

THE cARTel

Concept Store with Unique Angles to Fashion

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KHALID SHAFAR
ELIE DOMIT
F/W 15 COLLECTIONS ARRIVAL

Khalid Shafar

THE EMIRATI DESIGN
AMBASSADOR

Interview by May Barber

Khalid, you are a multi-faceted designer, how would you best describe what you do? I would keep it very simple as I'm purely a product designer. As designer I think you discover different disciplines depending on the project you explore but I am mainly a product designer.

What does fashion/style mean to you? I think I wear who I am. As a designer, whenever I pick a piece I ask myself, is this a designer look? People define a designer's look in different ways. Some consider it too extreme or edgy while others keep it very subtle and clean. It is very personal.

What is your personal style? There are definitely considerations I keep in mind about my personal style such as who I am, where I am, my age, my look, what suits me and what doesn't. I am not extremist in my style, but not conventional either. I like to keep it chic and elegant but still have an edge that would immediately indicate that I am a designer or working in the creative field at least.

What was your best fashion moment? Sporting my Carla Fernandez Scarf, which is inspired by the local cultures and crafts of her hometown in Mexico, back in Chanel Cruise Show in Dubai. I always wear this piece in different ways and reinvent the style around it such as today when I mixed it up with the cARTel fashion clothing; that was definitely a great fashion moment for me!

Have you ever executed or Would you consider doing a fashion collaboration? 100%, because I always believe

in collaborations with different disciplines other than my own. I'm not looking to collaborate with another product designer, for instance, as although we might create something interesting it will remain within the same design field. While when two different design fields comes together, the outcome is often something extraordinary and unpredictable.

With regards to working with fashion, I have actually employed a fashion element, the Egal in the traditional Khaleeji male attire, in one of my installations that I will be revealed soon in Emirati Expression Exhibition (Opening 11th November in Manarat Sa'adiyat). I did have a collaboration with the fashion brand COS. They commissioned me and five other international designers to each explore a project using only 1 square meter of paper. The commissioned designers varied in disciplines including architects, graphic designers and product designers and each one used only 1 square meter of white paper to create something. The project was challenging but also interesting as it made me further explore the fashion language of COS with their clean cuts and minimal language. I would certainly be happy to explore fashion further and collaborate with a fashion brand, a shoe brand or anything related to object making in the fashion industry.

Your work does not employ the conventional approach to design (textiles, furniture, installations, 2D vs. 3D), what is Khalid's design process? I like to expand my horizon as a designer with constant exploration and I think every designer should do that. We shouldn't limit ourselves to a particular medium or area. I remember in the beginning of my career during the first couple of years I was working a lot with wood and people would ask me all the time what's your story with wood or why do you love wood?

Later I started digging further in my exploration and started experimenting with different materials. My process stems from my design philosophy and ethos, which can be summed in a triangle of three principles: creativity, practicality and functionality. I always try to achieve the three but its not always possible and sometimes I need to compromise with one. I believe there is always creativity in the aesthetics of the piece, its form and choice of material. As for functionality, I think it is a must-have and I would never compromise it as I define myself as a functional designer and I am always keen on integrating the functional aspect in what I do. Functionality to me is not simply having something that works but rather something with an intended purpose.

Practicality is the extra benefit of my objects illustrated through sometimes serving more than one function or challenging limitations of height and space.

Tell us about DRAK; why did you decide to set it up and what's your vision for it? The main vision behind DRAK was to draw attention to Ras Al Khor industrial area as a potential area to become a creative district. That's the reason behind

injecting the name in DRAK which stands for Design Ras Al Khor. Even if the project moves to a different area in the future, the name is a constant reminder of the area this project started from. The reason behind this initiative was to create a design platform. The founding members of DRAK, who are also my good friends, travel a lot to international design scenes and particularly to Milan where we were influenced by the design scene there and the Design Week context, where designers (Italian and international) come together and present something collective as a group and we thought that we'd love to do something similar on the local scene. So when the opportunity came with Dubai Design Week, we felt as established designers in the local and regional scene that we wouldn't want to show in one space and represent a single installation or object, but rather contribute on a bigger scale and start an initiative that will run annually.

In the first edition and as founding members we participated and showed our work, but we are not limiting the platform to ourselves as we'd like to open the floor for other designers to expose their works and label DRAK as a platform to express our pure contribution to the design scene in the UAE. Besides our regular work, we will continue running our own brands while keeping DRAK as an exciting window to discover new talents and unlock fresh topics of design.

Following DRAK where you showcased the beautiful wood installations of Flame-Ingo and Mr. & Mrs. Fanteer, You're showing in Emirati Expressions followed by Warehouse 421, what's next for Khalid Shafar? The Installation I

am showing in Emirati Expressions is definitely one of my biggest and I'm very positive about how people would react to it. It has a very deep thinking and reflects something totally fresh and different. I want to see if people would draw a relationship between the initial thinking, the inspiration source and the object/ installation itself. In terms of a scale, it's one of the biggest scales I have worked with so far.

Next I'm looking forward to my two projects, one is an exciting international collaboration which will be unveiled during Design Days Dubai in March 2016 and the other is a collaboration with one of the local galleries which will be unveiled the same time.

What would you consider as your biggest achievement so far and what's a dream project you haven't realized yet? My biggest achievements are my international collaborations as they offer international visibility to my name as an Emirati designer and strengthen my brand more. My goal is to make my brand an international Emirati brand.

One of my biggest dreams in terms of design projects would be having my products mass-produced for a company like Ikea. I do appreciate the brand from a design perspective and how they have established a design direction for themselves and it would be a dream to have my pieces mass-produced and sold there.

There are also two brands that I'd love to design for since I appreciate their space and strategy - Camper, the shoe brand, and Aesop, an Australian cosmetic brand. Camper is known for commissioning collaborations with designers in their different branches across cities where each store reflects the design language of the city it is positioned in. Aesop also employs a similar philosophy in the design of their stores thus offering a flavored identity and character to each one.

How would you describe The cARTel in three words? Edgy, Fashion Forward and Courageous and I love all three!

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