



Don't Touch My Hair

An Ode to Black Girls Everywhere

UCO Archives and Special Collections
Max Chambers Library
University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, OK
2020

Cover artwork, Kito Collection, by Nathan Lee

Special Thanks

In Celebration of Black History Month, the Chambers Library, Archives & Special Collections presents *Don't Touch My Hair: An Ode To Black Girls Everywhere*, an exhibition that includes an art exhibit and three guest speakers who will address issues surrounding the currently trending topic of Black hair. This is an interdisciplinary, multicultural event designed to provide a transformative learning experience for the UCO community and the surrounding area. We want to thank our sponsors, the Friends of the Library, for their support. We would also like to thank those who had a hand in making this exhibition possible.

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Foreword

Max Chambers Library is proud to present an exhibition opening to commemorate Black History Month. *Don't Touch My Hair: An Ode to Black Girls Everywhere* explores the significance of hair in black culture through art, history, and personal experience. The visiting speakers and guest artists provide intimate, multi-disciplinary views of an integral feature of black history while providing an awareness of current black identity.

The Max Chambers Library could not have brought the present collection of artwork and speakers to campus without the curatorial work of Amena Butler, a UCO Museum Studies graduate student and intern in the Archives & Special Collections. Butler brings years of experience and knowledge about the art scene of minority artists in Oklahoma. Thanks to her involvement with the local non-profit organization Inclusion in Art, her work at the Melton Art Gallery, and her participation in local art exhibits as an artist herself, Butler has pulled together an eclectic, cohesive representation of hair in female black culture. In addition, her contributed essay offers a history of black hairstyles and hair's aesthetic, social, and spiritual significance.

We are fortunate to have three speakers for *Don't Touch My Hair* in addition to seven works of art and four essays. Each work offers an interesting perspective and intimate experience regarding black hair. Our first guest speaker, Tuesdae Pelt-Willis, Co-Manager of UCO's Women's Research Center, will shed light on the cultural appropriation of black hair aesthetics and the recent natural hair movement in the United States. Pelt-Willis will be followed by Gay Pasley who is a registered nurse, author, and photographer. Pasley recounts her Saturday trips to the beauty salon as a child to get her hair straightened, the hot comb, and the scalp burns. Pasley's raw testimony describes her life-long journey to find women who look like her.

Our third speaker is Ayanna Najuma, journalist, art advisor, motivational speaker, and civil rights advocate. Having participated in a sit-in at Katz Drug Store in Oklahoma City in 1958 to founding I HAVE A VOICE NOW! in 2019 (a movement developed to encourage children to use their voices to create change), Najuma has devoted her life to implementing change and empowering activism.

Although Suzanne Thomas-Justice, Co-Founder of Inclusion in Art, could not attend the opening reception, she generously shares the relatable, sometimes comical, story about her “good” hair. While a person’s hair can say much about her identity, Thomas-Justice chooses not to let her hair define her; she honors her hair, but she is not her hair.

The Max Chambers Library hopes the speakers, artists and essays presented in *Don’t Touch My Hair* will educate viewers about a noteworthy part of black cultural history, generate new thoughts about often overlooked social differences, and create more open dialogue about broader racial and cultural issues. The Library is central to knowledge-building, collaboration, and community on the UCO campus. We appreciate the support of the Friends of the Library and are extremely grateful to all the people who graciously donated their time, shared their experiences, and offered a new perspective on an important cultural topic.

Kristi Kohl, MLIS
Archives and Special Collections
Max Chambers Library
Edmond, OK. Feb. 2020

Don't Touch My Hair: A Passage of Womanhood Through Art

by Amena Butler

A woman's hair is said to be her crowning glory and manifestation of her femininity. The story of Black people's hair begins where everything began—in Africa. The birthplace of both astronomy and alchemy also gave rise to a people in harmony with their environment. Like natural air-conditioning, hair insulates the head from the brutal intensity of the sun's rays. Of course, there is not one single type of African hair, just as there is not one single type of African. The variety of hair textures from western Africa alone ranges from the deep ebony, kinky curls of the Mandingos to the loosely curled, flowing locs of the Ashanti. The one constant Africans share when it comes to hair is the social and cultural significance intrinsic to each beautiful strand. Hairstyles also served as indicators of a person's geographic origins.

