

SCOOP

(JEWELLERY)

GOTHIC
GLAMOUR
FROM LEBANON

GAELE KHOURI'S
DESIGNS ARE ANYTHING
BUT LOW-KEY

Stylist meets Lebanese jewellery designer Gaelle Khouri as she prepares to break into the Gulf market

It's impossible to describe Gaelle Khouri's debut collection without using the words 'statement jewellery'. Made using mixed metals – 18 carat gold, oxidised silver and treated bronze, to be precise – and studded with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and other precious stones, the first line from the designer's eponymous brand is chock-full of show-stopping pieces. There are ornate cage chokers that encase the neck from nape to collar bone, rings that drip from the finger and wrap around the wrist, elaborate, jewel-encrusted earrings in the shape of creepy crawlies... It's daring, avant-garde, divisive. It's certainly not what you'd expect from a former financier's first collection.

Khouri's background is not in design but in economics, having worked at investment banks in New York and then her native Lebanon before starting the switch to jewellery design four years ago. She began by

taking intensive jewellery courses alongside her job at a Beirut bank before quitting two years ago to pursue her passion full-time.

She believes her grounding in finance helps not only with the business side of the brand but also with the design itself, since, "Not coming from an academically artistic background actually frees my mind – my creativity isn't constrained by rules. And when it comes to creativity, you either have it or you don't."

Her cultural background also played a part: "Lebanon is a country with a lot of soul and history," she says, "and being surrounded by that culture has definitely impacted on my

Armenian craftspeople. (It was the Armenians, Khouri points out, who introduced the jewellery industry to Lebanon after fleeing the 1915 genocide in their own country.) "In my opinion, the craftsmanship in Lebanon is some of the best worldwide," says Khouri. "We start by creating a wax mould and then we add details to the metal once it's been poured in. I oversee all the work as each piece has so much intricacy and movement."

The debut collection, named 'Garden of Earthly Delights', was inspired in part by nature. "I use spiders a lot in this collection, and I also took inspiration from the complexities of other insects' anatomies," says

certain character and attitude to pull it off." Like all the pieces in the collection, she says, it aims to combine elegance with a gothic edge.

Gaelle Khouri jewellery is currently available at Harvey Nichols in London and has made its GCC debut at Qirdala boutique in Kuwait (qirdala.com). However, Khouri has set her sights on the UAE and will soon be stocked at a new Dubai-based concept store launching ahead of this summer.

Meanwhile, the designer is working on a second collection to launch in June. "I want to stay true to the DNA of the brand by focusing on craftsmanship and targeting a niche market," she says. "I'll keep using mixed metals, because it fits the vibe of the brand and it also makes the pieces more affordable, but I may experiment with some pieces made only in gold."

When *Stylist* asks whether she's excited about the success of her first collection, Khouri's answer is surprisingly downbeat. "I worry about letting the commercial aspect take over my creativity," she confesses, "so I try to empty my mind of that when I'm designing and just create what I would like to wear."

If her unique first collection is anything to go by, we don't think she's got much to worry about.

gallekhouri.com

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creativity. But it's also a country that's witnessed a lot of war, and we're still struggling every day with poverty and chaos, and I think that growing up here formed my personality and gave me the resilience to change career, start from zero, and aggressively pursue what I want to do."

While the Gaelle Khouri line first launched in London last summer, it's in Khouri's hometown of Beirut that the jewellery is handmade by five carefully chosen Lebanese and

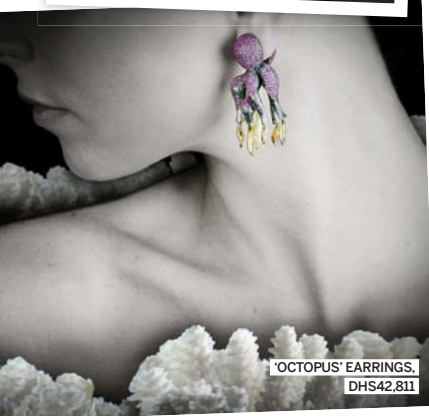
Khouri. "There's something that's very beautiful and, at the same time, very ugly about them, and that's what interests me. People are made from both good and bad feelings – there's always an inner conflict between happiness and sadness, being good and being bad. It's the mix that makes us human."

Her favourite piece is the 'Le Bouquet' ring (pictured below, right). "It's one of the most complex pieces," she says, "and maybe not the easiest piece to wear – it requires a

WORDS: HANNAH BASS



GAELE KHOURI WEARING SOME OF HER OWN DESIGNS



'OCTOPUS' EARRINGS. DHS42,811

PRIZED JEWELS

Stylist's pick of Gaelle Khouri's debut collection



'Spiders' earrings, DHS10,040



'Wings' upper hand cuff, DHS19,143



'Anchor' earrings, DHS20,079



'Le Bouquet' ring, DHS24,038