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*Give Me Space* is a body of work born out of my genuine curiosity of the world around me. This thesis explores my journey of rediscovering my relationship to my art practice, my identity and the world. I am reflecting on the personal culture shock of transitioning from predominantly Black and Brown spaces to UNCG which has a significantly smaller African American population. The mundane spaces I depict, my apartment, my studio, and the city of Greensboro have all served as places of reflection for me and have become important parts of my development as an artist thus far. The depiction of these, what many would consider, “boring” everyday places are transformed using bright colors which are influenced by the artist collective AfriCOBRA. Through painting and collage, I create confusing and disorienting spaces that are not only representative of the experiences of people of color in spaces where they are considered “other”, but also the psychological human experience. With this work I want the viewer to join me in this disorienting experience and ask themselves “what is reality?”.

GIVE ME SPACE

by

Karrington Gardner

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Approved by

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Dr. Sunny Spillane  
Committee Chair

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mother, my family, and the NCA&T Visual Art Department faculty who have supported me thus far. I want to definitely shout out my cohort for putting up with me these past two years. WE MADE IT!!! I also want to dedicate this to myself for taking on a challenge that I didn't initially believe I could tackle, but I did it!

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Growing up art was always the thing I ran back to. No matter how many sports and activities my mom put me in, I ran back to my sketchbook and colored pencils (I actually liked soccer though). Art was my safe place. I remember watching my Auntie Karolyn draw her name in graffiti lettering and fill them with bright colors. She would let me trace her drawings so I could add my own colors and ideas. Around the same time, I was just beginning to experience arts education at Killian Elementary School taught by the rapping red headed art teacher, Ms. Marine. She literally started each school year with an introductory rap in front of the whole school. “My name is Ms. Marine, cool like a jumping bean...” or something like that.

Graduate school was not something I envisioned for myself; at least not this early in my life. I was content with the way that I painted; photo reference, grid drawn, and every detail planned. I was fine with this for a while and decided to commit to teaching; that is what I spent four years studying and stressing for anyway. I taught high school art back home in Columbia, South Carolina and enjoyed it, and over time I saw my students growing as artists. Even with this, I slowly saw my art take a backseat to this career. Of course, there are ways to work my own art practice into that new schedule, but something in me said “you need more time, focus on you”. Throughout this new journey my former professor, Dr. Willie Hooker, encouraged me to attend graduate school. “Get that MFA man!!” he said constantly. I didn’t think I was ready at all. I thought Grad school wanted students with some level of experience, I was just some little Black boy that liked to paint people and I was fresh out of undergrad. I didn’t even fully understand my artistic point of view. Why would they select me? I realized my professor wasn’t encouraging me just so I can go get another piece of paper, but he believed in me. He wouldn’t constantly check

on me if he didn't have full confidence that I would excel. Since he believed in me, I might as well believe in myself too. So, I finally mustered up the courage to apply and got in!

I came to graduate school with the hope for growth not only artistically but mentally. I came to search for clarity on my art practice and a better understanding of how I fit into this art world, especially as a Black man. I spent so much time listening to other ideas and opinions on what my art should be, but what do I want my art practice to be? During these two years of graduate school, I made the conscious decision to lean into my curiosities, question everything and most importantly have fun.

## CHAPTER II: BLACK FISH OUT OF WATER

I knew grad school would challenge my art, but I did not think it would make me question other facets of my life. I never questioned my Blackness but being in this new environment made me feel like I had to rethink my connection. In South Carolina I mainly grew up and experienced Black and Brown environments. Of course, I was aware of different nationalities and ethnicities, but I mainly spent time around people that looked like me and lived similar lives. I never had to question who I was. I knew I was Black. I continued to exist in these Black and Brown spaces all the way through college. The older I got the more I became aware of the way the world treated those they deemed “other”. Coming to UNCG I knew that the population wasn’t predominately Black, especially in the art department. Being one of two black students in the graduate program gave me some level of comfort, but it still felt like I was not supposed to be in this space. Why do I feel like I have to prove something to these faculty members? I got accepted for a reason. I had this strange feeling that I had to be a representative for my entire community and become this pro-Black artist that used red, black and green in everything. No one in the program directly made me feel this way but it was a strange weight that was on my shoulders. It was a psychological experience I was having. I had too many conflicting ideas of what my own artwork should be. As an overthinker that was not a great place to be at the beginning of this program.

