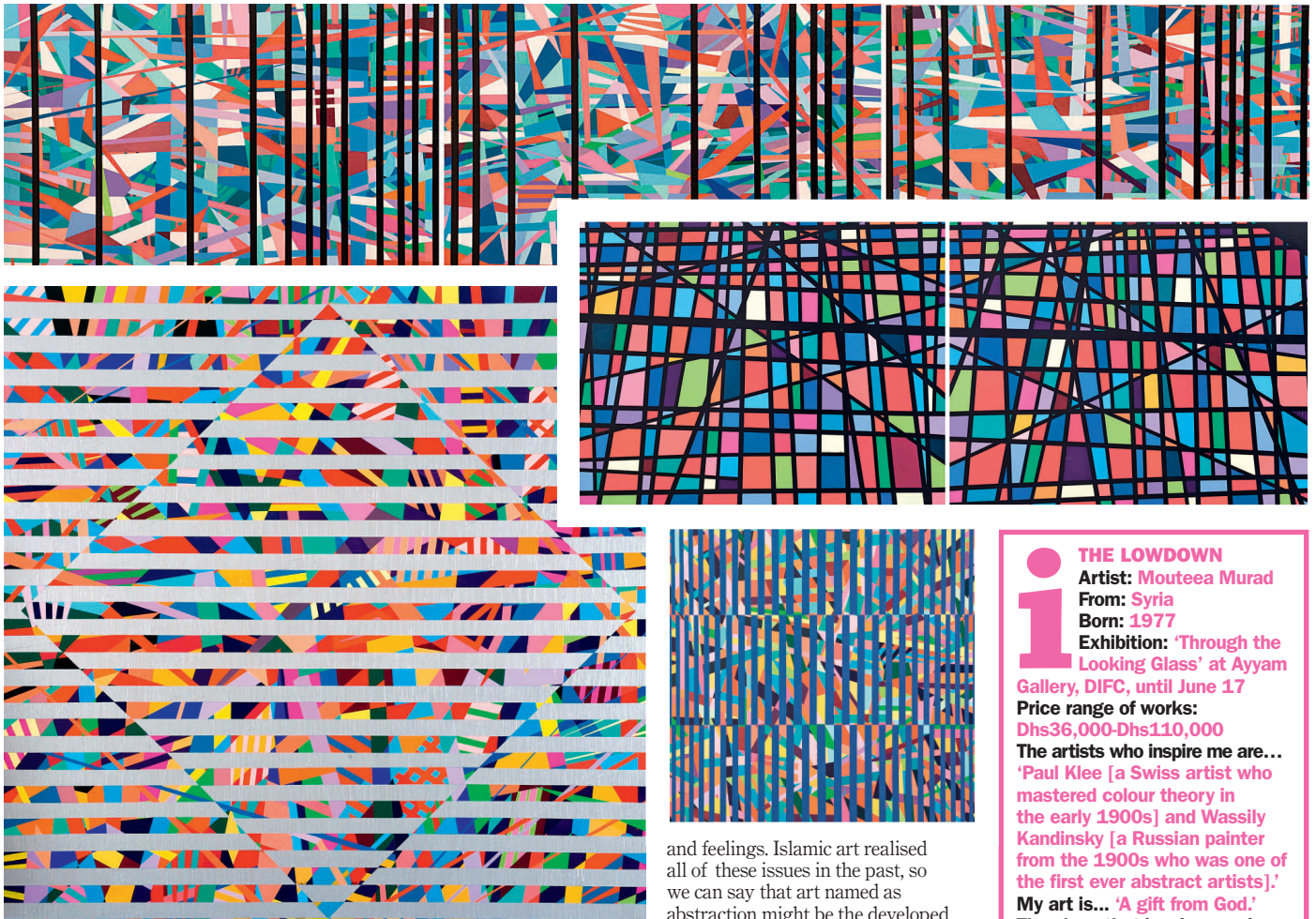


Rainbow brights at Ayyam



Syrian artist **Mouteea Murad** once dabbled only in monochrome, but his palette is now in full bloom. *Nyree McFarlane* steps into his colourful world

Like giant psychedelic stained-glass windows or a vista through Venetian blinds of a world ruled by colour, young Syrian artist Mouteea Murad's canvases focus on lines, hue and perspective. Featuring the clean, flat swathes of colour field painting alongside the dynamism and spontaneity of abstract expressionism, Murad tasks himself with exploring the different relationships between colours and shapes.

Until only a few years ago, his works were predominantly monochrome, moody and somewhat figurative, echoing fellow Ayyam artists Kais Salman and Abdul-Karim Majdal Al-Beik. Yet his decision to pirouette in style as a painter was

entwined with self improvement. 'I'm a person who changes,' he explains. 'The dark period stressed me, while the colourful artworks are helping to make me into a more positive person.'

The sharp angles, uninhibited use of colour and almost illusory sense of perspective create canvases that jump from the walls, the disparate shapes and colours forming a single pulsating entity. While his style is more akin to trippy Mondrian, Murad sees and feels a connection between his work and Islamic artistic tradition. 'As I see it, abstraction in contemporary times has realised reason's trend of order, harmony, construction and motion as well as the spiritual trend of emotions

and feelings. Islamic art realised all of these issues in the past, so we can say that art named as abstraction might be the developed extension of Islamic art.'

Like Islamic art, Murad's works are meticulously geometric, so it's surprising to hear that the planning stage is performed almost exclusively in the artist's head. 'I always have pictures of artworks in my brain before drawing them, so when I start the work it's based on the inside picture.'

While we like the unabashed palette of Murad's latest works, his more muted, haunting pieces were often more complex and thought-provoking, which is why we're glad to hear that the artist is considering combining the two. 'I can see my next exhibition. I have a lot of pictures ready in my head of perspective artworks, but we're going through tough times in the world right now, so I have ideas about adding my previous figures into the new works.' A combination of his brash palettes and mind-bending geometrics of late and his erstwhile eerie, dark figures is certainly something we'd like to see.

THE LOWDOWN
Artist: Mouteea Murad
From: Syria
Born: 1977
Exhibition: 'Through the Looking Glass' at Ayyam Gallery, DIFC, until June 17
Price range of works: Dhs36,000-Dhs110,000
The artists who inspire me are... 'Paul Klee [a Swiss artist who mastered colour theory in the early 1900s] and Wassily Kandinsky [a Russian painter from the 1900s who was one of the first ever abstract artists].'
My art is... 'A gift from God.'
The place that inspires me is... 'My studio.'

More on Murad

- The artist considers Syrian art today to be 'expressionist'. Expressionism is a modernist movement that developed after the first world war among an avant-garde community, in which artists chose to portray an emotion or feeling rather than a physical reality, even when being figurative.
- Murad chooses to call his canvases 'trials', implying that he considers his art a continual work in progress.
- In his final year of art school, Murad's proposal for his end-of-year project was rejected by his professors. He decided to go ahead with it anyway, and the bold move gained him top marks.