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4:44

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4:44

By

Matthew Meyer

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Major: Art

Under the Supervision of Professor Santiago Cal

Lincoln, Nebraska

April, 2024

4:44

Matthew Meyer, M.F.A.

University of Nebraska, 2024

Advisor: Santiago Cal

As a multimedia artist, I create using practices of painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, and digital methods. The conceptual basis of my work explores the specific relationship between material, process, and idea. **4:44**, the title of my thesis exhibition, refers to Jay-Z's 2017 critically acclaimed album. This album has a lot of influential moments within it; however, one song embodied the ideas that I was researching while at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. "The Story of O.J." contains different aspects of Blackness, whether how we treat each other, think about the future or just the different skin tones within the community. My thesis exhibition is the culmination of ideas expressed in this song, community engagement projects, and personal experiences. All of these come together to create a moment of education, expression, and truth.

Within the **4:44** exhibition, the placement and materials choices of the works are purposeful. Some ideas call for an in-the-round experience that demands the viewer's spatial awareness. These works are precariously balance on undersized pedestals or invasive of viewer space through proximity of the two-dimensional works. Other ideas require flat or illusionary spaces. They invite the viewer to enter their space through present but hard to read images. However, there are always moments where both exist. Each material used in the exhibition relates to how I view Blackness and Black identity. I insert meaning into material, they act like afrotropes. An afrotrope is an object or idea that somehow relates to Blackness. Trompe-l'œilness, or the ability to make something appear to be something else, is essential to my work. Plaster becomes a memory or cloning device. Paper and canvas connect past and present with the cotton and labor that comes with them. Wood is challenging and can relate to a certain sense of class, yet whether it can withstand time depends on how you treat it. What do all of these have in common? Everything I use allows me to manipulate it into a sculpture, giving me the freedom to deceive the eye.

My research deals with personal and communal aspects of the Black American experience through vulnerability. Subjects related to apprehension and elation are the two main concepts in the work. These are two separate feelings, yet sometimes they can intertwine. The Black voice is often stifled or spoken for by outsiders. Many things go untaught, unseen, or downplayed.

The work generally aims to inform and educate the community just as much as anyone else. Ambiguity acts like an attention grabber, causing viewers to want to find out more and, in turn, allowing free will to be vulnerable with themselves. When you get into the personal, you realize the in-your-face experience. As a child, my parents and other family members taught me about Blackness through books and stories. The lack of this information throughout school led me to create this way. The small glimpses into the Black experience in school textbooks touched on glimpses. I look to speak on more than just a taste of the Black experience; I want to do it

through my lens. I am not the spokesperson for Blackness; however, the incorporation of the multiple allows me to gain different views. Within this, the viewer can see many areas of the Black experience.

Ideas and Inspirations

When creating my work, it all begins with an idea. This idea can deal with an event, theory, need, or personal memory. Books, articles, movies, music, and experiences. I have thought about or been through inspire my research. There is never one specific type of Black person, no specific way to be Black. While I create based on my lens, I touch on multiple aspects of the diaspora.

Interestingly, we all share similarities, including things pertaining to home life, school, worries, joys, dangers, etc. This show compiles all of this. Each work has a story, method, metaphor, and educational aspect.

THE BLACK VOICE

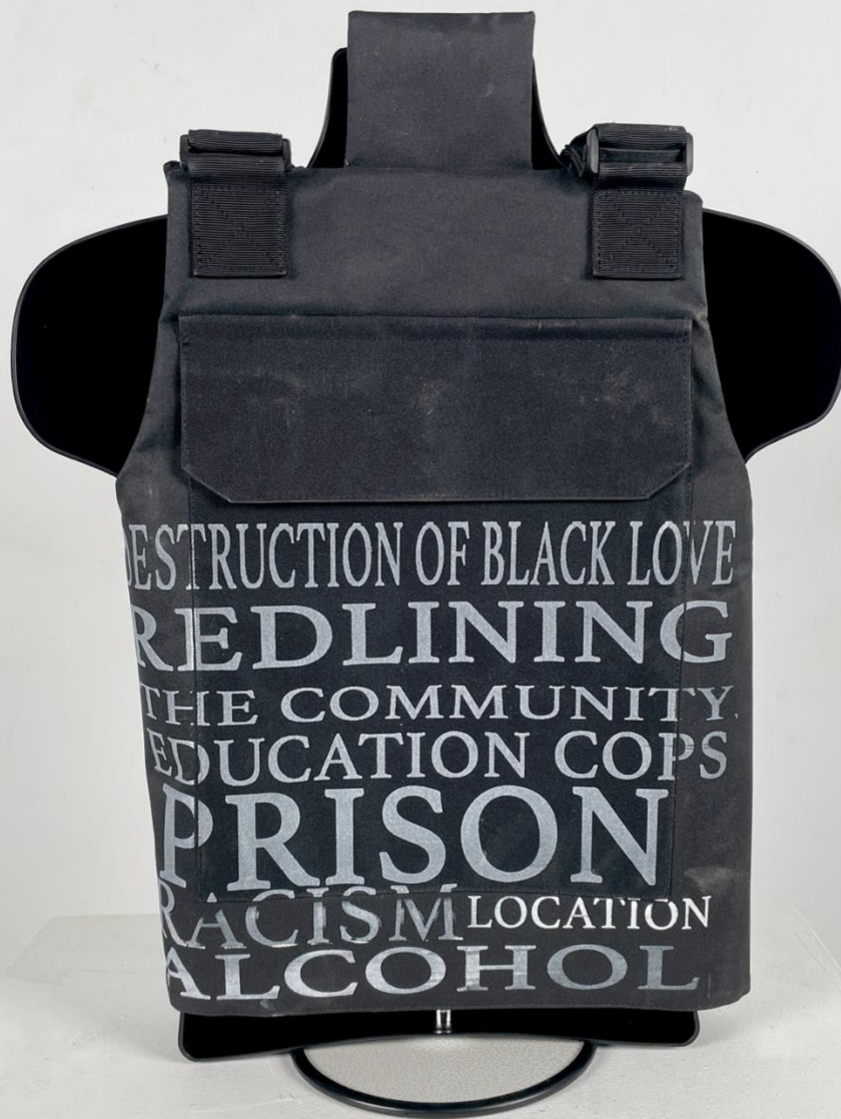
When it comes to history, past or present, within the community, certain aspects still have been kept in the dark and have come to light. You may see outsiders commenting on Blackness as if they know the person better than you. The media also plays a big hand in what is shown today and what was in the past. The news would often show the negatives within the community, almost painting a certain picture of it. Even movies would display a motion of evil or anarchists. With social media acting as the news, we are beginning to see more of the truth of what has happened. Even in film, we see more “educational” ways of displaying Black history. Since we are not taught much of our history in school, it is up to us, young Black adults, to find ways of educating ourselves and others. Education through expression, through reading, and more. Aside from the Black Voice as entity I wanted to touch on the Black Voice as a personal. Within my work I tend to include dialect that acts as not only a conversation within the work but from artist to audience. These can range from my own words, quotes from civil rights leaders, or conversations that I hear. It is important to my work to combine imagery and verbal’s.

