

ALVARO
BARRINGTON

Selected Press

'I fell asleep on a soundsystem!'- the pyramid-building artists invading Notting Hill carnival

- The Guardian

At this year's city-shaking, weekend-long bash, a triangular pavilion will be appearing amid the floats and dancers. Revellers can sneak inside for a rest – or climb on top and party.

Alvaro Barrington is recalling his first ever festival experience in Grenada: "I was maybe five years old and my cousins took me to J'ouvert," he says, referring to the day that acts as a precursor to the main party in Caribbean culture. "I have a memory of one of my older cousins holding my hand as we walked through the streets. We found a sound system and I climbed up on it and immediately fell asleep with the music blasting. A few hours later, I woke up to my cousin carrying me home while I laid on his shoulder."

He may have missed out on the good stuff, but the sleepy experience has inspired his latest project. Because amid the floats, sound systems and food trucks at this year's Notting Hill carnival there will also be a pavilion designed specifically for people who need to take a bit of time out from the action. Located next to where the carnival's judges are based on the Great Western Road, the approximately three-metre high structure is made from a series of interlocking plywood components. The pavilion will be completed during the carnival's opening parade by members of the community who will carry elements of the building, slotting them into the roughly pyramid-shaped construction themselves at the end of the procession. Once finished, party-goers will be able to rest inside Barrington's pavilion, or clamber up the outside in order to better see the procession. "Carnival can be a place for many different types of culture," he says. "For the Caribbean community, it has a long history of being a space in which art gets produced. I thought maybe we can bring architecture into that too."

Born in Venezuela to a Haitian father, but having spent his early childhood with his maternal grandmother in Grenada, Barrington gravitated towards the annual west London party after arriving in the UK to study art seven years ago. He initiated the project, but it is also a collaboration with the architect Sumayya Vally, who became involved in the

British carnival scene after she was picked to create the annual Serpentine pavilion last year. Her Hyde Park structure was a homage to various community spaces across London, not least the Mangrove, a historic Caribbean restaurant. It too spread beyond its initial home, with "fragments" of the building installed across the city, including in the Tabernacle, the Notting Hill music and community space.

"This new structure can likewise be taken apart and put back together, it is diasporic in its logic," says Vally, whose grandparents were Indian migrants to South Africa. "We started to think about spaces of gathering in west London and across the Caribbean. There are characteristics we could reference, like steps and porches." Barrington, who before he came to Britain spent his teenage years in Brooklyn, agrees that the stoop – the long external steps leading to the communal front doors of New York's tenements and brownstones, places to socialise or watch the neighbourhood – are symbolic of African American community. The pavilion is, he says, a "place where the carnival judges can view the costumes being paraded, places where carnival elders can sit".

Vally was the youngest designer in the history of the Serpentine pavilion and Barrington is no less precocious. His first show on graduating from art school was at New York's MoMA PS1 and he is represented by six galleries internationally, curators and critics impressed by his expanded vision for painting. His canvases, the mainstay of his practice, are invariably interrupted by textiles, woven threads and objects, often referencing his own biography. They come together as a form of bricolage story telling, often with migration as the central narrative.

In the very short history of humans on this planet, migration is a consistent truth. It became a material interest in my art because though it's personal it is also a universal human condition," he explains. A recent work, *Lady sing small @proud Mary bottom up*, features different coloured threads sewn in blocks to a blue painted canvas. A drum and a broom are attached hanging down below the frame. Those elements are glorious intrusions to a composition

that otherwise evokes the canonical history of geometric abstraction. At his recent solo exhibition at the South London Gallery, Barrington divided the space into North and South. In the former he hung a series of works reminiscent of cloud studies, made using wet concrete smeared onto dyed Hermès blankets. In the latter, as a commentary on global political and economic power structures, the same technique was used on hessian, the material most frequently associated with food bags and trade.

In 2019, the last carnival before its pandemic hiatus, Barrington organised a float of his paintings to join the parade. "Just to hire a truck can cost anything between £10,000 and £30,000. Now there's inflation, there's the cost of fuel. It's getting harder. So what you find is that a lot of the creativity has had to be reeled in and instead you'll see advertising for liquor or whatever. So I wanted to use a truck that would have been advertising a brand or whatever but instead show paintings.

"Is there a danger that gallery artists entering the fray could add to this gentrification?" The idea of artists as gentrifiers is a distraction from who actually has power in those processes," he says. "Gentrification happens through legislation, through the social conditioning that property is an asset. Saying that artists are gentrifiers is often done in bad faith so as not to address the issue." Vally agrees: "Notting Hill's power comes from its hybridity, the way it brings so many people into the conversation," she says.

Working with the carnival organisers was a natural fit. "I think there were a lot of assumptions made by very smart people in the 20th century about ideas of purity and reduction," says Barrington, "and I think most people didn't live their lives that way. I think what you see in my practice and Sumayya's practice is that these definitions were never truly real. Some people fell into an assembly line idea of art making, where they would only make paintings. But most people don't live their creativity that way."

