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## A Journey of Inspiration: Creating Art Based on Cubism's Relationship with African Art and Influences on African American Artists

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A JOURNEY OF INSPIRATION:  
CREATING ART BASED ON CUBISM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH  
AFRICAN ART AND INFLUENCES ON AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ARTISTS

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A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the  
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***Abstract***

This paper will explore the history of Cubism, the inspiration of African art on Cubism and the influence of Cubism on African American artists. When Cubism was established, it became one of the most significant artistic movements to happen during the early twentieth century. As Cubism made its breakthrough, it allowed for artists to step away from the traditional artistic style and step into abstract geometrical visuals. One of the things this paper focuses on is the style of African art, and its strong element of geometric shapes. Those very elements were influential to certain artists' work in the style of Cubism. With the help of African art, Cubism had a certain defined style that increased its abstract uniqueness. One will see that the characteristics and components of Cubism influenced some African American artists to create their own Cubists composition. This paper is serving as an introduction to my own creative project. Therefore, I plan to produce my own art, contributing to the African American Cubist tradition.



1: Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 243.9 x 233.7 cm. Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Dorothea Eimert. *Cubism*, Parkstone International, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, (pg. 6)

Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1937) painted *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907. This painting (*Figure 1*) shocked the twentieth century art world and launched the Cubist movement into stardom. Picasso decided, instead of capturing the woman's realistic appearance, to present a more abstract approach by composing it in the Cubism style. Notice how the women's figures are altered to look more like geometrical shapes. The women's vertical form is longer. The background is made to look two dimensional, as highlighted by the angle of the table setting at the bottom. The background is a collaboration of colors, not a place, which dramatically enforces the subject (the women) to stand out. What is most intriguing in this painting, however, is the women's faces. Notice the three outer females' faces are uniquely different. It is as if they were wearing individual mask compared to the women in the middle. The masked faces are longer, distorted and presented to look indifferent or unnatural. Perhaps Picasso was trying to show the viewer a new way of looking at women. Or could Picasso

visually be showing the viewer how *he* views women—at least at this moment? Though, this composition with its significantly dramatic visual changes, continues to be controversial. Nevertheless, this painting, by utilizing his new visual concept that became known as Cubism, allows viewers to see these women differently and not in a realistic aspect.

Cubism is an art movement and began in 1907, led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque (1882-1963). Cubism makes a scene or subject(s) abstract by making the visual less realistic. It involves a combination of real objects and ideal forms or geometrical shapes which together construct a finished visual (Einstein, pg. 160). The art is meant for the painter to not only respond to experiences and reality but also to envision it in a new way. Although abstract rather than realistic, Cubism to Picasso was a way of being concerned or having a direct response to the external world (Fry, pg. 296). One part of the external world which Picasso responded well to was African art.

Much like Picasso, other Western European artist of the time were amazed by African art like mask, sculptures, carvings, and other objects. The “artists saw that the African objects had an emotional impact and communicated an “abstracted” or Cubist style...” (Segy, *African Sculpture and Cubism*, pg. 292). Consequently, Picasso and Braque admired and found an opportunity to develop from this as artists. It seems as though inspiration from African styles of art were part of the creation of Cubism. Although, Picasso denies African art as being an inspiration for him and his creative work (Segy, *African Sculpture and Cubism* pg. 277), he developed his art in the similar African art style. Also, African art astonishingly resembles the style of Cubism. For, African art achieves abstraction by the different ways of portraying bodily elements as drawn out using geometrical shapes.

## *Inspiration*

French artist Paul Cézanne's (1839 – 1906) ability to impersonate landscapes uniquely and incredibly in his paintings came to be influential to the style of Cubism. In some of Cézanne's paintings, he abandons the idea of traditional perspective. "Cézanne liked to flatten the space in his paintings to place more emphasis on their surface - to stress the difference between a painting and reality" (The History of Cubism). So, instead of capturing the whole scenery he would define the objects shape. Also, some of the objects would be fragmented. Mostly in his paintings, the world would visually look unbalanced, or some objects would fit unevenly together. Notice in Cézanne's painting *La carrière de Bibémus* (The Quarry at Bibémus) (*Figure 2*), the similar use of colors, the overbearing and unbalanced shapes representing a street view. Overall, one can see the abstract style of perspective and its likeness to the style of Cubism.



Figure 2: Paul Cézanne, *La carrière de Bibémus* (The Quarry at Bibémus), 1895. Oil on canvas, Museum Folkwang, 65x81cm. Paul Cézanne - Google Arts & Culture." Google

Even so, African art played a role in the idea of what can fall into the style of Cubism. The exposure of African art in Europe started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century after colonial conquests began

(Alfert, pg. 387). The objects, like masks and sculptures, were collected and brought to be displayed in museums. It was only due to the new aesthetics initiated by Cubism that these works were appreciated as artworks of high quality, rather than only seen as a studied cultural work (Segy, *The Significance of African Art*, pg. 371 & Alfert, pg. 387). The works of African art started to have value as art rather than as collected or studied items. Given that Picasso was exposed to African objects (masks and sculptures), he was blown away by the talent and beauty. It seems that from the structured style of African artwork, he saw the artistic potential.

The true use of African mask and sculptures represented certain African society systems. Every mask was sculpted with function and purpose for every man, woman, and child. They were used to acknowledge achievements, represented family structure, or express spiritual aspects of life, and death. These were not brought in as part of Cubism, however; what greatly links Cubism to African art are its visual characteristics. The art involves having dissonant color tones and figural distortion (Murrell, *African Influences in Modern Art*). In the African art, masks revealed distorted facial features. Additionally, there is a wide range of geometrical shapes in the mask and sculptures, and the figures' angles are long and transformed. Notice how the faces on Picasso's the *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, 1907 resemble some of the African mask's features (*Figure 3-4*). The women's head and nose are similar in shape. The mouth placement is small but visual enough to see. Even though the images of African objects from Congo, Nigeria, and Ivory Coast may not have exact similarities to the mask-like faces of the painting, there is still some likeness in the painting (Alfert, pg. 389-395). They are similar in structure, given the tall figures and irregular facial features of the depiction. The African art screams abstract. Therefore, it seems that for Picasso seeing the African art was not only appealing but later contributed to developing the idea and style of Cubism.



