

Corinne Lampkin
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Reflecting on Dave Smith's 'Headlines' at the D'Aguilar Art Foundation

There were sunsets, palm trees and brightly painted murder scenes in Dave Smith's most recent show at the D'Aguilar Art Foundation (DAF). Aptly titled "Headlines", Smith referenced the local dailies in the exhibition that was on display at the DAF from November 2015 to January 2016.

Though he no longer lives in The Bahamas, the country is often the focus of his work. For years he has painted the idyllic scenes found in tourist-centric locales and middle and upper class neighborhoods. These are presented alongside the familiar landscapes of Over-the-Hill neighborhoods. Jolting combinations are not unusual for the artist; he has long been known and admired for his confidence in depicting cultural disparities. Still, for some, the contrasting medleys appeared with much rawness in Headlines.

For the past few years, on a regular basis, the media has been tragically peppered with crime reports, relaying details of the most recent violent crimes to an increasingly uncomfortable public. Most of the men who make the reports do so because they are either the latest bodies removed by mortuary personnel or the ones believed to be responsible for violent crimes. An uneasy feeling has become normalized for much of the public, as has the storyline of young, black and disenfranchised men being killed and sent to prison.

In Headlines, two common scenarios were presented in Smith's works: the sun shines on bikini-clad women of leisure and grinning, black poolside servers, while visuals of bloody bodies in a separate plane shocked viewers into considering the illogic of the combination.

At the show, audiences could not escape contemplating the inconsistencies of the current situation that exists beyond the boundaries of the DAF. The Bahamas touts a reputation as an easily accessible paradise and prides itself on its hospitality industry, which is arguably one of the most advanced and lucrative in the Caribbean region. Large resorts provide entertainment and a sterile beach environment for guests. Many of these hotels reserve executive positions for expats and foreign workers; scores of undereducated Bahamians take on positions of service, only to, at the end of the day, return to the same communities plagued with gang warfare.

It is difficult coming to terms with the contrasting realities. Only recently, the sexual assault of an American visitor by an unlicensed Jet Ski operator off of Paradise Island raised protests and uproar in the media. Yet, it would be a considerable feat to quantify the daily rate of unreported and uninvestigated sexual assault on inner city girls and women.

For some collectors, it might also be a challenge looking at a murder scene on a regular basis – even one that hangs on a wall. Others may question the benefits – if any – of crime and violence of this nature becoming normalized and accepting

of the image of an anonymous, murdered black man. Still, it could be argued that by inviting works like these into middle and upper class homes, collectors could consider how out of place the visual is in their homes and across the wider country as a whole.

Parallels could be drawn between this notion and the work being progressed by Black Lives Matter, which has been protesting widespread passive acceptance of the disproportionate force used by the American police force on black men.

It is not Smith's intention to poke fun or rile up audiences; but to offer a critique and a counter image. Seeking only to present two irreconcilable facets of the country, he leaves decision-making and judgment calls to his works' viewers.