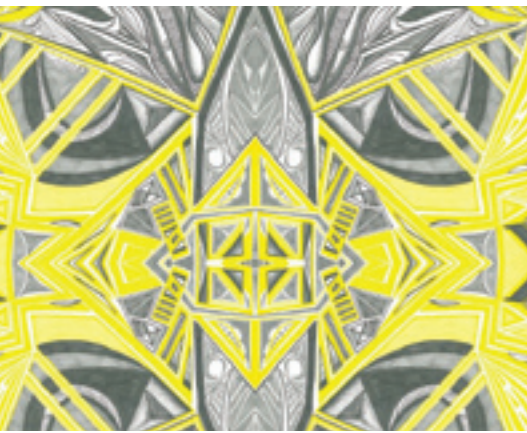


Around the world, many sisters use art and creativity in their daily lives: from seeking their rizq, to giving da'wah and sadaqah, or just enjoying creative expression as a means to recognise the brilliance and variance of creation.



## An Entrepreneurial Spirit

Brooke Benoit talks to artist Samar Asamoah, who influenced by her Afro-Caribbean heritage and Islamic faith, combines fine art, printmaking, and interior design for maximum surface coverage and then some.



When Samar Asamoah journeyed off to university to study fine art, she had also recently stepped onto another new path of becoming Muslim. Surprised by how far she would be going away, but knowing how headstrong she is, Samar's parents continued to support her choices, including to study in remote Newcastle. As she says "getting as far out of the country as possible without crossing any actual borders." At university, her first hurdle at combining her new faith and studies immediately proved to be a blessing:

"When I first became Muslim, I found out that it was haram to draw pictures of people and animals, so I had to completely change my artistic frame of work, as I used to do a lot of figurative work and portraiture. Alhamdulillah I'm glad that I found out about it at an early stage, so at least I didn't go into uni starting out drawing figures, etc., and then later having to say that I couldn't. I remember explaining to the lecturers that I couldn't do any life drawings, and at first they thought it was because the models were naked, and they wanted me to draw clothed models. I repeated that I couldn't draw people, and then they asked if I could draw animals. Being a new Muslim, I still wasn't very good at explaining things. I should have just said that I can't draw animals or people – period. Something that helped me through this time, is that I used to love tattoo art. I knew that tattooing people's bodies is haram, but the designs themselves didn't have to be, and so I started focusing on patterns and decorations, tribal markings, folk art etc. – places that a lot of tattoo ideas come from."

*I was always coming up with business ideas and selling things I had made to other kids, I had a troll catalogue and would make clothes for trolls, selling them for ten, twenty, fifty pence.*

While exploring her interests in African textiles, Islamic art, and Indian folk art, things came together for Samar when she "came across a story from the Qur'an, in which the King Solomon had built a palace entirely from glass." For her degree show piece, Samar began the work to lift her designs off of paper and build a full-sized structure made of her work hand etched onto glass.

"Since then the 'Greenhouse' has been on display at the Globe Hub Gallery in North Shields and the John Hansard Gallery in Southampton as part of collaborative exhibitions. I have also been commissioned by the National Glass Centre for the 'North and South' exhibition, for which I created a seven panel glass art pieces called 'ROY G BIV'. Each panel being a different colour of the rainbow sandblasted with one continuous design over the seven panels."

What's left for an artist to explore after mastering the tough stuff of working with such an imposing medium as glass? For Samar, nearly all surfaces have been, and continue to entice her. With a lifelong

interest in being self-employed and especially in interior design, Samar has remained realistic about the limited market available to her locally – so she went global!

"I wanted to work for myself since I was a child. I could never imagine actually working for someone. I was always coming up with business ideas and selling things I had made to other kids. I had a troll catalogue and would make clothes for trolls, selling them for ten, twenty, fifty pence. So, I feel like if I could do it aged seven then why not now? I know it isn't as easy, but still I'm not making troll clothes anymore am I?"

From her little "Yezark" studio in the North East, Samar uses several different online sources to market her expanding line of art and goods. With sites like Etsy, she is able to directly sell her paintings, drawings, handmade sketchbooks, and other handmade items. Recently, Samar has begun experimenting with using print-on-demand sites whereby uploading her drawings to the sites her work can be then be sold to buyers as products, such as large-scale canvases, greeting cards, smart phone covers, coffee mugs, and even cushions. Samar has been working on a line of fabrics and plans to make clothing with her seamstress and designer sister, as well as making more housewares for her interior design work.

Though Samar continues to work in traditional painting, canvas, and printmaking, many of her works are also functioning pieces of art, such as the glass house, soft furnishings, and pending clothes line. As a contemporary and multifaceted artist, Samar sees both the historical significance of functional art made by Muslims, as well as the importance of the act of making art.

"Functional architecture and tile work are a obviously a big part of Muslim heritage, especially in the eyes of the western world. It's something which they hold respect for, no matter what they think of Islam and the Muslims. Now there are a lot of contemporary artists coming from Muslim backgrounds and Arabian backgrounds who are doing well. I mean art is a social thing; it brings people together but it can divide them too. It can raise different issues and bring things to light. I think that in today's society, where Muslims are constantly being told how antisocial we are – that we don't want to integrate into the western culture, or that we don't appreciate its 'values' – looking at the art that Muslims are producing today is one of the many clear proofs against that. In that way, I think it is important, but I don't think that it should be the most important thing in a Muslim's mind... I make art because I enjoy it. It calms me and helps me to keep my hands busy and let my mind flow freely."

Samar's wide and ever expanding range of work is available for sale through several websites. You can view and purchase her work at [www.Samar-asamoah.artistwebsites.com](http://www.Samar-asamoah.artistwebsites.com) and follow her ever-expanding activities on [www.Facebook.com/yezark](http://www.Facebook.com/yezark)

*Brooke Benoit is an American artist who is home-educating her 6 children in Casablanca, Morocco. In addition to cloth-diapering and composting for the sake of Allah ﷻ, she also frequently works with dirt, seeds, worms, balsa wood, and glitter paint.*