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Artist House Resident Dorotha Grace Lemeh shares methods of "Visual Storytelling"

October 7, 2019 | Olivia Sothoron | Arts & Entertainment | 0



Located at the end of a gravel driveway on Mattapany Road, the St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) Artist Residency House serves as a place for visiting artists to decompress and dedicate time to developing their works, as well as lead discussions and work with students. In the fall of 2019, the Art and Art History Department along with the African and African Diaspora Studies Department have sponsored artist, poet and educator Dorotha Grace Lemeh's artist residency. Lemeh's visit at SMCM is from Sept. 3 until Oct. 15.

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Lemeh, who has taught art courses at both Penn State University and Wilkes Honors College, focuses her art on narratives through depictions of the human body—usually the female body. Growing up, Lemeh observed the power and strength of women in her maternal grandmother as well as her own mother. As her mother, grandmother, aunts and great-aunts took leadership positions in their church and community, Lemeh witnessed a woman's worth and took notice of how quietly and skillfully they manage responsibilities, even in difficult times.

The death of her mother in the mid '90s sparked some of Lemeh's strongest pieces and soon after, she opened a tribute gallery in Chicago in memory of the woman who played such a large impact on her life. The moving bond between Lemeh and her mother allowed her to create powerful works centered around the relationship between a mother and her child. "I knew exactly what I wanted to say and I said it boldly," remarked Lemeh. This tribute gallery served as an outlet for Lemeh in her time of mourning as she once again felt connected to her mother through her art. "She's never far from me," Lemeh claimed, "She's never, ever far from me."

The power of women which Lemeh witnessed as a child influenced her to pursue the topic of the entire female gender. Much of her work has to do with the role of women and their unspoken power. Lemeh explained that people get confused about the roles of women, remarking, "We're so inundated...with things and images and people on films telling us who we're supposed to be...What about the soul? What about the spirit? What about those things that actually matter? They don't fade, they are strengthened."

While her works are focused on women, Lemeh does not want to force feelings upon any viewers of her works. She discussed the importance of meeting viewers where they are, as her story which she conveys through art triggers something which allows the story of the viewers to unfold. "Just because the work is directed towards an idea, it does not mean it should negate how others see it," she explained.

Lemeh's influence has come from her admiration of the strength of the females in her own life. "I want to have strong, powerful, beautiful images of women," she stated. When she feels that she has finished saying what she needs to say regarding the underestimated strength of women, she will move into another direction, but right now, she views it as her responsibility to help young women to be empowered.

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In her time here at SMCM, Lemeh has enjoyed focusing all of her attention on her art. "I care about my students too much," she explained, indicating that all of her attention while she is teaching is dedicated to her students. Lemeh has also enjoyed delivering talks to various classes and groups about her methods of expression. She also worked with senior students on their St. Mary's Projects and helped them to develop their work. Lemeh hopes that her insight will help SMCM art and art history students to grow both as artists and as storytellers of their own lives.

The Artist House will serve as a temporary home to four artists, including Lemeh, this fall. For more information about the visiting artists, visit the SMCM Art and Art History website.

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