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THE BLACK ISSUE

A voyage into representation and identity

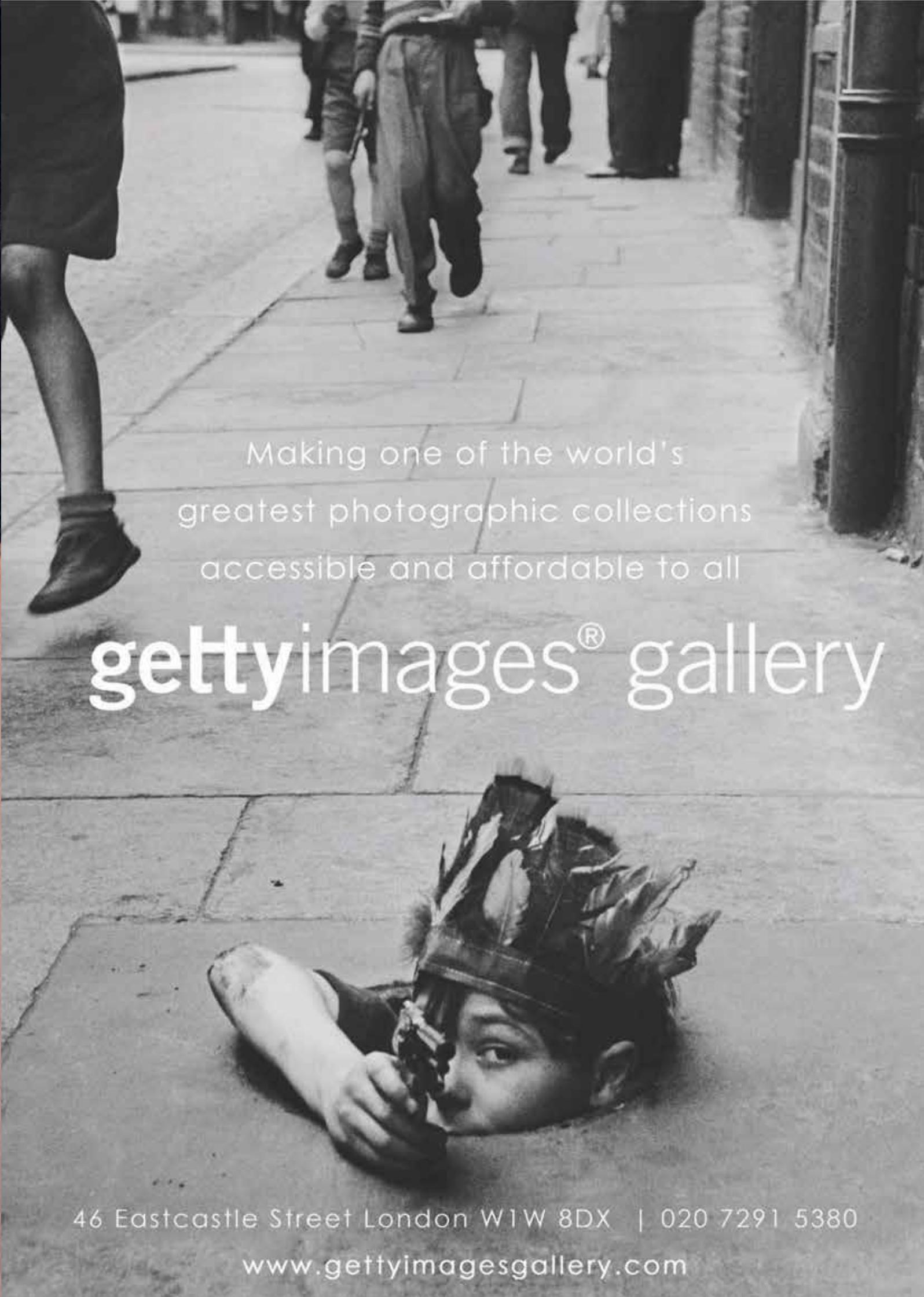
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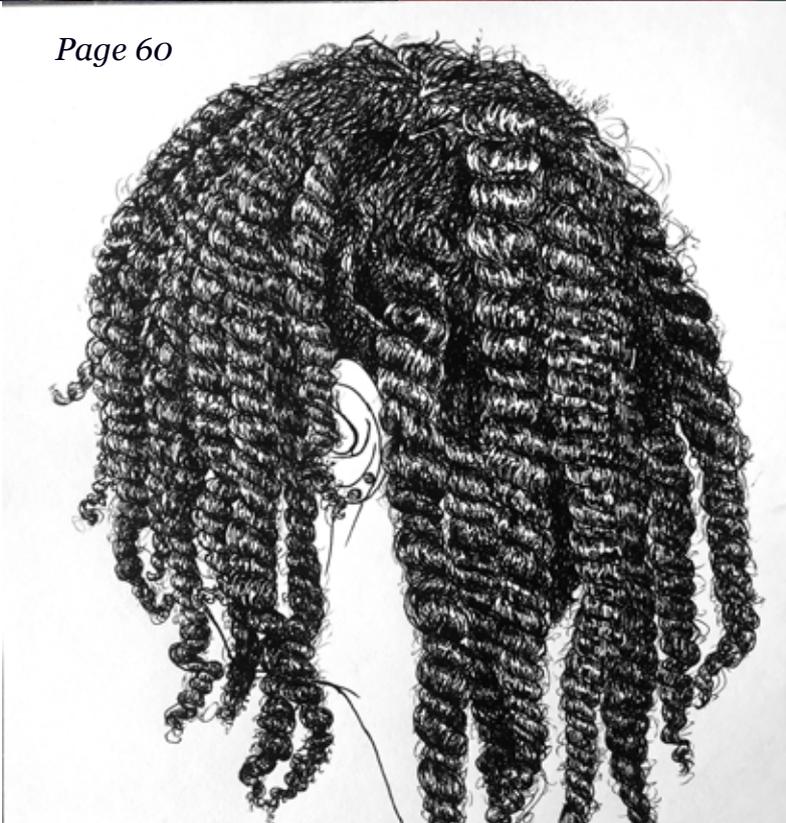
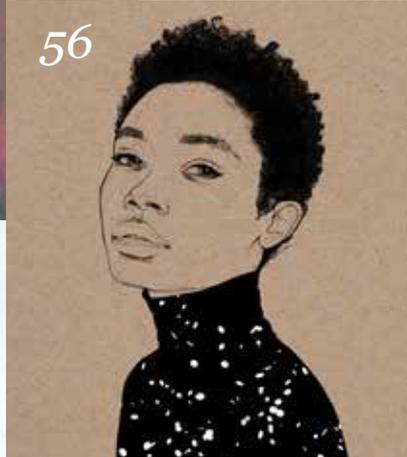




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SYNOPSIS

THE BLACK ISSUE

“A people’s art is the genesis of their freedom.”
- Claudia Jones, 1959

“How does the world perceive us?”
“Who writes the narratives that shape us?”

Centuries of inequality have resulted in countless de-humanising effigies of Blackness. Powerlessness meant that outside of their immediate communities, people of colour were misrepresented and ridiculed in the realms of art and media. Stripped of their humanity and treated as objects of violence and sex, debasing narratives and negative representations were able to thrive. Shaping the way the world perceives Blackness and most damagingly, the way Blackness perceives itself.

Black historical icons did much to turn these negative representations on their heads and express truer versions of the Black identity. However, with little control over what is broadcasted, displayed or published, Black communities have remained misunderstood and misrepresented.

Today, modern communications begin to level the playing field and creative black talents, whilst standing on the shoulders of the icons who went before are taking ownership of their identities, on a mass and very global scale. Digital safe spaces manifest in the forms of various social media platforms such as Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter.

“Black Twitter is part cultural force, cudgel, entertainment and refuge. It is its own society within Twitter, replete with inside jokes, slang and rules, centered on the interests of young blacks online — almost a quarter of all black Internet users are on Twitter. There’s no password. The only entry fee is knowledge.”

- Soraya Nadia McDonald, January 20, 2014, *The Washington Post*

These online arenas have quickened the force with which Black artistry has been able to develop, thrive and spread messages of equality, Black pride, self-love and human progress. Connecting members of the creative diaspora through shared experiences and mutual truths has resulted in greater unity putting us on the cusp of a cultural coup d’état.

In this issue, we introduce you to some of the game changers, resolute on redefining Black identity, beauty and representation through the arts.

- LASHARNA TURNER, EDITOR



Creative Direction
Lasharna Turner

Photographer
Danny Kasirye

MUA
T'rae Turner

Model
Vimbai Chapungu

“Progressive art can assist people to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensity social character of their interior lives. Ultimately, it can propel people toward social emancipation”

- Angela Y. Davis

“You know, the hardest thing for not only an artist but for anybody to do is look themselves in the mirror and acknowledge their own flaws and fears and imperfections. And put them out for people to relate to it,”

*- Kendrick (Kung-Fu Kenny) Lamar,
Weekend Edition, NPR, June 13, 2015*

INTERVIEW

JALEEL CAMPBELL

Illustrations of stone faced Black men and women, each one made up of geometric layers and fused together in complementary deep shades. Rich, powerful and emotive. Jaleel is the Syracuse, NY based Illustrator whose work feels familiar and new, all at once.

SB: Tell us about yourself?

JC: Art has always played a big role in my life and I continue to hone my craft whilst challenging the Eurocentric standards of beauty. What started out as a hobby during my youth has turned into a career filled with new challenges, rewards and most importantly, opportunities. I am certain that I've found my calling and believe that I am doing my part toward bridging the gap between art and design.

SB: How long have you been doing this?

JC: I began illustrating digitally five years ago. Before my illustrations were digital, I would steal these big canvases from my art teacher and paint these portraits of black people. I got amazing feedback from those pieces, which in turn caught the attention of my art teacher and I ended up paying her back for the canvases. Sorry again Mrs Ferlenda. I'm very passionate!

“Only WE can do us like no other... I love black people.”

SB: Define for our reader's Jaleel's perspective of true creativity?

JC: Creativity is the ability to turn nothing into something. I believe that when you don't have much, you are automatically creative because you have to come up with clever ways to survive. My creativity knows no bounds and I always find a way to capitalize off of it. Whether it be fiber arts, illustration, or even graphic design. These hands are crazy.

SB: What significance does your cultural heritage and background play in your creativity?

JC: Being black and absorbing black culture is all that I know. We see it everywhere and although it is often appropriated to appeal to the masses, only WE can do us like no other. I love black people. The Culture, the clothes, the sayings, everything! We are the creators of all things cool and I try to show that through my work.

SB: Jaleel, why does creativity matter to you?

JC: It's extremely therapeutic. I often find myself working on a new piece in my living room or basement, staying up all night listening to Mary j Blige or Kaytranada mixes literally in my zone. It is in those moments that I feel unstoppable. I get such an adrenaline rush each time I work on a new piece.

SB: What are your hopes for the future?

JC: I am working on getting my name out there and making the world fall in love with my artwork and me, of course. In the black community, men aren't pushed to pursue the arts which is unfortunate, however, I am simply trying to show that it is possible to make a profit and pursue what you love. You just have to put that work in. I refuse to give up on my dreams and know they will take me far! I'm trying to live lavish, multiple homes, fur coats, student loans paid off, so in order for me to do all of these things I have to keep moving mountains.

SB: What other creative talents do you admire?

JC: Wow, where do I start? Jacob Lawrence for one, Barkley Hendricks, Picasso, Michael Jackson, Kanye West (pre-yeezus), Beyoncé of course. Her marketing team has literally changed the game and I'm trying to figure out how to do the same. Leroy Campbell, Varnette P. Honeywood, Cey Adams, Mary J. Blige, Aaron Douglas, and so many many more.

