

Lecture Transcript:

Mamluks Made Modern: When Design Meets History **by Azza Fahmy and Omniya Abdel Barr** **Sunday, November 29, 2020**

Louise Bertini:

Hello, everyone, and for those of you who celebrated, I hope you all had a very happy Thanksgiving. I'm Dr. Louise Bertini, the Executive Director of ARCE, and I want to welcome you all to our November public lecture, and today, we're very happy to have the iconic Azza Fahmy and Omniya Abdel Barr, who are speaking to us about their lecture titled, "Mamluks Made Modern: When Design Meets History," and we're particularly excited to bring you this special lecture that will discuss this collaboration on the collection and giving Mamluk architecture a new dimension and how it reconnects the public to this rich and unique cultural heritage. For those of you who are new to ARCE, we are a private nonprofit organization whose mission is to support research on all aspects of Egyptian history, culture, foster a broader knowledge about Egypt among the general public and support American Egyptian cultural ties. As a nonprofit, we rely on ARCE members to support our work, so I want to first give a very special welcome to our ARCE members who are joining us today. If you're not already a member and are interested in joining, I invite you to visit our website, arce.org, to join online and learn more. We provide a suite of benefits to our members including our private member-only lecture series, and our next member-only lecture will be on December 6th at 1 p.m. Eastern Time with Dr. Caroline Ramsey of Carleton University and is titled "Coptic Feminism: Orthodox Songs and Gender Reformation in the North American Diaspora." And starting on December 12th at 1 p.m. Eastern Time, we are going to have the first of a four-part public lecture series titled "Africa Interconnected: Ancient Egypt and Nubia." This first lecture in this series is titled "From Slave to Demon: Baria and the Ethiopian Prayer Skulls" by Dr. Solange Ashby. For more on this lecture series, you can visit our website, arce.org. So with that, I'm now going to turn it over to the reason why you are all here today, and I'm beyond honored to introduce you to Azza Fahmy and Omniya Abdel Barr. Azza Fahmy is a researcher, author and jewelry designer. She is chairwoman and creative director at Azza Fahmy Jewelry. She graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts where she studied Interior Design and then started her career at the State Information Service. Simultaneously, she initiated her apprenticeship

in jewelry, training with the master craftsmen of Khan el-Khalili. Later, she pursued her studies in jewelry making and design at London Polytechnic. Throughout her long career spanning over 50 years, she has extensively traveled in Egypt and abroad to better understand and research traditional jewelry and cultural heritage. Today, Azza Fahmy is considered one of the top jewelry designers in the [foreign] region and has taken the role of translating Egyptians' culture, heritage and art to the world through contemporary jewelry design that reflects both her intense research approach and craftsmanship preservation. She created the first Egyptian multinational brand in jewelry and in partnership with her daughters Fatma Ghali as managing director and Amina Ghali as head designer. In 2015, she independently funded and established The Design Studio by Azza Fahmy, the first education hub of its kind in the region, and last year, she launched vocational training in jewelry making with funding from Drosos to train 200 young apprentices to ensure sustainability of the craftsmanship in Egypt, and she is author of "Enchanted Jewelry of Egypt" and "The Traditional Jewelry of Egypt." And Omniya Abdel Barr is an architect and art historian specialized in Islamic art and architecture. She has experience in urban conservation, monument restoration and cultural heritage documentation and digitization and holds a PhD in history from Aix-Marseille University. Omniya is currently the Barakat Trust Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and leading the digitization project on the K. A. C. Crestwell photographic collections in partnership with the American University in Cairo, the Ashmolean Museum and Harvard University. In Cairo, she is working with the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation on projects dedicated to rescue Cairo's Mamluk architectural heritage and the preservation of traditional craftsmanship. So with that, I now turn it over to Azza and Omniya.

Azza Fahmy:

Thank you, Louise.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Thank you so much, Louise.

Azza Fahmy:

Thank you very much, Louise, for this introduction.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes. It's actually ... First, both Azza and I would love to thank you for inviting us to share this love for the Mamluk collections that we worked on together, and it's really a subject that is very, very dear to both our hearts, and I don't know if anyone can tell from the first image in the presentation. If you can tell where it's photographed actually, send us some notes. I'd love to hear if you can grasp where it is because it's very exciting. I picked it randomly like this because it just shows lots of patterns, but it's just an image that I took. This is not a collage. I'd like to start by speaking with my earliest memory of Azza's work because this topic will be, as you will see, quite a conversation between both of us which at the end, we'll show you how it led to a fantastic collaboration with Azza and her amazing team in Cairo. My earliest memory of Azza's work is actually with the Nubia collection she created. Just trying to see ... Yeah, here we go. This is ... When I was trying to remember the earliest memory I have of your work, Azza, these popped out in my mind, and I remember seeing them maybe in the early '90s, and it was something completely different because I was fascinated with architecture, and I saw that you're already ... You're putting a bit of architecture into jewelry, so for me, this was quite interesting, but when we talked, you told me that there was already a long, long, long road before these little pieces from Nubia.

Azza Fahmy:

That's because when I started doing jewelry, first of all, I was interested in the Islamic architecture, and then I went to the museum and start looking to the jewelry in the Islamic museum, and I think the first copy which, at the beginning, I was copying, I copied one of the Ayyubid necklaces, and I look at the filter of the [Indistinct], the Fatimid one, [foreign].

Omniya Abdel Barr:

We found this earring that you made early on.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, very famous collection in the Islamic Museum, so I did a collection of pendants and earrings. It was very simple, but it was different, and people love it, and then I went to literature like [foreign] and poetry and things like that.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And then this led you out towards this.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, the architecture. I was fascinated about [Indistinct] the present architecture in Egypt, and this late collection when I did have a present collection with [Indistinct], his archive in the [Indistinct], but before that, it was the houses of the light, the big primitive one. This one is more sophisticated. At the left, you find a big piece of turquoise, which I boated from [Indistinct]. It was rare pieces of turquoise, and I did a complete village on the sculpture, on the earring.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

But this is why I thought, before we embark on the Mamluks, I wanted to give our audience and our guests today a bit of feeling of the kind of jewelry you've worked on because the Nubia were my earliest memories, but the Pharaonic collection, it was something quite outstanding and glamorous when you did it.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And I remember you told me that this was a challenge. This was 8 years of work.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes. If you look at these people, and you find what they did in everything, in statues, on the temples, how you can keep near to them, or ... And I don't like copies. I don't like to do copies because copies is everywhere in the museum. I want to do something new, so actually, it took me about 8 years which is, I was hesitating, "What do I do with these people? These people, they are great, and I have to do something which is relevant to them, have the spirit of the Pharaohs but different from what's in the museums."

