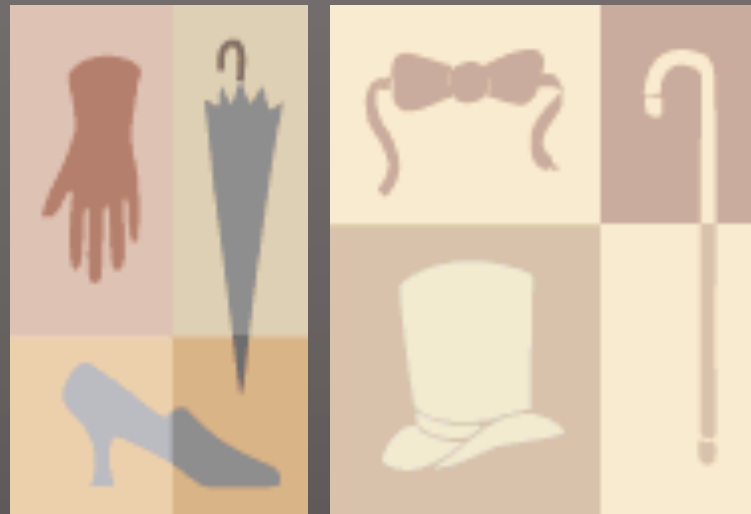


The Making of a Legend
The MET Honors Legend Arthur McGee

the “fashion designers of color” series
Dr. Aziza Bey



community scholars day / march 31, 2009

The Making of a Legend *

The MET Honors Legend Arthur McGee

•core beliefs that guided the scholarship & the project:

- democracy
- inquiry
- equity
- community

* fashion designers of color series



democracy:

opportunities

for all to participate
in the cultural, political, and

economic life

of the nation & the

world.



inquiry

Instruction, research, scholarship, **advocacy**,
& **outreach** to local and global communities.





equity

To **respect** all
individuals and their
communities for their

unique

backgrounds

and capacities and to
underscore the importance of

social justice.



community

To work collaboratively and
with integrity for

constructive

change in local,

national &

global communities

the proposal:

“fashion designers of color”

1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

timeline for decades of work:

education
research
studio time
atelier
the marketplace
the clients
the stories
the heroes
the proposals
funding
grants
the documentary

"you have to make the foot before you make the sock..."

step # 1) 2005 - 2006

the beginning :

research and interviews conducted on

fashion designers of

color who worked

circa 1960's-1990's

"the untold stories."

the project:

through **interviews** with

key designers of the time,

this special episode of visionaries will capture the moving stories of arthur mcgee, iris irby, bayyinah “ajabu” abdu sabur, janie sconiers (laughing water), elena braith (aziza braithwaite bey), stephen burrows and others, and place them in an international and historical context.

the documentary will take viewers

on a journey to understand the innovations, the challenges, and the triumphs facing people of color in the fashion design industry during this revolutionary time period.

