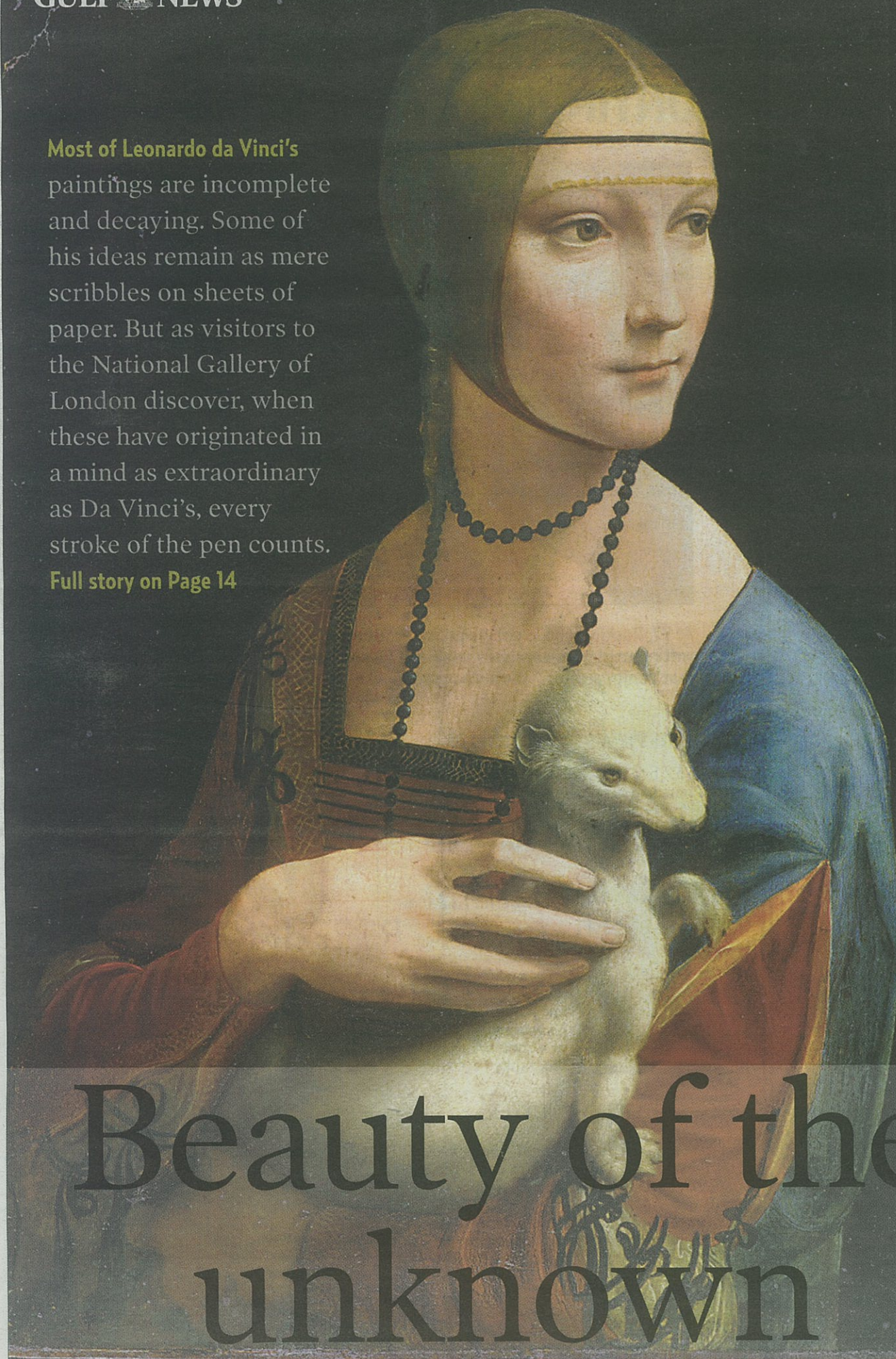


WEEKEND REVIEW

GULF NEWS

Most of Leonardo da Vinci's paintings are incomplete and decaying. Some of his ideas remain as mere scribbles on sheets of paper. But as visitors to the National Gallery of London discover, when these have originated in a mind as extraordinary as Da Vinci's, every stroke of the pen counts.

