

**ARTIST OF THE MONTH**



**AARON LINTON-CHAMBERS at his MA Graduation 2010**

He has always had an active imagination and just transferred his love of toys, stories, video games, history and films into drawings. First and foremost he doesn't consider or labels himself as a black artist. He's very proud of his Caribbean heritage being that of Jamaica, but at the same time he gets annoyed when certain groups of society have to conform to labels and stereo-types. Here's his story...

**NSS: Greetings Aaron, thank you for taking time out to be interviewed on *PANTHER NEWSLETTER*. Please tell the readers a little about yourself; where are you from?**

ALC: Thank *you* for giving me the opportunity to talk about what I love. I was born and raised in Birmingham England and I grew up near the city centre in the Winson Green area with my mom and my family.

**NSS: Did you go into further education after leaving school: College/University?**

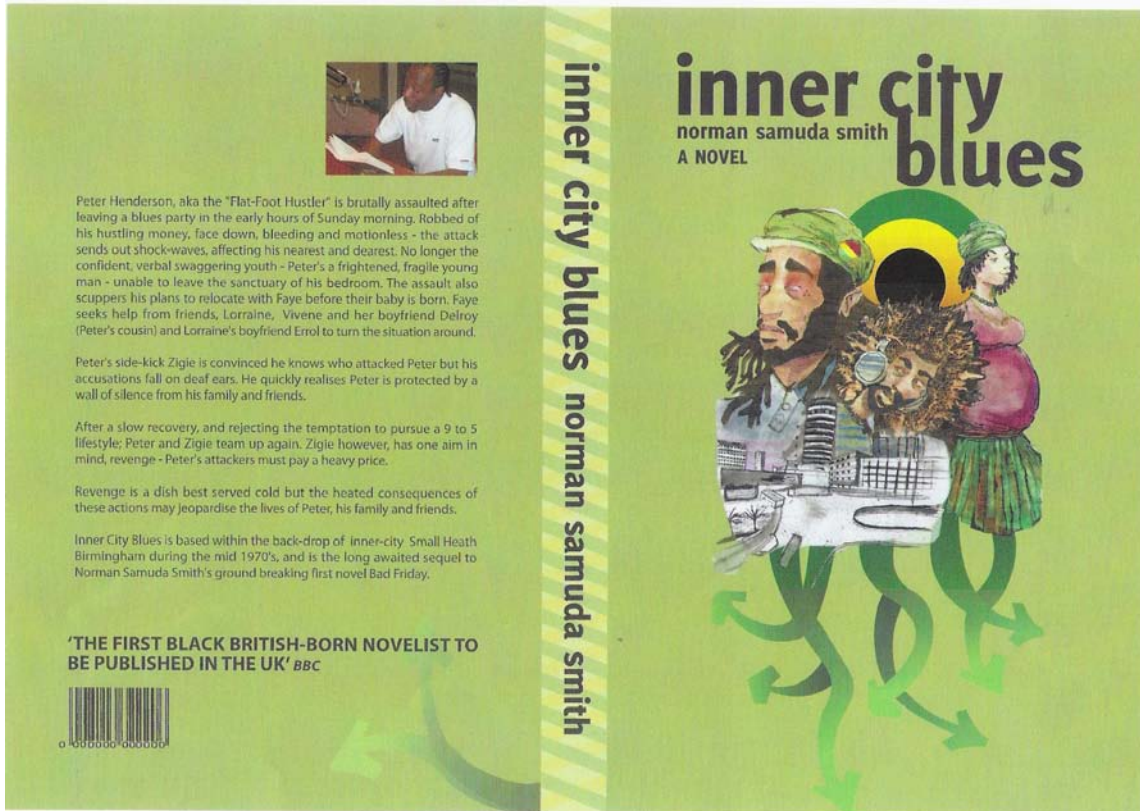
ALC: Yes, after I completed my G.C.S.E's at secondary school, I decided my sole focus was I wanted to pursue a career in Art and Design. I had the opportunity to go straight on to a Foundation course, but I chose to do my 'A' Levels instead which was really beneficial for me. I was able to build on my technical drawing skills as well as develop my art history knowledge.

