



Nayla Romanos Iliya, and her story with art

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Beirut: From Paris to Dubai, architect Nayla Romanos Iliya traveled the world with an artistic passion and eagerness to learn. As she immersed herself in diverse cultures, she felt further connected to her Lebanese roots and decided to return to her homeland, which she once felt estranged to.

"When I was 12, I wanted to be a pilot. However, it was not a realistic dream given the circumstances, so I became more inclined to architecture," said Iliya.

Positioned as a multifaceted architect, Iliya kept an open mind as she explored and worked in different artistic fields, besides architecture, ranging from interior design to sculpting.

"I worked on 5 renovation projects in Downtown Beirut and later on dabbled in interior design. My first design project was for Casa Blanca," she told Annahar.

Back in 2005, Iliya co-curated an exhibition featuring Lebanese designers alongside William Sawaya called Switch on Lebanese Design at the Salon Du Meuble in Paris. The purpose of this exhibition was to show the world the creativity and potential Lebanese designers hold. Amongst the participants were Rabih Keyrouz, Karim Shaaya, and Nada Debbes.

As Iliya continued narrating her story, she mentioned that the biggest challenge she has ever encountered was that most Lebanese resorted to engineers rather than architects to complete projects, especially residential buildings.

"The buildings constructed did not have a character; they were just mere space. I had to pour my creativity elsewhere so I diverted to smaller-scale work such interior design and sculpting," Iliya explained.

Her interest in sculpting grew stronger when she moved to Dubai back in 2010. She dug deeper into the Arab culture and came across the Phoenician's greatest contribution to this world: The Alphabet. Positioned as part of the Lebanese heritage, she felt more drawn to her country and felt she was on a mission to revive these archaic symbols.

"I came back in 2013 and began participating in Beirut Art Week. The first Phoenician related sculpture I ever created was Alhabeth," She told Annahar.

Amongst her many projects was the Thawra Scarf she created during Lebanon's revolutionary period. She sold it and donated all the proceeds to charities dedicated to helping the less fortunate.

Her latest project, "On the other side of time," is one of her biggest accomplishments to date as she considered it the start of the legacy she aims to leave behind in Lebanon.

Dante Aleghieri's Divine Comedy, a poem written in the Middle Ages. She included all the elements that represent Dante's three sections: Inferno, Paradiso, and Purgatorio.

"The Lebanese have witnessed a sufficient amount of violence and wrongdoings throughout their lives. This sculpture serves as a reminder to stick to doing good for the sake of being eternally rewarded," she told Annahar.