www.jaleelcampbell.com



Jaleel Campbell, by Cristian Kaigler

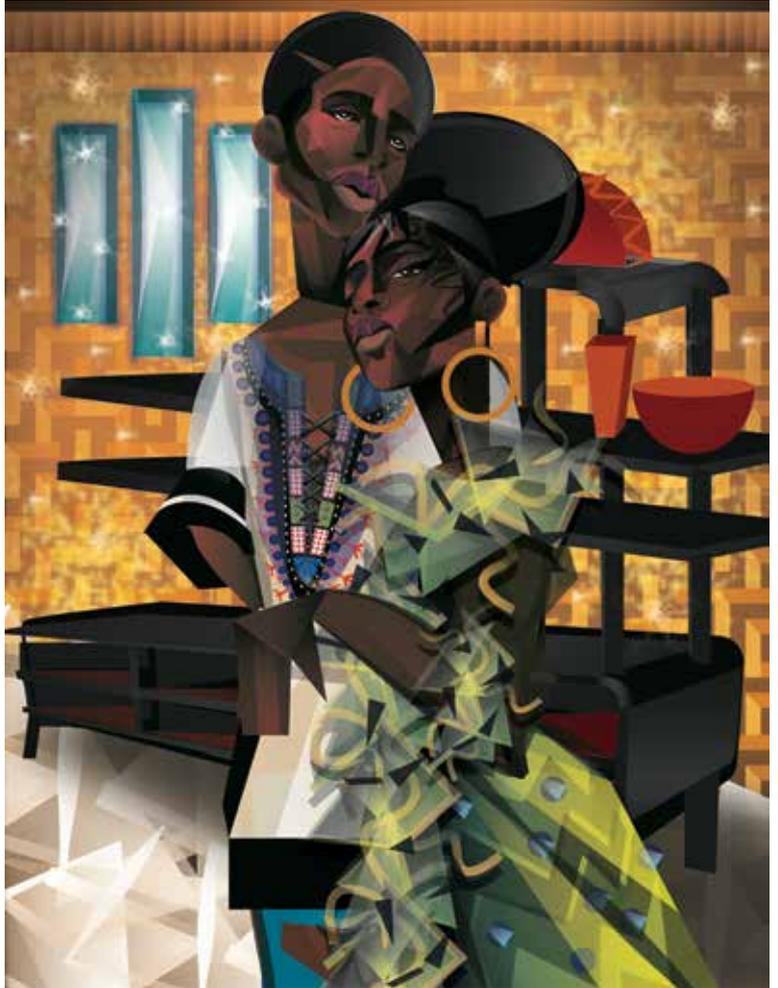


3 Men by Jaleel Campbell



**FREE
HUEY**

Do you love what you feel



Love Hangover



Right on

PROFILE

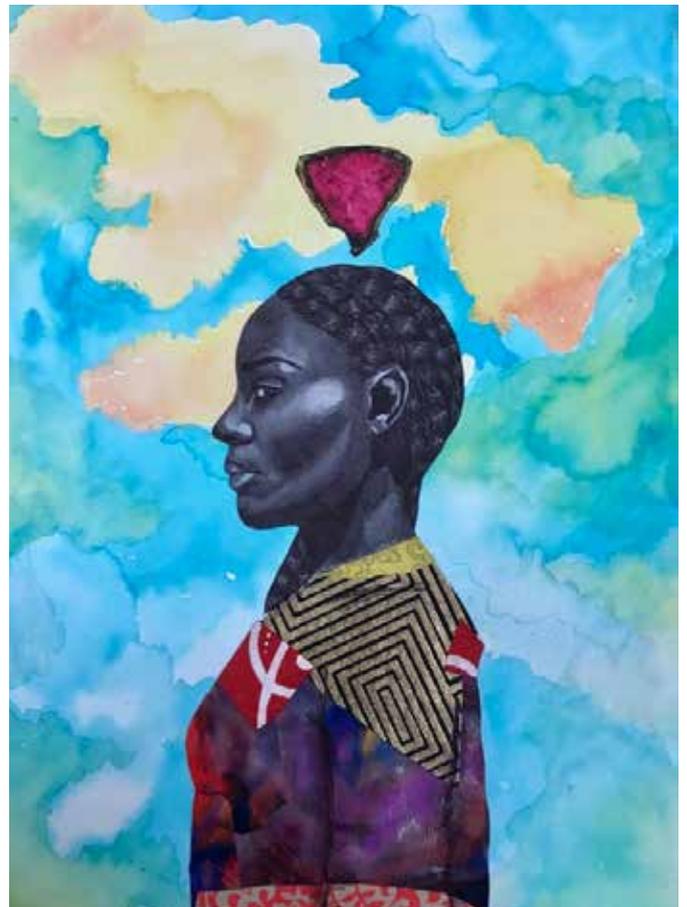
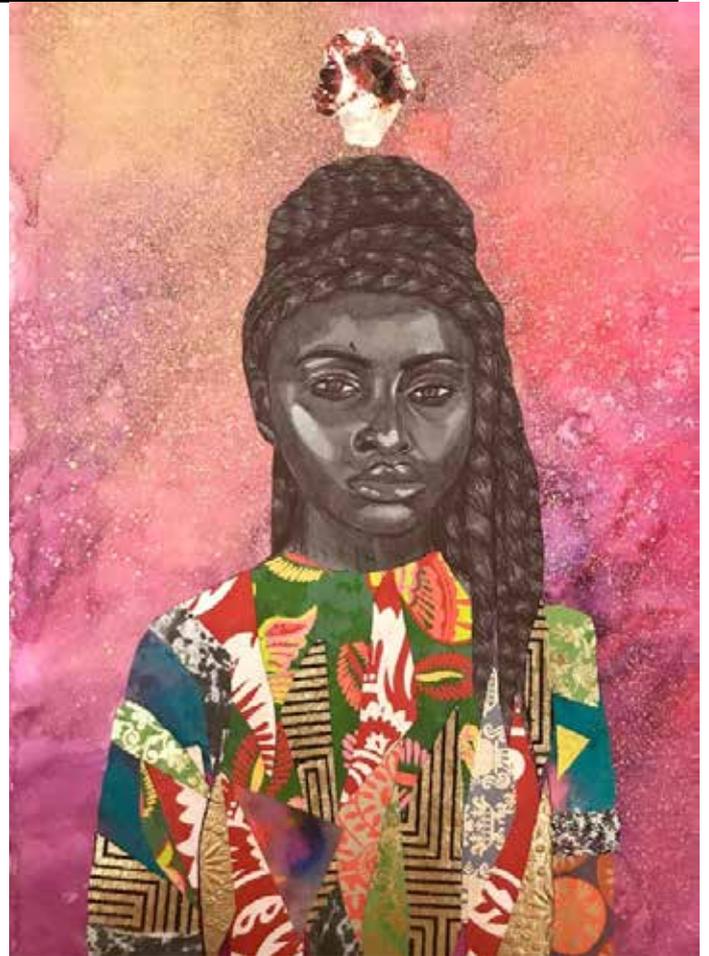
JAMEA RICHMOND EDWARDS

Meet Jamea the artist channelling her unique perception of Black Womanhood into emotive art pieces. Blank expressions sit on the faces of the smooth dark-skinned women Jamea's artwork depicts. They are youthful, beautiful and sullen. Simultaneously weighed down, yet liberated by the burden and blessing of their colour and gender combined.

When quizzed on her definition of creativity, Jamea's answer is more thought-provoking than expected: "I believe that creativity is the nexus of the black experience. It is the process and capacity to develop and engender novel solutions to expressiveness and problem-solving. As an African American, I am always astounded by the innovativeness throughout the diaspora that was birthed through some of the most treacherous times in modern history."

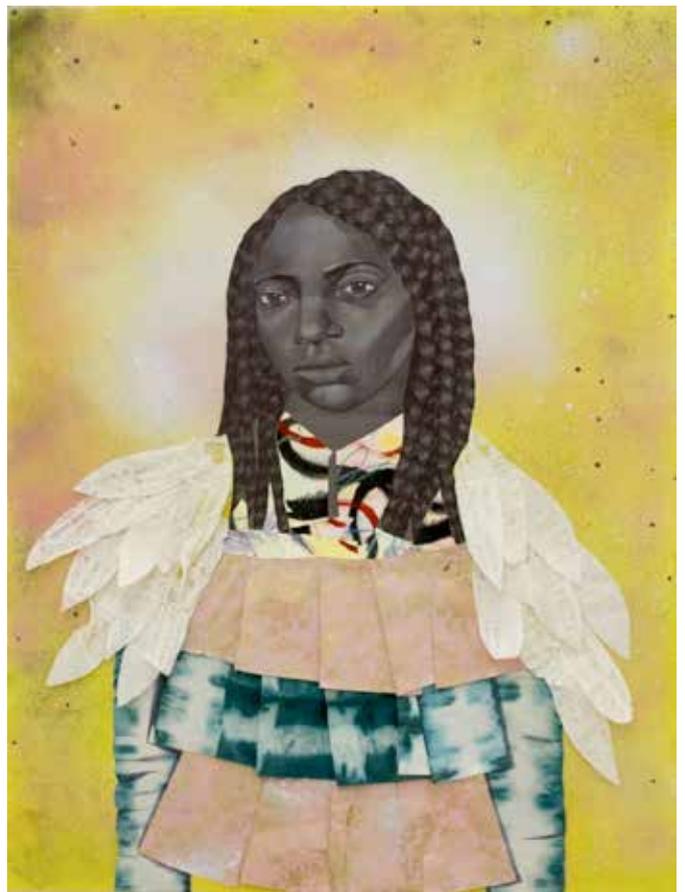
She goes on to detail how her identity is defined by her womanhood, pride in her ancestry and upbringing. All factors she credits as her key influences. "My work is an ode to blackness, femininity and my upbringing in Detroit, MI. I try to peel back some of the nuances of cultural aesthetics." Jamea's art challenges viewers to think about what they are seeing, analyse the layers and in doing so search for themselves.

Using her creativity to tell the visual story of Black femininity and Womanhood is only a portion of the movement. Jamea explains why she believes creativity is important, "Creativity matters because it is what propels us forward as a human race. The advances we've made in Technology and various industries is because of creativity, and it's very important that we cultivate young minds to be comfortable taking risks and exploring possibilities."





*"I believe that creativity is the **nexus** of the black experience."*





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INTERVIEW

K. PIERRE

Photographer | Fine Art Mixed Media Artist



Opening Up
Muse: James McCollum
Mixed Media Artwork

With a personal mission to alter societal constructs, Kendario LaPierre is the 25-year-old photographer, Fine Art Mixed Media Artist and self-professed “Cultural Change Agent” sharing a transformative message through his art. His softer depiction of Black men is exploring a conversation central to the depiction of Black masculinity and identity.

Born in Germany and raised in America, Kendario studied Philosophy and Religion at the University of Southern Mississippi. After obtaining his two degrees he moved towards expressing his worldview through creativity. With the desire to “alter societal constructs”, he pursues his mission not only through his art but also through existing as a community leader in his creative network of Bushwick based peers.

SB: Hi Kendario, tell us about yourself and your background?

KP: Six years ago, I fled to New York to fulfill my inner yearning to express myself in a way that would be embraced by understanding people. I create a surreal world in the likes of Basquiat to Dali. It is my passion to counter bad politics and inequality in society.

SB: How would you define creativity?

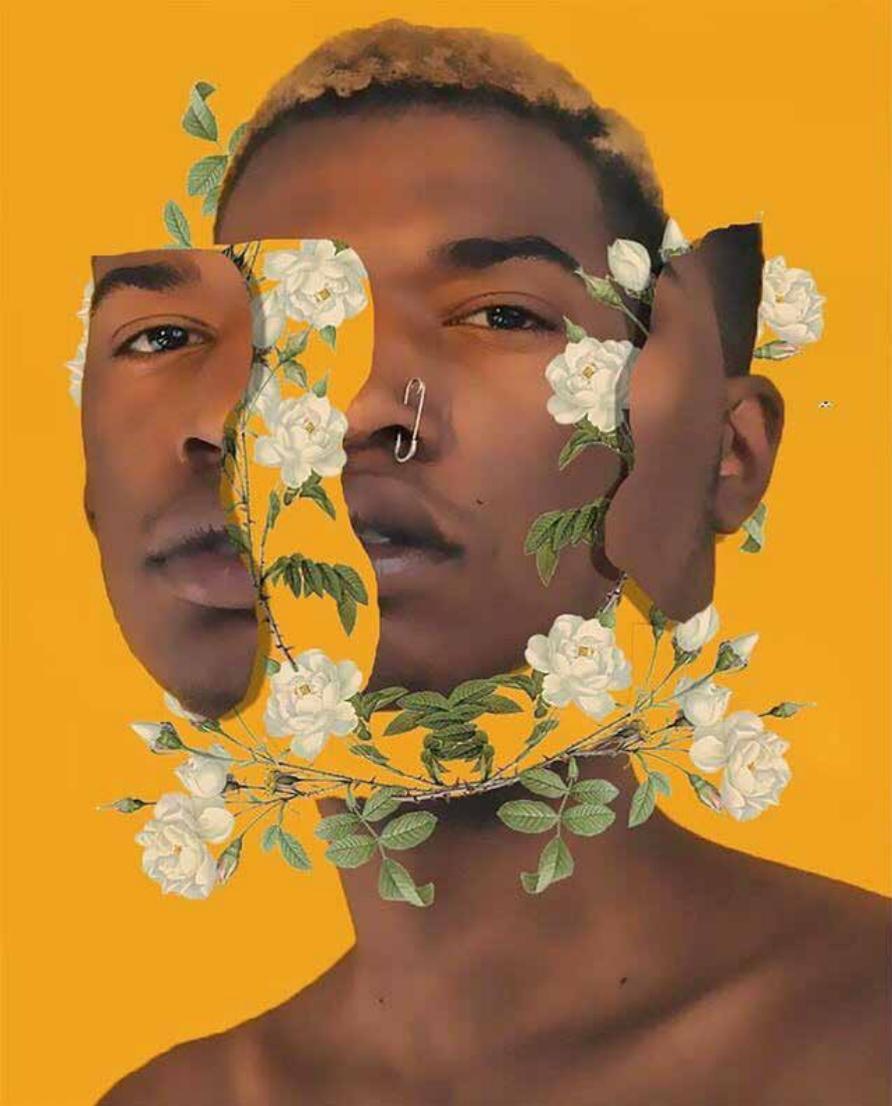
KP: My definition of creativity is the ability to find holes in society and to fill them with beauty.

SB: How do you channel your cultural heritage, identity and background into your work?

KP: Through music and reading. I find it vital to be aware of my predecessors and continue the echo of what it means to be a part of something in this world. My identity is linked to the present. I identify with those who are the outliers on this planet and possibly other planets. The background of my work can be found in the outcries of philosophy and the activism in politics.

SB: Why does creativity matter to you?