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And in this piece, you told me there's lots of symbolism in it.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, this because I started the ... Because every piece, the eye or the ankh or the ... Everything has a meaning. I put all this in one symbol, and we always sell our jewelry with an explanation, what's that. This is Nekhbet, which is ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes, the Nekhbet necklace, yes.

Azza Fahmy:

And I insist to call it Nekhbet because I wanted the people to say that for a minute, "Wait, Nekhbet is the mother protection or an [foreign]." What's [foreign]?

Omniya Abdel Barr:

The protective mother.

Azza Fahmy:

The protective mother, but actually, it's different because all these people, it is from the clothes of the priests. It's not with ... some of them, they are in the wings, and the others, I took it from the clothes of the priests.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And I personally, my favorite ever is this one because I think the amazing thing is the fact that you managed to make this piece wearable. It's from the Tutankhamun objects.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, yes, the scarab.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

This is when you can tell that the designer is a good designer because you managed to pick an old piece and make it wearable today in our contemporary context, and that's why perhaps it's one of my favorites.

Azza Fahmy:

And I use many techniques. Of course, we make it like a sculpture, and we know the filigree. The pharaohs, they never use filigree. I love filigree. This is an Islamic technique which is already very rare now, so I put some filigree work in the wings, which I like it very much.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Lovely. But then not just ... The focus is not always on Egypt. You also went and discovered other cultures, and maybe the Africa collection was one of the exciting ones you worked on.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, because ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And you told me that here it's not the architecture here is even intangible heritage.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, you know, because I started with Egypt, and I went to Syria, then Iraq, and then Yemen, and then North Africa, and then I found the whole world is in front of me. Why I am here in this area. If I start looking ... I love Africa because part of me is African. My grandmother is Sudanese. Actually, I went to Uganda. I went to Ethiopia, and I have a big collection of books about African art, and I choose the body painting to inspire me for this earring.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

It's fascinating, and then the poetry. Very quickly, tell us about your relationship with the word and the calligraphy that you're using in your jewelry, and how do you pick it?

Azza Fahmy:

Every day, I have to read something, either philosophy or literature or things. I want people to share. I share people with what I'm reading and what I like. This was the Gibran Khalil Gibran collection. It was very successful. It is from the Book of the Prophet. It's the famous Book of the Prophet, Kahlil Gibran. We did a beautiful collection. I think this was 2000 or before 2000.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

It's 2000, yes.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, it was very successful, and we did [foreign], and it has from the Andalusia from his book as well, and this is ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And I'm ending with this one, also one of my biggest fans, your Tahiyya for Tahiyya.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, I love this woman. I respect this woman on all of the levels, and I love because she's always done things with this peasant pieces but actually, we did a modern version of peasant pieces, and I dedicated this collection to her.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Wonderful, yes. So I want to take a few step back and also tell our audience today a bit about your training and your practice and what took you to Khan Al-Khalili early on, and how did you start?

Azza Fahmy:

Actually, I graduated from an academy of fine art, but ... And I worked in the government for a long time, but at the same time, I didn't feel that this is for me. This is not for me, and I start looking, and I found a book. It was the first international book fair in Cairo, and I was taking very little money at that time. Actually, when I saw the German book, I bought it with all the money, but I was sure that this book is going to change my life, and it did.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And it took you to Khan Al-Khalili afterwards.

Azza Fahmy:

It took me to Khan Al-Khalili because I don't want ... Because first, I went to Faculty of Applied Art, and I don't want to spend 4 years, and I wanted to make the short way. All the short way is, go and work with an atelier or things like that in Khan Al- Khalili, and I practice for 2 years at the same time as was working in the government. I finish my work at 2 in the government, go to Khan Al- Khalili, reach Khan Al- Khalili at 3, and work in Khan Al- Khalili from 3 or 4 until 9 and then go home. I was living in [foreign] at that time. I reach my home at 10 or 11 every day, but it was a good experience because in that time, it was in the late '60s, beginning of '70s, all the big masters in Khan Al- Khalili was there, and there is rules for the craftspeople, so I know all the area and all the people, all the top

people, and at that time, I took notes about who's doing who, and what's the technique for this and this and this? And it has helped me to make my first book.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Totally, but then you also told me that whenever you had a break, you used to go for a walk in the historic city, so it's interesting because you actually started with the Mamluk [foreign]. You were looking through the window, and you would see the dome of the complex of Sultan Qalawun.

Azza Fahmy:

That's right. The first man which I work to teach me, he put me beside the window, and when I look from the window, I found the complex of Sultan Qalawun, and for the first time, I was fascinated about using calligraphy on top, under the dome of the opal, and I said to myself, "If you are using calligraphy in architecture, why, I can use it in the jewelry." And this idea started from then. After that, I think I ... Yes, I did this, one of the early bracelets which I did long time ago.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Exactly, and for me personally, I'm loving that currently, you are revisiting the old designs and today, also, you have this one, was launched very recently in the latest collection. So again, it's ... I love the fact that you also check back, and it's not a problem to revisit old design and perfect it differently and to add layers to it.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, actually, and this is Amina's, my daughter's, design because she took from the old and make something which is more elaborate. This is Amina's work. And then I think it was after that, we have to make a logo for the company, and I'm always fascinating about the emblem of the sultans, their ankh, in English. Yes, and I say to myself, "You have to do something which is related to this shape." The shape is fantastic. I think after that, it was the program of the Gamal al-Ghitani, the great Gamal al-Ghitani, which he did a series in the TV about the Mamluk. It was ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Tajaliyyat Misriyya, yes.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, 30 pieces which for the first time, I saw Mamluk streets, monument, mosques, houses, and he described widely about what's the meaning of all this, so when you collect altogether, and then I met you, remember?

