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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to examine how artworks created by female artists in Trinidad address the image of Black women in the Caribbean. Therefore, the study asks the question: how do contemporary artworks address the image of Black women in Trinidad's society? It also demonstrates that positive portrayals of Black women in Trinidad's contemporary art have the potential to shape the way these women think and feel about themselves. This research particularly focuses on the analyses of six contemporary artworks created by the three Trinidadian female artists: Nneka Jones, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné and Shanice Gervais. Furthermore, information on the artists' reasons and intentions behind their depictions of Black women were obtained through mainly email interviews. Based on the information from the interviews, they create Black female art because of the sense of familiarity it offers them and their desire to make Black women feel represented and appreciated. The major finding in this study is that Black women can feel a sense of self-pride, self-love, strength and comfort from the empowering and encouraging depictions of them in artworks.

Key words: Black women, mistreatment, Black female art, Trinidadian contemporary art, empowerment, self-acceptance

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	I
ABSTRACT.....	II
TABLE OF CONTENTS	III
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IV
LIST OF APPENDICES	V
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	4
CHAPTER TWO.....	8
CHAPTER THREE.....	18
CHAPTER FOUR/CONCLUSION	20
WORKS CITED	21
APPENDIX A.....	A
APPENDIX B.....	A

LIST OF FIGURES

Name of Figure	Page
Figure 1: Image of the art piece called, ‘Destroy the Myth’ by Nneka Jones.....	8
Figure 2: Image of the art piece called, ‘Incognito’ by Nneka Jones.....	10
Figure 3: Image of art piece called, ‘Trust Your Roots’ by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné.....	11
Figure 4: Image of art piece called, ‘Learning to Love Myself’ by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné....	13
Figure 5: Image of art piece called, “I am a Sunflower” by Shanice Gervais.....	14
Figure 6: Image of art piece called, ‘Queen Bee’ by Shanice Gervais.....	16

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview with Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné	a
APPENDIX B: Interview with Shanice Gervais	A

INTRODUCTION

Black women around the world have been scorned, disrespected and mistreated because of their skin colour, hair textures and body types for many years now. The mistreatment against Black women is apparent since it is estimated that Black women face considerably higher ratios of emotional abuse and there are much higher ratios of Black girls being suspended or expelled from public schools than girls of other races in the United States (Green). They have also been subjected to various negative stereotypes regarding their personality, which include being considered as unruly, loud (Motro et al.), dangerous and uneducated. These stereotypes are very evident in the workplaces in the United States where, due to the recurring ‘angry Black woman’ stereotype, African-American female workers who express irritation or anger towards a situation, are considered as having an angry, aggressive and bad-tempered personality (Motro et al.). Such stereotypes were directed towards tennis player, Serena Williams and former First Lady, Michelle Obama (Prasad). Women of African-descent continue to be greatly mistreated worldwide because, according to apa.org, African-American women have encountered higher rates of physical abuses from their significant others than Caucasian women (Green). Furthermore, many cases of sexual, domestic and physical abuse against them have been neglected and unreported. This mistreatment and discrimination against women of African-descent is also very apparent in the Caribbean. In particular, many Afro-Caribbean women and girls encounter mistreatment and judgment because of their hair textures and skin colour in various places, like at school, at home, at restaurants, at the workplace, and other places. This discrimination in schools is witnessed at the CR Walker Senior High School in The Bahamas, when a girl who attended school with an ‘afropuff’ hairdo, was at risk of being suspended by her principal because the principal considered the hairstyle to be messy and unkempt (“Women Saying No”). Also, similar discrimination is experienced in Caribbean workplaces because according to the Afro-Trinidadian model, Gabriella Bernard, who was a contestant on Caribbean’s Next Top Model, she was ordered to relax her natural hair for her makeover and if she refused, she would have been forced to leave the competition and go home (Hudson). Afro-Caribbean women and girls are also taught and are raised with the perception that their kinky and curly hair textures and skin colour are unacceptable and unappealing, whereas European physical features are acceptable (Adegbembo 2). The preference of European features is also emphasized in Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival because it is indicated that Caucasian or light-skinned women are displayed excessively in Carnival advertisements and images (Powers). This is one of the main reasons why numerous Afro-Caribbean women have relaxed their hair, usually at a young age as well. Therefore, due to the evident discrimination and oppression, Black women and girls deserve to feel more cherished and acknowledged for the unfair treatment and abuses they face worldwide. Contemporary art, which has the power to alter opinions and feelings, implant moral values and communicate experiences, can positively impact the way Black women see themselves. This study is guided by the research question, “How do contemporary artworks address the image of Black Women in Trinidad’s society?” This study is worthwhile because it contributes to the current global moment of reckoning, in which there is a heightened sense of and resistance to pervasive anti-blackness.

THESIS STATEMENT

Positive portrayals of Black women in Trinidad's contemporary artworks have the potential to shape the way these women think and feel about themselves.

