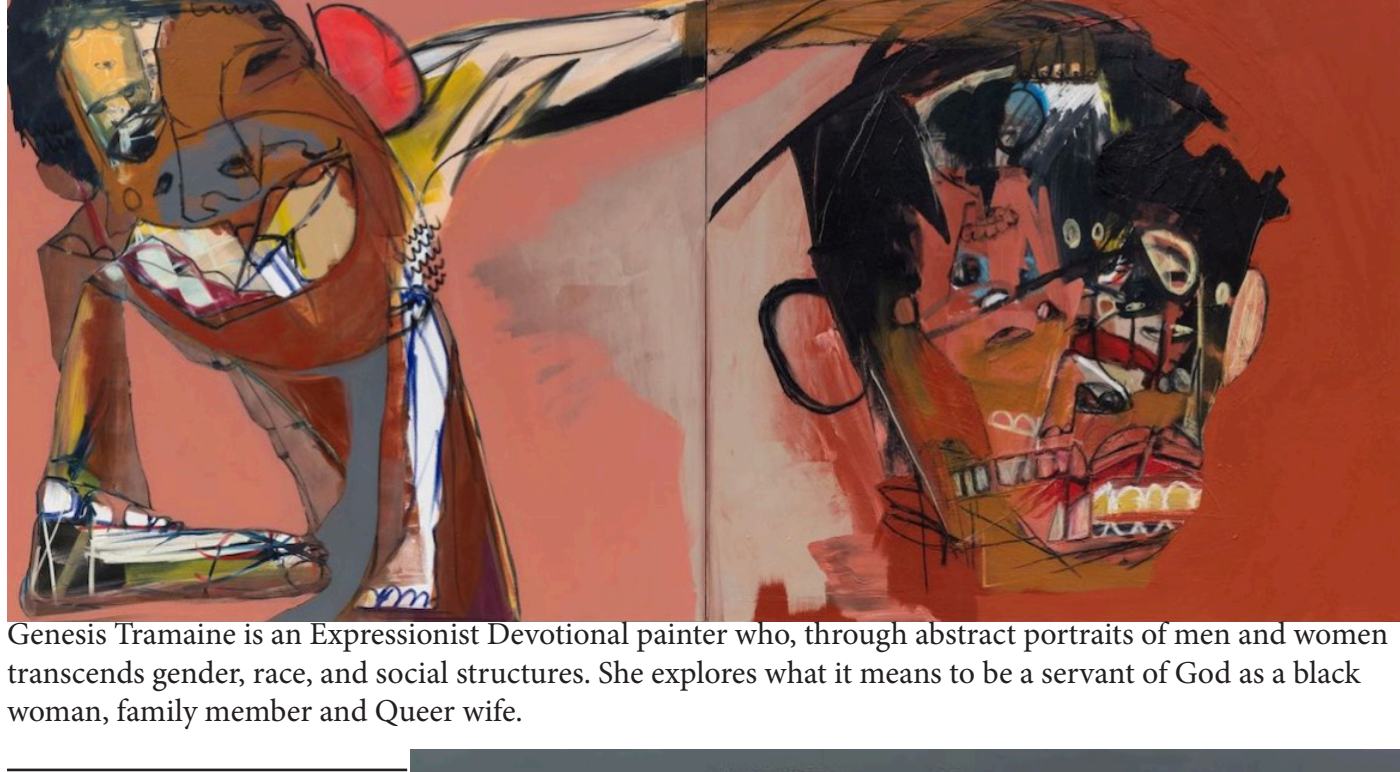


Genesis Tramine: A Queer Devotional Painter Interview – Revd Jonathan Evens

7 February 2021



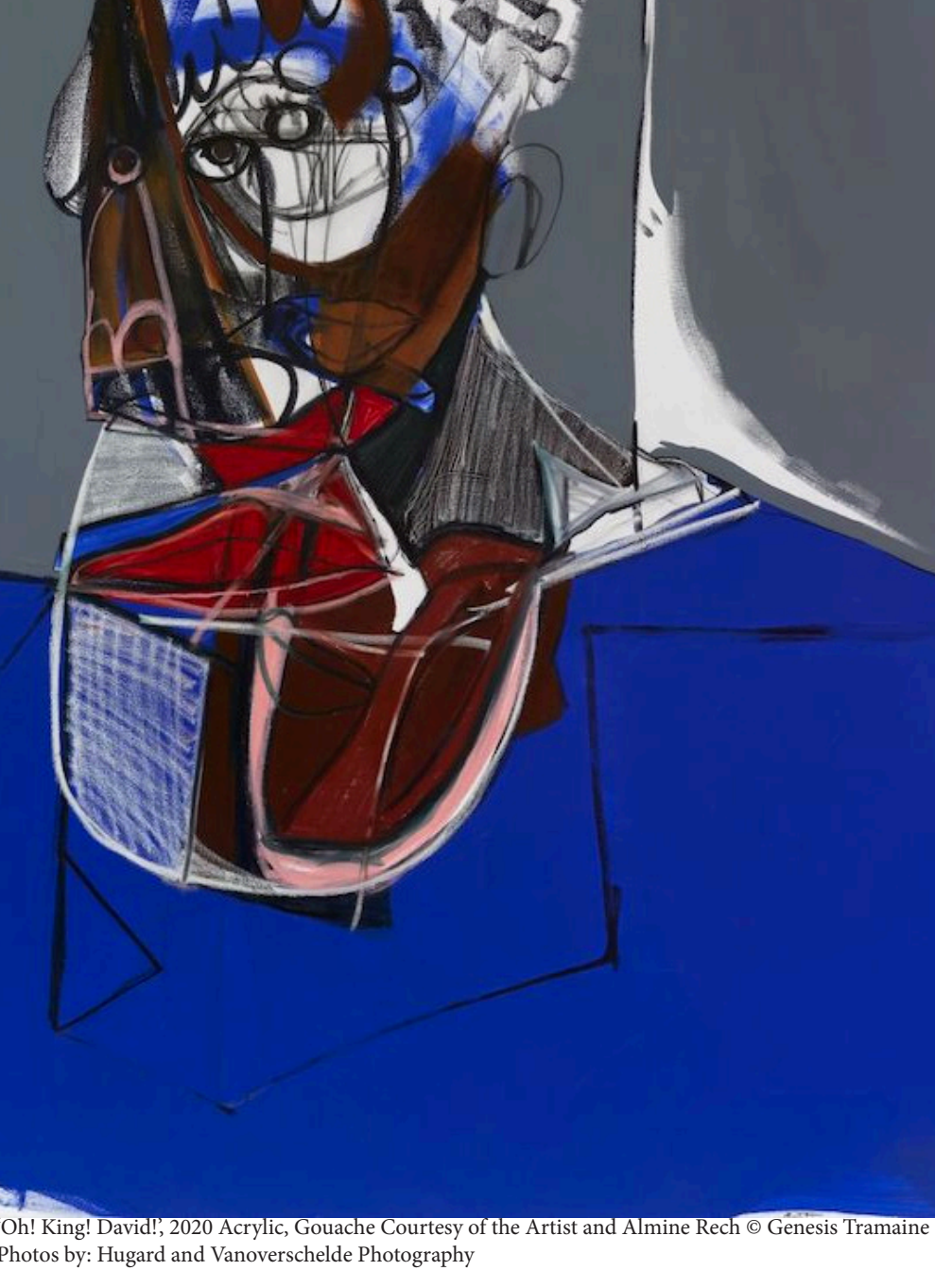
Genesis Tramine is an Expressionist Devotional painter who, through abstract portraits of men and women transcends gender, race, and social structures. She explores what it means to be a servant of God as a black woman, family member and Queer wife.

