

ARTIST PORTFOLIO:



Nokwanda Themba

Freelance Contemporary Illustrator and Self-taught Visual Artist

Biography:

Nokwanda Themba is a 24 year old (b.1994) Zambian-South African self -taught Freelance Illustrator/ Visual Artist and Pre-med Graduate based currently in Johannesburg, South Africa. Her work focuses on the Visual Anthropology of beauty, womanism, the cultural identity and representation of Women of Color from different global ethnicities. Her work has been described as whimsical, vibrant and imaginative illustrations creating nuanced reflections of the black female form, embracing all aspects of femininity — both her own, and that of her subjects. She describes her work as a social experiment, in which she explores the complexities and individual differences in the faces she meets.

— some might consider her work far removed from her background in medicine. Nokwanda holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Physiology of which she obtained at the University of Pretoria. Carving a multi-career, she wishes to pursue her dual passion in Medicine in the following years to come.

While pursuing her studies she has exhibited her work in group exhibitions and worked with galleries such as Trent gallery. In 2015 she was chosen to be a part of ULTRACONTEMPORARY EMERGENCYART #AFRICA hosted by Copenhagen Ultracontemporary Biennale (CUB) at The Museum of African Design where she worked alongside artists from Denmark, Berlin in a group exhibition. Her work has featured in with publications such as Elle South Africa and Napizum in the United States. Voted as the top 16 Emerging Creative Leaders to look out for, she has over the years appeared in many online features celebrating her self taught talent such as Design Indaba and worked with artists and collaborations spanning across the United States, Ghana, Tokyo and Milan. She continues to catch the eye of many studios, residences and organizations from across the world.

Her work can be found in the 'Women who draw- worldwide open directory for female illustrators.

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Artist Statement:

The current theme in my work is that of a Visual Anthropology, a social and cultural identity and representation of Women of colour from different ethnicities across society. How we fit into the Euro-centric world and how we define the concept of beauty within our individual ethnic community.

With Women of colour (mainly black woman) being my subject matter, a constant theme in my work is Womanism, by which author Alice Smith defines as:

*“(a womanist) loves music. loves dance. loves the moon. loves the spirit.
Loves love and food and roughness. loves the folk. loves herself.
Regardless.”*

My work is a representation of the different kind of women in our societies, highlighting the beauty, femininity, complexity, vulnerability, grief, softness, and grace we each identify with in our own way – all of which makes us women. In a society where WOC, especially black women, are viewed as weak, fragile, often overshadowed by toxic masculinity, the figures in my work stand exalted, regal, with magnificent prestige before you. They are, sovereign.

The use of coffee, tempera powder and compressed charcoal as mediums creates a rich brown skin texture, complemented with black ink, which is used for the extravagant and prominent hair. The figures and subjects are often represented through minimalistic clothing, in order to create timeless work.

I regard my work as a social experiment, by which I explore the different facial features of the equally beautiful and complex humans we encounter daily, which has allowed me to challenge my own perceptions. Not only with those we regard as beautiful, but the ordinary, yet peculiar. What a culture might consider disharmonic or ugly, another might consider a beautiful imperfection.

How do we respond to the different faces we meet? How do we connect with one another? How do we interact, form and create community? How do we navigate through the spaces we are in with one another?

Each person we meet has inside them the same complexity and vivid life of their own, and yet, despite the joy, grief, love and trauma we are each filled up with we show up as ourselves. Who are we really? Are we what we present ourselves as? Or is this simply a mask?