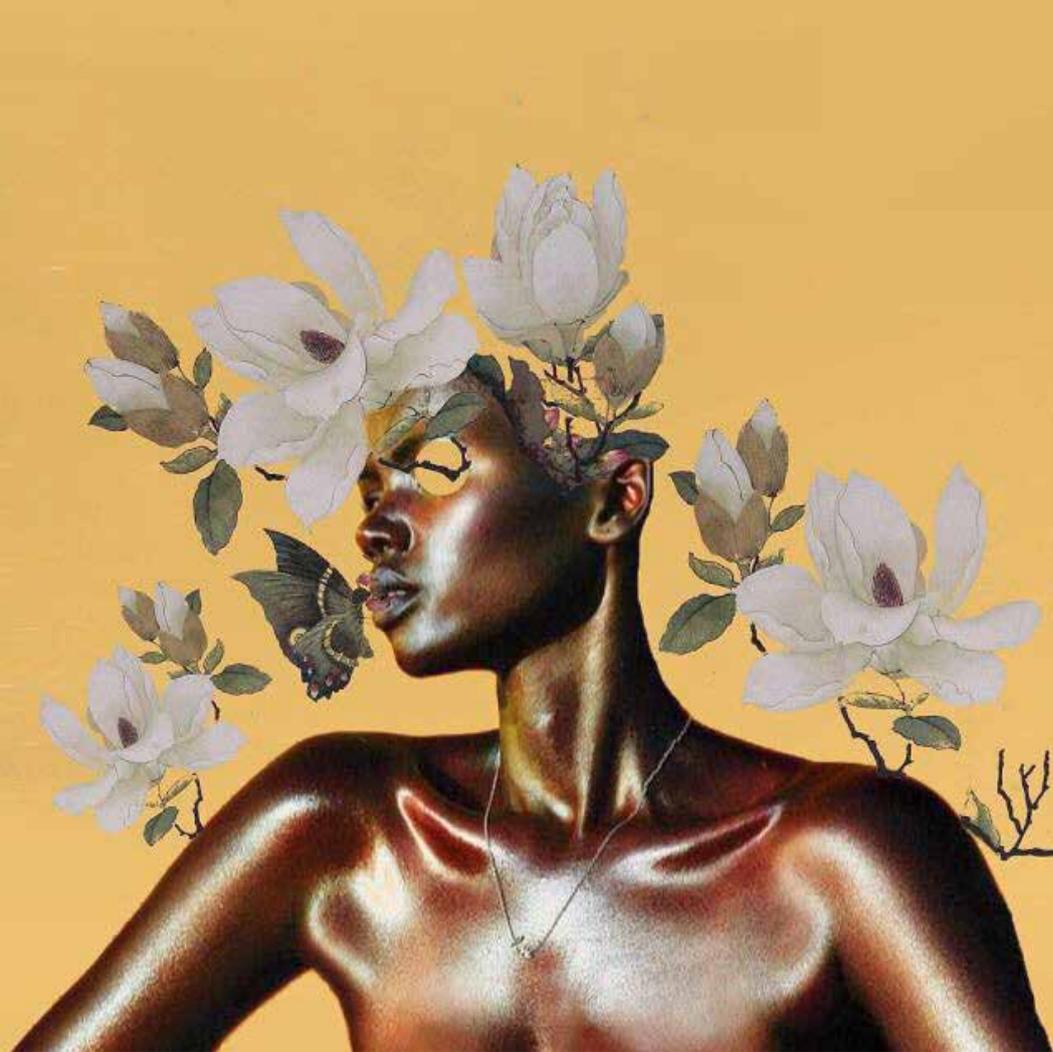
KP: Creativity matters because this world operates on the “new”. We are in constant need of creativity in order to advance or to keep moving forward.



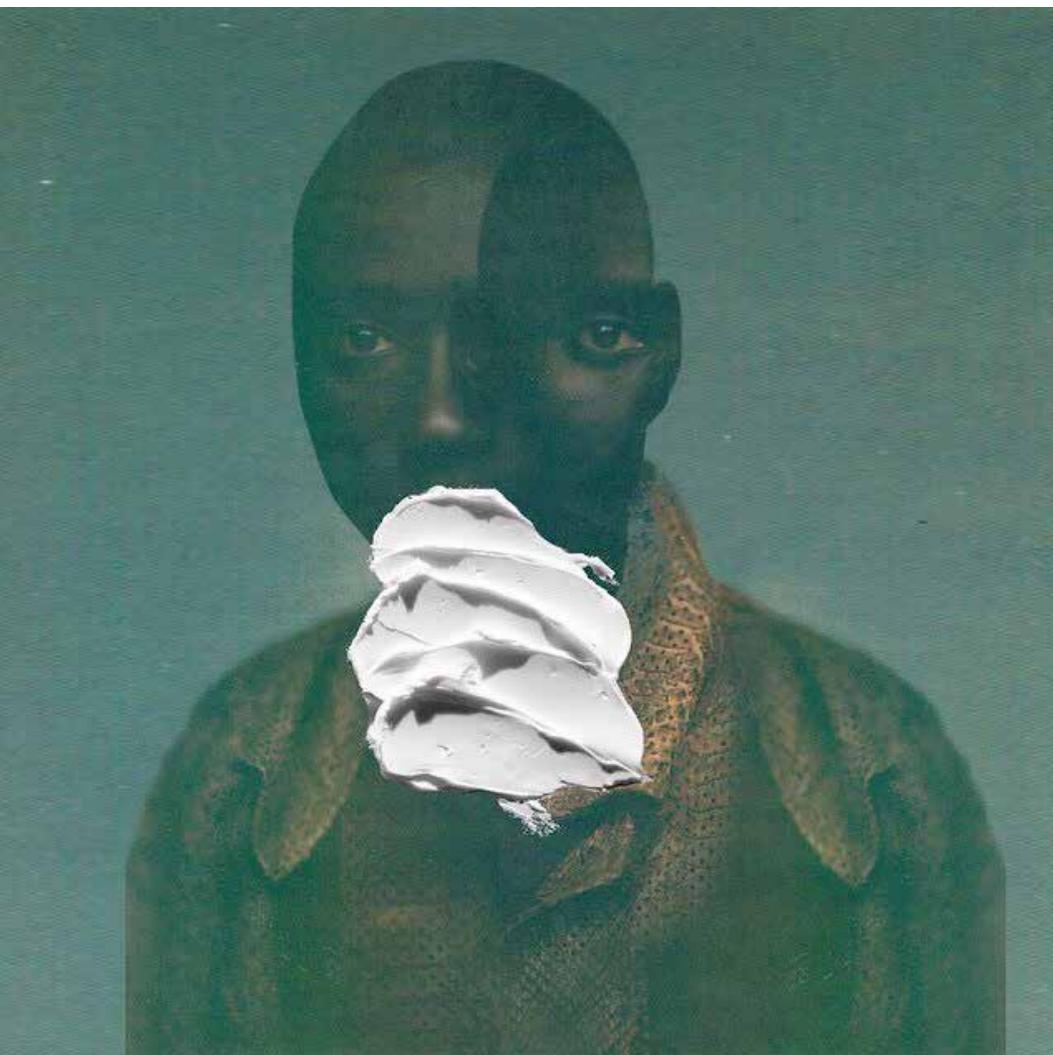
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Muse: Desmond Sam
Mixed Media Artwork



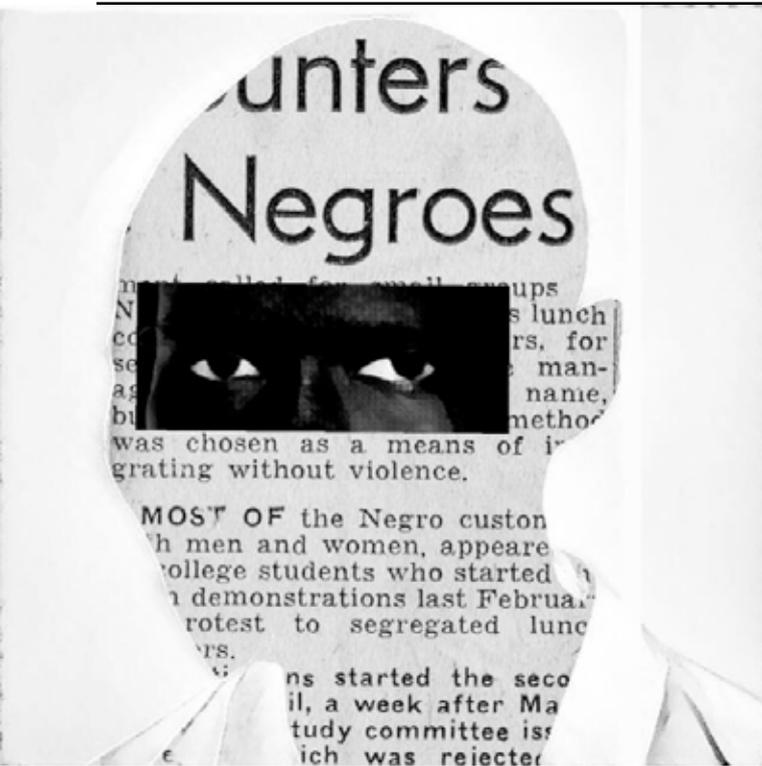
Let These Flowers Remind You of
Endurance Muse: Pierce Cady
Mixed Media Artwork,



Garden of Seduction
Original Photograph by @jamesmccloud
Muse: @lili_ann



Mistakes, Misstakes
Mixed Media Artwork



Unrest.
Mixed Media Artwork



Black Tea
Mixed Media Artwork,

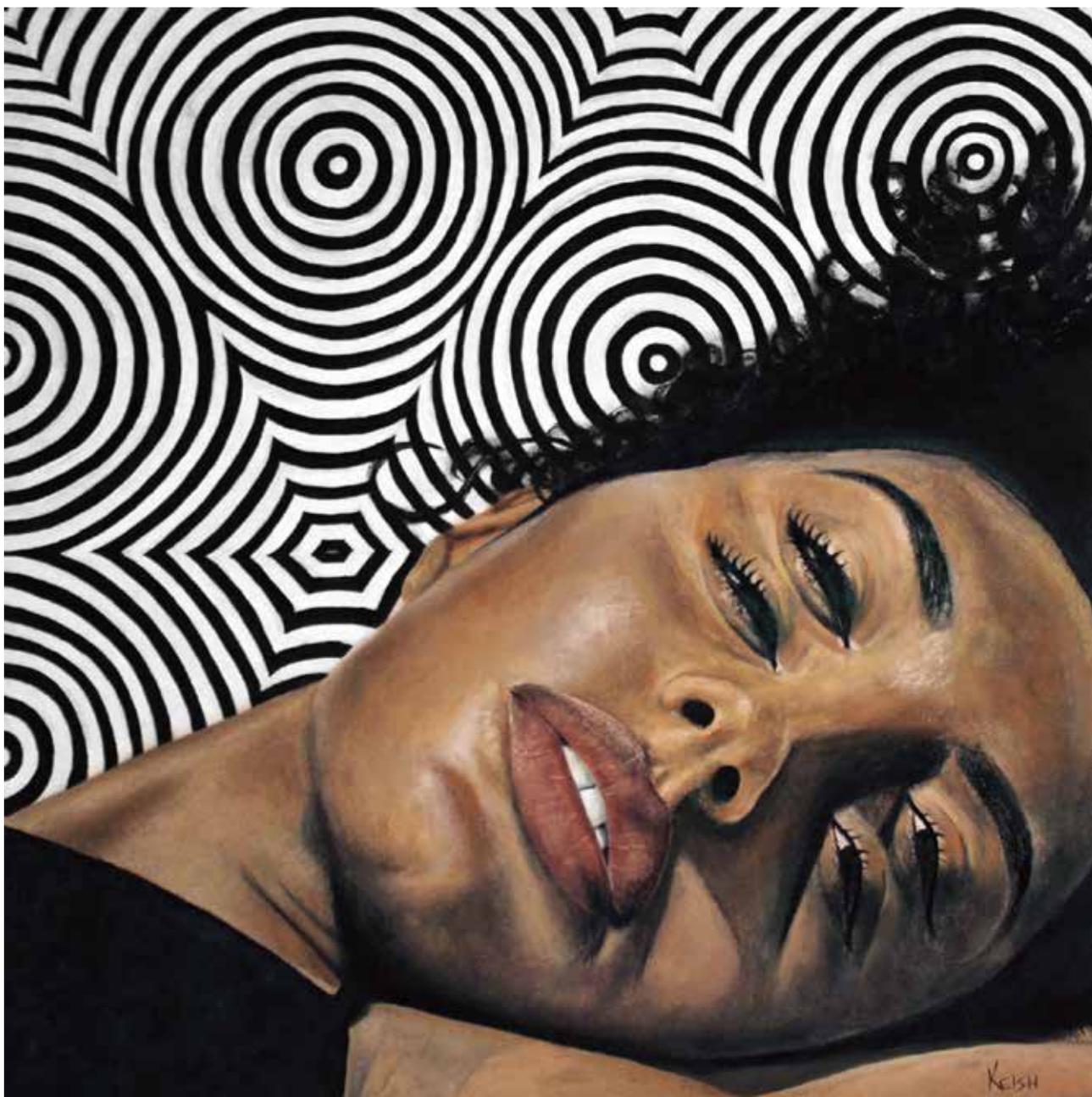


Misrepresentations
Mixed Media Artwork

PROFILE

KEISH JP

She is the Canadian artist celebrating Black womanhood, with her riveting take on the divine, femininity and Black musical icons.



Trippy

“Without creativity, life would be futile. There would be no growth, no joy, no point. It’s crucial for the evolution of human beings.”

