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Artist Aliyah Sidqe is seriously nailing it.

PHOTO BY PATRICK HYUN WILSON

Finding her rhythm

BY PATRICK HYUN WILSON / patrickw@newsreview.com

The funky groove of Sam and Dave's "Soul Man" fills the room, where a multigenerational crowd of nearly 100 people are gathered in appreciation of the watercolor, oil and acrylic paintings hanging on the wall. In the middle of it all, Aliyah Sidqe bounces around the room in her bright flowing dress, exchanging hugs and laughs.

Though it was a long road, Sidqe had made it to a landmark moment in her career as a self-taught artist. It was Feb. 1, the opening night of her first solo exhibition at The Brickhouse Gallery, titled *And The Beat Goes On*, and one in a month full of events surrounding the exhibition.

Thirty paintings are on display, including a self-portrait of Sidqe with her boyfriend of three years, both dressed in 1970s fashion. The couple gazes toward each other, creating the sense of being caught in the middle of a warm, quiet moment dislodged from time.

The portrait is emblematic of the entire exhibition and its connection to Black History Month, celebrating "the beauty in blackness and being black" through the culture of the 1970s.

"It feels like a time that was very unapologetic, very natural," Sidqe said.

One large mixed media piece, titled "Meet Me At The Dance Floor Pt. 2," depicts two black women dancing in royal shades of blue and purple from an extreme low angle. A disco ball refracts beams of light onto both women, one of whom stares at the viewer.

"I love going bigger," Sidqe said. "I just like how bold it is. Just like, it's there. You walk in the room, your eyes go straight there."

Sidqe revels in the boldness of her work now, but early in her life she wasn't always so forthcoming. "I never saw myself being an artist, because I really

believed in that 'starving artist' myth," she said. "It stifled me for a long time."

She became so stifled that she stopped painting for years; it wasn't until 2013 that she began to draw again.

"I picked it up and I was like, 'Oh, this is pretty cool.' And then my mom shared it on her Facebook—or with one of her coworkers—and they bought it," Sidqe said. "I was like, 'Oh, people are like, willing to buy it?' ... I guess that triggered something in my mind like, 'I can make money doing this.'"

Sidqe's mother, Shelia Dickerson, propelled her career as an artist in more ways than one. In 2014, she pushed Sidqe to seek a mentorship with award-winning artist Milton Bowens.

The two met at Old Soul Co., and it didn't take long for Bowens to see Sidqe's talent.

"She pulled up some work that was on her phone, and I looked at it and I was immediately impressed," Bowens said. "So I offered her an opportunity to do an exhibit."

Her first exhibition was a 2014 group show at Del Paso Works Galleries called *New Power Generation*. Since then, Sidqe has participated in numerous group shows around Sacramento, including at the Brickhouse.

Barbara Range, director and curator at the Brickhouse, approached Sidqe about her first solo exhibition last October, giving Sidqe four months to prepare.

Although it was a fraction of the time that most solo exhibitions have to prepare, the time frame wasn't what worried Sidqe.

"I always want to represent the fullest view of who I am, and who black people are in general ... The motivation for the show was just, not always being recognized for your fullest self," Sidqe said. "So a lot of the weight was just, making sure that I do it right."

And The Beat Goes On runs through Feb. 29. The Brickhouse Gallery & Art Complex, 2837 36th St. For more info, visit thebrickhouseartgallery.com.