

## ARTIST CLAUDE DESIR JR TALKS ABOUT HIS CHOICE OF IMAGERY, BLACK FACE



"I often use blackface in my artwork, heavily influenced by Michael Ray Charles. For those who are unaware or even unfamiliar with the black face caricature... blackface was how America portrayed African-Americans in the 1920's with these exaggerated features of large wide noses, big pink lips, nappy hair, beady eyes, even extra exaggerated by over sexualizing the women in other words the caricature mammy giving them large breast, extra wide hips, and big rear-ends. This imagery was a form of ignorance, racism and oppression. But for me instead being upset over how my people were being depicted I embraced it and the Jay Z music video plus Michael Ray Charles gave me a voice, a new vision. I took something negative as blackface and put my own spin on it. I see this as an opportunity to address the issue of

African-American history being hidden away until its forgotten and erased for good, society and media try's to hide these things over time as if they've never happened or even existed. I took it upon to take this piece of history and conversation that most hesitate to speak on, because I'm tired of things being dumbed down, sugarcoated and just vague. We need the whole truth, the good, the bad, and the ugly. So I want to be the one to revive these things to keep the future aware and updated on these cruel times in American history. I honestly get a lot of mixed reviews about this category in my artwork which I expect. Some viewers get offended, some really admire it and others are just are on the fence about it. This is what art is about, starting a conversation, bringing different groups and crowds together. But, also exactly the reason why I don't like to explain my artwork majority of the time because it's best for everyone to channel their own thoughts, feelings and voice their own opinions. The minute I give the piece a meaning of any sort it suspends viewers thinking. I'd rather say nothing at all, it's for the public to interpret".



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