

arts & life



Courtesy Myneandyou

Marwan Shakarchi, whose artwork is the first of many limited-edition pieces on Drawdeck's 50 / Collection series, explains why his cloud with 'x' for eyes appears in all his works and how he is extending that symbol of hope to his newer pieces **al3**

Cloudy yet bright

ORIENTAL SURREALISM ON SHOW

The Lebanese artist Wael Hamadeh's 14th solo exhibition Scene from the Orient is now running at Muse Artz gallery in Times Square Centre, Dubai. The display of 15 paintings and sculptures is inspired by Oriental surrealism. The exhibition is open from 5pm to 9pm every day until the end of the month.

A new set to draw from

The Dubai-based online platform Drawdeck's limited-edition artworks are a great starting point for collectors and creatives, writes **Anna Seaman**

Start your first art collection and learn about emerging artistic talent in the UAE with *50 / Collection*, a new series of limited-edition artworks at Drawdeck, the Dubai-based online platform for local artists who base their practice on drawing.

For the series, Drawdeck is teaming up with a diverse selection of emerging and established artists to produce 50 editions of an exclusive work. Every other month one artist's work will be added to the collection. The initiative kicked off last week with Marwan "Myneandours" Shakarchi's image *We Bleed As One*.

"We met Marwan on several occasions and love the passion he has for his work and the underlying messages in his pieces. He's an artist who is making a name for himself in this region and we couldn't be happier with the final piece he has produced for Drawdeck," says co-founder David Hammond.

Drawdeck was founded last year as "a passion project" by Hammond and Alex Dunn - Hammond was working as a landscape architect in Abu

Dhabi and Dunn was with an advertising firm in Dubai. The pair decided that there were not enough opportunities for artists in the UAE, particularly those dedicated to drawing.

"I was always interested in art and illustration, but there were a lot of artists here who weren't getting the attention they deserved," says Hammond. "There were platforms already, but nothing specifically for drawing. Other than photography, almost all art starts with drawing."

Drawdeck's philosophy is simple - provide a way for people to get their hands on unique and affordable art, allowing them to "buy, share, critique and discover creativity". It also works as a networking platform for artists, galleries and organisations.

Starting out as a portfolio website driven by artists who wanted to share their work with other artists, it soon became popular among art students, graphic designers, product designers, painters and illustrators.

From 10 users in the first month, the number climbed to 300 after the first year, and soon the duo were flooded with requests from people wanting to purchase art through the site.

So, this summer, the pair quit their jobs and committed themselves to the growth of their business. They set up an online marketplace for their users and offered artists the chance to sell their works, giving them full control of pricing, printing and framing, only taking on a set fee for their service.

Drawdeck now boasts more than 400 portfolios on the site and approximately 15,000 unique hits per month.

"This is one of the biggest regions for e-commerce and we have directed our site with that in mind," says Hammond. "The art work is categorised under colours, content theme and size and it is really easy to use."

Dunn says: "But the offline work we do is also really important. We have held several pop-up shops and worked hard at promoting our artists at local events. This has been important in terms of building awareness and educating our audiences."

● Visit www.drawdeck.com for more details

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David Hammond
co-founder of Drawdeck



We Bleed As One is the first limited-edition artwork up for sale as part of Drawdeck's 50 / Collection series. Courtesy Myneandours

Marwan Shakarchi's cloud is all about the silver lining

Anna Seaman

Marwan Shakarchi has his head in the clouds. The symbol that he has been using to represent his practice - a cartoon-like image of a fluffy cloud with "X" marks for eyes - has now become synonymous with the artist himself.

Shakarchi is now on a mission to popularise the symbol - it features on stickers that he hands out to friends and acquaintances; it's also on postcards and key rings; and whenever he visits a new place, he looks for a surface to paint his cloud.

Shakarchi says he felt the need to develop his art through a single symbol, especially in this image-saturated world that we live in.

"I am interested in what you can achieve with a symbol by repetition," says the artist. "I think it is important that you look at your environment in an objective way instead of just accepting it - my cloud inspires you to question that. It is not directly selling you anything, it is not formally part of any system - it just exists to exist."

Born and raised in London to Iraqi parents, Shakarchi moved to Dubai a year ago to pursue his artistic career. He had already developed his cloud symbol, which began as a doodle on a wall in his family home and was later fine-tuned when he spent a summer in Los Angeles as an intern in the studio of Shepard Fairey, the American graphic artist best known for creating Barack Obama's Hope poster for his 2008 election campaign.

Besides the cloud, Shakarchi is also identified by his moniker Myneandours.

"I like how difficult it sounds when I introduce myself - it makes people think," he says. "The name started off just as Myne, because it was a personal project, something I was doing for my own release. I was creating the work for myself and it was a way to vent."

"But afterwards it became about my audience, so 'yours' is a message to them."

Shakarchi hopes people see the cloud as a symbol of hope and as encouragement to reach for their dreams.

"I think people should be concentrating on making the most of living in the moment," he says. "The name and the cloud are supposed to help people find empowerment."

Before Shakarchi moved to Dubai, he was working for the fam-

Shakarchi hopes people see the cloud as a symbol of hope and as encouragement to reach for their dreams

ily business in London. Since he arrived, he has dedicated himself solely to his art, taking a studio in Tashkeel and slowly moving his practice past the simple symbology of tagging the cloud and giving it a firmer conceptual base.

He is now working on a series of paintings that feature a female character interacting with the cloud. The cloud represents him, while the girl represents his wife Reem.

"Each painting is about the girl and her relationship with the cloud," says Shakarchi. "Every girl that I paint is Reem. It is a comic that tells the story of our relationship panel by panel. I want my work to have more purpose, not just random paintings of clouds."

It is this series that has attracted the attention of discerning audiences. *It Will Be OK*, an image of a girl hugging the cloud, appeared in Tashkeel's group exhibition over the summer.

● Visit www.myneandours.com for more information

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Marwan Shakarchi, who paints under the moniker Myneandours, with his artworks at Tashkeel Studio. Pawan Singh / The National