PARAMETERS

Contemporary artworks are specifically analyzed for this study since these artworks provide artists and the viewers of these artworks opportunities to reflect on society and the issues that are currently significant to the world ("Art and Education"). The study focuses on artworks created in Trinidad over the last four years that depict positive portrayals of Black women. It examines artworks created in only Trinidad and not Tobago, since there are many more artists in Trinidad who create Black female art than in Tobago. Furthermore, the artworks of Trinidadian female artists are analyzed. The practice of women painting women gives a female point-of-view, a perspective that was not prioritized in post war figurative art since painting was mainly done by Caucasian male artists ("Women Painting Women"). The female point-of-view in the painting of women is important because women, in many cases, are able to express women's feelings and experiences in a profound way. More specifically, the artworks of the Trinidadian female artists, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, Shanice Gervais and Nneka Jones are examined because their varying techniques allow research into the stylistic choices made by these artists in their representation of Black women.

OBJECTIVES

This study is intended to:

- Explore how artworks by female artists in Trinidad address the image of Black women.
- Analyze female Trinidadian contemporary artists' intentions and reasons behind the depiction of Black women in their artworks.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this case study is to explore how art works executed by female artists in Trinidad address the image of Black women in the Caribbean. Therefore, this study takes a qualitative approach to data collection. Since the research encompasses the depictions of Black women in the contemporary artworks by Trinidadian artists and the positive impacts they can have on Black women and girls, data is derived from conducting formal analyses of artworks by the female artists: Shanice Gervais, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné and Nneka Jones. Additionally, information regarding these contemporary artists' intentions and reasons behind the portrayal of Black women in their art works was gathered through mainly email interviews with these artists. Secondary documentary sources were also utilized to gather information on the mistreatment of Black women in the Caribbean, the history behind the negative treatment and perception of them and the reasons as to why contemporary art that portrays Black women and their experiences can positively affect them.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study comprises four chapters. Chapter one is a literature review that examines various secondary sources that explore the representation of Black women in art. Chapter two, which is entitled "Depicting Black Women in Art", presents a formal analysis of the Black female artworks done by three Trinidadian female artists. Chapter three, which is entitled "Black Women as Intentional Subject Matter", is a discussion and analysis of the three artists' intentions with their artworks. Chapter four, which is entitled "Positive Representation Matters", is the conclusion that discusses how positive depictions of Black women have the potential to shape their feelings about themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black women and girls have not only been shunned and disregarded in relationships, schools and workplaces, but also in the art world for centuries. Historically, there has been a lack of the portrayals of Black women, their experiences and perspectives since the art field has long been overpowered by Caucasian men (“Black Women Artists”). So, women and Black artists have been less acknowledged and seen, and museums also contained less Black female art works (“Black Women Artists”). It is also stated that European art galleries in the 16th and 19th centuries could be considered as the epitome of whiteness (Bedworth). In the few artistic depictions, Black women were rendered as oversexualized primitive people (Morgan 32), slaves or servants in a harem (Bedworth). So, their humanity and identity were oftentimes completely disapproved and rejected (Bedworth). However, over the past centuries, there has been a progression in the depiction of Black female representation, positive portrayals of Black women and Black female perspectives in art pieces. This chapter intends to showcase the ways in which Black women have been portrayed and the development of Black female representation in artworks throughout the years.

In the 17th and 19th centuries, women of African descent were depicted as oversexualized uncivilized people in European art. Morgan discussed the degrading visual depictions of Black women throughout western art history (Morgan 29). Morgan first analyzed the portrayals of African women’s bodies from the 17th century which were considered as real portrayals of Black female physical attributes and sensuality at that time. The 17th century depictions, which were sketches created by Thomas Herbert in 1634, showed ‘Hottentot’ women (Morgan 31), which were Khoikhoi women from South Africa (“Hottentot”). They were abnormally displayed with sharp teeth and are breastfeeding their children over their shoulders while carrying out activities like, smoking marijuana and balancing on a foot while holding bleeding innards (Morgan 31). These portrayals showed that Black women were normally perceived as peculiar and interesting uncivilized objects, who had little sense of decency and from the Europeans’ point-of-view, were completely lacking individuality (Morgan 32).

The visual representation of Black women as oversexualized primitive people in artworks also circulated throughout western culture in the 19th century. This depiction of Black women was seen through the degrading paintings and drawings of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman who was captured from South Africa and taken to Europe in 1810 (Morgan 33). Baartman, who was called the ‘Hottentot Venus’, was sexually mistreated by French and British people for amusement until her passing in 1815 and was painted and drawn by French artists, Leon de Wailly and Jean Baptiste-Berre for medical and lascivious intentions (Morgan 35). These artists rendered Baartman’s body in a way that exaggerated her breasts and genitalia by enlarging them because of the Europeans’ degrading perception of Black women as lewd primitive people (Morgan 34). These body parts were also emphasized as a way to separate African Women from the human being species (Morgan 34). Kelsey-Sugg and Fennell supported this by stating that the exploitation of Baartman was done because she was perceived as an oddity and the missing connection between humans and animals. Cerbarano also added that the exaggerated artistic portrayals of her played a role in the ostracizing of Black women which has been prevalent in

western culture. The portrayals also formulated the way society views Black women currently (Cerbarano). These artworks showcased that Black women were considered as lewd, uncivilized people, who were greatly objectified, oppressed and used for the Europeans' visual entertainment.

