

ARTIST STATEMENT

My artistic exploration of the divisions and relationships between contemporary ethnic groups has stemmed from my own experience as an African American woman of mixed heritage. The compulsion to understand myself within the confines of the definition of my culture led me to realize that it is impossible to deny the mannerisms of other cultures that created my ancestral make-up and childhood experiences. Did lacking the essential traits that prescribe the looks, habits, religions and customs of my heritage position me outside my "own" culture? Is there anything inherent or absolute that allows someone to completely claim a heritage? If not, identity must be about individuality, not similarities. Perhaps we should say that a person is an individual first, with a specific biography, who only secondarily shares in the heritage of any definable group. Because our need to label and categorize each other still exists, despite the contemporary realities of social and geographic mobility, the notion of cultural purity survives as a convenient fiction. These labels and fictions create an artificial simplicity which guards a more complex and meaningful truth.

I am not a prisoner of my culture as it has been defined as a historical group, and must refuse the notion of a narrow definition of my identity. These issues in my paintings have been explored through my own image, representations of cultural artifacts and historical objects, and materials with possible individual and group references. Images, representations, and materials reveal themselves to the viewer initially through groupings of similar forms; slowly more information is revealed that isolates these forms away from the broader groupings and towards an individual character.

Roland Barthes said, "I myself am my own symbol, I am the story which happens to me: freewheeling in language, I have nothing to compare myself to...." In my work, portraits, historical objects, and materials are separate, layered and interdependent, together representing the complexity of our contemporary cultural heritage.