

# ARTIST OF THE MONTH

 **Manal Deeb**



Manal Deeb embraces the belief that everybody is born with a specific interest. It's no wonder then that she began to develop an interest in painting and art

during her school days in Ramallah where she used to sketch and draw figures and characters on paper and walls.

Manal moved to the United States and got married at the age of 18. This radical change allowed her to break free of societal expectations that encourage females to study only medicine or engineering. Despite the discouraging vibes from her family in Palestine, she pursued the study of studio arts and then acquired a BA in the psychology of art from George Mason University in Virginia.

However, moving to a different country and starting a new life of passion for the arts was not an easy step. It helped Manal realise the meaning and benefit of pursuing art. "Art has always been a

tool for expression and self-healing [...] So one could say that my passion for art was transformed into reality when I started living in the United States. Art, at that time, gave me the feeling of belonging and a sense of being at home away from home (living in the diaspora)."

Manal's choice to study the psychology of art was a way to respond to her realisation that "Palestinians, in general, suffer from psychological depression due to their search for identity and belonging." The use of media such as art and music helped Manal, and she believes it could help her fellow Palestinians overcome painful realities and memories. It's also a useful tool for resistance and perseverance because it helps to further develop the Palestinian art form and create a general understanding of the Palestinian struggle.

It was after her graduation that her artwork started to get some attention.

This eventually led to solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States, specifically in New York, Illinois, Washington, DC, Texas, Boston, and California. Manal's educational interests did not stop there, though. She went on to earn an MA in art education from George Mason University.

Her artwork ranges from paintings to digital art to posters and book covers. She was inspired by Salvador Dali and his surrealist works in pursuing dream-like images that unlock the subconscious potential and fantasies. She continues to explore her childhood memories of growing up in Palestine in order to create an artistic identity. She likes to use images of her face and those of Quran verses painted in expressive Arabic calligraphy. Palestinian poetry and poetic expressions greatly influence her artistic style and serve as a distinguishing feature of her artwork.

Manal regrets her failed attempts to exhibit her work in Palestine and the Arab world. Although some articles on her artwork have been published in Arabic journals and magazines, she feels that the galleries in the Arab world emphasise the sales potential of artwork more than its originality and inspired messages. Nevertheless, she still hopes to have the chance to contribute one day to building her Palestinian society.

*Based on an interview by Ahmad Damen.*

