



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

I thought we would meet in the timeless corridors of the Metropolitan Museum, to let our eyes wander and find some shard of pottery scratched by a restless Neolithic that we might agree to still be relevant today, or maybe some white elephant painted by a modern master (read: White male) for me to defend and for Destinee to burn to the ground as "full of sound and fury but signifying nothing." But I chose a Wednesday to meet, not remembering, not checking this is the day they take off at the august institution. So we took refuge from the February sleet in the plush lounge at the Carlyle Hotel, chatting over (no exaggeration) tea and crumpets. What a vast world view is packed into her petite frame, I could only marvel, filling me with hope for Art's future. But let's allow her contagious enthusiasm to speak for itself.

**DESTINEE
ROSS-SUTTON
BY NEMO LIBRIZZI**

Tell us about your childhood.

I was always a quiet kid. I stayed to myself or had a couple friends to hang out with. I was the one who would sometimes stay inside and read even if other kids were yelling up at my window to come out and play. I'm the second youngest out of my siblings, but that wouldn't stop me from speaking up when I felt I needed to!

Where are you from?

4th generation, born and raised in Harlem.

What was your family life like?

Life was chaotic but somehow harmonious. We would fight and yell and dance, and it was like having our own group of best friends (or enemies, depending on if wrestling was on TV). It wasn't easy; we didn't have a lot of money, but we had amazing support from family and each other.

Your education?

My education was unusual in such a great way. I went to a Montessori school in Harlem: we had rooms full of books with pages and pages of paintings, and people were suddenly asking me, 'What do you think?' That wasn't something I got asked often as a six-year-old. After that to a Waldorf school on the Upper East Side. Both allowed the children to explore life, nature, and culture in

unique ways to keep our minds more open. I then went to a boarding school in Hershey, PA, which allowed me the chance to meet kids from all over the country – which kind of popped this small NYC bubble I lived in. They taught us many trades and I was able to work at an almost professional capacity with culinary, which was an amazing experience.

When was it that you first became aware of art?

I used to watch PBS a lot. I used to see reruns of Bob Ross on PBS, and I'd see the creativity that came from him.

Was it always as a curator, or did you make things yourself?

I made art from a young age at school. Later while studying journalism, I also took photography classes. I then started volunteering at the Museum of Contemporary African Diaspora Arts, assisting the curator by organizing exhibitions and it naturally evolved from there. And I began to advise private clients on acquisitions of contemporary art with a focus on African and African American art, but not limited to only that.

So basically from curating both private and institutional collections I, in December of 2019, got offered carte blanche to curate my first major international exhibition at Scandinavia's largest independent art space CFHILL

DESTINEE WEARS
DRESS BY VALENTINO
RINGS DESTINEE'S OWN

PHOTOGRAPHS: SEAN WALTROUS
STYLING: GIANNIE COUJI
HAIR: PASCALE POMA
USING SHEA MOISTURE
MAKE UP: PASCALE POMA
USING M.A.C COSMETICS

in Stockholm, Sweden. This was the birth of the groundbreaking exhibition series *Black Voices*, the first edition opening in April of 2020 amidst the worldwide lockdown as Sweden was the only country that remained open.

The exhibition closed just as the international Black Lives Matter protests erupted, which in turn sparked my collaboration with the international auction house Christie's in NY and the equally groundbreaking *Say It Loud* exhibition series came to be. Both series are dedicated to helping redefine the art canon the way many know it, and in turn inspired many other exhibitions – expanding the art world's commitment to Black contemporary art and artists.

It was from there the idea of opening my own (as I like to refer to it) international nomadic gallery came, in order to further promote but also protect, in particular, young and emerging BIPOC artists through my "Ross-Sutton" sales agreement which prohibits resale at auction for 3-5yrs and also secures a % of the profit on future sales of the work for the artist, something which is not common practice. In 2021, I then started registering all works that pass through my hands on the blockchain in order for the provenance to not only be traceable, but for the title and COA (Certificate of Authenticity) to be securely transferred to the buyer and for future sales to be tracked and conditions to be adhered to.

DESTINEE WEARS
DRESS BY A. POTTS
RINGS DESTINEE'S OWN
SHOES BY VERSACE



I'M THE SECOND YOUNGEST OUT OF MY SIBLINGS, BUT THAT WOULDN'T STOP ME FROM SPEAKING UP WHEN I FELT I NEEDED TO!

What is the purpose of Art?

To reflect on the times we live in, to mark history in a more humane way, and to mark the state of the human condition.

What was the first artwork, or who was the first artist to speak to you?

I was taught about many artists at a young age, but what excited me at the time was this chance to "recreate" a Jackson Pollack painting at 6 years old. We studied the work, and then we put on our smocks and we're told to let our imaginations go wild on some canvas. Being allowed to be messy and not considering things to be done a certain way was such a fun and open experience.

How far back in history do your tastes or favorites stretch? As far back as the Egyptian?

Genuinely back to the first discovered cave-man paintings. The renditions of animals they encountered, streaks of color, and small handprints all point to this truly human need to be seen. To make a mark on the world, to prove that us being here means at least something. To be able to say, "We were here" has happened all through history and all over the place, and shows how we all feel the need to be seen and remembered.



Is there a period in history you look back to as a golden era for art?

We all think of the Renaissance – I like to think of times such as the Harlem Renaissance. So many people came up from the South as part of the Great Migration, eager to share ideas and whatever else was on their minds and in their hearts, and it created this explosion of culture.

