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Art is an artifact of human action that can speak to some universal experience. I know some people may disagree with me on that definition. Maybe they'd claim that art starts in the mind, or goes even deeper to some core property essential to being, but for me it starts with an action. This summer, I travelled to New York to speak with Black artists of the 21st century. With an interest in how the queer experience intersects with other minority experiences, I interviewed artists, poets, and curators to learn how Black expression parallels and intersects with queer theories of performance. I drew inspiration from the theories of Jose Esteban Muñoz and used his writings to help me form my interview questions.

Continued



New York City, NY

Disidentity: Queer Conversation on Identity and Art in New York City

Luckily, I encountered people working in the art field who were happy to educate me on their experiences, the ways they express themselves, and the ways their work fits into the larger aesthetic discourse.



I enjoy art, poetry, aesthetic criticism, music and art history because I believe art is an artifact of human action that can speak to some universal experience (that's not a definition I would have been able to type or know without the Burch Fellowship). We can unlock that experience only with enough context—whether that's cultural, historical, or something more mysterious. The context doesn't have to be the same for everyone, and the mystery of art is that quality art usually affects its viewers despite discrepancies in their education or historical knowledge of the discourse it's contributing to.



This experience calibrated me to the understanding that art is ubiquitous in my life and the lives of all humans. New York is full of art and artists everywhere, whether they call themselves that or not.

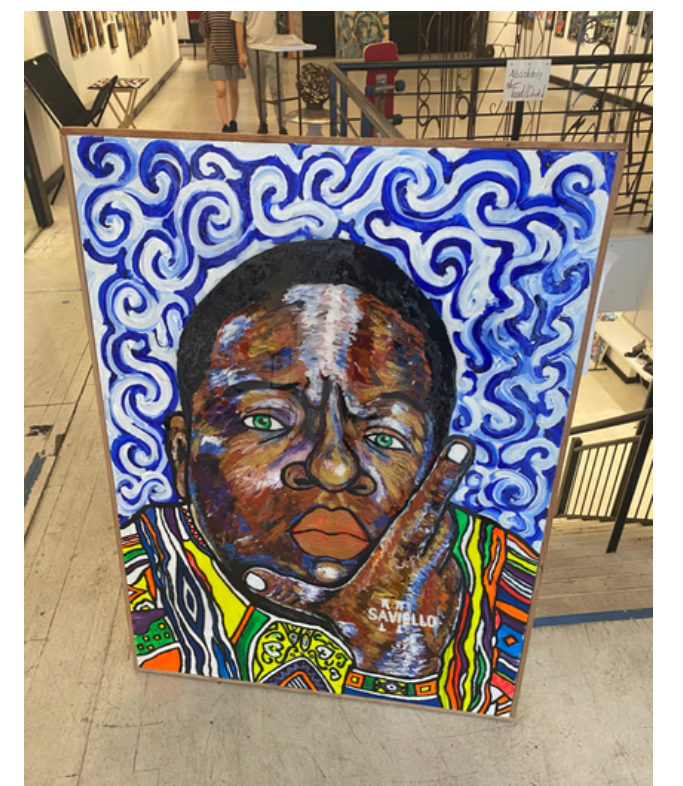
I quickly understood that some of the best artists in the canon of modern art were street artists, so anyone could be creating the defining art of my generation. I embarked on a project which exposed my privilege: it was presumptuous to ask Black



members of the art community to share their theories of expression with me. I hope to continue my learning by speaking to more artists about their work through the lens of disidentification; for me, this summer gave me a great start, but New York is so culturally different from the south.



Any conversation on Black art needs to include not only American southern artists, but also members of the Black artistic diaspora across the world. This is why I think it was so essential and refreshing to be asking artists directly about the way their art makes them feel and the way they want their art to make others feel. There



was not a single person I talked to who didn't teach me something about the human condition, art, and the experiences of artists. Thanks to allies and mentors like KJ Freeman, Dr. Cary Levine, Dr. Joseph Jordan, Dr. Maria Deguzman, and Professor Tyree Daye, I have a start at interrogating art through a critical lens.

