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Portraits: A Study in Objects, Family Relations, and Race

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PORTRAITS: A STUDY IN OBJECTS, FAMILY RELATIONS, AND RACE

by

Julie Quintero


Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Studio Art

at


Lindenwood University

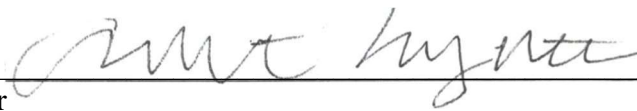
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PORTRAITS: A STUDY IN OBJECTS, FAMILY RELATIONS, AND RACE

A Project Report Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Arts, Media, and Communication
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

Julie Quintero

St. Louis, Missouri

December 2021

Abstract

Title of Thesis: Portraits: A Study in Objects, Family Relations, and Race

Julie Quintero, Master of Arts/Studio Art, 2021

Thesis Directed by: James DaVania

My final project is a body of mixed-media portraits which were exhibited at SculptureWorks Ferguson in December, 2021. Each of the twenty works are visual representations of events, identities, or relationships, experienced in both the past and the present. The materials used to help push each narrative include fabric, yarn, coffee filters, embroidery, wood, stain, plaster, metal, concrete, inks, conte, paints, and/or found objects. Each piece demonstrates a unique combination of image, media, and technique in the field of contemporary art. Some of the works include objects made by the people being portrayed. Others include materials that were acquired via social media platforms or other websites offering used items for sale. Most portraits have materials left over from other projects as part of the narrative of using what is available. Identities, family relations, and racial/ethnicity issues are often complicated. The purpose of these compositions is to explore what I call the “abnormally normal,” by starting a new conversation about how people understand and interact with other people. Through these works, I study my family, relationships, and things that I took for granted or resented in my youth. In particular, I realized how naïve and ridiculous my understanding of race and the racial backgrounds of family and friends were as well. The connection to the past and present simultaneously through portraiture is apparent in my works. This is consistent with what many contemporary artists are currently exploring.

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my committee chair, Professor James DaVania, for the continuous support of my master works, his patience, insight and encouragement. His reassurance that my work was of importance, generosity with his time for discussion, and skillful guidance got me through these graduate courses. I could not have imagined having a better mentor for my thesis project. Besides my chair, I would like to thank the rest of my thesis committee: Peter Cotroneo and Grant Hargate, for their encouragement, insightful comments, and reassurance.

I would like to thank my family, especially Michael Quintero, for helping me throughout the entire process by paying for my courses, critiquing my work in real time, being my studio buddy, paper editor, idea bouncer, personal chef, mixologist, and all-around slack-taker-upper. My kids and parents for not being too resentful that I didn't have much time for them in the last 18 months. I will be forever grateful for your understanding and support.

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Introduction/Background Information

What does it mean to “understand”? Is it making sense of new information by putting it into categories of old understanding, or is it thinking about how that information relates to you? Perhaps it’s about empathizing with someone else’s experience? Is the cause of misunderstanding a matter of nature, or nurture? Could it be because of a multitude of societal norms that are subject to interpretation or misinterpretation? What if one can find a way to understand, forgive, or relate by visually representing the events, conversations, or situations that were previously misunderstood? Feelings of confusion or embarrassment experienced in childhood, as the result of the actions of family members, are now understood as them doing the best they could with what they had. The family members who intentionally (or unintentionally) treated a child unfairly are now forgiven. Ancestors who were revealed (through genealogical research) to be deceptive are now absolved. I have found that my natural curiosity about a person’s cultural, ethnic, and racial background leads me to see the complexity of how they experience an identity that is profoundly shaped by family dynamics as well as broader societal currents. It’s clear that these external forces try to define the undefinable within one’s internal life. There is a common thread. Families are complicated; identity is fleeting. Mistakes are common, and absolute understanding is a myth.

Each semester, the body of work I have made has been a deeply personal account of how I am coming to terms with my own identity through relationships I struggle to understand. As I work through making each portrait, the use of appropriated images, symbolism, media, and found objects become a visual representation of my understanding of them. Several years ago, as a recent Art Ed graduate and newly hired long-term substitute at a high school, I was asked to exhibit one of my works in the faculty show. As a nontraditional student, I had most of my studio art classes 20 years earlier. Any artworks I made from that time, had been thrown away. In the period between

studio art classes and the second round of college, I still made things, but all were utilitarian: quilts for each of my four sons, baby clothes, photography sets, portraits of babies and kids, quilts to sell, etc.

For the faculty show, I decided to make a portrait of my maternal grandmother. She was a rural k-8 one-room schoolhouse teacher. We were not close, and I thought she was mean – until I realized we had much in common. She didn't have time or energy for me, and after teaching for most of her life, she also didn't have the patience. When I started teaching, I didn't have time, energy, or patience for my own kids either. The piece I made for that faculty show reflected that realization. I made a portrait of her out of fabric she had saved from a flour sack and scraps I had saved from making my son's T-shirt quilts.

I have made many other unrelated projects since, but for the first graduate seminar course, I found myself circling back to that idea. The pieces I made all have personal items either collected or made by the subject. I supplemented any other materials with what I had on hand, mostly cheap supplies, fabric scraps, and leftover construction materials. Most of the stuff I have should have been thrown away long ago but, in my family, who lived through The Great Depression, we do not get rid of anything that still "has some wear left." This coursework reflects what I know of the subject, and our shared collection of things. As I age, I see common traits between myself and each subject. These artworks explore personal commonalities such as hobbies, sense of frugality, and the impulse to keep/collect objects for their utilitarian potential.

For Graduate Seminar II, I asked myself the following questions: Why do you act the way you act? What events contribute to the identity of a person? What are the proportions of nature vs nurture that affect your personality? I came to the following conclusion: when you are raised by a single parent there are deficits. Deficits in attention, sustenance, finances, basic needs, and other

things that sometimes aren't apparent until later. Are there differences in how a child is affected based on the circumstances of why they have one parent? Is there a difference between the child being a product of a one-night stand and a child losing a parent to illness or accident? Loss is inevitable. Losing a parent for any reason at a young age is bound to have an effect on a child. How do you cope and how does that affect your relationships with others as you age?

