

## ACCESSORIES

Handcrafted  
HERITAGE

Eilaf brings East African artisans to the global stage

Eilaf, a luxury accessories and handbag brand founded by Sudanese American designer Eilaf Osman, is a celebration of heritage. Rooted in the three pillars of sustainability, social responsibility, and artisanal craft, the brand puts East African craftsmanship at the forefront of its designs, challenging the conventional notion of luxury. “I wanted to create a brand that preserves and celebrates my East African heritage in an authentic way,” says Osman. The Stanford graduate, who interned at Emilio Pucci, launched her brand during the pandemic and won the Fashion Trust Arabia Award in the accessories category in 2022. This gave the young designer international exposure alongside being able to retail her products on Matchesfashion.com.

Osman’s passion for design started at a young age, when she began creating bags in school and sold them to students. Her handbags became conversation starters and still are. With their eclectic shapes and savoir-faire steeped in East African history, each bag is crafted with longevity in mind using natural and toxic-free materials (an ode to the centuries gone by) and celebrates the hands that make it. After having conducted extensive research on indigenous artisanal techniques from East Africa and Sudan, the designer decided to approach traditional practices with a contemporary lens. Case in point: the brand’s Dom Basket bags highlight a rare weaving technique only known to three elders from the Brno Tribe in Darfur. Woven with palm leaves from the doum tree, the bag is finished with Italian leather and gold hardware, making it an ideal option for the beach and running errands alike. Meanwhile, the Half Moon Raffia bag is coil-stitched and handcrafted in Rwanda, and basket weavers from the Rwenzori Mountains in Uganda make the coil disk in the Rwenzori purse. While most of the bags are constructed in Africa, the leather work and final assembly are done in Ubrique, Spain, by a family-led atelier.

Its second pillar, social responsibility, isn’t one Osman takes lightly. The brand’s weaver communities consist mainly of women who are refugees, widows, divorced, or disabled, and Eilaf helps support their livelihoods through handicrafts. For example, in Uganda, Osman often works with the Rubona Weavers Cohort, a network of 12 villages of women who create the coiled disks used in her designs, using knowledge passed from one generation to another. By focusing on



Half Moon raffia bag in black

weaving techniques found only in Africa, the brand not only empowers the hands behind the craft but also ensures that ancient techniques remain alive. Eilaf also brings to life centuries-old practices like using natural and biodegradable materials such as banana stalk and raffia alongside using natural dyes. Banana stalks are first collected, and their leaves are cut into tiny strips for the weaving process for the basket art disks. Then, weavers use flowers like marigolds, cosmos, and indigo to make a natural dye. Each disk can take up to three days to complete. In a world that is moving at a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it speed, Osman’s approach to slow fashion is a breath of fresh air. [Eilaf.co](http://Eilaf.co)



Dom basket bags in off-white