
Freedom is a Dialogue

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Abstract

This piece examines the fluid nature of freedom through four 4"x4" Acrylic paintings set against a paper background with written notes and arrows between the pieces. Collectively, the questions, pieces, and directions disrupt conceptualizations of freedom as a picture-perfect static endpoint, instead presenting it as an ongoing, messy dialogue through abstract visual language. The artwork explores our complex relationships with land, imagination, self, culture, community and history. Each image features fluid lines that intermingle and flow, mirroring how ideas and concepts of liberation blend and evolve. Rather than presenting freedom as fixed, the pieces invite viewers to discover freedom in motion. The primary colour palette of red, blue, and yellow serves a dual purpose. In art theory, these foundational colours give birth to countless colour combinations. Similarly, within these works, this colour palette suggests that our pursuit of liberation gives rise to infinite possibilities. Blue and red carry the colours of the Haytian flag forward into these works. As a descendant of the freedom fighters who liberated my family and countless others from slavery's grip, I see in these foundational hues not mere pigments, but centuries of struggle distilled into colour—each brushstroke a quiet homage to those who bled for the freedom we continue to seek. Additionally, I use "Hayti" instead of the common spelling of Haïti as an act of reclamation. When our revolutionary leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, declared the country's independence in 1804, my ancestors deliberately named the country "Hayti" to honour the original Taino name, Ayiti, and reject the colonial renaming of the land. Using Hayti connects me to that revolutionary moment when we successfully overthrew slavery to establish a free Black republic.

Keywords

Black Studies, abstract art, Afrocentric, diaspora, mixed media, Haïti

Prelude

Freedom is often imagined as a fixed destination—a reward at the end of a journey, a moment in time captured like a snapshot or a painting. These four pieces challenge such thinking by exploring freedom as an ongoing dialogue spanning individual and collective worlds. This is particularly true for Diasporic Haytians, who are grappling with Hayti's current socio-political realities in a way that honours its rich legacy of liberation. Freedom is in the spaces between thoughts; it is in the challenging questions we dare to ask; it is the connections we forge; it is our evolving relationship with ourselves, our communities, our cultures, our histories, our lands, and our imaginations. Like the sacred crossroads where Papa Legba, a divinity in the Vodou pantheon, opens pathways between worlds, freedom exists in the liminal spaces where possibility meets reality. The deeper our inquiry into the normative frames of existence, of what is and isn't free, the more we shift the tone and values embedded within these frames; the more we wonder new possibilities into being—much as my ancestors in the mountains of Hayti carved hidden trails that led from bondage to liberation, creating freedom through the very act of moving toward it. Embarking on a visual dialogue of one such wondering, the artwork emphasizes freedom as an unfixed destination; as a living, breathing, ongoing exchange, flowing much like the Vodou divinity Dambala's serpentine wisdom through landscapes both seen and unseen. Freedom is found in the very act of seeking it. Perhaps it is less of a declaration and more of a punctuation, or even the blank space between defined boundaries and ideas. Perhaps freedom is an open space where ideas flow, where the maroon paths of my ancestors intersect with the possibilities that emerge when we, in the Diaspora, honour both the struggle that brought us here and the becoming that calls us forward.



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Author Biography

Daphnée is a Toronto-based Haytian diasporic artist who knew how to draw before she could string a sentence together. Drawing is her first love and her love language—a language she's been refining for over 4 decades. She is a multidisciplinary artist who paints, sings, draws and writes. Her works centre on themes of decolonization, womanhood, and collective healing. She has designed works for Greenpeace, and displayed her work at human rights conferences and art galleries in Toronto, both as a part of group and for solo shows. Daphnée is passionate about using her talents to imagine and build a more just world for all.