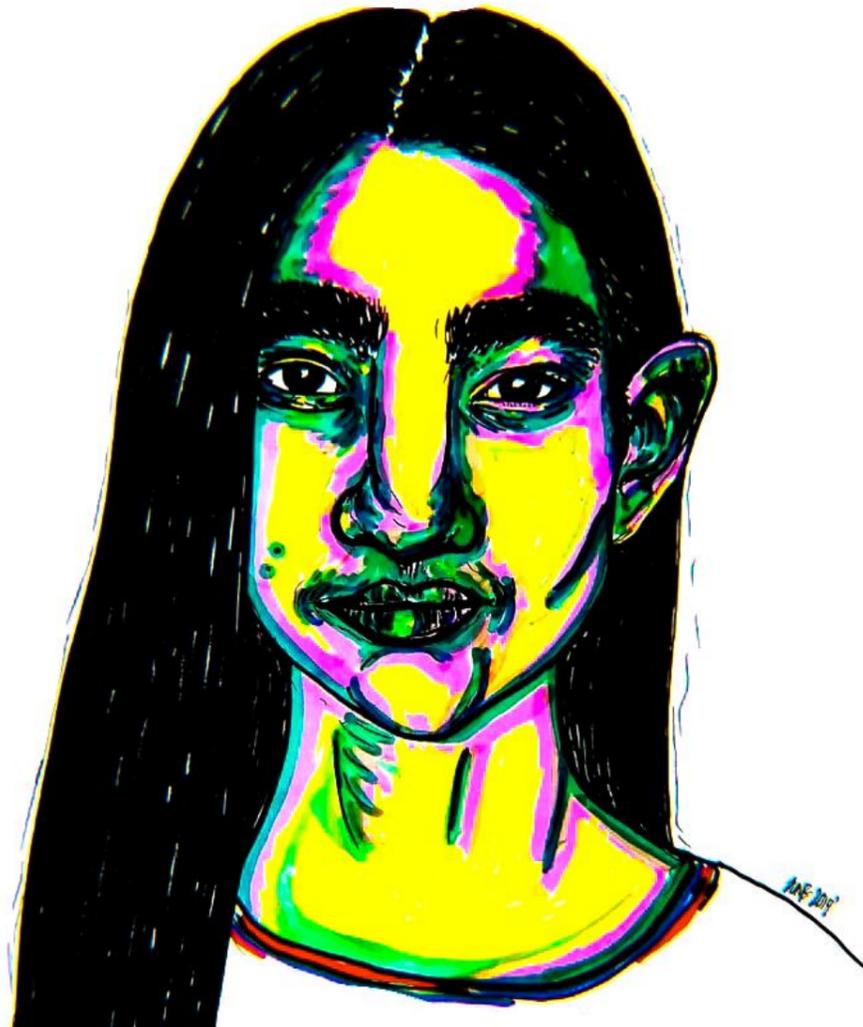
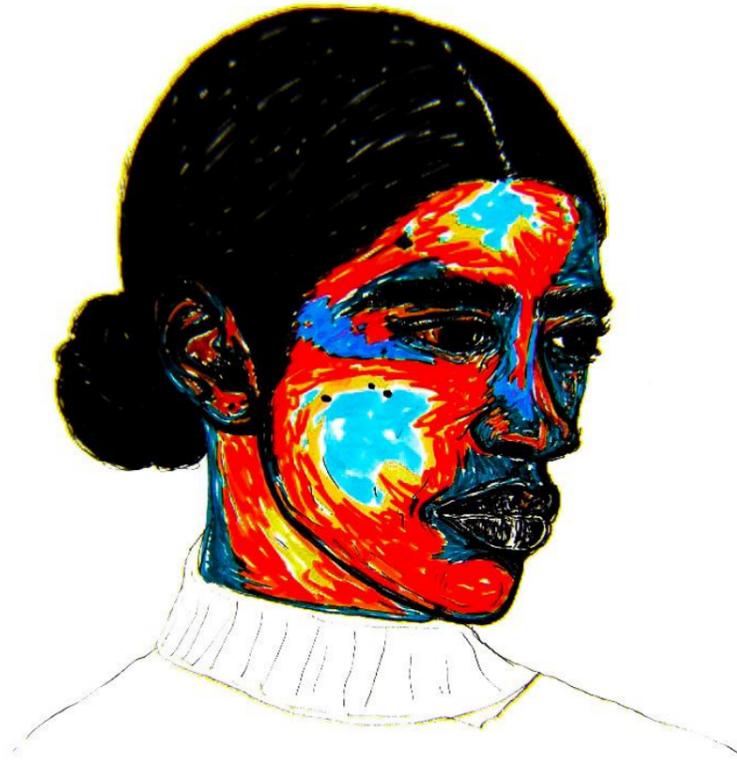
This is described as the art of Physiognomy- the science of deducing a person's mental character, personality, and temperament from facial features. By enlarging certain features (ears, nose, eyes etc.) of my subjects, they appear distorted, disproportionate, grotesque, loud and present. I am often intrigued by the shadow work, complexity, imperfections, and flaws that make us beautiful and humanly inhumane.

“If everyone isn't beautiful, then no one is.”