Alvaro Barrington at Nicola Vassell

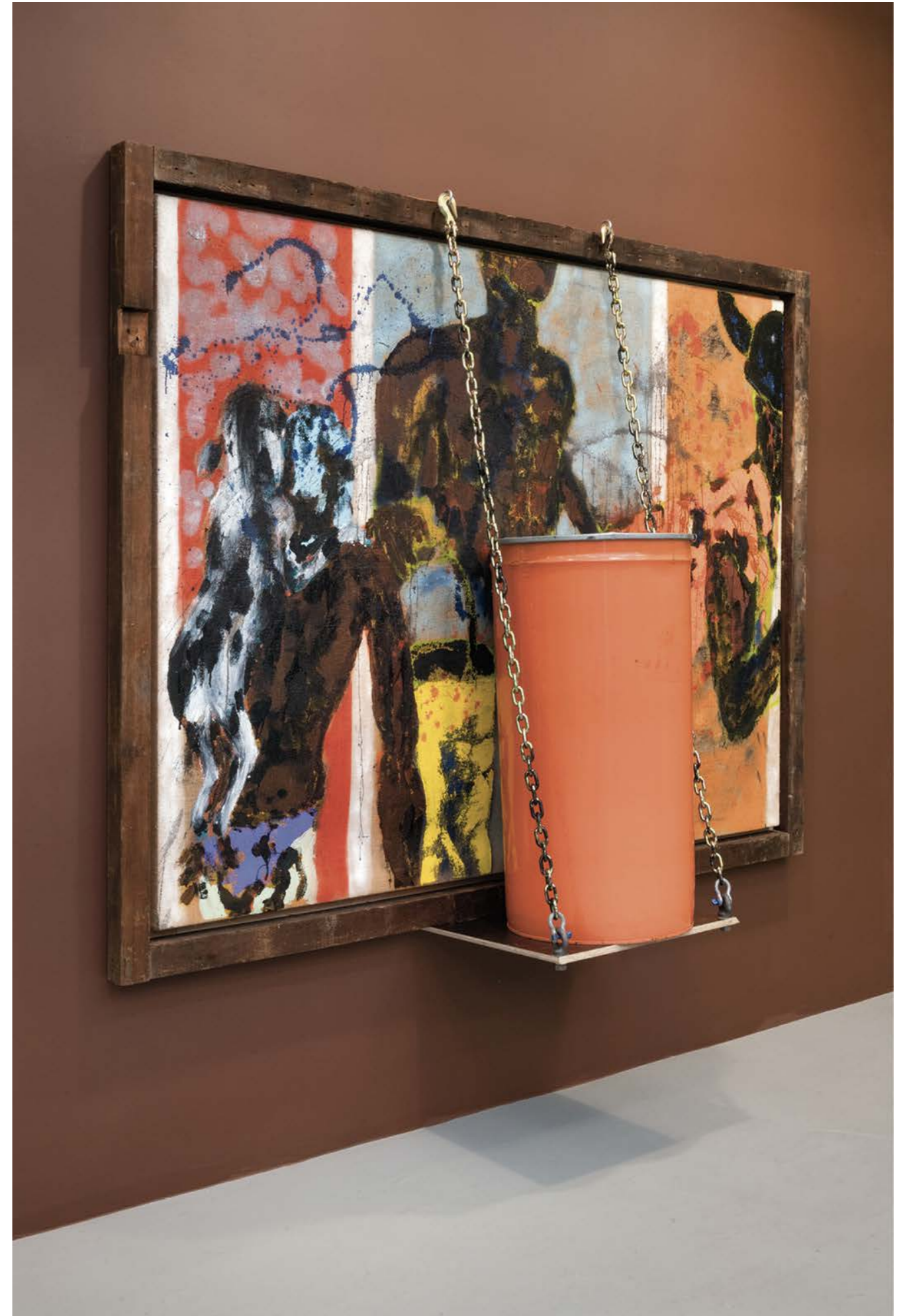
- Colby Chamberlain

Is everything all right over at the New York Times arts desk? In the paper's review of "Greater New York" at MoMA PS1 this past October, Martha Schwendener devoted whole paragraphs to disparaging the acknowledgment of artists' ethnic background on wall labels. Three weeks earlier, co-chief art critic Roberta Smith's write-up on Alvaro Barrington's recent solo exhibition told visitors to "ignore the overreaching news release at the front desk which ties the artist's life to that of Marcus Garvey, because of 'similarities in their migratory paths,' and consider the work." Smith then proceeded to liken Barrington's quasi-figurative paintings on burlap to the neo-expressionist confections of David Salle and Julian Schnabel. There's some merit to the analogy, but to invoke these much-maligned figureheads of the 1980s without also mentioning the member of their milieu that Barrington has actually cited as an influence, Jean-Michel Basquiat, feels less like an astute observation and more like a microaggression.