Conclusion

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *vulnerability* can be defined as the quality of being vulnerable: able to be easily hurt, influenced, or attacked. As it pertains to Blackness, vulnerability is the ability to allow others to look in and understand. **4:44** is a vulnerable and visual interpretation of Blackness within America through my lens. It is my intention that we can begin to understand things that have happened or are happening through creation.







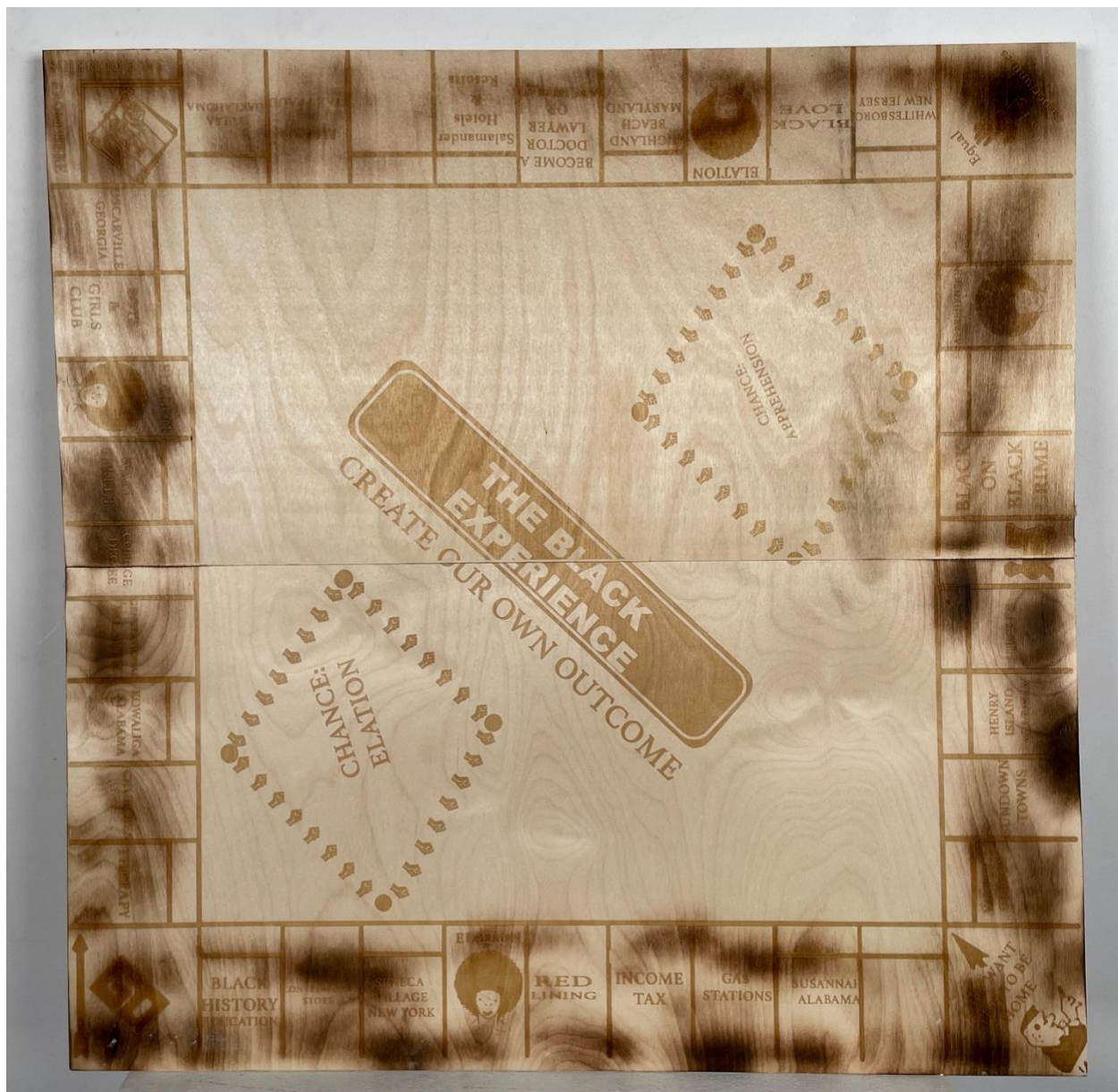
DESTRUCTION OF BLACK LOVE
REDLINING
THE COMMUNITY
EDUCATION COPS
PRISON
RACISM LOCATION
ALCOHOL

