

■ SHAWARMA FOR THE SOUL

It's all Greek!

Helen Ellinas believes in finding a way to hang on to the different cultures that she has lived in. There is a Greek saying, 'onoma kai pragma', which when roughly translated into English means, 'what I'm named is what I am.' Every piece of her art has her name scrawled on it, which also means Greek (this is her father's name, Ellinas, a name that truly defines who she is).

A London-born Greek Cypriot artist who falls in love with the countries she lives in and tries to capture their spirit in her art, Helen Ellinas primarily loves to work with glass. "The richness of colour and the tactile feel to the glass is unique. I love the way that each painting changes depending on the source of light that illuminates it." She loves the way her finished glass paintings look when natural light plays on their surfaces.

She admits that she learnt her craft through trial and error, "trying every type of paint on the market, mixing them, matching them, experimenting with various finishes and constantly looking for new colour combinations." But no matter how much she experiments, she always returns to working with glass.

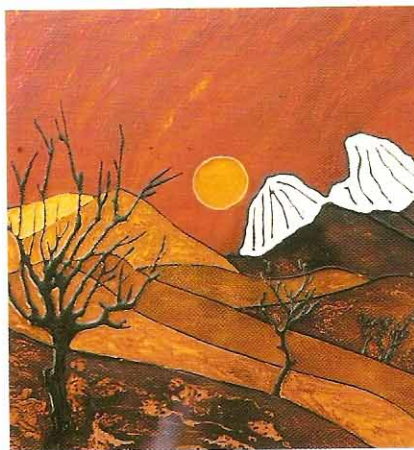
Ellinas has been blessed to have called many places around the world her home, from London to Larnaca. "Wherever I live, I have always loved to take long walks in order to drink in the atmosphere and get a sense of the place I called home at the time."

That the desert has opened up a new landscape of opportunities to derive inspiration from is for her a literal gift. That's why dune bashing is an important activity for her. "In the months from October through to April, a group of us go out travelling over the dunes into a new area of desert every few weeks. It's like a rollercoaster ride without the hindsight of knowing what we'll find."



Helen Ellinas knows how to capture the beauty of a place in her glass work. Landscapes inspire her, as seen with her depiction of Fossil Rock (Jebel Maleiha), below left

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"When our old bones have been rattled enough, a good spot is found, a fire is lit, blankets are laid, all surrounding scenery is photographed for future artistic reference, and vast amounts of meat are removed from cooler bags and barbecued!"

One such scenery that made its way into a painting was that of a fossil rock, officially called Jebel Maleihah. It is around 30 km from Dubai, and is en route to Hatta through the desert. It is abundant with marine fossils. That day, she recalls, was a perfect day for photographs. "It was so surreal, creamy white rocks emerging from the sands. The setting sun melting yellow ochre, burnt sienna and crimson red, with the dry trees that have been stripped of leaves by roaming camels.

It was truly nature at its best." She also has a nearly fanatical approach to colours. "Just as I love the green of England and the sparkle of the sun on the Mediterranean sea in Greece and Cyprus, I love the colours and shapes of the desert."

Ellinas derives her energy from being with customers and like minded artisans. She enjoys the direct contact with them in a multicultural atmosphere. For someone who's been in the market for 15 years, are there any tips that she can endow artisan-wannabees? "Watch your customers' reaction. They will tell you everything you need to know about your product."

You can contact her at helen.ellinas@gmail.com

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