

Meet the Artist: Keyara Bennett, painter

By Kelly Keenan, SACA

Photos courtesy of the artist

The Southbury Arts & Culture Alliance is pleased to introduce local artist Keyara Bennett, whose paintings explore identity, emotion, and the traces we leave behind. Although she has only recently made Southbury her home, Bennett has already begun building a creative life here while continuing to develop a distinctive artistic voice.

Bennett has lived in Southbury for about a year, though the town was familiar to her long before she moved. "I have been living in Southbury for a year although I've visited many times before," she says.

Her creative journey began early. "From a young age I was always drawing or coloring not knowing that I could turn art into a career," Bennett explains. While art was always part of her life, she didn't begin pursuing it seriously until after high school. "I didn't pursue it seriously until after high school, eight years ago."

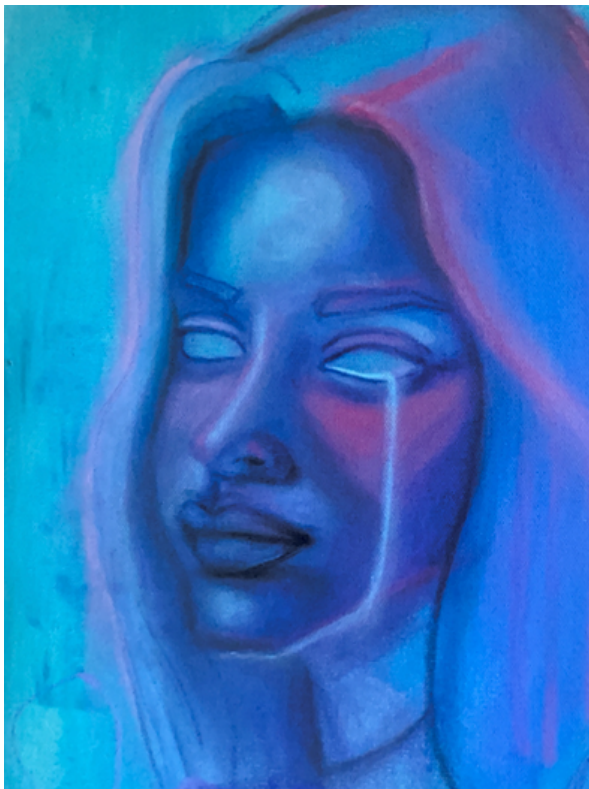
Today, Bennett gravitates toward imagery that explores the human experience. "My favorite subject matter (and what I find myself always returning to) are hands, portraits, and nocturne landscapes," she says. She also creates abstract works when she needs a change of pace. "I like to make works that focus on identity, human trace, and emotional transition."

Inspiration can strike anywhere. While she hasn't yet found a single go-to spot in Southbury, Bennett says she's still exploring the town. "I find inspiration almost anywhere at any time. It can come from a thought, a word, a place, etc. I have yet to find my one place to go for any inspiration—I need to do a lot more exploring!"

Her artistic process varies from piece to piece. Sometimes Bennett develops ideas through extensive sketching. "If I'm really excited about my idea, I will do multiple drawings both physical and digital until it's close to what I've envisioned," she says. She often writes notes describing color and composition while planning. Other times, she prefers a more intuitive approach: "I will start and fix things as I go."

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Like many artists, Bennett relishes certain stages of creation more than others. “When creating, I love the ideation phase and the part of a painting when you see it coming together,” she says. The most challenging stage? What artists often call the “ugly phase.” Bennett says, “I feel it’s almost every artist’s least favorite. I don’t mind it too much—it’s more of a love/hate thing. I like knowing that that stage isn’t final and will look completely different.”

Knowing when a painting is finished can also be difficult. Bennett admits she sometimes overworks her pieces, but she’s learned to recognize when it’s time to stop. “When I no longer feel excited about what I’m adding or my brushstrokes feel like I’m just putting paint down just to fill the space, that’s when I know I either need a break or to call it done.”

Bennett draws inspiration from many contemporary artists. “I admire so many artists and I’m always finding more. We’d need a full page just for them!” she says. Among her favorites are James Jean, Joshua Mizusawa, and Giorgiko, along with artists Kalle Hellzen, Be Fernández, and Esaí Alfredo. “I admire their uses of color, composition, and storytelling.”

While painting and drawing are her primary focus, Bennett has also experimented with other creative techniques. “I briefly did some screen printing and would love to get back into it and try other things,” she says.

For emerging artists, Bennett emphasizes curiosity and exploration. “The advice I wish someone told me when I first started—and what I’m still learning—is that you should find artists that you like and study them,” she says. Visiting museums, galleries, and art events can also be valuable, as well as talking with other creatives and seeking mentors.”

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Most importantly, she encourages artists to keep experimenting. "Try different styles and mediums until you go 'this is it!' There's no pressure to do or show anything," Bennett says. "Art is all about trying something new and having fun until you find what excites you."

Where to Find Her:

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She is open to commission opportunities and can be reached via email or social media.

For more information about this month's maker, or if you are interested in being featured in an upcoming issue of the Southbury Makers Spotlight, contact us at

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