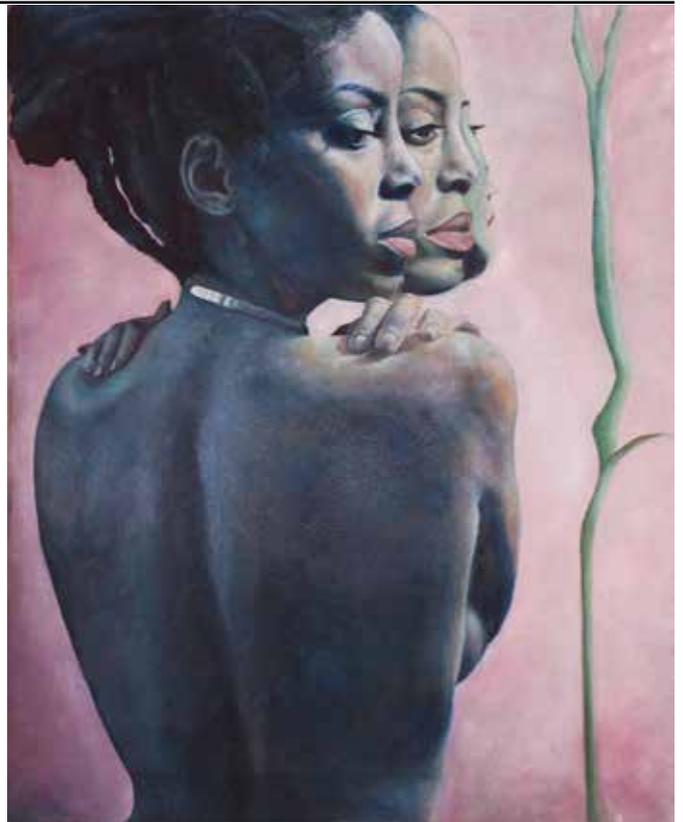
Based in Montreal Canada, Keish was born the daughter of an artist and so credits her Father as her earliest creative influence. Exposed to art from a young age, her affinity with sketching was palpable. Her natural inclination to drawing soon developed Keish into the self-taught painter she is today. Experimenting with both acrylic and oil paints, she forms stunning imagery, depicting the beauty, intimacy and tenderness of Black women.

Keish draws on her own truths to produce her paintings. She explains the vulnerability and authenticity involved in her process; “Creativity is the soul exposing a piece of itself in order to inspire and provoke feeling in others. When I create I’m giving my audience a piece of myself”.

Each painting is a demonstration of her thoughts and acts as a direct channel to her heart and self. The manifestation of the visual complexities and purities of black womanhood.

Eurocentric beauty standards in mainstream media encouraged Keish to represent herself and other women of colour in her art. “For me, growing up in a society that would predominantly promote European beauty, and not being able to see “myself” in mainstream media acted as a catalyst. It gave me the desire to embrace and uplift black beauty. It made me want to create art that shines a light on what makes black women stand out. I use my art to promote our icons, Black people who felt strongly about similar issues and used their platforms for empowerment. It’s important to be exposed to more than one type of ‘beauty’. It’s something I wish I saw more of growing up. Whether it is in the mainstream media or fine art galleries.”

Best known for her viral portrait work which is frequently celebrated by her twenty-thousand plus Instagram followers, Keish stands firm in her personal creative truth whilst building a global audience. Working on commissioned pieces along with her own original artwork, she continues to develop an international fan base. All of whom admire and connect to her honest, vulnerable representation of herself and other women of colour.



Who

Women of Colour





Goddess of Creation

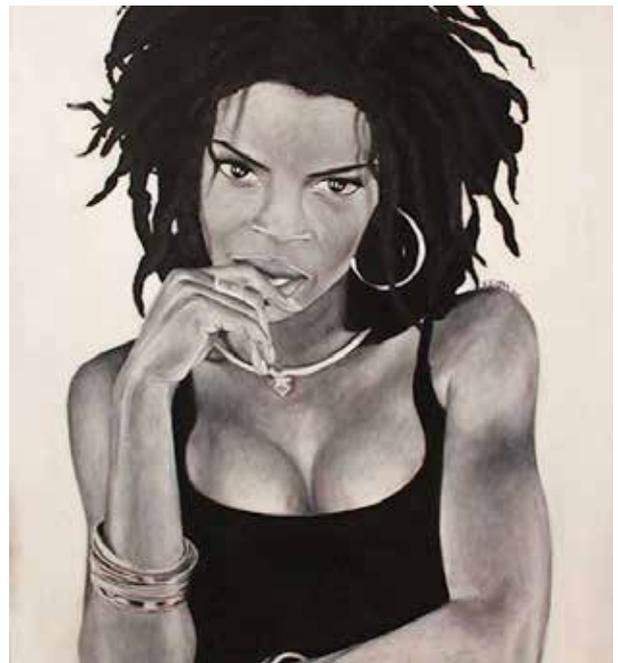
“Art can be seen everywhere & within anyone. In my mind, painting a beautiful piece captures the subject’s essence, allowing it to live forever.”



Astral Projection



Sade

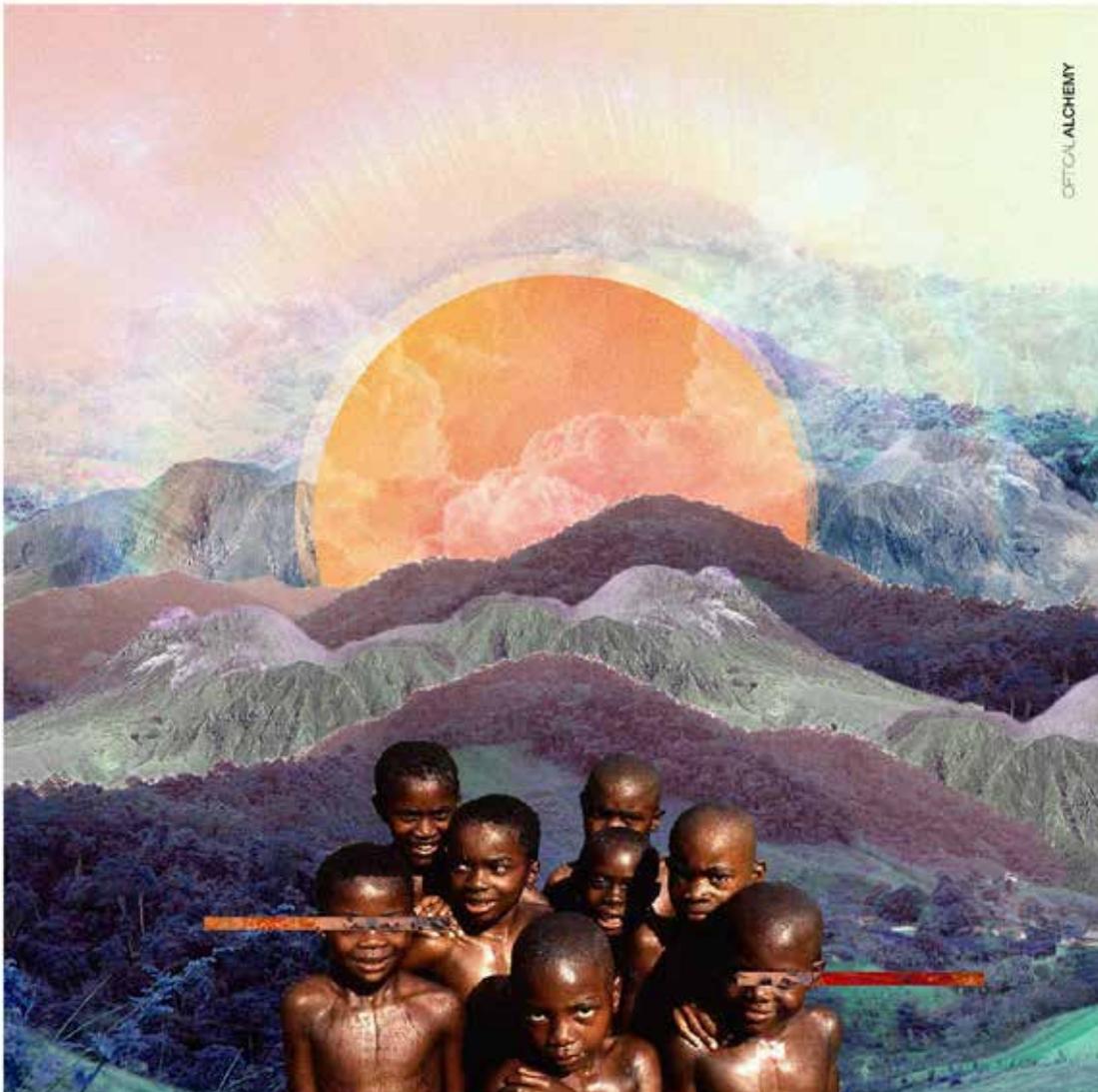


Ms. Hill

CONVERSATION

OPTICAL ALCHEMY

Playing with themes of space, nature and humanity, the artist known as Optical Alchemy creates mind-bending visuals that convey the complexities of Black representation, lifestyle and mental psyche. We had a conversation about creativity and authenticity.



Paris Terrell is the brilliant mind behind the creative persona known as Optical Alchemy. Born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, Paris graduated from Youngstown State University with a bachelor's degree majoring in Information Technology and minoring in Graphic Design. He was always drawn to art, despite initially pursuing a more traditional course and began feeding his creative appetite during college. "I have always had an avid interest in artistic expression but it was during my sophomore year that I began creating my own art through the medium of photography. Through photography, I developed a passion for videography and graphic design. I am at the point now, where I just enjoy having the ability to create as it has proved to be a necessary means of self-expression for me."



SB: So Paris, tell us about your definition of creativity?

OA: To me, creativity is an ever-present energy or force similar to gravity in a sense that the energy itself is unable to be seen but the effects of creativity are seen everywhere, literally everywhere. The laptop that I am using and the chair that I sit in are both results of creativity in a sort of microcosmic perspective when considering that life in its entirety is creativity. That is how I view creativity, from a perspective that allows me to see creativity manifested in works beyond what most would consider “art” and as a result, I am constantly inspired by things that are very often overlooked.

SB: Your work prominently features Black subjects. How does your culture and background play a part in your pieces?

OA: I am able to channel my cultural identity and background into my work by paying close attention to my life and the world around me from my perspective as an African American male. I feel how the world perceives black people, I see how black people view other black people and I see how these perceptions are built and perpetuated through negative representation and lack of representation, so I choose to strongly focus on

black representation when it comes to my art. For example in my digital collages, I primarily use black people as subjects to tell a story or to create an atmosphere from a perspective that represents blackness in a mostly positive and wondrous light.

SB: These key political elements are tangible in your pieces and so it seems that creativity has great importance to you, why do you think creativity matters to the world?

OA: Creativity matters because it is through creativity that we can alter our reality and continue moving forward as human beings living on this earth. Creativity allows us to continually find inspiration for change and progression no matter what the current state of things are. It is through creativity that this world can be gradually transformed into a better place for our future generations and that is why creativity matters, for evolution.

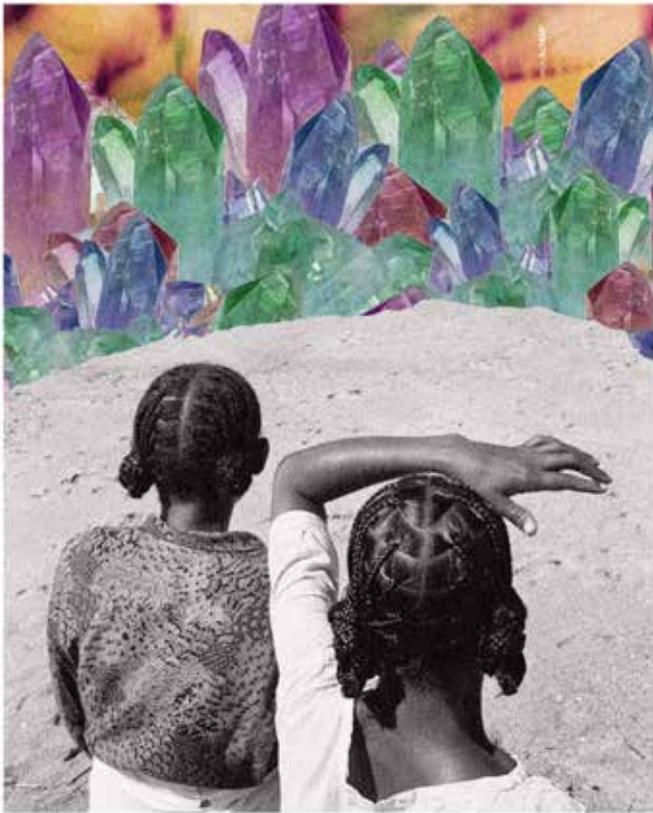
www.instagram.com/opticalalchemy



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Speak into Existence



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CONVERSATION

THE LOOKING GLASS COLLECTIVE

Maggie Ibiam is the curator of Looking Glass Co, the digital platform dedicated to celebrating African-European artistry. We spoke to Maggie about her journey to creativity, her cultural influences, passion for representation and the artists she's most excited about.

Born and raised in South East London to Nigerian parents, Maggie is heavily influenced by her dual British-Nigerian heritage and has now extended her European experience by moving to Berlin in early 2016. We discussed how she found the courage and drive to place herself at the helm of her very own creative platform devoted to Black Art.

SB: Tell us about your background in creativity?

MI: For as long as I can remember I have always had an active interest in creative arts. In my formal education, my teachers made it clear I was not a gifted painter or singer, so I started to channel my energy into writing and poetry. In my teen years I started to learn more about writing for print and digital and I also began to experiment a lot more with my personal style. At the time, it was a no-brainer, and I pursued a degree in Fashion Journalism at University. It was here I was able to witness and learn how fashion, art and music interlink.

