

## **Nataal Media: The magazine embracing diverse narratives**

*Co-founder Helen Jennings gives a unique insight into the award-winning digital platform that strives for diverse storytelling.*

In a global media landscape where representation matters more than ever before, Nataal Media stands as a beacon of hope for increased inclusivity in the fashion industry. ‘Inclusivity’ and ‘diversity’ are more than just buzzwords and check marks for Nataal, but core principles that allow them to showcase historically underrepresented voices. “The African fashion industry in a commercial sense has been small and localised for a very long time”, editorial director Helen Jennings rightly states. For fashion creators who have longed for representation and publicity, their prayers are rightfully being answered by Nataal, as they seek to transgress African talent.

The platform, launched in late 2015, was established by Jennings and a group of like-minded individuals, who felt the African creative scene was ready to take over due to the mass of young talent. “They were filled with creativity but still no multimedia platform dedicated to them”, the intersections of heritage, race and identity were all relatively unexplored by digital media prints before Nataals’ creative stories. This left a gap in this ever-needing market that founders Alassane, Hemming and Jennings filled.

“Africa is often being seen as a source of inspiration or a dramatic backdrop”, the former editor of *Arise* continues, “it’s their revolutionary output that we’re here to amplify”. Jennings brings much-needed expertise to the revolutionary platform, having contributed articles to *Vogue* and *Grazia*, consulting with major brands, teaching and even becoming an author. In praising her previous works, Jennings gushes about Nataal’s first digital issue, a collaboration with Bianca Saunders, a menswear specialist designer based in London with Jamaican roots. Since the issue, Saunders has increased in popularity and was given the much-needed publicity boost by Nataal, who has likewise excelled. Print issues are also valued just as much even though they’re not produced as much as digital issues, “they’re there to be cherished... contributors deserve that space to shine and bring their A-game.”

The commitment to elevating voices that have often been marginalised and overlooked before sets Nataal apart, although they do encounter issues, Jennings explains. “Being labelled as an African designer and not just a designer is resented by many”, as being solely known for just your origin is being categorised as overly restrictive, which sadly makes many designers disassociate with culture-driven innovation and continue creating contemporary designs, although Nataal are trying to change this expectation. “We have a way to go before the North and East African designers have the same attention that those in Western countries get”, Jennings continues, “You could probably say the same for the Caribbean designers”. Small-scale production is an issue for these creators who aren’t in the spotlight as if these talents aren’t commercially successful, they don’t stay in the headlines for very long. Although, Nataal are handling these issues very well, singlehandedly, as their inspiring content is a force for positive change.

“I think we’re in a good place... and it’s a very different landscape to even a decade ago”, the global industry is increasingly communicating African and the diasporas’ successes and allowing for boundless possibilities thanks to platforms like Nataal. “The continent breathes freshness into the industry”, Jennings expresses with a set of incredible designs on display. This ‘freshness’ is indeed apparent, and continues to strive, one brilliant story at a time.

