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A Danish artist has proposed setting up an Arabic library in Denmark to exchange knowledge and boost understanding between the two cultures and combat terror.

Dorte Dahlin who held many exhibitions in Sharjah during the last two years proposed establishing the library on the model of Arab World Institute in Paris.

The Arabic library in Denmark will incorporate a university institute in Arab studies, a book shop, a cinema, exhibition facilities, concert halls and auditoriums, she said in an article published in the Danish weekly Weekendavisen last week.

“To highlight the strength of our democracy, our weapon could be to create a ‘house of knowledge,’ an Arabic library. To counteract brutality and the fear-inducing consequences of terror which lead to spiritual poverty and which in turn are a breeding ground for brutal regimes, we should, in these times, consider the establishment of just such a house of Knowledge here in Denmark; a house for both cultures, for a lively exchange of knowledge, instead of ejecting our foreigners in the fear of harbouring potential terrorist cells. What about supporting and utilising the existing knowledge cells?”

Dahlin exhibited her works for the first time in Sharjah during the 4th Sharjah International Art Biennial in 1999. She held a solo exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum in January 2000.

“I only received four days to consider the offer, but nevertheless said yes, filled as I was with wonder and delight. Without ever having visited a Muslim country, I rushed off, a single woman alone. After only a few days, where I experienced extraordinary hospitality, I was invited to hold a large solo exhibition at the Sharjah Art Museum in January 2000, only nine months later.”

Dahlin was among Danish artists from the Royal Danish Art Academy who held “Overlaps: North-Southeast” exhibition in Sharjah last year. In the 5th Sharjah Biennial, She was the official Danish commissioner.

Dahlin said that the Danish Ministry of Culture is planning a culture exchange programme with the UAE.

“The Danish Ministry of Culture to discuss the possibility of having a direct cultural exchange with the UAE based on our relationship over the previous two years. It is hoped that the different projects, which were subsequently incorporated into this suggestion, will be carried out over a number of

years. This suits the idea of a long-term reciprocal exchange and training programme rather than mere short-term festivals and "exotic" fusion. The proposal aims towards specific support and visualisation of the existing and well-established initiatives, not least the co-operation and links between the artistic and university circles in the two cultures.”

Dahlin started her article by a quote by Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi saying “Art is the only way to an understanding between cultures.”

“Dr Sheikh Sultan, a historian educated in England, leads the emirate under the dictum, "Art is the only way to an understanding between cultures". Within the last five years he has established up to 30 cultural centres for children and a whole series of museums and educational institutions. He has founded two large universities, the Sharjah University and, at the same time, The American University. In other words, the Sheik would like his people to be highly educated, clearly understanding that even his world looks different today than it did 50 years ago when Sharjah's income was based on pearl diving and minor trade.”

“It might also be possible to learn something from the Sheikh of Sharjah, despite or because of the absolute differences in our two cultures. He has, as a representative of an ancient nomadic culture, an ability to open up his country to the global nomadic world. This is not least evident in the simultaneous establishment of two universities, an Islamic and an American one, on the same campus in the full understanding that differences need to be accepted and made visible to allow for the enrichment of each other's thoughts and lives so as to enable us to live together decently. Thirty years ago, Sharjah was still a desert nation, but today the UAE is a high technology information society; a society in flux which results in numerous structural problems and concerns regarding national identity, problems and concerns which we are faced with too, though we approach them in a different way; problems and concerns, in fact, which are common to the whole world,” she said.