Additionally, in the 19th century, Black women were either excluded or portrayed as slaves and servants in European art pieces. Bedworth indicated that Black figures were also excluded, rendered in servile roles and were mainly in the background like insignificant props in European art in the 1800s. The portrayal of them as servants and insignificant props in the background can be seen in the 1869 painting called, "La Toilette" by Frederic Bazille and in the 1844 painting, "The Death of Edward Colston" by Richard Jeffreys Lewis (Bedworth). She stated that Black people's humanness and identity were frequently completely disapproved (Bedworth). She also indicated the change in the ways in which Black people were portrayed in art works. This began after the abolitionist movement, which was an organized movement to eliminate slavery ("Abolitionist Movement"). This shift is witnessed in paintings like "La Nègresse" which was done in 1862 by Edouard Manet. Although the depictions of Black people were not completely positive because of the common and demeaning painting title, "La Nègresse", which translates to the Black woman, she was shown as the main focus of the painting, which contrasts the ways in which they were depicted before the abolitionist movement.

In the 20th century, Black women were portrayed as the focal points in more artworks and the Black female perspective was seen in art. Sayej discussed the 2018 exhibition, "Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today", the inspiration behind the exhibition and the descriptions of some of the Black female artworks in the exhibition. She stated that Henri Matisse' painting called, "Dame à la robe blanche", which was done in 1946 and was included in the exhibition, depicts a woman of African descent sitting while wearing a white dress and a blue and white beaded necklace (Sayej). This painting showed the progression of Black female art representation because a woman of African descent is shown as the main focus of the art piece and is rendered in a poised and refined way (Sayej). Also her clothes and accessories suggest that she is portrayed as middle or high class. Furthermore, a change from 19th century black female art to the 20th century is seen in the title of the painting which means woman in white in French. Although it is still a generalized name, it does not offensively highlight her race like in the title of Monet's painting, "La Nègresse". It was also noted that the painting was created after Matisse met artists in Harlem in the 1930s who supported the Harlem resistance, which was a Black arts movement that commemorated Black culture, customs and ancestry (Chiodi). He was influenced by the Harlem renaissance artists who wished to portray Black women with integrity (Sayej). This contrasts the 17th and 19th century depictions of Black women since they were displayed as oversexualized primitives, servants and objects in the background of paintings. Chiodi added to the explanation of 20th century Black female art by stating that there were also Black female artists in the 20th century like Laura Wheeler Waring and Lois Mailou Jones. Chiodi also supported Sayej's explanation that Black women were portrayed as the focal point more in the 20th century because she mentioned that these female artists created artworks which depicted Black women as the main focus of their paintings like in, "Woman with Bouquet" and "La Baker" (Chiodi). Additionally, it showed that the Black female perspective in art was being seen which shows a shift in the black female art from the 17th and 19th centuries, as they were done by Caucasian male artists.

In 21st century contemporary art, there is greater evidence of the Black female perspective in art, and more artworks which depict Black women in powerful ways and question old European art are witnessed. The increase of artworks that depict Black women in empowering ways is seen in the solo exhibition called, “A Woman’s Worth” by Nigerian artist, Oluwole Omofemi, which was prepared by the Out of Africa Art Gallery in Barcelona, London (Out of Africa Gallery). This exhibition, which lasted from April 9th to May 22nd, 2022, depicted various oil and acrylic paintings of women of color with either bald heads or afro hairstyles, while wearing colourful clothing in mainly plain brightly-coloured backgrounds. He portrays his Black male perspective of what it means to be a sophisticated and independent Black woman in his art (Out of Africa Gallery). Through this show, he aimed to encourage Black women and urge other Black men to encourage them as well (Out of Africa Gallery). Although this exhibition was not done by a Black female artist and does not have her artistic point-of-view, it still showcases an example of how Black women are depicted currently and the positive progression of Black female art. In a similar way, the current positive portrayals of Black women are shown in Bedworth’s article where she mentioned and described the artworks that showcase Black women in sophisticated and majestic ways. This is seen in one of the paintings she mentioned called, “Portrait of Michelle Obama” which was done in 2018 by the African-American female artist, Amy Sherald (Bedworth).

Certain contemporary artworks also question old European artworks and perspectives which exploited and degraded Black women for centuries. Love explored the background information of the Afro-Cuban artist, Harmonia Rosales and her art works which showcases Black people as divine and powerful figures. Love expressed that the powerful and divine portrayal of Black women is shown in Rosales’ painting called, “Creation of God”, which is a recreation of the famous Michelangelo painting, “Creation of Adam”. It depicts Black female figures instead of Caucasian male figures and by substituting the image of Caucasian men with Black women shows that Black female beauty is being raised to a form that is superior to art (Love). In addition to that, it is stated that she substituted Caucasian men who were the most depicted in art, historically, with people who she thinks have been the least depicted (“Black Women Artists”).

