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SENDING LOVE THROUGH A BARREL: INVESTIGATING THE IMMIGRANTS'  
EXPERIENCE, FROM BELONGING TO ASSIMILATION

by

KANDI-LEE REID

Under the Direction of Melanie Davenport, PhD

ABSTRACT

This studio-based thesis explores the experiences of a black immigrant woman as they migrate from the Caribbean to the United States of America. An exploration through artmaking addresses the impact of these experiences on a social, economic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal relationship level. This thesis examines how the implications of these experiences affect a teaching artist's life using them as inspirations and motivations while also discussing their impact. Not only is it impactful to a visual arts educator with these specific experiences explored as they navigate teaching, but especially also in teaching to a specific immigrant/refugee demographic of students.

INDEX WORDS: Visual arts education, Immigrant students, Refugee students, Barrel children

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by

KANDI-LEE REID

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art Education

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2023

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2023

SENDING LOVE THROUGH A BARREL: INVESTIGATING THE IMMIGRANTS'  
EXPERIENCE, FROM BELONGING TO ASSIMILATION

by

KANDI-LEE REID

Committee Chair: Dr. Melanie Davenport

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College of the Arts

Georgia State University

May 2023

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated firstly to my one and only savior Jesus Christ who has given me this life and all that is in it is given back to him. I'd like to also dedicate this thesis to my family and friends. A special gratitude to my parents, Celia, and Oral, but especially to my mother, whose sacrifices and love provided me the fuel to persevere. To my aunt, Dr. Dionne Cross Francis, who has always encouraged me to push through challenges to achieve my goals and satisfaction. My closest friend, Joni-Kay Scott, whose local Jamaican resources were the foundation of my research and whose personal encouragement motivated the entire journey. To my friends Kathie Laurent Coore, Danielle Thompson, Denisha Solomon, and April Jordan for every kind word and support. My cousin Lori-Ann Grant for not only her support but endless love and constant reassurance that I'm sure I can never repay.

I also dedicate this thesis to my former teachers. Mr. Joseph, my visual arts teacher, my drama coach as well as my Young Leaders Club sponsor (Basseterre High School, Basseterre, St. Kitts) who taught me the foundations of art and inspired me to always be myself. Mrs. Robinson, my visual arts teacher (Ardenne High School, Kingston, Jamaica) who saw my potential and always pushed me to go beyond that. Remembering her firm but gentle approach still inspires me to try new things and expand on my capabilities. Mr. Honeycutt, my Advanced Placement English Literature teacher (Henry County High School, McDonough, Georgia, USA) who shared his love for words and who always inspired me to dig for a deeper meaning.

Finally, this thesis is also dedicated to my grandparents, Noel and Lola Cross who helped raise me prioritize the two things that can never be taken away from me: my salvation and my education. My grandfather went home to be with the Lord in the process of preparing for my thesis proposal. May he continue to rest in God's comfort.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

I was about six years old when my mother left for the first time. At least, this is what I vaguely remember. It appears that I didn't know much about her then. I knew that she was my mother, I was told she loved me, and I was told she would soon return home. She did return home but before I could get used to her company, I remembered that she would leave me again. Nevertheless, my mother sought to work abroad for months at a time while my father, tethered to our home country through his dedication to our country's armed forces, was my sole caretaker. Therefore, my mother created opportunities for herself outside of our country to help meet the family's monetary goals. At a time when there was no video chat, no text messages, or the ease of the common person possessing a mobile phone, months would go by without me seeing her face. I would see her face, what I thought was her face, in strangers in the streets. The longing for her never left. I would get excited and run toward these strangers whose smiles seemed familiar. My father would embarrassingly pull me away assuring me that these faces did not belong to my mother. Why did she leave? Why did she stay away for so long? Yes, she sent goods home and every now and then I would hear her voice on the other end of the phone as well as receive letters in the mail. And, yes like other parents working abroad, she would pack up items in big brown cardboard shipping barrels to send to us. Yes, we gratefully received and appreciated the barrels, but as a child, I still could not understand why she left. This is often the plight of a barrel child.

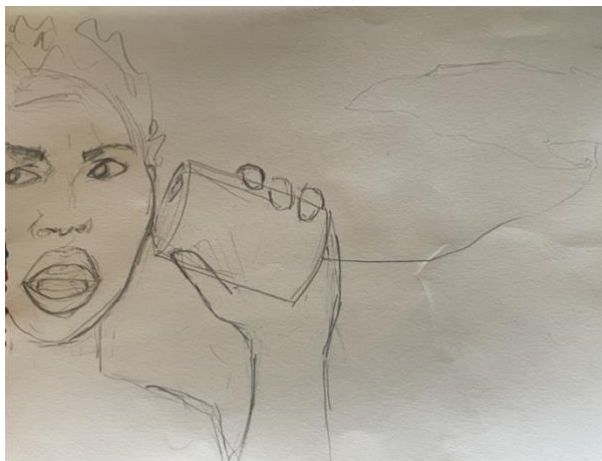
### 1.1 Connection to Home

The remittances that my mother sent helped my family reach our goals and helped create more comfort, but the separation still left its scar. It has been over thirty years, and I have since then repaired the relationship with my mother, but the effect of my parents' decisions is still felt.

These thoughts and experiences are not unique to me. In my case, the separation did not last for more than a year at a time, but others have different stories (Lu, Y. et al, 2018). The connection many children in this situation have to their parent(s) may just be the barrel and its contents. With time and technology, I imagine it to be a bit more manageable due to the possibility of frequent communication. However, this is no consolation, as many children do not ever see their parents again. Others' lives are affected in such a way that there are irreversible emotional, behavioral, and relational consequences.

Family systems and reorganization have mostly been studied during divorce and remarriage (Fomby & Osborne, 2017; Hetherington, 1992), but are also relevant when children are left behind by parents to circumvent the costs and uncertainty of migration and rejoin parents when parents establish some stability in destination societies (Nobles, 2013). In this process, children experience two sets of family reorganizations: first as they are separated from migrant parents, and second as they reunite with parents while separating from caregivers back home. These alterations lead to changes in family functioning and in multiple relationships-- children and parents, children and other caregivers, parents and other caregivers-- which creates disequilibrium and disruptions in child development. (Lu et al., 2018, para. 9)

Every barrel child perhaps holds a different representation of the barrel. For me, my barrel represented communication with my mother. Always seemingly gone but the barrel came so she never seemed too far away. A sketch shown in Figure 1.1, is a planning drawing for a piece that shows a barrel-like object connected to the drawn outline of the island of Jamaica (in the background) representing this form of communication.



*Figure 1. 1 Sketch for Barrel Love.*

## **1.2 Art as a Language**

Barrel child is a term that was coined by Jamaican psychologist Dr. Claudette Crawford Brown (2018). The term is used to describe the children whose parents “move abroad, most likely for work... the circular brown fiber or blue plastic shipping containers used to send material support to those that are back home” (Noel, 2018, paras. 4). Harewood (2005) mentions that sometimes a barrel child’s parent may prepare for a life abroad and migrate the child later in life, but some children never see their parents again (Noel, 2018). Dr. Crawford Brown often uses art as a therapeutic tool that allows a barrel child to express their thoughts and feelings about separation in ways that talk therapy may not do.

I was fortunate enough to be in the group of barrel children who would later migrate with their parents. Although it would come at a price, as being with my mother meant that I had to then also separate from my father and other caretakers. At about the age of seven, my mother received an opportunity to open a bakery on another Caribbean Island named St. Kitts. After she returned home from one of her trips, she would complete culinary studies in Jamaica, developed her passion into an opportunity, and away she went again. This time, to St. Kitts where she

would move me there with her at the age of nine. Although St. Kitts was another Caribbean Island, unfortunately, there were too many cultural differences between the two islands. The Kittitians saw me as different. Everything about me was different to them. My Jamaican accent was very different to theirs. I spoke differently to them. I did not grasp social cues and would often miss jokes where a local lingo that was not familiar with was being used. I was labeled a foreigner. It did not help that I was also quiet and very shy at the time. Jamaicans had the reputation amongst the other Caribbean Islanders to be the opposite which was not a stereotype that made us likable. I remember crying frequently and complaining to my mother that I was not making any friends at school. Not too long after, I returned home to Jamaica for two years, only to go back to St. Kitts again for an additional four years. The remainder of my time in St. Kitts from the ages of eleven to fifteen was filled with some more growing pains. After all, I was still the foreigner who looked, spoke, and acted a little different from the other kids. Maybe it is my stubbornness but being made fun of in such a way for being different rooted me as a person and helped define my core values. I started to explore even more all the ways I could express myself. I became extremely involved in school activities. As many as I could fit into my schedule. I participated in any and everything, from the drama club to the soccer team to the French club. From the young leaders' club, and pageants to track and field events, as well as the visual and performing arts. I acted in as many plays as I could, it didn't matter the part, and did just about anything that involved visual arts. My high school visual arts teacher became my favorite teacher, and the art room became my safe space with my closest friends. Ever since I was a very small child, I had a clear interest in art, but I fell in deep love throughout my middle and high school years as that was my avenue of connection. Art became my avenue of connection I believe that for me, art is consistent. Art is reliable and to top it off, I was good at it. Art became

a quite effective language for me. If I felt an overwhelming emotion, especially one that I felt was misunderstood or ignored, I would write a poem and draw about it. This allowed me to express myself in ways that I could not with words only.

