

# Colourful Expressions

by Katy Gillett

With her bold use of colour, vivid portrayals of reality and passion for life, art and everything in between, Seana Mallen beautifully and skilfully sketches her road less travelled.

Ever since she was just a toddler living in Switzerland, half American, half Irish artist Seana Mallen remembers travel being a large part of her lifestyle. Her abundant sketchbooks

speak for themselves. With each country she visits and trip she goes on, Seana fills an entire book with her doodles, paintings, thoughts and feelings. "When you sit down at a place with a sketch book, people tend to respect you from a distance; there's a kind of bubble around you. There's no better way to sit in a place for about half an hour. It gives you this slower-paced, quieter way to truly and deeply soak in a place," she tells **Bahrain Confidential**.

Seana's art is based in reality but is at the same time abstract. She uses colour to great effect as this is what inspires her most;

perhaps why her recent two exhibitions were on trips she took to Kerala and Kenya. She tells me that although she loves living in Bahrain and believes the island has opened up a world of opportunities for her as an artist, the landscape and lack of colour leave her rather uninspired. "People here are so warm and friendly. The life is good. The art community is really burgeoning and it's a great place to travel from, but Bahrain is the perfect palette for a minimalist."

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It is true that Bahrain's art scene is flourishing. Art galleries have been springing up

around the island and artists here are getting more and more experimental. "Bahrain has a generally well educated population who are interested in music and art. There's a lot of artwork but if you want to do something there are people who are always interested

and will look at it." Seana spent 20 years previously living and working on the edge of London and she tells us how the competition was impossible, with around ten artists a day entering a gallery, trying to get someone to look at their work.

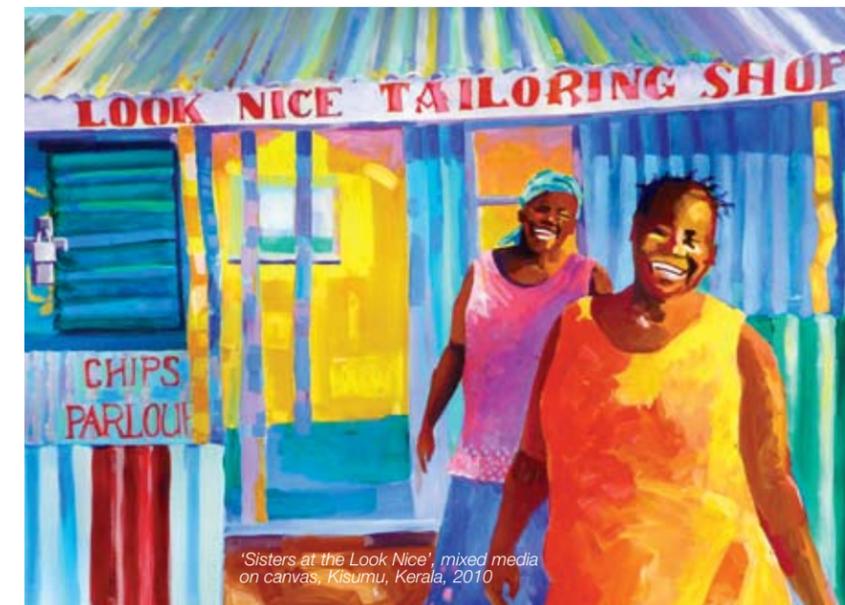
This was a struggle for Seana, but she found her niche through portraiture, which she is highly talented in. "I did so many portraits in London and when I first moved to Bahrain and I was very successful in this, but this type of work only calls for half my creativity and half the client's. My journey now is to simplify and make a statement that is more about colour, shape and form. It just makes something beautiful and happy and kind of life-affirming."