When you lose a parent to incarceration there are no Social Security checks, child support, or insurance policies. They're just gone. How the relatives who care for you react has some bearing, but what are you missing besides the presence of that person? Looking at multiple generations of my family I visually documented traits, deficits, and the overcompensating behaviors of some of the members. This series of mixed-media family portraits focuses on the residual effects of the absent father, and the attempts by each individual child to right the wrongs of what was lacking, only to fall short in other social or physical skills that are important in healthy family relationships.

The Thesis/Directed Project I course saw a shift in the portraits. More scholarly research was taken into account and some of the subjects had input on their own portraits. The works were born from past conversations but some also became a conversation between myself and the subject. As an art teacher in high needs/low-income public schools, I have had the opportunity to confront my own biases and racial color blindness. I have been shocked about my own racial background due to DNA test results. I have had many conversations with my biracial husband and other biracial and multiracial family members about their experiences. I have read the articles on social media in which mixed race public figures describe times when they were discriminated against, or other racial injustices they experienced. After reading their stories, I read the comments by people

identifying as one race, blaming the media for stirring the pot. People would rather blame the media than understand that it is hurtful to say insensitive and racist things to people of color.

After many conversations with people of all different racial identities, I noticed that even though I am empathetic, while trying to understand the other person's point of view, my first reaction is to be color blind. For example, if you had a difficult time growing up because your dad was in jail and your mom had to work three jobs, I would say the same thing happened to my dad. However, if you were a person of color, the discriminatory practices that happened to your family in addition to other difficult circumstances would have made that situation much worse. As I work to learn where this comes from, grow, and move beyond it, this body of work will result. However, it is likely that this subject will take more than these works to straighten out the biases I thought I was already past. White privilege is not fictional. It needs to be addressed and eliminated by the people who have it.

Some of the works are sculptural in nature and some 2D works are on shaped surfaces breaking the rectangular format of traditional portraits. This is not to try to be different or innovative in regards to the "state of the field." They are simply aesthetic choices made in service of developing the narrative of each portrait. As I work in the studio, the art seems to develop a life of its own and often diverges from my initial outline. Creative decisions are made intuitively, and this process seems to reveal elements of my subconscious, bringing clarity to my thinking and new focus to my artwork.

Literature Review

Just like most contemporary artists, I pull from my surroundings, memories, and perceptions when creating art. The resources I have used, for the most part, have validated my thoughts and reassured my direction as an artist. My research can be put into three categories: materials artists have used, narratives in artists' works, and qualitative and quantitative articles researching the topics of the narratives in my art.

In my first body of work as a studio art major, (illustrations 1-5), I used items I have saved over the years to make mixed-media pieces. The narratives focused on the memories of time, places, and people held by those objects. The work evolved into family portraits because those items were directly related to people and I appropriated them as part of the stories. I found plenty of inspiration from the artists discussed below. They were the subjects of the articles that I collected for the first body of work made at Lindenwood. These articles discussed each artist's materials, methods, and personal narratives.

Artists in the 1930's rejected capitalism by not using high art methods or materials.¹ The materials used in my work are mostly non-traditional art materials. El Anatsui's Kente cloth style work, - using uncommon materials, was out of availability and necessity, rather than artistic statement. Using liquor bottle caps to visually demonstrate the effects of globalization and trade on the crafts indigenous to the region, was realized after the pieces were made.² Uribe's work, mostly sculptural in nature, is made of found objects. In his work, there is sometimes a humorous

¹ David Eldridge, "Art and Design," In *American Culture in the 1930's*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.) 2008: 135. accessed May 29,2020.www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1s473wp.11.

² Lisa M. Binder, "El Anatsui: Transformations." *African Arts*, 41 no.2 (2008): 25. doi:10.1162/afar.2008.41.2.24.

relationship between the subject and the materials used, but more often than not, the materials and the subject have no intentional connection.³ Uribe, Anatsui, and I work similarly making intuitive decisions and connections while we are developing an artwork. Miller contrasts the value of “objects” as described by the photographers Steinbeck and Agee. Steinbeck talks about store bought trinkets being things of value, while other personal items such as letters and photographs, were being burned. Agee describes people in their artifacts: things they touched, used, made, or left behind rather than written biographies.⁴ The first set of family portraits I made explored the biographical nature of “things.” I utilized items touched, coveted, kept, or made by the subject. The real treasures are not what can be bought, but what can be made. In contrast, Dong’s work evolved from paintings to using found objects to make statements about not having what you need. Unlike Dong’s mother, who hoarded trash for 50 years,⁵ I’ve only kept what could be considered trash for temporary reasons. The intention is to throw items away after their purpose is fulfilled. I’ve made the portraits using certain saved items and will go back to throwing them away.

The second set of portraits (illustrations 6-10) made for my coursework focused heavily on family relationships while still using found objects as part of the narrative. I researched artists whose works explored the narrative of strained conversations, dysfunction, and masculinity. How

³ Anno Conero, “Art from Objects: The Magical Sculpture of Federico Uribe.” *Sculpture Review* 67, no.4 (2018): 24. doi:10.1177/074752841806700403

⁴ James S. Miller, "Inventing the "Found" Object: Artifactuality, Folk History, and the Rise of Capitalist Ethnography in 1930s America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 117, no. 466 (2004): 382, accessed May 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/4137716.

