

SPOTLIGHT



Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle

THE VISUAL ARTIST ANALYZES THE POLITICS
AND ERASURE OF THE BLACK FEMALE BODY

By LATOYA CROSS

On the first day of a class trip to Spain, interdisciplinary visual artist Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle and a friend got lost in the red-light district of Madrid.

"I was constantly assumed to be a prostitute because I looked the way that I looked," Hinkle recalls. The experience was jarring.

"Men were [exposing themselves] in front of me. One man pulled out a sword and threatened our whole group."

Though traumatic, the experience added a layer of depth to Hinkle's *The Uninvited Series*, exhibited at Art Basel Miami last December. The series, which has been in the works since 2008, includes photographs from the late 19th and early 20th centuries that interrogate the exotification and perception of the Black female body by French colonialists. Hinkle, 29, reconstructs and re-imagines the women through vivid drawings and unique placements on the canvas—in a sense restoring their loss of power.

"I was collecting these photographs that were expressions of colonial power in West Africa that were trafficked all throughout Europe to spread these ideologies that African women are hypersexualized [and] here for you to do whatever you want with them. [It's the]

same as how Black women are treated in America today," Hinkle says.

The artist's work investigates race, sexuality and history using historical objects in visual and performance art constructs. In *The Uninvited Series*, the Kentucky-bred Los Angeles resident uses colors and microscopic images to metaphorically represent the virus-host relationship, and to also explore the French occupation and the Black female body.

In her upcoming work *The Evanesced*, debuting March 1 at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, Hinkle calls attention to Black women who go missing as a result of sex trafficking and domestic abuse. Her archival photographs and drawings capture a sense of joy and trauma.

"Even though it's not the exact portrait of the victim or it's not about the exact instance of trauma, it's like this collective embodiment that's actually pouring through my very much alive body," she says. "It's a celebration of them."

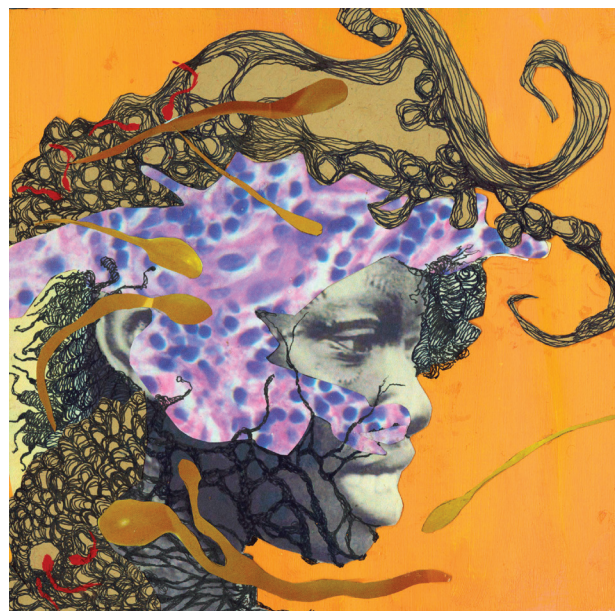
The visuals speak to Hinkle's personal mantra of the "historical presence."

"There's movement and usually an interplay between really intricate line work and really bold gestures," she says. "Normally, with the Black female body and working with these intersections of pattern and vivid colors, there's some kind of darker undercurrent. You don't know [whether] a woman is possessed, happy, distraught, if she's just having an intimate moment within herself or if she's putting a spell on you with her eyes."

Gwendolyn Brooks once wrote, "Art hurts. Art urges voyages." But looking at Hinkle's work, it's clear art can also be extremely complex and at times painful, yet also freeing.

"It's very complicated. But I like to go into those complicated spaces because I think that's where the healing is," Hinkle explains. "Working with these women and having them transform me and me transform them [simultaneously], the whole body of work has literally been healing. I do a lot of my work [with] that idea of turning trauma into art."

Stay connected with Hinkle via kachstudio.com.



The Transfiguration 2015: gouache, India ink and acrylic on wood panel