

BRÄVING CONCLUSIONS

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Drawing Conclusions is a suite of ten layered portraits of people real and imagined by **Tyeschea West**,

Each images combines photography, acrylic, watercolor, and transparent film
11x14 inches, framed : 17x21 inches.

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Tyeschea West

Drawing Conclusions

(titles, from left to right)

1.

“Why?!”

2.

“My regrets no longer burn bright as I get older;
they smolder instead”

3.

“Real war is more unimaginable when it’s at
your door”

4.

“The refreshing honesty of my kid makes me
laugh like nothing else”

5.

“I could turn back but at this point, but the
unknown seems like a better friend”

6.

“All the places I have been has become a part of
me in some way”

7.

“For me, drawing is writing without letters”

8.

“Where there is peace, happiness always
follows”

9.

“It’s frustrating when someone asks me where
I’m ‘really’ from, when they know I was born in
America just like them”

10.

“I have to remember, I’m more than enough,
even if most of society has been brainwashed
into believing differently”

Q. What draws you to portraiture?

Tyeschea West: Portraiture gives me the chance to connect to others and simultaneously acknowledge someone's existence. I believe everyone has value and yearns to be seen, heard, and understood. Moving around as a child encouraged my curiosity towards strangers and produced a desire to stay somewhere long enough to appreciate my friends. Since I didn't get that chance when I was younger, I value that even more today. I also believe human beings are multifaceted species that we can endlessly learn from.

In past work the portraiture was more traditional, or straight-forward photography, what led you to this the mixed media approach of this set of work?

I wanted to combine my eagerness to use my hands and shoot behind the camera. I started each piece with an abstract acrylic and watercolor painting. Then drew a person on top of the image that evoked the feeling conveyed underneath. Then I took a photo of the piece and placed this as the top layer. I wanted to draw the viewer into multiple layers of depth and wonder what goes into this (human) creation, each layer not perfectly lining up but still linked together in the human experience.

Who are the people who sat for you for this show?

A few subjects are friends or family members, and the other images are inspired by stock images. The subjects who I didn't know became an exercise in empathy and fictional writing. I imagined stepping into their shoes to create a quote they wanted to express.

What is your hope for people who see this work?

To leave inspired to be more curious. When we stop being curious about anything unfamiliar, we limit our experience. And when that happens, it can breed ignorance, hate, or violence.

Why is diversity America's strength? My answer is this; it makes us more compassionate and aware, less likely to subscribe to a false sense of hierarchy, more accepting of nuances, open to new experiences, and less afraid to value differences. It makes us better examples of humanity.

An essay in the wake of George Floyd, 2020

A rollercoaster of thoughts and emotions has filled my mind recently. Where do I begin? Maybe I should start with my own experience. My life as a black American was rooted in a Jamaican mother who grew up in a black society that never questioned her worth. It's rooted in military parents who benefited from being veterans, which gave us equal base housing, funded schools, VA loans to own homes and land, funded national and international travel, and more. It is only because of these experiences and these opportunities that I am who I am today. My mother's adamant refusal to accept the general white American's demeaning gaze as truth only made sense because of where she came from. The idea that white Americans claimed to know her and her capability just because of one physical characteristic was absolutely ridiculous in her mind. And she passed that belief on to me. So subconsciously, I was determined to make much of my life a case study against any stereotypes assumed about black people. You were not going to find any of the negative ones in me.

Looking back now, was that the right approach? Did doing this actually appease white America by assimilating too much? Did I really change people's biases towards black people? Or was I contributing to the idea that stereotypes needed to be proven wrong first before someone saw me as a worthy and non-threatening human being?

I have experienced being intensely watched in stores, saying I am _____ for a black girl, and repeatedly not getting interviews if I put my full name on my resume. But, I have not been a victim of redlining, police brutality, or poor education. And I know full well that the extent of the racism I have experienced is because of my lucky upbringing. I know that I am here because I am standing on the shoulders of the strong black men and women who came before me and were courageous enough to stand up and fight for the rights I have today.

After reading more and educating myself on past events that brought us to this seminal moment, my heart was heavy, my blood was boiling, and my soul was burned by the revelations I was finding. I knew the basics of racism, but I didn't know the exact systematic approach used to create and sustain a specific hierarchy of race and class in America.

When I realized how pervasive, intricate, sly, and easily specific tools were used within the federal, state, local governments and throughout many industries to force, legislate,

and regulate black Americans into segregation and poverty, it is beyond heartbreaking and demoralizing. And the fact that I only learned a short, glossed-over version of this history in my American History classes growing up, is even more troubling.

It is not honest or genuine to believe that one's family's history has nothing to do with who they are today. People in power and policies of the past will always directly impact the present moment, and denying that fact is like denying any invention from the past has nothing to do with the evolution of any invention we have today.

It makes me wonder, who would America be if all human beings had equal rights and opportunities to prosper from the start?

The laws and open policies which didn't allow people of color the chance to create decades of generational wealth, live in safe and healthy neighborhoods, access high paying jobs, attend fully funded schools, and live in peace without fear of being murdered, is what we are still fighting against today. Because of this, I believe America truly self-sabotaged how great it could have been. The birth of promising potential, innovations, and wealth that could have come from so many black Americans prospering and fulfilling their dreams in the 1800s and 1900s is a devastating loss. We could have had more, in addition to the beautiful cultural contributions that are currently known and celebrated today.

Sadly due to a strange fear and superiority that white America manufactured and continued, black Americans were seen solely as an existential threat rather than fellow Americans who were also human beings. And even now, feelings with that train of thought and policies with that root of superiority are still pervasive today, though they are much more subtle and evident at the same time. You can still see it in gentrification, police brutality, the prison system, domestic terrorism, social media, politics and many other places in society.

The American experiment may be failing at the moment, but it succeeded in perpetuating a false narrative and negative mythology of black Americans. Unfortunately, it has become so deeply embedded within the psyche of many people in this country that it is hard to come to terms with. This proves that people in power have immense control over a human being's psychological development, simply because they initiate the policies and allocate the resources that create the environment we live in, whether we want to admit it or not.

But some of us are "making it" despite this, and some of us are not. And sometimes it has nothing to do with the idea of working hard enough. Sometimes it's just because of the body you were born into, the physical and mental environment you grew up in, and the history that came before. It is undeniable that the trauma, heartache, fear, anxiety, and stress inherited in every black American's life, is an extra burden that many will

never understand. But many now want to, like some of my dear and loving friends. That means so much to me, and it is a beautiful, healing feeling for all of us. And I hope these hard conversations turn into healing moments, healing introspection, healing actions, healing legislation, healing environments, and, ultimately, mended hearts.

—Tyeschea West, 2020



“Why?!”

2022

photography, acrylic, watercolor, film

image: 11x14 inches, framed: 17x21 inches

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