⁵ Alexander Wolf, “Song Dong: Museum of Modern Art.” *Modern Painters* 21, no. 8 (2009): 73. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=505267810&site=ehost-live>.

these artists used different media to convey those narratives was also explored. These artists' works were both explicitly and implicitly defined by the authors. Mann's series offers a critical photographic exploration of the way in which relationships are organized in contemporary America.⁶ Some narratives I explored through the art making process are of men I'm related to and have strained relationships with, in contrast to Mann's sense of intimacy and mortality. In Lorna Simpson's work the following dualities are explored: found objects vs. photographs, misrepresentation vs. representation, White portraiture in antiquity vs. portraiture of the Black body, and the treatment of fabrics as status.⁷ I am using found objects, fabrics, and appropriated photographs in my body of work, both as illustrative and narrative, but the fabric becomes another media rather than a status symbol. The relationship between contemporary self-portraiture and reality is subjective in that, "the monstrous is determined by western society relations to the malleable and the indefinite."⁸ My work has one self-portrait in this series. It is in no way monstrous or controversial – visually at least. Each portrait can be perceived as both negative/critical and sympathetic; they are dealing with inadequacies within our relationships with each other, rather than with physicality. While Ligon's work explores a more systemic cause of the negative side of black masculinity, I am illustrating several gender related stereotypes

⁶ Ayelet Carmi, "Sally Mann: Looking at Him--An Exploration of Marital Intimacy and the Vulnerability of White Masculinity." *Woman's Art Journal* 40 (2019): 32. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=138770136&site=ehost-live>.

⁷ Nika Elder, "Lorna Simpson's Fabricated Truths." *Art Journal* 77, no. 1 (2018): 47. doi:10.1080/00043249.2018.1456248.

⁸ Loren Erdrich, "I Am a Monster: The Indefinite and the Malleable in Contemporary Female Self-Portraiture." *Circa: Art Magazine*, no. 121 (2007): 44. doi:10.2307/25564831.

including toxic male masculinity.⁹ Mann made works exploring race and race relations. What struck me is she, as a White artist, is making works depicting the Black body and residual effects of slavery. This was not only controversial, but risked backlash.¹⁰ My own work is only risky in that it will make my family uncomfortable. Mann is no stranger to controversy as her portraits of her children were criticized and a formal complaint was made by a Republican politician that said her work was outrageous and lewd.¹¹ Mann's courage is inspiring because art is hard and messy sometimes.

Marisol's sculptures reflect family identity with cubist, columnar bodies and semi-realistic heads. Her work has similar narratives to my pieces: searching for our own identity through portraiture of our ancestors.¹² In contrast to Bourgeois' works, my works explore the desire for knowledge about my paternal family, not an intimate desire of the men I'm related to.¹³ Hannah Maynard was seduced by "the mysterious art" of photography in the 1850s, by the turn of the last

⁹ "Have Fabric, Will Make Art." *International Review of African American Art* 15, no. 4 (1999): 34. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=505723675&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁰John Stauffer, "Sally Mann." *Aperture*, no. 223 (2016): 89, accessed September 18, 2020. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=115093789&site=ehost-live>.

¹¹ "Mann Handled." *Art on Paper* 4, no. 6 (2000): 16. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=505867001&site=ehost-live>.

¹² Marina Pacini, "Tracking Marisol in the Fifties and Sixties." *Archives of American Art Journal* 46, no. 3/4 (2007): 64. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/aaa.46.3_4.25435137?journalCode=aaa

¹³ Natania Rosenfeld, "Midlife Ruminations on Louise Bourgeois." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 51, no. 1 (2012): 12. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/5a772ed24b816288819247cc15abc784/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1975>

century, she was a celebrated, self-employed professional photographer.¹⁴ Her surrealistic portraits looked like Photoshopped images, but they were made long before surrealism and Photoshop. Altering photographs to develop the narrative is closely related to some of my portraits.

Regarding the subject of the absent father, Wettlaufer writes that the images of a French aristocrat leaving his wife and kids were used as propaganda against royalty. 200 years ago, the thought of a man abandoning his family was enough to overthrow the aristocracy.¹⁵ The plight of the broken family has only recently been talked about, accepted, and normalized. My dad certainly doesn't willingly talk about his father. My dad told me three things about his father in my 50 years of life. Yet, I was able to come up with a series of 5 works based on his 3 sentences. This speaks volumes about the damage one person and their actions can do.

For the third portrait series (illustrations 11-20), my focus has been on racial identity, specifically exploring issues such as passing, biracialism, and White privilege. Since this will be the focus for the next semester as well, I collected qualitative and quantitative articles about race in addition to articles about artists exploring racial issues. Instead of conducting my own research, I have found studies that echo the experiences of my family members. Some of the articles, especially qualitative vs. quantitative methodologies, have findings that completely contradict each other.

¹⁴ Jennifer Salahub, "Hannah Maynard: Crafting Professional Identity." In *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*, edited by Huneault Kristina and Anderson Janice, (McGill-Queen's University Press) 2012: 139. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=101655269&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁵ Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, "Absent Fathers, Martyred Mothers: Domestic Drama and (Royal) Family Values in A Graphic History of Louis the Sixteenth." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 23 no.3 (1999): 13. muse.jhu.edu/article/10503.

Starting with the research studies, there are differences in biracial individuals based on the racial identity of their makeup. For instance, Black/White individuals have historically been legally discriminated against more than other combinations of races. One qualitative study interviewed a Native/White biracial girl who had been adopted by a White family. The theorist described some bigoted bullying, but the participant was not affected by it.¹⁶ I suspect the writer found an anomaly: a biracial elite athlete with a supportive and well-resourced adoptive family. Another qualitative study published results that more closely reflected the experiences of my family members, e.g., knowing that people will judge them and see them as members of one of their races – or as not belonging to either.¹⁷ The discourse in this study reminds me of discussions I've had with my family. Quantitative studies find that lighter skinned individuals are more likely to identify as biracial.¹⁸ In the case of my biracial Asian/white female family members, they are more likely to identify as Asian. This is also the finding of research conducted on Polynesian/White participants.¹⁹ All of these articles conclude that state geographic location and socioeconomic factors matter when it comes to racial identity. For my family members from lower middle-class

¹⁶ Simon Nuttgens, "Biracial Identity Theory and Research Juxtaposed with Narrative Accounts of a Biracial Individual." *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 27 no.5 (2010): 359. doi:10.1007/s10560-010-0209-6.