Plenty of press releases are larded with jargon and pretense, but here the talk of "migratory paths" explained an important conceit. Barrington has mapped out a series of exhibitions dedicated to Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and an early proponent of Pan-Africanism, whose biography and philosophy exemplify the geographical coordinates and structures of feeling that sociologist Paul Gilroy has called "the Black Atlantic"—a sense of commonality that is both haunted and held together by the half-forgotten memories of the Middle Passage. Barrington uses Garvey as a prism for viewing the historical dimensions of his own life's itinerary, which spans Venezuela, Grenada, the United States, and, most recently, the United Kingdom. The colors and imagery of the main room were selected to evoke Garvey's native Jamaica. An adjoining corridor was lined with small panel paintings in handmade wooden frames that each featured in their title "1916," the year Garvey relocated to New York. At the exhibition's conclusion stood *Be His Peace* (all works 2021), a tapestry of yarn and burlap attached to a concrete block and holding aloft three Spalding basketballs couched in milk crates—an apparent nod to the hard-court terrain of Harlem.

A key concept in Gilroy's 1993 book on the Black Atlantic is the distinction between "roots" and "routes," i.e., between affiliations tethered to the soil of nation-states and those stretched across waterways once traversed by migrants, merchants, and slaves. To a striking degree, these two modes of identification inhere in Barrington's paintings as a play between his subject matter and material supports. In terms of what he chooses to represent, Barrington paints the green and gold of Jamaica's flag, close-ups of its local plant life, and scenes of Black bodies joined in celebration. By contrast, the materials he selects relate to shipping, mobility, and trade. The burlap he employs instead of canvas comes from sacks for cacao beans, and in *Black Power* a pair of chains suspend an actual oil barrel in front of the picture plane. Affixed to the frame of *U the Wettest* are two additional barrels that had been refashioned as steel-pan drums, musical instruments that epitomize the Black Atlantic's capacity to transform extractive tools into expressive mediums.

In a recent interview, Barrington noted that he reevaluated his work after realizing that members of his extended family were missing his art-historical references. "It was never my mission to get an education to make my family, who are all Black, feel unintelligent," he said. "I wanted . . . a more balanced approach of questioning and holding together my contemporary life and the long history of painting, which I also love." Barrington's paintings are densely packed with the sort of allusions that routinely pique the interest of critic types who write for *The Times* or, for that matter, *Artforum*. Walking through the show, I found myself thinking about Barrington in relation to Frank Bowling circa 1970. Both painters cover their canvases with vibrant color fields against which the outlines of figures alternately cohere into fixed images or dissolve into ghostly traces. Meanwhile, I missed that the words painted across a trio of compositions—*SLOW DOWN*, *DON'T RUSH*, and *GET IT RIGHT*—were actually lyrics from a song by Mary J. Blige, a favorite among Barrington's relatives. Perhaps the quality in Barrington's practice that Smith suggests is "overreaching" could be better understood as reaching out.



High-end Hermès yak wool blankets covered in concrete

- Adrian Searle

Hanging high on the walls above our heads, paintings of clouds encircle the South London Gallery. There's weather coming in, growing more and more troubled as we look. Alvaro Barrington has used concrete to paint the clouds, scuffed and trowelled on to gorgeously dyed, high-end Hermès yak wool blankets. As the storm approaches, the support changes to burlap. As much as these paintings might, at a stretch, look back to JMW Turner or to Constable's cloud studies, abstract expressionism and informalism are in there, too. It is action painting without the angst, unless, that is, you worry about covering luxury blankets with builder's concrete. This collision of materials, the one despoiling the other, is part of the point of these intemperate paintings, and one of the several ways in which the artist creates his debased and impure art, which attempts to reflect the textures, complexities and inequalities of the modern world.

Born in 1983 in Venezuela to Grenadian and Haitian migrant workers, Barrington grew up in Grenada and Brooklyn. He studied painting in New York and then at the Slade in London, where he currently lives. You never know what he's going to do or where his art will go next. Artists often used to complain about being "skied" by whoever hung their pictures so far up the wall you couldn't get a proper view, but clouds are meant to be seen from afar; otherwise, you're in the fog.

Barrington's show is less an exhibition of discrete individual works as an installation masquerading as an old-fashioned academy or salon hang. It is a good way of dealing with the SLG's tall single space, which was completed in 1891, when such curatorial arrangements were common. Barrington has adapted the manners of the 19th-century picture gallery to revel in the complexities of the present and an imagined near-future.

Spider the Pig, Pig the Spider takes as one of its starting points the inequalities of north and south, exacerbated by climate emergency, globalisation and industrialisation. Beneath the clouds, the paintings and drawings that jostle for attention at a more human eye level are presented in cumbersome concrete, aluminium and shiny steel frames.

As much architectural devices as frames, redolent of brutalism and corporate high-sheen decor, they give way, on the opposite long wall, to frames of brightly coloured painted wooden slats and corrugated metal. These are meant to remind us of the ad hoc construction work of a poorer south, of cheap building materials and the favela. I'm reminded of Brazilian *Tropicália*, redone as gaudy poverty chic. Where do the frames end and the paintings begin? They're all of a piece. Barrington intersperses these cumbersome objects with roughly painted banana leaves.