Furthermore, other artworks which show the visibility and empowerment of Black women in art and confront the absence of Black female representation in ancient European art is discussed by Salome Gomez-Upegui. She explored the Black female paintings by the French artist, Elizabeth Colomba, her intentions for her paintings and her background information. In one of her paintings called, “Laure (Portrait of a Negresse)” from 2018, she gained inspiration from Edouard Manet’s 1863 painting, “Olympia”, which depicted a nude Caucasian courtesan and her Black maid named, Laure beside her (Bedworth). In Colomba’s painting, she contrasted Manet’s portrayal of Laure in a servile position at the side of the painting, by painting Laure as the prime focus in the middle of the painting. Through the creation of this painting, she opposes the historic European artistic portrayals and views of Black women who were rarely portrayed, depicted as slaves, servants and as props in the background. Another clear shift from ancient European art is that she put the Black female servant’s name as the title in comparison to Edouard Manet’s painting “La Negresse ” who just addressed the figure as the Black woman. She signifies that the servant had value and needed to be acknowledged.

This chapter aimed to demonstrate and examine the portrayals of Black women in art works from the 17th and 19th centuries to now and the progression of Black female art representation throughout the years. Morgan clearly stated that the earliest depictions of women of African descent in the 17th and 19th centuries showed Black women as oversexualized primitive people. Although Bedworth discussed Black figures in art, in general, not specifically Black female figures in art, she added that they were mainly excluded, or shown as slaves and servants. Sayej then clearly indicated that Black women began to be portrayed as the focal point more in art works and referenced certain paintings but some progress still needed to be made since black women were still degraded in 20th century art. Chiodi added that there was a growing presence of Black female artists but many of them painted about Black culture, not particularly Black women. So further research on 20th century Black female art through the lens of Black female artists should be done. Black female art developed even further in contemporary art since Oluwole Omofemi's solo exhibition and Bedworth's article showcased powerful and appealing artworks of Black women. Love and Gomez-Upegui supported this by discussing Harmonia Rosales' and Elizabeth Colomba's art which portrays Black women as divine and worthy people while also questioning the depiction of them in historic European art.

CHAPTER TWO

DEPICTING BLACK WOMEN IN ART

Images have the potential to shape the way we see ourselves and the world. This chapter explores visual compositions by the artists: Nneka Jones, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné and Shanice Gervais. It analyzes the form of each artwork in an effort to consider how image choices and construction might impact perceptions of Black women.

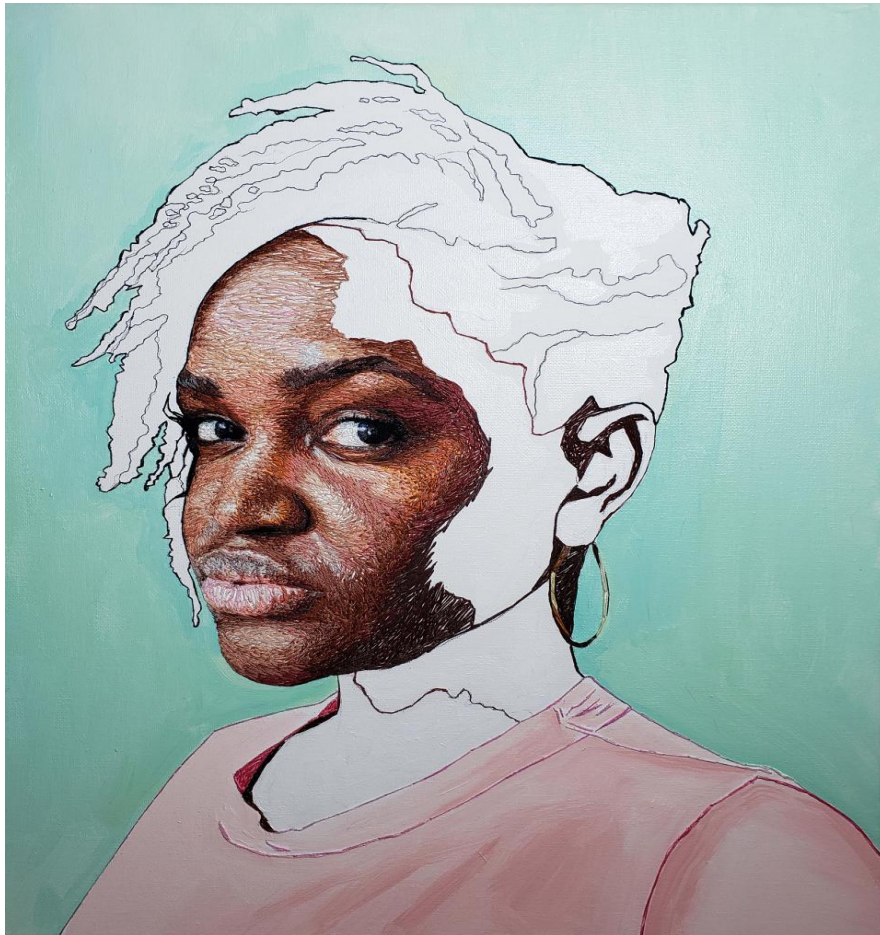


Figure 1

Image of the art piece called, 'Destroy the Myth' by Nneka Jones

Source; Eventeny.com

This artwork called "Destroy the Myth" (2022) is a 16 x 20 inch mixed media portrait that was created by the Trinidadian female contemporary artist, Nneka Jones. Jones created a portrait of herself using hand embroidery thread and oil paint on canvas. It is a head-to-shoulder portrait of

Jones whose body and face are angled leftward while she is gazing intently at the viewers. Jones clearly hand embroidered most of the face and the outline of the ear in a realistic way but left the rest of the face, hair and neck unembroidered. Only the outlines of the hair and neck are seen. Additionally, she painted the jersey and background using oil paint. According to Jones, the art piece portrays the removal of the layers of adverse stereotypes and myths about the identity of Black women.

