



Action Fashion

• Somy Ali's So-Me Designs Has a Shirt That's So-You

+ Writing | Sara Liss

+ Photography | Alissa Christine

Tolerance. Pluralism. Peace. Hefty messages to tackle these days. Yet for Somy Ali, that's a typical brainstorming session for her thought-provoking line of T-shirts called So-Me Designs. The former Bollywood film star, who also has a journalism degree and a parallel career as a documentary filmmaker, is attempting to raise awareness and spread positive attitudes through her stylish designs which include lines for men, women and children. With shirts that cover issues such as racism, religious differences and the environment, Ali has transformed the once superficial medium into a vehicle for understanding and activism.

"I noticed this trend of T-shirts with statements and I thought, 'Why not do something intellectual? And make it sexy and fashionable?'" she says. "Human rights issues are my passion and I've incorporated that into my clothing line."

The brand is also a catalyst for charitable work, with 10 percent of the proceeds benefiting a nonprofit organization Ali established. "I always wanted to start a nonprofit," she says. "My mom came up with the name No More Tears. I've partnered with four nonprofits and so far we've donated \$1,000 to each one. The goal is one day to construct a school in India through No More Tears."

A practicing Muslim, Ali's household was a blending of cultures. "My mother is Iraqi, my father is Pakistani," she says. "It breaks my heart to see people fight over religious difference. We're all human beings. This is the bond we share."

Despite the somewhat loaded symbols on her shirts, Ali explains that the general response to the messages has been positive. "The T-shirt line is supposed to be bold, but it's not meant

to be political," Ali says. "I want to portray the way things should be. Our 'Drop Peace' shirt has peace bombs falling from the sky. I don't want to make a depressing shirt, I want to raise awareness." In April, So-Me will launch designs that deal with the environment and going green. She just bought her first hybrid car and is looking into making the T-shirt line completely organic.

Ali's focus is on the fashion line, but she still devotes herself to filmmaking and is currently working on an AIDS awareness film. "It's an educational piece for schools called *It is Me*, because too often we distance ourselves and say it could never be me," Ali says. The project involves interviewing people with the disease and spending time at a diagnostic center in Broward County.

An avowed bookworm (her regular haunts include Borders and her local Coconut Grove bookstore), the entrepreneur stays away from the glitzy nightlife. "I like to be in a place where I can talk to people," Ali says. "If I'm in a club, I can't hear them. I'm more of a wine and Scrabble kind of girl."

Make a statement at www.so-medesigns.com