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# Limelight



## Escape to art

Tallahassee artist Quia Z. Atkinson and art therapist April Fitzpatrick organize video challenge **PAGE 3F**

# Video challenge sparks artists' creativity

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Council on Culture & Arts

Nine Florida artists passed their paintbrushes — with a toss, a drop, a flourish, and even a pineapple — from over 400 miles away. From Tallahassee to Miami, they sought connection and joy in spite of physical distance with their #DontRushChallenge video that has garnered thousands of online views and hundreds of shares in just two weeks.

The #DontRushChallenge was created by University of Hull student, Toluwalase Asolo, on March 22 as a way of connecting friends while in isolation. Ironically set to the song "Don't Rush" by Young T & Bugsey, participants use the magic of editing to physically transform themselves from drab to fab within seconds after swiping their makeup brush across the camera lens.

The challenge has launched millions of responses on social media applications like TikTok and Instagram.

Tallahassee artist Quia Z. Atkinson was introduced to the challenge by friend and local art therapist April Fitzpatrick and they decided to co-organize their own video.

It was only natural that the included artists Missy Cooper, Jasmine Jackson, Kadija "Ausetiri" Christie, Briana Michelle Smith, Edith Juanah, Ntrlxchng Art and Myah Freeman, who added their unique twist on the phenomenon, not just transforming themselves, but also empty canvases. The challenge has provided a platform to share their work, even while quarantined.

"It warms my heart that we can bring a smile to someone's face during this time, even for just three minutes," said Atkinson, owner of QZ Design Gallery and video editor. "It also let people know about artists they might never have heard of, and already many are asking how to get in touch and buy some of the art."

"Artists tend to paint in isolation, so I was fortunate enough to meet these individuals and use it as a way to start building community," said Fitzpatrick. "You have to find beauty in your brokenness, and turn your pain into purpose, and usually you find your purpose through connectedness."

For Fitzpatrick, creating the video inspired her to return to art after a series



**Myah Freeman waves her brush to reveal her MyahnArt collection. She holds her portrait of Angela Davis, an African-American activist for women's rights, which is part of the triptych that includes Kathleen Neal Cleaver and Nina Simone.**



**April Fitzpatrick, the founder of Pineapples with Purpose, blends her background in psychology with art to facilitate healing in trauma-focused workshops.** APRIL FITZPATRICK

of disappointing cancellations due to COVID-19. Her exhibit at the Historic Union Bank Art Gallery, "The Pineapple Metaphor: Expanding the Narrative," was postponed on March 27.

"I had been working close to two years creating this work and planning this exhibit, and had made a lot of sacrifices of going without seeing family and friends," says Fitzpatrick, who only had a small collection of paintings to choose from to include in the video since the rest of her collection still is hung in the empty gallery.

Unafraid to dive into the color wheel, Fitzpatrick wishes she could have included works like "Lamp to My Feet, Light to My Path" in her video. The piece explores mask-making, resiliency and a transition from dark to light, which feels appropriate given the #DontRushChallenge's sudden transformations.



**Myah Freeman, a Florida State University rising senior and recent recipient of the President's Undergraduate Humanitarian of the Year Award, found humor in trying to "pass" the paintbrush while home alone.** MYAH FREEMAN

As the founder of Pineapples with Purpose, Fitzpatrick blends her background in psychology with art to facilitate healing in trauma-focused workshops. She has both seen and personally experienced the increase in depression and anxiety that has accompanied the pandemic. Fitzpatrick uses the metaphor of the pineapple to simplify conversations around mental health, allowing people to move past the "spikiness" and get to the core to address issues. She's planning to host more virtual sessions on her website in the coming weeks.

Freeman, a Florida State University rising senior and recent recipient of the President's Undergraduate Humanitarian of the Year Award, found humor in trying to "pass" the paintbrush while

## Find it online

For more on the artists, please visit: QZ Design Gallery at <https://www.qzdesigngallery.com>,

Pineapples with Purpose at <https://www.pineappleswithpurpose.com>.

MyahnArt at <https://myahnart.wix-site.com>. Kadija "Ausetiri"

Christie at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/ArtOfAuset>.

Briana Michelle Smith at <https://bybriannasmith.portfoliobox.net>.

Missy Cooper at <https://www.facebook.com/theArtOfMissyCooper/>.

Jasmine Jackson at <https://www.facebook.com/jasminepaintsdopear/>.

Edith Juanah at <https://www.facebook.com/Ediisiaa/>. Ntrlxchng Art at <https://www.facebook.com/ntrlxchng/>.

#DontRushChallenge Video Link: <https://www.facebook.com/qzdesigngallery/videos/242886663578367/>

home alone. Seated on her blue couch in front of a blank white and yellow backdrop, Freeman waves her brush to reveal her MyahnArt collection. She holds her portrait of Angela Davis, an African-American activist for women's rights, which is part of the triptych that includes Kathleen Neal Cleaver and Nina Simone.

Freeman spent last summer in Saint-Louis, Senegal, working as an art instructor for nonprofit Maison de la Gare through the FSU Global Scholars Program. The largest painting in her backdrop depicts the young boys she worked with waving brightly colored flags.

"I felt it was my duty to create art about my experience there because that's my means of communication as an artist," said Freeman. "I would encourage artists to surround themselves with other creatives like we did. We still have our group where we talk about art and I like to follow other artists so that's what I see when I'm scrolling."

The transformation from blank walls to explosions of color motivated Atkinson in her own art-making. Since going into quarantine six weeks ago, she has

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# Artists

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continued to produce her custom three-dimensional art using mixed media. She builds in layers to give a decadent, jewelry-like feel to her décor and paintings. Her portion of the #DontRush-Challenge video spotlights her painting, “Golden Divide” which she describes as “a river of glass, resin and crystals” and a reflection of her art journey.

While many of the artists didn’t know each other before initiating the challenge, Atkinson said they were excited to learn about their individual styles during the filming process and have stayed in conversation. Fitzpatrick hopes this will lead to more brainstorming on how to come together more often and opens the door for people who didn’t participate in the challenge to join future workshops and events.

“I wasn’t picking up my paintbrush because of the unexpected change and I was wondering if I was crazy for chasing this type of dream,” Fitzpatrick said. “But I’m lucky to have a tribe of strong, supportive family and friends. Some

people offered me laughs, validated my feelings or invited me to groups. Connectedness has helped me and now I can create.”

As Atkinson progressed through her own stages of quarantine — craving touch and yearning to be near friends and family — she has found solace in art and answering online questions from aspiring painters and business owners.

“Sometimes you’re in a place of having to be pulled up and sometimes you’re having to pull someone up to be with you, and that’s what I want to do as an artist,” Atkinson said.

“With this challenge, art was an escape,” she adds. “When I’m creating, the world falls away, so I think with creating this video, it was really a time out for us to all stop thinking about what is going on because there is nothing you can do but wait.”

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)). This article is part of COCA’s Creativity Persists collection which highlights how our community uses the arts to stay connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic.*