

REPRESENTATION // AN INTRO TO JD MOORE

DEANNA LYNDSEY * ART * INTERVIEW

JD Moore is a fine art and commissioned painter, a thriving tattoo artists, and photographer who commands the revaluation of our current reality while utilizing the decisive representation of melanated beings. Imagine Classical Greek structure meeting Renaissance Era romanticism through the honest entanglement of a man's journey to self-realization. I was invited to his home shop, Last Angels Tattoo, in Dallas, where we talked over a full leaf turmeric tea, with rooibos, cinnamon and vanilla..

Your goal has previously been defined as “deconstructing racism and ultimately [trying] to defeat it.” Can you expand on this?

JD: Whenever we speak, especially in English, we have to make sure that the words we say are mutually understood. So whenever I talk about racism, one of the definitions that have been given to racism is that it is a discriminatory act, either systematically or individually; someone doing something to another person... the reasoning is normally solely on they don't like the race, or they have certain ideas about the race...

(I realize clarity is key here. It's easy to assume we're on the same page and still miss the message.)

JD: Just reading about other languages and other societies, the words are very specific, they mean things, and the words tell you what they mean, not the definition. So racism is a two-part word, it has a root, and it has a suffix. So when I say “racism,” I mean a system that is based on race, it's ism is the suffix that makes a root word a system. So I would like to eliminate the system that is race, because without race there would be no defined racism, racists, or racial problems.

Naturally, my initial reaction was wow, “black” art, however beautiful or thought-provoking, is once again, met with a limited and specific narrative. That changed as the plot developed, but I still wonder... is race the prevailing story here?

JD: Yeah. I want to do something else. I want to be able to use this and not have to fight something... just build and grow. Lets just say that the civilization of Egypt was in fact dark skin people, which is still up for debate. It being so advanced and so mystical, if you really research what they were doing... based off the evidence... I feel like we have that capability... We have so many abilities, you don't even know. And I feel like, we're being held back. I'm trying to use my intelligence and my wit to break out of prison when I can use my intelligence and my wit to just build something.

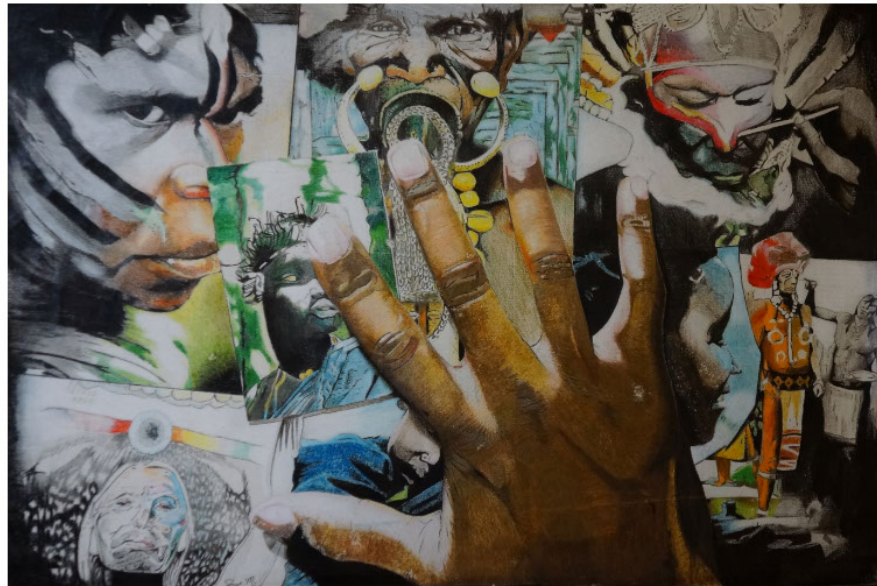
What is your approach on using terms like, “African American,” “black,” etc.?

JD: I'm glad that you mentioned that, because I have learned that you have to speak the language that people understand, because if they don't understand you then, there's no point in speaking. You won't get anything across. So with that said... I'm still learning, I'm not at any point where what I say has to be exact, but where I'm at right now, is that, language is important. What we call ourselves is very important, even the politically correct things is important.

“It’s important to understand and call ourselves what we are, because if we call ourself “black” it will just stop at... I have this color of skin... there’s so much more...”

