

It's Nice That

Ong, Jyni, "Troy Chew explores colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics in his Hip Hop-inspired oil paintings," *It's Nice That*, October 15, 2020.

Troy Chew explores colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics in his Hip Hop-inspired oil paintings

The artist's paintings draw on the freedom, energy and spirit of Hip-Hop.

Words Jyuni Ong

15 October 2020



Masterful Flemish still life and contemporary emblems of the African diaspora collide in the highly technical paintings by the San Francisco-based artist Troy Chew. In a new solo show *Yadadamean* – taking place from 17 October to 5 December at Cult Aimee Friberg Exhibitions – Troy showcases his latest series in a continuation of works known as *Slanguage*. It's a reference to the colloquial speech rooted in Black linguistics, "yadadamean" being an example of this – a more efficient term for "You know what I mean?"

Troy's work sparks discussion on the historic exclusion of Blackness in western art by colliding established European painting techniques with symbolic images of Black culture. A basketball, chocolate cake, a pair of sneakers amidst other signifiers to Hip Hop make their way into his considered depictions. It's a concept he's been working on for a while now, he tells us: "One of the most important themes is Hip-Hop culture and everything that is continuously coming out of it. Its impact goes so far beyond the genre and its smallest elements can inform an entire culture. Hip Hop bleeds into every part of our life."

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In a nutshell, this spontaneous and unique culture is what Troy's artistic visual language embodies. As Hip Hop as a genre has become saturated by the mainstream, and transformed in infinite variations since its beginnings, Troy's paintings draw on this sense of freedom and energy. As the artist puts it: "Hip-Hop created its own rubric. With Trap, people would complain they didn't understand what Young Thug was saying. And it's like, you're not really supposed to. When jazz musicians were experimenting with jazz music it sounded crazy to some people because they weren't really following a certain rubric. They were using their own language."



Above Troy Chew: Like tic, tic, Yadadamean, Cult Aimee
Friberg Exhibitions (Copyright © Troy Chew, 2020)

For Troy, it seems as if he's always created paintings. Spouting from the act of drawing, a natural progression for many painters, painting seemed like the obvious next step. There are countless other fascinations with the medium however, beyond this logical development. Troy puts it rather poetically: "Paint has a certain permanence for me; it's more like an exclamation mark than any of the other art forms I was working with at the time." He recalls his first tries with oil paint which felt like "creating real colours." In comparison to acrylic paint, or graphite which produces more muted effect, oil paints invoke another dimension to reality.

"When I started using colour the work just jumped off the canvas," Troy reveals. "Going in straight with the paint is something much different. Sometimes I think about paint almost like a sculpture, you can build it up to a place you want by layering." It was while studying for an undergraduate degree in psychology, Troy took his first art class. "The rest is history," he recalls

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of that moment, and hasn't looked back since. Later enrolling at California College of Arts, he soaked up as much as he could while utilising his background in psychology as research. "I look at all of my work as some sort of survey into a part of the culture," Troy explains on the matter, with this 'slanguage' series for instance, he looks into certain words, researches them through listening to music and delving into archives.

Importantly, he also contemplates how these words affect us. Similarly to how we can understand more about a place by someone who comes from it, he prescribes the same logic to that of words, who uses them, then expresses this through painting. Focusing on Black culture, he cites how many music lovers "understand so much about Atlanta because of Outkast" or "so much more about Houston and New Orleans because of Hip Hop." In turn, Yadadamean offers a glimpse into another micro-culture.

Troy also touches on places such as Detroit, Memphis, Compton and the Bay; all of which are "very important cities to the Black narrative that don't necessarily get talked about in the mainstream." Nonetheless, their cultures are strong and it is to these lesser known pillars of society that Troy also hints at. Where music meets culture meets language meets art, this is an intersection where Troy has and will continue to flourish. It's what he hopes for when it comes to the future. Finally going to say: "I'll keep listening to music and manifesting everything that's gonna happen in my life. It's gonna be dope."

Gallery

Troy Chew: Yadadamean, Cult Aimee Friberg Exhibitions (Copyright © Troy Chew, 2020)

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