After completing my 'A'Levels, I enrolled onto a Foundation course. While doing this, I learned how to be a more independent practitioner. I also began to develop my own style of illustration at this point. I have a lot of fond memories of my time on the Foundation course. It gave me and other students so much freedom.

Shortly after finishing my diploma, I began my B.A degree at Birmingham City University (formerly University of Central England), followed by my Masters degree. I achieved a first class B.A honours, and sailed through my Masters. At present I'm studying for my PGCE at Wolverhampton University. So altogether I've been in further education five years.

**NSS: What is your occupation at present are you a full time illustrator?**

ALC: After I completed my Masters, I took a year out from studying. Simply because I needed a break and I wanted to gain some experience. So I worked as a support worker assisting various students who had learning disabilities, for example, students who had dyslexia etc. In my spare time, I do some freelance work and develop my own projects which are always an on going process.



Aaron's Cover design for Norman Samuda Smith's future novel

### *INNER-CITY BLUES*

**NSS:** When did you first realise you wanted to be an illustrator? – What prompted you?

**ALC:** I can't necessarily pin point the exact time because drawing/illustration is something I've always enjoyed doing ever since I was little. I've always had an active imagination; I just transferred my love of toys, stories, video games, history and films into drawings.

When I discovered I had the potential to become a professional illustrator, all I've ever wanted to do is just get myself established. I don't like the idea of going to work and not enjoying what I do. I've met so many people that have been prime examples of why one should pursue their dreams. Being in a job you don't like can slowly kill you. Life is short; I definitely believe you should have no regrets.

As a teenager growing up in inner-city Winson Green, it definitely motivated me to strive to do better in life. It's far from being a terrible place, I did have many happy memories there, but having to walk by the local prison and mental hospital opened my eyes. I knew there was no opportunity there for me and I wanted more than what my surroundings had to offer.

**NSS: What illustrators have inspired by in particular?**

ALC: In terms of inspiration, I have always loved cartoons, particularly Tom and Jerry, Bugs Bunny, Top Cat and Yogi Bear to name a few. I think I admire the rawness of the subject matters; they were cartoons which became iconic.

As I got older I gained interest in reading comics such as Marvel, DC, The Dandy, The Beano, and Dark Horse, not forgetting 2000 AD, which greatly inspired me to draw. Japanese culture has always been a significant influence in my life; from traditional prints to the Anime films. The Japanese have a keen eye for detail and contemporary style. The films they made in the 80's and 90's were based on stories that pushed the boundaries of creativity. They never allowed anything such as censorship restricts their development.

Traditional illustrators who have inspired me have been Van Gogh, Renoir, Renée Magritte and Picasso. At school my art teacher introduced us to these artists. I think it was important to get a firm understanding of art history. It gave me an idea of what had already been done in regards to styles and movements.

I generally like looking at undiscovered or unknown artists. They always seem to be trying to break the mould. I normally discover them online or in fanzines. Jean-Michael Basquiat is a hero of mine. I discovered his work when I was on my Foundation course whilst I was doing a Fine Art module. The art work he produces oozes confidence and innovation, it is very playful. The element of having no inhibitions comes from being a child and I really love children's drawings. Children don't try to be analytical; their drawings are a very organic process of just going with the flow.

Last but by no means least my two tutors' works has been a great template for inspiration. They both taught me a lot about having structure with my visual imagery and seeing their work made me work harder and see how I could further develop ideas and technique; and they are Barbara Walker and Chui Kwang Man.

**NSS: What do you enjoy most about illustration?**

ALC: I enjoy the fact that I can lose myself in my work the same way cinema goers get engrossed in a plot line; it's the same feeling I get every time I create a piece of

work. I love coming up with a concept in my mind then seeing it take form and develop to a final conclusion. For me illustration is the best form of expression. My work is a reflection of me, who I am, how I feel at the time and sometimes where I want to be.

