

Culture Couture

Like a pirate, my father returns home with overseas treasure. Necklaces like artifacts, beaded chains to hang around my waist and earrings made of shell strung together to form intricate shapes. I've always admired the Liberian women in my life for their ability to pattern mix with ease. To combine colors like kaliedoscopes with lappas, and headscarves. It wasn't until I attended my first Afropunk that I deepened my practice of self expression through style, and showcased my culture through dress.

Afropunk is an annual arts festival that celebrates the alternative arts scene that grew from the underground culture of the African diaspora. It was developed by James Spooner and Mathew Morgan in 2005. The early festivals gave a new take on cultural and musical engagement. Overtime, Afropunk became something akin to a fashion show, a vibrant display of eclectic fashion. When I scanned my ticket and passed through the event gates, it felt to me like I was entering a ball. The fashion was grandiose, and bold, as if royals gathered in the center of the motherland. There was everything from cyber punk to trad-goth, and of course, afro-punk. Despite the wide variety of styles, it was clear where inspirations came from. Headscarves draped over like gown trains and afros adorned like crowns. Across fashions, there were traces of cultural inspirations, references to Africa; remaining prevalent by choice of styling and accessories. Ever since that experience, I've viewed the art of accessorizing as a means of giving hints of your inner world to those on the outside.

Living thousands of miles away from Liberia, I cherish the little things that make me feel closer to my culture. I've fallen in love with braiding charms into my hair. I've fallen in love with layering wooden bracelets until they form bangles. I've fallen in love with accessing parts of myself through accessories. I've fallen in love with carrying jewelry like they're seashells from the shore. Even if you take them home from the beach, you'll always remember where they came from.