

QUIVER VESSEL BY
ANJALI SRINIVASAN



LOCAL CREATIVITY

ABWAB

RAWAN KASHKOUSH,
HEAD OF PROGRAMMING
AT DUBAI DESIGN WEEK
ON THE MENASA-
FOCUSED EXHIBITION

So what will we see at this year's Abwab exhibition?

This year, it's a showcase of ready-made objects instead of interactive installations – and they are all on sale. We witnessed an urgency to accommodate the growing number of product designers who want to show people what they've been cooking up – there simply aren't enough concept or design stores to host regional products.

Who is taking part?

We have 15 countries represented by 46 pieces.

How were they chosen?

We piloted a peer-selection process called "designer dominoes", whereby if you want your work to be considered for Abwab, you are required to nominate another designer to submit. This exhibition is about empowering a community and knowing you might not be where you are if it wasn't for the help of others. We reached a shocking number of designers, losing count after 250. What this taught me is that we have more work to do to make sure those people are being seen and heard.



SILENT CALL WHIRLS INTO ACTION

What is the focus?

Materials. Once designers were mainly focused on showcasing cultural nuance, but their interest has turned to new materials and production techniques, whether that's the silicone dipped in gold leaf by Anjali Srinivasan, recycled rubber pulled to form carpet thread by Sara Ouhaddou or plastic strips melted and stretched to form transparent surfaces by Soukaina al Idrissi, there is a host of new ideas in this area on display.

AN INSPIRED INSTALLATION

SILENT CALL



KHALID SHAFAR,
DESIGNER OF THE
STUNNING GLASS
SCULPTURE,
EXPLAINS IT ALL

"The five daily prayers are among the most important obligations of the Islamic faith, but today's busy world poses a challenge to worship at times determined according to the sun. Software-based 'azan clocks' help travellers keep track, and this led to the idea of programming a sculpture to silently remind worshippers of prayer times using light effects and motion.

"It features stylised domes of five iconic mosques from the UAE, Russia, Malaysia, Germany and Denmark, all transformed into silhouettes of a chandelier's crystals. It may be uniquely preset to move according to its collector's time zone and schedule.

"Silent Call puts the audience in the experience rather than it being a static complement to the environment. It holds the viewer's attention as different performances are expected at different points of time."

LOCAL BRANDS

DOWNTOWN DESIGN

WE SPEAK TO RUE KOTHARI ABOUT WHICH LOCAL BRANDS ARE BRINGING THE BIG IDEAS TO THIS YEAR'S EVENT

SO, WHO WILL BE EXHIBITING THEIR DESIGNS THIS YEAR?

We're excited to be presenting 11 regional design brands at Downtown Design this year, coming from Saudi and Lebanon, to Bahrain and the UAE. They all demonstrate the immense potential of our own homegrown design industry. For many of these young designers, this platform is an opportunity to engage with a commercial audience and really test how the market responds to what they do. It's a great way to learn and develop, and ultimately we hope to lay the foundations for these designers to become the first "Made in the UAE" design brands.

HOW MANY ARE COMING?

We've doubled in size from last year so there are 150 brands, of which 70 are new. Today, the most successful brands are the ones that have adapted to the tastes of today's consumers, so it's less about luxury and more about original, high quality pieces that reflect the lifestyles of the multicultural people that live in the region.

HOW DO BRANDS USE THIS PLATFORM TO GROW AND GET NOTICED?

Downtown Design has proven to be a really effective platform for connecting brands to the region's leading buyers. We work with international and local brands to promote and engage them with the right audience, and help elevate their profile and ensure they have multiple opportunities to network and do business.



WHAT CAN PEOPLE EXPECT THIS YEAR?

We have the Middle East's largest curation of high-end design brands, and this year they will be presented in a new venue master-planned by local architects LSD. We'll be located on the d3 Waterfront, with a large scale garden installation designed by Desert Ink, with our registration area concept created by design firm Pallavi Dean Interiors. The Lighthouse will bring a bespoke pop-up created especially for the event, which will add another unique visitor experience.