

## BLACK JOY

Grace Soelberg

When the Stop Your Silence organization began in the spring of 2020, our goal was to create a safe space where Brigham Young University students of color could share their stories of racist discrimination and hardships and find community, healing, and support. Via Instagram, we rapidly received hundreds of stories and began to expand our content and audience not only to people of color but to white members of the Church. We realized there was a need for antiracist education specifically geared toward Latter-day Saints that showed how our doctrines and beliefs not only encourage but exhort us as disciples of Christ to mourn with those who mourn and take a stand against racial injustice.

I was initially drawn to Mikenzi Jones's work for how it unapologetically displays femininity. Through vibrant yet soft shades, organic line work, and a vast range of skin tones and body compositions, Jones's artwork reflects the stunning essence of womanhood and all its diversity. Positive, euphoric, non-sexualized artwork for women can be difficult to find. But Jones is able to capture the beauty of women and the wondrous work that can be accomplished when they come together across racial, cultural, and national divides.

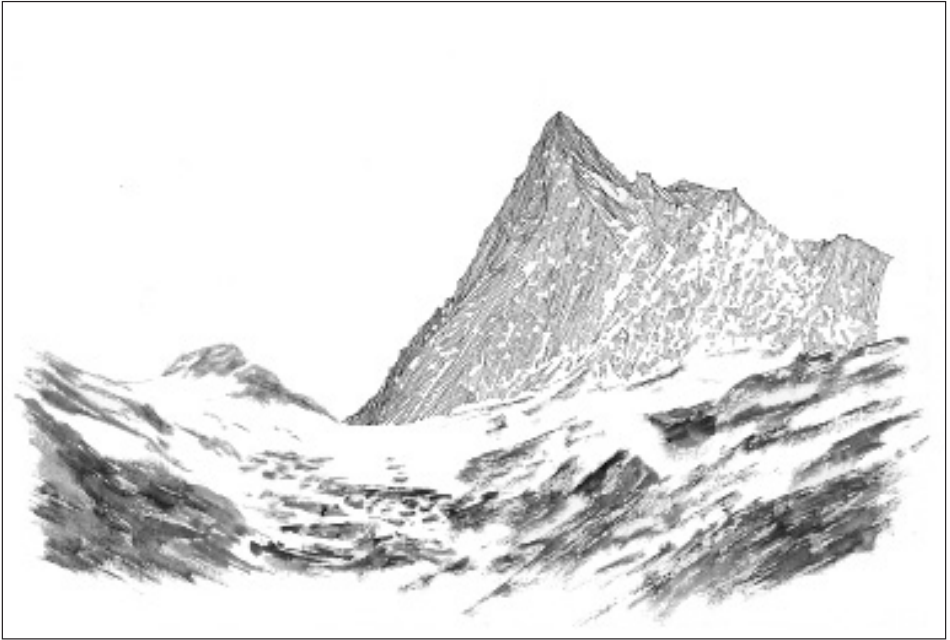
A common struggle Latter-day Saints of color have expressed to us at Stop Your Silence was a lack of representation. Whether it be in their congregations, in Church leadership, in music or worship styles, these Saints feel disregarded and unheard for a multitude of reasons. However, there was one area in particular regarding representation that came up repeatedly: the overwhelmingly whitewashed depictions of

Christ, God, and scriptural figures. The most well-known and highly circulated artistic renderings in the LDS art tradition tend to depict white, hypermasculine men. There was a lack of artwork that featured women from scripture and people of color that didn't fall into the racist "black-skinned" Lamanite caricature. With this in mind, we made it a priority to only highlight art that depicted people of color. Our page is filled with renderings of Black Heavenly Mothers, Indigenous angels, brown-skinned Christs, and more. It is our belief that our Heavenly Parents blessed the world by creating a beautifully diverse human population, and that every child of God deserves to see themselves represented in the divine. To deny someone that connection with God and to force God to fit solely in the square of whiteness is damaging to all of us. It is paramount to our relationship as human beings to see each other and God fully and honestly, to see clearly the stunning medley of divine creation on this earth.

