

Adrian Brandon

Stolen, November 15-16, 2019

Press release

Adrian Brandon, a young artist from Seattle, Washington currently living and creating in Brooklyn, offers his first solo art exhibit this month at 263 Bowery in Manhattan. Growing up in Seattle as one of only two black boys in his high school classroom, Adrian felt the pressure of representing Black culture to his white peers. Over time he has explored this responsibility in his art—working to dismantle negative portrayals while shedding light on the many layers of the Black experience.

Adrian's art depicts playful day-to-day scenes of the Black community, highlighting the unique joy, exuberance and love that is present, alongside images that provoke viewers to feel and reflect on the daily struggles of being Black in America. It is in this tension between the struggles of being Black in America, and the joy and beauty of the Black experience, that Adrian has found expression as an artist. Adrian says, "My goal is to make art that creates an understanding of Black culture, Black love and Black pain so that we can move forward together."

Adrian draws inspiration from Black people who are using their talents and influence to elevate the Black experience, and from every day scenes he witnesses while living in Crown Heights, Brooklyn—young boys helping one another tie their do-rags just right; folks hanging out laughing and listening to music on their fire escapes. He also draws from news events and national conversations around race and politics. A core piece of *Stolen*, the show, is *Stolen*, an art series made up of 40 portraits of Black people robbed of their lives at the hands of police.

*Stolen*, the series, is the result of years spent grappling with the pain and injustice of the treatment of Black and Brown people by our police and judicial system. While studying studio art at Pitzer College in California, Adrian painted murals on the sides of buildings to provoke conversations about race and inequity, and spent his thesis project exploring the common and extreme dualities in public perception of Blacks as superstars versus Blacks as thugs and people to fear. Between these extremes, where the Black community lives and loves, lies a minefield that can blow up an innocent life and destroy a family on any given day. The individual portraits in *Stolen* were sketched in graphite and then colored with Copic markers, one minute for every year the person lived. Tamir Rice was twelve when he was killed, so Adrian colored his portrait for twelve minutes. Adrian says, "For Black people, our lives and time on this earth are not valued with the same significance as our white counterparts. Thus each of these portraits are meant to show the harsh relationship between time and death. This series captures stories that will never be told and families and communities left to put together the pieces."

*Stolen* is meant to be experienced. While each individual portrait is haunting, viewing the unfinished portraits en masse speaks powerfully of lives cut short and of the tragic loss to Black families, the Black community, and to our world as a whole. In creating the series, Adrian experienced anxiety and a deep sense of loss in the process. "Every time I sit to do a portrait for this series, I set the timer and put it aside to make sure I am not aware of the time. This is important because it creates that element of surprise when the time is up. When the alarm sounds, I am hit with a wave of emotions ranging from

anger, to deep sadness, to hopelessness, to feeling lucky that I am still here. The timer is a really powerful tool in this series... [it] creates a lot of anxiety for me as the artist. *When is the timer going off? Will I be able to finish this eye? Damn, I haven't even gotten to the lips yet.* Although this anxiety may seem minor in that the consequences for me are very low, it does really have an affect on me. Anxiety is a feeling that black people are far too familiar with...these feelings build up and are exhausting. I shouldn't have to say a prayer every time I see police pursuing a black person in the streets... I shouldn't feel so damn anxious that I remove my hat and jewelry when the cops pull me over. I shouldn't feel so anxious that I would second guess calling the police if I ever needed to."

Adrian has shared many of the individual portraits of *Stolen* with his online followers and at their urging is producing *Stolen*, the show. "This is so, so important." "More people need to see this." "You need to get this out there." Some of the portraits have made their way to loved ones. "On behalf of Jemel's friends from Chicago, thank you for this." "This is the mother of his kids. Thanks so much, this means so much to us."

Adrian's work is honest and provocative in its rawness—inviting viewers to *experience* the loss Black families and *all* of our communities are suffering. At the same time, *Stolen* is hopeful, too. There's an honoring of these stolen lives; a promise to never forget and to do better—and a reminder that the Black experience is not defined only by its struggle and loss, but also by the deep love, courage, beauty and joy of everyday life.