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Lobyn Hamilton: Art in a New Direction



Local Artist [Lobyn Hamilton](http://www.vinylrecordartist.com/) (<http://www.vinylrecordartist.com/>), passed on a project for the latest Denzel Washington movie, took time to reflect in Cuba, and realized the work that matters most.

Known for his signature style of creating portraits from acrylics, album covers, and hundreds, if not thousands, of shards of vinyl records, the thirty-two-year-old has painted famous figures — from Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan to Prince and the POTUS. On March 2nd he'll bring his latest work to the Long-Sharp Gallery.

And though his high-profile clients such as Kanye West, Nas, and Fox's hit series "Empire" (which features his work) attract the most buzz, celebrities and his former self are taking a new direction in his latest exhibit, "Narrative Not Included."

“Most of my previous work had famous people facing you, some with eyes that seemed to follow, but what I’ve created now is a departure from that,” Hamilton says. “I still used album covers and vinyl, but the subjects aren’t predicated on iconography. They, too, have taken a different stance. You’ll recognize them but from behind, standing with their backs to the audience.”

It seemed to Hamilton he was only being validated through somebody else famous who bought his work. And then came a proposal from the folks working with the now Oscar-nominated Denzel Washington movie, “Roman J Israel, Esq.” Hamilton faced this potentially pivotal moment in his career, and he turned it down. He declined the paltry offer for his work.

“So I’m going to charge an individual \$2,000 or \$3,000, but I’m going to subsidize my artwork for a multibillion-dollar conglomerate?” he asks. “I know it was supposed to be an honor for me, because we’re supposed to need these things to make people feel a certain way about us, so they buy more of our work. But I said, ‘No.’”

Following that decision, he spent time in Cuba with his significant other and brother. The lack of ads, billboards, and commercials screaming for his attention, along with the quiet time to laugh, read, and reflect, solidified his opinions. It was time for a change.

Now, many months later his new artwork sits better with his conscience, even though it creates more challenges. “I’m not hiding behind pop culture or political icons,” Hamilton says. “Now I have to dig deeper, because half of my previous work was with famous faces who are already built into our ethos as geniuses—magnificent individuals we froze in a certain time (when they looked sexy or had their best music). But I don’t desire that same anchor at this time.”

His “Narrative Not Included” show offers his commentary on the fact that most people can’t express their views because of the current political and social climate and the risk of future fallout. And he’s no different than them.

“The audience will have to come up with their own interpretation and perspective on this show, and that’s part of the journey,” he says. “There’s a certain commentary that I know I literally can’t say. There are narratives you just do not touch. For example, the rich can’t shit on poor people — can’t come out and say, ‘You need to work harder.’ But poor people can shit on rich people all day long.”

The keyboard bravado of individuals on the Internet also paints an unrealistic picture, according to Hamilton. “People on social media make it seem like there’s a completely different world out there, but in reality, there’s a silent majority of people who are sitting here looking at the day-to-day and don’t agree with it, but when you speak out, they will not support you.”

He refers to high-profile examples such as Colin Kaepernick and Kathy Griffith, both of whom publically expressed their opinions and suffered extreme consequences financially and career-

wise.

“You have to be very careful with criticism (or even objectivity) and curate your opinions or your perspective almost to the point of thinking: Fuck it, it’s not even worth it,” Hamilton says. “We can have a very different discussion in person than on social media. They say art is supposed to do this and that, but I’m like: Yeah, but you won’t be here when the shit hits the fan.”

His work similarly reflects the reality of an artist who, like everyone else, feels censored boundaries. “I am saying that I’m not different. I’m like you—I’m just like you. I’m not going to comment on that, because that is the reality of where I am,” he says.

The Hoosier artist lives and works in Indy, which he sees as an incubator for his creativity. However his sales come from everywhere except the Circle City. Hamilton has gallery representation at studios in Chicago and Louisville. He says 96 percent of collectors of his work are African-American, and they, too, live elsewhere. To date, his largest project hangs in an Adidas store diagonally from the Apollo Theater in Harlem.

As for future exhibits and projects, Hamilton says, “I don’t know where this is going, but it’s nowhere I used to be. I hope you’re around for the ride. We’ll see...we’ll see.”

Lobyn Hamilton’s exhibit “Narrative Not Included(<https://www.facebook.com/events/631019103956435/>)” will open at 6:30 p.m. on First Friday, March 2nd, and continue through March 30th. For more information, visit www.longsharpgallery.com(<http://www.longsharpgallery.com>). The Long-Sharp Gallery is located on the first floor of the Conrad Hotel at 1 N. Illinois St., Suite A, Indianapolis 46204.

Follow Hamilton on Instagram(<https://www.instagram.com/lobyn/>).

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