In the early fifteenth century, hair functioned as a carrier of messages in most West African societies. The citizens of these societies, including the Wolof, Mende, Mandingo, and Yoruba were the people who filled the slave ships that sailed to the New World. Within these cultures, hair was an integral part of a complex language system. Ever since African civilizations flourished, hairstyles have been used to indicate a person's marital status, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth, and rank within the community. In some cultures, a person's surname could be ascertained simply by examining the hair because each clan had its own unique hairstyle.

Hair's value and worth were heightened by its spiritual qualities. Both male and female devotees of certain Yoruba gods and goddesses were required to keep their hair braided in a specific style. The hair is the most elevated point of the body, which means it is the closest to the divine. Associate professor of history at Columbia University and a

native of Dakar, Senegal, Mohamed Mbodj explains it as an indication of the power the hair holds. Because the hair is the closest thing to the heavens, communication from the gods and spirits was thought to pass through the hair to get to the soul. The hair was thought to be so powerful that medicine men in Cameroon used human hair to adorn the vessels and containers in which they carried their healing potions as a means of protection and added potency (See 3rd floor, Max Chambers Library Africa Collection).

Hair has never been a purely cosmetic attribute for the West African people. Its social, aesthetic, and spiritual significance has been intrinsic to their sense of self for thousands of years. It is a testament to the strength of these African cultures that the same rituals and beliefs regarding the hair remain in traditional societies today.

Since the beginning of slavery, black women have been conditioned to believe that their natural hair is unattractive. Today, this notion is still present for many black women. The images in popular media subliminally suggest and conceal the ideology that natural black hair is unattractive. The Western standard of beauty defines beautiful hair as that which is long and preferably straight. Having such a standard creates a hair hierarchy, with long straight European hair on the top and coiled or curly African American hair on the bottom.

Given the importance of hair to an African, having their head shaved was an unspeakable crime. Frank Herreman, director of exhibitions at New York's Museum for African Art and specialist in African hairstyles, explains that a shaved head can be interpreted as "taking away someone's identity." Presumably the slave traders shaved the heads of their new slaves for what they considered sanitary reasons, but the effect was much more sinister. The shaved head was the first step Europeans took to erase the slave's African culture and alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair. Arriving without their signature hairstyles,

Mandingos, Fulanis, Ibos, and Ashantis entered the New World, just as the Europeans intended, like anonymous chattel.

In the 1700s, enslaved women who worked in the fields usually covered their hair, while those who worked in the “big house,” sometimes mimicked the hairstyles of their enslavers. In cities like New Orleans, however, where free Creole women of color donned elaborate hairstyles that displayed their kinks and coils with an air of regality, the city implemented laws—the Tignon Laws—that required these women to wear a tignon (scarf or handkerchief) over their hair to signify that they were members of the slave class, regardless of whether they were free or enslaved. The constant coverage of black women in the media with straightened hair suggests to black women the need to change their hair in order to be perceived as beautiful. The images in magazines sell the idea to women and young girls that straight hair is beautiful. The connotations presented in popular black magazines are only the more recent reinforcers of the traditional beauty standards. Negative stigmas have been associated with natural black hair throughout history.

Madam C.J. Walker, a black woman, popularized the hot comb invention, and by the mid-1920s, straight hair had become the preferred hair texture to signal middle class status. Although some historians have applauded Walker’s business insight, others have chided her for perpetuating the idea that straight hair leads to social and economic advancement. Regardless, the invention offered black women an avenue for increased societal acceptance in an era when minstrel songs mocked the hair texture of African Americans.

In a 2009 interview with *Essence* magazine, Tonya Lewis Lee, the wife of movie director Spike Lee, recalls her childhood experience of having her hair thermally straightened by her mother. She stated, “My mother would press my hair, and I would just cry, I would be so red afterward, and she’d say, ‘But go in there and look at how pretty your hair looks.’ And then I would feel better.” Lee’s statement exemplifies many black

girls' experiences of having their hair thermally or chemically straightened; that is, it is often unpleasant and painful.