¹⁷ Dana Stone, and Megan Dolbin-MacNab, "Racial Socialization Practices of White Mothers Raising Black-White Biracial Children." *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal* 39 no. 2 (2017): 107. doi:10.1007/s10591-017-9406-1.

¹⁸ Sarah S Townsend, et. al., "Being Mixed: Who Claims a Biracial Identity?" *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 18. (2012): 94. doi:10.1037/a0026845.

¹⁹ G. E. Allen, et. al., "Racial Identity, Phenotype, and Self-Esteem Among Biracial Polynesian/White Individuals." *Family Relations* 62. (2013): 88. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00743.x.

families, race is a big factor of their identity. This is in complete contrast to the findings of the Cultural University study in which biracial participants experienced race as being less of a factor than monoracial participants.²⁰

I had heard of “passing” on a talk show when I was a teen, but never suspected that my family had done that. After some DNA tests revealed African lineage, I had assumptions about how and why a family member changed his race. Through genealogical research I found some clues, but with each document, I had more questions than answers. With little resources, I assumed my great-grandfather passed to be able to buy land and protect his family. Nix and Qian’s research confirms my speculations and explained why the documents I found were so confusing. Many Black/white biracial people changed their names, spellings, or dates on each census not only to be untraceable, but to become different races. Starting with the 1880 census, many people who could pass for darker Caucasians did so because of the new Jim Crow laws.²¹ In the Thesis/Directed Project I works, my portraits imagine family members changing races and what it might look like if they didn’t. Through these works I am processing and working through my own White privilege. My racial color blindness does not deny experiences of people of other races, but it is unrealistic to disregard another person’s race.²²

²⁰ Margaret Shih, et. al., “The Social Construction of Race: Biracial Identity and Vulnerability to Stereotypes.” *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 13. (2007): 128. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.13.2.125.

²¹Emily Nix and Nancy Qian, “The Fluidity of Race: ‘Passing’ in the United States, 1880-1940.” *nber.org*. (2015): 7. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20828>.

²² Helen A. Neville, et.al., “Color-Blind Racial Ideology.” *American Psychologist* 68 (2013): 458. doi:10.1037/a0033282.

As for art with similar narratives, I sought out work with race/biracial themes. Moriuchi's article outlining early 20th century works depicting "controversial" subjects such as biracial, one-quarter Black, one-eighth Black individuals is masterful. The works that were chosen for this article depicted individuals with a portion of African ancestry interacting with White people as equals.²³ Bagneris describes the portrayal of women of partial African ancestry as being controversial, not because of their race, or that they are nude, or in chains, but because they are young girls being sexualized. They are described as having "passions fiercer than those of any child of the North."²⁴ The "One Drop Rule" has lasting detrimental effects on our society. Like Moriuchi, Vendryes quotes W.E.B. DuBois in the analysis of art made by Black artists and art depicting Black people.²⁵ Even though it is implied, the role racism played in the arts is undeniable.

As an art teacher, I am always using art to make a statement about social justice and maybe even change minds. William Christopher's White Mask Series paintings did more than stir up controversy, they contributed and brought attention to the Civil Rights Movement.²⁶ Similarly, the work of Asian/White Australian biracial artist Fiona Tan brings attention to the racial

²³ Mey-Yen Moriuchi, "The Drop Sinister: Harry Wilson Watrous' Visualization of the One-Drop Rule." *Art Inquiries* 18 (2020): 21. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aft&AN=147313605&site=ehost-live>.

²⁴ Mia L. Bagneris, "Miscegenation in Marble: John Bell's Octoroon." *Art Bulletin* 102 (2020): 68. doi:10.1080/00043079.2020.1676133.

²⁵ Margaret Rose Vendryes, "Race Identity/Identifying Race: Robert S. Duncanson and Nineteenth-Century American Painting." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 88. Accessed May 28, 2021. doi:10.2307/4102840.

²⁶ Diana L Linden, "'In Honor of Dr. Martin Luther King': White Privilege and White Masks in William Christopher's Paintings of 1963." *American Art* 33 (2019): 64. doi:10.1086/707476.

discrimination seen by immigrants in Europe. Her work is an installation that uses found photographs of young Asian girls. Ghost animations seem to appear when a video of still photographs is projected onto other still photographs.²⁷ My husband has had time to process and come to terms with feelings of insecurity around his racial identity. However, one of my works portrays a recent high school graduate who is still processing those feelings. I found an article by an art teacher who has written a lesson to help multi-racial students work through feelings of discomfort after extended family holiday dinners with monoracial family members.²⁸ Some of the work the students completed echo the experiences of my young family member.

The resources I have chosen for these courses are seemingly unrelated to each other, but relate to the works and accompanying essays I write for the pieces made for this body of work. Some of my pieces were made before the articles were selected and some were made after, because something about each of them resonated with me in some capacity. Some reaffirmed my thoughts; some were thought provoking. Others made me think the only difference between their works and mine is exposure. I will continue to use found objects and “things” that are part of the narrative as I create art pieces that explore different issues that affect identity and relationships through portraiture.

²⁷ Jacqueline Lo, “Moving Images, Stilling Time.” *Third Text* 28 (2014): 60. doi:10.1080/09528822.2014.880552.

²⁸ Gloria J. Wilson, “The Table Setting as Medium: Lived Curriculum and Mixed-Race Identity.” *Art Education* 73, no. 4 (2020): 17. doi:10.1080/00043125.2020.1746164.

Research Methodology

The Graduate Seminar I & II works I produced over the last year, were family portraits using found objects as part of the narrative. All of these works were biographical in that the decisions were made based on my experiences with the subject. How they affected my personality, how I learn, or what I learned from them became part of me, and in turn, became how I saw them. Any peer reviewed articles used to validate my direction has been in the realm of qualitative methodology. For the Thesis/Directed Project I & II series, the research has continued to be qualitative and biographical. In addition to studio course study and scholarly research influencing the concept of the pieces, the themes behind each artwork will also be informed by personal experiences, conversations, and reflective practices regarding race.

