

Behind the Fashion scene in Egypt.  
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### **LEAD-IN:**

The fashion industry in Egypt is growing, despite a struggling economy and lack of resources. AUC Radio's Nada El-Tobgy reports on how Egyptian designers struggle to boost to an industry that has a long way to go, giving insight into their own different experiences and diverse backgrounds that eventually lead them to making names for themselves in Egypt.

*Music: "Vogelbird" by Sleeping Policemen (:6)*

Most girls all over the world often dream of getting all dressed up and looking pretty as little kids and sometimes even refer to it as the best memories from their childhoods. If it's not just while dressing up their dolls or making cloth on their little sewing machines, **NATSOUND of a single sewing machine (:2)** It's about raiding their mums' closets and dressing up in grown up cloths.

*Amina: It's just a normal path, I wanted to do fashion since I was 10 Years old. It was always something I always knew I wanted to do (:6).*

That was Amina Khalil the creator and designer behind the well-known brand Amina K. She is one of the people who have worked long and hard to get to where she is today.

*Music: "Through Heavens Eyes" by Hans Zimmer (:7).*

For thousands of years Egyptians have been in the business of making cloths, people back then used to make their cloths from almost the same materials that we use today.

Given the geographical properties that the land provided.

Fashion in Egypt has changed dramatically since then, given all the different civilizations and cultures that Egypt was apart of throughout history like Greek and Roman.

Even at a time when Egypt was part of the Islamic empire there were distinct differences and development in the way people dressed.

At this point in history, Cairo was the most important textile production and distribution center in the world with experts in the weaving of silk, cotton, and linen.

Fabrics were the most sold products in Cairo's markets, after coffee and spices.

*MUSIC: "Work at It" by Liam Stewart (:27)*

Today, Fashion designers are very creative and have the ability to develop incredible collections that carry a unique styles and signatures. You'll understand how such a glamorous career with all that spotlight has its own joys and obstacles. Here's where

the story begins.

Like any career, fashion has its ups and downs, but this industry can be tougher than you think.

The fashion industry in Egypt is still in its early stages of development it has a long way to go before it becomes one of the world's important fashion cities like Paris, Milan, New York and any others. This is the vision that some fashion designers have for this City.

A number of these designers have been in the market for almost 15 years like Amani El Chrief. She began her career working as consultant in New York. Then she was able to open two galleries in New Jersey and another one in Cairo.

*Amani: Because in the states it's a different mentality than in Egypt. When I was there they asked my though I would like to be a consultant, because in all the art stores they gave me some courses. And I found out that I'm the kind of person who can be a consultant for another person. To her give any opportunity to buy any fabrics, if it's the price or where she can buy it. So I took her to New York and I give her my opinion, and then they asked if I like to open my own gallery. So that's why I started everything in the US (: 45).*

Another example of someone who is just at the beginning of her career in this industry is Laila Youssef.

*Laila: I applied to San Francisco fashion school and I got accepted; and I'm doing my masters there (:7).*

Laila just started a career in styling but hopes to one day go back to her love for designing that used to study at AUC. She applied for fashion school in the US and she is going to study styling.

*MUSIC: "Digg it" by C-Doc (:4)*

Such struggling designers and many others who are interested in the field, don't have the opportunity to learn everything they need to know about fashion in Egypt. So most of them do is travel abroad to countries like France, Italy, and the US.

Amina spoke of her own experience in London and how she started working as a fashion designer.

*Amina: I did a year at AUC, I did Mass Comm. and I tried a few courses here and there in Cairo and I was working on my own. Like fashion wise I was trying different things like sketching and trying to make cloths by my self. And then after a year at AUC I felt like, no I want to make this my career. Its every thing I wanted to do, so I went to London for the summer to decide and by the end of the summer I knew I was moving to London to start fashion. (:29).*

Whether enrolling in fashion school or working with fashion brands, these beginning designers have to acquire specific skills that they don't have the ability to learn in Egypt.

*MUSIC: "Harmless Blues" by Moore and sons (:17).*

So the question remained, will the fashion market in Egypt have enough potential to grow even further, given the fact that more young people are looking for a better education in fashion?

Amani believes that it is possible and that this career path is becoming more frequent among younger generations.

*Amani: "Yeah for the future, now, I feel like we will do. But in the past, it was very hard to think about being something in the world. But now everybody is open." (:28)*

She thinks that the more people are open to idea and willing to change their perception of this field the better chances it has of becoming more professional and better advanced.

Amina on the other hand talked about the fact that the market in Egypt isn't competitive enough yet. She talked about how different both market are and special difficulties that come with each market.

*Amina: Its a lot easier here in Egypt to build a name, because the fashion industry hasn't even developed, its still starting. So here if anyone is doing anything right or anything, everyone is going to know about it. Abroad you have thousands and thousands of amazing, amazing designers that are so talented. So really, it's really competitive over there. (:27)*

What makes Amina's and Amani's opinions that much more reliable is that they both worked with so different designer in the western fashion industry and that presents them with a unique perspective on the different both market are.

*Music: "Digg it" by C-Doc (:4)*

The other problem with this industry is the lack of variety in fabrics and materials. That was the most shocking part. While most designers agreed that you can find some sort of middle ground with fabric shops in Egypt, but all the best materials are imported.

*Amani: I like a high quality material; I don't like to work with middle class material. That's why I always import my material from Italy. In Egypt, most of the material like 60 percent is from China. I'm not saying that Chinese material is bad but its not like the ones from Italy ( :22).*

That piece of information contradicted what my research had shown; which was Cairo as the most important city in the world when it came to producing and distributing fabrics and textiles.

But Amina said that while Egypt still has a few local suppliers but that is mostly true, but it also depended on what kind of design you're working with.

*Amina: But you have a few suppliers like Hisney, it's a very well known fabric*

*suppliers and manufactures or the Shurbagy. You have big names that still produce fabrics and are available to the local market. Its defiantly not fabric for evening wear but it can be used for cotton shirts, men's shirts, and different types of cotton linens. You have them available here. Obviously the always give priority to exporting the fabric, so you kind of have to pick from what is left. You have to work your way around the system.*

*Of course I'd love to have the option to buy whatever fabric I want but you just have to pick from what is available here. And the rest, I make up for it from exported fabric, which I didn't want to have to do. I'd much rather buy all my fabrics Egyptian but we don't produce all fabrics, we don't make chiffon, we don't make silk...and if we do its not standard, I cant use it. (1:04)*

After talking to these different designer and getting their feed back on how the fashion community, industry, and market in Egypt still have a long way to go. But they remain hopeful that Cairo would once again become the city where fashion has its own highlight.

*Music: "Nola" by Felix Arndt (till the end)*

Special thanks to Amani El Chrief, Amina Khalil, and Laila Yousef.

Sources from: Interviews and fashion history website < <http://fashionhistory.zeesonline.space.net/egypt.html> > and WHKMLA: A history of textiles in Egypt < <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/sp/1011/ignoramus/igno2.html> >

Music by:

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"Digg it" by C-Doc

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Thank you for listening to "Behind the Fashion scene in Egypt."