

**NAUSHEEN SHEIKH: ARTIST, TEACHER AND INTERIOR DESIGNER**  
By [Meg Dreiss](#), [November \(2009\)](#) edition of bazaar



Nausheen Sheikh

---

**Have you ever wandered through a modern art exhibit or gallery and thought, “Hey... I could make that! A trip to my local art supply store to pick up some tubes of acrylic paint and a blank canvas, and I am on my way to quite the little masterpiece.” Well, this is definitely not the feeling you get as you take in Nausheen Sheikh’s works of traditional Islamic art.**

Influenced by her Persian roots while growing up in Zimbabwe and later by her post-graduate studies at the Prince’s School of Traditional Art in London, Nausheen is an accomplished artist, interior designer, and teacher. She lives and breathes the school’s goal of sustaining traditional art techniques in the context of contemporary society. During her recent visit, Nausheen’s second time to Kuwait’s Sadu House, the artist held a workshop exploring the art of the Arabesque or Islimi and also gave a presentation entitled, “The Language and Meaning of Islamic Art and Traditional Craft,” at the Kuwait Textile Art Association’s monthly meeting. Steeped in the belief that art has lost its heart and soul in its modern form, Nausheen is certain that art cannot convey a deeper meaning and display true passion without a spiritual connection between the artist and her Creator. The artist is simply a vessel, says Nausheen, and suggests that the desire to create beauty is given to man by God and that beauty, once physically presented, is simply the reflection of God within one’s soul.

The flowing lines of the arabesque and the balance and symmetry created with Rumi designs in Nausheen’s work highlight the painstaking repetition and rhythm required to achieve such harmonious effect. The artist compares the countless hours spent mastering these geometrical forms with pencil and tracing paper in hand to the mundane repetitions of everyday life. The pristine lines of her work are juxtaposed on highly textural handmade paper and a background of inky paints she grinds and mixes herself. Her geometric patterns and Islimi are shaded using gold, silver, and white pigments she grinds from shell to reflect light within the painting. This connection between her materials and her art form are the foundation of her view that traditional art demands, yet fosters, personal character development of the artist.

During her workshop, Nausheen explained that in Islamic art, calligraphy is the noblest form of work because it is the “visual word of God,” and represents the knowledge that Islam encourages its believers to gain. The geometric patterns associated with Islamic architecture and art represent the power of God, as they are infinite, with no beginning or end. And finally, she described the arabesque as the love of God, depicting the rhythm of nature and God’s creations here on earth. Nausheen sees these three art forms as the divine elements of God and their presence in daily life through traditional art reflects the essence of Islam as love and peace and the thirst for knowledge. Enlightened with this information, the students were instructed to begin just as she did – with pencil and template, learning to trace.

In many ways, spending time with Nausheen feels more like spending time with a life coach. She speaks with such warmth and gusto that you leave with a desire to mimic the balance of her amazing pieces in your own day-to-day projects and activities. Putting her own vision into action, the artist’s goals are threefold. She plans to develop her own work through personal projects and interests. Secondly, she is researching the decline of traditional arts in today’s society and unearthing the reasons why there is a waning desire to learn these age-old techniques. Finally, she travels around the world giving workshops to students, eager to share her knowledge with those interested in traditional Islamic arts. Nausheen is an embodiment of work ethic and old-fashioned elbow grease, believing that all worthwhile pursuits, like her beloved traditional arts, can be cultivated over time, with study and passion.