

2008/09 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships

Anonymous Award



SIPHNE SYLVE

Illustration

Sophomore

Memphis College of Art and Design

The idea of being an artist never occurred to me until my senior year of high school. I had always been involved in art, through art classes and attending art school, but I never understood fully the value of being an artist. It wasn't until more recent years I began to understand the wonderful ability an artist contains of being able to produce images that alter and/or change the way individuals perceive a particular subject. What I found most intriguing and useful in this understanding is how African American artists of the 1920s–1940s had the ability to reach and uplift an audience through their creative gifts.

I am mostly reminded of the brilliant painter Jacob Lawrence, whose “Migration of the Negro” series visually informs and depicts the history and social development of African Americans during this period. The idea of visually communicating and educating a people who may not have had the ability to encounter such knowledge intrigues and inspires me to use my creative skills in the same manner.



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During the past few years I have been intensely interested in the idea and iconic value of hairstyles within the African-American community. I believe there are several hairstyles specifically among African Americans that carry a large visual association with important movements or changes among African Americans. I recently read a section of a book that focused on how activist and former Black Panther Angela Davis is often recognized by her large afro and not so much her works.



I am currently focusing on how hairstyles similar to dreadlocks or the afro are perceived among individuals within my generation. During the 1960s–1970s many African Americans would wear large kinky or natural hairstyles that were meant to function as an external expression of their pride and embrace of being African Americans. Like wise several years later African Americans wore their hair in a dreaded or locked style for the same reason. I am interested in deciphering whether or not these hairstyles carry the same value or purpose within my generation. I hope to use these images and each individual's hair history to educate and inform an audience of my generation about the foundation and root of their hairstyle. I attempt to accomplish this through a combination of text and images that visually document the individual's reason for this particular hairstyle and the origin or foundation of the each specific hairstyle.

In the future I hope to continue to educate my generation and generations following about the importance of one's culture and the culture of others. I aspire to expand this teaching not only through visual aids, but also through other art forms and community-involved organizations. I aspire to develop more clubs and organizations similar to our Memphis College of Art Multicultural Artist Club, which we hope will bring awareness of a variety of cultural practices to the MCA community and Memphis' youth collectively.

