



# LEASHO JOHNSON

NEW WORKS 2018

# Artists Statement

In this release of works, I am showing my most recent pieces in portraiture, and am including developments and explorations of my past Series' 'Speaker paintings,' 'Belisario and the Soundboy' and the ceramic sculptures of the 'Avatars'.

The portraiture work, 'Yeng yeng', 'Sugar daddy, and 'Big dawg,' utilise my core embodiment of the avatars as caricatures of dancehall masculinity by imagining the constructs through which that masculinity is expressed in everyday living in the post colonial. Black masculinity defines itself with what it surrounds itself with. And so I explored my paternal ancestral line, and questioned what made them the men they were, and are today. What had been their aspirations and their flaws? How did they claim their masculinity based on their own personal history, and in the cultural space in which they lived? How was the black male body made meaningful in regard to gender and power in economic societal dynamics? I sought reference from local popular film culture, icons like Jimmy Cliff in 'The Harder They Come,' Leroy Wallace in 'Rockers,' and from dancehall cultural figures such as Shabba Ranks, Tiger, Bounty Killer, and Vybz Kartel.

I wanted to work towards an abstraction that merges man and object, exposing the core vulnerability of how a black male engenders his identity as a societal man. The fears and anxieties of the contemporary male is fraught with historical stereotypes and contemporary cultural demands. Navigating these give light to the internal tensions between authenticity and dissonance, and it is at these nerve centers where vulnerabilities reveal themselves. The hardened external identity of these men in my work, is toned with objects of claimed material and cultured 'worth,' an effort to recreate/reclaim an identity that slavery, and a post colonial society, has stripped them of. I question whether constructs are chosen, or thrust upon them. Whether constructs are the unpondered wounds of history, or the visceral chosen clothing of revolt and independence. I question whether notions of belonging, manhood and power require submission to cultural norms, or a taking of arms against them. As such, I am giving life to 'blackness' as a complex myth through the lens of dancehall and the dynamics of contemporary realities.

Continuing the conversations I initiated with J.B. Kidd's paintings of pre Emancipation Jamaica in my series, 'Belisario and the Sound Boy' in 2016, I have *sampled* the historical images of John J. Audubon's 'Birds of America' in both my portraits and 'Speaker paintings'. The colonial ventures of Europeans to capture and archive the 'wildness' of the 'New World', and their obsession to separate themselves from Nature, deeming anything outside of Europe un-civilized and primitive, has driven the use of this imagery as a material through which to reinterpret this narrative in relation to colonial history and notions of civility. My portraits 'When sugar was queen' and 'When paradise isn't enough' play into this disruption of power in narratives of both Monarchy and Saviour.

Pieces in the 'Kill a Soundboy' and 'Cock-tales and pumpum' series are also included as I continue my work in sculpture. 'Cock-tales and pum-pum' was first exhibited in my solo exhibition 'Belisario and the Soundboy' in 2016 and in the British Council/National Gallery of Jamaica's landmark exhibition 'We have Met Before' in 2017. The 'Kill a Soundboy' series of Avatar sculptures are a new exploration using these same characters. In this incarnation they are hermaphrodite, both male and female, sliced in half and held together by a vinyl record. The intention is to illuminate the blurred lines of gender identity, *mixed* with the violence of the dancehall.



1.

