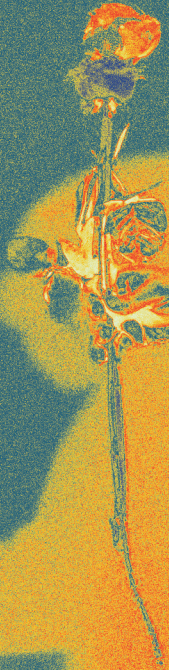


ENDS



KNUCKS
Jubilee Breakdown

LITTLE SIMZ
Space Age Babe

SKEPTA
Living And Breathing Art



1234567890

OCTOBER ISSUE

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SKEPTA

Living And Breathing Art



Grime MC, rapper and producer Skepta is one of the most exciting young stars on the British music scene. But this multitalented icon's talents extend way beyond the mic - as evidenced in his art, an obsession which evolved during lockdown. Finding painting offered him new outlet for his characteristically powerful and emotional work, today Sotheby's is excited to welcome Skepta to collaborate as guest curator of - and a participating artist in - Sotheby's Contemporary Curated auction in September.

Joseph Olaitan Adenuga Jr has always been interested in the many forms that art can take. Best known by his stage name, Skepta, the British Nigerian is one of the UK's most prolific rappers and producers. He occasionally works in fashion too (collaborating with Nike and designing for his clothing line, Mains), so his first venture into painting comes as no surprise. "I live and breathe art in everything I do, everything I think," he says. "When I look at something I analyse it and lose myself in it - I've always been into loads of different styles of creation."

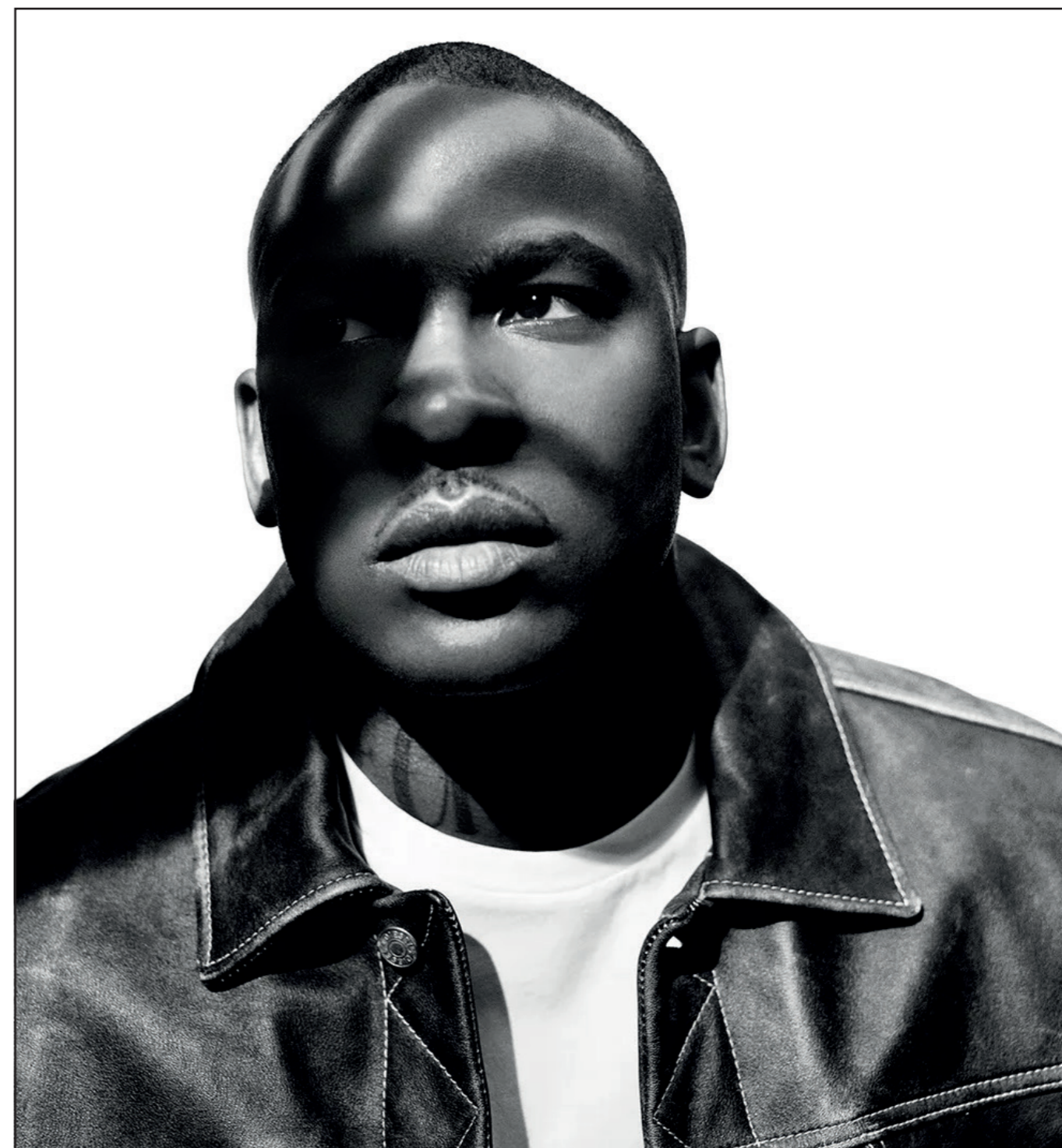
During the 2020 lockdowns he says he was "in the house pulling the last hairs out of my head". The worry that the pandemic might mean he would not be able to take River, his daughter, over to Lagos to see her relatives became the inspiration for his first painting, *Mama Goes to Market*. This work will be included in a landmark collaboration with Sotheby's, which will see him select works for its Contemporary Curated sale in September.