the people : the moving stories

5 . Arthur McGee

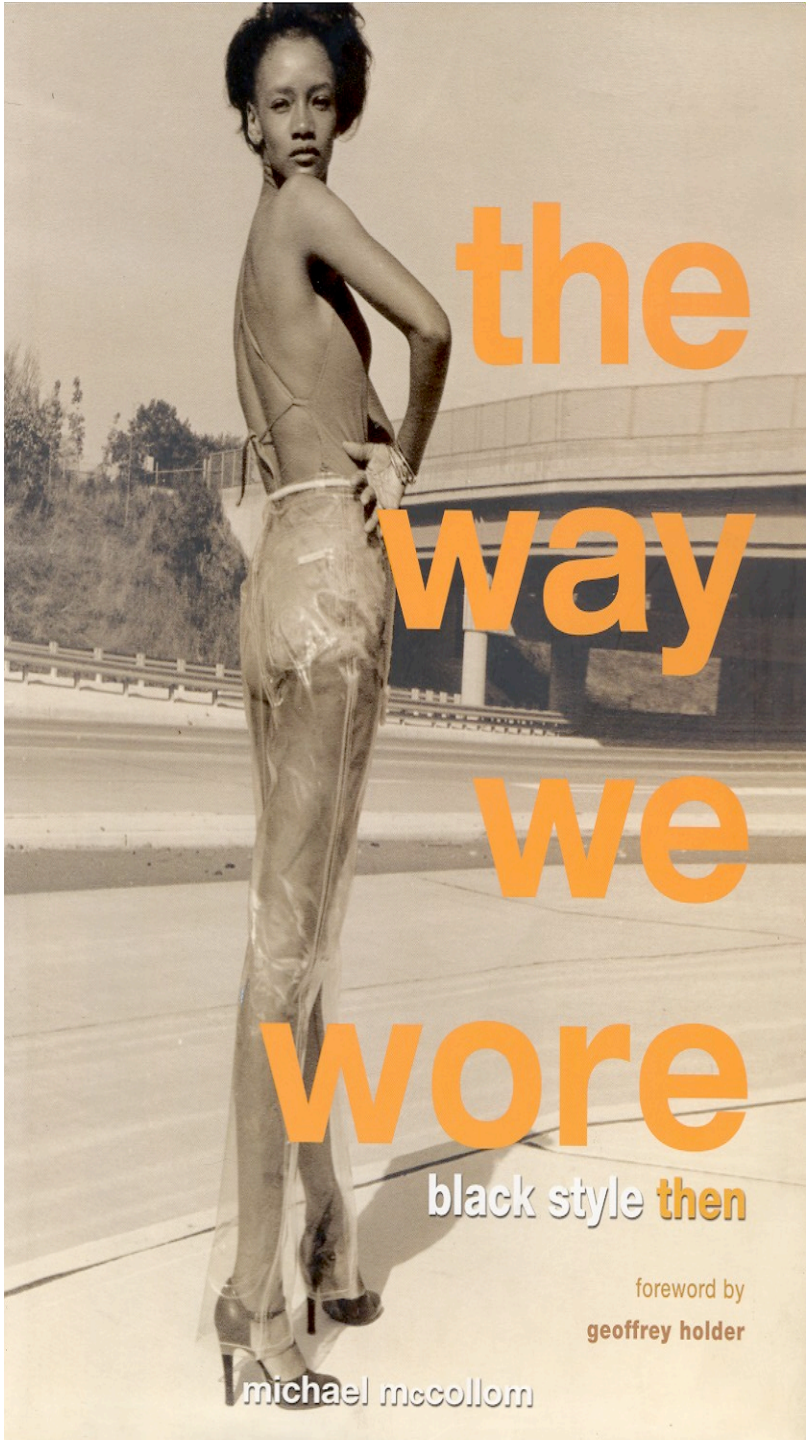
4 . Bayyinah “Ajabu” Abdus Sabur

3 . Iris Irby

2 . Janie Sconiers (Laughing Water)

1 . Elena Braith (Aziza Braithwaite Bey)

