

5-2021

We Are Gold

Amber Shanice Bowser
California State University - San Bernardino

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MASTER'S PROJECT IN STUDIO ART


Final Review and Approval

MFA in Studio Art
California State University, San Bernardino

Date 05/21/2021

Name Amber S. Bowser

I have reviewed the above student's Master's Project and Exhibition and find that it meets my approval for graduation with a M.F.A. in Studio Art.

Advisor 

signature

Alison Ragguette


name

Committee Member 

signature

Brad Spence

name

Committee Member 

signature

Matthew Poole

name

Committee Member _____

signature

name

Committee Member _____

signature

name

Graduate Coordinator 

signature

Alison Ragguette

name

Amber Shanice Bowser

Artist Statement

My work is influenced not only by the underrepresentation of Black women in the art world of today, but also in our past and in our day to day lives as a whole. My work heavily incorporates the use of different Black hairstyles and beauty to represent familiarity to my culture while also showcasing the beauty in our versatility to another.

I use mix media such as oil paints, graphite pencils, synthetic hair, clay, and digital media in my artwork as well to add abundant elements of texture throughout. The use of lots of neutral tones in my work like warm to light browns is extremely important to me in order to represent our wide range of melanated skin and the significance of that in our community.

The overall vision for my work is to uplift Black women to see themselves in a light that represents their worth in this world that is so underappreciated. I want to showcase our beauty in ways that are not seen in the typical art galleries. We are Queens and we will be beautifully framed! Being a Black woman myself, I strive to represent the beauty that is within me and to help other Black women as well as young Black girls to see the beauty within themselves as well.

WORKS



Amber Shanice

We Are Gold, 2021

Brown Skin Lady, 2019-2020

Oil Paint, Gold Leaf, Kanekalon Braiding Hair, Beads, Cuffs, Satin Fabric, Coconut Oil, Wood

40 x 52 inches



Amber Shanice

We Are Gold, 2021

Something about her Soul, 2021

Digital Painting, Kanekalon Braiding Hair, Beads, Cuffs

18 x 24 inches



Amber Shanice

We Are Gold, 2021

She is the Truth, 2021

Graphite and 300lb paper, Kanekalon Braiding Hair, Beads, Cuffs

40 x 52 inches



Amber Shanice

We Are Gold, 2021

BWAQ! Series

(Because We Are Queens), 2021

Speckled buff clay body, Brown spray finish, Gold cuffs

15in x 6in x 6in



Amber Shanice
We Are Gold, 2021

BWAQ! Series
(Because We Are Queens), 2021
Speckled buff clay body, Brown spray finish,
Gold cuffs
20in x 6in x 6in



Amber Shanice
We Are Gold, 2021

BWAQ! Series
(Because We Are Queens), 2021
Speckled buff clay body, Brown spray finish,
Gold cuffs
15in x 6in x 6in



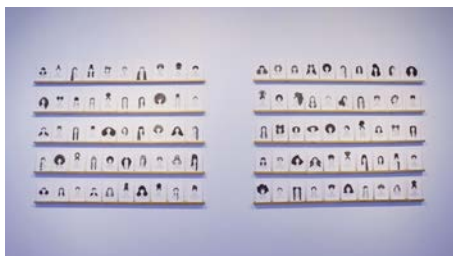
Amber Shanice
We Are Gold, 2021

BWAQ! Series
(Because We Are Queens), 2021
Speckled buff clay body, Brown spray finish,
Gold cuffs
15in x 5in x 5in



Amber Shanice
We Are Gold, 2021

Crowns, 2021
Speckled buff clay body, Gold spray finish
4 x 8 inches each



Amber Shanice

We Are Gold, 2021

100, 2018-2021

There are over 100 ways to wear our crown

Over 100 ways to let these curls speak

Over 100 ways to be left in awe

Over 100 ways...

