

# GIFTS

& decorative accessories

## These 5 Handmade Makers Are Turning Burqa, Bullets and Other Materials into Quality Gifts With Incredible Stories

NY NOW had a wonderful showing of international and local handmade artisans during its summer show in August. Here are five of the most interesting stories from exhibitors, plus more on each company's sustainable mission.

The summer edition of NY NOW could be summed up as "revitalized." It was so nice perusing the floor and seeing so many new faces and first-time exhibitors, as well as a refreshed layout and exhibitor program that better identified company values, like sustainable, fair trade and handmade. I was so excited to meet a wide variety of handmade brands, most of which had an incredible story behind the goods. Here are five of my favorite backstories of handmade brands that I learned while covering NY NOW this August.

### 1. Artisan Links



Artisan Links' Burka Clutch and Coin Purses are made by Afghan refugee women from burqa material.

The first thing that caught my eye in Artisan Links' booth was this collection of gorgeous black purses with embroidery details. But what captured my attention was the story behind them: They are made by Afghan refugees from burqa material. The sales rep in the booth affectionately described the purses as "made from a better use of burqa." What a statement!

Besides being a statement piece in more ways than one, the purses also feature delicate Kandahari embroidery, which is an intricate technique that comes from the province of Kandahar, Afghanistan. Artisans use a very thin needle to hand embroider the fabric, and the designs usually include geometric shapes that work together to create a different motif, like flowers or other patterns. The collection pictured includes a clutch and coin purses.

The company is a fair-trade business and a member of the [World Fair Trade Organization](#), and the products are created by women-only artisans that are Afghan refugees in Pakistan. “We empower women in marginalized communities by helping them gain economic security and encouraging them to exploit their artistic expertise,” the company says in its mission statement. The company was registered as Artisan Links in 2017, but the concept first began in 1985 as part of the [Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees \(DACAAR\)](#), an embroidery income-generation project started to assist some Afghan refugee women. The company has been exporting to the U.S. among other countries since 2006.

## 2. Global Mamas



Global Mamas' Water Hyacinth collection includes coasters and trivets made from harvested invasive hyacinth in Ghana.

[Global Mamas](#) is a fair-trade business that supports mother artisans in Ghana and produces a wide variety of products, from home textiles, like aprons and throw pillows, to fashion accessories to bath-and-body goods. The network of “global mama” artisans began as six founding members in 2004 and now includes about 400 producers in six communities across Ghana. The booth was filled with eco-friendly, brightly colored jewelry and handbags, as well as hand-beaded ornaments.

What pulled me in for a closer look, though, were the coasters and trivets made from [invasive water hyacinth](#). The hyacinth is harvested from the Volta River, which in turn helps to restore biodiversity and the livelihood of local fisherman, which is threatened by the material.

### 3. Silaiwali



Silaiwali creates decorative dolls from upcycled waste fabric in New Delhi. Image from <https://silaiwali.com/>

A guaranteed World Fair Trade Organization member, Silaiwali is turning the waste of fast fashion into goods that support sustainable incomes for Afghan women refugees in India. The handmade dolls were a topic of discussion and admiration at market, since each one is created by upcycled waste fabric from apparel scraps. In fact, fast fashion contributes to a large amount of world pollution, and eco-conscious consumers are craving more sustainable fashion as a result. Not only are the dolls absolutely gorgeous and finely crafted with intricate details, but they're eco-friendly, support marginalized artisans and include a wide variety of looks, which appeal to a more diverse group of consumers.

#### 4. Fair Anita



Fair Anita is a sustainable, handmade brand that makes jewelry, including a collection from recycled bullet casings.

The first thing that pulled me into [Fair Anita's](#) booth was hearing about a necklace that was made from upcycled bullet casings, and what kept me perusing the booth was the fact that the company creates *affordable* sustainable jewelry.

I love the company's motto: "You never have to wait for a sale to wear your values." Retailers know that though handmade and sustainable products have a wonderful and sellable backstory and is usually marked by a high-quality of production, it oftentimes comes with a high price tag. Though the higher cost of goods shouldn't deter retailers or customers — especially considering products that provide a fair income to its global artisans — it's nice to see a company that's helping to make sustainable and eco-friendly more accessible by making it more affordable.

The brand also creates eco-friendly accessories and provides a fair income for women artisans, particularly those who have been victims of domestic violence. The founder herself was a victim of rape her senior year in High School and, as part of her recovery journey, she eventually traveled to [Peru](#), which in 2009 had the highest reported rate of domestic violence in the world. Founder Joy McBrien helped to build a battered women's shelter in Chimbote, Peru, which is where she met the social worker for which the company gets its name.

"When we started Fair Anita in 2015, few people were talking about violence against women, and we knew we wanted to be a resource for survivors, both the silenced and outspoken," McBrien said. "We learned that financial insecurity is the No.1 reason why women stay in abusive partnerships, so we started Fair Anita with this in mind, staying grounded in supporting women's resiliency and lessons from (Senora) Anita."

"(Senora) Anita is completely adored by her community and she's known by everyone as a very fair and empathetic human: the kind of leader I certainly aspire to be," McBrien continued.

## 5. Bebemoss



Bebemoss children's toys stuffed with material made from recycled water bottles.

These colorful, soft and adorable stuffed animals are handmade by mother artisans in Istanbul, many of which are refugees from Syria, Iran and Afghanistan. The hand-crocheted play pals are also eco-friendly, made from sustainably manufactured yarn and stuffed with "plush" made from recycled plastic water bottles. The founder started [Bebemoss](#) after moving to Turkey from France and realizing that she wanted a huggable doll for her baby that was created with more care for the product, makers and environment.

For more on the handmade and sustainable goods that exhibited at the show, check out the [NY NOW site](#), which tells many of their stories, including that of zero-waste jewelry and wall-art maker [JAB Fine Art & Design](#).