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## Leeya Jackson

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*Illinois Wesleyan University*

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Leeya Jackson

John Wesley Powell Undergraduate Research Conference, 2013

Illinois Wesleyan University

Hello everyone, my name is Leeya Rose Jackson; I am a B.F.A painting and print-making major. Basically all of this work was made within the last year or so. Basically the first three years I spent just exploring what artistic direction I wanted to go in and I'm a double concentration because I couldn't really choose between the two and I was equally invested in both. Amongst the various other artistic and aesthetic decisions young artists have to make I had the additional struggle of deciding whether or not to allow my ethnicity and gender to show in my work. It was a constant flux between deciding how much my work should deal with my personal identity as a multi-racial women and essentially my work as a whole actually dealt with racial and gender identity as well as social oppression and progression and calling into questions cultural ideals of beauty. Aesthetically, my work includes stylized patterns, intricate borders and bold colors. This is what I call "The Diversion Series"; these paintings came about from experimenting with stylization. Originally they were not meant to focus on anything specifically dealing with race or gender but mostly on just capturing aspects of elements like water and fire in unique ways. The painted frames in the canvas emulate wood carvers decorative picture frames and this is perhaps influenced by home decorations that I grew up around. And the frames essentially serve as symbols for feeling boxed-in by so fabric painted restrictions, but also function as a compositional tool.

Aesthetically, line and pattern is important in my work, not only with the frames, but also how I stylistically render subject matter. This painting, "Ascendance and Abdication", kind of evolved from this painting ("Serenity"). Basically, with this painting ("Ascendance and Abdication") the central figure is the own literal human with the small figures are elementals in the fire and water diverging. They serve as allegories for human nature, they're not specifically human. And, just like in this one ("Serenity") I take those same types of figures and it's definitely the humanoid figures in this one ("Ascendance and Abdication") that kind of serve as human nature enduring plight and struggle. All in all, this is a painting about human progression, oppression and submission.

"The Vanishing Women, Resurfacing Women" began with one basic idea; I wanted to paint a bold tribal print and just with a central figure. It just as supposed to kind of reflect my personal ethnicity and background. I wanted the backgrounds to reflect my backgrounds, I don't know if that translates well. But, in some ways it was my own racial struggles of feeling overshadowed by or slowly made up of cultural aspects. Eventually that focus moved beyond

myself and to the broader context of women in general. I just wanted to play between the relationships of culture, gender and suppression. Each of the poses I chose kind of is supposed to reflect the struggles of each culture, but also the strengths from each culture. So like the pose in "Kinte" is one of subdigation but also a difficult pose to hold (I know because I had to pose for that one). That shows a sort of strength at the same time. And the one in "Damask" is one of demure femininity. And the one in "Tribal" is one of vulnerability. The patterns I chose are supposed to reflect the cultures but also the fact that I chose decorative patterns; in each of these cultures women are the ones who are expected to decorate, so it kind of is that play on gender and race. As a whole it is supposed to be debatable about whether they're fading into their surroundings or emerging from and I'm going to leave that up to the viewer, it tends to be if you're a more optimistic person or a more pessimistic person.

Now onto my prints, I call this "The Prevention Series" and it's kind of along the same lines as "The Vanishing Women" where it's about the state of womanhood, except for this is about progression. Basically, it starts with childish innocence and ends with being a fully-blown woman. It's also more personal to me because I use my own niece's images and my own image for the woman one. It's personal in the symbolism too because each of the symbols reflects my own experiences.

Now these lithos are more about beauty ideals and different cultures and I took the idea of the African neck rings that some Africans have (and Thai cultures) and played with it and took our beauty ideal of pearls and strung them with barbed wire, which is something that is used to hold back and constrain. Basically, I'm just calling into question things about our beauty ideals and I've wanted a play between the eastern and the western beauty ideals.

That is essentially what my work is about. Thank you.