

Hi everyone I am really excited to get to speak with you all, but before I start, I think it's important I recognize my privilege here as a white woman sharing the stories of these incredible Black women through my art---because when someone shares another's story---which is necessary to do with most of these sisters as they are no longer on earth to share their own stories---but when we share stories, we always share it from our perspective, with our own biases on what we think is most important to share. So I have my own inevitable subconscious perspective as a white woman on what aspects of their lives I choose to put in each painting and how to display those; I try to continually be learning, but---there is never a point in a white person's life where they'll completely understand racism, so I do this art with humility, knowing that I am not an expert and welcome critique when I am wrong. But I do this because racism was started and is allowed to continue by white people, so in reality, it is truly our responsibility to clean up this mess.

That is why I wanted to make these portraits uncomfortable--so they are definitely a celebration of and an opportunity to learn about Black history, but they are also just as much a reminder of white people's responsibility to dismantle racism in society today. They are a call to action, for white people to examine ourselves and our lives for racial justice. And I am still very much learning how to answer this call myself; it is a lifelong process of learning and reflecting, making changes in our lives, and taking action when it is difficult and uncomfortable. The life stories of these women are inspiring to look up to because of how they committed to resistance and racial justice with such conviction, but they cannot be appreciated without genuinely reflecting and changing our own lives to more closely reflect that same conviction.

So process wise--- I approach each piece almost like an essay, reading about each woman and compiling the information into the main points that I want the portrait to highlight about the woman's life, but instead of writing a paragraph for each main point like an essay would, I display those visually through symbolism, references, and colors which you will get to hear about as I explain each piece. This has really been, in a way, a spiritual process of getting to know each woman, because when you spend so many hours looking at a portrait while you are painting, it ends up being a very prayerful way for me to reflect on their lives, even if it's just subconsciously, which has been unbelievably meaningful for me and is a new connection with the women that I hope can come out of others

engaging with this art. FutureChurch has mentioned before that I'll be putting out prayer cards on my store soon, which I promise will happen soon, but with the prayer cards I approach the writing of them really as an extension of the painting, as I love showing ideas through visual art, but I also love writing, and want the prayers to be very intentional and thought through, because even though it sounds cheesy, I do see them as a different form of art about the women, and want to be very prayerful about how I compose them, because again, with this art I am almost speaking on behalf of these women's life stories, which is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly, which is why I need to be prayerful about the writing, because it almost becomes a collaborative process with God and the women then.

Ok so with that, we are going to start with the first portrait, Sr. Antona Ebo

Antona Antona Ebo

The painting shows the iconic picture of her speaking to the press at Selma that ended up on the first page of the New York Times. Behind her is the actual crowd from the march--however if you can spot it, the crowd transitions from the protesters in Selma to the people at the Ferguson protests, showing the two different crowds that Sr. Ebo spoke to, decades apart--- this emphasizes how the racism from the civil rights era is the same racism we see today, just in a slightly different form. The crowd further transitions into the protests for Black Lives Matter that occurred this summer, as although Sr. Ebo wasn't alive to speak at a protest, this further shows racism's continuity over time, and calls us to confront racism in our present like Sr. Antona did. The dove in the sky is a nod to her love of the Holy Spirit, and how she always gave the spirit credit, relying on her heavily in her justice work and throughout her life.

Next to the image of the painting, I have the actual historical images that I painted from, as I will include with the rest of the paintings I show you, just so that you can see the actual images.

