

The ultimate guide to the hottest emerging fashion designers from all over the world

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INTRODUCING
MAHITAB
HANNA

DR MAHTAB HANNA

Dr. Mahtab Hanna is an award-winning British jewellery artist and designer-maker with a Persian heritage.



Sassy & Co magazine recently caught up with Mahtab to discuss her journey in the fashion and jewellery industry and here's what went down:

Could you please tell our readers a brief background about yourself and how you started your business?

I am a British jeweller with a proud Persian background. It all started when I first wore my mother's jewellery, I became passionate about the small design details on those jewellery; how its made, the precious stones, and how people wore them. It was then that I saw people, their clothes and jewellery as a canvas.

This led me to study jewellery and goldsmithing for over a decade leading to an MA from the Royal College of Art and a Ph.D. from Central Saint Martins in Jewellery.

How did you get into the fashion industry?

I love fashion, its an undeniable ingrained part of the substance of being a woman. Whilst there are so many fashion designers, there aren't enough female jewellers in my view.

I entered the industry by showcasing my work and being showcased. I expanded from my artistic jewellery lines into fashion jewellery and body adornments, leading to my 2011 catwalk show at The Royal Exchange in London.

What do you like most about being a designer?

Being a designer is about sharing your life, your experiences, your feelings, your journeys, all under the umbrella of new creations. It's a conversation with people you may never meet but have communicated with. You are influencing their confidence; how they communicate themselves and how people see them. Amazing!

Every designer is an individual, their creations are unique to them, just like their fingerprints. The concept behind my Goldfinger piece was that it would be customised for each individual wearer.

Ultimately, extending the experience of jewellery wearing is to challenge and ambush the boundaries of function and ornamented decorative art, highlighting communication, concluding with stimulating contemplation.

While creating each piece is a process and expression or development of a vision I have, jewellery is created for other people. It is important to remember this without compromising the original vision I have throughout the design and creation process.

The downside to being a fashion designer?

One of the most frustrating issues is that of designs being stolen or copied without the due respect to the original designer or maker. What was thought through in the design has been lost because the item is now simply "a thing," not a messenger.

Of course, this is not a problem that's just exclusive to jewellery, but the entire fashion arena.

Dr. Mahtab Hanna is an award-winning British jewellery artist and designer-maker with a Persian heritage, whose designs are radically different from others – the cross-pollinating of Eastern and Western history, culture, religion, character, thoughts, and politics play a large part in the inspiration process leading to her creations. Whether its unique pieces or a limited edition series of work, her quest is to define within those pieces what she is aiming for, what the client is trying to communicate, and the reason behind each design. Some of her specialties include fine and contemporary jewellery, sculpture, and body adornment.

In 2017 Mahtab held a solo exhibition entitled "Political Jewellery: Silent Protest" at the P21 Gallery in London, and she has been featured by The Goldsmiths' Centre (UK's leading charity for the professional training of goldsmiths and a community for design, creativity, and craftsmanship), New Designers, Cox & Power, Masterpiece, Gallerie Marzee, amongst others. Mahtab's trailblazing achievements include being awarded her Doctorate from Central Saint Martins and during those 4 years of her Ph.D, she had two children!



What has been the most memorable experience of being in the fashion industry so far?

There have been many memorable experiences, such as being featured in Vogue Italia, selected as one of the top luxury jewellers in the UK newspaper, The Telegraph, and featured in Qatar Airways magazine. I also appeared in a TV program called Four Rooms where top dealers tried to negotiate to buy some of my pieces.

Perhaps the most memorable was being selected to be the cover for the Goldsmiths' Company inaugural post-graduate programme and being mentored by the late Dr. Stuart Devlin, one of the jewellery industry's royalty.

Naturally, there is a lot of satisfaction from seeing my creations being used in films, photoshoots, and publications.

Who have been the most interesting people you've met so far?

The word "interesting" applies to every human, in my view. Those that have had a profound effect on me include the renowned British jewellers Shaun Leane and Theo Fennell. Their support for upcoming jewellers is a testament to their commitment to the industry.

Didier and Martine Haspeslagh who have a passion for jewellery made and designed by painters, sculptors, architects, and designers from the late 19th to the end of the 20th century.

Audiences have taught me the array of views on my pieces, clients have taught me the sheer personal nature of jewellery, the industry has taught me the sense of community. Therefore, many people who have interests!

What has been the most valuable lesson you've learned while in the fashion industry. This can be about the industry or yourself.

There's a lot of politics behind the smiles in any industry, and fashion and jewellery is no exception.

I try to engage in one of the core values I place in life: from every person I meet, I try to leave the conversation having learned something or having exchanged knowledge. This is, in my view, the essence of being a designer – every lesson is valuable and shapes me.

The single most valuable lesson has been to remain faithful to my own values. Always consider the options but trust yourself to take the decisions – leadership starts with you!

Is your family supportive of you being a fashion designer?

I have been blessed to have a family that is completely supportive and unflinching in their love throughout my journey, through the victories and the challenges, especially my darling husband, Rafah Hanna.

It is critical for any creative person to have someone to support them, not only during the achievements but also at times of growth and learning. This is the person that will stand by you as you face those that do not have your best interest at heart.

If you could go back in a time machine to the time when you were just getting started, what would you do differently?

In the early days, I would want to focus much more on brand growth, especially internationally.

Another thing I would change would be to closely study those that have taken a similar journey leading to success, learning from their experiences.

What is the best advice you have ever been given?

My mother often says to me - If you can be inspired, you can definitely inspire.

What are your future plans? What new projects are you currently working on right now?

I am excited to tell you exclusively that I am working on publishing my book related to political jewellery! How jewellery is used as a tool of messaging and communication to affect protests and opinions in the matter of politics.

I will also be having an international exhibition with the same theme related to the book.

My "Pawns" Chess Set is an example of my political jewellery designs, which I also made. It is made from Sterling Silver and Bronze and relates to the most extreme form of protest – war: a highly emotive and evocative subject throughout mankind's history.

Politics, religion, money, and natural resources are all causes of wars, and these are all represented on the stage within this work in their own way.

The chess board is made from sand and soil, both of which represent another cause of war - "land" – as well as the battlefield.

The 'LIGHTNING FAST' Round:

1. Last good movie I've seen:

Frozen 2 – as my daughter, Anais, and I both love it!

2. What do you consider beautiful and why?

Beautiful is such a personal thing – we may share a view of beauty, but it is equally about your values, thoughts, and mood even, I consider beautiful to be yourself, it is to fight for those that cannot fight and stand for equality.

3. What haven't you done yet that you wish you could?

I would like to run workshops whereby I would mentor upcoming jewellers and designers, sharing my experiences with them, helping them to confidently progress in their chosen careers.

4. Complete this sentence: "If I had no fear, I'd..."

I don't actually recognise the notion of fear. Life and careers are a series of challenges, fear is certainly one of them. It's your job to face them, analyse them, and find paths to strengthen yourself to be able to proudly overcome them. Consideration and respect towards anything, person or decision is a far greater asset than fear. Fear simply holds humanity back.

5. What is the one "flaw" you wouldn't change about yourself?

I sometimes don't know when to stop working, trying always to reach a state of perfection! However, I wouldn't change that as it drives me towards even higher quality.