2024 MFA
Thesis
Kevin Byrd
I grew up like most African American family's poor and fatherless. I was born in New York along with my twain brother. I have two other sibling a younger brother and an older sister. It wasn’t easy for my mother to raise four children, especially in the Bronx. My father was killed in 1968. I have memories of my mother telling me of my father’s passing, which was very painful to me and my siblings. I really took it hard I acted out physically by getting into fights in school, I needed something to calm me down. My mother would punishment me and send me to my room for hours. The only thing that was up there was the bedroom furniture and old comic books that I read over and over again. I became creative with them instead of reading them again I started drawing and sketching from them using typing paper I stole from my mother’s bedroom. The comic books were those old Marvel comics, Ironman, Spiderman and The Avengers. Occasionally, I might sketch from an old superman comic that I stole from my brother’s collection. I loved drawing and sketching not only that it kept me out of trouble, I became good at it. My mother ran across my drawings when cleaning my room. She was in aye with them and decided that I should take up art. She thought I was talented enough to go to an art school. I was at the age to enter high school. So, she helped me with fulling out an application to the School of Music and Art. She actually thought I be a shoe in being my uncle attended there. When the letter came stating I was not qualified she and I was disappointed. However, she was determining to get me into a school that offer an Art program. She found out that the local high school had an art program that was very good. I became very excited and couldn’t wait to start school that fall. During High School the art program was very challenging. I learned about art, artists, and how to channel my imagination along with color theory and
storytelling through art. However, when I graduated, my mother couldn’t afford to send me to college so I was face like many young Black Americans, I had to earn money. Back in the 1970 and 1980 a job was hard to come by. Drugs ran rapped in the Hood and many of us joined the Arm Forces just to get out from under the depleting drug infested neighborhood we called home. However, I never gave up on drawing and sketching. This time I didn’t draw from comic books, I started drawing fellow soldiers. When I discharged out of the Armed Force, I want back to school to pursue my degree in Police Science at John Jay College. I actually didn’t finish there I dropped out and received my Bachelor of Science degree at Marcy College while working for the Department of Correction, but I still maintain my ability to draw and sketch. When I was attending these Universities, I use to drew people on the buses, trains, and sometimes in the park, this practice helped me hone my skills as an artist. After 25 years in correction, I decided to pursue by Masters of Fine Art at The University of New Paltz where I learned to become an Abstraction Expressionism Artist.

Expressionism is a modernist movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Europe around the 20th century. Its typical trait is to present the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effects in order to evoke moods or ideas. My art work is synonymous to the contemporary artist of 20th century. Artist like Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock and Pablo Picasso. Like them, I too would like to revolutionized the way art is created. I will express my voice through my art to challenge dominant narrative and demand recognition and respect for my contributions to society and my community. Like many of the African Americans artist before me, I will carry on the tradition of celebrating Black culture and challenging systemic oppression and fostering a sense of pride and solidarity. I will pave the
way for future generations to continue the fight for equality, justice, and liberation. I’ll develop a meaning ethos by authentically expressing my personal experiences values, and perspectives through my art. I often engage with social issues; cultural contexts work that resonates with audience. This may involve exploring themes such as identity, social justice, and environmental concerns. My involvement in the artistic community and willingness to push boundaries and my chosen medium. By consistently embodying these qualities I will cultivate a distinctive ethos that informs my artistic practice that will resonate with my viewers.

