

'I WAS CAPTIVATED AT FIRST SIGHT'

LULU AL-SABAH

THE KUWAITI SHEIKHA OPENS UP ABOUT ART, LOVE AND FAMILY LIFE



With an artistic mother who grew up in New York during the 60s, it's no surprise Lulu Al-Sabah was drawn to the contemporary art world. When *OK!* caught up with the Kuwaiti Sheikha in Dubai, we knew she was in her element, surrounded by fellow art enthusiasts and looking immaculate in Jason Wu. Not content with being a multi-tasking mother of one, last year the 30-year-old former journalist co-founded an independent art advisory company called JAMM with partner Lydia Limerick. We sat down to discuss her passions, family life and her quest to make the Gulf an international cultural destination...

What does JAMM stand for?

My partner Lydia Limerick has two sons Jack and Max and I have a daughter, Amaya, so it's the first letters of their names – we don't normally tell people that! We added the extra M to make it more contemporary and it's an easy name to remember.

Where does your interest in art come from?

I would have to say my mother. She's from New York and she grew up in the 60s when you had pop artists like Andy Warhol. From a very young age she took us to galleries and museums, so I was exposed to it from a very young age, though I didn't appreciate it until much later in life.

You recently hosted an auction of contemporary art in Kuwait where sales totalled more than half a million dollars...

It was a great opportunity to showcase Kuwaiti artists. Only one Kuwaiti artist had ever featured in an international art auction before. It was an art auction first and foremost but 30 per cent of the proceeds are going to the charity K's Path. I noticed, having worked for Christie's, that there are a lot of people who are scared by the process of auctions. I wanted to introduce it in a way that was young and fun and small-scale to get over that fear factor.

What was the highlight of the auction for you?

The highlight was definitely the turnout. We had over 400 local and international attendees. And I was so pleased by the enthusiasm among my fellow Kuwaitis.

Which artists inspire you?

That's a tough question, because I know so many artists and I'm still learning. There is an Omani artist, Hassan Meer – he inspires me not just because of the quality his work (he works in paint and video), but also because he decided he was not going to exhibit on his own but that he wanted to incorporate other



contemporary Omani artists and he created a specific festival to do just that. My goal is to promote Arab and Iranian art, and so that really inspired me.

What is the most rare or expensive piece of art you own?

A few years ago at the Basel Art Fair I came across a work by an abstract artist called Callum Innes. I just fell madly, madly in love. At Dhs184,000 it was way beyond my budget. My mother purchased the work for me and I paid her back in instalments. Once I had paid all the instalments she sent it to my house. It was a work that stopped me dead in my tracks.

Which celebrity would you love to have involved with JAMM?

Celebrities who have a cross-cultural appeal – someone like Lenny Kravitz. He's labelled as a musician but he's so much more than that, he's a cultural trendsetter. Madonna is also a big one, I'd definitely like to work with her.

Have you had any celebrity clients buying art at the auctions?

We try not to differentiate between celebrity and non-celebrity clients. For me auctions are democratic and every single client is just as important to us.

What are your passions in life other than art?

I love travelling, reading and dancing. I really like documentaries more than anything and I love fiction novels. I studied History for my BA and my Masters, so I like to have a grand love story set to an accurate historical background.

Do you find it hard to balance your work with family life?

My team is made up of four women, so by virtue of being women we understand the stresses and pressures of family life. We don't have an office (apart from in London) so because we all work from wherever there is no strict timeline. As long as things get done, I can allocate time where it needs to be given, which is wonderful.

Do you believe in love at first sight?

Yes, I do. Well, maybe more captivated at first sight. I experienced that with my husband when I met him seven years ago.

Women usually love romantic gestures, what wins you over?

As clichéd as you can get! I love the movie-style romance – the flowers and candlelit dinner. My ideal evening would be my husband and I dining al fresco, with a guy playing accordion in the background.

Have you done much shopping in Dubai?

The first few times I came to Dubai I came for work, and I never went to the beach or the mall, and I feel like an alien! But since then I have been able to go to Boutique 1 and to S*uce. There's some great shopping here.

Who are your favourite designers?

I'm very lucky because my sister is a buyer for a clothing shop in Kuwait so she introduces me to young, up-and-coming designers. I'm dressed in Jason Wu today – but I hadn't heard of him until six months ago. There are certain designers I always gravitate towards, Vanessa Bruno for example.

What's your favourite city in the world for a dose of culture?

It depends on what's happening. You want to be in Venice during the Venice Biennale, you want to be in London during Frieze. In the future I hope people start saying the Gulf, and maybe one day that'll be the case.