



7 Mile Fly Girl

Date

2018

Primary Maker

Jamea Richmond-Edwards

Medium

Pigment print with silkscreen diamond dust and gold foil

Description

In her mixed-media print *7 Mile Fly Girl* Jamea Richmond-Edwards celebrates the fashion aesthetics popular in the Detroit neighborhood in which she grew up during the 1980s and 1990s. The piece centers around a single, female figure depicted in grayscale. The soft tonal transitions and curvilinear shapes in the face and hair contrast with the angularity and colorfulness of the surrounding pieces of paper including a dusting of glitter and application of gold foil around the head of the woman. Feathers flanking the figure's arms suggest wings—perhaps paying homage to Richmond-Edwards's forebears (the artist's ancestry is Muscogee, Choctaw, and African American)—and communicate the figure's "flyness" and confidence: "She's front and center and

that's what we aspire to be." Wings also imply an ability to take flight from the harsh, everyday realities of life in a neighborhood plagued by drugs and violence, and the figure's inward focus suggests someone in the course of gathering great strength. Evoking a kind of shrine, *7 Mile Fly Girl* honors the resilient women who contributed to the vitality of Richmond-Edwards's urban community. Richmond-Edwards created *7 Mile Fly Girl* for *All That I AM*, a series of print editions published by Art+Culture Projects in partnership with curator Larry Ossei-Mensah. Using contemporary art to examine the complexities of cultural identity, the series featured Richmond-Edwards alongside Deborah Roberts—both of whom use figuration to explore the intricate layers of the African American experience—for its second installment. Richmond-Edwards's piece is part of her series "7-Mile Girls," which comprises thirty mixed-medium collages portraying girls that Richmond-Edwards grew up with around 7 Mile, a community located off 7 Mile Road in West Detroit. Incorporating acrylic, watercolor, spray paint, glitter, tulle, and cut paper, the collages take as a point of departure the "fly" fashion Richmond-Edwards's cohort embraced. The ability of fashion to serve as a marker of status and tool of empowerment is a theme that runs through much of Richmond-Edwards's work, communicating what the artist refers to as "the belief that, as a black woman, if I present myself a certain way, perhaps the world will treat me differently." She describes Detroit in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a "middle-class city" known for its flamboyant style and abundance of high-end brands: "When blacks first migrated to Detroit from the South, those who had upward mobility moved to the west side and so there's this sort of elitism that exists there. . . . People who worked hard, spent their hard-earned checks on going to the mall and to these luxury boutiques to acquire these things. But then you had the boosters." An integral part of the urban landscape, boosters were those who stole these opulent goods and sold them out of their cars or at beauty salons and barber shops. Black women boosted with the intention of reaching a higher status, adorning themselves with luxury brands to change society's attitudes toward them. Yet a separate black fashion aesthetic persisted—one sometimes coopted by the whiter mainstream. As Richmond-Edwards notes, "I remember I saw a black woman who had a shirt on and it said something like, 'This is ghetto until it's fashionable.' It's this idea that when [certain trends] are viewed as low-brow or kitsch, you were just looked down upon. I think that is part of the conversation, so this is just about celebrating our aesthetic." "7-Mile Girls" thus pays homage to a black aesthetic and expression while acknowledging the complex societal ramifications of capitalism. Alongside her exposure to the boosted goods in her neighborhood, Richmond-Edwards's first introduction to couture fashion came from leafing through the back pages of *Ebony* magazine, where a section titled "Fashion Fair" presented fashion shows featuring black women. Coinciding with societal attitudes that did not recognize black women as luxury-goods consumers, the absence of black bodies in glossy magazines like *Bazaar* or *Vogue* stood in stark contrast to these pages of the iconic African American publication. "That was a huge inspiration for me," Richmond-Edwards says, "because you just didn't see us." Jamea Richmond-Edwards graduated with a BA from Jackson State University in 2004 and earned an MFA from Howard University in 2012. Her artwork has been exhibited at venues including the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington, the California African American Museum in Los Angeles, the Charles Wright Museum in Detroit, and Kravets Wehby Gallery in New York. In 2013, the

Huffington Post named her one of “30 black artists under the age of 40 to know.” She currently lives in Maryland with her husband and three sons and works in Washington, DC. Mary Bei Prince, Class of 2020

Dimensions

Image: 20 × 16 in. (50.8 × 40.6 cm) Sheet: 24 × 20 in. (61 × 50.8 cm) Frame: 27 7/8 × 23 7/8 × 1 5/8 in. (70.8 × 60.6 × 4.1 cm)