

ALISON COLLINS ON SEVEN THINGS THAT HAVE CHANGED IN THE ART SCENE IN THE LAST TWO DECADES

1. Modern communication has changed the business of art. No more snail mails and film negatives of art images that took us months to plan our exhibitions. Organising an art exhibition is now done in weeks rather than months.

2. The high standards of art that have evolved with the setting up of new art galleries in Dubai have made this an undoubtedly sophisticated market.

3. Art Education has become the norm rather than an exception. Most schools both private and public have incorporated art on their curricula.

4. The setting up of specific art schools for tertiary education with workshop and studio facilities, film studios and organising festivals to promote the arts throughout the community has given a tremendous impetus to the visual arts.

5. Due to economic prosperity more and more people are wealthy, which means they've disposable



Alison Collins... "Greater communication between various galleries is supportive to the art movement"

income and can invest in art pieces more than ever now. This has led to proliferation of galleries stimulating the market with contemporary talent and imagery and providing diverse environments for emerging and established artists to exhibit.

6. Greater and better communication between various galleries is strong and supportive to the

art movement. We see each other as partners in building the market rather than rivals. There is a strong drive to maintain ethics and give art in the Middle East respect.

7. The trend to adopt Dubai as a prime home has taken away its transitory nature and catapulted art much higher on the "need to have" agenda in most residences now.

love for art pushed her to consider the idea of setting up a gallery that would provide space for artists to display their talent. The city at the time didn't have much scope for such displays.

Recalling the glorious days of the mid-1970s, Collins says: "In those days the Maktoum bridge was just a one-lane road. Bur Dubai ended at Bastakiya, the tarmac road ended at Al Diyafa and I was working in Deira across the creek and found it convenient to live here and hop across to office on an *abra*."

To begin with, Majlis was her first home in Dubai. She would often invite people for a viewing of her personal collection of art works. Her three children grew up weaving in

and out of the courtyard home and frolicking through the narrow lanes of the Bastakiya. "Those days if you wanted something to happen, you had to initiate it yourself. I loved art and began to have informal get-togethers. I would send out handwritten invitations and ask people to bring in their friends. I had four to five exhibitions in a year in the middle room that was the majlis (a living room). That is how the gallery eventually got its name."

However, this wonderful stage of evolution was nipped in the bud when the authorities announced in the early 1980s that the Bastakiya district would be demolished. Collins was compelled to give up her home and move to

another neighbourhood. "I was sad, but had to move out. However, four months later, the landlord told me I could move back as the decision [for demolition] was revoked."

That set Collins thinking and she decided to ask her friend and art enthusiast, Minoti Shah, to lend a hand in setting up the Majlis Art Gallery as an LLC company which was finally inaugurated on November 2, 1989. Both partners wanted Majlis to be a casual meeting place for art lovers where they could enjoy displays and also sit and chat about trends and artists. Thus Collins brought art into the living rooms of Dubai. "We created an art gallery which was a pleasure for an art lover