I stayed away from the topic of racial identity in my work in the beginning. I created figures out of random colors and did not assign any details about their identity, especially not their race. I was afraid to have race be a factor in the work. Anytime there is a figure of color in artwork it is easy for the societal connotations to be attached automatically and impact how the

work is interpreted. I didn't want to depict a Black body or at least I did not want to say these figures were Black because of the trauma often associated. Another part of that hesitation was hearing that my white counterparts only really interact with Black artwork if it was about slavery or Black trauma; but that's a whole 'nother conversation (stay tuned).

### **Absurdity and the Black Existence**

To exist as a Black person in this world is one of absurdity. We are forced to fit into a system that wasn't made for us to ever participate in, unfairly treated because of our skin, and we face our own issues within the community. It seems like there is no true place to rest. Esther Merla Jackson (1962, 359) in *The American Negro and the Image of the Absurd*, describes the existence of the American Negro as representative of the human conflict and a constant conflict between the ethics of power and the idea of moral law. This constant mental and societal battle that we didn't sign up for; constantly trying to prove that we aren't a stereotype. I first equated this idea of absurdity to my love for animation and cartoons. The worlds these animators created made sense within the context of the TV screen, but elsewhere it would be completely irrational. I later connected the absurdity in my drawings and paintings to the absurdity of existing as a Black person in this world.

In the work I noticed there was a doubling that began to happen. Whether it be me or the objects around me. It is not as simple as a good Karrington or an evil Karrington. It feels more like two parts of my existence; one part is aware, and the other unaware. Constant conflicting ideas and expectations trying to understand each other. It was clear that this was the double consciousness that W.E.B DuBois was talking about. The tension and negotiation between my racial identity and conforming to a society that marginalizes me and so many like me. I have come to realize that though there is a doubling of my own consciousness, it is not a bilateral

experience. In the work my use of doubling isn't as simple as two mirrored images; I use multiple angles and perspectives at the same time to emphasize this mental experience.

The lack of sleep allowed the nonsense and whimsical ideas in my mind to flow freely. The space between my conscious and unconscious mind became closer. In *Sleep*, the figure rests among a spiraling and fracturing world while a hand looms over to disturb him. The bed sheets become a soft landscape and a place of comfort but get cut off by the spinning fan. As the scene continues to spiral, another world is revealed in the background with an alternate figure sleeping. Is this a world where the figure is aware of the atrocities and absurdities it exists in? Is it complacent in that life? Throughout the painting there are subtle indications of a mirror as seen near the bottom figure's head and the inversed word "LOST" on the television. There are also elements that allude to the original collage: the overlapping strips of paper in the top right corner and the two strips weaving through the lines on the bed sheets. The whimsical element in this painting arrives with the water reflections in the top right; something that came to me during the painting process. This element is not just a background but further integrates itself into the painting. The reflection interacts with the backing of the chair, onto the fan, and transitioning onto the wall near the door.

Figure 1. *Sleep*



### CHAPTER III: MIRROR MIRROR...ON THE DRAWING TABLE

After running away from my own identity for the first part of the program I finally looked in the mirror...literally. Before I was accustomed to using photo references in my work. This was a way of me knowing the outcome of the painting. I was directly translating what I saw which made the result stale and uninteresting. I was advised to paint more from life to capture the energy I was lacking. I set up a mirror on my drawing table and started the timer. *That's What I Look Like?* was the first time I truly got lost in the painting process. I used my intuition to build the form and let the paint strokes do the heavy lifting. When I finished my literal reaction was "that's what I look like?". I wasn't used to uneven proportions, the strange lighting, and the quick brush strokes, but I loved it. It felt so dynamic and alive way more than my previous works. I didn't even know I could paint like this.