The peer reviewed articles I have read, as thorough race and ethnicity studies of racial bias, used quantitative methodology to acquire their research on human subjects. Other articles have qualitatively studied the self-esteem of biracial individuals. The findings regarding the vulnerability of stereotypes of subjects identifying as biracial will be taken into consideration while conceptualizing portraits of biracial and multiracial friends. Due to the similar content of previous conversations I've had with my family, I am using these assessments as conversation starters with my friends. I will rely more heavily on race and ethnicity studies to refute the antiquated theory that biracial people have to pick one race to identify as.

For my own self-improvement, I have been reading literature regarding color-blind ideology as I work through my own biases regarding race, White privilege, and White guilt. The works made of my mixed-race blood relatives have been relying heavily on the National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series. The statistical findings on passing in the late nineteenth century has been very illuminating.

My work relies on several methodological approaches to explore possible meanings of the works of other artists who have explored race in their works. Bagneris applies psychoanalysis and iconography to the sculptures and paintings depicting mixed-race slaves in chains after the end of the Civil War, searching for meaning by analyzing sexualization of young females. Semiotics leads her back to iconography where she finds similarities between the sculptural works of John Bell and Hiram Powers. Postcolonialism is then employed when the cultural implications of comparing those sculptures to a painting by Howard Gavin, which again points out the sexualization of biracial slaves. Portraits often reveal the biases of the artists who create them. This is something I am taking into consideration as I complete my portraits.

I hope that my work could be used to teach others, or at least be a subject of conversation like the works of William Christopher. Linden uses race and culture methodologies to investigate Christopher's works and his activism. She contrasts his paintings depicting the inequality and humanity of Blacks, to other contemporary artists' racist portrayals. To make a personal body of artwork, an artist relies on qualitative practices to explore skills learned through studio exercise. In addition, the biographical nature of contemplating what they read, see, hear, say, think, and dream about becomes part of the resulting body of work. The work becomes an extension of themselves. To be innovative in the "field", I am taking in all of this information, digesting it, and through qualitative analysis, will synthesize it all into a unique body of work. Walking a thin line between White privilege and social justice, I hope that this body of work can promote positive social change or inspire others to analyze and work on overcoming their own prejudices.

Production/ Discussion of Results

There were many qualitative methodologies used to produce this body of work. They were used to analyze my own experiences and thoughts about situations or events that I previously could not quite figure out. As a result, the main methodology is biographical. Because the mixed media works, along with the written narratives, illustrate a cohesive portrayal of each subject, they are ultimately my experience. The works made for the graduate seminar courses employed items made by the subject. The items became the media used to portray them. The objects, memories, and likenesses (mostly from photographs) were used interactively in the process of making their portraits. The composition changed and evolved through the metaphoric conversation between me, the subject, and the materials.

The qualitative methodology of race and ethnicity studies were used in the thesis project artworks. The idea for the portraits started with DNA test results that revealed that I my racial background is not what I had been told. The project then evolved into exploring my husband and other family members' relationships to their multiracial backgrounds. During the process of creating this series of portraits, the effects of insensitive comments on people who are of a not-so-neatly-categorizable race became clear. The knowledge gained from the process of producing the first three series of works is what led to the final series of thesis project portraits. The master works were a progression, and the question became: how can I continue making portraits when I don't have anything else to confront from my childhood or present relationships? I started asking more questions. I had direct conversations with friends who were willing to be the subject matter for my portraits. In addition to answering a list of questions that took inventory of their thoughts and experiences, they also provided me with objects that they considered personally meaningful and symbolic of their identities. These objects were integrated into their portraits

Conclusion

The portraits and written narratives produced during the graduate seminar courses could appear like I am sour about the first half of my life. The reality is all the things that confused me or made me feel like I wasn't treated fairly have now been resolved. Producing these works was cathartic and therapeutic. Working on them/through them made me see the humanity of the parties involved. I have wanted to make narrative-driven works for years. By using objects made by family members to create their portraits, I finally met and ultimately exceeded this goal. Because I explored different socially relevant narratives and incorporated found objects as a central element in the investigation, the scope ended up being much larger than I had originally anticipated. Making quality works that I could exhibit in a gallery or present to hiring committees, was also a goal that I have successfully met.

The race studies theorize that a person of mixed race must choose one race to identify as, but my findings are that this needs to be rethought. What I have observed is that each person identifies as or is most connected to the race of the people who have provided them with a nurturing environment. For those never accepted by anyone, they continue to question who they are and where they belong. Each of the subjects portrayed during the thesis courses had the similar experience of not identifying with any of their races. Some oscillated between trying to identify with each race at some point in their lives, ultimately deciding that they were not any one race and were most comfortable without being one. The strength of this project is bringing awareness to the multiracial identity issue. In a time when people are so polarized and unsympathetic, maybe seeing the corrosive effects of bias and insensitivity can be eye opening. The limitations are with the theories themselves. If this methodology is not challenged, stereotypes and misinformation will be perpetuated.

