



# Nickola McCoy-Snell



Image: Nickola McCoy-Snell (2016), *Stardust*,  
from the collection of NGCI

**“I cannot truly say when I first discovered that I had artistic ability. I've always been one to draw and colour and escape the world around me by using any means or objects I could find in order to scribble, paint, spray, etch, piece together and take apart.”**

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## The Artist

Nickola McCoy-Snell was born on Grand Cayman, the eldest of four children born to a Jamaican mother and a Caymanian father.

McCoy-Snell used art as a means of escapism in a childhood spent in an orphanage. Art gradually fell by the wayside after high school, as she tried to secure a living.

Her life has seen varied areas of work including time as a police officer, a dive instructor, a postal worker, an insurance administrator and a teacher.



Photograph courtesy of: the artist herself

In 2000, following a spinal injury and three months of immobility and intense physiotherapy, she gave up her then-career in insurance. This became a turning point in her life and she began to take her first love, the arts, more seriously.

She redirected her focus on the two things she loved most, art and children, and began working at the St. George's Anglican School teaching motor skills through the practice of art to young children. A year later in 2001 she was asked by the Education Department to set up an art curriculum for a public primary school, teaching basic art skills. McCoy-Snell worked with the George Town Primary School for two years as the main source of art for the entire school.

McCoy-Snell was the first winner of the McCoy Prize (no familial relation) for Excellence in Caymanian Art in 2002. She is an active member of local arts cooperative, Native Sons and successfully ran her own gallery in Grand Cayman for several years.

She has recently relocated to England with her family after numerous visits. Her travels have also taken her to Russia where she worked with orphaned children, and to Cuba where she assisted with medicinal aid and vaccination programmes in under-funded hospitals.

## The Artwork

The painting, Stardust, is a mix of ink and acrylic on canvas and is one of the most recent pieces by Nickola.

Painted, along with others, as a tribute to the late British rocker, David Bowie, McCoy-Snell credits the musician as a major influence on her artwork over the years.

Additionally, Stardust is autobiographical, chronicling the past twenty years of the artist's career. She further explains "Written on the canvas are the happenings along that walk that has profoundly moved and are continuously molding and reshaping my life." These include her injury and subsequent recovery, finding herself artistically, starting a family and moving away from Cayman.

## Discussion

- This work is full of emotional meaning for McCoy-Snell's experiences, however it could also be very subjective. What else might you interpret from this painting?

- Consider the artists' choice of colours. What might they be symbolic of?

## Making Comparisons

- Look at the paintings of Russian-French artist, Marc Chagall, who was also heavily influenced by music — can you see any similarities between his and McCoy-Snell's work?

[www.theartstory.org/artist-chagall-marc-artworks.htm#pnt\\_2](http://www.theartstory.org/artist-chagall-marc-artworks.htm#pnt_2)

- McCoy-Snell alternates between several styles as her moods vary. View the work of Georgia O'Keeffe and make comparisons.

<http://www.wikiart.org/en/georgia-o-keeffe>

<http://fineartamerica.com/art/paintings/nickola-mccoy/all>

## Follow Up Activities

- Copy the composition below onto watercolour paper with pencil or light vine charcoal. Complete your copy using short, quick strokes of acrylic paint. Allow enough time to work in layers in some areas.



Image: Nickola McCoy-Snell (NDA), *Lazy Days*, private collection

- Using a viewfinder, select an area one quarter the size of the painting. Copy an enlargement of this area and practice the brushstrokes.

- Write an art review of *Stardust*.