Andy Warhol



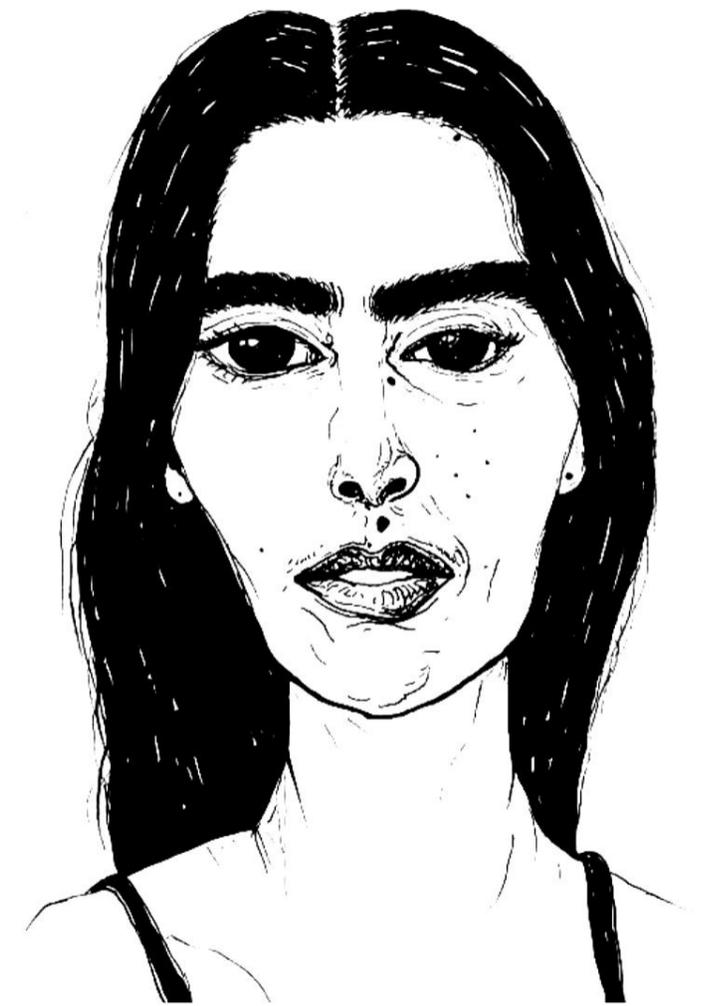
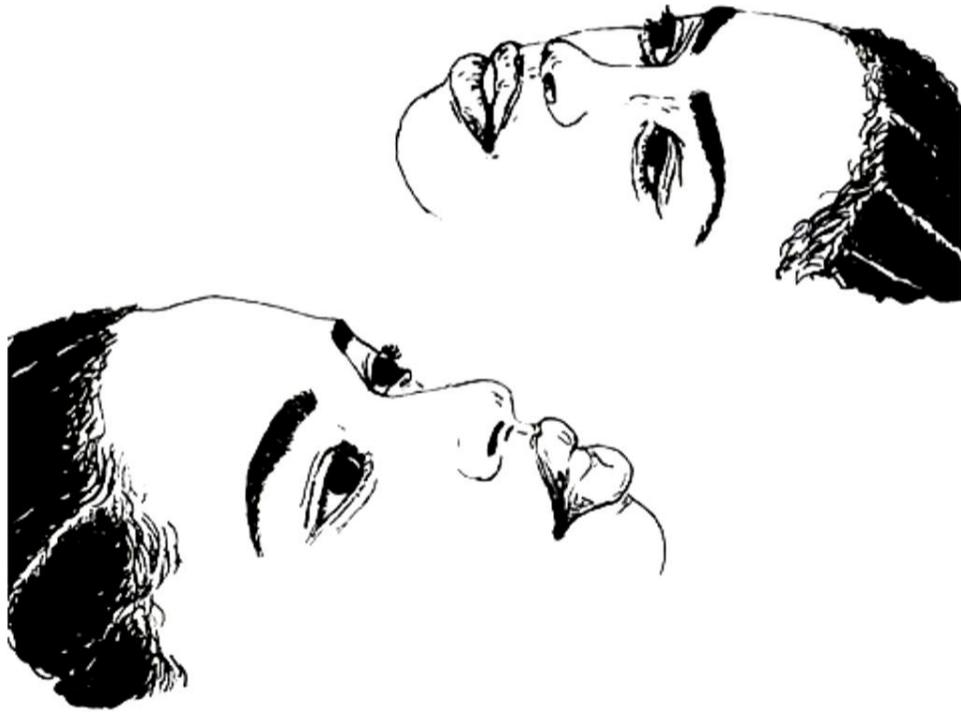
RECENT WORK
2020-Current

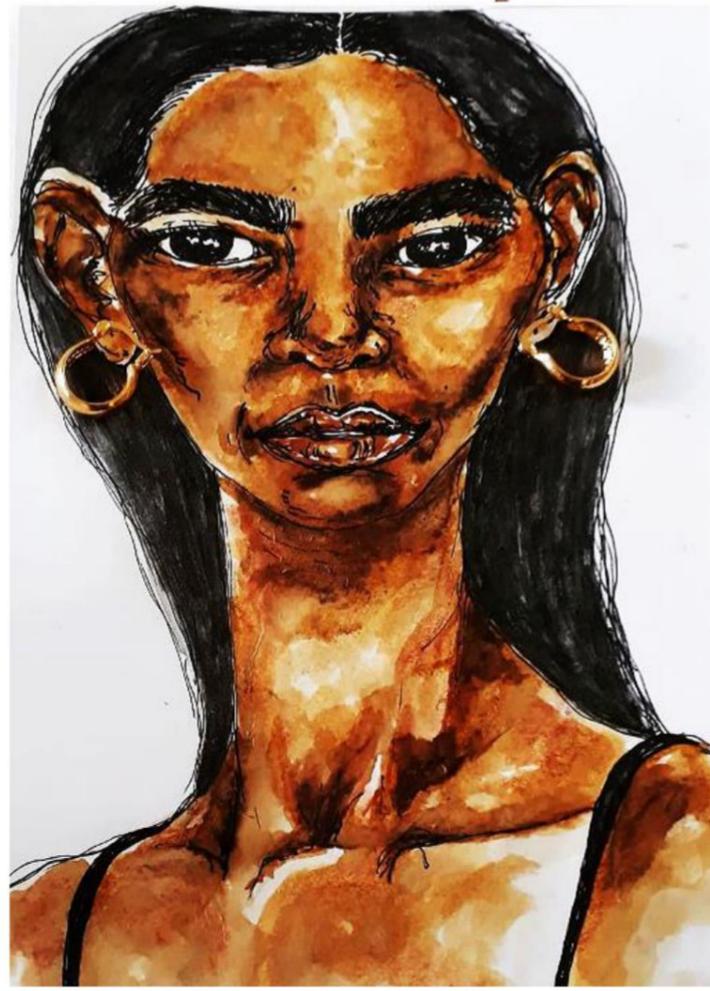
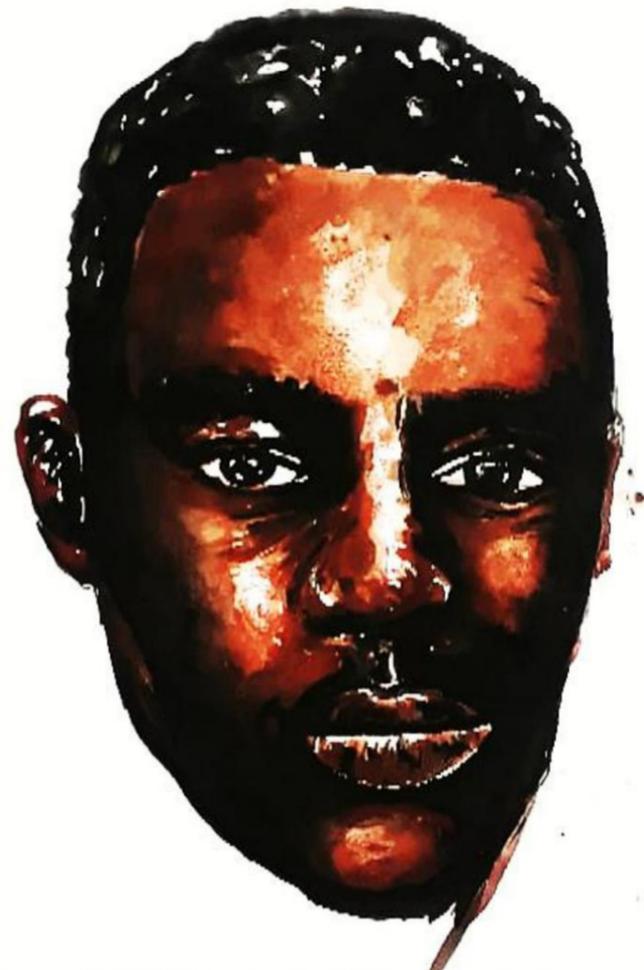


