



Multi Talented Artist and Painter Jim Adams

James Lowell Adams was born in 1943 in Philadelphia, PA. His father, an artist, musician, and band leader, was one of the youngest members of King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and went on to form his own orchestra, "Jimmy Adams and his Continentals". Adams received his bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Temple University (1965) and his Master's Degree from the University of Pennsylvania (1968).

Jim Adams' works are included in the collections of The Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey, BC; Tuskegee Airmen National Museum, Detroit, MI; International Women's Air and Space Museum, Cleveland, OH; The United States Air Force Collection, New York; Kozlekdesi Museum, Budapest, Hungary; as well as in numerous private collections in British Columbia; Philadelphia, PA; Los Angeles, CA; Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Washington, DC; New York, NY; Princeton, NJ; Wake Forest, NC; Parma, Italy; Rome, Italy; Lausanne, Switzerland; London, England; Gravesend, Kent, UK; Pittenween, Scotland; and Budapest, Hungary, The Wedge Collection (Kenneth Montague) and Tricon Capital (the Berman Family).

1. What can you tell us about the influence of your father, who was also an artist, musician, and a bandleader who shared the stage with: Count Basie, Louie Jordan, and Fats Waller to name a few?

My father was always my role model - even before I knew what a role model was. He was a tall, urbane man talented and creative both musically and visually. He had a small room in our house that was his studio. He arranged scores for his band (Jimmie Adams and his Continentals) and created portraits of family members and a wide variety of signs and educational props for the local school and neighbours. As a kid I would watch him paint and when he was at work (a day labourer) at an automotive parts plant, as most university educated black men were denied the golden baton of management in the 1950s America. Relentlessly I would sneak into his studio and wreck his brushes and paints trying to paint as he did. Fortunately, he was a patient man who replaced the damaged equipment and kept encouraging me to draw and paint. His music filled the house, literally. His band would come to our home for practice and his ten-piece band would fill the living room and hallway of our red brick Coronation Street style row house in Philadelphia.

My brother and I would cling to the upstairs banister, listening until my mother literally dragged us off to our beds. Many nights he wouldn't come home but went directly from his day job to a "gig" (yes, that word is a heck of a lot older than you think), which might last until the early morning hours. He would then change and head back to work. All of this became more complicated when he became the president of the Musician's Union local (274) created for black musicians as (the Musician's Union was still segregated until the mid-1960s). While he was holding down two jobs, he still made time for me. On one particular visit to the Philadelphia Art Museum, it changed my life, inspiring my artistic aspirations.

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES



Jim Adams, Centurion-Self-Portrait, 1977, acrylic on canvas

2. As a young man, you grew up around the flight path of commercial airplanes. How did this unique influence materialize in your paintings?

In the 1950s, televisions were small screened, black and white boxes with “rabbit ear” antenna on top any electrical activity would make the TV image dissolve into a sea of static. My favourite (and only) TV show was on at the same time as the evening flights from across the country. We lived directly under the flight path so when the propeller-driven airliners would pass over, the show would disappear. I would rush out and yell at them for interrupting my programme.

After a few yelling sessions, I accepted the airplanes for what they were, beautifully crafted flying sculptures. So now the situation was reversed. When the static appeared, it was a signal for me to run outside and watch the magnificent silver creations fly overhead. I tried to draw them and after a rare visit to the library (a half hour’s walk, no direct trolley), I read about them and I quickly decided that I wanted to be a pilot. Armed with the confidence of the sixth grader which I was, I marched down to the recruitment office and said to the Sargent, “I wanna fly jets!” He looked me up and down, smiled and said: “Son, you’re too tall.” I was 6’ 6”. Disappointed at not being able to fly them, I threw myself into drawing them and the element in which they existed. That led me to an art major in high school and an art student at University (via an athletic scholarship). From there I went to graduate school and while my subjects varied over those years, flight and things that flew were never far away.

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Jim Adams, Our-Nation's-Strength, 1983, acrylic on canvas

3. Were you always planning on becoming a full-time artist, or did it happen along the journey of life's highway, and what has been the most influential turning point along the way?

As I mentioned earlier, my father took me to the Philadelphia Art Museum where I saw collections of the world's greatest art for the first time. We spent hours wandering through the various collections and wandered into a quiet room filled with 17th century Dutch paintings and was awestruck by a painting titled, "Interior of Saint-Laurenskerk", (translated as St. Lawrence) by an unknown artist changed my life. The painting portrayed the pristine interior of a Protestant church painted with such authority and profound understanding of light, that I stood riveted in front of it, knowing from that moment I would spend my life painting.

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Jim Adams, *In Living Colour*, (8pm, channel 13), 1991, 44 x 84"

4. *You were born in Philadelphia, however, you made Canada your home. Please describe the driving forces behind moving to the Canadian West Coast?*

In one word, smog. My first wife was a newly graduated medical student and was looking for an internship. I recently graduated with my Master's degree and we were both looking for the next stages in our lives. She found her internship at the Riverside General Hospital in Southern California and I landed a teaching position at California State University. Southern California in the late 1960s had an extensive smog problem, but we felt we could endure it for a year while she finished her internship.

We would move back east to New York/Philadelphia and started our professional lives. We had driven from Philadelphia across the US to Riverside California and decided it would be adventurous to travel back east through Canada. We crossed into Canada at the Peace Arch, South of Vancouver. We immediately appreciated the slower pace, and the clean air, although Vancouverites were complaining about the smog. After spending a day in Vancouver we vowed that we would return one day.

After a fascinating and pleasant trip across Canada on the Trans Canada Highway, we turned south and drove to New York only to arrive in the worst smog day in history. It snarled traffic and we couldn't see more than a half block. It was impossible to drive across town to the Holland Tunnel into New Jersey. We navigated towards the Verrazano Narrows Bridge then south to Philadelphia. That was the plan anyway. We got about a third of the way over the bridge when we came upon a burning oil tanker. The intense heat and apocalyptic greasy black smoke filled the air and begrudgingly merged with the smog. We looked at each other and (with the help of the emergency responders) made a U-turn and drove until we were safely back in Canada. Four days hence we moved to Vancouver and never looked back.

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Jim Adams, Lost Trophy (Apollo), 2012 acrylic on canvas

7. Please share with us an overview of a theme you are contemplating in your new paintings?

I continue to work with the reinterpretation of Myths. For most of human history, the “Gods” had one (or more) dominions over which he/she held sway, and seen by those who worshipped them as beings with the same faults and frailties as the human race. This made them easier to understand and accept what came their way. Artists have reinterpreted these myths and gods over the centuries using contemporary garb and references. I am continuing in that vein,

race. This made them easier to understand and accept what came their way. Artists have reinterpreted these myths and gods over the centuries using contemporary garb and references. I am continuing in that vein, especially looking into the African Origins of Greek and Roman myths.