SB: So the link between Fashion and Art is one of the oldest creative crossovers there is, this makes sense. How did you get started, once you recognised your interest?

MI: Well, it stemmed from a conversation I had with some close friends. In this conversation, we discussed and debated the lack of outlets for African- European artistry. It was a problem because I felt as though I wasn't able to really identify or truly see myself represented in many popular cultural websites, fairs, shows, events, pop ups, exhibitions etc. This was more apparent living in Germany. Even though Berlin has this "international appeal", it still lacks cultural diversity. I wanted to emulate a digital space for us that mirrored the tone of voice I would have conversing with my friends: frank, unapologetic and a stimulating dialogue bouncing back and forth. For it to be relatable I had to gear this toward my own identity. The idea was Looking Glass Collective, conceived in autumn 2016 and the site (www.lookingglasscollective.com) went live on the 1st of September 2017.

SB: Congrats on launching the platform, it's looking great and already packed full of brilliant creativity. What in your opinion is the definition of creativity?

MI: For me, creativity is being able to channel your vision, ideas and emotions into your craft. It's both a physical and mental labour of love and a passion. I think creativity can be sourced in

a number of places. I find inspiration from a variety of things. For example, when I travel, the places I see, my surroundings, people I meet, things I read, music I listen to and generally the information I consume. I'm a sensitive person, I can be inspired by many things.

SB: On the Looking Glass Collective website and earlier you speak in some detail about your background and upbringing, how has that defined your own expression of creativity?

MI: When everything is stripped-down, I really feel as though my Nigerian culture is basically the only thing that I have, which can't be taken away from me. When I was growing up in London, there was a time when I was indifferent about Igbo culture, partly because many of the traditions are quite obscure, plus I couldn't speak the language well. But as I got a bit older I took more of an interest in learning about my heritage reading books, watching films, listening to music, visiting my maternal and paternal home in Ebonyi state (south east Nigeria) and listening to the stories from my family back home. I think the more I self-educated the prouder I became.

When I remind myself of the adversity Nigerians have faced over the decades, it's like I feel obligated to channel this into the work I'm producing somehow. And when I think of my family history, we've endured a lot and still are enduring but still thrive, so we must be celebrated.

SB: Cultural authenticity and identity sound like they are key factors for you in your work. As someone who has dedicated so much of their time to art, tell us why, in your opinion, creativity matters?

Creativity is fundamental! I believe the world would be lost without it. It's an outlet for scattered thoughts, innovation and self-expression. It influences the way we interact and co-exist with one another, how we digest information and the way we consume products too. Whether it is something that can be taught from a textbook or must come naturally, I'm on the fence, but I think what matters is that it's encouraged and nurtured from a young age.



SB: What are your hopes for the future of Looking Glass Collective?

MI: I believe there must be more outlets for Afro-European artistry. I hope to continue curating pop up exhibitions with African-European artists in other cities throughout Europe. I would also love to collaborate with other black-owned businesses and communities, in the form of workshops, panel discussions, events, readings, open studios, exhibitions etc. Not only for Looking Glass Collective is this important, but I really do believe black collectives need more support from large organisations and cultural institutions, as this would help lessen structural racism in “esteemed” spaces. I also hope Looking Glass has a long life ahead of it too!

SB: What creatives are you currently really inspired for and keen to share?

MI: I first saw Asmah Williams’ collages on Tumblr, I can’t really remember what I was searching for but as soon as I saw one image, I just had to see the rest. She has an impeccable sense of style too and this translates into her art. From looking at her work I get a strong sense of her identity, warmth and complexity.

I like Hilda Kortei’s paintings too. Her work is haphazard and unapologetic but beautiful and inviting at the same time. I like the way she interprets issues of race, culture and identity, it’s an honest prose of her own truths.

I really love Ussi’n Yala’s work and also admire the unconventional path he took to pursuing a career in photography. He shoots mostly in black and white, every image feels raw and has a narrative you want to follow.

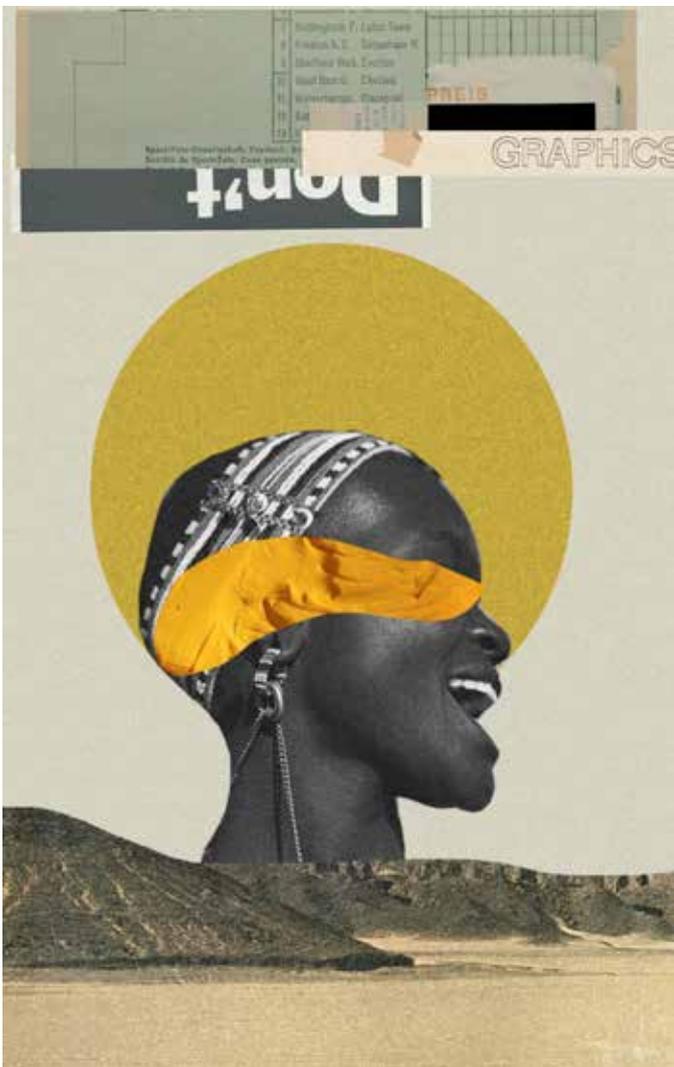
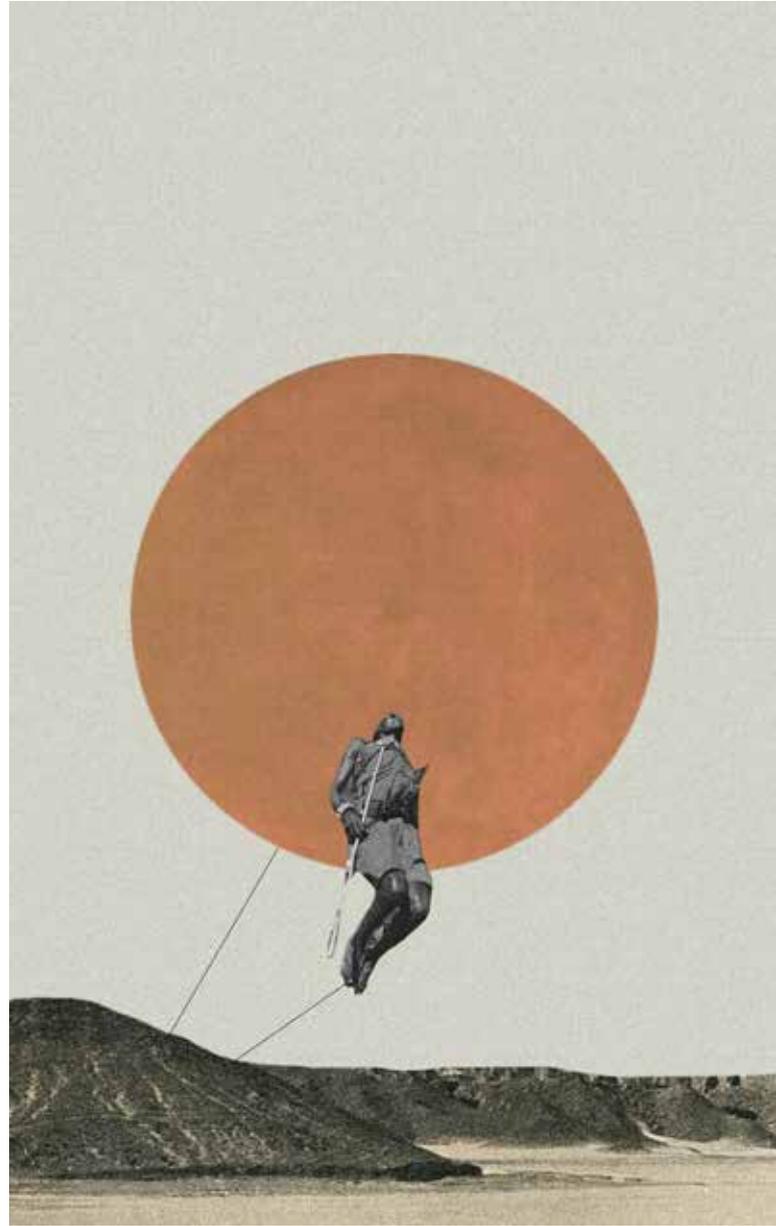
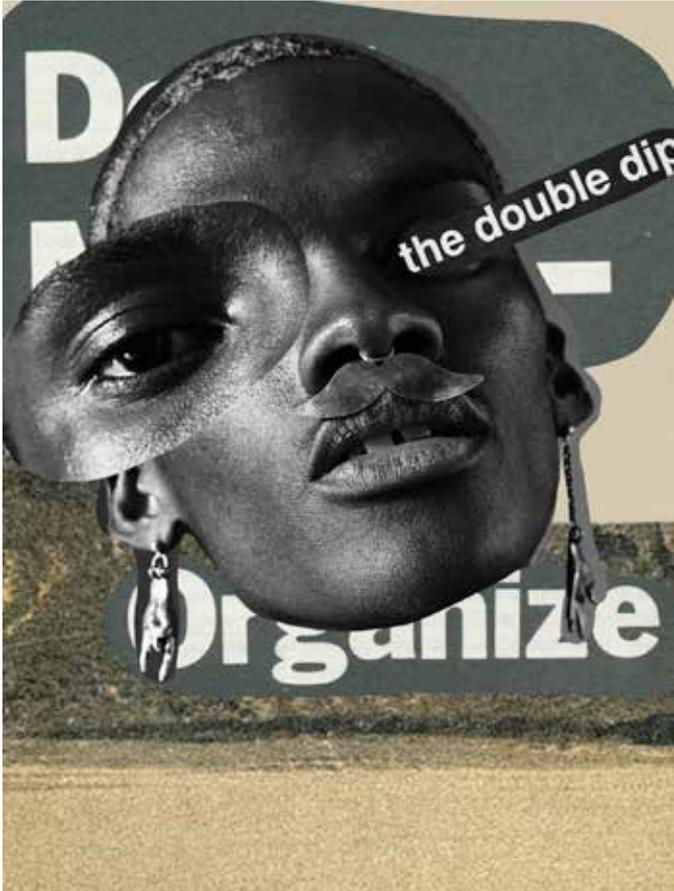
I also like Ib Kamara’s styling and creative direction, I’m a fan of pretty much any editorial he touches. Heavily-accessorised, conceptual and so damn extra, but I’m here for it!



Be sure to catch Looking Glass Collective group exhibition, showing 20th-22nd October 2017, at Das Giftraum, Donaustrasse 119, Berlin 12043. Visit lookingglasscollective.com for more info.



Asmah Williams





Hilda Kortei



20·10·2017 - 22·10·2017

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HILDA KORTEI

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ASMAH WILLIAMS

LOOKING GLASS COLLECTIVE: BELONGINGNESS

CONVERSATION

KERN BRUCE

You can't help it. An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times.
– Nina Simone

Kern references Nina Simone in his artist statement and in his artistic depiction of her. Similar to this iconic Black creative, Kern is outspoken about the cultural challenges the global Black community experience.

