

PORTRAIT OF A PHOTOGRAPHER

MUHAMMAD YUSUF TALKS TO A SAUDI ARABIAN PHOTOGRAPHER WHO RECENTLY HOSTED AND TOOK PART IN A GROUP PHOTOGRAPHY EVENT IN DUBAI

Saudi national Rania A Razek who held a photography event in Dubai at the Gallery of Light, DUCTAC, Dubai, has a pleasant way of describing the lives of women photographers in her country. She smiles a lot; but sometimes one feels that the charm hides the obstacles that have been faced while trying to put photography on a firm footing in her country.

Born in St Louis, Missouri, USA, she began her freelance photography career soon after receiving her BA degree in Visual Media Communications from the American University in Washington DC. She also received her Master's degree in Film and Video Production there, after working in television production for the Arab Network of America (ANA) and the Middle East Broadcasting Channel (MBC).

Currently teaching at the Dar Al-Hekma College, a women's private college in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, she helped found the first women's photo club in Saudi Arabia and was also involved in developing the Photography Diploma programme at Dar Al-Hekma College and other institutions in Saudi Arabia. Currently, she is working on media projects with her students, creating videos to promote awareness of Middle East women's interests. They are broadcast on Al-Aan TV, Dubai.

"Some people believe that their life journey begins when they are born," she said. "But I believe it begins when their dreams become a reality." She says that she held a camera when she was a child — and that is when her journey in life began. "In hosting the Dubai show, which was preceded by two other exhibitions, the second of which was held at the Saudi Royal Embassy in Washington DC in July-August 2010, I was trying to prove that Saudi women can photograph and show their photographs all over the world," she said.

She can reel off stories on the mostly difficult and sometimes dangerous life she leads as a pho-



Rania A Razek

tographer. In early days, when she began teaching at Dar Al-Hekma, she says she "learned to be cautious when instructing my students regarding photography in the Kingdom. I would tell them to avoid taking pictures in restricted areas as they would in any other country. I advised students always to ask permission before they photographed out of respect for the country's culture and traditions. I also emphasised acquiring government authorisation letters to photograph certain sites in Saudi Arabia."

But the struggle paid off. "As the years passed," she noted, "it has become easier for Saudi women to take pictures publicly. People even began to pose for my students who were working on their photojournalism projects... Government authorisation letters have been granted to photograph certain sites, photogra-

the serene simplicity of Birth Of Light and the poised menace of Engulf — all pointed to an artist who knows what to look for and, more important, how to capture the character of what she sees.

"I shoot spontaneously, though sometimes it is planned," she says. "And whether the picture is done in black and white or is in colour, depends on the scene." She mainly uses a Nikon D80 or a Canon 5D model. Familiar both with the darkroom and the digital world, she says gleefully that her students, who sometimes have not even heard of a darkroom, are shocked at the manipulations that go within it. She is of the opinion that technology enhances than degrades photography. Among her inspirational models are photographers Ansel Adams, Peter Sanders and Jerry Velsmann.

She has shot her pictures in North Africa, Africa and Asia. "Each place has its uniqueness," she avers. "Morocco, for example, is colourful, vibrant and full of energy. The Middle East is rich in culture and history while North America is a high field of digital tech, with a fast moving pace."

She said that the main reason why she was showing in Dubai was because the emirate is a "huge melting pot of different nationalities." One gets global exposure here, according to her. "Jeddah, also a melting pot, does not have as many galleries as Dubai." As for photographing Dubai, she said that right now, her outlook on the city was only "touristy."

She is sanguine about the future of photography in Saudi Arabia. "It is being nourished and is developing," she said. "Especially the role of women, not only in photography but in the art world, is growing at a great pace. I see many more exhibitions occurring not only in photography, but also in the film world."

The Dar Al-Hekma is working on hosting a film competition where the Saudi Visual Media Awards will be given (www.saudi-film.org). Razek, you see, is not content with mastering only one field.

Photograph: Kamal Kassim



83RD ACADEMY AWARDS
PAGE 6

Published by
Taryam Omran and Abdullah Omran

Editor-in-Chief
Aysha Taryam

Features Editor
Nutan Sheriff

Design
Ansar Saleem

Chief Sub-Editor / Reporter
Raghib Hassan
Zafar Iqbal

Senior Sub-Editor / Reporter
Riaz Ali Khan

Sub-Editor / Reporter
Nabi Dad Khan
Zeinab Nasser

Special Features Writer
Muhammad Yusuf

Editorial
Tel: 06-5777999
Fax: 06-5777737
E-mail:
gulf_today@alkhaleej.ae

Marketing
Tel: 06-5777888
Fax: 06-5777677

Circulation
Tel: 06-5777444
Fax: 06-5777642

Dubai
Tel: 04-2625304

Abu Dhabi
Tel: 02-6426266

Al Ain
Tel: 03-7656796

Fujairah
Tel: 09-2241970

Ras Al Khaimah
Tel: 07-2334380

Representative Offices

India
The Times of India – Response
Department
Tel: 0091 22 2630338
Fax: 0091 22 2673145

Bahrain
Arab World – Advertising
& Information Centre
Tel: 00973 277794
Fax: 00973 254297

Pakistan
Tel: 0092 21 6634795
Fax: 0092 21 6634795

Muscat
Tel: 789 268

Paris
4577 0 220

London
3419 284

Printed and published by
Dar Al Khaleej
P.O. Box 30
Sharjah, United Arab Emirates