Is there a difference between art made by White Americans versus Black Americans?

Yes, and no. Art, much like life, is different for each individual. Black American art is a reflection of the experiences we share, which can also be different from someone from Africa. It speaks to shared history and stories, but also resonates with broader human experiences. Art is a form of human expression, so it is something individual, yet universal.

Is art made by Black Americans created mainly for other Black Americans? Or how could a White American best approach an artwork by a Black American, if we agree there are generally two very different human experiences at play?

I would say, no. Again art is a form of human

expression. Yes, the Black experience is in certain ways a different experience than the White American experience, but they are also all the American experience. I would say with any art by whomever, if you want to understand it, if you want to understand any other human, it starts by listening. The individual's gender, race, nationality, age, etc can all play a role in the artist's personal experience, feelings, thoughts.

Do you sometimes regret that segments of society as a whole that are least exposed to art are rather those that need it most?

Absolutely. I was part of that segment for a while. I grew up in the late 90s in Harlem. We weren't always thinking about a museum trip because there were often more pressing matters. These grand institutions are mere miles away, but felt much further. It is a nuanced and layered conversation that involves many ideas and facts that creates this "separation" from culture and art, despite Black Americans being the creators of quite a bit of it.

The irony isn't lost on me. That's why I love to see young people in museums and institutions, though it makes me sad to see

DESTINEE WEARS
DRESS BY FAITH CONNEXION
RINGS DESTINEE'S OWN



DESTINEE WEARS
DRESS BY A. POTTS
RINGS DESTINEE'S OWN
SHOES BY VERSACE

TO BE ABLE TO SAY, "WE WERE HERE" HAS HAPPENED ALL THROUGH HISTORY AND ALL OVER THE PLACE, AND SHOWS HOW WE ALL FEEL THE NEED TO BE SEEN AND REMEMBERED.

their discomfort sometimes. I tell them that as long as they respect the space, we belong there as much as any other seasoned collector or patron does.

Do you endeavor to turn people on not otherwise tuned in to culture?

Yes. I see the benefits of it. There are so many exciting things to learn, things that are happening now. Those that wish to take part or witness it should be able to. I wouldn't be here if others hadn't given me that chance to experience culture.

Do you think art made from the perspective of different intentions (religious, ritual, commercial, craft, academic intellectual) can nonetheless arrive at a similar result?

As long as it doesn't depart from the idea of art for art's sake. That's what we all have to remember, myself included. It all reflects the times and conditions that we live in though; ideas, beliefs, and concepts are almost always unconsciously put into the work.

Do you consider great art generally destined to receive in time the attention it deserves? Or do you think that many innovative talents are doomed to be overlooked?

I think the more we rush the market, and the more we look at what's popular or cool,

that is bound to happen. We can't think of art in the sense of trends, we have to examine what people are trying to talk about and what the viewers are responding to.

Have you ever started out by disliking an artist's work then later had a "eureka" glimpse into understanding their vision?

I've had moments where I didn't "get" a work, and maybe it just didn't resonate with me, until I found a common thread to maintain – where my mind was opened to concepts I didn't consider before.

What artists have you worked with firsthand that you enjoyed most, collaborating as a creative adventure?

I would have to say Khari Turner. We always discuss each project together and exchange ideas. And from there some amazing things happen!

How is art as a creative path or discipline related to art as a career path?

There has to be a balance, where we can't minimize it to just another market. (But we also have to eat, lol.) It is a community where mutual support is needed, especially for promising artists who need a chance to develop their craft without worrying about how marketable their work is.

Do you intend to establish a brick-and-mortar gallery of your own?

Well, I founded my own gallery in December of 2020. When it comes to a permanent physical space I am enjoying this nomadic concept, where I can increase the audience for the artists, allow protections for artists but still get to travel and increase my reach, meet new people and artists, etc. The online business of the gallery also keeps me very busy; Covid gave it a huge boost. Last December, I also started my own publishing business for limited edition prints, and it is doing very well.

You have established a name for yourself at a young age – can you give us a peek inside of your five-year plan?

I will further expand on being more international when it comes to the locations of exhibition projects, may those be collaborations with institutions or other galleries or doing independent pop-up exhibitions. The plan is for my latest curatorial project, the landmark exhibition *4000+ Years of African Art* to travel and to be expanded upon as a collaboration with the new director of the Wall House Museum in Saint Barthélemy.

I am working on an extensive catalogue of my *Black Voices* and *Say It Loud* exhibitions. Since I have also made somewhat of a name for myself as being a curator that discovers new talents and starting artists' international careers, it is somewhat of a testament to our times when it comes to the art and artists that have been creating new work in the past 3 years.

I will continue working on building my foundation, the Black Artist Collective, that helps promote and support, in particular, young and emerging African and LGBTQ+ artists of color. The plan is to create a residency program as well. I will most likely partake in 1-2 international art fairs and do 1-2 institutional exhibitions like the *4000+ Years of African Art*, for example.

I'm currently working on a major museum exhibition in Asia for 2023. And I will also be moving to Europe to set up shop there, but it got delayed due to Covid. Then I will commute between Europe and New York since my entire family is in NY.

IG @desti.knee
IG @rossuttongallery

DESTINEE WEARS
DRESS BY HELMUT LANG
RING DESTINEE'S OWN

