

MODERN MASTER

WE CAUGHT UP WITH VRAM MINASSIAN TO TALK ABOUT
SCULPTURES, COSMIC FORCES AND JEWELRY

BY
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Tell us about your journey from Beirut to Paris and then, LA.

I was born in Beirut in 1963. My father was a jeweler and a watchmaker who had his own shop there. I was always enamored by the clientele who visited the store – distinguished, worldly, and cultured people all of whom looked to my father as an expert. Plenty of beautiful women too! During the summers I'd spend mornings apprenticing in the workshop sawing, drilling, filing, drawing wires, piercing, stretching, and stringing before going to the beach. Even then I thought I'd become a jeweler one day. But by the time I was in high school, Lebanon was plunging into civil war – and with the business climate unstable and my parents insisting that I get a traditional academic education, I enrolled in the American University in Paris, where I earned a degree in International Business. Only after that did I move to Santa Monica to study at GIA.

For around 30 years, you've designed for private labels and done bridal collections too. How different is the creative palette – then and now?

Working with other brands is a totally different process. I'll use a tennis analogy – when I was doing



private label, I was the coach or the trainer – always helping others reach their goals. And now I'm not only the coach and the trainer, but the player, the manager, and the agent too. There's immense creative freedom but also a whole new world of responsibility.

What was your debut collection for VRAM? And how long did it take you to come up with the final set?

My first collection for the VRAM brand is called Continuum Moment I. I had been working on the collection for around a year, when I decided to show them to Barneys New York in the summer of 2016. I requested a few weeks to prepare if they were interested in doing a show, but they wanted me in the store only 13 days later...so, I figured it was as good a time as any and booked my flight.

How did you go about channeling your passion for sculpture into your jewelry?

My passion for sculpture is something that seems to be innate. With abstract forms either you're drawn to them or you aren't. And it has to do with the forms, but also the context and the minds of the sculptors. It isn't so easily explained and yet, I find myself with a whole collection of abstract works – most of



which were created by little-known California sculptors, whose names aren't found in art history books. Now I'm in a place where I don't even talk about specific artistic references because I realize that it detracts from the experience. It works much better if they form their own understanding with their own 'a-ha!' moments.

Your rings Sinc, Sine and Echo – part of the Continuum series – relates to mathematics, and what else? What inspired the name 'Continuum'?

The name Continuum comes from a couple of places – first, because the initial pieces were created shortly after the birth of my first daughter, Elsa, and I was thinking a lot at that time about how generations are both a renewal and a continuation of what came before. I also knew then that my designs should have a similar dialogue: ever evolving, but stemming from a common sensibility.

Do cosmic forces influence your design ideas?

Yes! One of the main inspirations for the first Continuum collection was unseen cosmic forces including sound, gravity, and magnetism. There's also the invisible force between the shape and the viewer to consider – attraction? Repulsion? Ambivalence? Apathy? Affection?

What else inspires your work?

I grew up in the 20th century during the space race and I was transfixed by science fiction books and films growing up so that had a much larger influence on me. In my mind, the concept of outer space is inextricably tied to fantasy, imagination, and play. There is something amazing about the vastness of the universe that is awe-inspiring and helps put everything in perspective. I'm glad if my pieces can remind people of that in a small way. Some of my elements, especially in the second and third Moments echo geological and biological forms.

This year, you've added on necklaces, and lots of gemmy earrings and statement rings. What sparked your decision?

I still tend to design pure shapes without gemstones first before working on colors or gemstone treatments. That being said, I also create 15-to-20 one-of-a-kind pieces per year that are built around specific gemstones. People are really starting to notice the gemstone-rich pieces now because my studio is small and a lot of them take four-twelve months to complete. Now I've made nearly 60 – with more completing each month. Look out for debuts at the upcoming Couture show!

What kind of finishes are you experimenting with?

Every piece calls for its own finishing treatment. Right now, my favorite process approximates the texture of the best vintage jewelry.

