

From realism through the postmodern era (5db)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Laylah Ali is the 21st century artist who was born in Buffalo, New York in 1968. She has studied at Williams College and received the Master degree in painting from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri in 1994 (Paintings on Paper Featuring The Work of Laylah Ali 2001). She has also attended the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. This provocative African American artists has exhibitions in New York, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, Miller Block Gallery in Boston and many other cities in United States. Now the artist lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

Her works are like little narrative that have gone through the many cultural and racial changes. Her paintings seem to be unfinished, however, Laylah's paintings are able to say a lot about any historical period: from Nazi German to the Salem witch trials. All of her paintings have small cartoon-like figures who are hard to be identified in sex, nationality or race, but these figures are like the mirror of the present (Art in the twenty-first century).

This painting, as the majority of Laylah's works, does not have a title. It was completed in the year 1998 and is the part of the Greenheads and Attack of the Bluehead series (Bonami 2006). There are four individuals on the paintings, with improper body structure. It seems that the figures in green suits have committed some form of crime and will be punished for it, but at the closer looks it appears that the painting is about the identity and power struggles in the modern society.

The individuals with the raised hands have the green and orange dress, while the person who is representing the authority wears the white dress. It is interesting that despite of the idea that the painting is the reflection of the modern societal power division, the person in the white dress reminds the Egyptian aristocracy from the times of Pharaohs. Even his hat is of the same

form as Egyptian's. At those times the Egyptian society has been much socially divided. Rich people had slaves who had no rights and freedoms and were working for food, clothing and roof over head. The similar situation is happening in the world today - the global wealth is divided among a group of people while the rest is working for the small payment hardly enough to satisfy the basic needs: food, clothing and housing.

Even though it is not possible to directly explain what is depicted and who are those figures, but these unanswered questions make the view think about the reality of life. The painting is race and ethnicity free, leaving it up to the view to see the picture they want to. The bodies of the figure have improper structure with the head being the biggest part. As if the painting was drawn by the kid, however, this technique has a deep symbolic meaning. The heads of the persons in green suits are bigger compared to the head of the person in white suit. It might be the link to the mental abilities of the depicted figures - the rulers are not always smarter than the people they rule over and but the money gives them the decision making power.

The painting of Laylah is understandable for every viewer, as if the artist wanted to say something to each of us. Each viewer is able to find himself in this painting either in the position of the green-dressed person or the white-dress person. The figures lack gender and race characteristics, however, the painting is still about discrimination - the social oppression. As if Laylah wanted to say the world - what we are doing is wrong, it should not be this way.

Word Count - 595

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