I sense some underlying symbolism.

JD: Exactly, so that's the purpose of the definition that has been given. It's a symbol. Its part of a code. When I talk about race being a system, like a computer system or an operating system, they have a code. The codes tell the system what to do, so when I call you black this is telling the system, you are to be treated this way, versus if you were to be given the code white, you'd have this other function... That one I feel like is going to take a while to get people to wrap their head around because we do this thing where we like to make the best out of a bad situation. [We] have to take away calling ourselves black based on our skin color and call it, “okay well it's actually brown, or shades of brown,” then go deeper... “well it's melanin,” and there are certain types of melanin, so I'm not “black.” I'm melanated. I'm a melanated man.



Touching My Heritage

There's a piece you did in high school, called *Touching my Heritage*. As part of your research, you interviewed your Grandmother to dig deeper into your ancestral lineage and family history. Can you tell me more about this?

JD: For sure. We were suppose to make a collage of our history or something that resembles us. So I chose my [familial] history. We're in high school, so a lot of kids did stuff like, "I love shoes, I love cars," stuff like that. It was the way and the specific wording, that made me just go to... "I need to know who I am." So yeah, I asked my grandmother and she gave me names to research. I looked into National Geographic, I had all these magazines, I would print out stuff, and these were the images based on [those] names. So [we] had to make a collage and include a body part, so I was just like, "I want to stick my hand in there and just take a picture." I typically build my narrative after the fact, and touching my heritage is what I'm doing, basically. But I guess I wanted to feel connected to it. Or maybe I feel like I missed out on it, because I'm not really apart of it or something, I don't know.

Your favorite era in art is the Renaissance. How did this develop?

JD: It started off, because that's just what I was introduced to. Even here in the tattoo world, I've grown into favoring tattoos that have this statuesque look to it. It seems so timeless and... powerful. It's just so aesthetically and visually very pleasing to me. That's what gave me the inspiration to make art. What's keeping me chained to it is now the concepts of things that go deeper. What they mean, what they stand for.

Can you tell us about your recent residency at the Chateau D'Orquevaux?

JD: For one, I'm in this environment that I know has skeletons in the closet, you know, France. I'm in this place, where I'm surrounded by people who, you know, don't look like me. I'm sure everyone has their cultural differences, so no one's exactly [alike], but I was the most radically different going there. It was nerve-racking at first. But with all things, there really is no need to be afraid up until that point. I should have been scared when I was there. I was isolated out in the country. I just saw *Get Out*... But no, it was a great experience. I did a lot, I learned a lot. I knew exactly what I wanted to do, which was a self-portrait.

(It didn't take much stalking online to see that JD is wearing a rich red robe and lux pajamas in nearly every photo from this trip not to mention the contributed piece, a self-portrait titled, Representation. I couldn't wait to ask...)

What's with the pjs?

JD: What I learned about France is that to this day they are collecting a colonial tax to a multitude of countries in Africa, [meaning] "we've colonized you, we've invested in you. You want us out... we [lose] money on you, so if you don't pay us what we've invested, then we're gonna start, just killing people." And that's what they do. So they're taking this money from Africa and putting it in their reserve, so all of this is paid for by African colonialism. So by me being there, [it personifies], "Bleeding Africa, Feeding France." So this [red robe] is a representation of [me] bleeding. The whole time I'm here, I'm living this luxurious lifestyle and the blood is flowing, it's pouring... It's very thick, it's heavy, it's everywhere, and it never leaves. Even though I'm living this lifestyle I feel like what they're telling me is, "you can be here, we can give you money. We can give you a place to stay... this beautiful view, but you're gonna bleed, you're gonna feed us."

"I for one, need these people to know. I'm here. I'm painting. You don't see me anywhere in this house as far as being depicted, but I'm here. Here is me."



Representation

As we begin to understand who we are and where we come from, representation is invaluable. Perhaps it's conceived visually, until it's born through language and later placed into the sticky hands of systems where clarity is fleeting. Its timelessness and power shapes our current narrative, simultaneously transforming our future. JD Moore journeys beyond the mirage of equality as Representation is about correctness, acknowledgment, and honoring our truth. See Moore @jdmooreportfolios.