



Future Past

JO SABAVALA

BIOGRAPHY

Jo Sabavala is a New York based jewelry designer and maker with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Jewelry Design from Pratt Institute. Her handcrafted pieces are designed and fabricated with a keen attention to detail. Her most recent work draws from nature and connects it to her personal journey and her upbringing as an adopted child in Mumbai, India.

Jo's work has been exhibited on CritiART as part of the Platinum Design DNA Awards presented by Platinum Guild International (PGI) and Pratt Institute in 2021, in which she was awarded the second prize; and in Pratt Institute's Library Adorned cuff show in 2018. Her work has also been featured on the Society of North American Goldsmiths' (SNAG) Instagram page as part of Future 50 in 2020.



THESIS STATEMENT

Employing both cast and hand fabricated elements, this silver collection links the different stages of development in my life to the growth of a plant, and traces my personal journey from the past to the present.

The designs based on the past have been inspired by a poem titled *Your Legacy* (anonymous) and from photographs which capture my pre-adoption period. In these works, I explore the emotions surrounding my adoption through visual elements that draw from nature. I have incorporated the poem into a few of the pieces by casting handwritten versions into resin and using them as gemstones.

The designs based on the present, on the other hand, have taken inspiration from my Parsi background, specifically from the *Ses*, a set of ritual objects and symbolic items used during ceremonies. Whilst continuing to draw from the natural world, I have put a contemporary spin on these works which highlights their significance in my own life.

Through this collection, I hope to trace a cultural and emotional evolution; a journey from roots to budding and blossoming.



THE PAST

YOUR LEGACY

Once there were two women who never knew each other,
One you do not remember, the other you call mother.
Two different lives shaped to make yours one,
One became your guiding star, the other became your sun.
The first gave you life, the second taught you to live it.
The first gave you need for love, the second was there to give it.
One gave you nationality, the other gave you a name.
One gave you the seed of talent, the other gave you an aim.
One gave you emotions, the other calmed your fears.
One saw your first sweet smile, the other dried your tears.
One gave you up, it was all she could do,
The other prayed for a child, and God led her straight to you.
And more you ask me through your tears,
The age old question through the years,
Heredity or environment, which are you the product of?
Neither my darling, neither, just two different kinds of love.

(Anonymous)



AN EYE INTO ADOPTION

This necklace aims to generate awareness of the two forms of love that are integral to adoption. Much like the anonymous poem *Your Legacy*, the necklace too seeks to tell the adoption story in a way that can help children come to terms with their adoption.

The seed takes the shape of an eye. I have used this motif because it is often assumed that I've inherited my brown eyes from my father since my mother has green-grey eyes. This assumption usually prompts me to wonder about my biological parents and which parent I actually look like. The seed symbolizes the birth parents and the pearl within the seed forming the iris of the eye, represents the child's DNA.

The necklace also draws on other symbolisms. The multiple wires that go around the neck symbolize the many children who are given up for adoption as well as the numerous factors which help ensure that each child blooms. The adopted child is represented by the central pearl which aims to show how each child is unique and valuable and ultimately blossoms irrespective of whether he/she was brought up by biological parents or adoptive parents. The upbringing of the adopted child is symbolized by the shoot which rests on the adoptive parents who are portrayed through the support stick.





An Eye Into Adoption

Necklace

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

14.6cm x 12cm x 0.9cm

SHUNYA SERIES

Inspired by the hollows formed in tree trunks, this series symbolizes the vacuity resulting from not knowing who my biological parents are. The wire structures help enforce the idea of recurrence and echo as this feeling keeps coming back. The pieces make use of the poem *Your Legacy* which has helped me gain a sense of my identity and understand where I come from.

The broken mirror in *Shunya #1* reflects on how I always look for parts of myself in others.

The wires at the bottom of *Shunya #3* symbolize the two different kinds of love talked about in the poem and how they are trying to come together. They also represent how I am torn between two identities. On the one hand I am my mother's daughter but on the other hand I can't help wondering whether I would have been a different person if I had grown up with my birth parents.





