

Rezia Wahid, MBE
34, Handwoven Textile Designer



Creativity is a part of who I am. I never set out to be an artist, I was born into it. After my A Levels, I completed an Art Foundation at Chelsea College of Art and Design followed by a degree in Woven Textiles at the Surrey Institute. As well as designing and producing my own woven cloths, I also teach Textiles – I love making but it's a lonely existence and teaching gives me the opportunity to meet and inspire others.

Every artist needs to find their voice. It seemed too obvious to use my Asian heritage as an influence for my work. During a walk in the English countryside, I found myself in a field of dandelion seeds. They were blowing all around me, it was so beautiful and I knew instantly that I wanted to capture that moment in my work so I decided to weave light, airy cloths. While researching how to do this, I learnt about baf-tanna, a traditional Bangladeshi weaving method similar to what I wanted to do. But I use fine neutral Egyptian cottons and raw silks from Japan instead of the bright Bengali colours.

Success came as a surprise. After spending three years at art college, every undergraduate dreams they'll get 'spotted' at their degree show.

I was so sure that no one



Light side :: Rezia's handloom woven work is inspired by Bangladeshi baf-tanna

Here's **one** we made earlier!

PROOF THAT ASIAN WOMEN ARE STILL HANDY WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING!

would be interested in my final work, a handwoven fabric inspired by roses, that I priced it at £2500. The morning after our private view I received a call to say that my work had been sold. I was so shocked but it gave me the confidence to leave college, go out there and do what I love doing!

I'm lucky to have my family's support.

I was brought up in a creative environment, my mother used to embroider and as a child I was fascinated by my grandfather's fashion sense. My husband is an artist and musician who understands my need to be creative. We don't have a structured life and our routines change according to work commitments. He respects that I need to spend time in my studio, but we also

work together on a community project teaching Sufi music and weaving workshops in Wembley (www.silkroads.co.uk). On top of that we have a nine-month old daughter but I believe in having quality time and try and aim for this.

I nearly gave it all up. One evening I was working in my studio until midnight, all alone, contemplating giving up my practice. Then on the way out to catch the last train home, I collected my post and found a letter addressed to me with the Queen's stamp on it. I thought it was from the tax office but to my utter surprise it was a notice to say I had been nominated for an MBE for services to art in London. To this day I have no idea who nominated me, but it is one of the most incredible things that has happened to me, it is an appreciation of my work and this motivates me to carry on.

• www.woven-air.com



Photography: Sohail Anjum • Hair & Make-up: Annie Shah and Noor Zara • Location: The Flow Gallery, London T: 020 7243 0782, www.flowgallery.co.uk

Tanvi Kant
28, Jeweller

Working from home is a privilege. My studio is a converted garage at the bottom of the garden – it's where I do all my making as well as the paper work – even creatives can't escape that! I have a bench for metal work, a small kiln for ceramics and a comfy sofa in the corner to collapse on at the end of the evening.

Every day is different. I take an organic approach to my work, I'll start with a basic idea and spend hours researching but sometimes the results aren't what I expected so I have to scrap it and start again. In the build up to exhibitions or craft fairs I tend to make all day long.

I like to challenge people's notion of jewellery. When I tell people I'm a jeweller they presume I'm a goldsmith but I specialise in contemporary jewellery, it's more sculptural using scrap fabrics and materials.

Travel is all part of the job. Being a designer doesn't mean you spend every day locked away in your studio. It's also possible to do residencies or be involved in touring exhibitions. I was lucky to be awarded a bursary that allowed me to spend three weeks in India. I embarked on a craft tour where I visited Gujarat, Rajasthan and Delhi and met craftsmen and women who specialise in traditional techniques like bell making, dying, bandani, wood and block printing. Seeing these talented artisans who take pride in ensuring these heritage crafts are not lost has been a highlight of my career so far.

Crafts are a competitive industry. These



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days it's so easy to access mass made jewellery on the high street, but buying directly from a maker is a completely different experience. Each piece is 100% unique and one of a kind. This level of service and professional quality commands a higher price.

Job satisfaction comes before salary. I'm lucky that I'm doing my dream job – I work for myself which means my hours and place of work are flexible and although at times the demands are intense, I enjoy the work life balance. It takes time to become an established designer/maker and dependent on the commission the price varies. I may charge an hourly rate or flat fee, but I also need to account for time spent on research not just making.

As an artist you never stop learning. You don't need a degree to work in the art and craft sector but it helps. The benefits of going to college include having access to workspace, being able to network with other students and time to experiment with ideas and use free resources. It gives you a chance to experiment and make mistakes, a luxury you don't get when you have to meet client briefs. I'm aiming to further my skills by continuing my education with an MA this year.

You're never alone. There are numerous support networks and opportunities for individual artists and crafters. I am currently working on a project called 'The Shape of Things' where eight artists from minority backgrounds are given a bursary of £5000 to develop a solo exhibition which will take place in four venues across the UK. My work will be shown at The Touchstones Gallery in Rochdale (link4life.org/touchstones) in July and at The Flow Gallery in October (www.flowgallery.co.uk), it's a fantastic chance to showcase my work and engage an audience who may never have seen contemporary jewellery before.

• www.tanvikant.co.uk