Her work references Art Brut and 1980's urban New York graffiti, reminiscent of Jean Michel Basquiat

Larry Ossei-Mensah notes that Evidence of Grace, Tramine's second exhibition for Almine Rech – the first being Parables of Nana in 2020 – serves as her creative rumination on the many trials and tribulations that have come to define 2020. He lists these as the 'COVID-19 pandemic, the resurgence of racial tensions in North America's mainstream discourse, and the Black Lives Matter movement that has shifted our social consciousness':

'Searching for a way to make sense of what she found to be troubling in our society – injustice, discrimination, and a lack of care for each other – Tramine began her quest for answers. As Tramine often does when faced with a problem and seeks to process events occurring in the world around her, she looks inward and engages in deep prayer. Tramine's prayers provided a spiritual spark that catalysed the creation of the paintings in Evidence of Grace.'

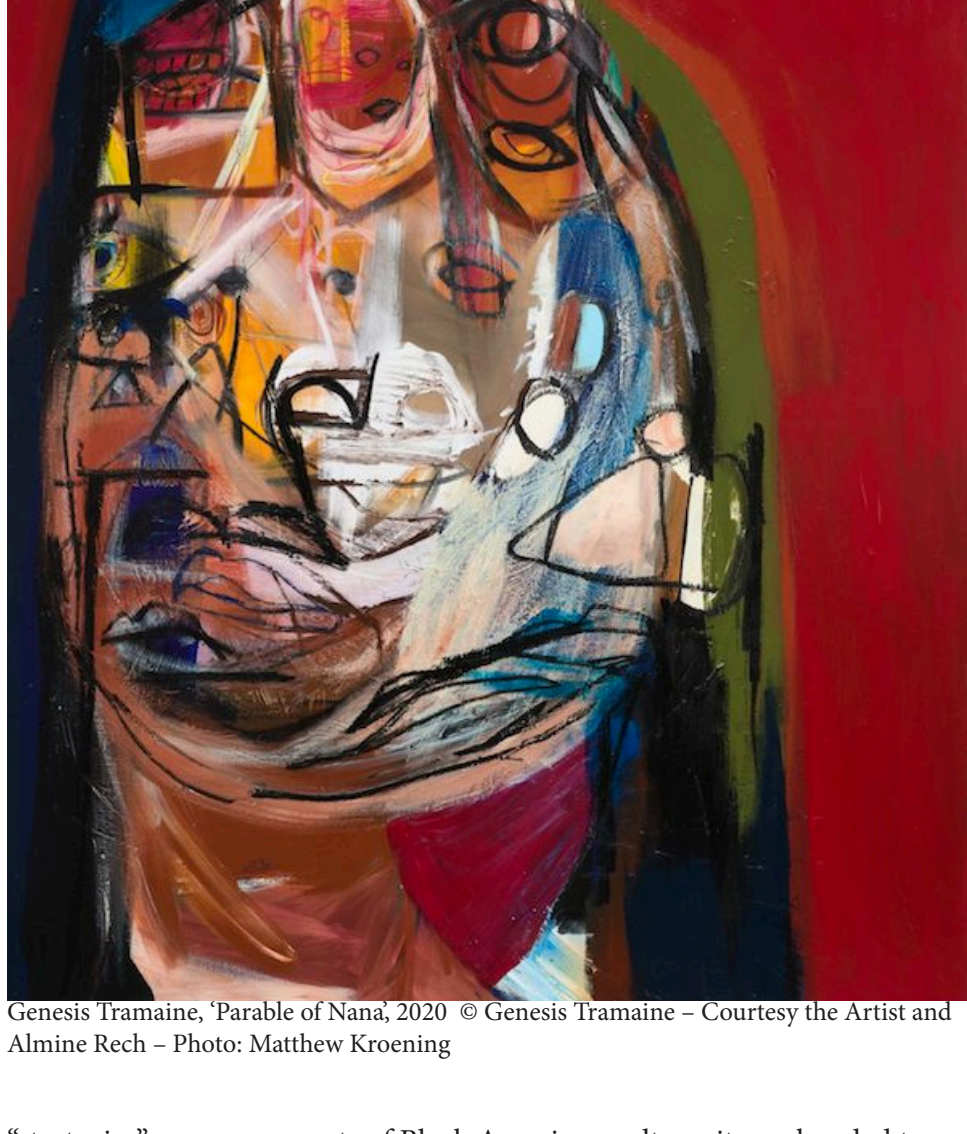
I began by asking her about this prayerful and reflective response to the pandemic.