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Exactly. This was all in your reservoir, and we met in London in May 2017.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I was just invited to a reception at the residence of the Egyptian ambassador, and here you were, presenting a publication on the Daughters of the Nile.

Azza Fahmy:

Daughter of the Nile, yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes. And I remember then, I don't know if you remember because I just submitted my application for the Mamluk Member Project at the time, and I was waiting to see if our projects would be successful or not, and I was telling you. You asked me, "What are you doing in London?" And I started telling you what I'm doing, and I don't know what came into me. I looked at you and told you, "Don't you want to design a piece for the Mamluk Members of Cairo?" Then you said, "Okay, let's think about this."

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, it's held by a collection, not only one piece.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Exactly because you came back the following day. Exactly, and that's why ...

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, I remember.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And we went to the Victoria and Albert Museum, and at the museum, we have 14 sketchbooks from this British architect, James Wild, who came to Cairo in the 1840s, and at the time, Cairo was actually in a very particular time in history in the 19th century. It was before all the expansions and the development that would take place under [foreign], so the city was a bit frozen in time, but the city was also terribly neglected, and I think James Wild being the architect he was sketching these items and details as you see on the screen here, I think it was his way of saying, "I need to preserve this beautiful work for the generations to come," and actually some of the pieces that he has checked are no longer existing, but for me personally, when I see these designs because when we walk on the street, and we look at the facades of the architecture, that is something, it's another dimension, but when you start looking at it in the dimension of a paper and of a drawing, this is when you can feel a design can start building up. And then we went to Cairo, and we took the entire team even with the marketing, not just the design team but also the marketing team to visit the historic city, and I was privileged because I picked the locations, and I took you to all the places I liked, so here we are in front of the minbar of Sultan Qaytbay and the other one, actually, I don't remember where this other one was at.

Azza Fahmy:

I think this is probably [foreign].

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah, it was probably [foreign].

Azza Fahmy:

Yeah.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And I think the fact that also the team has seen these monuments that close, it has helped them visualize what was coming after.

Azza Fahmy:

And now, they memorize each motif, and they know it by heart. This is almost Sultan [foreign]. This is [foreign], which I love it because they ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I'm also ...

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, it was really ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah, yeah, and the discussions in front of the minbars, exactly, and the craftsmanship because here in particular, you told me that the carving and the inlay and the details of the geometry, it has been quite revealing of the level of craftsmanship they had during this Mamluk period.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, and this minute design, how they put ivory and mother-of-pearl and silver in this perfectly, perfectly. We did an earring of [foreign].

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah, I enjoy it that way. Very quickly, I would like to just answer these two questions: Why the Mamluks? Why not ... Because we're in Egypt, so why is the Mamluk period that we have focused on working on? And for me particularly, why did I take you to see all these beautiful minbars? So the Mamluk sultanate started in Egypt in 1250, and it lasted in 1517 when the Ottoman came to the Cairo, but the Mamluks were not only in Cairo. Big city like Damascus, Aleppo, Jerusalem and the two holy cities of Medina and Mecca were under the Mamluk sultanate at the time, and therefore, Cairo was the capital, and Cairo started getting this interior dimension which I believe was lost since the time of ancient Egyptians because before that, we had Berber. We had Damascus with the [foreign] and the [foreign] and then with the Mamluk, it starts getting this new volume. And since the money was there because as well economically, it was doing well, so all the artists that came, it was like a magnet. They came because this is where the projects were. The sultans were embarking on very exciting patronage in the city building beautiful complexes because architecture was also a tool to spread the message that this is the power of empire, and this is a solid empire. And therefore, you read in the Mamluk sources, and it tells you of people coming from [foreign], from Damascus, even from Turkey to work in Egypt. And the Mamluks, as you know, they built these beautiful complexes. Sultan Hassan, which is considered like the fourth pyramid, in Egypt and then the complexes of Qarawiyyin and then al-Nasir

Muhammad and al-Ghuri and the two minarets on Bab Zuwayla. These are Mamluk minarets. Bab Zuwayla was built before that actually during the Fatima period, but here, I wanted to give a closer look on some details in the design. It is not just one material. They perfected the work on metal, on wood, on marble, on carving on stone. It feels like no material was invincible for them, just whatever it is, they are capable of perfecting it and formulating their ideas. It's like a canvas that they would draw their patterns on, and so this is just to show you. These are really zoom-ins on the Mamluk details that you can find when you go visit the monuments in Cairo. And also something that I wanted actually ...

Azza Fahmy:

Sorry, I wanted to ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Here I have a question for you guys.

Azza Fahmy:

No, I want to say something. This is crafts and civilization flourish with the money, richness and a good economic situation.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Totally, but here is a designer, yeah, this is question for you because you are a designer, and your eye is now experienced and trained, why do you think there was such strength in the Mamluk design?

Azza Fahmy:

I think that the very special designs in the Mamluk, I found it in the geometric patterns which is completely new, and in that time, a lot of people came, like what did you say, from all over around the world, good craftspeople from Persia, from Damascus, from ... and invented this strong geometry design. It was something new and modern at the same time. And when you look to the left, to the right one, it is completely modern, completely modern, but at the same time, it is traditional.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

It's these hidden lines that are the invisible lines of the designer that allows you to have the end result at the end. Geometry is usually not the thing that you see because it's like the construction lines that you work around, and I've learned that.

