

Sculpting Textiles

She revels in timeless pursuits. Textile art is her passion, and much like a sculptor, she finds inspiration in her tools. She loves to play with contrasting textures and uses numerous techniques to transform fabric. Saniya Khan creates art that you can wear differently and keep forever. Saniya's Fall and Winter 2005 Collection premiered at the L'Oreal Fashion Week in Toronto with much applause and aplomb. Vivacious velvets, subtle silks and caressing chiffons formed the highlights of her line with lilting bursts of colour. The effect was flowing and rich, all in the same breath.



Saniya Khan

"Fashion is art itself," says Saniya. "I find joy in every aspect of creation. It's a challenge to mix art and design." Born in Jhelum, Pakistan, to a businessman father and an artist mother, her creativity was always encouraged. As a teenager, she designed for her family and friends. Saniya studied art at the prestigious National College of Arts in Lahore with a distinction in textile design. In Pakistan, she did a lot of surface designs and linen collections for the European market, U.K. and South Africa. At the same time, she was always making art in textiles, *sarees*, clothing and interiors, and found a lot of freedom in eclectic, custom-oriented work.

Saniya migrated to Canada five years ago along with her husband, Hamad, and two children. A chance visit to the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga opened a new door, and within six months of her arrival, Saniya was offered to teach community courses at the centre. Four and a half years ago, she joined the Living Arts Centre as a resident artist.

"Canada has been so wonderful in terms of support and positive vibes," says Saniya. "Leaving your country and starting anew is not easy." Furthermore, people responded well and her products started selling. Saniya's scarves, wraps, skirts, capes and accessories created a niche market. Her work is exhibited and sold at various art galleries, boutiques and luxury stores across Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. Her



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work is also featured in Harrod's, Holt Renfrew and private collections of former U.S President Bill Clinton and late Princess Diana. When Bill Clinton visited the Living Arts Centre for a defense lecture in December 2003, he bought three of Saniya's scarves. Late Princess Diana was presented with Saniya Khan's hand painted fabric when she visited a cancer hospital in Lahore, Pakistan. It was an aqua blue silk duppioni fabric inspired by the Mamluk era.

Saniya's clothing line is an extension of her accessory line. "It came naturally," she says. "It was time for me to venture into it. I did two dresses for Fox TV last year for the movie *Anonymous Rex*. I had also done bridal collections in the past that are showcased in Libaas.

Her latest collection is influenced by the orient. She plays with contrasting textures, opacity, and transparency to create fluid lines and pieces that are practically wearable and comfortable. "Comfort plays an important part," she says. "The silhouette is very classic. Each piece is made with care, a bit of surface embellishment, block prints, appliqué, hand paint and sequins."

Saniya explains that all fabrics have a different mood and feel to it. She personally loves natural fibres, all forms of silk, cotton, linen, and the way they take colour. She not only aspires to use every color in her work, but also immensely enjoys finding interesting colour relationships. "I tend to use very subtle and tranquil tones of colours, and then, all of a sudden, have a mood of colouring this world vibrant...like 'RAGAAS'. You want to splash colour all over and enjoy it."

Saniya is now focusing on this season's orders and working towards her next collection.

"I just feel that being passionate about my work is the biggest achievement for me," she says. "But you know that every time you put forth your creations, you feel you can do better next time...so that, eventually, becomes your goal. Ideas flow and you are directed as you go. I tend to go with the feel of things. Being able to create is a blessing that one cannot take for granted and you just hope and pray that it keeps on flowing." AV

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