All of which seems a big step to Peppa Pig and Louise Bourgeois' gigantic sculpted spider, both of whom are referenced in Barrington's paintings. These creatures evidence themselves in the pink limbs, cartoonish fingers and trotters, and hairy, grey and black spidery appendages that cross their surfaces. Infant fantasy meets adult darkness, you might say, except there's no darkness more chilling than that of childhood.

Except it isn't really Peppa and it isn't exactly Bourgeois' Maman either who populate Barrington's fractious, unruly works. Somehow George Orwell's Napoleon, the porcine dictator in *Animal Farm*, and Anansi the Spider from the west African folk tale are in there, too. I worry about the pig and the spider. Are they an item? And then there are the 1980s songs, the riffs on other artists and the autobiographical details that litter Barrington's multilayered and, at times, confusing art; it has taken me days to get to grips with it.

It is all enough to make you start climbing the walls, which are themselves painted in bands and blocks of flat colour, a kind of colour-coded index of weather and light, pollution sunsets, nightfalls and dawns and grey afternoons. The entire experience is like a gigantic, immersive video game with multiple levels, wormholes, diversions and escape hatches. It is hard to know where you are. This sense of being unmoored and caught between worlds is signal to the contradictions and contrasts of Barrington's own peripatetic life.



In one work, a game map from Nintendo's Super Mario World provides a background, much like a fragment of ancient cartography. Trotters and spider legs are sprayed and smeared on the under-surfaces of his glazed paintings, abstracted into compound brushstrokes, casting shadows on the layers beneath, which themselves reiterate or echo the same forms in accents of heavily brushed colour. These often bring to mind the loose patches and licks of other painters. You can easily lose yourself in these box-like agglomerations, which also include reproductions of old monochrome photos of city tenements and sidewalks with passersby, a towering Brooklyn Bridge and other city views printed on acetate and sandwiched within their multiple layers. I begin to see things that aren't there or are merely glimmering reflections of the works that hang on the opposite wall. Behind the imagery there are areas of canvas sutured and sewn with brightly coloured yarn – a reference, perhaps, to a spider's web.

Sometimes works by other artists are attached to the surface – a plain outline drawing of a man in his underpants, Casting Sexy Twinky Guy, from a series of gay porn drawings by Dutch artist Dorus Tossijn, who was at the Slade with Barrington, and who has also provided a small oil painting of Rihanna wearing a Giambattista Valli frock. Then there are the lines "I bless the rains down in Africa" from the hideous 1982 song Africa, by soft rock band Toto (inexplicably, the official video of the song has had more than 694m YouTube views), repeated over the surface of one painting, and lyrics from Rick James's 1981 Ghetto Life printed across another.

Bristling with visual references and optical intrigue, low culture jokes and high-end art references, Barrington conflates the personal, the political, social issues and the idiosyncratic. Sometimes you have to get up close, squint and peer through the glazed surfaces to see the world within. The more I pick up on the details, the more lost I am. Look, there's a helicopter. And here some Ellsworth Kelly plant drawings, redrawn by Barrington and with the letters ICU repeated over them. The initials standing both for Intensive Care Unit and the text message abbreviation for "I see you". You look at his paintings, and they look at you.

Proceeding by intuition and calculation, Barrington plays the painting game at several simultaneous levels. People still talk about post-internet art, but all art is post-internet now. Although resolutely handmade, Barrington's paintings belong to a world that is totally entangled with both the real and the virtual. His rafts of references and materials are heir to Robert

Rauschenberg's commodious approach, which predicted much of our interconnected world, without having the net to fall back on. It is impossible to say that Barrington is one of a generation ushering in a new species of painting, but he might be, even if it's somewhere between a pig and a spider.

Blackness has been a constant reinvention of ourselves

- Enuma Okoro

Alvaro Barrington on his new show, which draws inspiration from Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey and his own Brooklyn childhood.

The London-based artist Alvaro Barrington has the uncanny ability to turn a conversation into a pilgrimage. I catch up with him in New York for the opening of his new solo exhibition, *Garvey I: Birth —The Quiet Storm*, at the Nicola Vassell Gallery in Chelsea. Whenever I ask him about how he came to the idea of referencing Marcus Garvey — this is the first chapter of a four-part reflection on the life and work of the Jamaican activist, proponent of black separatism and father of Pan-Africanism, who died in 1940 — he starts by telling me something that doesn't immediately seem to answer my question. But soon enough I see that he's taking me on a journey, making illuminating connections between art history, ideology, Afro-Caribbean cultural traditions and his own experiences — all to give a richer reply.

In the gallery, walls painted grass green and dark cocoa offset the yellow, green, brown and orange palette of the works. *Garvey I* first showed at the Sadie Coles gallery in London in 2019. Barrington tells me that he wanted to organise the show as a kind of story about a couple meeting, falling in love and then deciding to migrate. It's a nod to his parents but also to countless others who leave their country for another place.