Hafu 2 Hafu collaboration -2019



10 min drawing series:





'The Sovereign' Series





Elle South Africa March 2018 cover



Afropunk Johannesburg 2017



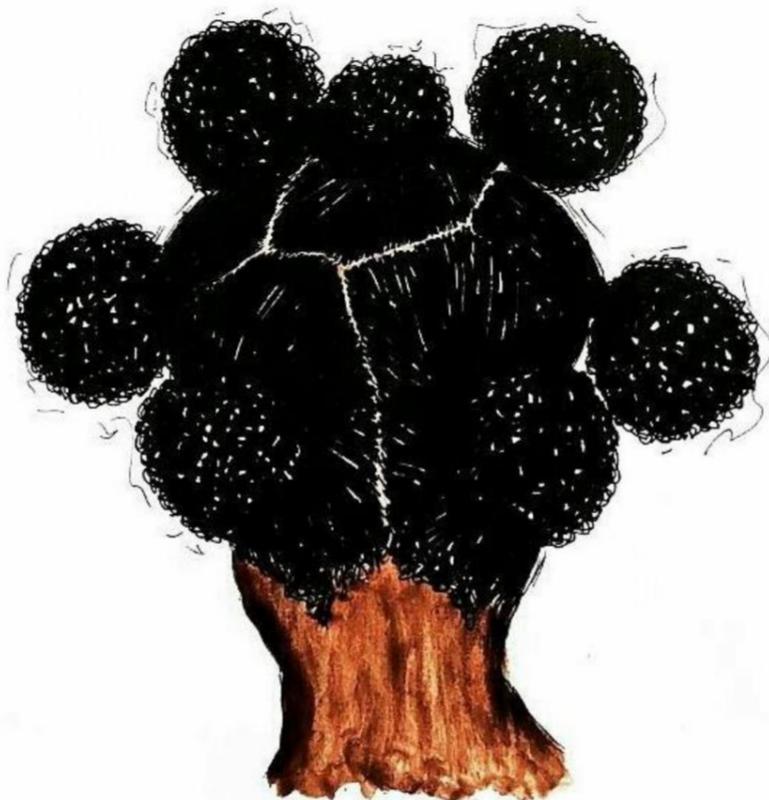
Azania Forest in traditional Xhosa womenwear