Figure 3: Masque, Lwalwa, République Démocratique du Congo. *LWALWA MASK, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO*. 29 cm. Sotheby's. *African and Oceanic Art*, 2021,

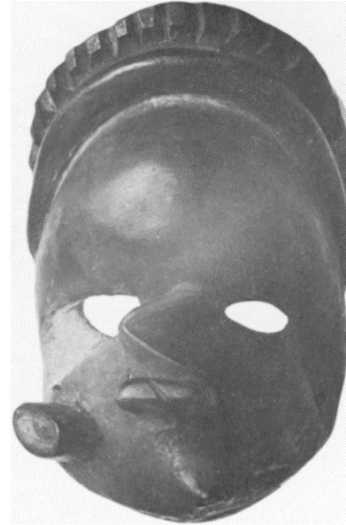


Figure 4. Ibibio, Nigeria, 9.5 in. Deformation mask, mouth jutting out at left. Alfert, Max. "Relationships between African Tribal Art and Modern Western Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1972, pp. 387-396. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/775542](http://www.jstor.org/stable/775542). (pg. 395)

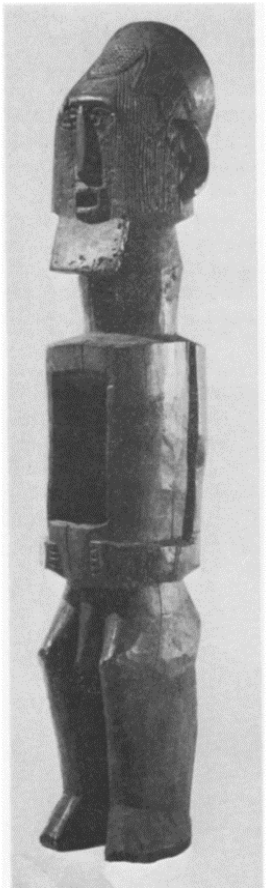


Figure 5. Ba-Take, Congo, 17.5 in. A fetish, as indicated by the cavity in the chest of the figure. Alfert, Max. "Relationships between African Tribal Art and Modern Western Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1972, pp. 387-396. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/775542](http://www.jstor.org/stable/775542). (pg. 393)



Figure 6. Senufo, Ivory Coast (19<sup>th</sup> century) 9 in. Alfert, Max. "Relationships between African Tribal Art and Modern Western Art." *Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1972, pp. 387-396. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/775542](http://www.jstor.org/stable/775542). (pg. 389)



## *Visual Analysis*

While Cubism rejects capturing a facsimile of reality, it is not so much a full visual illusion or step away from reality either. It is forming an interpreted reality—or presenting reality newly by rendering objects and figures in new forms. It is important in the Cubism style to use simplified forms, shapes and contrasting vantage points to create fragmented and abstracted compositions (Sotheby, *About Cubism*). Nevertheless, Cubism has evolved from being represented in just painting. Cubism can be radically transformed into sculpture, printmaking, drawing, watercolor, and typography (Museum of Fine Arts Boston). When viewing a Cubist painting, one can see an unbalance form of perspective, and a constant usage of geometric shapes used to define or alter the chosen subject or elements. This relates to the African art in terms of perspective, form, color, and abstract style. There is a resemblance in Cubism and African art when it comes to facial features. There also is a meaning of expression and representation in Cubism of how one views the world. Picasso and Braque sought to express what moved them. They were determined to separate their art from everything realistic without turning completely to abstraction (Apollinaire, pg. 29). In fact, Picasso and Braque developed Cubism in two phases, differing in how their paintings can still obtain the Cubism style.

The two distinctive phases of Cubism are Analytical and Synthetic. Analytical Cubism started in 1908 and was often used by Picasso (*Figure 7*) and Braque (*Figure 8*). This phase of Cubism involved the artist observing a subject, systematically breaking into sections, and then reconstructing it. The subject of the painting is to be viewed from many different viewpoints and interweaving planes. The color used in this phase are monochromatic, meaning colors of a single hue (Sotheby, *About Cubism*). Notice in *Figure 7* the colors are in the same shades of brown and

faint green tones. In Figure 8 the colors used are gray, with the violin being an exception. Moreover, the subjects are being torn apart and almost forced to be unrecognizable.

Synthetic Cubism is different because it allows more use of colors and decorative style. The style has simpler shapes, different textures, and patterns. Notice in Pablo Picasso's *Harlequin Playing Guitar*, 1914-1918 painting (Figure 9) how the fragments of shapes form a figure. The different colors and patterns also help in creating depth and convincing abstraction. In a Synthetic painting, the subject is most likely less recognizable and is in collage form (Sotheby, *About Cubism*). Synthetic Cubism involves using different elements or fragments of an object, colors, or shapes and turning it into something new. Yet, it is important that the cube-like form is still present. The style and characteristics of Cubism overall have a constant approach of taking what we experience, reality, and transforming its appearance to look abstract.



