Adrian Armstrong’s work is extremely powerful to me, and shows particular commitment to the Black Condition. He creates his art as an expression of what it means to be Black in America. He expresses both his own personal experiences, as well as shared experiences between Black Americans, often including those shared with other people of color. He values the idea of representation, and wants to see more black bodies in cultural spaces.

“The Birth of Venus” is a reference to Botticelli’s work, of the same title. When setting out to create this piece, the artist’s original intent was to create a reproduction of the piece, but with black bodies. Once he began to draw, however, he decided to choose only the essence of the piece. Which, of course, is Venus. The goddess of love, sex, beauty, and fertility, Venus represents much of what the artist believes to be where Black women are underrepresented. Questioning the idea of whether Venus should be, or even could be, white, Adrian felt that Venus would be most appropriately depicted as the opposite of standard beauty ideals. What is more beautiful than one who forces the viewer to seek beauty? In defying standard beauty ideals, Adrian has created a subject that has “re-standardized” beauty, tipping the scales in the favor of the women who do not fit these ideals. With “non-ideal” hair, and with body modifications, Adrian’s depiction of Venus has allowed the viewer to redefine what qualities make a goddess such.

“Conscious” is a piece chronicling Armstrong’s own experience with his growing awareness of the realities of the political and social landscape in which he exists. He remarks upon how easily one can go through life with little to no awareness of what is real in this world. There is so much within society that is fabricated with this express purpose of distraction, and appeasement. However, when a person wakes up, it is difficult for them to return to sleep. “This represents me opening my eyes and becoming conscious of how the world is and how they see me and my people. Things become a little more clear.”

“We Can’t Breathe #1” is the first in a series of drawings done in response to the murder of Eric Garner. Armstrong feels that it is important to stand with those who are racially profiled, have dealt with police brutality, or anyone who has faced systematic injustice. The phrase, “I Can’t Breathe” encapsulates much of the feelings which Black Americans hold in reference to institutionalized racism, as well as systematic oppression. Each hand represents a way in which Black Americans are oppressed. Each hand constricts another aspect of Black life, at its source. The colors within the piece also have significant. Blue, which, in the American flag represents vigilance, perseverance and justice, has been contorted (like the ideas themselves) to show the lack of oxygen, and life, and ultimately injustice. Red, which represents valor, has come to symbolize the blood which stains the hands of America. White, which symbolizes innocence and purity has been used as the background for which all of this takes place, to show just how not innocent this entire thing is.