### **1.3 Sense of Belonging through the Arts**

What purposes can the arts serve people, especially the immigrant? When I became fully immersed in my first experience as an immigrant, I was a pre-teenager and then grew into a teenager. In addition to facing the normal teenage woes, art allowed me to express the feelings I was struggling with as I figured out my identity. I donned a different identity with each geographical move. Assimilation became the dominant theme in my life. This experience is not unique to me. No matter the age of the person, everyone must assume a new identity with migration (Abramitzky, 2017). I found myself having to change identities often. I moved from being an ordinary Jamaican child at home with a substantial support system of extended family and trusted family friends in Jamaica. Then to being the main caretaker for my younger sibling while my mother worked, as well as having to navigate being a teenager in a new country in St. Kitts. I felt like I moved from being cared for to being the caretaker. Around the age of twelve, we no longer had babysitters, and a lot more than I anticipated was expected of me. While I also went from feeling comfortable in my social circle having had the same friends since kindergarten in Jamaica to having to make all new friends in the fourth grade in St. Kitts, amongst children who not only seemed to not like me very much but who, ironically, had known each other since kindergarten. Then being back in Jamaica again but experiencing the beginning of being seen as a ‘foreigner’ in my own home as me having different experiences with them over the previous few years created a separation I did not know was there until later. With this last move, I had to continue to be a foreigner again but this time I sometimes felt like I had to be performative.

Americans were curious about my Jamaican culture. I was constantly asked to ‘speak Jamaican’ and asked curiously about the absence of my dreadlocks and other questions influenced by whichever other stereotypes they learned from the movies. Although I experienced the beginning of being seen as a foreigner in my home in Jamaica, I was still culturally very comfortable and accepted, but moving to the United States meant that now I could no longer be myself even by way of culture. The change I made upon the move to the United States is the most drastic change I ever had to make. I had to learn to assimilate to not attract unnecessary attention to myself and to better fit in. In conversations with my students in elementary school through to high school, I have noticed some ways that they orchestrate changing their identities. Some have expressed to me a desire to be addressed by their non-ethnic name or a different version of their name altogether. Students sometimes forego explaining certain things out of frustration with either not wanting to translate from their first language or not knowing or wanting to describe their cultural significance assigned to ‘a thing’. We all must assimilate to a culture of some sort, whether we are immigrants or not, but this may be an optional choice. Yet, for the immigrant, it might be an obligatory choice for survival (Abramitzky, 2017). “When the children and their families first arrive in America, they step immediately into new identities.” (Brunick, 1999, p. 14).

Despite where one comes from, one will always aspire to belong in their environment, especially as an immigrant in a new country. It is important as educators to know that when we experience one of these interactions with our students, we understand what the root of it could be. How can art in this case be used to help create a sense of belonging for a student? It might be a challenge for students to find an understanding support system in the host country. How can we as educators bridge the gap of understanding for the student until and through the process of them receiving services from other professionals? As a former *barrel child*, I did not receive any



mental health support until I sought it later for myself in adulthood. Before and through the services, art created that sense of familiarity, comfort, and a safe space. Despite the lack of mental health resources in the earlier years, being separated from either parent at any given part of my journey and dealing with the different emotions from that, allowed me to dive deeper into my art. While constructing these different identities may be disorientating, art's purpose could be the compass for any child in these specific or related circumstances.

Glasgow and Ghouse-Sheese (1995) have noted that mental health professionals are often ignorant of immigrant West Indian culture, family structure, and child socialization practices. Insensitivity to the cultural traditions of clients can impede communication in counseling. It is therefore important that counselors educate themselves about these issues, learning both about the culture in the country of origin and also about the challenges of migration and the coping strategies used to deal with it. (Pottinger & Williams Brown, 2006, p. 9)

Although the barrel child is a common phenomenon in the immigrant community, it is not the primary one as it relates to migration. Another occurrence that is also widespread in the immigrant community is that of an immigrant child being solely sent away abroad to live with extended relatives or family friends for a 'better life.' This could be the opposite of what we discussed prior. Children who might have grown up in one country with their primary caretakers can be sent to their home country, even though they might not have been born or/and raised there, to live with an aunt, uncle, or grandparents, for example, to get hands-on experience of the family's culture. Although this type of migration is not for economic reasons, there may still be challenges because the separation is still the same.

Refugee children, barrel children, and children of other migration circumstances alike could utilize the arts to assist them in processing their difficult emotions. According to Akthar and Lovell (2018), some refugee children will experience some challenges as their support might have been removed as they have migrated to the host country. They also state that storytelling in art therapy could allow for a safe avenue of expression of these challenging emotions for them. In looking at the trauma experienced by these different types of immigrant children, support could be offered through the arts.

Outside of using art to express my emotions, art was also used to connect. The ways I connected with my peers included situating myself and celebrating shared experiences and any shared culture. Whether it was our favorite tv shows, common musical taste, extra-curricular activities, or school events, we created a common ground. Through my second time migrating to St. Kitts, I remember connecting with the other students who also loved art. This was the first step in creating those connections for me. Participating in the arts brought me together with my peers and it allowed me to make friends and build community (Lee, 2013).

In my over decade-long career being an art educator, the first nine years were spent teaching Pre-Kindergarten through to the fifth grades. It was essential for me to not only create a comfortable environment for the refugee and immigrant students but to also teach empathy as a part of the social-emotional segment of my lessons. I used art not only to allow my students to connect by sharing experiences, but I also wanted to create a space for art making as well. “Art therapy techniques such as non-directed drawing opportunities, tolerance of shocking images, and respectful listening are especially beneficial in helping to meet the special needs of these children.” (Brunswick, 1999, p.12) An example of effective implementation of social-emotional learning was using the experiences of children outside of my classroom, such as through

activities as I did in a pre-instructional video of *Mustafa Goes for a Walk*. *Mustafa Goes for a Walk* is a video produced and published by UNICEF via YouTube where we see the experience of the beginnings of war from the point of view of a child. Mustafa, a child from Syria, is seen eating at the dinner table with his family in their home. This video, animated in a cartoon style, with bright colors, and imagery digestible for a younger audience, is also narrated by Mustafa, now a refugee child, describing his journey from his original home to his current refugee home. I identify with the feeling of being an ‘alien’ in a foreign land and I can imagine that a few of my students feel similarly as well. Once the students would complete the video, I would question the students to provoke their thoughts. I would ask anything from basic observational questions to ask about their immediate feelings in reaction to the video. The goal is not only to create but also to build empathy as well as to prompt an emotional reaction that would inspire authentic expression in their artwork (UNICEF, 2016).

#### **1.4 Barrel Children**

Barrel children, children sent abroad without their parents, or refugee children, all experience the turmoil of emotions. The marring wounds the separation from caregivers might produce and a struggle with a sense of belonging amongst a variety of other strong emotions are among them. The arts were utilized in my own life as a former ‘barrel child’ to help create my identity, define my sense of belonging, and helped create consistency for me. Immigrant children from all walks of life, children with any background and/or current life circumstances could be choosing art to assist them in navigating through life.

As a teaching artist, I have found myself working in the Clarkston area of Atlanta, also known as ‘Ellis Island of the South’ as well as the most diverse square mile in America due to its abundant representation of people who emigrated from numerous countries throughout the world

(Wells, 2017). Although I have spent my first nine years teaching in Pre-K-5<sup>th</sup> and now the last couple with high school, I have been in the same community for a decade long. This community not only includes students from all over the world but also from many different life circumstances. As a teacher, I want to support them on their journeys. As an artist, I want to share how I express my emotions in hopes of inspiring their own expressions. By creating a series of artwork about my own immigrant experience, I not only inspire them but while I worked alongside them, I gained insights into how art might support my students, and by sharing this artwork. I aspire to continue to build more empathetic relationships with and amongst my students and transcend the challenges they may have within their families and their neighborhood. Studies have shown the impact that art-based expression may have on the life of a student and how it impacts change (Gerber et al., 2018). In addition, immigrants tend to fair better overall as they gain a community in their host country (Moriarty, 2004). In the classroom, and my studio, this may look different based on the day. Through working on this studio-based thesis, I have modeled to my students not only through my art-making process, visually articulating my voice but also through navigating the varying emotions of completing these goals while trying to help them with their own.