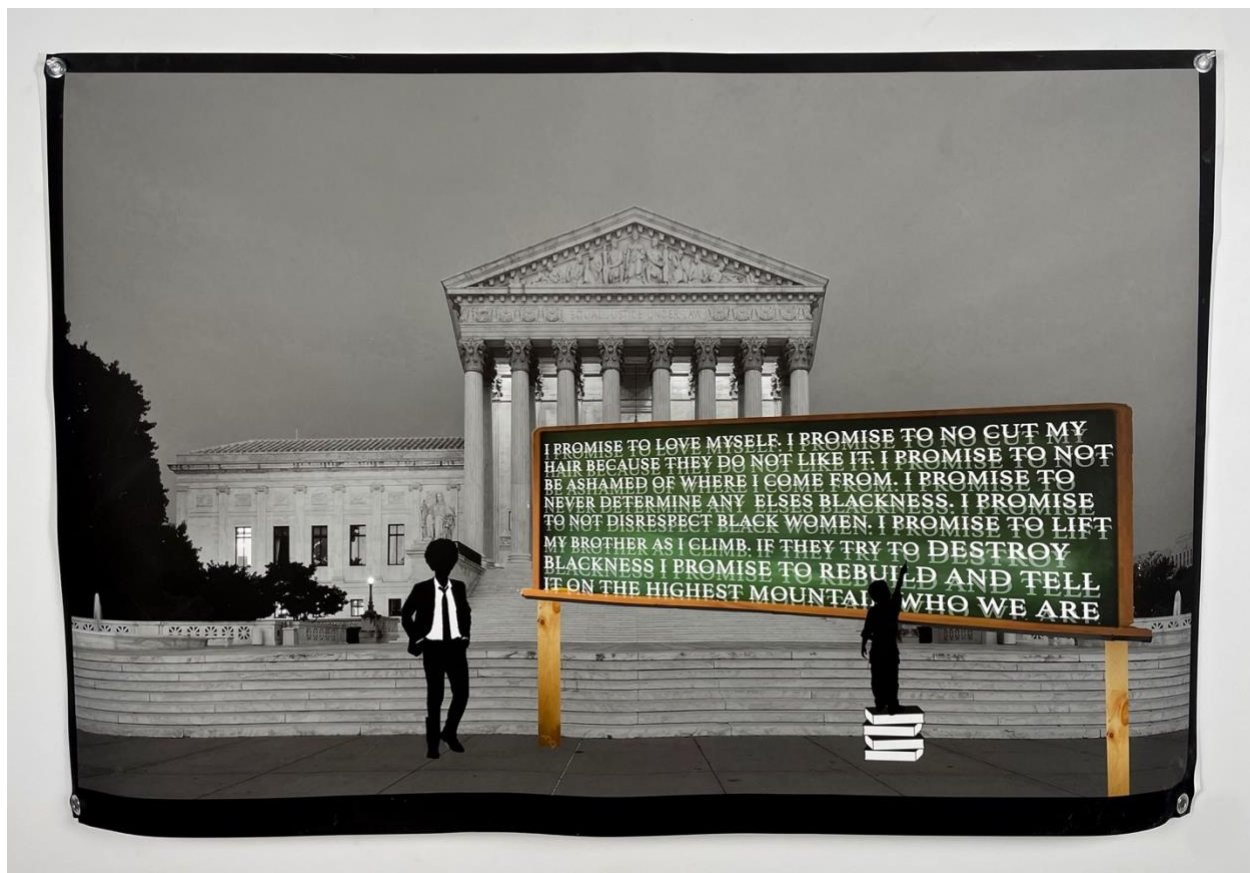




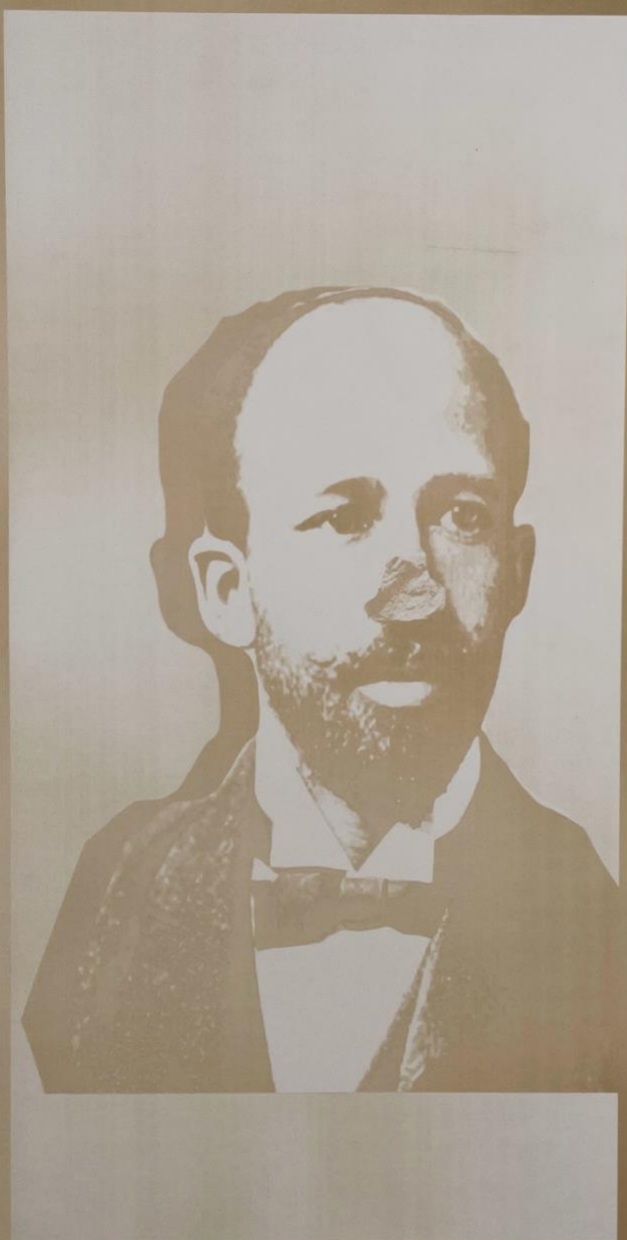
CRACKCYCLAS
OUR OWN PEOPLE
LACK OF SELF LOVE
COLORISM
ASKING/OFFERING HELP
DECIDING WHO'S BLACK ENOUGH
COONING







I PROMISE TO LOVE MYSELF. I PROMISE TO NO CUT MY
HAIR BECAUSE THEY DO NOT LIKE IT. I PROMISE TO NOT
BE ASHAMED OF WHERE I COME FROM. I PROMISE TO
NEVER DETERMINE ANY ELSE'S BLACKNESS. I PROMISE
TO NOT DISRESPECT BLACK WOMEN. I PROMISE TO LIFT
MY BROTHER AS I CLIMB. IF THEY TRY TO DESTROY
BLACKNESS I PROMISE TO REBUILD AND TELL
IT ON THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN WHO WE ARE



W.E.B. Dubois

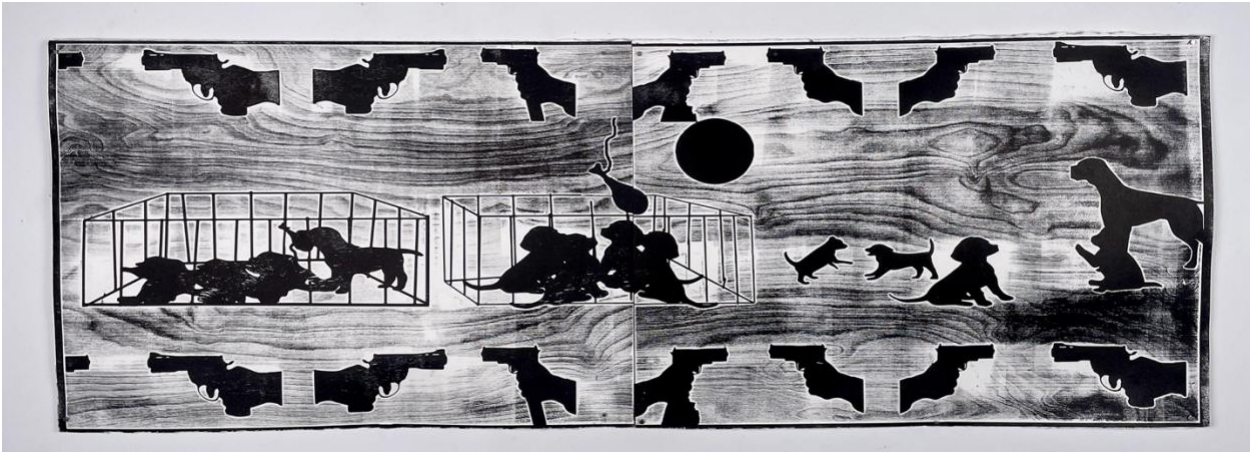


Rosa Parks

















Keionne: safe place + quiet mind, microa

Kaleb - Outside near a river; annoyed

Bousaina Ibrahim
anywhere in nature, Sudan, my home + my sisters
disrespected, angry, ready to get violent

My aunt's house - my black side
of the family always gathers here
Microaggressions: people always
tell me I'm not really black

Manish May
Worry: Not finding my place in society with my career
Joy: Being surrounded by my friends in college, supporting
each other, and pushing each other to succeed so we can
make a name for ourselves

Frieda
worry - not be good enough
Joy - my family

Lack of opportunities
Yadav
worry: that

Gordon Taylor
no where on campus, my house
→ angered, unjustified

No room at my safe haven and the most
comforted comment
I first feel shocked and getting around
my surroundings to see how best to respond

Ahmed Alisaid
my house is my safe place, I feel comfort
I experience microaggressions I feel
lost, confused, but nothing new I feel
hurt, angry, I hurt

Bl - lack of opportunities, worried,
culture

Azida Fleming - my house, keeping my house as a safe space
Joy: I am being able to work up
and is not making the world better Germany
It is

Nyankor Timothy
My aunt's house in Minnesota, it's family there
microaggressions: "did you grow up knowing
English this well?"