Figure 7: Pablo Picasso, *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, 1910.  
Oil on canvas, 100.3 x 73. Cm.  
Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Dorothea Eimert. *Cubism*,  
Parkstone International, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, (pg 40)



Figure 8: Georges Braque, *Pitcher and Violin*, 1909-1910.  
Oil on Canvas, 117x73.cm.  
Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Dorothea Eimert.  
*Cubism*, Parkstone International, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, (pg 18)



Figure 9: Pablo Picasso, *Harlequin Playing Guitar*, 1914-1918,  
Oil on canvas, 98 x 77 cm. Private Collection  
Apollinaire, Guillaume, and Dorothea Eimert.  
*Cubism*, Parkstone International, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, (pg.127)

## *Interpretation*

Cubism allows artists to focus on what they believe is to be the important forms of people and objects and create their own representation. It is up to the artist to decide what should be left out, what should be developed and reshaped. Picasso and Braque partly formed Cubism to express how one analyzed an object or situation through abstraction. Although there are many others, there are two African Americans whom I wish to focus on, whose art used the style of Cubism. Artists Hale Woodruff (1900-1980) and Jacob Lawrence (1917- 2000) captured moments of something they have seen and reconstructs the reality of it into something abstract.

Woodruff used the style of Cubism in his paintings to show the aesthetic derived from African American culture. Woodruff's *The Card Players*, 1930 painting (*Figure 11*) disregards the laws of perspective, plays with the reality of facial features, and devotes itself to illustrating a two-dimensional form (Sanmiguel, *African Art: The First Form of Cubism*). He was inspired by all those who had an impact to the start of Cubism.

“...On seeing the work Paul Cezanne, I got the connection. Then I saw the work of Picasso and I saw how Cezanne, Picasso, and the African had a terrific sense of form. The master I chiefly admired at the time was Paul Cezanne; then Picasso, who was certainly bolder and more courageous in his cubist work...” (Patton, pg. 126).

Woodruff was able to connect Cubism with the inspiring factor in African art. Notice in Woodruff's painting (*Figure 11*), that the scene involves two African Americans figures playing cards in a room. Although it may seem obvious that the two figures are playing cards, Woodruff decided to paint the scene in a different style. The flat figures and objects and perspective reflect the Cubism style. Woodruff uses all the objects to look two dimensional. The visual has distinct geometrical shapes, for example, like the rectangular table and square-like bodies. The two faces have very long facial features, as seen in the vertical head and nose or the horizontal squared

eyes. Woodruff may have been inspired by the abstract facial elements of African art like Picasso and Braque. It is as if the faces were formed to look as though masked; consequently, the true figure, underneath the similar colored masks, could be anyone. It seems that Woodruff is accepting of anything and anyone. It does not matter the shade or shape because they are similar, what matters is how both figures will essentially play the game.

The use of color is really expressed in Woodruff's painting *Parisian Cubism*, 1927 (*Figure 10*). This painting is completely abstract because it is impossible to identify any certain objects or even figures. Thus, this painting requires the viewer to do more interpretive work. Notice the painting's title, it claims to symbolize the style of Cubism. First, there are a lot of geometrical shapes being spread around the canvas. It seems that Woodruff took the Analytical Cubism approach by using similar colors. The forms are distorted and seemed to be layered, yet they look two dimensional as well. Notice there is possibly a face hidden within the mixture of many altered shapes. It seems as if the figure is holding something. Could Woodruff be using Cubism as a more appealing way to interpret what he has seen? I am to imagine that the attraction of Cubism for Woodruff was the ability to be abstract and no longer be restricted to how reality looks objectively. There is sense of freedom and being able to create on the canvas what has been subjectively seen.



Figure 10: Hale Woodruff. *Parisian Cubism*, 1927. Acrylic on canvas, 29.5 x 35 in. "Parisian Cubism - Hale Woodruff - Google Arts & Culture." *Google*, Google, 2020,



Figure 11: Hale Woodruff. *The Card Players*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 74.6 cm Patton, Sharon F. *African-American Art*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1998. (pg. 126)

Jacob Lawrence, through his paintings, aspired to publicly express what he was seeing and what he recognized and understood around him—namely, the life and culture of African Americans in the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Deeply inspired by Harlem, Lawrence used the new outbreak of writers, sounds, dances, music, and lifestyle as his muse. Also, he was determined to show a visual of all he had personally experienced. He was a narrative painter and created a series of paintings to tell a story (Lawrence's Style). His paintings are seen to have a Cubist style because of his use of geometrical shapes and changing viewpoints. Like Picasso, he distorted the perspective in his paintings and changed certain elements of a subject (Lawrence's Style). That was intentionally done to fix the viewers' attention on an informative message or symbol.

Lawrence went so far with his work as to develop his own phase of Cubism as well. He labeled his work 'Dynamic Cubism.' He brought the African American experience to life using rich blacks and browns juxtaposed with vibrant colors (Jacob Lawrence: African American Artist). He used this term to describe his work because he saw that his work as being most lively and effective through color. Notice that in his painting *The Library*, 1960 (Figure 12) he is focused on catching the whole scene rather than one or two specific objects or figures. He is illustrating what is happening in a library. What helps this painting be defined as cubism is large number of rectangular forms in either the objects or the people. His use of colors is meaningful because it allows the viewer's eyes to dance around the canvas. What also helps is the overlaying of rectangular figures, some are easier to spot while others deserve a second glance. He uses unusual angles and dynamic fragmentation (Fortin). Moreover, notice in *Community*, 1986 (Figure 13) that he paints the angles and perspective to look almost flat. The figures have a large, fragmented body, in a way to resemble the strength of African American workers. There is a

strong use of abstraction in color because of the vibrant primary colors. However, notice how the faces are painted on the figures. The faces are of a lighter color, as if it is a mask. The mask on their face is part of their routine as they go off into their day. This painting is an abstract understanding of a working day and Lawrence used the methods of Cubism to help execute the quality of his paintings.