The Black Power Movement influenced many blacks to wear their natural hair in afros and other natural hairstyles. The afro in the 1960s became a reflection of political and cultural progressiveness as well as self-esteem, among black people. Yet, the dominant white majority stigmatized the afro as militant and unkempt. Because many people held the notion that natural black hair as political, it became a symbol of the Black Panthers.

Dick Hebdige in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* states that "hegemony can only be maintained so long as the dominant classes 'succeed in framing all the competing definitions within their range'." Hebdige is saying that hegemony exists when the dominant majority is successful in shaping how something is perceived or understood.

There has been an increase in the number of black women returning to their natural hair texture, that is, they are no longer chemically straightening their hair. The decision to return to the natural texture of one's hair is termed "going natural." Black women's return to the natural state of their hair is often an act of self-awareness. On their journey to natural hair, many black women not only discover their natural texture but also the latent ideology that natural black hair is unattractive and unacceptable in society, which stems from years of oppression and racism. Today, we are more accepting of different races and cultures, but black women's natural hair and styles are still considered political or unprofessional by many people.

Many black women believe that in order to have a decent job or be taken seriously, their hair needs to be straightened. The dominant force was and still is the white majority. The dominant Western culture framed the definitions of beautiful and professional hair. Men are also a dominant force in society and as such they also help shape what is or is not acceptable for a woman. Male executives at a New York law firm invited

Ashley Baker, then associate editor of the prominent magazine *Glamour*, to speak on the “Dos and Don’ts of Corporate Fashion.” In a slide show, she said the following about a black woman in an Afro hairdo: “A real no-no! As for dreadlocks, how truly dreadful! Shocking that some people still think it’s appropriate to wear those hairstyles at the office. No offence, but those political hairstyles really have to go.” Courts are still divided about African Americans’ rights to wear their natural hair in the workplace. Cases filed by black workers alleging discrimination against their natural hair in the workplace have filled courthouses for more than forty years, yielding mixed results.

There are similar state and federal laws that protect against discrimination due to religious hairstyles and head coverings. California became the first State in the nation to ban discrimination based on natural hair for black Americans. Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill into law that legally protects people in workplaces and K -12 public schools from discrimination based on their natural hair. The new law, which takes effect January 1, 2020, prohibits the enforcement of grooming policies that disproportionately affect people of color, particularly black people. This includes bans on certain styles, such as Afros, braids, twists, cornrows and locs.

Gov. Newsom said the need for the protection entered the national political consciousness in December when a referee forced a black wrestler from a New Jersey high school to cut his locs or forfeit his match. That indignity forced the student to choose whether to “lose an athletic competition or lose his identity,” Newsom said.

The CROWN Act, which passed unanimously in both the California Assembly and Senate, adds traits historically associated with race to the state’s list of classifications protected from discrimination, including race, sex, religion, color, national origin, disability and sexual orientation. The bill’s author, Sen. Holly Mitchell (D-Los Angeles), said the new protection provides all Californians the right to wear natural

hairstyles without fear of repercussions. Students will be able to go to school, and workers do their jobs, without feeling pressure to conform to Eurocentric ideals or change their appearance based on someone else's "comfort level," she said.

Lawmakers in New York and New Jersey also proposed legislation modeled after the CROWN Act. New York City officially banned natural hair discrimination, saying that hairstyles are protected under the city's existing anti-discrimination laws because policing black hair is a form of pervasive racism and bias.

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Black Hair & Cultural Appropriation of Black Hair Aesthetics

by Tuesdae Pelt-Willis

For centuries black communities around the world have created hairstyles that are uniquely their own. These hairstyles span all the way back to the ancient world and continue to weave their way through the social, political and cultural conversations surrounding black identity today.¹ When we think about black hair it is often not considered to be the cultural statement that black women know it to be. Black hair is now dominating hair care lines, influencing the way products are advertised, and even entertainment has taken a page from the book of hair diversity. During these powerful changes it is becoming more known that black women and black hair is a force to be reckoned.

