

***Lebanese- Irish Fashion Designer Mrs. Tamem Michael Visits LERC and gives talk at NDU***

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Reported by Aurélia Eid and Elie Nabhan

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center welcomed to its premises Mrs. Tamem Michael, an Irish designer of Lebanese decent, accompanied by Mr. Guy Younes, chairperson of the Irish Lebanese Cultural Foundation (ILCF), and her two Irish friends, Mrs. Irene Pyrne and Mrs. Mary Hiney. Mrs. Michael was warmly received by LERC's Director Ms. Guita Hourani with refreshments being offered at LERC's Archive room.

Mrs. Michael was then interviewed by Mr. Elie Nabhan Nabhan, LERC Interim Administrator, and given a presentation of LEAD (the Lebanese Emigration Archive and Database) by Mrs. Lilanne Haddad, LERC's Chief Indexer.

Scheduled to deliver her talk to NDU students of Fashion Design at the Faculty of Architecture, Arts and Design (FAAD), and accompanied by her friends and all members of the LERC team, Mrs. Michael was welcomed to the faculty by Mrs. Linda Choueiri Assistant Professor, and Mr. Nadim Matta, Chairperson of the Department of Design at the FAAD.

Standing before her audience Mrs. Michael expressed her great pleasure at being at such a prestigious university and went on to deliver a talk form the heart.



Mrs. Michael delivers her talk at NDU's FAAD (Nov 2010).

Mrs. Michael was born in Sierra Leone in West Africa, where her parents were greatly impressed by the work of the Irish Catholic missionaries and sent her and her brothers and sisters to Ireland to continue their studies in the 1960s.

Since an early age Mrs. Michael was impressed by her mother working away on a sewing machine. She became fascinated with colors and fabrics, she started to design dolls and made their dresses, so when it came to choosing between medicine and dress designing as a career, it was of no surprise to family and friends that she chose fashion.

“It’s something you have to love,” she said, stressing on the fact that designers need to have original ideas both in heart as well as mind.

For her success did not come easy

Starting out designing and creating dresses for her new customers took place in a room at home. Yet she was not satisfied. She set up a shop but still was not happy so she approached the Irish government who at the time were offering a program intended to help small entrepreneurs in finding jobs. Overcoming the economic obstacles in the 1980s, she worked hard enough to branch out and specialize in wedding gowns. Out of this came her own her own brand and a wedding house at Dublin City.

An Award winner several times, Mrs. Michael’s wedding house is in Fashion City at Dublin. The House is made up of two: one specialized in doing creating a dress for each customer and the other to create and supply dresses for the shops.

With the changing of times and economic factors, manufacturers in Dublin began to concentrate only on designs and outsourced production to China. This contradicted the whole philosophy of Mrs. Michael who wanted wedding gowns, created in Ireland and manufactured by the Irish.

Her strategy, she explained, was to discuss the whole process to the customer and to respond to their needs. Her design house, the House of Tamem and her two bridal shops in Belfast, Northern Ireland and the other in Drogheda are a testament to her advice to the students: “keep working hard and don’t give up”.

Mrs. Michael began to field the questions being thrown her way, yes, wedding dresses can range between two to three thousand euros and up to fifteen thousand, yes, Haute Couture in Lebanon is expensive, and yes, she did face obstacles with clients. Some dresses had to be put back on the rail once a customer decides that it is ill-fitting of her. The solution, she said, is creating a new dress.

The questions still flowed from an enthusiastic audience. Yes, each customer has to go through a series of steps, each with a trial of the dress, yes, her main purpose of coming to Lebanon was to reconnect with the birth place of her parents, dedicated to their home country, a place where she has many relatives, aunts, cousins and nephews with whom she likes to spend quality time.

Mrs. Michael explained the steps she follows each time she is asked to create a dress: discuss things with the bride, design the right dress for her; give her the price, be precise with the materials, work closely with the manufacture producing the dress, and finally let the bride try the dress.

And of course, there is the small matter of the client signing a paper, legally defining all the materials that will be used in its production. For every small change in design could mean a whole difference. And every dress is named according to the name of the bride.



Mrs. Michael poses with enthusiastic students from the FAAD (Nov 2010).

She advised the students to learn all they could about the whole process of manufacturing, from the basics to the finished product, from the factory to the fashion house. She listens to her imagination, takes ideas from her customers, looks at other designers and stays up to date with the media. “The most important thing,” she said “is to use your eyes and listen to your heart.”

After the lecture, LERC accompanied Mrs. Michael, her two friends, and Mr. Younes, to take a tour of the Museum where a surprise awaited. Mr. Younes delivered a speech, mentioning the integration and achievements of Lebanese emigrants and of their importance. Mrs. Michael is “so Lebanese,” he said, and deserves the honor bestowed on her by the World Lebanese League, the “Meritorious of Honor and Gratitude” in recognition of her achievements.



Mr. G. Younes bestows an award of recognition on Mrs. Michael at the Lebanon Migration Museum at NDU (Nov 2010).

Ms. Hourani, presented Mrs. Michael LERC’s latest publication *Our people* with a LERC brochure and decorated her with a golden pin of the Lebanese emigrant.

Mr. Bou Tannous Maged, a Lebanese fashion designer and a NDU professor presented Mrs. Michael with a book detailing the history of Arab fashion and a brochure of his fashion house.



Photo of the “Meritorious of Honor and Gratitude” award bestowed on Mrs. T. Michael by the World Lebanese League (Nov 2010)



From left to right: Mrs. L. Haddad., Mr. G. Younes, Mr. M. Abdouni, Mr. M. Abdouni, Mr. R. Khatlab, Mrs. T. Michael, Mrs. L. Choueiri, Mrs. M. Hiney, Ms. G. Hourani, Mrs. I Pyre, Mr. E. Nabhan (Nov 2010).