Celebrating Black History Month 2021

Art of Toyin Ojih Odutola

toyinojihodutola.com

Image: Ojih Odutola, This is How You Were Made; Final Stages from A Countervailing Theory, 2019
The Artist: Toyin Ojih Odutola
Hunting Season (Mother and Daughter), 2016

A Misunderstanding with the Mistress, 2016
Identity and Hair in the African-American Community Brief History

- One of the first steps in slavery: Shaving a person's head
  - Removal of identity by removing defining hairstyles that symbolized group, status, spirituality etc.

- Braiding, twists, knots etc. transferred to the Americas
  - Hairstyles largely used as a form of maintenance in harsh slavery conditions

- Hairstyling was one of the only forms of control and freedom
  - Not completely without restriction- Tignon Laws in Louisiana passed in 1786 forced black women to wear headwraps
Identity and Hair in the African-American Community-Brief History

- After slavery with the marketing of the hot comb to African-Americans by Madam CJ Walker in the early 20th century, the more socially acceptable straight hair was now attainable by black women.
- First chemical relaxer, invented by Garrett A. Morgan in 1909
- Straighter more European style hair dominated the black community, as with the “Paper Bag” test (test were a brown paper bag was held in comparison to an individual's skin color to deny entry) there was the “Comb Test” where if a fine tooth comb couldn’t pass through a person's hair they were denied.
  - Product of internalized hatred and racism
- “Lily Complex”- Normalization of black women (and men) assimilating into white culture by altering themselves.
  - Unconscious or conscious effort
Identity and Hair in the African-Community in America-Brief History
Identity and Hair in the African American Community

- Starting in the 1960’s and 70’s as the Black Power Movement gained momentum and influence, as did pride in black features including hair.
- Afro’s, beaded braids, dreadlocks, knots etc. inspired by traditional African hairstyles popularized in the U.S.
  - Resisting against Eurocentric standards and embracing blackness
- Simultaneously, racist discrimination against hair was occurring. First court case involving hair discrimination was Jenkin vs. Blue Cross Mutual Hospital in 1976.
- Though legally black Americans could wear any hairstyle, hair discrimination in the workplace and in school persisted.
Identity and Hair in the African-American Community

- Decline in popularity of afro textured hair, rise in looser curls and straight hair in the 1980s and early 90s
  - Rise in chemical relaxer use
- Mid-late 90s and 2000s saw an increase in natural hair, waves, braids, twists, dreadlocks, weaves and other styles.
  - Increase in court cases against hair discrimination
- Recent publicized hair discrimination against against students:
  - Malden Charter School suspensions of Deanna and Mya Scot for braids
  - Barbers Hill Independent School prohibiting Kaden Bradford and his cousin De'Andre Arnold from attending school with dreadlocks
- Unspoken rule of “professional” hair for black men and women (typically straight hair or low cut hair)
Identity and Hair in the African American Community

- Only 7 states have passed laws against hair discrimination:
  - California, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, Colorado, Washington, Maryland
- Restrictions put on black people and how hair is worn fostered creativity and versatility
- Hair is a form of expression, and a personal representation of who someone is or wants to be
  - Hair is homage
Create a Drawing in the Style of Toyin Ojih Odutola

Carbon paper
A picture printed on regular paper with several people in the composition.
Black paper
White paper.
Black colored pencil
White colored pencil
Glue