Many of the hairstyles like dreadlocks, box braids, cornrows, and afros can date back to drawings in Ancient Egypt. The history and culture for black hair runs deep and can be forgotten when associated with the more recent wave of natural hair movement. Dreadlocks although they have been depicted in a variety of ancient art, still spark controversy when associated with “business” or “formal” attire. What is marvelous about this rhetoric is that black woman and men across the nation have bonded together to solidify the importance of natural hair being accepted in all forms. The opposite of dreadlocks, braids have been accepted so much that they are copied in entertainment and utilized as a form of cultural appropriation. When we view cultural appropriation, hair is among the top of the list of things that are copied from black culture and repackaged as something else. Famous celebrities that are among the perpetrators of cultural appropriation of black hair are the Kardashians, Jenners, Katy Perry, and many more. Taking on styles like cornrows and bantu knots and not giving the credit to African American culture is the reason why cultural appropriation is becoming more known and argued.

When it comes to hair care products, more hair care lines are starting to

push the approach that they are all inclusive and have concentrated or changed their products to focus on more diverse types of hair. By including more natural ingredients in their hair care lines as well as more formulas that help with the needs of black hair. By taking out chemicals that are harmful to black hair and adding more texture-based ingredients, it is evident that the world is becoming more aware of the needs of black women's hair. While thinking of the needs it is hard not to associate the undesired among those needs. Biggest struggles that black women face with our hair is the misunderstanding of its significance, the desire to touch or poke, and the dismissal of the complexities.

Authors like Amanda Seales and Phoebe Robinson have recently published works that hit on the topics of black hair, cultural appropriation and additional things. Phoebe Robinson's book titled *You Can't Touch My Hair and Other Things I Have to Explain*, digs deeper into what black women feel about the topic of black hair and what other races may find so obscure or fascinating about it. She also gives good comedic relief to the issues that black women face when it comes to our hair. Understanding black hair is something that black women have been addressing for decades and probably will continue well into the 21st Century.

African Blush

by Gay Pasley

“Gay, I think you should really, really cut your hair low. Bald, even. Bald is sexy. I really think you could pull that off.”

Austin is Oklahoma’s kickboxing champion and has a black belt in karate. He is my friend’s thirty-year-old son. I gave up smoking years ago, but things are stressful, and so when he offered a smoke, I said yes.

His mother, who is my friend Angie, says, “Not bald. Maybe just shave the sides down low.”

“No, bald,” Austin says as he shakes his head up and down at me and smiles.

“Really?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says. Then he Googles “bald black women” and “women with TWAs” (teeny weenie afros). I think that’s really interesting, since I have just had a conversation with his mother about his preference for white women.

As a child, the worst insult imparted upon me was that I was “black and baldheaded.” It would reduce me to tears because it was true. I was black and my hair was very, very short. I am what you call nappy headed. My hair was too short for the hot ironing comb. And it was proclaimed in more than one North Tulsa black beauty shop that I had bad hair. I was a challenge. My Saturday morning is torture.

I have an established beautician, like most black girls do. I spend my entire Saturday after dance class in the beauty shop. This is to make me presentable for church on Sunday. Pressing my hair straight with a hot comb sweats out too easy and I get burns. As soon as I get home from

dance class, I want to practice my handstands and back flips and standing on my head.

My hair resists. I am a black child who lives in America. I have working class parents. I eat three healthy meals a day. Vitamins. I have my own personal hair grower. My head is routinely massaged and oiled, but I sleep wild, and any scarf that is tied on my head is lost and most nights never to be found. The white dentist says most little black girls he sees have long hair. I have tight, black, wiry coils that lay close to my scalp. My mother thanks him and we leave.

My rite of passage. My kindergarten pictures. My hair must be straightened with lye. My ears are coated with Vaseline. The lye is applied to my scalp. "Leave it for as long as you can so you can be pretty." My five-year-old scalp bears the pain. Tears roll down my face. I am disappointed. What is it that I expect to see? Light skin. Long hair. I don't have ponytails. I have pigtails and first- and second-degree burns. "It's okay. They will heal if we put a little medicine on it." I'm barely able to put the ends of my hair in pigtails. A tiny tuft of hair, and not the adorable Afro Puffs. I barely have enough to put stretch into a rubber band.

The little boys on the playground don't chase me. I am too black. An African. We had been raised to think that Africans were barbarians and that we were living in the land of the free and brave. They live in huts and eat bananas. They appear in Tarzan movies. To be African was considered a bad thing. To be bald headed or nappy headed was too.