This art piece showcases certain art elements like: colour and texture. Regarding colour, the presence and lack of colour and texture in the face, hair, ear and neck, showcases that Jones is reconstructing the Black female identity and reshaping her views on Black women. The bold colours on the face, alongside the intent and fierce facial expression, highlight that Jones is fed up with the adverse stereotypes against Black women and is determined to remind viewers that Black women are feminine, attractive and can be gentle. The pastel pink colour of the t-shirt and the pastel green colour of the background highlights the femininity and vulnerability of Black women.

Regarding texture, a soft and fuzzy texture is seen on the embroidered parts of the face. This soft texture also portrays that Black women are feminine, vulnerable and can be gentle. Emphasis is given to the face to focus on character and personality – aspects of Blackness that are often overlooked. The hair, which is typically a marker of identity, is left as an outline or suggestion. The viewer is drawn to the texture of the face.

This art piece, which showcases that Jones is rebuilding the Black female identity through the absence and presence of colour and texture, also shows that she is deconstructing Black female stereotypes and myths which entail being masculine, loud, combative and unattractive. The incomplete white parts also depict that Jones is rebuilding her confidence and love for her identity and features.

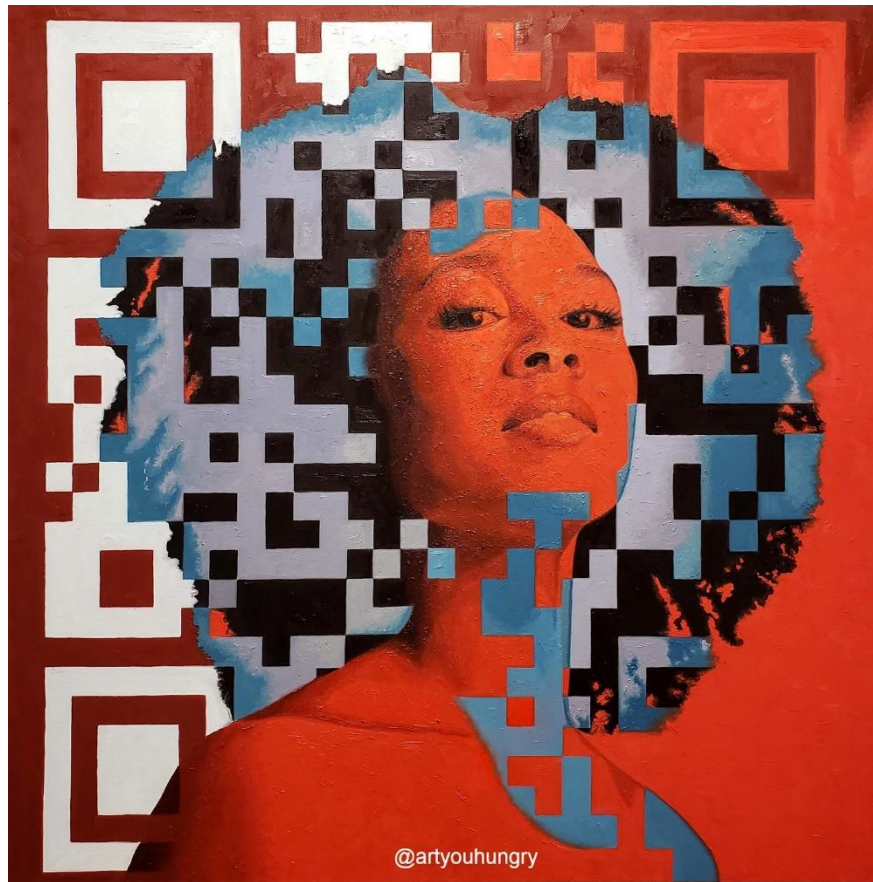


Figure 2

Image of the art piece called, 'Incognito' by Nneka Jones

Source; artyouhungry.com

Another art piece by Nneka Jones, titled "Incognito", is one of the three paintings in her QR Code series. The series features Black female figures at the centre of the canvas with a QR code pattern as an overlay. According to Jones, the QR codes in the artworks are fake because she stated that if a viewer tried to scan the portrait, the code would not work. She indicated that the codes are special because they imply that one has to get permission before acquiring personal information from the female figures (Jones).

This painting, which was created in December, 2021, portrays a portrait of a Black woman who has a curly afro hairstyle with a QR code pattern overlaid on it. The female figure, which is positioned at the centre of the painting, has a confident and dominant facial expression since her chin is angled a bit upwards. The figure's shoulders are also facing rightward. More specifically, the portrait appears to be a slight low-angle shot of the figure since it seems like the figure is gazing down a bit at the viewers.

