



FEBRUARY 2019

BEE AND FLOWER SYNDROME

... and babies too ... | Ebony G. Patterson



VISIT THE BMA

and come see ... and babies too ... in the Berman Textile Gallery through April 7, 2019.

On a plush pink carpet, surrounded by walls covered in a warm pink polka-dotted fabric, is a long, richly embellished table. In one corner, a dense cluster of light and dark blue butterflies scatters into individual butterflies and smaller clusters across the space.

On the table lies a tapestry, custom woven with images made for kids, such as Dora the Explorer and Hello Kitty. The artist has sewn to this surface patches of rainbows, flowers, and cupcakes and has added glitter and beads. Eighteen pairs of cast glass shoes rest on the table. Their sizes vary from those of babies to teenagers, decorated with lace and trim, suggesting unique personalities. Crayons and miniature toy vehicles are strewn across the table. Larger toy cars, trucks, and buses circle a ledge at the base of the tabletop. On the floor underneath lies an assortment of papier-mâché balloons covered in patterned fabric. There is an attractive brightness and sense of play to the table and its surroundings.

However, as you look more closely, you may begin to wonder why the shoes seem abandoned. Longer examination reveals police car patches, plastic emergency vehicles, and reproductions in glitter of a Nerf gun and packet of Skittles, which may call to mind the murders of Tamir Rice and Trayvon Martin. The work no longer seems so playful, inviting us to examine innocence as an ideal that is not available to all children. Ebony G. Patterson made ... and babies too ... in response to the 18 children killed in her home city of Kingston, Jamaica, in early 2015, memorializing them with 18 pairs of cast glass shoes. Patterson challenges us to contrast the trappings of carefree childhoods with the reality of the pervasive violence that affects so many young people, especially young black and brown people around the world.

Ebony G. Patterson explains her work as using the “bee and flower” syndrome—drawing viewers in with its irresistible color, sparkle, and beauty, but on closer inspection, challenging the viewer to spend time considering questions and realities that, under other circumstances, they may have ignored.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Using Ebony G. Patterson’s approach, select a significant issue in our world that you think needs more attention. Create a paper collage which combines attractive elements related to the issue, then subtly integrate images that indicate the problem. For example, if you choose environmental degradation, consider collaging images of beauty in nature and then place images of environmental problems (such as smog, an indicator of air pollution) so that they are not immediately obvious to the viewer.

Ebony G. Patterson. ... and babies too 2016–2018. Made in collaboration with Temple Contemporary at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia. Courtesy the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago. © Ebony G. Patterson.

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