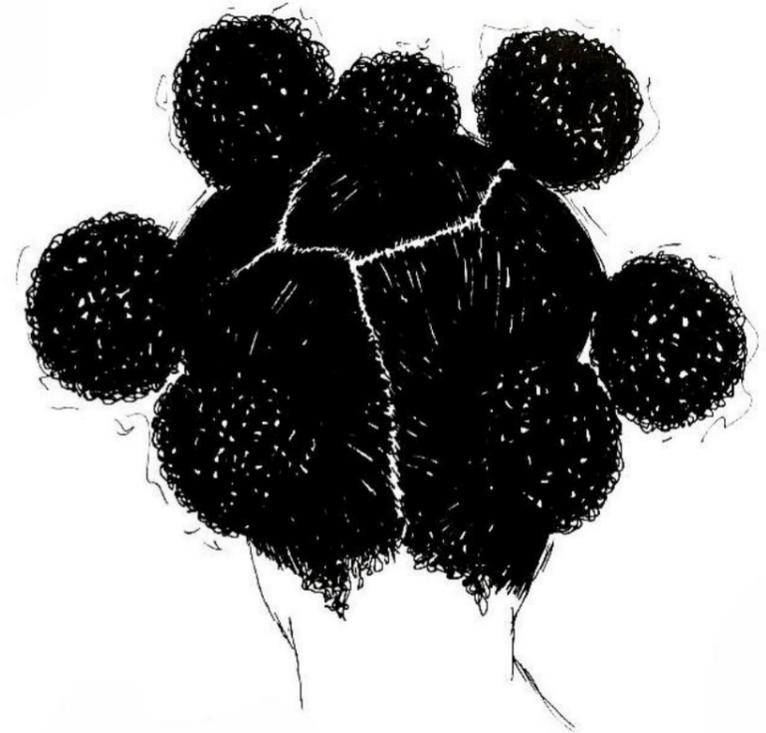
Nina Simone



2015



Ghanian traditional hair





Imaam Hammam covers



Tamu McPherson



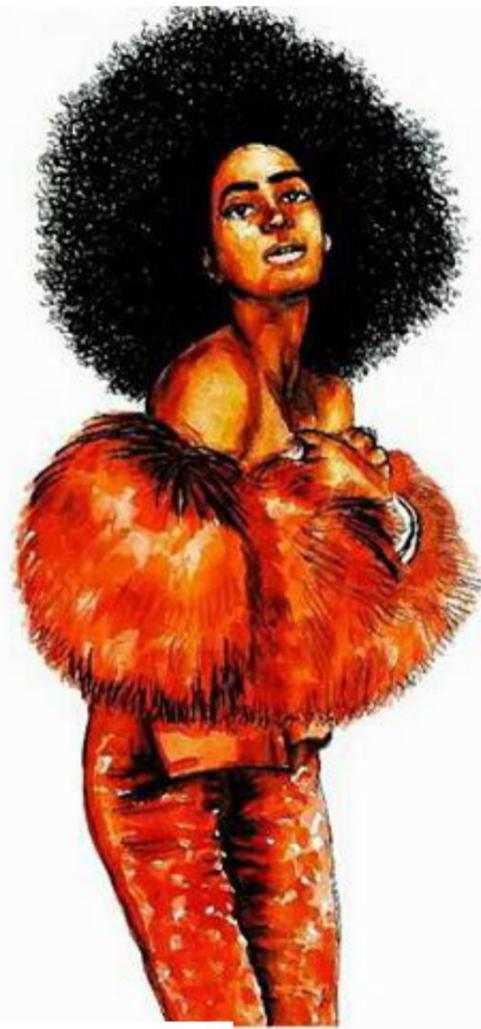
Zadie Smith



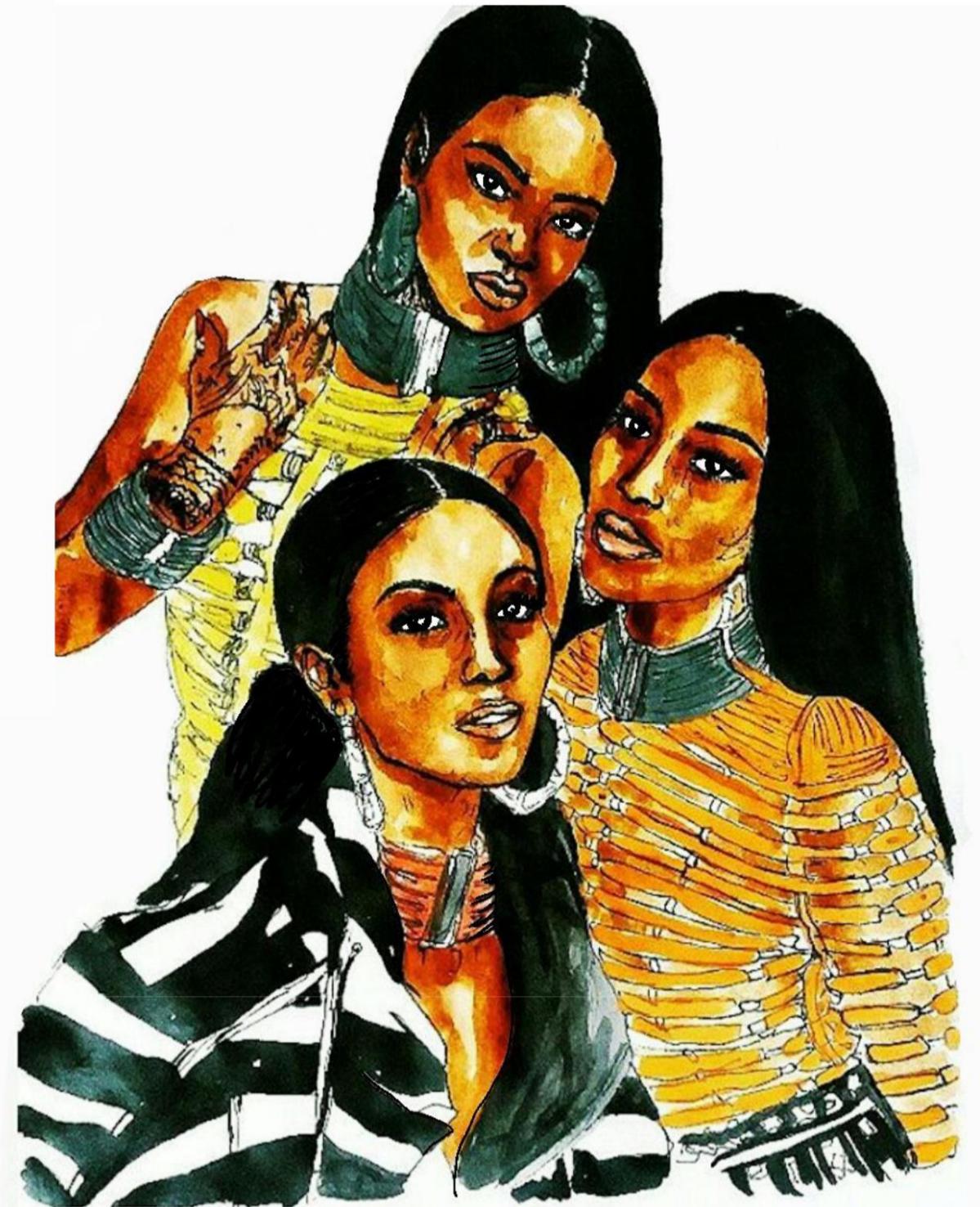
Solange 'Cranes in the Sky'