The cover art for this issue in particular also highlights something that for me, as a Black woman, is often overlooked in art: joy. Oftentimes Black women are shown and described as strong, confident, independent, and persevering. These are all qualities that many Black women exude and epitomize, but what is missing is their inner happiness and joy. Black women are rarely given the space to simply exist and be joyous, to reside in a space that isn't defined by activism, emotional labor, and work. The Black woman on the cover of this issue effuses a joy and radiance that I hope all Black women, but especially Black Mormon women, can experience as they navigate this world. While they remain confident and strong, I hope they, too, can have joy.

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GRACE SOELBERG is a recent Honors graduate from Brigham Young University. She majored in history with an emphasis on twentieth-century US history with minors in sociology and Africana studies. She is currently on the research staff at the Maxwell Institute continuing her research on BYU's first Black graduate, Dr. Norman Wilson, as well as working with the BYU Slavery Project.



Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Alps Highest Peak*, 2020,  
watercolor and ink, 11" x 14"



# HONG KONG

Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Hong Kong City Streets*, 2020,  
digital print of ink drawing, 16" x 20"

## TRANS IN THE CHAPEL: ATTENDING CHURCH AS A NEWLY OUT TRANSGENDER WOMAN

Emily English

The ratchet tightened in my chest pulling into the parking lot. Four of our five children in tow and one serving a mission. Fifteen minutes early in the hopes that we could settle in before anyone noticed. My children insist we sit in our usual pew to the right side, six rows back on the bleached knotty pine and speckled blue-green padded benches that were clean of goldfish and Cheerios. Dressed in a freshly pressed Foxcroft white oxford women's button-up blouse and black pleated polyester women's dress slacks, I slid into the bench and practiced my breathing exercises while trying to look away from anyone who might look over. My eyelashes were subtly coated in matte black mascara, on my cheeks a light dusting of dusty rose-colored blush powder, just enough that I could feel comfortable and almost myself.

"Nice to see you back where you belong, Brother English."

*Look down, don't make eye contact, and breathe.*

"Thank you."

*Breathe in and hold for three seconds, breathe out and hold for three seconds. Breathe in and hold for three seconds, and again, breathe out and hold for three seconds.*

"Well, hello, young man . . . nice to see you, it has been a while. Are you sticking around for priesthood this time?"

*It will be okay. Three, two, one . . . let the breath out.*

"Hello, it has been a while."

I forced a smile then looked back down at the polished, almond-shaped tips of my shiny black Naturalizer flats, remembering that my toes were painted the color of lilacs somewhere underneath. I hoped I didn't scuff them on the way in.

I watched peripherally as the Relief Society president came in the room and moved from sister to sister, greeting them as they came in with their families. Her navy, floor-length chevron maxi dress moved gracefully with her from Sister Tanner to Sister Johnston to Sister Brown. A stiff and highly appropriate handshake with the second counselor, then on to Sister Hansen. As she came toward the English family pew, she sat down beside me and softly took my hand.

"I'm so glad you made the extra effort to be here. You look beautiful and full of grace."

I took a deep breath, and we wept together until the meeting was about to start.

She moved her family over to sit in front of my little family, pulling a small pack of tissues out of her purse and handing them to me with a subtle look of reassurance.

Forty-seven minutes of breathing exercises and making small origami frogs out of the program to distract myself from the anxiety of the meeting. Someone said a closing prayer. The Relief Society president returned to my side, held my hand again, tears again.

"Would it be okay if I stay here with you for a minute?"

"No, thank you, I need to go outside if I am going to be okay."

"Okay, is it okay if I check on you?"

"Yes, I will be out in the car until the kids are done with their meetings."

*Standing up, adjusting the blouse, careful to not scuff my toes. Taking a breath as two hands extend in front of me.*

"Nice to see you, Brother English. Glad you are back where you belong."

*Breathe, correct my posture after the aggressive grab and shake of my clamped-down left shoulder.*

“Would you consider coming early to help the young men pass the sacrament next week?”

