



Hurvin Anderson: Salon Paintings

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Hurvin Anderson's artistic journey, a subtle yet resonant force in contemporary British painting, unfolds in his recent exhibition *Salon Paintings* (The Hepworth Wakefield, 26 May – 5 November 2023). Born in 1965 to Jamaican parents in Handsworth, Birmingham, Anderson's canvas is interwoven with the tales of the Caribbean: for him a realm both mythical and laden with the echoes of colonialism and contemporary economic intricacies. Within the lush green landscapes he conjures, Anderson navigates the delicate interplay between reality and imagination, immersing viewers in the dichotomy of the Caribbean's natural allure and the intricacies of daily life.

The exhibition's focal point is Anderson's "Barbershop series", a theme that has captivated him for over fifteen years. Beyond being a mere portrayal of a vital social space for the British Caribbean community, the series becomes a gateway into Anderson's nuanced exploration of the essence of contemporary painting. His canvas becomes a realm where straight lines echo through cubist shapes and hair clippings disrupts geometric order with tufty irregularity. This vibrant scene, rich with dissonant colours and tactile textures, transcends the physical to explore metaphysical realms. The evolution of the Barbershop series unfolds as a visual narrative, a wrestling match between figuration and abstraction. The resulting tension between figuration and abstraction becomes a recurring motif, echoing the inherent challenges of encapsulating memories and experiences on canvas. Anderson's meticulous process involves a calculated distancing from his subject. Barbershop interiors are not painted directly. Instead, photographs serve as a collage-like foundation, enabling Anderson to deconstruct and reconstruct the scene. The displayed preparatory drawings provide a glimpse into this layered process, showcasing the artist's experimentation with pace and rhythm, weaving a sense of space and place. *Salon Paintings* meticulously

charts Anderson's artistic evolution, spanning works from 2006 to the present day. The delicate balance between paintings and preparatory drawings provides an intimate look into Anderson's experimental nature and the laborious process of deconstruction and reconstruction. In concluding his almost two-decade-long return to the barbershop setting, Anderson presents two final works, *Shear Cut* and *Skiffle*, created exclusively for this exhibition. The removal of barbers' chairs and the introduction of figures bring viewers closer to the mirror, embodying the client's perspective. These concluding pieces rise to the challenge of concluding a creative practice, offering a striking commentary on the passage of time within and outside the painted space. The mirrors that initially drew him to paint his first barbershop work become a central site of inquiry, introducing a slippery reflection that challenges the viewer's relationship to the painted space.

In a complementary exhibition, Hurvin Anderson Curates, Anderson's work takes on a broader context, featuring 20th-century British paintings from UK public collections in dialogue with influential figures from the Black British Arts movement. This curated selection, personally chosen by Anderson, offers a distinctive perspective into his motivations and points of reference. Notably, Anderson's inclusion of an abstract work by Victor Pasmore hints at the significance of the periphery over central imagery: a concept mirroring his focus on social spaces crucial to the Jamaican diaspora in the UK, yet existing in the margins. Hurvin Anderson Curates takes visitors on a journey through his formative influences and highlighting the importance of British art historical references in his work. The eclectic nature of Hurvin Anderson Curates becomes evident as Anderson includes British modernist painters who have somewhat fallen out of favour, or been overlooked in recent years: on display are paintings that reveal points of conversation with Anderson's own practice, including works by Michael Andrews,

Francis Bacon, Patrick Caulfield, Prunella Clough, Duncan Grant, Richard Hamilton, Claudette Johnson, R.B. Kitaj, Leon Kossoff, Eugene Palmer, Keith Piper, and Sir Stanley Spencer. This curatorial choice adds depth to the exhibition, offering a fresh perspective on the diverse influences shaping Anderson's artistic landscape.

The influences displayed in Hurvin Anderson Creates reminds us that, despite being born in multicultural Birmingham and training in cosmopolitan London, despite his Caribbean heritage, it is specifically British art that Anderson draws upon, weaving a narrative that resonates with our shared British history, culture and more universal experiences beyond unique lived experience and identity. In presenting the barbershop as a central figure, Anderson not only offers a contemporary twist on the relationship between the mainstream and the periphery, but crafts a profound dialogue

between personal narratives and broader artistic traditions. As viewers walk through space and time in the barbershop with Anderson, it becomes a quiet marvel - an exploration of metaphysical realms, a homage to shared histories and a testament to the enduring legacy of Black British social spaces as much as British modernist painting.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of Interest.