In my ability as a barrel child, I was able to use art as a language to express difficult emotions and thoughts. I was able to create ways to artistically communicate these challenging emotions while the sense of community, I so longed for, was produced through participating in the arts with my peers. In this thesis project, I have created a series of artworks exploring this immigrant experience through my lens. In the next chapter, I will discuss the artists who inspire me in doing so.

## 2 INSPIRATION

I have been a lover of the visual and performing arts since as far back as I can remember. Although, like many other parents, there was a concern for life sustainability with the pursuit of the arts, my mother still encouraged my talent and exploration of the arts. Other members of my support system were not as supportive, but my passion and my mother's encouragement created the inspiration to pursue art anyway. As a visual arts educator, I have had the privilege of being exposed to many artists and their works, from the classical to the contemporary, with influence from more than I can recall. However, there are three that stand at the forefront of my soul that have particularly impacted me over the years of my life. As an Afro-Caribbean woman who migrated to the United States roughly twenty years ago, it is no surprise that I tend to gravitate to artists who share some similar roots.

### 2.1 Achieving Freedom Through Art

“Jean-Michel lived like a flame. He burned really brightly. Then the fire went out. But the embers are still hot” (Goldkorn, 2019, para. 17). Jean-Michel Basquiat captivated me with the simple strokes of his paintbrush but complex content. I identify with his tragedy. That is, the tragedy of his life is evident through his works. Jean Michel Basquiat grew up in New York City, a city that I have somehow loved since before I knew it. I remember dreaming as a child, of flowing through the rhythms of the sound of New York City. Perhaps it was the allure of 90s cinema, portraying the big city as the heartbeat of culture, expression, and all things art. Every Caribbean person I knew had at least one family member who lived in New York, and I was no exception. Perhaps it was the visits of my family from New York as they visited home or when the elders visited them. Either way, I was always captivated by their stories. It is no surprise that I fell in love with an artist who represents what I love about the city. Growing up in Kingston,

Jamaica, the capital city of the island, some people would even refer to it as ‘Little New York’. This was because of the likened hustle and bustle and the need of its inhabitants to work hard and get things done. The ambitions of Kingstonians are to ‘make it’, typically you’d hear stories of Jamaicans who lived in the rural parts of Jamaica with aspirations of more. Whether it was to go to a more advantageous school, to live, to do business, or follow a dream in Kingston, looking to take advantage of opportunities their small town could not produce then, they would move to Kingston. Kingston provided these varied opportunities back then for the ambitious Jamaican.

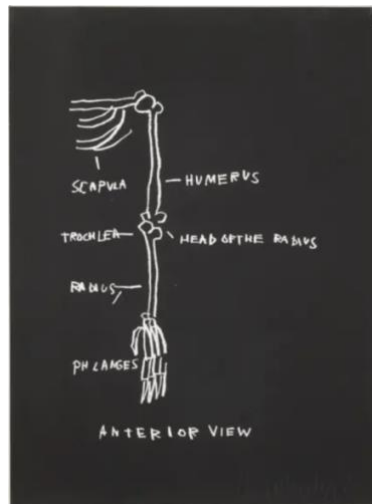
I first discovered Jean-Michel Basquiat in my late teenage years. The expressions in his pieces, the lines he used left by his brush strokes, spoke to my heart. In the junior year of my undergraduate studies, I had to choose an artist to inspire a piece of art I was to be working on. I had to study life, his style, critique his work, then my own. What I learned allowed me to be completely enamored by him and his work.

Jean-Michel Basquiat, a writer, musician, and artist, was born on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1960. He was born in New York City to a Puerto Rican mother, Matilda Andrades, and a Haitian father, Gerard Basquiat. Basquiat started his career as a creative as a whole and did not get into painting until a bit later. His creative expressions were varied, as he participated in visual and performing arts. Untrained in music, he started a band. Jean-Michel on the clarinet and his childhood friend Michael Hoffman, on the drums. They formed what would be Basquiat’s first public work, an electronic band they named ‘Gray’. People would describe Gray’s sound as organized chaos but many thought it was brilliant. This chaotic style would transcend through whichever discipline of art he would pursue in that season. Gray would continue to perform in the underground hangout spots for the art crowd.

Basquiat grew up in an upper-middle-class home where his father was an accountant. His father had very traditional ideals and values which includes pursuing a traditional career. His father owned a substantial bit of property including the three-story brownstone home, he spent his youth. Basquiat would only stay in that home with his family until he was seventeen years old, and he would never return. In his lifetime, Basquiat would never find a traditional career and initially fended for himself by panhandling and picking up change off the floor of nightclubs. He would sell his art to help continue to sustain himself, which were at first postcards and collages he'd sell on the side of the road. With his aspirations set on non-traditional work, he would dive into becoming a full creative but as a result, would become unhoused as a young adult before he could financially sustain his living expenses. In his street art, Jean-Michael would add thought-provoking words and poetry, collaborating with another high school friend, Al Diaz, always with the same SAMO tag which is an acronym for Same Old Sh\*t. Basquiat first started tagging SAMO in Soho amongst other places in New York. Basquiat's use of poetry was a very different approach to the graffiti artists of the time, who would tag with just their names if not an altogether larger artwork (Buchhart et al., 2015).

Basquiat, like many of us, had experiences in life that helped define a theme or focus in our artwork. At the age of seven, he spent months in a hospital after getting hit by a car when playing in the street. This was one of the most significant events that occurred in his life. During his time spent in the hospital, his mother gave him the book, *Gray's Anatomy*, written by Drs. Henry Gray and Henry Vandyke Carter in 1858. It was his mother's intention to help him understand what was going on with his body while in his long recovery. Basquiat sustained multiple broken bones, including his arm and after multiple surgeries, his spleen was removed (Jean Michel Basquiat et al., 2015). Throughout his work, he would often reference the human

anatomy but especially the arm and the spleen. In 1982, at 22 years old, Basquiat would publish his first print series, consisting of 18 prints entitled, ‘Anatomy’ (Dery, 2022).



*Figure 2.1* Jean-Michel Basquiat. (1982). *Anatomy, Anterior View*. [screen print]. Gallery Red, Palma, Spain.



*Figure 2.2* Jean-Michel Basquiat. (No date). *Untitled (Spleen)*. [crayon on paper]. The Grand LA, Los Angeles, California, USA.

Jean-Michel would often position himself in opportune places. Over time, all over the world but especially in his home city of New York, his popularity and notoriety increased. He would begin to maintain friendships with other artists and musicians whom he would collaborate with. Andy Warhol was the most notable artist he collaborated with, and he did so extensively.





*Figure 2.3* Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol. (1984-1985). *Arm and Hammer II*. [acrylic and silkscreen on canvas]. Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK.

Although Basquiat's life ended in tragedy, he represents freedom for me. Freedom in thought and action. He ultimately chose himself over others' expectations and he garnered success within his reality. It is less about Basquiat's technique for me and more so about his process. His work speaks with such raw emotion and a 'carelessness' that communicates varied content. Basquiat speaks of the black experience, comments on colonization, and its effects on people as well as the state of people's minds and the influence society has on us as people (Mount, 2015). It is hard to see initially but one would have to pay very close attention to even the smallest mark and consider it within the whole piece of art to gain a better understanding. In dealing with his own trauma, the idea of being 'foreign' and 'not like the others' due to his missing spleen and facing the fragility of his humanity at such a young age, his markings became his language.

