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# Eniwaye Oluwaseyi examines the power struggles of shared spaces through painting



In his debut solo show, the rising Nigerian artist showcases a technique he's only been working on for the last year and a half.

Words Jyni Ong

—

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Eniwaye Oluwaseyi always wanted to become an artist, even as a child. But somehow along the way, he found himself going down the engineer route, studying

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Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering. During his second year of studies, he started watching YouTube tutorials on how to create realistic charcoal and graphite portraits. Gradually, he tells us, “I became more ‘artistic’ and art-inclined,” a path he’s fully explored to become a self-taught artist brimming with character and flair.

Born, raised and based in Kwara state, Nigeria, the rising artist is currently exhibiting a solo show at Accra’s Ada Contemporary art gallery. Titled *The Politics of Shared Spaces*, the show features 12 large-scale paintings by the artist, highlighting a new body of work which explores how identities, narratives and power struggles are defined in shared spaces, whether it’s a shared living space, shared mindset, shared community or a shared transience. Launching last month, the exhibition is on until 10 January 2021.

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Colourful, painterly with a distinct emphasis on his subject's contoured expressions, *The Politics of Shared Spaces* seems far from Eniwaye's graphite-using beginnings. Once he got to grips with the monochrome tool, the artist reached a point where "this medium could not capture and represent my entire ideas, the vision and message that I was willing to pass to my viewers." Looking for a medium to further his communication, he turned to oil and acrylic paints which brought the dimension of colour to the work.

"I was so eager to learn how to paint that I read a book by Betty Adams on colour mixing within a day!" he recalls, "So here I am." A mere year and a half since he watched that video with a solo exhibition underway and very much enjoying the potential of the medium at the same time. YouTube and its abundance of

and colours are my biggest inspiration"

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tutorials have played a key part in Eniwaye's practice to date. Even before he picked up a graphite stick for himself, it was a YouTube tutorial by Kelvin Okafor which inspired him to try charcoal one "very beautiful afternoon," the artist remembers.



Above Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: Home is Warm, but far away. Courtesy of the artist and of ADA (Copyright © Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, 2020)

As the technical aspect of art eased, Eniwaye started to pour his emotions through this

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creative extension. Fears, decisions and struggles made their way subtly into the work through the subjects. He tends to include his immediate environment in most of his paintings, imbuing a sense of familiarity. Additionally, he likes to use friends and family members as subjects, “an attempt as an artist to reflect my personal perception,” he says, “the time and space around me that influence my vision and rendering of sociopolitical issues.”

In *Blue Jacket Lockdown* for example, Eniwaye creates a reflection of self. The painting depicts him in a different lens, using his best friend as the subject but seen through the artist’s distant point of view. This particular artwork is Eniwaye’s favourite as it is highly personal, created during the first lockdown earlier this year. “I was able to revisit and interrogate the kind of person that I have been prior to the

lockdown,” he says. Capturing the intimate relationship between the artist and his best friend during the lockdown where they shared a space, the painting marks a period of time that could have been stressful which in fact passed without a single tension.

In other work, Eniwaye turns his attention to the marginalised Albino community in his birth country. The idea came about when he saw an interview with one of his main influences, the artist Kerry James Marshall. In the interview, Eniwaye thinks back, “Marshall talked about going to the museums and seeing only paintings of white people from the Renaissance to the present contemporary age.” Contemplating this assessment, Eniwaye in turn, thought about his place as an artist, working and living in Nigeria.

“I was able to look deep within my community to observe the underrepresented minorities

and read about their marginalisation,” he explains. As a consequence, he came across the plights of Albino communities living in Sub-Saharan Africa. “It truly struck me,” Eniwaye finally goes on to say. Along with the *Albino* series now on show as part of *The Politics of Shared Spaces*, it’s also a subject the artist hopes to further explore in the future, trying his hand at various other mediums too.



Above Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: A Glance at Redemption. Courtesy of the artist and of ADA (Copyright © Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, 2020)





Above Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: From the Other Side. Courtesy of the artist and of ADA (Copyright © Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, 2020)



Above Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: Boy with the White Hair. Courtesy of the artist and of ADA (Copyright © Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, 2020)





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Above Eniwaye Oluwaseyi: Blue Jacket Lockdown. Courtesy of the artist and of ADA (Copyright © Eniwaye Oluwaseyi, 2020)

Hero Header

Eniwaye Oluwaseyi:  
A moment in time  
(family house).  
Courtesy of the  
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About the Author

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—  
Jyni joined It's Nice That as an editorial assistant in August 2018 after graduating from The Glasgow School of Art's Communication Design degree. In March 2019 she became a staff writer and in June 2021, she was made associate editor. Feel free to drop Jyni a note if you have an exciting story for the site.

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