

ERIN KENDRICK

VISUAL ARTIST/ARTS EDUCATOR

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ARTIST STATEMENT

In my paintings and installations, I examine contemporary spectatorship and the power of language as it relates to perceptions of and about black women, through the lens of the oppositional gaze. The oppositional gaze, penned by author bell hooks, “is one which cultivates a power to look, enabling black female spectators to document what they see and construct their own dialogue with their own voice [1]”. I believe that black women have historically been victims of language as our ascribed identities were largely derived from negative depictions that have been distributed historically via media, art, and contemporaneously, social media. In my work, the women are not just objects meant to be seen but serve as both spectator and witness. The subjects in the portraits stare back at the viewer and one another challenging inherited perceptions, historical prejudice, and contemporary assumptions. The subject becomes the spectator as opposed to the spectacle through the transformative power of looking/seeing...the oppositional gaze. The images and experiences honor black women’s humanness in an effort to encourage empathy through both connection and confrontation.

[1] Hooks, Bell. “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators.” *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Sue Thornham. New York: New York UP, 1999. 307-19.