Graphite on 300lb paper, wood, gold leaf,
gold spray

5 ½ x 7 ½ inches each drawing

55" x 16' 5" displayed together



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School of Beauty, School of Culture

Amber Bowser

ART 617 MFA Graduate Seminar – Critical Theory and Genealogies of Cultural Theory

Dr. Jane Chin Davidson

March 18, 2019

At first glance Kerry James Marshall's painting, *School of Beauty, School of Culture*¹ looks like the typical African-American female beauty salon. The nature of this piece instantly tapped into my senses that I would experience when walking into a black beauty salon. It is as though I can hear the soulful music playing in the background, the smell of the hot comb pressing out hair, the sound of children's laughter as they occupy their time and that Saturday morning gossip between the women in the parlor. As you begin to truly peel back the layers of this piece you will discover that there is much more than what meets the eye. Marshall beautifully captures the essence of the everyday black culture while incorporating hidden references to older paintings such as *Las Meninas*, 1656, Diego Velazquez and *The Ambassadors*, 1533, Hans Holbein the Younger. When you go to experience Marshall's pieces they are not to be looked at for a just second, but to be sat with and fully appreciated in its entirety. It is important for Marshall to change the typical stigma of only seeing white faces in museums. He wants to normalize seeing the representation of all people when walking into a gallery so that everyone feels included. In Marshall's work, he is literally taking the typical capital S subject which in this case are whites and replacing them by adding the African-American figure to show how just as important we are in this world are well. He is breaking down those barriers that our society has deemed as acceptable and showing that it is time for a change. In an interview with the *Louisiana Channel*² on YouTube Marshall states that, "If you

¹ Kerry James Marshall, *School of Beauty, School of Culture*, 2012, Acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas, 107 7/8 x 157 7/8 inches, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama.

² "Kerry James Marshall Interview: Paint it Black," YouTube video, 10:18, posted by "Louisiana Channel," March 31, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wNTN3MaLTY>.

look around the museum you notice there's an absence of Black figures. I don't expect those people to have made pictures of me because I wasn't part of that culture and I wasn't part of that history. I have to be able to project myself image in such a way as I can guarantee myself a place on these walls." And he is doing just that. If we don't take charge and place ourselves in scenarios that we are dismissed and excluded from then who will.

When you begin to dissect Marshall's painting you will notice that there are elements of this piece that you may have missed at first glance. At first you will see African-American women socializing while getting their hair done. You will see children wondering and everyone having a good time together in the typical African-American beauty parlor. Just like with all of Marshall's Pieces all of the women in this piece are painted in a very dark 'black' complexion. They all have beautiful natural hairstyles from curly hair, dreadlocks, braids and more. Like the typical genetic make-up of an African-American women, the women in this piece are all made up with a smaller upper body and a larger lower body. They are wearing vibrant colors along with gold accessories. There are lots of decorations in the background like posters, beaded lighting, and family photos. You will notice that one of the background decorations in this piece is a signed record of Lauryn Hill on the top center back portion of the wall in the parlor. That record being the Miseducation of Lauryn Hill. This record is one of the most profound records in our black community, preaching about black empowerment, black culture, and black love. This being incorporated in this piece is very important because it helps add an extra layer to help the viewer understand the feelings you would get, what you hear, and what you breathe when walking into this type of salon culture. You then will see a poster in the back that says, "it's your hair, dark

and lovely” which is a movement that started in the 1960s. This was a movement that not only uplifted African-American woman but African-American people as a culture to accept their beauty and to not feel less than because of the social norm that only white skin is beautiful. We are to celebrate who we are as a culture, as a people, and as a black union. There are also smaller elements that you may miss like the family photos that are tucked into the mirrors at each beauty booth which really reminds me of what you would actually see when walking into a beauty parlor. In the reflection of the mirror you also see that there are colors that associate with the African flag, those colors being red, black and green. Seattle Art Museum³ explains this beautifully in their description of the piece stating that, “The color red being the blood that unites all people of black African ancestry, and shed for liberation. The color black being people whose existence as a nation, though not a nation-state, is affirmed by the existence of the flag. Lastly, the color green being the abundant natural wealth of Africa.” Marshall even references old paintings such as *Las Meninas*, 1656, Diego Velazquez. In this piece by Velazquez, you will see that the artist placed himself in his painting while he was supposed to be painting a portrait of the king and queen. Instead he places the king and the queen in the mirrored reflection at the center most part of the piece. Marshall references this piece in his painting by instead inserting himself in the mirror that is in the center most part of the piece where he is taking the photo of the painting the we are seeing it self. He also references *The Ambassadors*, 1533, Hans Holbein the Younger which shows a skull distorted on the floor that may have been missed which represents death. Marshall takes this and replaces it with an image of sleeping beauty, who is a

