



“Each campaign holds a powerful message about real people who dedicate their lives to keeping the Lebanese land”

ALEXANDRA HAKIM

Sustainability Queen

Already counting Rihanna as a fan, British-Lebanese jewellery designer Alexandra Hakim is successfully fulfilling her mission to create stunning, sustainable pieces for a more socially conscious and circular fashion future.

Tell us about your zero-waste approach to design

Essentially, I take pieces of rubbish to my studio and transform them into unique pieces of contemporary jewellery. My design process revolves a lot around trial and error. I use a special casting technique that I have developed over the years – upcycling disregarded elements such as consumed matchsticks, leftover fruit and mixed metals in a way that preserves every detail of the original material. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't but I take comfort in knowing that metals can be melted down and re-worked almost endlessly so that nothing goes to waste.

How does your Lebanese heritage live through your work?

Each campaign holds a powerful message about real people who dedicate their lives to keeping the Lebanese land and its heritage so rich and fertile, from the craftsmen to the farmers and the fishermen. My favourite collection is called No More Fish in the Sea, which was inspired by a fisherman I met in Chekka, Lebanon, called Bob. He told me that he'd been fishing everyday, come rain or shine, since he was 10. The Mediterranean Sea was his home but it's no longer what it used to be. He explained, "back in the day we'd catch so many fish that we sometimes threw them back in. Now, the water is so polluted that I catch just enough to feed my family. I fish to survive." After speaking with him, I immediately decided to make pieces from all of the trash in the sea that Bob caught in his nets – minus the fish, of course. I designed this collection as an ode to this local community and their undying hope for a more sustainable future.

What does sustainability mean to you?

Sustainability has been at the core of my brand's DNA since day one – from my work ethic to my studio practice. It's really about honesty and transparency, and creating pieces that are good for the planet.

How did your perspective on design change after becoming a mother?

Apart from practicality, not much. However, it has encouraged me to delve deeper into the protective nature of jewellery and to focus on the unique sense of empowerment that a well-made piece can evoke.

Who do you design for?

For the modern, curious human, for forward-thinkers, and for people who are hungry for something different. And, also for those who like the jewellery they wear to tell a story.

What rituals have you adopted to help you reset from your busy lifestyle?

I like to spend time visiting museums alone. I live in Madrid, which serves as an endless source of inspiration. Sitting in front of Baroque masterpieces and absorbing the detailed craftsmanship hits the reset button for me every time.

BASSAM ALLAM

The Surreal Deal

Whether it's documenting nature or capturing high-fashion, Egyptian photographer Bassam Allam presents the world through an artistic and surrealist perspective.

What is your earliest memory of a camera?

I think it has to be when I was around six years old at Giza Zoo in Egypt, holding an Agfa Optima pocket camera. I remember it made me feel like a spy because it had a very special shape. All this was happening while my dad took videos of our trip, there is a tape of it somewhere.

What about your Egyptian heritage inspires you?

How the ancient Egyptians used light in their temples and tombs, and how rich the colours of the walls were. The geometry in everything they created is amazing. The concept of duality in ancient Egyptian mythology also resonates so much with my own work.

If you could be any surrealist master who would it be?

I'd love to meet so many of them, especially Lee Miller, Man Ray, and Andre Breton, but I don't think I would choose to be anyone else but myself.

Colour seems to be a significant element in your work, is there a meaning behind it?

Colour is one of the most inspiring things in life for me. I can go as far as saying that sometimes I like a picture simply because it has a beautiful colour combination. Mastering colour can help communicate or add another level of emotions to a picture.

Your work screams surrealism, but who is Bassam Allam through the looking glass?

My work is just an extension of who I am, how I see the world, how I think and feel, how things look inside my mind. I am the beautiful colours. I am shadow and light.

***“I don't think I would
choose to be anyone
else but myself”***





JAD MAQ

Soul Searcher

Inspired by the struggles in his life including separation, homelessness and starvation, Jad Maq's artwork offers a unique reflection that celebrates one's inner true self.

We've seen the spiral as a repetitive symbol in your work, what does it mean to you?

To me, spirals represent the cycle of the soul – the individual's journey through life. The way I use spirals in my work is to have them represent the layers of social constructs that were buried in us from a young age. The driving force for the viewer should be a curiosity to unfold those layers and reach a deep connection with oneself and each other.

Talk us through your colour choices, does their darkness serve a message?

Yes it does, the aim of monochromatic colour palette is to present the viewer with a hint of the individual's journey through darkness and light..

What does the element of fire represent in your work?

Fire to me sparks a sense of a childlike pleasure, which I believe is the force of creation that lies at the heart of our civilization. I enjoy that fire can represent gentleness but also torture, which translates to me as looking to the future without forgetting the past.

If you could be anywhere in the world, where would you go?

I'd go back to the Mediterranean Sea, simply to feel the serenity of the scenery and the ambiance of the soundscape once more.

