

William Paterson art exhibit takes on race and gender

Kara Yorio , Staff Writer, @karayorio 6:00 a.m. ET Feb. 8, 2017

A new art exhibit at William Paterson University galleries tackles gender, race and the impact of stereotypes.

“The Body as Battleground” is a photography and installation show by artists Nona Faustine and Joiri Minaya that explores the representation of the female body as a political act.

“I think there’s a lot of points in both of our work where they converge, where they dialogue in a fruitful way,” Minaya said. “They’re obviously both about the body. At the end of the day, we have that connection of trying to confront what the black and brown body is for all the stereotypical ways of seeing it out there.”

Specifically, Minaya is looking at the depiction of Dominican women.

“It came from a repetitive moment when I met someone and they couldn’t decipher where I was from and they asked me where my accent was from and I would say, ‘I’m Dominican,’” she said. “And they’re like ‘Ohhh, Dominican.’ I was wondering what that ‘Ohhh’ meant, like they knew what it was, what their preconceived ideas could be. Out of curiosity I Googled ‘Dominican women.’ Then I saw all the images, and that led to this whole other process that ended up being that piece.”

The piece “#dominicanwomengooglesearch features cut-out images of body parts with tropical fabric patterns printed on them hanging from the ceiling. She hopes this makes gallery visitors reconsider their gender and cultural stereotypes.

In her photography exhibit, called “Container,” Minaya presents a series of "performance photographs" of women in bodysuits. The women are posed as she often saw Dominican women in pictures, and the bodysuit is sewn in a way that doesn’t allow the woman to move from that pose.

Faustine is looking at the representation of African-American women. In her photography exhibit, “White Shoes,” she is the subject in her photographs, posing nude with only white heels in most of the shots. They are all located at New York City landmarks that were former slave markets, cemeteries and important places in African-American history as she tries to raise awareness of the underappreciated role of African-American women, as well as reminding gallery visitors of New York City’s history with slavery.

In her installment “Untitled,” Faustine uses life-size cardboard cutouts of Mami Wata, an African water deity worshipped for her healing and fertility attributes. Faustine surrounds her with the skulls of her victims as a demonstration of self-empowerment.

“I think it’s super-strong work,” Minaya said of Faustine’s exhibits. “I’m super-happy and honored to be exhibited next to her.”

ART

WHO: Artists Nona Faustine and Joiri Minaya

WHAT: “The Body as Battleground,” photography and installation art

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, plus noon to 4 p.m. Feb. 12 and March 5. Through March 17. Co-curator Stephanie Rivera Berruz will lead a public conversation with Faustine 2 to 3 p.m. Feb. 16 and with Minaya 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. March 9.

WHERE: Ben Shahn Center for Visual Arts, William Paterson University, 300 Pompton Road, Wayne, NJ 07470