³ Seattle Art Museum, School of Beauty, School of Culture, Figuring History, <http://figuringhistory.site.seattleartmuseum.org/kerry-james-marshall/school-beauty-school-culture/>, March 14, 2019

young blonde white woman in a black beauty salon. While instead this distortion is being a reminder that even though we as African-American woman come together in our own space we still sometimes unconsciously want to pertain to the typical white beauty standards by doing such acts as straightening our hair for example. There are also young children a boy and a girl that are standing by the figure of sleeping beauty on the floor and they both seem interested in different ways. The young boy is bent over and it looks as though he is looking underneath this figure and the young girl looks as if she is pointing and trying to get an adults attention to look as well. This reminds me of myself as a child and what I looked at as beautiful growing up because this was all that I saw when watching things such as Disney. There are always white princesses but never any one that I saw who actually looked like myself. This could be very dangerous for young generations growing up not seeing representation of all cultures because they could begin to feel as though they are less than when in fact they're not. However, this is what society has showcased as being the only beautiful that it is so deeply embedded in our everyday lives that it is hard to un-see. In an article by Jessie L. Whitehead, *Invisibility of Blackness* she discusses Marshall's work in its entirety. Whitehead references Powell-Hobson and Hobson (1992) and states that, "we are reminded of the long history of American racism that creates an environment in which young black children are faced with the challenge of developing self-pride and positive black identity and the conflicts and rejection of blackness are related to messages children receive from their environment. Messages such as negative stereotypes promoted by the media, teachers, parents, and the larger society." However, the beautiful thing is that being that we are now in 2019 the black culture in specific has taken a powerful stance and now understand as well as vocally express that we will not stand for what our white society continues to tell us is

beautiful. We know that we are beautiful and we will not allow anyone to tell us otherwise.

Unfortunately, we do still have to face the fact that these beauty ideals will still be in our face every day, but emotionally I believe as a culture we are not as mentally affected as we would have been previously many years ago. When you take all of these elements that Marshall has put in this piece it truly is just breathtaking to see how he really makes the viewer sit and think about real life issues that people try to push under the rug.

In Michael Foucault journal, *The Subject of Power*⁴ he states, “In order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations.” This is a perfect example of exactly what Marshall is striving to portray in his art work. Marshall is taking what we all are immune to witnessing, ‘white privilege’ and turning that on its head. In specific to art, predominantly seeing white faces in art galleries to represent the ideal beauty is being taken away and replaced with black bodies. Marshall is playing with this notion by taking black faces and filling the walls of museums to showcase that representation of all beauty matters. At what point will we all begin to take this sort of action upon segregation and realize that we are doing nothing but hurting ourselves. We would be so much stronger as a people if we could just simply accept one another.

⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.8, No.4 (Summer, 1982)

When you look at the word ‘invisible’ what is the first thing that comes to mind? For myself, it is the act of not being seen or heard. In the same interview⁵ mentioned previously Marshall explained that he read a book by a man named Ralph Ellison titled ‘Invisible Man’. From that book Marshall quoted that the act of being invisible is “not a retinal invisibility, it’s the psychological invisibility that’s imposed by a culture that doesn’t particularly care to see you in the fullness of who you are.” I truly could not agree with this more. Why is it that we are not judged by the content of our character but only by the color of our skin? The notion that beauty is way more than skin deep needs to be taken more seriously. Your physical appearance should not be a hindrance to you; it is what you bring to the table that should be looked at, at face value. Your actual knowledge, your capabilities, and the assets you bring is what needs to be looked at and absolutely nothing else. Marshall explains that, “Reading the prologue of that book (Invisible Man) is what set up this exploration of this simultaneous capacity of being and not being, being present and absent.” He goes on by telling his story on how he began to paint his black figures. Marshall explains, “The first picture I made that used the black image of a black figure against a black background, I needed to try and figure out a way to create some separation between the image and the ground by changing the color temperature of the two-different blacks you would use.” The use of his tones and his well thought out choices of color is what got him to where he is today. So, this was the first time he had used this sort of black image and it all was born from him reading invisible man by Ralph Ellison.

