



Credit: Gowri Sunder/

"The black person seeking soul rejuvenation and renewal.
 We are tired, we are sick and tired of being sick and tired.
 Rejuvenation is key, in the age of self-preservation.
 Our bodies are fragile, but our souls are full of a thousand songs, poems, books, the rejuvenation library.
 We are asking for a year of relaxation, reflection, safety.
 The spa year for the black soul, self-love, safety and tranquility in reminder that you are not alone in the struggle for black liberation.
 Rest your body in the warm words and songs of Solange, Nina Simone, James Baldwin, caressed by Audre Lorde.
 Full soul massage, free of charge, supplied by the black love and black blood in our veins.
 We are, in love with ourselves, and each other.
 Purely refreshed, the rejuvenated body/soul, pure honey.
 New body, celebration of blackness.
 We are, in love with ourselves, and each other."

This is the manifesto of junior art student Kasem Kydd's ongoing project *The Black Soul Rejuvenation Library*, opening its first show at the Frame Gallery. This all began October of last year, in response to rhetoric and coverage of violence against people of color in the United States. With both the activist Black Lives Matter movement and the white supremacist all-right movement gaining momentum through social media and online platforms, the sharing of information began to play a central role in his conception of this project. "This information overload is unhealthy," he says, referring specifically to the psychological toll that sensationalized violence and inescapable reports of bigotry takes on black individuals. He describes the impact to be akin to PTSD, anxiety which sticks with you in day-to-day life.

This constant fear for one's safety and well being that Kydd describes, is a topic that researchers are still working to understand in minority groups. Researchers have found that rates of clinically assessed PTSD symptoms in urban communities touched by violence are comparable to those in returning veterans from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam [<http://america.aljazeera.com/story/2014/2/psych-mental-health/urviolenceinms.html>], but this goes beyond individuals living in inner cities. The impact of discrimination and systemic violence Kydd describes reaches so many people because of way people respond to sustained threat.

Sustained threat is best described through a famous analogy involving a glass of water. A psychologist supposedly asked her class "How heavy is this glass of water?" After hearing guesses of the weight, she replied saying that the absolute weight does not matter. Rather, the significant factor is how long she was holding the glass. Holding the water for a minute might not be so bad, but if she held the glass of water every day for years her arm would become excruciatingly fatigued. For Kydd, the water glass is the stress of questioning, "am I being treated this way because I am black? Is my safety in jeopardy because of my race?" When worrying about one's safety and those like you becomes highly regular, it translates into a kind of hypervigilance which is emotionally exhausting and ultimately unhealthy.

From this issue was *The Black Soul Rejuvenation Library* born. Kydd describes this project as an act of healing for those who are fighting for justice. Intended to have both an online and real-life presence, it is a place for people to pause to feel — as the title suggests — rejuvenated through the celebration of self and identity. Activism is a marathon, not a sprint. Kydd's work points to the importance of staying physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy throughout the process, and the need for spaces to exist where one can do so. Through online platforms [<http://blacksoullibrary.zumbl.com>], [<https://www.instagram.com/blacksoultrejuvenation/>], Kydd has collected samples of


black culture and the work of black artists. The website undoubtedly still displays calls for action, but it does so through introspection and self-love. To be clear, this is not about avoidance and complacency, but about countering a dangerous and prejudiced world with spaces where people of color can focus on self-care and the good there is to fight for.

The exhibition at the Frame Gallery is Kydd's first move to bring this offline and marks the halfway point of this project. The show is a mix of art objects, including an installation called "When the Squad Links up and Smashes the Militarized Police" and a public library of books where viewers can take and place literature on the subject of blackness. His own work is also placed in the exhibition, dealing with topics of black masculinity and shrines, with pieces that invite the viewer to interact with the topic.

He talks about cultural alchemy, exemplified in "Spilled My Wave Cream but Im [NO APOSTROPHE] still 360" where he takes everyday objects such as wave cream and transforms them into holy relics through the shrine-like sculpture, where they stand in suspended state. Alchemy is also a present theme in his work that deals with self-portraiture. Through the use of gold and chiaroscuro lighting, traditional to Italian religious painting, the sculptural presentation of his self portrait photography has a similar effect of the exultation in self. Socialization in this society often dehumanizes black individuals, making black males out to be inherently predatory, criminal, and less than. The spiritual love of the self in such a society is perhaps one of the most powerful acts of rebellion to counter this kind of messaging. Self-portraiture and cultural icons have a long history in art activism for this reason.

And thus, the viewer is asked to follow in his footsteps. To reflect on culture and history, to find pride in who you are and where you've come from. It creates this beautiful dialogue between creator and viewer, subverting their roles and the distance between pieces. The exhibition at the Frame is a start. It shows the incredible potential of *The Black Soul Rejuvenation Library*. He is hoping to receive more submissions from people of color in the CMU and Pittsburgh community, to fully embrace the collaborative nature of this project. He is also planning to move outside of the University, working around Pittsburgh in community spaces and restaurants to tackled projects involving self-love and economic stability. Healing of a broken society and healing of the self; if there was ever any question of whether art can be healing, Kydd's work is a force to look out for that will remove any doubts from your mind.

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CMU students are circulating a petition asking the university's admin to take action in response to the COVID-19 crisis in India. The petition, which has over 250 student and 60 faculty signatures, asks the CMU President to help India deal in four main ways.

PC: The New Yorker



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