

Gio Swaby, *Pretty Pretty 3*, 2020
Toronto-based artist - b. 1991, Nassau, Bahamas



From a distance — I thought this was created with ink or pencil — up close I was surprised to see how it was really made — **Look closely — How are the lines made?**

- **We're seeing the reverse side of the canvas — it was stitched on the other side**
- **Gio Swaby's GOAL:** show tangles, loose knots and threads on the reverse side—a reference to the complexity & vulnerability of womanhood —> and embracing **"the beauty in imperfection."**
- She said —We can celebrate who we are...."**And that's what I want Black women and girls to see" when they look at my work.**
- **"Pretty Pretty," is a series —the title also comes from a Bahamian phrase, which essentially means "extra pretty."**

Swaby grew up in a household dominated by women; her mother was a seamstress who raised her, her three older sisters, and her younger brother — as a single mom.

- As a child, Swaby would sew clothes for her dolls with her mother. In college — worked with textiles —> **brought her the most joy—and she felt close to her roots**
- Swaby believes — **Textiles make her work a little bit more accessible to people.**
- **Do you feel textiles are more accessible to people than other media? How did you decide?**
- **How would this be different if it was painted?**

No right answer for this — looking at the shoes she’s wearing — what do her choice in shoes tell you about this person?

- Uses small areas of **Appliquéd bold patterned fabrics** — in this case the shoes —to showcase **individuality and personal style**.

Black bodies experiencing joy

- **Swaby**: “We don’t have enough images of Black bodies experiencing joy. The media feeds us so many images of **Black people in moments of suffering** (she referenced George Floyd & BLM), and it effects you because you see yourself reflected in that,”
- “I wanted to create a space where **we could see ourselves reflected in a moment of joy, celebrated without expectations, without connected stereotypes.**”

The Burden of Stereotypes

- She sees **personal style as a tool of resistance against "being unseen"**
- It’s a way to navigate **"the contradictory experience of invisibility and hypervisibility."**”it is about **reclaiming space through unapologetic self-expression,..**” “I want my work to function as a **love letter of sorts to Black women, to create space for us not only to be represented but to be celebrated.**

Her eyes are looking directly at us... Imagine what she is thinking about us....

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