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Santos, Rafaela

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Silenced No More

Rafaela Santos

Abstract

Several artworks from a larger project created in 2020, during the times of the pandemic and unrest, when people of color decided that they would be silenced no more.

I created these pieces (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3) during the pandemic and unrest, which has become a commonplace way to describe how people of color decided to be silenced no more. As I watched the news perched in the mountains of upstate New York, the sounds assailed me, violent in their acts to get me to pay attention. I realized that we were dying by the thousands, choked, breathless, by a virus and the virus of racism that has plagued us since they first set eyes upon us. I'd pondered those long 6 months being sequestered how do we protect that, which is not respected or understood: a life, a black life? Do we shroud ourselves in a shield to hide our true selves? Do we take up arms to stop them from killing us? My only foreseeable defense was to pick up my paintbrush and document as much as I could lest we forget. I knew we must say their names, force their shame although it may not exist, to remember those lost forever. These pieces, created in 2020, are moments in time that document sentiment, fear, sorrow, hopelessness and yes, anger, lots of anger!



Fig. 1. The muzzle can finally be removed. No longer do brown and black peoples feel the need to keep quiet and yet, when we do take off the muzzle, we still risk dying. Rafaela Santos. *Silenced No More*. 2020. Acrylic on archival paper. 15 in x 22 in.

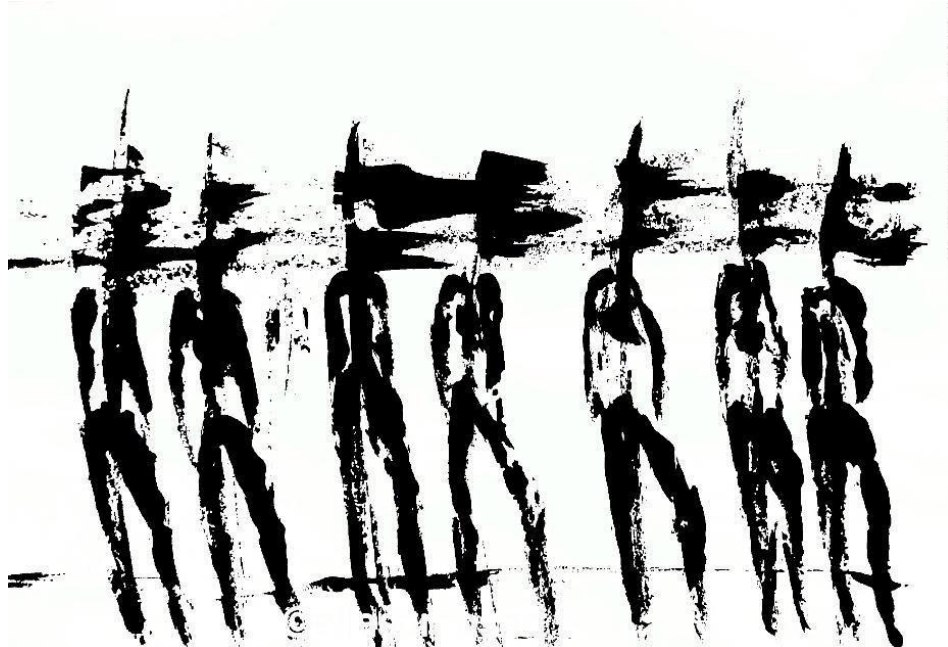


Fig. 2. We scream, wail, shout and chant their names. With every breath like a leaf floating in the wind, we say their names to keep their spirits afloat. Rafaela Santos. *Say Their Names*. 2020. Acrylic on archival paper. 15 in x 22 in.



Fig. 3. Our day of the dead is daily, we memorialize them, in our hearts, with their oral histories, they live forever. Rafaela Santos. *Forever In My Heart*. 2020. Acrylic on archival canvas. 16 in x 20 in.

About the author

Rafaela Santos, artist, grew up in New York City, a Bronx girl. She is a Bronx girl to this day, which animates her career as a multi-faceted creator working across an enormous variety of medium for over ten years. Throughout her explorations, motifs of blackness have emerged to unite each piece. Blackness holds space in terms of both her cultural identity and the color itself, which maintains a committed presence throughout her paintings. IG handle: @ellasantosart; Website: www.ellasantosart.com. Email: ella@ellasantosart.com