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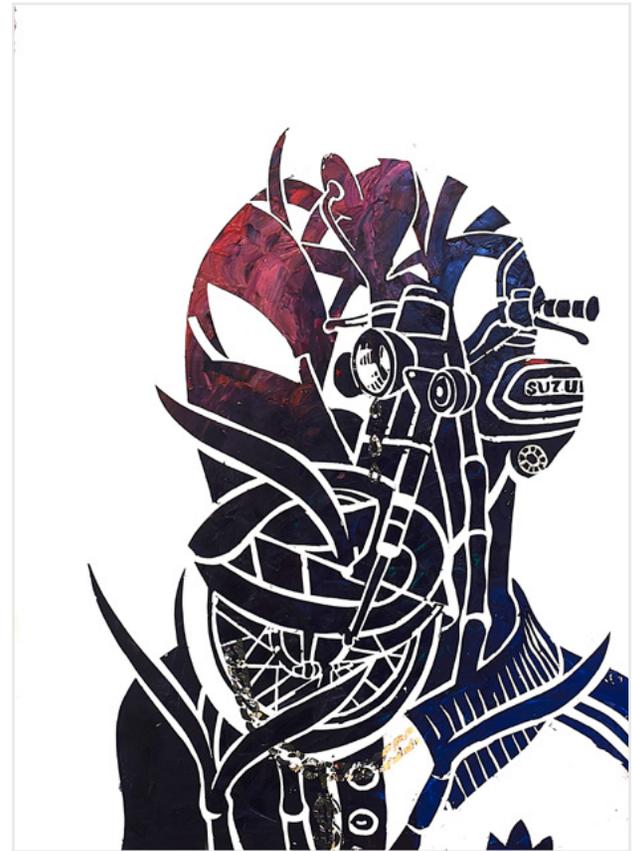
Yeng yeng, 2018 , oil paint, gold leaf, spray paint and vinyl on 150lbs watercolour paper, 60" x 50"



2.

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Yeng yeng #2 , 2018 , oil paint,  
and vinyl on paper 22" x 30"



3.

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Yeng yeng #3 , 2018, oil paint,  
and vinyl on paper, 22" x 30"



4.

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Big dawg, 2018, oil paint, spray paint and vinyl on paper 60" x 50"



5.

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No fear , 2018, oil paint, and vinyl on paper, 22" x 30"



6.

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Big dawg #2, 2018 , oil paint, and vinyl on paper, 22" x 30"



7.

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Sugar daddy, 2018, oil paint, and vinyl on paper,  
60" x 50"



8.

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Sugar daddy #2, 2018, oil paint, and vinyl on paper, 22" x 30"



9.

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Sugar daddy #3, 2018, oil paint, and vinyl on paper, 22" x 30",



10.

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When paradise isn't enough #1, 2018, oil  
paint, spray paint, gold leaf, vinyl on paper,  
30" x 44"



11.

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When paradise isn't enough #2, 2018, oil  
paint, spray paint, gold leaf, vinyl on paper  
30" x 44"



12.

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When sugar was queen #1, 2018, oil paint, spray paint, gold leaf, vinyl on paper, 30" x 44"



13.

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When sugar was queen #2, 2018, oil paint, spray paint, gold leaf, vinyl on paper, 30" x 44"



14.

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Speaker painting white, 2018  
Acrylic on 18" diameter  
subwoofer speakers



15.

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Speaker painting red, 2018  
Acrylic, spray paint on 18"  
diameter subwoofer speakers



16.

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Speaker painting gold, 2018  
Acrylic and gold leaf on 18"  
diameter subwoofer speakers

17.

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How to kill a sound boy #1, 2018  
earthenware, Spray Paint, vinyl record,  
12" x 12" x 13 "



18.

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How to kill a sound boy #2, 2018  
earthenware, spray paint, vinyl record, 12" x 12" x 13 "



19.

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How to kill a sound boy #3, 2018  
earthenware, spray paint, vinyl record, 12" x 12" x 13 "



20.

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How to kill a sound boy #4, 2018  
earthenware, spray paint, vinyl record,  
12" x 12" x 13 "



21.

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How to kill a sound boy #5,  
2018, earthenware, spray  
paint, vinyl record,  
12" x 12" x 13 "





22.

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Walk like a dog #1, 2018, earthenware, gold leaf,  
vinyl record 12" x 12" x 8.5"



23.

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Walk like a dog #2, 2018, earthenware, gold leaf,  
vinyl record, 12" x 12" x 8.5"

24.

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Cock-tales and pum-pum #1, 2017, vinyl, glass, ceramics, Acrylic paint, cedar wood, assortment of bottles varied sizes



25.

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Cock-tales and pum-pum #2, 2017, vinyl, glass, ceramics, cedar wood, assortment of bottles varied sizes,



26.

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Cock-tales and pum-pum #3, 2017  
Vinyl, glass, ceramics, cedar wood,  
Assortment of bottles varied sizes



27.

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Cock-tales and pum-pum #4, 2017  
vinyl, glass, ceramics, cedar wood,  
assortment of bottles varied sizes





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