Mother Mary Lange

Mother Lange is next to a student from St. Frances academy---the school formed by the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first black Catholic sisterhood in the US that she founded. I purposefully posed them in the same positioning and colors as the famous Black Madonna, our Lady of Czestochowa (cheh stuh hoe vuh), to draw the connection that Mother Lange was a mother figure for not only the church and the Oblates, but also the Black community of which she was leader for as they grappled with such a tumultuous time of history, leading up to and during the civil war. In the students halo, I wrote "Say Her Name" ---which is the campaign that was recently created to bring attention to the names of Black women who were murdered by police violence, as they are not getting as much public remembrance as Black men are. I decided to include this campaign as Mother Lange focused especially on women so much throughout her life, beginning with the all-girls school---so I included the names of those Black women from the "Say Her Name" campaign near the top of the sky. However, near the bottom of the sky, the names transition into the rarely known names of the countless Black women who were lynched or raped by White people during this time period---what I like to refer to as the "Say Her Name" campaign of the 19th century. This again refers to the continuity of racism over time, showing how the racism and sexism of Mother Lange's time has just taken a different form into today. Finally, the hands at the top of the painting are layered with meaning, all interpretations of them apply to the piece, as I purposefully wanted to make them ambiguous so that they could hold multiple meanings. They can represent the aura of unity that Mother Lange and the Oblates provided for the Black community in Maryland. They can represent the women of the names in the painting, both from the 19th century and the 21st, holding hands together in God's Kingdom. And they can also represent people holding hands while praying.

Sr. Thea Bowman

Sr Thea is actually my favorite Catholic of all time, so I felt a lot of pressure going into her portrait because I really wanted to do it justice. I decided to think about what the essence of Sr Thea is and then build upon that. I decided that Sr. Thea really could not be represented without the audience being able to feel the joy and lively energy that she is universally known for. I conveyed this partly through color, as you can see I used a lot of warm colors on Sr. Thea to contrast with the blue night sky behind her, to almost show her as this beam of light in the night.

She is also singing or preaching, which was also an essential part of her identity---and the crowd she is preaching to is the bishops from the famous talk she gave to the USCCB about what it means to be Black and Catholic, which I felt was a undisputable moment that I needed to include, especially because I think it is such a powerful image to see a black nun preaching to all of those white bishops. So as you can see with the reference image I put on the left, those are actually the bishops were were at that speech, but I made the crowd even larger than the bishops who were there to relay how Sr Thea taught the larger white Catholic community about the beauty and legitimacy of Black Catholic religious expression, and even more so, the urgent need to dismantle racism in the Catholic Church and United States; something White people are responsible for. Above her in the night sky, I used the constellation almost as a caption bubble, to show what Sr Thea is singing, which is written around the moon which, if you look close, is actually the globe---which was just a symbolic detail I wanted to add---but quote says “ I bring myself, my Black self, as a gift to the Church.” which again is really the message of her ministry throughout her life.

Mother Anna Bates

So I wanted to convey how Mother Anna Bates created a church of people through the summer programs she created, before the diocese finally agreed to grant her community Our Lady of Victory church. Mother Bates and her parishioners are standing in the actual shape of the eventual church they founded, to show that Our Lady of Victory, and the Catholic Church worldwide, are so much more than the structures that define them, but ultimately in their most simplest form, are the people. The church imagery is continued with the stained glass behind them that calls out the different ways the Catholic Church marginalizes and excludes Black Catholic women---something Mother Bates faced throughout her life. The panel on the left represents the discrimination and lack of representation of Black women with natural hairstyles; the middle panel displays a Black Madonna, chosen to contrast the white-washing of Mary and Catholic motherhood, as well as the Church’s ignorance and lack of response to the high rates of infant mortalities for Black mothers caused by racism---something that is a dire life issue; and finally the right panel conveys how Black song and spirituals are excluded from what is viewed as quote unquote typical or traditional Masses and prayer services, and are even seen by many white Catholics as not being truly Catholic song. I chose the stained glass to convey this because it has

historically been one of the least likely art forms to include Black figures, so this stained glass panel is a protest celebration of Black Catholic women, displaying a future church where they are centered and valued.

