

Black History Month Commissions October/November



Luka Rollings

Kyoki is a poem which I have written in an attempt to represent the residing force of racism in the modern day. I also wanted to explore the incredible injustice, yet incredible love and pride of black people. I began by listening to and reading lots of music and poetry written by black artists such as Charles Bradley, Gil-Scott Heron, John Coltrane, Fela Kuti, Bob Marley, The Last Poets and Kayo Chingonyi. Many of these artists challenge the idea of race and racism through rhythm which, I think is reflected in the poem. For me, Kyoki conjures an image alternating between African and American black culture. The musical element is key in all of it as this is where I feel race is reflected most.

Kyoki

For you: the better Man,
The skinned and Skinner,
Skinny in the back door flat,
Breathing the colour of proclamation,
Here, He waits;
Peeking from behind my hypocrisy and stereo blasting out Kayo's tunes.
An eye trained to the spot
 Iris of pitched hair
High on Marley's metamorphosis,
We found Coltrane, delivered into a lake-side swing.
Here, He waits,
Escaping the early sundown
With Bradley's infant love seducing the rainfall.
A soft touch,
A tamper with the keys
The dying pleas
The patters
The pans
The skinned honour of a drum
The conception of rhythm
The night.
And exile stayed in touch
With carnivorous white.
With dimming soul. The final soul.
Gil-Scott Heron trimming back the organ, an Ocean Trumpet,
Trump beats black behind an African orange.
Ying settled at yang.
A yellowed leaf worshipping the n-word
Chanting My Brother or Slave,
(Pardon my white)
But what speaks the difference?
And who am I to say that slavery never extincted?

(initially written to the song by Alfa Mist)

Sophie Wembridge

It's about the history of Bristol and in particular the recent debate surrounding whether Colston Hall should have a name change because of its attachment to Edward Colston. It's about how Bristol has been shaped by its history and grown to become such a wonderfully diverse place - how we can't erase our connections to slavery because it's a reminder of the ugly past. It's the idea that beauty will continue to grow from it no matter what.

Black history Bristol.

Race – to the finish line,
Baring black, white and red,
But first: erase the indelible they said.
We should neglect face, name,
forfeit our mistakes for those
who claimed their voice for storm and rain?
Which watered seeds, flourished your feet,
Wove a patchwork quilt down a steam rolled street.
Our friends are roses, our family orchid,
bred under the moon with breath of a ship
in wind, sailing. We are no longer sordid.
We are all matter, so every life does too.

Bronya Marsh

I asked people around me, friends and family, of a word that to them embodies black history. I kept it very vague so it was what it meant to them. I then used those words and incorporated them into my poetry, they are the words in bold and I used them as inspiration and a basis of which I could then have some room to write what it means to me. Most of the bold words are other people's but Nelson Mandela is what I chose as to me he is incredibly inspiring and he used the injustice and helped make a change.

A Hindsight of History

Retrospect,
regrettably necessary in exposing man's **injustice**,
To appreciate a **revolutionary** race,
MLK's 'dream' the result of a nightmare..
A **disgrace**.

Eye opening,
but a history of eyes closing,
slamming like doors
Against the colour of skin like its content of character.
A custodial sentence against
equality.

Devastating,
that a body of people will stamp on their innocence,
Like its a cigarette on its last breath,
To reject the body of a people.

Nelson Mandela
labelled a terrorist,
incarcerated for 27 years before

Uprising.
4 years later, emancipation, liberation,
A president against **discrimination**.

Against **segregation**.

Chelsea Stockham

'Day of the Dead'

There were ghosts in Charlottesville
wearing sheets
so white the nooses
they could be tied into
would be invisible
 they carried hellfire

Some couldn't see the smoke
some won't mark the day
there were ghosts in Charlottesville
in their calendars

but you and I will

because you know what it's like
to suffocate
and I know some bodies
don't get to go on.

Katie Welch

It is about Bristol's silence and guilt around the slave trade and the ways in which we are trying to break the silence by teaching children to try and ensure that we do not make the same mistakes again.

Bristol will not sweep it under the rug

No-one admires talk
of how we once scolded
your people skin
scrubbing them until they bled
positioning them on a stage
to place a price upon their head.
We do not often bring up
how we stood them,
if they survived the transatlantic trip,
before large crowds
stripping them bare
so the rich could see every flaw
each crack on the surface
that could make them undesirable and weak.
We do not pride ourselves on Colston's work
we do not place him on a pedestal
for our children to admire
but we do not erase him from the history books.
It is too late to sweep it under the rug
to hide the flaws in our city's wealth.
Instead we teach.
We discuss how it was wrong
to steal the humanity
because of a minuscule difference in DNA
that does not make a person lesser.
You see, it is said that history happens twice
as we do not learn from our mistakes
but this is one mistake
written in bold
circled twice in red
to ensure we never make it again.

Megan Eyres

This poem reminds people how discrimination towards people of colour has not stopped and how history continues. It shows two black men who have been killed in the modern day and how justice hasn't been served. It's a poem to remind others that we need to change our society before history is repeated.

Choking on Histories Chains

We were given a legacy.

A Reminder.

To carve an angel from the chameleon's tongue,

To starve the hate the world consumes.

But have we done that?

Alton Sterling.

His candle was tortured, yet we light millions to breath the blinding truth.

Philando Castile.

His death was a murder yet his justice lies with the fragments of his memories.

The continuity of history flows through the murky tears of hell,

as the sirens symphony slips from their chains in silence.

You will hear it. As sterling's aunt once said:

"We need closure... We need justice"