

STILL



I RISE

MASS MoCA



Genevieve Gaignard, *Miss/ed America*, chromogenic print, edition of 3 + 2 Aps, exhibition copy, 2017, courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

STILL I RISE

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise
— Maya Angelou, 1978*

Images of women populate TV screens, the glossy pages of magazines, our Instagram feeds, and the walls in this very gallery — but how do we actually see them? And what do these images tell us about the time in which we are living and the times that have come before?

In examining the portrayals of women of color throughout history, the artists in *Still I Rise* found an absence of portraits of people who looked like them, or their families and friends. Through their photography, paintings, collage, and installation work, they fill in these blank spaces, encouraging us to consider such questions as:

- **Who is often the subject of a portrait?**
- **Whose images make up the story of Western art history, as it is typically told?**
- **How have art and popular culture shaped our views of women and people of color?**

As the following Western art historical examples demonstrate, white women were sometimes featured as portrait subjects in ways that were pretty exceptional for the time, including being represented as powerful rulers, or powerful forces in society; sometimes women themselves were artists, leading to fresh perspectives. The *Still I Rise* artists are attempting to make art history and the art field more inclusive of women of color, as well as portraiture that captures a person's unique character and appearance.

—Laura Thompson, Ed.D., Director of Education & Curator of Kidspace



E2 - Kleinveld & Julien, *Ode to Marcus Gheeraerts' Portrait of Elizabeth I*, archival pigment print, edition 1/3, 2014, courtesy of Jonathan Ferrara Gallery

THE HISTORY OF ART

Housed at the National Portrait Gallery in London, the painting of Queen Elizabeth I (below) is by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger in 1592. In this period, women rulers were uncommon, and thus this image of the queen is a rare portrait of female power. The artistic duo E2 - Kleinveld & Julien replicated this image in their 2014 photograph (left) with the goal of broadening traditional portraiture to be more inclusive of women of color.

“While our world has always been a diverse one, the history of art has focused almost exclusively on white faces and bodies, with subjects of other races depicted in the background and/or as servants of those in power. Our work seeks to correct this whitewashing of history through visual art by recasting iconic masterworks with subjects of varying races, genders, and sexual orientations.”

— E2-Kleinveld & Julien



Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, *Queen Elizabeth I* ('The Ditchley portrait'), oil on canvas, circa 1592, National Portrait Gallery, London

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

The National Portrait Gallery's label text: *“The portrait shows Elizabeth standing on the globe of the world, with her feet on Oxfordshire. The stormy sky, the clouds parting to reveal sunshine, and the inscriptions on the painting, make it plain that the portrait's symbolic theme is forgiveness.”*

What do you notice about the story being told in the E2 - Kleinveld & Julien version?



Tim Okamura, *Storm Warrior [Knight & Squire]*, oil on canvas, 2019, courtesy of the artist

POWERFUL WOMEN

The 1866 painting of a duchess (below) is by Belgian artist Alfred Stevens; the original title interpreted from French means “a woman who puts on airs.” Paintings such as this one, often showed symbols of the individual’s power, class, and personality. Tim Okamura’s 2019 painting (left) portrays women of color with “dignity, respect, and relatability in a positive way.”

“Sometimes people question a little bit [that a Japanese-Anglo Canadian man painted these works], but I don’t consider myself trying to say I’m an authority on African-American culture of life per se. I’m really a storyteller, and in my portraits there’s a narrative, and I think that the people I paint, in my opinion, have a very important story that needs to be told.”

—Tim Okamura



Alfred Stevens, *A Duchess (The Blue Dress)*, oil on panel, 1866, The Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Over 150 years have passed between the creation of these two portraits. There are notable differences, yet at the same time they both are of powerful women, and are both painted in a realistic style for their eras.

Compare and contrast how the artists have portrayed these two women. What words would you use to describe them? What makes them powerful?



Deborah Roberts, *The Bearer*, mixed-media collage on paper, 2017, collection of Jessica Stafford Davis

CHILDREN IN PORTRAITURE

The Double Portrait of a Boy and Girl of the Attavanti Family (below) was painted by Italian Renaissance female artist Sofonisba Anguissola in c. 1580–1585. *The Bearer* (left) is a collage portrait by contemporary artist Deborah Roberts in 2017. In classical portraiture, upper-class Caucasian children have long been the subjects, representing power and wealth. Robert's portrait, on the other hand, pushes us to reconsider innocence and ideal beauty, particularly in light of race and class.

“My early ideals of race and beauty were shaped by and linked through paintings of Renaissance artists and photographs in fashion magazines. Those images were mythical, heroic, beautiful, and powerful and embodied a particular status that was not afforded equally to me or anyone I knew. These images influenced the way I viewed myself and other African Americans, which led me to investigate ‘How has African American identity been imagined and shaped by societal interpretations of beauty?’”

—Deborah Roberts

*“As a Black woman raising two sons and living in the United States, *The Bearer* speaks to my struggles of being enough while still managing the strength to stand strong for the sake of my children.”*

—Jessica Stafford Davis, a collector, on why she was attracted to own this piece



Sofonisba Anguissola, *Double Portrait of a Boy and Girl of the Attavanti Family*, oil on panel, c.1580–1585, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, OH

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Both artists present portraits of beauty that have been shaped by the era in which they were produced.

Compare and contrast these portraits of young people. What do they tell you about their lives and who was considered beautiful?



