

Jewelry IS A LANGUAGE BY ITSELF

By Ghiya Irshaid

“When I started this workshop in 1991, I had no intention of turning it into a serious profession, it was a mere hobby,” says Mrs. May Rishani. “As time went by, I became more involved and decided to teach myself the profession. I read books about the old and new techniques of making jewelry and studied its history and symbolism.” After a great deal of work and effort Mrs. Rishani, now a well established jeweler, has managed to develop her business on a much larger scale, with seven professional artisans working with her. All the work is done in the workshop from the minute the gold is bought as a raw metal until it is transformed into a unique piece of jewelry displayed in the show room. Mrs. May Rishani’s designs are greatly affected by oriental jewelry: “In my opinion, jewelry is a language by itself.” She explained how wearing jewelry evolved from just a pebble on a string, to a symbol of wealth and social status. Jewelry in many cultures has a direct association with the gods. People wore certain stones to protect themselves from evil, or out of superstition. Not only is jewelry a piece of adornment but, “it has a lot to say about you, as a person. The metal, colors, and stones you choose have a lot to do with your personality, hopes, and aspirations.” Today the value of a piece of jewelry is relatively very important to the buyers. It is thought of in terms of an investment. When asked why this profession is mainly dominated by men, Mrs. Rishani said: “I

think the economic factor plays a major role in this issue” Usually, men have more financial means than women. Men think more in terms of investment and profit. Women, on the other hand, tend to be more sensitive to the art itself



and the aesthetic beauty of a piece of jewelry rather than the commercial value.

Mrs. Rishani was brought up in a conservative environment: “We were strictly disciplined at home and had limited freedom. Yet, culture and self accomplishment were the bases of our upbringing”. Mrs. Rishani is very active socially. She is one of the founding members of the Louise Wegmann College and a member of the American Women’s Club. She has helped in giving aid to the children of the West Bank and has served as member of the Shuwaifat municipality. Now she is the President of the Society of the Friends of the American University of Beirut Museum. Although she is independent and active at the social level, Mrs. Rishani insists that her role as mother, for her two sons, is the most important. Her husband and children were always her first priority. A mother, as she asserts, has a “sacred obligation” towards her children: “I always made it a point to be at home the minute they came back from school. They might be busy studying, but they knew that I was there for them.” Mrs. Rishani attributes her success basically to her family’s support. Her husband provided for her career at the beginning; however, the shop today is a totally independent financial entity. It was her family, she asserts, that provided her with the confidence she needed, and they have remained a major source of strength and reassurance.

Rishani affirms that work has changed her personality. She has become more critical in her judgment of people. Although, she had always taken everything she did seriously, she insists that work demands more commitment and perseverance. A strong sense of responsibility is vital if you wish to succeed in any job or profession: “It was the first time I had really dealt with money and budget, and this made me more cautious. You cannot afford to overlook the minutest detail.”

Mrs. Rishani encourages all women to work. Work gives a person a sense of self-accomplishment, satisfaction, and financial independence and boosts one’s self confidence. A working woman feels that she is equal to man in the real sense. Mrs. Rishani admits that it is very difficult for a full time working woman to cope if her children are still young. Therefore, “a working mother should try to spend quality time with her children, to make up for the time she is at work.” In her opinion, the family is a “sacred obligation,” and she has succeeded in achieving a balance between her private and professional lives. Looking around the show room, one cannot but be astonished at the beauty, style, and uniqueness of her designs. She is a truly talented artist, with a strong sense of persistence and resolution, just the right combination for success!