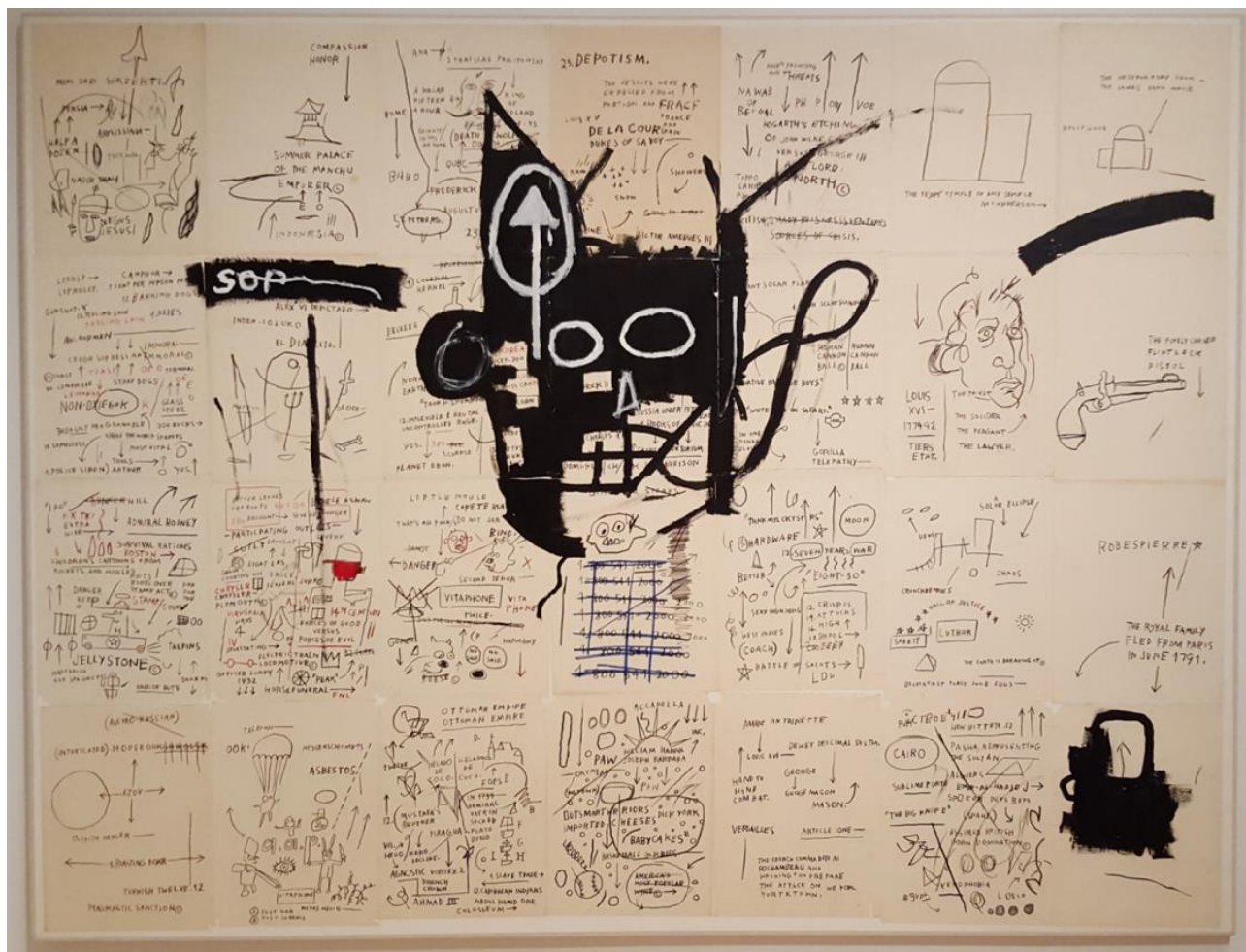


Figure 2.4 Jean-Michel Basquiat. (1982-1983). *Untitled*. [Oil paint stick, pencil, crayon, and gouache on paper mounted on canvas]. Private Collection, New York.

In discussing Basquiat's artwork, I observed that there is subliminal permission to go against the grain. A not-so-subtle encouragement to use art to tell a story. Basquiat was authentically representing himself, although ultimately to his detriment, he was still authentic.

Over the decades, the study of Basquiat's paintings and drawings has offered textured insights into the 1980s and, importantly, continued reflections on the Black experience against an American and global backdrop of the white supremacist legacy of slavery and colonialism. At the same time, Basquiat's work celebrates histories of Black art, music,

and poetry, as well as religious and everyday traditions of Black life (*The Broad, n.d.*, para. 3).

A crushed suit, free-form dreadlocks, and sunglasses. Blasé. Nonchalant. Being solivagant, Jean-Michel Basquiat embodies a disposition about life that I aspire to attain. The epitome of, “I do what I want”. A life full of an artist Jean Michel Basquiat, a Haitian American artist, born in the part of the American dream for Caribbean immigrants includes, ‘looking like you wouldn’t fit at home.’

In *Anthony Clarke*, too, the face becomes a mask and the associative field is opened by collaged fragments: here. Basquiat pastes lists of chemical substances, animals, and anatomical details. Clarke’s body I markedly brutally cut through by an orange line that largely follows one of the wooden planks of the painting’s ersatz frame. Here and elsewhere, Basquiat shows fragmented, lacerated individuals that reflect their suffering and the painter’s own trials (Buchhart et al., 2015, p. 19).

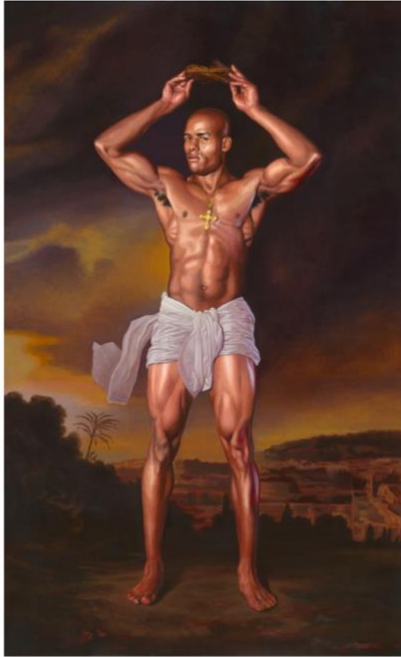
Throughout his body of work, one could surmise that Basquiat’s choices in his artmaking were purposeful. I took inspiration from his process as I produced my own body of work. Even the seemingly small marks on Basquiat’s substrate had a purpose. Not only did his attitude towards his art inspire me in my artmaking but also the way that he allowed his own experiences to help narrate the canvas. In my second piece in this series, ‘Blended’, I was able to experiment with my mark-making. Perhaps this is why there was so much contemplation in deciding on the background that ‘felt right’ for this piece. I allowed the strokes of the brush to dictate the direction in which they would go as I desired even the direction of implied lines to express my own experience, just as Basquiat does throughout his own body of work.



*Figure 2.5* Jean-Michel Basquiat. (1985). *Anthony Clarke*. [acrylic, oil, and collage on wood]. Private Collection, T. Shafrazi Gallery, New York, New York, USA..

## 2.2 Sense of Expression by Inspiration

Captivated by his use of brown bodies in bright colors and iconic themes, Kehinde Wiley's work introduced me to an approach to visual arts in such a unique way that I had not been impacted by before. My upbringing included catholic school as my primary education, Sunday School each Sunday morning, church camp, and Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) in the summers, consequently a connection through the recognition of these notable religious icons throughout his work was no surprise to me. Where the contemporary meets the traditional Christian religion, Kehinde Wiley's body of work initially intrigued me because of the idea of the old meeting the new, marrying the two seemingly effortlessly.



*Figure 2.6* Kehinde Wiley. (2016). *Lamentation, Christ after Lady Macbeth*. [oil on canvas]. Petit Palais, Paris, France.

Kehinde Wiley was born in Los Angeles, America on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1977, to parents, Freddie-Mae Wiley, an African- American, and Isaiah D. Abot, a Yoruba tribe Nigerian. His parents had six children together, but Kehinde would only be raised by his mother as his father did not have permanent residence in the United States. Wiley, although not a barrel child, experienced separation from a parent through migration. At the age of eleven, Wiley's mother, to keep him and his twin brother busy and out of the mishappenings of South-Central LA, enrolled them in an after-school visual arts program. By the next year, in 1989, Wiley was invited to be amongst a group of 50 other American children to participate in an exchange program. They were moved to Russia at the Centre for U.S./U.S.S.R. Initiatives for a year where they studied visual arts as well as the Russian language alongside 50 Soviet Union children (Wiley, 2019). The Centre for U.S./U.S.S.R. Initiatives began in 1983 by Sharon Tennison, who is an American activist. Her goal was and still is to help foster pleasant relations between the United States and

the Soviet Union. Kehinde is permanently a part of this continuing piece of history. When Wiley visited Russia he recalls it as ‘...a strange, magical time’ (Wiley, 2019). Imagine his experience of being foreign, ‘an alien’. He recalled,

It opened my eyes to a community of artists and young people outside of what I knew in South Central. It represented a break from seeing what was immediately around me and made me see that there were so many different ways to live. So many traditions to see. And so, as someone interested in art, I started digging directly into other histories and seeing the histories of others as being perhaps something that belongs to me as well. So, it almost created a kind of global citizen out of me (Morris, 2021, para. 14).

The influence of other cultures in his global citizenship is apparent throughout his work but especially throughout his World Stage exhibition, where he traveled to and photographed the local people of Jamaica, Haiti, China, and Sri Lanka and painted portraits of them portrayed in ways likened to old colonial portraiture.

“How is it possible for a black American artist to go through the world to try to capture on some small level the echo of different cultural influences from one society to the next? That what the World Stage is about?” (Vassell, 2022, 0:00:17).



*Figure 2.7* Kehinde Wiley. (2013). *World Stage: Jamaica, Frederick William III, King of Prussia*. [oil on canvas]. Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, United Kingdom.

Playing on the history of power and the relationship between one country and the next. In the case of the World Stage series, it is about Jamaica's relationship with its former colonizing nation of Britain.

