





FACETS OF

JOY

words KATIE SILCOX









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Tell us about your background: I was born in Nigeria, I grew up in Oyo State and moved to London when I was 18.

Where do you think your creative streak comes from? My dad had an inbuilt sense of style, and my mom and my grandmother used to do a lot of fabric-buying and sewing. I think I picked up the concept of colours and patterns from them, but also from art classes in high school which I used to love - along with my Yoruba lessons. I felt a strong connection with the Yoruba language lessons at school because my parents were from the Yoruba tribe. It was easy for me to understand and feel every component of it.

You've given some of your artwork Yoruba names. Tell us about this: I did it because it will make people think about where the artwork comes from, and also because, for me, it's a connection back to my childhood. There's a painting named ÓDÓLEWU, this is where I went to high school. I named a series of work AWO GÓÒLÙ, which means 'gold skin' in Yoruba - I chose the name because of the gold accents in these paintings. ILÉSÁ is the place my grandmother is from and I named one painting that because of the feeling this particular painting portrays; it's a play of innocent, child-like colours.

You work with a lot of bright colours. Why? When I started, I actually worked with darker colours. I was trying to do some portraits. But then one day I thought that maybe if I added some colours it might make people feel happy when they look at it. This is when I found my style. Both the clothes people wear and nature are bright in Nigeria and give a sense of joy. I'll never forget the day I came across a chameleon in the forest near my school, and watched as it changed colours. It was fascinating.

Is there a message you're trying to convey through your art? I paint with feeling. It's what makes me feel good, and I hope that it translates to make other people feel good too. I like to think that the colours I use reflect the way I felt growing up in Nigeria: there's a party for everything there, each with people dancing and enjoying themselves while wearing vibrant clothes. People in Nigeria have a sense of joy within them, and that is the feeling I want to create with my art.

How do you know when a piece is finished? If I come back the next day and the colours still make me feel good, it's finished. If they don't then I paint over it with new layers of colour, or sometimes even with white and then start all over again.

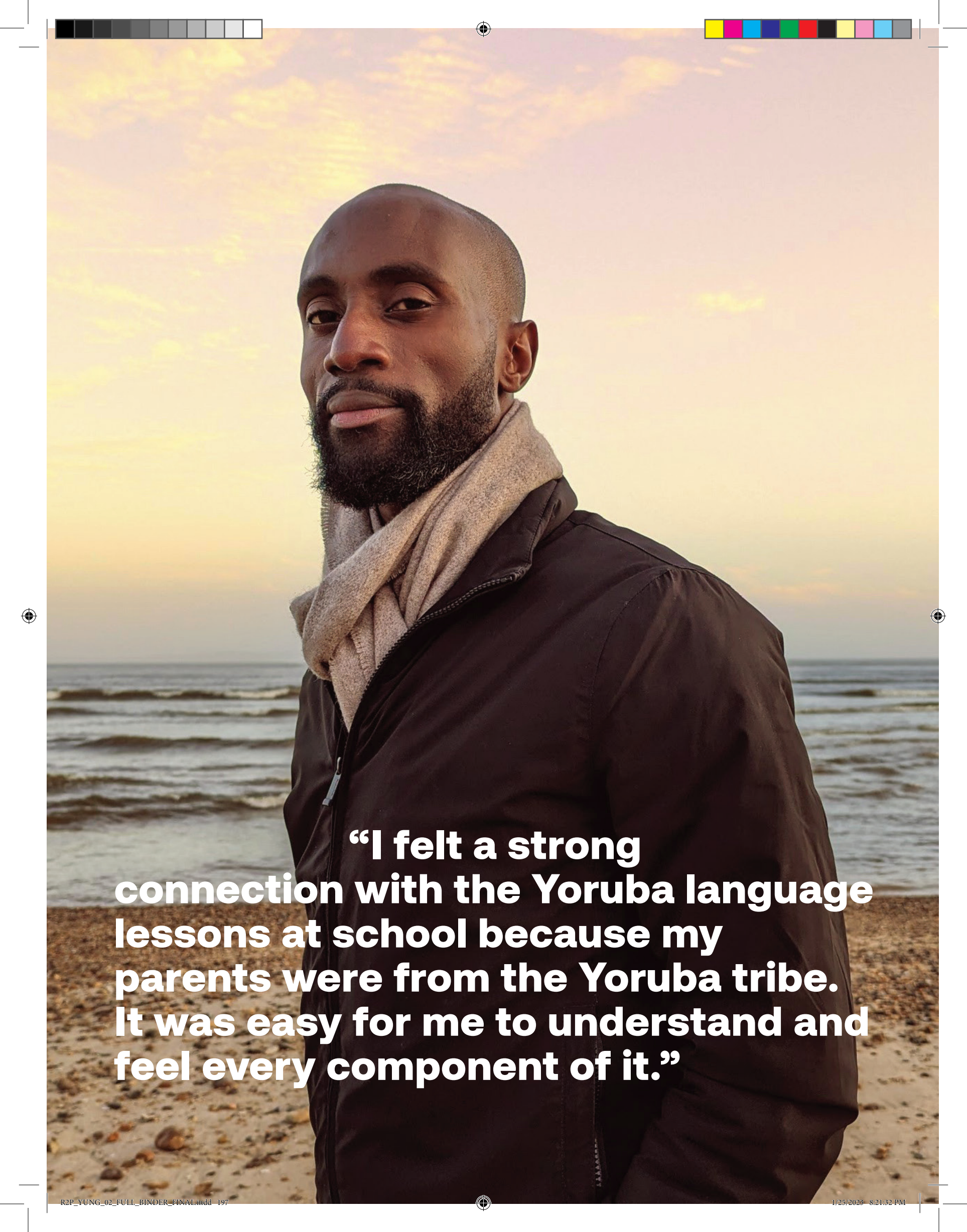
Who is your art inspired by? There are a lot of painters or artists who inspire me, ranging from people like Jean-Michel Basquiat all the way back to people like Henri Matisse. Music also inspires me a lot, particularly the music scene in Nigeria because of how far it's come. I like listening to Nigerian artists such as Wizkid, Davido and Asake. Then there's fashion, clothing, nature. Inspiration really is everywhere. Sometimes my paintings might be different because I see something I like, and I try to incorporate it into them.

Do you listen to music as you paint? If so, who or what? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. If I am, I will be listening to music without words - maybe jazz or instrumental - so that I can completely focus on what I'm doing. I think music is a frequency and that it plays a role in how you're creating. But when I start painting, I already have in mind what I want to do, the music is just an enhancer.

Why is art important? Art is a form of expression. It's creativity, and we live in the creativity of other people. Take architecture, for example: offices, libraries, or football stadiums - it's all science mixed with art and creativity. Art plays a huge part in enhancing human existence, be it the fashion you wear, the car you drive, the phone or laptop you use, or the way you style your home.

You mention the intersection of art and science. As a painter, what do you think of AI and NFTs? I don't think there's any one way to define art. If someone thinks AI and the product that algorithms produce is art, then it is art. The only thing I would question is feeling: if I pick up a Picasso, I know that this was made by a person who existed and who painted this piece with his hands. There is an exchange of feelings that is difficult to achieve through a computer. I'm not saying it's a bad thing, it's just different. As for NFTs, they have a monetisation benefit. A source of income to artists. And why shouldn't artists have a good life, as other professionals do?





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