



Schaun Champion Reflects: *Rest on the Flight*



The light and the dramatic cluster of clouds in Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s *Rest on the Flight* lured photographer Schaun Champion to the painting, on view in the BMA’s European art gallery. Champion is a Baltimore-raised artist known for photographing subjects in quiet moments surrounded by natural environments. Her rich color palettes ornament the ordinary.

“Whenever I look at my favorite paintings, they always look like they’re in the middle

of catching someone doing something,” Champion said. “It never feels staged, it never feels forced. It literally feels like someone could have taken a camera and captured that [scene].”

The scene in *Rest on the Flight* is a single moment in the life of Christ. The artist, best known for lighthearted and whimsical paintings in the “Rococo” style, took an unusual detour into religious subject matter. The painting shows Joseph, Mary, and the

Christ child in a moment of rest during an escape to Egypt from the wrath of King Herod. Mother and child pause to share a tender embrace as Joseph looks back in fear at the hostile forces they’ve evaded. Joseph, and a billow of clouds, seemingly protect the pair from harm. A distant light warms their respite.

Champion’s own path to image-making began at eight years old when her father, also a photographer, bought her a Kodak 110 camera. By her teenage years, she’d begun documenting travels and archiving special family moments, collecting inspiration along the way from the vibrant color tones of her favorite classic films from the ‘50s, ‘60s, and ‘80s.

After losing a family member to gun violence in 2020, she channeled her grief into her existing series, *A Black Bouquet*. She has since exhibited the series in galleries and commissioned murals across the U.S. and internationally. The photographs depict Black men and women wearing haloes of fresh flowers posed in verdant settings—themselves escaping the world around them to luxuriate in a moment of pause, a necessary rest that mirrors the ease of Mary and child in Fragonard’s *Rest on the Flight*.

“I admire when a painter can make lighting look so natural and dramatic,” Champion said of the painting. “It’s warm and inviting. It looks like a little snapshot of a story, and I want to know more.”

In those moments when we are overwhelmed by trauma and grief, I want to share some joy, solace, or maybe even courage. I want people to see my work and see themselves and their emotions.”

Above: Jean-Honoré Fragonard. *Rest on the Flight*. c. 1750. The Baltimore Museum of Art: The Mary Frick Jacobs Collection, BMA 1938.182