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Fashion Interview: Gemma Marissa Designs

Jemma Crow interviews Gemma Marissa - a crafty London-based accessories designer from Yorkshire with a penchant for The Secret Garden and 1940s fashion...

Written by Jemma Crow



Illustration by Jenny Robins

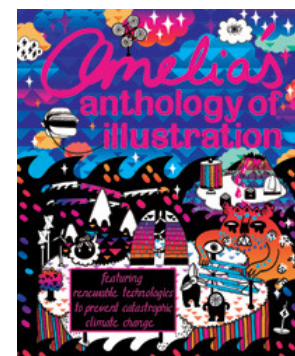
This could become confusing as I'm interviewing the fabulous Gemma Marissa, designer of the most beautiful crocheted jewellery and accessories I have ever seen. Gemma (the designer) and Jemma (the interviewer), both from Yorkshire and both in love with all things crafty. I think I could have a newfound friend.

It seems Gemma has always been the creative type "making things with whatever she found in her mother's sewing box" and was soon whisked off to the big city to attend the [Chelsea College of Art & Design](#). Having worked her way from student to designer (in every position along the way), she started her own accessories label in the summer of 2008 and has been working on the line ever since.

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But lets rewind a little bit, **how did she manage to get this rising empire up and running?**

As soon as I walked in to the knit room at Chelsea College, filled with different coloured yarns and knitting machines, I knew that was where I belong. After university, I worked all over, from the Channel Four Costume Department to designing for [Luella Bartley](#). After leaving there in 2008, I decided I wanted to focus on my own designs and began selling pieces at [Spitalfields](#) and [Portobello Road Markets](#). I was luckily spotted and commissioned by the London fashion label [Neurotica](#), to produce their accessories for SS10 (sold at [Beyond The Valley](#) and shown at [London Fashion Week](#)), which was fantastic!

The nature inspired collection with Neurotica's fabulous prints was so successful that I was asked to follow on with a range of very different but playful pieces for AW10. I have also just finished my collection of accessories collaborating with designer [Michelle Lowe Holder](#) which is a great range that consists of delicate crocheted necklaces and bracelets made with Michelle's wonderful ribbon weave work that will be available for AW10."

A busy bee and very clearly someone who is dedicated to her talent, I wondered **what inspired Gemma to create these beautiful pieces instead of 'normal' jewellery?**

As a child, I was brought up in a very inspired environment and my mother and grandmother are both very 'crafty'. My sister and I were always in clothes made by them from pieces in the sewing box (an odd assortment of everything from fabric and ribbon to wool and buttons.) My life in Yorkshire is another important inspiration; being surrounded by the [countryside](#), with its flowers and wildlife, allowed me to wander off on adventures. I would sketch everything that I saw and most of these things can be seen in my work now which focuses on my love of insects such as bees, butterflies and ladybirds."



Is it just nature that has been her inspiration then or **is there something else behind the Gemma Marissa magic?**

"As with any designer I'm constantly looking back at vintage fashions, as these were times of great femininity and the clothing and accessories were elegant and beautiful, particularly in the 1940s and early 1950s. I also take a lot of inspiration from my love of childhood stories (mainly fairytales and poetry) and one of my first collections was greatly inspired by [The Secret Garden](#) and filled with crocheted flowers, poppies and daisies; it's something I hope I can go back to in the future.

I do take other inspirations from my favourite artists for their colour and texture (Gustav [Klimt](#), Monet, Cezanne); illustrators for their simplicity and delicate antique feel (Kate Greenway, [Beatrix Potter](#), Edmund Dulac); photographers for their joy and playfulness (Robert Doisneau, [Tim Walker](#)) and movies for the fun and fashion ([Funny Face](#), Amelie) but I can equally find insights from objects seen whilst scouring charity shops, car boot sales and antique markets. I'm always on the look out whether I see embroidery on an old table cloth, a vintage toy or the pattern on a piece of crockery."

It seems then that there isn't just one source of inspiration for Gemma's designs but that ideas can come from anywhere. And it must be **a glamorous life, one filled with lavish parties and free bars. Right?**

It can be glamorous yeah and I do get invited to shows and parties, which are wonderful and exciting; however it really does mean more to me that I get to live my life each day researching, experimenting and designing as art and creativity have always been part of my life. I don't know who or where I'd be without it. I love to surround myself with beautiful, inspirational things and being able to design and create my accessories everyday really is a dream come true and I wouldn't want to do anything else!