My process begins by meditation. By meditating I quickly develop themes and subjects that is employed in my paintings. Depending on the subject matter I may use acrylic, oil, or a collage. My use of a palette knife and a stroke of a paint brush helps me to develop my own creative style. I recently experimented with latex paint on wood panel, which helped me create brilliant abstractions that resonant with my work. I use many different resources such as, magazines, family photos, or ideas that came to me by meditating. I hope to capture the imagination of the observer and touch their souls to create an experience that will make a positive change and an impact on a broader cultural landscape. My work often explores themes of African American identity, history, and culture. I use bright colors that radiate and captivate viewers and prompting deeper examination of social narratives. I follow in the footsteps of many of the contemporary African American artist. Artist like Dvid Hammons, Kara Walker, and Jean Michel Basquiat, just to name a view. They have continued to carry the traditional touch and challenge dominant narratives and demand recognition and respect. Like them, I too will carry on that same tradition for equality, justice, and liberation. Through my art I will challenge systemic oppression, and foster a sense of pride and solidary with in my community. My art
tells stories of the struggles and triumphs of African Americans and their culture. I use my creative ability to address and advocate social injustices, identity and racial inequality. I depict the African American experience by using vibrant colors, form and shapes to convey emotions and to address social issues within the community. My work explores themes of community, identity, and resilience of the African American community as well as celebrating the strength and accomplishments of my subjects. I’m inspired by books that I have read, such as, 1619 Project, by Nikole Hannah-Jones, A Promised Land by Barack Obama, and Hip-Hop Gospel, The first instrument, by Krs- and many others. I was exposed to the 1970s blaxploitation and sexploitation cinema that featured explicit content. My paintings are paradoxical to the exploitation genre of films. I push and focus on traditional storytelling through my creativity. I hope to change the narrative and mind set of the African American community by depicting positive images and changing the negative narrative of the way African American are portrayed and stereotyped as gangsters, womanizers, and criminals. I basically challenge pessimistic view of the African American community. Through My paintings I create commentary that addresses issues of race, power dynamics, and identity, which would serve as a catalyst for important conversations about societal challenges and the need for representation in visual culture. My research into the African American cultural and historical context, plays a crucial role in my studio practice. I researches different pigments, techniques and subjects that I employs in my paintings. I engage with new ideas through meditation, historical periods, or social issues in the African American communities. I hope in the future I will be able to create large scales paintings like Julie Mehretu, like her I also hope to create and explore themes of globalization, identity, and history. I want to evoke viewers with elements, identity, and symbols that will reflect
African Americans. To change the narrative from a pessimistic view. It’s essential that my work opens up a dialogue about race with empathy, openness, and the willingness to listen and learn from diverse voices. I will challenge systemic racism and strive for equality and understanding. Through my Art I will be challenging stereotypes in my community and promote understanding and unity. Too many times you can see common stereotypes in the African American communities, it’s important as an artist that these stereotypes, such as, Thug, welfare queen, Angry black man, Athletic, and being Exotic. These stereotypes are very harmful as they oversimplify the diversity of experiences and identities within the black communities, perpetuating harmful biases and limiting opportunities for individuals to be seen and valued as individuals. It’s important that as a black artist that I change the narrative on how people view the black community. As a black artist I’ve a powerful platform to change narratives through my art. I can start by telling diverse stories. I can create works that depict the multifaceted experiences of black people, showcase their humanity, resilience and triumphs. I can challenge stereotypes through my art, I can subvert and challenge stereotypes by presenting nuanced and authentic portrayals of black individuals and communities’, by promoting empathy and understanding. I can use my art as a powerful tool to evoke emotions and foster empathy. I’ll use my work to promote understanding and bridge divides by sharing stories that resonate with diverse audiences. I can highlight social issues and shine a spotlight on those issues such as racism, inequality, and driving change through my creative expression. I can celebrate culture and heritage through my art, reclaiming narratives and diversity of black identity. By using my creativity and platform, I can play a vital role in shaping narratives, challenging perceptions, and advocating for positive change within society. African American artist is known to incorporate
culture elements in their art and I won’t be an exception. I like the African American artist before me I too will be highlighting black history, traditions, and achievements of the black communities. I’ll be depicting and honoring by heroes by paying tribute to historical figures, leaders, other artists, and activists who have made significant contributions to the black communities. Celebrating my culture through art is a powerful way for me to affirm my identity, share my experiences, and contribute to the collective cultural tapestry of society.
Thesis Images

Acrylic on Canvas, Sunday Bonet
Marathon Runners

Oil on Canvas
Drewing #1 Collage on Paper.
Three Brothers, Oil on Canvas
Community, Oil on Canvas
Drawing #2 Collage Water Color on paper
Assemblage, Acrylic on Canvas
Late Subway Riders, Digital Painting
Luna’s Evolution

Donyale Luna
Marbles, Indigo Prints