

# Frilly

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## Sugar & Spice

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**Farah Al Fardh...** "I am always challenging myself to create shapes that show my ability and also the versatility of this craft (quilling)"

UAE. Alongside all this she also holds a full-time job.

"I was born and raised in Umm Al Quwain. However I moved to Dubai two years ago to live with my sister and her family. While I do miss living in Umm Al Quwain, I believe that Dubai is a city filled with opportunities. I studied at the Zayed University in Dubai [I used to commute to Dubai from Umm Al Quwain every day] before I started to work here. Most of my best friends are based here as well. So I am pretty much satisfied with the way things turned out after I moved here."

### The origin of the art

The exact origin of paper quilling is not known. Some say it has its origins in ancient Egypt. Others say it was developed right after the invention of paper. Still another school of thought insists that paper quilling was first developed in monasteries where thin paper strips were rolled, shaped and bent into delicate looking designs which were then affixed on to the books to imitate the gold and silver filigree work. The beauty of quilling is that it cannot be duplicated, as it is individually handmade and the styles of quilling vary among the quilling artisans. Paper quilling has other names, such as paper twirling and paper filigree. It is a time-consuming art, but one that never ceases to amaze customers and connoisseurs.

"With paper quilling you can use any type of paper as long as it isn't hard or thick," Farah says. "In fact in one of my upcoming creations, I am going to use old newspapers and magazines in order to reduce paper wastage. So far I have used magazine paper to create beads, but using them for paper quilling would be quite interesting."

With quilling you can create just about anything, whether it be a basic greeting card or an exquisite three-dimensional work of art. As for Farah, she loves creating Eid sheep. "I created these for Eid Al Adha and I sold more than 500 sheep. I also spent 10 days creating an Egg Garden and used more than 100 paper strips for the egg itself in addition to other small parts inside the egg. This way I am always challenging myself to create shapes that show my ability as well as the versatility of this craft. I am grateful that I have a good

imagination. The use of quilling is unlimited. You can decorate favour boxes, greeting cards and gifts with your quilling creations. I have also taken photos of my creations and used the images in calendars and greeting cards."

Her childhood love for paper and its myriad uses in art and craft took a backseat when she was at university. "However, after I graduated in 2002 and took up a job I started to fall sick quite frequently. During recuperation periods, I thought it was best to return to my hobby as I felt it was a good way of releasing negative energy. I am grateful that my gut feeling proved to be right. I started buying books on various arts and crafts. That's when my eyes caught the art of paper twirling and I ended up buying all the necessary tools for it. I then started to make different shapes to gift them to my sisters and friends." This was in 2005.

Today she looks back with fondness on her journey with her favourite hobby, and she smiles at the realisation that it has become an integral part of her life. What really helped her hobby to flourish however was her mastery over the English language. It enabled her to help the lure of quilling reach many Arabic-speaking women. Had she not been able to translate the many English books into Arabic, Farah says she would have experienced frustration at the obstacle. "I grew up listening to three languages, Arabic, Urdu and English. My mother finished her high school in India and got married to my father. When I was around four years old, she started attending Grade 1 in government schools so that she would be able to help all of us with our studies. While she was teaching my elder sisters, I would repeat whatever she was teaching them.

"I was however unable to speak English fluently till I joined Zayed University in Dubai, as our government schools didn't emphasise spoken English. I chose to major in Integrated Marketing Communication and had to take media writing courses. That forced me to learn spoken and written English. In fact those courses improved my English communication skills. I used to hate writing, but now no one can stop me. Once I get an idea, I write on. In fact people believe that I would make an

# The great paper chase

**F**ARAH AL FARDH'S love for the paper-based art quilling is limitless. She has even translated English books on the topic into Arabic. By **Preethi Janice D'Sa**. Photos by **Silvia Baron**

When her mother drew intricate henna designs on her hands, young Farah Al Fardh would wait for the deep crimson colour to mature, and when the pattern bloomed on her tender skin, she would get out a pencil and copy the exact design on to a sheet of paper. From a very early age, Farah developed a love for paper and design.

So much so that almost all her copy books in school had freestyle drawings on every page. She had teachers writing complaint notes to her mother about her 'wrongdoings'. Drawing and paper were to the young girl an immense source of pleasure. "[When it comes to drawing and designs], I would say that my siblings and I are all gifted. I recall my mother shouting at us as children as we went

about happily turning the walls in our home into vast canvasses that gave vent to our artistic aspirations. She would get us to clean up the walls every time we drew on them. But that didn't stop us from expressing our creativity!"