The exhibition follows Garvey's migration to London and then New York. Grounded in the activist's famous quote, "A people without knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without its roots", narratives of Barrington's own family's migration are blended with his experiences and his exploration of other Afro-Caribbean and African-American people in history. And to think through answers to some of life's bigger questions of identity, belonging, social-economic equality and homemaking.

He works in mixed media, combining paint with materials like yarn, wood, cement, burlap and steel. Interspersed

throughout are hip-hop lyrics that find their way into the works as texts or titles. Some works are three-dimensional, incorporating steel pans, basketballs and wheelbarrows as sculpture. There are 37 pieces in the show, spread across five different rooms. They weave together different threads related to the larger fabric of a people migrating: social and financial concerns, mental and emotional health issues, staying connected with and supporting those left behind, questions of uncertainty about the future, and elements of communal narratives and storytelling.

From talking with Barrington and viewing his work it is easy to understand his rapid rise in the art world. Born in Venezuela to a Haitian father and a Grenadian mother, he has lived in the Caribbean and in Brooklyn in the US. He studied painting at New York's Hunter College, then the Slade School of Fine Art in London. Since his first solo exhibition at New York's MoMA PS1, Barrington has had soldout shows, and he partners with several galleries: four in Europe, while also working with four in the US.

We're standing in front of a mixed-media piece called "U the Wettest". It's almost abstract, a colour-soaked image of a woman with orange hair dancing in a splash of water, and painted on burlap fabric. Her back is towards us, her body dressed in green, yellow and orange blobs. Its curved outline makes her appear to sway in motion, her hips swinging and her arms raised. The canvas is set in a rough wooden frame with a strip of corrugated metal on the top rim of the canvas, like a roof over the work. The words "You the wettest", lyrics from a soca song, are painted in bold block letters across half the canvas. Two steel pans hang on both sides of the frame, like ears listening to the musicality inherent in the work.

The way Barrington uses materials in his work speaks to his understanding of what it is to be black in the US. "In America, blackness was about the erasure of your identity in Africa, and the creation of your identity in opposition to whiteness. So blackness has had to be about a constant reinvention of ourselves, even in our relationships with

each other. It's about constantly reimagining how we can survive, stay alive, experience faith and deal with our hurt and trauma.

"So the show is about exploring [elements] that I was born into. Then the next show will take another Garvey quote and build a body of work around it."

He continues: "When I graduated from Hunter College there was a lot of praise. But my family... didn't get any of the reference points. I didn't know till then that I was making work that somehow alienates them. It was never my mission to get an education to make my family, who are all black, feel unintelligent. That was when I realised that this couldn't be what I really do with my art. I wanted... a more balanced approach of questioning and holding together my contemporary life and the long history of painting, which I also love."

Thus the pieces in this exhibition fuse references to artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Jackson Pollock with cultural material from his own life, from the basketball milk crates and hip-hop lyrics of Brooklyn to the burlap, banana-tree leaves and steel pans of the Caribbean. As his own socio-economic position changes, he is increasingly concerned about deeply rooted inequality and a wide range of current topics.

"A big part of me is asking, 'What does my practice put out into the world?' For example, I get a lot from going to carnival, in Brooklyn or in Notting Hill. It gives me tremendous inspiration. Then I make a painting based off that inspiration, sell the painting and make a lot of money. So we've set up a community interest trust where a chunk of the profits goes to the community of black and brown people who organise carnival."

As we walk through the gallery, my eyes gravitate to three works on a centre wall in the main room. Each painting has an instruction spray-painted across a large leaf of some kind.

Collectively Barrington calls them "ThreeTrees". The first work is "Slow Down", yellow letters against a dark-green background and the leaf of a money plant. The second is "Get it Right", with pink letters against a large aloe leaf symbolic of healing. In orange paint the third instructs "Don't Rush", a banana leaf expanding behind it. The paintings are an ode to Barrington's mother and the women who became his aunts. Together, the words are lyrics from a song by Mary J Blige, whose music, Barrington says, the women loved.

The last room and the last piece, "Be his Peace", is a preview of *Garvey Chapter II*, symbolising the activist's time in the UK and North America. Three black plastic milk crates hang from the top of a wooden frame as makeshift basketball hoops.

Each crate is filled halfway with concrete and has a basketball inside it. An iron chain falls from the centre of the crates on each side of the canvas; a black rope falls from the crate in the middle. Behind the chains and within the wooden frame is a burlap canvas with the words "Be his peace" stitched in large letters made of yarn. For Barrington, this work reflects his own experience as black boy and young man growing up in Brooklyn and trying to survive. "In Jamaica, black people are 80 to 90 per cent of the population. When Garvey goes to the UK and America he suddenly becomes the minority. He sees how black people are treated, and that's part of what begins to radicalise him. I wanted to think about my own neighbourhood in Brooklyn, and how we lived. There are things we do in our neighbourhood to [survive] and to be the peace of [each other] when someone needs something."