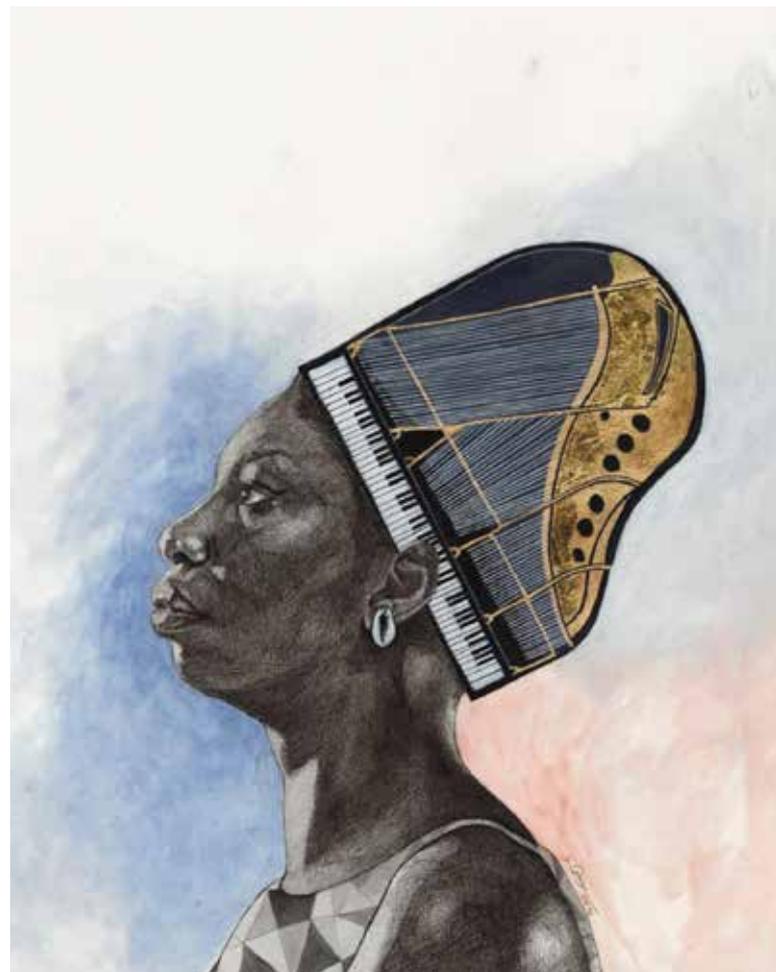
“Using the words and work of Nina Simone as a catalyst, I plan on creating work that both interprets and documents the current political climate of a Trump presidency on Newark and predominantly black and brown communities like Newark. Representation is a reoccurring theme in my work. Seeing contemporary black and brown bodies continue the tradition of resistance for me creates a sense of pride and serves as a reminder that collectively “we’ve been here before”. Where Simone used music — I plan on using line, form, colour to both document and inspire marginalized people as we move through our current cultural climate.”

“Where Simone used music — I plan on using line, form, colour to both document and inspire marginalized people...”

Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Kern Bruce is the mixed media and digital artist whose work focuses on subjects from the African diaspora. Exploring themes around resistance, colonialism and modern-day racism, Kern uses his artistic platform to speak his mind. Challenging the norms of racial identity and the dominant representation of marginalized groups Kern takes a critical view of socio-political and cultural issues.

At the age of three, Kern began drawing and painting and soon found his feet at the Newark Community School of the Arts and then later progressed to Newark Arts High. He then went on to achieve an undergraduate degree in Art Semiotics and Modern Culture and Media from Brown University and a Master's of Advertising and Media from Boston University. His work includes literal and abstract interpretations of the trials Black people in America and around the world face and the grace with which they overcome.

Most recently Kern has shown work at Art in the Atrium, The Puffin Foundation, and Gallery Aferro. He is a 2015 / 2016 muralist for Newark Mayor Ras Baracka Model Neighborhood 2015 initiative.



Nina



Chrississ Universe



Sembene

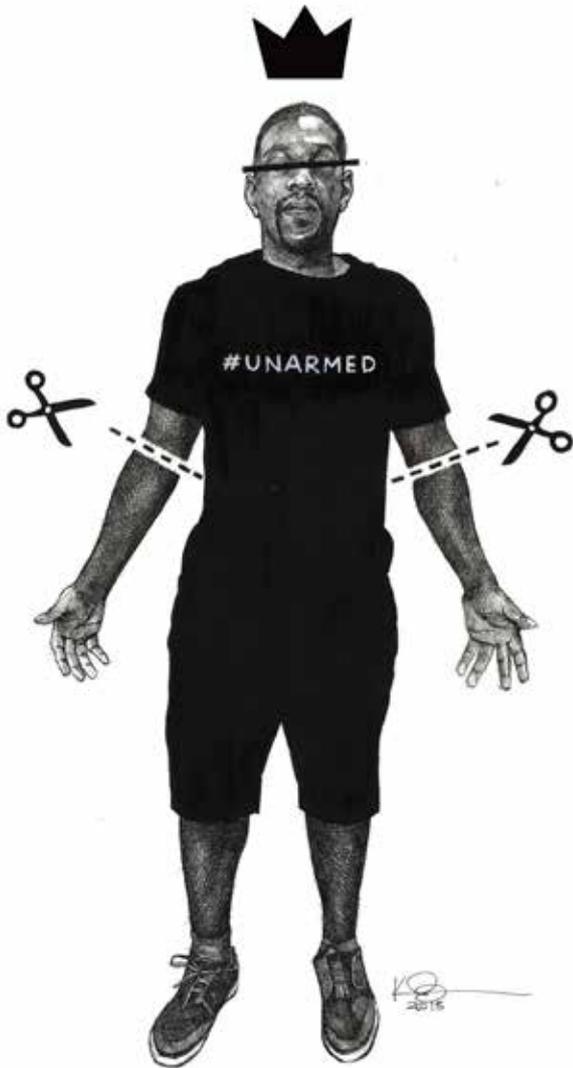


Song for Carliene

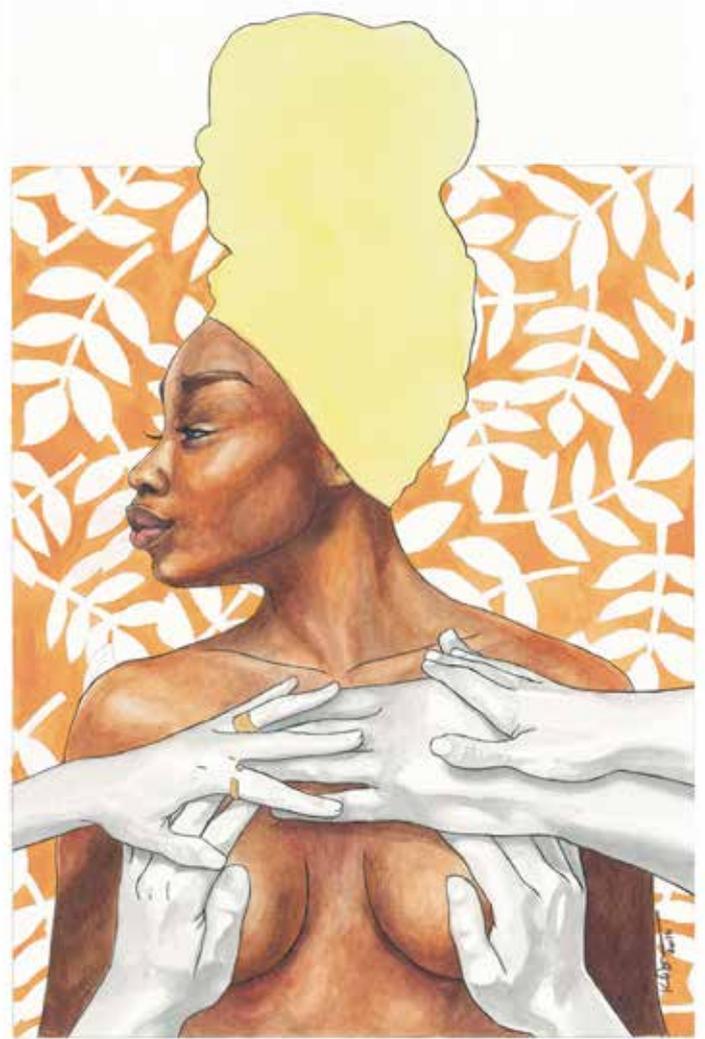
Pineal



A.B.C. CALLOWAY



#UNARMED



A queen in her own right

CONVERSATION

DANIEL ODUNTAN & SOUL LABELS

We first encountered the remarkable collective that is Soul Labels at the #64BITS event in London earlier this year. We spoke to the London based Creative Director and Founder, Photographer and Artist Daniel Oduntan about the polymath group and the importance of identity, representation and Black Creativity.



Now here test print, SOUL COMPLEX



SB: Hi Daniel, tell us about who you are and your journey to this point?

DO: I'm a London born photographer, artist and the creative director and founder of polymath group Soul Labels. I studied at the London College of Music & Media from 2003-2007 and after, I worked at Metropolis Studios. I had dreams of climbing the ropes, working in the Music Industry and making music, but decided to leave and work in construction and demolition instead. (Sadly didn't care much for the music industry once I was in it). Unfortunately, this happened at around the same time of the UK recession and so found it hard to find good apprenticeships, many companies were firing more than hiring, including a company I was with at the time that eventually let me go.

Long story short I found my creative bug again in the still moments while working on construction sites, I would take photos on my camera phone and the positive feedback I got once I uploaded them online encouraged me enough to get into photography. Soon after I made the decision to leave the construction world and go to work in the museum and gallery visitor sector, where I've been freelancing in between photography and sound work for the past 6 years.

I was nominated very early on in my development for best British emerging artist by the Mica gallery in 2012, there was a gallery space set up in Sloane Square with my work on display, a gala dinner and auction I was invited to attend at the Saatchi gallery. If I'm honest, I found it incredibly difficult to fit in and navigate my way through the fine art scene, coming from a working-class background with no mentoring or financial support within the arts, I pretty much fell through the cracks. This was one of the main reasons I started Soul Labels 3 years later, with the intention to build a house for artist where they can feel comfortable being themselves, while at the same time working towards sustainable careers within art and design. We still have lots of work to do but that's the dream.

SB: That sounds like an incredible journey and certainly inspiring for those struggling to balance a creative vision with the challenges of day to day work. Your desire to branch out and build something to support those like you is really reassuring and represents the type of culture Black creatives around the world should aim to adopt. In this political and cultural climate, we see many people expressing themselves in a number of ways, it seems as though some are turning to creativity as a form of cathartic release. How do you use and define creativity?

DO: Creativity is life, it's everywhere and everything, it's a form of expression that can make you dig deep and problem solve or sit still and reflect. It transports me to other spaces and in many ways is a portal to my real self, who I long to be or how I wish to be understood. It's not always easy to access or live with a person who constantly feels the need to create, we can be awkward, our own worst critics, hard to understand, plus getting the money and work balance right doesn't come naturally for most. But it's a gift that in many ways has the ability to touch people and feel it should be used to add to the progressive development of our world.

SB: You've mentioned feeling marginalised in the fine arts scene, this is common in many spaces where People of Colour are minorities, has this influenced your work?

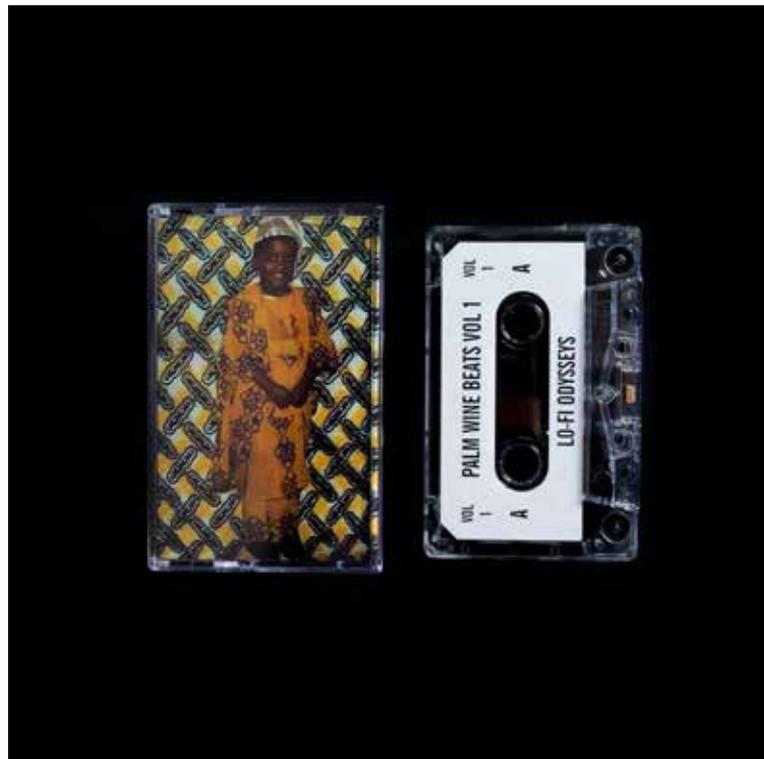
Much of the time, my work comes out of a need to share or explain something that's close to me. Other than that I often work on projects that allow me to respond to experience. I still feel that this is an area I'm really yet to fully explore as I have so many ideas I'd like to develop that nobody knows about, even the projects we've worked on at Soul Labels are just testing the waters, it's very far from the full picture of what we want it to be.

In a funny way, sound and mixtapes have allowed me to channel a lot of my identity in a very different artistic way to photography. In 2014 I started a personal archive project called Lo-Fi Odysseys, it was a way for me to fall back in love with sound art, music, storytelling and use whatever mediums I had to hand. Sometimes it takes the form of reimagined west African folk music from old tapes, documentary mixtapes, a live band, or even visual art and film projects. One doc-mix I put together called Black [is a culture] came about from conversations I'd had with friends and strangers about the aspects of white supremacy and institutional racism, both in the UK and US. Another mix I did for a record label from the Netherlands called INI Movement is one of the most honest reflections of myself as a creative and my background. So much of my personality is in that mix, I think if anyone ever wanted to understand how I think they should listen to it, it's also a night project so best listened to in those long testing nights creatives often have to pull to make things happen.

SB: And finally Daniel, tell us why creativity matters to you?

