Everyone is Watching
You Stare At Me

Amani Williams
Drawing
BFA Presentation 2021
Statement

With satire and sass, I challenge what is considered “inappropriate,” especially what is taboo and sexy as it relates to women’s bodies and behavior. A double standard has existed for centuries. As “society’s housekeepers,” women in western culture have been told to publicly perform cleanliness, prudishness, and tidiness, while men have not been held to that same standard. Cis-men are culturally permitted to act in impure and crude ways. “Boys-will-be-boys” is a form of permission that is given to things like burping contests between adult men and cussing to publicly expressing sexual desire. My work features female figures who are unashamed of their sexuality and sensuality. These women smirk and grin, both inviting and scaring the viewer; their smiles say, “Come in, if you can handle it.”

The figures directly and calmly gaze out of the paintings. Like a *Looney Tunes* character, they stare out from the work, breaking the fourth wall. The women’s relaxed expressions communicate delight, appearing to laugh at viewers who may be uncomfortable with their debaucherous gestures. The figures are rendered in a variety of settings, both public and private. Their comfort with their nude and semi-nude bodies in these places adds to the taboo nature of the subject. The work pushes the viewer to reconsider how they have gazed at women via art and media. Eve from the Garden of Eden, Aunt Jemima, Psyche from Cupid and Psyche are all caricatures of women that have destructive intentions towards women.
A cartoonish aesthetic is used in both the paintings and drawings. This aesthetic decision functions as a way to depict the “idea” of a woman. The figures are highly stylized, creating an uncanny feeling. In the paintings, the oil paint and pastel lay in a flat manner on the canvas, making shapes that are bubbly, round, and smooth. Application of the material in the drawings is rougher, emphasizing the contours of the figure, adding dimension. The paintings are large scale and hang on the wall higher than normal; forcing the viewer to look up at these women and admire them.

Many viewers, especially those who feel restrained by society’s expectations of women, will feel seen by the work and feel joy. They will see themselves in the work and perhaps for the first time be, “in on the joke.” It is also possible for this work to be transformative for the audience in another way.

Through my work, I am creating a space that is idyllic, as there is no implicit or foreshadowed punishment for the women for misbehaving. This work is a way to break away from pain and begin to heal. I strive to join these women and misbehave myself. By depicting them on a large scale and rendering them in powerful positions, I am redefining the role of women. My work invites other women and people silenced by the patriarchy to join me in embracing this new confrontational female empowerment.
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AMANI WILLIAMS
DRAWING
Garden of Eden, 60” x 40”
oil pastel, and oil on paper
2021
Tapestry No. 1, 74” x 35”
acrylic, oil paint and oil pastel on
unstretched canvas
2021
Potential Outdoor Orgy, oil pastel, detail shot
Red Wings, acrylic, oil pastel and oil, detail shot
That was nice now where did you say your house was?, acrylic, oil pastel and oil, detail shot
Street show, oil pastel and oil, detail shot
Feelers, oil on canvas, detail shot
I Don’t Cook, I Don’t Clean (an ode to Aunt Jemima) ,73” x 37”
Oil on unstretched canvas
2021
Gobble Me, Swallow
Me, Drip Down the Side of Me (Folds) 50” x 40”
Oil on unstretched canvas
2021
Psyche’s Head, 17” x 11”, graphite on pastel paper, 2021
"Luncheon the Grass", 11” x 17”, graphite on pastel paper, 2021
Untitled (Green, Blue, and Orange), 24” x 18”
Oil pastel and oil on mixed media paper
2021
Untitled (Green, Red and Yellow)
24” x 18”, oil pastel and oil on mixed media paper
2021
Untitled (Green, Orange, and Purple)
24” x 18”, oil pastel and oil on mixed media paper, 2021
Thank you!

Questions?