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Sports Illustrated

Knicks' Moe Harkless Rekindling His Passion for Art in New York

BEN PICKMAN · APR 12, 2020

Just after 5 p.m. on an early March Saturday evening, Moe Harkless pulls out his iPhone to capture artwork that catches his eye. He's drawn to the more than two-dozen comic book covers in front of him that appear to riff on classic superheroes, including *Spider-Man*, *Superman* and *Captain America*.



Moe Harkless explores art galleries at The Armory Show in Manhattan

Kumasi J. Barnett at Lowell Ryan Projects

Sam Maller/The Players Tribune

Artist Kumasi J. Barnett has painted the covers displayed at The Armory Show, an annual high-profile New York art fair that features representation from more than 30 countries among its more than 180 galleries. Barnett has covered the originals, replacing them with titles like “The Media’s Thug” and “Police-Man.” The series looks to address real world issues through the superhuman genre, the booth’s exhibitor explains.

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Harkless listens intently as the exhibitor discusses the process behind the works and the rationale behind Barnett's choices. Before being ushered to another of the show's installations, Harkless appears to photograph the vibrant sign hanging just above his eye-level. "The Amazing Black-Man," it reads, referring to one of Barnett's most prominent characters.

"That would be good for your man cave," Harkless quips as he moves to the next display.

As the 6-foot-9 Knicks forward moves through the show, which is held on the far West Side of Manhattan overlooking the Hudson River, he speaks less and listens more. The fair, which ran from March 5–8, just days before the NBA halted its season indefinitely, has a lot to take in. "It definitely had the widest range of any show I've been to," Harkless explains later.

The forward's knowledge of the art world is continuing to expand. He is a self-described "new fan," but when he rattles off favorite artists, he does so with ease, throwing out a half-dozen names. He's looking to celebrate emerging artists and learn more about his budding passion. "It's another way to express yourself," he says of his growing collection.



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The eight-year NBA veteran was traded to the Knicks on Feb. 6 in a deadline day deal that sent forward Marcus Morris to the Clippers. The move shipped Harkless from a club with championship aspirations to a franchise where victories are hard to come by. "It's obviously tough going from a team where you're expected to win most games, to a team where we're

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struggling to win games,” he says. Harkless previously played with the Magic and the Trail Blazers, where he was a key part of last year’s Western Conference Finals team. He says he used to frequently exchange off-court ideas with Portland teammates Evan Turner and Al-Farouq Aminu.

But New York is home for Harkless. He grew up in Jamaica, Queens, and spent his lone collegiate season at St. John’s. As a child, Harkless first became interested in art. It was one of his favorite subjects in school—“not just ‘cause it was easy,” he jokes—and he enjoyed occasional school trips to New York City’s countless museums. He recently found a series of drawings of *Looney Toons* characters he had made in a high school class. His mom, Rosa, still has one of his old sketchbooks.

In the wake of the trade to the Knicks, he had initially planned on taking advantage of his off-court time by continuing to learning about the industry. He lives in Chelsea, where small galleries are seemingly as prominent as bodegas. He had compiled a list of galleries and museums that he was going to tour in the season’s waning weeks and into the offseason. Those plans, of course, changed, though it’s something he still intends to revisit when life resumes to normal.

Amid the NBA’s hiatus, the veteran forward has instead returned to Los Angeles, the site of his growing collection, which has more than a dozen pieces. He’s doing what he can to stay in shape and be ready if, and when, the NBA season does resume.

In much the same the way that he enjoys understanding the elements of a successful basketball team, Harkless is interested in the process behind the works he both examines and collects. His questions to exhibitors at The Armory Show reflect his curiosity. “It allows you to appreciate it more,” he says.

At the early March fair, he appears particularly drawn to Barnett’s comics, Whitfield Lovell’s delicately drawn portraits and the eye-catching, yet poignant work of Derrick Adams, among others. “The best part is trying to understand what they’re doing with their work,” Harkless says as he walks between the show’s two piers.

The 26-year-old is interested in understanding stories on canvas. As he continues to improve his on-court passion, he’s on a parallel quest to learn more about another.