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ABSTRACT BEAUTY

From trauma and tragedy to works of art. See how Kamiesha Garbadawala's pain ripples into poignant and vibrant paintings.

Consisting of dark colors and an array of brush strokes, Kamiesha Garbadawala's *As A Whole* painting is breathtaking. It was featured this summer, positioned in the center of the back wall of Galleria Ca' D'Oro in Chelsea. The up-and-coming abstract expressionist of Jamaican descent was raised in Connecticut but she describes how her lineage and culture penetrate through her medium, "it's still a huge part of who I am. I think it's not so much a direct Jamaican inspiration, but more of the mood portrayed in my art."

Although she was always creative, the '99 Parsons School of Design grad admits to jumping into painting in 2016. In just that short time her work has impacted many.

She recently completed Columbia University's School of the Arts' Summer Advanced Painting Intensive Program. She is an ArtSlant Prize Showcase Winner in multiple selections and an Artist-in-Residence at the School of Visual Arts. She was featured in Miami's SCOPE Beach Art Fair in December of 2017, and several New York exhibits.

Bleu spoke to the artist recently about her work and her life.

Bleu: What inspires your creativity?

Kamiesha Garbadawala: My mother was always one of my biggest inspirations and I even named my luxury handbag line (Alric Suba) I designed in my 20s, after her. I just loved that her name didn't really resonate with any particular culture.

I went through a series of traumatic events starting with a pulmonary embolism in October of 2015. Essentially, it was a blood clot in my lung, caused by my birth control pill. I'd taken it for years, so I thought it'd be safe, especially after my doctor







agreed. Yet, it was an abrupt life-threatening incident. Sometimes, it felt like I did die and was reborn in the process. Because of its severity, I asked my mother to visit. Surprisingly, she was severely unwell and passed away a few weeks later. Both of those events together really affected me. I felt lost. As a mother of two and a career person at heart, I wasn't sure what to do. My husband eventually recommended that I should try an art class, which actually became my start into the art world.

This past May, I also suffered from a Grand mal seizure - it's like running a marathon in seconds. Strangely enough, I almost feel like I have to experience these semi-tragic things to create my art. I guess tragedy and trauma are a large inspiration for my work.

As a female, were there any challenges becoming an artist?

It's definitely a struggle. You have to have faith, endurance and not become discouraged. Just keep moving forward. It's still a male dominated industry, but it doesn't bother me as much. I feel I have something of my own to offer - a story that I'm telling...it's empowering. My dad would always tell me, 'you'll be a very happy woman not because you married your husband, but because you're doing what you love.' I think as a woman, to have that inspiration and feedback from a male figure is so powerful.

What's your favorite piece(s) you've done so far?

Eden because it was my first. I just saw so much of my mother in it, and because of that, I'll never sell that one. Sugarcane is another, inspired by my

father with reference to Jamaica and his spirit. He really embodies the 'everything is going to be alright' attitude. Brainwaves, is my last in reference to the seizure I had in May. It's inspired by the EEG tests (the brainwaves shown on a hospital screen).

Do you have any advice for future painters?

I would still love some advice! I know that an MFA isn't necessary - if you want the education, that's great, but you don't need it to be in the art world. Residencies have helped me. You need to find someone who believes in you. It'll take years, but just get out there. Networking is so important - attend the shows, talk with people and go for studio visits. Don't be afraid to ask for help and find mentors. You don't need everybody to like your work - just that one person.