"I was just dealing with that thought and frustration," he says about the process of creating the painting. "Will River get to go to an African market, or see her mum go to one? I thought 'she will always have to buy everything online, she's never going to experience this' - so I tried to portray it in paint."

Initially, he didn't take it seriously, finding the process so slow compared with making music that he assumed he would never finish it. But the result is striking: *Mama Goes to Market* is both colourful and tender, with figures that evoke the soft theatricality of works by Lubaina Himid.



"For me it's about that beautiful thing of being able to look at a picture and feeling an emotion. If I look at an art piece and feel something, I fall in love with it"





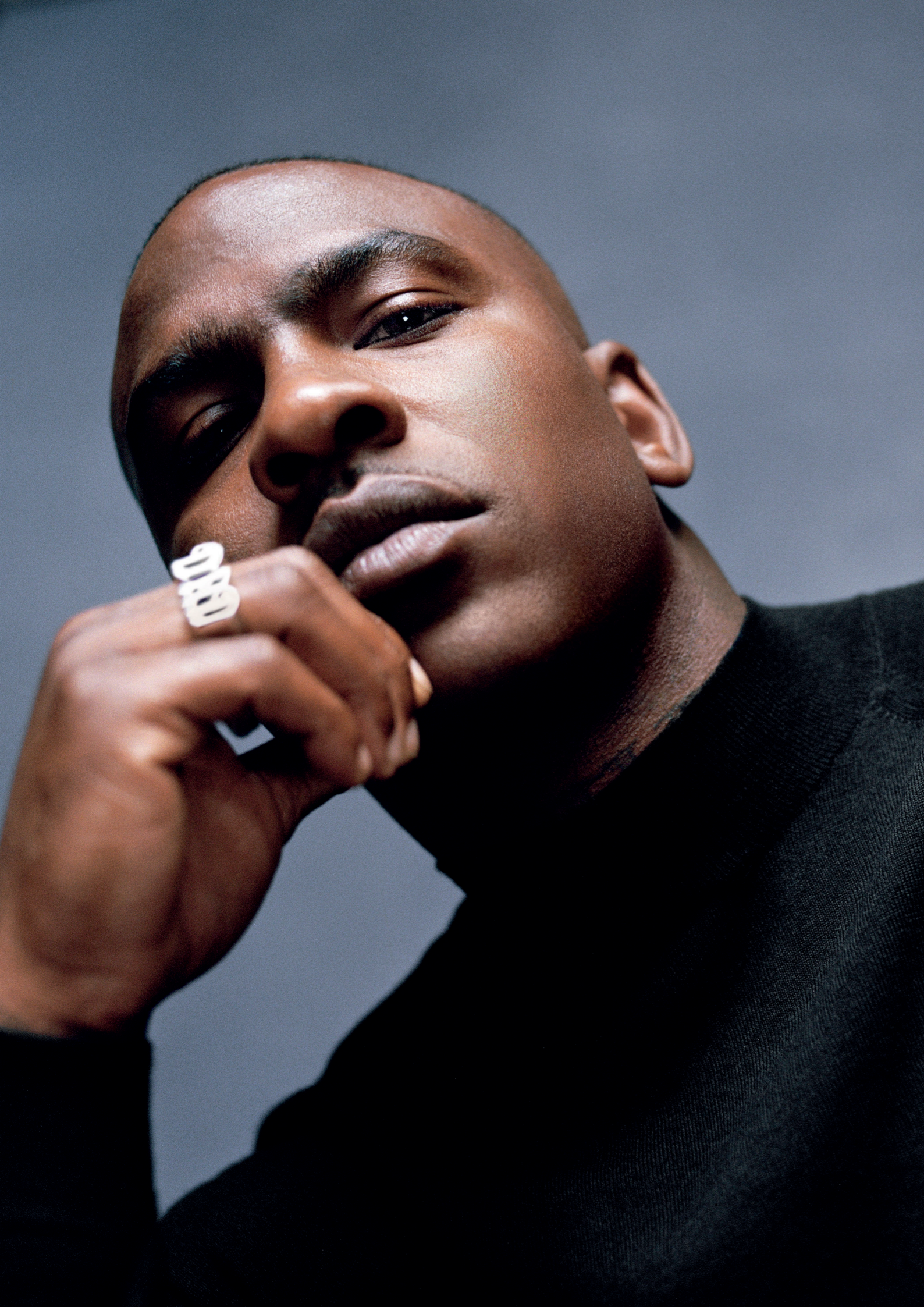
Although the painting looked 'done', Skepta felt something was missing: the walls of a Lagos marketplace would never be blank. He heard that the graphic artist Chito was doing a pop-up with the fashion brand Givenchy, so rather than bringing clothing for Chito to customise, Skepta decided to take his painting. Now the wall is decorated with distinctive licks of graffiti by Chito that he drew with a Sharpie – Skepta then went over them with a stencil and spray paint.

He also enlisted Nigerian artist Slawn and his fellow UK music pioneer Goldie to add to it. He admires how these artists take up space with their work. "That's how I live," he explains. "We're not given anything, we have to barge our way into places when it comes to this industry, so that kind of mindset is fire to me."

For the Contemporary Curated sale, Skepta has selected Mama Goes to Market alongside spray-painted pieces by Chito and Slawn, as well as a surreal portrait by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, collage work by Ouattara Watts and a densely textured Abstract Expressionist painting by Frank Bowling.

There is no single thread that ties the pieces together. "'Good' and 'bad' art is always gonna be subjective," he says. "But for me it's about that beautiful thing





of being able to look at a picture and feeling an emotion. If I look at an art piece and feel something, I fall in love with it – I’m interested in how and what it’s making me feel.” He nods to his deep love of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, as well as the artwork for albums by Tupac Shakur, Pink Floyd and Queen, stressing that young people should find artworks that resonate with them rather than worrying about what they think they should like

Skepta often uses his work as a way to talk about where he is from, not least as a means of self-reflection. “My job is to fight for this identity to stay,” he says. “Anyone who was born in a country that isn’t your maternal home... I think it would serve you well to delve into your culture.”

Though he is still in disbelief that this moment with Sotheby’s is happening, he is not especially interested in returning to fine art. “Only if there was another lockdown,” he laughs. “Right now I can’t wait to make more music – that’s what I’m thinking about.”

