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## **The Newark Museum of Art Announces Fashion Exhibition, *The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway*, Opening February 22, 2024**

*The exhibition features the works of 11 fashion designers with Newark connections, including Narciso Rodriguez, Stephen Burrows, and Project Runway finalist Shavi Lewis to celebrate the city's deep roots in the garment and jewelry industries.*

February 1, 2024 – The Newark Museum of Art (NMOA) today announces the opening of *The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway*, on view February 22 through June 2. In development since 2021, this is the Museum's first large-scale exhibition dedicated to contemporary American fashion. Bringing together loans from prestigious public and private collections, *The Story of Newark Fashion* features the work of 11 fashion designers with Newark connections.

The heart of the exhibition features a simulated runway showcasing the designs of Newark-born Stephen Burrows, recognized as one of the defining designers of disco era fashion. Nine of his garments are displayed as if "walking" the runway in Paris, referencing Burrows' triumphant presentation at the Battle of Versailles in 1973. With historical footage of Pat Cleveland and other American models, a clip of the documentary film *Versailles 73* projected as a backdrop sets the scene. The film, directed by Deborah Riley Draper, explores the pivotal moment in which 12 African American models and five American designers (Burrows, along with Anne Klein, Bill Blass, Oscar de la Renta, and Halston) faced off against established brands of Paris's *haute couture* (Yves St. Laurent, Christian Dior, Hubert de Givenchy, Pierre Cardin, and Emanuel Ungaro.) The full-length film will be screened at the Museum on Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at 7pm, along with a panel discussion including Draper and model Mikki Taylor.

Newark, with its rich history as an epicenter for the production and trade of jewelry and accessories in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has been a site of creativity and innovation in the world of contemporary fashion for more than 75 years. A generation of inspiration has come out of the Brick City, influencing fashion designers globally and garnering critical attention. This unprecedented survey will connect the stories of Newark designers within the narrative of the global fashion world.

*"The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway* brings long-overdue attention to the contributions of this creative community, focusing on bold innovators designing for iconic cultural figures, including Rihanna, Michelle Obama, and others," said **Linda C Harrison, NMOA Director and CEO**. "This exhibition shows the adjacency of the Black and Brown fashion community to household names and global brands."

The story of Newark as an influencer in the fashion industry begins in the ateliers and classrooms of Wesley Tann and Emily Miles in the 1950s and 1960s. Both were groundbreaking Black designers and pivotal mentors for the next generation. This rich history sets the stage for the Museum's survey of contemporary designers prominent in the field, the full list of which is detailed below.

*The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway* is guest-curated by Kristen J. Owens, a historian of Black fashion, with Tracey "Africa" Norman serving as a curatorial advisor. An international star of the runway and Newark native, she has long been both muse and model to several designers featured in the show. To celebrate Norman and the Newark fashion community, the Museum commissioned a full-length portrait by Michalene Thomas of Norman wearing a Douglas Says gown.

A catalogue documenting the exhibition and featuring oral histories with the living designers, published by The Newark Museum of Art, is forthcoming.

*The Story of Newark Fashion: Atelier to Runway* is made possible by funds from the New Jersey Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment of the Arts, and by generous grants from The Coby Foundation, Ltd. and McKinsey & Company.

*The Story of Fashion Newark, Atelier to Runway* features the work of the following designers:

1. **Melody Asherman** – Born in 1988 and raised in Newark, Asherman studied at Fashion Design Training Studios in Newark and at Parsons School of Design. Asherman’s designs incorporating West African textiles are inspired by her Liberian heritage and center inclusive sizing for full figured bodies.
2. **BrownMill Atelier** – BrownMill is a New Jersey-based clothing brand founded in 2009, influenced by the work ethic of Founder and CEO Justis Pitt-Goodson’s grandparents. At the crosscurrent of bespoke tailoring and streetwear, BrownMill handcrafts garments including collared shirts, embroidered jackets, graphic t-shirts, and single-cut pants customized for every individual.
3. **Stephen Burrows** – Born in Newark in 1943, Burrows is recognized as one of the defining designers of disco era fashion. An Alumnus of Newark Arts High School, he was one of five American designers—and the only African American—selected to present at the epic Battle of Versailles (1973), a watershed fashion show at which the Americans triumphed over the French.
4. **Tyrone Chablis** – Born in 1962, designer, modeling coach, and fashion show commentator Chablis attended Newark Arts High School and was a mentee of the Newark-based designer Wesley Tann. A frequent collaborator and documentarian of Newark’s fashion scene, Chablis is a mentor to many emerging designers and models.
5. **Jerry Gant (1961-2018)** – A beloved fixture in Newark’s local arts and culture scene for almost four decades, Gant was a multi-disciplinary fashion designer, visual artist, poet, and arts educator. Gant hand-painted found textiles and garments, enhancing them with patterns and symbols influenced by his love of Black diasporic cultures. Gant’s mentorship has impacted a generation of creatives in Newark.
6. **Marco Hall** – A self-taught fashion designer and Newark native, Hall, born in 1970, runs his storefront boutique, MH302, on Halsey Street—in the heart of the city’s Downtown arts district, around the corner from the Museum. Born in 1970, Hall has designed signature fashions for acclaimed musicians, actors, and playwrights such as Rihanna, Vivica Fox, and Ntozake Shange.
7. **Shavi Lewis** – Born in 1985, Lewis garnered national acclaim during Season 18 of the Emmy award-winning TV series *Project Runway*. A mentee of Marco Hall, Lewis has long worked in and around Newark, presenting his designs at local fashion shows and underground ballroom pageants. He has dressed clients for The Daytime Emmys, The Mrs. Earth Competitions, and The Cannes Film Festival.
8. **Narciso Rodriguez** – Rodriguez is a Cuban American designer born in 1961 and raised in Newark. After training at Parson’s School of Design in the 1990s, he freelanced in New York’s garment industry for designers Anne Klein, Donna Karan, and Calvin Klein. Rodriguez opened his atelier in NYC in 2001. His designs have been worn by Carolyn Bessette and Michelle Obama.
9. **Douglas Says** – Born in 1961, Says is a multi-faceted designer, make-up artist, and stylist who has worked in around Newark for nearly four decades. His collaborators include fashion model Iman, Cuban singer Celia Cruz, and runway coach Miss J Alexander. In the 1980s and 90s Says founded CMS Studio in Newark to help mentor young fashion models and designers.
10. **Wesley Tann (1928-2012)** –One of the first African Americans to open a shop on Seventh Avenue in NYC, Tann began his career as a design assistant in the 1950s and formed his own company in 1961. His clientele included Jacqueline Kennedy, Diahann Carroll, and Leontyne Price. A Newark resident for years, Tann ran fashion and interior design workshops, and a street was dedicated to him in 2009.
11. **Emily Miles (1910-1999)** – A long-time Newark resident, Miles was an African American milliner, fashion designer, and modeling coach. She founded the Belle Meade School of Charm and Modeling in Newark and trained more than 1,000 women and girls, including Newark-native Whitney Houston.

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#### **About The Newark Museum of Art**

*We welcome everyone with inclusive experiences that spark curiosity and foster community.*

Founded in 1909 and located on a four-acre campus in the heart of Newark, New Jersey, The Newark Museum of Art (NMOA) is the state’s largest museum and ranks twelfth nationally in terms of collection size. Global and diasporic, the collection includes more than 300,000 works from the ancient world to the art of today, including significant holdings of science and natural history. Visitor- and community-centered, NMOA responds to the evolving needs and interests of the diverse publics it serves by offering exhibitions, programming, a research library, paid internships, and local and global partnerships. Under the leadership of Director and CEO Linda C. Harrison, NMOA has launched an era of transformation to create an engaged citizenry by reimagining the role of the art museum for the 21st century.