visionaries : changing the world one story at a time



the

way

we

wore

black style then

foreword by
geoffrey holder

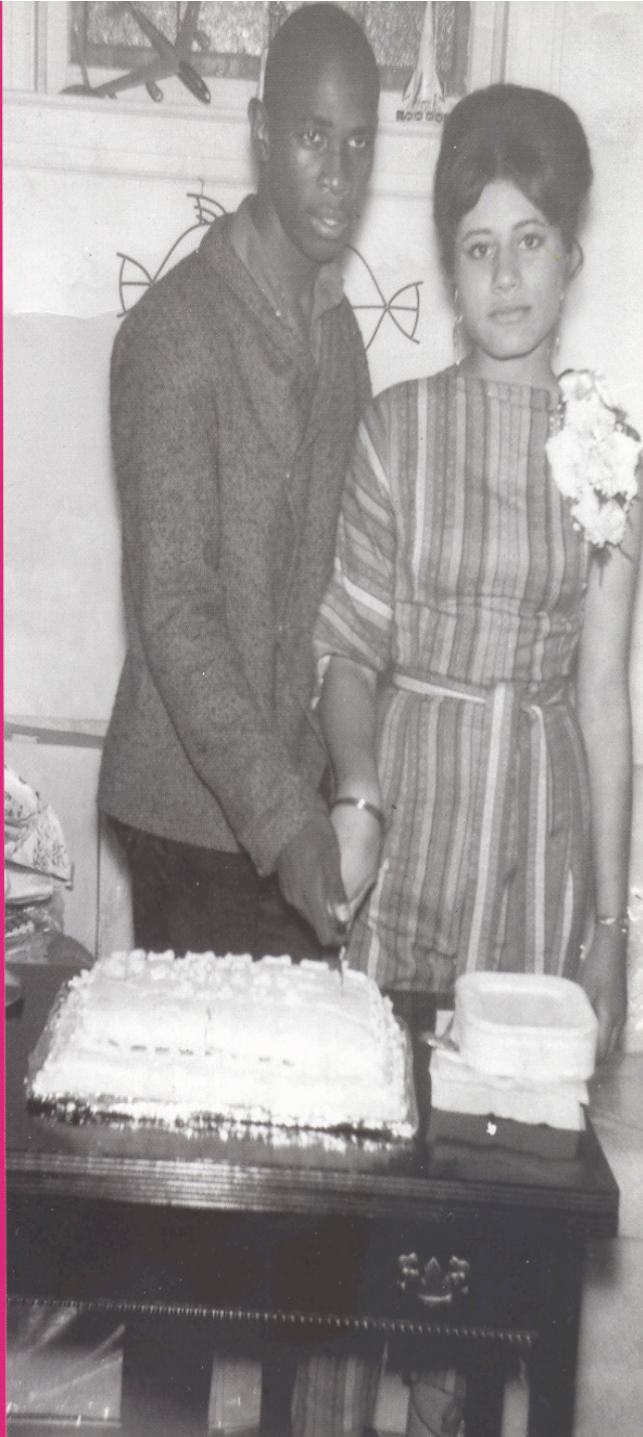
michael mccollom



1958 • Jamaica, New York

"Pictured here is my life-long friend Art Lilly and I cutting cake for my sweet sixteenth birthday party in my parents' home. We are wearing designs that we created and made."

DR AZIZA BRAITHWAITE BEY
Professor at Lesley University,
Cambridge, Massachusetts





1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

About Elena Braith:

(Aziza Braithwaite Bey)

Essence Magazine,

1975

Hand printed Qiana asymmetrical design



1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

Red leather jumpsuit for
Elizabeth Arden Salon
5th Avenue, New York and Chicago
by Aziza for Elena Braith, Ltd.,

1983

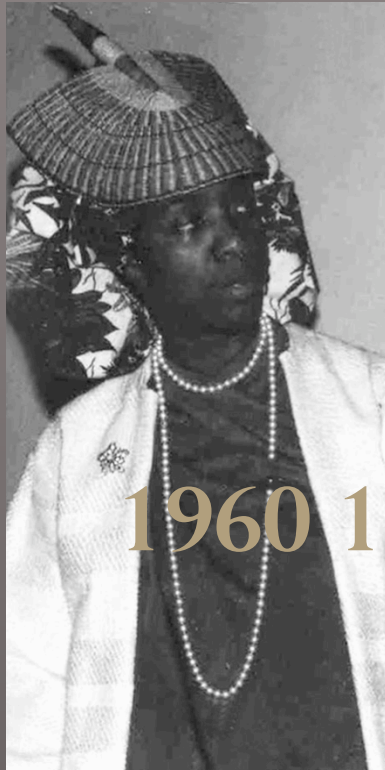
1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

1980

Aziza wearing white
gabardine jacket from
Elena Braith, Ltd.
Hat by Janie M. Sconiers



About Janie Sconiers (Laughing Water):



1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

At the New York Sheraton Hotel

Women's League of Science Luncheon, **1985**

Hat by Janie M. Sconiers,
Fashion by Aziza

About Iris Irby

1970s



1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

About Bayyinah “Ajabu” Abdus Sabur

McCALL'S



DESIGNS BY
BAYYINAH

Display until June 30, 1998.

1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010



DESIGNS BY
BAYYINAH

1960's

About Arthur McGee



1960 1970 1980 1990 2000 2010

Arthur and Maxine Gordon,
Academy Awards Ceremony, 1987

step # 2) 2007 - Presented

my **research** to

Visionaries, Inc. an

award winning producer for **PBS** and contracted

with them to **create a**

documentary:

about **“fashion designers of color”**
product development, vision and needs assessment..



research:

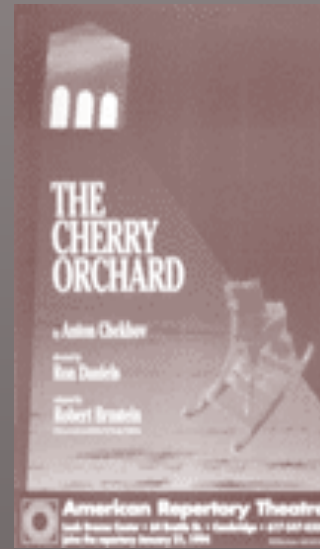
our children have been taught very little about the **contributions of people of color to culture or design.**

by **empowering** them with this **knowledge** our **children** will become **creative** problem **solvers...**

research: “fashion designers of color”

books on history and culture
costume design: film & stage
costume history: doll design
african entrepreneurship

we have a history...



product development



dolls created by aziza bey



cultural perspective:

designers of color often have a non-european
aesthetic point of view!