Shunya #1

Brooch

2020

Sterling Silver, Mirror Acrylic,
Resin, Coffee and Ink on Paper

7.8cm x 4.7cm x 1.5cm



Shunya #2

Earrings

2020

Sterling Silver, Resin,
Coffee and Ink on Paper

7.1cm x 2cm x 2cm



Shunya #3

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls,

Resin, Coffee and Ink on Paper

11.9cm x 2.5cm x 2cm

MY STORY

This necklace tells my story. On one side of the necklace the multiple wires symbolize the many children who are adopted. The single wire on the other side focuses on me. In the center I have used a pearl to represent a seed from which a flower is blooming in the downward direction. This downward inclination symbolizes the weight of the unknown past, how it has a sort of gravity, drawing me towards it and making me dwell on it.





My Story

Necklace

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

17.3cm x 11.8cm x 1.2cm

PAST FORWARD

This pair of earrings signifies that despite my past weighing me down, I have been able to blossom into the person I am today with the constant support of my mother who is represented by the straight line.





Past Forward
Earrings
2020

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

12.1cm x 2.1cm x 2cm

ROOTED

Through this brooch I have portrayed how the poem *Your Legacy* has helped me stay grounded and deal with questions regarding my past and my roots.





Rooted

Brooch

2020

Sterling Silver, Resin, Coffee and Ink on Paper

9.3cm x 8.1cm x 1.4cm

CAPTURED SERIES

This series works with the idea that the more comfortable a person is with his/her roots, the stronger the person is. It symbolizes how the questions I have raised about my past and my roots have caused me to doubt my identity. In a way these questions are caging me in and preventing me from blossoming further into the person I can be.





Captured #1

Neckpiece

2021

Sterling Silver

22.8cm x 11.6cm x 4.9cm



Captured #2

Ring

2021

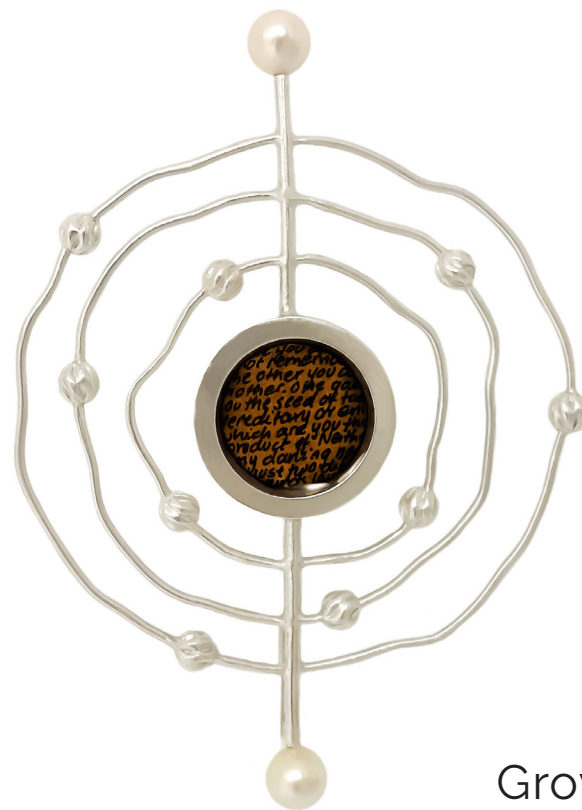
Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

4.6cm x4.6cm x 6.7cm

GROWTH RINGS

The growth rings of a tree, as well as the toy I was holding in the photograph of me when I first stood up with the help of support, have inspired this brooch. It makes use of the poem *Your Legacy* at its core to represent how the poem has helped me cope and grow. The sterling silver beads on the growth rings serve as markers of events in my life when I have truly grown as a person.





