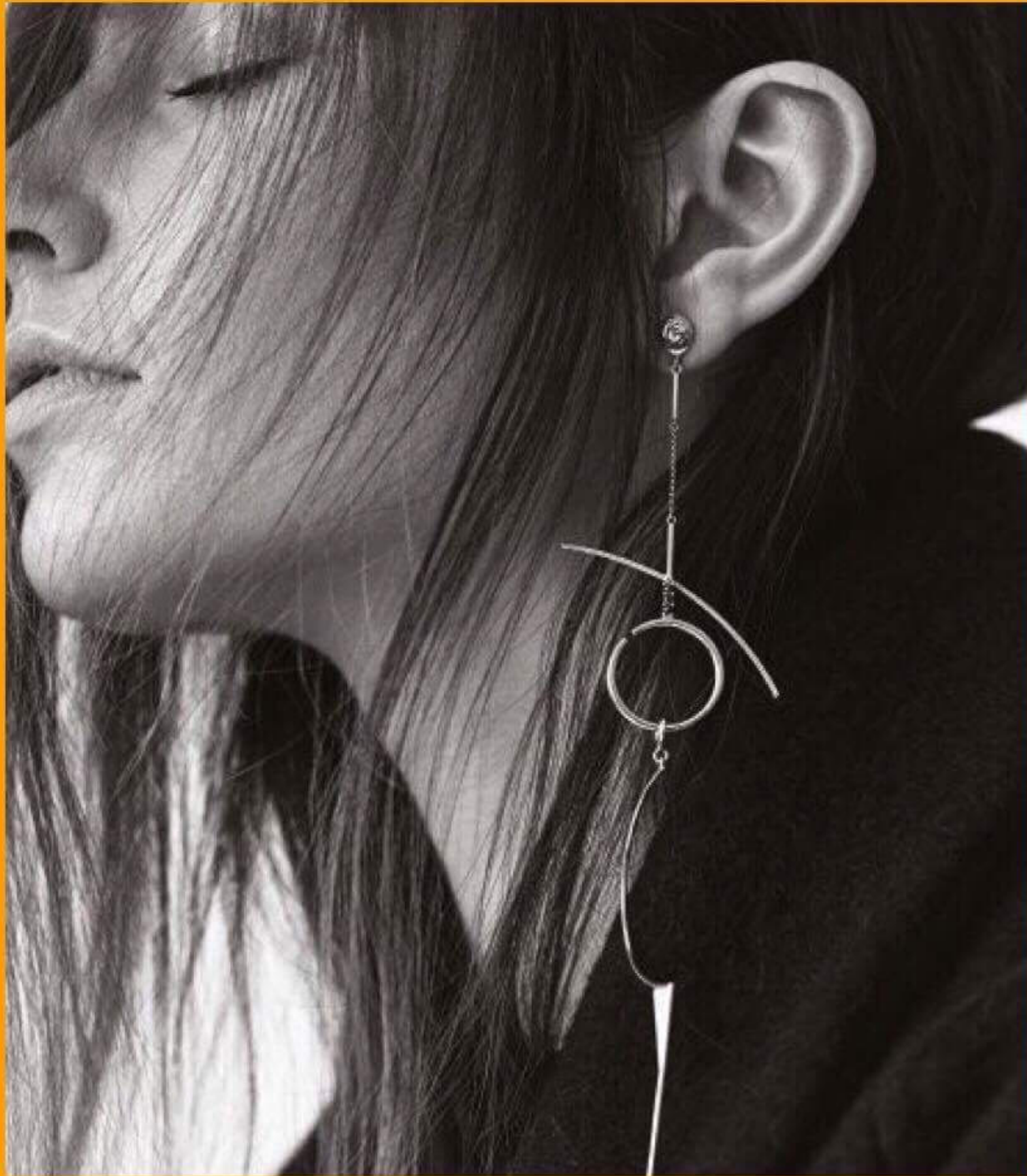
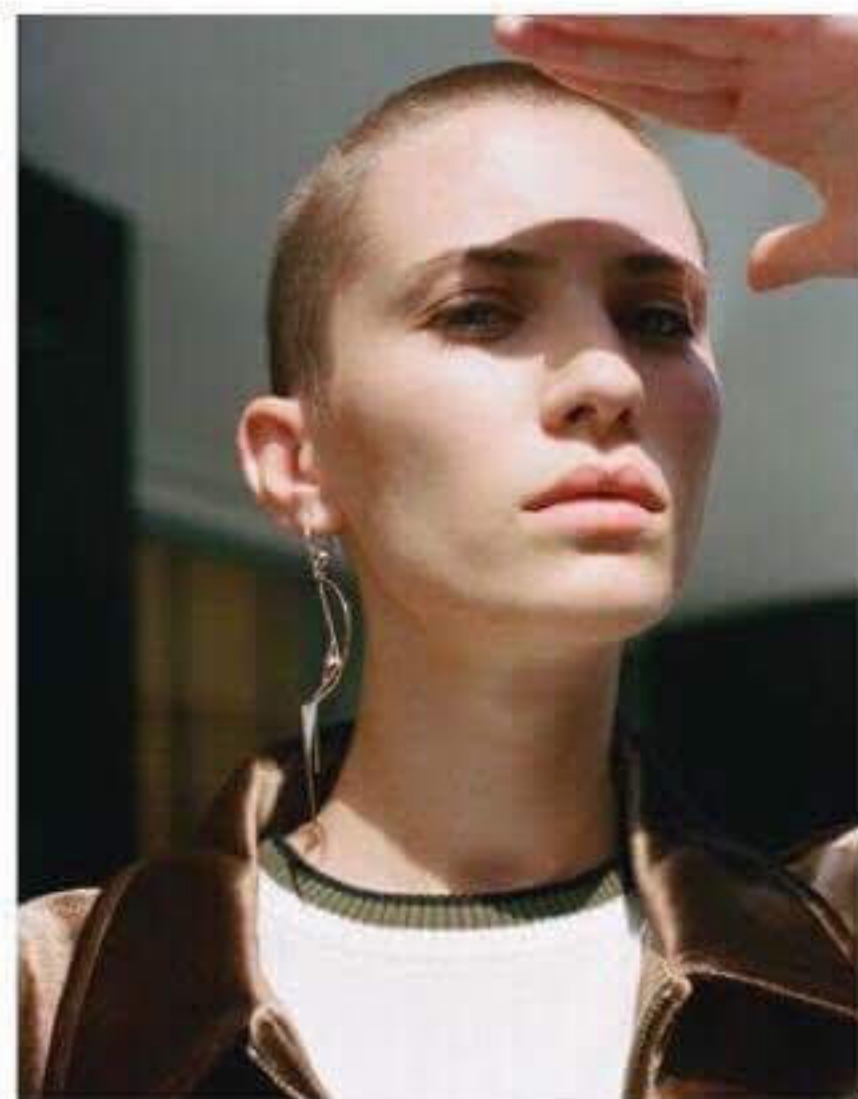


