Michaela Yearwood-Dan's large-scale colorscapes chronicle the artist’s process of self-historicization, forming playful visual soliloquies meant to find connection with other femme, Black, and queer individuals. Each work is a repository of cultural signifiers—including acrylic nails, gold hoops, and dancehall lyrics—that reference millennial culture, Blackness, feminism, and healing rituals. Yearwood-Dan's propensity for adornment acts as a double-entendre, referencing both her own personal style and the Catholic religious iconography that was one of her earliest influences.

Growing up in South London, the artist's discovery at sixteen of Chris Ofili’s work, specifically the painting No Woman, No Cry (1998)—a portrait of Doreen Lawrence as a tribute to Stephen Lawrence, a victim of a racially motivated shooting in South London—was a critical encounter that shaped her connection to art and its potentiality. Ofili’s painting inspired her pursuit of abstraction and encouraged the artist to freely incorporate connections to her West Indian heritage beyond clichés of representation. Calling them cathartic releases, Yearwood-Dan's partiality toward vivid tropical palettes is reminiscent of the Caribbean Artists Movement of the 1960s, most specifically the vibrant patterning and wild abandon of fellow Londoner Althea McNish, known for her tropical eye. Lush and lyrical both gesturally and in textual references, Yearwood-Dan's practice builds as much upon reflected style as it does on the energy and atmosphere the work radiates. Poetic excerpts taken from drafted text messages left unseen, notes to self, lyrics, and introspective questions often overlay the work as quirky, thought-provoking intersections of life. While impasto layers of rocaille-like twining meld with gold leaf or flashes of glitter, to form a vibrant riot of color and texture often surrounding a central void intended for contemplation.

In It’s All Happening (2021) Yearwood-Dan’s characteristic swaths of carnivalesque color are the first impact that command visual attention. Gueva pink delicately blends into blooms of crimson and vivid hibiscus, the vibrant colors ringing pools of cerulean, and crepuscular flashes of saffron. The artist has mentioned currently being in a “red moment” after years of avoiding the color, drawn by its complexity. Her partiality to working with a palette knife is evident in the work as a full topography emerges, replete with hills, valleys, and peaks of paint and high drama. Collaged squares of red stand oppositional to red outlined grids as if each square was freed from the painting itself. Methodic pointillist maroon dots surround two-word phrases hastily scrawled and struck through. While coruscate drippings of pink and gold glitter saturate the canvas on one side as if the work itself is at the point of deliquescing. There is an intensity in the work, an undercurrent of frenzy and exultation that speaks to its title. It is all happening.

Yearwood-Dan’s paintings are explorations for the artist and the viewer. Visually immersive, they are an amalgamation of pop culture and traditional painting references through the lens of modern impressionism. Her work, much like the artist herself, refuses to be framed into any subset of expectations, but rather searches for space to encourage possibility.

- Keshia Turley, Curatorial Assistant
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