



JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER FRAMING THE UAE

HIND MEZAINA WANTS LOCAL PUBLISHERS TO IMPROVE THEIR PACKAGING OF THE UAE'S CULTURAL OUTPUT

I often wonder what kind of literature tourists take back home after their holiday in the UAE ends. Is it the ubiquitous postcard-style picture book of the city, or can we offer them something more in-depth? I hope the day comes when someone like me visits this country and can find unique books that can speak to them visually; which can be taken back to their home as memorabilia – something they can share, something to show there is more to this place than initially meets the eye.

I'm always drawn to bookshops during my travels, looking for literature about the city I am visiting or memorabilia to bring back home with me, searching for books about photography, film, music, architecture and design.

The Middle East has several established book publishers, but we are lacking publishers that cover the

arts. Discussions with my friends always lead to one conclusion; there's no demand for them because no one is interested to read about the arts in our own language: Arabic.

Is this the case? Do we have to resign ourselves to the fact that there is no demand amongst an Arabic reading audience for books that cover the fields of art, design and culture? There is an assumption that anything modern and creative can be found in other languages – just not in Arabic. The GCC doesn't lack original content, it just lacks the will and dare I say, the savviness, to bring our own literature to the fore, especially when it comes to books covering the creative arts.

When I recently took stock of my collection, I noticed I own just a handful of Arabic language books. I have Arabic novels translated into English, but it dawned on me I don't have a decent selection of books in Arabic. It's a reflection of my

generation's disconnect to Arabic books, or at least the ones who went to English language schools. Although we speak the language, we've lost interest in seeking knowledge from Arabic books. Wanting to make small steps to change this for myself, I went in search of Arabic books, curious to see what I would discover, what would grab my attention.

I headed to one of the oldest suppliers of Arabic books in the city, Dar Al Hikmah, on Diyafah Street in Dubai. A medium sized

bookstore surrounded by fast-food restaurants. It's an 'old school' place that I am glad to see is still standing after 30 years.

But what struck me was the heavy presence of Islamic literature and political books about the Middle East. It's as if books in Arabic have limited categories.

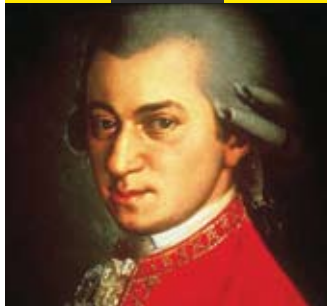
There were many international best-sellers translated into Arabic, but I couldn't find any books with a strong visual edge, something that looked modern and fresh. Even

though the place is endearing – it had a feeling of a family-run bookstore – I couldn't help but wonder if more can be done to appeal to readers like me.

When I went to one of Dubai's newer bookstores, Book World by Kinokuniya in The Dubai Mall – a place that looks like any big international bookstore – it lacked atmosphere but it did have a large selection of categories that went beyond religion and politics, which was refreshing. I felt however, for all its choice, it was still lacking

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSICAL GENIUSES

1756



Combining genius with hard work, *Mozart* began composing at the age of five, which explains why, despite his death at 35, he remains one of the most prolific classical composers. Transcends mere music.

1926



The genius of *Miles Davis* was his ability to recognise the importance of the space in between the notes. Also a very, very cool cat.

1935



He borrowed heavily from rhythm and blues and came up with rock 'n' roll. Girls fainted, parents complained and radio stations exploded. *Elvis Presley* was the first bona fide global superstar before developing a debilitating cheeseburger addiction.

1939



Marvin Gaye rose above the doo-wop music Motown expected him to perform and created one of the greatest albums of the 20th century, *What's Going On*, despite the label initially refusing to release it. Beset by demons, he was killed by his father in 1984.

something. Where are the books told through a native’s perspective about the architectural landscape of the country for the past 40 years? There’s a rich history of poetry and storytelling here, which is passed on verbally, but we also need this to be recorded in books. And these books need to be contemporary in feel, utilising some of the amazing graphic designers and illustrators we have in this region.

Where are the books that talk about embroidery, traditional

food and music – again told and documented from a native’s point of view, but with a modern aesthetic. I’m talking about the quality of books that are published by the likes of Booth-Clibborn and Phaidon.

With so much reliance on imported expertise and opinions, more needs to be done internally to attract and reintroduce Arabic readers to their own cultural DNA.

Whether it’s the role of existing publishers, new entrepreneurs or new regulations to push through this

change, it is very clear that a change is needed. Bookshops comfort me. They are places where I can enjoy a mental escape from daily life. Whether I go to buy magazines or browse for new books – and despite today’s digital options to purchase and read books – nothing can replace the feeling and experience of being inside a bookshop. It this experience that I look for when I am abroad and I hope it is something I can soon experience here in my hometown when I go in search of Arabic language books. ■

1942



A perfectionist who tottered on the brink of madness (he once spent three years in his bedroom) Brian Wilson married melody, harmony and technology better than anyone else.

1955



Kool Herc invented hip hop by combining James Brown breaks with verbal exhortations over the top of the records. A true original.

1974



The originators of punk and the idea that raw, stripped down rock music was more effective than the bloated music of the time, The Ramones were red-blooded musical pioneers.

1994



Justin Bieber and his haircut have taken the world (or at least the teenage part of it) by storm. Despite his music being less inventive than a business card, his genius lies in his marketing.