Bijoux



TARA IS A MODULAR FINE JEWELRY LINE FOR THE UNCONVENTIONAL GIRL / HERMÈS'S
CAPE COD WATCH CELEBRATES ITS SILVER ANNIVERSARY / CARTIER UPDATES A
BELOVED STAPLE / SPOTLIGHT ON THE JEWELRY BRANDS OF THE PLACE VENDÔME

Do Your Thing



By NANA CARAGAY



Annette Lasala's modular fine jewelry also shapes lives

She didn't know it at the time, but Annette Lasala designed the first of what would become a full-fledged line of jewelry when she was 18 years old. That birthday, her mom gifted her with a diamond ring that once belonged to her grandma; decreeing it a little too precious-looking for her taste, Lasala reworked it into a simple chain featuring the same string of diamonds that now encircles her wrist daily.

"I wear it to remind me that I am a designer," says Lasala, a declaration that took a long time coming. She spent more than a decade working as an auditor for an accounting firm in San Francisco before hitting a period of professional burnout and deciding that she needed a break. So she and her husband quit their jobs and took a year off to travel the world, with one of those stops being her home country, the Philippines. She got in touch with her Iloilo-based uncle who heads Taytay sa Kauswagan Inc., a non-profit micro-finance company that provides loans to small businesses, among them local artisans hoping to develop their craft.

Lasala put her passion for design, love for fashion, head for business, and desire to uplift the marginalized together, and found her true calling: a jewelry line called Tara, which stands for The Artisan Row Accessories. Here, her sculptural, clever visions for fine metalwork with a smattering of precious stones are created by the Filipino craftsmen whose lives she is intent on improving.

"Did you see that famous video where cocoa farmers finally get to taste chocolate for the first time?" she says. "I had a very similar experience with them when I showed them the campaign images. I don't think they had previously seen their work in an editorial. They would really pick it up and say, 'I can't believe it.' You ask me what I've done to improve their lives, but I feel like I learn from them all the time."

In the beginning, Lasala sketched designs that metalworkers told her were flat-out impossible—rods with wires that were hairpin-thin, or earrings that resembled suspended triangles. She learned the basics by taking a course at the Gemological Institute of America, but will

readily admit she's not technically trained. Still, it's paid off, because her vision is so unique; at Tara, Lasala offers pieces in 14k gold that are modular in structure and design. There are basic "studs" or building blocks like an earring, necklace, and ring, on which you can attach "danglers" in the form of a pendant, bar, or chain until you have a single stunning statement piece that you can add onto or remove, depending on your mood.

The driving force behind this modular philosophy comes from Lasala's own desire to streamline her belongings. "What if I could create jewelry that was really more like my wardrobe, where you'll buy a black dress or a black top and then you would have your statement skirt?" she asks. "Could I have jewelry that could adapt to all these different occasions that I wasn't committed to? 'Oh, I want the chandelier piece, but I don't want it forever.' So I could envision it like a top and a bottom." Ultimately, that's how Tara's fine jewelry wardrobe concept was formed—rather ambitious for a startup venture, but then Lasala is no stranger to defying the norm.

The Instagram bio for Tara reads, "Buildable fine jewelry for women who are doing their own thing," and that's exactly what Lasala has long lived up to. "People ask me, 'You left your career in finance to do jewelry?'" she relates, often accompanied with an incredulous look. "But I realized that there's really a part of me that just does my own thing. I moved from Manila to the States... if I fully knew what it entailed, I might not have done it, and I think that's what it is. Ultimately, I design for a woman who doesn't care about convention." Even her earrings are not sold in pairs, though she says you can go ahead and buy two if you insist. "It's strange because buyers will say, 'People still buy pairs. Selling it by singles is weird.' Who says earrings have to come in pairs?"

Which makes perfect sense when you realize that this is the same woman who made a bracelet out of her grandmother's diamond ring.

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