

I am one of the 70 million people who visit the top art institutions in the world each year. Countless times I have sauntered through museum galleries full of paintings from all the old masters. My favorite paintings are always the baroque or classical portraits of aristocratic women in gowns of rich fabrics with definitive beauty. Though rarely, if ever, have I seen someone in one of those portraits who looks like me.

My project goal was simple: I wanted to create a large, Baroque-style oil painting with a non-white subject in order to alter the preexisting narrative of black figures in art—the one-dimensional portrayal of them as only servants or lower-class members of society. My primary focus was on replicating the aesthetic of European paintings and making my piece visually appealing in the color palette and rendering of the fabric. The inspiration came from Italian artist Vittorio Reggianini and the English artist Thomas Hudson. I wanted as much as possible for my painting to look as if it was directly extracted from the Baroque era; I didn't want to create something directly provocative but instead promote a public reception in which it is normal to view a person of color painted in this way.

PORTRAIT OF A GIRL IN BLUE

Darena G.