

Introduction to *Foreday Morning* by Paul Dash

Miranda Matthews

(1347 words)

Paul Dash is a vitally aware artist, educator and writer who has inspired generations of artist teachers. I had the good fortune to meet Paul when I was starting out as a teacher in 2003. In 2008 he encouraged me to start a PhD at Goldsmiths, and became my co-supervisor. He is one of the most inspiring people I have ever met, a fantastic friend with the greatest, most welcoming warmth. *Foreday Morning* presents Paul's authentic voice, his vignettes of life and the land in Barbados, including the hard work his family did to keep themselves out of the poverty that they saw around them in Fairfield. We read also of the tragedy of loss in his family, as eight of 13 siblings did not make it past babyhood. Paul writes about the strong bond he had with his mother, who always lived with the loss of other children, and nurtured Paul's life force in art. As his Mamma said, Paul can 'draw anything.'

There is so much painterly, sensory texture in Paul's writing; one can see and feel the happenings, the events, the interactions that he describes, with great charm and humour. The open playfulness of the childhood scenes that Paul recounts here show the sparks of wit and creativity that he has taken forward, always in support of others. Paul's stories breathe the compassion and awareness of difference that also appear in his artwork. He has an integral sense of equality that is present in all the experiences he describes.

The incidents of racism that Paul writes about are heartrending. He tells the stories here with astute observations of the prejudice and hostility that were prevalent among white people in the 1950s, when his family moved to Oxford, England. He said that 'all this is the reality of the Windrush.' Paul was probably the only African Caribbean student of

secondary age in the state system in Oxford at the time, and readers will be shocked at the horrific treatment Paul received in a British school. Paul's talent as an artist enabled him to reach past the school's ignorance of his capacity as a student, and the social streaming of the tripartite grammar, secondary modern and comprehensive system of the times. There is still much institutionalised and embedded racism in British society, in all areas including the arts. Paul's writing and painting act as an invitation for more people of colour to tell their stories through practice, and for more white people to wake up from their unsustainable dreams of intolerance and exclusivity, that are so unjust for the global majority.

Paul won a place to study for a degree at Chelsea School of Art, and was the first person in his family to go to university. Despite the criticism of figurative art that he met with at that time, his interests in impressionistic figurative and semi-abstract painting continued to flourish. He found allies in all areas of creative and intellectual life as a young man. In 1968 Paul joined the Caribbean Artists Movement – CAM, that strengthened a network of active, vital contributors to the arts and culture in the UK and internationally. Before CAM black artists and artists of colour were very isolated. Paul said, 'Artists such as Sonia Boyce and Steve McQueen weren't around then and in art education there wasn't another Black person on the scene'.

In 1970 Paul began teaching art at Haggerston Girls School in East London, and by 1985 he was Head of Department at Haberdasher's Aske's Boys School in South London. Paul was one of very few black art teachers in the country. When he started to lecture at the Institute of Education in 1990, and then at Goldsmiths in 1997, he was one of very few black academics. There is still a massive discrepancy in representation for black, indigenous and people of colour in schools and academia, however some have been able to follow in Paul's footsteps. I work at Goldsmiths in the arts and learning now and on my travels around

London schools, people of colour ask after Paul, and have fond memories of their time learning to teach with him.

Dr. Paul Dash attained his PhD in Educational Studies in 2007. His academic writing is essential reading for all who are working on decolonisation in the curriculum, aiming to achieve greater representation, and to narrow achievement gaps that are fuelled by lack of cultural understanding. For instance, *African Caribbean Pupils in Art Education* (2010) offers great insight into diasporic presences in the classroom, and how to resource teaching to support imaginative creative voices and the sense of belonging. Paul writes very clearly and identifies the significance of art practice for making meaning in the world. By the time Paul retired from teaching in 2013 he had established his contribution to academia, had become a Senior Lecturer and had made great connections with artists of colour in the Centre for Arts and Learning at Goldsmiths.

Since this time Paul has mainly been painting, expressive, lyrical, gatherings of figures that explore themes such as migration, carnival and ceremony. The figures Paul paints are in communities of care and celebration, close together but respecting each other's spaces. Sometimes Pauls shows work in the Open Studio days in Hackney Wick, and there is a family atmosphere about his studio. I have introduced my family a few times to Paul, and met his children and wife Jean in the studio. My brother who is widely travelled recognised Paul's Bajan accent straight way. My late stepfather thought Paul was amazing and said that one could travel the world and never meet someone like him.

The studio gatherings and café exhibitions grew to a major solo show at 198 Gallery in 2019. *Lifeline: A retrospective of works by Paul Dash*. Curator David A. Bailey recognised Paul's achievements in their conversation on *Lifeline*. Paul's subtle works in ink, water

colour and collage evoke a relationship with art practice as a continuous life force that is with him throughout.

Paul continued to paint throughout lockdown and social distancing in the times of Covid-19, and he contributed his reflections on a 'Painting for a Friend' to a Centre for Arts and Learning project I researched in 2020-21 called *Finding Comfort Within Discomfort*. Paul said he had re-learned how to paint a portrait from a grid on a photograph, since if it wasn't for social distancing at that time he would definitely have been working from life.

It is very timely that Paul's work has started to become known more widely. In 2020 his painting *Migrants*, appeared in the Royal Academy Summer show, showing a huddle of people on a boat. This work on migration recognises and awakens feeling for people who make dangerous voyages, to attempt survival in another country. *Mas' pays homage to Haiti*, at the Mall Gallery New English Art Club, 2020 enables the viewer to visualise a carnival atmosphere, as an overview of the gatherings of people of colour. The carnival paintings redistribute cultural understandings towards positivity and away from surveillance and racist expectations of trouble making. In the work of Paul Dash we see ways that black people and people of colour celebrate humanity in even the most challenging environments.

Then in 2021, Paul's work became even more widely collected and exhibited. His work in *A Brighter Sun: Caribbean British Art 50s – Now* at Tate Britain, has contributed to a major gathering of great artists. It is so delightful to see Paul Dash take a central place in the art world in the twenty-first century. The title of this exhibition links to the novel *A Brighter Sun* by Sam Selvon (1979). Readers of *Foreday Morning* may find a connection between these works that explore the pursuit of life goals that take the authors through such difficult times, and reveal their great brilliance as creative people. *Foreday Morning* in this new

edition is more than an autobiography, it is a compelling cultural argument for social justice in the arts and education, that offers readers the rounded worldview of artist and academic, Paul Dash.