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VIDA online design introduces Susan Schaefer's Kabbalah Aleph collection

VIDA, an e-commerce platform that promotes socially responsible shopping has selected local Minneapolis artist, writer and journalist, Susan Schaefer's [Kabbalah Aleph](#) collection of wearable art for their curated design line.

VIDA, founded by Pakistan native Umaimah Mendhro in 2014, connects artists with craftspeople and manufacturers to source and design products, bringing global consciousness and "an impeccable sense of taste to style-seekers through carefully selected artistic partnerships and luxurious, responsibly produced clothing and accessories, starting with a line of tops and scarves," says Mendhro.

Going further than catering to fashion enthusiasts, VIDA brings real-world benefits to the people working on its products, ensuring that production workers receive livable wages. Because today's consumers care deeply about and want socially responsible production, VIDA goes beyond monetary compensation, meaning that the scarf-makers in Karachi, Pakistan, also earn literacy and math classes for every 15 scarves produced. VIDA designers also are a part of the equation, able to see how many workers receive classes based on purchases of their products.

Schaefer, a Twin Cities business and civic leader, began adding visual arts to her *verbal storytelling* practice a few years back. A feature columnist for *The Southwest Journal* and *The Journal*, with a series on the Twin Cities Creative Class, and a photographer and reporter for the online *Mill City Times*, Schaefer became a continuing education student in the University of Minnesota's (UMN) Fine

Arts Department, and is a recent graduate of St. Catherine University's highly regarded Women's Art Institute.

Yiddish Immigrant Connection

The Hebrew letter *aleph*, central to Schaefer's inaugural [Kabbalah Aleph](#) VIDA collection, is taken directly from her 5' x 16" diptych installation, *Recollection: My Lost Yiddish Civilization*, which features ten, 8" x 6" individually collaged panels arranged in two columns of five – a nod to the traditional layout of artistic renderings of the Ten Commandments. She created the installation as a remembrance of her own lost Yiddish ancestry and culture, incorporating rare archival family photographs, ink drawings on paper, fine art papers, found papers, and newsprint. *Recollection: My Lost Yiddish Civilization* was shown in a group show at UMN's West Bank Quarter Gallery this past summer. For her VIDA collection, she scanned the Kabbalah Aleph panel.

"The lost history of the Yiddish civilization is my history, and the mysticism of the Kabbalah my spiritual center. In these trying times when the topic of immigration is a global concern, I'm thrilled that the pieces I have in my VIDA collection echo the real life narrative of my and so many other families who were or are refugees and immigrants."

Hebrew letters divine meaning

For this particular VIDA collection, the significance of the Hebrew letter *Aleph* is vital. Renowned author Paulo Coelho explains that Hebrew alphabet is not simply a collection of abstract linguistic elements like the English alphabet, but the letters have names, identities and

numerical values. Coelho writes, "The first three Hebrew mother letters, *Aleph*, *Mem* and *Shin*, form the Divine prime trinity representing the three dimensions of space."

Aleph's numerical value of 111 contains the trinity and is also the constant of the magic square of six. $111 = 1 + 10 + 100$. Symbolically this means that *Aleph* combines the divine, the spiritual and the physical world.

"People who purchase and wear my mystical Kabbalah design may feel some extra divine connection – advantageous for these stressful times," Schaefer jestingly adds.

As an active member of The Northeast Minneapolis Artists Association (NEMAA) and The Women's Art Resources of Minnesota (WARM), Schaefer embraces her growing arts reputation. Her work has been in a number of juried exhibitions, and will be featured in a solo photography show at the Birchwood Cafe's Gallery in Minneapolis' Seward Neighborhood 3/21 - 5/26/17.

Schaefer is past President of the Public Relations Society of America, Minnesota, founder of the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce's Creative Class Public Affairs Committee and past chair of its legendary Leadership Minneapolis Program™, and was Seward Neighborhood Group's executive board member. She created the first public relations curriculum for and taught in the University of St. Thomas' Master's of Business Communications (MBC) Program, and is an adjunct faculty member at the University of St. Catherine's Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership (MAOL).