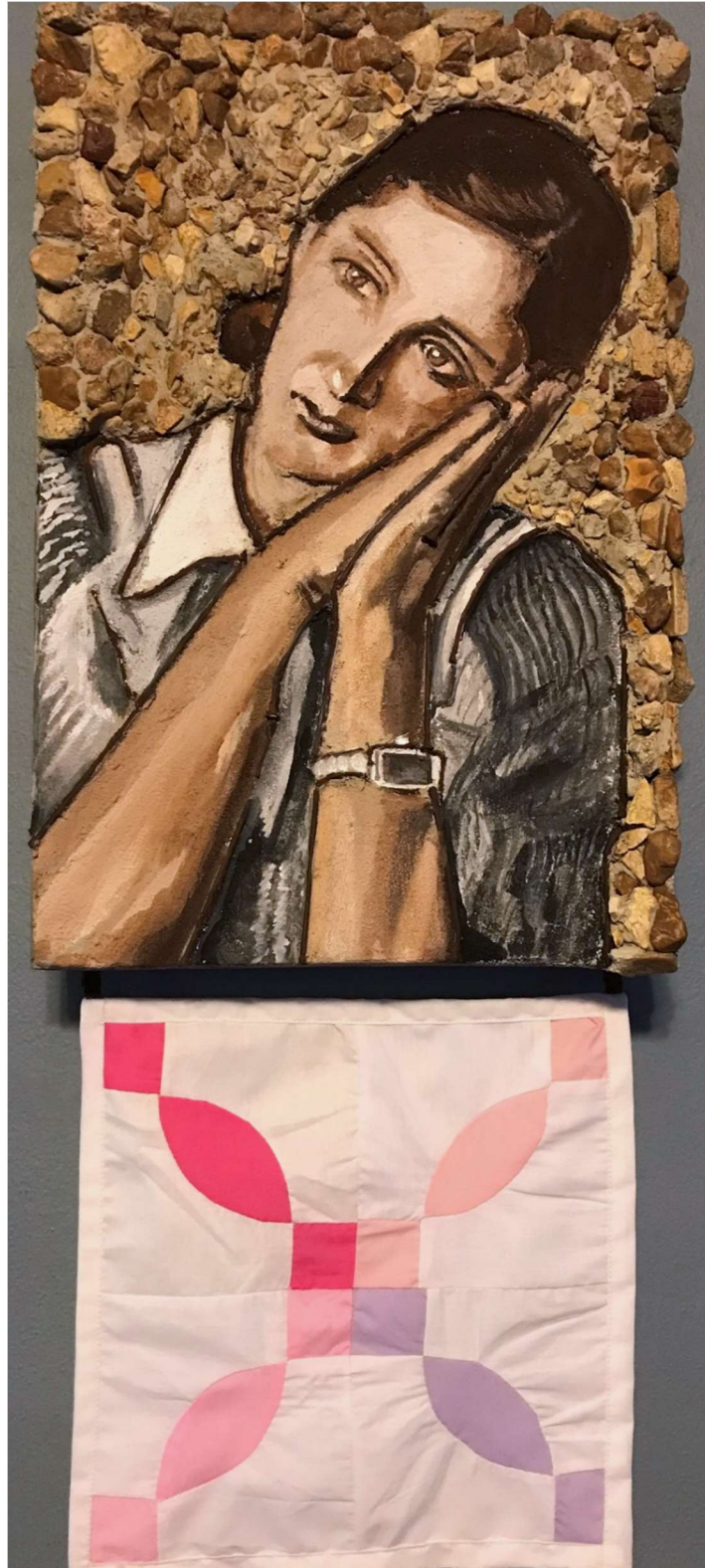
The use of found objects, and certainly, the practice of portraiture is not new to contemporary art. However, to my knowledge, no other artists have explored the same narratives or used media in the same way to create portraits. To be more specific, I have not encountered any works of portraiture that incorporate objects that were crafted by the sitter. This concept can be duplicated in commissioned pieces or pieces for juried exhibitions. Events, objects, words, and photographs hold the memories that define us. They do more than chronicle and document our existence. They become lenses that reveal how people see or remember us. Eventually, they become the symbols that carry on after we are gone.