Skepta’s main takeaway from his foray into painting is a respect for this slower approach to creating, and a desire to support others trying to make their way in the art world or simply thinking about giving art a try.

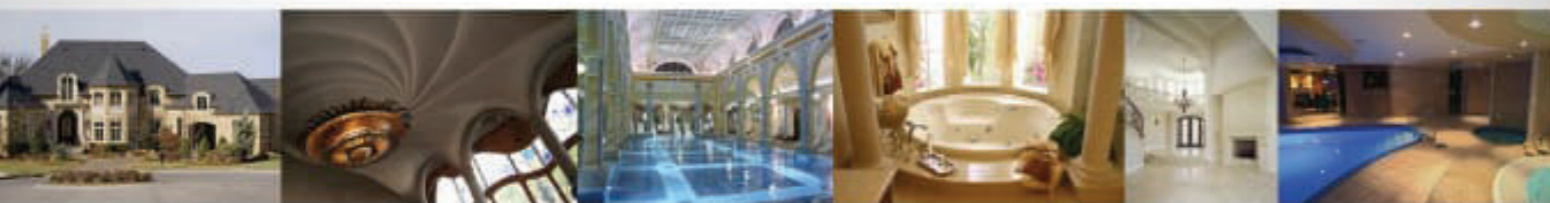
“I have gained a massive appreciation of the emotion, energy and creativity of artists, many of whom sit for hours at a time,” he says. “I want artists to speak to me, I want to lift them up and have others appreciate them as I do. I want, hopefully, to be able to get them the support I have had.”

Tara Joshi

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Stormzy

'In my diction, in my stance, in my attitude... this is Black British'



Last summer, Glastonbury gave music's greatest platform to one man and he, in turn, gave it to the community who led him there. From faith and South London to scholarships, left-wing leadership and a 58-date global arena tour starting this month, Stormzy's voice sells millions, but it belongs to millions more

Stormzy is 25 minutes into his headlining Glastonbury set when he feels something go “boom” in his in-ear. The pack that pumps studio-quality sound to the singer while he’s on stage had gone haywire. “It was just going, ‘Eeeeeeee!’ I’m talking deafening. Then it blew and I couldn’t hear shit.”

He’d just finished “Sweet Like Chocolate”. The stage lights had gone down. Stormzy stands there, eyes intense, back straight, standing tall, very tall, black, lean, buff, clad top to toe in lily white. Sweat cascades from his face. He lifts his fingers to his earpiece and stares ahead. Back-up soul singers gather around to cover Kanye West’s “Ultralight Beam”: “This is a God dream / This is everything.” Fireworks erupt; jets of sparks shoot out beside the stage; search lights strafe the night. “That was one of the most powerful moments in the show,” he says. “And I can’t hear shit. All I can hear is the festival speakers. And I’m just rapping and just praying to God that I’m on time. And the song just finishes and I’m thinking, ‘Bruv, you can’t hear shit. You’re at Glastonbury. And you can’t hear shit. This is a shit show.’”

He makes it through “Ultralight Beam”. The stage goes dark again. Chris Martin comes on with a piano; Stormzy runs off to the wings. “I take my pack off and I’m close to tears and I’m screaming, ‘I can’t fucking hear nothing!’ They’re switching my pack and I’m thinking, ‘Glastonbury. Chris Martin. What the fuck?’”

Martin stalls, looking over his shoulder, wondering where Stormzy is. Stormzy returns, his pack fixed, and takes his seat next to Martin. He does one more song. Then the pack blows again and remains out for the rest of the set. “I’m listening to the festival speakers, which are delayed, so if I go with that I’m going to be off beat. So then I’m just listening to the drums and performing with muscle memory. I’m like, ‘You’re fucked, but just do it.’ And I’m thinking the whole time I’m off beat. I know it’s delayed, but I’m thinking just spit, just spit, just spit. All that was going through my head was, ‘Bruv, you have absolutely fucked it.’ I was thinking of all the people who wanted me to fuck it – ‘Stormzy? Glasto? That small-timer?’ – just watching and thinking, ‘Look at him. He can’t even spit on beat. He’s all over the place.’”





