

GULF NEWS

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John Boyega during an anti-racism demonstration in London.

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JUSTICE



As the Black Lives Matter movement gains ground following the killing of George Floyd, stars raise their voices in the fight against racism

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ART AND CULTURE

Carla Tolomeo is known for her fun chairs that blur the border between art and design

By **Jyoti Kalsi**
Special to Weekend Review

Carla Tolomeo is an accomplished painter, printmaker, sculptor, ceramicist, and writer.

Her practice is inspired by her research of great masters such as Leonardo da Vinci and Mantegna and she has successfully exhibited her drawings, paintings, etchings and engravings across the globe. But the Italian artist is best known for her fun, funky chairs that blur the border between art, design and sculpture and have earned her the sobriquet 'Lady of Chairs'.

Her recent 'chair sculptures', presented by Oblong Gallery, Dubai are designed to add colour, glamour and positive energy to any home, and they offer a stylish way to work from home.

The turning point in Tolomeo's artistic journey came in 1997 when she took a break from her career to look after her ailing mother. To distract and amuse her mother, she began playing with chairs and sofas transforming them into roses, swans and butterflies.

"My philosophy is to transform any object into a piece of art, even if it is something as mundane and domestic as a chair," she says.



Carla Tolomeo.

The response from collectors across the world to her first exhibition of these quirky creations encouraged her to continue with these experiments. She swapped her paints and brushes for materials such as a velvet, silk, satin, vintage fabrics and tapestries, mats and textiles from India and other countries, trimmings, sequins, foam rubber and yarn to create her bold, surreal designs.

Each piece expresses different emotions and makes a strong statement. Some seats have a back-rest composed of grape vines covered with shiny colourful sequins or palm trees decorated with arabesque patterns evoking the beauty and tranquillity of nature.

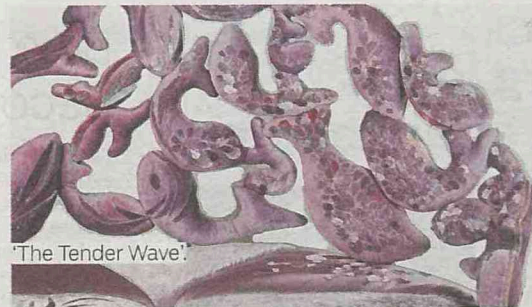
Another design has a pod of playful dolphins riding the waves on the back of a pouffe. Other chair sculptures have been created with sequined crescent moons in silver, gold, and bright colours. Her most popular series includes sofas, pouffes, divans and chairs shaped like roses. Tolomeo often uses vintage fabrics and embroideries, incorporating memories of the past into her contemporary designs.

'Black Grapes Leaves'.



Top: 'Le Palmares'.
Below: 'Moons Dream'.

Working from home in style



'The Tender Wave'.



Tolomeo with one of her designs.

Photos supplied

"I get inspired by the work of great artists and musicians, by nostalgic memories and by everything around me. Each piece I create is unique, and even if they are roses, each one is different because it reflects a specific mood or time in my life or a certain memory that I wanted to relive while making it. The names I give to my chairs offer hints about the stories I want to tell through them," Tolomeo says.

"I am constantly looking for new materials that inspire new forms for telling new stories. My ultimate aim is to look for beauty and express the joy of life. I want to transform ordinary chairs into totems

that bring back magical memories of childhood but also convey a sense of mischief that comes from the passion of living life to the full," she adds.

Paola Marucci, co-founder of Oblong Gallery says: "Our gallery focuses primarily on sculpture and I fell in love at first sight with Carla's chair sculptures. Her mystical colours and unusual shapes create magical feelings and moments. They are particularly relevant now because there can be nothing better than a beautifully designed high-quality chair to energise our interiors and boost our mood whilst working from home."