

*Tender-headed*, based on my identity as a black female, explores African hair and how it exists outside of western beauty norms. Because I referenced family photos to create each painting, this artwork stems from personal and intimate experiences of managing my hair throughout my youth. This installation embraces and exults a condition common to many African American women, seeking to reconcile the dissonance between one's appearance and the narrow, widely accepted interpretation of modern beauty.

In *Tender-headed*, I use embroidery thread to simulate a visual encounter with the chaotic nature of African hair, contrasting with the orderly pattern on the backside of the canvas. Embroidery thread, in addition to being essential to decorative and domestic stitching, is a material commonly used in creating hairstyles to tame kinky hair in braids or weaves. The flower patterns created on the backs of the paintings are based loosely off of floral Doc Marten boots that I owned as a child, evoking nostalgia that is consistent with my memories of getting my hair braided and combed. Additionally, I chose to stitch floral forms because they are recognizable as an ornamental and feminine pattern.

In *Tender-headed*, embroidery, a peaceful, maternal action, is meant to characterize similar sentiments involved in braiding hair. Furthermore, the stitching is present where the hair is altered from its natural state with combing, parting, or braiding. While the front of the canvas shows tangled threads, the orderly backside of the canvas celebrates African hair's chaotic nature. The contrast in the thread's appearance on both sides of the canvas represents a problem and solution dichotomy, referring to how African hair is usually approached as a problem to be solved. Because many African American women may decide to align with popular beauty ideals through chemical

straightening or weaves, the back of the canvas can also represent conformity as a means of resolution. Just as grooming normally occurs behind closed doors, the backside of the canvas, while customarily unseen, is displayed and accessible to viewers.

Together these paintings, positioned on a carpet that is cut to imitate the outline of a house blueprint, create a sculptural installation. While these images depict interaction between figures, hands, and hair, the paintings themselves are connected with thread and interact with each other like a family tree. People are invited to physically walk on the carpet to enter a domestic, intimate space and examine the nurturing images in close proximity.