

Tracy Keza

About the Artwork

Tracy Keza's work is a cross between fine art and documentary photography that challenges existing stereotypes of the "other." Through her works, Keza explores notions of identity, oppression, and expression of marginalized communities with a particular interest in societal perceptions and treatment of Black and Brown people.

As a young African woman currently living in America, Keza is particularly interested in how diasporic communities understand issues of marginalization through the lens of intersectionality. Keza believes that representation is an essential part of the ongoing discussion on race, and religion in America, a pivotal part in the fight against social injustices. Keza is committed to the fight against anti-Blackness and Islamophobia. She believes we can better understand our interconnectedness through our shared struggles for equality but only when the diversity of marginalized voices is heard. Keza draws inspiration for her work from Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, American photographer LaToya Ruby Frazier, Deb Willis, and artist JR, and most importantly her daily encounters with the people she meets every day.

In 2016, in collaboration with Studio Revolt, Keza worked to bring *Hijabs & Hoodies*, her current portrait series, to cities with a history of racial profiling, hate crimes, and violence targeted towards the POC and Muslim communities. Some of these cities include Chicago, Oakland, Seattle, Philadelphia, and New York. This multi-disciplinary project is a portrait initiative that questions the dress code for America and the intersection between anti-Blackness and Islamophobia; it explores the stereotyping of African Americans and Muslims, looking specifically at how clothing can be perceived as a threat. *Hijabs & Hoodies* dissects the intersectionality between race and religion in America and the association of hate crimes between both Black and Muslim communities, specifically Muslim women, and Black men. The project includes an exhibition and an open studio process. Keza sees this series as a community action initiative in which portrait participants become active collaborators in an "open studio" process. In these sessions, informal conversations allow participants to openly share their experiences, concerns, and often compelling personal stories. Keza is seeking participants who question and challenge the detrimental stereotypes of being Black/Muslim or sometimes both. Her goal is to humanize people impacted by a broken system that continues to disenfranchise and disembodify Black and Brown bodies. The *Hijabs & Hoodies* portrait series is rooted in love and solidarity as well as an attempt to subvert and reclaim the very gaze that have made these garments and ultimately these communities "threatening."

Keza's black and white portraits are exhibited as giant murals—enormous faces with an unavoidable sense of visibility and presence.

She wants viewers to encounter faces and fabrics that draw a range of reactions depending on who views them. The larger-than-life portraits demand the viewer's gaze and attention. Keza has made the aesthetic choice to work primarily in black and white because she believes that stripping her work of color allows her to focus more keenly on the subject's humanity and dignity.

About the Artist

Raised in South Africa and Rwanda, Tracy Keza is a Kenyan-born, multi-continental-based photographer and an undergraduate student at Trinity College. When Keza moved to the US for her undergraduate career, she found herself having to integrate into the African American/Black culture at a time where racial tension and injustice towards Black and Brown people has become the norm due to the socio-political systematic bias that perpetuates racial inequality. As a visual artist, she finds herself in a unique position that allows her to explore and dissect issues of race, religion, gender, and diasporic identity from different perspectives.



Photo Credit: Hijab and Hoodies

She completed her pursuit of a dual major in both Environmental Science and Photography and returned to Africa with the power of both science and art to create social change. In January 2016, Keza was selected as the artist-in-residence for Studio Revolt, an award-winning collaborative media lab currently engaged in international collaborative work. Her photography-based project *Hijabs and Hoodies* was incubated with Studio Revolt during her 2016 residency and has since traveled to several parts of the US.

