



DELAVAN ART GALLERY

Contact: Gloria Romeo
Public Relations Coordinator
315.425.7500 or 315.428.9205
E-mail: gromeo@twcny.rr.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BUDDING YOUNG FASHION ENTREPRENEURS INTRODUCE DESIGNS AT DELAVAN ART GALLERY SPECIAL EVENT BENEFITING HAITI

Syracuse NY, February 23, 2010 – Bilaya Jackson and Me’Lisa Matthews, two highly motivated young women have set in motion their aspirations to embark on careers in the fashion world. The pair will introduce their designs at a Delavan Art Gallery special event on Friday, March 12, from 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm. Net proceeds from the show’s \$15 admission fee are being donated to Catholic Relief Services Haiti Relief Fund.

The fashion show, a rather large initial undertaking for the two ‘would-be’ entrepreneurs came about following Bilaya’s visit to the art gallery a few months ago, where she hoped to interest someone in her portfolio of sketches. Gallery director Bill Delavan liked what she had done so far and encouraged her to continue. That spark of recognition ignited the drive in the 21 year-old who then relayed it to Me’lisa, her 22 year-old business partner, and their introductory show was born with a fundraising effort attached in recognition of the girls’ acquaintance with some local Haitians.

Called “Bilaya’s Billie Dream’s Couture and Me’lisa’s JEMA Couture,” the special event boasts some notable headliners. The Hon. Van B. Robinson, President, City of Syracuse Common Council and his wife, Linda Brown-Robinson, president and owner of an event planning company are Honorary Co-Chairs. Community-theater treasure, Maureen “Moe” Harrington is host for the evening. Joseph G. Slavik, President, Catholic Charities and Community Services will speak briefly about his work as coordinator of the Haiti Relief Fund.

Backgrounds for Jackson and Matthews are similar. Both are recent graduates of Nottingham High School who became enamored with fashion at an early age. Self-taught Me’lisa started hand sewing at age 12 and vigorously pursued her talent when her mother gifted her with a sewing machine on her 15th birthday. Bilaya says fashion has intrigued her since she was six, but that her creative abilities soared in high school when she realized how her style of dress became a form of self-expression noted by those around her. She, too, was buoyed to make a career in fashion and began designing and making her own clothes when her mother gave her a sewing machine on her 17th birthday. Bilaya took two years of Fashion Technology at Central Technology Vocational School and after graduating from Nottingham, completed one year of study at Onondaga Community College as an art major. Currently, the pair supplements expenses working part-time as aides in area nursing facilities. Further schooling in fashion design is an option for the future.

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Another unique connection in the girls' partnership is the way in which each arrived at naming their own distinct line of design. Bilaya Jackson's "Billie Dream's Couture" refers to her alter ego named Billie who, she says, "is the voice inside me that dreams big and has high expectations of success." She says further, "when a young woman wears one of my garments, I want her to feel the same confidence and empowerment that being fashionable instills in me." Jackson's overall theme for her segments of the fashion show is "Concrete Jungle," signifying a mix of brilliant color, shown in the first half as a more masculine dress-up military look and the second part instilled with a vibrant collection of tribal accessories of feathers and beads.

For her line of couture, Matthews implores her middle name, Jema, which means 'my beautiful jewel,' saying she chose it because "my creations are as precious to me as a piece of jewelry is to someone else." She adds, "My clothes really represent both sides of my personality – my wild, free spirited outgoing side and my feminine, girly sensitive side." For the fashion show, Matthews presents two themes for her segments, justifying her dual persona. "Glamrock" designs are colorful and fun with a punk rock feel amid the glitter and rhinestones. "Sea Goddess" designs are more feminine and flow with hues of blues, greens and violets representing the sea, and shimmering gold hues representing a goddess.

On the evening of the March 12 special event, audience can also appreciate the artistry and color of Delavan Art Gallery exhibits that surround the fashion show's runway: "Art: 2003 – 2009," featuring an array of new works by some of the artists shown before, and a collection of students' pieces in the "Blodgett and Seymour Benefit Art Show" that captures the imagination and promise of the very young who might aspire to a career in the arts as did Jackson and Matthews.

Delavan Art Gallery is a 3,800 square foot showcase and sales venue for fine art created by area artists. Conveniently located in downtown Syracuse at 501 West Fayette St., just a block beyond Armory Square, the gallery is free and open to the public. Off-street parking is available and the gallery is handicapped accessible. Regular Gallery hours are Thursdays and Fridays from 12:00 noon – 6:00 pm, Saturdays from 10:00 am – 4:00 pm and at other times by appointment.

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QUICK DETAILS FOR CALENDAR LISTINGS

Haitian Benefit Fashion Show
"Billie Dream's Couture" and "JEMA Couture"
Friday, March 12, 2010, 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm

PRESS RELEASE IMAGES

Bilaya Jackson
Me'lisa Matthews