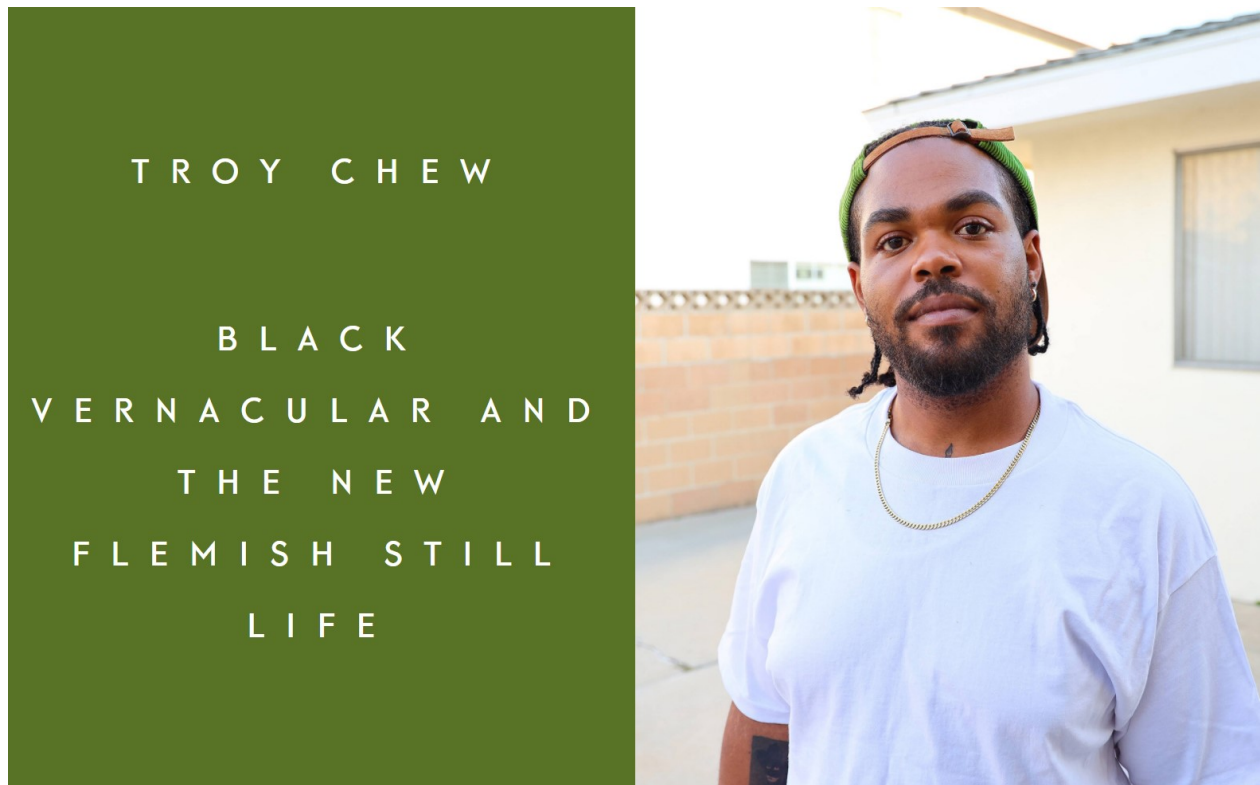


METAL

McLaughlin, Lucy, "Troy Chew, Black Vernacular and the New Flemish Still Life," *Metal Magazine*, 2020



Part of his series billed *Slanguage*, *Yadadamean* is the newest exhibition from the United States' Bay Area artist, Troy Chew. Showing at *CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions* in San Francisco until December 12th, the artworks draw largely from hip-hop – Chew's still life work exploring the contemporary Black household in conjunction with the Black vernacular and oral tradition. Through a discussion of the artist's content and stylistic choices, we may gain a greater understanding of what is meant by 'Yadadamean.'

Troy, firstly, I would like to congratulate you on your solo exhibition with CULT Aimee Friberg Exhibitions. Before we dive into Yadadamean, can you tell our readers a little bit about yourself, your formal training and what inspires your artworks?

I'm a painter from Los Angeles. In undergrad, I studied psychology at the University of California, Merced. I attended California College of the Arts (CCA) for my Masters of Fine Arts, where my formal training in fine art began.

Hip-hop is a major inspiration. I think about words a lot in my practice, so I started to incorporate words from hip-hop music into my art. Often, people would ask what words mean when listening to a song. I started thinking about how words coded to language, so I made a series about that called Slanguage.

I understand that 'Yadadamean' is a vernacular term for 'You know what I mean?'. Can you tell us what you mean with Yadadamean and your engagement with colloquial speech and Black linguistics?

That's a good question. Yadadamean is an analysis of Bay Area-created words. That's what I mean with it. My engagement with speech and linguistics is expanded through music. Black linguistics is a very oral tradition. Within that tradition, hip-hop is a language of efficiency. Music passes ideas, expressed with words, down through the culture. Music permeates linguistics in a different way because it is played all around the world. In turn, as words and music become mainstream, they become American culture.

In Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?, Mark Fisher claims that hip-hop became increasingly popular due to its rejection of nostalgic illusions, the fact hip-hop nods to the 'real' much more than other music genres. Can you speak to this in your exploration of the language associated with Bay Area hip-hop?

Hip-hop culture nods to the real. I notice the phenomenon in hip-hop that we respect the real and honest. Through lyrics, everyday words are presented as metaphors so they transform to an altered reality. Using metaphors within my work is not necessarily real.

The objects I paint are everyday items in Black people's homes. Often that's how slang originates, based on things that are in our life daily. My work considers ownership and elevates mundane objects into the vernacular. The objects I portray tie to representation and are cues to things people appreciate in the works in Yaddamean.



Like tic, tic (2020).

As an artist who works primarily in the mode of oil painting, may I also ask where this interest in language and linguistics comes from? It is quite a unique aspect of your art.

My interest in language and linguistics hails from hip-hop. Hip-hop is all about words and the stories that artists tell. The complex way the words tell a story, whether direct or through metaphor, is similar to my style of painting.

There is a clear and deliberate portrayal of motifs rooted in Black culture within your still life work, such as the sneakers in *Ghost Rider* or the basketball in *Ball Street Journal*. How important was it for you to paint objects that have since been appropriated from their Black origins and assimilated into mainstream culture?

Objects communicate our lived experience. I thought about the Black household but wanted to push past that and think about the metaphors they represent. Black people are not thinking about how our everyday is translated through whiteness. Likewise, I don't think of my work in proximity to whiteness; it's my lived experience. I paint objects that are common so they can be

identifiable – I am not showing culturally-specific items like edge control. So the objects like basketballs, lettuce and bread I paint aren't synonymous with Black culture only. Most things Black people own are known in the mainstream. I'm not thinking about appropriation. I'm thinking about my lived experience.

I feel that anything Black people create, once it becomes popular, everyone uses it. Like 'fo'sho,' for example. Everyone says that now. It's similar to the items I've chosen to paint. They're popular items in America, but Black culture is the lens I'm coming from.

Is there a particular reason you chose to fuse Black culture with the aesthetic traditions of Flemish still life painting?

In my early years experimenting with art, I just liked painting the things around me. I encountered Flemish still lives during my MFA program. I liked the composition of still lifes but at that time it was just a category to me, like landscapes, portraits, etc. I was just drawn to any dope painting that inspired me. But the main aspect of Flemish still lifes that inspires my work is the coded language; I saw a parallel with the visual language within hip-hop.

While your art clearly works with these aspects of European and Flemish tradition, would it also be fair to say you engage with the mass object and consumer culture inherent to pop artists like Warhol and Oldenburg? Furthermore, did you grow up consuming these iconic objects depicted in your art such as Coca-Cola, juice boxes, etc.?

I sourced the subjects from consumer culture since these are the most popular objects, so the viewer relates to them more. They are things very common in many households. They are what we see every day and get turned into 'slanguage.' Sometimes I think of the consumer culture aspect, like when I'm painting Yeezys.

On that note, what artists would you say influence your work the most? Are you inspired by one movement/group/school more so than others?

I am most inspired by hip-hop and Black culture. Black artists like Ernie Barnes, whose art was in my home growing up, got me into making artwork. I grew up seeing his art but was not necessarily consciously influenced by it; my work doesn't look like his. I related to the work because I recognized the culture within his art and other Black artists like him, and I wanted to make art also. For a long time, Black artists like Barnes were excluded from the art canon and institutions. They painted unique creations of their culture, Black culture, that ultimately became mass-produced and acknowledged.

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Five on it (2020).

Continuing with your influences, can you tell us more about the Bay Area in general and how this space permeates your work? Can you expand on your relationship with the Bay Area?

I'm from Los Angeles but the Bay Area has always been a sister city. Bay Area culture was in the music I listened to and on TV, too. Once I moved to the Bay, I began to understand the culture even more. The rapper E40 is one of my biggest inspirations. He expanded and created new words and has been a pivotal person in the way I think about words. He inspired, maybe created, the word 'slanguage.' A lot of Bay music has influenced the country and the world.

Do you plan on creating more continuations of the Slanguage series such as Yaddamean? Where do you see your work progressing at this moment?

Yes, I plan on doing a subseries that will travel to different cities. Yaddamean explores the Bay Area and I want to look at all cities like Los Angeles and New York City. My cousin who lives

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in NYC calls money ‘butter.’ I’m thinking about how slang is different across cities. It can be very local and yet general at the same time.

Finally, what do you want your audience to take away from your art – if anything at all? Are you aiming for a certain emotional response with Yadadamean and the wider Slanguage series?

I want people to listen to the music they are listening to a little deeper. These words are context clues and can help be identifiers to understanding the music and maybe even understanding Black culture.



Ask Berner (2020).



Sup Bay (2020).



Ghost Rider (2020).

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Ball Street Journal

Words
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