frames can be used for notepads.

It's straightforward to throw things away without a second thought. However, most of the waste we generate can be reused or repurposed. These days, most residential communities and apartment buildings have recycling bins, yet many people simply put all their waste in one bag. One of the easiest, most effective ways that the public can help is to segregate their waste at source, and use the designated bins provided.



Amit Jadhav, Head of Fabrication and Automotive Workshops, DulSCO Environment, shares how, tucked away in their Dubai workshop, a dedicated team of upcyclers have transformed old tires, wood, coolant barrels, scrap metal, and car spare parts into 40 unique creations such as furniture, home accents, toolboxes, pet beds, BBQs, and games. He contributes an exclusive piece on how recycled art has become a significant movement within contemporary art, driven by growing environmental consciousness and a desire to address the global waste crisis.

# MUSIC: TUNING INTO DIVERSITY

The recently celebrated World Music Day with the theme, “Unite People in Joy and Peace,” reminds us why the international community must unite and celebrate the importance of music and its role in our society

One of the reasons music brings people together is its universal appeal, regardless of who we are or where we come from. As musicians, we recognize music as a shared language that unites people from diverse backgrounds.

Take a classical ensemble, for example. Here, individuals who may have never met each other and don't speak the same language can all recognize one of Beethoven's symphonies, and some may even be able to play it beautifully. This shared bond of playing and listening to music creates a sense of community and helps people feel part of something bigger than themselves.

Inclusivity resonates exceptionally well in the UAE, a nation known for its home to over 200 nationalities. World Music Day, celebrated on June 21, is about breaking down barriers and creating an inclusive environment. The slogan “Faites de la musique” (make music) invites everyone, regardless of skill level, to participate and share their love of music. The message of celebrating World Music Day — bringing people together — is already in our country, in the UAE's DNA.

The UAE government doesn't just talk about diversity and inclusivity; it puts these principles into action through various

supportive initiatives, and music and the arts are core to this. From talent programs like the ten-year cultural golden visa for musicians to generous funding for local music institutions, we're witnessing many beautiful initiatives that have significantly enhanced the work of those in the industry in this country.

Music has the power to unite people and provides a platform where we can break down existing barriers and empower individuals. This is particularly true for women musicians, historically underrepresented in classical music worldwide. In the US, for instance, only 15% of orchestra conductors are women. Even today, women musicians make up only one-third of the members of European orchestras. These statistics reflect female classical musicians' global challenges throughout their professional journeys.

One way to address this lack of representation is by creating platforms where women musicians from all walks of life can unite and experience the thrill and beauty of musical collaboration. This approach will enhance their visibility and career progression and provide a unique and enriching experience for the audience.

Firdaus Orchestra, which was created during Expo 2020 under the visionary





leadership of Her Excellency Reem Al Hashimy, is a testament to this; we've had the privilege of building a trailblazing all-female ensemble, bringing together 56 talented female musicians from 28 different nationalities. As the flagship orchestra of Expo 2020, we were fortunate enough to delight millions of visitors worldwide during that exhilarating event. Our diverse backgrounds allow us to draw inspiration from Western, Indian, and Arabic musical traditions in performances and crafting original scores. The female empowerment and solidarity atmosphere has given us an incredible drive to perfect our sound and present our work to the global audience.

The success of initiatives like the Firdaus Orchestra showcases the power of music to break down barriers. With numerous arts and culture initiatives in the pipeline, this is the start of a beautiful journey of artistic

exploration and growth in our country.

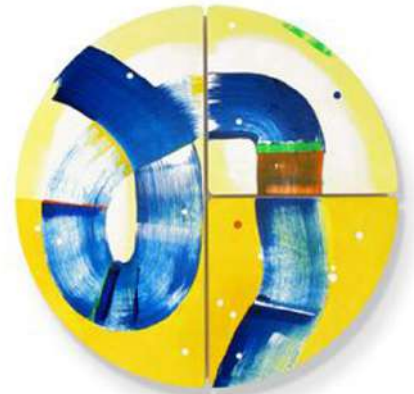
We look forward with hope and aspirations; together, we can continue cultivating a richer, more inclusive nation through the universal language of music. It's time to recognize and appreciate our progress and the journey ahead.

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Monica Woodman, Conductor of the Firdaus Orchestra, an initiative of Expo City Dubai, contributes an exclusive piece reflecting music's profound influence on our lives, bridging cultures and fostering a sense of belonging among diverse groups.

## DESIGN: ABSTRACT

To add to the joy, each painting by Kirsty Black is accompanied by its story



*Kirsty Black Studio has introduced Cannonball Ken and Cronies, a collection of unique, modular artworks bursting with life by New Zealand-based contemporary abstract artist Kirsty Black.*

“My aim as an artist is to engage the viewer and create a sense of escapade as if romping across the canvas. I achieve this using a mix of intuition, spontaneity, and considered mark-making. Painting, for me, is a medium that allows the imagination to run free. Storytelling through art creates a common bond and can be cathartic, joyful, and entertaining. My goal is to

invite viewers into a narrative landscape where they can explore, connect, and find their stories within the artwork,” said artist Kirsty Black.

