

Our stories are formed by the impactful moments of our lives being woven together. Oftentimes, as we recount our journey, the traumas and obstacles we were forced to overcome take center stage. For Melvin Nesbitt Jr.; however, he has unearthed the memories of joy and excitement that, while pivotal to our journeys, can be overshadowed. A self-taught artist, he captures enthralling narratives of day-to-day life in the Black American community through mixed media collages that celebrate the unheard stories within our society.

Skilled in painting and drawing from a young age, it was not until later in life that Nesbitt discovered the realm of collage. What was meant to be a skill for the preparatory stages of his paintings became the foundational medium of his practice as he was able to incorporate found objects, archival elements, and dynamic textures into his figurative narratives. Now immersed in this experimental realm that felt as if it had limitless possibilities, Nesbitt's work became imbued with his spirit.

The works he creates combine printed paper, recycled materials, wire, fabrics, and other easily discarded items. He constructs an archive. The experience of the everyday in the present collides with the recreated scenes of his youth exposing in a single image the multitemporal experience of memory. Atop the layers of material, he adds his own artistic touch. Acrylic paints with the occasional crayon or pastel ensure that the materials undergo a metamorphosis, refusing to be left untouched by the creative process.

His works are portals back to specific moments of Nesbitt's life. Raised in a public housing neighborhood and then the rural countryside of South Carolina, he makes a deliberate effort to convey the strength of his community, the bonds of friendship, and the support of his family as opposed to the struggles that would arise in his life. In doing so, what emerges from these scenes is a critical investigation into how we understand the role of the Black community in our modern American social fabric. What forms are storybooks. The bold saturated palettes exude a playful and whimsical energy, the story of Black American life is reconceived with positivity and inclusivity rather than burdened by the weight of systemic oppression.

The works are a celebration of life, community, and culture that is unveiled when we unlock new memories, finding light in the darkest of times. While Nesbitt's work is often autobiographical in nature, he touches on the innocence, and loss of it, that resonates with us all. Young black children can see themselves portrayed in art, culture, and history in a positive manner that shapes their understanding of themselves and their outlook on the future. Those who have become men and women are asked to rethink how they envision their personal stories to find the hope and beauty that exists within. Through the power of nostalgia within Nesbitt's captivating works, audiences find themselves wishing to reclaim their memories, their heritage, and their stories.