
LEILA HELLER

60, IRANIAN

As a young girl, Leila Heller, whose eponymous art galleries in New York and Dubai generate transatlantic headlines, accompanied her mother to fashion houses in Paris such as Dior, Yves Saint Laurent and Courrèges, breeding a lifelong admiration for the finest couture. Now an internationally renowned gallerist, Leila retains that early affection for the French greats, citing a black Chanel suit that can go from day-to-night as “a saviour for my lifestyle”. She also supports American craftsmanship, notably in the form of Los Angeles-based designer Barbara Tfank, who has dressed Adele and Michelle Obama.

Buying made-to-measure is a privilege that Leila has earned over her illustrious career, and she confesses that it wasn't always thus. Back in 1981 she was on the committee for the Guggenheim Museum's masquerade ball in New York, for which she borrowed a sample-size Oscar de la Renta gown. “I was standing in the greeting line at the door when I dropped my purse. I bent down to pick it up and the whole zipper burst from behind,” she laughs. Cue a hasty retreat to the bathroom where a friend stitched her back in, “Thanks to her I was able to continue to dance all night,” Leila recalls.

One ready-to-wear label she can always rely on to zip up perfectly is Moschino, which fits “as if it were designed for me”. Handily, the Italian label is also housed close to Sotheby's off Bond Street in London, making it a convenient post-auction shopping stop. Other than her occasional trips to Moschino, Leila confesses that she does most of her shopping at Terminal 5 in London's Heathrow airport. “I always find time to pick a dress or two between flights,” she confides.

The mother of two, who lives in Manhattan but is a frequent presence at Dubai's glittering art world soirées, particularly now that the city is home to Leila Heller Gallery – the largest art gallery in the Middle East – reveals that her one true indulgence is luxury loungewear. “After a long and busy day there is nothing more precious to me than to relax in the perfect pair of pyjamas,” she smiles.

During daylight hours, however, Leila believes that self-awareness breeds elegance, advising, “A woman becomes stylish when she can recognise and respect what looks good on her own body.”

Leila wears Barbara
Tfank dress; Iradj
Moini jewellery, both
Leila's own



PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD HALL. STYLING: CHARLOTTE BLAIR. WORDS: LOUISE NICHOL. HAIR: MARIA FOR SOH ART + BEAUTY. MAKE-UP: SARAH-JANE THOMPSON FOR SHISEIDO. LOCATION: NATTAS CAFE AT GLOBAL VILLAGE