

## BAKER AWARDS 2024 SUBMISSION

### PROJECT #1: Ancestors in the Paint

The *Ancestors in the Paint* series emerged at the confluence of face pareidolia, ancestor veneration, movement, and jazz + blues + R&B music. Each painting begins with a song that I *must* feel in my bones, my heart, and my soul. Nothing in this series is preconceived or sketched out. The rhythms, melody, lyrics, and instrumental arrangements in each song inform the colors of the painting. For example, “Mack the Knife” called for russet tones of dried blood while Sly & the Family Stone’s “Higher” insisted on a lot of psychedelic red. While listening to a song, the music moves through my body, out of my hands, and onto the canvas. It gets messy. And then I wait—sometimes for weeks or months until faces or body parts begin to appear out of splashes of dried paint. Sometimes they disappear or take on different shapes before I begin to outline each form with ink markers and color them in with oil and acrylic paints. I never know what or who will appear to tell a different side of a song’s story, to deepen its hues. I may include other elements, such as glass glitter and mirror pieces as the painting dictates. I do not control the outcome. I must let go, wait, and see.

My husband made the first video in 2021 of me throwing paint in a friend’s basement to Otis Redding’s classic recording of “Try a Little Tenderness.” The first image that appeared weeks later, on the right side of the canvas, reminded me of one of those old-school R&B singers I used to enjoy at the Royal Theater in the 1960s. Head thrown back, body bent, and wailing. And I knew somehow, without doubt, that every figure who appeared on that canvas was an ancestor who had come to tell a piece of the song’s story. Hence, the title of this series: *Ancestors in the Paint*. I have subsequently done the outlining and coloring of faces and forms in every other painting while sitting (or standing) next to the ancestor altar in my home. Only once has an ancestor appeared immediately after dripping paint and tears on the canvas while grieving over the health of a son and listening to Wapajea Walks on Water aka Nataska Hasan’s haunting version of “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” My gut tells me it was an ancient ancestor from the future who came to bring me solace. This is why I continue to hang out at the messy confluence of face pareidolia, ancestor veneration, movement, music, and paint to see what else will emerge to give my creative life new meaning.