Arthur hand painted this skirt
with Japanese knot closures at bodice

designers of color often have a non-european socio-political point of view!

The Disruption of Cultural Knowledge in Schools

Culture and Nurturance: The Aesthetic Life of School Children, Pre K-12th Grade Teacher's Resource Manual Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey



In her most recent publication, **author Aziza Braithwaite Bey** encourages teachers and students

to **value**

multiculturalism.

This teacher's resource manual was also her **social action project for her doctoral degree.** The manual is designed to challenge school children of all ages to look at humanity from outside the parochial box and **develop a multicultural perspective**

step # 3) 2007 Dr. Bey

Wrote a grant which was funded by the **Baker**

Foundation to create a **website** on **Arthur**

McGee **the dean of fashion**

designers of color & *the first designer of*

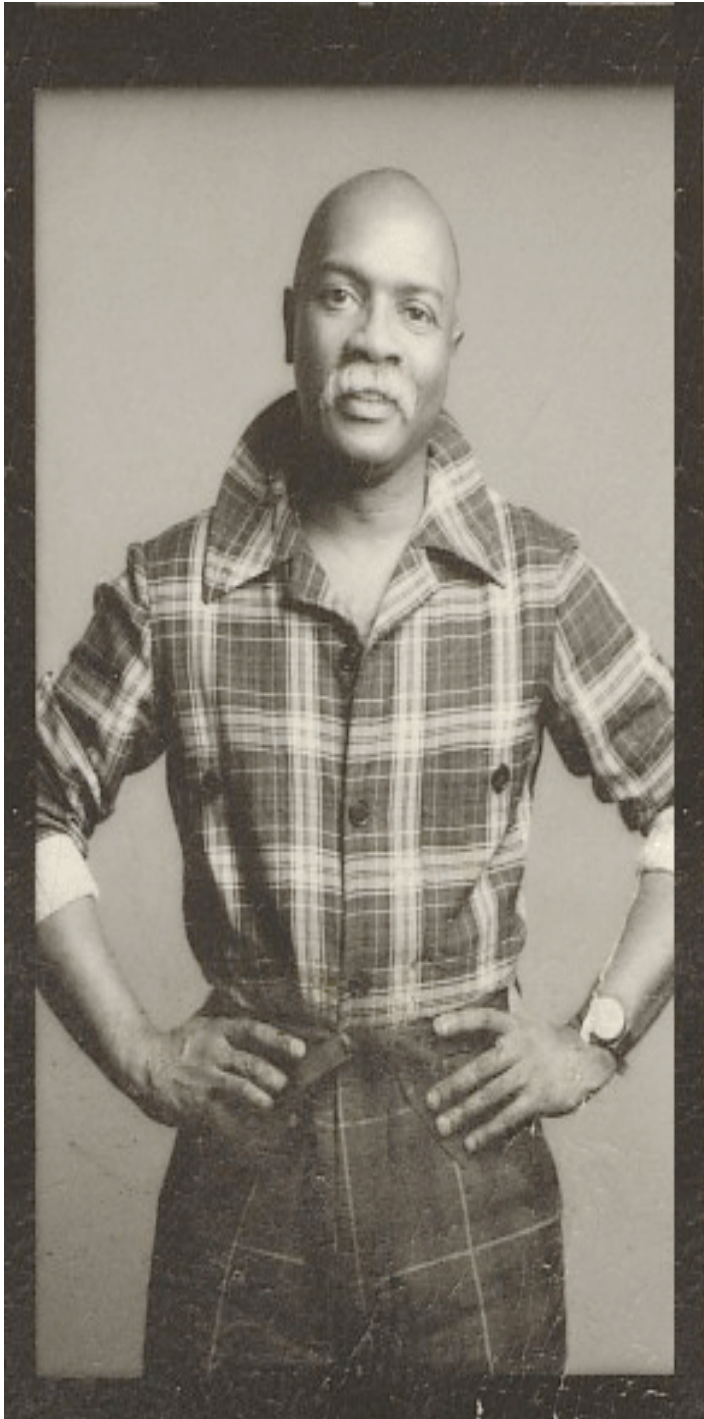
African ancestry to design for a major Seventh Ave

*house in 1957- Bobbie Brooks, Gathering his designs
from clients far and wide, doing photo shoots and*

reconstructing Arthur McGee legacy.



