

Biography

Jade Smith is a junior at Vanderbilt University, majoring in chemical biology and minoring in English. Smith loves doing research and is very passionate about pharmacology, healthcare legislation, and regulation. Smith hopes to obtain both a J.D. and a PhD to not only engage in research but also legislation and policy.

Title

Memento Mori

Artist Statement

This piece was created as a final project for my introduction to drawing course. We were given a theme for the project, but were also told we could deviate if we wished. The theme was *memento mori*, which translates as "remember to die." Typical *memento mori* pieces include elements such as skulls, hourglasses, and flowers, all of which symbolize the inevitability of death. I wanted to take elements of this theme but integrate my own style. As an African American student in STEM, I have few opportunities to express myself artistically and reflect my own struggles and experiences in the work that I produce. This project felt like an opportunity not only to draw in a style that I am familiar with, but also to depict black people in my work. When I first approached this project, I knew that I wanted the subject of the piece to be Black, because I felt underrepresented as the only Black person in my class. I wanted to find a way to force my peers to reflect on those who look like me in the work I created.

Throughout the course, I often found it difficult to resonate with the given project themes and assignments and struggled with fully immersing myself in the drawing that I created. I chose this subject on the left specifically because I wanted the frustration that I experienced to be felt by the audience. I wanted the subject to be directly facing the viewer, almost in a confrontational manner. As for the subject on the right, I chose a skull that mirrored the pose of the subject on the right but faced the subject rather than the audience. This was my way of integrating the original theme into the work. The skull facing the subject on the left served as a direct reminder of the coming of death.

To me, this piece represents my personal experience as a Black person in higher education in multiple ways. The piece feels like an embodiment of the frustrations I feel as a Black person struggling to find modes of artistic expression at a predominantly white institution. It also conveys the balance between identity, personal artistic style, and the regulations imposed through higher education courses that so many Black students struggle to find here at Vanderbilt University.