

## Wire sculpting makes for fine jewelry



The designer stands amongst her creations during her first exhibit. (Courtesy of Rania Hilal)

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Visitors to the Gezira Art Center in Zamalek in February and March may have admired an unusual exhibition of jewelry — intricately twisted wires binding semi-precious stones — and wondered about the artist responsible for the work.

They might not have guessed that the creator of the sparkling coils of gold, silver and copper only moonlights as a jewelry designer. By day, Rania Hilal works for the Ministry of Trade and Industry as a graphic designer.

Flanked by an artistic mother and sister, Hilal found she had surplus creative energy; having studied numerous media at the Applied Arts Faculty at Helwan University, she sought to vary her means of expression. Three years ago, her imagination manifested itself in the form of wire.

“I like jewelry ok, but it’s all the wire... I like the sculpture itself, making sculpture with small raw things... I just start with the wire, and see how it goes. Sometimes I have an idea; I’ll sketch an image from my mind... Usually though I just start. I move with the curve [of the wire] until it can’t go any more. It has limits, its own personality,” Hilal explains.

A course in jewelry design from El-Sawy Culture Wheel piqued Hilal's interest. Before long, however, her compositions transitioned from the realm of casual pastime to part-time business venture.

"I started because this was something I liked, I wanted to do it for myself, then people told me they wanted pieces too. I didn't take it seriously initially, I didn't plan it as a business, but from the feedback I began to think about it... At the course they told me my style was different. Three months after the course I had my first exhibition and for the next three years I would sell my products and receive feedback."

The exhibition at the Gezira Art Center, however, represented a turning point.

"I was going to ask around [for opportunities to exhibit], I managed to introduce my work to the Ministry of Culture and was honored to have their support... they gave me this area [in the Gezira Art Center]."

Hilal modestly downplays her show, held in the Kamal Khalifa Hall. Yet the transition to a large formal venue, (past exhibition spaces included the artistic bazaars held at the El-Sawy), forced her style to evolve, as displaying a complete collection requires the fulfillment of specific requirements for pieces of jewelry.

"Creating a collection is different, you have to think of it differently, you can't work so freely... you have to cover all styles and all variations and include pieces for both young and old," she said.

Hilal admits she usually prefers creating pieces with someone in mind; for example, she often finds that mature clients prefer stones such as citrine, "The orange is like the color of Egypt: yellow, antique and old."

Hilal acknowledges the Gezira Art Center as a transition point for how she thinks about her art: after the exhibit she applied for support from the Industrial Modernization Center (IMC).

"I heard about an initiative by the IMC, they have a program to help entrepreneurs. The IMC told me to fix my financial statement and they would think about [supporting me]. This was the first time they were thinking about supporting such small businesses as this — it's a micro business. They are currently building their database. I was only able to give a financial statement about the last exhibition I did because I hadn't started it as a business before."

In 2009, the IMC included jewelry among the sectors it supports. An independent entity jointly funded by the European Union and the Egyptian government to promote Egyptian industry, the IMC offers training and support to areas as diverse as cinema, agriculture and engineering.

Hilal explains that the IMC has yet to extend its support, as she only recently requested it, but she feels confident that resources for entrepreneurs are available.

"For me, it is more about support than funds: I need training, feedback about my style. I [currently] don't use any welding. It's called sculpture because it's all built up together. I would like to learn to weld though, I think I would build up new techniques and ideas, but it needs to be done with a skilled trainer... I look forward to getting the right support."

In the meantime, Hilal knows she needs to obtain a space to showcase her work permanently, even if it's on the web. Although she currently has a self promotional Facebook

group, (search for “Rania Hilal”), which features photos of her work, she intends to design an independent site. Having already designed her logo, business cards and a Rania Hilal signature coin, the website should represent a minor hurdle.

Finding a physical location may prove more difficult, but Hilal exudes optimism. “I am taking time to make this work, to develop the next step and think how the business is going to run.”

“I don’t have any business training at all, I’m just a designer,” she laughs. Yet her willingness to turn her art into a part time profession represents an important trend as many Egyptians search for more support to launch and operate micro businesses.