He was unable to remember details and events since suffering an aneurysm and being confined to a nursing home. He had lost his speech and ability to write and function on his own. He is now so much better (all we need is love!)

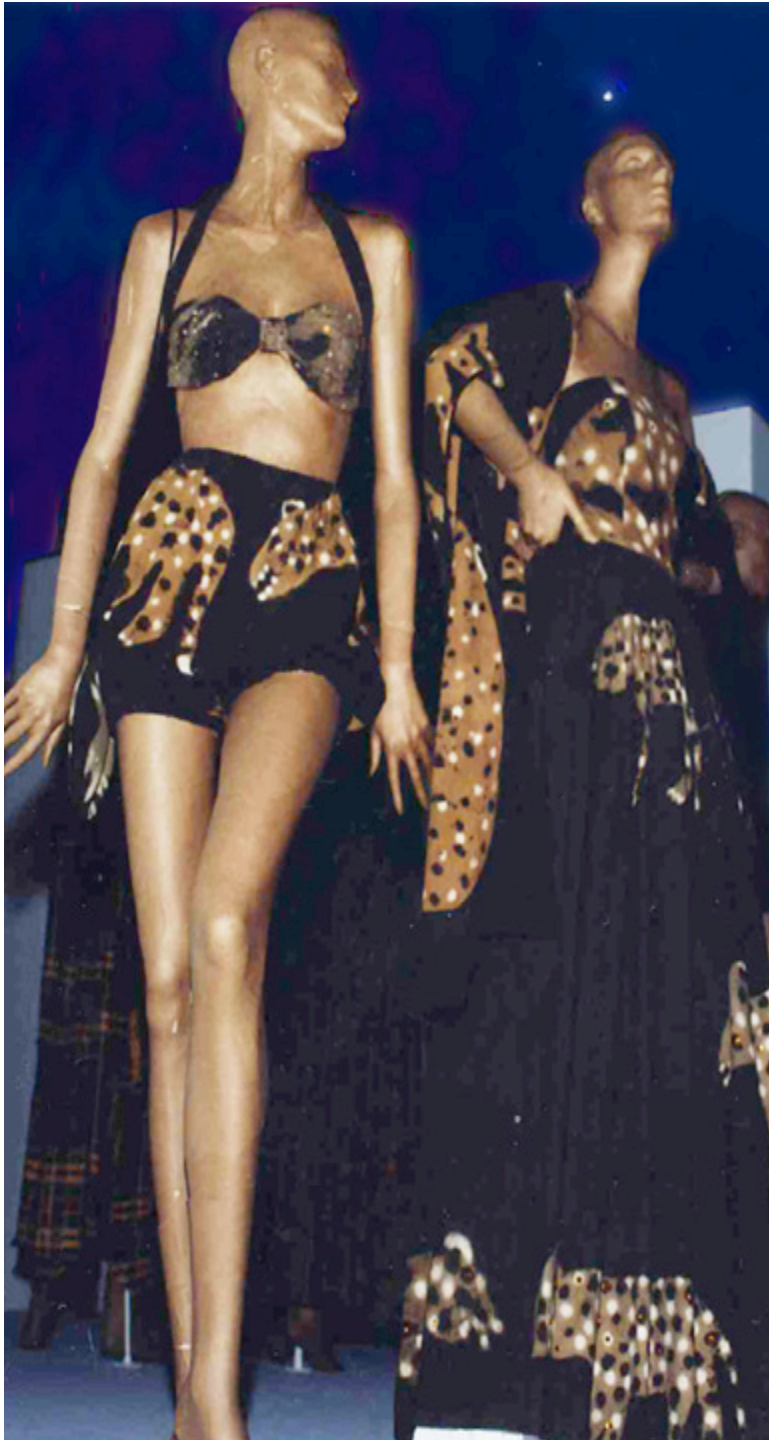


style:

“God created black people and black people created style.”