***“Spirals
represent
the cycle
of the
soul – the
individual's
journey
through
life”***

FATMA MOSTAFA

Weaving Creativity

Whether it's documenting nature or capturing high-fashion, Egyptian photographer Bassam Allam presents the A multi-hyphenate creative, Fatma Mostafa is an Egyptian artist, embroiderer and photographer who takes a multidisciplinary approach in her work, incorporating her many talents in her award-winning jewellery designs.

Why is embroidery such an important part of your designs?

For me, embroidery was one of the first mediums I worked with. Later on, when I studied painting, I loved experimenting with different materials and mixing techniques with my embroidery – I really just enjoyed the process.

Given your multidisciplinary background, what made you choose jewellery design as the main gig?

While I was experimenting with different materials, I got the idea of mixing metal with embroidery to make something wearable. I felt that with this mix I could make unique designs and pieces that are different to what already exists in the jewellery industry. I feel I can express myself with all the materials I love to work with.

What challenges did you face when incorporating embroidery in small-scale jewellery pieces?

Jewellery making and embroidery are two crafts that, individually, require a lot of effort and time to deal with. The idea of mixing them together, and the precision and patience needed to make small paintings with embroidery is challenging, but I enjoy the process.

How did your love for painting aid your jewellery design process?

I think being a painter is what makes me think of every jewellery piece as wearable art.

How are you influenced by your Egyptian heritage?

Egypt has a lot of visuals, civilizations and diversity of traditional crafts, which definitely influenced my creativity.

What is the significance behind the names of your collections?

Every collection has its own story. For Water Lilies I was inspired by Monet but also the water lilies lake at Orman Garden in Cairo. For Out Of The Blue the name came after a period of mental blocks and lack of inspiration.

After winning the Fashion Trust Arabia Jewellery Designer Award, what's next for you?

It was an honour to win the prize in the jewellery category, I am so happy and proud of myself. I'm so excited for what's coming, and being the winner of the prize will definitely play a role in my brand development.



words ALEXANDRIA GOUVEIA; photography FATMA MOSTAFA

“I make unique designs and pieces that are different to what already exists in the jewellery industry”



KAZNA ASKER

Street Life

Combining her British upbringing with her Yemeni heritage, fashion designer Kazna Asker's streetwear label is inspired by the Arab and Muslim world, incorporating traditional Middle Eastern designs and fabrics into activewear.

When did you discover your love for fashion design?

I was nine years old when my dad bought me and my siblings matching Rocawear outfits for Eid, everyone would come up to us and be like, "That's Jay Z's brand." I guess that's when I discovered fashion... and Jay Z.

Your work is extremely driven by community and values, why is this important to you?

My aunt is extremely involved in community work and we'd always co-organise charity events to fundraise money for Palestine and Yemen. I've always been surrounded by a strong Yemeni community where we all know and help each other. I have a lot of experience in charity work and community work, from working with refugees in the Netherlands, to teaching in Nepal and organising fundraising events in Sheffield. It felt natural for me to be inspired by real people and reference their stories and voices within my work.

What's the message you are trying to convey through your designs?

The story that I try to convey is always based on sincerity. I design in matching pairs – a complementing look for men and women – to represent the brother and sisterhood of my community. My muse is always inspired by the strength and prayer of Muslim women, so I prioritise Islamic modesty within my designs. I would say my story is sincere to the people I was raised around, which contradicts and challenges any stereotype and negative connotations associated with the Muslim community in the news.

What was the biggest challenge you faced whilst designing your recent collection?

Definitely imposter syndrome especially at Central Saint Martins. I'm aware fashion is a superficial industry and that people don't want to think about politics whilst shopping. So I'd always question if fashion was the right platform to

convey my message, but my tutors really believed in my message, which I'm super grateful for.

Why did you choose streetwear?

I was born and raised in the UK, and around people wearing tracksuits everyday – whether it was my dad, brother and cousins in Liverpool or my community in Sheffield. So all I would see and wear was Nike and Adidas, and I guess those details and styling inspired the design process.

How is your personality reflected through your work?

I combine my Yemeni heritage with my British upbringing, the same way I wear a Nike tracksuit with a keffiyeh head scarf. I think you can definitely see the family dynamic within my work. I'm super close with my brother and sisters, and I always design in groups or pairs to tell my story. Also, I'm a little feisty, and my work stands up for all my political views.

Who is your biggest style inspiration?

Probably my grandma and my cousins. I love my grandma's traditional abayas and hijabs and my young cousins in their tracksuits. I like seeing how we adapt our cultures as the next generation. In terms of fashion eras, I'm inspired by everything from the 90s.

You won the Debut Talent Prize at Fashion Trust Arabia, what's next for you?