This painting contains complementary colours: orange and blue, alongside white and red-orange, which are bright, bold and attention-grabbing colours. These eye-catching colours draw the viewers' attention to the Black female figure and QR code design, which convey the importance of a Black woman's consent and permission. Furthermore, in terms of texture, the figure has a rough texture which was produced by heavy brush strokes, while the background has a smoother texture which was produced by lighter brush strokes. This was done to highlight the Black woman and the importance of Black women's privacy and consent.

This painting also opposes the ways in which Black women have been portrayed historically in art and the media as over-exposed, lewd and primitive because this painting shows a Black woman as being modest, having self-respect and dignity.



Figure 3

Image of art piece called, 'Trust Your Roots' by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

Source; danielleboodoofortune.com

This artwork, which is called “Trust Your Roots”, is a 10 x 14 inch painting that was created using watercolour paint, acrylic paint and pen by the Trinidadian female contemporary artist, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné. This painting, which was done in August, 2021, displays an abstracted portrayal of two standing Black female figures who have curly afro and braided hairstyles and are wearing African garments. The figures are also leaning their heads a bit towards each other while their eyes are closed, which shows a calm and satisfied facial expression. This painting, which portrays the figures from their heads to their torsos, shows that the figure with the curly afro is taller than the figure with the braided hairdo. The painting also shows that the figures’ shoulders and torsos are overlapping one another. Also, the figures’ garments comprise various types of leaves in different colours and the background contains abstracted leaves which have similar vibrant colours, sizes and shapes.

The painting uses colour and line with important effects. Complementary colours like: purple and yellow, and orange and blue add vitality and energy to the composition and bring a sense of liveliness and power to a representation of Blackness. Additionally, the presence of the cool blue-green colour of the taller figure’s hair and green-brown skin tone contrasts the shorter figure’s warm red-violet hair and red-brown skin tone. This contrast highlights that the figures have different lifestyles, personalities and desires. However, the analogous colours in the intersecting part of their bodies like: violet and blue-violet, showcase that they are connected because of their African culture and ancestry, despite their differences.

Furthermore, regarding line, curved, organic lines, give a sense of fluidity which defies the rigid, fixed or limited ways in which Black women are perceived and understood. The intersecting lines of the figures’ bodies also emphasizes their bond and similarities.

Regarding the prominent presence of leaves, I believe that they represent the women’s African roots. Furthermore, the leaning head position and facial expressions also portray that the women feel comforted and at peace because they share a similar race, culture and ancestry. It also shows that they accept their identity. I believe that this painting also relays the message that Black women should accept and uplift each other despite their differences and accept their natural features, culture and ancestry.



Figure 4

Image of art piece called, 'Learning to Love Myself' by Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

Source; danielleboodoofortune.com

Boodoo-Fortuné's "Learning to Love Myself" is an 8.5 x 11-inch painting created using watercolour and acrylic paint and pen. This painting that was done in August, 2021 is an abstracted painting that showcases a plus-sized Black female figure who is sitting while hugging herself with her eyes closed. She also has very long curly hair and is leaning sideways a bit in her sitting position with a moon and clouds positioned to her upper left side. Also, she is positioned on a mat with oranges, a cat, a potted plant, a drink and a plate of cookies near to her.

This painting uses colour and line with important effects. Due to the incorporation of the colours and the stars in the hair, the woman's hair is pictured as a vast and wide universe- an image that goes against restrictive views of Black hair types. Many curved organic lines, which are used for the figure's physical attributes, portray a sense of flow, ease and comfort. These lines express that the Black woman feels comfortable and satisfied with her identity and features.

Additionally, the figure's calm and satisfied facial expression, pose and the home-like setting, which suggests comfort, are emphasized because of the splash of purple colour around the painting. This further highlights the love and comfort that the Black woman feels for her identity

and physical attributes. Furthermore, the colour purple surrounding the painting, which represents power, independence and pride, symbolizes the power, independence and pride of Black women.

These curved lines, analogous colours and home-like setting also symbolize that more Black women should feel comfortable and satisfied with their natural features because they are appealing. It also promotes the message of self-love and self-acceptance for Black women since they have always been shunned and disrespected because of their physical features for many years.



Figure 5

Image of art piece called, “I am a Sunflower” by Shanice Gervais

Source; shanicegervaisart.com

This art piece, which is called “I am a Sunflower”, is a 15 x 22.5 inch watercolour painting created by the Trinidadian female contemporary artist, Shanice Gervais. This painting, which was done on Arches 300 lb Cold Press Watercolour paper, was completed in August, 2020. The painting showcases a portrait of a Black woman who is gazing blankly at the viewer while sitting in a sunflower field with sunflowers and leaves in her large curly hair. The figure’s body is also facing rightward and her upper arms, shoulders and head are visible while the rest of her torso is concealed by the sunflowers at the base of the painting.

The figure’s large curly hair, which has a circular shape and thin, curly hair strands protruding out of it in different directions shows that the figure’s hair represents sunflower petals while the body represents the stems. This portrayal, alongside the prominent presence of sunflowers in the painting, depicts that the Black woman is similar to a sunflower.

