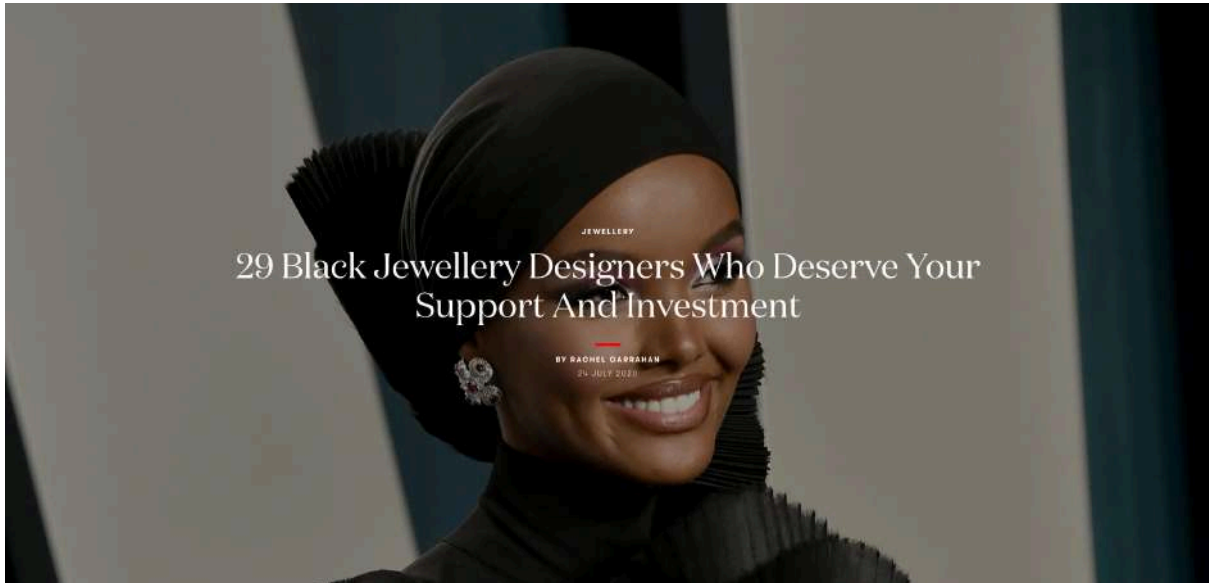


# VOGUE



Prominent Black voices are rare in jewellery. Even though many of the world's riches in the form of precious metals and gemstones come from Africa, its residents are far more likely to have been cruelly exploited in the name of adornment than to have benefited from it.

It was at London's PAD art fair in 2017 that my eye was drawn to a striking, sculptural, forearm-long bronze and copper cuff that stood out among all the glittering diamonds. It was on the stand of Lee Siegelson, a dealer renowned for his keen eye for icons of jewellery design. He told me the 1948 piece was by Art Smith, one of the most talented jewellers of the mid-20th century and one of only a few from an Afro-Caribbean background (another was Smith's mentor Winifred Mason). I am ashamed to say that I had never heard of him before.

Smith died in 1982 but during his lifetime, he was an advocate for both Black and gay civil rights. While today his pieces sit in prestigious museum collections including the Met's in his native New York, he would have been disappointed, even devastated, by the prejudice and injustice still facing people of colour in the US and all over the world.

The Modern  
cuff,  
presented by  
antique dealer  
Siegelson at  
the  
Masterpiece  
Fair in 2017,  
was made by  
Afro-  
Caribbean  
jeweller Art  
Smith in 1948.



Jacqueline Rabun, the American-born, London-based jeweller, says Black people in the jewellery industry meet with the same prejudices they face in all walks of life. She established her brand 30 years ago and quickly became acclaimed for her modern and refined approach to design. She believes that over the years however, her race has meant that she has been passed over for prominent design positions with luxury brands. Fortunately for her, Georg Jensen, the Danish heritage brand with whom she has collaborated with for more than 20 years, has been the exception. “Our relationship is authentic and purely based on a shared design language and sensibility, and nothing to do with the colour of my skin,” she says.

Terry Castro, the designer and jeweller behind Castro NYC, believes the problem is not a lack of talented Black jewellers, but rather their lack of recognition, whether through ignorance or prejudice, by the media, by stores and by clients themselves. “Whether it’s conscious or sub-conscious, it all works together to reduce our visibility,” says the American jeweller, who is based in Istanbul.

Designer Monique Péan described in an Instagram post earlier this week how she looked on in fear as her 70-year-old father, who uses a ventilator at night, risked his health in the midst of lockdown to protest on the streets against the murder of George Floyd. His reaction was simple. “My father explained to me that as a Black man, he would rather die than sit in silence,” she wrote. She told me afterwards that she believes increasing the number of people of colour in the creative industries requires a commitment to change from the top down. “The fashion and design industries need to nurture diverse talent, create a network of opportunities for the work of minorities to be highlighted and championed, as well as provide mentorship at all stages of their careers to help them flourish,” she says.

She herself has built a brand that champions sustainability, diversity and artisanal craft “to lift up those who are marginalised”. She is also a founder, alongside Yale University and Management for Leadership Tomorrow, of a career advancement programme that provides minority professionals with networking and mentoring opportunities. “I believe that initiatives like these are crucial for the future of the industry,” she says.

Designer Lauren Harwell Godfrey was so appalled by the deaths of Floyd and other victims that she has created the broken heart onyx pendant, 100 per cent of sales from which will benefit the NAACP, a civil rights organisation that fights for racial justice in America. In just six weeks, she has raised almost \$70,000. “As a Black woman in an industry with very few of us, I wanted to find a way to use my work to support the fight for racial justice and equality,” says the San Francisco-based designer. “This design — a broken heart that has been put back together, along with the “=” to symbolise equality — visually expresses the hope I have for our country going forward.”



—  
Lauren  
Harwell  
Godfrey's  
sketch for her  
broken heart  
pendant,  
which she  
designed in  
response to  
the deaths of  
George Floyd  
and other  
victims of  
racial  
violence. 100  
per cent of  
proceeds from  
the sale of the  
£1,985 gold,  
diamond and  
onyx pendant  
will benefit the  
NAACP.



Rabun is similarly optimistic in her vision of the future. “I hope in the new world that we will be recognised for our talent and not looked over simply because of the colour of our skin,” she says.

In the meantime, talented Black creatives deserve our support. It is well known that jewellery is an expensive business for anyone to be in, and inequality and systemic racism mean that being a person of colour is likely to affect your ability to even be able to fund your brand. Here is *Vogue*'s pick of those jewellers – including many from London including Vanleles, Emefa Cole, Melanie Eddy and Satta Matturi (whose earrings were worn by model Halima Aden at this year Vanity Fair Oscars party). They deserve your attention and investment now, and always.



9/29

**Emefa Cole**

Igneous cuff by Emefa Cole, gold vermeil over silver, £2,500, [emefacole.com](http://emefacole.com).