One thing that the lockdown forced me to do in a way is that I took out my compass, and I started drawing the geometry from the minbars because I wanted as well to understand the construction and the composition of the geometry itself, and it took me a long time actually to understand how these patterns were created, but I'm very grateful because it's also the repetition. You have to go. You try once, and it goes wrong, and you try again, and you learn from it, and I'm showing this because this is on the right, it's my drawing. On the left, this is a friend that I met on social media, Margie. I've drawn my pattern. You will see it's the same pattern. Mine is from Cairo, from the [foreign] which has this minbar that we just showed you, and Margie, I think she did her drawing based on a monument in Iran, so in a way, the geometry is like a universal language that is used by the designers of the area and the designers of today, and I'm very happy that the geometry is becoming more and more into light lately, and I'm seeing many artists are using it in their own work, and I believe it will create also a big wave of beautiful work. This is just to show you. That's another thing. But very, very quickly, now if you go to any museum with Islamic collections around the world, the Mamluk artifacts and the Mamluk objects are always in the primary location. The mosque lamps are a beauty to be seen. This is at the British museum. The metalwork, even though the metal, the work was famous from Mosul in Iraq, but the Mamluks perfected it in a way, and you find the pieces on sale sometimes at the auctions, and they always hit the highest price. And the Quran, the elimination of the Quran in years where you see ... Perhaps with the Quran, this is when I feel most the designer because it's on paper, and that's the medium I'm used to use, but again, and this one is from Baybars al-Jashankir's Quran which is at the British Library here in London. I've put these two. They are at the Museum of Victoria and Albert, but these are copies. In the 19th century, the museum sent staff to go and do casts from the monuments in Egypt, and very quickly to tell you just for the background, so the V and A was created in the mid-19th century to teach people good design basically, if we put it in a very short sentence, and they saw that these designs are something which could be an inspiration to the British designers here in London and in Britain in general, and so if you go to the museum, you will find them in the Cast Courts. One is from Sultan Hassan, and the other one is from Sultan Qaytbay, and then my second question when I told you why the minbars. So the minbars are the step to pulpits that you find to the right of the mihrab, and this is where the imam stands to give the Friday sermons and the Eid sermons as well, but what happened is in the past years, they have been a constant target for looting, and I started documenting looting in 2012, especially after the uprising in 2011 and with the security void that

was created, and I realized that ... I have even this. I can show you. From 2006 to 2019, we have 25 monuments hit. 2011 to 2017, we have 15, and even in one month in June, 2014 we had seven monuments. So it was very obvious to me that probably because there's an art market, there is a buyer, so people were stealing these pieces, but the pieces would appear later on in the art market, but I couldn't link them to that original location, and this is why the idea of creating a documentation project for the Mamluk minbars, which afterwards we added restoration and conservation as well was put in place. Just very briefly, just to show you, we had 14 minbars that were attacked. This is the minbar of Maridani which was entirely ... All the pieces were stripped out from the minbar in 2008, if I'm not confusing, yeah, 2007, and just recently, but this was on the market here in London last October, and this panel is actually from the minbar of Maridani, but it was an old theft because the minbar was also looted in the 19th century but just to show that there is a demand, and people are appreciating this art and are buying it, and just a tiny, tiny piece like this can fetch up to 5,000 British pounds. So it is a big budget, and that's why we started our project, which we've been working on for 2 years. We're almost done with it, and we managed and handled it in the document, 45 minbars, and we've rescued more than 20 minbars in Cairo. So I'm very, very proud of this project and the team of the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation but then just to give our speakers this bit of background. In a way I was focusing on my minbars, and you were trying to find what can be done with all of these Mamluk architecture. This is when I remember we went for very focused trips afterwards to check some monuments that I particularly love so much. The Mausoleum of Qalawun is a masterpiece. The dome and the work that was done is something ... Sometimes some historians even call it it's like the Jerusalem of Cairo. Some people think it was inspired from the Dome of the Rock even, but I'm not very sure about that, but it's an iconic architectural foundation in the heart of our historic city, and I wanted to talk about this piece because you saw this in the Mausoleum of Qalawun as a ...

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And it's just a marble panel not as big of this ...

Azza Fahmy:

It's with ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... with a very interesting design.

Azza Fahmy:

Yeah, it's a small design and the amount of work and colors in this small piece ... The minute I saw this small part, I saw it as a bracelets, and I don't want to do it flat. I want to do it on levels like sculpture. So I took a lot of time to give it levels. It is about ... This design on the right hand, it is three level of silver and gold. I inlaid lapis lazuli, and we did a lot of tries, cartoons and paper and things to be fit on the hand, and the system, you open it, and you close it. It took us a long time to be easy to wear.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And in a way, this is the role of designer because you saw two-dimensional pattern, and you managed to transform it into a three-dimensional piece, and this transformation is actually not easy at all.

Azza Fahmy:

You know, Omniya, it gives another feeling when you see things alive in front of you with levels of metal and levels of silver and gold. It give another impression in the design, and I dedicated this to Gamal al-Ghitani, and I put one of his writing on the back of the ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

In the insides, in the inside of the cuff.

Azza Fahmy:

It was a Sufi man.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah, yeah. Actually, I would love to research this pattern a bit more in depth because I'm trying to see where it all originated. If you remember our very, very first slide, this pattern was in it, but it was not in Qalawun. It is actually in the mausoleum of a Mamluk amir called Salar who was actually from the same time as

well in the 14th century, and we see this pattern repeatedly in a in a few ... in a number of monuments as well. I'm trying ... It's like a detective. You're trying to understand what was happening. Was it a craftsman who was famous, and so he was asked to do these decorative patterns in different mausoleums? I don't know.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, maybe they are copying each other like when you do a beautiful design, somebody copies it but either/or.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Somebody would copy that.

Azza Fahmy:

It's one of the most beautiful Mamluk designs, and it's a complicated one. It's very complicated. It's not easy. It's not simple. I think the one he did ... Oh, here is the one which I ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And now I'm taking you to a more complex design because Islamic architecture is famous with the muqarnas, which is the stalactite that are used mainly in entrance portals, and they are there to adorn the summit of the portal. It's one of the strongest architectural element in the Islamic architecture, not just limited to the Mamluks, but you find it as well in Turkey and in Iran and in Syria, but I took you to this one. It's the entrance portal of the Palace of Amir Qawsun, and it's the only surviving palace, which is terribly in a ...

Azza Fahmy:

In a bad shape.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... in a ruinous state. The only palace surviving that is with this grandeur. It's a beautiful big structure. The muqarnas is not as sophisticated maybe as of Sultan Hassan or [foreign] or even Umm al-Sultan Sha'ban.

