

Black Art & Design

BK Adams On His Debut Show 'Five Miles,' Choosing The Right Representation and Exploring The Hidden Secrets Around Us



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September 14, 2023

Philosopher and artist BK Adams' debut solo exhibition at the esteemed Claire Oliver Gallery in Harlem, NY, represents a pivotal milestone in his artistic journey—a goal he firmly etched on his studio wall as early as 2008. It was a distinct honour for me to delve into the mind of this remarkable artist, where we explored the symbolism and intricate narratives that grace his canvases. Adams takes us on a journey through the inspiration behind his exhibition's enigmatic title, 'Five Miles.' Drawing parallels between the leadership of a male pride lion and the role of a head of a household, he poignantly reflects on the influence a single individual can wield. As B.K. Adams' mentor, the renowned artist Sam Gilliam once told him, 'You are working from within again, man – and people will cheat off of you when you do that.' This profound compliment underscores Adams' approach, his ability to break new ground, redefine artistic boundaries, and inspire others to follow suit.

In our correspondence, the artist shares insight into the hidden stories in his paintings and how he uncovers these secrets. He's all about spreading good vibes and positive thinking, drawing

from his own life journey. Adams wants his art to inspire people to make a positive impact in their own communities and families. 'Five Miles' isn't just an art show; it's an open invitation to explore, learn, and become better, both individually and for society as a whole. B.K. Adams has this incredible knack at showing us how to look at the familiar in a whole new light.

I spoke with B.K. Adams via e-mail about the inspiration behind his debut solo exhibition 'Five Miles,' his artistic journey, and the symbolism he weaves into his creations, shedding light on why his art is a captivating and authentic storytelling medium.



B.K. Adams: You will notice a cast of recurring characters in my paintings. These animals have been chosen carefully and have become important ciphers in my work. The title of the exhibition was very purposefully chosen to connote the power a single individual has. Five Miles refers to the fact that the minimum distance a pride lion's roar can be heard is five miles. The male pride lion is the leader of the pack and takes on the responsibility for the entire clan. He is responsible for food, shelter, safety, encouragement, teaching and on and on... the head of a human household has much in common with a lion in the wild. They patrol their territory – a daily surveillance of the terrain to keep all safe and to let everyone else around know that this pack of creatures is protected, cared for, and will not be messed with – the roar heard in the outermost community says, “mess with us at your own risk”. I am speaking out to every viewer in hopes my experience and gained knowledge can be taken away with them to nourish and improve their own lives and to encourage them to keep going.

B.K. Adams: The goal to exhibit my work in New York has been one I have had and wrote on my studio wall in 2008. I feel having my representation in New York is the pinnacle of any

artist's dreams. I have been holding out for the right one, though. I want to be a team and Claire and Ian are great teammates. Claire Oliver understood my work immediately and did something that impressed me right away; she purchased two paintings for her and her husband's private collection. That told me all I needed to know about the faith these people had in me and my work.

Christopher Okereke-Cox: Your artwork often incorporates powerful symbolism. Can you share a specific artwork from your "Five Miles" exhibition and delve into the layers of symbolism and meaning that you've woven into it?



B.K. Adams: One place secret live is between the covers of books; sometimes we must really tease them out and they take a lot of thinking but are very rewarding too. Another place they have been known to live is in the canvases. In life there are hidden secrets all around us, yet people rarely feel confident enough to ask the secret keeper about them. There is an intimacy in that asking that is uncomfortable for most people. The secret is to ASK. The key to the first secret is to ask for the meanings – simply to ask. In Five Miles, I am revealing daily secrets

hard learned through my experiences and successes in life in terms of being an “adult” human. I hope that people visiting the exhibition will feel the power of positive thinking and be encouraged by my own faith in them to do the hard thing that will make a difference for the community and the family.

Christopher Okereke-Cox: “Five Miles” takes viewers on a journey of discovery and introspection. How do you envision this exhibition impacting your audience and what emotions or thoughts do you hope they will take away from the experience?

B.K. Adams: This exhibition is a mirror of my life; I am inviting viewers to take a positive approach to their life. I am encouraging the viewers to be better, act better – if you want to live in a better society, be a better human. I portray images of family life; everything that I do I do for my family – Family is both micro and macro... that is a metaphor for society at large – keep your community dear and nurture all that surrounds you. I want to encourage parents and support systems that might be a little tired, weary or worn out that they should keep going because the rewards are so enormous when you see what one person’s efforts can accomplish.

Christopher Okereke-Cox: You promote themes of joy, magic, and shifting perceptions. Could you share a moment from your life where you experienced a transformative shift in perception, and how has this influenced your art?

B.K. Adams: At the age of eight, I wanted to fly. I had dreams of it all the time. My Aunt gave me a blue bike for my birthday, and I decided I was going to make that my flying machine. I took the bicycle to the top of the steepest hill in the neighborhood, and pedaled as fast as I could down the hill and off the curb. I woke up in a hospital bed sometime later with my mom and dad looking down on me. I was there for two months. During my recovery, I painted and drew every day for a good portion of the time. It was then that I knew my dreams could be big and could happen through my art. When I had that vision, I did it physically. Now I have the vision and I put it down on canvas. The layers come slowly at first and then faster as I find more doors into the story. I feel I must act on the vision right away whenever I get inspired because if I don’t act on it, it will move on.

Christopher Okereke-Cox: Can you give us a glimpse into your creative process? Could you describe your studio space and how it contributes to the development of your unique artistic style and concepts?

B.K. Adams: My space is very personal for me. It’s packed with just about everything. I’m not going to lie about that... My only complaint is that I can’t get enough room for a big chair – a comfortable one – in there... I consider myself a thinker first and an artist second so a comfy place to sit and think is important. Otherwise, I would be putting the cart before the horse to paint without good thinking first. So, I need the quietude and busy messiness of the space to plot and plan and then to create. I can see very well how the thought is going to segway me into the physical artwork – I need not jump quickly but finesse the entry points to the story I will unfold for the viewers