Figure 12: Jacob Lawrence, *The Library*, 1960, Tempera on Fiberboard. 60.9 x 75.9 cm. "Jacob Lawrence." *American Art*, vol. 8, no. 3/4, 1994, pp. 134–136. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3109178](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109178) . (pg. 136)



Figure 13: Jacob Lawrence, *Community (study for mural, Jamaica, NY)*, 1986. Gouache, 76.2 x 56.2 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Transfer from the General Services Administration, Art-in-Architecture Program, 1990.36, © 1986, Jacob Lawrence



I find Cubism as an effective style of abstraction to express what is being seen. The idea and effects of Cubism allows me to visualize things in a different form – by using colors, shapes, and positions of objects – rather than in realistic form. Cubism allows me to not always view things in a straightforward way. Sometimes a Cubic painting forces you to observe the painting longer. What makes Cubism enjoyable is the process of interpreting what you are seeing. As the artist abstracts the elements of shapes to illustrate a new scene or objects, it is up to the viewer to come up with a conclusion as to what it represents. So, whatever I am thinking or experiencing about reality, Cubism allows for me to piece together or transform what is most significant to me.

### *New Inspiration*

I am inspired by Lawrence's ambition to paint his truth in vivid color. I am inspired by Picasso and Braque to step away from realistic painting and reassemble objects to express my feelings or thoughts. I am inspired by Cézanne to reject the traditions of facsimile- oriented perspective and scale. Finally, I am inspired by Woodruff's need to acknowledge and combine African art with the evolution of Cubism. All the knowledge and visuals I have analyzed inspire me to create my own Cubism painting.

I am motivated to paint as part of my creative work. It will be based on what I have either experienced, read, or have seen. I intend to further my creative work by writing multiple art statements explaining my painting(s) and how it mirrors the topic of my chosen subject. I am thinking of doing this creative work in either a series of different paintings or doing one big mural painting. The types of paints that I would want to use is either watercolor or acrylic paintings. The paintings might include a mixture of the different Cubism phases—Analytical, Synthetic and Dynamic Cubism. Moreover, the incorporated figures will be inspired by African

mask and sculptures. I want to reflect on what I have seen and experienced by challenging myself to making it look abstract in the form of Cubism.

## **ORIGINAL ARTWORK**

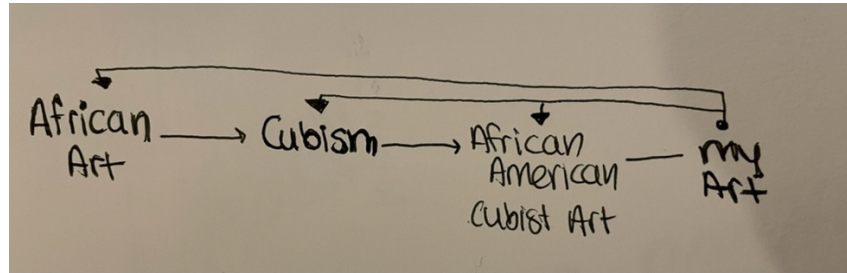
### ***Project Statement***

The most important goal for this project was to bring awareness to the power of inspiration and what amazing things can come out of one's creations once they are inspired. During this process, I felt like many other artists felt. The idea and the plan do not always go as we envisioned. However, I still was able to accomplish my main goal of bringing Cubism and African American art back to each other by creating paintings based on literature read for this thesis work. I was more focused on what my art would represent and using Cubism to show an image of African American art in a different way. After all, Cubism was inspired by African art.

My journey of inspiration starts with deciding which impactful or inspirational moment in my readings meant more to me to capture and put on a canvas. I read Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Ibi Zoboi's *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young & Black in America*, and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Not only did I want my compositions to be memorable for the viewer but also myself. I hope those who view my paintings will feel inspired and understand the impact.

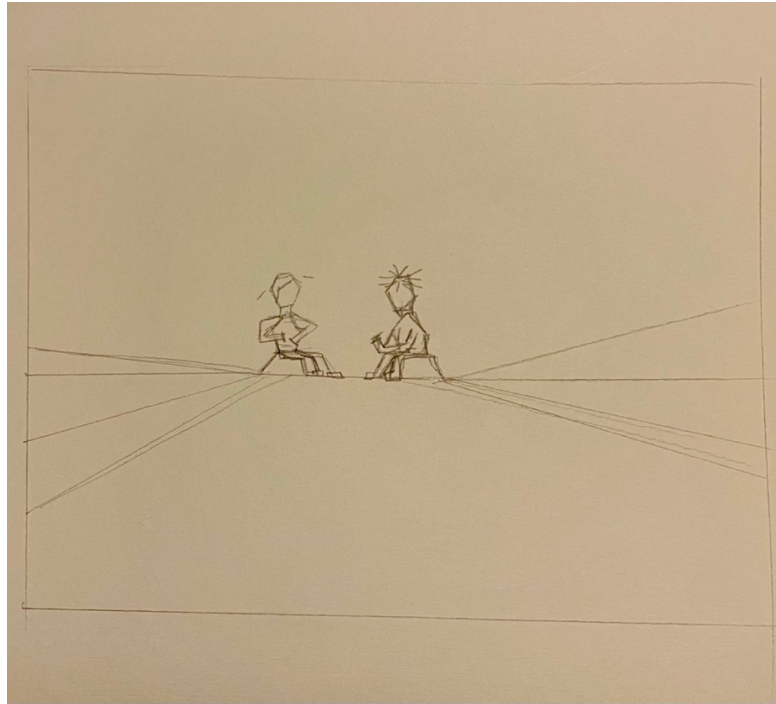
I narrowed down the literature selections based on what I think reflects what African Americans and Black people go through today. Most importantly, what resonated more with me as an African American woman. This process was a long, and at times, overwhelming one. I could not decide which moments from the books to capture and paint. Each seemed worthy

although there were those that had more of an effect than others. However, I believe each author I read had in their own way of explaining their truth and evolving lifestyle as a Black person. I kept seeing a pattern of growth and dealing with societal norms and how to overcome those as a Black person.