Additionally, since sunflowers are known as happy and positive flowers, the dominant presence of them in the painting depicts that Black women should be content with their physical attributes and remain optimistic despite the discrimination and mistreatment that many of them face worldwide. Since sunflowers also symbolize adoration and admiration, this suggests that many Black women admire and adore themselves and their cultures. Furthermore, sunflowers represent strength and resilience. Therefore, the dominant presence of them also depicts that Black women are resilient since they have carried on with their lives and remained optimistic, despite the mistreatment that they have experienced over the years.

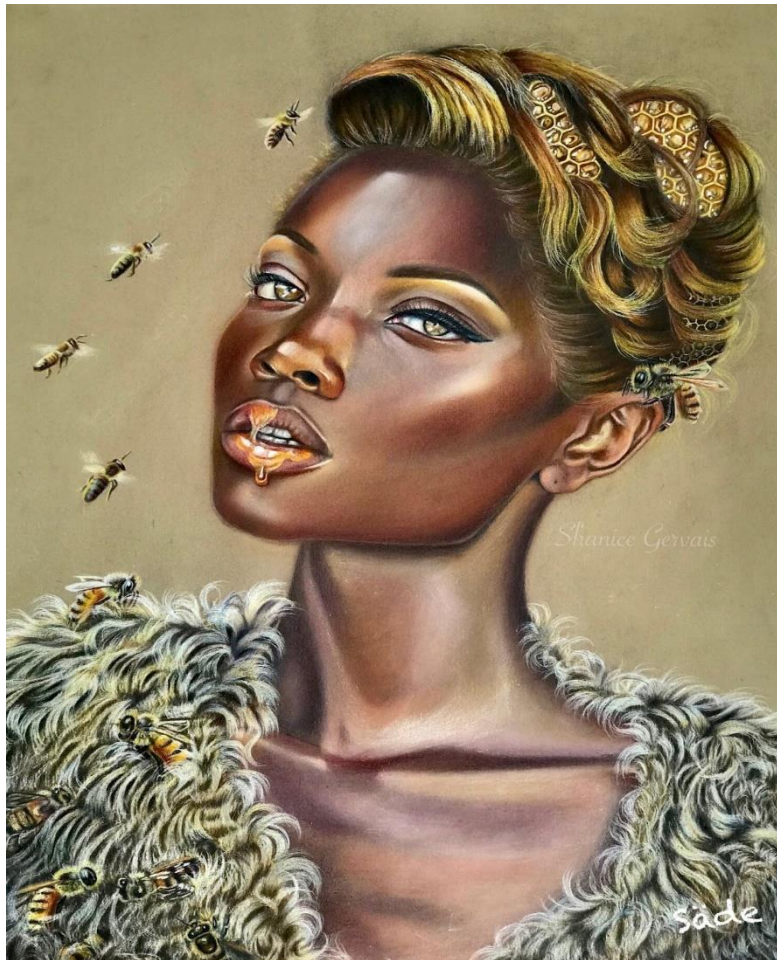


Figure 6

Image of art piece called, 'Queen Bee' by Shanice Gervais

Source; shanicegervaisart.com

Gervais' "Queen Bee", is a 22 x 30 inch coloured pencil drawing that was created using Luminance coloured pencils on Canson Mi-Teintes Touch Sanded Paper. The drawing, which was done in August, 2020, is a realistic portrait of a Black female figure who has a beehive in her hair in a gold background. The figure, who has a confident and dominant facial expression, is also surrounded by bees, has honey smeared on her lips and is wearing a furry garment.

The drawing's colour and treatment of emphasis are deliberate. In terms of colour, the warm colours, yellow, yellow-orange and gold are the most prominent colours in this drawing since they are seen in the figure's face, hair, clothing, in the bees, beehive, honey and background. This dominant presence of yellow, which symbolizes wealth and royalty in certain cultures, emphasizes that the Black woman is a queen. In particular, it highlights the value, worth and success of Black women. In this drawing, emphasis is also placed on the bees because of the

portrayals of the multiple bees, the beehive and honey, which symbolizes that the Black woman is a queen bee. This further conveys that Black women are worthy and powerful.

Furthermore, the portrayals of honey, which is a sweet and appealing substance, alongside the bees and the beehive, which create and store honey, accentuates the appeal and beauty of Black women's physical attributes. Additionally, the figure's confident and dominant facial expression depicts that more Black women should have more self-confidence because they are worthy and valuable. The drawing also symbolizes that Black women should be cherished and respected more in society, especially for their successes and skills.

CHAPTER THREE

BLACK WOMEN AS INTENTIONAL SUBJECT MATTER

The intentions behind the works by artists Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, Shanice Gervais and Nneka Jones, offer a deeper understanding of their art and add layers to the process of analysis and interpretation. They further emphasize the meaning and objectives of the artworks. They also clearly highlight the artists' views on Black female representation in art and the feelings they want to evoke in Black women who observe their art. This chapter draws on data primarily from email interviews with the artists. It discusses the reasons behind their portrayals of Black women.