If you look at this, you would say this is a simple muqarnas, but I was very happy that you decided to work from this one because I think it's ...

Azza Fahmy:

I don't think it ... I don't see ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... a very powerful design.

Azza Fahmy:

No, Omniya, I don't see this it this way. I saw this. This is the most beautiful muqarnas in the Mamluk period.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Because of its simplicity.

Azza Fahmy:

It is ... No, it is different. This modern ... I mean the focus on this lines, it's completely modern, and this half-round flowers which are on the side, when I think of ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Ah, these ones.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, these ones and the form, when you see the form, the form of this and the form of this lines and how he combined this flowers with this straight lines, it is genius. I remember when I looked up, I said, "Oh, I will have a heart attack to see all this." Really, it was amazing the combination, and between the simple pieces and this, it is unusual for me, and this necklace is actually ... It took ... We make 14 models and 14 maquettes of the rings to wear it and to be comfortable when you are wearing this.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Because here this is different. This is a three-dimensional composition that you are transforming into a level that also it was important to have it sit nicely on the chest when the ladies are wearing it. So that it's like a structure in itself.

Azza Fahmy:

And it has to be light on the end and not so heavy when you wear it. It is one of the pieces which really I love it, but at the end ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And it's actually ... It's one of the best sellers in the collection as well.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Well I was very impressed because I thought people would not go for it, but actually no, I'm very happy ...

Azza Fahmy:

Me too. I said, "Who's going to wear muqarnas around his neck?" But Alhamdulillah it's... we succeed.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

But this is just to show you how the building unfortunately is in terrible neglect, and it has been a dream of mine maybe for 20 years now, maybe one day I'll be able to restore it so who knows, Inshallah. It will have a lot of written support, but who knows? We'll try. And with this piece, we called it the Baybars-Qaytbay, and Baybars is actually almost the very first sultan, the Mamluk Sultanate was created because of his ... of the system he put in place for the empire and Qaytbay ... So Baybars is a Bahri Mamluk sultan, and Qaytbay is a Circassian sultan. So Qaytbay is of the late-15th century. In a way this piece was uniting the beginning and the end of the Mamluk Sultanate, and you picked two architectural element which is the lintel, the stone lintels, on top of doors from these two monuments. So this is from Qaytbay, and then you have as well the other from Baybars, and you created this bangle with three different designs which are duplicated because you have six sides.

Azza Fahmy:

Look at the modern geometric one down. How they did this? How it came to the mind of the craftsmen who did this? How he put this all together? He's a genius. They were genius people and to draw with ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

This is again, it's ...

Azza Fahmy:

... it's very complicated. It's very complicated.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

This is geometry here, and for me ...

Azza Fahmy:

... It's the best ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... with the questions, I keep on asking myself ...

Azza Fahmy:

... geometry in the world. This is the best geometry.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

It is. I totally agree with you, and then we have the Mamluk necklace which I'm actually wearing, and I love this piece because it is telling too many stories in just one piece. So we have the rank here, the blazon. We have this from a fountain in the bimaristan of Qalawun ...

Azza Fahmy:

Of Qalawun.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... And here is from the mashrabiya of Maridani with a little pieces that looks like the [Foreign] from the minbar.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

That's why we couldn't give it a name, and we named it the Mamluk Necklace because it's like telling the story of the Mamluk architectural element into one, and actually I'm very thankful that you gave me the freedom of naming the pieces because ... But this is also the ... It's the eight-sided, eight-folded star, and I decided to call it the Jashankir from the khanqah of Baybars al-Jashankir in Gamalaya, and I picked the Jashankir because it's not a common name. So people will ask, "What is Jashankir?" And Jashankir was one of the royal titles. He was the one who tasted the food before the sultan. So the taster, you also have the master of the robes, the cupbearer, and you have the selector except for weapons. So it's a ... And I'm happy that probably with this collection we're introducing a bit of awareness about this heritage and the richness it has, and then finally this is the piece that I actually asked you for when we first met when I asked you, "Can you make me a piece for the Mamluk minbars?" And then you came back and made me a collection, but this is the Barsbay Earrings. Even though the minbar was made for another mosque, but the Mosque of [foreign], which was demolished in the 19th century. So the Committee for the Conservation of Islamic Art, of Arab Art at the time they used to call it, they transported this minbar and put it in the khanqah of Barsbay which is in the City of the Dead, and really if you are in Cairo, you have to go and sit closely to this minbar and look at its beautiful, beautiful pattern, and when you designed this piece, Azza, it was also ... It's like creating a dialogue with the minbar because the minbar with all the pieces being ... It's like a puzzle, one into the other, and when you did this piece as well, the silver and the gold, it was also this picture of putting ...

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, and inside at the center there is stones, a lot of stones in that.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

The center is made of stones. So you inlaid it with precious stones like they inlaid it with mother of pearl?

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, yes, and you know the other problem is you have to make it light. A part of that earrings it has to be open work, and the other has to be solid, and you have to keep the harmony between the open work and the solid one and the harmony between the silver and gold, how you distribute the colors of the two metals and

how it moves because at the top of the earring, this is the start of the earring, and it has to move. I can't make it very stiff, but actually, Omniya, usually when you design you face technically problems, and you face also things which has to be light, comfortable and many, I mean, important things that you have to be aware when you are designing jewelry for people to wear.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And I think you told me for the stud you decided to ... You were inspired by the door knockers.

Azza Fahmy:

[Foreign]. I used the door knocker of Satan Hassan and put the motifs from the minbar, and to reach this, you have to try to make many trial. Sometimes you make it, and it's very clumsy, "No, I have to change it," and at the end we decided to take the simple knocker of the door and make it as the ... To put the star on the back of it.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

What makes ...

Azza Fahmy:

I mean ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... the minbar of [foreign] ...

Azza Fahmy:

Sorry, turning.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Excuse me, again?

Azza Fahmy:

This is an architecture monument, to turn it to jewelry, this is is what the problem.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Exactly.