I feel super grateful that I could represent Yemen and raise awareness on the current humanitarian crisis. I'm also proud that I could bring everything beautiful about my local community in Sheffield to Doha. My goal is to develop my own brand and continue the journey of merging local cultures, community, charity and activism with fashion.

MUNIRA AL SAYEGH

Weaving Creativity

Whether it's documenting nature or capturing high-fashion, Egyptian photographer Bassam Allam presents the A multi-hyphenate creative, Fatma Mostafa is an Egyptian artist, embroiderer and photographer who takes a multidisciplinary approach in her work, incorporating her many talents in her award-winning jewellery designs.

Tell us about your background

I was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. I recently graduated in Jeddah, and just moved back to Stockholm. I come from a mixed-race background, which is an attribute I'm very proud of – being multiculturally diverse is a flex. It has benefited me in terms of my ability to accept, adapt and grow.

What influences you?

I've recently limited my exposure to music, mainly to ensure that I'm not influenced by anyone else's style. Instead, I've surrounded myself with silence in order to truly discover my voice and sound. The music scene has lacked a blend of language and culture with modern day beats and vibes. So, I'm trying to combine both so that people from various backgrounds, preferences and languages can find comfort and relatability in my music.

Do you feel represented in the music industry?

In terms of values, morals and beliefs, I don't resonate with most female artists and rappers in the international music scene. I believe in modesty. I'd love for younger girls and women, like myself, to see themselves in my music and to feel like they have someone that they can relate to, and someone who represents them.

Do you feel pressured to look a certain way?

I've worn the hijab since I was 12. Attending an international school I was one of a handful of girls who wore the scarf, and after moving to Sweden I learned to adapt to what I felt most comfortable in. I value modesty and being a *hoodjabi* is where I feel most comfortable. But rapping in a scarf doesn't feel right to me out of respect for it. So, my go-to is a hoodie, beanie, turban, durag, hat, bandana. As long as I'm covered, I'm good to go.

What's the biggest misconception faced by Arab artists?

Misconceptions on Arab females in general is that we are oppressed, limited and forced to not live our truths. But we have broken boundaries and continue to do so. As an Arab female artist, rapper, and graduate (she has a degree in International Relations and Psychology), I debunk every stereotype in my favour. My latest track, "AFA", tackles societal expectations. Women can do multiple things, we don't have to be limited to one role. As a female, I believe that I should embrace my feminine energy and use it to my benefit, whilst also continuing to grind and pursue my passion. Be a wife, be a mum and be a boss, why not?

Talk us through your debut single "966", which you wrote, performed and filmed in less than one week for Saudi National Day.

Pulling that off, with all the pushbacks I faced, is an accomplishment I'm truly proud of. It proved to me that every 'no' you hear should motivate you to push harder. Through "966" I realised how powerful and impactful my music could be. I used Saudi National Day as an opportunity to show all the people that have misconceptions on how modern, educated and advanced Saudi Arabia is, how much we've changed and how women are supported and empowered instead of oppressed and silenced.

Give us some advice for aspiring musicians living in the MENA region?

Our time in this world is limited, so leave a footprint you'll be proud of. Speak your truth.

So, what's next?

I've a few more songs I'm hoping to release in the upcoming year.



"Rapping in a scarf doesn't feel right to me out of respect for it. So, my go-to is a hoodie, beanie, turban, durag, hat, bandana. As long as I'm covered, I'm good to go."

SAM KARAM

Beat Master

Based in London, the Lebanese DJ and producer Sam Karam tackles house and techno beats to shake up the electronic music scene with a sense of Arab pride.



“Umm Kulthum was basically techno before techno was even invented”

What has been your favourite gig so far?

It's been an incredible year for me, my busiest to date. Playing at Sama Abdulhadi's fundraiser for Beirut was one of the best performances of my life. The Palestinian techno queen invited some Lebanese DJs to play at one of the best clubs in London, so the pressure was on. I managed to weave in fun housey vocals with entrancing techno, and even slipped in some Palestinian techno – Shabjdeed and Al-Nather's Mtaktak.

Who's your favourite Arab music icon?

This is a tough one. Sonically I'm almost always inclined to say Fairuz, because her voice is just unmatched and otherworldly. I would say though that Umm Kulthum still takes the crown as the greatest of all time. If I had a choice between a ticket to Mars or to time travel to an Umm Kulthum concert back in the day, I'd choose Umm Kulthum in a heartbeat. In contemporary times, I have to give a big shoutout to Felukah who, unlike most manufactured pop stars from the Middle East, is breaking boundaries and connecting with listeners on another level. The expat experience for Arabs is very real and difficult, and to be a voice for them is something that is much needed.

What do you love so much about Umm Kulthum?

She was basically techno before techno was even invented. The long sets, the hypnotic effect of her repetition of words, the tension created by elongating pronunciations, the emotion evoked from the harmony of the instruments behind her, and the hype coming from her audience. These are the ingredients that make magical dancefloor moments, which people around the world seek out in good times, and bad times.