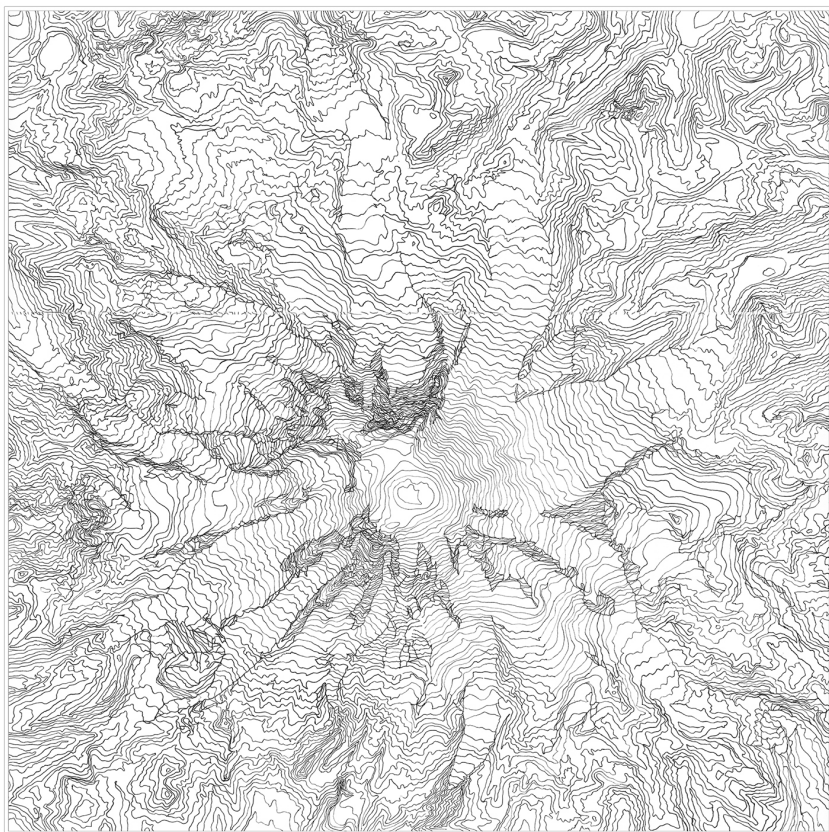
“Maybe.”

Moving to the car, I reach into my pocket, pull out one of the tissues, dab the corner of my eye, careful to not disturb the long black lashes. Grateful to have worn waterproof mascara this time.

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EMILY (EM) ENGLISH {emenglish@csi.edu} is a technical writer and educator at the College of Southern Idaho. She is married and proud co-parent of five children and a min-pin (Pepper). Currently, she is obsessed with collecting sand from Idaho’s beautiful places to go along with a collection from national and state parks.





T A H O M A  
MOUNT RAINIER, WASHINGTON

Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Tahoma, Washington*, 2021,  
ink, watercolor, and homemade  
natural pigment, 16" x 20"





# SALT LAKE CITY

Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Salt Lake City, Utah City Streets*, 2015,  
digital print of ink drawing, 16" x 20"



Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*San Rafael Reef Drawing Process*, 2021,  
photograph of artist's hand and ink on paper, 17" x 17"



Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Carrara Marble Mine*, 2020,  
watercolor and ink, 22" x 30"





# MEXICO CITY

Kirsten Sparenborg,  
*Mexico City Streets*, 2020,  
digital print of ink drawing, 16" x 20"

## ARTISTS

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North Carolina-based artist MIKENZI JONES is the artist behind Kenzi Studio Co. Mikenzi's art embraces diversity, beautiful natural tones, and earthy boho vibes. Mikenzi has a BFA in graphic design from Brigham Young University-Idaho and has been working as a freelance designer and illustrator for the past ten years. When she's not creating designs and prints through her Etsy shop, Mikenzi is busy being a mom to two small boys. Follow @kenzistudioco for new art.

KIRSTEN SPARENBORG {Kirsten.Sparenborg@gmail.com} makes art that is explorative, cartographic, earth-bound. Her work interprets the emotional power of place in peoples' lives, using watercolor, ink, and collage. Maps, mountains/landscape, and sketches/studies offer a visual memory of place at three scales: aerial, distant yet omnipresent, and intimate/inhabited. Altogether, the work may be called architectural map-drawings because it is Kirsten's education and practice as an architect and urban designer that led her to appreciate and manifest the sensory value of places. Learn more at [www.turnofthecenturies.com](http://www.turnofthecenturies.com).