

Shaina McCoy

Father, Father

September 29 - October 24, 2020

Shaina McCoy is a self-described “family person”. It’s an orientation that structures her life, and spurs on the creation of her enigmatic, thickly impastoed oil paintings, which she bases off of family pictures that she fishes out of old photo albums and, we might poetically imagine, a dusty shoebox or two. But as devoted as she is to her family, McCoy is not interested in faithfully rendering them for posterity. Instead her paintings are like memory traces of the original images, scrubbed of their details, rich with association. Most notably, there are blank spaces where faces should be, replaced by chunky, languid brushstrokes reflecting a spectrum of skin tones. Only her subject’s hair retains a trace of realism, resplendently rendered in peaks of paint that resemble cake frosting.

Despite the work’s abstraction, there is something about McCoy’s eschewal of verisimilitude that gets closer to the heart of things: how our grasp of the past in its photographic granularity is slipshod at best, and yet how the memories of caring and nurturance from our distant childhood remain lodged in our bodies, quietly calling us home. The paintings are monuments to tenderness and sacrifice, and to the hope that every good parent has for their child’s happiness and well being to outpace their own. (One work, of a man holding his baby daughter on his lap, is titled *I’d Give You the World, Too.*) Of course, as a child receiving this variety of devotion, your impulse is to return the favor in kind, which is part of what these paintings are about. “Painting them,” McCoy says “makes me feel like I’m doing something, like I’m giving back to my family.”

Viewed against the backdrop of America’s current reckoning with its endemic racism, the faceless figures become an allegory of the attempted erasures of Black and Brown families. These attempts have taken many forms, both overt and covert, all of which we know well, from the atrocities of slavery, lynching and police violence to the racially targeted war on drugs that keeps our prison systems filled to bursting on the one hand, and from the redlining of Black neighborhoods to the silencing and sidelining of Black voices on the other. But one disappearing act that goes mostly unremarked upon is the relative invisibility of images of Black happiness—of loving families, of playing children, of thriving marriages—when weighed in comparison to images of Black suffering. Perhaps with these paintings, McCoy is attempting in her own modest way to balance those scales. While the world rightly has its eyes riveted on harrowing images of Black fathers and daughters and mothers and sons being brutalized and sometimes killed, McCoy gently asserts that these are not just horrors we must fight against, but that we must remember what we are fighting for, as well.

Shaina McCoy (born 1993, Minneapolis, MN) is an artist living and working in Minneapolis, Minnesota. McCoy graduated from Minneapolis Community and Technical College with an AA in Fine Art in 2017, having previously attended the famed Perpich Art Academy in Apple Valley, Minnesota. Solo exhibitions include *A Family Affair*, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco, CA (2019). Selected group exhibitions include *Riders of the Red Horse*, The Pit, Los Angeles, CA (2020); *Body in Motion Traveling Bodies*, Stems, Brussels, Belgium (2020); *The Flat Files*, The Pit, Los Angeles, CA (2019); *33 Works By 3 Artists*, Ever Gold [Projects], San Francisco, CA (2018); *Now More Than Always (Gimme Gimme the Money Please Please I Want the Money Please)*, Gildar Gallery, Denver, CO (2017); *OverNorth Part 2*, Venture North, Minneapolis, MN (2015); and *Rapper’s Delight*, City Wide Artists Gallery, Minneapolis, MN (2015).