What message do you try to convey through your music?

I always try to be intentional with my writing, whether it's the more cosmopolitan electronic tracks, or my Lebanese-identity alluding tracks, like those on the Sorrow Carves album. Although it's hard to decipher and deliver a message in electronic music – what with its lack of words most of the time – I want to invoke a sense of Arab pride when people listen to songs on that album. When people think of Arabic electronic, they often think of Acid Arab bangers or Omar Souleyman's nasal synth melodies. Even on They Troubled Us, the closest thing to a wedding banger on that album, I tried to emulate a trippy atmosphere and bring manipulated vocal samples to the foreground. The SWANA region has many talented producers, and I want them to get ideas from the rich catalogue of music our homeland's hold. I would rather we use these samples in novel ways before a European with an oriental alias does it.

When did you realise your love for music?

Getting up for school was always exciting. Not because I had to go to school, but because I was always excited to pick a cassette to play in the car ride. When my dad traded up for a car with a CD player it was like the gates of heaven opened. Not only could we listen to albums from the collection at home, but I could burn mixtapes and curate our car rides from Beirut to the mountains or to the Bekaa Valley.

Did you have the support to pursue your career in music?

I'm very lucky that my parents always helped to nurture my creativity especially with guitar lessons from a young age. However, the social stigma of pursuing a career in music was definitely troubling. I felt this more from teachers, classmates and society in general. But, I'm truly fortunate that out of all the obstacles that you face when pursuing such a challenging career, my parents were not one of those obstacles. I couldn't be where I am without their faith and support.

How have you been treated within the industry?

In the past eight years of pursuing this, I've had support and belief from a huge pool of DJs from different (mainly immigrant) backgrounds in London. One particular crew is Mehmoon, a party series by the wildest Iranians in the capital. I recently played with their organisers again at Village Underground to raise awareness about the revolutionary efforts in Iran.

What's your favourite album of all time?

I was a huge music journalism nerd in high school and I have to say I'm happy that I grew out of that phase. This is quite a hot topic and I always think it is extremely subjective – everyone's experience of music varies based on factors such as language. With that in mind, I think the greatest jazz albums, like Miles Davis Kind of Blue, should trump the most legendary PR-assisted rock and hip hop albums. I would also say Madvillainy by Madvillain is my personal all-time best album because of the extraordinary use of sampling techniques while still delivering a collection of tracks that transport you to another world.

Where's your dream gig destination?

I've been hearing some great things about Wadi Rum in Jordan and Bonjuk Bay in Turkey, so I'd definitely say these are on my dream gig list.

TALA MORTADA

Rule Breaker

Beirut-based art director and DJ, Tala Mortada, is using music and design to help affect political change and build community.

Has a career in music always been your dream?

As one of the founders and managers of Factory People (she's also a founder of Clap Clap design studio), we build all our projects around music. When I was younger I dreamt of making music videos, but what I ended up doing is designing interiors, installations, films and graphics for our stages, our clubs and our online platforms. It's a whole visual world revolving around music, where I also get to perform.

How do you feel when gigging?

I get goosebumps when I remember tunes that match together so perfectly, or when one track seems to exist just to continue the story of the track before it, and to introduce the one after. When the crowd appreciates those moments, it's crazy synergy.

Are you ever anxious before a performance?

The anxiousness definitely reduces with time, but yes there's always a nice kick before a performance, like when you're about to meet your crush. I stay calm by doing everything at the last minute.

How do you manage a work/life balance?

Before having a baby, I used to only work. I thought I had a personal life, but I was hiding behind work. I was always under the impression that I had to live for my passion and career, but after the pandemic I realised the importance of giving time for my well-being.

Now that I have a baby, I have to be very rigid about how many meetings I take, how many working hours I do and how many nights I DJ. I want to give my son a lot of my time so I'm very careful about how I juggle everything. It's exhausting to switch mindsets so frequently.

How has being a mum affected your career?

My company was getting back on its feet when I was well into my pregnancy. The pandemic and the Beirut explosion in 2020 destroyed our clubs and a big component of our business. So I basically never got to take a break, but I did take kind of a back seat.

On the one hand, this helped me observe my job from a distance, and understand what I want out of my career. I used to do everything, and now I'm happy being more focused on my creative tasks, on training my team, and on overseeing high-level decisions.

But on the other hand I'm saying this in hindsight; how it felt was much tougher than this. It was really hard having to take a back seat while my partners could still be driving at full speed. It was hard giving myself time for my body and brain to recover - and the worst part is the guilt I still feel when I spend a lot of time on work instead of taking care of my baby and myself.

What message do you have for emerging DJs in the region?

The world needs happiness today, forget about all the rules, forget about appearances, play music for people who love your music.

