

LESSON

Fashion of the Future

NE10 Artist: April Bey

Grades 10-12

National Art Gallery of The Bahamas



THINK

**What do materials and objects reveal
about our environments?**

THINK

**What does our fashion or style reveal
about our identities?**

MEET THE ARTIST

April Bey is an interdisciplinary artist and art educator born in The Bahamas. She lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

April Bey's artistic practice is expansive—working between painting, printmaking, collage, video and textile. Her work is an introspective and social critique of American and Bahamian culture, race, colonialism and Afrofuturism, among other themes.

VOCABULARY

Afrofuturism is cultural aesthetic that combines science-fiction, history and fantasy to explore the African-American experience and aims to connect those from the black diaspora with their forgotten African ancestry.

VOCABULARY

Afrofuturism has its origin in African-American science fiction. Artists incorporating afrofuturism in their work typically explore the role of slavery and colonialism in the Black and African-American experience today.

SHARE

“Bey’s artworks are often crafted around the perspective of the fictional planet Atlantica, an Afrofuturist alien world which redefines Blackness outside the context of white supremacy and colonial suffering. Identified by the artist as her true point of origin, the planet was named in reference to stories her Black father told her as a way to explain racism, colorism, texturism and identity when she was a child.”

—Alicia Puig

THINK

The figures in April Bey's tapestries are emissaries from Atlantica and are based on friends and figures she admires, like Marsha P. Johnson and The Cowgirls of Color. Atlantica is a place that celebrates, honors and elevates Black love, joy and queerness. How does Bey celebrate these important people with her artistic process and aesthetic?

VIEW & DISCUSS



**Don't Be So Obsessed with Me
That You Think You Know
What's Best for Me, 2022**



In Your Belly Good Sir, 2022



A Whole Me?!, 2021

SHARE

The following large-scale public project by April Bey features a Black woman promoting the fictional brand Colonial Swag. Bey incorporates a distorted jar of a hair product by Royal Crown to create a high fashion headpiece which references consumer culture and colonization.

VIEW & DISCUSS



Colonial Day Sale: What Are You Gonna Do, If You Like a Woman and Your Mama No Like Am?, 2020, April Bey.

THINK

In Atlantica's Gilda region, there are futuristic industries, including the "recycling of remnants of colonialism into high fashion." What are some of the visual remnants of colonialism in The Bahamas? How would you use those visual elements to create a piece of high fashion for Bey's Colonial Swag brand?

Source: Los Angeles Times

VIEW & DISCUSS



Power Girl (Incarceration Queen), 2018. April Bey.
“African” Chinese knock-off wax fabric, hand-sewn into canvas with drawing ink, Chinese knock-off pearls, made-in-China thread and needles. 72” x 48”. Image courtesy of the artist.

SHARE

Queen Elizabeth II recurs in Bey's work as a symbol of colonialism in The Bahamas. Bey says, "The Queen is depicted with bars of hand-sewn fabric that were purchased in West Africa, and that is marketed as 'authentic' African fabric but in reality is just Chinese knock-off fabric sold due to the 'authentic' fabrics costing too much for the actual people to afford."

CONNECTIONS

“When I got [to Ghana], the people in the markets told me the Ghanaian brands are not even owned by Ghana. They’re owned by the Dutch, the Chinese and other countries. And they’re priced so high that the average Ghanaian can’t afford to buy it anyway.”

—April Bey discussing a trip to Ghana

SHARE

Most recently, April Bey had her first solo show in The Bahamas called “*Colonial Swag*” at TERN Gallery in April 2022. Bey’s work imagines an optimistic future for Black people where “expression [is free] from the politics and victimization of Earth’s ingrained power relations. Glitter is currency and all inhabitants are glorious in their forms of free expression.”

SHARE

“The show is an unveiling of a new fashion brand that’s exposing and making commentary on all of the different forms of colonialism that are still in the Caribbean, throughout West Africa, and across the African continent.”

—April Bey discussing her solo show "Colonial Swag"

VIEW & DISCUSS



Guess Jeans: Mind the Business that Pays You, 2022. April Bey. Digitally woven blanket with hand-sewn fabric and glitter. 80” x 240”. Image courtesy of the artist.

THINK

- **How do you feel when you look at April Bey's work?**
- **What are some common threads in Bey's works?**
- **Who do you think is the audience for this work? Why?**
- **How does the use of textiles impact the experience of the artwork?**
- **What do you think the artist is trying to communicate in these artworks?**
- **What does the aesthetic of your future look like?**

VISIT THE MUSEUM

April Bey's work is a part of the tenth National Exhibition titled "*Mercy.*" This tenth national exhibition is a nationwide opportunity for collaboration with a diverse community of Bahamian artists, creatives and storytellers to reflect on the shared theme of mercy, evoking personal and collective historical experience.



ART PROJECT

**Using unconventional materials,
create a futuristic textile that can be
used to make a garment.**

PROCEDURE

- 1. Brainstorm and jot down some of your initial ideas.**
- 2. Collect your materials. Consider how April Bey used the Royal Crown hair dressing as a motif in her designs. What materials will you use?**
- 3. Combine your materials by gluing, sewing, or connecting them in another way. Make your textile at least 18” x 18”.**
- 4. Sketch a design for a garment that incorporates your original textile.**
- 5. Present your textile and garment design to your class.**

REFLECTION

- **What did you enjoy about this project?**
- **What did you learn about April Bey's work in the process?**
- **What did you learn about the materials you used during this project?**
- **How do you feel about your final project?**
- **If you could do this project again, would you do anything differently?**
- **How would you expand on this project in the future?**

CONNECT WITH US

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- **Tagging us on Instagram @nagb242 or using the hashtag #NAGB**
- **Submitting your work at the link here for a chance to be featured**

Please visit our website for more information on exhibitions, workshops, and other educational activities. Contact the education team at education@nagb.org.bs for any additional questions you may have about this teaching resource.

SOURCES

- [April Bey's website](#)
- [April Bey - TERN Gallery](#)
- [April Bey - Miami Design District](#)
- [April Bey - Artsy](#)
- [Kolaj Magazine](#)
- [Art & Cake Magazine](#)
- [The Beauty and Charm of Colonialism: April Bey's "Power Girl" Series](#)
- [Create Magazine](#)
- [Tate](#)