



LABOR OF LOVE

San Francisco–based fashion designer turned philanthropist **Chrissie Lam** founded the Love Is Project as a way to empower female artisans in developing communities across the globe. Together, they produce a line of handmade LOVE bracelets inspired by the vibrant history, culture, and craftsmanship of each country. *DestinAsian* asks her how she got started on the social enterprise, and where’s she’s taking it next.

HOW DID THE LOVE IS PROJECT BEGIN?

In 2012, I left a career in corporate fashion with a mission of working with artisans around the world to create products and connect them to brands for market access. I did this for a few years before launching the Love Is Project [loveisproject.co] as a standalone brand in 2017. My “Aha!” moment came when visiting a group of Maasai craftswomen in the Ngong Hills of Kenya. Inspired by the bold colors used by their tribe, I designed a simple

bracelet featuring the word “love” in traditional Maasai beadwork. I had the equally simple goal of helping to create jobs for their community. With that bracelet in hand, I asked two strangers on a flight to Russia what love meant to them. I then profiled them on Instagram. Thanks to the grassroots support of influencers, what started as a personal travel project soon transformed into a viral social media campaign, and now, we’re producing bracelets not only in

Kenya, but also Indonesia, Bhutan, India, Vietnam, Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico, with more than 1,200 female artisans involved.

WHAT MAKES THE BRACELETS SO SPECIAL?

We’ve built the brand through authentic storytelling—from our makers, our consumers, and our contributors. We fuse “Humans of New York”-style narratives with social impact products that bring a sense of compassion and humanity to our collections.

WHAT HAS TRAVEL TAUGHT YOU?

I’ve visited 104 countries so far, and spend two to three months a year in Bali. All this travel has made me adaptable, curious, and resourceful—and able to find inspiration anywhere. It’s also enabled me to grow my network of friends around the world.

YOU WORK WITH ARTISANS FROM KENYA TO BALI. HOW DO THESE COMMUNITIES DIFFER?

The main differences are in their culture, religion, or environment. Certain groups are just more developed, and their quality of life is better than others. But they all share a deep sense of community. Each group is like a family, helping one another out. Love is the common denominator. It is inherent in human nature that mothers want the best for their children—giving them food, health, shelter, and funds for their education. The women all take pride in their traditional crafts and are quite innovative with the resources available to them. Many of the artisan groups save and invest in other microfinance projects to sustain themselves during the slower months of the bracelet business.

WHAT’S NEXT? We’ll be launching our tenth Love Is Project country collection with artisans in the Philippines this August. We’re also excited about our upcoming photo book, *The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*. It’s a collection of stories from my last five years of work with female artisans around the world, giving readers a first-hand look at the unique cultures, talented artists, and inspiring people who bring the Love Is Project to life every day. We’re seeking funding on Kickstarter, so support is most welcome. The book will also help fund future partnerships with female artisans, so that we can continue to spread the love. ☺

—As told to David Tse