My aunt's house in Minnesota, it's family there
microaggressions: "did you grow up knowing
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Nyankor Timothy
Safe Space → My house, Gaughn, Banhwich
Microaggression → Confused, angered

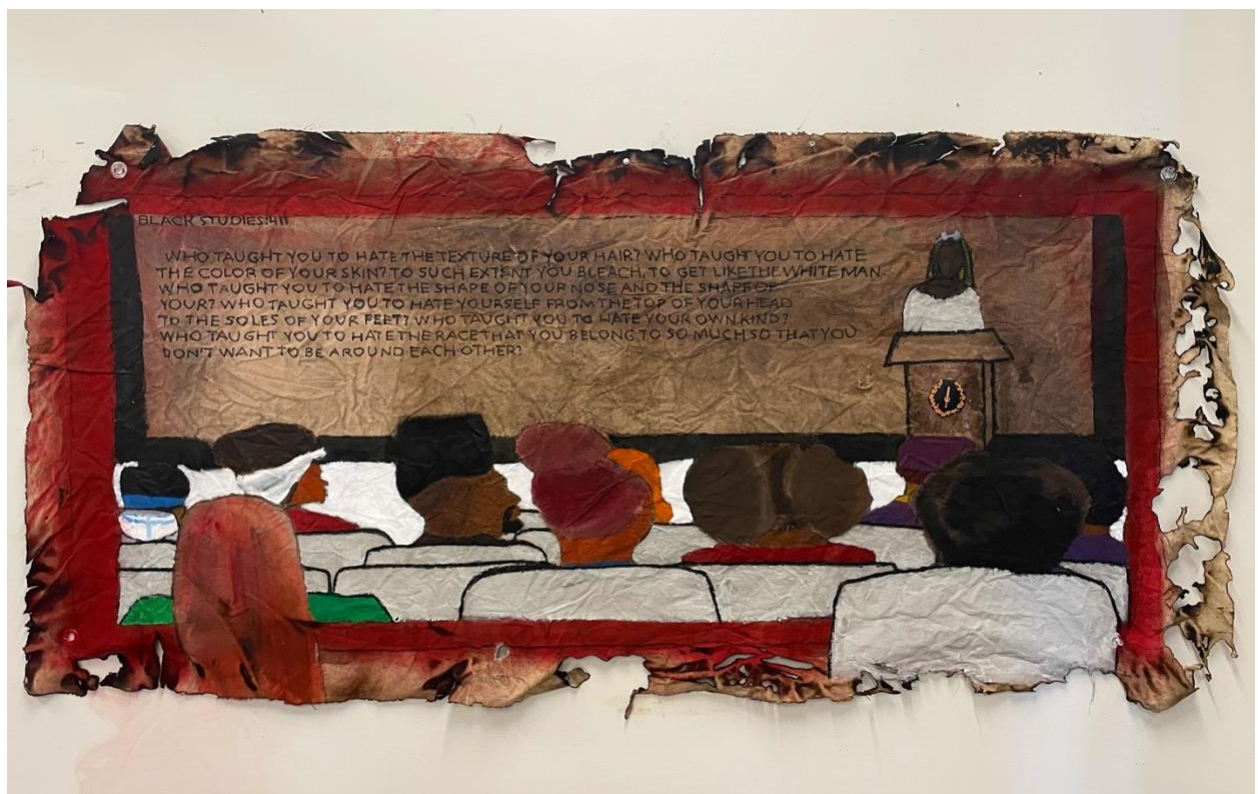
Laqueedah
Worry: I worry about disappointing my parents.
Joy: I enjoy listening to music.

