

## Stephen Friedman Gallery

WABE

Artist Deborah Roberts 'Emancipates' Black Girlhood in Spelman Exhibit

Myke Jones

25 January 2018

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"The Evolution of Mimi," which conflates the album titles "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" and Carey's "The Emancipation of Mimi," is on display at Spelman College Museum of Fine Art until May 19. CREDIT COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Here are a couple names that may not get mentioned much on "City Lights": Lauryn Hill and Mariah Carey. Those two artists served as sources of inspiration for Austin-based artist Deborah Roberts, as well as providing the title of her new exhibit.

"The Evolution of Mimi," which conflates the album titles "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" and Carey's "The Emancipation of Mimi," puts selections from the last decade of Roberts' work onto the walls of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art.

"Lauryn Hill was so powerful and she knew who she was and her own identity," Roberts says. "And Mariah Carey was going through this thing where people [were questioning] whether she was black or not, whether she was black enough. I wanted to merge those two ideas into what was black feminism."

The artist's collage style focuses on the figures of young black girls between ages eight and ten, often rearranging their faces and swapping their limbs around in an exploration into ideas of childhood innocence versus cultural perceptions of young women of color.

"How has black beauty been imagined?" the artist asks. "If you're eight, nine, and ten, and all the images of beauty that you see on TV and in ads are white faces, then where does your beauty lie? And how does that challenge you?"

The exhibit marks Roberts' first solo museum show and contains more than eighty of her works from galleries and collections all around the country.

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"At this moment, when so many ideas and questions are being put before young girls, this is an incredibly relevant topic," says Museum director Andrea Barnwell Brownlee. "How do we think about ourselves?"

"Deborah Roberts: The Evolution of Mimi" opens with a reception Thursday at 6:30 p.m. The exhibit is on display through May 19.