

Walter Price Research Paper

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Walter Price, *Discomfort*, 2022. Acrylic and gesso on canvas, 40 × 40 inches (101.6 × 101.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Zeshan Ahmed. Collection of David Lewis and Anne Ackerley, New York.

Walter Price is a 20th-century contemporary Black American painter. He was born in 1989 in Macon, Georgia. After high school, Price served four years in the U.S. Navy before studying at The Art Institute of Washington in 2011, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts. He went back to school in 2014 and graduated with an Associate's degree. Price is currently living and working in Brooklyn, New York. From his work in the Navy, Price wakes up at sunrise, does a rigorous exercise routine, and heads directly to the studio. To know how he wants to approach a painting, he sits in his room with his legs crossed and thinks about the most guileful way to portray his idea. Once he has his idea down, Price dunks his hands into buckets of paint, closes his eyes, and moves his hands around the canvas, scraping at the pigment until he is satisfied.¹

¹ Dean Kissick, *Walter Price Doesn't Aim to Please* (Cultured Magazine 2022)

Price's pieces have a distinctive feel, with fluid compositions and bold colors that intentionally try to confuse the viewer. In an essay about Price's work, Darby English stated, "Approaches in sheets or lands with a thud, it bewilders, and it is potent exactly because it talks more to the body and imagination than to the head."² His use of color aids the story he wants to tell. It requires the viewers to sit and stare, trying to unpack the painting entirely. His paintings are often his interpretations of dreams he has had. Price using his dreams as inspiration for his pieces may explain why he painted the faces in *Discomfort* (2022) the way he did. The faces are recognizable but simple, almost like he could only remember essential details about the people in his dream. The faces and sofas presented in the painting melt together as if the way he imagined this scene changed as he thought more about it. This abstraction relates to the concept of dreams because sometimes you are not sure what the dreams may mean, but they hit you in a way that causes you to think more about yourself and your environment. Also, the meaning will always differ depending on who you speak to, much like Price's paintings.

His goal is to make something that "feels funky" but also tells a story using small symbolic things that relate to personal experiences. His work definitely has this funky quantity to it, the way he uses color and shape is unconventional to most, but it is unique and captivating and almost adds to the obscure meanings of his artwork. Price said that painters like Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000,) a 20th-century Black American painter who focused on dynamic cubism, inspired him most. Lawrence made vibrant paintings with themes of war, specifically how traumatic World War II was, the Black experience, and religion. Price grew up loving Lawrence's style, specifically, the composition and the colors used in the pieces.³ This inspiration is apparent in *Discomfort*. The artwork uses texture and overlapping images to create discomfort in the audience. The flat yet textured background is reminiscent of the scenes Jacob Lawrence portrayed. As well as the abstract nature of the piece, there is not an explicit story suggested, but with the added texture and overlaps, you can make your own assumption of what may be happening. Typically, Price uses an array of vibrant colors in his art. However, with *Discomfort*, he used a more monochromatic color scheme; the intense red present throughout the piece allows the figures to blur into each other. Your eyes strain as you try to make out the figures in the painting, it confuses you in the best way, and that discomfort stays within you the more you stare at the artwork.

Price also said Sigmar Polke and early David Salle influenced him as an artist. Both Polke and Salle are postmodernist painters. These painters focused on the idea that every human will have a different perception of life, and there will never be a universal truth about anything. Postmodernism is a principle that is prominent within Price's work. Price has a habit of adding everyday objects into his paintings, like cars and couches, which create a sense of familiarity for the viewer because it keeps their attention. The overlapping of objects and textures is seen in Polke's and Salle's work. Much like every artist, Price took the ideas he adored from the painters he liked and made them his very own.

² Darby English, *The Fluid Part* (Greene Naftali 2020)

³Enuma Okoro, *Pearl Lines by Walter Price* (Financial Times 2021)

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