

Artwork

Fetus in Situ

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Description

"Fetus in Situ" is a traditional flat-stitch Métis beadwork piece by settler-Métis artist and medical student Jamie Thompson. The piece measures 10.3 x 8.5cm and is handmade with size 15, 11, and 10 Czech seed beads, depicting a Black fetus with their head within a pelvic bone, about to be born. It considers the structural inequities that Indigenous, Black, and other people of the global majority (PGM) face in Canadian healthcare and in medical imagery. Considering that 30 percent of Canada's population is non-white and encounters significant social barriers to healthcare access, the representation of non-white skin tones in only 4.5 percent of medical textbooks' illustrations fails to represent a diversified population (Louie & Wilkes, 2018). In obstetrics specifically, Black women face a three-fold higher risk of death in pregnancy or childbirth compared to their white peers, and there is a studied need for anti-Black racism training and Black healthcare provider representation in obstetrics, a discipline which was founded on experimentation upon Black slaves (Statistics Canada, 2022., CDC, 2024).

The dark brown and black beads were chosen to confront the viewer and society's colorism and white privilege, as even when PGM are depicted in medical imagery, it is often with neutral tones of beige and light brown. The white, ivory and blue beads of the pelvic bones are a stark contrast to the fetus' skin, and a representation of the white-centric society they are being born into. The fetus depicted is in the Right Occiput Anterior (ROA) position, which is an ideal position for vaginal delivery. As an artist and viewer, however, we are unable to see the fetus' face, leaving us frustrated, and still yearning for the faces of Black babies to be represented in medical and obstetrical spaces.

The artist was inspired by the work of Chidiebere Ibe, a medical student who has gone viral for creating digital medical illustrations of Black bodies. Ibe draws attention to the concept that diverse representation in medical imagery can positively influence the learning environment of future healthcare providers and

lead to better experiences and outcomes in healthcare for marginalized populations (Merelli, 2023). While non-Black, the artist recognizes Ibe's groundbreaking work through the need for diverse medical imagery and critiques the ongoing racism within their chosen specialty of obstetrics and gynecology. By featuring an unapologetically and undeniably Black fetus, *Fetus in Situ* challenges viewers to face the fact that they have likely seen very few medical illustrations with dark skin, to consider the biases of healthcare providers studying white-centric medical imagery, and the downstream effects that these biases will have on the healthcare outcomes of PGM communities.

The piece also seeks to bridge the concept of diverse medical imagery through Métis and Indigenous beadwork, inviting viewers to contemplate the lived realities of our Afro-Indigenous community members, who face layered intersections of racial violence in their everyday and healthcare experiences. Viewers of this piece are encouraged to further explore their own understandings, perceptions, biases of, and accountability to the Canadian Afro-Indigenous population, in order to be more accountable neighbors and healthcare providers. *Fetus in Situ* aims to inspire other PGM artists to contribute to the discourse on diverse representation in healthcare imagery through their own methodologies. It unflinchingly reiterates that Black Lives Matter, and that their representation through medical imagery and the need for widely implemented anti-Black racism training are unnegotiable in building an equitable healthcare system.

References

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