To add to the joy, each painting is accompanied by its story. For example, *The Roller Disco Dames* was inspired by Abstract Expressionism; the piece highlights vibrant colors and dynamic gestures. The fluid brushstrokes and vivid color blocks invite viewers to explore the intricate interplay of hues and forms, making “*Roller Disco Dames*” an engaging addition to any art collection.

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Born in the UK, Kirsty Black grew up traveling extensively and living in various countries. Her experiences, curiosity, and vivid imagination inspire her work and a lifelong love of abstract art. Her studies at Otago University deepened her appreciation for early 20th-century European and Russian art movements, influencing her vision of abstract art. A finalist in multiple notable art awards, she paints from her studio on the coast of Maratetai, Auckland, New Zealand.

# SKETCHES: ON-LOCATION

Urban Sketchers Sharjah: Putting Sharjah on the world map and providing opportunities for everyone to exchange ideas and learn together

Urban Sketchers is a global community dedicated to the practice of on-location drawing. We share our love for the places where we live and travel. Founded in the USA in 2007, the organization now has chapters in 450 cities across over 70 countries.

Our community welcomes people from all professions and all skill levels. I am thrilled to lead this community in Sharjah and to have started a chapter here. The Dubai chapter is run by Manupriam Seth, and the same has been active for over six years.

In March 2024, we decided to start a chapter for sketchers in Sharjah. Initially, I was unsure of how to proceed, but after talking to various individuals, we began securing venues for our sketch sessions. We later partnered with the Sharjah Museum Authority, which graciously opened all their museums for us to visit and sketch.

We started our sketch walks with the Sharjah Architecture Triennial in March. Later, we had our sketch walks at Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, Sharjah Art Museum, World Art Dubai, Sharjah Maritime Museum, and recently, we went to the Sharjah Aquarium. We are planning more exciting sketch walks once the weather improves, including trips to Khorfakkan and Kalba. Our goal is to capture every corner of the city so that, over the years,

one can see the history of Sharjah through our sketches.

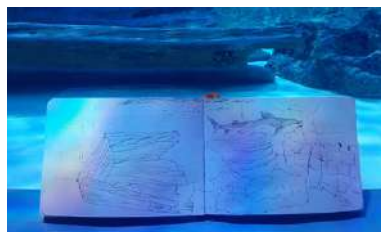
Our sketch walks are organized every other Sunday and last for two–three hours, showcasing amazing talents from everywhere. All walks are free of charge. We do not charge anyone for anything.

Since we began our activities in March 2024, we have organized nine successful sketch walks with up to 40 participants each. My goal is to put Sharjah on the world map and provide opportunities for everyone to exchange ideas and learn together.

You can follow our Instagram page to learn about our upcoming sketch walks @usksharjah



Shrutika Gosavi is an acclaimed artist and poet based in the UAE. She always aspired to become an artist and holds a Master’s degree in Fine Arts. She is a recipient of many international awards and fellowships. A full-time practicing visual artist, Shrutika has been living in Sharjah for over a decade. She contributes an exclusive on the work dedicated to building a community for artists and sketchers, which led her to start the Urban Sketchers Sharjah Chapter.







## CULTURE

Regarded as a beacon of excellence within the MENA region and beyond, the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX) 2024 will take place under the esteemed patronage of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Emirates Falconers' Club. The event, organized by Capital Events, the events management arm of ADNEC Group, in collaboration with the Emirates Falconers' Club, will take place from 31st August to 8th September 2024 at ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi. This year, ADIHEX will showcase its most diverse activities, featuring live performances, exciting competitions, and leading heritage and sports. The live performances arena is the centerpiece of ADIHEX; highlights include musical and heritage equestrian shows, horse training workshops, Arabian camel auctions, horseback archery demonstrations, and workshops on outdoor adventure skills. Additionally, visitors can embark on an educational journey exploring the rich heritage and unique characteristics of wildlife and Arabian falconry.





## CONCERT

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The World Tennis League (WTL) is thrilled to announce that legendary rock musician Bryan Adams will perform in the league's third season, promising an unforgettable musical experience for tennis fans and music lovers alike. Renowned for its unique blend of supercharged musical performances and elite tennis action, the WTL promises to return bigger and better as it builds upon the success of the previous seasons. Past editions featured stellar performances by global sensations such as Tiesto, DeadMau5, Wiz Kid, Armin Van Buuren, 50 Cent, and Ne-Yo, who mesmerized audiences and contributed to its success. Bryan Adams joins the fold of iconic headliners as he is set to electrify the crowd with a live performance on December 19, concluding the opening day of the WTL 2024 at the iconic Etihad Arena in Yas Island.

# stories over art

middle east & beyond

August 2024  
#2

Imagine our community with a street dedicated to creativity, similar to Dubai's Happiness Street. What name and location would you propose for this street? Let's brainstorm together! We're seeking input from artists, gallery owners, curators, and art enthusiasts in Dubai. Send your responses to [hello@storiesoverart.com](mailto:hello@storiesoverart.com) with the subject line "Street and Arts."

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