Detroit, a widely known city in a slow decline, has been in a process of renewal that retells the cautionary story of capitalism. The Nice Outfit installation in downtown Detroit, a collaboration between assistant professor Anya Sirota with her architecture studio Akoaki and the Detroit-based artist Olayami Dabls, challenges the commonly asked question of how art and architecture can produce a changing image in the city in order to positively impact communal experience. Built within a month at the Detroit African Bead Museum and reconstructed in Harmonie Park for the Carr Center’s Summer in the Park concert series, the project brought together a diverse group of people both in its creation and for the installation. Nice Outfit is composed of 9 triangular figures or ‘architectural primitives’ designed by the architecture team using simple ingrained American wood construction. Select surfaces are decorated by Dabls, who creates heavily doused effects using layered paint and broken mirrors. The combined techniques make Nice Outfit both structural and symbolic: a backdrop for performances and events in the park and a public reminder of Detroit’s important connection to African culture. Experiencing the installation, intensified by a funk concert at the opening, was stirring for many people, especially Detroit residents who have felt excluded by the redevelopment increase in downtown and midtown. The image of Nice Outfit will continue to tell the story of collaboration, diversity, and beauty beyond the short life span of the project.
Nice Outfit

Ashley Daniels, researcher
Anya Sirota, mentor
Design Studio Akoaki & Artist Olayami Dabls, design collaborative
Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

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ABSTRACT

The Nice Outfit installation in downtown Detroit challenges the commonly asked question of how art and architecture can produce a changing image in the city in order to positively impact communal experience.

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At the opening, Funk music performances featuring the famous Parliament Funkadelic bassist, T Money Green, flute player Gall Soo Hoo and guitarist Andre Fox were accompanied by contemporary rap artists. The programming illustrated how bringing together music and architecture can activate public space and unify diverse groups of people.

Nice Outfit opened on July 2nd in Harmonie Park and will remain on view through the end of September. The installation serves as a scenographic stage for the Carr Center’s Summer in the park concert series. Performances every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 6PM.

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