My work is mainly on the dynamic Cubism side in terms of style. Yet, some of my work would fall on the analytical side. All canvases are 16 x 20 inches, and I used all acrylic paint to create my images. But, before I would start painting, I sketched my ideas first. When it came to drawing it accurately was a trial and error. After reading a passage, I would outline or draw the first thing that came to mind.

Moreover, after I finished one of my selected books, I would look back and sketch what resonated with me the most or what I had highlighted. After I finished the sketch, I found it most helpful to reread the passage or chapter in the book to remind me what it meant to my project and myself as the artist. I kept thinking about what is most important for my audience to see or know from my painting? How could I connect what I've read and create it in a Cubist form? Once I sketched the foundation in my sketchbook, I would develop different variations of the sketch. I would then produce images I drew in pencil, marker, or watercolor. Then once I found an idea that I liked, I would develop it more and put it onto a canvas for practice.



*Pencil sketch – “Unforgettable”*



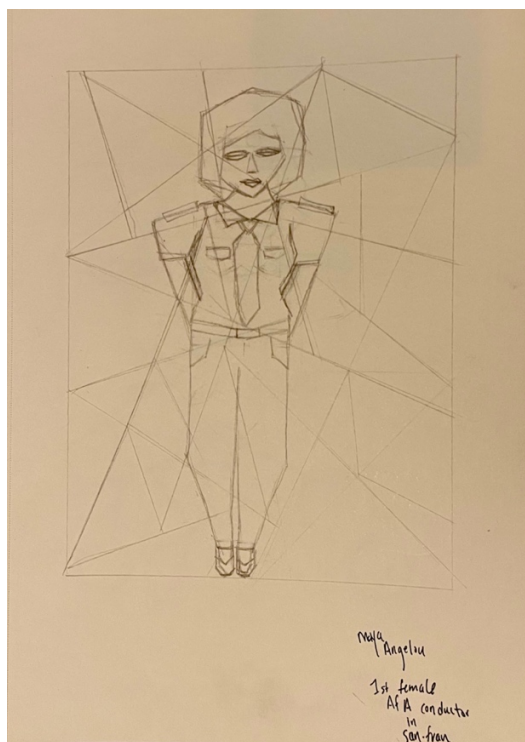
*Acrylic Paint – “Unforgettable”*



*Marker Sketch – “Unforgettable”*



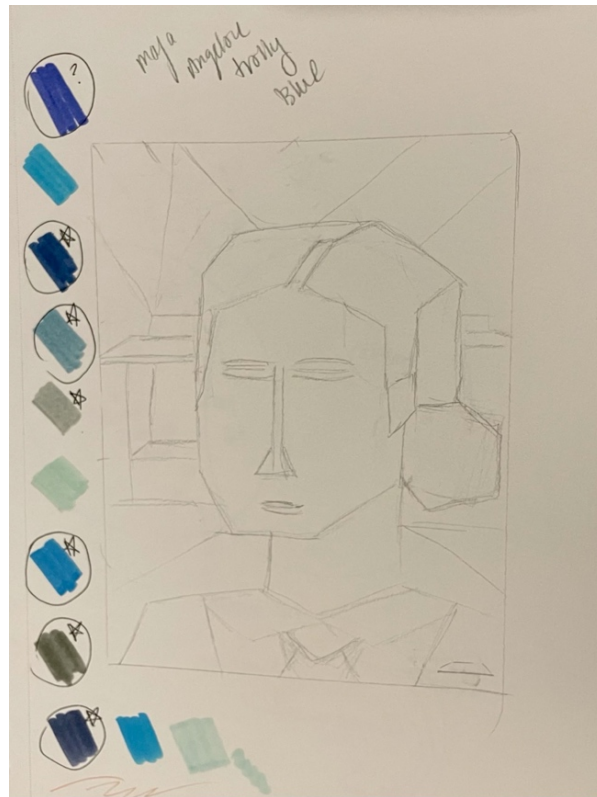
*Acrylic Paint & Charcoal – “Unforgettable”*



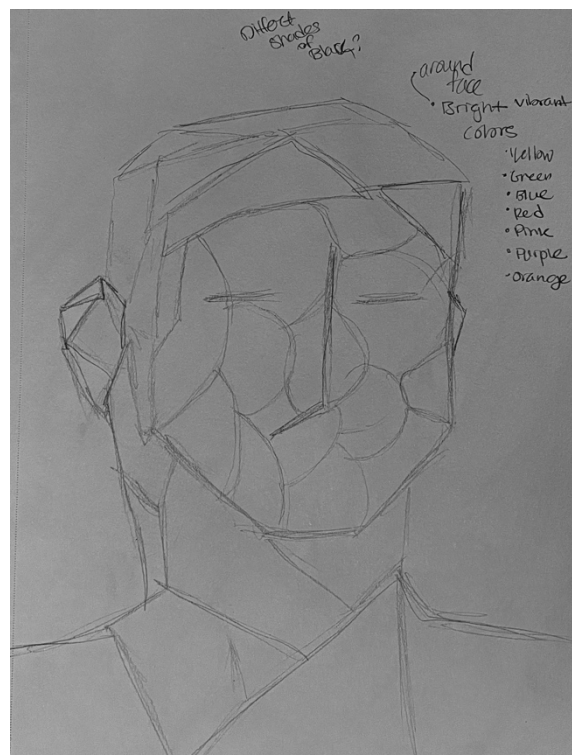
*Pencil Sketch – “Blue Story”*



Acrylic Paint – “Blue Story”