'The shock on their faces... I was thinking, "Brother, I've been stabbed a few times." They were horrified'

When he came off stage he smashed his pack, flew into a rage for five minutes and then collapsed into tears. "I was just bawling my eyes out. I thought, 'You have just absolutely fucked that.' I haven't cried like that since primary school. I just broke down." It was only later, when someone handed him a memory stick so he could see the performance for himself, that he came around to the notion that it had, in fact, gone rather well.

Stormzy, real name Michael Ebenazer Kwadjo Omari Owuo Jr, is sitting on the edge of his sofa at his home in South London in an all-black tracksuit with the television on mute. His height is not obvious when we're both sitting down (I'm 5ft 6in, he's 6ft 5in; when we take selfies later he has to stoop low just to get in the shot, as he does when dancing with his mother in the video for "Know Me From"), but his scale is. He talks like he raps, with his hands, and, at times, when he has a point to make, he flings them out wide. The sheer span is impressive. Stormzy has reach.

Hearing about his brush with calamity at Glastonbury, contrasting the confidence and physical energy he exhibited on stage with the frailty of the inner monologue torturing him simultaneously, I'm reminded of Ice-T's explanation of why young rappers are so vulnerable to scandal. "When you're rolling at the speed these cats are rolling at," Ice-T told me in 2001, "it's hard to keep things straight."

Stormzy identifies immediately. "You're going from one extreme to another extreme," he says. "From poverty, not having anything, violence and street life to glitz and glam and finally having resources and money at your disposal. And that's a rapid gear-six change."

Stormzy has been rolling at quite a speed ever since he came on the scene. It is a steep climb to go from Best Grime Act at the 2014 Mobo Awards to headlining Glastonbury in just five years. Yet despite being a good-looking, outspoken, famous, wealthy guy at the gritty, combative end of his industry, he has managed to keep it straight.

If he appears in the tabloids it's generally for his music or his politics, not for the women he's sleeping with, the men he's feuding with, the scenes he's caused or the cases he's caught. Even after his split from long-term

girlfriend, the TV and radio presenter Maya Jama, last August, the break-up made headlines because a telegenic celebrity couple were no more. As a 26-year-old grime artist he has provided less copy for the gossip columns than the Conservative prime minister, who is twice his age.

I assumed this might be due to his belief in God. In the time we talk he is never more than five minutes away from saying he's been "blessed", "God willing" or "Thank God". He refers to his on-stage challenges at Glastonbury as his "God-ordained story" and his journey as a "blessing from God". It is rare to hear British artists draw on their faith so openly or often.

"God gets all the glory for everything," he says. "I know I'm capable of being a success. But more than all of that, God engineers my whole shit. He's the reason for everything. Even coming from where man comes from. I got so many bredrens who are just as smart as me, or smarter than me, or can make music just as well, and still didn't have that opportunity. So there's something deeper here to it."

But he says he owes his relative sobriety and self-control to a more earthly experience – the two-year engineering apprenticeship he undertook in Leamington Spa after he was excluded from school. "Lucky for me I moved out of London when I did," he says, "because at that time I was probably going to end up fully submerged with all the street stuff. I left my little place in South London and I was with 17 white kids from Yorkshire, Newcastle, Scotland and all over. My bredrens would never know anyone from Scotland. Thank God for me I had an insight into not being a little bad boy Michael. I had to become a project engineer. On those five days of the week there was no street. Nothing. I just had my headphones on, going to college."

The moment when he realised things to which he had been accustomed were not necessarily normal came when he took his hat off during a welding course and one of his fellow apprentices asked him how he got the scar on his head. "I got stabbed," Stormzy told him.

Gary Younge



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THE WONDERFUL EVERYDAY

Little Simz

Space Age Babe



Where were you in 94? Little Simz was busy being born. The young'un is one of a handful of serious new music talents that the UK has been raising on the down low, preparing to release them into the big, wild world.

