

Josephine Nakafeero

Going Beyond Upcycling

Josephine Nakafeero, a Ugandan sustainable fashion designer, is ready to make her mark in Canada. Josephine was born and raised in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. She is the only girl amongst 5 brothers with additional step siblings. Growing up, she would ask her mother to bring home fabric to hand sew into clothes for her dolls. She learned the ins and outs of making clothes all by herself. The inspiration for her doll's clothes came from her love of fashion reality TV programs, like project runway and America's Next Top Model with supermodel Tyra Banks, an African American woman success.

Josephine graduated from Makerere University in 2009 with a bachelor's degree in commerce and entrepreneurship course, but she knew she belonged in Uganda's fashion community. She would often sneak into her friend's fashion and design classes. Josephine began a media career with Uganda's Next Broadcasting Services (NBS). She hosted fashion-related television and radio programs. The inspiration for her own fashion designs came from interviewing other designers. She worked for NBS TV for eight years and saw it grow into a nationally recognised platform.

In September 2023, Josephine immigrates to Edmonton in search of political asylum. Uganda has been ruled by an autocratic government for over 38 years. Josephine is an outspoken supporter of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine. She had the opportunity to design Bobi Wine when he was a member of parliament and was introduced to his revolutionary ideas for the future of Uganda. Josephine describes the current state of Ugandan politics as unfair: "an injustice in my country is an injustice everywhere." Ultimately, her opposition to the government made her fear for her safety. She decided her activism could be more effective outside of Uganda.

Like many art forms, fashion can be a powerful voice for social and political change. Global change comes from empowering women and girls with applicable life skills. In Uganda, Josephine taught women sewing, design and upcycling skills. Rather than just providing clothes for others, she shared the gift of creating their own clothes. A gift that can be passed on to the next generation of girls. Josephine was overjoyed when she was given the opportunity in Canada to combine her artistic passion with her commitment to empowering women in her community. She does this by volunteering at the Women's Art Museum of Canada, the Edmonton Food Bank and speaking to newcomers at the Newcomer Centre in Edmonton.

Josephine is aware that she, like everyone else, has a role to play in tackling the climate crisis, as the fast fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world (1). With most governments failing to take action, she sees sustainable fashion initiatives as an essential part of humanity's response to this issue, which is why Jose House of Creations is built on a sustainable brand platform. Every garment speaks to this issue. Josephine gives





us the opportunity to see how accessible sustainable and upcycled fashion is.

“At the end of the day, I want what I create to relate back to where I come from.”

Fashion designers from across Africa have highlighted the destructive impact that donated clothing from wealthy countries has on their communities (2). Western countries produce large amounts of textile waste that flood the markets of African countries. The Second-Hand clothing industry is a result of this phenomenon. This industry keeps the average market price of clothing extremely low, making it difficult for small-scale fashion designers. These clothes also end up in their own landfills. Josephine hopes that Canadians will understand the consequences of fast fashion. I wasn't aware of the severity of

the problem in Africa. As consumers, we can recognise our contribution to this extremely harmful industry and take steps to reduce our consumption of fast fashion products. One way is to upcycle our own second-hand clothes. Recently, Josephine was able to teach Edmontonians this skill by facilitating an Afro-Western fusion fashion upcycling workshop at the City of Edmonton Reuse Centre. Participants worked with recycled denim and Ankara fabrics (3) to create an entirely new piece, combining upcycling skills with traditional African patterns. A highlight of the workshop was a visit by Her Honor Salma Lakhani, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.

Since Josephine's arrival, many Albertans have come together to make sure she feels truly welcomed and supported. She is excited about the future. She continues her commitment to community empowerment initia-

tives and to expanding the reach of her sustainable fashion and design practice.

Based on an interview with Anya Labelle in 2024

References

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3. Schenck, Catherine. “In upcycling drive, South African designers give new life to Western fashion waste.” Reuters. Last updated July 14, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/upcycling-drive-south-african-designers-give-new-life-western-fashion-waste-2023-07-14/>.
3. Abrams, Melanie. “Eight African Wax Prints And Their Unique Stories.” Vogue World. British Vogue. April 18, 2018. <https://www.vogue.co.uk/gallery/eight-stories-behind-traditional-african-wax-prints>. Additional note: Ankara, or African wax print, is a type of patterned fabric commonly used in clothing in Africa. They are used as a form of non-verbal communication between people, especially women. Each unique pattern carries a specific meaning that the wearer hopes to convey to others.