Oroma Elewa

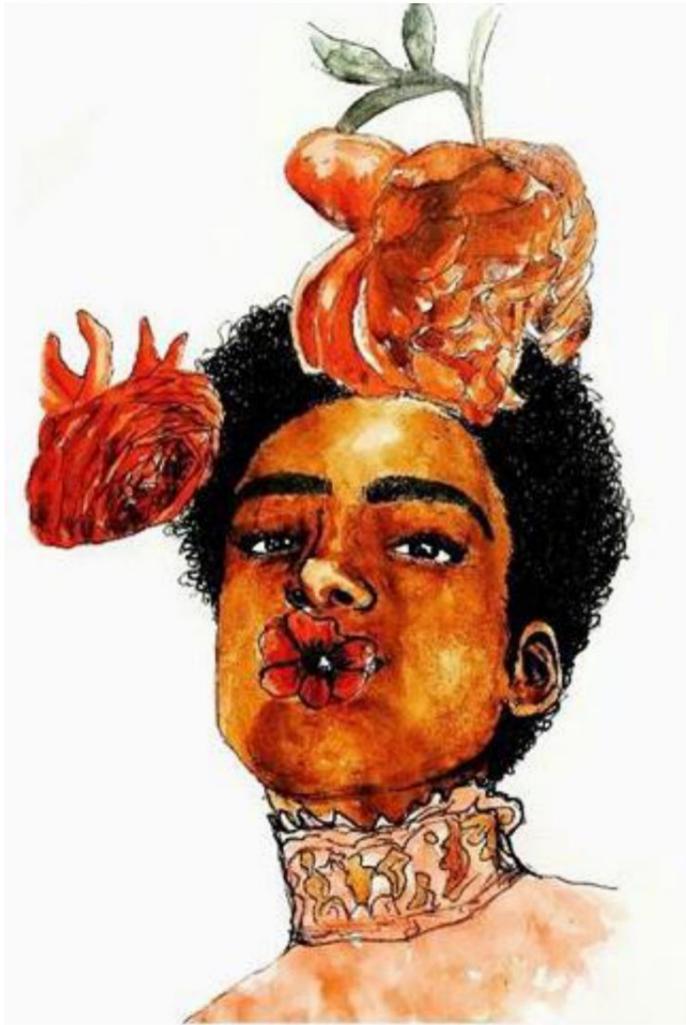
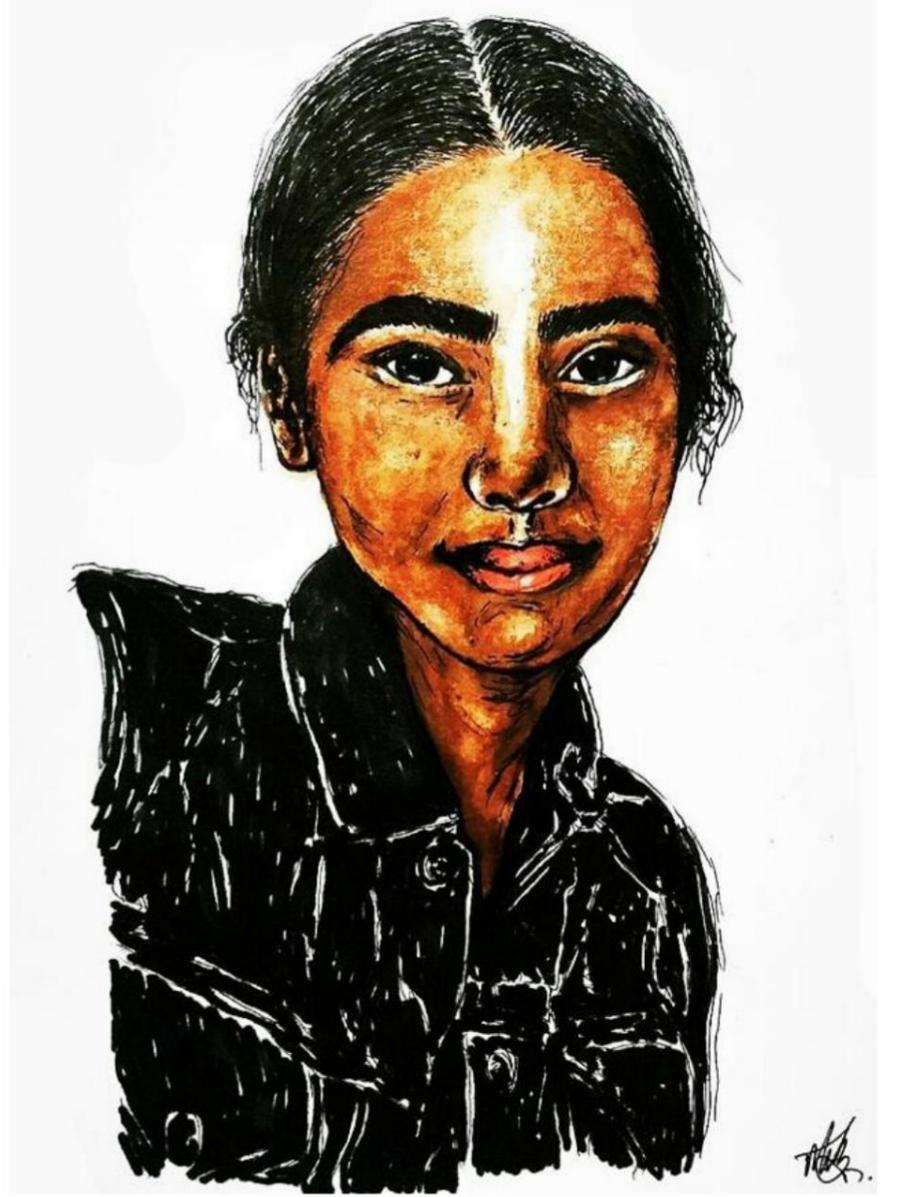
