What heritage means to me: Neil and Emelia



Youth ambassador Sarah spoke with the artist and the curator about the stories behind the National Lottery-supported photographic exhibition, Expectations: The Neil Kenlock Archive.

- Neil Kenlock is a photographer known for documenting the black British experience. He was born in Jamaica and came to London in 1963
- Emelia Kenlock is Neil's daughter, and the curator of Expectations Exhibition: The Neil Kenlock Archive at the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton
- Sarah Moreno is one of our Heritage Ambassadors, the Dustkickers

Watch the full film here:

Sarah: What does heritage mean to you?

Neil: Heritage to me means something that is preserved for posterity, so that the next generation can understand it, and it can help them to be better citizens. It tells stories; stories about our community and when it started; about what people think and feel when they came to this country. That’s very important. Without these images, nobody would see and

understand what really went on in this country.

Sarah: You started doing taking pictures at the height of race inequality and the fight for equality in Britain. What inspired you to start documenting?

Neil: I was watching TV one day and I saw this famous photographer, from a working-class background, taking photographs of stars and important people and I said: "I want to be like that, but for the black community." And what I tried to show was strength and determination.

Sarah: The exhibition explores leadership, collaboration and the power of one voice. How do you think you go about amplifying that voice through the pictures in this exhibition?

Emelia: There's a group of images that represent challenges, because all leaders have challenges. Then I thought it would be good to group some images that really represent change. For example, change in the NHS. 2018 is the 70th anniversary of the NHS and also Windrush, so I thought we need to have an area about change. You can have leaders and individuals who are making change, but you can't do it by yourself. All of these leaders, not all but a few, I noticed had worked together even if they were from different parts of the UK. And that's when I thought we also need something about collaboration. So the third area is around collaboration.

Sarah: Do you have a favourite artefact or photo in the exhibition?

Neil: All of them tell a story. I mean I could say the photo with the Queen smiling which is unusual as far as I'm concerned. I could say KEEP BRITAIN WHITE which is another story to tell. And even the beauty competition photo, where black women could not enter Miss England because they were not white and we created our own fashion show and beauty queen.

Emelia: The photo of the three Rastafarians. It is actually one landscape image which I decided to divide and put into a long panel, because the whole idea is that it's a building takeover and we're putting photographs in places at the BCA where they've never put pictures before. It also highlights each individual in the photo and all three of them have a story to tell.



What I've learnt since having the exhibition in the last month or so is that they actually came from Luton. My Dad did remember that they were a reggae band or that they were some kind of performers, but now we know that they had their own sound system and they were really popular in Luton and other parts of the UK. The gentlemen at the top, two of his children actually contacted us via Instagram because of the project and because they saw the picture on social media and in the Guardian.

Sarah: Do you have a favourite historical figure?

Neil: [Jamaica-born black nationalist and civil rights activist] Marcus Garvey

Sarah: Marcus Garvey, that was mine too. Emelia were you going to say him too?

Emelia: It's got to be Marcus Garvey.

Sarah: What were your reasons for choosing Marcus Garvey?

Neil: Because he's a man with a big idea and massive thoughts and personality. A great man that talks a lot of things and do a lot of things and it happens. And he's got that vision.

Expectations Exhibition: The Neil Kenlock Archive

Find out more including an online exhibition of photographs on the Expectations Project website.