

The Art of Story-Telling



Shaquille-Aaron Keith with his painting 'I Hate Your Twisted Poetry Tell Me More' (Shot by me)

Shaquille-Aaron Keith's first solo art exhibition, "The Art of Story-Telling" was a thought-provoking and immersive experience despite its traditional presentation. From March 3rd to 13th, the exhibition showcased Shaq's growth as an artist and featured paintings from the last few years. Most paintings were accompanied by a poem or anecdote that described the inspiration behind the piece.

Walking into Campbells Framing and Art Gallery in South Kensington, I was immediately shocked by the first piece that caught my attention. 'For Your Entertainment Only (Leroy the Clown)' centres a Black clown in Shaq's unique art style surrounded by striking and vibrant blues. Around the clown we see white hands, taking pictures and reaching out to touch his hair. Before reading the painting's poem, I sensed its meaning, especially as someone who

experienced this several times in the past. It spoke to Black people's treatment in white spaces as spectacles or alien, even in this day and age.

Shaq's ability to relate to Black audiences comes as no surprise being that his artistry is often drawn out of his Trinidadian heritage. Growing up in London he was no stranger to the need for Black-Brits to be able to connect with each other.

'Black Cloud' is a piece that I can define simply as 'melancholy'. It depicts an imaginary raincloud which I interpreted as depression. The closer one stands to the painting, the clearer it becomes that each raindrop is actually a word or phrase that has weighed on Shaq. This technique adds even more depth to a piece that already evokes overwhelming emotions.

I have followed Shaq's journey as an artist since 2017 when he was introduced to me on Kyra TV's creation, PAQ. The weekly challenge-led show garnered a huge audience both in the UK and internationally. With a loyal fanbase and creative doors opening left and right for the hosts, it came as a shock when they decided to part ways with Kyra and end the show in 2020.

Clearly, Shaq has remained focused on his aspirations towards being an artist. "I did PAQ and I was doing the fashion thing, but I never lost sight of my goal", he tells me. "I am an artist first. That's why I started doing PAQ. I needed a platform but I already had ideas."

Shaq's attention to detail and craft are visible in his pieces but he also describes some of his struggles to finish his paintings: "There are a couple here that I hate. Because I didn't know what I was doing back then. I didn't think people were taking me seriously as an artist so being commissioned to paint was confusing."

Around 5.25pm that day, recent Brit Award winning rapper Little Simz walked in to the gallery. A testament to Shaq's reach within the community. While he may not have always known what he was doing, plenty of other people continue to support him. For Shaq, this is just the beginning of what looks like a promising artistic future.

Kemi Iruwa