



In their own words:

Michaela Yearwood-Dan



'Two, Twos' 2016
oil on canvas

© Michaela Yearwood-Dan

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*People ask what my work's about.
I always say Me.*”

Did I always know I was going to be an artist?

No. Yes. No.

I was a happy, smart young adult, always inquisitive. I was very self-aware that as a Black woman from a working class background, the likelihood of me having success in any of the creative endeavours was pretty slim, but my art teacher took it upon herself to introduce me to a plethora of successful Black and female artists. Good teachers make the biggest impact.

I was most inspired by TV

Even to this day I find music videos and fashion inspiring. Lyrics, too. There was little Fine Art I was as inspired by.

The worst feeling is when you are politically aware and have absolutely no power

I was going to protests aged 15 and 16, but I felt completely voiceless. Seeing Chris Ofili's 'No Woman No Cry' made me want to become an artist. This politically charged beautiful work by a Black man, that sat in national collections - it was incredible.

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I felt like I was talking to myself

‘Two Two’s’ was made during my BA in Brighton; I was exploring my identity as a Black British woman with Caribbean ancestry. I was one of only two Black students. People were afraid of saying the wrong thing, where often silence is the wrong thing. I was fetishised in a way that hadn’t happened in London. I found myself questioning why I was so incredibly *othered*.

I started to screen-grab everything

I spent six months self-historicising - observing my general life, and noting what I was seeing. Looking at newspaper cuttings, old family photos, National Geographic... I googled images around growing up in inner city London, contrasting with the idealised Caribbean seen through the Western lens. I found class situations exoticised.

I was thinking about the manipulation of imagery

My figures never had faces, because I didn’t feel it was necessary to the narrative or their identity. That reasoning came from how Black people were used in the media - for instance, the iconic mug shot image of Mark Duggan that went around when he was killed by the police, how it was actually a crop of his face from a picture taken at his daughter’s graveside.

Two Two’s is London slang for stating the obvious

I used that. Everything worked in the pairings, the dualities - the ID of self, and the globalised ID. There’s lots of symbolic imagery, starting with the split screen. The knives scattered on the table that happen to be pointing to the hand of the Black man. There’s a gentle energy in the way he’s holding his cutlery; the relaxedness of the wrist that felt very soft, in a way that Black men were not being perceived in the media. The analytical understanding came as I was making the piece.

I navigate through this world as me

I believe the artist’s role is to be as authentically themselves as possible, and to reflect the times in which they live. My work’s about what I like - my music, my colours, my personal storytelling. That’s not narcissistic - it has nothing and everything to do with me.

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What now? ↻

Self-historicise

What's history, and who makes it?

At the end of every year, TV programmes select their highlights - who died, who won sports events; the natural disasters and scientific breakthroughs; which celebrities had babies and which broke up - but what if you had the job of selecting? What would you include?

15-minute brainstorm

What has happened to you today?

This week? This month?

How about over the past year?

Write a list. 15 minutes.

What events major and minor have touched your life?

Map where each event in your list happened, adding your own key.

Did most of it take place in your own home? Not a problem. Map it.

How far does the map extend? To the end of your street, or the other side of the world?

Work out how to include everything - e v e r y t h i n g!

Spend time observing your life

What are you inspired by?

What are you passionate about?

What music, colours, fashion?

What food?

What... invent your own categories - work with a friend compiling lists.

Challenge each other.

Be as specific as you can.

Screen-grab

Search online for images, and make screen-grabs of the things that inspire you.

Go analogue

Transfer the images you find online by printing, drawing freehand, or tracing off the screen.

For tracing, make sure you use a soft pencil or a pen that doesn't put pressure on the screen (if you have a touch screen, there are tutorials on how to lock it so the image stays still). Use this material to populate your map.

To navigate the world as you, you need a map

Taking inspiration from [The Outposted Project](#), find a fold-out map of where you live. OS maps are great, but can you improvise? Think about scale. Pick a single square of the map to embellish in any way you choose. If you care to work with a friend, take turns filling in squares. Keep going until the whole map is decorated and annotated.



'Comet Trail, Leaving the River' (detail)

lino print and collage on map, 2020

© Artwork photo: Andrea Robinson for the Outposted Project, South London Art Map

What next?

Map your memories

Maps are more about their makers than the places they describe. Map who you are. Map where you are. Fill the map with a story or paint your favorite cup of coffee. Map the invisible. Map the obvious. Map your memories. Becky Cooper

Mapping Manhattan is a short film by Cooper explaining her project

This article from Brainpickings website contains many illustrated examples of personal mapmaking.

Memory Maps - people, objects and places is about people and their relationship with place. In recent years a new form of writing has emerged drawing on fiction, history, conversation and memoir. Memory Maps includes contributions in the genre from contemporary writers and includes opportunities for contributing new works.

On This Day She

Sets out to give voice to both those already deemed female icons, alongside others whom the history books have failed to include.

History Is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain

7 artists selected over 250 objects, which come from both public and private collections, as well as draw upon informal collections and objects such as photographs, newspapers, films, domestic items, and artefacts.

SAMPLE some of the book

The Heart of the Race, Black Women's Lives in Britain

by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe Foreword by Lola Okolosie

First published in 1985 'The Heart of the Race' is a testimony to the collective experience of black women in Britain, and their relationship to the British state throughout its long history of slavery, empire and colonialism.

Thin Black Line(s)

In the early 1980s three exhibitions in London curated by Lubaina Himid - 'Five Black Women at the Africa Centre' (1983), 'Black Women Time Now' at Battersea Arts Centre (1983-4) and 'The Thin Black Line' at the Institute for Contemporary Arts (1985) - marked the arrival on the British art scene of a radical generation of young Black and Asian women artists. They challenged their collective invisibility in the art world and engaged with the social, cultural, political and aesthetic issues of the time.

"How does visual culture impact how you see yourself?"

Artist Heather Agyepong in conversation, Arnolfini

Interview: Michaela Yearwood-Dan and Mary Evans

talk about being patronised by barmen, misunderstood by their peers – and why nurturing the next generation is as important as making their own work.

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