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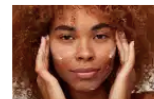
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FASHION / FASHION SCOOPS

Tracy Reese and Nonprofit Nest Launch Support for Detroit's Underserved Creatives

"This is an opportunity to amplify Black voices and the voices of indigenous and people of color in general, to support immigrants," the fashion designer said.

By **Ryma Chikhoun** on June 30, 2020



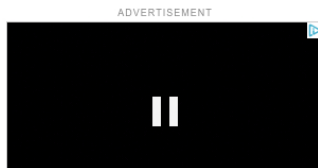
Tracy Reese
Courtesy

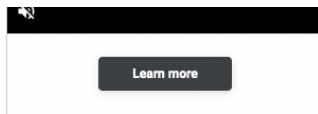
"It was startling to see how little Black Detroiters have equity in some of this new investment that has been coming to Detroit as part of the city's resurrection, if you will," said **Tracy Reese**.

Though she's lived in New York City for more than 30 years, the **fashion** designer is a native of Detroit, where she's been quarantined since March.

"It made me look at Detroit in a new way, and the politics of how programming naturally rolls out and how funding doesn't always end up showing up in the places where you think it's most needed," she continued, adding that she's been spending more time in the city since purchasing a residence there three years ago.

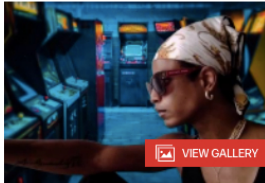
Alongside Nest — a nonprofit whose mission is to create a more holistic environment for female entrepreneurs — Reese hopes to create change while fostering local talent in her hometown with the help of the nonprofit's Makers United initiative.





"Craft is often considered to be the second largest employer of women in emerging markets," said Nest's executive director Rebecca van Bergen, who founded the organization in 2006.

Nest also works to preserve craftsmanship, while increasing workforce inclusivity. With Makers United, which launched three years ago in Birmingham, Ala., the focus is on improving diversity and assisting those who are often confronted with obstacles when looking to expand their businesses.



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"Detroit is predominantly Black, and they also have a significant immigrant population, both of which come with craft, artistic, art activism heritages," van Bergen said. "There's a disconnect between existing resources not ending up in the hands of makers, particularly people of color and immigrants."

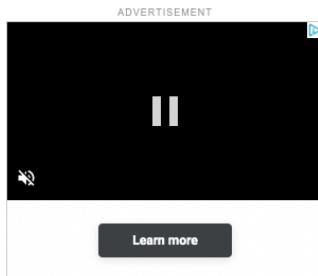
"People who find out about these initiatives and opportunities, they're often white and highly educated," added Reese, a Nest board member. "They can write a grant proposal and fill out numerous applications. The Black community is much slower to realize that these opportunities exist largely for them. I want to be a part of [helping] people of color actually benefit from some of these wonderful opportunities. That's Nest's mission in Detroit. We're on the same page and want to reach the same audience."

There's a wide assortment of talent in the city, she said. There are sewers, textile creators, print designers and jewelry makers. There's also an emphasis on **sustainability**, like the production of naturally dyed, organic products, for example.

"When I think of my mom, who was a huge sewer and crafter, and so many of her friends, I don't think that they realize that they could achieve some degree of economic independence through their own talents and crafts," shared Reese. "Nest opens that thinking."

The nonprofit's objectives are closely aligned with her goals for Hope for Flowers, a clothing brand that uses ethically sourced materials. She launched a direct-to-consumer site for the label on June 1, as she continues to manage her namesake line as well.

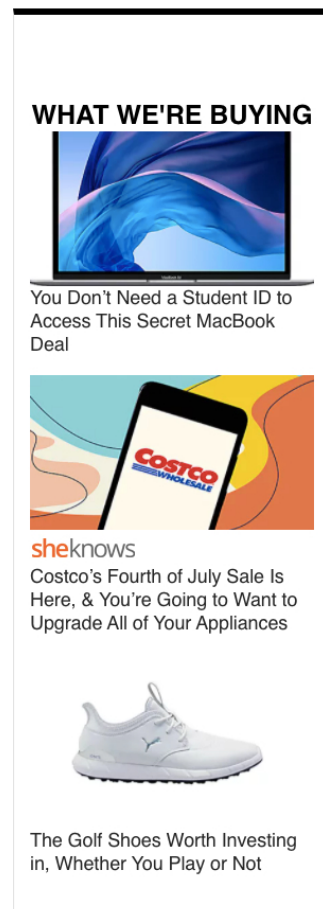
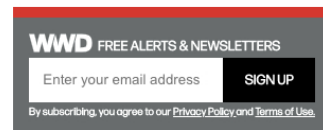
"The work is getting done," she said of working in the current climate. "It's not as impossible and scary as we thought it might be. I had a buyer meeting yesterday and had to share my screen and talk about new styles, and they were very responsive. I haven't had to do that before. I'm a bit of a dinosaur when it comes to technology, so it's forced me to embrace more facets of it and keep learning."



While the 56-year-old left Detroit for New York City in the Eighties to pursue her **fashion** career and attend The New School's Parsons School of Design, she's adjusted to running her business from Michigan since being back.

"Nothing against New York, but the main thing I miss about it right now is my friends," she said. "I don't think I'm tied to the city for my work. I have found that I definitely don't need to be in New York to design my collection, to even make my samples and do probably 90 percent of my work of running my business."

A benefit of Makers United, she added, is that it encourages local commerce: "We're



SOCIAL STUDIES



reducing carbon footprint by working right here and in the U.S., serving our own communities instead of everything having to be imported.”

Key findings in Birmingham note that there’s a lack of community and human resources for makers, who wear multiple hats as both artisans and entrepreneurs, according to Nest. The initiative is now in Austin and San Antonio, Tex., and plans to expand to St. Louis and New York City’s Garment District later this year. In Detroit, they’re currently “mapping” the community and connecting with local institutions in collaboration with Gusto Partners, a platform that services small businesses. They’ll then work to create workshops and programs. The endeavor is also a partnership with home decor chain West Elm, Same Sky Foundation, a resource for underserved women, and Bloomberg Philanthropies, Michael Bloomberg’s charity.

“This is an opportunity to amplify Black voices and the voices of indigenous and people of color in general, to support immigrants,” Reese said. “It’s difficult to be an immigrant right now. It’s difficult to be a Black person. It’s difficult to be an indigenous person or a person of color. When we talk about **Black Lives Matter** or human rights in general, there’s no better time to shine a light on all of the beautiful art and crafts created by people of all races and largely undertaken by women.

“There’s been so much pain attached to this moment, deaths and illnesses, all the injustice and unequal treatment in health care, all the systemic racism and bias that’s being revealed, especially by the latest events and pandemic,” she continued. “I’ve taken it as a time of reflection and to be crystal clear about my mission and what I’m doing with my time every day.”

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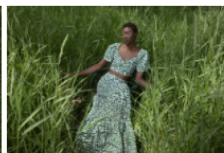
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A graphic titled "Data Brand Value" showing various charts and logos of brands like Apple, Google, Facebook, and McDonald's.

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