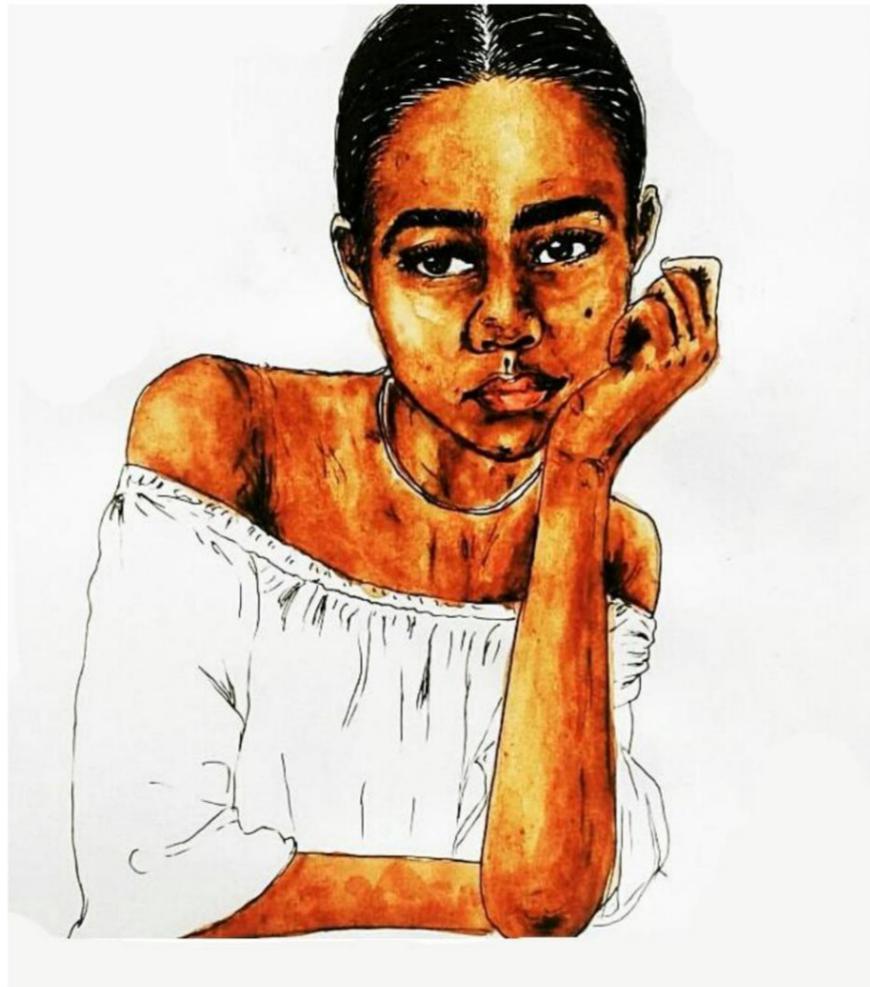
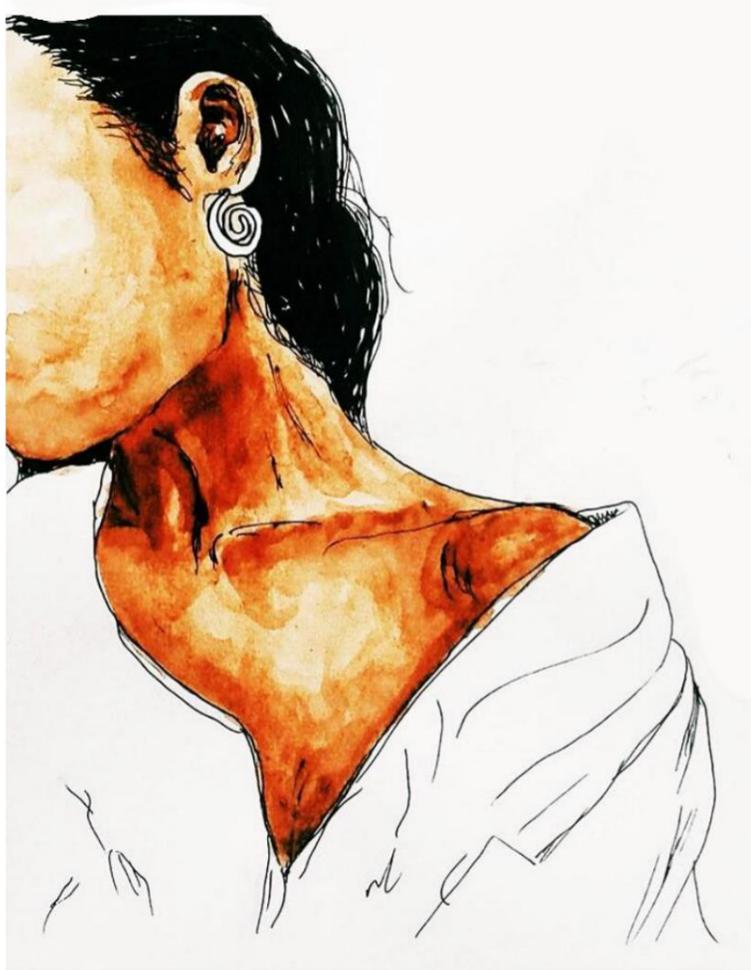