Illustrations

1. Liz, 16"x38", Mixed Media, 2020



2. Doris, 16"x16", Mixed Media, 2020



3. Jewell, 13" x 31", Mixed Media 2021



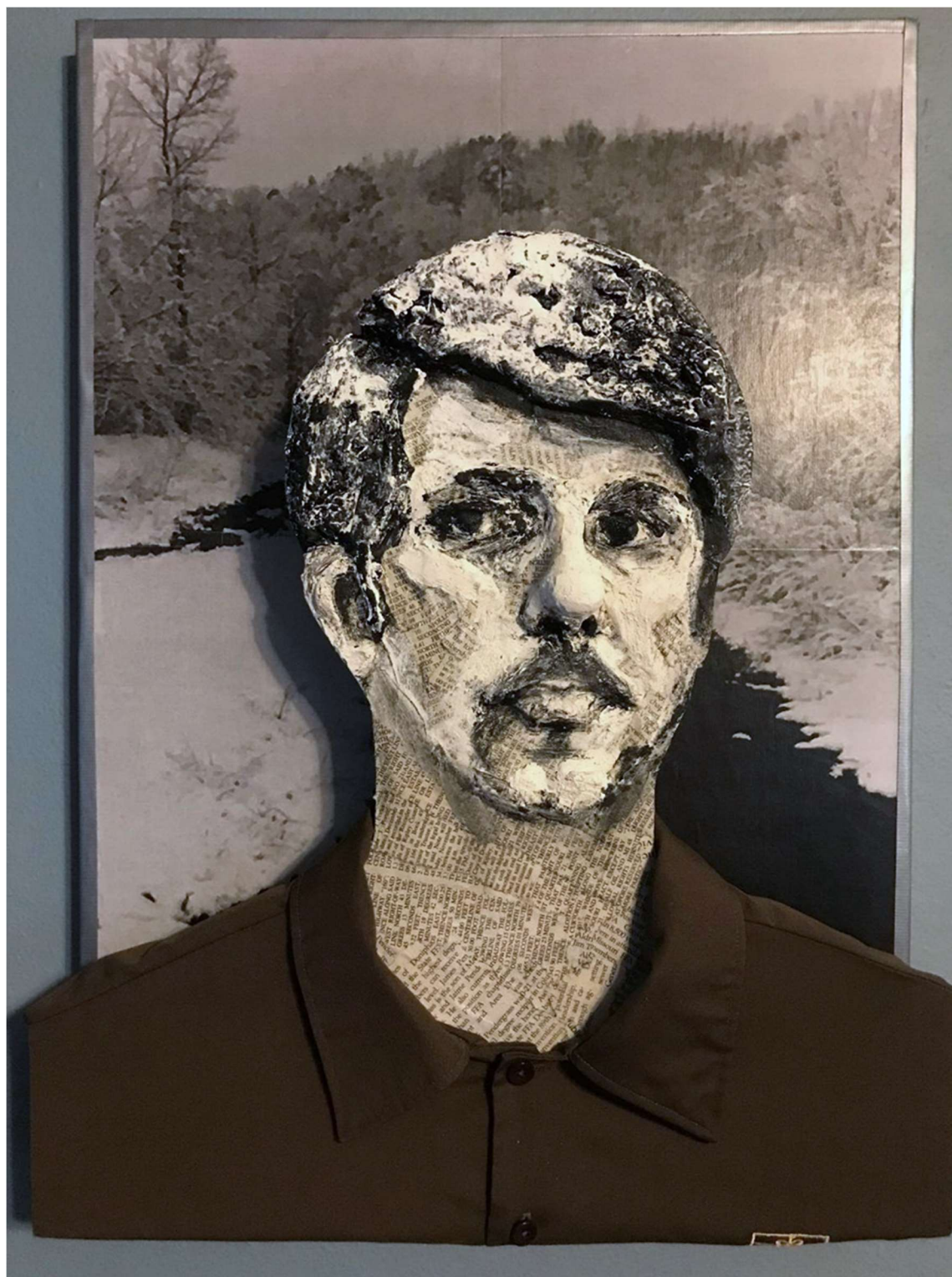
4. Mrs. T., 18"x30", Mixed Media, 2021



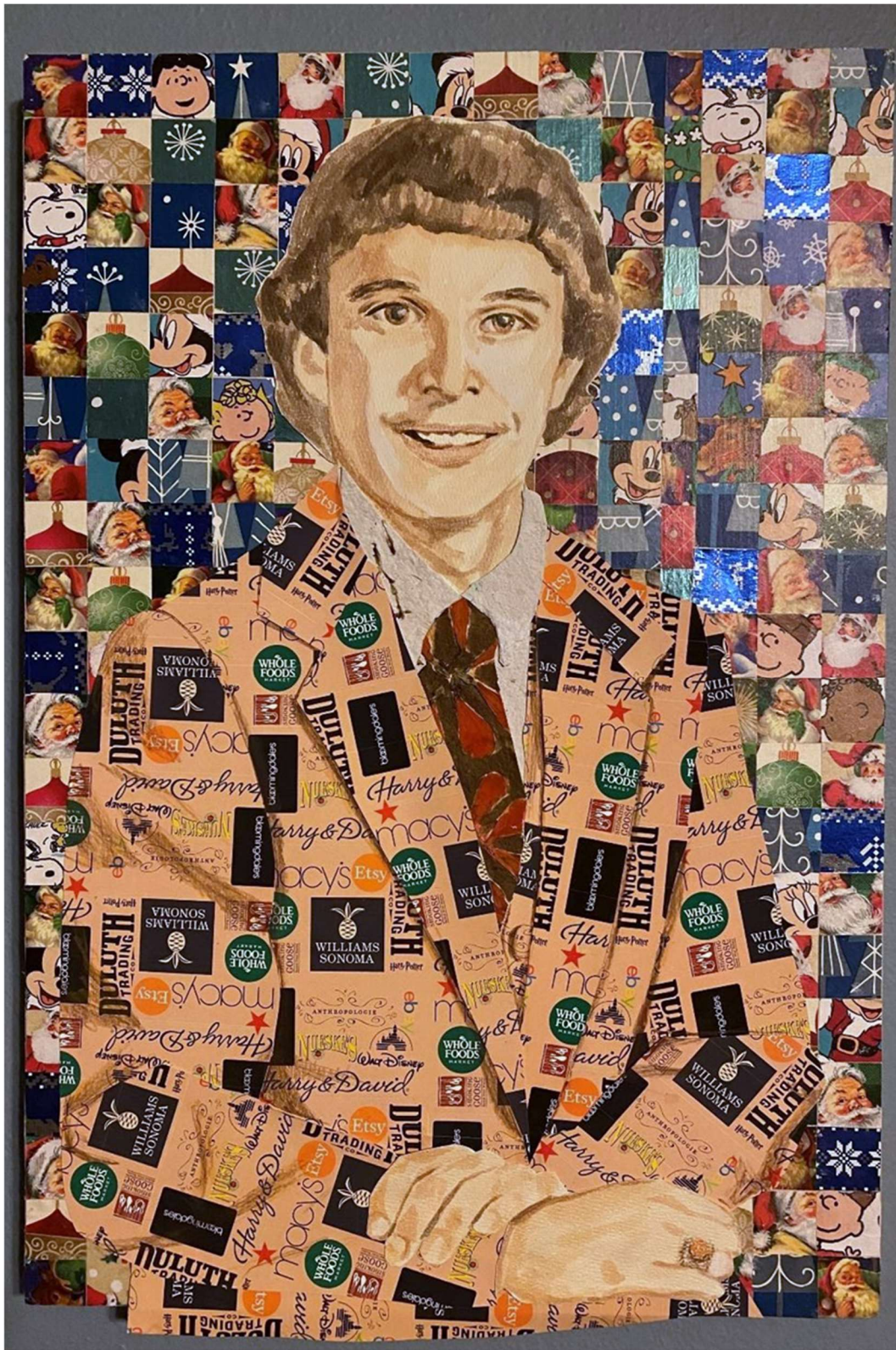
5. R.L.T., Portrait size: 16"X21", Mixed Media, 2020



