

“Spirit comes and spirit talks. Spirit tells you where to put this color, this shell. So that’s basically how the hats were made.”



## Ayesha Rahim: Spirit Talks

I had not a clue. I am just figuring out how images are in the atmosphere and they come from God. How else could they come? I see them in my sleep. I was a designer and I made the clothes that I saw in my sleep. I didn’t have the money to make the outfits that I saw and I would go to my cousin. It only took a dollar for fabric. And all I ever needed was a measuring tape and pins. I never made a pattern. And I came out of high school being “Best Dressed”—Gratz High School, 1955. I got scholarships to Moore College of Art. When I got there, I went on and I applied myself because my attitude was, “I was an artist.” I didn’t care about money and I didn’t care about what they thought I should care about.

I was concerned with people. And how people were poor and they were miserable, unhappy. And I knew that at a very young age and I always wanted to make a difference. I didn’t even

know what I could do but I had a sense of something being not right.

I went to Moore, and at that time my mother was doing day work for six or seven dollars a day. My father wasn’t giving us money to support us. I used to feel so guilty asking her for dollars for bus fare. I didn’t have anyone encouraging me, mentoring me. Moore was only 10 blocks from my house, at Broad and Oxford. And I didn’t even realize it.

I was already making clothes. People said, “Remember when you made me this?” “Do you remember you made this sorority outfit?”

I was already making clothes for artists, for people who sang. I was doing all right. Before I went to Moore I was making neckties. I was doing fabric design. I was designing shoes and dyeing shoes.

But when I went to Moore, they took—it was like rape.

Because they were telling me that what I was doing was wrong. And I became very insecure. And I had to start using patterns when I wasn’t using patterns. I was discouraged.

So I dropped out. I was not giving up. I was not going to let them tell me how to make anything. I refused to let that happen again. I refused to let them make it a job.

I had no knowledge of crochet. My mother was creative. This house. Same house as I live in now. My mother had creative ability. She made my prom gown and she made rugs. She was immaculate. She came up from Virginia.

My mother did not do crochet. But I knew people who did crochet. People helped me out. My hands—they never showed me how to hold my hands. I don’t know one stitch from another. I just make the stitches.

I started off making a kufi for



*Ayesha Rahim wearing one of her crowns. Photo: Debora Kodish, 2006*

the Muslims. I remember I made a bigger one for my own head.

Charita Powell, from the stand Amazulu, in the Reading Market, saw it and said, "Oh!" We became friends. She said, "Did you make that? Could you make me one?" She has the very first one.

The thing about it, it's like spirit work. I was over at Temple University selling the hats and I was impressed because they were telling me what part of Africa they were

from. Spirit comes and spirit talks. Spirit tells you where to put this color, this shell. So that's basically how the hats were made. Spirit talks so much—I had one hat, I had to cover it up at night. The talking at night kept me up! Not all of them are like that. Some of them are really special. But if you try to do it on your own, they'll make you take it out and take back up where you left off. It's quite an experience. I have had a special life because of the

creativity—and it puts you in a meditative state. It's a place that you go, you are so in the spirit. You won't really withdraw, but you don't really want to come back.