SJohn Celebrates Her Heritage, Expresses Herself Through Art

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Is there a correct definition of Art? Not according to Sharon Johnnie Williams. To the striving new artist, art is simply an expression and if she can feel it, she can paint it.

Williams expresses herself daily in her collection of paintings called "The SJohn (Sa-John) Collection." One of Williams' favorites, titled "Sundown," depicts seven field hands leaving a cotton field at the end of a working day. Their backs appear tired and stooped.

All of Williams' artwork celebrates African American history and culture. Her recent collection is done in the "primitive art" style - simple, innocent, charming and possessing a child-like quality. Some are serious, others humorous.

"A lot of my work comes from memory of background, stories I just carry with me," said Williams.

The artist describes herself as shy, lacking confidence in her talent because she has never had professional art lessons.

"I've never been taught how to blend colors," she said.

A few years ago the Kaplan native began using oils and the public demand for her work increased. Her art shows during Black History Month and at the National Black Business League and National Black Caucus have all sold out, according to Williams.

The joy the artist feels when painting is indescribable. "If it gives other people the portrayal I want to achieve - I've succeeded." Admitting she had a very tough upbringing, the creator of the images realizes now how much she appreciates.

Several of her humorous paintings include females strutting or pouting and in amusing situations.

"No way to Act" depicts two well-dressed, young women pouting with backs to each other, hands on their hips, pursed lips and noses in the air.

"Mystified," done in 1992, is not for sale. It depicts a young black girl sitting on a tree stump in a green field looking beyond the wood fence that holds her in.

"She's just sitting down gazing or punished, locked in the yard and can't go no further," explained Williams.

Black art is dear to Williams because she believes it is a tradition that should be carried on. "I do a lot of religious art because without God I wouldn't do this."

"The Black Last Supper," depicts 12 black disciples with a black Jesus at a table preparing for the last supper.

"This is one of my favorites because it shows something I can relate to as well as others. It is a black image," she said.

Painting for Williams is an outlet but her dream exceeds art. "I would like to start a greetings card line. Everybody can afford greeting cards."

Encouraging Williams are a sister in New Orleans and her husband, Stanley.

Unfortunately, her parents didn't live long enough to see the success of their sixth child but their visions - the visions passed on to her by them - erupt when she strokes the canvas. It is no longer a vision but an expression of memories.