Quoted by George Wolfe in Summers, Barbara, (2001)
Black and Beautiful Amistad, NY, NY.

Arthur McGee wearing his two tone “Tartan” jumpsuit



wrap:

Swimsuit and skirt with wrap
in African print
by Arthur McGee



hip/hot:

Summer shorts by Arthur McGee



body of work:

McGee with designs

on exhibit at the **MET**

step # **4**) 2007 - 2008 **Packaging**

the **PBS Documentary** and
organizing a *Defining Style Advisory*

Committee : **Aziza** Braithwaite

Bey : Chair and founder,

Susan Taylor (former Editorial Director Essence Magazine), **Harold Koda** (Curator in Charge the

Costume Institute at the **MET***,

Leandra Abbott (Former Vice President Con Edison),

Art Lilly, - Menswear designer/retailer,

B. Micheal - Couturier on Seventh Ave.

TO HONOR ARTHUR MCGEE @

* METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART



2009

Iris Irby, Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey, James Daughtery, B. Michael, Arthur McGee, Art Lilly, Cicely Tyson, Harold Koda, Stephen Burrows.

step # **5**) 2008 **Harold Koda** takes

The **Dr. Bey proposal** to the
Audience Development Dept. at the
MET who hosted the event and gets **Lord &
Taylor** to sponsor a
luncheon to honor **Arthur
McGee** on January 26th,
2009.



The Defining Style Advisory Committee presents Arthur McGee with a plaque for his accomplishments in the fashion industry.

Mr. McGee is also presented with:
A proclamation from Governor Paterson of NY
A proclamation from Mayor Bloomberg of NY
A proclamation from the NY Dept. Cultural Affairs.

*Dr. Bey ,Founder of The Committee presents Arthur McGee with a plaque
Cicely Tyson (far right) lifelong McGee client looks on with pride*



*Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey, Johenetta Shearer,
Arthur McGee and Maxine Gordon*



Susan Taylor, Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey: Fashion Icons of Color

**“If the press was not there,
it didn't happen...”**

(old chinese saying)

the show left, by his standards, uncertain. Yes, there were some strong clothes, with the daywear among his most grounded ever — a trim, short navy suit with a flouncy sand-colored blouse; a military jacket over mannish, slouchy pants. And there were nods to joy in poufy polkadots and a charming navy balloon dress.

Evening provided a bigger puzzle. True, Lacroix showed some beautiful work — a deftly draped vermilion chiffon goddess gown; flamboyant bohemian layerings of painted gazar and chiffon — he doesn't know how to make a bad dress. But, lovely though it was, his lineup was just dresses, lacking the sense of passion and otherworldliness that makes his best work transcend fashion and approach art.

Maison Martin Margiela Artisanale: Martin Margiela is a designer of his time. With the economy tanking, the conceptual Belgian took the commonest of materials — paper towels, shoelaces and plastic price-tag fasteners — and transformed them into witty confections for his Artisanale line. Long known for his penchant for recycling, Margiela used throwaway garments such as old jeans, shredded them and turned the result into a cascade of fringes on a one-legged jumpsuit. Old hair combs were fastened together into a dress, and colored plastic straws were applied to a leather jacket to form a tiger's head and a gun in a way that resembled tattoos. Myriad pairs of shoelaces were strung together into a dress, and hundreds of small plastic price-tag fasteners were woven together into a coat that, from a distance, looked like a fur. The cheekiest piece was the white tuxedo jacket made from paper towels. It wouldn't be a surprise if Margiela now made a dress out of the kitchen sink.



Maison Martin Margiela Artisanale

Maison Martin Margiela Artisanale



Jones, who staged his first runway show for men's label Dunhill on Sunday night. Allen said she was gearing up for the worldwide launch of her second album "It's Not Me, It's You" in February.



PHOTO BY STEPHANE FEUGERE

CLUB SANDWICH: Andre's after-dark empire just keeps expanding. The pint-sized entrepreneur disclosed Monday night at the presentation for House of Waris that he's taken over a hotel next to the Cafe Flore on the Left Bank of Paris. **Vincent Darre** will be behind the decor. "We're going for an old Seventies vibe. It's going to be really private, as there are only around four big rooms, as well as a small bar," said Andre, adding that the bar should be up and running within three weeks.

