

Seema's Symbolic Jewellery



Agadez Cross from the Koumama Tribe



Seema Persad



Made by Survivors Resilience Sat from India

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It's not often that you come across local online jewellery stores that deal in symbolic jewellery, but one does exist (symbolsjewellery.co), and it's run by Seema Persad, an Online Symbolic Retail Jeweller.

Open since November 19th and FIU certified, she and her husband Neil – who incidentally also designed their website – sell uniquely hand crafted jewellery pieces that either tell a significant story or has deep rooted history, both to their creators and to the ones who will eventually purchase and wear them. Their tagline, "Speak from the Heart" does just that, for symbolic jewellery is all about the meaning attached to the pieces.

Previously, Seema spent 20 years in the corporate world in various sales and marketing roles, including a brand trade manager for a multinational company. In 2015 however, she was let go as part of a regional cost cutting exercise. The timing couldn't have been worse, for she was about to enter into the thesis stage of her MBA studies – she was pursuing an Executive Masters of Business Administration degree at the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business (and will graduate in January 2017).

"I was at a fork in the road,"

Seema reflected.

"I could either go back into the corporate arena or take time off and finish my Masters. It forced me to ask myself what to do with the rest of my life, and I came back to the saying 'Choose a job that you love, and you'll never work a day in your life.' It sounds romantic, but it is possible, and you can find a way to have an income out of it."

Eventually, that very thesis became her business plan titled 'Marketing the Emotion of Symbolic Jewellery'. The more she learned, the more she wanted to do something positive. Seema's ability to establish an intrinsic link between emotion and the symbolic meanings is the heart of the collection (and connection).

"What I found is that people sell jewellery based on beauty," said Seema. "People choose pieces, but it's often more about style as opposed to meaning, so what we try to do is put both together. For example, we have pieces with integrated cultural symbols, which is unusual. There's an Ohm symbol with a Celtic Trinity Knot etched on the side of it. We also have Claddagh rings from Ireland [which Seema herself wears] which feature a crown (for loyalty), a pair of hands (for friendship) and a heart (for love), and according to which hand it's worn on and which way

the heart points, you can tell if the woman is married, engaged, or if her heart is taken. We also know the cross, a visual identifier of Christian faith that represents salvation. You give a talisman or charm to someone to protect them because you love them. It's about integrating different cultures and religions to represent harmony and balance while spreading the underlying message of unity. Doing this research proved what I had thought all along; many of the cultural symbols from around the world are based on one key principle, which is love. Spreading positive energy through the symbols was very important to me, especially at a time when there seems to be a lot of hate, division and negativity, which is what's getting all the attention. We want to redirect that and bring back that connection to people. This is why speaking from the heart is such a powerful statement."

Two important jewellery sources featured on the site are doing just that; an NGO from India called Made by Survivors, and the Tuareg people of the Koumama tribe in Africa, both sourced during her research.

Made by Survivors is an organization that rescues women who are victims of sex trafficking, slavery, child labour and other forms of human rights abuse, as well as

women are born into bonded situations where they have to keep working to pay off family debts. What they do is empower these women by teaching them the art of jewellery making; with this skill they are able to earn a decent living for themselves and their families to help break the cycle of the abuse and slavery.

"When I looked at the pieces, all of them were symbolic; each represented struggle," said Seema. "Their founder Sarah Symons was excited to work with me and loved that their pieces would be shown in the Caribbean as they had no representation here. When I ordered a pair of Resilience earrings, I also received a report card on the girl who made them, including how she did in school. She was also working part time to support herself and her family. This is real, material change in action and I wanted to support this. The girls make a decent living and it's all about getting families out of the cycle. Most importantly, whenever items are purchased from this organisation, 100 per cent of the proceeds go towards these life-changes."

Seema also discovered the beauty of the Tuaregs – a matriarchal society also known as the 'blue people' while researching her thesis, and she was moved by the story of their Agadez cross, which

is passed down from father to son at puberty. This cross represents the four corners of the world and it is believed that because no one knows where they will perish, it is important to be wearing the cross at the time of death.

"It's both a rite of passage, and a bond between father and son that transcends time and place."

Many of their pieces also celebrate the female form (represented by triangles) which honours female divinity. Their jewellery is made using the lost wax technique, where the piece is roughly shaped in wax and then replaced by molten silver. The piece is then finished in intricate hand edgings. They also use ebony wood and agate, which is thought to possess all areas of healing in your life.

"This is how the tribe sustains themselves; when they sell pieces of jewellery, it all goes back into the tribe," said a smiling Seema.

"This is art in life, living art. The way that it's made with love, that energy is transferred and can empower a lot of women in Trinidad. It's wonderful to see women being respected through jewellery."

To view samples of these items, Seema will be having a viewing at Tifara Boutique at No 3 Patna Street St James on December 18th, and also on Saturday December 24th at UpMarket at the Trinidad Country Club, Maraval.