

CULTURED

ART

ARTIST AYA BROWN THANKS BLACK WOMEN ESSENTIAL WORKERS VIA PORTRAITURE

KIARA VENTURA

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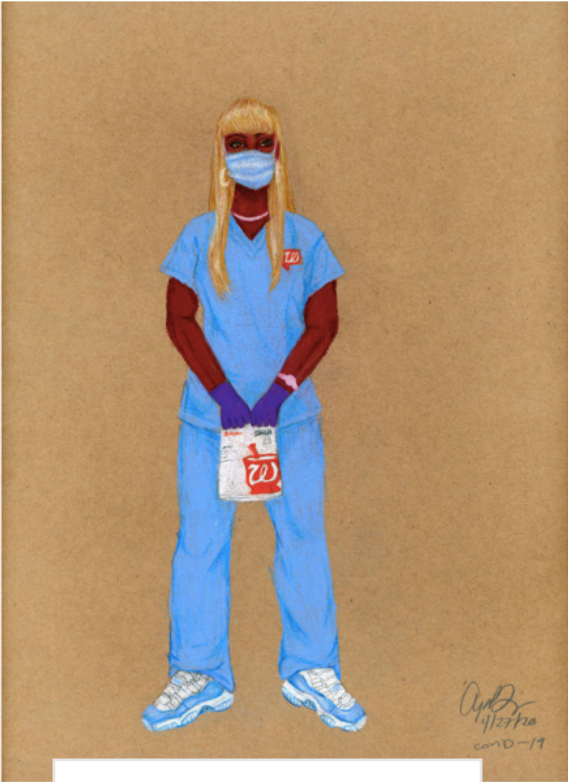
USPS WORKER, COVID-19, 2020

Many of us have been hit with this hard and swift breakup from our pre-quarantine life. But for some, working from home, acting like lunchtime is an episode of “Chopped” and waking up at 11am are not options. With her most recent series, “ESSENTIAL WORKERS,” artist Aya Brown reminds us of all the black women in service jobs who are working hard to allow us to cope, heal, grieve and move forward with our lives. The black woman handing us our prescription at Walgreens. The black woman assisting us in selecting a weave at the local beauty supply store. The black woman who leaves the packages in our lobbies. The black woman who had to leave her own family in the city to babysit a wealthy couple’s children at their beach house in the Hamptons. The black woman nurse checking our vitals and doing her best to help us heal. These are the underrepresented women who are on the frontlines, too, and risking their safety so that we can stay home.

Drawn on brown paper with Prismacolor pencils, Brown, a native Brooklynite, is revealing the diversity of the essential works we should all appreciate, one portrait at a time. Adding to the many historic and contemporary visual narratives highlighting black portraiture and quotidian life, Brown truly updates this narrative with our new everyday and responds in a loving and grateful tone. When sharing recent additions to her series on Instagram, she captions the posts with capitalized words dedicated to the essential worker in the image, such as I LOVE YOUs, lots of heart emojis and sweet messages like, “WE THANK YOU WE SEE YOU.”

The love doesn’t stop there. Last week, the artist teamed up with creative safe space Girls Only and Bronx arts and culinary collective Ghetto Gastro to release a limited edition T-shirt, the proceeds from which will go towards Rethink Food NYC, a non-profit using excess food to distribute nutritional meals to those in need, and La Morada, a community-driven Oaxacan restaurant in the Bronx. Brown featured the first drawing from her series, titled Nurse 1, on the front of the shirt, which unsurprisingly sold out, as this collaboration emulates true gastrodiplomacy infused with the intersection of philanthropy, art and fashion. The back of the tee quotes the late Toni Morrison’s words for The Nation’s 150th Anniversary Special Issue in 2015, a reflection on when she was depressed by the 2004 presidential re-election of George W. Bush:

“This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.”



PHARMACIST, COVID-19, 2020



"WENDY" CHILDCARE WORKER, COVID-19, 2020



NURSE 2, COVID-19, 2020



BEAUTY SUPPLY, COVID-19, BEAUTY SUPPLY, COVID-19, 2020