He leans in and confides in me: "The next show, *Garvey II*, will be paintings of people I grew up with and the conditions in which they figured out how to survive." He then adds, with a widening grin, "Except, there won't be any paint."

Profile: Since graduating from London's Slade School of Fine Art in 2017, the artist has had rare, immediate success with his multi-faceted work. As he prepares for an extended stay in New York, Barrington discusses ideas of home, time and why art-making is an ongoing education *by Andrew Durbin*

Alvaro Barrington



In London, Alvaro Barrington wakes to the sight of commuter trains passing by his bedroom window. When I visit his flat in Shoreditch one spring morning, we sit on his balcony and talk as the carriages screech by at a regular clip. Gliding along the curve of the overground track that connects the East End to south London, they pass the numerous new skyscrapers that line Bishopsgate. 'When I came here,' Barrington says, nodding absently at the ever-rising towers, some girdled in construction netting and cranes, 'I was a student. I kept thinking about this place from a working-class perspective. Building structures, building cities, building spaces.' Sunlight – rare this March – refracts from the city towards us. With the COVID-19 vaccine rollout underway in the UK and lockdown restrictions easing, the artist is now thinking about his next move.

When we meet at his flat, Barrington has recently returned from Paris, also in lockdown, where he mounted his latest exhibition, 'You don't do it for the man, men never notice. You just do it for yourself, you're the fucking coldest', at Thaddaeus Ropac. (The title is taken from the lyrics to Drake's 2010 song 'Fancy'.) The paintings, which I can only view online, are gentle and smooth, despite their heavy-looking, concrete frames. Some depict the outlines of female figures lounging against coloured carpet backgrounds – a nod to Henri Matisse's cut-outs of the

1940s, the title credits of 1960s-era *James Bond* films and iPod ads of the early 2000s, the artist says in a promotional video shot by the gallery. *Em reclining sofa bed w/ Burberry pillow* (2021) shows a woman in blue, her bare arm propping up her head. As with the other paintings at Ropac, the purple carpet, which evokes the soft dens of 1970s suburban 'key parties', blushes with a touch of the voluptuous. (Think also of Drake's sultry video for 'Hotline Bling', 2015, where women dance in a James Turrell-inspired light installation.) Even on my MacBook screen, these paintings seduce. I ask about the audience for the works and he laughs. 'Women.'

Since I first encountered Barrington's work a few years ago, I've most admired the breadth and range of his flirtations – the way he glides, in painting, sculpture and performance, between the intimacies of daily life and historic memory. Last year, at Corvi-Mora in London, Barrington's 'Garvey 2 – They eyes were watching god' scaled these registers by looking closely at links between the US, Europe and the Caribbean, where Barrington was born and partly raised. It's one of a series of exhibitions he's developed around the life of Marcus Garvey, the writer, publisher and Pan-African activist who pioneered Black separatism in the early 20th century. Though primarily a painter, Barrington here installed *A Different World* (2017–ongoing), a series of beams that stretched from floor to ceiling, chiming with the gallery's sloped roof. From each protrudes an antique

Previous spread
They have They Cant, 2021, hessian on aluminium frame, yarn, spray paint, concrete on cardboard, bandanas, 229 × 245 × 56 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; photograph: Charles Duprat



This page
Em reclining sofa bed w/ Burberry pillow, 2021, carpet, concrete, wood, mixed media on burlap paper, 2 × 2 m. Courtesy: the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; photograph: Charles Duprat

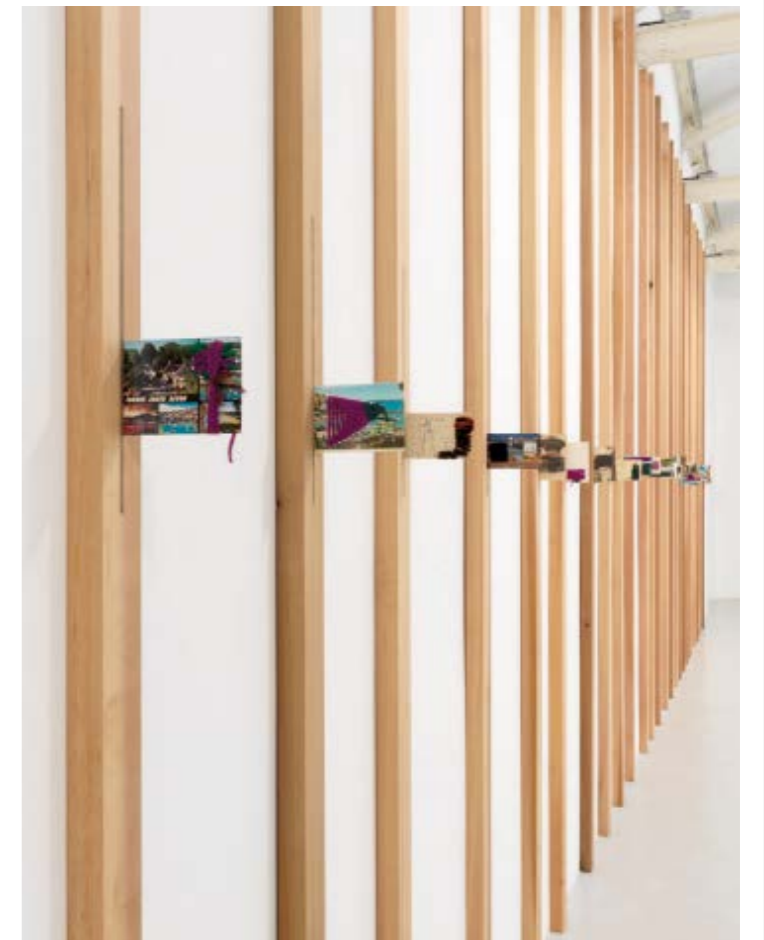
Opposite page
A Different World, 2017–ongoing, installation view, Corvi-Mora, London, 2020–21. Courtesy: the artist and Corvi-Mora, London; photograph: Marcus Leith

