

# What's On



Sheikha Altaf Al Sabah and Rosemary Alexander at the opening of the Floral Art Show with HE Michael Davenport, Ambassador of Britain.



HE Michael Davenport welcoming the guests

## An event built on love, compassion, hope and resilience

# Art with heart: British Embassy hosts Floral Art Show

By Chaitali B. Roy  
Special to the Arab Times

**G**liomatosis Cerebri is a rare brain cancer that is highly aggressive and very resistant to treatment. The inoperable cancer grows like threads deep within the brain in the connective tissues. It is currently untreatable, both by surgery and radiation or chemotherapy. This form of cancer is extremely rare with fewer than 100 cases diagnosed in the United States each year. On the 4th of June 2013, on what was supposed to be his 26th birthday, bright, young and giving Rudy Menon succumbed to this dreaded disease. Inspired by his compassion, and zeal for life, his family and friends, established the Rudy A Menon Foundation to continue his legacy of giving.

The Foundation helps fund research on Gliomatosis Cerebri and other rare brain cancer and works with the Institute of Cancer Research, London, UK to find out more about this silent killer, which most times goes undetected. "The loss of our son Rudy Anirudh Menon very suddenly to Gliomatosis Cerebri on his 26th birthday, and the fact that he was perfectly healthy before that was the reason to set up the Rudy A Menon Foundation as a non-profit organization, registered in UK," informed Vidhu Menon, Rudy's mother and founding member of the foundation.

"Currently because of the dearth of information on GC, there is a lack of understanding both in the medical profession as well as for families of patients who are struck with the disease. It is a feeling of extreme fear and isolation for families when they do not know what their loved ones are afflicted with. The Rudy A Menon Foundation liaises and works closely with similar parent led foundations and research agencies globally to bring together an international effort to find a cure for GC."

### Campaign

Playing an active part in this much-needed campaign against this cancer, the British Embassy on 16th of January hosted a Kuwait-British Floral Art Exhibition to coincide with the start of a yearlong celebration to mark the 120th anniversary of the British-Kuwaiti Friendship Treaty. Proceeds from the sale of the exhibits went to the Rudy A Menon Foundation. The exhibition was opened by Sheikha Altaf Salem Ali Al Sabah of Sadu House and the distinguished British gardener, Rosemary Alexander. "Thank you all for coming to our home this evening to support the magnificent and pioneering work of the Rudy A Menon Foundation and its research into the cruel killer disease - Gliomatosis Cerebri," said HE the British Ambassador Michael Davenport in his welcome note. "This exhibition has been inspired by our garden. It has been

a labour of love and compassion. I think you will agree that the joint work of the creative and talented people is a vivid symbol of the enduring Kuwaiti-British friendship which began 120 years ago next week - with what was at the time a top secret treaty. There will be many grand and official celebrations both here and in London during 2019, but this evening, bringing together - as my wife Lavinia puts it - gentle souls interested in gentle things like flowers and painting, is a reminder of how special and personal our friendship really is."

Speaking after the event, Dr Lavinia Davenport, wife of the British Ambassador shared, "The floral art exhibition was a charming happening and everybody I have spoken to enjoyed it. I really appreciate all the hard effort put into it by our floral artists. There was a buzz of excitement about something completely different - art serving a human cause and flowers serving the creative expression of a group of talented women. As one of our distinguished guests said, "This event is so different from anything I have ever attended at any Embassy - all so unexpected and

low-key. Not a bit stuffy just filled with light humour and love. There were flowers everywhere, on the walls and on the piano and then we could see 'the real thing' in the moonlit garden beneath the sparkly terrace where we all gathered." Sheikha Altaf Al Sabah was happy to be an active participant. "It is said that art speaks a universal language," she said. "That night art spoke beautifully, humanly and charitably. I am immensely pleased to have been part of that meaningful event in support of cancer research."

