



Mane attraction: Kat Reynolds' latest curation intersects art and the complex beauty of black hair

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Yvonne Osei's "EXTENSIONS" is among the featured installations of the 'Mane 'n Tail' exhibition curated by Kat Reynolds. Photo by Yvonne Osei

I often hear so many black Americans speak of how they do not understand the purpose of fine art and steer clear of art-related events because of their disconnection to its intent. The purpose of art has been explained in detail through many forums. But in simplicity, I find art's purpose is to evoke thought-based conversations with others or within self – based on the familiar and unfamiliar. As one begins to read the curatorial statement in the program guide of "Mane 'N Tail," so begins the conversation.

"One can argue that the beauty supply, as its own unique ecosystem, is one of the first art stores young black woman encounter," the statement reads.

For Kedira Pelloquin, those thoughts were rooted in explorations of the capitalist system associated with the establishments that cater to black beauty but are not owned by blacks, along with the political processes that encourage this trend. It was these types of conversations that St. Louis-based artist

Katherine Simone Reynolds envisioned when curating “Mane ‘n Tail,” which is currently on display at The Luminary through March 8.

Upon entering the exhibition space, a pleasant scent fills the air. The familiar scent is so instantly recognizable that it makes for a whisk down memory lane. For some of the ladies present during the opening reception, it took them back to early mornings in their grandmothers’ kitchen, or a front porch down the street for a neighbor “HOOD” beautician hook-up at the last minute – and a reminder to a few gentlemen of what exactly took their female relatives so long in the bathroom growing up. “Mane ‘n Tail” evoked a myriad of conversations revolved around black beauty. Black viewers answered the many questions amongst white attendees – including the purpose of this fountain of pink liquid that lent flowing aromatic notes of lilac and lavender through the air. The fountain of Luster’s Pink Oil Moisturizer left guests raving. It was an installation by Pamela Council entitled, “Tenderheaded.”



The exhibition is named after the equine shampoo that later became a hair care staple in black households across the country. “It investigates the intersectionality of this beauty exchange,” Reynolds said of the exhibition. “How the Beauty Supply manipulates the way women of color feel about themselves, as well as the purchasers of beauty and the people and spaces that supply it.”

Works by 10 artists are featured in “Mane ‘n Tail.” Among the highlights include SHENEQUA’s, “MY HAIR MY CROWN,” a soft sculpture, composed of cotton synthetic hair and satin rollers be immediately connect the black viewer to the familiar. In contrast, Rachel Youn’s “NATURESCAPE: Self Care Stimulation” will evoke more complex thoughts and may be a missed connection for those unfamiliar with contemporary art. Yvonne Osei’s “EXTENSIONS” video will connect with anyone who has ever had their hair braided, as it simultaneously shows us the pride and confidence within the black woman.

I strongly encourage all to go and explore this amazing exhibition, as Reynolds’ curation gives Black Americans that feel disconnected from art, a much needed, relatable and interactive fine art experience.



Pamela Council’s “Tenderheaded” is among the featured installations of the ‘Mane ‘n Tail’ exhibition curated by Kat Reynolds.