

DREAMS OF TANGIER

A conversation with Emirati artist and jewelry designer Shamsa Al Omaira reveals an allure of distant lands and themes

Shamsa Al Omaira opened the door with a sweet smile and ushered me into an elegant parlor in her home.

She is beautiful and graceful, but her kind exterior should not be dismissed; she is also a talented artist who juxtaposes materials and media to convey vivid emotions.

The young designer has always pursued her artistic calling, displaying creativity as a child and later obtaining a degree in Fine Art from Zayed University. "My professors always pushed me to try to do more than asked," she says, describing her natural affinity towards crafting art. However, raw talent didn't stop her from facing criticism. When she decided to put together a solo exhibition for her graduation project, people told her that she was too young and couldn't do it. But persist she did, and soon she was exhibiting at Abu Dhabi Art, Art Dubai and Sotheby's.

One aspect that sets Shamsa apart from other artists is her love for creating her own canvas. She enjoys the discovery of new surfaces, and has experimented with stretching fabrics, organza, linen, and marble, exploring how the texture changes with the various materials. "On a canvas, you can paint over to correct mistakes, but when painting on fabric, there is no room for error," she says, elaborating on the thrill of the experience.

A trademark element that she returns to time and time again are chairs. "Chairs connect to different kinds of people. Their personalities reflect their



Jewelry from the 'Ingrained' collection



owners," she enthuses. "I like revisiting classic chairs." Though chairs may stand still, Shamsa's creativity does not. It was only a matter of time before Shamsa's artistic nature led her to jewelry design. "I have always put my hands on everything I wear," she says. Her first collection, Classic O, was not conceptual, but rather composed of simple pieces. Classic O features diptych bangles, which convey delicateness and femininity. In her second collection, Her Pulse, Shamsa conveyed a very different idea of what it means to be a woman.

Her Pulse is characterized by bold, jagged lines, defying the notion that women must refrain from expressing their inner emotions. "As women, we are sometimes ashamed of being emotional," says Shamsa. "However, it is a luxury to have these emotions; they make you feel alive."

Designing Her Pulse served as an outlet for frustration and negative sentiments, and opened the conversation amongst friends, family and consumers about breaking the taboo of having and expressing negative feelings. While she concedes that the collection is too bold for some people, she said there has been much interest around incorporating it into photoshoots. It is sure to subtly, but surely, become more visible.

Shamsa does all the conceptual photography for her jewelry collections herself; she is self-taught in this domain and is proud that her jewelry is locally designed and produced. For the time being, it is available to purchase only in the UAE, adding to its exclusivity at a time when so much in the world is mass-produced and mass-consumed.



The theme of Shamsa's latest collection is Tangier, based on the Moroccan city in the early 1940s, when it welcomed people from the East and West fleeing conflict thus creating a melting pot of cultures and customs. She feels the meeting of modernity and tradition is echoed through this collection, which features four sub-collections replete with diamonds and 18-carat gold. "This is my first collection inspired by something traditional, and is very suitable for Ramadan and Eid," she says enthusiastically. When asked if Dubai's own position as a crossroads has influenced her thinking, she says yes. "I appreciate seeing so many cultures coexist in harmony. It increases my appreciation of my own culture, and inspires my work."

While Shamsa's jewelry designs keep her busy, she still manages to squeeze in time to continue her artwork. She is currently working on a triptych, which she describes as big in size and concept, and very emotional. She is also considering opening a boutique. Full of feeling and energy, Shamsa's art and jewelry designs are set to stay.

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Reiterated Ropes and
Twirling Tassels by
Shamsa Al Omaira