**Figure 2.** *That's What I Look Like?*



I continued to work in the vein of 15<sup>th</sup> century High Renaissance portraiture, just painting my head and shoulders with a plane background. I was not used to these slightly distorted paintings of myself but decided to keep going. To keep myself interested I would close my eyes and pick random colors before each painting session, or I would give myself a new rule to follow to see if that impacted the results. Through this process I came to realize that these self-portraits were not me, but representations of me at that given moment. I was capturing the intense staring and emotion I was feeling during that one-to-two-hour time frame. I became less attached to the perfection of my representation and became more interested in the act of painting itself. Later iterations of these self-portraits led me to think of ways I could conceal or reveal my identity. *Eye Couldn't Really See While Painting* was a result of one of the many strange rules I gave myself during the daily painting session. "What if you cover your head while you paint this one?". I wrapped floral fabric around my head to see if the reduced sight would have an impact on the painting. One eye staring directly at the viewer, and a head wrapped in bright yellow fabric. At this point in my practice, I had been thinking perception and assumptions. How do you interact with the work when you can't make assumptions? What is your idea of the figure when you can't automatically add your own implicit biases? I had been looking at the work of Ronald Jackson and his masked figures and I was interested in the stories that were created using the context of everything except the subjects' face.

**Figure 3. *Eye Couldn't Really See While Painting***



Mirrors and reflections became a major motif in my work. Mirrors are an inversion of the real world and a repositioning of my relationship with the world. Is the person I see in the mirror the person that interacts with the world? Are these two separate people or does this existence merge at some point? If we consider the literal function of a mirror or reflected surfaces, do we ever really see ourselves the way that the world does? The more I merged the layers between reality and reflection the more confusing the paintings became. At first these were all intuitive decisions made within my one-to-two-hour painting session, but in *What You Lookin' At?* I thought about the figure ground relationship of the Mirror and the objects near me. I approached this painting like my daily painting studies: quick but intentional decisions. I thought it would be interesting to add elements that exist within and outside of the mirror like my blue tumbler, and

the chair holding the fabric behind the mirror. Originally, I left the knee out of the painting, but later added it to widen the space within the painting. The painting of a reflected form raises the question of who the viewer is. Am I painting you looking at me? Are you watching me paint me? On a more personal note, I never usually add my body in my artwork, but this was a chance for me to become more comfortable with myself, to confront the uncomfortable and literally stare at myself as I worked on this painting. Compositionally, the painting was comparable to *Las Meninas* by Velazquez (1656). Both paintings have an in-progress work on the left side of the composition while the artist stares directly at the viewer. Like Velazquez, I am inviting the viewer to be a spectator and participant in the work; questioning reality. I leave evidence of the active decision making in the painting. In the bottom right corner, the underpainting of a full jar peaks behind the top of the stool, but I only add color to the cracked portion (full transparency I accidentally knocked the jar over in the middle of the painting session and thought it looked more interesting than the original jar). I also explore my idea of completeness in this painting. I remember a conversation with Lee Walton where we talked about completing the story for the viewer. This led me to think about how much visual information I really need to include in the work for the viewer or myself to understand it. What parts do I clarify and what parts do I leave in ambiguity? This would become a through line in my paintings throughout the semester.

Figure 4. *What You Lookin' At?*



## CHAPTER IV: I NEED SOME SPACE

When I think of the word “space”, I automatically think about outer space; uninhabitable, empty, and expansive. Space can be given or taken, space can be welcoming or exclusionary, space can also be constructed or deconstructed. I began to think about space and how we construct our own spaces to feel comfort, to aid in how we are seen and even how we are treated. *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard has heavily impacted the way that I further dissected the word. Not only was it quite literally poetic, but also an interesting way to consider our interactions with space, especially places we call home; the idea that a space can hold memories even after we are long gone. As I started painting from life, I began to widen my view and include the space around me. In *Blue in the Studio*, I became aware of the distortion of space in my paintings. The quick time frame caused me to paint and not consider the accuracy of what I was painting. The full-frontal mirror and my reflection are the only “normal” components of the composition. The areas around the mirror became abstract and almost act as extensions of the body that don’t fit into the frame of the mirror. The drawing table in the bottom right corner helps to create a sense of depth in the painting. This idea of manipulation and construction was so exciting to me. How can I manipulate space to mimic the psychological experience I was having? How can I use it to tell a story?

**Figure 5. *Blue in The Stu(dio)***



Before I began my second year in the program, I traveled home to South Carolina for a much-needed mental break and decided to bring my paint just in case I had any ideas. I got accustomed to painting from life, but I decided to return to using reference images. Instead of following the images exactly, I put different pieces of the scene together like a puzzle that had no definite result. *Sleep (Study)* is a combination of several images taken using a mirror. The only pieces of reality in the painting are the striped sheets filling the foreground and the bed frame on the right. Everything else is an inversion of reality, a construction of my own imagination. This was the first time I truly began to manipulate the space I was in. As the figure is asleep the world around him is changing, he is completely unaware. The hand in the bottom right corner was left

unfinished so that no identity was attached. This ambiguous hand could be me, the viewer watching me, or some other entity. Who is the one aware of the chaos occurring?

