

Chantal Chandler

UNLV Calvert Award

Creative Works Entry

19 April 2023

Artist Statement

Who are you without your hair? Are you still beautiful? Are you still a woman? These questions flooded my mind as my exhibition partner, Tabiya Conyers, and I were in the process of creating our exhibition in the UNLV Lied Library about the C.R.O.W.N. Act (Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) entitled *Wearing My Crown*.

I was graciously invited to be part of this exhibition for my photographic and art work, my work ethic, and for my personal experience in this subject. Being a person of mixed race (Black, Mexican, and American Indian) I know first-hand how it feels to continually be discriminated against because of my skin and hair. As a mixed individual I was not accepted by any race group because I was considered “too black” for white people and “too white” for black people. When I would go to salons, hairdressers, black or white, did not know how to do my hair. I learned early on that my hair and I were considered “different” which caused me to create an individual culture of acceptance within myself.

One year ago my high school sweetheart, partner, and father of my three-year-old son unexpectedly passed away. Upon hearing the news my heart crushed like a broken fragile wine glass scattered on the floor in a million pieces only to be trampled underfoot by unaware

pedestrians on a busy street. The finality of his untimely death saturated my soul, seemingly infecting me like nuclear radiation –Chernobyl status!

The contrasting combination of my personal experience (with my race and hair) and the unwanted personal experience of grief served as unique “ingredients” enabling me to create a safe space to personify a positive voice for celebrating all natural hair types in the workplace, school, our nation, and thus the world. With this in mind I created a clear focus on the emotion I wanted to convey in this project.

It was crucial for me to highlight the importance of radical self-love and in turn self-acceptance, as well as create a vehicle to assist me in coping with grief. This is when I decided to shave my head as a protest against what is “acceptable” in modern day American society. Challenging racial, gender, cultural, sexuality identities and the like. Begging the question, “Who are you without what you individually identify with?” My main purpose was to showcase that I am, you are, we are all beautiful, accepted, and loved apart from it all –let’s wear our diverse crowns together, uniting as one.