WITH HONORS: On Monday, the Metropolitan Museum of Art honored designer **Arthur McGee**. Lesser known in wider fashion circles, McGee, who worked with Charles James as a student, became the first African-American to head a design studio on Seventh Avenue, at Bobbie Brooks in 1957. **Jeffrey Banks**, **Bethann Hardison**, **André Leon Talley**, **Steven Kolb**, **B. Michael**, **Stephen Burrows**, **Thelma Golden** and **Susan Fales-Hill** were just some in the glamorous crowd who came to tip their hats off to McGee at the luncheon. "I have been in this business a long time," McGee, who was born in



PHOTO BY ROBERT MITRA

Arthur McGee and Jeffrey Banks

1933 in Detroit, said. "Look at the room. Everybody's here, from now and from years ago."

The event was hosted by the Metropolitan Museum's **Thomas F. Campbell** and **Harold Koda**, and **Richard Baker**, chairman of Lord & Taylor, where McGee once sold his clothes. Koda was inspired to honor McGee when **Aziza Braithwaite** **Be** approached him about a television documentary on defining style, with a commentary on African-American talent. "One of the bad things about fashion is that we are in a constant cycle and sometimes forget the past, so I thought we should recognize Arthur's contributions."

"This tribute is long overdue," said actress **Cicely Tyson**, in her remarks about the designer.

The recognition may not end with the luncheon. "I once did a show with **Richard Martin**, and we used one of Arthur's ballgowns made with mudcloth," Koda said. "We can't locate it anymore, and we are looking for it."

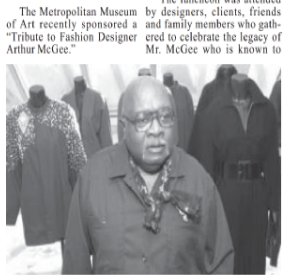
PHOTOS BY GIOVANNI GUARNON

womens wear daily :new york

KICKIN' IT

The Metropolitan Museum of Art pays tribute to designer Arthur McGee

By Audrey J. Bernard and Richard Baker, chairman of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Multicultural Audience Development Initiative; The Defining Style Advisory Committee; and by designers, clients, friends and family members who gathered to celebrate the legacy of Mr. McGee who is known to



Arthur McGee with Designs

The luncheon hosted by Thomas P. Campbell, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with Harold Koda, curator-in-charge, the



Stephen Burrows, Bethann Hardison, Emily Rafferty, Andre Leon Talley

Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Donna Williams, chief audience development officer, The Metro-



Bryant Howroyd, Janice Howroyd, Brett Howroyd

politan Museum of Art Multicultural Audience Development Initiative; The Defining Style Advisory Committee;

Harold Koda

The celebratory luncheon began with an intimate cocktail reception and exhibition of his designs followed by a delicious

lunch, dessert and a fabulous screening of a filmed interview with Mr. McGee covering his early career right up to the present.

During the brief program, one of his first clients and a lifelong friend, Cicely Tyson, shared some great stories confessing that she still wears his designs which she finds "ageless."

After lunch some guests joined the fashion maven in the exhibition area where Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey, founder, The Defining Style Advisory Committee, assistant professor, Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, Creative Arts in Learning Division, Lesley University, briefed guests about the mission of her exclusive committee.

"Our goal is to create visibility for these designers through a variety of projects, including a documentary on the pioneering career of Arthur McGee, the first African American designer to run a design studio on Seventh Avenue," stated Dr. Bey. "The committee was launched to recognize American fashion designers of color who had been overlooked in fashion history - starting with McGee."

The committee members include Leandra Abbott, former vice president, Con Edison; Harold Koda, curator in charge, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Art Lilly, Menswear Design and Retailer; b. michael, b. michael couture; and Susan L. Taylor, founder, National Cares Mentoring Movement/Editor-in-Chief emeritus, Essence Magazine.

Born in 1933 in Detroit Michigan, Arthur McGee began his fashion career at the age of 18 when he entered a scholarship contest sponsored by the Traphagen School of Design in New York, advertised in a local Detroit newspaper. Inspired by his mother who often created her own fashions, Arthur submitted the winning design and set his course for Manhattan.

Mr. McGee went on to study at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) where he honed his skills for millinery and apparel design. He began working for the American Couturier Charles James while a student at FIT and later produced his own designs while pursuing employment in New York's apparel industry.

