

## New Views

*A film exploring the complex relationship between black women and European beauty standards is one of several provocative offerings at the Afrikana Independent Film Festival*

by Samantha Willis

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"Black is beautiful" was more than a catchphrase. It became a full-blown movement and lifestyle in the 1960s, when African-Americans used it to bolster self-confidence and combat negative reflections of themselves in the media. Fifty years later in Richmond, a young filmmaker is taking up the mantle with a film that will screen at Afrikana Independent Film Festival's first multi-day event.

"Being a black woman comes in all different complexions, shapes and sizes," says filmmaker Alvalia Pemberton, 22. "You are no more or less of a black woman because of your complexion or hair texture."

Pemberton's three-minute film "... still" explores African-American beauty standards that were historically influenced by European norms. The film's poster gives a clue about its content: Pictured is a black-and-white image of a hot comb, which, for generations, women of color used to manipulate their curly and kinky strands into a straighter texture.

Pemberton, a native of the Bronx in New York City and a recent Virginia Commonwealth University graduate, says personal experiences inspired her to create the film.

"I started becoming interested in the chemical processes that black women perform on our bodies, to make ourselves 'more acceptable' and 'more beautiful' — which I know I struggled with growing up."

Her film, "... still," was screened at The Byrd Theatre in May 2015 and shown at the Big Muddy Film Festival in Chicago in March. It will be just one of the works by local and nationally renowned filmmakers shown at the Afrikana Independent Film Festival, set for Sept. 15 to 18. See [afrikanafilmfestival.org](http://afrikanafilmfestival.org).

"You can expect screenings that range from experimental micro-shorts to traditional narratives and documentaries hosted at various venues throughout the city, like The Valentine and 1708 Gallery," says Enjoli Moon, Afrikana's founder and creative director. "There will also be artist talks, happy hours and after parties."

Hip-hop producer and rapper 9th Wonder (Patrick Denard Douthit), an adjunct professor at Duke University who has collaborated with Jay Z, Drake and Idris Elba, will screen a film and give an artist's talk. Grammy-winning jazz pianist and producer Robert Glasper will give an artist's talk on composing the score for "Miles Ahead," the 2016 biopic about jazz legend Miles Davis, co-written and directed by, Don Cheadle, who also portrays Davis in the film.

Since its founding two years ago, Moon says the organization's purpose has outgrown pure entertainment.

"Richmond has become a city dedicated to creative expansion," she says. "I believe true creativity requires a variety of voices at the table. Through Afrikana, I hope people understand the importance of the voice of the black creative class in our city. I also hope that people walk away with a greater understanding of the full spectrum of the global black experience."

Afrikana Independent Film Festival

Byrd Theatre

Alvalia Pemberton

Big Muddy Film Festival

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