

Disciples in the Marketplace – Omari Booker

Transcript of Audio from the Video

00:00:02 My name is Omari Booker and I'm a visual artist. I didn't make artwork really as a kid, outside of doodles and sketches and trying to replicate the comics. The moment that I knew artwork was a consistent daily practice really was a transformative process that happened while I was incarcerated.

00:00:31 I think the necessity to stay alive and to stay motivated and the therapeutic and spiritual [and] mental health aspects of art making were really, really important and I kind of had to lean on those in that system – and I by no means give that system the credit for that necessity. It's just that necessity came in really the most challenging time of my life.

00:01:00 I haven't found a better metaphor for life than just making a piece of artwork because it does go through a stage of incredible excitement: if you think about like a child being born, it's like ohh, I've got this idea and you're fired up about it and then the child breaks its arm when it's five and you're like, 'What's happening to this thing that I'm kind of trying to make? It broke its arm! Or whatever that life process is, it's always in that kind of messy flow. And I'm really grateful to have those constant reminders to [in] these pieces of artwork.

00:01:47 Artwork in general is saying something without using words – I think there's such huge value in being able to say things without having a physical person behind it. A lot of the work that I focus on is around issues of race and justice and things that I've just experienced.

00:02:10 To see someone interact with a painting versus to see someone interact with a large Black man telling them what I'm trying to get across because the image, you have that conversation with yourself, really. It's your own interpretations and there's just a lot of beauty and also a lot of power in one hearing themselves say that, 'This is what I see in that,' without being kind of beat over the head by a messenger.

00:02:36 I think that **daily life and work life are essential places to meet God and share grace**. Once we're into adulthood we're working a lot of that time, but as an artist, it's challenging to offer, you know, really getting into those whole self and heart and soul on a wall and then let whoever wants to come look at it, look at it and say what they want to say about it. And I think that's probably the offering of grace: to share myself as openly as possible and as honestly as possible. Whenever someone says, 'hey, you know, I don't have it together,' then the rest of the room can kind of be welcomed into that space of saying, 'gosh, me either,' you know.