

**William F. “Bill” Smith**  
**Class of 1951**  
(1933 - 1991)  
**MCHS Hall of Fame Induction 2025**

Born and raised in Madison, Indiana, Bill Smith was one of the most innovative jewelry designers of the 1960s and 70s. Born in 1933, he attended the Broadway Colored School until his senior year, when he transferred to Madison High School after it had been integrated. He was active in the Industrial Arts Club, was involved in MAHISCO, and worked on the set of at least one theatre production. In addition to visual art, he also took an interest in dance, which took him to Indiana University, where he studied dance and performed in many productions. He graduated with a degree in metalsmithing.



In 1954, Bill moved to New York to formally pursue a career in dance. With some success and a great network of professionals, he continued to pursue his passion but also held several other jobs to support himself, including a messenger, a librarian, and a side job at a jewelry store in Greenwich Village. Little did he know it would be a springboard to his legacy.

Bill's work as a jewelry designer eventually took center stage over his performing, and in the late 1950s, he decided to pursue design full time. In 1960, he started his first company, Smith St. Jacques, with his business partner and upcoming actor, Raymond St. Jacques. Then, in 1968, he was named Vice-President of Richeleu Costume Jewelry Company, a first for a black man.

His work often graced the covers of fashion magazines around the world, worn by stars of the time such as Lena Horne, Cher, and Twiggy. Further success came when large department stores such as Lord & Taylor began carrying his work, featuring experimentations with size, texture, and shapes in costume jewelry. Followed closely by others, his extravagant work, often made from industrial materials and inspired by Africa and the Middle East, was featured in editorial pieces as the jewelry accessorized models in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* magazines.

Throughout his life, Bill was a positive role model for those who were black and gay. He was ostracized and bullied. But his work spoke for itself. Often considered outlandish and genius, he was the first black designer to have his jewelry recognized with a Coty Award in 1970. His designs are part of the permanent collections at The MET in New York City, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Eskenazi Museum at Indiana University, and a permanent collection of his pieces is on display at the Jefferson County Art and History Center.