



# PAPER TRAIL

Farah Al-Fardh shares her passion for quilling and the future for this prolific art form with **Arabian Woman**.

As Farah Al-Fardh takes a seat in the small Italian restaurant where we met, she seemed too young and too humble to be the pioneer of an art form in the UAE. It was even more surprising to learn then that she is the regional representative for 'The Guild' – UK's

quilling group, and also has many other titles and achievements to boast about.

Born and raised in Umm Al-Quwain, Al-Fardh was almost always surrounded by art and its myriad forms. As a child, she was fascinated by the beautiful henna designs her mother would create

on her little hands. And just after it dried, she replicated the same designs on paper. Her family consists of artists of all kinds – musicians, card-makers, painters, embroiderers and make-up artists. So this explained Al-Fardh's love and dedication to art.

Quilling as an art was developed in the renaissance period by nuns and monks, who would use it to decorate books and other items. The art is also known by names like paper filigree, paper twirling and paper mosaic. Basically, strips of paper are rolled, shaped and glued together to create decorative designs. The paper is wound around a quill to create a basic coil shape, which is then glued at the tip. These shaped coils are then arranged to form flowers, leaves, and various ornamental patterns.

In 2004, on a random search for paper craft books on the popular website amazon.com, Al-Fardh stumbled upon some manuals for kids that were labeled 'Paper Twirling from KLUTZ'. Her innate desire to explore unknown spheres of art made her purchase this book. "The book came with all the tools and materials required. It was easy to follow and had clear-cut instructions," says Al-Fardh.

Apart from the designs in the manual, Al-Fardh also experimented and used her creativity to make more and more new shapes, few of which she gifted to friends and relatives. The unique gifts were widely-appreciated and this, along with her family's constant support, gave her the encouragement to continue her pursuit.

Her interest further heightened when, for the festival of Eid, Al-Fardh quilled the Eidiya sheep. Al-Fardh was delighted with the overwhelming response, as she sold out 350 pieces of this little sheep. For the minimal cost of USD0.8, another 350 pieces wouldn't have taken too long to sell either. Al-Fardh says, "Back then, I was too naive to realise that the returns were not commensurate with the time and effort that I put into making them".

This young quiller, who works as an Assistant Manager in Vendor Relations at Dubai World Trade Centre during the day, efficiently balances her time between a full-time technical job and quilling. "If you are passionate about something, you will find time for it. In my case, I love quilling, so I manage to find time for it. I cannot quill whenever I want, but whatever little time I have, I quill, promote quilling or teach it to someone else. And I have many wonderful people who support me," she says.

Al-Fardh has quite a few accolades in her bag, but boasts about none whatsoever. In January 2009, she launched the first English-Arabic website on paper quilling. This soon became a platform for communication for both Arab and non-Arab quilling fans. The site, [www.farooha.net](http://www.farooha.net), which was conceptualised in 2008, fetched her the Tamaiaz Award from Mawarid in May 2009, in the category of Entrepreneurship. "In 2008, when I saw that the interest in knowing about quilling is increasing, I decided to have a website dedicated to it. I wanted it to be the first of its kind and so introduced it in both languages – English and Arabic, as it is primarily aimed at the Arab world," recalls Al-Fardh.

As she explains, there are three major quilling guilds in the world. The first is UK's, The Guild, of which Al-Fardh is the deserving 'Regional Representative'. She is a member of the other two – Japan Quilling Guild and North America Quilling Guild. Al-Fardh received an invitation to



the centre of the coil almost invisible. I was happy as the Japanese artists loved my 3D quilling, especially the 3D cartoon characters." It was during this event that Al-Fardh received her membership card, marking her as the official member of the Japan Quilling Guild.

She talks about a similar experience in the UK, "The Guild in the UK organises an annual gathering called AGM. This year it happened in Sheffield-UK, and I had a regional display all by myself. On that day, people from different areas in UK and other countries organise regional displays. This is the first year the UAE was represented. They also have a quilling competition, but unfortunately, I was unable to participate due to late arrival. There is also quilling market, where you can buy all the quilling supplies and tools. This event was followed by 'Idea Sharing Workshop', where everyone comes and presents quilling ideas, techniques and designs. I met Jane Jenkins there, who has written many books on quilling, and learnt quite a few things from her."

As for the future, Al-Fardh believes in taking one step at a time. Through online forums and other media, she is introducing the paper-art to the people unaware of its existence. Al-Fardh has conducted quilling workshops across the UAE – Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain, Dubai and Al-Ain. "I am planning a tour to different countries, and I will start with Jordan as there are many ladies who would like to start this art there. So I will visit them for one day to show them the basics and get them started. Then I will select another country."

However, Al-Fardh will not stop there, and is determined to get the art recognised on a larger scale. She is aiming for a fourth international quilling guild, and says, "We would like to have an official existence by forming The UAE Quilling Guild as we have lots of talented Emiratis, but the problem is gathering them to form a group. Later, we will also plan the first Quilling Exhibition in the region."

For ambitious quillers, Al-Fardh suggests, "No special quality is required to pursue this art. Only a desire to do something is enough to start with. Learning the usage of tools requires less than an hour, and then just let your imagination loose."