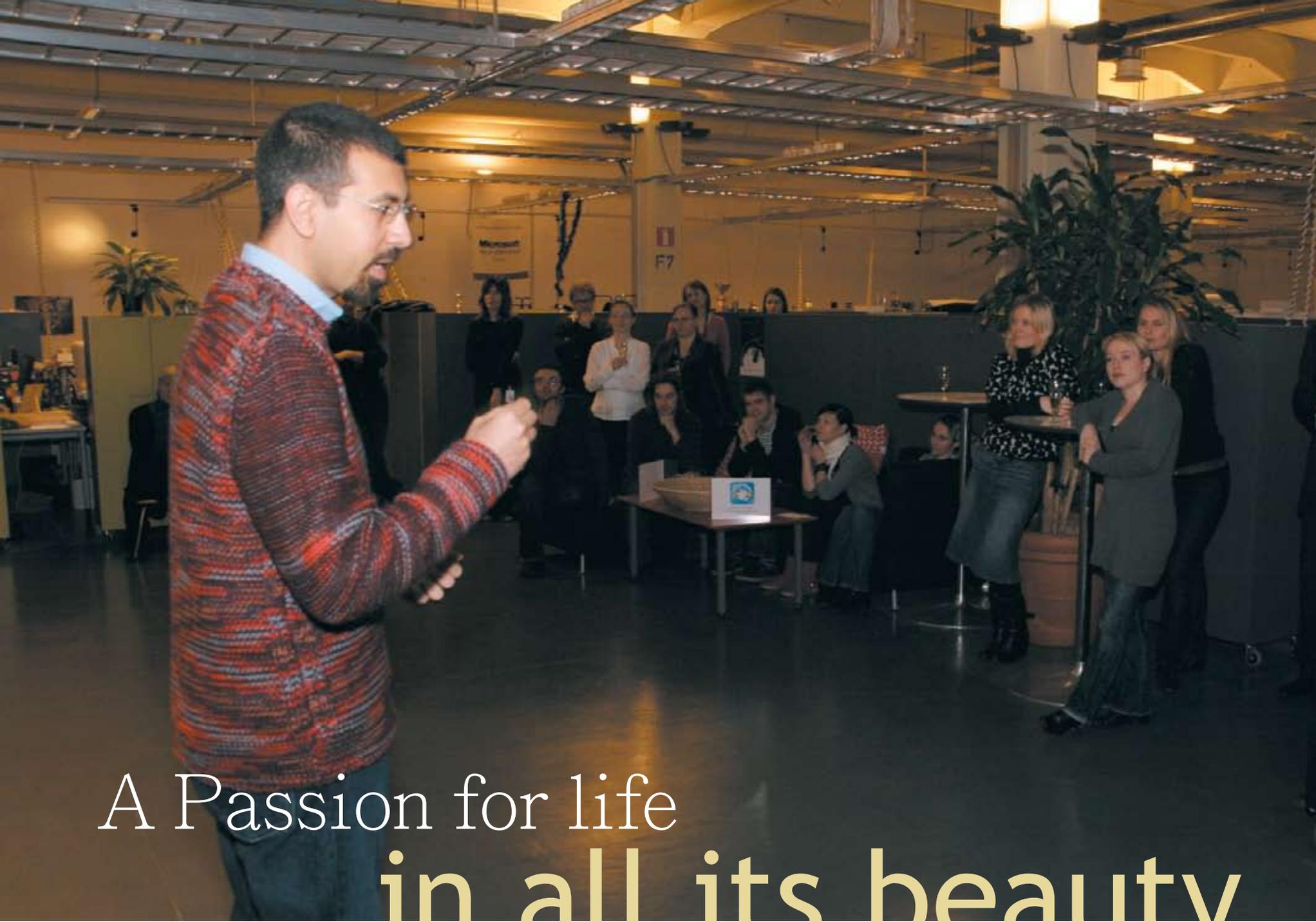


PASSION *men's*

“Golf used to be an old man’s game, now it is a young man’s **sport.**”

Says Mr. Qatami Al-Qatami

A renowned Golf enthusiast and one of the first to tee off
at the Sahara Golf Club- Kuwait



A Passion for life in all its beauty

Meet Mr. Louay Ahmad whose love for life and the Arts have made his life experience a truly unique one.

Loaay Ahmed turned to art to help him get through gruelling chemotherapy sessions in a successful fight against cancer. Now his digital artwork is on display around the world. Men's Passion met him as he prepared for his first exhibition in Kuwait

When did you start your digital artworks?

In February 2005. I had been diagnosed with colon cancer and following the operation I had six months of chemotherapy treatment. I had read about the possible side-affects of this so I arranged my work and time so that I was at home for most of that time in case I was not well. Luckily for me I had no side-effects, but for the first time in my life I had a lot of free time so I tried my hand at digital art. It started as therapy, something that I could use to express myself and keep me going. I ended the treatment with a good amount of art and people who were involved with the art world told me to hold an exhibition.

Even though I had not intended my art to be shown I got in touch with a few artistic organisations and the Centre of Contemporary Printmaking in Connecticut in the United States. They accepted one of my

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works and one of the judges there was a curator at the Whitney Museum in New York, which is a very strong contemporary art museum. It was wonderful to get that kind of endorsement of my work by such a leading international expert and that has helped me on my way in art.

Your work has been exhibited in a number of countries over the last two years but this is your first time in your home country?

Yes, last year I exhibited in the United States, Algeria and Finland. This year I will be at the Dar Al Funoon here in Kuwait from February 2-13 as well as in the United States. I am also organising exhibitions in Berlin and London for 2009 and talking to galleries in Dubai. This year I'm also hoping to be able to focus on producing other concepts that I've put on hold for some time.