Solange



Noami Campbell, Iman, Rihanna for Balmain





Brown girl yogi



Solange



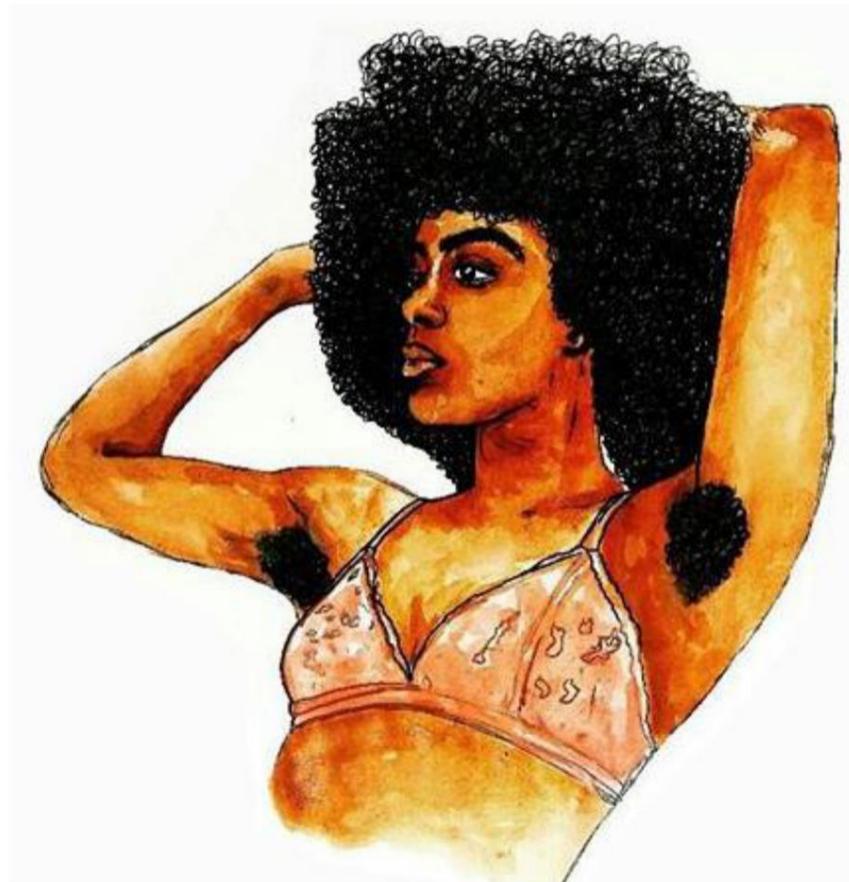
Black Hair series



Armina Mussa



Stefanie Johnson



Imaan Hamam