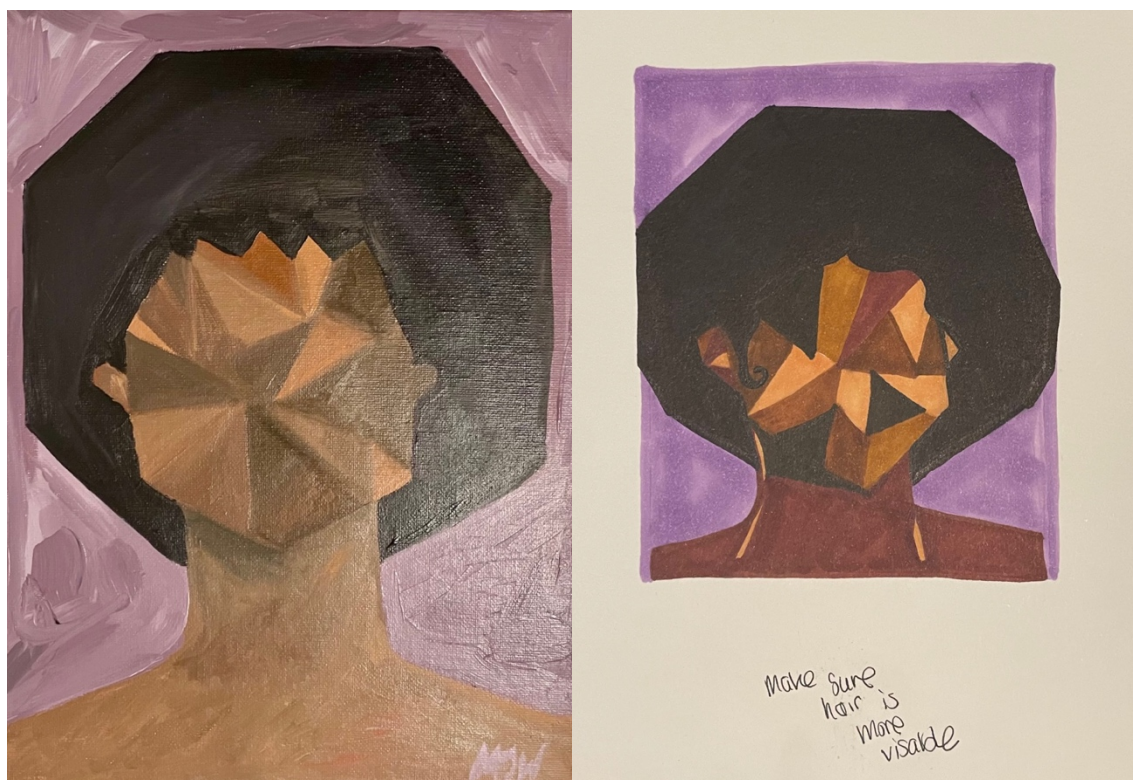
Pencil Sketch – “Blue Story”



*Pencil Sketch – “Enough 2”*



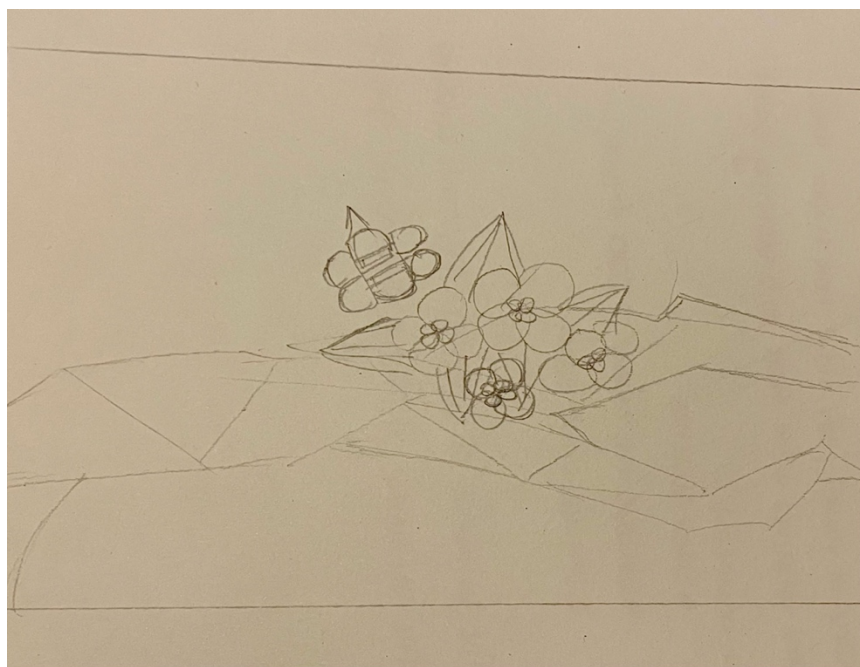
*Marker Sketch - “Enough 2”*





*Acrylic Paint – “Enough”*

*Marker Sketch – “Enough”*



*Pencil Sketch – “Golden”*



*Acrylic Paint – “Golden”*



*Acrylic Paint – “Enough 2”*

*Acrylic Paint – “Enough”*

As I moved forward with my creative process by painting on what I called “trial canvas,” I found it very helpful with how I wanted my final design to look. When I decided it was time to start painting, I became very nervous. Even though I know acrylic paints are undemanding to work with, I still did not want to make a mistake. But then again, that is all a part of the process. As I painted on my “trial canvas,” I made mistakes that helped me understand what I needed to focus on when working on the final painting. Also, by making those “trial canvases,” I was able to see what I wanted to change. Overall, I became more excited and closer to creating my final paintings with this process.