Henriette Delille

I wanted to focus on Henriette's identity as a biracial woman---her father was white and her mother was Black---as sometimes that identity is overlooked, or people will portray her with darker skin than she actually had, so I thought it was important to accurately display her paleness, to not downplay her light-skinned privilege, but also to recognize that in the racial hierarchy she was in, as much of the U.S. was at the time, Blackness was so distained that the genealogy of each person was so well known by the communities in order to classify people as Black if they had "one drop", they were treated as such---so really i dont think her light skin is something to cover up, but speaks to a horrible aspect of American history where Black people were so unbelievably feared and hated by white people that there was an obsession with genealogy to keep white genes "pure". Not only is she biracial, but she worked with both white people and black people despite the strict hierarchy in New Orleans, with the interracial sisterhood she tried to form and how--the Black Catholic sisterhood she helped form---the Sisters of the Holy Family---served people despite their place in the racial hierarchy. So the two hands reaching across for each other represent both of those aspects of Mother Delille. The two hands raised with the words hands up don't shoot is the connection that I have drawn to the present, as I was inspired by seeing Black and white people standing next to each other putting their hands up and saying this chant at the protests for Black Lives Matter this summer. In the spirit of Mother Delille's interracial work, I wanted to emphasize the call us Catholics have, to truly do interracial justice work. This means that when addressing anti-Black racism, white people have an obligation to be genuinely in solidarity with Black people, not just when it is comfortable, but to stand with Black people when it is most inconvenient for us---that is why I have the phrase "hands up don't shoot" that has been recently popularized to represent the police brutality that so many Black people have faced---and have had their lives cut short because of---to be truly interracial , white people must literally and figuratively, stand alongside Black people in moments as horrific and difficult as that phrase. Finally, the hands coming from the sky, holding the sacred heart is a reference to the name of the sisterhood that Delille helped found; the Sisters of

the Holy Family. I wanted to show a depiction of the Holy Family as Black to honor the Black identity of the sisterhood---so one hand is meant to represent Joseph, the other, Mary, and the Sacred Heart is for Jesus. Finally the background is intentionally displaying a New Orleans nature scene, as the context of the racial hierarchy of Louisiana is necessary to understand the weight of how radical Delille and her commitment to interracial work was.

Sister Martin de Porres Grey (now Patricia Grey)

So for Patricia Grey's portrait I wanted to focus on how she centered Black women---as I read in an article that the National Black Sisters Conference, which she is known for founding, was joyful and truly free. It really struck me that Grey created such a sacred space for Black Catholic women to meet and no longer be the outsider, to be temporarily relieved from the suffocation of racism and patriarchy. So I have Patricia Grey in front of the women from the conference---as you can see on the left, this is the actual image from those early meetings. I thought I could portray this idea that the conference was a sanctuary, by having the land and the sky around them be the lush, almost transcendent landscape of the Sahel in the rain season in Africa, symbolically and emotionally representing this almost-utopia. Because the problems of racism and patriarchy are rooted in colonization---Black women in the U.S. have yet to experience the same freedom that women in Africa had before white people, specifically men, colonized, kidnapped, sold, and enslaved them. Before, this, understandably there wasn't white supremacy, but additionally, history indicates that African women were valued, centered, and free in most communities in pre-colonial Africa.---something that Black women in America have never truly experienced, and are only able to temporarily experience in spaces like the Black Sisters Conference that Grey created. Lastly, the young girl looking up to Grey is included to symbolically show how Black children---both at the time and for generations to come---are able to be empowered by seeing a Black woman in a public position of leadership---as Grey was the president of the conference for years, and ever since then, the conference has only had Black female presidents.

Mother Mathilda Beasley

I was personally really moved by the secret school that Mother Mathilda started in her home to educate free and enslaved Black children in the early 19th century---which was extremely illegal at the time---something she did before she even became a nun, so I wanted to use that to represent her devotion to Black children and Black Georgians. The house behind her is actually that house---you can see its picture on the left. As I've mentioned before, this was before the Civil war, so all of this was happening while people were being enslaved around her. I used the sky to symbolically display this. The clear blue sky within the home's door and windows symbolizes the hope she built for her students as they lived under the suffocating conditions of slavery and a deeply racist society—which is represented by the contrasting dark, storming, threatening sky above. Finally the phrase in the grass, “Not Yours to Wwn,” has a dual meaning to acknowledge her identities. Firstly, her identity as a Black woman. In this context the phrase signifies how Black people are not anyone's to own—through enslavement and the less literal “owning” of Black people through racism's dehumanization. The other meaning honors her Native American heritage, as her father was known to be indigenous, although we unfortunately don't know what nation he belonged to. But from this perspective, the phrase reminds us that Indigenous land is not to be owned. Not by anyone, but especially not by the white colonizers who stole the land through forced removal and the genocide of what is widely estimated to have been 20 million Indigenous people across the Americas. The phrase applies then as it does today, as Black and Indigenous communities in the U.S. continue to resist racism's inherent “owning” of their identity, their power, and their land.