Growth Rings

Brooch

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls,
Resin, Coffee and Ink on Paper

7.6cm x 5.5cm x 0.5cm

SPROUTING

This pair of earrings draws from the idea of a cut tree sprouting. The concentric rings portraying the cross section that reveals my adoption, fructify into the shoot which represents how I am continuing to develop.





Sprouting Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

7.5cm x 2.2cm x 0.9cm

UDETI SERIES

This series is about the budding of a plant.

Udeti #1 portrays me represented by the bud growing with the help of my mother who is symbolized by the support stick. At the bottom of each earring is a square pearl conveying through the idea of a blank canvas that the past is unknown to me; it enables me to be imaginative about my birth parents.

Both *Udeti #2* and *Udeti #3* complement the earrings.





Udeti #1

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

10.9cm x 2.2cm x 0.8cm



Udeti #2

Pendant

2021

Sterling Silver

2.3cm x 0.8cm x 0.4cm



Udeti #3

Ring

2021

Sterling Silver

2.1cm x 0.7cm x 0.8cm

NEW BEGINNINGS

Inspired by the process of germination, this pair of earrings links the growth of a plant to that of an individual. Even though the shoot is rigid, the tapered roots are moveable, giving them a sense of not being grounded.





New Beginnings

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver

7.9cm x 1.5cm x 0.7cm

NAJWA

This cuff earring seems to be whispering my story to the wearer. Focusing once again on the process of germination, the cuff earring translates the different stages in my life into those of a plant. On each root is a sequence of pearls which symbolize key moments in my life when I have developed as a person.





Najwa

Ear Cuff

2021

Sterling Silver,

Freshwater Pearls

14.6cm x 3cm x 2.5cm

EMBRACED

This neckpiece is based on my mother's and my aunt's interpretation of their relationship with me which indicates I am embraced in their infinite love. This love is rooted firmly, without beginning and without end.

I have incorporated this interpretation into the neckpiece by means of an opal drop symbolizing me as the bud surrounded by a spiral made of wire which comes out of the bud and merges into the stem representing my family, thus portraying how I am embraced in their infinite love.





Embraced
Neckpiece

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls,
Kyocera Opal

17.5cm x 9cm x 1.4cm

FAMILY

Working with the idea of a family tree, this brooch incorporates the members of my immediate family into a flower bouquet. The buds represent my cousin, who I consider my sister, and myself, both of whom were adopted by my aunt and my mother respectively. My aunt is represented by the flower in the middle and my mother is represented by the flower on the right. My grandfather, who has passed on, is represented by the drooping flower.





Family
Brooch

2021

Sterling Silver,
Freshwater Pearls

18.1cm x 9.4cm x 4.4cm

THE PRESENT

SES

The Ses is an important part of celebrations amongst Parsis, a small community in India to which I belong. This community moved from Persia to India in the 10th century CE; it has retained many of its original customs while incorporating certain customs that are native to India.

The Ses consists of a tray, usually made of silver, on which are placed various ritual items and elements from nature which are of symbolic significance for an auspicious occasion. Some of these which I have incorporated into my thesis include — a *Devo* (oil lamp), a *Gulabaz* (rose water sprinkler), a *Toran* (garland of flowers), rose petals, a *Pigani* (container for vermilion), rice, a *Soparo* (conical container for rock sugar or sugar rounds), and a *Vataki* (bowl) used for *dahi* (curd). Each of these holds a special significance for me.



DEVO

This lamp draws inspiration from the traditional *Devo* which quite often is a pierced cylindrical container inside which an oil lamp is lit. It is used to symbolize light which dispels darkness.

The lamp has a wire frame in the center of which hangs a bowl in which an oil lamp can be lit. The outside of the bowl is detailed with overlapping roots and the inside is detailed with growth rings. I have used these details to show how light or positivity is necessary in order to grow. The flame-like dangling element connected to the end of the wire frame echoes the flame of the lit *Devo*.





