

# I'm a Black, Trans, Disabled Model — And I Just Got Signed to a Major Agency

Aaron Philip writes on being signed to Elite NYC as a Black trans model with cerebral palsy, and her dreams for the future of fashion.

BY AARON PHILIP

September 4, 2018



Dress By Gucci, Fishnet Top (Worn Underneath) By Kozaburo, Necklace By Arielle De PintoMATTHEW TAMMARO

My name is Aaron Philip. I'm 17 years old, I live in the Bronx, and I'm about to be a senior in high school! I identify as a gender-nonconforming trans woman who uses she/her pronouns. I also have cerebral palsy and use a motorized wheelchair to get around. As of September 1, I'm also one of Elite New York City's newest models, and am about to participate in my first season in New York.

I enter the fashion world with intentions of making the industry more diverse, inclusive, and accessible. I have never seen a physically disabled supermodel or a Black transfeminine model heralded, celebrated, or even working in the way other models are — and I hope to change that. This lack of representation and visibility in fashion has deeply affected me throughout my life, and has driven me to take matters into my own hands to carve a space and try to provide opportunity for members of my community in this field. And while this might sound inspiring to some, to me it's simply a matter of showing the world something different, and opening people's minds — especially in fashion, where there's a fine line between art and consumerism.

As a person, I wear my identity on my sleeve. Coming into this industry as one of two models in wheelchairs signed to a major modeling agency (the other being my angel & good friend Jillian Mercado) while being Black and transfeminine is both very empowering and sort of terrifying. And like any other model, I have many aspirations. I dream of Miu Miu, Chanel, Dior, Calvin Klein, and Prada while I'm sleeping. I live vicariously through the shows of Helmut Lang, Versace, Eckhaus Latta, Balenciaga, and Givenchy. Fashion is important to me because it's the ultimate form of conveying self-expression and toying with gender. The possibility of creating opportunities for disabled and gender-nonconforming people in high fashion is what excites me about being in this industry.

Now that I'm signed and ready to hit the runway this season, I have lots of questions running through my mind. *Who will be daring enough to cast me in their shows? Will I book any shows this season? Which casting directors are*

*interested or uninterested?* As excited as I am, this is all new to me. I know that because of my appearance, my disability, and my identities, I may be boxed into a position where I'm either seen as unique and fascinating, or straight up *not* what a casting director or designer may be looking for. More than anything, I can only pray for success and happiness within my career and the goals I intend to achieve. I don't want signings like mine to be a trend or a fad. I want careers for Black, disabled, and trans models to be attainable and sustainable.

While I work toward my goals, it's nice to reflect on the fact that I'm here to celebrate myself, my communities, and my friends who work in this business. I'm so very honored to be chasing and achieving my dreams. I hope that one day soon, trans and disabled models will be able to reach the level of success any other talented and hardworking model can. I won't settle for anything less.

See you on the runway.