

interview with israeli designer

NAIM QASSIM



When did you start designing, and what inspired you to become a designer?

I began designing at 15, not clothes specifically but sketching whether it was architectural, things I saw around me, or people that inspired me. I would start with taking designs I knew and restructuring them or re-thinking them. At that age, I knew I should be involved in design, whether it was against my culture or not.

How would you describe the look of your designs? Is there a specific vibe that your clothing exudes?

I tend to gravitate toward very sharp lines and silhouettes related to architecture I have seen. I focus specifically on Arab-Muslim women and emphasize the ideology and dialogue it takes to create something both appropriate and unique for them. I must fit their desire to stand out, yet also accord to cultural norms.

Do you feel that your Muslim view impacts the styles that you design?

Of course it does. I grew up in a very conservative environment despite the fact my mother's friends wore mini skirts in the 1970's. I recycle the memories of my youth and my culture, and they are part and parcel of the more conservative environment that Tira has become.

Do you design your pieces for a specific target buyer?

Well yes. Much of my designs are specifically commissioned for women that would be more conservative than your target buyer in New York. I am very accustomed to designing wedding and party gowns for religious weddings and

ceremonies from where I grew up. All these things have influenced me, so I tend to be more conservative than other designers from Israel. But all my designs are conceived from what I see and what I feel reflect all my experiences.

Has the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influenced your designs or impacted the production of your fashions in any way?

Of course it has. Unfortunately, Israeli companies will not pick up my line because I am an Arab, despite the fact I am a citizen of Israel.



Naim gets his inspiration from the graffiti of Palestinian peace activists.

If you don't mind my asking, what are your views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Do you have any ideas for a possible solution to the problem?

I agree and believe in the two state solution. Do I believe it will help me? NO. But it will help my people.

What visions do you have for yourself and your designs in the future?

Of course I want to be famous and want to be featured in major retailers. I want to present at New York and Paris Fashion Week. Besides that, I want to move beyond the stereotype of being an Arab fashion designer inside Israel.

How do you find inspiration before you design a collection?

My inspiration is taken from architecture, both what I can readily see and those I must take from books. I am trying to form a dialogue between the strictly religious forms and the new emerging forms seen all over Europe and Asia.

Did you study fashion design or is it more of just a natural talent that you have refined over the years?

I have formal training from Shinker University in Tel Aviv, Israel where I majored in Fashion Design in 2001. From there I showed in New York City and Italy

Do you consider your

work with fashion to be more of an art or a business?

For now it is art, but in the future, inshallah (godwilling) it will also be a business as well.

Describe your typical day.

I usually wake up at 6 am and take a shower. I then proceed to my favorite cafe for my morning coffee and cigarette. From there I open the doors

of my studio in Tira, Israel. I then proceed to work on my own designs or specific commissions until around 3. I then take my lunch and continue working until 8. After 8 I meet up with friends I find inspirational and creative whether they be in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, or Ramallah.

In what ways do you think it is different being a fashion designer in Israel as opposed to the United States or Europe?

Are there any other messages you would like to get across to our readers that you have not already provided?

I wish to overwhelm the fashion world. I want to disprove all odds against me as an Arab, as an Arab male fashion designer, as an Arab male designer in Israel.

ALLIE KAHMANN