The exhibition featured Jamaican men and women assuming poses taken from 17th and 18th Century British portraiture, the first one in the 'World Stage' series to feature portraits of women. The juxtaposition between the sitter and the art historical references reflects on the relationship between the island and its former colonial power. Wiley restaged this history, transforming the race and gender of the traditional art-historical hero to reflect the contemporary urban environment. The subjects' proud posturing refers to both the source painting and the symbolism of Jamaican culture, with its singular people and specific ideals of youth, beauty, and style. (Concept NV, 2013, para. 2)

Afternoons and weekends in Kehinde's youth were filled with the busyness of art making, but especially also Saturdays, when they took a five-hour bus round trip to simply take part in art making at these community centers. Reflecting on his childhood, Wiley expressed that in spending time with his mother while she operated her street vending business, which he referred to as, the 'junk shop' he learned some valuable life lessons (Wiley, 2019). Not only did he learn Spanish in catering to her customers but also in how to create, "... a sense of making something out of nothing, trying to dust off old items and seeing some level of value in them, recognizing that no one is going to help you." (Wiley, 2019, para. 8).

In a sense, his ideal of repurposing is one of the most prominent themes in his works of art, "dusting off old things to create a new.", "A repurposing in a way." As in, making the old, the formerly Classical repurposed into the Contemporary. Wiley also chooses mostly people of color, most specifically, black men as the main subjects of his works of art. "I know how young black men are seen. They're boys, scared little boys oftentimes. I was one of them. I was completely afraid of the Los Angeles Police Department" (Solomon, 2015, para. 2).

Wiley continued his pursuits in art but at first in his childhood years, only as a hobby. His mother did not encourage him to leave his art behind but motivated by her religion and Wiley's success in oratory competitions at the time, encouraged him to be a preacher. His mother's influences are seen throughout his body of work as he commonly not only transforms the old into the new but also borrows from religious art. Wiley would later continue to Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, and later complete his BFA at the San Francisco Art Institute as well as receiving a full scholarship to complete his MFA at Yale. His main influences were Constable and Gainsborough, but he also was steadfast in creating the art that he wanted to create instead of focusing on what his teachers wanted him to.



I was first introduced to Kehinde Wiley in my research looking for contemporary artists to introduce my students to in my field of teaching. Charmed by the vibrant blooms of colors in the background which juxtapose the warmness of the hues of browns and reds he chooses to use for his subjects' skin tones. Through more extensive exploration, Wiley continuously enchants me with his work. I am particularly captivated by his 2016 body of work, *Lamentations*. “*Mary, the Comforter of the Afflicted I*” and “*Mary, the Comforter of the Afflicted II*” both work in stained glass. Still, in his style of bright colors in the background with warm hues of brown for the skin of his subjects (See Figures 2 and 3). In this case, Wiley uses a popular Iconoclastic work of art as his inspiration. Jesus is seen as God in human form. In the Catholic Christian denomination, Mary is revered as a Saint. Therefore, throughout the ages, artists have used their depictions of Jesus' Mary as a central figure in works of art, especially to depict an image of comfort, peace, and guidance. Instead of using the Mary in the center of this all too familiar imagery, Wiley chooses to use a black man as his subject in both “*Mary, the Comforter of the Afflicted I*” and “*Mary, the Comforter of the Afflicted II*”. In “*Mary, the Comforter of the Afflicted I*”, he chooses a man with loc'd hair while choosing a man wearing a fitted cap in the other. Both men, wear gold crowns. Both men are dressed in what is popularly considered urban clothing, often worn by individuals who belong to a particular community. Both men are surrounded by those who are seemingly lamenting or expressing grief, a figure in shackles below their feet, and various figures who appear to be male, female, and child-like whose hands are clasped and eyes closed. This hand-clasped gesture is commonly interpreted as a prayer pose, a popular symbol in Iconoclastic works of art. Wiley chooses to have the main subjects in each work of art, both adult males, each holding a small child whose bodies are both in relaxed poses.

It is implied that the body is lifeless considering the poses of the surrounding figures seeming to be in mourning.



Figure 2.8 Kehinde Wiley. (2016). *Lamentation, Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted I*. [stained glass in aluminum frame]. Petit Palais, Paris, France.

This is just one example of how important Wiley's works of art are. In my classroom, his works of art inspire conversation about how the image of people of color is perceived in the world. We discuss how the popularization of his works of art will impact the community, not only the one that he is depicting but also others outside of that specific community that gets to observe his artwork. Also, what does it mean to have these works of art be deemed as valuable by not only exhibiting his works of art in important places but also tagging them with such prices? In addition, how does perception influence reality? Whose reality is altered and what's the result of such?

### 2.3 Aspiring to Self-Explore

In 2002 I had recently migrated back to Jamaica from St. Kitts and was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. There was an uproar in the city of Kingston. Many whispers loudly through the news broadcasts and quietly in private discussions with people at home. Laura Facey, an unknown artist to me at the time, just installed a new piece in our newly built Emancipation Park. Emancipation Park is a public park initially dedicated to being a safe space of leisure for the Jamaicans in the city with also being a site representing community unity and an area to host cultural programs and engagements in the New Kingston area. Two nude three-quarter figures about eleven to fourteen feet high stand tall in a pool of water, facing each other, arms straight to their sides while they both look up into the sky. Some might have been offended as I recall critical whispers from people expressing their concern with the public boldness of their nudity, claiming it was vulgar. Confused, it was not out of the norm to go to a craft market on any day and see human body parts on display. Perhaps it is because of the space as it was dedicated to the locals and their families. Dedicated to freedom as was Emancipation Park, Facey named this sculpture *Redemption Song*, after Jamaica's reggae icon's song of the same title. Bob Marley's *Redemption Song* speaks of overcoming and stands as an anthem of emancipation from slavery for the Jamaican people. Although these nude figures caused a stir, despite the controversy, Facey's tribute to freedom is still revered. As I continued to learn about Laura Facey and her work, I would later continue to find out this reoccurring theme of the history of Jamaica and its people continually being represented in her works of art.



Figure 2.9 Laura Facey. (2003). *Redemption Song*. [bronze]. Emancipation Park, Kingston, Jamaica.

Laura Facey Collins is a Jamaican contemporary artist who was born in Kingston, Jamaica on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1954. Facey is a trained artist who attended West Surrey College of Art & Design, England, and Rhode Island School of Design, USA. She also attended the Jamaica School of Art, Kingston, Jamaica for her diploma in Sculpture. Laura’s artwork themes include the combination of the African experiences in the history of Jamaica as well as her own experiences (Facey & Seiderer, 2021). From the history of slavery in the history of their family home, an old plantation, “My Mother, passionate about our family history and the history of where we live, unearthed the slave inventory that I use in *62 Men and 63 Women*” (Facey & Seiderer, 2021, para. 10). Facey is currently still living and working in Jamaica. Her work is locally revered, as she has several commissioned pieces both from the government and private patrons. Her most popular, and most controversial artwork to date is still *Redemption Song*.

Laura Facey had the privilege of have not one but two parents be involved in the Jamaican art world. Her mother Valerie Facey was a graphic designer and her father, Maurice

Facey was a businessman who was hand-picked by the Jamaican Prime Minister of his time (Michael Manley) to establish and then chair the first board of the committee for the National Gallery of Jamaica (Facey & Seiderer, 2021). I can only imagine the impact of being raised in a home in which both parents participated and had an influence on the arts. I can imagine what it was like in her home and the conversations they were having each day surrounding art. Her mother Valerie encouraged her artistic maturation but Facey does not talk about this influence much outside of the high expectations she faced (Archer-Straw, 2003).



*Figure 2.10* Laura Facey. (2019). *Heart of a Man*. [wood and fiberglass canoe, cedar and mahogany hearts, rope, and hook]. The National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston, Jamaica.

Facey's work is rich in the metaphoric language of pain. Each material she chooses holds a meaning of its own. She will typically choose a medium and material as dictated by the story she would like to tell. The authors explain,

While working, each piece has its own rhythm, there is an unfolding, sometimes slow, sometimes fast — a piece of wood is delivered to my studio by the help of my husband and assistants, sometimes chosen by me sometimes not, sometimes the wood sits for years waiting or sometimes immediately I pounce, throwing bark and sap in every direction. It depends on what's on my mind, what needs to be said, sometimes current events are the trigger — *Heart Of A Man* was a counter response to the Me Too movement — men have their own buried pain from being shackled on a ship, not being able to protect their families, their hearts metaphorically ripped from their chests. That pain pervades their lives today.

(Facey & Seiderer, 2021, para. 11)

Facey further explains that *Heart of a Man* was also inspired by William Blake's drawing of *Negro Hung By The Ribs*.