**Figure 6.** *Sleep (Study)*



I remembered reading a chapter in *The Poetics of Space* about the house and idea of home which made me think about my apartment here in Greensboro. Mentally when I moved into my apartment, I was not moving with the intention to make this my home. This place is temporary; go to grad school and move on. It is also a convenient 15-minute walk from campus. Even with this, I have spent a lot of time in my apartment this semester. It has been a place of rest, contemplation, and enjoyment for me. Even though this apartment is temporary, it has become my home overtime. It has been filled with memories of homecoming, late night talks with my friends, and quiet afternoons on my patio. It has essentially become a place of comfort. This apartment has been occupied by numerous people, with their own memories and ideas.

“[A]ll really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home...” as the memories accumulate over time and our imaginations begin to “comfort[s] itself with the illusion of protection...” (Bachelard 1964, 5). *APT 101* is representative of that illusion.

The easily recognizable components of the room, the bed, the floor, the dresser, among other items, serve as an entry point for this painting. As you move through the painting the image gets more and more confusing. There are pieces that overlap, conflicting angles and a doubling of objects. Out of all my paintings this is one that has a more realistic color palette. Color is one of the main ways that I add interest to my paintings, so I had to figure out a way to keep the painting visually stimulating. I continued painting and it still was not interesting to me, until I looked at the reference image. I noticed how the physical collage had imperfections that were not captured. Then it clicked, make the painting look like a collage. I remembered how much I loved the Tromp L’oeil technique used to merge the second-dimension surface into the third. The most obvious evidence of this is the bubbling of the paper on the left side, but moving throughout other imperfections begin to reveal themselves like the lifting or the slight tearing of the paper. These references to the collage essentially wake the viewer up. They take them out of that illusion of protection and comfort. This is not reality; it is all a construction of our own mind.

Figure 7. *APT 101*



## CHAPTER V: PUTTING THINGS TOGETHER

Collage was not something I expected to become a part of my practice at all. I quite literally hated it (sorry to all the collagists out there). Out of everything I made for the review during my first semester, I did not expect the faculty to be so intrigued with a collage I made. I was so excited to talk about all the other work I created, but they were so infatuated with *Adam*. *Adam* was the first “man” I created using collage. Being that I wasn’t originally interested in this mode of making I wasn’t going to spend all day on it. I painted acrylic on drawing paper, grabbed some scissors and had one thought: construct a figure. I analyzed the different textures on the painted paper and continued to build the form until I was satisfied. I didn’t know it then, but *Adam* was the introduction of collage into a practice that I solely thought was dedicated to painting.

**Figure 8. *Adam***



I went through Drawing Marathon collaging mainly printed images, but I wanted to combine my already established painting practice with this newfound collage practice. In *Bedroom Studies 1 & 2*, I combine three different painted angles of my apartment. In the first iteration I slightly distort the reality of the space. It is a seemingly normal room with fractured moments and memories. Multiple angles colliding and picture planes collapsing together to create one experience. Throughout the collage, there are strange instances that distort reality even more; the double bathroom door, the overlapping bedframe, rays of light escaping the frame of the window. In the second iteration, I used residual parts. These residual parts of a normal apartment now become parts of a surreal landscape. The scale shifting, use of negative shape to indicate missing objects, and lacking sense of stability continue intensify this disorienting feeling. I painted each room to my desired detail level; some areas and objects are fully realized while others remain brightly colored ambiguous shapes. I liken this to a memory; sometimes fully developed and sometimes we only have a faint outline of what we remember to be true.

