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Using Unexpected Materials, Krystle Lemonias Contextualizes Life Through Art

Lemonias won first prize at the Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative's 2021 *Black Muse* exhibition, with work that tells the story of her life.

By [Emma Lichtenstein](#) July 20, 2021



Hole up yuh foot!

This work is made from baby clothes and relief prints, and is part of Lemonias's "Mommy an my Man" collection.

Photography by [Andrew Rafacz Gallery](#)

[Krystle Lemonias](#) is the winner of the Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative's recent 2021 [Black Muse exhibition](#), earning \$1,000. Her winning piece, *A Portrait of the Past and Present*, is a self-portrait made from creative materials that reflect important moments in her life. Originally from Jamaica, Lemonias attended undergraduate school in New Jersey and is now pursuing a graduate degree in art out of the University of South Florida in Tampa.

“I think creating has always been an outlet to process my thoughts,” says Lemonias. “I have always found ways to use my hands to work through ideas, emotions or experiences—and it’s serving as a record to kind of put a pinpoint on experiences that are not European centric.”

Art is very personal for Lemonias, and she uses it to tell her story, from immigrating to America from Jamaica to her present life in art school.

Her experiences in America were the inspiration behind the piece she submitted to the *Black Muse* exhibition. She accumulated many free shirts throughout her years here, ones that just about everyone has in their closet—from 5K runs or volunteering or high school clubs. Lemonias knew she didn’t want to throw them away, as sustainability is important to her, so she got creative. She took the old shirts and used the fabric to create her award-winning portrait.

“I created the portrait of myself using the shirts as a way to contextualize these experiences that I have participated in, from high school to a young adult in my 20s,” she says. She adds that a lot of self-reflection went into this, as she thought about coming from Jamaica and all that she has gotten to do since then.

“The shirts have all been experiences that I’ve had here in America,” she says. “This portrait was an opportunity for a bit of gratitude for all that I’ve been able to do, that I could afford—afford economically and also in terms of time.”

Though art is personal for Lemonias, she adds that there is universality in it. “In considering the viewer, I create opportunities and perspectives that one can inject their experience in, in various ways. I know that [my art] will allow for these connections,” she explains. She says that she creates art primarily for herself, about her own unique background, but that she thinks all can find an aspect to relate to.

If there is a takeaway that she hopes people have from her art, it’s that every human has a rich and compelling story, and that every human can make positive connections with each other.

“I like my work to give opportunities for individuals that are non-European to be centered as subjects,” she says. “There are many biases because of this lack of understanding of people that are non-European that inhibit us living full lives. So my work is allowing for an understanding of perspective that is not based in just being the help, but [being] an individual that has the resilience to get through the many hurdles it takes in these spaces to succeed, and allow for understanding of these experiences.”



Krystle Lemonias

IMAGE: JOHN NUNOO