Laura Facey is a sculptor who inspired me to develop a language of sculpting for myself. As seen in *Redemption Song* and *Heart of a Man*, she not only uses subject matter to tell the story, she also interprets each material she uses in her art in an effective visual narrative. Facey continually confronts the issues of race, caste, gender reconciles her family's past while highlighting the plight of the enslaved people of the island's past. As she seemingly reconciles her place in Jamaican society, Laura Facey, an Anglo-Jamaican, whose family lives in a known plantation house stands as a constant reminder of what took place in this island's history.

## 2.4 Storytelling

These three are very different artists with different approaches and styles but they have all impacted me in the way that I approach my artwork. As an individual living the immigrant experience, I can best perceive my experiences through my lens. I have been in the United States for so long that sometimes I forget what version of myself I should be portraying. Sometimes, for

example, if I am speaking with a person or in an environment that I am comfortable with, I might forget the rules of assimilation I have previously learned. It would be when someone, for example, would remind me indirectly by either being surprised that my accent is still so strong at that moment and will ask me to, 'speak Jamaican', or exclaim that I, 'still do...fill in the blank', of my need to portray that certain identity. In my ten years teaching visual arts, I have been fortunate enough to teach in a community that is filled with students who are also from various backgrounds. These same identities I portray as an immigrant navigating this world in the United States are the same versions my students must navigate between as well. I would think that when I interact with them that I am able to relate to them because of our shared experiences. It is my hope that through this and our artmaking that they feel less like an 'alien' and closer to a community.

In creating this series, I pulled inspiration from these three artists, Basquiat, Wiley, and Facey, to explore these experiences in my life where I felt like an alien. Basquiat, born of a Puerto-Rican mother and a Haitian father, works of art were complete in his expression of his alien identity. From his participation in his electronic band to his works of art with Warhol, he wanted to always live life on his terms, as authentically as he knew how, chaotic, messy, and in rebellion, but still free. Basquiat used poetry to enhance his art and often chose to be a voice for those less represented in addition to using colors and direction of lines to express his voice. With this, he has allowed me to *see* myself and helped emboldened my personal artistic voice as well. Wiley, born of an African American mother and a Nigerian father whom he was separated from due to his migrant status, gathered influences from his upbringing and heritage. He later gleaned not only from his local African American culture but also expanded his influence through travel and observing other people's cultures. The backgrounds and clothing of subjects filled with bold

prints in his works of art represent the cultural influences of the people he studied. Wiley's focus on highlighting diverse cultures allowed me to dive deeper into the exploration of my own. Laura Facey, an Anglo-Jamaican, continually reconciles her own family's connection to Jamaica and its connection to enslavement in her works. She not only encourages dialogue of such sensitive subject matter surrounding her work but simultaneously celebrates the country by using its natural resources as media in her works. Through examining her process, I noticed that she was always purposeful in how and why she chose her media. Inspired by her process to choose these based on what she wants to communicate and the focused subject matter, I do the same.

After examining the works of art of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kehinde Wiley, and Laura Facey, their influence affects my artwork in the most obvious ways: Basquiat's attempt to achieve freedom through his art, Wiley's sense of expression by inspiration of culture, and Facey's continued aspiration to self-exploration.



### 3 METHODOLOGY

My studio-based project includes the creation of three works of art. Each of these expresses a different aspect of being an ‘alien’ in one way or the other as I navigate the intersectionality of being an immigrant, a woman, and a person of African descent.

The questions guiding me in this project include:

- How can I push to expand the mediums I use to help to express my immigrant identity?
- What can I learn about my artmaking process that I might utilize with my students to support their artful exploration of their identities?
- How will modeling my artistic process to my students be useful for them and me?

To address the first question, I created a series of artworks – using mixed media and three-dimensional mediums and pushing myself to use methods that I have not utilized much of before. My first degree is a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art Education with a concentration in drawing, painting, and printmaking. In the past, I have purposely avoided sculpture, and any construction of any three-dimensional structures of art was completed in the best ways that I could. The truth is, I was not willing to take the risk of expanding the media I used as I thought that I would not succeed. My past self would look at my current self with surprise had I known what I would grow to be now. Who could predict that I would evolve into an artist who would not only further explore three-dimensional art making but who would also purposely include these in my body of work as I pursue higher education? I have taken some inspiration from Facey in my art methods in that I have chosen materials and colors that would help communicate my message. I would look at how I needed to apply the medium onto the substrate and the process of the application. For example, with my 1<sup>st</sup> piece, ‘Alien’, on this journey to be the person I feel like I had to be built, most specifically chiseled, refined even. Not hard like a stone,

but still firm yet fragile enough where one wrong move could be detrimental. Throughout my artwork, there are also symbols used that represent specific experiences within the immigrant journey.

To answer the second question, I have learned about my art-making processes by documenting my process through taking works-in-progress photos, journaling, and by video recording myself working. I learned about pushing myself in new ways and outside of my comfort zones. I learned more about new and inventive ways to approach unfamiliar media as well as how to push through challenges, pivot when things do not go according to plan, and achieve the goals finally successfully, I've set for myself in artmaking. I also learned to inspire my students to explore the emotional aspect of artmaking and not only do extensive research on media but to listen to one's intuition in making artistic decisions throughout the progress.

My works of art were completed in my classroom, alongside my students, so that I was able to model for them how an artist thinks through their decision-making as well as engage with them in real conversations about the content I explored. Considering the demographics of the community I currently teach in, not only will I be able to help students find their voice to navigate difficult emotions, but this research has also proven that I am equipped to relate to them. In addition, many of my students not only may find themselves busy navigating the different versions of themselves between the country of their birth and the country of their residence but also may find themselves navigating the difficult emotions of being separated from a loved one by their migration.

All three pieces tell a story. It is through the journey of my life and the experience of becoming a naturalized American that I have become the person I am today. I used a variety of media like collage, acrylic paint, wax, and cardboard amongst other media throughout these

works. I completed these three works of art over a four- to five-week period. While all three works of art focus on relationships, the first one focuses more on my relationship with the different countries, while the second and third focus on the relationships that I have with people through the context of the experiences of the country or the process of immigration/separation. I have experimented with different media; some of which I was not comfortable or familiar with to expand my repertoire in finding the right materials to tell my story. I consider myself to be a two-dimensional artist, yet two out of the three pieces are three-dimensional while the 2<sup>nd</sup> does have some relief sculptural characteristics to it. In my younger years when I made my five- and ten-year life plans, I imagined it would turn out the way that I expected, a linear journey. However, my life's journey has been anything but linear, instead, it has been full of rich and beautiful twists and turns with lessons and life principles cemented along the way. In the same way, my artistic process was similar. It was not a linear process. It was full of many twists and turns that allowed me to learn how to work with new media, be patient with myself through the developments as well as trust that I would be able to communicate my intentions with the product.

#### 4 PROCESS AND PRODUCTS

This body of work is entitled 'Storytelling', as it tells my story as an Afro-Caribbean woman who has struggled to define her identity in the world as I move through it as a migrant. In the first piece, a sculpture, I explored the internal conflict I have faced with my sense of belonging. Stuck between the definition of what it means to be Jamaican having been born and raised there, spending a transient time in my teens in St. Kitts, and finally moving to the United States of America moving in early adulthood since then navigating life here with these labels I have either been born with or adopted. I constantly must prove my 'Jamaicanness' to the Jamaicans, but when it comes to the Kittitians as well as the Americans, I am not enough of either to not be considered an 'Alien'. Hence the first piece's title. Considering that Jamaica and the United States are the countries in which I have spent the most time, I perceive the experiences I have had in these places as the most defining. The second piece is complete with acrylic paint and a collage on canvas. The black and white pictures shown in the collage in the artwork are of my most valuable experiences in both countries. Although valuable, these experiences have not come without trial and focus on the contradiction I now face as a citizen of both countries. Each collage of pictures fills the contour of one half of the geographical map of the United States and the other half with the geographical map of Jamaica. Although both countries will be fused, each country will still be separated and fused by a jagged line of red to indicate pain in the making of the fusion. On top of both, a haze of grey paint in a wash will stand in the forefront with a gestural drawing of a female figure in a defensive pose. The third work of art will explore the most significant relationship I have had in my life, which is the relationship I have with my mother. Although my parents were married at the time, my father was dedicated to the Jamaican Defense Force (the Jamaican Army) and could not move with her or in her stead. My mother has

worked very hard and had chosen to migrate before us. This did not come with consequences, however, which unfortunately meant that I have very few memories of my mother and me before the age of eleven. In between the few memories, however, she did send a barrel home with purchased goods. This became a substitute for the love I yearned to receive from her. Hence why, the third and final piece is 'Barrel Love Child', a sculpture, that shows this yearning for love. This mixed-media piece uses various types of media. There is a small representation of the barrel in this piece which interacts with symbols of love, my mother, myself as a child, and the longing for love. This narrative is a familiar one amongst the immigrant population which is the separation between loved ones.