**Figure 9. *Bedroom Studies: 1***



**Figure 10. *Bedroom Studies: 2***

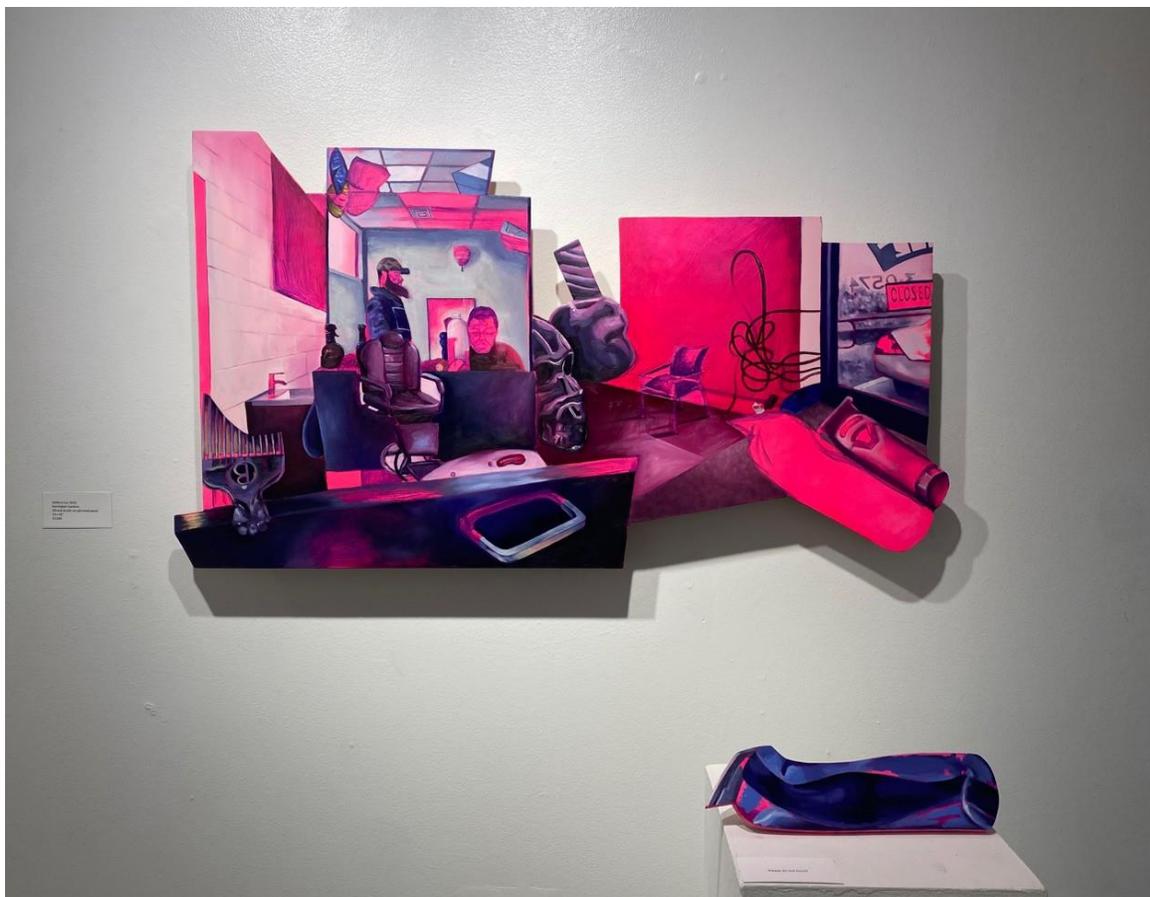


### **Reflected Disorientation**

The rectangular images I was using were no longer fitting into that mold. I noticed the collages I was constructing were creating interesting shapes. As I continued to merge the lines between painting and collage, I wondered how the shape of the painting could structurally reflect the chaos I was creating within. This led me to *Gettin' a Cut*. Structurally the wood panel is cut to reflect the collage it is based on with some minor adjustments. The barbershop, though a public space, somehow still has a sense of privacy for me. Like my room, the barbershop has become a place of reflection and comfort as it is for many other African Americans. I remember the conversations about school with my barber and the reruns of *Family Matters* on the TV as he cut my hair. I looked at Kerry James Marshall's *De Style* (1993) and Devan Shimoyama's *Mighty, Mighty* (2019) and the depictions of this sanctuary for the Black community, specifically black men. The neon pink underpainting, however, was used to disrupt the belief that the space is inherently masculine. The other color decisions were made with my knowledge of color theory.

