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451 N Paulina Street, Chicago 60622
312 243 2129 moniquemeloche.com

The New York Times

Her Art Hangs in Museums and 'Empire'

By ANN BINLOT NOV. 27, 2015



Ebony G. Patterson, a multimedia artist who explores social issues, including race, class and gender, through a female lens. Credit Marvin Nicholas Bartley for The New York Times

AGE 34

HOMETOWN Kingston, Jamaica

NOW LIVES Ms. Patterson splits her time between the University of Kentucky in Lexington, where she is a painting professor, and Kingston, Jamaica.

CLAIM TO FAME Ms. Patterson is a multimedia artist who explores social issues, including race, class and gender, through a female lens. Her artworks, which often weave intricate patterns, jacquard photo tapestries and glitter, are prominently featured in the current season of the TV show "Empire." "The works are not just background," she said. "They really become a part of the conversation within the show."

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BIG BREAK In 2009, Ms. Patterson took part in Next Art Chicago, a now-defunct fair that supported emerging artists. Her “Gangstas for Life” portraits, which depict men in the Jamaican dance-hall scene with floral motifs, bleached skin and red lipstick as a way of challenging notions about homosexuality and beauty, caught the attention of the [Monique Meloche Gallery](#) in Chicago, which became the first major gallery to represent her. “Around that time, there seemed to be a growing interest in what was happening in the Caribbean,” Ms. Patterson said. “The work at the time was also exploring ideas around gender and masculinity, and how all of that was playing out in popular culture.”

LATEST PROJECT Her first solo museum show in New York, “Dead Treez,” which opened at the [Museum of Arts and Design](#) on Nov. 10. It features 10 ornately dressed mannequins, representations of Jamaican men in dance-hall culture, set against tapestries embellished with rhinestones, glitter and silk flowers.

NEXT THING A show opening in March at the Studio Museum in Harlem. It includes a new series that Ms. Patterson says focuses on the popular perception of black children. “I’m particularly interested in the way black children are depicted within the media,” she said. “They’re often depicted as adults, not as children.”

ARTISTS MATTER One of the subjects of her coming exhibition is Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old African-American boy who was shot by the Cleveland police in 2014. “I’m hoping to present six to eight large-scale works that explore children as subjects,” she said. The works, she said, “create a moment of confrontation” for viewers when they realize they are looking at black children.

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