

Spiritual thread

Adilah Bundakji weaves magic with embroidery and calligraphy

By FATMA SALEM
Features Writer

Embroidery introduced Adilah Bundakji to the world of calligraphic art. The artist from Saudi Arabia took her first step into the world of art 20 years ago, designing dresses for children. Soon after, she shifted to designing interiors and furniture, but returned to the world of fashion, focusing on designs for women's apparel.

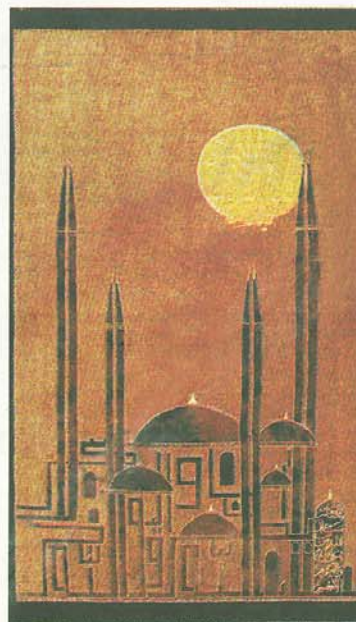
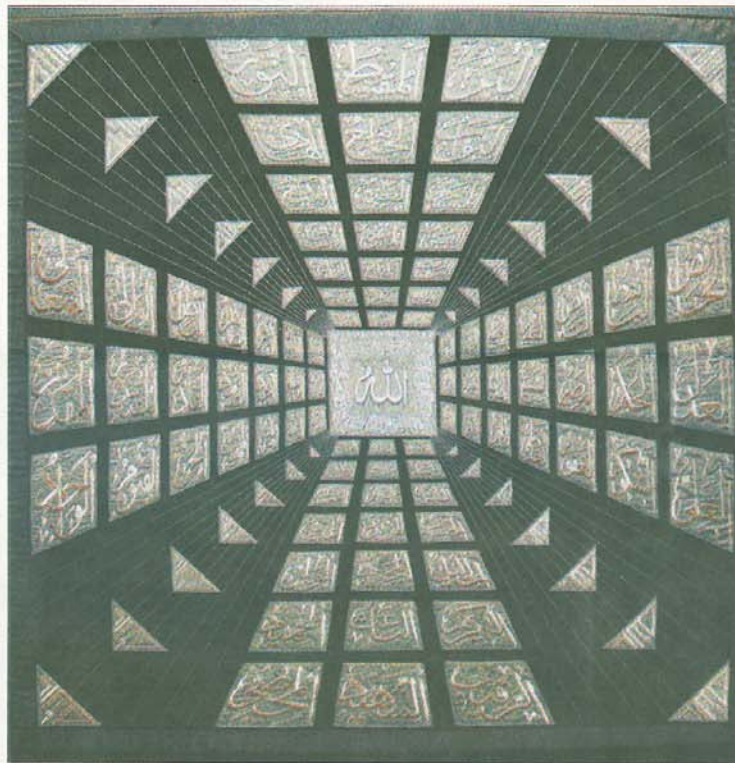
"Designing outfits for women required a lot of embroidery, especially in bridal gowns and abayas," Bundakji says. "As Ramadan was approaching, I thought of doing Ramadan gifts such as Kiswah, a fabric elegantly embroidered with Quranic verses. This became the source of my inspiration for calligraphic art and calligraphy on fabric became my passion."

Bundakji started off by making small pieces and the tremendous response she received encouraged her. Ever since, the teachings of Islam and verses in the Quran have been a perennial source of inspiration for her work. She believes there is no subject for art that can attract more attention than the verses of the Quran.

"I like the spiritual link between God and human beings and the Quran's verses have brought aspects of positive energy into my life," Bundakji says. "The verses bring happiness, protection, blessing, health and attract positive energy. Therefore, I attempt to incorporate all those qualities in my art. ... Embroidery is a way to translate them into an irresistible artistic form."

Bundakji had been creating calligraphic art on fabric for 12 years, but only for a select clientele. Her art has received great recognition over the years and she has been hired to make Ramadan gifts for the royal family of Saudi Arabia. But she is now working on making her art accessible to a wider section of art lovers.

Bundakji says art provides a window on various cultures. Her multicultural background has a bearing on her perspective.



"I was born in Johannesburg. My mother is South African and my father is from Saudi Arabia. I was educated in Pakistan, where my parents lived. As a result, I have been exposed to many cultures," she says. "The pieces I create are not defined by nationality — they are a combination of artistic influences from all over the world. For instance, my works have drawn upon the artistic traditions of Europe, Spain, Turkey and Kashmir."

Bundakji's thoughts are reflected in her choice of colours. "We all go through different moods. My mood influences my choice of colours. ... Each has an identity and meaning. For instance, orange represents vibrancy while red suggests 'hot', 'happy', 'fiery', 'active' and 'confident'. Earth colours indicate humility," she says. "All colours are beautiful. I love earth shades and the colours of autumn and spring."

Bundakji is wearing a black gown. Asked about that colour, she says: "Black is a master of colours, it suits all occasions and is a sign of elegance."

The artist doesn't consider herself to be any different because she is an artist. "I am down-to-earth and optimistic. As an artist, I present concepts in a simple way that can reach everyone. I am not the kind of person who would judge others."

Bundakji says her brother, Shukri, who admires her work, has been insisting that she share her art with more people as it would set up a dialogue with art lovers. "For the past 12 years, I haven't taken part in any exhibition. But Shukri convinced me to share my art with the world. I took his advice and held a show in Dubai last February where I displayed 20 calligraphic works with other artists."

Dubai fascinates Bundakji. "The city is progressive and developing fast. Whenever I plan to visit Dubai, I wonder how it is going to look. It is a city that welcomes all forms of art."

Faith Inspired, an exhibition of 26 pieces of calligraphic art by Adilah Bundakji, is on at the Mondo Art Gallery, Dubai, until July 25.

Adilah Bundakji's works are mostly inspired by ideas from Islam and the Quran. Clockwise from top: 'The Cube' presents verses in a geometric pattern; '99 Names', a fine piece in black and gold; 'Masjid', an intricately embroidered piece