I recall seeing a sculpture of an African woman. Her hair is shaved low and close to her head. I promise myself as a child that when I grow up, I will go to Africa and find women and girls who look like me. I will find my tribe. I long for Africa. I look at maps and wonder where my African ancestor was kidnapped from. I want to see me. But it used to be impossible to know where your ancestor had been kidnapped from until Dr. Henry Louis Gates began his research. I am fascinated with the science

but assume that it is far too expensive for me. After reconnecting with my father's family, I learned that a cousin, Dr. Cher Atkinson, has done the research. We descended from the Temne tribe of Sierra Leone. I plan my trip to the country. This is soon after my divorce, around the time I pick up my camera for the first time. It takes five years to raise the money. The organization changes hands. I begin to wonder if I will ever get to go. I persevere despite the obstacles. Years pass, and eventually, wearing a fitted black dress, I arrive in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

I am at the market and the African children are rejecting me. They do not run from the European students who are snapping their pictures with cell phones. Just me. The white Europeans are embarrassed and ashamed for me. Suddenly, I feel a tug on the back of my shirt. I turn around to see one little fellow. He is in rags. He puts down the container full of corn that he has carried on his head. He throws his hands behind his head. He says, "Snap fa me." He isn't very cute, but he is beautiful. I get down on eye level with him. He gives me the most brilliant grin and throws his arms behind his head. I take his picture. The children are finally accepting me. She is the next child to jump in front of my camera. I see her and I gasp in awe. I say, "Oh my God, you are beautiful. Oh my God, you look like me." She is dark. Her hair is black and the texture of wool. Her hair is coiled tightly to her head. She looks down and smiles, and redness comes to her cheeks as she blushes. I found myself in Africa.

Later, at my first exhibit, my Caribbean godmother, who was the first to hold me when I was born, examines the picture closely. "Oh my! Look at her ears. She looks just like you."

I call the image of this beautiful African girl who looks so much like me, *African Blush*. This is another one of the many ways I find myself in Sierra Leone, West Africa.

I Am Not My Hair: I am Content, Confident, and Transcendent

by Suzanne Thomas-Justice

In graduate school, I was challenged to make 1000 prints from braids. Challenge accepted. I did indeed print 1000 braids, on just about anything I could get my hands on: print paper, drawing paper, colored paper, and canvas. It was a rather exciting experience. While creating these prints, I could not help but be reminded of a story my paternal grandmother told me about the time she cut hair plaited braids off after she was advised that she could get rid of her headaches by cutting off her hair.

You see my father's mother – Grandma Thomas- had long hair. So when she cut her hair short, to rid her headaches, she laid out the cut braids on the bed, so her husband, my grandfather, would see them. And he did. According to legend, he saw those braids turned to my grandmother and said, “if you were to pick up most colored women and hang them upside down by their ankles, their hair would not even touch the ground. And you go and cut off all your hair!” He slumped down on the bed, started crying and then left and got drunk (in fairness, according to my dad, he would have gotten drunk anyway).

I love this story. It is funny, sad and absurd, but it probably is relatable too. It was for me. My hair journey has been just as funny, sad and absurd. Absurd because its hair, and I just referred to it as a journey. Nevertheless, it is a journey, this, in my 20 years of having locs.

Grandma Thomas and I had similar hair. Which has been referred to as “good” hair, and while she was proud of that, I was not. I did not like having “good” hair. I wanted the hair my sisters had; nappy, thick, and heavy! Hair that could take a licking and keep on ticking! Fried, dyed, and laid to the side! My sisters' hair was strong, and magical, and my hair was “good,” which in my mind- meant weak and thin.

When the Jheri curl was popular, I was like finally a style that I could wear! In my high school senior pictures, I am rocking a Jheri curl, and I felt pretty darn cute. In college I started to wear braided extensions and would continue to go from braids to natural hair, to relaxed hair, back to braids, and start all over again. I embraced the versatility of my hair, and even when I had beauticians telling me I had “good” hair (argh!).

