

AFRICA FASHION DAY BERLIN X PREMIUM

When it comes to African-inspired fashion it's common for people to look to more established fashion markets like New York, London, Lagos, South Africa, as these areas host the popular African-inspired designers and e-commerce stores. However, with initiatives like Africa Fashion Day Berlin (AFDB), that aim to bring African fashion to a European market, there is the belief that soon, Berlin will be a prominent name on that list of markets.

For Berlin Fashion Week Spring/Summer 2016, during the popular international fashion trade show PREMIUM, AFDB featured three designers: Adama Paris, Gloria Wavumunno and Alexandra Tamele. All three designers share a united front regarding supporting African fashion, but use different ways to illustrate what African-inspired designers are capable of in the here and now. For SUPERIOR MAGAZINE Biki John sat down with two of the exhibiting AFDB designers - Adama Paris (AP) and Gloria Wavumunno (GW) - to learn more about the designers and their recent collections.

Where are you from and where are you based currently?

AP: I'm from Dakar, Senegal and based in Dakar.

GW: I was born in London and live in Kampala, Uganda.

What year did you launch your label?

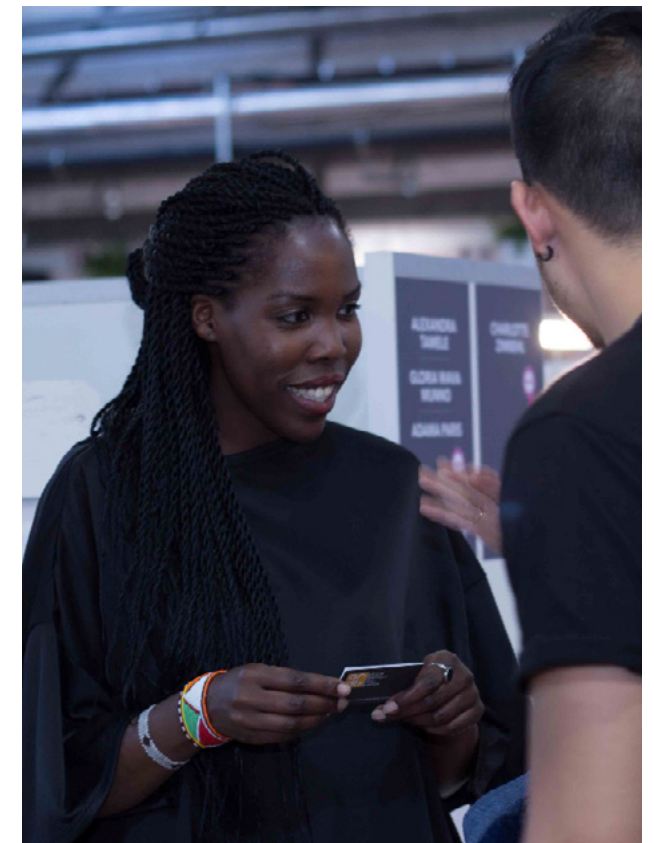
AP: 2002.

GW: 2009.

How would you describe your brand's aesthetic?

AP: My upbringing was both European and African, and I like to consider my brand as a bridge connecting these two cultures, so I would describe my label as multicultural.

GW: My brand's aesthetic is constantly evolving. Due to my strong tailoring background, my pieces tend to be structured and tailored. I also like to create simple multi-purpose pieces that are versatile.



BEATRACE ANGUT OOLA
Founder & Managing Director AFDB

Who would you say is your typical client?

AP: Professional women who appreciate the finer things in life at affordable prices.

GW: My pieces largely attract girls who are 'Coming Of Age' and the mature woman.

Due to popular international figures championing African fashion like Michelle Obama, Beyoncé and Lupita Nyong'o, there has been a rise in designers tapping into this niche. What value would you say your brand adds to the market?

AP: I like to think my brand shows the range that we Africans have as designers. My label represents the "New African Fashion"; one that isn't constrained by prints and bold



ADAMA PARIS

color. There are many Africans like myself who are travellers, citizens of the world so to speak, and my collections tap into that.

GW: The value I'm adding through my brand is creating employment for young women interested in pursuing design, crafting and the marketing side of fashion. Also, I'm a single African woman based in Uganda running her business and I hope to empower young women by breaking the popular African stereotype that says to have value as a woman, you must be a mother, a breeder so to speak.

Tell us about your most recent S/S 16 collection and its inspiration.

AP: In my most recent collection, I used luxurious fabrics like silk and fashioned them into chic, modern and wearable pieces. With



GLORIA WAVUMUNNO

the heavy embellishment detailing, tulle and use of predominantly pink hues; I wanted to create a collection that's unashamedly feminine.