Devo

Lamp

2020

Sterling Silver

4.4cm x 7cm x 9.4cm

GULABAZ

The *Gulabaz* is a traditional container with a long neck which was used to sprinkle rose water on guests while welcoming them. It emphasizes the importance of spreading fragrance around in the form of good deeds.

This container interprets the traditional long neck of the *Gulabaz* as a stem. At the top is a flower with an opening to let the fragrance pour out. It celebrates my welcome into my family's fold.

The funnel used to fill the *Gulabaz* with rose water makes use of a flame-like element on the handle which symbolizes the fire that the Parsis worship as a physical symbol of truth.





Gulabaz

Rose Water Sprinkler

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearl

3.9cm x 3.9cm x 9.1cm



Gulabaz Funnel

Funnel

2021

Sterling Silver

10.2cm x 2.6cm x 3.2cm

MOGRA

A *Toran* is a garland of white and red flowers sometimes including *mogra* (jasmine) buds. It represents joy.

Instead of designing a piece based on a traditional *Toran*, I have drawn inspiration from a single *mogra* bud to design this pin stem, as a reminder to be joyous.





Mogra

Pin Stem

2020

Sterling Silver

8.1cm x 4.9cm x 1.2cm

ROSE PETAL SERIES

Rose petals can either be incorporated into the *Toran* (garland of white and red flowers) or placed separately on the *Ses*. They symbolize happiness.

"Happiness to him who gives happiness to whomsoever else" is the opening statement of a sacred text of the Zoroastrian faith that the Parsi community follows.

The pair of earrings takes the form of rose petals and has pearls incorporated into them to represent wisdom gained from experience. These earrings convey qualities that I value in my family and in my life.

The pendant is meant to be a token of happiness.





Rose Petals
Earrings

2020

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

9cm x 1.6mm x 1cm



Rose Petal
Pendant

2020

Sterling Silver

2.8cm x 1.6cm x 1cm

PIGANI

The traditional *Pigani* is a small wine glass shaped utensil with a lid in which *kunkun* (vermilion) is kept. The vermilion symbolizes self sacrifice and is used to put an auspicious red *tila* (mark) on the forehead. A vertical mark is put on the forehead of men signifying the rays of the sun and a round mark is put on women signifying the moon. Once the *kunkun tila* is put on the forehead, rice is placed on the red mark to signify plenty.

Unlike the traditional *Pigani*, this container takes the shape of a cylindrical box on top of which sits a seed with roots and a sprouted bud signifying my connection with this custom. The box itself has two compartments — one for the *kunkun* and the other for rice.

The *kunkun* applicator has two sides. On one side of the applicator is a spoon which is used to add water to the powdered vermilion so as to make it into a paste and on the other side of the applicator is a small sphere which is dipped into the vermilion paste and placed on the forehead to get the perfect *tila*.





Pigani
Container

2021

Sterling Silver

2.6cm x 2.6cm x 7.6cm



Kunkun Applicator

Applicator

2021

Sterling Silver

6.6cm x 1cm x 0.6cm

PLENTY SERIES

This series uses the shape of the rice grains, signifying abundance, that are placed on the vermilion *tila* (mark) on the forehead.

Plenty #1 is a combination of the shape of the rice and of the *tila*.

Plenty #2 while using the shape of rice grains, also incorporates pearls which symbolize wisdom gained from experience.





