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St. Thomian Carmen Nibbs Showcases Madras Fashion Dolls at Orlando Science Center

Dolls in Madras Fashions' Exhibit Celebrates Caribbean Culture in Central Florida

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St. Thomian Carmen Nibbs stands near her "Dolls in Madras Fashions" exhibits at the Orlando Science Center – part of ART SPEAKS: A Celebration of Black Artists, showcasing talents from Central Florida.

St. Thomian Carmen Nibbs, an artist and doll stylist, is currently showcasing a collection of madras fashions at the Orlando Science Center – part of ART SPEAKS: A Celebration of Black Artists, showcasing talents from Central Florida.

Ms. Nibbs' exhibit "Dolls in Madras Fashions – Cultural, Traditional and Modern" has garnered significant attention for its distinctive "Barbie"- sized dolls dressed in clothing that celebrates Caribbean culture, fashion and the region's vibrant fabrics, creating a visually stunning and culturally rich experience.

The dolls are on proud display at the Science Center's Fusion STEAM Gallery, which attracts approximately 700,000 visitors annually. The exhibit features a total of seven dolls, each telling a unique story. Attendees are first introduced to the Moko Jumbies, cultural icons of the USVI and other Caribbean countries. Next, they are able to feast their eyes on "Three Generations of Traditional Madras Dolls", a display which captures the essence of familial connections.

As they move through the exhibit, viewers are then able to appreciate the versatility of madras, with a doll dressed in traditional attire next to one styled in a more modern fashion, crafted from the official USVI madras pattern.

Madras fabric, both from the territory and elsewhere, takes center stage in this exhibit, showcasing the fabric's extensive global history rooted in colonialism, trade, culture and tradition. Originating from Madrasputnam, India in the early 1500s, the fabric has been woven into the heart of Caribbean communities.

Ms. Nibbs, a graduate of Charlotte Amalie High School and Temple University in Philadelphia, runs a business centered around her passion for doll styling – Laylee M. Doll Clothes – established in 2015. She sells her designs through e-commerce platform Etsy and has garnered a following of thousands through her social media platforms.

The doll designer attributes her skill at sewing to her late grandmother, Mabel Nibbs of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, who was a talented seamstress. Acknowledging the challenge of sourcing the specialty fabric in Central Florida, Ms. Nibbs expressed gratitude to friends still residing on St. Thomas for ensuring a steady supply of the exclusive territorial Madras, as well as other prints.

The "Dolls in Madras Fashions" exhibit is scheduled to run from January 13 to April 4.