

DiTM – 05 The Black Experience_Omari Booker

Transcript of Audio from the Backstory Clip

[DiTM - Omari Booker - 05 The Black Experience.mp3](#)

00:00:03 My experience as a black person, especially [a] black male in America, has definitely had a big impact on my artwork. Work is influenced by what the person experiences, whatever the vessel is, and being a black male in America, you experience things in a way – that kind of feeling of being ‘the hunted’ a lot, even just in normal circumstances, of just by being maybe one of the only [Black persons] at a school or in a church or in the grocery store or whatever.

00:00:32 And so **I think the artwork for one has offered me a space to say what I'd like to say**, be what I'd like to be, and also talk about some of those issues that are really important to me because I've experienced them – **but also a place to get away from**. So I think **it's kind of dealing with the world and getting away from the world, all at the same time**.

00:00:57 Through creativity you can express some of those traumatic events and get out some of the stuff that's going to come out one way or another. I know that my life's trajectory has been drastically shifted by artwork and by making artwork as a transformation that I think started happening before, but the big turning point was while being incarcerated – that can kind of speak to what was happening before I was making artwork consistently and what's happening now, and just how it not only transforms your life, but it transforms communities because you have a space to put all of those things and feelings and realities that are, that are very justified. The idea of an of an angry black person being an issue. It's like, yeah. We are, should be, you know, should really be more angry, given what the experience has been.

00:01:53 Enslaved people have a lot of fortitude. There's strength that comes from the challenge. It doesn't make the challenge just or right. What happens as a result of injustice doesn't mean that it wasn't still injustice, that it should be repeated, or that you know, for every one person that is a success story, there's a thousand that are just stuck in the system – and they're just as talented, but haven't had this opportunity to kind of get out and share it.

00:02:25 In the same way that being a black artist working on issues of justice and race can be expected of you by either your community or other communities, that in itself isn't liberating. It's like you're doubling down on someone's incarceration by locking them in certain subject matter, certain ways of being. **So I think a huge part of the progress of**

African American artists and African Americans in general is to be able to exist and *not* talk about those issues – not that you won't, because you might – but to *not* have to, that's the real freedom. I kind of touch on the ones that come up naturally. And if they don't, I try to maintain that reality, that if I'm really going to have the results of freedom, the results of freedom is *not* having to do it.

00:03:17 Growing up with that reality of 'unless you're exceptional you're going to be completely left behind.' It gave a self-belief of "I'm exceptional," you know, and I mean I kind of credit that to my mom and my grandmother and my sister and my dad also, but there can be a heavy dose of you are enough. You're good enough. What you make matters and counts because families sort of know how that's countered once you get out into the world, it can be really driven home (while you're at home) and I know that had a lot to do with my success as an artist, because when galleries didn't call me back, I didn't take it as I'm not good enough. You know, when I didn't get into shows, when I didn't sell artwork, there was never really that thought of 'my work isn't good enough.' The thought was always, "Oh they just hadn't caught up yet. They don't know [laughs] – yet, but it's going to happen in whatever time it's supposed to happen.' So I think all of those realities as a black person, a black male coming out of that culture and experience has been really informative and really essential in the success. So it's interesting some of the same things that can make the success challenging can also give you a good shot.