

Iris

Kensmil

My souls

Some of



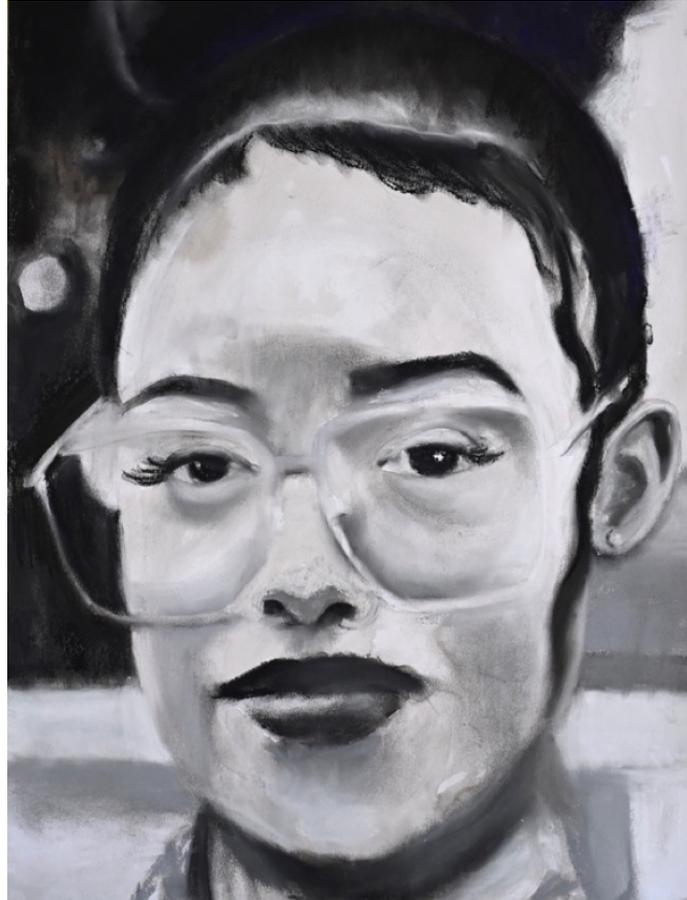
We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue, 2011–present.

“When we speak we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak.”

This quote is written by a feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde. She is one of artist *Iris Kensmil*'s inspirations. *Iris* speaks through her artworks. The paintings are her voice. *Iris* thinks that in the Netherlands there is not enough attention in newspapers, TV, or in books on people of colour that have changed the world. By painting and drawing these people she hopes they will become a permanent part of our history, and by that of our future as well.

Way of working

The artist Iris Kensmil collects pictures and pieces of text from newspapers or other news about women and men that speak to her. Those people are often activists. Being an activist means that with your actions you try to change the world. You can protest by making music, marching on the streets, making art or writing. She calls this collection her archive. After this she researches the person's story. And then she starts by drawing or painting a portrait.



We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue, 2011–present.

For more than ten years, Iris Kensmil has been painting and drawing portraits of men and women of color. These portraits are kind of a 'passport photograph', but then painted or drawn. The people she portrays are often activists. Iris Kensmil has a specific way of painting. She starts with a white underground and paints, layer by layer, in darker colors. This is why her paintings have a bright light shining from them. She finds drawing or painting the eyes as the most important. The eyes show a lot about someone: for example how confident or strong someone is.

Look at this image of the drawing with great details.

1a. Which materials do you think the artist used when making this portrait of singer H.E.R. (1997, USA)?

1b. Draw a circle around five words that you think suits the portrait.

music

color

masculine

activism

friendly

paint

tough

brush

light

pencil

kind

sweet

grey

cloud

confident

soft

iron

glass

bird

feminine

We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue



The art installation *We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue* is in a room with black painted walls. On these walls hang 48 portraits, drawn by the artist. In the middle of the room you find pillows you can lie or sit on and listen to the music. The portraits are an ode to artists of color who wrote and sang protest songs. You can listen to those songs by grabbing a pair of headphones and sitting or lying down on the pillows, or by scanning the QR code that is on this page with your phone.

If you take a closer look at the walls you will see that the black on the walls is not really black. This is because the black is mixed with a tiny bit of blue. With this colour the artist makes a connection to the song by Curtis Mayfield: *We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue*.



We the People Who Are Darker Than Blue, 2011–present.

- Queen Latifah
- Alton Ellis
- Aretha Franklin
- Big Bill Broonzy
- Augustus Pablo
- Billie Holiday
- Black Stalin
- Bob Andy
- Bob Marley
- Bunny Wailer
- Burning Spear
- Curtis Mayfield
- Chuck D
- D'Angelo
- David Hinds
- Dennis Brown
- Erykah Badu
- Fela Kuti
- Gil Scott-Heron
- H.E.R.
- Freddie McGregor
- Isaac Hayes
- James Brown
- Janelle Monáe
- Jay-Z
- Jill Scott
- John Lee Hooker
- Judy Mowatt
- Keiyaa
- Lauryn Hill
- Lee Perry
- Ma Rainey
- Mahalia Jackson
- Marcia Griffiths
- Marvin Gaye
- Michael Rose
- Miriam Makeba
- Nina Simone
- Noname Gypsy
- Oscar Brown jr.
- Odetta
- Patrice Rushen
- Sam Cooke
- Sandra Puma Jones
- Solange
- Syl Johnson
- Tierra Whack
- Tracy Chapman

2a.
What do you think a protest song is?

2b.
What do you think is the meaning of the song *We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue* by Curtis Mayfield? You can look up the song by going to Spotify.

Next here you see a list of names. These are the names of all the people that are portrayed in the art installation *We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue*. Maybe you can recognise some of the names.

Research

3a. Choose names from the list of artists. Choose one you already know. Fill in each of these names in the bottom of the frames below and follow the next steps.

3b. In each of the blocks, make a drawing of what you think the musician looks like.

3c. Look up the name of the musician on the internet and write down a short text about what you have found out about them.

3d. Why do you think the artist Iris Kensmil has chosen to paint this musician?

3e. Describe in one word what you think is special about this musician and write this down. You can use what you have found on the internet.



3c.

3c.

3c.

3d.

3d.

3d.

3e.

3e.

3e.

Protest

4a.
Find a big sheet of paper or use the rest of this page. Cut out the loose words from the previous assignment (3e).

4b.
To who, what or where in the world do you think more attention is needed?

4c.
Make a new sentence with the loose words that you have cut out and the subject you wish more attention for and paste these here, or on your piece of paper.

Tip! The sentence does not have to be grammatically correct, it is all about the message behind it. For inspiration, please check kunstinstituutmelly.nl.

4d.
Look for a picture in a newspaper or magazine that fits your sentence. Cut out the image and stick it under your sentence.

4e.
Make a drawing over the image to reinforce your message.

4f.
Your art piece is now finished. Make a photo of your art piece and email this image to activiteiten@kunstinstituutmelly.nl. We will place your art piece on the website of Kunstinstituut Melly. In this way everyone can read your message.

Concept & development: Emmelie Mijs
Design: Loes Verstappen

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Kunstinstituut Melly
Witte de Withstraat 50
NL-3012 BR Rotterdam