Gustave Blache III, *End of Day*, oil on wood, 10 x 8 inches, 2011, on loan from Alden McDonald

PORTRAITS OF GATHERINGS

John Sloan's portrait (below) shows a gathering at a New York City boarding house in the early 20th century. Writers, philosophers, and artists would meet here to enjoy conversations and community. Gustave Blache's portrait of Leah Chase (left) depicts the famed New Orleans chef taking a rest from work at her Dooky Chase's Restaurant, a well-known meeting place for the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Today, it continues to attract politicians, activists, and artists.

"The painting End of Day was a true depiction of Chef Leah Chase at 4pm after a long shift that started at 7am that morning. I witnessed her time and time again will herself (88 years old at the time) through the painstaking process of cutting vegetables, stewing chicken, and stirring gumbo, all while still managing her staff and inventory of products. The worn and exhausted expression on her face in this painting exudes the true heroism that her hard work and dedication to a community she's fed, housed, and continues to inspire looks like."

— Gustave Blache III



John Sloan, 'Yeats at Petitpas', oil on canvas, 1910–1914, Corcoran Gallery of Art

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Both artists are known for illustrating everyday life.

Compare the women in the two images. How have the artists portrayed them? What can we tell about what their lives were like from these images?



Genevieve Gaignard, installation view of *Us Only*, 2015

OBJECTS AS PORTRAITS

Everything in this bedroom forms a buoyant and joyful ensemble.

—MET Label Text

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1720 bedroom (below) shows life in the home of an elite, highly decorated Italian palace. Genevieve Gagnard's installations (left) feature imagery and symbols of the artist's everyday experiences. As the daughter of a black father and white mother, Gagnard's work shows her wrestling with her personal identity, gender, and race.

"I want to use my platform as an artist to critique how we are programmed to fit into this box of 'normal.' If we can shed that way of thinking, then I believe we can co-exist in a more productive way. I'd like to spark conversations that deconstruct the ways in which we talk about—or ignore—issues of race and racism in America."

—Genevieve Gagnard



Bedroom from the Sagredo Palace, ca. 1720 or later, stucco work probably by Abbondio Stazio, Italian, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Gagnard said about her installations that she is “fascinated by what people choose to surround themselves with in their domestic spaces and the objects that make a place feel like home.”

What do the objects in these rooms tell you about the period of time and the residents of these spaces? Compare the MET bedroom and one of Gagnard's earlier installations (left) to her teenage bedroom in Kidspace.

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTISTS



Gustave Blache III (b. San Bernardino, CA) is a figurative painter from New Orleans, LA, who is currently based in Brooklyn, NY. Interested in documenting everyday laborers and highlighting the intimate nature of work itself, Blache has gained international recognition for his well-known series of paintings of celebrated chef Leah Chase, pictured with him here, who is known as the “Queen of Creole Cuisine.”



Genevieve Gaignard (b. Orange, MA) is a Los Angeles-based artist whose photographic self-portraiture, sculpture, and installation use her own body to explore race, femininity, and class while interrogating notions of passing. As the daughter of a black father and a white mother, Gaignard has been navigating the space of biracial identity as long as she can remember. Blending humor with pop culture through lowbrow pop sensibilities, Gaignard’s work reveals the way we represent ourselves and each other.



Deborah Roberts (b. Austin, TX) is an Austin, Texas-based artist who creates paper collage portraits often depicting young girls of color with the theme of “otherness” as central to the work. As symbols of both vulnerability and naïve strength, the subjects navigate their way amidst the complicated narrative of African American identity. Roberts has a keen awareness of how the portrayal of race and beauty in popular media has contributed towards the dismantling and marginalization of African American identity.



Tim Okamura (b. Edmonton, Canada) is a Brooklyn based artist who paints realistic portraits focused primarily on women of color. He is concerned with challenging traditional standards of beauty and representing resilience and strength, while searching for metaphors for the greater human experience. Through the media of collage, spray paint, and mixed media, and by sampling art history with classical techniques, Okamura investigates identity, urban environment, metaphor, and cultural iconography.



The self-taught artistic duo Elizabeth Kleinveld (b. New Orleans, LA) and Epaul Julien (b. New Orleans, LA), who works under the name “**E2**,” offers reinterpretation of canonical paintings. Their versions are altered to include historically underrepresented people through reenactments incorporating diverse representations of race, gender, and sexual orientation.



FOR FURTHER READING

- Embrace Race offers webinars, tip sheets in English and Spanish, and a guide to children’s books for caregivers to use in talking to young children about race. <https://www.embracerace.org/>
- Educators Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards have written extensively about engaging young children in anti-bias work, particularly in early childhood education settings. See *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (2009) and *What if All the Kids Are White? Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families* (2nd ed. 2011).
- Teaching Tolerance has a wealth of additional resources for supporting children’s positive engagement with social justice and anti-bias. <https://www.tolerance.org/>
- Finally, ask your child’s school what kinds of anti-bias pedagogies are being used in the classroom. Ask teachers about what kinds of representation are available in the books and curricula offered. Look to local organizations, particularly those that are led by women of color, that may also offer resources to families and educators in engaging children in anti-racist and anti-bias behaviors.

Gustave Blache III

E2 - Kleinveld & Julien

Genevieve Gaignard

Tim Okamura

Deborah Roberts

Kidspace is a child-centered art gallery and hands-on studio, creating educational experiences in collaboration with leading artists. During the school year, Kidspace provides curriculum-based programs to local partner schools, with free public hours and art-making all year round.

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Cover:

Deborah Roberts, *Folding the Black into the red*,
2017, mixed-media collage on paper, 30 x 22 inches,
collection of Michael and Jeanne Klein

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