ART

GENESIS TRAMAINE SHARES SURVIVAL STRATEGIES WITH CURATOR STEPHANIE SEIDEL

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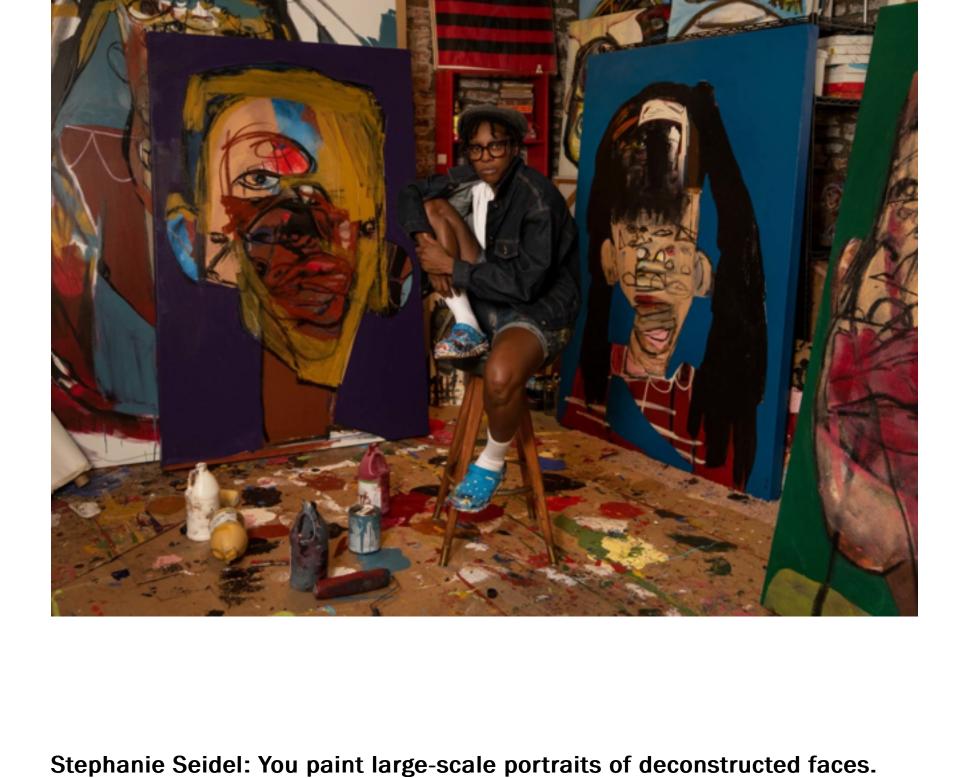
GENESIS TRAMAINE DISCUSSES DEVOTIONAL PAINTING, SOURCES OF

KNOWLEDGE, AND FINDING STRENGTH AS A BLACK WOMAN IN AMERICA.

12.22.2020

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GILLIAN LAUB

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Genesis Tramaine: The portraits are biblical saints. I am a devotional painter and I think it's important to give a face to the saints, who have names but don't have a real persona in the Bible. The images of saints that we know and that are projected at us

are all white with blond hair—and we all know that that is not true. I think it's a part of my journey to bridge these gaps. Often what propels me to get in the studio and gives me the energy is the Word.

STS: Do you mean scripture, the word of the Bible?

GT: Yes, that'll get me going. I'll read something that strikes me. Then I do the research on the word, Bible phrase, story or a specific character. I have to know who

Who is portrayed in these works?

their parents and their family are. Then these "characters" come to life. I'm such a Bible nerd.

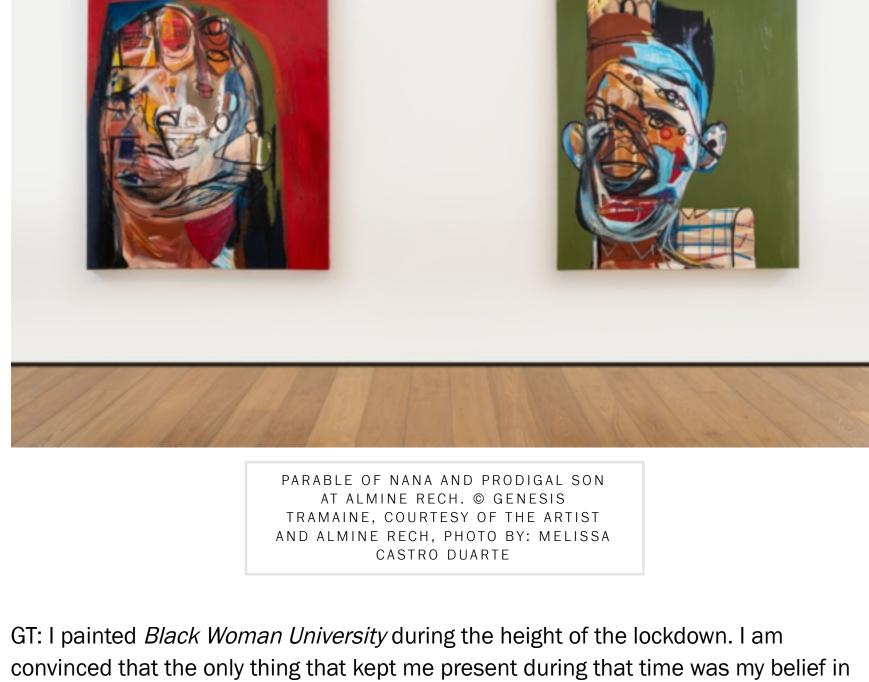


charge of what the work is going to look like. I don't have to worry about any mistakes. I can just let God be God. It's the one moment of the day where I can completely let

go. One of the greatest gifts that God has given me as a painter is that I get to be alone as often as I choose because solitude is an expected part of the painting process. As women we don't get these spaces. We are not trusted with "alone spaces." And as Black women, we are often not afforded those spaces.

STS: One of your recent works is titled *Black Woman University* (2020). The title really stuck with me. Could you talk more about it and how it relates to the broader framework of your practice?

GT: I'm going to be honest with you: I can just close my eyes and I don't have to be in



STS: You've described your paintings as "portals." I'm curious as to what kind of seeing or visibility you want to facilitate in your works. What are they entry points for?

GT: For me, the works are the best way—other than being on my knees in solitude—to connect to my higher self and the greater God that is within me. A fresh piece of

canvas is like a watering hole. It's a safe space. That's what the portal is for me. I

don't necessarily know where the angels take me, but I know I'm safe. There are

things that I've learned to pay attention to, to connect to the portal in the physical

space of the studio. I pray over this space, I pray for the spirit of the Holy Ghost and

then I receive the gospel: that is what is reflected in the paintings. Usually it looks like

a portrait from afar. But up close, if you really study the details of work, you'll notice a

separate story. You'll notice the gospel in the work.

God as well as all the knowledge that the women gave me who have raised me. I am

who I am as a Black woman in America because of the grace of God and because of

encouraging and that's the energy I took into that work. It was my way of honoring and

these women. There are specific survival strategies that got me through this year -

the things my Nana told me and the things I watched my mom do. All of that is

I think it's important to be honest about the fact that I am a vessel, creating a portal for someone else to find a greater sensory space of spirituality for themselves. I want people to feel invited in to the highest point of who they are spiritually. And I think that art can do that.

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