

FASHION SCOOPS

12 NYC Fashion Companies Awarded FMI Grants



- Nearly \$460,000 is being awarded this year through the FMI grants.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

As U.S. apparel brands and retailers are becoming more open to shifting some overseas production to domestic resources, the Council of Fashion Designers of America and the New York City Economic Development Corporation have awarded the 2022 Fashion Manufacturing Initiative grants.

The FMI Grant Fund is an anchor in the CFDA's and NYCEDC's Fashion Manufacturing Initiative, which was created in 2013 to strengthen and preserve citywide fashion manufacturers. The latest installment, as in years past, is focused on bolstering the New York City fashion manufacturing sector. To date, nearly \$4 million has been rolled out in the five boroughs with nearly \$460,000 in grants being doled out this year alone.

Those funds will be shared by a dozen grant recipients, including the Button Down Factory, Create a Marker, the Design Incubator, Dyenamix, Etier, Fugitive Patterns, Hidden in Plain Sight Studio, In Style USA, Knit Illustrated, Knit Resort, LW Pearl and Tailored Industry. Pattern making, marking, grading, cutting and sewing, sample making embroidery and embellishment, fabric dyeing, knitwear services and washing are among the services that the companies offer.

With the global fashion industry valued at \$1.7 trillion, the U.S. fashion sector accounts for nearly \$369.4 billion. Textile and apparel manufacturing Stateside is showing glimmers of light. The output of U.S. textile manufacturing (measured by value added) totaled nearly \$16.6 billion last year – a 23.8 percent increase from 2009. “Made in the USA” textiles and apparel are gaining ground in some high-tech categories such as medical textiles, protective clothing, specialty and industrial fabrics and nonwovens.

While the pandemic, inflation, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and other geopolitical matters have snarled overseas production and shipping, some domestic manufacturers, retailers and designers are using local resources. Giants like Walmart Inc. have made a case for domestic manufacturing in certain sectors. Earlier this month, the company touted the opening of a Classic Fashion factory in Santa Ana, California, that will cut and sew garments for Walmart.

While veteran American designers like Yeohlee Teng, Tracy Reese and Maria Cornejo have long championed the upsides of domestic manufacturing, emerging ones like Wiederhoeft's Jackson Wiederhoeft and Tanner Fletcher's Tanner Richie and Fletcher Kassel have also addressed the importance of supporting local resources.

Half of the recipients are being awarded funds through the FMI Grant Fund for the first time. In addition, women-owned businesses comprise 75 percent of the recipients and minority-owned businesses account for 50 percent. In years past, FMI grants have been given to eight recipients on average, making this year's batch of 12 the most that have been offered. More than 120 jobs are impacted across the recipients' businesses through the grants.

Services of the recipients include pattern and sample development, cutting and sewing, knitwear services, embellishment/embroidery, fabric dyeing, printing and washing, as well as marking and grading. The criteria that was considered for grant winners included sustainability, diversity, equity, inclusion, community and workforce impact and overarching business viability. Financial audits and social compliance audits addressed issues like health, safety and worker wages.

Create a Marker's Paul Cavazza emphasized that with technology constantly changing, it is imperative that his company keeps up with the newest iterations of technology, software and programs. “Factories, not just in the Garment District, don't update their technology. They keep the same machines and the same techniques that were used 20 and 30 years ago.”

As a strong believer in technology, Cavazza frequents garment industry-related technology trade shows like Techtextil in Frankfurt, Germany, to stay up-to-speed for his grading and marking

pattern service. With a 7,500-square-foot space and about 28 employees, Create a Marker has received a \$75,000 grant. The company will update its software, hire more employees, buy scanners, offer new services and is buying two Gerber MP plotters (leading speed machinery that prints similarly to a blueprint.)

“Domestic production is definitely up, as customers are reevaluating production overseas,” he said, a change that started during the pandemic.

Fugitive Patterns' owner and head patternmaker Calli Roche runs her two-year-old business from Brooklyn, New York. Operating pretty much as a one-person operation save for a sister, who acts as a business manager when she can, and a part-time assistant, Roche aims to use pattern making for sustainability efforts, slow fashion and improving fit. The FMI grant will go toward upgrading the company's software with made-to-measure software, which will boost its capabilities and reach, especially in terms of doing digital custom patterns for designers more quickly.

