

Simone Elizabeth Saunders

The Messenger, 2021, yarn

Artist statement

My name is Simone Elizabeth Saunders, I am an artist residing in Mohkinstsis. I create hand-tufted and embroidered tapestries. My textile, *The Messenger*, is an intricate array of colourful threads nested together to emulate what the large magenta text in the background states: LOVE.

This work was created in 2021 during the height of the pandemic. As a community, we were isolated and feeling the repercussions and the tolls of the outbreak. I had the fortune of working from the studio, located in the comforts of my home. My work uplifts Black womanhood, and the resilience, joy and the strength of being a Black woman.

Textiles engage upon a search for belonging, a connection to a community, to personal identity and a connection to Black history. I create narratives through cultural mythology, current iconography, and personal landscapes. A big source of inspiration within my work is Art Nouveau, an era in which female portraiture was highlighted and exuded tremendous grace and femininity. This is reflected within *The Messenger*, capturing a sensuality, mystery, vigor, and charm amongst the vibrancy of colour. It is a style that I capture within my textiles which I have called, Black Nouveau.

The Messenger portrays a woman adorned in a gown - reminiscent of the Charleston era - resplendent with lace and an intricate design. Her arm is outstretched, reaching toward a swan whose wings are wide and ready for flight. A background tone of pink and red exude with warmth and joy, having captured - intermittently - vibrant florals which scatter the ethereal abstracted landscape.

The Black Lives Matter movement was ongoing throughout this creation. We witnessed in horror the senseless murders of our brothers and sisters. I was encountering my own personal demons of having suffered a personal loss. I was surveying the online landscape in a daze, noting the decline of my mental health, and yet a divine understanding that I was not alone.

The Messenger is reaching out for connectivity. It's vying for a sisterhood, casting my thread to pierce through the diaspora, for Black women to come together, to heal, the Love. *The Messenger* debuted at my solo exhibition, *u.n.i.t.y.*, at Contemporary Calgary in November 2021-January 2022. From there, it went to London's 1-54 African Art Fair. It has been featured internationally, in Black Art Magazine (Atlanta) and Colossal (US). It is a work that holds strong to the meaning of love, what it is to love, and most importantly, to love thyself. As an artist, legacy is imperative. I have my work collected in prominent museums in the United States, such as the Mint Museum (NC), the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Weismann Museum (MN).

It would be an incredible honour for my textile to be collected in the province where I was born and where I now reside and create. Representation is key, and to know that Black and Brown youth who enter the Alberta's Legislative Building, or who witness the TREX programming, can feel and be seen, that is the magic of art and the legacy that I intend to create for myself.