“The world needs happiness
today... play music for people
who love your music”



TINTEIN

Sister Act

Harnessing the power of two, Jordanian-Palestinian sisters Aisha and Muna Khalaf launched Tintein a production house specialising in wardrobe and set styling, creative direction and casting.

What's the story behind Tintein Productions?

We're inseparable sisters – we do everything together. People always refer to us as “tintein” (Arabic for the two of us), so we made it our business identity. We launched mid-pandemic when life became too short, too fast for us not to act on our dreams.

You recently styled Felukah for a Coca-Cola campaign, what was the inspiration behind it?

Felukah, the Desert Woman herself. Her energy was magnetic and we wanted this look to reflect a strong innovative Egyptian woman that's not afraid to stand out. This is why we used a huge amount of jewellery – Middle Eastern women have been told to be quiet for way too long and we wanted her to sound like a song when she moved. We also, of course, pulled from Jordanian-Palestinian designer Toleen to bring in one more powerful force.

How do you get yourself out of a creative rut?

We look back at our old work and what had inspired us to create it, or sometimes we go thrifting and up-cycle or re-work some pieces to get re-inspired.

How would you describe your personal style?

We have the same mind as when styling everyone else but we have different personal vibes. Muna is all about comfy-glam, and Aisha is soft punk-comfy glam.

If you were invited to a last-minute evening event, what is your go-to outfit of choice?

Aisha: Low-rise, floor-length skirt, a shoe with a statement or geometric silhouette, jewellery and a small fairy top.

Muna: Fitted long dress, statement jewellery, statement shoes, oversized leather jacket.

TRASHY CLOTHING

Telling Stories

From the dynamic duo that is Omar Braika and Shukri Lawrence, Trashy Clothing is a ready-to-wear fashion brand with mission to reclaim Palestinian-Arab identity and push barriers.

Why the name Trashy Clothing?

The name is a satirical take on branding and questions the concept of luxury.

What about your Palestinian heritage do you cherish the most?

Living under occupation, our culture is so important to us as our existence is resistance. We document our identity through garments. The Palestinian cultural dress – the thobe – features embroidery that represents the stories of each village. Storytelling is such an important aspect of Palestinian culture. When it comes to design, we are very much storytelling oriented. Our Palestinian identity is represented within the stories we convey with each collection. We both studied filmmaking, so when it comes to design, everything needs to tell a story, every pattern, fabric, texture, print, thread, and zipper.

If you were to have dinner with any icon dead or alive who would it be, and what would you be wearing?

It would definitely be with our label's muse Haifa Wehbe. There's always an homage to Haifa in our collections, so we'd wear our SS22 Haifa Cruise pieces that reference her iconic Pepsi 2008 advert for The Sea Of Stars movie.

Who is your favorite Arab pop icon?

Currently, our favorite is Massari. His look during his Be Easy era inspires a lot of our Trashy Clothing boys' menswear pieces.

If you were to be born in any era, which would it be?

We loved growing up in the 00s!

“We document our identity through garments”

photography & art direction BASSAM ALLAM; makeup & hair: SABINA PINSONE;
Styling: LORAND LAJOS; model KISHA; digital makeup BASSAM ALLAM



ZEINA AREF

Identity Parade

Drawing inspiration from her hometown, Cairo, creative Zeina Aref explores identity and celebrates womanhood through the mediums of film and photography.

“The process of nurturing and building a story is an extremely stimulating one”



What are you currently working on?

I'm currently in different phases of production for a music video and some commercial work, which has really been helping in my understanding of the craft of making. I'm also developing a personal experimental short film which has been challenging but is something that I'm aiming to shoot in the coming year. On top of that I'm aiming to shoot another self-portrait series, which is a process that's becoming almost like a ritual that helps me in documenting my process and my journey.

What is your favourite medium to use in your work?

I think every story is best told with different mediums. Experimenting with film, photography, sound, installation and performance are things that I want to continuously explore in my practice. Currently, I'm really enjoying film and moving image. It's so multi-faceted, collaborative and allows you to explore and experiment with different senses, narratives, and formats for storytelling. The process of nurturing and building a story is an extremely stimulating one.

Outdoors or in a studio, where's your favourite creative space?

I definitely prefer shooting outdoors or on location. A lot of my inspiration comes from spaces and their natural connections, patterns and visuals. I also think that nature is so rich as a base, and I tend to root aspects of my work in reality. I don't really enjoy studio work as it's not as dynamic or inspirational to me.

What does being a woman from the MENA mean to you today?

I always try to be intentional with my writing, whether Being a woman from Egypt is one facet of my identity and it means that the stories I enjoy telling are informed by that culture and by my personal experiences. It is something that I identify with and the experience I connect to most.

What is your favourite memory of Egypt?

One of my favourite memories would have to be very old family trips to Alexandria. We'd have these very redundant loops of activities related to the beach and walks by the waterfront which are really nostalgic.

Topics surrounding women seem to highly influence your work, why is that?