In 1957, Mr. McGee became the first African-American to run the design room of an established Seventh Avenue apparel company, Bobby Brooks. His remarkable talent and the broad appeal of his work transcended racial barriers, selling to such stores as Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale's, Henri Bendel, Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf



Jeffrey Banks, Cicely Tyson, b. michael, Arthur McGee

Goodman, and Lord & Taylor. He opened his first store in the early 1960's on St. Mark's Place in New York City where his



Harriett Cole, Melanie Hervey, Spencer Means, Susan Fales Hill

clients included Cybil and Richard Burton and Arthur Mitchell of the Dance Theater of Harlem. He became the designer of



Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey, Arthur McGee, James Daugherty

choice for many celebrities, including Lena Horne, Cicely Tyson, and Stevie Wonder.

Known as the dean of African-American designers, Mr. McGee mentored many young talents, including Aziza Braithwaite Bey (Elena Braith) and the late Willie Smith, paving the way for designers of color.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Multicultural Audience Development Initiative reflects the Museum's founding mission to educate and inspire by reaching out to all of its constituencies, including



Andre Leon Talley, Deborah Roberts

(Photos: Patrick McMullan)

beacon press new york

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Submit Your Comment

By
Submit Cancel

Report Abuse close
Username
Reason for reporting this comment
Offensive
Description of Violation

Submit Cancel

Oldest First | Newest First | Show me only Recommended Comments

Most Emailed

- Macy's to Cut 7,000 Jobs, Consolidate Operations
- Lauder to Cut Jobs, Restructure
- Struggling Fortunoff Could Be Next to Vanish
- Tough Times for Luxury Watches
- Fortunoff Goes Chapter 11

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<http://www.wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/fashion-scoops-lily-allen-valentino-195...> 2/7/2009



Photo By: Robert Mitra

Arthur McGee and Jeffrey Banks

RELEASE

webnews:+

PRESS
March 28, 2007

LAUNCH OF NEW WEB SITE:
THE FASHION OF ARTHUR MCGEE

(An Online Gallery for an African American Fashion Pioneer)

www.arthurmccgee.com

application of core beliefs & proof of hard work:

the invitation



Thomas P. Campbell, Director
with
Harold Koda, Curator in Charge, The Costume Institute
Donna Williams, Chief Audience Development Officer
The Defining Style Advisory Committee
and
Richard Baker, Chairman, Lord & Taylor

invite you to a luncheon
celebrating the legacy of fashion designer
Arthur McGee

Remarks by Cicely Tyson

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street
Monday, January 26, 2009
12:00–2:30 p.m.

Business attire

This invitation is not transferable

Please present it at the Museum's Main Entrance or the Parking Garage Entrance

R.s.v.p. by January 20, 2009

tel: 212.650.2525; email: audience.development@metmuseum.org

Please send direct inquiries to audience.development@metmuseum.org

Arthur McGee

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Defining Style Advisory Committee

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LEANDRA ABBOTT
Former Vice President
Con Edison

DR. AZIZA BRAITHWAITE BEY
Assistant Professor, Graduate School of
Arts and Social Sciences, Creative Arts in Learning Division
Lesley University

HAROLD KODA
Curator in Charge, The Costume Institute
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

ART LILLY
Menswear Design and Retailer

B. MICHAEL
B. Michael Couture

SUSAN L. TAYLOR
Founder, National CARES Mentoring Movement
Editor-in-Chief Emeritus, Essence Magazine

Learn more about the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute and its collection at
www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/the_costume_institute

Learn more about the Metropolitan Museum's Multicultural Audience Development Initiative
and its Advisory Committee at
www.metmuseum.org/audiencedevelopment



*“Little wonder that those thousands
of men and women who plied their trades
as seamstresses, dressmakers, modistes & tailors,
utilizing brains, brawn
& imagination...”*



*Never received a line of credit
in any book of any period –
including those written by blacks.*

*Yet it was **those individuals**,
many unnamed and nearly all **unheralded**,
who **subtly shaped the fashion** statements
of their times.*



They literally dressed a nation!”

democracy
inquiry
equity
community

Audrey Smaltz in Alexander, Lois K. (1982)
Blacks in the History of Fashion, the Harlem Institute of Fashion, A Solar Production, N.Y., N.Y., p17.

Use the inspirational power of the arts to reach, teach,
and transform others.



Thank you so much for listening!



The Making of a Legend:
The MET Honors Legend Arthur McGee
Dr. Aziza Braithwaite Bey

Q&A