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Artist on a roll: Paper Chase

Farah Al Fardh has crafted a success story from her creative hobby of quilling and now she plans to take this ancient art form to a whole new level

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Farah sold 350 of these cute little things during Eid Al Adha

Image Credit: Xpress, Megan Hirons Mahon

When Farah Al Fardh started twirling tiny strips of paper into decorative designs, no one would have thought her creative hobby of quilling would turn into a business proposition.

But it did. And how.

"I had always been passionate about quilling, but it's commercial potential dawned on me just a few years back.

"It was Eid Al Adha and I had created some cute sheep forms to hold Eidiya, the money that's given to children by elders as an Eid tradition.

"The response was overwhelming. By the time the festival got over, I had managed to sell 350 Eidiya sheep at Dh3 apiece.

Of course, back then I was too naive to realise that the returns were not commensurate with the time and effort that I put into making them," she recalls.

More returns

Her creations fetch much more than that today - between Dh250 and Dh300 per piece - on the www.uaewoman.net forum, where she operates under the nickname Faroooha.

The 29-year-old Emirati also plans to get a trade licence and set up an exclusive quilling boutique as an anchor for her website www.faroooha.net.

But Farah, who works as an assistant manager at the World Trade Centre, says her objective is not to make money, but to create awareness about the art, which many believe originated in 13th century Europe.

"Painters can see their paintings and musicians can hear their music, but quillers can actually hold the shape of their thoughts in their hands. It's a pity not many know about this astonishing art. And that's why I want more and more people to learn it," said Farah, who routinely conducts quilling workshops and also demonstrates the art on local television channels.

But isn't she worried that more awareness would lead to competition?

"No. I know what I am doing. I know the quality of work that I am producing. That apart, no one can peer in to my mind and read what I am thinking," she said, flaunting an adorable little giraffe which she has created as a wedding gift for a friend.

Last year Farah was appointed regional representative by The Quilling Guild of the UK - one of only three such organisations worldwide - and will represent the UAE in a quilling meet in Japan in July.

"We'll be sharing our work techniques. It will be an enriching experience. I am excited," she said.

Meanwhile, Farah is busy translating her paper chase into paperback, by writing what she claims will be the first quilling book in Arabic. The book is tentatively titled *Al Tareeq Ela Fan Laf Al Warq* (The Road to Quilling).

Origin of quilling

Quilling can be traced to 15th century European monasteries. The fine strips of handmade paper trimmed from the pages of religious manuscripts were far too precious to be discarded, so a new form of art was developed to utilise them. These strips of paper, which were rolled and curled around goose quill pens, came to be known as "quilling."