

WELCOME TO
LAMODARABIA

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW | THE MAN BEHIND THE WORDS - IYAD NAJA



Inspired by elaborate culture and artistic detail, bustling environments and rich sensory experiences, Iyad Naja brings his expressive concepts to many creative disciplines. He received his BS degree in graphic design from LAU Beirut in 2000. Iyad worked in advertising and became creative director at one of the international advertising agencies, but his passion lies in design and more specifically in Arabic Calligraphy and product design, he finds it more rewarding when you put all your energy in one item and someone appreciates it enough to have it in their home. It's the only time where he savors the moment. He believes we have heritage to be proud of, so let us celebrate it now and let it take form in any canvas, fabric, wood, or metal... Iyad established a design firm in 2014 which is dedicated to product design. We had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Mr. Iyad Naja during the grand opening of Rukun Gallery in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia where he gave a short presentation about his calligraphy line which he is showing exclusively there.



-Tell us about yourself?

I think I am the balance between serious and fun, I believe we play roles in this life, and if we know how to play our roles correctly without losing ourselves then this can be very rewarding. I grew in a house with many extended family and I had no particular role model, I had a bag full of role models taking the best quality from each. I tend to spend time with elderly people a lot and enjoy the way they reason and express themselves. I think the mere facts that there are humans who do what they do on this earth is a miracle itself.. we look for mysteries, without realizing we are the creators of mysteries, who we are, what we do, how we interact, and react, how we evolve and progress, or even regress.. its very amusing. I have been told that I am a person who can always be self-sufficient, I don't get bored of life, and I never run out of things to amuse myself with.. it can be pretty stressful for people around me.. but to each his own 😊

-How did you start designing?

It all started 10 years ago, when I started making furniture items for my home. I would go to buy an item that I needed but I always had something missing, or something that was over , it never had the right pinch for me, and thus I resorted into making the items that I wanted, and friends and family started asking me to make some for them, and that is when I realized that this is something I enjoyed doing a lot.



Growing up, I took every thing that was offered to me for granted, all my senses and experiences seemed infinite and my loved ones eternal. Soon the family gatherings became seasonal, the proverbs, and advises minimal.. until finally every thing faded with time. The need to capture the memory in a visual context lead me to develop my Calligraphy collection, where form and typography co exist together to reach out and touch any viewers sentiments, and in so doing, filling the void as it represents the birth of an entirely new discipline that is both appealing to the eye and flattering to the soul, The collection will have an endearing approach to heritage and to our existence as human beings in the new millennium. This line undergoes a detailed process, from poetry writing, to hand calligraphy, then blacksmith work to get the calligraphy form, and then the color treatment and finally light insulation or other finishing touches it may require. I feel its our duty to carry our identity in a contemporary way, many people fall into the trap of sticking to history, or innovating without having the solid foundations, but with the right knowledge, you a equipped for that.



-Do you think living abroad helped sculpture a stronger Arab identity within you? if so how?

Having lived in Africa, Europe and the Middle East it definitely made me see things from a general perspective and a bigger picture, had I been in one location all my life I would have taken my experiences and my foundations for granted. Knowing the reality about certain matters that were a mystery simplifies things and empowers you with the energy to do it yourself or explore more, ask more and get more in return , to share more.



-What comes first the material or the design?

This is a very interesting question having worked in advertising I learn to never own an idea.. we are fluid and progressive and when you throw an idea a bigger one comes. As a designer I am not attached to my work, I design progressively...but when I go to the factory to produce my work or to trade shows I experiment with new materials. I don't mind altering the design to accommodate the material, the result is usually impeccable when a designer knows what materials he is using and how he can work with them, or around them, its always a challenge that I love cracking. Technology is a recourse liberating force when you know how to use it...

-What part of the process excites you the most?

The most exciting part of design is when the idea pops to my mind at an usual place , like dinner, or while riding my motorcycle and I have to rush back to my sketch book to sketch the design down, I also value that final moment when its on display and it gains the recognition it deserves given the effort invested on each piece.. the most part that scares me is when I have to delegate my work to a calligrapher, or the factory and I am waiting for the prototype, I get worried that it won't meet my stratification, and usually I am right , I keep trying till I get it right, I am totally hands on.



-During your presentation in Rukun Gallery's opening you discussed your opinion on the use of Arabic Calligraphy in modern day art.. Can you share it with our readers..

Many have tried to breach the gap for sustaining our heritage by using calligraphy, to simplify it. You have those who simply resurrect it back from history and force it into your modern way of living , and the others who try to innovate it without having good design foundations and the result is like Frankenstein, a collective series of meaningless letters such as "waw" and "meem" ," noon" etc , placed together , or having a word without contexts like " 7ob, " amal" , " salam" these are positive words I agree , but cute on a lover's sketch book or a pillow case ,not on an item of furniture whose aim is to be an icon in the person's home. I try to work with a modern approach to the play on words and the choice of font and how the letters correspond to each other. The challenge is to present what people have always seen as historical or classical, into a form that is contemporary and new.



-Although you're only showing your calligraphy designs in Riyadh, we know you have other lines tell us more about that, and which came first?

I have 3 lines , the calligraphy, the contemporary , and the re-used.

The calligraphy came first, and my audience started to label me as the designer who enter-grades Arabic calligraphy into furniture(I don't mind that), but the other segment of my audience don't like much the Arabic treatment and they appreciate something completely minimalist and modern, creating that was a big mind blower because I had to make a line that when you see it you can immediately feel that it s an IN piece without having to relate it to Arabic calligraphy.