It was in 1994 I decided to no longer use chemicals to straighten my hair. I could tell you that I got woke, but honestly, that decision was primarily based on financials. In 1994, a relaxer touch-up was \$60! So, I just let it grow out. I read numerous books on how to take care of natural hair, and I wore braided extensions. I even had a weave or two. Around 1999, I was toying with the idea of locking my hair, but I did not want to make that commitment. I truly did like the versatility of wearing different hair.

What finally convinced me was a trip to Washington DC. It had been almost 10 years since the last time I was in DC., and I have always loved it. This time I saw all these black folks with locs, and they were so beautiful and polished and just perfect.

Decision made. A year later, I did a two-strand twist in my hair and left it alone. It took a little longer for my hair to loc, because of the texture of my hair, but in about a year it was locked! Here I am, 20 years later, still with locs. Best hair care decision I have ever made!

As you can imagine, at least in the early 2000s in Oklahoma I got a lot of looks. Mostly, people were fascinated. My best story is during that time, I was an artist-in-residence for the Oklahoma Arts Council. I was on a roster for teaching artists to go into schools and teach art to k-12 students.

So, I was in a little town called Aline, Oklahoma, which is roughly 30 miles west of Enid. It is a rural area, and I did not see any black students. I was in the elementary school working with the kids and it was the last day, this one little girl, around 7 years old, was standing next to me and staring at me. I could feel that she wanted so badly to ask if she could

touch my hair. She was literally vibrating. I looked at her and smiled and said to her, “you want to touch my hair, don’t you?” she lit up and smiled and nodded, “yes.” So, I let her. Her eyes got so wide. I then asked to touch her hair and she was happy to let me. We both noticed our hair felt different, not weird and that is okay.

As of today, I have had one hairstyle for 20 years. I have made peace with my “good” hair and have learned how to honor it and take care of it and to not let my hair be more than what it is- hair. I am not my hair. But I do love my hair, and that is a pretty awesome thing.

Artists & Artworks



*Angelique- My Crown,
My Glory
Collaborative effort by
D.B. Brown & G. Mesfin*

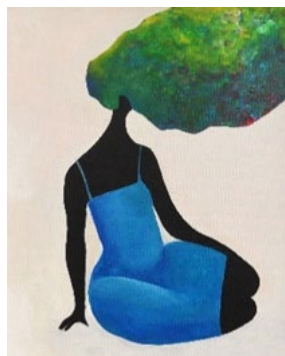
D.B. Brown, an Oklahoma City based portrait artist for the past 16 years, started at a young age recreating images of animated characters. He continued drawing anime, while studying masters of the Italian Renaissance. From that Brown gained a love and respect of the human body and its functions during movement and emotions. He now works with a team of models, photographers, makeup artists, and hairstylists to create artistic shoots for images and ideas. Working in pencil, pen and Ink to create life-like images, Brown creatively collaborated with a graphic and

digital design artist for this piece. “I love working with people and hearing ideas, so I am always excited to work alongside those who want to create artistically and bring a new idea to light.”

G. Mesfin, an Ethiopian Artist. The inspiration for her art comes from African culture and black women. The abundance of color and vibrant prints as well as patterns are influenced by traditional African clothing. Mesfin’s subject matter heavily focuses on black women she says “for a long period of time they were misrepresented and not fully appreciated as muses in the art community. My art is meant to uplift and celebrate the rich ancestry, heritage, culture and beauty that black women possess.”

Nathan Lee is a well-known visual artist and arts activist from Oklahoma. He is a multi-disciplined visual artist interested in truth seeking through many methods including science and philosophy. Lee is the founder of Inclusion in Art and is best known for his efforts towards creating a more racially diverse art community in Oklahoma. In addition, Lee is also the co-producer of the groundbreaking film *Transend* which explores the lives and creative process of five Black artists living and working in Oklahoma. *Transend* is the first Oklahoma film to focus

on the Black creative class in the State and the first to document artists from the Black Visual Arts Movement being experienced in Oklahoma. “I tend to gravitate toward situations where there is an opportunity to pioneer not for glory, but to add to humanity.” The word Kito comes from Swahili speaking countries and is defined as meaning “Gem”.