Along with her Space Age crew, Simz has found herself an incredibly talented bunch of friends that includes actor Fady Elsayed and model/star of The Face, Sienna. Her professional contact list is shaping up to be just as impressive. When she's not in the studio with Joey Bada\$\$ producer Chuck Strangers or Digital Soundboy's Jakwob, she's teaming up with Dizzee and Kelala, before turning up to house parties with Chance The Rapper. Since she dropped her Blank Canvas mixtape late last year, all eyes have been on the North London wonder kid, whose starry life seems to be more LA than UK these days. We grabbed the cooler-than-cool Simz for a catch up and an exclusive spoken word...

Where are you right now, what are you doing and what outfit are you rocking?

Right now I'm in the studio working on new material. I'm rocking pretty casual attire... Saucony trainers, skinny jeans, a tee from Illustrated People and a North Face puffer jacket.

What's life like for you day-to-day right now?

Day-to-day life's pretty busy for me right now as I'm juggling university and music. I have quite a lot of shows coming up so I spend my days in rehearsals getting my set as tight as possible and then have evening classes in Uni during the week, as well as getting into the studio to record and prep new videos.

Who's instagram do you enjoy following the most?

I enjoy following instagram pages that are really art related. I follow a lot of photographers more than anything - they manage to capture moments really well, which makes my instagram that bit more exciting to scroll through.

'We all made incredible albums. We all changed people's lives with our music, and that's the most important thing.'





Were you a well behaved kid?

I was definitely a well behaved kid in primary school. I think in secondary I was still that same kid but became a little bit of a rebel lol, but all those experiences moulded me into who I am today.

What group of friends did you belong to growing up?

My friends in secondary school are still to this day my closest girls. We have a real friendship and all support one another's careers. Sienna, Jade & Jasmine, I got you! x

What was the worst crime you have ever been chucked out of class for committing?

Lol, nothing extremely drastic... something like chucking it back to the teacher or talking in class.

Who has instilled the greatest sense of faith in you to succeed?
Definitely my mother. She has always been so supportive of my career, both in education and music, and has pushed me to become the best I can be. She has given me so much and taught me so much about life and how to be a woman.

What's been the best show you have ever attended to date and what makes someone a good performer?

The best show I've attended to date was probably going to see Odd Future live. The energy they possess as a collective is insane! I love it when a performer is able to connect with their audience and is engaging. Confidence is key when performing and keeping the crowd entertained throughout the duration of the set.

What labels are you into and do you have a day-to-day uniform?

I'm into Lacoste, a sick upcoming brand called Illustrated People and a lot of vintage stores, I love a good bargain!

You're a big Lauryn Hill fan. Women in hip hop today are represented quite differently from the way she presented herself in the '90s. Where do you feel you sit personally in respect to your female rap peers?

I feel like rap in general these days is becoming more diluted. People used to talk about real events happening in their lives such as not having any money or finding life difficult which made it real and authentic. I feel as if nowadays it's focused a lot on the finer things in life, which is cool, but not everybody can relate to that. I want people to be able to relate to my story and what I have to say - through good and bad times. I'm very open and honest in my music.

How do you want to be perceived?

I would like to be perceived as a young icon figure to my generation. I want to set an example. I want young people to look at me and believe that if I can do it, so can they.

Who are harder to entertain in your opinion, male or female fans? And how do you maintain cross over appeal for both?

The guys are definitely harder to please! The girls will have your back because you're representing them, but the guys want you to prove that you can go as hard as the male rappers in the industry, if not harder!

Where are you off to now?

I'm currently in the US working. Right now I'm off to Rocawear to perform, then off to the studio!

Francesca Dunn





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Knucks

Jubilee Breakdown



The north London rapper breaks down the Stormzy-featuring track released to celebrate his 25th birthday.

In the age of self-isolation and reflection (read here: overthinking), music has become an even more crucial escape from our fantastically ordinary lives before -- and hopefully after -- coronavirus.

