

# ART PROBE

ISSUE #17

- Shristi Sainani

**Exhibition :** *Queen Mudda*

**Artists :** *Cydne Jasmin Coleby*

**Venue :** *UNIT London (London, UK)*

**Dates :** *26th March – 23rd April 2021*



*Courtied Laydees (detail, 2021)*

Source : *UNIT London*

*Cydne Jasmin Coleby* is a digital and mix media artist based in The Bahamas (Caribbean, West Indies). Introspection forms a large part of her art making process as she produces her vibrant, fragmented compositions. She questions the notion of identity and body, to deconstruct the idea of 'being'. Through her stimulating collages, *Coleby* examines personal and collective relationships to trauma and conditioning. In 2012, she completed her Associate of Art degree from The College of The Bahamas, Nassau.

'*Queen Mudda*' is her second solo show, hosted by UNIT LONDON. Through this show, *Coleby* claims to draw narrative from the on-going exploitation of the unseen labour of Black women. She bring to focus, the quotidian female figures. They are ecstatic, confident, full of life and pride. They wear bold patterns and elaborate head-dresses. '*Queen Mudda*' is a celebration of women and girls, who *Coleby* addresses as "those who have the broadest shoulders and are the backbones of our family lines.". Visually, she takes inspiration from the western aesthetics of Rococo and Baroque as well as the hyper-embellishment of the Caribbean and African diaspora. One can recognise resonating patterns of African wax print fabric, Junkanoo, and Carnival.

Pieces which stood out from the show 'Queen Mudda' are:

## 1) Queen in Training, 2021



Source : UNIT London

The first in line from the *Coleby* show is 'Queen in Training, 2021'. This heavily textured work is an acrylic, decorative paper, crepe paper, fabric, and photo collage on canvas, measuring 101.6 x 91.44 cm. On examining the piece, the viewer recognises a Black, female, toddler wearing a dress, sitting on a wooden chair. The dress is energetic; one can see ruffled lavenders, hints of brown African wax print fabric, a red ribbon accent and a turquoise floral, lattice print. The little girl is wearing shoes that are in shades of pink and carries an ogee print. She sits with a posture that radiates a sense of self-assertion. She is unexpectedly aware of her might. In her eyes, one can evidently notice, a sense of pride. Her eyes look older than her, perhaps as they are cut outs from another source. The toddler sits indoors with a printed, maroon wallpaper as backdrop. The plants around her, spring outwards. They look alive and unreserved.

The two aspects which make this piece stand out as compared to the rest of the show is the choice of subject as well as the brilliant play of patterns. The composition is balanced, although there is a multiplicity of textures, colours and motifs. The subject induces a sense of hope and resilience, communicating the ever-present scope of growth.

## 2) Ushered in, 2021



Source : UNIT London

Second, from the UNIT LONDON's exhibition, is '*Ushered In (2021)*'. It is an acrylic, decorative paper, crepe paper, glitter, gold ink and photo collage on canvas, measuring 97 x 91 cm. In this piece, there are two subjects. At first glance, it would be assumed that they are sisters, perhaps twins, who are dressed homogeneously. They are both clothed in a turquoise printed top with ruffled sleeves. The sleeves seem to be made out of shredded, crepe paper. Their skirts are orange, sparsely printed in florals. To tie the outfit together, there is a beige band above their torso. Both the sisters carry grande, glittery blue bags with beige ruche. Their footwear is blue, printed and mismatched, when the right foot is compared to the left. As the backdrop is examined, it can be seen that the girls may be a part of an elaborate party with figures much taller than the two, towering them. One can discern a blue physique dressed in animated fabrics and heels on the left of the canvas, as well as gestures hinting at a crowd present in the space. The show of scale (where the adults are clearly out of focus and macro-scaled), presence of negative space around the sisters (to give them centrality) as well as gestural (not literal) hints that suggest the presence of a crowd, elevate the status of '*Ushered In (2021)*'.



### 3) Heir Lesley (Her Mudda Shadow), 2021



Source : UNIT London

Another well constructed piece put forth at 'Queen Mudda' is 'Heir Lesley (2021)'. It is an acrylic, decorative paper, glitter, androsia fabric, and photo collage on canvas, measuring 101.6 x 76.2 cm. Coleby uses the Batik printed fabric, native to the Bahamas, to create a high-spirit composition. In this Coleby work, she keeps a Black, young woman in focus. The subject seems like she may be somewhere in between the ages of 25-30. She sports a neat afro, with a slight smile. Her chin rests on her hands gently; she is conscious of her beauty. She wears a bright green, leaf-printed dress over which there is another, negligibly-muted, green outerwear. Her hands are hiding behind gloves. Gloves, usually symbolise high status and therefore, she is deemed as an affluent woman. The backdrop celebrates her beauty. The motif is a palm leaf. The direction of its lamina sets the subject as a point of centrality. A similar coloured print as that of the backdrop, merges into her magenta-coloured forehead which makes the piece specially interesting to look at. When examined closely, one can also see a neon yellow slim patch in the middle of the composition. Thus accentuating the subject's neck, as a result complimenting the woman's beauty further.

A major setback of exploring this exhibition is not being able to experience its materiality to the fullest. There are limitations on the visual information one can gather looking at a photograph. For instance, *Coleby's* pieces use crepe paper, wax print fabric and glitter at many instances, which can not be examined to its fullest from behind a screen. They possess a surface finish of their own which turns invisible, when viewed as a digital image. Another aspect of the show, worth drawing attention to would be *Coleby's* claim to shed light on 'the exploitation of the unseen labour of Black women' which is not clearly demonstrated as a part of her compositions. Her attempt to positively showcase brilliant, powerful women of all ages is commendable and appreciated. But her assertion, made as part of her statement for UNIT LONDON, is lost in her productions.

## REFERENCES

### **Cydne Jasmin Coleby | Queen Mudda, 2021:**

Unit London. 2021. *Cydne Jasmin Coleby | Queen Mudda*. [online]

Available at: <<https://unitlondon.com/whats-on/78-cydne-jasmin-coleby-queen-mudda/>>

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