

HOUSE & GARDEN



Michaela Yearwood-Dan. Photo: Joshua Monaghan

Artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan in her studio

By: Emily Tobin
November 18, 2020

Emily Tobin meets artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan, whose colourful work reflects her interest in subjects as diverse as the natural world and Siri's opinions of her art.

Michaela Yearwood-Dan's paintings sing with colour and feeling. She calls them 'cathartic releases'. Her east London studio is packed with these large-scale abstract works, each of which provides a window into her personal experiences. Femininity, love and heartbreak play their part, as do themes of class, race and gender. But, in examining these ideas, Michaela borrows freely from all areas of life – there are gold hoop earrings, acrylic nails, extracts from text messages she has drafted but not sent, and almost always plants and floral motifs. These are unashamedly beautiful paintings by an artist who revels in method and technique as much as concept and aesthetic.

Michaela uses thick impasto layers of textured paint, which give her work a luxurious feel. Much of what she is creating at the moment pushes against intellectualised ideas of beauty defined by men, but there is also humour. A recent body of work was built around asking Siri, Apple’s virtual assistant, for answers to some of life’s more complicated questions – such as ‘Siri, are you my friend?’ and ‘Siri, what do you think about my art?’ ‘The world we live in is serious enough,’ explains Michaela. ‘We really need to make a conscious effort for things not to be sad and dreary.’



Left: A detail from her painting, *Wake Up*.

Center: Her ceramic vessel *A Hypnotic Strange Delight* is overlaid with text and colour.

Right: Colorful canvasses in the studio.

Much of her work is overlaid with inscriptions – taken from notes jotted down on her phone, from conversations with friends, or song lyrics. The interplay between concealment and revelation is a constant in Michaela’s paintings. ‘I want people to spend time with my work,’ she says. ‘So some pieces of text are visible and others are not. I’ve intentionally made it so you can’t read everything.’

Michaela attributes the omnipresence of nature in her work partly to her mother, an avid plant collector whom she dubs ‘the queen of clippings’, partly to the ‘calm, quiet and beautiful’ cemetery opposite where she grew up in south London, and partly to the Caribbean, which is where her parents are from and which she describes as ‘one big garden’. Though she once painted figures, over time people have gradually left Michaela’s canvases. Now the only nod to figuration is the portrait format in which she paints. During lockdown she began working with clay, hand-building ceramic vessels and overlaying them with text and colour.

Later this year, her work will be on show in Nottingham as part of the group show *Laced*, which will bring together six women ‘tied together by a shared ancestry but working in different ways’.