

KERATAN AKHBAR-AKHBAR TEMPATAN
TARIKH : 13 APRIL 2018 (JUMAAT)

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KERATAN AKHBAR
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Breathing new life into ethnic accessory

BIDAYUH jewellery designer Winnie Copper's is seeking to give Sarawak's traditional beads a contemporary twist.

Her modern jewellery pieces incorporate Sarawak's ethnic beads and accessories. "Sarawak is famed for traditional bead designs by tribes such as the Kelabit, Kayan and Orang Ulu. The younger generation rarely adorn themselves with beads, deeming them too traditional and unappealing," says Copper at her stall during the recent Minggu Kraf, a week-long arts and craft exhibition organised by Kraftangan Malaysia last month.

At the event, she displayed beautifully-crafted clay bead jewellery, such as earrings, chokers, necklaces and bracelets. Her items are sold online (amaxmall.com), through Instagram (mmcollectionhandcraft-edbeads) and word-of-mouth.

One of Sarawak's unique tribal accessory is kabo, a bobble made with hundreds of colourful seed beads.

The original kabo comes in bright chili red colour, and is used as a centrepiece of the men's necklace. Male warriors adorn themselves with kabo, and it used to be that only men could wear kabo. But these days

women also wear the kabo.

It is incorporated in bead necklaces by Sarawak tribes such as Kelabit, Kayan and Kenyah.

Copper's signature pieces are clay bead necklaces paired with the traditional kabo.

"Modern women like clay bead chains which look chic, simple yet stylish. The challenge is to incorporate a kabo piece into a necklace without it looking old-fashioned. It boils down to the colour scheme, pattern and size of clay beads to match the kabo," explains the 39-year-old former kindergarten teacher and tutor.

In 2016, she signed up for a Ceramic Beading Technology course, organised by the Ministry of Industrial Development Sarawak and Standard and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM) in Kuching. The month-long class taught her how to use clay-firing equipment and make ceramic beads, vases, bowls and jewellery.

"Clay is a versatile natural element, touted as one of the oldest material. It has unique properties where it is pliable when moist and rock hard after undergoing bisque firing (a technique where high heat is applied to clay). All you need is creativity and interest



Copper aims to promote Sarawak's ethnic designs by giving them a contemporary twist. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

to venture into this field.

"Sarawak is famed for clay pottery. What better way to showcase the versatility of ceramic items than through jewellery. Foreigners love clay products – be it vases, beads or souvenir pieces. This is a perfect way to further promote Malaysian handicraft to the world.

"Sarawak is a land rich in heritage and traditions. We have many tribes with different cultures, beautiful costumes and food.

That inspired me to come up with jewellery designs that represent Sarawak's heritage," says Copper, who quit her job in 2016 to start MM Collection, a home-based business specialising in clay-based jewellery and handicraft.

Part of Copper's clay beads collection is inspired by nature.

These include earrings that look like betel nut seed and miniature pumpkins, complete with ribbed skin and grooves. There are also