#### **4.1 Alien**

This first piece, 'Alien', is a sculpture made from candle wax and fabric which is displayed on top of a wooded box painted in a whitewash. The human representation can be seen sitting on top of a closed suitcase with three different flags around them. The countries' flags, made from white cotton fabric and colored with permanent markers, are of Jamaica, St. Kitts, and the USA. The American flag drapes on the right side of the figure and the Jamaican flag drapes over the back to off and over each of the shoulders while the Kittitian flag is draped from over the left knee onto the left hip, over to the side of the suitcase, and onto the floor. I started this process by grating blocks of wax and melting the pieces down over an outdoor portable range. I placed the melted wax into a box and waited until it formed a solid block. I used a pencil to indicate on the block where I wanted to remove first, then used carving tools and the subtractive method to create the figure sitting on top of the suitcase. I continued with this approach along the way until I achieved the desired dimensions for each part of the form. The fabric flags were dipped into the melted wax quickly to not have the colors bleed out of the

fabric, then shaped and molded to fit over the form of the figure then secured with push pins before they dried. This piece took roughly 20 hours to build.



*Figure 4.1 1st sketch for Alien, 9.5" by 11".*



*Figure 4.2 2nd sketch for Alien, 9.5" by 11".*



*Figure 4.3 Work in Progress #1 of Alien.*



*Figure 4.4 Work in Progress #2 of Alien.*

The figure is meant to look unhappy; their back is slumped as they sit on their suitcase (See Figure 4.4). While they sit on the suitcase, the flags envelop the figure like a hug. They ponder, “Where do I belong?”. These were my actual thoughts on some occasions while navigating my identity as an ‘alien’. After all, when I was in St. Kitts, I was constantly reminded that I was a foreigner. As I am in the United States, it is apparent within the day-to-day, that I am

not American. Ironically, when I am in Jamaica, although I still have my accent and mannerisms, I am told that I am now an African American. This was news to me; I was not aware of this. Neither here, nor there, nor there. I am in truth, an alien, the only place that welcomes me wholly is the suitcase.

Although the United States has been my permanent residence for over fifteen years, culturally, I am still Jamaican. A saying by an unknown author that was popularized on the internet in the early 2000s states, “Human by nature, Jamaican by design”. It is in the way that I communicate, my mannerisms, and the way that I choose to live in my community. With that being said, the Jamaican flag can be seen as the most prominent flag while looking at the ‘Alien’ sculpture from the frontal view. When working on this piece in my ‘classroom studio’ various students made several comments on the subtractive process. They had to google the flags, but they understood the general meaning behind this piece once it was completed. The commentary was mostly on the process as they did not know that finer details could be achieved with a subtractive process. Although creating this artwork took the most amount of time out of all three, I enjoyed this process the most. I was initially very optimistic but given the challenges I had, I soon wanted to give up. As I pushed passed the ‘ugly phase’ I was able to see a form that I was satisfied with.





*Figure 4.5 Front view of Alien. [wax, fabric, and ink], 6" by 7" by 6" (Final).*



*Figure 4.6 Right side view of Alien. [wax, fabric, and ink], 6" by 7" by 6" (Final).*



*Figure 4.7 Left side view of Alien. [wax, fabric, and ink], 6" by 7" by 6" (Final).*

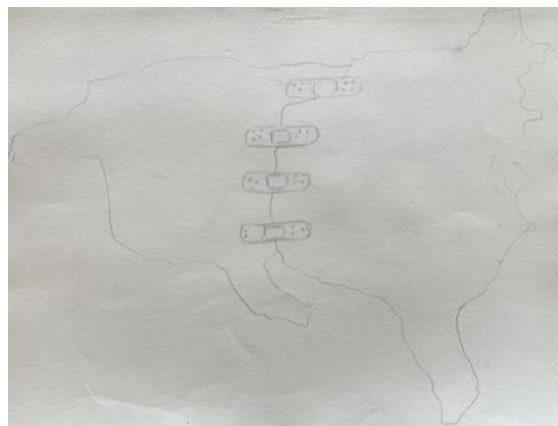


*Figure 4.8 Back view of Alien. [wax, fabric, and ink], 6" by 7" by 6" (Final).*

## **4.2 Blended**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> piece in this series is entitled, "Blended" which is a two-dimensional mixed-media piece. The media used are paper and paint on a 20" by 30" stretched canvas. Blended started as a sketch with the two countries, the USA, and Jamaica, being held together by band-aids in the

middle. However, through developments, I decided to change it. The silhouette of the map of the USA is on the left while Jamaica's is on the right. In each silhouette, there are black and white pictures overlapping filling up the space within each country. These two countries are connected by a ragged streak of red heavy-body acrylic paint. The background is a mix of reds, pinks, and yellows paint applied in short strokes in multiple directions. In the foreground, there is a light wash of light grey, and on top of that, an outline in dark grey of a figure in partial movement.



*Figure 4.9 Sketch for Blended, 9.5" by 11".*

'Blended' created more problems than I anticipated for it to be the only two-dimensional artwork of the three. There were many trials and errors. I changed the background roughly four to five times. Once I applied the collage within the countries' silhouettes, it did not feel complete. I left the canvas on the easel for a few days and watched it from each side of the room. I asked my students for their input. Some students really liked it the way that it was while others agreed that it looked incomplete. In between my contemplation, I was reminiscing about my grandpa and how we loved to watch wrestling on Monday nights together when I was a teenager. I then began to let my imagination flow which came as the inspiration for the figure that would complete this work.

The process of creating this artwork started with the sketch (as seen in Figure 4.9) but it was changed as I painted the countries onto the canvas. I realized that I did not like the idea of band-aids, and it needed to be changed. I considered using string, wire, and hot glue but none of them seemed right. I then started to examine how I felt when I think of the journey in bringing these two countries together. I immediately thought of flesh. When one gets a cut on their body, depending on how deep the cut is, one might need to get stitches. At around four or five years old when I was showering, as I attempted to get out of the tub, I slipped and fell on my chin. One emergency room visit later in the pouring rain, I had stitches. These were not the dissolving kind; this was the very invasive thread and needle kind. Upon impact with the tub, my lower jawbone ripped the flesh on my skin so deep that it could not heal on its own without the risk of infection. I needed the assistance of thread and needle to heal. Until this day, as I glide my finger along my chin, I can still feel the scar. I no longer feel the pain, but I can even still feel the scar that formed from the needle that pulled my broken skin together. Although these countries are not geographically together, they are together within me. I have had to learn to live with these two being a part of my journey. The good and the bad. These two pieces of flesh being smashed together, the USA and Jamaica, in the process of healing together that in the end will be blended like one flesh, is represented by the ragged red heavy-body acrylic between them. The photos are of all happy memories in each country. This is the 'good'. In the middle, however, over the scar, is the outline of the standing figure. This figure is not meant to be the sole emphasis of this piece. She is meant to represent a fight. This is the 'bad'. I imagined watching a fight between two opponents. The figure shown is the underdog. Her head is tilted back, and her arms are outstretched as she just succumbed to an almost devastating blow to the face. She stumbles but has not yet fallen. At any moment, she will regain her strength with the last wind of energy within

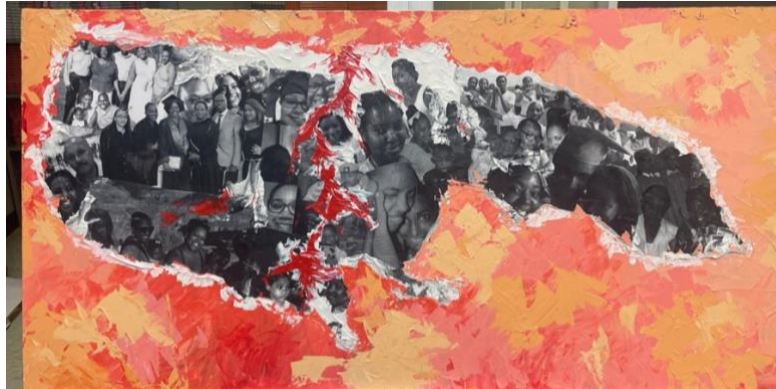
her to ultimately win the fight. She has not and will not be defeated. This figure is meant to represent resilience and grit. She is meant to symbolize me as I am continually learning more and more each day how to blend these two countries and my identities in them together each day.



