

Marie Khouri's sculptures form both seats and a message of peace

Marie Khouri changed careers from financier to sculptor, after enrolling in an art course on a whim

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The Let's Sit and Talk installation at the Equinox Gallery in Vancouver in 2014.

When Vancouver-based artist Marie Khouri decided to leave behind the professional career she'd had as a translator and financier in Paris, it wasn't because she was dissatisfied with her life — she enjoyed her work and found it fulfilling.

But when she tried to take a drawing course during a sabbatical and her teacher put her into a sculpting class instead, she knew she had found her life's passion.

"I get shivers right now when I think that I could've gone by it, without having discovered it," Khouri told North by Northwest host Sheryl MacKay, explaining that she was "terrible" at drawing but felt like she found her voice when handling the clay in the class.

"The teacher asked us to do a ball ... she said, 'How long have you been sculpting for?' And I said, 'This is the first time I've touched clay.'"

Khouri, who is now in her mid-50s, said that first class — which she enjoyed so much that two hours felt like 10 minutes — led to more classes, and eventually to her enrolling at the École du Louvre in Paris.

"It was like being re-born in a way, having a second chance in life. [I] discovered something that I was eager to find in the morning, that I couldn't let go at night."



Marie Khouri, who can speak five languages, said sculpting is another language for her.

Let's Sit and Talk

Some years later she came to Vancouver, a city that her family had come to when she was 15 years old, after her father had been assassinated in Lebanon. She channeled her family's difficult history, and, also inspired by the wide open spaces of Canada, created a series of sculptures of large white objects, which at first glance look almost like massive bones. Each sculpture, which can also be sat on, is a letter in Arabic when seen from above. She also had an installation at Vancouver's Equinox Gallery in 2014, where the pieces spelled out the words "Let's Sit and Talk" — which is also the name of the series.

"Let's Sit and Talk was a message to perhaps the nations, of being able to sit down and talk, instead of having to invade and to bring war. So it was a message of hope, and it was a message of peace."

Khouri has now created sculptures for the entire Arabic alphabet, and creates installations of whole sentences for galleries around the world. She said she still feels like she has a lot of ground to pursue and discover in her sculpting career, but she's happy she's finally found her life-long passion.

"It's never too late to start something that you had in the back of your head, or something you have a longing for."



Marie Khouri first designs and makes small-scale models of her sculptures. Seen from above, the sculptures spell out letters of the Arabic alphabet.