

Proposal

Throughout the Capstone, I will be exploring themes of romanticization, including nostalgia and idealization, as a means of considering and expressing aspects of the human experience through self exploration. I have chosen to represent mainly my own experiences because I feel as though I can only speak for myself and would only be able to accurately depict how I interact with romanticization through the lens of queer, trans, and POC experience.

I've been significantly influenced by the work of Glenn Ligon, whose work often discusses complexities in relation to queerness and Blackness. His work *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* resulted from his ambivalent feelings about Robert Mapplethorpe's *The Black Book*, which features erotic images of Black men. On one hand, Mapplethorpe portrayed Black masculinity as beautiful and capable of vulnerability, which contradicts the prevalent image of Black men being hyper-masculine and aggressive; on the other hand, *The Black Book* plays into the stereotype of Black men being highly sexual. This culminates into a romanticized image of Black men who are strong but vulnerable and sexual but demure, and while this deviation from the typical portrayal of violence and aggression shows a more positive perspective of what Black masculinity looks like, it is a deliberately palatable version of Blackness for White consumption. Ligon recognized that these men in *The Black Book* were devoid of personality and history in a way that made them appealing to specifically White gay fantization without actually challenging them to confront their own racism in the way they perceive Black men, namely why they would have sex with a Black partner but not date them. This led Ligon to create *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* to contextualize *The Black Book* and create real conversation surrounding Black masculinity.

In my work, I will consider the complexities of romanticization, like Ligon, to show how there can be both benefits and drawbacks without proper contextualization. As discussed in *The Benefits of Positive Illusions*, a certain extent of idealization can promote happiness and satisfaction within one's situation; however, it is important that the idealization is grounded in reality so that it is an embellishment as opposed to a complete fabrication. One of the main issues with *The Black Book* is that it was created by a white man and came across as more of a fetishization than an appreciation, and this shows the shortcomings of romanticization created by people who are not part of the romanticized group. When we romanticize ourselves, there is often a greater ability to root the idealization in reality. For example, when trans people on TikTok say "all trans people are hot," transness is romanticized; however, they do not mean that all trans people are physically attractive but rather that to be trans implies characteristics such as questioning the status quo, self-reflection, and knowing ultimately oneself, which are attractive qualities.

We often think that our lives and struggles are unique, which they are, but as one of more than seven billion people in the world, our personal experiences can be both relatable and capable of being understood by others through empathy. Because emotion transcends culture and often eludes language, I plan to use primarily visual mediums such as drawing/painting and photography to convey ideas that may not be as clear through written or spoken language. I specifically will explore ideas such as catharsis in nostalgia, imagination's role in romanticization, and positive human connection through positivity bias.