Azza Fahmy:

This is the function of ... The function wasn't on woods, and to turn it another metal and be wearable, it was a challenge.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And particularly for this minbar ... This minbar was also a challenge for the people who made it, the carpenters, because as you look at the pieces, they are curvilinear. So that's even ... That's another challenge in the carpentry. It's not just a few pieces that you put together, no, also that you need to create this curvy linear shape of the piece. So it was challenging in wood, and it's also again challenging when you did it with metal.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

In a way, you can also check the rest of the pieces in the Mamluk Collection, but in the end, we have 12 pieces designed in the collection, and when we were thinking about where can we launch it, it was exactly a year ago, the 30th of November last year when we launched the collection, and you decided to do it in a very special place. So we ...

Azza Fahmy:

I was trembling. I was really trembling when we choose that Islamic museum in Cairo, "How I am going to compete and put my jewelry beside their pieces? They are gorgeous," but in handling that, it was good, and people love it. It was a great opening for our collection in our great museum, and it bring awareness to the people because a lot of people after that they were visiting.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I was about to say, yeah, because many people were visiting actually for the first time and were discovering the Museum of Islamic Art for the first time, and because, again, when I was younger in the '90s, I would go to your shops and look at the jewelry in their glass box, and for me it was like a museum experience. Seeing them at the museum, it felt like ... I am losing my battery, just a sec. Yeah. So it felt like these pieces will be museum pieces in a few years, and because you're celebrating the craftsmanship of the time, and this what pieces of the

museum are telling us as well, innovation, the craftsmanship, the richness, the design, the perfection in the design, and all of that is very important. I want to thank the team, the fantastic team of the Azza Fahmy Jewelry because honestly it was such a wonderful experience to work with them all, and I'm very happy that now they are also speaking Mamluk. So I felt that I've done something as well. I've introduced them to these monuments that probably they were not on their everyday trajectory while they were visiting the historic city. If you'd like, you can go to YouTube, and if you just put the hashtag #MamlukReimagined or if you write the Mamluk Collection of Azza Fahmy, there is a small 3-minute video that you can watch that is showing all the pieces that were designed in the collection. I won't show it now here because with Zoom sometimes the video is not ... The sound and the images are not always synchronized, but please go and check this video, and you can always also go to the shop and check the collection and look at them. These are ... For me, these are museum pieces, so at least you can hold them for now. Yeah, do you have anything else to say, Azza?

Azza Fahmy:

No, I thank you very much for this wonderful opportunity. These are ... Omniya.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

It was a dream come true for me, jewelry and architecture, and you, working with you was also something, yaani. It's an experience in which I've learned so much, and I want to thank you for the opportunity of including me in this team and allowing me to work on something that I love so much which is our Mamluk heritage and jewelry design. So it's ... I thank you. It was ... For me really it was a dream come true. Thank you, Azza.

Azza Fahmy:

Thank you.

Louise Bertini:

No, thank you both so much for this lecture. I just want to ... For those of you attending, if you have any questions, you can please enter them in the Q and A button, and we will be happy to answer questions. Actually, I think I might start with a question first. It's directed to both of you, but maybe for Azza specifically is when you were observing these monuments, I would say what was something that jumped out of you ... or jumped out for you as both a challenge within your design

process, but also what was something that surprised you that you had to include within your collection?

Azza Fahmy:

First of all, I have to ... When I look to a monument like that, sometimes ... Because I can't focus of the whole monument, but I have to focus on a square or a piece of things which I can see it, I can turn it to a jewelry, maybe a knocker, maybe a motif on a door, maybe a window which have a repetitive motifs of cast iron. Immediately, Louise, I saw a jewelry. Since I started my career, I turn everything beauty in my eyes to jewelry. When I see a flower, I saw the form of the flower, and I see it immediately, "How I can turn to jewelry?" When I saw a motif on a textile, I see immediately if I connect this together, it can be a train. It can be a nice train, but actually this is by experience you can gain this, but actual I see a part of the architecture, and I put it in my jewelry.

Louise Bertini:

Wonderful. We have a question from Marilyn. What is the historical connection between the geometric designs of the Mamluks of Egypt and the beautiful geometric designs of Islamic Spain, as in Seville, for example? Was the design carried through the Islamic conquest, or did the artist in Spain embellish it? The Spanish version seems to have a lot of color, lots of blues and yellows, for example. I don't know, maybe ...

Azza Fahmy:

Andalusian pattern.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

There is a difference, a slight difference, between the geometry and I know ... I think today by experience when I look at a piece that is from North Africa or Andalusia, my eyes are maybe a little bit more trained, and I immediately know this is not from Egypt. This is from North Africa. I cannot really tell what is it because you can have 12-fold star and the 16 fold and all, but I think ... I don't know. You have some length. The shapes of the star patterns are slightly different. The base of the geometry is usually the same. We always start drawing things with the same time. You need a compass, and that's all you need to do and to be able to divide your pattern, but I really ... I don't have the answer for this question, to be honest. It's just that by practice I can feel where is this coming from, by seeing

many patterns from different regions. By the way, we have craftsman from North Africa coming to work in Mamluk Cairo. Look at the Minaret of [foreign] also in [foreign] and the gypsum work that was done. It's interesting because on this one complex, this one and the other one, you have influences from east and west, from Persia to North Africa, but it's just the experience from looking at so many monuments perhaps, but I cannot tell geometry wise, but I have some very good geometry friends, so I can ask them this question and see if they have one.

Azza Fahmy:

I feel ... Omniya, I feel that the geometry of papers, if we take the geometry of papers, it is actually more ultra modern geometry. I didn't find this in North Africa or in Andalusia. There are more of a traditional one, even the repetition, but to go extremely modern, I think I found it only in the Mamluk.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Well, the Mamluks, they built on what was before, the Ayyubids and the Fatimids, and already there was this tradition of geometry, especially in the carpentry and the stone carving that existed in Cairo at the time. So they used the craftsmen which were already trained in this tradition, and I think when you have an exciting client, in a way, you have the sultan who wants to do something outstanding, something magnificent, and because bear in mind that the Mamluks they were not the legitimate rulers, let's say, in some parts of Islamic where they would consider them then, "Why are you now the sultans of Egypt?" They have impose their ... Not just impose, they had to justify being the rulers of Egypt, they brought the [foreign] from Baghdad, and the [foreign] started taking Cairo as residence because after the Mongols and the fall of Baghdad and the loss of the Abbasids, and it was a way of also acquiring this legitimacy. So, again, the architecture was another medium to promote this image that the rulers of Egypt wanted to show the rest of the Islamic and Arab world. So I am sure that they only hired the best.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes.

