

Kuwaiti quilters recognized by international guild

KTAA takes quilting to the next level

By Chaitali B. Roy

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Hanan Al Kazemi and Nora Alali, two gifted Kuwaiti quilters, members of Kuwait Textile Arts Association (KTAA), an organisation that operates under the auspices of Sadu House, recently qualified the coveted South African Quilters' Guild (SAQG) Quilt Teacher Accreditation. This course equips quilters with in-depth knowledge of copyright and contracts, quilt teaching theory, quilt teaching techniques, quilt techniques, marketing options, quilt history and practical skills and tasks assessed by accredited tutors and judges. With this qualification, Hanan Al Kazemi and Nora Alali become the first Kuwaiti certified quilting instructors recognised by an international guild. "Kuwaiti women are very strong-willed, creative, and capable," says Hanan Al Kazemi. "Therefore, earning this certificate is a reminder of the passion and capability they possess towards any craft they choose to take part in."

Quilting is one of the easiest ways to recycle cloth. In some cultures, quilting is an integral part of daily living. But with the quilters of Kuwait Textile Arts Association (KTAA), quilting and crafting with textile, yarn, and fabric is more than a hobby and a craft. It is a way of creatively expressing their technical expertise, their emotions and responses to the world around them. There are no boundaries apart from the ones set by one's ambition -- the only skill required is precision and patience. Quilting is a major activity of KTAA, with its quilt group holding regular meetings, workshops and demonstrations. In recent years, KTAA has seen a sizeable increase of Kuwaiti members eager to learn the craft.

Activities

The lockdown has been hard on everyone. KTAA, like other organisations, has put a pause button on its activities. Still, some of its members like Hanan and Nora have continued to practice their craft and have raised it several notches with rigorous training and certification. Hanan Al Kazemi is an outstanding member of KTAA who has coordinated several textile art exhibitions for the KTAA. Talking about her motivation for taking the course, Hanan says, "I took this course to enhance my knowledge of being a quilt teacher. I have fallen in love with the beautiful art of quilting, and I wanted to teach it to those interested so that they can experience its beauty as well. I was honoured to have taught the beginner classes with the KTAA before taking the course. I feel that the course has complemented my knowledge and made me aware of more in-depth aspects of quilting, which will, in turn, make me a better quilt teacher."

Like Hanan, Nora too wanted to empower herself with more knowledge of techniques. "There are still so many new quilting techniques out there that I would like to learn about and explore," she says. "I was a quilt instructor for many years before I decided to take this training. The certification will give my previous work a more legal and authentic aspect." A gifted quilter Nora Alali believes in constantly upgrading herself. "Education, in general, is an ongoing quest for me. I cannot help it," says Nora. "I have an inquisitive mind. A certification is just the end result of a path that I took. I believe that ongoing education is important for self-improvement. Individuals must always strive to do better. Otherwise, the future will just run us by. For Kuwaiti women, in particular, a certification is an acknowledgement that we can achieve a certain standard of competence in a specific field that ranks us competitive and equal to other women practising this art all over the world," she says.

Accreditation

The South African Quilters' Guild (SAQG), which gave Hanan Al Kazemi and Nora Alali, their accreditation, is the National Guild for quilters in South Africa. A non-profit association, SAQG aims to maintain high standards of craftsmanship and design and build a strong community of quiltmakers, teachers and judges by offering training courses and through quilt competitions and festivals. Wilna du Toit, a South African Quilters' Guild teacher and KTAA member, was the liaison for the two Kuwaiti quilters. "As SAQG Liaison (Kuwait) it has been a pleasure for me and Jenny Hermans, the President of SAQG, to create the opportunity for KTAA members to partake in the SAQG Quilt Teacher Accreditation Course. It has been a privilege to play a supporting and guiding role with all the academic assignments and practical assignments. I am looking forward to the ladies' careers as accredited quilt teachers. As students, they both worked diligently, and we congratulate them on their success and achievement." Wilna du Toit lived in Kuwait from 2006-2011 before moving back again in 2019. "My ad-



Nora Alali's final assignment to SAQG teaching certification.



Hanan Al Kazemi (left) and Nora Alali.



Wall hanging by Hanan Al Kazemi.

venture started in 2006, when I was introduced to quilting, fibre arts and the KTAA by Chrissie van Wyk and Aiesha Khalid," she says of her association with the KTAA. "From 2006-2011 (and now from 2019 onwards) I observed how the KTAA ladies have fun, friendship, laughter and exciting technique training during the weekly meetings. Seeing the ladies weekly and learning from all the ladies has made my KTAA adventure fun and exciting -- the perfect combination of the fabulous "mish-mash" of quilting's mathematical precision, creativity, and perfection."

The course undertaken by Hanan and Nora was rigorous and demanding. Spanning over ten months, it involved continuous research, reading and learning followed by practical execution of the training. "It took a lot of time and effort," says Hanan, "but it was worth the knowledge and

experience that I have gained in the end." The course is composed of 5 different subjects related to quilting arts and teaching principles and techniques. "Deadlines had to be met, and the pass rate was set at 80%!" says Nora. "Students had to pass each trimester first to be able to proceed to the following one. Therefore we were always on the edge when we submitted our assignments, not knowing if we will stop there or proceed to the next set of assignments."

According to Nora Alali, training has structured her knowledge of teaching quilting. "I can describe my knowledge before as scraps of patchwork fabric scattered all over the place," she says, sharing her take away from the training. "Now I have a well-defined philosophy that puts all those different coloured scrap fabric into a quilt sewn together to make a cohe-

sive structure. It has also given me wings to try new things and explore my inner artistic voice away from commercial patterns found everywhere." Hanan Al Kazemi agrees. She says the course has opened her eyes to aspects of quilting that



Wilna du Toit

previously she had not considered. "The entire purpose of taking this course was to gain the fundamentals of being a quilt teacher so that I could become the best quilt teacher for my students as well as educate our society and introduce them to this wonderful art," says Hanan.

Standards

Over the years, quilters of KTAA have maintained very high standards of the craft, with many participating in international quilt shows and winning prizes. When asked about quilting standards in Kuwait, Wilna du Toit observes, "In Kuwait, I observed how quilting (and fibre arts) transcends all boundaries, whilst uniting the ladies in the sense of family -- the KTAA family. As with any art, quilting is very individual and driven by many different motivational reasons. Each

KTAA quilter is 100% committed to the art of quilting, and are regularly encouraged to try new techniques, new equipment and new beautiful fabrics. The standard of quilting in Kuwait is high and artistic, making it extremely satisfying to be part of."

A quilter is neither a crafter nor an artist, but both. Hanan Al Kazemi and Nora Alali craft quilts that are artistic, and the process of making them feeds their souls. For Nora, the added knowledge this course gave her connected her better to her past. "This certificate in a way links me to the long line of mothers, grandmothers and teachers who taught their daughters, neighbours and friends how to sew and create with their hands. I feel honoured that this tradition that has survived so many centuries will continue through my work and teaching."