

Cultured Focus MAGAZINE

VAN HUNT

*A Voice for Inclusivity in
the Creative Space*

Photo by G L Askew II

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C O N T



Van Hunt

A Voice for Inclusivity in
the Creative Space



The Zay Initiative

An Ode to The Past, A Nod
to The Future



Indigo Hotel Dubai

A Pioneer in Arts
& Culture



New Music

by Sukhmani

"Not Your Exotic"



The Zay Initiative

An Ode to The Past, A Node to The Future

By: Taylor Re Lynn

Photography by Issa Saleh Al Kindy

Speaking in an exclusive interview with Cultured Focus Magazine at the Expo 2020 Women's Pavilion (sponsored by the Cartier Foundation), The Zay Initiative's Dr. Reem El Mutwalli lays out the diligent and extremely important work conducted by her foundation in preserving the cultural heritage of the Arab world. Dr. El Mutwalli is a published author with over 40 years of experience in art and cultural heritage. She founded The Zay Initiative



in 2019 to create the world's first Arab dress historical archive. Inspired by the intricately designed dresses from an earlier age, Dr. Mutwalli found herself drawn towards the fashion industry during her time as the head of the Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi. Over the course of her career, she collected dozens of dresses spanning back to the founding of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Finding that she still needed to collect more dresses for a complete collection, she decided to form The Zay Initiative, a sprawling yet intimate take on the evolution and development of dresses throughout the Arab world.

Through its work, The Zay Initiative aims to empower women regionally and globally by bringing their untold stories to life.

Dr. Mutwalli is vigorously invested in her work. Her passion and love for the initiative show when she discusses the painstaking process involved in collecting dresses from all over the world. Her stunning success is demonstrated by the incredibly

special items in her possession, in particular, a 60s era Libyan dress bought by an American oilman working in the country during that time period. As the dress travelled from Libya to America and then to Dr. Mutwalli, it completed a journey spanning 80 years from its inception to its final resting place at The Zay Initiative in the UAE.

Incorporating her work with female empowerment, Dr. Mutwalli explains that she



decided to partner with top trailblazing women from the UAE to wear these iconic dresses. It always seemed to her like a no-brainer that women at the forefront of cutting-edge fields in the UAE would come together, adorned in the historical dresses sourced through The Zay Initiative's diligent work.

A labor of love, The Zay Initiative has managed to accomplish a tremendous

amount of work in a short amount of time. The epitome of grace and purpose, Dr. Mutwalli is the perfect leader for the Initiative. Though still in its infancy, its potential is clear. With the birth of the organization and the global recognition, it is time to nurture the project; in order to do so, further support is needed, explained Mutwalli. The Zay Initiative is not a government institution;

it is an individual non-profit organization registered in the United Kingdom, which lends it credibility. To further the organization's work, more Ph.D. and Master's level researchers and writers

are needed to assist with the rigorous in-depth research required to further the Initiative's goals. In the future, the Initiative aims to obtain additional acquisitions, as well as engage with and promote existing collections to encourage collaboration and knowledge exchange. Additional funding from individuals, institutions, brands, and corporations will support the important

work needed to grow the organization. Those interested in being a friend of The Zay Initiative can donate at www.thezay.org. The Zay Initiative welcomes like-minded individuals who believe in their work and the importance of sustaining culture and traditional crafts. In supporting the Initiative, donors are directly empowering women since the initiative employs craftswomen who help collect, mend and

maintain the dress collection. Dr. Mutwalli has achieved an impressive feat - collecting decades' old pieces of traditional Arab clothing from the far reaches of the world to preserve their stories, their intricate design and manufacturing processes, and the impact these dresses have on local cultures. The Initiative has managed to fulfill a much-needed cultural gap in

a region where arts and culture are experiencing a transformation so rapidly that pundits and observers are having a difficult time keeping up. With the utmost care and passion, The Zay Initiative has managed to save an important part of the region's culture for the inspiration of countless future generations in the Arab world.

For more information, visit www.thezay.org.