DO: Creativity is a connection to our souls, I think it allows me to really explain my true self, be it visual, film, physical, or sound. Being dyslexic, I don't always express myself well, words are limiting for me, both written and spoken. Even though I speak far better than I type, I often space out when talking to people. I was a manic daydreamer in school and I still am. I often take shortcuts in my own writing due to grammatical difficulties and how much energy and time it takes for me to construct sentences. I can sometimes be horribly misunderstood if I don't take my time, and so I feel that creativity gives me permission to use a much better tool from my workshop. Also if I'm creating something it's a way of living beyond your physical time on earth, not in an egotistical way but it's a way to leave a part of yourself behind. Not everybody is going to understand you or your art straight away, sometimes it takes years, sometimes it takes new perspectives, that's one of the things I love about creativity, it's timeless.

www.danieloduntan.com
www.soullabels.com



LFO



Rahoul_Drewitt, 64 Bits

About Soul Labels

Soul Labels is a polymath group exploring subculture creativity and ways to widen access to the arts. Our work encompasses everything from exhibitions and workshops to performance and design. Young people are in danger of becoming products of their environment rather than their ability, particularly those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, working class and poor families. Our founder, Daniel Oduntan, was one of them. That's why he decided to start Soul Labels in late 2015 – to become a springboard for 16-30s and the unsung to embark on sustainable careers in the creative industries.

We encourage people with little or no experience to engage and express themselves. We do this through a variety of activities such as intergenerational festivals and mixed media exhibitions. Participants and audience feel a deeper appreciation of the arts, the roots of things, and a greater sense of togetherness in the documentation of shared experience. We hope that through our activities, everyone from school kids to seniors will be able to find the art in the every day and look a little closer. Who knows, some may even progress to making their own work.

By engaging in these projects and undertaking commissions, emerging artists will be able to earn by producing very personal work that breaks the mould. We can also license their work (art, music, photography) so it has an afterlife. In effect, our living archive becomes a catalogue with commercial as well as educational value.

The core vision is to become a cross between a record label and a museum – documenting culture with depth and originality while developing new professional artists. Soul Labels also becomes a respected auction house, helping people to break into the fine art and design worlds on their own terms. This could be accomplished through a mix of brand sponsorship, commissions (book, song, painting, anything) and funding.

It would be great to have our own studio where we can provide design, production and licensing services to clients while also running a mentoring scheme in partnership with local authorities, public institutions and key collaborators.



soul/labels

PROFILE

THE MENTALYST

Inspired by his everyday experiences, Kenyan Photographer and Filmmaker Trevor Maingi is telling stories through portrait photography.



“I try to show the way I see things, differently. Almost like seeing a third side of a coin...”

Born and raised in Nairobi Kenya, Trevor started his career in Aerospace and software engineering, far from the story-telling style creativity he explores today. "I picked photography up as a hobby in 2015 after joining Instagram. My motivation came from my everyday living, seeing untold stories."

Trevor believes that creativity can be used as a tool to change the world through sharing a different perspective. "I try to show the way I see things, differently. Almost like seeing the third side of the coin."

Dedicated to incorporating different technical styles and creative themes he wants to appeal to a vast range of people with his work. "I always try to contribute to a style that resonates with both Ol' & Nu school. I always find interesting people who have a story written all over them. Merging both gives me ties to both worlds."

Trevor believes that his work enables him to rewrite the narrative often forced on people of colour and specific segments of society. "In a world where you are living by a narrative that has been told by someone else, where so much of what you are seeing or doing has been done before, creativity is key for narrating and shaping my own story and sharing the way I see the world, it's life through my eyes."

www.thementalist.net



Trevor Maingi, photo by Alessio La Ruffa







www.thementalist.net

The London Arts Board



londonartsboard.blogspot.co.uk

Image: Jack Sutherland, Tung (detail)

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PROFILE

DARNELL DEPRADINE

At the age of Twenty, Darnell Depradine has struck a vicious blow to the beast that is Black male toxicity. In the form of his solo debut project, the visual EP 'Dear Male Ego'.



The East London based film maker reveals no evidence of novice in his latest project. Having executively produced the soundtrack album to accompany his film, he manages to deliver a highly emotive piece.

The portrait film director studies Film Practice at London Southbank University. He's been directing for just over a year and got started in videography and photography. Pulling on his own experiences Darnell tells us about his journey to authentic self-expression. "I try to always be transparent with my work.

So my thoughts and emotions are always on display. I try to make my work seem as though if you're watching my work then you're watching me."

He references his Caribbean background and household as key influencers in helping him infuse his desired messaging and values into his work. 'Dear Male Ego' is remarkably creative and his desire to convey something interesting and different is routed in his personal creative philosophy. "My definition of creativity is to be different, unique and unapologetically



yourself with whatever you do.” As a Black male dealing with several challenges that his work explores Darnell feels that his creative outlet is therapeutic. A form of expression and a way to affirm our identities. “Creativity is what makes us stand out from others.”

Watch ‘Dear Male Ego on Vimeo:
vimeo.com/221112470/3be2dca098



Darnell Depradine

PROFILE

ADEFÉ

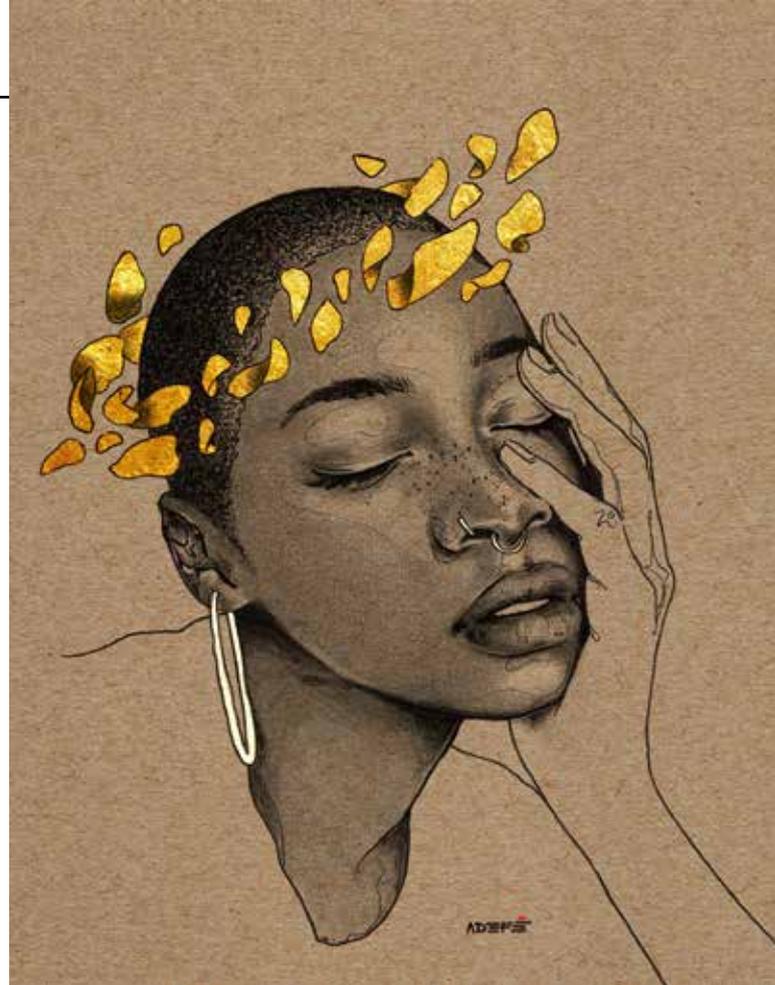
Meet the Architecture graduate turned multidisciplinary artist and creative consultant, Adefé. Nigerian born, his heritage is tangible in all that he does creatively. Channeling his personal struggles of leaving his homeland at 8-years old, he focuses on portraying his idea of identity.

By exploring portraiture and experimenting with gestures Adefé expresses his own definition of beauty and in doing so empowers those far less frequently represented in artistic circles. "My inspirations come from life itself, depicting my experiences and thoughts in the best way I can. In a world where humanity is segregated by race, gender, religion and other aspects that affect human conditions, I believe in scrutinising equality through art."

Adefé's call to creativity is rooted in being able to create meaningful artwork. "To be able to deliver impactful imagery, that allows people to see the world differently and to be guided by it - that is creativity". In his work, he tries to combine his love for beauty, individualism and synchronicity with nature. He refers to these as "The simple things we are all surrounded by."

Having invested years into refining his craft, Adefé is constantly trying to maintain a balance between Art and Design. "I can't help but feel that my work continues to shift forms due to self-consciousness and my need to express. Visual storytelling and driven narratives have always been my thing, I'd like to think my Nigerian culture or my Architectural background has a lot to do with that. Somehow the disciplines from both worlds seep through into my work."

With a growing portfolio of exceptionally gorgeous pieces depicting an African idea of beauty, Adefé finds a justification for his very existence in creativity. "It is the very reason we all exist, It's our chance to make something out of nothing. This world is governed by that basic fundamental. It doesn't matter what sector one belongs in, whether finance, sports, gardening, politics, teaching... I could go on. It doesn't matter because creativity is less about the object, rather it's about the substance and intent of the mind. So I think it really matters, simply because it's what we were all born to do."



Crown me with petals

Dunn as Sade





Look at me



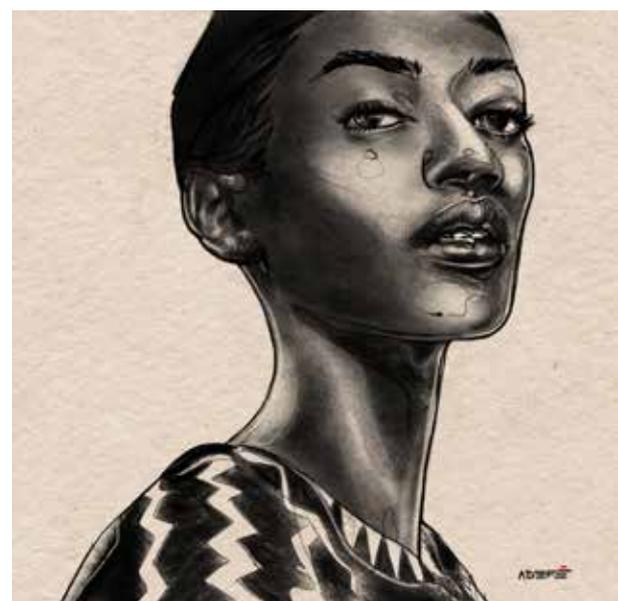
Boys are just tough



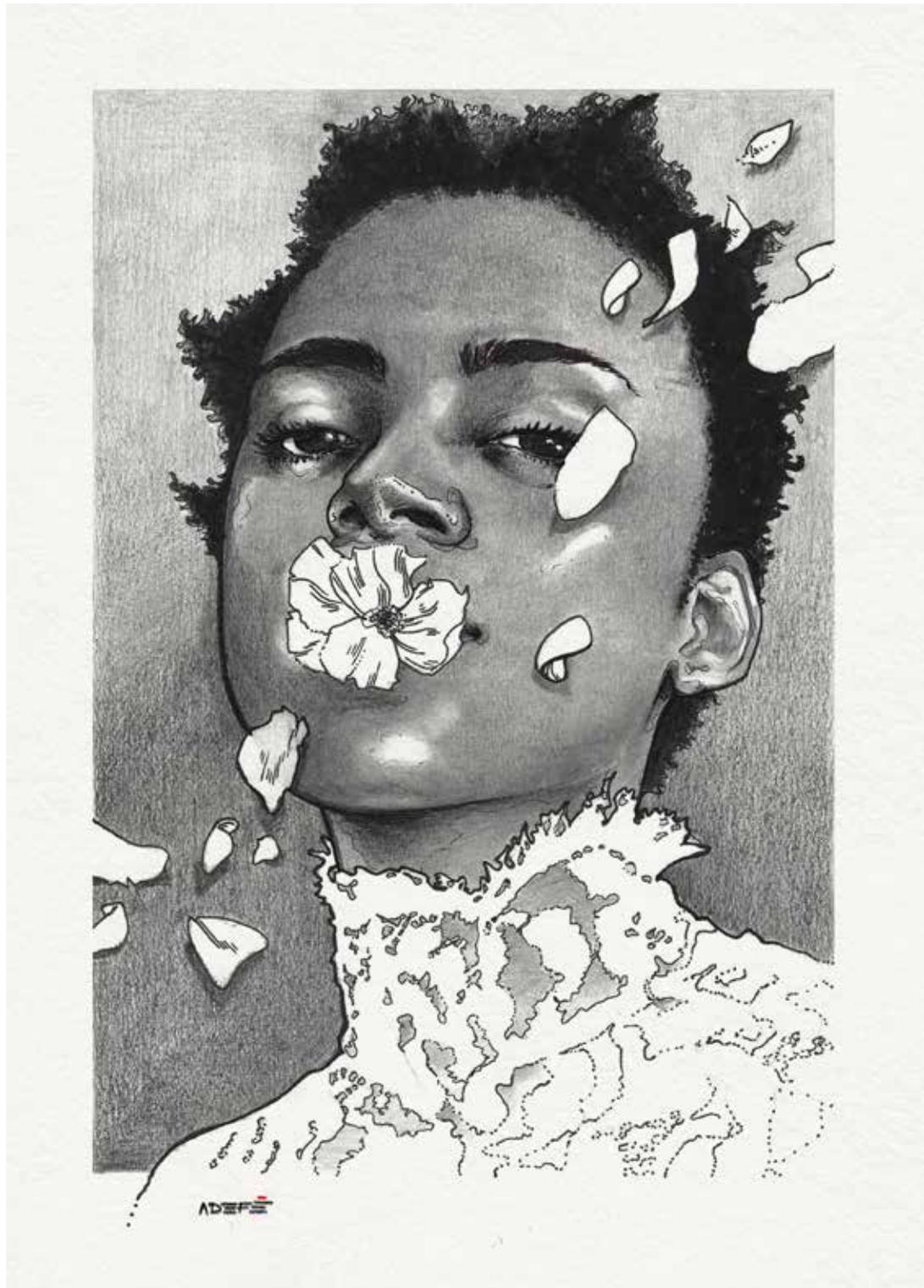
Your world



Freckles



Brown Sugar



Petals & Desire

PROFILE

E. BEZALEL

Using creativity as a means to finding new approaches to life, E. Bezalel's gorgeous drawings demonstrate the beauty and intricacies of Black hair. Joining a whole wave of black women embracing their natural beauty E channels her appreciation for black beauty into her work.