Sister Anne Marie Becraft

In this painting, I wanted to show the two schools where Anne Marie taught---the building on the left represents the school that she founded in Georgetown at age 15 to serve Black children after a discriminatory law pushed many out of school---there isn't an actual photo of her school, so it's not completely accurate but is a guess at what it would've looked like. And on the right is the actual building for St. Frances Academy where she taught after she joined the Oblate Sisters---and if you can see in both of the buildings I painted the students in the windows to support the fact that these are schools, and also to show that the quote in the sky describes not only Anne Marie, but also her students, and even further, all black children throughout history and today. Because, the phrase

says, “Degrade our minds, our souls, our youth, but still we rise”---which is a clear reference to Maya Angelou’s “Still I Rise Poem.” I included this quote to directly name how white society disenfranchised Anne Marie Becraft, and all Black children. They have degraded her mind by limiting access to education (like the D.C. policy that pushed so many Black students out of school, or the underfunding of schools in Black communities we see today), we also see this through propaganda that insinuates that Black people are incapable of being smart—a lie that we can find existing in many aspects of America. Society devalued their souls. When Becraft was alive, a significant amount of white people believed that Black people did not have souls; a belief which still has remnants today in the lack of “mainstream” religious art depicting Black people. This additionally exists in white people’s suspiciousness of Black Americans’ goodness that can be either subconscious or overt. Finally, society has degraded Black youth through systems that stunt their futures (like the school to prison pipeline) and by perpetuating the lie that the power of black young people is foolish and incapable of impacting society. This is the same lie that Anne Marie likely faced as she fearlessly harnessed her power at fifteen, yet still she and so many others, continued to rise.

Mother Mary Theodore Williams

As you can see on the left, this portrait was based off of an actual image that I found that shows a Franscian Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary's sister (the black sisterhood that Mother Williams founded) with some of the children they were serving in Harlem. I loved the image as a way to show her commitment to Black youth, so I just changed the sister to be Mother Williams. I wanted to have her pointing toward the rising sun, as a metaphor for how she was always looking towards the next possibility, whether it was forming her religious order, or moving them to Harlem, or the multitude of initiatives that they started to serve their community, Mother Williams was always looking for the next possible step to take. Thus, the night sky behind them is gradually getting lighter, as the sun is rising in front of them. This is reinforced by the painted quote, “The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,” which is the first line from the poem “The Heart of a Woman” by Georgia Douglas Johnson, a Black poet from the Harlem Renaissance, as Williams moved her order to Harlem during the Renaissance. However, the dawn is also a much greater symbol for the hope needed to commit to the difficult work of dismantling racism. The complete eradication of

racism in all forms may be far away, but we can learn from Mother Williams. Don't allow our despair to stop us from continually pursuing the next visible possibility for a more just world, in hopes that one day, the sun representing a united world will fully rise. Thus, the children can also represent future generations being figuratively guided by mother williams in their justice work. Their colorful clothing further conveys this hopeful energy, and as you might have noticed, those colors were inspired by the bottom reference image I included. I found this image off of the Franciscan Handmaids' facebook page, and it shows people performing in cultural African clothing, so I decided to add a layer of pride for African heritage and culture as well. Which i think correlates well with the embracement of African American culture that occurred during the Harlem Renaissance.

Concluding remarks

I included the names and links to some artists that are doing similar work to me, because I think it is my responsibility to stress that I am not doing anything completely new. My art isn't saying anything that hasn't been thought of before; my work is built on the work of other Black artists and thinkers who have been tackling white-centerdness in art for decades. So I included Titus Kaphar, Kehinde Wiley, and Harmonia Rosales who are just a few of the many many artists who inspire me and who have been leading this work longer than I. So if you haven't heard of those artists before, I encourage you to check out their work too if you enjoyed my art! So I hope that the paintings evoked in you a longing to learn more, and I truly appreciate that you took time out of your evening to listen and learn a little bit more about this art! So I think it is time for us to take questions!