



St. Louis Visual And Performing Artist Kat Reynolds

Jacqui Germain / Feb 16, 2017



All photos by Jacqui Germain

Visual and performing artist Kat Simóne Reynolds has spent the last couple of years carving out a brave and vulnerable space for herself in St. Louis' professional-arts community. Reynolds, known for her stunning portraiture work focusing on black women, is being honored at the 2017 Visionary Awards as this year's Emerging Artist recipient. Since her first solo exhibition in 2014, Reynolds has continued her artistic exploration of tenderness, vulnerability and authenticity, while dedicating time and energy to establishing her own studio space and practice. "I realized that what works for one person doesn't necessarily have to work for me, and that's okay. It's still going to continue to develop, of course, but right now I'm pretty comfortable in the things I want to do," she explains. "It took me a really long time to

realize that being a timid person with my practice really isn't getting me anywhere."

Her portrait work—which has produced some of her most recognizable and memorable creations to date—is only one part of a multi-faceted artistic repertoire that includes a bachelor's degree in dance, architectural photography and more. In her latest show, "This is a Soft Place for my Hard Black Body," her attention to authenticity and self-discovery is evident, immediately eliciting a self-awareness in the viewer that is both calming and unexpectedly disarming. The show is currently on view by appointment only at the Millitzer Studio and Gallery until March 25.



What was your first reaction to finding out that you were a 2017 Visionary Awards recipient?

I just started crying. And the first words out of my mouth were, “I work so hard!” You realize that you work really hard and because you’re working so hard, you don’t know that other people are actually looking at you. I just really didn’t—I never thought that I was ever going to be awarded anything.

How does your work push visual arts, photography and the arts community in St. Louis forward?

I’m such an emotional person, so I think that it’s kind of relieving for a lot of people. I’m so vulnerable with the way that I feel about things, so other people feel that it’s okay for them to have space. Especially by showcasing the tenderness of black people, and especially black women. That’s represented in a show I did called “Ask Her How She’s Doing,” which is dedicated to my mom, my auntie and my grandma, three really hardworking women. Now it’s showcased more, but when I first started doing it, I really thought that I was in the minority.

I also think the mindset I have towards my practice is really valuable, and I think it helps a lot of other young black women think that it’s possible, you know? I struggle. I work a 9-to-5 job, I have ADHD, I have depression and anxiety, I’m in a very serious relationship, and I have a lot of things I have to juggle every day—but you can make it work. You just have to make it work for you. You’re the only one doing this. If you have a passion for it and you have this sensitivity towards it, then do it.

Your portrait work as a photographer isn’t just candid photos; they seem to be deliberately staged to communicate a message.

It’s actually not quite as deliberately staged as Deana Lawson’s work, for example. It’s not extremely posed, actually—it’s really working within my subject’s feelings. It’s also really therapeutic for me because I realized recently, I like putting a lot of my own emotions and baggage into the process, so I actually feel really good after shooting. And my subjects usually do, too. It’s largely geared towards authentic movement, practice and feeling.

Why that medium? Why that form?

That’s a really good question. I’m starting to not focus so much on photography. I’m going into video and sculptural work. The last show “This is A Soft Place for My Hard Black Body” utilizes a lot of different mediums, and I just couldn’t see it any other way. So it’s not thinking, “I’m a photographer.” It’s more that I am a visual and performing artist at this point.

“This is A Soft Place for My Hard Black Body” was a deeply personal, reflective series. How do these self-portraits get your vision across to the viewer?

I basically made myself into—not made myself into a character, but tapped into this confidence that I used to have. I was kind of channeling my 21-year-old confidence. I was in a different mindset than I’m in now—just being comfortable. So utilizing that confidence and putting on this blue braided crown and getting my nails done—it’s about me fitting into this stereotype of a black woman’s body. I didn’t really know how to navigate that, and I think having this self-portrait series really helped me to be okay with it.

The Visionary Awards celebrate the contributions, specifically, of women in St. Louis.

Who are the female artists you look up to?

Eartha Kitt. Eartha Kitt is a huge inspiration for me, because she symbolizes this supreme ruling of confidence and black beauty, but in this way that I won't know until I'm 52, which I'm really cool with. She was so okay with being this older woman, and I thought that was maddeningly attractive and special and important. Serena Williams, of course. Carrie Mae Weems. Adrian Piper. My grandmother—Margaret Handy—my auntie and my mom. Faith Ringgold—she authored the first book I ever loved. Gina Grafos—she's a professor at Washington University in St. Louis, and has really been someone I can talk to about my feelings and my practice in a really different way. My friend Ligia Lewis, she inspires me a lot with her work ethic. Renee Cox, she's amazing. Grace Jones. I think about Sandra Bland almost every day, and Whitney Houston.

What's next for you?

I'm speaking at the Saint Louis Art Museum regarding my work and the black body. And we're also going to be talking about form and authentic movement within the black body, and the presence of a black body and what that looks like. I'm pretty excited about that. And also after that I have the ceremony for the Visionary Awards, and so that's really awesome, too. I'm super excited about it. Then I'll be attending a residency at Paul Artspace.