

NINA CHANFL ABNEY



2017-2018 DUKE/UNC NANNERL O. KEOHANE
DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSOR

Filling large canvases with colorful shapes, words, numbers, and a wide range of characters, visual artist and muralist Nina Chanel Abney creates work that touches on narratives of politics, race, celebrity, consumerism, and other controversial topics. She addresses questions about the dynamics of power and responsibility throughout her work and describes it as “easy to swallow, hard to digest.”

Since receiving her MFA from the Parsons School of Design in 2007, Abney has received national recognition. *Vanity Fair* magazine wrote that Abney is “championing the Black Lives Matter movement with a paintbrush” while *Paper* magazine called her one of the “Next Irascibles.” New York City gallery Kravets|Wehby signed her soon after she finished graduate school and her work is present in important collections around the world, including the Brooklyn Museum, Bronx Museum, and the Burger Collection in Hong Kong. Her first solo museum exhibition,



Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush, opened in February 2017 at Duke’s Nasher Museum of Art.

“My overarching aim is to unite many of the themes found in my work, and through my process collaborate with faculty across the university,” says Abney of her role as a Nannerl O. Keohane Distinguished Visiting Professor. “I want to take time to utilize the combined university acumen,” she says, noting that there are many areas of study across the UNC and Duke campuses that overlap with her work.

Abney sees parallels between her work and a wide range of academic departments including those of African, African American, and Diaspora studies; American Studies; and Sociology, as well as with departments



addressing the topics of race and government, food and identity, and medicine. She is eager to explore university connections on multiple fronts and to avoid “easy definition” in any of her projects. For instance, she says, “my fluid and intentional use of ambiguity on the subjects of race and gender would be interesting to examine through the lens of public policy.”

During her residency, Abney will also connect with faculty to discuss the needs and interests she could reflect in a community mural and begin collaborating with local organizations on creating that mural somewhere in Chapel Hill. “The idea of spending time on the campus is invigorating,” she says. “[I’m excited about] having access to resources, both human and spatial, and to current regional discussions. Most of my time has been spent in the Midwestern and Northeastern parts of the U.S. and I believe the South has such rich elements to add to cultural storytelling.”

“My vision is that the time I spend on campus with faculty, staff, and the student body will be mutually valuable and broaden perspectives holistically,” she says. “The time spent with UNC and Duke will of course impact my process and I look forward to working in new mediums and expanding or collapsing parts of my practice.”

- MICHELE LYNN

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WHAT NINA IS WORKING ON

Creation of a Permanent Mural in a Public Space in Chapel Hill

Roundtable Discussions on Topics Such as Race and Government, Food and Identity, and Medicine

Open Studio Time at Duke University