



Rice modeling "In Your Eyes," the most time consuming look from his collection.

Escape to Planet 9

UNA Apparel Design student Kennedy Rice takes streetwear to a new universe

story and photography by *Samantha Vise*

Some talents are formed through meticulous practice, some are found naturally. For 22 year-old Kennedy Rice, his talent for fashion designing has been with him his whole life – he just needed to discover it. Rice is a senior at the University of North Alabama majoring in Apparel Design.

Rice was born and raised in the nation's capital, Washington D.C. Although he has not always been drawn into the world of design, he fell in love with fashion at a young age. He grew up with a brother and three sisters, and they influenced his love for fashion. He jokingly recalled his siblings criticizing his outfits and telling him he "couldn't leave the house looking like that." While Rice's family played a large part in his love for fashion, music is ultimately what reeled him in. Alicia Keys' music in particular.

"Originally I was very utilitarian in my approach to fashion – clothes are just clothes, they have a function and it's not a big deal, you know? Then I discovered Alicia Keys and I wanted to do everything she did, so I started dressing like her," said Rice. "That got me into celebrity fashion and then from there, I really just fell in love with it."

Rice moved to Huntsville in 2010, which is where most of his family lived. He graduated from high school in 2018 and began attending UNA in the fall of that year. At first, Rice wanted to do Forensic Anthropology and he was majoring in Criminal Justice. He wanted to be in the FBI, but quickly realized his major was not where he belonged. After speaking with a friend about the Fashion Merchandising and Design Program at UNA, he decided to take FASH 322 - Visual Presentation.

"I would come to class and sit down and I just knew I was with my people. We were talking about Stella McCartney, sustainability, fashion trends and visual displays. I just felt so ... at home," Rice said. "I'm not in a class full of people I don't care about, I'm in a class full of people like me."

He quickly changed his major to Fashion Merchandising and Design with a concentration in Apparel Design.

"I originally wanted to be a stylist," Rice said. "I took Beginning Sewing Construction and I just kind of discovered a hidden talent. My grandmother got me my first sewing machine, and I spent all of quarantine learning how to sew."

The first time he had ever touched a sewing machine was in his beginning sewing class, but Rice found that he was a natural. He designed a full kimono and pants set for his final project in that class. After that, Rice knew that designing was what he was meant to do. He became one of three students to be the first in the Apparel Design program at UNA.

"Originally I was like, I can do styling and if it doesn't fit I can tailor it for my clients or if they need something specific to go with the look I can make it. Then I felt that being a stylist, for me at least, would be sitting on the sidelines," Rice said. "I'd be going to all these shows for big designers and I'd be like 'wow I should have made this.' Instead of sitting back and watching people do the stuff that I want to do, why don't I just go all the way and be a designer?"

Rice continued his education in fashion, broadening his knowledge on subjects such as draping, fabric sculpting and pattern making. With every step of the way, he improved his craft and felt more and more at ease with designing. He excelled through classes and turned out showstopper after showstopper.

"After Advanced Apparel Construction, I knew I wanted to be a designer – I had this in the bag. After that I was like yeah, I think I can do this. Draping, too, was really an awakening," Rice said. "I loved being able to physically sculpt the design. I love sculptural fashion. It was very hands-on, and it was just like: I want to be a designer. I want my hands on everything. I can't just be on the sidelines, no one will do it the exact way I want to do it, so let me just do it myself."

Sitting on the sidelines has never been

in the cards for Rice. His style matches his extroverted personality, and he remarked that people complement his outfits wherever he goes. He refers to his style as streetwear and tomboy chic, and he likes to call himself an "apparel architect."

So far, he has designed one collection: "Temporary Highs in the Violet Skies." It is based off of the album of the same name by Snoh Alegra, touching again on Rice's love for music. The collection is modern streetwear with loud, dramatic twists. The collection has six looks.

"The way music makes me feel is how I want to make other people feel through fashion," Rice said.

He listened to the album religiously after it came out in 2021 until just recently. He loves the world it created and how the album was presented. Rice wanted to capture the album's essence in his clothing.

He is working on building his brand, "Planet 9," and hopes to open an online boutique soon. Unfortunately, getting all the materials needed is incredibly expensive and stressful, especially when doing it alone. Rice hopes to have a team working for him in the future when he has

his own company, but for now, he is focusing on getting his feet wet.

Rice has showcased his collection in two different fashion shows: the Shoals Designer Showcase and the Alabama Fashion Alliance's Style Tank Competition. Despite losing to a professor in the competition, Rice stood by his work and looks forward to the future. He has his sights set on bigger and better opportunities and he knows his work is capable of achieving great things.

"I love the whole concept of leaving Earth, it's always resonated with me and anything outer space [related]. The planet is not a vibe right now, especially for our generation. We're left with all these things that suck: politics, climate change, racism," Rice said. "It's a hot mess, so what if we just went to a different planet, which is 'Planet 9.' It's supposed to represent cloud nine, but *we're not limited to just a cloud*. We have our own world where we can be who we are."

-Kennedy Rice



Rice in the studio working on something new.



Rice modeling his look, "Violet Skies" which was inspired by the album his collection is named after.

"Right now I could go anywhere, especially applying to jobs. I actually just applied to an Alexander McQueen position in London. I really want to work for Schiaparelli in Paris, that's my dream job," Rice said. "My brother will send me their stuff all the time and be like 'you literally thought of this.' They need to hire me!"

After graduation in May, Rice plans to move to Philadelphia because it's more affordable than New York City, but still close enough so that he could get the benefits of living near the Big Apple, and Philadelphia has style as well. Plus, he would be closer to his home of Washington D.C. Rice is open to moving anywhere – except Australia because he doesn't do insects or "things that can murder" him.

"My dream job is to have my own ... everything. My own studio in New York, my own apartment and my own team. Having other people working with you is so important. Seeing what other people are capable of makes me think of how much better my ideas would be if it wasn't just me," Rice said. "The diversity contributes so much to the overall success of creativity in the brand. Having my own team would be priceless."

Rice is eager to become part of a big city, especially one that is a fashion capital. Although he cherishes his time spent in the south, Rice is ready to spread his wings and join a higher end fashion community.

"There are some good things and there are some bad things [about southern fashion]. I don't hate southern fashion – I love denim so, so much. But when I think of southern fashion I think of dusty riding boots, which I'm not a fan of," Rice said. "I think the south is definitely a little bit behind, especially when you see what's going on everywhere else in terms of fashion."

Yet, Rice remarked that he enjoys the hospitality of the south and the coziness of the fashion. He appreciates that he can go out in a cardigan and sweats on a lazy day and not be judged, unlike in Los Angeles with their "boujee" style. Rice does not conform to southern trends, though.

"My style doesn't really fit in here. When I was growing up I always kinda leaned towards whatever my sisters said was trending, but other than that me and my family don't really conform to the southern trends," Rice said. "I dress how I dress and I like what I like. I'm not going to diminish or water myself down to fit into any kind of box."

His individuality has played into the creation of his brand, "Planet 9." Rice has been working on the brand for the past couple years, and he finished it in the fall of 2022. It was showcased for the first time in the Shoals Designer Showcase, the student-led fashion show hosted by the Fashion Merchandising and Design Program at UNA.

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"I joke that I want to be the next Virgil Abloh, but I do want to be the first Kennedy Rice. I want my brand to be one of these things that doesn't die off after I do. I want it to be up there," Rice said.

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Rice modeling his look, "Lost You."



Rice modeling his look, "Indecisive."