It's just something that is innate to me, and they are the stories I feel are most important to discuss and to resolve within myself. My work is a reflection and reaction of my present self and the social and political spaces I inhabit. And so, naturally, these themes and conflicts surface in my most personal work.

What's the greatest lesson you've learned?

It sounds super cheesy to say this, but trusting the process, and yourself. I think this is something that I've often struggled with and - to a certain extent - self-doubt is healthy. But I've really learned to understand the true meaning of trust, and how important it is in order to experiment, to push yourself and to develop your work.



DUHA BUKADI

Towering Dreams

Dive into the world of Tunisian designer and architect, Duha Bukadi. It's a place that rebels against the norm and is instead full of pink skies, kittens, and smiles at strangers..

Your footwear brand, Pupchen, is rebellious to routine - are you, too?

Yes, everyday is different for me. I don't follow a routine, I forget a lot and I like to improvise. I'm careful, but I also love taking some risks. Most importantly, I have fun! I try to make everything fun.

Take us to the start of your design process, where do you get initial inspiration from?

It can be from anything in my surroundings or my memories. A discussion I had with someone or my vivid dreams. I think I also work a lot during my sleep: I choose colours and come up with solutions and concepts as I dream.

Does being an architect influence your shoe design process?

It does. I don't have any education in fashion so I always design shoes as I would a building; bearing in mind aesthetics, structure and functionality. We also live in our shoes, don't we?

Your unique sphere heel is all about standing out from the crowd. Why spheres?

Spheres are fun, free, feminine and mysterious. I also love all things circular: pom poms, lollipops and crystal balls. Plus, we live on a huge sphere.

A Pupchen client is wearing one of your pieces on a day out, what does this day look like?

When I close my eyes to imagine a day like this, I think of pink skies, fun, laughter, good news, long meetings, smiling at strangers, adopting a kitten from the streets, telling another woman that she looks amazing. The idea is to enjoy every aspect of life, to have fun with everything..



words ALEXANDRIA GOUVEIA; photography KARL SFEIR

***“The idea is to enjoy every
aspect of life, to have fun
with everything”***

LELLA FADDA

Enigmatic Energy

Solitude leads to uniqueness for Lella Fadda, whose sounds come from a confidence only music can give her.



“I believe the feeling of loneliness has always been the protagonist of my writing”

Behind the spotlight, who is Lella Fadda?

I'm a very private person so what I choose to show is what I want people to see. The last year has been about focusing on music and enjoying the process. Behind the spotlight, I'm learning to have fun with everything I create, and to be kinder to myself.

When was it that you discovered your love for performance?

I was a very lonely kid who always had problems talking in front of people - but enjoyed singing for them - so I'd say that music was my only friend while growing up.

What challenges do you face being a performer in the MENA region?

People are trying so hard to put me in a box full of their own ideas about how a female artist should look and sound. I'm just here to embrace my uniqueness, without trying to live up to people's expectations. I know I'm creating a new genre and it's going to take time for people to get it.

Take us through your creative process:

I write to document my stories and life - I could forget a phase of life ever existed but not a song, you get me? I believe the feeling of loneliness has always been the protagonist of my writing. My songs are very personal, I'm sharing more than music. My most personal, completely heartfelt, is my latest release, Malleit.

What are your pre-performance rituals?

My Rubik's Cube. It lets me hyper-focus on one thing rather than stressing out about what could go wrong. Also the thought of getting food after the show makes me feel like life is worth living.

Who would you like to perform or collaborate with next?

Sevdaliza, Agar Agar, Tamino, Tuğçe Şenoğul, Ghali, Akher Zapheer, Michelle Gurevich. I can go on (and on!) about the people who inspired me throughout my life, but these are a few names that popped into my mind. I know we could create magia together. Magia is my favorite word, it means magic in Italian.

What distinguishes you from other performers?

I don't know. I've always been very attracted to 'real' artists, people that I knew were giving so much more than just a performance. Likewise, I just do what I like to watch.



DIMA SROUJI

Fragile Vessels

Inspired by landscapes, Dima Srouji is intuitively designing glass shapes and forms similar to ancient vessels, while showcasing the skills of Palestinian craftsmen.

What was the lightbulb idea behind Hollow Forms?

There wasn't really a single lightbulb moment, but it was the moment of my return to Palestine that had a lot of magic. I think with return a lot can happen. It was a process of meeting the glassblowers (who, to me, looked like alchemists), having an amazing conversation, and starting to make a collection together. It was their first time working with a designer. The ten collections we've made over the last five years have been vessels for me to think with and play with; they've really been an escape in many ways.

If you were to move from your current home in London and only take three things with you, what would they be and why?

This is an interesting question for me. I've moved around so much in my life: I used to hold onto things, to make me feel at home everywhere I moved. I would bring my rugs, my frames, books, etc. Now I don't feel I need to take those things with me anymore, but I would love to keep three of my plants.