⁵ “Kerry James Marshall Interview: Paint it Black,” YouTube video, 10:18, posted by “Louisiana Channel,” March 31, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wNTN3MaLTY>.

Some of the first lines in Frantz Fanon book, *Black Skin, White Masks*⁶, Chapter 5, The Fact of Blackness states, “I came into this world imbued with the will to find the meaning in things, my spirit field with the desire to obtain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.” When reading this it just makes you think wow, we are all human beings yet we are being treated as if we are an object. We were sold, we were used to make someone else’s life easier, we were demeaned, we were abused, we were a lifeless object in the eyes of the ‘white man’. We are mistreated, we are judged, we are unappreciated, we are killed, beaten, battered, and bruised because of what we look like however, we no longer will allow ourselves to be put in the back seat. We will make ourselves be seen since no one else feels that it is important to do so.

I’d like to talk about one of the most profound racial experiments by Jane Elliott called Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes⁷. Elliott was an elementary school teacher who taught third graders and she did an experiment where she told her students one day that the blue-eyed children in the classroom were better than the brown-eyed children in the classroom. The next day she then flipped that and told the blue-eyed children that the brown-eyed children were better. This experiment caused the children to begin to question why the child with the opposite color eyes

⁶ Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1993. pp. 109-140.

⁷ “Brown eyes and blue eyes Racism experiment (Children Session) - Jane Elliott,” YouTube video, 14:36, posted by “Faheem Shuaibe,” July 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHxFuO2Nk-0>.

was better as well as being treated differently than they were. The privileged student at the time was told that they got five extra minutes at recess as well as they were able to drink out of the water fountain while the student with the “bad” eyes for that day had to drink out of a paper cup. By doing this experiment she noticed that the kids began to act differently towards each other and not in a good way. They began to make fun of one another as well as learning at a slower pace because all they could think about was someone being more privileged than they were. It is heartbreaking that these children who were just friends are now saying mean things to one another just because their teacher told them that blue eyes are better than brown eyes and vice versa. By doing this experiment she beautifully displayed how racism shouldn't have ever been okay. What I love so much about this was that she was doing this experiment with children in specific. This shows that shaping our children's perception of the world and how they view people is what is going to make our world a better place. If we teach our children to hate they will not know any better to do otherwise however, if we teach our children to love everyone equally there will be no reason for them to begin to discriminate against one another in the first place. At the end of Elliott's experiment, she asked both the brown-eyed students and the blue-eyed students how they felt after they were told one was better than the other. Their response was breathtaking. That being that they hated being treated differently. That they did not like the way it made them feel. She followed that question with, “So are blue-eyed people better than brown-eyed people?”, the kids responded with no. She then asked are brown-eyed people are better than people with blue eyes and once again the kids responded with no. Then the infamous question of, “Are white people better than black people” and the children gave an astounding response of no. Elliott's experiment was absolutely beautiful and I thank her for sharing this moment with the

world. Although trying to change the perceptions of those who have had these ideals embedded in them since childhood would be very difficult, we would have to hope that not only this video but our everyday experiences with life discrimination would hopefully change the view that white is better than black. I feel that it is important to mention this in relation to Marshall's work because he is doing the exact same thing by replacing the white faces that are on the walls in galleries with black faces so that not only we can see ourselves as important, but also so that white people can see the importance of who we are as well.