postcard, their paper surfaces embroidered with various shapes in yarn. By obscuring landmarks, beachside towns and golf courses, Barrington recasts the recessive photographic background as an ambiguous foreground, drawing your attention to what isn't there – in a way that tourism, with its careful emphasis on hotels and monuments dissociated from ordinary local life, seldom does. 'It's all about backdrops,' he tells me. 'How do you translate that? What are the backdrops against which art is formed?' His own, which began in Venezuela and Grenada and continued to New York, interweaves the influences of hip-hop, Biggie Smalls, Master P; Garvey and Audre Lorde (especially her 1985 book, *Poetry Is not a Luxury*); his late mother and the 'aunties' who raised him in Brooklyn after she passed away when Barrington was just ten; the *Spider-Man* and *Batman* comics from whose pages he taught himself to draw.

Barrington was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1983. He spent much of his childhood on the island of Grenada, then moved to Brooklyn with his mother in 1990. After she died in 1993, Barrington felt alone, he tells me, though a large community of his mother's friends stepped in to nurture him. 'That's when I'd start drawing,' he says, 'Just hours of me drawing comic books until I fell asleep. Mostly to keep my mind occupied.' One of his first works was a flipbook of Nintendo's Kirby – a squishy pink alien from the planet Popstar who assumes the attributes of everything he eats. The character was an apt first choice for Barrington: his own multifaceted, highly referential art has a similarly canny knack for absorbing influence.

After more than a decade of studying literature, history, photography and fine art at New York's Long Island University, Barrington enrolled in the art school at Hunter College, where he learned to paint by cribbing from artists such as Josef Albers, Philip Guston and Giorgio Morandi, whom he had begun to establish as his lineage. One of his advisors, art historian Katy Siegel, encouraged him to apply to programmes in Europe once he graduated in 2015. Visiting artists Nari Ward and Chris Ofili agreed that time away from the US would help Barrington further develop his practice. Specifically, Ward felt that Barrington, as a Black man who had graduated from community college – 'where some of the most brilliant people attend', Barrington stresses – would be dismissed by the Ivy League-educated students in Yale's or Columbia's MFA programmes. 'You'll have to fight harder to have your ideas heard,' Ward warned him. 'Do you want to jump over that?' As an outsider, Barrington would face different challenges – and opportunities – in Europe than in the US. Ofili recommended London – a crossroads, just like New York. Barrington was accepted to the Slade School of Fine Art in 2015.

While at the Slade, Barrington studied the holdings of the capital's museums. 'Art school is self-education,' he tells me, and self-education is a motivating force behind his work – one he is at pains to make clear in how his paintings are received. In 2019, he co-curated 'Artists I Steal From' with Julia Peyton-Jones at Thaddaeus Ropac in London, which included works by Etel Adnan, Joseph Beuys, Guston, Jacob Lawrence, Henry Taylor, Issy Wood and 43 other artists, alongside his own. As he told Farah Nayeri of *The New York Times*: '[Copying] was my way of understanding what they were doing. It was a way of looking, learning, making in a sort of circle.'



Barrington's multifaceted, highly referential art has a canny knack for absorbing influence.

Barrington's bet on London paid off. After graduating in 2017, he had his first solo show at New York's MoMA PS1, nestled in a small, ground-floor gallery alongside Carolee Schneemann's career retrospective. I remember crowding into Barrington's exhibition on its opening day, in late October, and encountering what appeared to be a re-creation of his studio – with a few paintings hung high or leaning on the floor. On one wall, Barrington posted sketches torn from his notebooks, photocopies of essays, hand-drawn diagrams, a gallery worklist and other slips of paper. Yarn-sewn postcards – like those that would later appear at Corvi-Mora – were arranged neatly on an old table. Barrington's transparency, a rare opening gambit, was fresh, vulnerable and self-assured, while never so conceited as to imagine itself as complete. In some of the notes on display, the artist stated his motivations: 'Painting that belong to Carnival Culture', he had written on one. Another simply read: 'Brown'. Still another offered a question he poses to himself often: 'What is the next obvious but unexpected move?' Barrington's show was a triumphant homecoming in New York, yet his postgraduate reception in London was staggering. Four European galleries (Sadie Coles HQ, Corvi-Mora, Emalin and Thaddaeus Ropac) began to share representation – an unusual arrangement, especially for a young artist. (He also works with Blum & Poe, Karma, Mendes Wood DM and Nicola Vassell Gallery in the Americas.)