Louise Bertini:

We have not a question but a comment. The gorgeous motif used in the Qalawun Cuff has some passing similarities to the pharaonic motif of the Heka frieze.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

We want to see that.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, which one?

Louise Bertini:

The Qalawun cuff, I can see where they're thinking that.

Azza Fahmy:

They mean the Qalawun cuff? They have similarities of ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Will you send us an image sometime to check it?

Azza Fahmy:

Yeah, maybe the first one ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I had a discussion with ...

Azza Fahmy:

Maybe the impression of the borders because in temples when you look up, you see the borders, which you have either triangles or rectangles. Maybe this is the similarity. but it's completely, I think, not similar.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I'll be so excited if there is ancient Egyptian inspiration in this piece. That would show that the medieval builders, they went and checked these temples and got inspiration from the work of the ancestors.

Louise Bertini:

I will say everything goes back to ancient Egypt, of course.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Exactly. We will investigate this, Louise, huh?

Louise Bertini:

Yes.

Azza Fahmy:

You know, Louise, I think we have to ... I have to ... You gave me an idea now. I think I have to make something with a combination of [foreign], Islamic and pharaonic.

Louise Bertini:

Yes, definitely.

Azza Fahmy:

A crazy piece.

Louise Bertini:

We have a question which I think I can answer from Ann. Are your pieces available online? I think the answer is yes to that.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes, check the website.

Louise Bertini:

I think it's azzafahmy.com, right?

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes.

Louise Bertini:

Yeah. Question from Mariam, how could I start jewelry design by self-learning? Where to start such a career? She said she loves you so much, and you're such an inspiration.

Azza Fahmy:

She's in Cairo?

Louise Bertini:

I guess so. She doesn't say. So, Mariam, if you're online and you want to shoot us your ... You can shoot to myself or ...

Azza Fahmy:

You can visit Azza Fahmy Design Studio.

Louise Bertini:

There you go. Another question, "The ancient Egyptians were inspired by the nature around them. Would you consider a jewelry line inspired by Egypt's plants and wildlife?"

Azza Fahmy:

I think I did that in the Pharaonic Collection. We did ... We took from the Amarna period a bracelet from the plants of the Amarna. I love this period very much because it's very modern, this period. But I think I have in my collection ... I have a bracelet from the plants of the Amarna.

Louise Bertini:

Hmm. Oh, a question on the opening picture, "I have sent, it looks like, a mosque, but where?"

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I'm going to actually put it up again because it's just like a tiny puzzle. The mosque is in Sayyidah Zaynab, and if you go, the street is called [Indistinct], and it is the Salaran Sangar el-Gawli. I don't know why my, yeah, my presentation froze. Here we go. Unfortunately, the mausoleum is closed, but I hope that one day it will again be open to the public. And when I took this photograph, I was literally inside the mihrab. I was standing in the mihrab niche, and because you see this curvature here, this is the mihrab's curvature, and this is the roofing of it. It has a word for it, but I can't remember it now. And then you see, this is the Dome of Salar, and the emir is buried under, next to it. But I was inside the mihrab when I took it. It just ... It's got so many details in just one shot, and you feel it's a collage, but it's not. It's just the mihrab of Salar's mausoleum. And Salar and Sangar, they ... It's an interesting story because he died in the prisons of Al-Nasir Muhammad out of ... And he died of hunger actually because he was very arrogant, and the sultan decided to leave it to die without giving him any food, and there's also this sad

story that he was found. He ate his own shoe. But anyways, this is the cruelty of the medieval history sometimes. You don't know if it's the reality because we have these news from the historians over time, and you don't know how trustworthy they could be sometimes. So the emir built this mausoleum for his friends, and his own mausoleum is very modest and with absolutely no decoration. He decorated the mihrab of his friends.

Louise Bertini:

Yeah, it's a great picture.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

I hope it's already open again because it's really a wonderful monument, and it's just ... It was open for prayers not that far away, but recently they just closed it because of ... I think there must be some structural problems. And, well, that's another beautiful, beautiful monument in the historic city that needs attention and care. Now by telling these stories through the pieces through the jewelry, this is how you also create awareness so that the people would be ... would consider that maybe, I hope, in the future, the private sector will be investing more in Egypt's heritage because you cannot leave it all to the state. It's a lot of work, and heritage usually doesn't bring that much money either. So it's very important that we, the citizens of the city, also take care of our own monuments and invest in their well keep and maintenance and restoration. So hopefully this could lead up to other projects in the future where we can rescue these monuments.

Louise Bertini:

There is no shortage of monuments that need rescuing, and they're all so important. Have a question, well, first a comment saying, "I love your jewelry," and then, "Could you picture the daily scene of your workshop? Who are the artisans who make your ideas come true? Are they all Egyptians, and are your pieces handmade only?"

Azza Fahmy:

I have a team of 26 people working in my department. Between people after I did the sketches and finished the sketches, we start putting some of our things. We start putting in computers. And I have a technician which is ... can serve this to ... because when you draw something and you turn it to a metal, you have to be aware of the thickness of the metal and many technical problems. I have a team of

technical. They are all engineers. And I have people working on computers, and I have people working on four main sculptures, and I have calligraphers, and I have people in the administration that took notes to be sure that everything I said when I'm telling them, it will be corrected. It's really a big team, a big team. And also that we start working ... I start working with the team and then finish the prototype, and then when I finish the prototype, I give it to the market, and I have no clue whatsoever what happens after that. They have to decide how many pieces, if we are going to produce 10 pieces or 20 pieces, and there is a people who do the bill of material because when you go from the design department to the production department, it has to be on ... The bill of material has to be accompanied by the prototype. How many grams of gold? How many grams to silver? How many efforts we did to calculate the price of the things. It's a long-drawn, I mean, process.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Process.

