

Hassan Al-Jarrah: Introducing the third dimension to calligraphy

Free standing letter sculptures



Hassan Al-Jarrah's work introduces the third dimension to Arabic calligraphy. He is a master of calligraphy on wood – free standing pine wood cuts which resemble sculptures and exquisitely carved Quranic verses mounted on a velvet background with a wooden frame.

The calligraphy in wood could be described as 'calligraphic marquetry' - inlaid veneers fitted together to form a design or picture. But Al-Jarrah is convinced his creations go beyond marquetry.

"You can feel the work", he explained. "I try to stimulate the movement of the pen. The calligraphy is an art form and people who are not familiar with the Arabic language appreciate the aesthetic quality of the letters which describe the relationship between human beings and

mother earth. Both the wood and the people came from the earth."

Al-Jarrah hopes his unique work will make him an ambassador for Arab culture and art. "When people in the West think of Islam they usually associate it with terrorism. Most of them don't know about Islamic art and Arab art. I want to show the positive side of Arab culture".

For his work, Al-Jarrah uses pine easily available from hardware shops. He paints the calligraphic

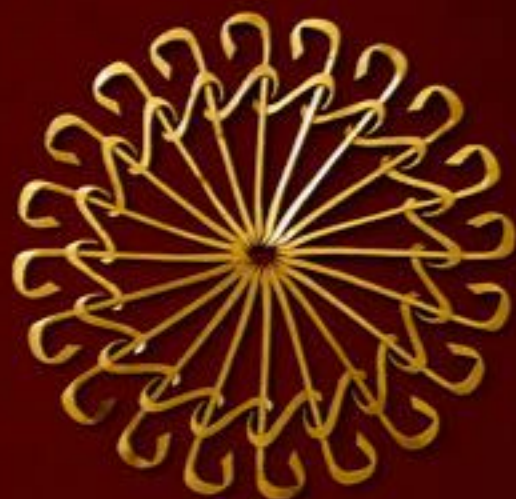
Supplication



Hassan Aljarrah



Oh Lord



verses on the wood, cuts the wood with a jacksaw, crafts it, gives the letters shape and finally prepares the background and frame. Some works take a few hours to complete, others days and others weeks. Everything is handmade. He works for the love of his craft and gives most of his creations away to friends as presents while he earns his living as a freelance cameraman.

Iraqi-born Hassan Al-Jarrah (58)

started working with wood when he was at school. He was very skilful at cutting wood with a jack saw and began making shapes and ornaments. At the age of 14 he enrolled in a marquetry course in Kadhimiya, a suburb of Baghdad and excelled even though he joined late. "The teacher said he would like to kiss the hands that made this work", he recalls nostalgically.

But Baghdad was not kind to the young artist. His dream to go to the Academy of Fine Arts in Baghdad was shattered as he was not a member of Saddam's Baath Party and was forced to leave Iraq during the 1980s when people of Iranian origin were expelled.

A life of exile in Iran, Syria, Germany and finally the UK followed. Wherever he went Al-Jarrah continued to study. In Syria he familiarised himself with the traditional Arabesque style using very small pieces of wood. In London he studied art, design, photography, IT and computer graphics at the North West



The Opening Passage of the Quran

Quranic verse



The truly honest man has no friends



College for five years and film making in Westminster College.

His first exhibition in London in 2003, 'Forgotten Faces' was a collection of photographs of the refugee camps on the Iran-Iraq border taken with a simple camera.

Yousif Nasser, proprietor of the ARK Gallery in West London where the exhibition was held remembers cutting the photographs into small pieces and enlarging each piece to come up with large, 70 – 80cm images.

"The world did not see much of the inhuman situation in which people were living. No one could take photographs on the Iran-Iraq border. It was Hassan's first exhibition in London and it was the ARK's first photo exhibition, Yousif recalls.

Al-Jarrah has participated in many group exhibitions in Iraq, Iran and Britain and has had several photography and marquetry exhibitions. In 2003 he exhibited his photography and marquetry in the 'Nostalgia to Mesopotamia

cafe-gallery in Sheffield. 'Interlock on Wood' was held in West London's Kufa Gallery in 2004. On the first anniversary of the toppling of Saddam's regime he held a photographic exhibition 'To the Other Sid' in an Islamic centre (Dar Al Islam) in London.

In 2008, he won first prize in the Hidden Talent exhibition in London and last year he participated in the Westminster Open Art Exhibition. His work is on display in Iran, Kuwait, the UAE, Lebanon and Germany. Last year he held a

calligraphy-marquetry workshop for women in the ARK Gallery.

Always eager to learn new skills and to educate himself, Al-Jarrah has started experimenting with the Kufic style a form of script consisting of straight lines and angles, often with elongated verticals and horizontals.

"This year, I hope to hold a fourth exhibition of calligraphic marquetry. I have made many more pieces since my last exhibition", Al-Jarrah said.

The shortest passage in the Quran

