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Fashion

From canvassing to clothes to shoes, Reign Entertainment Co. brings art to life

WRITTEN BY SHAMONTIEL VAUGHN POSTED: 02/24/2016, 12:42PM



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f
t
v
p
e
SKIP TO NEXT ARTICLE
1/5



Painter S. Whittaker and CEO Robyn Willard at REC studio (Photo credit: @SWhittakerRec/Instagram)

Working within the music industry is challenging enough, but CEO/Executive Producer Robyn Willard took it one step further by teaming up with her artist friend of 10 years, S. Whittaker, at **Reign Entertainment Co (REC)**. Ten years after the company was founded by Willard, the duo is still going strong, with a few other artists in tow.

While art enthusiasts may more often look for new pieces in galleries, REC brought their pieces to potential customers' homes via social media during the "first ever Instagram art show." With artistic interests that range from

od: Fall 2016's best beauty trends
after 50

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why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care for
thinning hair

in galleries, he's brought their pieces to potential
customers' homes via social media during the "first ever
Instagram art show." With artistic interests that range from
painting autumn trees, Mickey Mouse and African-
American legends, S. Whittaker's versatility made Willard
believe in her friend even more.

Sun Times Network spoke with the two recently to find out
what keeps the CEO and visual artist going strong in the
art and fashion industries.

- f
- Twitter
- 37
- p
- Envelope
- SKIP TO NEXT ARTICLE
- 1/5



Fall 2016's best beauty trends after 50

Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care for aging thinning hair



Shamontiel Vaughn: The shoe designs are a collaborative effort between you and Robyn Willard. What made you two come up with the idea of shoe art?

Robyn Willard: The idea of art on shoes derived from the "Woman" art line we did in 2014, which was the first ever Instagram art show ever done. We would premiere a new piece of art work every day with music, which highlighted iconic women from past and present. To build brand awareness and because we don't have a marketing team, we decided to make shoes with the art on them so people could recognize us. Fortunately for us, they became really popular.

S. Whittaker: Robyn and I were inspired to push our artwork on apparel. Our goal is to allow our art to be available on merchandise that may be obtained by anyone and not only on a canvas.

d: Fall 2016's best beauty trends
after 50

Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and
why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care
thinning hair

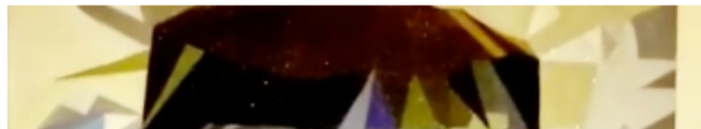
SV: Your website says that Reign Entertainment Co. is not interested in “promoting carbon copied artists.” What exactly made S. Whittaker stand out from other artists?



SKIP TO
NEXT
ARTICLE

1/5

RW: What stands out to me the most about S. Whittaker’s art is the sense of story. Her portraits evoke intensity in the eyes. Her color pallets are unorthodox and bold. She mixes all mediums and creates complex art works. To me, S. Whittaker doesn’t paint scared or limited. One of my favorite pieces is “With Grace,” a portrait of Grace Jones. Before doing the Woman line, she had never heard of Grace Jones, so before she painted her, she read her bio, listened to her music and read her interviews. S. Whittaker has to have a commonality with what/who she paints before she can paint them.



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after 50

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why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care
thinning hair



Grace Jones painting by S. Whittaker (Photo credit:
@SWhittakerRec/Instagram)

SV: What was your first piece of art that you were paid for? Inspiration?

SW: Years ago I painted a simple Mickey Mouse piece and decided to try my luck on eBay. The painting sold

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after 50

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why you must try it

Honey Good: H
thin

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- 
- SKIP TO
NEXT
ARTICLE
- 1/5

SV: Years ago I painted a simple Mickey Mouse piece and decided to try my luck on eBay. The painting sold within the first day for \$65. The customer who purchased my Mickey Mouse painting ended up commissioning me for another Mickey Mouse painting for his vice president, who loves the character. This commissioned piece sold for \$450. What inspired me to paint the first Mickey Mouse that I placed on eBay was the love I had for Mickey as a child.

SV: While some artists may struggle to be sold locally, you and S. Whittaker sold a Nelson Mandela painting to go all the way to South Africa. What was the connection? Had you already traveled there? Should more African-American artists pay attention to art markets in other continents?



od: Fall 2016's best beauty trends
after 50

Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and
why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care for agi
thinning hair

f
t
w
p
e
SKIP TO
NEXT
ARTICLE
1/5



Nelson Mandela painting by S. Whittaker (Photo credit:
@RobynREC/Instagram)

RW: I took my mother to Cape Town, South Africa this past December for vacation, and it was such an eye-opener. My mother and I are African-American, and the South-African natives were very receptive but surprised to see us. More surprised to see someone my age pick South-Africa as a vacation travel destination.

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Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and why you must try it

Honey Good: How to ca thinning hair

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- 
- 
- 
- 
SKIP TO
NEXT
ARTICLE
- 1/5

During our visit to the township of Langa, I started talking to a woman who was from Cape Town but now lives in Johannesburg. We were discussing the disconnect between young African-Americans and Africa. From that conversation, I told her about S. Whittaker and her art, and she immediately fell in love (with her artwork). She said she wanted to show her support and buy some art. In exchange it was my duty to bring as many of our people back home to visit. She kept her promise, and I'm still working on mine. As for African-Americans paying attention to other markets, absolutely. Why would you ever limit yourself and further opportunities?

SV: Tell me about the [R.E.C. KIDS](#) fashion show. Is it done every year or was this one of the first with the two models featured on your website?



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R.E.C. KIDS
+ NEW ART BY S. WHITTAKER

Meet The



@SWhittakerREC

REC CREW

Robyn Whittaker

RESPECT THE CULTURE OF ART

REC Crew members painting by S. Whittaker (Photo credit:
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Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care for thinning hair



SKIP TO NEXT ARTICLE

1/5

RW: R.E.C. KIDS is something that my company introduced in September of last year. S. Whittaker and I are working on a kids' fashion line that will premiere in the fall of 2016. We will do a soft launch in two test retailers that will be announced in the spring.

SV: The characters you draw, such as the 2016 Black History Month calendar, are a blend of animation and painting. What made you choose this angle as opposed to traditional portraits?



Fall 2016's best beauty trends after 50

Honey Good: All about dry shampoo and why you must try it

Honey Good: How to care for thinning hair

f
Twitter
Reddit
Pinterest
Email
SKIP TO NEXT ARTICLE
1/5



2016 REC Black History calendar, co-creation from S. Whittaker and Robyn Willard (Photo credit: @RobynREC/Instagram)

SW: We wanted to showcase those who we paid homage to in our calendar differently. Everything that we want to see or feel, we will create it. The idea of the animated characters came from S. Whittaker and I wanting to see cartoon characters that looked like us. Black Animation is very scarce in Hollywood or on television. We also yearn for the youth, children and everyone as a whole to learn history in a vivid, fun way.