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“Project Runway” Season Five fan favorite Korto Momolu may not have won the big prize, but the designer definitely has a bright future in front of her. Her vibrant designs have already gotten her a wave of positive press and celebrity endorsements, and this weekend, she’s producing the fashion show at the "Tom Joyner Family Reunion" in Orlando, Florida.

But as a Black designer, Momolu -- like her Seasons One and Three counterparts, Kara Saun and Mychael Knight -- is still a rarity in fashion. In fact, despite the exposure they’ve gained from “Project Runway,” Blacks in fashion remain largely on the sidelines in an industry that is still segregated. But due to pioneering individuals who have managed to break through, openings have been created for Momolu, Saun, Knight and others who want to pursue their dreams in fashion.

Here we celebrate 10 of fashion's most unsung, yet significant, Black icons.

**DONYALE LUNA**

Black models were unheard of in fashion until the heyday of Detroit native Donyale Luna, born Peggy Anne Freeman. She is credited as the first Black supermodel, appearing on the cover of British Vogue in 1966. An illustration of Luna was the cover of Harper's Bazaar in 1965. The slim, 5'10 model appeared in several Andy Warhol films and in films by Fellini and Otto Preminger. She was the lead of the film "Salome," released in 1972, and modeled for some of the top designers in the '60's. Sadly, Luna spent much of her short life denying her African-American heritage and died of a drug overdose in Rome at age 34. Her daughter, Dream Cazzaniga is an artist living in Italy.

**ANDRE LEON TALLEY**

He may be best known to young people as the man who put Oscar winner Jennifer Hudson in that "Star Trek" shrug on Oscar Night, but he's also the preeminent African-American fashion authority. As the editor-at-large at *American Vogue*, Talley, 59, has had a literal and figurative front-row seat to fashion for almost three decades. Born in North Carolina, Talley worked his way up through the fashion world, eventually coming to the attention of former *Vogue* editor-in-chief Diana Vreeland, who became his mentor. An early and vocal supporter of President Barack Obama, Talley introduced Michelle Obama to designer Jason Wu, who famously designed The First Lady's inaugural ball gown.

**WILLI SMITH**

The late designer Willi Smith may have been the most successful mainstream Black designer ever. In his '80's heyday, his Williwear line sold over $25 million annually (and if adjusted for today's dollars, would undoubtedly be much more). The openly gay Smith was born in Philadelphia and earned two scholarships to attend the Parsons School of Design. He won both the prestigious Coty Award for women's fashion in 1983 and the Cutty Sark Award for men's

fashion as well in 1985. Easy-going, inexpensive sportswear was Smith's trademark. His casual suit design for groom Edwin Schlossberg at his wedding to Caroline Kennedy made headlines, but he remained as popular as ever among commoners. Smith's sister, Toukie, was a well-known model in the 80's. Sadly, Smith died of pneumonia and the parasitic disease shigella in 1989 at age 39.

**TRACY REESE**

Designer Tracy Reese is definitely an anomaly in the fashion industry: A mainstream female black designer who's managed to maintain her line for over a decade. Not only that, she's now a board member of the powerful Council For Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), fashion's governing body, and she has an eponymous New York City clothing store. Reese also designs a home and footwear collection. Not bad for a girl from Detroit, Michigan. (Like another Detroit homegirl made good, Reese attended Cass Tech, Diana Ross's alma mater.) Reese attended Parsons School Of Design and started working for designer Martine Sitbon before eventually starting her own line. After a few fits and stops, Reese hit on the winning formula that she maintains today.

**SEAN COMBS**

Yes, the world knows him as Diddy for his TV shows, his baby mamas, his red carpet appearances and his attention whoring, but Combs is also the designer who brought hip-hop style to the mainstream. Now in operation for over a decade, Combs' Sean John line was popular in both the streets and with his peers, earning him the 2004 CFDA Award for Menswear Designer of the Year. Since then, Combs has added fragrances to his repertoire, and Sean John has a flagship store on Fifth Avenue. Russell Simmons' Phat Farm and other urban designers, including Karl Kani, Mecca, Akademiks, Rocawear and more, were synonymous with street chic, but only the tireless self-promoter Combs could take it to a whole other level.