### Inspiration

The floral art on display at the British Embassy drew inspiration from the "very British garden planted on Kuwaiti soil." Sharing her observations on the garden in the Embassy grounds and its 'British-ness', Rosemary Alexander, the gardening guru, said, "Having had a good look at the garden, I can see the British style of its layout. It was, I believe, designed in Delhi by the office of the famous architect, Lutyens. The beautifully maintained garden here has evolved over the last 80 years. The

Serpentine flowing borders studded with colourful trees and shrubs are very British. I can well understand the pleasure the artists must have had photographing and then painting or embroidering the flowers." Floral motif has always been a popular design choice in the realm of textile and fibre arts with examples found worldwide in cultures stretching from ancient China to medieval India. Through centuries artists have found innovative ways to explore this imagery. The floral art show showcased the work of British and Kuwaiti artists who based their work on flowers found in the well planted garden of the British Ambassador's Residence, formerly the British Political Agency. Members of the Kuwait Textile Arts Association (KTAA), including prize-winning quilter Hanan Alkazemi, were among the participants. Hanan said, "The whole purpose of the exhibition was very touching, and I wanted to contribute with whatever I could to help as much as I could. And I presented my lily flower in the paper piercing technique to go along the floral theme of the exhibition."

### Nature

Suzanne Mannolini, KTAA treasurer, had her work on display. "It is through my love of textile arts that I have made friends, and now colleagues among the Kuwaiti ladies. It has been a pleasure to work together on the project initiated in the summer. I am so proud that the

show presented so well and has been well-received by the wider Kuwait community." The well-known British floral artist Venetia Norris, the Kuwaiti painter May Alnoori and potter Mona Al Duwaisan donated their work to the exhibition. Venetia is a British artist living in Kuwait who is inspired by nature. She enjoys the spontaneity of drawing from life and communicating a sense of place. Her artwork has been shown at Christies London, Art Fairs around the UK and included in several group shows at The Mall Galleries London. "The British Embassy garden is a colourful, lush haven along the Gulf Road full of history," she said. "I layered pencil drawings of flowers from the Embassy Gardens on top of British maps. I then sewed these together using colours from the Kuwaiti flag. I was interested in the idea of a British garden in Kuwait."

The Floral Art Show that marked the beginning of the year-long celebration of the 120th anniversary of the British-Kuwaiti Friendship Treaty showcased some spectacular art pieces centred around floral imagery - some of the stitched work, in particular, was texturally rich, achieving a lushness that gave an amazingly detailed depiction of these plants. The Floral Art Show resonated at different levels - Apart from a coming together of artists from two friendly and historically close countries, and the high quality of work, it was an event built on love, compassion, hope and resilience.



An artwork on display



A view of the British Embassy garden - the inspiration for the Floral Art Show.



An artwork on display

## New Look

## A calm, bright and sociable young fellow

# Mohammad's positive disposition the secret of his success

This is the first in a series of articles on Mohammad Al Balood, a bright young director at the Kuwait Radio Station.

- Editor

By Lidia Qattan

Special to the Arab Times

**M**ohammad Al Balood is a calm, bright young fellow, sociable and amiable who loves getting involved in team work helping people. His positive minded disposition and optimism is the secret of his success in life. Indeed he believes he can create his own golden chance through taking initiatives and working hard.

Mohammad's positive minded disposition is reflected in his behavior and philosophy, while a strong belief in himself enables him not only to keep on the bright side of life, but also to use his ebullient energy of youth in overcoming obstacles and any challenges that may come on his way.

Brought up in a loving family surrounding that enhanced his natural disposition, Mohammad doesn't talk about his philosophy; it radiates spontaneously through his personality, his attitude towards life and the respect he has for everything - for time, for work, for people and for all living things.

### Focused

From early childhood Mohammad was attracted to people, he loved to socialize. In school is favorite subject was physics, he cared little for Arabic,

but he loved the English language; during class he could keep so focused on any subject that he hardly needed to open the book to study. All he did before the exams was to revise the subject to get top marks in it.

At graduation from high school, Mohammad was eager to work to feel certain self-independence, at the same time he wanted to continue his higher education and get his diploma.

Incidentally he was in his last year of high school when the invasion shattered his immediate plans, making him lose one scholastic year. However, it was this drastic event in the life of his country that spurred his natural propensity for helping people and get engaged in voluntary work during the invasion and in the aftermath of the liberation.

Incidentally on the 1st of August 1990, on the eve of the Iraqi invasion, Mohammad left the country with his family to spend the summer vacation in London, UK.

