

NonToxic Masculinity

Curator: Kibibi Ajanku
Art Director: Joseph Ford

Ernest Shaw Bio

Ernest Shaw, Jr. is a native of Baltimore, Maryland. Shaw comes from a family of visual and performing artists, and as a youngster, there was never an absence of influence or inspiration. Shaw's work defines the duality of the African American experience. His artwork exhibits this dichotomy through an array of media and concepts. The most prevalent aspect of the artist's work is his use and understanding of color and the figure. The figure in his work is a continuation of a rich history of African American figurative art. His use of color demonstrates a deep level of understanding rhythm acquired through West African drumming experience.

E.L. Briscoe Bio

E.L. Briscoe was born and has lived most of his life in the Baltimore-Washington area. Briscoe's artwork narrates the boundaries created by socially constructed concepts of identity and race. Through his work, he attempts to illustrate a communication of emotions and feelings in a manner that opens a silent dialogue with those who engage. Briscoe believes fully in the idea that information, inspiration, and knowledge can be obtained by revisiting the grass roots practices of Hip-Hop and Punk cultures that were an integral part of his early experiences. This he uses to interplay with formalized academic concepts gained through university-based education.

Curatorial Statement

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Can the aesthetic practice of contemporary fine art stand in opposition to the oxymoron of identity politics? Will we ever rewrite the negative narrative that is being publicly and vastly digested in real time through thought, word, and deed? ***NonToxic Masculinity*** is an exhibition of purpose that seeks to invoke a sense of righteous activism. The exhibition takes on the heady topic of Black Lives Matter with an empowering and enlightening look at black male identity. Black Lives Matter is an international activist movement birthed within in the African American community that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people. This is a movement that is deeply intertwined with the historical treatment of African American men across the nation.

NonToxic Masculinity is an exhibition that seeks to control the narrative by shifting away from the gaze of main stream media. It is a fresh and refreshing revelation that spotlights strength yet tenderness as it adjusts the lens and encourages a broader view of African American men, both young and old. The show invites a re-interpretation of the stereotypical reflex to respond to men of color, particularly Americans of African descent, as dark, dangerous, ominous, and foreboding. The works circle around the idea of sensitivity and emotion, and that idea shows up over and over again throughout the work and within the exhibition as a deeply rooted juxtaposition.

NonToxic Masculinity is curated by an African American woman, but it takes unwavering and respectfully careful steps to investigate the implications of this compromised nation from the perspective of its artists, who are African American males. The exhibition artists are talented men who are not merely artists, but also live a layered existence in the world of pedagogy as educators. Additionally, they reside in a place that is suspended between the tension of being and nothingness... unwarranted invisibility and the unimaginable requirement to be small and unintimidating... as well as, the unspoken yet glaringly loud intent to beat back and marginalize everything that they could, can, and dare to be. While the magnitude of the inequity is inconceivable, the art that explodes from within speaks volumes. This exhibition is the manifestation of the intent to engage its audience to authentically witness the whole human spirit of masculinity in its amazing entirety.

“If your love for me requires that I hide parts of who I am, then you don't love me. Love is never a request for silence.”
— DeRay Mckesson

The exhibition presents only one manifestation of an ongoing effort to evoke dialogue surrounding larger conversations that are a continuing conundrum. Conversations that point to race and dominance, inequity and power. Conversations that can be activated by art, artforms, and artistry. Art has the capacity to encourage intense thought and critical thinking. Within the gallery space, ***NonToxic Masculinity*** seeks openness and deep consideration. The exhibition invites a widened awareness as a wonderful takeaway.

“Hope is the belief that our tomorrows can be better than our todays. Hope is not magic; hope is work.”
— DeRay Mckesson

Kibibi Ajanku, MFA
Independent Curator