

A'Kailah Byrd-Greene Artist Statement

Artist Bio

A'Kailah Byrd-Greene is a painter from Southern California. She focuses on bringing a colorful and vibrant outlook to the way African American and Black women are presented in art while often manipulating traditional skin tones to highlight varying emotions. A'Kailah received a BA in Studio Art from the California State University of San Bernardino in 2019 and is currently working towards her MFA at Claremont Graduate University (2021).

Artist Statement

My work is an exploration of what I want my experience as a Black woman to be like. It is colorful, bright, and bold. It prioritizes Black women, puts them front and center, and reduces distractions from the outside world while recognizing and acknowledging the emotions that come through in many shapes and shades. Black women are regularly overlooked in art. Our bodies are often used for our shapely figures and as symbols for sex. I hope to present a way of looking at Black women that embraces our beauty and individuality while stepping away from negative and non-inclusive historical embodiments of how we have been portrayed.

The figures I paint are hybrids of collaged models and family references that display a variety of emotions paired with an assortment of nonconventional skin tones against a bold background on a large canvas. I take into account that each facial feature and hairstyle holds its own importance and is symbolic in Black culture. The hybrid character is a result of enhancing the ambiguity of the figure in order to erase preconceived notions of a singular person. These figures may not physically exist in the real world, but they are ideas of people who exist on a more global scale.

In my work, the body, clothing, and jewelry are not necessary as slight variations in facial expressions, hair, and head tilts articulate what I want to convey: how the woman is feeling, thinking, and what they want to communicate to the viewer without the trapping of class or social status. The color of the backgrounds and skin tones directly correlate to the emotion that the figures have. The size of a painting is just as important. While I often paint in a variety of scales, I prefer the paintings to be larger than life and big enough to be confrontational, while still being small enough to not be intimidating. My paintings are often direct parts of me, they arrive from feelings and experiences that I have had socially and politically, however, they represent a community that is beyond me as an individual. Their purpose is to help create an open dialogue about the struggles that we as a people face.