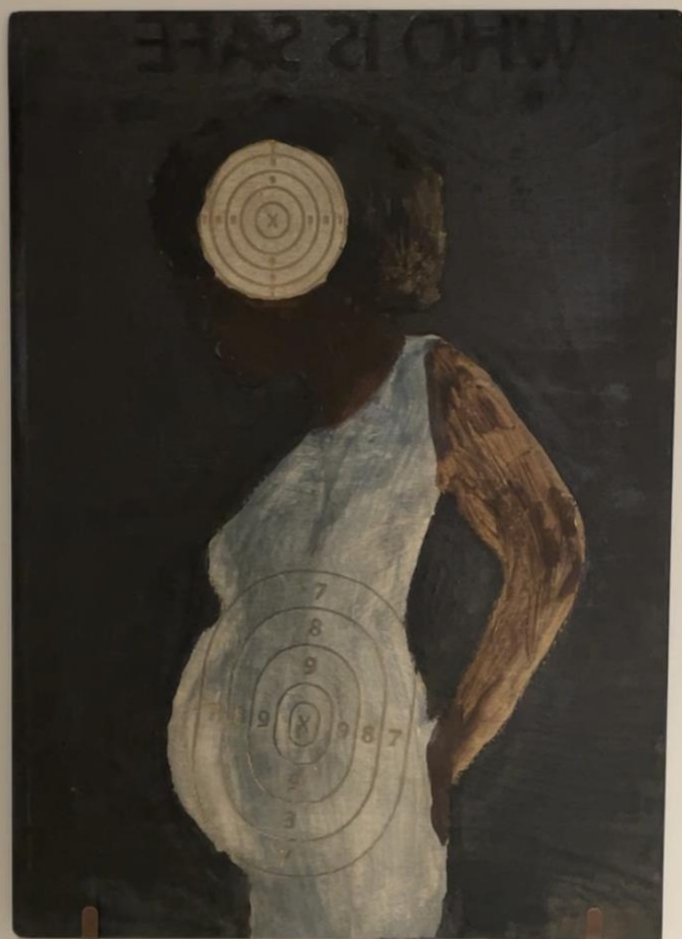
Keionne
- cultural racism
- being black

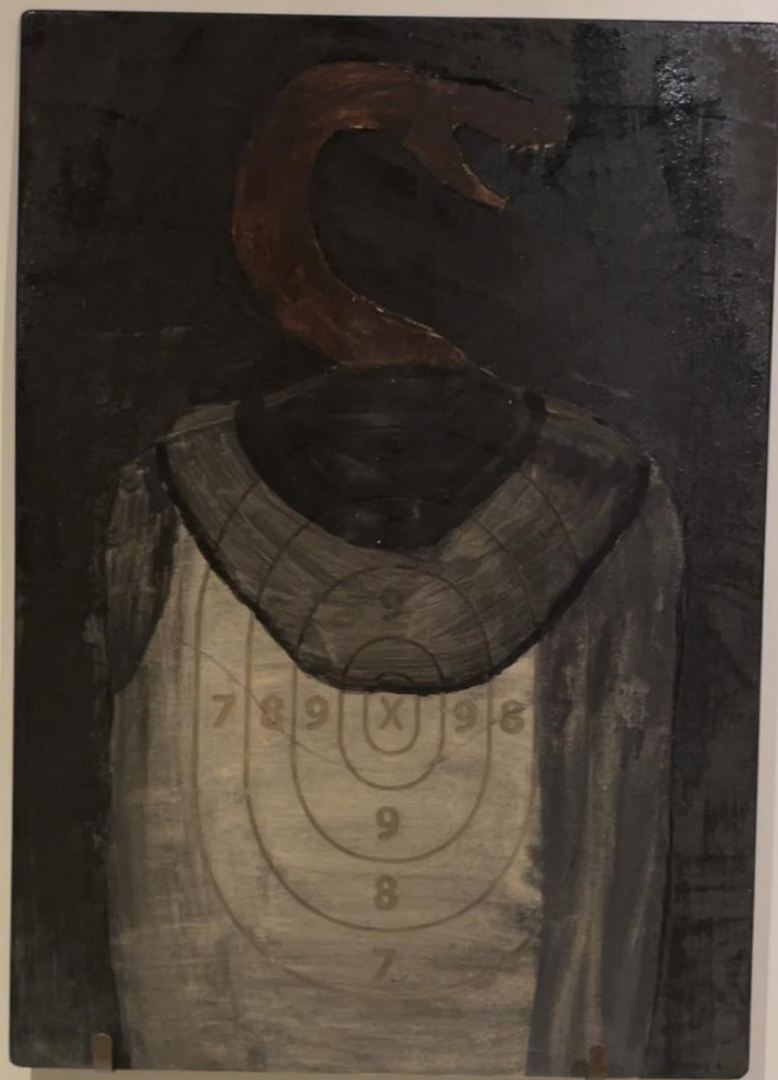


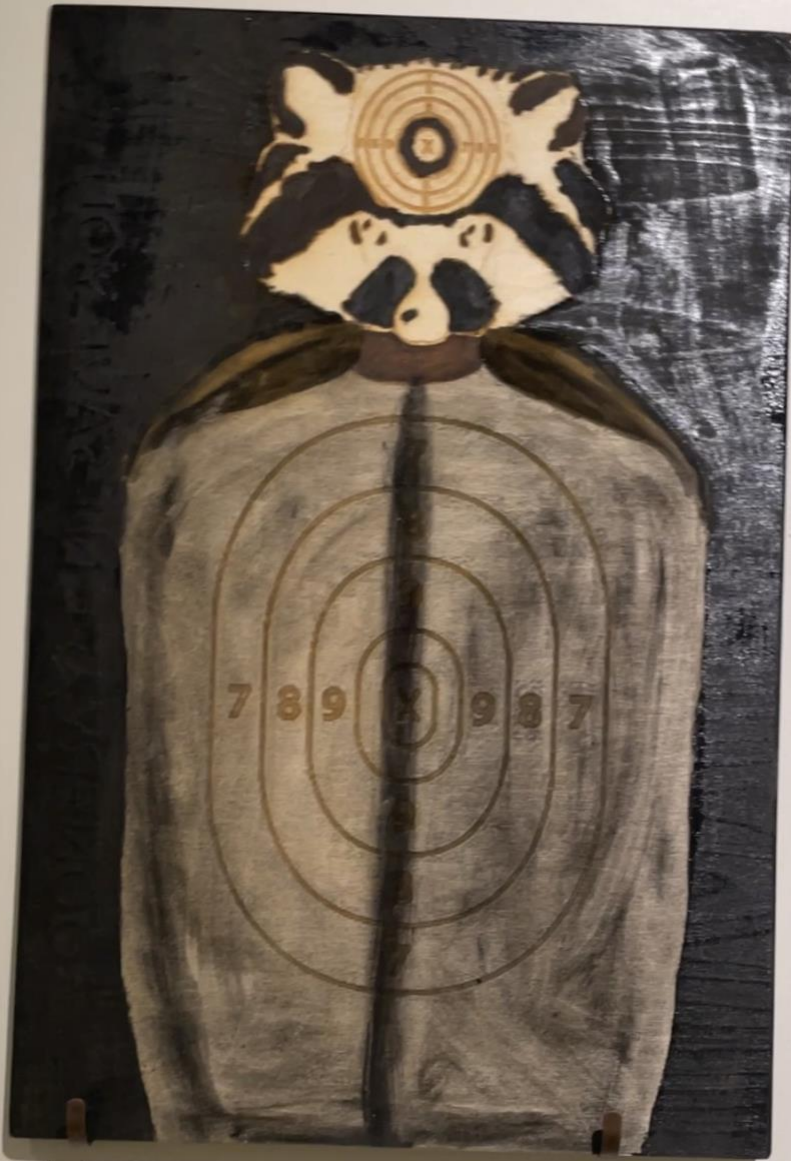
IT WAS MY MIDDLE FINGER. IT WAS A TOY. IT WAS CANDY. IT WAS SUNGLASSES

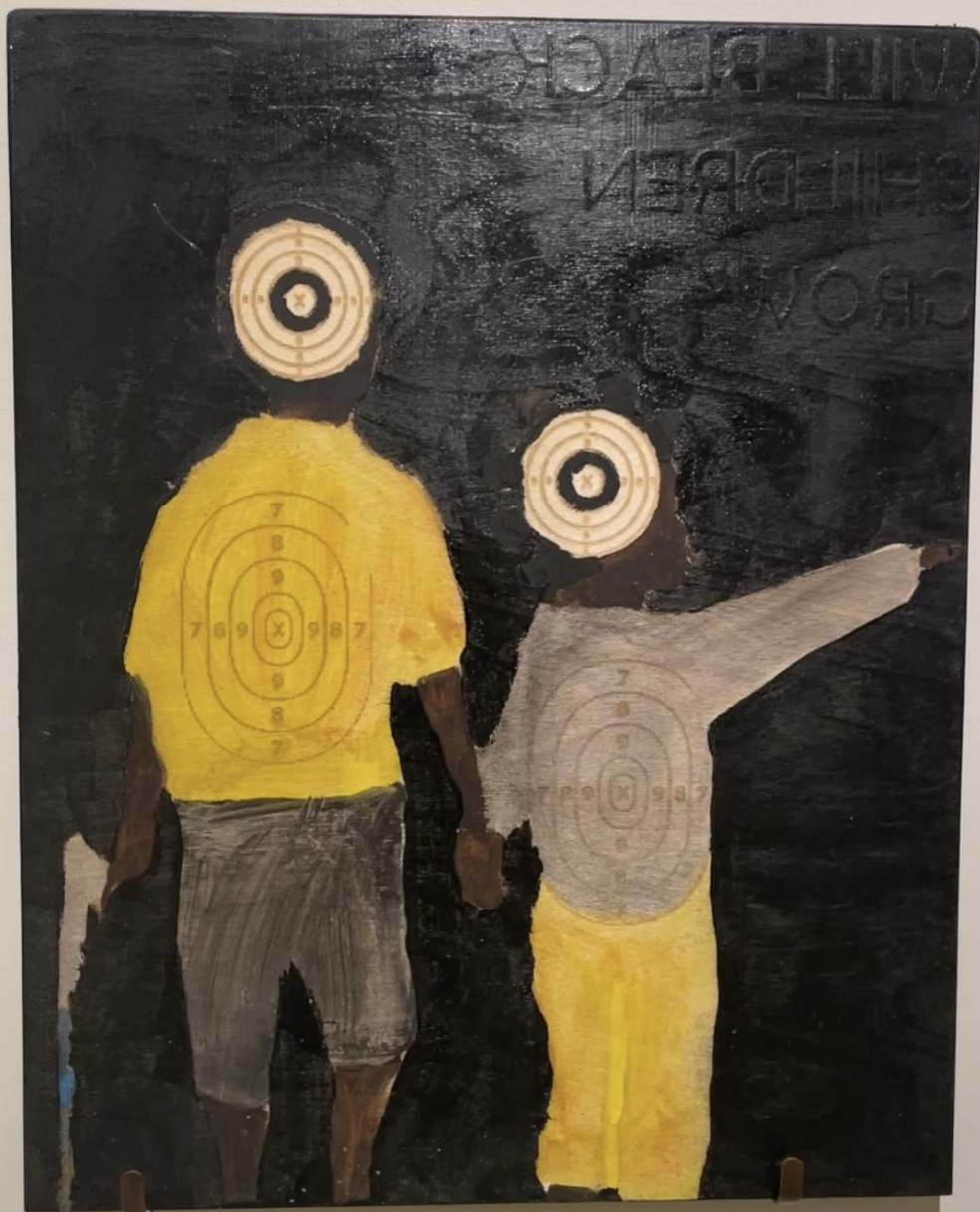
IT WAS FEAR. IT WAS A WATERBOTTLE. IT WAS MY PICK. IT WAS ANXIETY











Thank You Black Women

For Being Unapologetically YOU

P.O.P.E

THE BLUEPRINT

Black women are
Still the most
Disrespected and
Least protected
Person in America

