



Cuneiform, not Uniform

If someone said, “Iraqi jewellery” to you, what would spring to mind? Would it be the names of *modern* jewellers? Or perhaps your mind would hark back to more ancient times, when roughly the area known as *modern Iraq* was the literal centre of the world in terms of civilisation... Meet Hajer Ghani, who’s bringing the *ancient arts* to the jewellery world

Remember sitting in history or social studies class, learning about the ancient city of Babylon — the cradle of civilisation, home to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World? The region has gone through a lot since then (in the understatement of the year), including war and now recovering from the effects of that, but it still holds an air of ancient charm.

The daughter of famed Iraqi sculptor Mohammed Ghani Hikmat — revered in art circles worldwide, and creator of Baghdad’s most famous and recognisable monuments and

sculptures — Hajer Ghani has always had art, creativity and passion in her genes.

“I grew up surrounded by art and can vividly remember it being part of my childhood and history,” she recalls. “It’s a part of me. I didn’t actively seek it, it came more as second nature to me; although I did refine my love for art by studying it later on in my life. My jewellery designs are a result of my love and appreciation of art, though.”

Her father, like many artists, intellectuals and academics, left Iraq a month before the United States and Great Britain invaded in 2003 and returned several years later, sadly to find ▶





“Each *person* is special and our jewellery should be a *reflection* of that.”

- HAJER GHANI



INCREDIBLE IRAQ

The area now known as the modern country of Iraq was historically known as Mesopotamia, and the ancient city of Uruk is where the name Iraq derives. The current country was created by Britain in 1919 under the League of Nations mandate.



► that looters had stolen about 150 of his works from the National Museum and that his studio and many of his sculptures there had been damaged, according to *The New York Times*. He passed away in 2011, and Hajer carries on his legacy through her beautiful jewellery design.

“In the beginning,” she explains, “I was inspired by the work of my late father; I turned his sculptures into statement pieces. For me it meant I could carry and continue my father’s legacy, and best of all make it accessible for others to wear.”

Before becoming a jeweller, Hajer completed a Bachelor’s in English Literature at Baghdad University. Upon graduation, she realised her passion was to create, and that jewellery was actually her favourite medium with which to tell her stories.

“As a child I was surrounded by art, artists and art enthusiasts. My mother is an archaeologist, so I was exposed to museums from a young age and in turn learned to appreciate archaeology as an art form,” Hajer says. “My home country, Iraq, is rich in both culture and history. Growing up in an area historically known as the Cradle of Civilisation played a vital role in inspiring my jewellery.

“I grew up seeing sculptures in the streets, lush gardens of ‘Babylon’ and a substantial amount of Islamic architecture. These all played a role, whether consciously or subconsciously in my creative process.”

And her background and passion for her home country is absolutely on display in her creations — beautiful, unusual pieces that straddle the divide between airy fairy hippy jewellery and jewellery so fine, it looks incredibly expensive. She’s found fans of her work in the US and Canada, as well as locally in Saudi



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Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE — and it’s no surprise women in Manama and Dubai are taking to her pieces like a duck to water.

She explains the link, “My designs are primarily inspired by the Arab region; from flying carpets in *1001 Arabian Nights* to women wearing abaya.”

She suddenly grows passionate: “Middle Eastern women are risk takers! They aren’t afraid to try new things, push boundaries and wear designs that make a statement. I love that the Middle East market is open to trying new styles and experimenting with different types of jewellery!”

Looking at Hajer’s pieces, it’s no surprise that risk-taking women are her muse — at *La Femme*, we see jewellery on a daily basis: most of it created by the world’s most famous hands — and Hajer’s jewellery is absolutely unique. It’s bringing something fresh and eccentric, yet eerily, charmingly ancient to the fine jewellery scene.

When we asked her for her advice on jewellery, she was, perhaps a bit frustratingly, quite vague — but then, that makes sense. She is absolutely herself, and wants other women to be as well.

“Yes, I think it’s so important to be yourself!” she exclaims. “In a world filled with followers and mainstream ideas, people are becoming less creative. So my advice is to be unique, choose pieces that relate to you, that speak to you. Get something that is an heirloom that signifies something, and can be passed on for generations.

Hajer continues, “We tend to get bored easily, and sometimes fall victim to mainstream fashion trends and end up neglecting our jewellery. Pick timeless pieces that relate to you, like a birthstone or one with meaning. Every stone has its own power, energy and history, and this should absolutely play a part in your decision-making.

“The right piece can last a lifetime and can be passed along to your children and grandchildren. Jewellery is unique to each individual, so I cannot pinpoint one particular piece that would work for everyone. However, my collection has something to suit every taste. Each person is special and our jewellery should be a reflection of that.” ■