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Paola Paronetto is having her most spectacular year yet. The renowned ceramicist has already amassed a significant fan base for her innovative paper clay technique, and isn't short of acclaim from collectors and interior designers globally. But this year, her profile was projected through a collaboration with La Grande Dame, who commissioned her for a unique creative project that has been met with an incredible response. Following in the footsteps of Yayoi Kusama, the brand's previous creative muse, this collection has been travelling the world and is due to land in Dubai for the first time during Art Week at Alserkal Avenue.

Paola had long been curious about the Middle East, and the UAE in particular. It seemed the perfect moment then to launch a very special collection inspired by the energy and spirit of the place. "I've always had a love of the natural world, people and different cultures," she enthuses. "The Emirates is a part of the world that I didn't know much about and that piqued my interest. Discovering how vibrant and rich the aesthetic is in the region, has been very stimulating."

At her studio, in the grounds of her home in Pordenone in northern Italy, Paola has meticulously crafted every piece for this new collection by hand, selecting colours that evoke joy and express the region's love of luxury. It's a process that she's refined over years of practice, exploring different clay-working techniques; and when she discovered how paper pulp fibres make clay more fluid and malleable, it became the start of her real journey. This material blend allowed her to sculpt the paper clay and push it beyond its boundaries to create dynamic, fluid pieces that are sturdy but appear delicate and fragile. She's mastered this unlike any other artisan, and since then she's never looked back.

"I enjoy improving and refining my work on a daily basis," she says from her studio that is set against the Italian mountains, the morning sunlight streaming through the windows. "I like to take advantage of



Left: Soft tones of blush and ivory enhance the appeared fragility of the paper clay creations

Right and below: The pieces embody distinct forms with grooves and lines accentuating textural dimensions which capture the eye

Clay made more pliable through added paper pulp fibres contours into intricate curves



new experiences that come my way. It enriches my life and as a result, quite naturally, my art." For Paola there is little separation between her daily family life and her artistry. They are one and the same. She is fiercely dedicated to her work, and on the rare occasion that she has a moment to relax, it's always with her family – these are the times she truly cherishes.

While much of her time is spent in Italy, she continues to refine the eloquence of her forms and colours, exploring more than 100 different shades to date. "I can say that over the years my approach has remained the same, but as I evolve as a person, this is reflected in my work. Recently I've been exploring more bold forms in terms of size and you'll note this in the large sculptures that you see in the Emirates Collection."

It's this distinctive aesthetic identity that has led multiple brands including Veuve Clicquot to reach out for possible collaborations, all honours she is grateful for, along with the opportunity to continue to tell the story of craftsmanship in life and art.

Post Dubai, Paola will be heading to Milan for Salone del Mobile, the yearly fixture for every Italian brand. As she prepares for what is her biggest week of the year, made even bigger by this larger lens on her work, she gives us a snippet of what is in store: "At Salone del Mobile I'll be presenting some new collections along with the classics, but I am most excited about how we will be displaying them," she says, wanting to retain a little mystery ahead of the unveiling. "I don't want to give too many details away but our presentation will not only display my collections, but will tell a story and create an intimate experience that will give my clients a glimpse into my world."

As for the upcoming exclusive Emirates Collection, this will be on show at the Jaipur Rugs Showroom in Alserkal Avenue, and Paola is excited to see how the people of Dubai will receive it. "I simply hope that this gesture is received well by the people of the UAE and that the connections I have made here will continue to influence my work in some way and hopefully touch the heart of the region." ■

HEART OF THE REGION

Italian ceramicist **Paola Paronetto** launches a special collection inspired by the people of the UAE

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