



From left, Shehd Azzubair, 11, instructor Monique Fillon, 19, Kabir Nanda, 10, Malaika Nanda, 10, and Lakshmi Khatri, 11, all of Dubai, make crafts based on the Islamic art work at the Farjam Collection in the DIFC Gate Village yesterday. Amy Leang / The National

With special access, art comes alive

Camp gives children opportunities to see, learn and practise

Anna Soaman

DUBAI // Fifty children have been allowed access to some of the most rare and valuable pieces of Islamic art as part of an interactive summer camp in Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC).

The children, aged six to 12, have been learning the history of some of the 80 items in the Farjam Collection and developing basic art and craft skills to re-create them.

The Art Camp is a four-week programme within the gallery space usually reserved for exhibitions of the private collection of Dr Farhad Farjam, a prominent Iranian art collector. The camp runs in four weekly sessions where the children observe and create from the objects they see. In the first week they

studied a pair of Persian helmets from the Safavid and Qajar Dynasties before making their own from paper mache and paper clips.

Another session featured an ornate curtain that had been laid over the Prophet Mohammed's tomb in Saudi Arabia. The ancient artefact hanging above them, they practised weaving techniques using thread and paper strips. Although the tasks were simple, they have the long term benefit of providing a greater understanding of art, said Rebecca Jarvest, the collections and exhibitions coordinator who helped devise the camp content.

"It's a common misunderstanding held by adults that this sort of art is inaccessible," she said. "For example they think they need to understand the calligraphy before they can understand the piece."

Children don't have the same mental blocks, they just see the beauty in the shape of the letters.

"If you start that thinking from a young age it will change the way

they appreciate all art in the future."

The best way to make the art relevant to the children was to show them how it was used in everyday life, said Emilie Faure, the gallery manager.

As she stood next to one of the oldest copies of the Quran, from the seventh century with large Sufic script, she explained how the children appreciate the items if they are put into context.

"We take the prayer scrolls and show them how they would be rolled up and fitted under the arm or attached to clothing," she said. "Or point out the Sultan's signature at the bottom of the textiles and break it down into segments so they can recognise them."

Some of the children's parents work in the art industry in the UAE, including Antonia Carver, the new director of Art Dubai, and Wissam Shawkat, the calligrapher who was commissioned to provide art work at DIFC.

Mr Shawkat said he had enrolled his eight-year-old daughter, Reem,

into the camp to bolster her exposure to art in school.

"In terms of art history I don't think she is getting enough education and I have seen the Farjam Collection lectures and tours, they are very professional.

"This is a very good opportunity for her to learn and to practise her painting. She has been very excited about it."

One student, Malaika Nanda, 10, said she had learned a lot.

"I like doing the worksheets and I really like the Persian art," she said. "I've never seen a miniature painting before, the style is different."

Luca Parkes, six, said he was there because he found art interesting.

"I'm very good at drawing and I love painting. I want to be a famous artist."

The camp will continue until August 12 and costs Dh500 per child for a week.

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► To see a video of the art camp, visit www.thenational.ae/multimedia