'Oh! King! David!', 2020 Acrylic, Gouache Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech © Genesis Tramine Photos by: Hugard and Vanoverschelde Photography

Jonathan Evens: Evidence of Grace, your latest exhibition, is a response to the traumatic events of 2020, one of the most challenging years any of us will have faced, yet your works are full of life, energy, colour and spirit while the inspiration for many of the works is the centuries-old biblical story of King David. How did all those things coalesce in your mind and practice to create these paintings?

Genesis Tramine: I prayed for peace. I pray to be covered. I pray to be used. I pray for my practice to be



Genesis Tramine, 'Parable of Nana', 2020 © Genesis Tramine – Courtesy the Artist and Almine Rech – Photo: Matthew Kroening

elevated so it may help someone else find a deeper connection spiritually. When you praise the Lord with thanksgiving and you close your prayers in the name of Jesus, blessings come down. I am grateful for the fifteen portraits that are the bodies of Evidence of Grace. King David is a Saint, a man born to us as ordinary and used for extraordinary things. His life saw several trials, several tribulations, yet he hung close to the Lord. He consulted with God for each test and shared his testimony in Psalm, which ignited much of the biblical components present in the Gospel and titles of my work.

Jonathan Evens: Your first exhibition with Almine Rech Parables of Nana drew on the inspiration and strength of the women in your immediate family. You've spoken of those women providing survival strategies that have helped you through this year. How have those strategies helped and how have they helped with your art?

Genesis Tramine: Those "strategies" are components of Black American culture; it was handed to me through my grandmother, mother and aunts and ancestors. There are lessons that are rich in home remedies, secret sayings, lessons in patience and giving. Most importantly, how to sustain as a black woman. The events of 2020 were new to my eyes but were not new to the black experience. The Black Woman University has left a script for me to pull from. Almost like the Bible.

Jonathan Evens: Your practice seems to be Spirit-led. You begin in prayer, paint as the spirit leads, and the portraits that result seem to have the marks of an inner spirit on the faces you have painted. From where does this Spirit-led practice derive and what part does technique play within it?

Genesis Tramine: I've painted and drawn for many years since I was a child. I suppose much of the sketching technique is a discipline that I've engaged in since childhood. The difference now is that I pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit. I pray to be used. And I do it all in the name of Jesus. I suppose that's the greatest difference my practice has seen. I am not quite sure when spirit is in the room; I am not quite sure of the moment. I am grateful for it. However, the portrait isn't complete until the Holy Spirit's presence is clear to me. Nana taught me to mix puddly and to be confident when I pray unto the Lord. So, though I don't know the hour or moment in time because I've prayed for it, I expect the presence of the Lord to hold my hand as I complete the work.

Jonathan Evens: What part do saints and angels play in your paintings?

Genesis Tramine: I reference the Bible within my daily means of worship. There I learn about Saints and their narratives. Their testimonies encourage my walk with the Lord and painting practice. Coming up, I heard the term angel used in reference to positive energy that would stop by. I grew up with acceptance of said energy; I give that presence to the Holy Spirit.

Jonathan Evens: Contemporary artists haven't tended to speak openly about faith, grace, healing and spirit in their work, even if they have engaged with those things, partly for fear of how they might be perceived or received as a result. Are you conscious of breaking the mould in this way and what gives you the confidence to do so?