www.popmag.com



00041100

Dear Black boys in men,

I am sorry that the system has failed you. The system being the government. The system being where you live. The system being who is in your household. If your father is around whether it is in your household or close by, thank him. I am not many have that ability to do so ever so close. Hug him. Tell him that you love him. Tell him up for not many can. And when you grow do the same for your children. I am sorry that the system started long ago taking those outside the home another life into a continuing cycle. I am sorry they used your mothers or used the opposite way and that takes a toll. If they were taken from your mother, I am sorry for that as well. Black boys it is never to late. You have to

remember you who you are. I am sorry that our Black men are being brought down and we are not doing enough to help them. I am sorry that our Black men are being brought down and we are not doing enough to help them. I am sorry that our Black men are being brought down and we are not doing enough to help them.

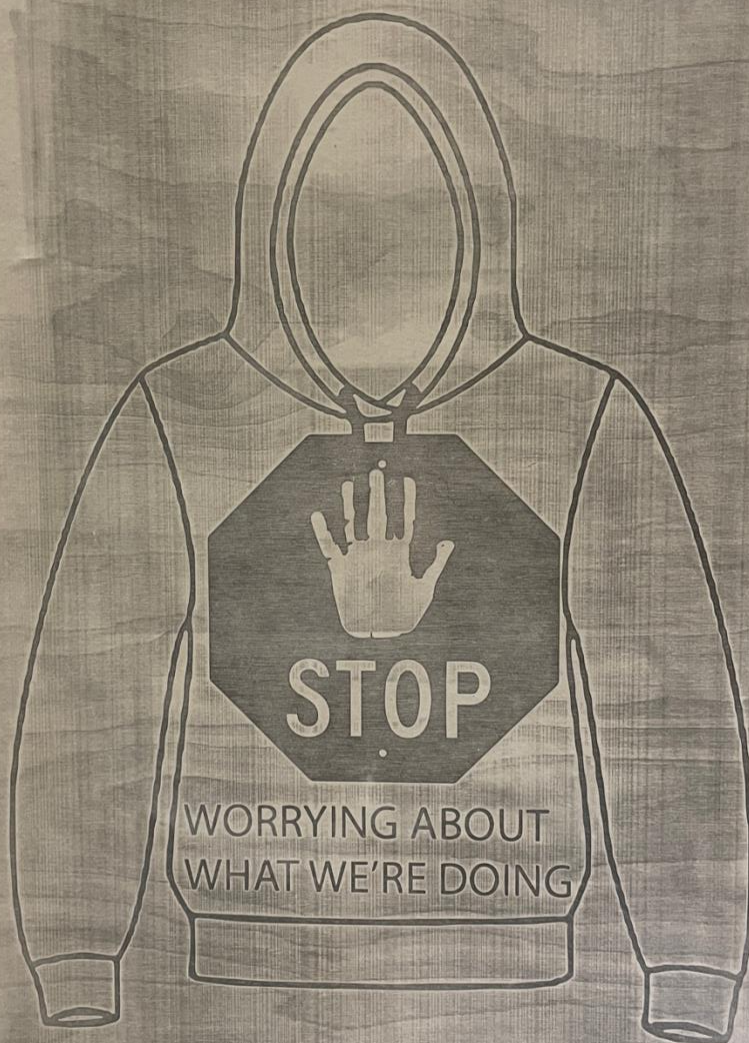
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Dear Black people,

We have come so far in life so we have overcome many adversities, trials, and tribulations. We have always been a strong people regardless of what is thrown at us. Those of the past have fought for the liberties of today. We are loving, yet we are judgmental of each other. We are together, yet we separate each other and disassociate from who we are. We have been lied into this ideal of Blackmen and what it is or isn't based upon those outside our community. We stick together but we go against our own and our own interest. We strive for betterment and success, yet we feed into exceptionalism. We walk down the street mean, mugging each other instead of saying hello how are you, have a good day, stay blessed. Yet we are quick to forget and get rid of and smile when talking. Our women, women, each other, get less each other down based upon how they talk, what they say. Our men can't be around each other for too long or they want to fight or shoot. Our children think gangs are the way to go instead of college. Yet we are kind and we support each other. We are able to connect to each other in many moments. Something wild happens you look at me I look at you and we said a thousand words. Street lights come on many of you where we need to be. If we are outside we know not to go inside for we have to be doing one thing. We have a hand no matter how much they pin us up against each other. We play not like on the who is Black yet in many ways it is a matter of life or death. We are together. We are intelligent. I thought to be all the same or not worthy of knowledge. Yet we are happy, successful and we are smarter than most in the room. We are more than hungry for hunger even though they try to deprive us from it. We are not looking for sympathy, yet billions of dollars are spent on why we are poor, why we are poor, why we are poor. We are intelligent. We are successful. We are smart. We are not going to just stay down. Be something. Be somebody. Love Each Other.



WORRYING ABOUT
WHAT WE'RE DOING

I AM A REVOLUTIONARY:

P.O.P.E

CHANGE AND
HOPEFUL BEGININGS

Inside

HOW
STICKING TOGETHER
& UPLIFTING EACH OTHER
CAN PROGRESS OUR
COMMUNITY



00041100

**BLACK
People
Needed!**

For an art Project I'm Doing

Matt Meyer First Year sculpture Gnu-MFA
School of ART, ART History, and Design