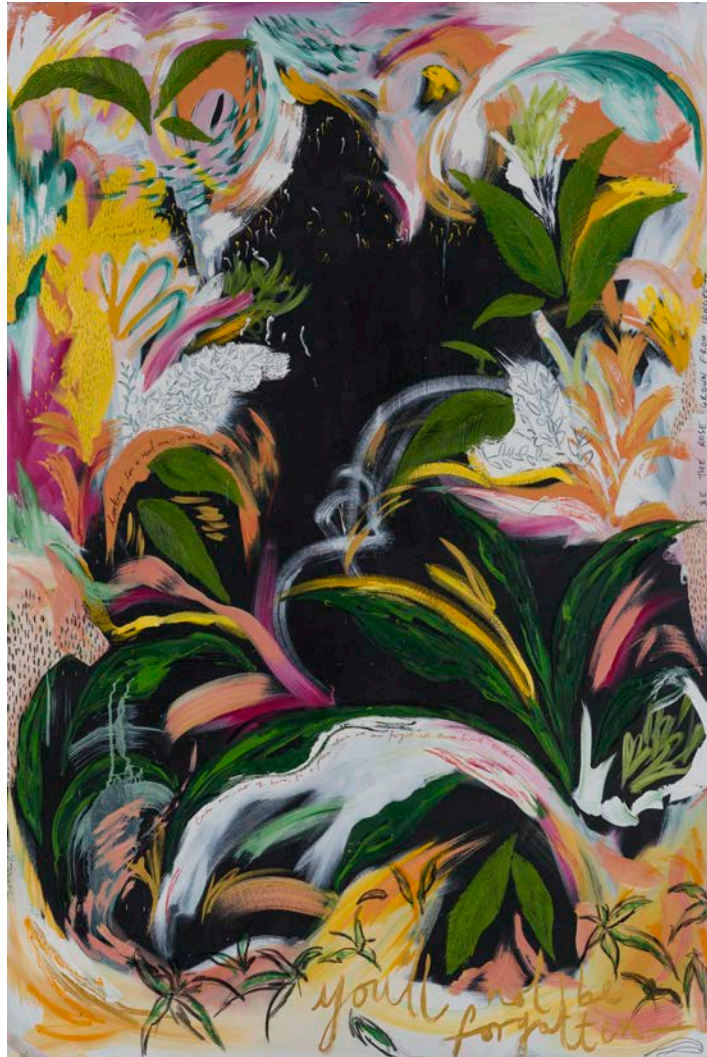


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## 5 Questions: Dive Deeper Into Michaela Yearwood-Dan's Sexy, Super-Romantic Paintings

By: Charlotte Jensen  
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*The young British artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan explains how love, passion, her West Indian heritage and feminism have helped her find an authentic style as a painter.*

The infectious gyal power of the Queen of Dancehall, Spice—who established the Grace Hamilton Women Empowerment Foundation in 2018—has been something of a role model for the artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan. It's not only Spice's sex-positive feminism that's inspired the artist, whose lush, sensual paintings are currently showing in her first solo exhibition at London gallery Tiwani Contemporary. There are elements of Spice's aesthetic, from the curl of her acrylic nails to her eye-catching carnivalesque colour palettes that also make their way into the young British artist's brushstrokes.

Though she was born and raised in South London, completing a Fine Art Painting BA at the University of Brighton before returning to the infinitely grey metropolis, her paintings propel you into a world dripping in the kind of colour you might encounter in nature in the Caribbean. Floral gestures and motifs recall places distant in time and place, and Yearwood-Dan has said she is inspired by historical Japanese and Chinese painting methods and craft. With their intuitive rhythm and lyrical titles, her works also suggest her connection with music (she's a fan of British rapper Kano, as she explains below).

Figurative painting has dominated the contemporary art of last decade, but Yearwood-Dan proves that abstract painting can still be sexy and that there's still a lot of unexplored terrain in painting for a romantic millennial feminist.



### **How many times have you been in love?**

Oh wow right in there with the big questions! I've probably only been in love once or twice. But I would definitely say that I love and fall for people really easily, and have had many moments of intense and momentary passion that I've thought were love, but when I reflect upon it after... I know full well it was not love. I'm super romantic, and get lost in the daydream of romance sometimes, but I'm also annoyingly pragmatic, which has worked against me and held me back from love before, too. If this was a certain HBO classic I would be a fifty-fifty blend between a certain redhead lawyer and a marriage-obsessed brunette. Or maybe more sixty-forty!

### **Can you tell me more about how Kano and Spice informed your latest body of paintings?**

Music has always influenced my creative endeavours—I grew up playing instruments, singing and acting in youth theatres—so it was clearly hard to leave those influences behind when I turned to fine art. I've loved Kano since his bars in Pow 2011 and then more so once I saw his face so his music carried through with me for years, but the narratives within his two most recent albums *Made in the Manor* and *Hoodies All Summer* are perfect. They provide a narrative of a life that I've grown up knowing and the lyrics are political, celebratory, inspiring, romantic and honest. That's pretty much the message I'd like to relay through my work: honesty. As for Spice...just look at her! She's a sexy, smart, gracious yet confident, Caribbean feminist...more things I believe that I am! So in honour of Queen Spice I used her lyrics and array of wig colours as inspiration for a painting in my recent body of work.



**You've spoken about being honest in your work and not making art that people expect from a black, feminist, millennial painter. What do you perceive as some of those expectations, and how did you manage to free yourself from them? Is that represented in your move towards more abstract painting, and your shift away from the figurative work that you were doing when you graduated?**

I'm sure every person of colour, queer person or disabled person can relate to this, but there is this weird pressure put on you to make artwork about your othered experience. This is especially true at art school, and especially if that school is at a university lacking in a multicultural and diversely gendered staff. So it was somewhat embedded within me to make work about the black experience, and it wasn't until I was given the freedom to escape that way of thinking it dawned on me that my work could say something different. The weight of relaying the narrative of a whole group of people is hard, but the pressure is lifted when you just focus on telling your own personal truth. I guess I managed to free myself from it by simply questioning why I was making the work I was, at a point of my life where I felt very emotionally broken. I made the conscious choice to not make this thing (art), which was meant to be my cathartic stress reliever, burden me with pressure I didn't ask for.

**Can you tell me about the title of the show, *After Euphoria*? And speaking of HBO, have you seen *Euphoria*, the Drake-produced series featuring Zendaya, which deals a lot with contemporary love and desire? I love it...**

I didn't know Drake produced *Euphoria*—gets about, doesn't he! I've seen the first episode of the show and wasn't interested in seeing any more. I had personally been very close to a lot of the storylines touched upon in the first episode and didn't really want to see them played out. For me, *After Euphoria* was a signal to the feeling that comes after the dream of falling in love or lust with someone. Sometimes it goes on to flourish in romantic beauty and other times it fades into nothing or shatters into a million pieces. But regardless if it's good or bad... something comes after that state of intense happiness.



**You have an extraordinary sense of colour; your palettes are beautiful and unique. Where does your sense of colour come from and is there anything in particular that you reference when it comes to palettes you apply to each canvas?**

Thank you. The honest and obnoxious answer is that I just kinda get colour theory. I love green so I use that a lot. I don't like purple, so I tend to stay clear of that one. Red I find difficult to work with so knowing me and the need to challenge myself...we probably will be seeing a lot more of that in future works. But, like Spice's wigs, I sometimes just see combinations I like and incorporate them into a new work.