In 1990 Seana also discovered her love for teaching. She began teaching through adult education in south west London and then went on to do an MA in drawing at Kingston University where, after completion, she also lectured and taught. Adult education has always been her main focus and remains so to this day. Seana recently just began three classes at Studio Ceramics, one of which teaches beginners. "I really believe that if you put your mind to it anyone can draw. Everyone has this idea that it's a God given gift but no one would expect

to be able to play the piano without learning! A lot of people have gone through life believing they can't draw; it's a passion of mine to unlock these doors. Drawing is much more about seeing and training your eye to see. Even if they don't go on to be artists I believe they will always see the world in a clearer way."

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and together they created the idea of an ongoing alternative art space to promote the talents of local artists alongside their



'Sisters at the Look Nice', mixed media on canvas, Ktsumu, Kerala, 2010

Seana is also working on another project; launching Sar Art Space at the Sar Music Centre. Lydia Martin, the director of Sar Music Centre, showed Seana the foyer of the school with its clean but bare walls

musicians. "I've always been interested in the relationship between music and art." This launch, dubbed 'The Art of Jazz', will come in conjunction with the first concert of the year on 16th October, which will

feature talented jazz musicians who teach at the centre. The art exhibition will open at 6.30pm as the concert kicks off at 8pm. Seana hopes it will showcase many artists' work, based

around jazz and blues music.

As the afternoon progresses and we get deeper into the interview, it becomes evident that Seana has many interests. "Something I've always wanted to do is figure out a way for my art work to be useful. I love to paint but at one level I realise that I'm mostly painting to decorate other wealthy people's houses. That's ok, but I would also really love to find a way to actually engage communities with art work that will benefit them in the long term."

On her recent trip to Kenya, Seana met a man named Adam who astonished her. "To look at him, he wasn't amazing at all; 27, American, nothing particularly special." But it's what he's done which is special. After graduating in America, Adam went to Kenya to do some volunteer work and ended up opening a school in Jangwani, which is within the larger Mathare Slum in Nairobi. Four years on and the school has 120 students - "these kids feel like they're the luckiest children in the world even though they have nothing," Seana remembers. She visited the school during her trip and taught the kids to draw, sang songs and played games with



'The morning catch', watercolour in a sketchbook, Lake Victoria, Kenya, 2009

'Aleppo Citadel', watercolour in a sketchbook, Syria, 2010

'Susie at the Calm Café', acrylic on canvas, Kerala, 2009



Seana Mallen



them. She then came back to Bahrain and held an exhibition alongside the Manama Singer's African Sanctus at the Crowne Plaza, where she raised money for the charity. "The best thing about this charity is that the money goes straight to the school; there's barely any administration."

Art really has taken Seana all around the world and allowed her to see it in a way that those of us who rush through life never will. Seana tells me about yet

another project she will soon embark upon - one which I'm sure will make most people jealous. Teaching art on cruise ships! "It seems crazy to me but

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it will be so much fun!" Seana exclaims. The company, Crystal, visited Bahrain for the first time this year and Seana went

aboard one of their top luxury cruise liners. She then found out about Odyssey Art at Sea, who are the agents that supply artists to cruise liners for their 'enhancement

programmes'.

"Every hour of every day, there is so much to do on a cruise ship, and learning how to draw or paint is just one of them.

These ships are at sea 365 days a year and they swap us round every ten days or so, so there is a lot of opportunity in this industry." Seana has been booked a year in advance and the first cruise she will embark upon goes from Miami and around the Caribbean; the second goes from Stockholm to St Petersburg, stopping off at many other countries along the way.

Forget the stereotype of struggling or tortured artist! It seems the artisan's path can be a charmed one and it is obvious that Seana Mallen has made the most of every minute of it. "I can't imagine myself or my husband ever really retiring. Once we leave here I would love to travel around India for a year or so just painting, or maybe join a volunteer organisation. I really hope we have many travel adventures ahead of us." ■



'Stick no bills', Kerala, Mixed Media on canvas, 2010

To find out more about joining one of Seana's classes call Studio Ceramics on +973 1759 9026.

To enquire about showcasing your art at The Art of Jazz at Sar Music Centre email: mallengallery@gmail.com.

Finally, to find out more or donate to The Kenya Children Project, visit [www.matharechildren.com](http://www.matharechildren.com)