*Figure 4.10 Work in Progress #1 for Blended.*



*Figure 4.11 Work in Progress #2 for Blended.*



*Figure 4.12 Work in Progress #3 for Blended.*



*Figure 4.13 Work in Progress #4 for Blended.*



*Figure 4.14 Blended. [acrylic and collage on stretched canvas] 20" by 30" (Final).*

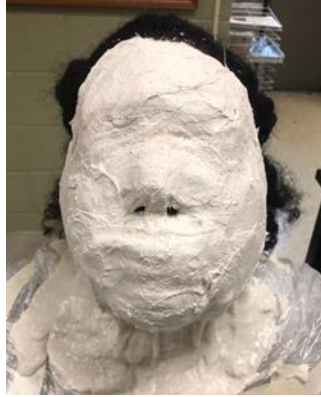
Using my classroom as my studio amongst my students as a teaching artist allowed my students the opportunity to witness as I overcame challenges with this piece. It was beneficial for me as well as I was able to receive their feedback. Many students were not familiar with Caribbean geography and were initially confused about the overall shape. However, once I explained, they understood. One student wrote in an informal critique of this work in progress (see Figure 4. 12) that, although they liked the contrast of the grays with the reds and pinks, it hurt their eyes. On the other hand, another student explained that they thought the background was 'too boring' for the collage in the foreground. I knew I had more work to do. Once I was able to complete this artwork to my satisfaction, I can be proud of how I was able to communicate what I initially did not know how to verbally articulate. 'Blended' represents the overcoming that many of us must gain as we walk through blending the native with the foreign.

### 4.3 Barrel Love

'Barrel Love', the final piece, is also a three-dimensional mixed-media piece that stands 12" tall, 6" wide, and has a depth of 7". The media used were plaster of Paris, paper, cardboard, and paint. When you look at the barrel from the outside, you will see a dress-up toy shoe on top of the transparent lid of the barrel. Under the international shipping company's logo, there is labeled simply, "To Kandi, from Love". On the inside of the barrel, you will see red paint dripping from the brim of the barrel moving into a rough texture of white then down to the mold of a face, lit up from underneath with a small LED light. Using my colleague as my assistant, alginate was applied to my face, then plaster of Paris gauze strips to help me create a mold (see Figure 4.15). Once it was dry, I mixed the powdered plaster of Paris and set it into a hardened form using this mold (see Figure 4.16).

This artwork is intended to symbolize the communication barriers between the parent and the barrel child. In this dynamic, the barrel is used to provide necessities for the child. The most memorable toy I have received from those barrels was a pair of princess slippers. I was about six or seven years old and was mesmerized by how beautiful these shoes were. They were translucent and seemed to beam across the room. Although I appreciated and adored the shoes, I would have traded them to have my mother's physical presence just a bit longer. This particular time, she visited with the barrel, she did my hair and we spent quality time together. For just a little while, I could experience her love in person and not through the barrel. The molded face at the bottom of the barrel in my sculpture represents my mother. The red paint inside represents the pain of not having love. The slipper at the top, shiny and beautiful, is a representation of all the tangible things ever received in a barrel. However, at the end of the day, as a child looking down into the barrel, I desired most to see her.





*Figure 4.15 Work in Progress #1 for Barrel Love.*



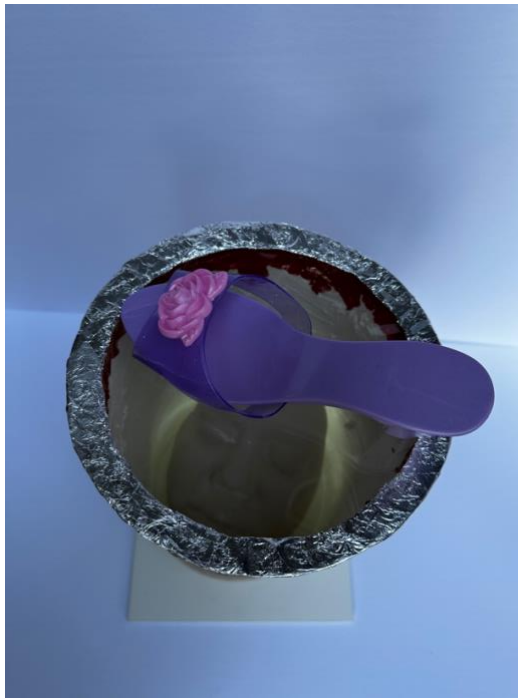
*Figure 4.16 Work in Progress #2 for Barrel Love.*



*Figure 4.17 Work in Progress #3 for Barrel Love.*



*Figure 4.18 Front View of Barrel Love. [cardboard, ink, acrylic paint, plaster of Paris, and plastic] (Final) 12" by 6" by 7".*



*Figure 4.19 Above View of Barrel Love [cardboard, ink, acrylic paint, plaster of Paris, and plastic] 12" by 6" by 7" (Final).*

This body of work entitled; 'Storytelling' represents relationships. Relationship with oneself, relationship with one's country (native or otherwise), and relationship with an individual or an idea. When observing my art, I would hope that one would find comfort in 'alien' knowing that there is a community of people who also feel like an 'alien'. They might be able to identify with 'Blended' as they are empowered to face the challenges many of us immigrants face as we migrate to a new place. While navigating their internal struggles as they reconcile their issues with abandonment, longing, and love, one might connect with the emotions surrounding 'Barrel Love'.

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

While working on this project, especially while using my classroom as a studio working amongst my high school students, I have learned quite a bit. Not only was I able to model working through my artwork as I addressed my own challenges, modeling for them how to handle their challenges, but my students were also very encouraging to me throughout the process. They used their kind words and asked intriguing questions in trying to not only understand the meaning behind each of the pieces but to also understand the reason and methods used in some processes. The wide range of media I used allowed me to explore and find my voice in what I was trying to communicate. In previous chapters, I challenged myself by asking myself the following questions.

- How can I push to expand the mediums I use to help to express my immigrant identity?
- What can I learn about my artmaking process that I might utilize with my students to support their artful exploration of their identities?
- How will modeling my artistic process to my students be useful for them and me?

In addressing this first question, I can say that what helped me in expressing my immigrant identity through my artwork by choosing different media is research and intuition. As I examined my journey as an immigrant, I identified the people, places, experiences, and things that are meaningful to me. I also delved into my prior art knowledge and visualized the processes I went through to complete past projects. After some self-reflection, I was able to identify the emotions I encountered while going through these different past experiences. It was then that I realized that some of my past artmaking processes could be used as a metaphor for some of these emotions. Through these reflections, I was able to not only find ways to express my identity but to also explore different media while doing so.

My students were a large component of this process, and I am grateful to have gone through this journey with them. Through this journey, to address this second question, I have been reminded that the path through any artmaking process, especially when reconciling difficult topics, is not linear. Change of plans, the evolution of ideas, mishaps, etc. are bound to happen and sometimes the new plan is for the better and the final completed piece may be even better than the original plan. Also, one might still not be satisfied with the outcomes but there is bound to be growth through learning either way.

Using my visual arts classroom as my working studio for this studio-based project was one of the best decisions I could have made throughout this journey. It was this decision that allowed me to model for my students in real-time. They were able to witness the planning, building, and execution stages of each artwork. Most importantly, they were able to witness me being flexible as things did not go according to any plan that I made. I was able to show my students that even I get frustrated, it is a completely normal part of the process to want to give up after being dissatisfied with the process. My students and I were able to engage in discussions about my research topics, and the theme of my pieces, and gave me valuable feedback as I completed them.

I hope that this studio-based thesis will encourage art teachers to support their students' exploration of their self-identity and by extension, their recognition of themselves as artists, as they become equipped with the confidence to approach some potentially challenging topics cautiously in the visual arts classroom. According to Marshall and D'Adamo (2011), these three approaches to learning and pedagogy: experiential learning, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning allow students to involve themselves in their artmaking. I hope other educators can utilize some of what I have modeled in their classrooms for their benefit of all their students,

from the student who lost a parent to migration, war, or other circumstances, to the student who otherwise may experience the feeling of loneliness, alienation, or challenges of isolation. I hope other educators can utilize some of what I have modeled in their classrooms. What this would look like in the classroom is allowing space for art practice as a tool of expression and to create meaningful learning for the student. They could engage in a series of experimental activities being exposed to various media coupled with guidance in questioning their processes throughout their artmaking, solving the problems that may arise, and presenting scenarios to develop their own story. Whether it is by using external resources to allow students to hear of other children's experiences outside of their own, journaling about their own experiences, or simply even just having a whole group or small group discussions amongst their peers or/and with the teacher, this material can serve as a springboard into creative expression and thus developing efficient coping tools and refining communication all while using art as their language.

Throughout this process, I have transitioned from teaching K-5 fully remotely to teaching 9-12 hybrid and in-person. I moved from teaching roughly 600 elementary school students to teaching roughly 100 high school students. I moved from teaching six grades throughout a day in elementary school to having three preps in high school to having five preps and now preparing to have six this coming fall. I have experienced loss through death and other personal battles all while my artwork provided me an avenue for expressing and navigating some of those challenging emotions. As I walked through these different transitions, I would often have a dialogue with my students on how they can use life circumstances as fuel to create. Whether it is something as deep as missing a loved one to something not quite as deep as being disappointed in the breakfast choices in the cafeteria that day. Everyone has their own artistic voice and deserves a way in which to express it.

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