

Glyneisha Johnson

The access that Glyneisha Johnson (no relation) allows in her work is distinct and culturally specific. As an African-American woman whose childhood was spent in Dallas, Texas, Johnson infuses her art with both a sense of homecoming and an undertone of melancholy. She is a recent graduate of Kansas City Art Institute, and her work bridges the gap between going home, as well as the artistic mediums of collage, drawing and painting.

“Collage is a metaphor to describe the dislocated nature of Black history due to colonialism. In the same way, Black history is lost, found, and pieced back together with new elements from new generations,” stated Johnson.

Her piece *Occupant* pops with color and texture and story. We see a collaged domestic worker, dressed in green from head to toe. She’s alone and sits at a kitchen table looking inward, and while we see life outside the window, we also see the visible markers of being a domestic that show up in much of Johnson’s work. One object that stands out is the wood-burning stove. It points to the time period when, for a Black person, being a domestic was not easy work. Johnson packs a lot of detail into her interiors like decorative objects and religious artifacts. Bits of paper and fabric - some which she colors and prepares herself - embed narratives in the layers of collage.

Despite its title, *Blue Room* doesn’t have color as its guide. Rendered in graphite and charcoal, it’s a starker representation of a domestic space. It evokes an empty kitchen that can be entered through a back door. The blue is the blue of sadness. In the culture that Johnson paints about, specifically Black, Southern culture, an empty kitchen - empty of food, and cooking utensils, and people – suggests an emptiness of spirit, a loss of belonging.

*What If Daddy Were Home* is a particularly personal piece of Johnson’s. In the graphite drawing she portrays a standing male figure in silhouette embracing a woman rendered in much more detail, except her head, also in silhouette. We are drawn to the hands of the two figures touching. This image of apparent tenderness is really a fantasy. Johnson explained the piece was inspired by “desolate truths and overt absence within my own family” from being raised with her brother by a single mother.

Because of my own heritage as an African-American woman there is a lot of emotion to be found in Johnson’s work - the emotion of connectedness and belonging, the emotion of emptiness and searching. Johnson said that much of her work is about “places where people can occupy, but do not own.” They are places that many can recognize in art, but that few can access and recreate with Johnson’s artistic talent.

Michelle Tyrene Johnson