



## Artist Interview: Inas Al Soqi



By Seth Macbeth

Transported on a spell of mystical charm and wonder, I find myself journeying through the enchanted forest of Inas Al Soqi's elaborate and unyielding stories as if following the white rabbit into a new dream. I enter her world through portals of mesmerizing collage pieces, drawn in by a beautiful array of colour and shape composed with delicate and wondrous precision. That otherworldliness and sense of a realm where anything is possible grows around you like wild flowers from a garden of travel and exploration, cultivated by Inas' young, free and inquisitive spirit.

"Once you don't belong to a place, traveling just makes sense. This idea of home is very strange, it is interesting to not have that one place to go back to."

With multiple residencies and gallery shows in countries all over the world, including Venice, Amsterdam, Marrakesh, England and New York, Inas has a wealth of life experience and a clarity of self exploration that only travel can bring. Matching that with her impressive array of certificates from Boston's Tufts University and Sotheby's Institute of Art in New York, she has wasted no time in becoming one of New York's most impressive collage artists.



Growing up in both Kuwait and Romania, she found her experiences and education restricted to the very specific teachings of both Muslim and Communist beliefs, sewing the seeds for a very distinct mix of artistic processes linked heavily with local traditions and lifestyles. Blooming in the shadow of this somewhat restrictive artistic approach, Inas began to draw a new world of her creating, that allowed for the expression she craved.

"The way they teach in the Arab world, you can't really depict real world things. I started to draw sandcastles, and imaginary doors. You would have to interact with the piece of paper somehow to get through the door. In some ways that was the start to my collage."

Inspiration from the Romani traditions of storytelling, fairy tales and mythical fantasy encouraged Inas to push the boundaries that had been formed around her art. "That very gypsy way of thinking, where everything means something." She explains. "I started to really tell stories through my art."

As she grew and continued to travel, Inas explored more of the world and her talents. Studying in North Carolina and Boston, those deep Romanian beliefs and customs blended with new experiences and teachings. "To go to an art school and be surrounded by professors who are artists themselves, and who talk to you like a fellow artist is invaluable," she tells me. "rather than pushing ideas or technique on you, they push you to explore your own language, and what you're trying to say."



The elaborate and sophisticated images explore themes and narratives close to the artist's heart, based upon the many colourful chapters in her life. Examining poignant and personal themes such as female identity and politics of the Middle East, she notes in particular her knowledge of Islam and the way women are treated in Eastern Europe. Her bounteous treasury of insight into multiple cultures and peoples gives her the influence and vision to breathe life into images and source material she has collected from all over the world. Pictures and imagery that have walked long across the face of the globe just as she has bring with them their own exceptionally unique story to add to the luscious bouquet that is the final tale.

"With all my experiences and the blurring of so many cultures, I feel like I have something to say; something about who I am – I don't quite know what it is yet, and I don't think I'm supposed to. But I think my work says it without me knowing it."

Looking back proudly on her work even just a few years ago, Inas feels braver and more confident about the messages and stories in her work, and can't wait to see what the future brings. "I can't wait to see the work I'll be doing in my fifties!" she laughs, expressing her excitement to be part of Kreative Finds. When it comes to pushing buttons and hitting hard on the subjects that matter, "sometimes you don't want to go there" she says. "I slowly slowly hint, but one day I'll have the courage to really go there, and really say it. I'll always be trying to work out how to say more."