E. Bezalel, known as E for short was born and raised in Texas. Currently living in California, she uses drawing as a relaxation method as well as a creative outlet. She originally discovered her knack for sketching as a child, "I got my start in drawing, mainly tracing and freehand sketching characters from my favourite movies. Drawing was simple, cheap and easy to do anywhere while killing time, so I stuck with it until college when my attention turned to oil painting. I've only recently returned to drawing as my primary focus. I find that it helps me unwind and keeps ideas constantly flowing."

E defines creativity as thinking laterally about everyday issues and artistic challenges. "Being faced with some kind of dilemma, whether it's boredom or a tangible problem, and instead of throwing the rulebook at the situation, you choose to explore even the most ridiculous possibilities. Even if it doesn't solve anything and ends up being an abandoned idea, it opens you up to new ways of approaching life, which is never a waste."

E attributes her beautiful series entitled 'Coiled' to a pivotal event that took place back in 2008 on the same night President Barack Obama was elected. "I used a product that reacted badly with my hair, which was chemically relaxed at the time. It turned my hair into a matted birds nest. I ended up cutting it all off in my dorm room that night. It's still one of the best decisions I've ever made. Embracing my natural hair texture was a huge step in exploring my identity as a black woman, and it was a defining moment in my life.

My series 'Coiled' is a celebration of that, and an indulgence in the beauty and great diversity of natural black hairstyles. Many of the styles in the series are ones I, my family or my friends wear on a daily basis, so there's a personal and direct connection." E explains that life without creativity, for her wouldn't have much appeal, "life would be dull, and both social and technological progress would be slow or nonexistent without it."

We are keen to see how E continues to use her creativity and platform to fuel social progress and wider acceptance and appreciation for natural Black beauty.





PROFILE

CHIIZII

Chiizii is the 22-year-old visual artist and textile designer combining her African heritage with her big city experiences.



A portfolio of vibrant artwork reflects her international adventures. Born in the fast-paced city of London, Chiizii grew up in the equally as frantic city of New York. She places special emphasis on the most consistent cultural factor in her life - her Nigerian Igbo background.

Currently based in London, Chiizii uses her art as a means of social commentary, expression of thoughts and to learn about herself and others. Her dedication to authenticity has seen her develop a strong relationship with vivid colour and pattern referencing and celebrating her culture.

Describing herself as an Aries (with Cancer rising and sag moon) with an Enfp-t personality and a love for food, Chiizii tells us about her definition of creativity. "It is a very weird thing to me because I can see and understand that creativity is in everything, even things that I feel were created without genuine creativity, but how can I really be the judge of that. Creativity for me is basically when my senses, are overridden with an idea that comes and forces itself to the forefront of my mind".

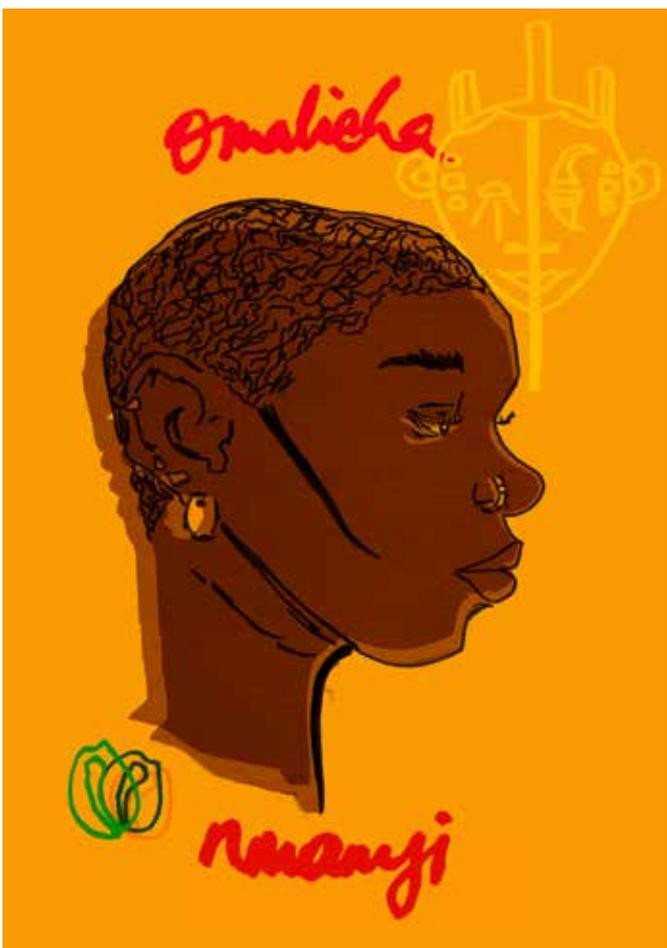
Citing her cultural background as the anchor for her identity, Chiizii tells us about her process. "I don't create what I'm not connected to and I have no idea what I would make without my culture. It informs how I approach themes, what themes to work on and my style of work. Every project I've done has to do with an experience, a heritage, person or place that has really impacted me.



So my identity and background decide what I make but then that work serves as research to learn more about my identity and background. When I look at the progression of my work it reflects a timeline of important events and revelations that have really shaped me.”

This existential approach to creativity enables her to share her definition of self with the world, “Creativity matters to me because it’s one of my languages.” Chiizii explains that her work creates a bridge of communication between the various topics, people and areas of knowledge she desires to connect with. “When I really appreciate someone I create work based on them. It is the same when there is a truth that I can’t speak freely about because of deeply emotional associations, so I create work about it instead. When I want to learn deeper about a people or place I create work on it because it’s easier for me to receive knowledge that way.”

www.originalechiizii.wixsite.com/chiizii



PROFILE

TARAJOSU

Tarajosu combines patterns, portraiture and vivid colour to create stunning art pieces giving a face to underrepresented ethnicities and their multi-faceted identities.

At 28-years old Tarajosu describes himself as an all-around creative, “I say that because I don’t just specialize in visual art. In fact, my true passions extend into other disciplines such as cinematography, music, and many other forms of storytelling. However, most people know me for my murals and artwork inspired by all cultures of the world.”

Tarajosu defines creativity as the ability to take an idea from its conception and see it through to fruition, no matter what it takes. “For me, creativity is about bringing a vision into the physical realm, it is also about being resourceful and innovative.”

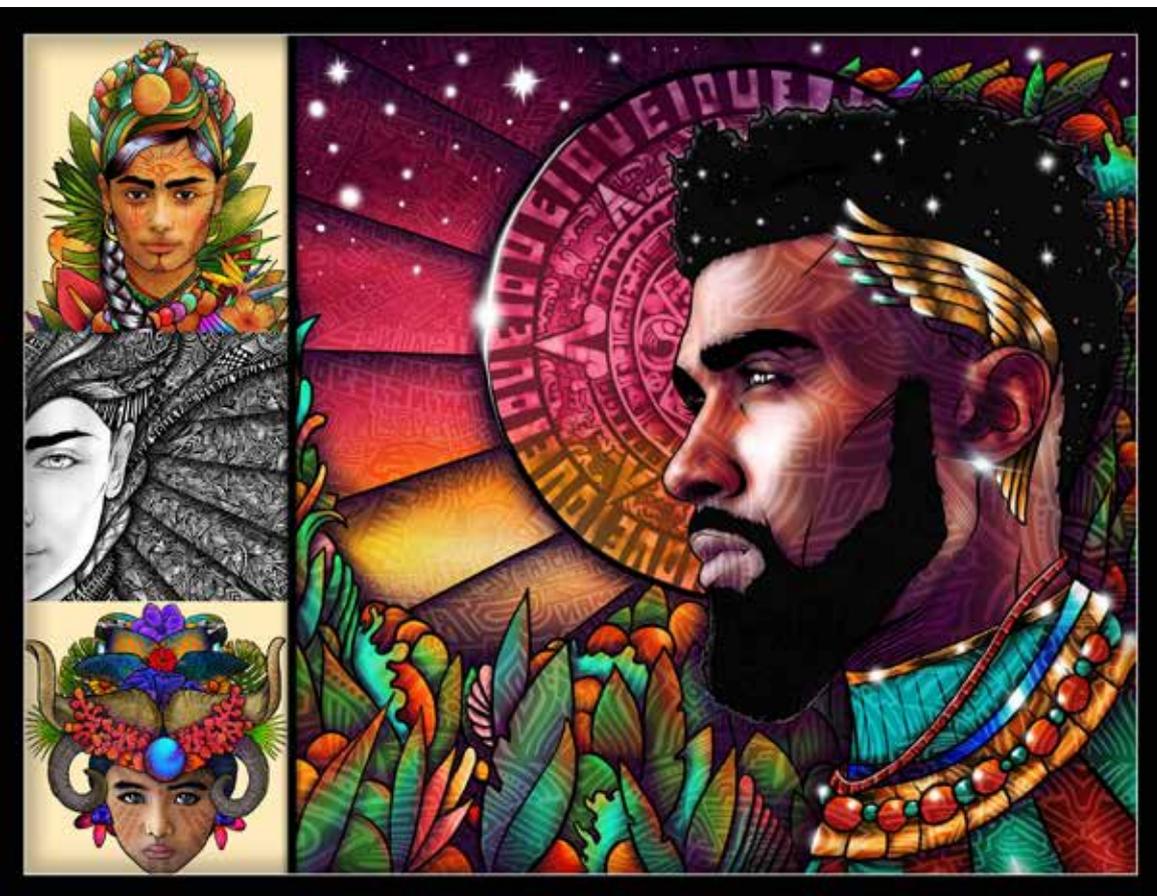
Originally from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, Tarajosu is a first-generation American born to Jamaican and Guyanese parents of African and Indian descent.

This combination of heritage and culture has inspired him to represent many cultural identities in his work. “I’m not just one “thing” and that’s reflected in my creative pursuits in many different ways.”

For Tarajosu, creativity is vital to the evolution of humanity. “Creativity takes us further as a human race. We can see the greatest creatives throughout history advancing our knowledge and ways of life, whether they were scientists, inventors, mathematicians, musical savants, or painters. Creativity is synonymous with ingenuity and innovation. It takes creativity to thrive in this world.”

www.tarajosu.com





PROFILE

JEFF MANNING



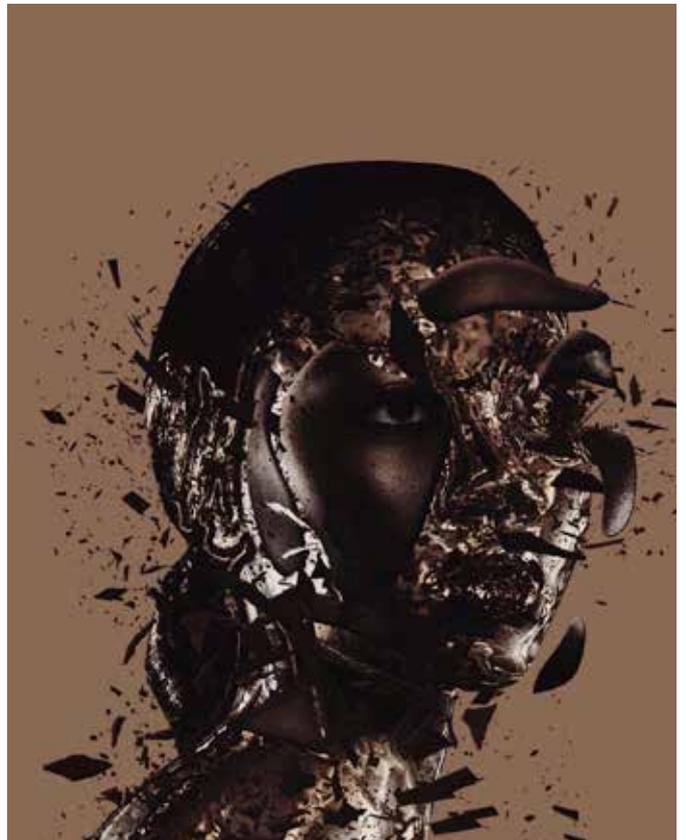
Jeff Manning works as a freelance graphic designer whilst producing stirring imagery outside of his day job. The 24-year-old artist is based in Philadelphia, Pa. Having worked in the graphic design field for 7 years, Jeff uses his creative skills and artistic eye to compose brilliantly detailed and striking pieces.

Jeff defines creativity as a combination of real life and imagination. “My definition of creativity is bringing experiences, imaginative thoughts, and inspirations into artistic form. I believe that everyone is an artist in their own way.” Highlighting Black culture in his work, his aim is to depict elements of the Black identity often forgotten in mainstream imagery. “I’ve always felt that Black identity needed to be represented a lot more in Graphic Design specifically. I also use my work to share a message of self-empowerment with my audience.”

With the firm belief that artists can express abstract ideas not easy to communicate in words, Jeff uses his artwork to convey complex visual concepts made up of various elements.

Each piece enables the viewer to consider what they are seeing and contribute their own interpretations and meanings, sometimes taking them away from their present existence. “Creativity can also be used as an escape from whatever problems a person may be going through.”

www.jeffmanningart.com







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