6. Check, 10x12x8", Mixed Media, 2020



7. Duane, 16x20x6", Mixed Media, 2020



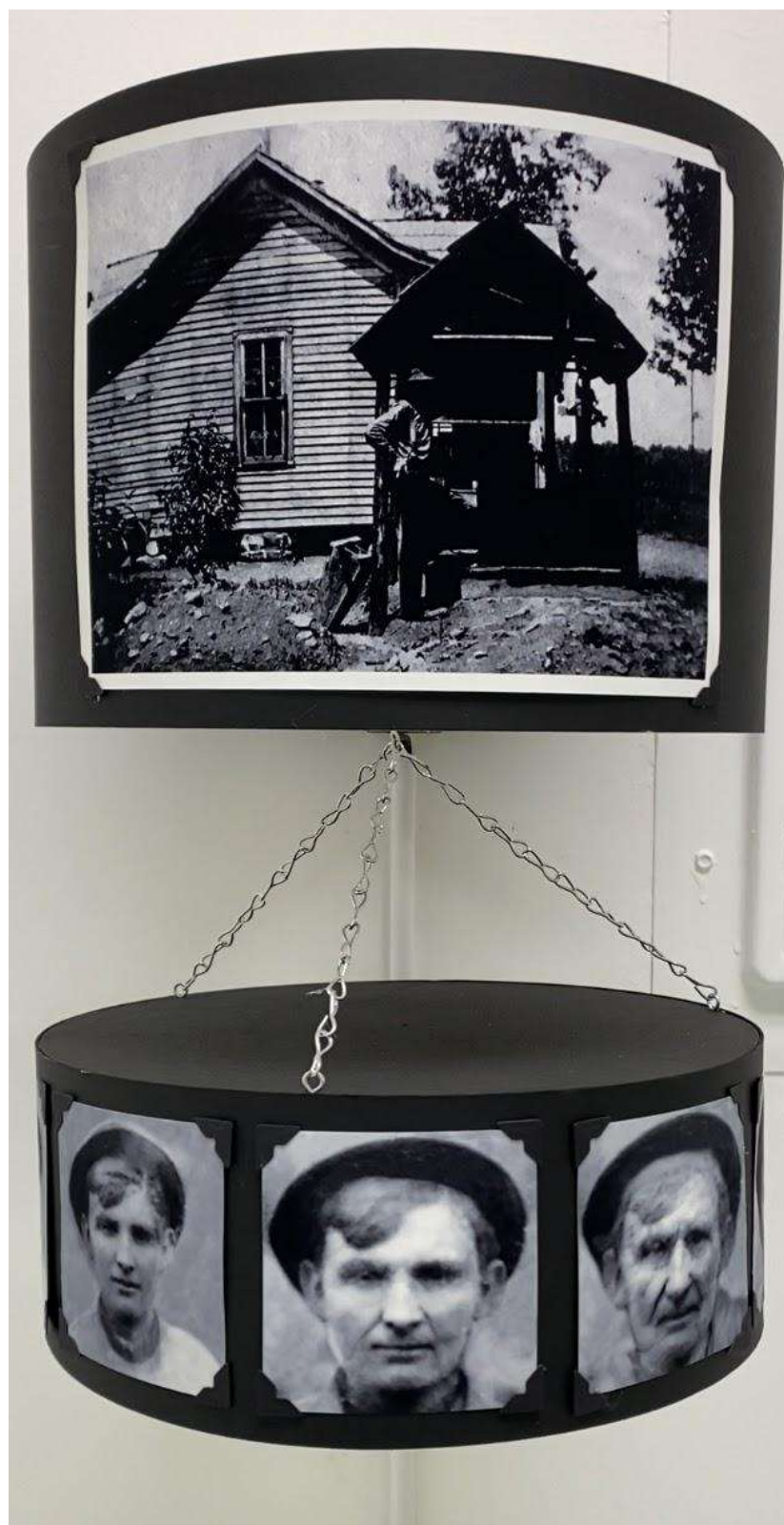
8. Wayne, 16x21", Mixed Media, 2020



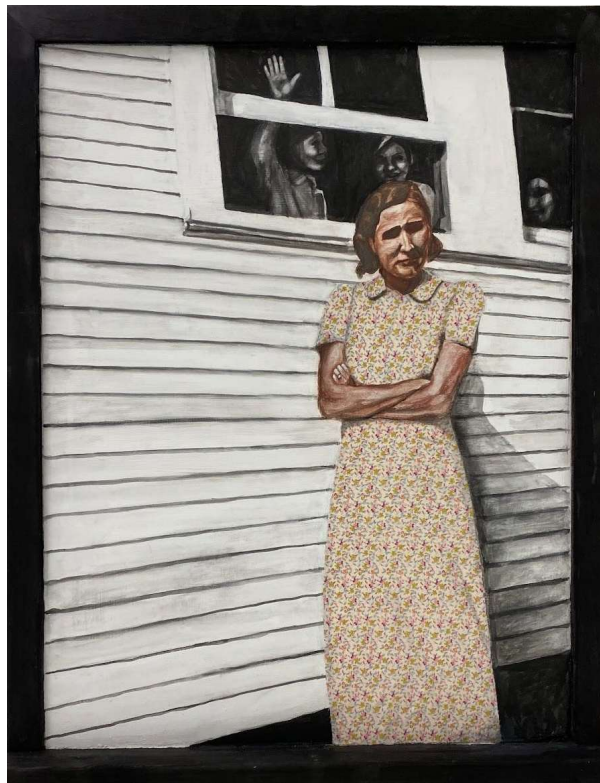
9. Julie, 16" x20", Mixed Media, 2020



10. Jack, 21x30", Mixed Media, 2020



11. J.J., 18" x12"x12", Mixed Media, 2021



12. Opal, 18"x24", Mixed Media, 2021



13. Michael, 32"x 16"x 5", Mixed Media, 2021



14. Gabby, 20"x20", Mixed Media, 2021



15. C.C., 24"x24", Mixed Media, 2021



16. Lanae, 15" x 25" x 18", Mixed Media, 2021



17. Danika, 24" x 70.5" x 8", Mixed Media, 2021



18. Bethany, 30" x 53", Mixed Media, 2021



19. Alana, 24" x 55", x 10" Mixed Media, 2021



20. Lex, 14.5" x 30", Mixed Media, 2021

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