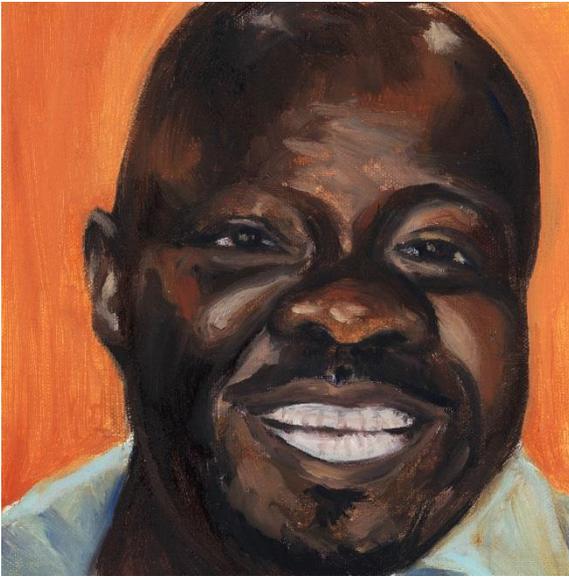


Dara Bayer on Dearly Beloved



Alfred Olango

July 29, 1978 – September 27, 2016 (38 years old)

As a visual artist concerned with creating a just world, I have always struggled with how my creative work could make concrete social change. I often wonder about the role of political art in our collective human journey for liberation. While this is an ongoing exploration, I have found some important understandings through my collaborations with the Dearly Beloved project, conceived by Dr. Viviane Saleh-Hanna and Dr. Julia Jordan-Zacchary in 2014.

I heard of Dearly Beloved while it was still in the creative womb, before it was a fully formed idea. My close friend, Viviane, shared about her desire to respond to the devastating murder of Trayvon Martin, and the subsequent acquittal of his

murderer, George Zimmerman; she talked about her and Julia as Black mothers and scholars, and their interest in creating an alternative space for justice and healing that honored Black and Indigenous people whose lives were taken from state sanctioned violence. This vision included memorializing each individual through painted portraits and then creating a quilt in the Afrikan and Afrikan American tradition of recording history and preserving culture. The portraits and quilt were then part of a mass memorial service in which all the individuals honored were eulogized in October of 2015 at UMass Dartmouth.

After our initial discussion, I was moved to paint a portrait of Darrien Hunt, a young man who was murdered by police in Utah for carrying a toy Samurai sword. He reminded me so much of how I imagine my brother to look as a young adult; I was and continue to be haunted by the fact that all the Black men and boys I love dearly, my father, my brother, my friends, are vulnerable to police violence and murder in this country. As the project further took form, I ended up helping to coordinate artists of color across all ages to create portraits of 31 different individuals, ages 7 to 107, who were tragically killed by state sanctioned violence. I also had the privilege of painting the image that became the centerpiece of the quilt: a portrait that represented the countless unknown and unnamed Black and Indigenous people who have lost their lives through colonial and white supremacist policies and practices. In the second iteration of the project, which is currently happening in Providence,

I also had the opportunity to memorialize Kendra James, Manuel Loggins Jr. and Alfred Olango. With each painting, I worked to capture the infinitely complex humanity of each person; each brush stroke was an invocation of their spirit, an honoring of their role as ancestor in our current reality.

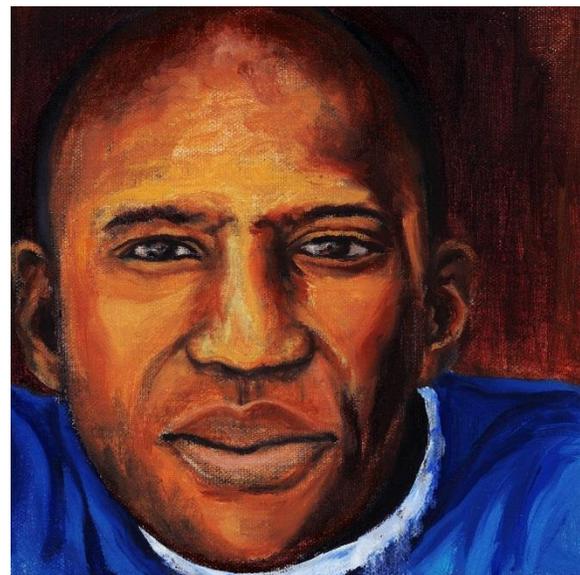
The artistic work that came out of this project was a powerful reminder that engaging in a creative process to address systemic injustice carves out space for new possibilities. The creation of the

portraits and the quilt allowed each artist to bring forth the lives of each individual whose humanity was not recognized by those meant to serve and protect. Stitched into the quilt is the love and care that can offer a healing balm for those impacted by this senseless violence; it is also a site of consciousness raising, a reminder that we all must collectively work to create a world where our descendants can live self-determined lives free of white supremacist violence.



Kendra James

December 24, 1981 – May 5, 2003 (21 years old)



Manuel Loggins Jr.

February 22, 1980 – February 7, 2012 (31 years old)

Dara Bayer is a local artist.

To see more of her work, please visit: www.imaniarts.com