Plenty#1
Hair Ornament
2021

Sterling Silver
2.7cm x 1.9cm x 0.6cm



Plenty #2

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver, Freshwater Pearls

6.8cm x 0.6cm x 0.8cm



Plenty #3

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver

3cm x 0.6cm x 0.5cm



Plenty #4

Pendant

2021

Sterling Silver

3.1cm x 0.6cm x 0.5cm



Plenty #5

Earrings

2021

Sterling Silver, White Topaz

7.1cm x 0.6cm x 0.5cm

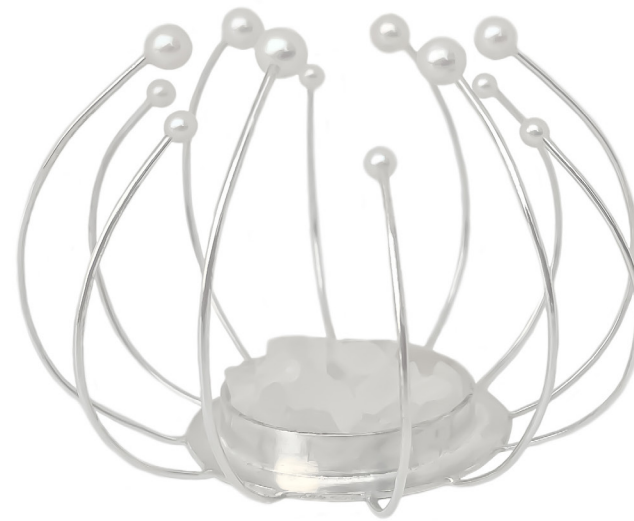
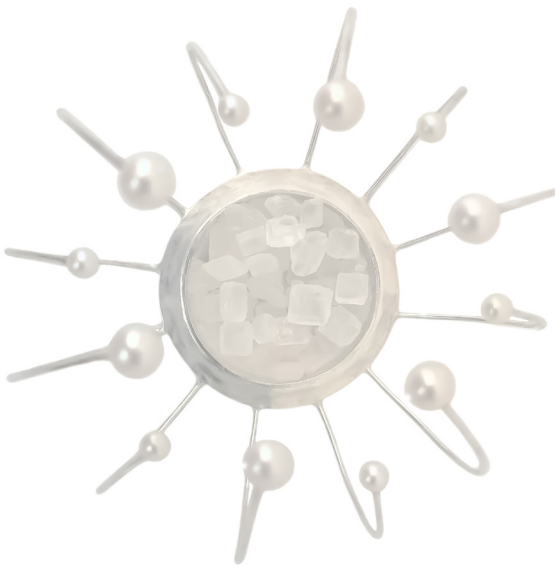
SOPARO

This container is based on the *Soparo* which is traditionally a conical utensil made to hold *khadi sakar* (rock sugar) or *patasa* (flat sugar rounds). It is reminiscent of the Persian *Kaleh Ghand*, a cone of rock sugar wrapped in green gold foil. The *Soparo* symbolizes a mountain of sweetness.

This container incorporates the traditional conical shape of the *Soparo* but has also taken inspiration from the will-o'-the-wisp which is a flame like phosphorescence seen over bogs or swamps and according to folklore, is said to signify a misleading or illusive hope or goal.

The piece takes the form of a bud in the process of blooming, overcoming illusive goals and opening up to reward you with sweetness and good fortune.





Soparo
Container
2021

Sterling Silver, Reticulated Silver, Freshwater Pearls

7.8cm x 7.8cm x 5.7cm

DAHI VATAKI

The *Ses* usually includes a *Vataki* (bowl) containing *dahi* (curd). The curd is mixed with *khadi sakar* (rock sugar) and offered for good luck on any auspicious day.

This *Vataki* is detailed with overlapping roots on the outside and growth rings on the inside. I have used this design so as to convey good fortune in every stage of growth in one's life. The bud shaped like a flame on the lid of the *Vataki* as well as the flame-like stand resemble the fire that the Parsis worship as a physical symbol of truth.

The spoon designed to be used with the *Vataki* containing *dahi* also makes use of a flame-like element on the handle which symbolizes the fire that the Parsis worship.





Dahi Vataki

Bowl

2020

Sterling Silver

4.5cm x 4.5cm x 3.7cm



Dahi Vataki Stand

Stand

2020

Sterling Silver

5.4cm x 5.4cm x 13.7cm



Dahi Vataki Stand

Stand

2021

Sterling Silver

4cm x 4cm x 5.5cm



Dahi Spoon

Spoon

2020

Sterling Silver

13cm x 1.7cm x 0.7cm