Is there a significance behind the organic shapes that you create for Hollow Forms?

A lot of the forms are inspired by early Islamic vessels, but it's unintentional. The intuitive and abstract design process somehow ends up feeling similar to ancient vessels from the region. I like the idea that the inspiration from the landscape can be abstracted in the production of objects thousands of years apart, yet somehow still contain a similar essence.

What was the best advice that someone gave you?

Dr. Adrian Lahoud recently said something to me that changed my perspective on how I operate in my practice: "movements are not meant to be clean, they are meant to push us forward." It relieved a lot of anxiety about where I work, where my red lines are and how I straddle the art world and activism simultaneously, which is not a clean process.

What are your ways of staying positive amidst all the world's chaos?

Deep conviction in the work we're doing and so much joy that the network is growing. Most importantly, Gen Z kind of just gets it. I feel calm around them. I surround myself with people that I love very deeply who are part of the same struggle. I think Žižek said something recently about finding happiness, something along the lines of if you are looking for it the object will disappear, but if you are working with people on and through the same struggle, then love and happiness are very present. I think that's absolutely true.

Where's the next travel destination on your bucket list?

Hard to decide but I'd like to see more of our region. I'd love to go to Tunis.

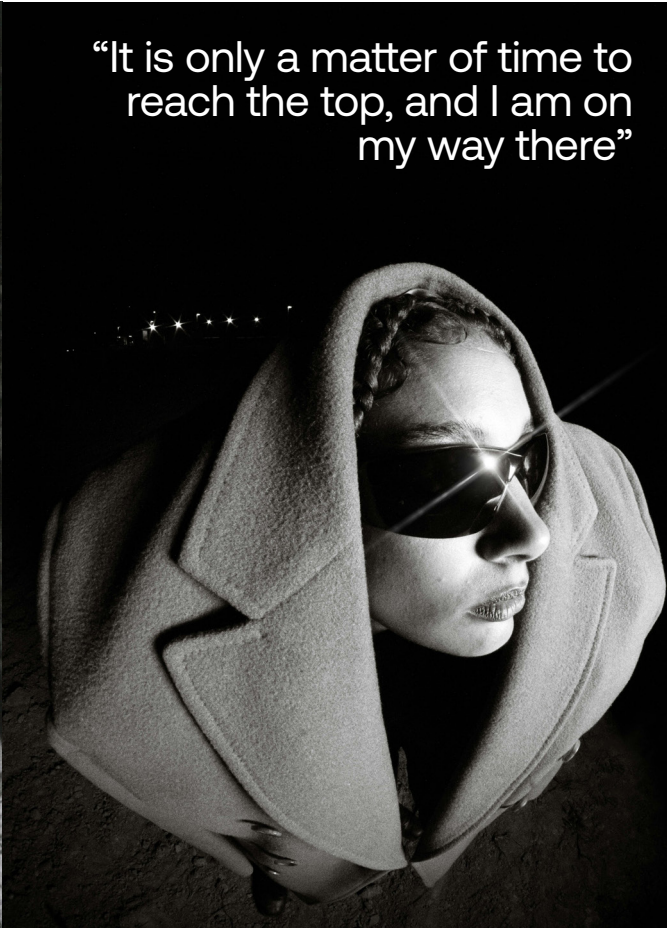
While brainstorming, what music are you listening to?

The 98 year old Ethiopian nun and pianist Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou who lives in Jerusalem.



“It was the moment of my return to Palestine that had a lot of magic. I think with return a lot can happen”





AHMED RAZEEK

Mind Matters

There was never a plan B for Ahmed Razeek, who knew from a young age that he was destined to become a photographer. Now, he's on a mission to showcase Arab and African talent to the world.

How did you pave your way into the industry?

I started working in photography when I was 16 years old. It led me to pursue a degree in film from the University of Paris 8, and this was the foundation that took me into the fashion industry.

Did your upbringing influence your work?

I was born in Egypt and raised in France; this cultural mix definitely influenced my work. I have a huge vision: to show the world that the Middle East and Africa have exceptional talent and a tremendous impact on our industry. This is my ultimate goal right now, and I believe we are going to make it happen in the near future.

You live in Paris now, how does the Parisian environment inspire your work?

Paris is an art masterpiece - there is talent on every corner. People are so inspiring here, and I like to connect with them. Through them my vision expands and evolves. Also, the mix of cultures in Paris is something I admire and use as inspiration.

How would you describe your style when it comes to your creative practice?

My style is timeless, psychedelic, and a mix of my personalities. I'm trying to take people on a journey and allow them to make their own ideas about my work. With every project or photoshoot I do, I envision how I would like to portray it. Then, once I have my vision and inspiration, I begin to build the idea behind it.

What has been your favourite project thus far?