The artists create positive and appealing depictions of Black women in their art because of the sense of familiarity and relatability it brings them and the desire to explore black female identities and consent. Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné believed that there was a lack of representation of women of color in the artworks she adored, which caused her to feel disconnected from them. She felt this way since she is a mixed-race Trinidadian who has been surrounded by diverse Trinidadian women. Therefore, she creates positive and appealing portrayals of Black women because she strives to showcase figures that she and the women around her could relate and connect to most. In a similar way, Shanice Gervais indicated that since she is an Afro-Trinidadian woman, she wanted to create portrayals of figures that she understands and feels familiar with. Nneka Jones depicts mainly Black women in her art works because she wishes to examine Black female identity, consent and her own encounters with these as a Black female artist (“Nneka Jones”).

The artists were inspired by nature, life experiences, the impact of colonization and the mistreatment of Black women to create their positive black female art. Gervais was influenced by her surroundings, nature and daily life experiences as an Afro-Trinidadian woman to create her Black female artworks. However, Boodoo-Fortuné expressed that she was inspired by the connection between the landscape and Caribbean women and the ways in which they were impacted by colonization and European perspectives. This inspired her to create art that rejects the European male classical art style, which lacks the representation and positive depictions of women of colour. So, the rejection of that art style influenced her to create art that primarily reflects women of colour and evokes a sense of liberation, joyfulness, beauty, pride and confidence. Furthermore, Jones indicated that her Black female artworks are more so inspired by the continuous mistreatment of black women and disregard for their identities (Jones).

Additionally, the artists generally believe that there should be more Black female art in the contemporary art world. Although Boodoo-Fortuné stated that she cannot speak from the views of a Black woman since she is not one, she still believes that there should be more diverse portrayals of women which elicit the depth of the experiences of women of color and offer portrayals of liberation, magic and beauty. Gervais also believes that there should be more positive Black female art because it offers a sense of safety and comfort for Black women since black women continue to be underrepresented and excluded in the visual world. She thinks that

these artworks would make Black women feel more included and vulnerable since the art portrays figures that reflect their identity and culture.

Moreover, the three artists create these positive depictions of Black women because they want black women to feel represented, empowered, beautiful and satisfied with their physical features. Boodoo-Fortuné creates art that showcases women of color in a positive light because she wants Black women and girls to feel seen and connected to her artworks. Similarly, Gervais wants Black women and girls to feel truly represented and beautiful. In addition, she wants them to feel self-love, confident and empowered by her artworks. Likewise, Jones stated that she wants to help empower Black women and girls (Travers) and help them feel satisfied with their physical features when they observe her Black female art (Jones).

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

POSITIVE REPRESENTATION MATTERS

The mistreatment and objectification of Black women has been apparent in societies, the media and artworks for centuries. This disdain for Black women has not only led to the abuse and death of many Black women around the world, it has also caused many to despise and feel unsatisfied with their physical features, race and culture. However, the presence of artworks that positively depict Black women and the increase of female artists who create these artworks, hold the power to change the way Black women think and feel about their identities and features. Such depictions are evident in the artworks by Trinidadian female artists: Nneka Jones, Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné and Shanice Gervais.

These positive portrayals like Jones' art pieces, "Destroy the Myth" and "Incognito", which entail the deconstruction of Black female negative stereotypes and the importance of black women's privacy and consent, respectively, can have a positive impact on Black women. They can encourage Black women to reject the stereotypes, increase their self-esteem and value their privacy and worth. Furthermore, Boodoo-Fortuné's artworks, "Trust Your Roots" and "Learning to Love Myself", which symbolize black women's acceptance, love and comfort in their identities, features and culture, can also impact black women. They can help boost Black women's pride, love and confidence in their physical features, race, ancestry and culture. Shanice Gervais' artworks, "I am a Sunflower" and "Queen Bee", which depict the appeal, optimism, resilience, power and worth of Black women, can make Black women appreciate their features and feel proud of their strengths and successes even more.

Additionally, the artists' reasons and intentions behind their art pieces gathered from mainly email interviews, offer powerful contexts that can impact how Black female audiences see themselves. Learning about their intentions is even more beneficial than what we interpret from artworks, so searching for the artist's intent is a vital part of the art experience (Conrad 12). Based on their interview responses, they all create Black female art because it reflects their identities and the identities of Trinidadian women and they want Black women to feel represented and appreciated through their art. Their positive intentions, which add to the meaning and purpose of the art, can also make Black women feel cherished and uplifted. Moreover, these portrayals are significant because they can provide a sense of comfort, strength and encouragement for Black women around the world who face ongoing discrimination and mistreatment.

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APPENDIX A

Interview with Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné

1. I noticed that you portray a lot of Black women in your artworks. Why?
2. Who or what inspires these artworks?
3. A lot of nature is incorporated alongside the female figures in your paintings. Why?
4. Do you think that the contemporary art world needs more positive portrayals of Black women? Why or why not?
5. How do you want black women and girls to feel when they view your Black female art?

APPENDIX B

Interview with Shanice Gervais

1. I noticed that most of your artworks portray Black women. Why?
2. Who or what inspires these artworks?
3. You are skilled in coloured pencil drawings, watercolour painting and digital art. What is your preferred medium and why?
4. Is there a reason why many of your Black female artworks have elements of fantasy and realism?
5. Do you think that more positive Black female art like yours is needed in the contemporary art world? Why or why not?
6. How do you want Black women and girls to feel when they observe your art?