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Miss Universe 2022 R'Bonney Gabriel visits The Empire State Building on January 17, 2023 in New York City.

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R'Bonney Gabriel has a lot on her plate as the new Miss Universe.

The 28-year-old Texan tells PEOPLE she is excited about her reign after she was crowned Miss Universe 2022 on Saturday at the New Orleans Morial Convention Center in Louisiana.

Gabriel is the first Filipino-American woman to be crowned Miss USA, and the first Miss USA representative to win Miss Universe in a decade.

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The fashion designer, model and sewing instructor hopes to be a "voice" for change in both the fashion and pageant industries as Miss Universe, while simultaneously owning her "uniqueness" and promoting eco-friendly fashion.

"Especially now that I'm Miss Universe, I have a very big platform, and that is one of my key goals as Miss Universe," she tells PEOPLE.

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA - JANUARY 14: Miss USA R'bonney Gabriel crowned Miss Universe 2022 onstage during The 71st Miss Universe Competition at New Orleans Morial Convention Center on January 14, 2023 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo by Jason Kempin/Getty Images)

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Gabriel had just three months to prepare for Miss Universe after she was named Miss USA in October. Among the items on her checklist was preparing a costume for the competition.

Gabriel tells PEOPLE she worked with a Filipino artist on her "Woman on the Moon" piece " which quickly went viral online.

"Honestly, I'm not somebody that takes myself too seriously," she tells PEOPLE. "I love seeing the memes about them. They make me laugh. I was laughing at myself when I got on stage."

RELATED: Miss Thailand Anna Sueangam-iam Wowed in a Dress Made Out of Soda Tabs at the Miss Universe Pageant

But Gabriel's costume wasn't ready until a week before the competition. Without a way to ship it in time, Gabriel's parents traveled to the Philippines to retrieve their daughter's enormous costume.

The costume was heavy, too. She doesn't know how much it weighs, but Gabriel

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tells PEOPLE it was "too much for me to wear it longer than 30 minutes, at most."

"My back was hurting at the end of the night," she says, adding, "I chose to wear heels instead of sneakers. I don't know why I did that to myself but I just went for it!"

Story continues

The 71st Miss Universe Competition - National Costume Show

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As a designer, Gabriel is passionate about eco-friendly fashion. Her love for sustainable style began as a child when she would visit thrift stores with her mother, which was her introduction to "upcycling."

Gabriel tells PEOPLE she has real concerns about fashion's impact on the environment, and plans to advocate for sustainable fashion practices as Miss Universe.

"I feel like Mother Nature has given to us to respect and enjoy and I just hate the fact that we're destroying it in ways," she says. "So that's why I'm so passionate about it. Because I think it's something that we can take action on and fix."

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Among her concerns is fast fashion, which she notes is the second largest polluting industry in the world. Her eyes were opened to the issue through a documentary that offered a behind-the-scenes look at how clothes are made, and how the fashion industry operates.

"I was really taken aback by that," Gabriel tells PEOPLE. "I said, 'Oh my gosh, I don't want to be part of that problem. I want to be part of that solution.' So that's when I really dove into recycling pieces [and] using fabrics that are donated."

Miss Universe

Roy Rochlin/Getty

This is the first Miss Universe pageant held under the organization's new ownership. JKN Global Group purchased Miss Universe for \$20 million in October 2022, making its CEO Anne Jakapong Jakrajutatip the first woman to own the organization in its 71-year history.

Gabriel tells PEOPLE she feels that pageants like Miss Universe are "becoming more and more diverse and inclusive," as evidenced by recent title holders and leadership.

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But the first Miss Universe competition's new ownership has been met with controversy. Shortly after Gabriel was crowned Miss USA in October, Miss Montana Heather Lee O'Keefe alleged that several contestants felt like there had been "favoritism towards Miss Texas USA." Other contestants also spoke out on social media, claiming they felt like they never had "a fair chance" at the crown.

At the time, Gabriel told PEOPLE that the allegations made against her were "based on perception, and not the truth," adding, "I would never want to enter a competition that was rigged."

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA - JANUARY 14: Miss Venezuela Amanda Dudamel Miss USA R'bonney Gabriel and Miss Dominican Republic Andreã-na Martã-nez speak during The 71st Miss Universe Competition at New Orleans Morial Convention Center on January 14, 2023 in New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo by Jason Kempin/Getty Images)

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The controversy continued after Gabriel was crowned Miss Universe over the weekend. The organization denied the rigging allegations on Monday and suggested the "absurd" claims "distract from the incredible milestones our organization and the delegates experienced" over the weekend, according to Today.

"Instead of focusing on unfounded statements, we will continue to shine a light on global women's empowerment, inclusiveness, diversity, and transformational leadership," the organization added.

RELATED: Miss USA 2022 R'Bonney Gabriel Denies Allegations That Pageant Was 'Rigged' in Her Favor

Speaking with PEOPLE after the competition, Gabriel says she feels "fully prepared for anything coming my way" as Miss Universe, including any haters she may face. Her "main goal" is to prove she is a good selection for Miss Universe, and hopes her hard work will "do the talking."

"This is an opportunity to show the world [that] even when negativity comes your way â€” I think we all experience a little internet hate here and there â€” to not let it get to you. And I think that this is a great opportunity for me to set an example," she explains.

Miss USA R'Bonney Gabriel crowned Miss Universe 2022 onstage at New Orleans Morial Convention Center on January 14, 2023 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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As Miss Universe, Gabriel plans to be authentically herself â€” including her love for sneakers and streetwear. In doing so, she aims to change "what people imagine a pageant girl" might dress like.

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The Texas native also hopes her journey to becoming Miss Universe inspires others "to believe in themselves" and follow their dreams.

"It took me three years to get to this point, of working every single day non-stop," Gabriel says. "And I just want to share the story about what goes on behind the scenes and how you can achieve something that seemed so impossible at one point."

Reference

[A History and Philosophy of Fluid Mechanics \(Dover Civil and Mechanical Engineering\)](#)

[Engineer Coloring Book for Adults: An Adult & Funny Appreciation Gift for Engineers and Engineering Graduation for Stress Relief](#)