

Carrying

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Abstract

Carrying is a digital painting that is representative of Black mothers in academia who carry their children with them into the learning spaces that they create. The artist statement reflects on textile work as a form of literacy which has been historically practiced by Black mothers. The artistic decisions on colour and texture in this piece pay homage to these literacies and their histories. The “literary space” that Black mothers in academia create, sustain themselves and their community (Baker-Bell, 2017). I have been able to benefit from this as someone who has been carried into the academic space by my mother. I am grateful to the Black mothers in academia who carry us with them.

Keywords: *Black Mother Scholars, Textile practice, Literary space*

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[Permission granted from Reyanne Morgan (artist), Carrying, 2026]

CARRYING

Artist Statement

The child wears their mother's cap while being carried in her arms in homage to the source of this painting—my mother's graduation photo.

This artwork is based on a photo of my mother and I at her graduation, in completion of her master's degree at York University. I was no more than a few months old in that photo. She held me proudly standing in her academic regalia, with a smile. However, she was not wearing her cap, instead she placed it on my tiny head while she carried me. Before starting this painting, I pondered on how our mothers carry us for far longer than nine months. I thought of how my mother did more than just bring me into the world; she showed me hers. In doing so, I was introduced to the world of academia and my right to education.

Taking a somewhat expressionist approach, I created this painting digitally to represent how Black mothers—like and unlike my own—carry their children into the world of academia, subsequently making room for and mothering generations of Black academics. I chose to use expressionism to focus on the feelings I have in connection to Black mother scholars and my own mother now standing where she stood twenty-three years later. I would not be where I am today without being carried by Black mother scholars.

I aim for this painting to evoke a sense of comfort; the smooth textures in the background represent a fabric like softness felt while being held. The broken lines used to decorate both subjects and their regalia creates a texture reminiscent of stitching and beadwork. I felt this method of conveying texture to be most appropriate because it reminded me of the cultural significance of textile works as a form of literacy, historically practiced by Black mothers (MacDowell and Furman, 2023). For example, quilting and dressmaking were used as “freedom technologies” for information and sharing liberation (Toliver, 2022). The colour choice for a deep indigo on the

white gown is a nod to West-African textile practices—specifically “indigo dyed cloth” of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria (Ulzen-Appiah, 2005). Further, I interpret (like some others) indigo to be a symbol of royalty and protection, both things I hope for this painting to invoke feelings of.

The colour of the cap and gown were chosen in reference to and, in honour of, Gloria J. Wilson’s cap and gown featured in her “construction of the blackademic” (Wilson, 2018). Her textile work has permeated my mind and influenced the way I now view and interact with academic regalia and textile practices. Consequently, I wanted to reflect her influence on me in this painting. Reflecting on how my artwork connects to Black mothers’ writing and beyond, this work comments on the use of textile artwork as a way that Black mothers have sustained themselves while also creating “literary space” for their communities (Baker-Bell, 2017). Black mothers in academia carry their children with them, physically and figuratively, through literary spaces and in academic institutions. This act of carrying brings further generations of Black scholars into the academic spaces that they are encouraged to hide from. This painting is a statement of my gratitude to have been carried into this space and, a symbol of my goal to carry others into it as well.

References

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