

38.8%

Visualizing Racial Identity in Search of Selfhood and Others



MSU Art Museum

Elka M. Stevens, PhD
Artist-in-Residence: Critical Race Studies
April 25 – June 10, 2022

Dr. Elka M. Stevens is a 2021– 2022 MSU Artist-in-Residence: Critical Race Studies in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design at Michigan State University and Associate Professor, Fashion Design program coordinator, and textiles collection curator in Howard University's Art Department. Her scholarly interests lie at the intersections of visual and material culture, international trade, and identity. As an interdisciplinary scholar and artist, she uses textiles and clothing as a lens of analysis, inspiration, and media for her written and creative works. Current research projects examine media and design pedagogy, black designers, impression management, and the digitization of a historic costume collection. As an engaged artist/practitioner, Stevens' mixed media pieces explore issues of identity, globalization, social justice, and repurposing. She teaches courses on fashion, textiles, international trade, African American appearance, clothing history, entrepreneurship, and gender. In addition to teaching in excess of 25 years in the United States and Africa, Dr. Stevens has worked as a product development specialist, a micro-enterprise trainer for the Peace Corps, and a technology trainer in Ghana. Elka has also worked as a creative and marketing consultant for businesses in the US and Ghana. Her collaborative endeavors explore relationships between artists, ideas, media, and technologies. In addition to extensive teaching, research, and entrepreneurial endeavors, Elka has maintained membership in various service, academic, and professional organizations. She received her PhD from the University of Minnesota.

In 38.8%, artist and designer Elka Stevens visually interrogates aspects of race, ethnicity, nationality, genetics, and their presentation as part of identity. Although many aspects of identity are out of people's control and largely unseen, clothing and accessories allow individuals and groups to communicate messages about themselves, their cultures, activities, events, locations, employment and so forth. Using textiles and clothing as a primary vehicle to present ideas about race, Stevens presents a mini-collection of stylized, wearable garments for plus-sized women and selected artifacts that engage both the viewer and wearer in a dialogue about race that explores how individuals wear their identities. Featured garments and accessories include dresses, skirts, and hats. A quilt and blanket also narrate the social and physical attributes of race. A second quilt reflects on ideas about heritage. The works incorporate sewing techniques, such as embroidery and quilting. Surface design techniques incorporate aspects of genealogy research and DNA testing into the collection. Archival research and imagery also contribute to the works, through motifs that include family charts which document and present wearable family histories and maps. Original surface designs are featured throughout. Color, along with other elements of design and their guiding principles, bring attention to an articulated genetic makeup. In sum, **38.8% is a re-presentation of a lived experience through worn and displayed objects.**

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