

Saundra Ayala

Clarity Haynes uses a variety of mediums and traditional techniques to create contemporary portraits which express a unique feminist perspective. A few of Haynes' exhibited portraits were done using paint, but the majority of the pieces were done in charcoal and pastels. In addition to these portraits on display, Haynes exhibited small scale samples of some of her previous work which included, *The Breast Portrait Project* and *The Beard Portrait Project*. Both works explore the female body and challenge traditional notions of beauty and gender. Women of various ages are the central focus in all of these works.

Haynes' portraits are mostly traditional frontal views of the face with bare backgrounds. However, there are a few portraits with contemporary twists in which Haynes chooses to present the back of her models so that the hair, indentation of the spine or shoulder blades becomes central to the piece. In other works, narrative elements are explored and the figures appear amongst a natural landscape.

In each piece, the wide range of white, black and gray values of shading as well as the subtle use of pastel hues, add a sense of space and softness to the subjects. The absence of bold color in many of the pieces creates a mood of intimacy and gives a realistic sense of form to the figures. Lines are used to accentuate folds or wrinkles in the skin, creases in clothing, or to highlight locks of hair, but the emphasis in each piece remains on the faces which Haynes renders with uncompromising realism.

All the women of this collection seem to evoke a sense of power, determination or rebellion through their expressions. In one piece a young woman, wearing a black party dress and pointed princess hat stands defiantly with her arms folded across her chest. Her body language dares confrontation, even as the softness of her eyes invites it. She is at once a contradiction, a mixing of childhood innocence and adult sexuality, rebel and princess.

Haynes' work also seems to explore aging and the way beauty is redefined in the process. Several works are portraits of older women, whose wrinkled faces are celebrated in their careful representation. This is a refreshing change from the culturally negative connotations so often associated with aging.

These women wear their gray hair as a mark of wisdom, but the reoccurring theme of hair in some pieces takes on mythical qualities. One portrait shows a woman whose tresses completely cover her body while another shows two women holding a patch of hair between them. Haynes seems to choose hair, for its visually abstract qualities and because it is often culturally associated with beauty and femininity.

In my opinion, paper as opposed to canvas, and the use of charcoal, as opposed to paint, are best suited for rendering the female form in Haynes' artistic style. The rendering of landscapes in some pieces seem to border on surrealism. This is an area I feel the artist should explore as it would allow her to challenge traditional images of women and their environments as well as add more narrative to the scenes.

In Clarity Haynes' artwork there is a comfort in familiarity, in being warmly invited to share in recognizable elements of ourselves. Perhaps it is in the intimacy of the faces, the honest expressions of casualness. Or, perhaps it is in the choice of medium, the way the charcoal and pastels lend softness to the skin and make these women almost seem to breathe. Whatever it is, Haynes' pieces reveal an authenticity that engages the viewer in a visual conversation, one that challenges our notions of beauty, femininity and what it means to be a woman.