Marking the start of his 25th year on the planet, Knucks's new single «Jubilee» is a triumphant retrospective of the journey so far. Taking on a newfound optimism in the current climate, it's bound to have you reminiscing on your own summers past with hopeful energy. Jam-packed with nostalgic orchestral samples, cheeky nods to the immigrant experience and even a snippet of Stormzy's Glastonbury speech, it's definitely one to be blasted from the speakers and/or headphones in moments of need.

We catch up with the Kilburn by-way-of-Nigeria rapper to chat about hitting his quarter-century milestone, the UK rap scene and bucket baths.

We'll get the coronavirus question out the way first: how are you finding quarantine?

I think I'm taking it like everyone else to be honest. Obviously, it's slowed down some of the plans that we had, but it's also giving me a lot of time to be indoors and just take in a lot of extra information

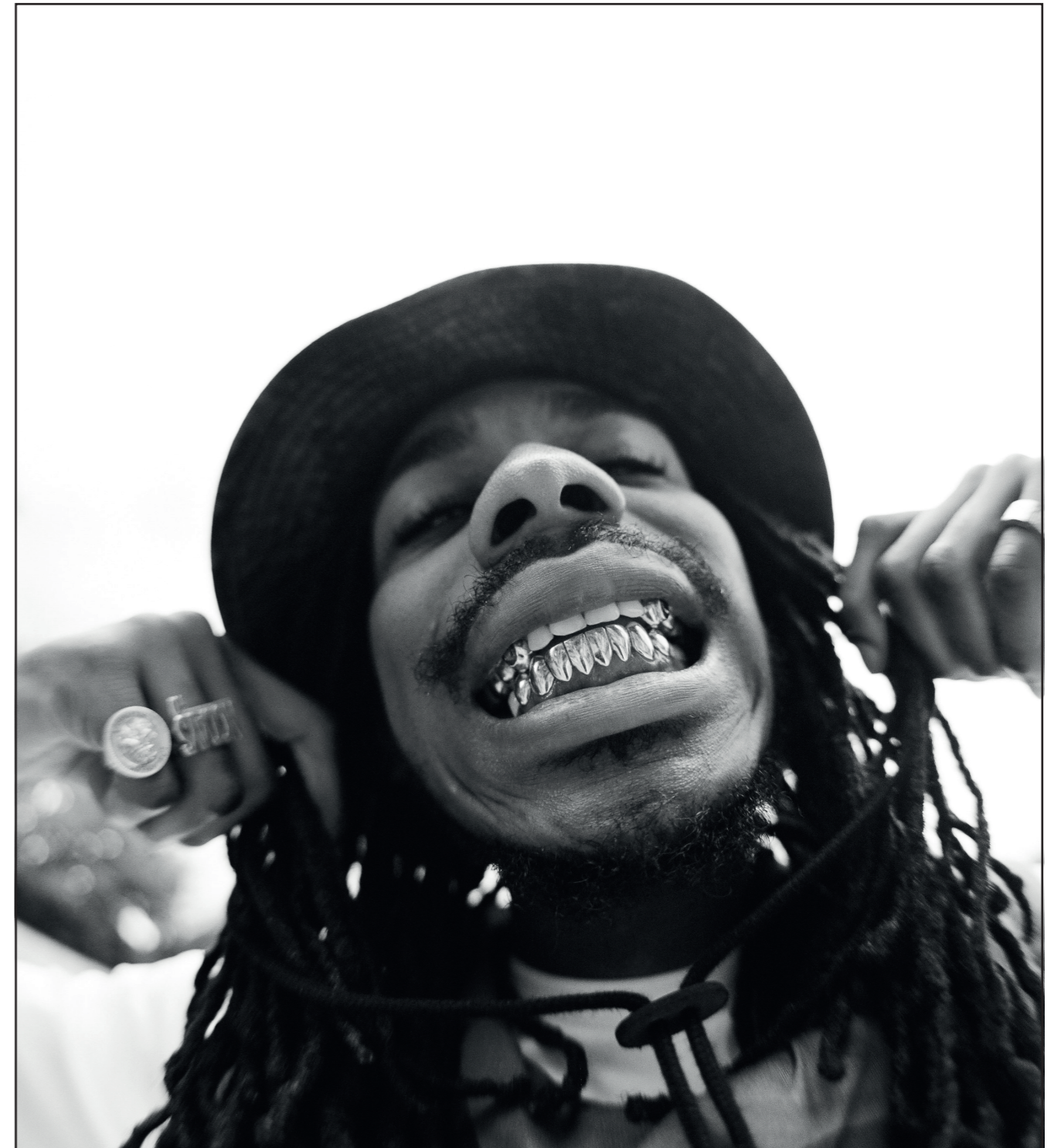
You turned 25 at the end of 2019, do you feel like this stage in your life is a turning point?