Should this be a warmer color or cooler color? How much of the underpainting do I allow to show? In this painting I shifted the scale drastically. The skull spray bottles are larger than the reflection of me and my barber, the clippers are almost the same size as the car, and the hair pick and barber chair are almost the same size. This was also the first time I included a separate element outside of the two-dimensional surface. It felt too simple to just paste the clippers back onto the wooden panel. With the clippers placed below the painting it implies movement and they sit on the pedestal as if they can be picked up for use. The pieces of my paintings are now beginning to enter the third dimension; our reality.

**Figure 11.** *Gettin' a Cut*



## **Cubism (It's Complicated)**

The collapsing of picture planes, the fragmentation of figures, and the various angles are all elements that I have been exploring in my current artwork. I looked at the work of many cubists like Picasso and Braque, however, I cannot ignore that these famous Cubists got the inspiration from African sculpture. All the smuggled artifacts in these European studios serving as the basis for one of the most widely known artistic movements. It doesn't sit well with me to be working in the shadow of these European artists, but I can take that acquired knowledge and use it in my own work. My work is becoming a cross between Synthetic and Analytic Cubism. I am using the fragmented multi-viewpoint and planes of Analytic cubism with the bright, lively color and collage reference of Synthetic cubism. In a way it feels like I am reclaiming cubism. They took inspiration from the African artists and now I'm taking it right back.

## **Collage as Curation**

There is a level of play and problem solving that goes into my collage process. There is a child-like naiveté that allows me to explore the relationships between the images I am using without a prescribed outcome. In a way, collage has become almost like a drawing process for me. Instead of picking up a pencil and paper, I picked up my Xacto knife and matte medium. Collage has also become an act of curation for me. My work in the Gatewood Gallery opened my eyes to curation and its function in the gallery. Working with William Paul Thomas to prepare for his show in the Gatewood Gallery was pivotal in the way I thought about curation. Will and I worked late into the night deciding the order of his paintings and thinking of how the viewers would move through the gallery. What's the visual story being told? It was exciting to work with the artist to curate the show and help bring his vision to life. Like curation, collage gives me the opportunity to carefully assemble and reassemble pieces and ideas to create a total experience.

With my work I am curating space to mimic the experience of human existence; often confusing, ever-changing, and unsettling.

## CHAPTER VI: THE MUNDANE IS EXCITING

My apartment, my studio, and Greensboro. These are the spaces I spent most of my time during this program. These spaces are mundane, a part of my regular routine. As humans we naturally fall into a routine and as we get more accustomed, the less we are aware of the actual activity. Everything in life is so fast paced. We are on to the next big thing in less than 24 hours in search of that next shot of dopamine. These past two years I have been able to slow down and appreciate the everyday and the often-overlooked components of my life. When asked why I was choosing these places as subject matter, I quite honestly didn't know. It just felt natural to use and manipulate my own environment; these were places I was familiar with. I tried using images of exterior spaces but that felt too honorific. The work I wanted to create was made to reflect the internal psychological experience so interior spaces felt like the appropriate choice.

### **Mundane Afrofuturism**

I was encouraged to research Afrofuturism earlier in the fall semester of my second year. At first, I was hesitant. What I knew of Afrofuturism was the idea that African Americans originated from the cosmos, science fiction, technology and Sun Ra. It felt a little too otherworldly in the beginning phases of my work. Over time, I started to think about the escapism of Afrofuturism. The idea of being transported to another place, to another reality or future. I didn't think I would find anything to attach my work to, but after an insightful studio visit with Dr. Sunny Spillane, my fantastic committee chair, I was able to find Mundane Afrofuturism. This felt more grounded in what I wanted to accomplish with the work. I did not necessarily agree with the idea of African Americans originating from space, but agreed with the fact that we are alienated. I didn't want to reimagine the past, but I wanted to imagine a new future with our current state of humanity. As Martine Syms (2013) so eloquently said in her

manifesto, Mundane Afrofuturists recognize that the “rituals and inconsistencies of daily life are compelling, dynamic and utterly strange.”.

