

Mother Mary Lange Artist Statement

Chloe Becker

Mother Mary Lange is sitting with a young student from St. Frances Academy, the school she started for Black girls.⁴ The positioning and colors of the two reference the iconic Black Madonna of Czestochowa as a means to emphasize Mother Lange as a powerful mother figure in the Church and her community. I wanted to center Mother Lange's portrait around her focus on women in her racial justice work (as her school was initially created only for girls, and also formed the Oblate Sisters of Providence).⁵ So, I connected the Say Her Name campaign of today with what I believe would've been the Say Her Name campaign of the early nineteenth century--the countless Black women who were lynched and/or raped by white Americans during this time period.⁶ The names near the bottom of the painting are of those from the 1800s, and transition halfway to names of Black women who were killed by police in the twenty first century. Finally, the hands held at the top of the painting are layered with meaning. They represent the unity and support that Mother Lange provided for her Black community still dealing with the aftermath and continual existence of slavery after the Civil War. They represent the women of the names on the painting holding hands together in God's Kingdom. They can even represent people holding hands while praying. All interpretations apply.

The FutureChurch resource packet for Mother Mary Lange can be found here:

<https://www.futurechurch.org/women-witnesses-for-racial-justice-downloads>

⁴ "Servant Of God Mother Mary Lange, O.S.P.," Black and Indian Mission Office, 2018, <https://blackandindianmission.org/servant-god-mother-mary-lange-osp>.

⁵ John Lavernburg, "Black Religious Orders Broke Racial Barriers in the U.S.," The Tablet, February 11, 2021, <https://thetablet.org/black-religious-orders-broke-racial-barriers-in-the-u-s/>.

⁶ David V. Baker and Gilbert Garcia, "An Analytical History of Black Female Lynchings In The United States, 1838-1969," Quantitative Criminology, October 1, 2019, <https://www.qualitativecriminology.com/pub/v8i1p5/release/1>; "Sexual Exploitation of Black Women," Equal Justice Initiative, August 8, 2016, <https://eji.org/news/history-racial-injustice-sexual-exploitation-black-women/>.