I'm exhibiting in Kuwait as an international artist and not a local one. It can take artists a long time sometimes to get to the international world and I do not want to waste time. I know you need to be established in your own country and region but I did not want to wait 20 years to exhibit internationally. If you have the talent you should go for it and push forward. You will get rejected internationally as well as locally but you need the determination and drive to just keep going. In the contemporary art world more doors will open to you as people are willing to experiment.

So your illness has opened new chapters for you?

Definitely. The cancer was ironically one of the best things that happened to me. I was blessed that my cancer was detected early and was successfully treated. I now try to make my life more meaningful to others rather than myself. I used to worry about the future, now I live more for the moment. I am also trying to make people more aware of cancer. I'm launching an awareness programme called Najee.org to give people tips on how to survive and beat colon cancer, not from a medical point of view, but from an awareness of the disease and how to develop a positive attitude to fighting the disease. Najee in Arabic means both survivor and worshipper. I want people to be aware that colon cancer is not something that can just affect men over 50 years old, it can hit people in their 20s as well. I always try to tell people that they should go for an annual medical check-up; exercise for 30 minutes most days and try to eat more fruit and vegetables. If people can do that they can avoid many diseases in general.

Doctors told me my recovery was faster than many other people because of my attitude, but stress causes so many diseases I did not need to make myself worse by stressing out when I had already been told my disease was curable. The Chinese have a wonderful saying "if there is a problem and you can solve it then why worry, and if you can't solve it then why worry either," and I believe in that philosophy.

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You say you try to make your life more meaningful to others, what do you mean by that?

When I hold exhibitions I donate money from the artworks sold to two causes dealing with the environment and health issues. I try to make it a local charity to the country in which I'm exhibiting. The proceeds from the Kuwait exhibition will be going to the Beit Abdullah children's hospice and an international organisation called Trees for the Future. I donate to them because I print my works on paper so I feel I am helping to balance what I take out of the environment. I have a training management company and for every training course we organise we donate to Children in Crisis, a charity managed by the Duchess of York, helping to fund children in poor countries to receive an education.

Did you study art in college?

Art is a feeling, you either have it or you don't, no one can teach it to you. I have not studied fine art but my work has been exhibited in three places around the world so far, and all those quality and reputable organisations can't be wrong. Vincent van Gogh never studied fine art either and yet he has his own museum and is regarded as one of the greatest influences of the post-Impressionist movement in the 20th century.

You have to look at art for what it is. Art is a personal relationship between you the viewer and the art in front of you. When you look at a work of

art and you either love it or hate it, that's good as it means it has had an affect on you. When I go to a gallery I look at art and see if it speaks to me and that's what matters. On my website I mention a number of artists and it reaffirms the point that you should not judge my background. It does not make me less of an artist than anyone else.

How do you produce your artwork?

I admire Jackson Pollock's sense of discovery. Neither Pollock nor Salvador Dali had a predetermined outcome to their work. They experimented to see what came out and that is how I work. My studio is a computer and a board with a special pen so that when I draw it comes out on screen. I start by taking a picture with a camera and I work on that. Most of the time the image that made up the original picture is far removed from the final piece of art. That means that when many people look at my work they cannot figure out what it was before I started to work on it.

The process is like a journey of discovery as I don't know what the original image will end up as. Digital art is just another technique just the same as using a brush and canvas. But I don't want people to pay a lot of attention to the technique so much as for me it is all about the concept. I don't keep track on what process I used for certain pictures so I could not duplicate my work. I don't believe in creating art, I'm discovering it, only God can create.

What scenes capture your imagination?

My eyes see things in patterns. I tend to see the lines on a cabinet, for example, or the natural form of leaves. If the pattern strikes me as something exciting I capture it on camera, but a lot of my pictures do not end up as art, it has to talk to me. I am drawn to nature and anything that deals with every day life so you will not find me photographing a power station for example.

How would you describe your style of work?

I am anti-labelling. I am not post-Impressionism or minimalism or any other ism. My style is to have no style. The martial arts expert and actor Bruce Lee used to say you should be 'like water' you don't have to be bound to any form and that is how I am. My subject is everyday life and the variety that we can see in the world. I frame my work with classical frames in the style of the 18th and 19th centuries as I like the contrast. If van Gogh was alive today I would not be surprised if he would be experimenting with digital art.

How many works of art have you produced since you started?

Over 50 pieces so far. I produce my work in limited editions of 70 pieces. If I produced one-off pieces they would be expensive as I would have to cover my time, but in a limited edition of only 70 it means more people can enjoy it at a lower price. I have many ideas for other collections, which I am looking to produce and they all stem from every



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day life. I mount and hang all of my works and I find it really relaxing. The titles in my works are also very important, you will never see any of my works untitled.

I find titles add a very strong influence to the pieces without actually telling you what you are looking at as I'm not interested in telling you how to look at it, that defeats the purpose. It is up to you to decide what you are seeing.

Have you always been interested in art?

Yes. I have always visited art galleries and museums and I'm fascinated by architecture and interior design. My every day work is also creative as I work in branding, marketing and commercial digital printmaking.

What art do you have on your walls at home apart from your own works?

I have a big collection of Japanese woodblock prints. I love their simple subjects, original concepts, their extraordinary colours and their incredible accurate colouring process. I love the work of Hasui Kawase who is one of the great Japanese masters of woodblock prints in the 20th century. Unfortunately I have not visited Japan yet.

Do you have hobbies other than art?

I'm fascinated by Asian philosophies and I practice martial arts. I find it therapeutic. You forget about everything, your commitments, life, every day stress, as you are just experimenting with different moves, improving your technique and focussing on your inner energy.