

Louis Burroughs

Artist Statement 2018

As early as third grade, my teachers noticed my drawings. I was given pictures of landscapes, animals, and white figures to copy. Black images in my textbooks consisted of Little Black Sambo and a host of other related negative images. I excelled in drawing and was sent to the Cleveland Museum of Art for classes. At Glenville High School, I was described as happy and mischievous. My grades were average and I was an avid reader of science fiction and psychology. Black History was not taught. I graduated high school in 1964 and stopped making art.

Between 1964 and 1970, the neighborhood burned, national leaders were assassinated, and acquaintances killed. The Ohio National Guard and the City of Cleveland Police instituted an aggressive form of community policing. The Black community was shattered and businesses shuttered. To this day, neither are recovered. Before the riots, I had little experience with black consciousness or racism, but after the riots, I became radicalized and began to devour black history books.

By 2000, I knew that I wanted to make art, and I knew that African American struggles and contradictions would be at its center. My art would be symbolic of the oppression, struggles, and triumphs of black people. First, I had to resolve the complexity of transmuting those problems into visual images, which my current body of work now represents.

My work uses strong color to accentuate subject. Layers of information, symbols, and abstracted icons are open for interpretation from multiple perspectives. I have explored subjects such as Katrina, 911, racial degradation and exploitation, and black liberation. I use mixed media of oil and acrylic paint, wax and polyurethane for sculptures and paintings.

Some of my earliest influences came from paintings, such as Picasso's *Guernica* and Louis David's *Rape of the Sabine Women*. In the early 2000s, I became familiar with artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, visionary artist Thornton Dial, and European primitive Jean Dubuffet. Locally, artist Reverend Albert Wagner influenced me. I am currently interested in the work of Kara Walker.

I hope my work comments on the tragedy and irony of racial subjugation in a supposedly multi-racial society, and that it makes a difference.