My favourite project is my latest short movie, Miel. This project is my baby and we have made huge efforts to make this happen. People from 10 different nationalities have worked on it, including talents from France, Italy, Egypt, Turkey, Senegal, and more. For me these people are the power of this project.

If you were to live in any era, which would you choose?

I would choose to live in the future, say 100 years from now. I think this would be very interesting and it matches well with my futuristic vision.

Apart from photography, do you dabble in any other creative practices?

Of course - I would say photography is a part of me, but I am also a creative director. Music also plays a huge role in my life; I'm currently trying to learn to become a DJ - it's something that inspires me, but I still have some way to go to master it.

Has there been a moment where you lost hope on your professional journey?

I've had this vision since I was a kid, and started to practise at the age of 16. Only a few years later it has become my job. Honestly, I never lost hope because I have trust in my talent and vision. It is only a matter of time to reach the top, and I am on my way there. People's successes - especially those who started from the bottom - always inspire and fuel me to keep going and not give up.

Dead or alive, who would you dream to photograph?

I would like to shoot Ahmed Zaki, the Egyptian actor who passed away a few years ago. With strong art direction behind it, that would be an iconic shoot.

Which photographers do you admire, and why?

I really admire Sarah Moon, she had a forward-thinking vision. In my opinion, she changed the fashion photography industry, and we can now see a lot of people who are inspired by her style.

But it isn't only photographers that I admire, I also admire Wes Anderson as an exceptional director. I'm a huge fan of his vision: he left nothing to luck - every detail from location to colours to people are well thought through. It's as if every scene of each one of his movies is a magazine cover.

ABD AL HADI ABUNAHLEH

Dancing King

Dance is in Abd Al Hadi Abunahleh's blood, but bringing his talent to the world wasn't quite so straight forward.

In a society where dancing and choreography are not stereotypical professions for a man, how did you come to realise this was a passion?

The reasons I chose to dance are always unfolding themselves to me. When I was a kid I was extremely observant, with so many questions about people's behaviours and movements. This intuitive observation soon started to operate on a larger scale, and I started contemplating people moving in groups and masses. At some point, I knew that I needed to start moving in order for me to understand movement and its relation to the human body. After years of practice I came to a realisation that the more I dance, the stranger my body feels to me, and this is when I started inventing my own movement system, which is simply rediscovering my own voice.

How would you describe your style?

My own movement is simple and primitive, yet, the construction of the pieces as a whole, feels like a ceremony or a ritual. This is why I describe myself as a ceremony inventor.

How did you make your passion for dance into a reality?

Like any other artist, I was starving and still trying to create a comfortable environment and conditions - but this is very difficult in Amman, especially when it comes to dance. Getting involved and collaborating with other artists from different disciplines offered me a huge support system. I was also privileged and hardworking enough to be invited to more than 30 different countries as an artist and a choreographer where I was able to collaborate with other artists, galleries and institutions. This gave me the opportunity to be present in multiple geographic areas.

Tell us more about Studio 8 and the idea behind it.

With the non-existing infrastructure of choreographic work and contemporary dance in Jordan, we wanted to create a platform that functions as an ecosystem to support dance, from teaching and audience building to exchange and presentation.

What's your favourite type of music to dance to?

I appreciate any type of music. But when it comes to my creative process I play experimental and soundscapes - where rhythm and time are not defined - in order for me to move freely without having my movement choices affected by the structure of the sound.

What feelings are heightened in you when you are dancing?

It's a case by case, to be honest. With each honest choreographic work, it seems like I'm possessed with a certain energy, character and feelings. The experience of creating and dancing my latest work Crossing, for example, is totally different from one of my other works named Wujud w Hodoud. But there is one feeling in common whenever I dance: I feel like I'm detaching from the physical world and ascending space and time. It's as if I dance in my sleep; when I stop dancing, I wake up with flashbacks flooding into my brain as well as so many question marks and a massive space for contemplation.

What made you incorporate painting and dancing into some of your projects?

As I started to practise contemporary dance, my friends were all artists from different backgrounds, too. This inspired my work. I also see similarities between different art forms and believe that art forms can be very similar when it comes to the process - but different in results. When harmoniously merged together, these results - installation art, sound design and painting, for example - create magic.

How can we encourage more males to dance?

I feel that society in general should be more exposed to dance, and be more open to the idea of contemporary dance and movement - not only in the theatre and commercial sector.

What does love mean to you?

Love is simple, and is within all and everything. I can find it in the most complex and the most simple little things.

Other than your profession, what do you love to do as Hadi?

As an anthropologist, I like to travel and explore other authentic, traditional and native cultures. I love diversity in food, myth, oral culture, landscapes, arts, architecture, food and languages.

If you were to paint a picture of your happy place, what would it look like?

A source of light.

***“My own
movement is
simple and
primitive,
yet, the
construction
of the pieces
as a whole,
feels like a
ceremony or a
ritual”***

