



BEYOND THE RED CARPET: ICONIC AWARDS AND ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS

INSIDE THE DESIGN AND CREATION OF SOCIETY AWARDS, MAKER OF THE WORLD’S MOST CELEBRATED AWARDS

BY LIZ BERTRAND

This December, visitors to Mint Museum Uptown can walk the red carpet for a first-of-its-kind exhibition that showcases the art and craft behind award miniatures.

Beyond the Red Carpet: Iconic Awards and Artistic Collaborations, on view December 1, 2023–February 11, 2024, presents a close look at more than 150 awards designed for the world’s most celebrated competitions, prestigious brands, and discerning clients.

The exhibition highlights the exquisite creations of Society Awards, the premiere designer and manufacturer of luxury custom awards.

“We’ve been fortunate enough to have collaborations with some of the most famous artists and brands in the world,” says Society Awards Founder and CEO David Moritz, whose company is among the fastest growing in the United States.

ABOVE: Kehinde Wiley x MTV VMAs Moon Person. RIGHT: David Moritz, founder and CEO of Society Awards. OPPOSITE (from left): Juno Awards, American Music Awards, and Golden Globe Awards. Photos courtesy of Anna Stallmann Communications



Art as aspiration

Since 2007, the company has teamed up with world-renowned artists like Kehinde Wiley and Jeff Koons, fashion and jewelry designers like David Yurman, esteemed brands like Nambé and Baccarat, and iconic organizations ranging from the Emmys and American Music Awards to MTV and YouTube.

Moritz knows people will be excited to see the best-known awards up close, but he thinks the real surprise will be in glimpsing the variety of ways our culture honors achievement.

From the American Welding Society and the Gies Editorial Award for dental editors and journalists to the Crushies that honor the world’s best beer marketing and design to “Dancing with the Stars” and the Video Game Awards, people can see themselves and the dreams of possibility in these objects.

“We tend to be aware of the awards that have celebrity recipients and ... have publicity behind their program,” Moritz says. “But in every field of human endeavor there is that top honor, where if you work in that industry or you’re associated with that field, you’re aware of it. And winning that is the most important thing that you can do in your career and potentially in your life.”

Art as inspiration

Behind each design and collaboration is a story. Take, for example, the MTV Video Music Awards. For decades, VMA trophies have used MTV’s iconic moon person, inspired by the first astronaut landing on the moon. To mark its 40th anniversary in 2021, the VMAs engaged artist Kehinde Wiley to create a limited-edition version. Society Awards helped bring the vision to life. The special version is only the third in VMA history designed by an outside artist and the first by an African American artist. It includes botanical vines wrapped around the moon person’s legs and arms — a motif also used in some of Wiley’s current portraiture work.

As reported by “Rolling Stone,” the design symbolized inclusivity and diversity, with each vine and leaf having a different historic relevance.

“I think any celebration that we can have of these awards as true works of art, which they are, benefits all the parties involved,” Moritz says, “and elevates the milieu of super iconic and important awards as art ... and as a part of pop culture and a part of our cultural heritage.”

Having an artist at the “stratospheric level” of Kehinde Wiley (who also painted President Barack Obama’s official portrait for the National Portrait Gallery and whose work is within the Mint’s permanent collection) elevates a design even higher, he says, to the realm of fine art.



Award design inspiration can also come from significant works of the past, as with the licensed, individually numbered reproductions of Alexander Calder’s stabile *Elephant Walking* (1942) used for the National Magazine Awards. The awards, which honor outstanding achievement in print and online publications, are popularly known as “The Ellies” because of its distinctive prize.

Other times, Society Awards collaborates to create a completely new piece of art, as it did for the YouTube Creator Awards, capturing the essence and excitement of a new cultural phenomenon.

“It’s art because of what it means and how badly people want it,” Moritz says, “and of course what it is — it’s beautiful and it’s iconic. And this to me is very interesting. The interplay, how we’re walking on the lines, blurring them, crossing them.”

An evolving company

As its designs and clientele continue to evolve, so does Society Awards. In 2020, Moritz and his young family relocated from Manhattan to Charlotte in search of more green space, better weather, and a different pace of life.

“We looked all around the country and settled on Charlotte as the ideal spot,” he says. “And then once we planted ourselves here, we realized that it was a great place to do business and ... to expand our company.”

Society Awards is now headquartered in South End’s historic Atherton Mill with a second office space underway at The Line.

“I appreciate it every day,” Moritz says. “... I’m sitting in an office where I can see trees just outside the windows, filtered light rays coming down. It’s gorgeous and feels good to step outside and enjoy that sunshine, to appreciate how beautiful this area is.”

Liz Bertrand is a Charlotte-based feature writer and editor who has a love of the arts in all forms.