

# A date with art

**T**HE MAJLIS ART Gallery in Bastakiya celebrates its 20th anniversary. Art lovers can head to this important landmark that has played a pivotal role in shaping the art sensibilities of the UAE for a visual feast. By **Suchitra Bajpai Chaudhary**. Photos by **Grace Paras**

In the bustling heart of Bastakiya that so wonderfully captures the mood of a bygone era stands the Majlis Art Gallery. Housed in a traditional wind tower home, the art gallery has been tirelessly honing and nurturing the artistic aspirations of the UAE's community for 20 years.

The result of a passionate art aficionado's commitment to create a haven of art in Dubai, Majlis has evolved as a mirror that consistently and brilliantly reflects the talent of a wide spectrum of artists. From the famous to the lesser-known, from international to local, the gallery has showcased endless riches of imagination and earned itself an enviable reputation in the process. It would be no exaggeration to say it has in many ways shaped the art movement in Dubai.

It was on November 2, 1989, that the beautiful wind tower house was officially inaugurated as the Majlis Art Gallery. This year the gallery completed 20 glorious years and to mark the occasion it has launched The Majlis Collection, a unique selection of signed limited edition prints. The collection represents artists who played an important role in the journey of Majlis. There are 20 works in the collection.

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Though I've been to the Majlis Art Gallery on many occasions in the past, the visit this time feels special even though everything is as picture-postcard-perfect as ever. If anything the patina of time lends it more charm. The courtyard, with its tall henna tree festooned with glass art works, its signature touch, still makes

me gasp. The compact, sun-brushed rooms all leading off from the central courtyard still hold delightful surprises and always make me lose track of time as I enter and exit them at will.

Much after you have visited all the rooms and taken in the artworks, you still linger. Finding a chair and settling in the balmy sunshine in the courtyard seems just the thing to do. The bustle and rush of the city outside needs to be held at bay for some time. Like a weary traveller savouring the calm of an oasis, the Majlis Art Gallery smoothes the frayed edges of your senses with its art as much as with its very presence.

In a city that is packed with art galleries, Majlis still retains a charm that is to be experienced rather than laboured to be defined.

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Dubai was still a modest trading hamlet when Alison Collins arrived 30 years ago from the UK with her husband, a veterinary doctor. She instantly fell in love with the energy and spirit of Bastakiya. She then joined a British company as a design consultant and her passion and deep

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