**NSS: What subjects do you illustrate – Do you have a favourite?**

ALC: I don't have a favourite per-say. I would say it depends on the project I'm addressing at the time. Generally with my own work I tend to do a lot of figurative drawings mixed with sequence and narration.

**NSS: Do you write your own material – What inspires you; graphic novels perhaps – and why?**

ALC: At the moment I'm illustrating pre-written material and my own work. The reason is I'm an avid student of literature and visual communication. I try to learn as much as I can from other people's stories to inform me of the basic principles of storytelling. Working with other people's literature has improved my story-boarding skills which is essential for what I'm trying to accomplish as an authoritative illustrator.

In terms of graphic novels I do have some all-time favourites that stick out in my mind. The Batman never gets old. There's always a place in my heart for it. Batman is an anti-hero. His whole persona goes against the norm of what people suggest a hero should be. Plus I would say the modern adaptations are heavily influenced by film noir, which gives its character.

**NSS: How do you go about putting your material together? What kind of research is involved?**

ALC: Well creating a brief or working from a pre-created one is crucial to the success of any project I have been involved in. Having a brief helps focus the research I need to do. It is easy to go off on a tangent if you don't have one. This is why you always hear of '*creatives*' having in-complete projects. Anyway, before I go off on a tangent myself, my research comes from many facets. The internet is an easy one to use but I do prefer using books. For me, books provide clear access to information that is vital to my projects. I also like to collect a lot of imagery in my note books in case I have any ideas that come to me.

**NSS: In regards to creating your material, do you impose a discipline on yourself regarding schedules, goals etc?**

ALC: I prefer working from a time-table and set aims and objectives so that I don't stray from the main task. Each time I do a project I learn so much in terms of planning. I keep a log of the successes and failures of a project. It's beneficial and it's an

art form in itself. Not many people have time for such things. Everyone has there own way of doing things and getting work accomplished.

**NSS: How hard is it to become a successful black illustrator in the UK and what does it take for a person to be a success in your artistic genre?**

ALC: First and foremost I don't consider or label myself as a black artist. I'm very proud of my Caribbean heritage being that of Jamaica, but at the same time I get annoyed when certain groups of society have to conform to labels and stereotypes. Put it like this, Pablo Picasso is never addressed by anyone as the greatest Caucasian artist that ever lived. He's simply recognised as just being a great artist! People acknowledge his point of origin but they just embrace his work, that's the same way I want to be recognised. I don't want to create any sort of limitations to myself.

My advice in general to any body wanting to become an illustrator is to have a good portfolio, advertise your work and network as much as possible. They should also think about what sector of the design world they want to enter since there are so many possibilities job wise. Whatever you choose to do as an illustrator, be passionate about it. It's not easy getting through the doors of where you want to go, but you should always be determined and realistic about what you want.

**NSS: How do you promote yourself?**

ALC: Business cards, networking at art functions but since I haven't gone through the route of having a website, I normally get commissioned through word of mouth which has worked well for me.

**NSS: Outside of your works, what other interests and hobbies do you have?**

ALC: I like to play video games, exercise, socialise with friends and listening to music when I have the chance. I watch a lot of drama and films.

**NSS: Finally, do you have any advice and encouragement you would like to share with any potential budding artistes?**

ALC: Keep practising at what you do and work hard. Try not to give up when failure seems to appear, that applies to art work and career opportunities. You should also never steal other people's work. Being influenced by a style is one thing but directly ripping someone off is a cardinal rule in art that should never be broken. If you can't create your own work you can't call yourself an artist. I know a lot of mainstream artists do it but it shows they've run out of steam and need to retire. Copying and stealing work is a characteristic of a parasite.

Last but not last, keep creating and be inspired.

**NSS:** Aaron, thank you for taking time out to be interviewed on ***PANTHER NEWSLETTER***. May our Creator guide you and protect you in all your future ventures.

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