Yeah, I think this year means me being exposed on a bigger scale and being introduced to more people as an artist. Especially of the back of the «Home» video [directed by Ray Fiasco] which opened me up to a wider audience.

And what's one thing that you know now that you didn't five years ago?

To just stick to what you know. When it comes to the music you make, it's so easy to be wavered by the different trends that are coming in and out, but you should stick to making the music that you love and that you know you want to be making.

***“People forget that making music and performing doesn't come hand in hand. I've only gotten confident [performing] because I've done it so much.*”**





Who are your biggest influences?

From US hip-hop, Curren\$y for style and vibe and then Nas in terms of the lyricism and the concepts behind his songs. From the UK, Youngs Teflon as well as Sade and Anita Baker.

I really love the line in this track about bucket baths, and you have a lot of lyrics like that in your music that feel so culturally specific. How much do you think about repping the Black British experience when writing?

Initially, I didn't at all. I just started rapping about my personal experiences growing up in smart ways that were digestible for people and obviously that's a big part of it. But over time, I started to realise that people were really relating to those parts and I think it's good to put them in there to show people that they're not the only ones going through some of these things. Sometimes they're funny but also it's good to be vulnerable -- a lot of the time I still don't know if people are going to relate but you hope it will touch someone.







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J Hus

Beautiful and Brutal Yard review

Back after three years away, the east Londoner is polarised between feelgood summer tracks and bleak reportage – but he makes it all cohere, despite some terrible sex puns



At the end of last month, a series of cryptic messages appeared on electronic billboards in east London. “With da Burna. Boy you know I’m masculine,” read one. “I made a comeback as a villain & made a movie so sit back & get the Popcaan my killy,” read another. These turned out to be advance publicity for Beautiful and Brutal Yard (BABY), their announcement of the album’s guest features forming part of a lengthy, mysterious promotional campaign.

Everyone they were aimed at seemed to know straight away who they referred to, which tells you a great deal about the status of the album’s creator, J Hus, which only appears to have grown during his absence from the world of music. The east London rapper hasn’t released solo work in the three years since his chart-topping second album *Big Conspiracy* in 2020 and – his ability to do so held back by a spell in prison and then the pandemic – last toured in 2017: an intriguing corrective to the contemporary wisdom that an artist needs to pump out a constant stream of product lest they get forgotten about.

If *BABY* feels more like a sharpening of his style than the innovation of his debut *Common Sense* – that authentically groundbreaking stew of rap, bashment and Afrobeats – it’s an exceptionally classy end product. Drake’s presence might have broken *Who Told You* in territories hitherto resistant to J Hus’s charms, but the album has the ability to follow through. As for Britain, no one who recognised what those illuminated billboards in Stratford were driving at is likely to come away disappointed.

“That moment... was the moment I’ve been waiting for. Everyday I’d been saying to myself, ‘I can’t wait to be home,’ and then I’m home and I get to shake the world like that.”



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Index

B

Breakdown 34 = an explanatory analysis

C

chucked 29 = throw (something) carelessly or casually.

Curated 8 = selected, organized, and presented using professional or expert knowledge.

D

deafening 16 = (of a noise) so loud as to make it impossible to hear anything else.

O

outlet 5 = a means of expressing one's talents, energy, or emotions

T

telegenic 20 = having an appearance or manner that is appealing on television.

W

well behaved 29 = conducting oneself in an appropriate manner.

