

Pigeonhole Episode 44

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

CHERYL: This is from the late Lavaun Benavidez-Heaster's artist statement. She writes, "I enjoy creating vibrant art, and want to inspire people to ask things like 'why do I, as a legally blind artist, like bright, contrasting colors; while other low vision artists, like Monet, created muddled, blurry images?'" She absolutely loved talking about her "touch paper collages" and how her art grew and changed over the years. Nearly a decade ago, I made a documentary about her called *Paper Visions* for a film class. She got the filming bug and would come to my house with a big stack of her artwork to show off to the camera while she told more stories just in case I could use them. And I just found this one. It's classic Lavaun, always keeping accessibility in mind and asking questions about what might delight her and also delight audiences with a different experience of blindness from her own.

[bright ambient music fades into chill music that plays throughout this section]

LAVAUN: Colors! Let me think about colors. How do you describe colors when it comes to someone who has never had vision? There's more to colors than just what we see. I was raised in the United States. Red is all about blood, anger, violence, hot...outta control. Stop. Stop lights are red. When I was a kid, my mom told me about red being painted on doors of brothels and having red light bulbs where they had "whorehouses" and everything. [chill music fades out]

I actually really love red. That's why I use it in so many pieces. Like I said, I have it here: red with sparkles. And then [paper rustling against smooth, stiff cardstock] I have it over here in the flowers because I love poinsettias. For me, red is the ultimate power color because red comes from blood. I don't think of it as blood spilled in battle or, you know, letting of blood or any of those things. Blood is your connection.

[tender music plays through the rest of the episode]

My mom, when I would say, "I wasn't your child. [laughs] They gave you the wrong child at the hospital" or "you adopted me, and you never told me about it," she would grab my hands. We have the same hands, and nothing else looks the same about us. She'd say, "Those are my hands. You are my blood." And what "you are my blood" meant was you belong to me. You are part of me. We are part of each other. Belonging is so important to me, having this feeling of sometimes not belonging because I'm not brown like my mother. I'm white. So, I'm not really part of her culture, but I am. I have a disability, but most people don't know it. On the outside, a lot of the things about me don't reflect where I feel like I actually am, what my blood is. What the blood running through my veins actually is, is not necessarily reflected.

[tender music continues as a crackling fire slowly comes in]

The sound of red, I think, can change, but it's a popping. It's popping. It's got a lotta energy. [a slow heartbeat layers onto the crackling and tender music] I think of red as a heartbeat. And that more vibrant red here, that's kind of that fast heartbeat where it's fluttery and excited. And then

there's a deeper, and that's that heartbeat that's still really strong but not so fluttery. And then there's this other color of red that I love. It's got a little bit of the wine tint color to it. And that color of red, to me, is that slow heartbeat that you fall asleep to that's just your connection to another person and everything. And so, to me as a person who can see colors, how I would describe red would be that it's a heartbeat.

[chill fades into bright ambient theme music]

CHERYL: Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at WhoAmIToStopIt.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

Sound effects in the episode: Heartbeat by Moulaythami from FreeSound.org