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# At the crossroads

WORDS BY KARINE MONIÉ  
IMAGES: COURTESY OF IBBINI STUDIO

When a visual artist and designer joins forces with a computer scientist and maker, the outcome is like no other. A case in point is Ibbini Studio.

“It was more a natural evolution of the practice, coupled with the growth of our collector base, that resulted in the formalising of the work into Ibbini Studio,” remembers Julia Ibbini, one half of the duo. Both Jordanian and British, Ibbini grew up in the United Arab Emirates. While she’d known that she wanted to be an artist since a young age, it took her many years to realise her dream. “I spent 10 years in marketing before moving into a full-time arts practice.”

Born in France, Stephane Noyer obtained a master’s degree in computer science and then moved to the UAE, where he worked in several fields before starting to collaborate with Ibbini in 2017. Since then, the two have created a unique body of work of which sits at the intersection of art, design and contemporary art.

“Sometimes the work is closer to functional art; for example, we’ve just completed a collection of mirrors,” says Ibbini. “On other occasions, it’s more contemporary craft with a design lean – as with our *Symbio Vessels* collection. I find it more interesting not to sit within specific boundaries of a ‘field’, and instead push the practice to spill over into many areas.”

Their elaborate and ornate pieces can take up to six months to complete as some of them comprise thousands of single parts. They require different skills, from software programming to the highest level of craftsmanship combined with the use of very precise machines.

“An important part of the practice is in research and development, so a portion of the projects focus on purely pushing [the]



boundaries of material/technique/concept,” confesses Ibbini.

Fine veneer wood, paper, mother of pearl and – more recently – repurposed thin acrylic sheeting are some of the materials the duo work with to create their mesmerising pieces in their new studio space in Abu Dhabi. “We select the materials for their delicate and tactile qualities when cut,” says Ibbini. “I am particularly fond of paper, which looks like lace when cut finely enough.”

Working mostly on commissions for private collectors, hotels and corporate collections, Noyer and Ibbini – who received the Van Cleef & Arpels Middle East Emergent Designer Prize in 2019 – are always busy, and the coming months show no signs of slowing down. “We’ve got some especially large-scale pieces underway that will need a lot of development before they are completed,” Ibbini says. “We are also working on a series of more functional works that I’m excited about.”

Whether it is through the repetition of simple motifs, elaborate geometric constructions or an accumulation of ornamental details, the Ibbini Studio creations reinterpret old references in a contemporary way, giving life to something visually unique that cannot be compared to anything else. Complexity and simplicity intertwine through objects that involve both humans and machines. “Algorithms allow [us] to augment hand-drawn designs; high-precision machines are used to laser-cut or 3D-print parts; and the final build is always carried out entirely by hand,” Ibbini and Noyer say. The right mix for the perfect result.