Kito Collection,
by Nathan Lee



African Blush, by Gay
Pasley

Gay Pasley was born in St. John’s, Antigua, and arrived in America as a political refugee at a time when diversity was far from embraced. She is an award-winning community leader, respected health care professional and distinguished photographic artist. Her empathetic photography and gifted storytelling developed out of a lifetime of giving to and connecting with people. Pasley’s art and writing seek to capture the under-reported experiences and challenges of what it is to be a working-class woman of color. Pasley is a graduate from the

Oklahoma City Red Earth MFA Program. Her work has been featured in *Abstract* magazine, *Journal of Dada Writing and Art*, *Literature and Arts in the African Diaspora*, *Thread Literary* magazine and many more.



Picnic on the Grass, by Skip Hill
Little Girls in Bantu

Skip Hill of Norman, Oklahoma, is primarily a self-taught artist. Hill studied under the Native American conceptual artist, Hachivi Edgar Heap of Birds, and abstract painter George Bogart, at the University of Oklahoma. He has participated in several solo and museum group shows, curated, and created an

installation for the exhibition “Casting Stones” at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Hill creates lyrical collage work, paintings and drawings that weave a tapestry of aesthetic styles, languages and philosophies rooted in cultures from around the world. Directly influenced by his years living in Thailand, Brazil and the Netherlands and traveling to exotic places around the world, as well of his deep studies of Religion, Art History and the African-American experience. Traditionally in Nigeria, Yoruba women were known to wear one of these distinct African hairstyles, known as *Irun Kiko* (translated to “hair knotting with thread”), as a symbolic embrace of femininity and a declaration of cultural pride.

Bantu knots, also known as Zulu knots, are a traditional African hairstyle that has been around for over 100 years. "Bantu" is a comprehensive term used to describe the 300 to 600 ethnic groups within southern Africa that spoke the Bantu language and is recognized as the Zulu word for people in most languages. The hairstyle is worn by African women of certain cultural groups with a sense of pride and are a strong representation of women in the community wearing a natural hairstyle passed down from generation to generation.

Jaiye Farrell is an Oklahoma-based artist that cultivated his style of painting from abstract patterns that transcend societal and cultural divides with remembrance of communal roots of humanity. From an infatuation with archeology emerged his creative and ambitious talent. Driven to craft signature designs that inspire self-reflection. It's continual, intentional, and it weaves a narrative together that is in the mind and that remains subjective to the viewer. When people interact with art, they see an image that is unique to their experience.



*Irun Kiko-Yuruba Hair Threading,
Collaborative effort by
Jaive Farrell & James Ere*

James Ere a Nigerian artist, graduated from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in painting. Ere's embellishments are reminiscence of the ancient practice of body decoration in the south-eastern region of Nigeria. His portraits form a medium for expression and the elegance of black female identity. As a mixed-media artist he incorporates architectural design into his paintings and considers his creations as something that speaks beyond mere words.



*Lonely in Grief She Watched,
by Edward Grady*

Edward Grady earned his University, Nashville, Tennessee, and a Masters in Art Education. While attending Fisk he completed summer museum internships at the Smithsonian Institute and the Detroit Institute of Art. During the summer of 1970 he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture

in Skowhegan, Maine. After graduation he completed a year's internship at the Margret Woodbury Strong Museum in Rochester. Grady was Assistant Curator at the Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center, and Professor of Art Education and Behavioral Sciences and Art Appreciation Honors Program, at Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma. One of Grady's influences in art is the world renowned African American Artists Jacob Lawrence. Grady says, "The colors, shapes, symbols and textures of my environment exist on my canvases on my individual terms."

Beverly Kirk was born in Chickasha, Oklahoma. She is a quilt artist and quilt historian. Since 1997, she has been teaching and lecturing to local and regional guilds with a focus on African American historical quilting techniques. Her love of fabric, color, and texture... "I remember sitting next to my mother's sewing machine... such a peaceful humming! Since my personality is that of one who is a stickler for no loose ends and all things being done decently and in order; it was natural for me to want to master the squared corners and triangles in basic quilt construction."



*Revel alongside the spirited young woman
who is connected to her ethnic heritage —
her head wrap and hair style shouts joy
and freedom from deep within her soul!
by Beverly Kirk*

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