Genesis Tramine: The Lord strengthens my stride. God is Trans. The Word says that God knew me in my mother's womb, died for my sins and that by God's stripes, I am healed. That means that, my steps are ordered, my path is clear and as long as I believe and claim it all in the name of Jesus, God's grace shall overflow. I hope my testimony reminds others of God's Love. I am not worthy of any of my blessings; it is God's love that makes room for who I am. The Word has assured me that no weapon shall hurt me, and I have found Joy in the Lord so...I may as well be who God is building me up to be.

Jonathan Evens: Are there other artists with whom you identify in terms of faith infusing their work, as with your own?



'Saint Bathsheba', 2020 Yahweh! Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech © Genesis Tramine Photos by: Hugard and Vanoverschelde Photography

Genesis Tramine: Yes! I am a huge Contemporary Gospel fan. I listen to Jonathan McReynolds; I appreciate the vibrance and honesty of Gospel in his work. Very Jesus focused and encourages me to praise from the depth of my soul; to paint, let go and trust from that space. I am not quite sure what happens – Black folk say I catch the spirit. Le'Andria Johnson, she encourages an honest testimony. She is a very brave black woman and I respect her.

With respect to the fine art culture, Saint Gertrude Morgan is a stunning artist. I learned about her work during a self-residency in New Orleans at the New Orleans Museum of Art. She painted a piece called Seven Last Plagues that left me feeling affirmed, confident and encouraged to share all of what God has given me. Especially the parts that are hardest to bear witness to. She encouraged me to bear witness for the Lord. She reminded me there's a future me, a future woman, a future child, a future somebody who would be encouraged by what God uses my hands to do. Some others are Romare Bearden, Hilma Af Klint and David Hammond.

Jonathan Evens: You have spoken about your wife and yourself suffering horrific experiences in church, including being denounced, yet you remain incredibly positive about your faith and its expression in your work. What is the well that you draw on to remain so positive about your faith despite some of your church experiences?

Genesis Tramine: The Lord asks that we follow a narrow path, the Lord asks that we do not judge each other, and most importantly, that we forgive one another. My wife and I have endured things perhaps we shouldn't have in "church", but we've also received love and care, family and an opportunity to serve. I'd rather highlight the benefits of what a church can offer than to dote on experiences that I've prayed through and forgiven folks for. I praise God for every test, and obstacle – it's all for my good! I don't think God gives me more than I can handle, so I handle it. I am grateful for the church community that has wrapped its arms around me, my family and practice.

Jonathan Evens: You have said that the job of artists is to heal. In what ways have you experienced healing through art and how can paintings offer healing to others?

Genesis Tramine: Painting is a discipline that encourages mistakes and self-forgiveness. The practice has reminded me to forgive others and myself, and healing begins with forgiveness. Forgiveness is a mountain I have had to climb again and again. The more vulnerable I am as a woman, the more I can give to God. The more I give to God, the easier it is to forgive. My spaces of honesty and vulnerability have encouraged a deeper relationship with God, self-growth and my work is stronger. I have thicker skin than I've given myself credit for; my faith really keeps me strong.

Jonathan Evens: In a society that often seems to be characterised by injustice, discrimination, and a lack of care for each other how can paintings help reframe how we see ourselves, each other, and the world around us?

Genesis Tramine: Painting gives me room to see myself. To listen to myself and others without words or judgement of societal norms that characterise social injustices. Painting adds colour to an otherwise dull world. It allows a frequency that motivates and inspires others to be creative. Painting allows me to identify and disconnect from the conditions that have shaped my identity as a Black woman artist and lean on the strength of the Lord for new hope.

Words: Revd Jonathan Evens Associate Vicar, HeartEdge – St Martin-in-the-Fields London © Artlyst 2021

Genesis Tramine: Almine Rech Brussels | Evidence of Grace Until 27th February 2021