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# TheNational

## Interview with Milia Maroun

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The first Arab designer to show at Milan Fashion Week, Beirut-born Milia Maroun won over an international crowd this week with her Milia M collection at Abu Dhabi Fashion Week.

### Q. Why did you go into fashion?

A. I've loved fashion since I was a little girl, not necessarily making clothes for my doll – I was not a “doll” girl. But I loved getting dressed to go to school; I always looked different. Growing up, I wanted to do anything artistic – I wanted to be a painter, then an architect, and then it seemed natural to merge the art with fashion.

### Q. How do you start to design a collection?

A. I'm quite independent. I travel a lot, and at the fabric shows we are bombarded with trends. But every collection for me is a new story. I start by looking for beautiful images – scenes from a movie, or an attitude of a woman, or an emotion. Then I start finding objects or photos, and from that point I gather fabrics that relate. I do my drawings and then we start making the items for real and it just flows. It's a lot of pressure to do two collections a year, but without the pressure, we don't get the work done.

### Q. How did you get involved in Milan Fashion Week and Abu Dhabi Fashion Week?

A. The Abu Dhabi Fashion Week organisers got in touch with me in November because they were looking for Arab designers to launch the event. A month later I was told they wanted to sponsor me to show in Milan, because to them, I represented the Arab world in terms of seriousness, longevity and prêt-à-porter rather than couture. I think the Italian press were surprised: maybe they were expecting some kind of local, folkloric show, which is not me at all, so they really responded positively.

### Q. Do you place your designs in the local or international arena?

A. I'm definitely not local. Yes, I have a shop in Lebanon, but my aim is to sell internationally. The local scene is very important to me though – it's my home scene and a beautiful ground for trial and error. And Arab shoppers are very demanding, but they are also very curious.

### Q. Where do you like to shop?

A. I like concept shops. My favourites are Dover Street Market in London, by Comme des Garçons; and 10 Corso Como in Milan. And I love IF boutique in New York and Dubai: in terms of what they carry they are one of my favourites – but then they carry my pieces too!



The Lebanese designer Milia Maroun (centre) with some of her models before her show at Abu Dhabi Fashion Week [Stephen Lock / The Nation](#)