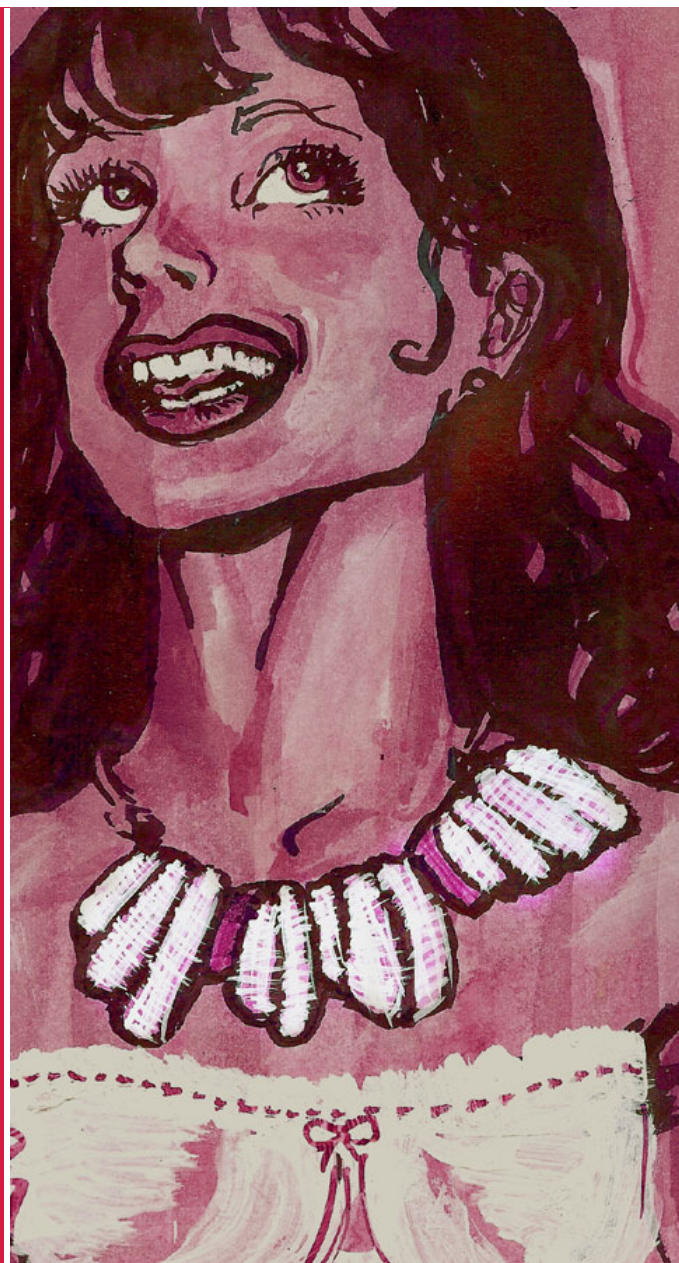


Illustration by [Jenny Robins](#)

I'm sure we're not at all jealous (me? [Turning green?](#)) but when she's not designing, **does she look to for everyday inspiration in the clothes she wears?**

"I like to have simplicity and playfulness in my style so I admire a lot of French designers such as [Chanel](#), [Chloe](#) and [Sonia Rykiel](#) (three ticks there from me) but I also like smaller designers like [Creatures of the Wind](#) (a new one to me but some stunning pieces online) and [Erdem](#) (the golden boy at Fashion Week).

There are also many celebrities who have styles that I greatly admire, especially Audrey Hepburn, Maggie Gyllenhal, Kirsten Dunst and Audrey Tatou.



So the girl has impeccable taste as well as a winning jewellery line, but I wonder **what her best moment has been so far?**

Hmm if I had to choose one I would say that my work for Neurotica has been the most important and significant thing in my career; collaborating on design ethics really makes for exciting projects. It means your work evolves in to something different and brings new ideas and inspirations in your work. It also meant I got to show at London Fashion Week in the Neurotica showroom and was asked back to design a second collection for aw10."

I think it's safe to say that the girl from Yorkshire has done more than good in the furious world that we call fashion, whilst managing to keep her feet firmly on the ground. Find out more on her [website](#) and if you've been inspired to invest then you can find her pieces [here](#). This is definitely a designer to be watched.

Written by [Jemma Crow](#) on Monday March 15th, 2010 6:46 pm

Tags:

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