Today that creativity has matured into the art of quilling for Farah.

Proud of her Emirati background, Farah Al Fardh is a young, confident woman who could well serve as a role model for many other women wanting to find their purpose in life. A Communications graduate, she has taken her love for paper and quilling to great lengths. Apart from translating many English books on quilling into Arabic, she has also introduced the art of quilling on various television channels in the

PEOPLE

excellent English school teacher, but I do not see myself as one. I prefer to help people learn English as opposed to teaching the language for the sake of passing exams.”

Farah now uses English as a tool to spread awareness about paper quilling by translating English quilling books to Arabic. “I am a member of the [www.uaewoman.net](http://www.uaewoman.net) forum where I sell my quilled creations. Most members asked me if there was a book in Arabic about the art, and since all the books were available only in English, I translated them into Arabic. In fact this is what pushed me towards setting up a quilling website in both Arabic and English. I believe this is the first Arabic website in the world dealing with this art.”

**Butterflies and television**

She actively sells her quilling creations under the name of Farooaha, which is her nickname, and she wants to use the media to teach the art.



She has been interviewed by various Arabic magazines, and has also presented the art of quilling on TV.

The latter though has its share of tense moments! “I suffer terribly when I have to be on TV to demonstrate the art. However, I am no novice to the world of television. I used to do a lot of modelling when I was at Zayed University. My face was used in a lot in university publications and the photograph of my hand framing a medal won a

**Some of Farah Al Fardh's creations...**  
Paper quilling is a time-consuming art, but one that never ceases to amaze even connoisseurs

photography award in the US.” In fact, she acted in a locally made film hosted by Zayed University titled *And the Desert Smiled* which was screened at many cinemas in Dubai. “This was the first Emirati movie to take part in international film competitions in

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the UAE, Europe and the Arab world." Farah is also often invited by schools in the UAE to demonstrate the art of quilling to students. She recently held a one-day workshop for a school in Ras Al Khaimah. "It was a success," she says. "As I have a full-time job, I don't accept all the invitations, but my employers have always encouraged me to start an arts and crafts club for our employees in order

to create a better work environment and promote team building."

She was also invited by the UAE Ministry of Culture and Youth to be part of the Ramadan Majlis that showcased Emirati talents in Umm Al Quwain. She is on her way to becoming the first UAE representative for quilling as part of the British Quilling Guild. But she does confess to still getting butterflies in her

**With quilling** you can create just about anything, whether it be a basic greeting card or an exquisite three-dimensional work of art

stomach when she has to address a really big forum.

Looking at her artworks, it seems unlikely that such momentary issues will have any overall impact on her zeal to take quilling to great heights in the UAE. She is clear about her future, as she is ambitious about the future of quilling here. Apart from wanting to set up her own training centre for arts and crafts, and more specifically for paper quilling, she is also mulling over "a shop to start my quilling business. That would be an anchor for my website, which already attracts interested people".

For more details visit her new website [www.faroooha.net](http://www.faroooha.net)

- Preethi Janice D'Sa  
is a Dubai-based freelancer

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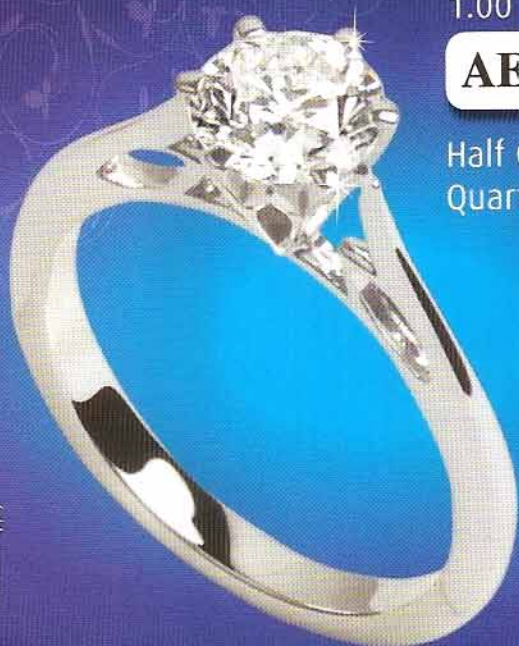
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