

# Diversity in Design (DID) Collaborative Launches its First Initiative in Detroit, Rallying Design Leaders Around its Inaugural Youth Design Fest

*Responding to the Overall Lack of Diversity in the Design Industry, "Designed By" Aims to Foster Awareness of Design as a Viable Career Path for High School Students*

**DETROIT, MI - March 18, 2022** — The [Diversity in Design \(DID\) Collaborative](#) presents its inaugural youth design fest, entitled *Designed By*, on Friday, Mar 18, 2022, at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan. Centered on five themes—form, space, identity, culture, and experience—*Designed By* highlights the pervasive nature of design and hopes to make the practice a clear career path for youth. Detroit students grades 9 through 12 hear from noted speakers, participate in small group discussions, and view design work across different typologies.

The day kicks off with a keynote address by Hip Hop Architect [Michael Ford](#), whose years of research, writing and lectures fuse his two passions, hip-hop culture and architecture. The keynote is followed by a series of round table discussions led by 30 Black design leaders from the collaborative and the Detroit community from the fields of Fashion, Product Design, Furniture Design, Architecture, Interior Design, UX Design, UI Design, Industrial Design, Urban Design, Graphic Design, Branding, and Typography. A panel conversation features Estelle Bailey-Babenzian, founder of Dream Awake, an interior architecture and experiential design studio and co-founder of clothing brand NOAH, with Neala Muniz, a 15-year-old member of the Detroit Institute of Arts Teen Council and a designer herself, and is moderated by The Ronin's Chief Strategy Officer Christian Banks. Design installations by select collaborative members such as Civilization, D-Ford, fuseproject, Ralph Appelbaum Associates, Studio O+A, Wolff Olins, and Work & Co bring to life different design disciplines.

Under the leadership of DID's Director Todd Palmer, *Designed By* is the first in a series of initiatives across impact areas of focus: raising awareness among youth of design as a profession; creating opportunities for university students interested in design to gain experience and thrive; and increasing opportunities for emerging designers, from internships and mentorships to professional development. Through Palmer's leadership and the efforts of the Collaborative, DID is committed to building actionable recruitment and retention practices that encompass: career-coaching, pooling collaborative job boards, the implementation of connector and networking programs, and the examination of industry-wide conditions that identify areas of improvement for Black designers and employees. Palmer brings 20+ years of cultural institutional design and non-profit knowledge to this initiative.

"DID's central area of focus is to grow the network of members to collaborate on projects that address the immediate issue of the lack of representation of Black creatives in design in the United States," says Todd Palmer. "It's exciting to see our member organizations bringing their knowledge and experience to the table to create new, joint partnerships and initiatives, such as *Designed By*."

DID launched to collaborate with industry partners in fostering equitable ecosystems for Black designers through a shared value system in the industry. Considering that such change requires commitment, strategic action, and financial support, DID is committed to measurable, effective systemic change. Initiated by MillerKnoll in 2021, DID launched with 19 members from independent design studios to large corporations across a myriad of design disciplines, from Adobe, Dropbox, and Wolff Olins to Gap Inc. and Levi Strauss & Co. Today DID announces 30 new members, including 3M Company, Airbnb, D-Ford, Johnson & Johnson Design, and VANS, for a total of 48 collaborators.

Detroit will be the first city to host *Designed By*, setting a precedent for communities in major cities about how to cultivate young talent. Detroit, a city of many firsts, is distinguished as a future city and leader of American innovation, influencing music, design, industry, and social progress. With a population of 78.3 percent Black residents, according to the 2021 census, Detroit exists as a representative of Black America's creative community. Detroit's palpable influence contributes to how the nation shapes more human-centered cities. Detroit is an ideal civic partner as DID hopes to energize the creation of mindful design that promotes a world with greater solutions for all.

Wes O'Haire, Product Design Manager at Dropbox and Founder of [Blacks Who Design](#) says, "As a hiring manager it's important to look where other companies aren't looking. Exploring different talent pools, colleges, training peer groups will be essential as we look at the future of our industry."

Upon exploring the demographics of the design workforce, MillerKnoll realized that full-time Black-identifying designers made up less than 5 percent<sup>1</sup> of the industry as a whole. Further, less than 10 percent<sup>2</sup> of Black students enroll in U.S. undergraduate design programs, indicating an accessibility problem in the field. This raises the argument that design careers must become more accessible to young Black people. For the Diversity in Design (DID) Collaborative, increasing representation of Black creatives in design means qualitative and substantive shifts must be made to business and sectoral conditions. This change cannot be attained with new hiring processes alone, but also changing how talent is developed at every level. DID's *Designed By* will engage young, aspiring designers and introduce youth and their families to the industry of design as a financially viable and creative career.

"It starts with awareness," says Alice Coleman, Experience Design Director at Detroit-based Rightpoint, "Kids can see doctors and



teachers in their daily life, but imagining being a designer is where it gets a bit more nebulous."

Beyond preparing students to pursue design careers at the high school level, the Diversity in Design (DID) Collaborative will launch a development program to bridge the gap between young adults and design businesses this fall. This summer, DID will establish this programming connecting member organizations to Black creative networks and partners. Immediately, DID commits to re-examining the field of design using investigative methodology and data collection to produce a "State of Design," which builds on survey assessments of conditions for Black creatives within DID member organizations. Designed By returns to Detroit in the Fall 2022 as a returning element of DID's partnership and activations within the Detroit community.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics derived from 2018 The US Census Bureau, ACS PUMS 1-Year Estimate. Statistics comprises those who listed their profession as: commercial and industrial designers, graphic designers, interior designers, landscape architects, other designers, urban & regional planners, web and digital interface designers, architects (except naval), or designers.

<sup>2</sup> Per a 2018 review of design colleges and universities by D'Wayne Edwards / Pensole Academy

<https://news.millerknoll.com/Diversity-in-design-did-collaborative-launches-its-first-initiative-in-detroit>