One of the most compelling parts of life to me are the parts of life that time has forgotten. The places and objects we abandon in search of a new. *A Drive Through the Neighborhood* is a compression of the time and experience driving through my hometown of Columbia, SC. As I drove through, I reminisced on the homes I would pass on the way to my grandparents' house and my old high school. I now notice new neighborhood developments not too far from abandoned gas stations and businesses. The old and the new, the relevant and the forgotten seen all within a 15 to 20-minute drive. In terms of setting, this was a departure from the interior spaces I was constructing in my paintings. Though it is not a literal painting of a car driving through a neighborhood, I do allude to the car by including the driver's side mirror. The underpainting gradient of a sunny yellow to a deep phthalo blue is representative of the time of day I was experiencing this drive; that last moment of daylight before the sun set. I overlapped parts of the buildings I was interested in most; juxtaposing the old and the new. From a technical standpoint, I have realized that the range of my painting has increased so much throughout this whole process. From tight technical skill to more loose brush strokes, I have been able to expand the visual language of my work to further push the idea of disorientation and confusion to even indicate different times of day or emotions.

Figure 12. *A Drive Through the Neighborhood*



## CHAPTER VII: LIVING COLOR

In the canon of painting, neutral/earth tones like raw/burnt umber, and raw sienna are used for underpainting colors. A tradition started by White European men, and last time I checked I was not White nor European. Bright color has remained an important part of my practice throughout this whole process. I have always been interested in color, especially in the television and movies I used to watch growing up. My first Color Theory class during my sophomore year at NCA&T (AGGIE PRIDE!!) deepened that interest once I understood the nuances. Bright colors against Black skin had a luminescent quality to me and I equated that to the Black joy that I portrayed in my previous artwork. The color in this work has become a part of my exploration of the mundane and my curiosity of the absurd. These mundane places I was depicting are not exciting naturally, but what happens when you give new life to a place or an object that normally goes unnoticed? My use of these saturated colors is my way of giving these mundane spaces a new life and energy.

### **AfriCOBRA and Depictions of Blackness**

I never heard or read about the Black Arts Movement before graduate school, but I am glad I decided to do my own research. That research led me to the artist collective AfriCOBRA. I fell in love with the way AfriCOBRA represented Blackness. The collective utilized bright beautiful colors, depicted real and personal experiences, and focused on their audience. Jeff Donaldson (2012, 80) said it best, the work coming this artist collective was “[a]rt for people and not for critics whose peopleness is questionable”. Everything they stood for and embraced felt so pertinent to my work, even down to their principles like Cool Ade Color and Mimesis at Midpoint. Cool Ade Color principle was representative of the colors worn by African Americans

and those in the diaspora in the sixties. AfriCOBRA's use and celebration of color is something that I admire and will continue to apply to my own practice.

*A Meeting with Mom* was my way of using my own Cool Ade Color to depict my dining room table. The dining room table in my household and many others is used for more than just communal eating. It is an accumulation of our lives outside of the home, full of old receipts saved for tax season, paint brushes from a grad cap painting session, and dishes that haven't made their way to the sink after breakfast. I remember my mom would always tell me that no matter how busy our lives get we will eat at the table together as a family. It is a way of grounding ourselves after a long day. Of course, as life gets busier and our schedules get more complicated, the dinner table is a reminder of our time together. Clearing the table is more than just an activity, it serves a reset, a fresh start. It is a return to connection with the people you love.

**Figure 13.** *A Meeting with Mom*



## CHAPTER VIII: A PROMISING PRACTICE

Fun has become an important element of my practice. It is the way that I exist in the world, so it is only natural that my work resembles that. No matter the result of my time in the program, the one part of my practice that I wanted to be evident was fun and curiosity. I spent so much time worrying about the opinion of others in the beginning of my practice. Will the faculty understand me? Is the work good enough? Once I realized that all of this is subjective and gave myself the space to create, my practice began to open up to me. I started making the work that I wanted to see in the world. I started to make the work that fueled the love for art that I've always had. Creating the work for this show was stressful, but I feel that I have reached an extremely generative place within my practice. Each piece I produced felt like a natural step forward; asking myself "what if?" along the way. I have reached a place in my practice where I am wondering how I can further blur the line between the 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional space; constantly questioning reality.

Many times, in my life, it felt like I've been waiting and asking for permission from others. For the first time, I'm starting to claim agency over my life and the way I interact an exist with the world. No more waiting for approval from others, no more living in fear of others' expectations. I am excited to see where my art takes me after this program, and I can confidently say that I have established my very first artistic practice. If being in this program has shown me anything, it is that when we give ourselves the space to grow the world begins to open up to us.

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