Throughout Stony Brook University, there is a diversity of events that are taking place on campus every day. Whether it is a football game, a lecture from a special guest, a Weekend Life event or a club’s general body meeting on a Tuesday night, there is always something going on. Then there are student leaders who coordinate events for other students to have a new experience and have a great time. SAAB Brother and Secretary Ovaun Latouche did this when he hosted an event connected with an exhibit, “Race, Art and Love,” that took place between September and October in the Paul W. Zuccaire Gallery. He was a part of a great number of individuals who got together, picked photos, cultivated the event, and presented at the exhibit.

According to the Stony Brook University Zuccaire Gallery summary, “Race, Art and Love” is a collection of photos taken since 1999. Over 100 artists of color working in the photographic arts have created vital images during their residencies at Center for Photography at Woodstock (CPW). The article added, “over twenty artists of color from the artist-in-residency at CPW,” were chosen to be featured using their photographs. When Latouche was asked about the process of the exhibit and why he joined, this is what he said:

OL: I wanted to do the art exhibit for two reasons. For one it satisfied the speaking requirement [Stony Brook Curriculum] and that was my main reason why I wanted to do it. But as I went every day, we had meetings every Wednesday during campus lifetime...I realized most of the artists were artists of color, and I felt like this was something I was learning from. Even though I came there [for] my main reason [which] was for the speaking requirement, it actually grew bigger than that. Actually like wow, these artists they are like using different structures and different elements in their work just to, like, in some way express the oppression they are feeling within themselves, but that could be like a mental or just like physical thing or just like a nationwide racism thing.

What Latouche shared relates to the curator, Sarah Lewis, an acclaimed author, art historian, and assistant professor at Harvard University who created the first “Race, Art, and Love” exhibit. She says: “It is impossible to separate the history of photography from the history of labor, love, and race in America... A critical function of photography, through a vast range of aesthetics, is the labor of becoming and the work it entails—on the land and
within our inner worlds”. Art does imitate the reflection of the world’s activities and current events that are occurring.

To bring that out to the exhibit in Stony Brook, I had to ask Ovaun how was the planning process and what he took away from it:

RF:  *So how was [the exhibit] set up?*

OL:  I wasn’t the only person running it. There were six other students. So, it would be a project but it would be like with no strings attached, [how] the director of the art gallery [operated], she wouldn’t actually pressure you into what way to go with it. Like, you had the whole space to do whatever you want. So I felt like that gave me a little [sic] advantage as in I was able to like pick which art I felt like reflected me the most and I got a chance to present it to the SAAB brothers and I actually got their input on it.

RF:  *Okay, cool. So how long was the planning process?*

OL:  It was about eight weeks.

RF:  *Eight weeks? What did you do about the planning process?*

OL:  The planning process, it was a little hard because every week we would actually go in and we would learn about these different artists and I felt like it was hard because all of them stood out in some way. Just being a person that can just connect to each of them, and I felt like it was kind of hard for me to just cut out of 30...something pieces. I had to cut out the five that I felt affected me the most and would actually bring some connection between the brothers. I felt like the planning process itself, it was the hardest cutting out like which one I didn’t want to present and picking the five best ones.

RF:  *So from the five artists or paintings that you picked, which one did you like the best? Which one resonated with you?*

OL:  I’m not sure, I don’t remember the name off the top but it was a piece about a mother and a daughter. Basically, the artist just captured pictures of her and her mother. At one point they were just like standing next to each other as in just all out just not caring, like I just woke up. And then the other one was a mother—she was just looking at her mother. I felt like that connected with me the most, as in she is looking at her mother like okay, this is what I can become in the future or this is what I will become in the future. And it was also about their body as well, as in they didn’t really care what they were wearing. Her bra was like halfway off and she was like this is my body and I’m proud of it. I actually look at that as in like body shaming
as well, like people just fat shaming other people and I felt like that’s what she didn’t care about. She was like this is my body and I’m proud of it and this is my mother. One day, I’m looking at her like my body might transform and actually become just like her. So I felt like that was the one that connected with me the most.

Throughout the event, students were engaged in conversations with the exhibit guides, which Latouche served as. When asked about his expectations, being engaged with the students, this is what Ovaun experienced:

OL: Okay, so my expectations, well at the beginning I would say I was a little nervous. As the event proceeded I actually felt like it lived up to more than I expected. When the event first started [being talked about] back in August I felt like it was just going to be a breeze, I was just going to do this for a requirement. But as I moved on and as it started, I felt like I learned so much; and the day that I was supposed to present to the SAAB brothers, I felt like that was the day I was going to like in some way like take everything I learned in the past few weeks and just like try to push it to them in the shortest time as possible. So I felt like that was a problem as well, but I felt like I learned way more from them than I did within those few weeks.

RF: Interesting.

OL: After I presented my five pieces, I gave them [the visitors] the whole gallery to pick their piece that they felt like was the most [significant] and their reasoning behind picking their piece. It actually came away from the meeting that the artist actually made the piece itself. Like, the artist didn’t really mean that, but their reason actually was so like, it was deeper in a way and it connected more. And then after we had like an end discussion and I feel like that really wrapped up the direction of the art gallery like wow, I’ve been working here on this specific theme for weeks like presenting tours like over and over, and I’ve never been touched by a group like this before.

RF: Wow.

OL: So I felt like that was a really good accomplishment just from the brothers themselves like presenting to us. Like, this is their first time ever in the gallery. They have never been here before. I’ve been here for weeks and they are telling me stuff about these different pieces that I didn’t see, like these hidden things.
RF: That you didn’t know.

OL: I was just like wow, that’s amazing. And I felt like the directors in the gallery as well, because they actually came on the tour with us.

RF: Okay.

OL: And they were like wow, that’s actually really impressive. And it was on such short notice. I was just like hey, take a minute and pick your best piece. So I felt like overall it was a big learning process for all of us, even though I’m the only one that really got credit for it I feel like I learned more from them.

In conclusion, I asked Latouche if he had any advice for SAAB brothers or anyone that is interested in art, or just going out and be involved in what Stony Brook offers:

OL: Last idea is if you get a chance please visit the gallery. It’s there for the whole campus but also it’s also part of what SAAB is about, [it is all about] intellectual development, learning things outside of your comfort zone. I feel like that it was big because, I have never been to a gallery before and I was an ambassador for eight weeks. So it was a real thing being out of my comfort zone, learning about things I have never learned before. These things are there but it’s not like somebody is pushing you to learn. It was a different type of fun, like an experiential learning. So I felt like it was a good thing. If anybody has a chance to do it I would say definitely [do it]. I would definitely do it again if the opportunity comes.