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Burning the Rubber Soles of Harlem-Based Artist, Kim Dacres

The visual artist gives a master lesson on what happens when you revisit a dream deferred.



[Kim Dacres](#), a Jamaican-American sculptor, has captivated the [Home & Texture](#) team with her unique [artwork](#) that repurposes recycled vehicle materials. Her innovative approach transforms tires and rubber from cars and bicycles into striking [sculptures](#).

Dacres' artwork powerfully reminds us of the potential for beauty and meaning in materials we might otherwise discard. By turning waste into thought-provoking pieces, she challenges our perceptions of environmentalism. As a native of the Bronx, Dacres draws inspiration from the multifaceted personalities within her community. Through these lenses, she explores how individual experiences influence perceptions. With this in mind, the ongoing artistic focus of her art centers on portraying people of color in everyday situations, touching on themes such as spatial entitlement and many other culturally sensitive topics.

In our exclusive interview with the artist, we dived deeper into her inspirations and the origins of her work with recycled materials. Read on to discover more about Kim Dacres and her artistic process.

Home& Texture: You have become known for your visual art, specifically using rubber tires. What made you gravitate to this material for your work?

Kim Dacres: Like Black people, tires are everywhere, coming in all shapes and sizes and with varying skills, contextual experiences, and purpose. The material was a constant presence in my childhood through adulthood and the means for me to get from one place to another physically and emotionally. I think there is a kinship between being mobile, durable, and useful and then discarded unceremoniously or a general willful or flippant ignorance towards a person or an object's origins or life experiences.

H&T: How does your cultural heritage influence your art?

KD: Answering in a few veins. First, both of my parents are hardworking and disciplined people who immigrated from Jamaica to America. They instilled in me the automaticity of showing up every day for the work that you do, which continues to inspire me even today. My work is very labor intensive and is created over a series of days, weeks, and sometimes months.

Second, I grew up in a section of the Bronx known for its tire and auto body shops. Going about life every day and passing these business, the stacks of tires most certainly had an impact on my practice; notably the smell. Lastly, shout out to my mommy, Marcia, for always decorating our home with art inspired by the continent.

H&T: What inspired you to pursue art full-time?

KD: Becoming an artist first occurred to me years ago in undergraduate school, but then the reality of needing consistent income post-school—and the late 2000s economic crisis quickly grounded me. I also wanted to have a clear career so my parents wouldn't worry about me being able to take care of myself. I loved teaching and working in schools with young people. But, working in spaces where the adults you work with don't necessarily value your cultural experience, work ethic, or joy would make anyone go back and revisit a dream deferred. After working in New York City public schools and in education, working for myself felt like a natural progression, a return to the other degree I studied in undergraduate school. I wanted and needed a change of scenery and purpose.



Photo credit: Anthony Artis

H&T: As a Black woman and artist, do you face any challenges presenting your art form to the general masses?

KD: One of the biggest challenges is the lack of depth on how folks approach or opt to interrogate me about my work without doing research beforehand. This, in addition to a general decline in literacy skills, the fine arts community feeling very opaque, less focus on sculpture, and a general lack of knowledge about my chosen material, makes the focus more about filling in those knowledge gaps as opposed to whatever it is I am making.

My identity as a Black queer woman or flatly an “artist working with tires” becomes the default foundation versus the art and craft and why of what I make. I don’t think this is unique to the general masses, as the art ecosystem tends to flatten artists. I think the next biggest challenge is an automatic and embedded devaluation of Black women and queer folks, in general, coming from all sides. This leads to constant correction, teaching, and reframing to encourage people to respect you.

H&T: Do you have any artists who inspire you to create?

KD: It’s not just a matter of do I and more of how many. Yes—a range of visual, literary, and musical artists inspire me not just to create but to get up out of bed every day. These artists, my friends, and my family are constant sources of inspiration.

At the moment, top of mind:

Writing: Toni Morrison: “The Source of Self-Regard,” Ta-Nehisi Coates: “The Message,” N.K. Jemison: “Thousand Kingdoms Series.”

Music: Love songs in general because being an artist is like one big love story full of heartache, hope, and wonder—Whitney Houston, Glorilla, Stevie Wonder, The Chi-Lites, and Beyoncé.

Visual Artists: My colleagues who inspire the rare combination of joy, awe, discipline, and wonder in me—Melissa Joseph, April Bey, Jeffrey Meris, Bony Ramirez, Murjoni Merriweather, Layo Bright, and others.

Plus, of course, those who remain a constant inspiration through their mentorship by proximity or their mentorship by merely existing: Chakaia Booker, Kara Walker, Robert Pruitt, and Barbara Chase-Riboud.

This article has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.