

URBAN MILWAUKEE

In art, the butterfly endures as an eternal symbol of redemption, rebirth and renewal. Fashion designer, artist and business owner Brema Brema has claimed this symbol for his own, and with it has catapulted his brand, Unfinished Legacy, to the forefront of creative production in Milwaukee. On July 8, Unfinished Legacy opened its flagship store at 201 N. Water St. in the Historic Third Ward.

The store builds on the national reputation won by the Unfinished Legacy brand created by childhood friends and partners Brema and Jene Tate, with an ever-fresh skate and streetwear aesthetic that has been commissioned for clothing lines like Levi's, the Milwaukee Bucks, and has appeared within the pages of Vogue Magazine. The owners are not yet 30 years old.

Brema, a refugee from Sudan, was raised in Kenya and immigrated to Milwaukee with support from the United Nations. He and Tate, a Milwaukee native, began their collaboration at TRUE Skool, an after-school program whose mission is to "engage, empower & educate youth, families and communities through transformative arts and Hip Hop Culture." It was here that Brema and Tate would learn that creativity, entrepreneurship and giving back can be a simultaneous endeavor.

The young men skated, created and overlapped with other artistic young people at TRUE Skool. Brema started pulling silkscreen prints by hand onto clothing, which began to merge with his nascent, now definitive butterfly imagery, as well as the name and identity of Unfinished Legacy. The term describes Brema and Tate, their insights into themselves and outwardly the vision for their new company, a story yet to be written.

The pandemic struck as Brema and Tate's projects expanded. Online sales became brisk. Eventually, the company bankrolled enough funds for Brema and Tate to pack up a newly branded van with their entire studio and drive it to Los Angeles to expand the scope of their business.

In a new city the business owners networked, held events and sourced materials and other details for their projects. Soon the designs of Unfinished Legacy were seen around town, with sightings of their designs being worn by actor Michael B. Jordan and other influencers. Tate mentions that L.A. was never a long term goal. Milwaukee was always meant to be the place that Unfinished Legacy would call home. Their return and the new brick-and-mortar location cements this vision.

Milwaukee Streetwear Brand Wins National Attention

Creators of Unfinished Legacy are a stunning success, with a new shop in Third Ward.



*By Rafael Francisco Salas ,
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The designs themselves remain firmly planted in the owner's upbringing and experience in Milwaukee. Skater fit denim, t-shirts and prototypes for updated barn jackets with custom zippers, patches and embroidery are all on display in the store, either for sale or in the design phase for guests to see. Brema's butterflies can be hand printed on shirts in 360 degrees, an exacting and problematic design offering beautiful visuals. Designs also offer aspirational text such as "Genius from the Hood, 'Fuck War', or the definition of rebirth: "the action of reappearing or starting to flourish – to be born again." In my view what is special about these designs is this in particular, their devotion to the traditions of streetwear and Hip Hop culture, mixed with a meticulous sensibility, along with messaging that is uplifting, collaborative and forward thinking. Art, advocacy and industry are woven seamlessly into the universe of Unfinished Legacy.

Along with a selection of available designs for sale, the shop offers guests the opportunity to participate in live screen printing events on Saturdays, with printing tools prominently displayed in the store. In addition, Brema and Tate have built gallery walls to display artwork. The artwork of Gabrielle Tesfaye, a prominent multimedia artist who has exhibited internationally and locally, who is also an alumnus of the TRUE Skool, is currently on view. The storefront is also a hub for creative young people, as Brema and Tate have committed to sharing their creativity and professional skills with their communities. When I visited the store, a group of young people had just arrived, and were busy being led through the store and having questions fielded as they browsed and looked.

As described, the future of Unfinished Legacy remains untold. In February, the Milwaukee Bucks Pro Shop began selling the designer's "Bucks in 6" collection at Fiserv Forum. Brema and Tate are selling their designs in boutiques in Yakima, Washington, Atlanta and other cities. They are expanding a satellite production facility in Milwaukee to produce for other brands. Their legacy may be unfinished, but today is an exciting present for these young designers.

Unfinished Legacy, 201 N. Water St. Photo by Dave Reid.