Through this project, I have come to understand that my idea/thesis took a life of its own. I created art based on Cubism’s relationship with African art and its influences on African American artists. However, I saw myself with a different thought or answer. From reading and observing various African American artists like Jacob Lawrence, I have learned that they used

Cubism as a spectacle. It just so happens that Cubism has a connection to their possible ancestry. Also, artists like Lawrence and Hale Woodruff used the unique style of Cubism to stand out, and I believe it was a stepping-stone for those who created after them. It was momentous for them to create abstract work so that those who view it could question their work and its meaning. Based on my inspiration, I created my artwork to tell different stories using Cubism as the base to express it more in-depth and in an abstract form. I can show its significance through connection and meaning to Cubism's history by illustrating African American literature. It can be beneficial to develop in an uncertain style to make for conversation and clarification. Cubism has a way of doing that. That is what I envision my artwork to do.

*Conceptual Statements*



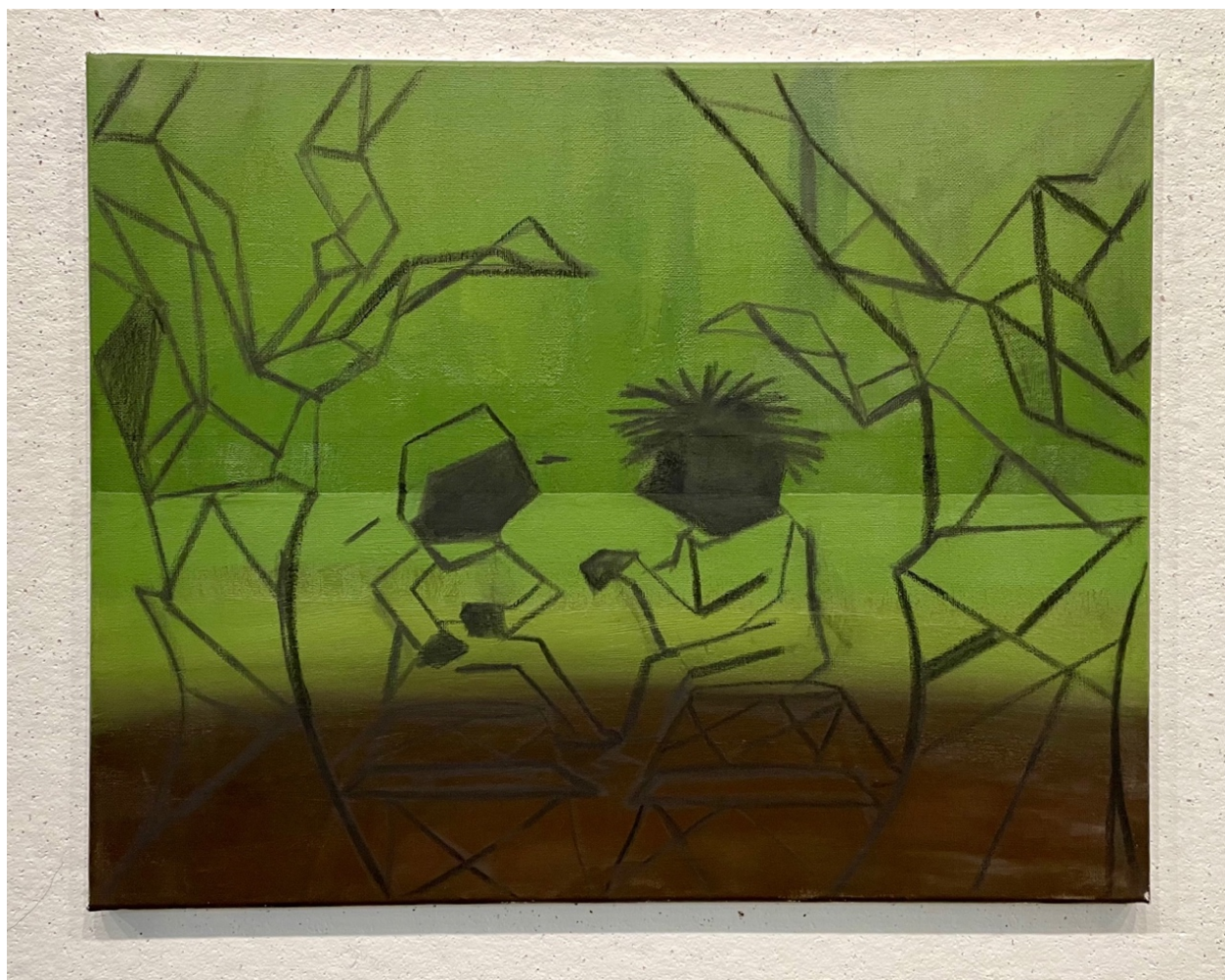
*"Blue Story"*

*Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

*16"x 20"*

I was inspired by Maya Angelou's willpower to not give up on what you desire. This first painting represents Maya's shift in young adulthood as she stood firm and fought the obstacles to

earn her dream job. Her determination and drive allowed her "...on a blissful day, to be hired as the first Negro on San Francisco streetcar" (Angelou, pg. 269). And with that accomplishment, her mother paid for her first "blue serge suit" to be tailored. The central part of my painting is different shades of blue mixed together in geometric shapes. I treated this painting almost as a puzzle piece, each piece I sized and designed on the canvas fitted precisely right and formed into what I wanted. Maya is a mirror of other women who have broken barriers in the workplace. My painting represents a women's accomplishment. It is a self-portrait of what she achieved. Behind the uniformed woman is my Cubist representation of a streetcar. I was leaning toward the style of Dynamic Cubism and a little of Synthetic Cubism. Yet, I was inspired to paint this women's face in the same style as an African mask I observed. Her face is strong, yet her eyes are open and ready to take on the world. Her mouth is slightly concave with a story to tell. My goal of this painting was to show part of Maya's story. Almost under the surface, her accomplishment made her the first black *woman* to conduct a streetcar.