After his arrival on the next day he woke up and discovered that his homeland had been invaded. At first he didn't believe it, because when he left Kuwait the day before everything was calm. It took him three days to accept and finally believed what was going on in his country through the

world mass media!

From that day he became involved in organizing and taking part in peaceful demonstrations and helping his people; he also tried to join the army but he was not yet seventeen, too young to join.

Both his grandmothers and his brother were in Kuwait and that worried him, especially after seen the destruction going on in his country and the consternation he saw on the faces or refugees crowding at the frontier trying to cross into Saudi Arabia.

When he heard that his people in Kuwait managed to cross into Saudi Arabia, he left the UK with his family to be with them, but after arriving in Saudi Arabia, realizing they actually never left the country, he had to remain in Saudi Arabia till the war of liberation got underway.

The most scary and agonizing time he spent away from home was when the ground attack began, and his people in Omariya, a new town on the skirts of Kuwait capital, were close to an Iraqi camp, where most young men and women in the resistance were taken for interrogation and tortured. The few that survived the ordeal were left maimed for life or died shortly after the liberation.

Thinking about his people so near to the danger zone, Mohammad was in a state of utter anxiety fearing for their safety. The moment it was announced that Kuwait was free he felt such a jubilation, a feeling of joy and relief so intense the like of which he never experienced before

or since. He was impatient to return home but no one was allowed not only because of the total destruction of all vital commodities, but also because of land-mines scattered everywhere throughout the countryside and in towns. There were bobby-traps in private and public buildings the Iraqi soldiers left behind during the hasty withdraw of the Iraq army. Indeed on the aftermath of the liberation Kuwait was in such a chaos with its whole infrastructure destroyed and needing all sorts of supplies that no one except teams of experts could enter, to assess the damages and write their report.

In spite of the danger from land-mines and other hazard they could meet on their way Mohammad and his family risked to venture through the desert.

At the first sight of his homeland his heart sank. He could not believe what he saw; at every turn an unrecognizable scene of desecration and destruction opened before him. It was daytime but the sun could not shine through the heavy strata of toxic smoke hanging between the earth and the sky. Firing tongs leaping towards the sky reflecting on glistening lakes of asphalt gave him an impression of hell. The whole sight made him angry; he could not believe such a diabolic act could be by anyone called human!

On reaching town, wherever he went he saw filth, destruction, houses and trees covered in a layer of black fallout, but when he reached home and saw his people still alive, shaken but happy, all the pain and the anger



Mohammad Al Balood

in his heart faded away.

On the next day he joined the teams of volunteers helping people, taking water from the reservoirs of empty houses to distribute it around, clearing the rubbish in an attempt of restoring some life in the country. Other teams, mostly military, were patrolling the streets and suburbs by day and by night till national security was re-established.

### Survived

The only place Mohammad had no heart to see at his return was the local zoo where the poor animals became firing targets for the Iraqi soldiers. In spite of the danger during the invasion young men, jumping the wall of the zoo, tried to feed those poor animals, even medicate those injured, but could not prevent their slaughter; the carnivorous were the first to be

destroyed; the lion suffered the worse, he was found burned in his cage; only few animals survived the onslaught. Mohammad had only to see photos of their pitiful remains to feel his blood boiling.

The revival of the old Kuwaiti solidarity flared during the invasion and in the aftermath of the liberation made him confident there would be a change in Kuwait for the better; he was very disappointed when the same atmosphere of affectation that sank his country in a state of torpor before the invasion, returned yet more pernicious, causing a wave of cynicism that affected the younger generation in particular. Refusing to surrender to dark thoughts that would only waste his energy, Mohammad looked for a job before his final exams, while still in his last year of high school. Applying at the Ministry of Information he was assigned to the radio department, which was in need of personnel at the time.

Going to school in the morning and working at the Radio Station till seven in the afternoon made Mohammad more eager to study; hence at graduation from high school he entered the College of Technology to get his diploma in Electrical Engineering.

At about the same time the sudden loss of his brother in a fatal car accident, got him also involved in his brother's business, looking after the three shops in the Fahaaheel Mall; later Mohammad added two more shops.

To be continued