I also give women the opportunity to layer the pieces, so they can tone down the "Girli-ness" if they want. For instance, the maxi tunic with slits can be paired with the satin skinny trousers and the powder pink and silver embellished top can be worn with boyfriend jeans and flats. The collection is fluid and open to interpretation by different women, as they so desire.

GW: The title of my collection is I M...P, which can be read to stand for, "I Am Perfection", or "Imperfection", depending on how you want to construe the words. I chose to make a play on the words because personally, I don't like my clothes to be 'perfect'. However when you look at the detailing of my collection like the tailoring, the deliberate imperfections make it perfect.

With this collection, I used textures like leather, faux leather and cotton jersey. I also wanted to make a shapely collection, for e.g. with my "Curve-Zip Skirts" where I exaggerate the hips; going back to my Perfection/Imperfection idea, I wanted to show that no matter the size, a woman's hips are beautiful.

How would you say your hometown influenced your S/S 16 collection?

AP: My hometown inspired my collection because my starting point was to make pieces for a cosmopolitan African woman who enjoys to go out looking distinct and ladylike.

GW: I live in the rural areas of Kampala by the lake, so I was inspired by its landscape. Nature's colors and textures have an air of imperfect beauty, and that is what I wanted to capture in this collection. The cracks in the leather pieces mimic the lines one sees on a tree's trunk. The richness of the green earth can be seen in my moss green pieces. I also wanted the silhouette of my clothes to imitate nature; so for example, I translated the softly rounded marshmallow shape of a cloud into the puffy-shaped jackets and tops in my collection.

Every designer in a large city faces specific challenges common to that area. What obstacles have you faced with running your business in your hometown?

AP: I deliberately chose to make my production team Senegal-based and it's a small team of 12, so keeping up with stock orders can get challenging. Without the workforce power of a large-scale manufacturing company, it also makes it harder to compete with brands on an international scale.

GW: It's difficult to find fully-qualified and capable people to fill the roles in the company. This can mean from seamstresses to fashion creatives like photographers, to marketing professionals.

How would you say you've overcome these challenges?

AP: Well, my team and I work as hard as we can each day, doing the best we can under the circumstances.

GW: The lack of fully qualified fashion professionals in Kampala stems from lack of education. I try to overcome this by giving internships at my studio, so for example, we offer seamstresses internships to enhance their skills, and those that rise to a sufficient standard are often retained to work full-time.

What does it mean for you on a professional and personal level to be part of the AFDB initiative?

AP: On a personal level, I love to support African fashion initiatives, this is why I've supported AFDB from the very beginning of its journey. Professionally speaking, due to AFDB partnering with PREMIUM Exhibitions, it gives designers like myself an excellent opportunity to meet with key buyers and influential press. I've been here for two days, and I've already had buyers placing orders, and this is great!

GW: On a personal level, as my collection is not stereotypically 'African' in terms of being rich with colorful prints, I'm happy that AFDB embraces how I choose to express myself as an African designer. On a professional level, by being part of AFDB this season, I am appreciative of the press

and buyers that myself and my label are able to be connected with. Also, with AFDB partnering with PREMIUM Exhibitions, this helps to dispel the negative reputation that African fashion has internationally in the buying market and will hopefully boost its authenticity and value.

Walking around PREMIUM Exhibitions, what are your first impressions?

AP: PREMIUM Exhibitions always attracts extraordinary brands, walking through the vast exhibition space, I'm always impressed by the range of high-quality designs on display. As a woman, I just want to buy everything I see here!

GW: I love the fact that it gives each brand on display the creative freedom to express their vision in their stall space. Also, the organization and co-ordination on PREMIUM team's part is truly outstanding.

Currently, where can your pieces be bought?

AP: ADAMA PARIS is stocked in stores in New York, Paris and parts of Africa like Dakar and Cotonou.

GW: For now my pieces can be bought in a boutique in Kampala called Bold. My pieces also sell on the African e-store, Jumia. Currently, I'm having talks with a few online stores, so expect my pieces to be available from more online stores.

What are your future goals for your brand?

AP: For this year, the goal is to consolidate the efforts and strides we've been making in Asia.

GW: To expand my studio and employ a large variety of artists working in a space, creating good quality garments from Kampala.

Finally, can you tell us what exciting projects you are working on at the moment?

AP: I launched Fashion Africa TV a year ago, and we show in dozens of African countries. Right now, I'm working hard to ensure we show in even more countries.

GW: I'm the founder of Kampala Fashion Week, our partners are LDJ Productions from New York. This year will mark our second season. Kampala Fashion Week starts on 14th November and I'll be showing there with designers from London, Kampala and Rwanda.



BIKI JOHN



ALEXANDRA TAMELE



ADAMA PARIS



GLROIA WAVUMUNNO