While seldom talked about in fashion circles, patternmaking is a key part of the design process. That is especially true for those working in New York that are trying to manufacture on a smaller scale or design a well-fitting garment that highlights the creator's concept, Roche said. “It gives designers a much more hands-on experience that is more intuitive and organic. And in my opinion, the product is closer to the original idea.”

Looking ahead, she plans to develop a new grading system to give small-scale designers, at-home sewers and patternmakers the ability to get custom patterns made to their specific body measurements. That online service will be more of a one-stop pattern as opposed to mass manufactured patterns that Fugitive Patterns does on a regular basis, Roche said.

The CFDA and the NYCEDC have joined forces on other fronts previously such as workforce-related initiatives, relocation grants and the CFDA.com Production Directory. They also had teamed up to give out FMI Grants via A Common Thread and the Workforce Relief Collective in order to provide financial and personal protective equipment support to businesses and workers impacted by the pandemic.

BEAUTY FEATURES

SAG-AFTRA Urges Congress to Pass CROWN Act

- The law, which passed the U.S. House in March, would prohibit racial bias and unfair treatment based on hairstyle or texture at work, federal programs and public accommodations.

BY NOOR LOBAD

Members of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists are urging Congress to pass the CROWN Act.

In a statement sent to the U.S. Senate on Tuesday, dozens of members of SAG-AFTRA including Zöe Kravitz, Niecy Nash, Kerry Washington, Don Cheadle and Rosario Dawson advocated for the law, which seeks to end hair discrimination nationwide.

“The CROWN Act is a huge step in ending discrimination based on hair

in public education and work spaces,” said SAG-AFTRA president Fran Drescher in a statement. “People should feel free to style their hair how they feel most comfortable without the threat of prejudice and unequal treatment.”

The law, which stands for “Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair,” passed the U.S. House of Representatives on a vote of 235 to 189 last March.

Enacted in 19 states to date, including California, New Mexico, New York and Massachusetts, the CROWN Act now sits with the Senate. If passed by the Senate and president Biden, the law's protections would apply to all 50 states.

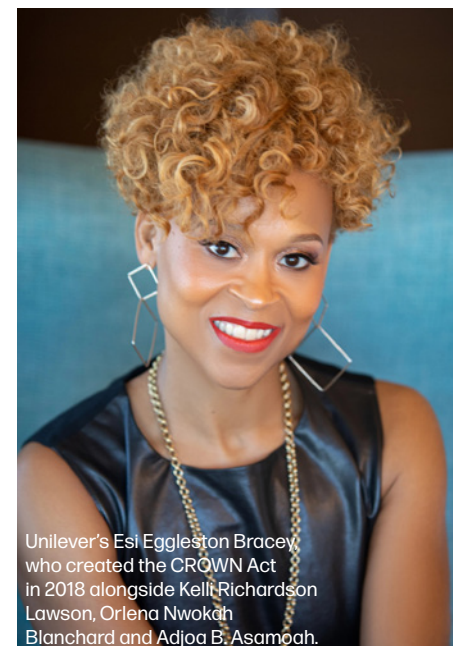
“When you work in an industry where you can be hired – or not hired – largely on how you look, you become acutely aware of how damaging it can be to discriminate against someone based on something as extraneous as how they wear their hair,” said Jason George, chair of the SAG-AFTRA

Hair and Makeup Equity Work Group, which recommended the statement.

Other members of the SAG-AFTRA Hair and Makeup Equity Work Group include Yvette Nicole Brown, Tiffany Yvonne Cox, Michelle Hurd, Ezra Knight, Linda Powell and Sheryl Lee Ralph.

“Until our nation's leaders say, in no uncertain terms, that it is not acceptable to discriminate against someone based on their hair, private employers and institutions will continue to skirt the issue with ease,” George said.

The CROWN Act was created in 2018 by four Black women: Esi Eggleston Bracey, Unilever's chief operating officer and executive vice president of beauty and personal care; Kelli Richardson Lawson, the founder and CEO of DC marketing firm Joy Collective; Orlena Nwokah Blanchard, president and COO of Joy Collective and ABA Consulting founder and CEO Adjoo B. Asamoah.



Unilever's Esi Eggleston Bracey who created the CROWN Act in 2018 alongside Kelli Richardson Lawson, Orlena Nwokah Blanchard and Adjoo B. Asamoah.