In conclusion, artist like Kerry James Marshall are who we need to help change the unnecessary evil that we as a people encounter in our everyday lives. If our white America could stop and think about how people of color are treated differently on a daily basis, they could then take that idea and apply it to themselves. If they did this would they then feel obligated to take action in what is right. If you simply take the question, 'Would you want to be treated the way a black person is treated?' and if there is any ounce of hesitation in the answer of saying 'yes!' then that alone should be evidence enough to show that there is indeed a problem. Not only does Marshall explain that his art is there to help young black brothers and sisters see themselves as important on the walls of art galleries, but he is also preaching way beyond that. As explained before, he is showing that we should not stand for what has just been excepted as okay for all these years. We are now in a new day and age and we must begin to recognize just that. We shall not continue to carry out these ideals that racism is okay, that discrimination is okay, and that the miss treatment towards others who do not physically look like you is okay. We must

teach our children to love and except all people for who they are on the inside and not the outer layer of their skin. In a sense, we all bleed the same, breath the same, and see the same so, why should we not be treated as the same. Kerry James Marshall is the epitome of greatness. I thank artists like Marshall for showing people who look like me an African-American person that we stand just as tall as those around us. We are just as smart, just as beautiful, and our light shines just as bright.

Bibliography

Kerry James Marshall, *School of Beauty, School of Culture*, 2012, Acrylic and glitter on unstretched canvas, 107 7/8 x 157 7/8 inches, Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Alabama.

“Kerry James Marshall Interview: Paint it Black,” YouTube video, 10:18, posted by “Louisiana Channel,” March 31, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wNTN3MaLTY>.

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Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.8, No.4 (Summer, 1982)

Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness,” *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1993. pp. 109-140.

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Amber Shanice

MFA Thesis Exhibition

May 19, 2021 @ 6pm

CV Amber Bowser

Personal Information

Name: Amber Bowser
Date of Birth: 11/13/1995
Phone: (951) 489-9148
Email: ambershanice5@gmail.com
Website: ambershanice.com

Profile

I strive to inspire future students to express their artistic vision through drawing, painting, ceramics and more.

Education

2018-2021	Master's of Fine Arts California State University San Bernardino - Teachers Assistant to Brad Spence (painting)
2013-2017	Bachelors of Art in Studio Art California State University San Bernardino - 2017 student art exhibition in Robert Frances and Fullerton Museum of Art (RAFFMA)
2009-2013	High School Diploma Moreno Valley High School

Professional Experience

Fall 2021	MFA Teaching Associate for Beginning Painting California State University San Bernardino, San Bernardino California - Professor for beginning painting course to undergraduate students for the 2021 fall semester.
January 2020-present	Personal Art Instructor Los Angeles California - Teaching the fundamentals of painting and drawing through one on one lessons.
January 2020-present	Independent Artist California - Providing commissioned works for both professional and personal use.
February 2018 -	Art Instructor

- March 2020 Purple Easel, Ontario California
- Teaching step by step paintings to both adults and children.

Extracurricular Activities

- Jan 2019- June 2019 Art Instructor
Moreno Valley School District
- Teaching the basic fundamentals of art to elementary school students.

Exhibitions, Achievements, Entrepreneurial set-ups

- 2021 - MFA Thesis Exhibition, We Are Gold, RAFFMA (Dutton Gallery)
CSUSB, VR Exhibition
- 2020 - Visual Frequency Group Exhibition, We Shine, RAFFMA (Dutton
Gallery) CSUSB
- 2019 - MexiCali Biennial Calafia, She is Beauty and Untitled Piece
- 2019 - Visual Arts Lobby, Able, CSUSB
- 2019 - Second Year MFA Group Exhibition, I Am..., RAFFMA (Dutton
Gallery) CSUSB
- 2020 - Advancement to Candidacy
- 2018 - Lineage Project Presentation, RAFFMA Art Gallery
- Current - Updating website to showcase more works and begin selling prints,
merch, etc.

Skills

- 8 years of painting and drawing primarily focused in portraiture
- 5 years of ceramic and sculpture
- Adobe photoshop
- Procreate
- Office skills