

Clara Nartey
Artist Statement

Human vision is not an exact reproduction of what we actually see. What we do see, is to a large extent influenced by our experiences and the knowledge we have.

My work creates experiences through which we can see ourselves. It feeds the knowledge bank from which we draw in order to make sense of the world we see around us; alternative narratives we may or may not typically be exposed to.

The images of people we see, the experiences we have, and our perception of those encounters influence our identities. Moreover, there's a powerful visual connection between the brain and how it recognizes faces. Perhaps a much stronger connection than the way the brain interprets all other objects we see. As a result, I focus on the human face as a medium for shifting perceptions.

I like to explore themes of joy and beauty; identity and belonging, and resilience.

I center my portraits around intricate Black hairstyles because Black hair to me, epitomizes resilience - the human ability to bounce back from adversity over and over again. For a long time, Black people have had a complicated relationship with our hair due to being subjected to Eurocentric standards of beauty. The ability to wear Black hair is an exercise in resilience; a human trait that is to be admired in whoever possesses it.

My work combines digital painting, textile design, and free motion machine embroidery/quilting. My practice is rooted in my African heritage. So, using African motifs, I digitally design my own fabrics for the clothing my figures wear. Each fabric tells a unique story. Together, I'm stitching a complex narrative which goes beyond simple shapes, colors, and patterns.

With my sewing machine and lots of embroidery threads, I add dimension, details and texture to my work. The rhythmic motion of the sewing machine, the pushing and tugging of the fabrics while I'm sewing, all form part of my process of melding the various parts of the narrative together; narratives that feed into knowledge banks which drive perception and vision.