Azza Fahmy:

And it's complicated.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And, Louise, just to tell you, for the Mamluk collection, it took us 2 years.

Azza Fahmy:

Yeah. Yeah, for 12 pieces. Isn't it [foreign]? It was 12 pieces?

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yes.

Azza Fahmy:

It is nonstop.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Twelve pieces, and it was ...

Azza Fahmy:

Nonstop working.

Louise Bertini:

Question from Farah, "Do you think the Mamluks used just compass and straightedge for constructing patterns?" Or maybe, how do you think they went about constructing these patterns?

Azza Fahmy:

[Indistinct] what do you think, Omniya?

Omniya Abdel Barr:

We don't have records, unfortunately, but being someone who worked on the field, I'd say the compass is your tool. You need a thread, and even with a thread, you can do your length on the ground even if you want to do it on-site. But I know that they use compasses because we have some records for mathematicians at least that have studied this geometry thoroughly. You don't have the other tools that we are using today. They didn't exist. The compass was always the base. The fact of ... There's a big debate in art ... between art historians and historians of this period of, did the Mamluk draw their monuments or not? That was actually part of my PhD because, being an architect, I cannot at all imagine that you can build these monuments to this perfection, to the millimeter, without calculating beforehand and drawing things beforehand. But also, with architects, once you have the end result is the monument and it's there, you don't have a documentation process at the time, huh, or an archiving system, so we just ... You could throw away your papers because, well, the example is in front of us. If we need to copy it, we will just take the dimensions. And actually, we have some records like this, like [foreign] would ask to have domes similar to the domes that [foreign] had built with the zigzags domes. And we know that they used to do wooden maquettes to show the complexes. And there are different interpretations. Sometimes, it doesn't have to be just paper, but they can just say, "We're interested by this example. Now about you build me something similar to this?" because nothing has survived in written saying how did they build these monuments, but as someone who draws and who actually work in architecture, I try to imagine how things could have been, and I am sure that there was a process in which they had to think through because And as I can say this as well, you have different patterns in the same space. If these patterns ... If you don't have the harmony and the balance between them, it would be messy.

Azza Fahmy:

Of course, design is balance and harmony. If you did ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Design is balance. Exactly.

Azza Fahmy:

Yeah.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

So you have to think it through, and you have to try one time, two times, three, 20 times until you reach ... That's a question for Azza. When you do you reach a phase, and then you say, "Yes, this is the final one. I am satisfied. This is what we are going to do"? Because we do many variations throughout the process. And at one point, you look at something, and you say, "This is it. I am going with this one." Like with the muqarnas necklace, you decided, "This is the design I want to work on at the end." But it's key ...

Azza Fahmy:

Because you know...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

... the 40 priors.

Azza Fahmy:

Actually, Omniya, you train your eyes by years and years ... And I'm 50 years in this profession. But actually, my eyes is very trained to see the unbalanced lines in the design. But actually I see it immediately. Immediately I can recognize where is the wrong line in the small paper. This is, I think, given by training.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

And it's ... I always say it's always the link between the eye and the hand. That's why you cannot just always look or always draw. You have to have these two together because this is when you can perfection it, and you can really master it.

Azza Fahmy:

And I think you have to connect it to the heart. Otherwise, if you didn't like the piece, you will not give the people the same piece. Your heart has to love it. That's very true.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, yes.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Someone said something very nice the other day, and I think it was heart, head. There was something, a third thing, but I can't remember what it was. But you design with ...

Azza Fahmy:

No, that ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

The heart and the head ...

Azza Fahmy:

You have a heart in your body, and you have a heart in your hands. If your hand doesn't love what you are doing, you will not transfer this feeling to the piece.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Yeah.

Louise Bertini:

Somebody just commented, "Heart, head and hand."

Azza Fahmy:

Hand!

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Of course!

Azza Fahmy:

You will not ... Sometimes when you look to a nice piece, the piece talks to you. Actually you feel something happen to you when you see a nice piece. For me, it is, I feel that this piece is talking to me.

Louise Bertini:

So we have, I think, two very appropriate final questions. From Gina, she's asking for Azza, "What is your next inspiration coming from?"

Azza Fahmy:

I can't say. Louise, I can't say. There are going to kill me if I mention my next collection. They are going to kill me in the company!

Louise Bertini:

Okay. That's totally fine.

Azza Fahmy:

... a very nice subject.

Louise Bertini:

And I guess the final question is from Dina, who says, "Brand Egypt globally is not oftentimes associated with quality design and excellence, but Azza is the only global brand really from Egypt, so how do you see the future in this space? Is there a place for Egypt on the global design scene?"

Azza Fahmy:

I think in the last 5 years I saw a lot of young designers. They have great opportunities. If they are serious to develop their work and working hard to develop this, I think they can reach this. But there is a movement now. You see it in Cairo. There is a movement in many things, not only in jewelry, in many things. They're doing furniture. They're doing sometimes clothes and shoes, textiles. No, I'm very optimistic about the young designers in Egypt, but they need more and more and more and more, more experience and more work.

Louise Bertini:

Well, I personally am very excited to see not only your work but a lot of ... There's some very wonderful designers up and coming.

Azza Fahmy:

Yes, yes.

Louise Bertini:

I love to see the inspiration in all these different design spheres within Egypt. I think it's just really wonderful to see, and I hope it does gain more notoriety just as your amazing work has. So I just want to close with again thanking both Azza and Omniya for their wonderful lecture today, and thank all of you for joining us. And if you're interested in ARCE's efforts to research and conserve Egypt's past, I urge you to visit arce.org and make a contribution today or sign up to become a member as we rely on your support to make all of our work possible. So thank you again, and I look forward to hopefully seeing you all at our next member-only lecture on December 6th. And thank you yet again, Azza and Omniya, and I hope everyone ...

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Thank you, Louise.

Louise Bertini:

No, thank you. And I hope everybody now has a happy holiday, so take care!

Azza Fahmy:

Thank you.

Omniya Abdel Barr:

Thank you.

Azza Fahmy:

Goodbye.

Louise Bertini:

Goodbye.