*“Unforgettable”*

*Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

*16”x 20”*

This second painting was inspired by one of the many short stories in Ibi Zoboi’s edition “Black Enough.” This story was written by Rita Williams-Garcia called “WHOA!” I wanted to capture the moment where a young man from the present is conversing with an American enslaved person in the 1800’s. The style I made in this painting was gravitating more towards Synthetic Cubism. This painting resonates in history and life for any descendent of enslaved people in America. The young man I drew on the left explains everything that has happened in

America, especially the life turning events. The man on the right is simply laughing because he essentially cannot fathom any of these moments happening, especially the abolishment of slavery and, eventually, Black people gaining their civil rights (Williams-Garcia, pg. 245). This painting had some heavy weight regarding forming an idea and creating it. However, I knew I wanted to do it because of its vital message. I painted my background in acrylic paint and drew the characters and deformed trees in black charcoal. I chose charcoal to bring out a dramatic texture and experience the roughness of not only slavery but also of this idea of talking to an enslaved person. I had them face each other. Almost as if they are looking in a mirror. Having them faced directly in front of each other equally represents the struggle, oppression, and injustice Black people still face in America today. Yes, certain events have allowed Black people to make many steps in the world, but the steps still take longer to reach, and there is still trauma. The trees I chose to leave open and not shaded represent the unfilled ability of most Black family trees. However, the “family” tree is their understanding of what their ancestry left or is still unknown for some African American families. The forest they are sitting in is empty, but some trees are filled and have hope and success.



*“Enough”*

*Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

*16”x 20”*

This work is intended to draw attention to the many colors in the figure’s face. It represents the beauty and diverse shade of colors Black women hold. It is all about the different shades of melanin! I was inspired to paint various colors on this woman’s face as a way to mirror



the many short stories in Ibi Zoboi's "Black Enough." Altogether, the hair and body display the Black race. However, her distorted face shows the many ways Black women can be represented. Also, if looked closely, one could see the abstract face. The geometric shapes come in different shapes and size yet show that they are all beautiful, unique, and powerful. I want the audience to see that no matter the shade or form, Black women all face in some way the same good movements and bad. What matters is that they remind themselves that they are enough.



*“Enough 2”*

*Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

*16”x 20”*

This painting has a similar meaning of being the face of all Black men. This painting is meant to have a feeling of harshness and softness. Although you cannot see the expression on their face, you are meant to think of the circumstances Black men go through. What they face,

good or bad, is intended to be represented based on Ibi Zoboi's "*Black Enough*." I worked hard to create the right shades to mirror the different shades of the Black race. Even though I could not create all the shades, those not represented do not mean they are not enough. I want the audience to walk away with a feeling of imagination and almost see themselves or have an idea of what it may feel like to be part of this painting.

My intentions for these two paintings were to represent each shade of the Black race. I noticed much from Jacob Lawrence's paintings that he used either dark brown or black for his Black figures with vibrant colors. However, I wanted to show off all the beautiful shades and do it in a Cubist style. I distorted the faces and used different shades of brown to piece the faces together. It is as if the Black race are wearing a mask to honor and remind themselves of their beauty, no matter the shade of their melanin. I distinctly gave both figures an afro because naturally, their hair is shaped that way for most of the Black community: matted, puffy, and full of thick curls. However, I chose to make my afro in a clean Cubist style. These paintings I carefully aligned to ensure I could make an unnoticeable face. The shades also mirror those who identify as Black. Even though we are all different shades, we still experience the same things to some degree. The Black race has some lows and some incredible heights, so it is important to see each color and love and understand its story. I refer to the book "*Black Enough*." My painting aims to show each shade resonates and is given a visual to each story being told by the specific Black character. Both the man and woman represent the short stories in this book.



*“Golden”*

*Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

*16”x 20”*

This painting is meant to take place when Zora Neale Hurston’s main character Janie saw “a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom...So this was marriage!” (Hurston, pg. 11). How Hurston described Janie watching the bee interact with a bloomed pear tree was a visual that I knew I wanted to paint. It is a simple painting that is leaning towards the Cubism style. The background was designed to envision innocence, along with the interaction between the bees and the bloomed pear flowers. The message behind this painting is confident expectation and wonder; “what happens after the bee interacts with the flower?” In this case, Janie imagined it as a traditional commitment between two figures. I chose this specific sense to paint because of its

important message on how specific commitments are perceived. I decided to paint this moment because the viewer will not automatically understand this moment without reading the book. However, because fulfilling the painting in a Cubist style, not everything is as it seems.

### ***Conclusion***

I want to show how inspiration is so powerful in being able to create artwork and its impact. My vision and goal are to bring awareness to African American art's relationship with Cubism – especially at the beginning of the movement- and how it transcended or resurrected in African American artists' work. I am directly showing off my work inspired by Cubism. Cubism, to me, is alternating and distorting an image to the point where it is abstract using geometric shapes. Cubism allows artists a chance to show an image in a new light, giving it a new story.

My five paintings express various moments most, if not many, Black people have read or experienced themselves. The original artwork displays the expressed thoughts visually—the inspirations based on Black artists and authors and personal experiences. Having a likeness for Cubism and understanding its history and development motivated me to express its ties. I took it upon myself to educate myself on Cubism and was pleased to see its connection to Africa and later African American backgrounds. This project was my chance to bring forward and talk about all the connections and create my art. Artists design and create to tell a story based on something they have seen or been inspired by. My artwork has a double consciousness or meaning. I am using my artwork to express the monumental stories based on African American culture and give honor to African art by using Cubism.

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