

## KINGDOM

### Tanween Design Boutique launches 'Backstage' to promote talent

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Director and Founder Nada Alawi of "Annada" brand shows unique scarves with motifs inspired by Middle East artists.

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**JEDDAH** — Tanween Design Boutique held a two-day "Backstage" end of the year event on Nov. 13 where an interactive platform was used to display the works of 19 Middle Eastern designers as part of an ambitious initiative to promote independent designers and creative entrepreneurs in the Middle East.

"This event is not just an exhibition. Above all it's a social initiative by 10 members of Jeddah's creative community including entrepreneurs, event planners, architects, photographers, interior, fashion and graphic designers who worked hand in hand in presenting regional talents and sustaining the entire artists' category. We wanted visitors to visualize the event's "behind the scenes" and walk through an interactive space that would make their experience more hands on," said Sofana Rabea Dahlan, CEO and Founder of Tashkeil, a social enterprise that comprises Tanween Boutique.

"The term "backstage," literally referring to the area behind a theater stage, was chosen for its capacity to evoke different meanings including the invisible efforts, good coordination and inner workings that lay behind the setup of any successful event or activity," explained Architect Amy Lam who was among the creative contributors of the "Backstage" team along with photographer Mokhtar Chahine, interior designer Hania Arafat and fashion designers Alessandra Serafini and Sarah Suri.

The cosy environment of Tanween Boutique was arranged to create an eclectic space. A large blackboard at the entrance showcased pictures and profiles of the event's organizers accompanied by a draft of the brainstorming process and activities they went through to build up the event.

The 19 designers' artworks, ranging from fashion and jewelry to accessories and visual arts, were mingled with artistic recreations of a cinematographic backstage and a real photographic set. Here people could photograph themselves using a remote control and get a souvenir picture of their participation.

"The choice of the event's organizers and of the designers displaying their products was based on their profiles. We wanted above all to allow the expats and Saudi community to get together, socialize, break barriers and exploit the creative potential of a diverse environment. For this reason we called designers from Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Egypt and formed a creative staff involving Europeans and Asians," Sohana said.

Italian fashion designer Alessandra Serafini, member of the event's organizing team, explained the reasons behind her participation: "Being an Italian

fashion designer, I was pleased to contribute with my personal artistic point of view and taste to the setup of the exhibit. At the same time, similar occasions help me understand the local mentality and catch the most successful trends," she said.

"I am for instance impressed by the success of "Sarah's Bag" feminine, fresh and fashionable line of handcrafted women's accessories. Her colorful bags portraying Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum are selling like hot cakes among young women. I have the impression in general that people like objects carrying cultural references. This also explains the success of "Karma," the Egyptian brand founded by young Designer Dina Hafez who aims at reviving the Egyptian heritage and its ethnic handicrafts. A similar principle is followed by "Annada," with its creative assortment of scarves inspired from the works of Middle East artists," said Serafini.

A part from "Sarah's Bag" and "Karma," accessory brands comprised "Le Nour Designs," a luxurious line of handmade handbags, "bint thani" turbans line, "Tasche" leather accessories, "Miss E" bags collection and "Solo" bags collection by Saudi Designer Maha Attar.

Among women fashion clothing brands, particularly stylish were the haute couture line "Collectible," the modern fits of Lebanese Designer Nadine Mneimneh and the original fabric combinations proposed by fashion designer Amina K, who likes to explore new colors, materials and designs maintaining an element of elegance and comfort.

The exhibit also displayed elegant and contemporary jewelry collections by "Mukhi Sisters," "Tha'aba," "Falamank," "Cynthia Raffouf" and "Rania F" whose jewels are inspired by falling leaves and jasmine flowers.

"Tanween Design Boutique launched its first event with just four designers in Dec. 2010. After only two years, the boutique was able to attract 19 designers and generate a waiting list of 50 designers of all categories willing to use this platform to enhance their brand's visibility," said Sohana.

"Most of the brands showcased here are in fact new while others are well established abroad but have yet to penetrate the Saudi market. A part from promoting these designers' artworks, Tanween Boutique and Tashkeil enterprise have the merit of bringing them together under one roof, giving them access to a commercial network of boutique owners and helping them take the best possible benefit from the signing of an eventual deal," she added.

Sohana also explained that her organization is grounded on the idea of fostering the skills and creativity of Middle East designers by encouraging them in following their creative instincts. "The main thing I discovered being a business consultant is that often designers are not able to break through because they are too much influenced by consumers' behaviour in developing their style. I'm sure Jeddah is full of potential talents that only need to freely express their personality."