**BETHANN HARDISON**

Bethann Hardison has held many jobs in the fashion industry, but the one she'll probably be best known for is activist. Hardison has long been an outspoken opponent of the racism in the fashion industry and has publicly advocated for more representation of Black models on the

runway. Smith got her start as a model for Willi Smith, but since 1984, she's run Bethann Management, which handled most of the Black models in the industry, as well as her son, actor Kadeem Hardison. Model Tyson Beckford was one of her biggest clients, signing a lucrative contract with Ralph Lauren under her tutelage. In 1988, Hardison formed the Black Girls Coaltion with Iman, and they and others continued to fight for more opportunities for people of color. "I'd like to think I'm here to make a difference," Hardison told Vibe Magazine. "I never expected to make big money at what I do. But in terms of respect and longevity, I can make a difference."

**AUDREY SMALTZ**

Audrey Smaltz has been involved in fashion for almost 50 years. The one-time model and Ebony Fashion Fair coordinator has run The Ground Crew, a fashion show production company, since 1977. She's earned the respect of prominent designers like Oscar De La Renta, Vera Wang and Carolina Herrera for bringing organization and professionalism to one of the most important parts of any fashion line: The fashion show. At the time she started The Ground Crew, hiring experienced dressers and crew for fashion shows was a novel idea, but now Smaltz' company is very much so in demand. (She's coordinated BET's "Rip the Runway" fashion show, among other projects.) At 72, Smaltz is as busy as ever, continuing to keep fashion flowing from her unique perch behind the scenes of some of the world's greatest artists.

**PAT MCGRATH**

British-born makeup artist Pat McGrath says she got her start in the clubs of her native London, doing her own makeup to look as hot and stylish as possible. Her self-stated "obsession" with makeup led to her discovery on a London street by a TV show host who loved her makeup. Though she has no formal training, McGrath has become one of the most popular makeup artists in fashion, working with photographers like Annie Leibowitz and celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Madonna and Jennifer Lopez. Photographer Steven Meisel has been a constant collaborator. McGrath is now global creative design director for Proctor and Gamble, so it's safe to say she's the Black woman with the most influence on what lip, nail and eye colors will be hottest next.

## PATRICK ROBINSON

If you've walked into The Gap recently, you've probably noticed one huge change -- a complete overhaul of the jeans lines, with better, more updated cuts and pockets, as well as upgraded denim quality. Blame or congratulate Patrick Robinson, The Gap's executive vice-president of design, for the new look of Gap overall. While successful, The Gap stores had fallen into a little bit of a rut until Robinson took over. The former head of his own design line, Robinson knew he had to make the stores current to keep the customers he had and potentially gain new ones. As someone who worked with both Giorgio Armani and Perry Ellis, Robinson was up to the task. Because of the global reach of his audience and the staying power of the Gap brand, Robinson is arguably now one of the most influential Black designers ever.

## STEPHEN BURROWS

Designer Stephen Burrows was one of the most influential fashion designers of the '70's working with Henri Bendel, one of New York's most prestigious fashion boutiques. The New Jersey native grew up making clothes with his grandmother, and after graduating from NYC's prestigious Fashion Institute of Technology, he opened his own boutique. Through Bendel's, Burrows gained the notice of the celebrity world and began developing a clientele that would support him both at Bendel's and with his own line. He won a Coty Award, and in 1973, was one of five American designers chosen for a fashion show to represent global fashion at Versailles in Paris. Designer Mark Jacobs counts Burrows as an influence on his own work. In 2006, the CFDA awarded him the Board of Director's Special Tribute Award.

## ROBIN GIVHAN

Robin Givhan, the fashion editor at *The Washington Post*, is a rarity indeed. Not only is she a Black woman writing about fashion for a major mainstream newspaper, she's also a Pulitzer Prize winner for her criticism, the only fashion journalist to win the prestigious award. Givhan explores fashion (and inevitably, culture) in her
*Post*
column, putting her in the cat bird's seat now that Michelle Obama is in the White House. Givhan's notoriously blunt criticism has not given the First Lady a pass, as her recent column on Mrs. Obama's choice of shorts on vacation proves. African-American fashion writers with influence are a rare breed, but Givhan is holding the spot down nicely.