Full story on Page 14



Beauty of the unknown

BOOK REVIEWS INSIDE

Friday 16/12/11



INTERVIEW

**Ahmed Aboutaleb
on development –
social and human 4**



ARTS

**Suha Arafat talks
about her husband
in a new film 11**



SCIENCE

**Exercise can help
subvert the effects
of the fat gene 21**

A chisel in thrall to memories

Emirati traditions, modern Dubai and a diasporic perspective have inspired Khalid Shafar's designs

By JYOTI KALSI
Special to Weekend Review

Khalid Shafar's designs have an international look but a distinctly Emirati signature. The young designer's first solo exhibition in Dubai, titled *Inspirationalists*, features prototypes for a range of furniture and home decor products inspired by palm trees, the Dubai traffic and various elements of the UAE's culture and traditions.

"I am a storyteller and a dreamer. I was born in Dubai and my memories of pre- and post-modernisation Dubai are the source of my imagination and the inspiration for this collection. Each of my designs tells a story about my heritage, my life and my city, and my collection is thus a list of my inspirations. My dream is to create an internationally respected Emirati design brand that will put my country on the global design map," Shafar says.

Ironically, it was being far away from home that sparked Shafar's desire to create designs inspired by his country. "I went to New Zealand to do a course in woodworking and got extremely homesick. Being away from home made me appreciate my homeland and culture, and truly understand what it means to be Emirati. It spurred me to learn more about my heritage and to help preserve it through my work. At the same time, the experience of two different worlds and cultures motivated me to create designs that draw on the best of both worlds," says Shafar, who now divides his time between his homes in Dubai and New Zealand.

One of the first pieces he created during the course is a carrom board, titled *Dubai Journey*. "It was inspired by my longing for home and my childhood memories of playing carrom with my friends and family. The board features an aerial image of the desert with sand dunes and camels walking towards it. The words 'Dubai is the home of the human being' express everybody's feelings about my city. The four baselines resemble the flag of the UAE, and I used teak

to frame the board because that is what our dhows are made from," he says.

The designer's Palm and Arabi lines are also deeply associated with his roots. The Palm line includes tables and stools with a palm-trunk-shaped base and a top made from hand-woven palm-leaf mats, and a coat stand — also shaped like a palm trunk. "I grew up surrounded by beautiful palm trees. The idea for the coat stand came from my memories of watching the men who climbed the trees hang their shirts or tool bags on the spikes on the trunk. I added flexibility to the stand by making hollow pegs that can be fitted over the spikes," Shafar says.

He has used handmade mats, or *sarood*, woven by Emirati women, as tops for his tables and stools. "These mats were created for me by craftswomen from the Heritage Village. I learnt so much about our old traditions and handicrafts from these women. And this line is a tribute to all Emirati craftswomen and to this dying craft. In the old days, these mats were spread on the floor for dining. By elevating them from the floor on to the table, I want to ensure that they continue to be part of our life and the craft does not die out," the designer says. Similarly, the Arabi line features lighting that combines the *egaal*, the black headband worn by Emirati men, with a traditional oil lantern, or *fanar*.

However, Shafar's Illusion line of arm-chairs and dining chairs is inspired by modern Dubai. It is an expressionist design, with zigzag lines reflecting the city's energy, speeding cars, cosmopolitan community and busy life. "I am a city boy, and although I love the natural beauty and tranquillity in New Zealand, I miss the hustle and bustle of Dubai," he says.

The influence of both his worlds can be seen in designs such as *The Crate* and *The Surfer*. Both are inspired by the ocean view the designer enjoys in his homes in Dubai and Auckland. *The Crate* is an innovative beechwood coffee table that looks like a shipping crate but can be transformed into a stylish multilevel table. And *The Surfer* is a leather lounge chair inspired by the kite-surfers, their surfboards and the waves in the ocean.

"Some say we are defined by the objects we choose to own, but I believe that we are defined by the stories we choose to own. Each of my designs is part of a story, a tale of my experiences, memories and life journey. I am striving to preserve our traditions and rich history by keeping their stories alive through my designs," Shafar says.

"Though my work is inspired by my culture, my aim is to make products for an international market. And my advice to all young Emiratis is to think global and also act global," he adds.

Inspirationalists will run at Gallery 1, The Pavilion Downtown Dubai, until February 4, 2012.



Clockwise from top:
Illusion dining chairs: ash wood and polyester rope;
Palm coffee tables: ash wood, metal bases and hand-woven palm-leaf mats; and
'The Crate' coffee table: beechwood, glass and mirror tops