Transparency was a rare opening gambit – fresh, vulnerable and self-assured.



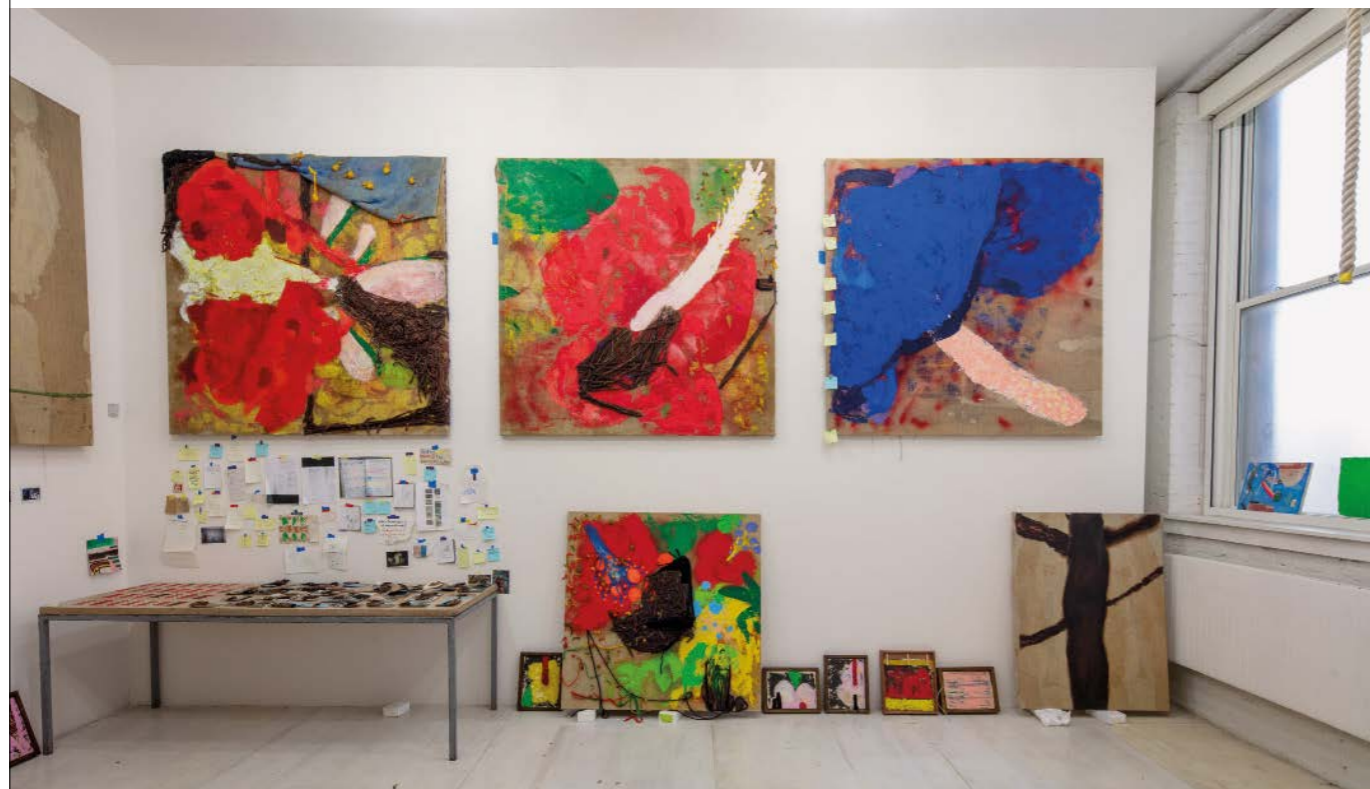
Clockwise, from bottom left
 Rafael Aponte at a rooftop grill party in Harlem, c.2008. L train headed to Samantha's '80s party in Williamsburg, date unknown. Portrait by my brother Jeremiah, c.2013. Fifth-floor LaGuardia High School crew on the 1 train when spider jackets were the mood, c.2000. Youngest brothers Brandon and Alex at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, c.2007. All photographs on this spread courtesy: the artist

When we meet again in early April, at his studio, the promised spring has not yet arrived. It's a grey afternoon and we're both wearing heavy coats that we'd hoped were retired for the season. Yesterday, it snowed. Barrington shows me into the ground-floor garage space, where he is at work on large paintings. They are works-in-progress, mostly meant as material tests. Some will be shown later this year at Emalin and others at the South London Gallery. Concrete frames, some painted, inspire images of London's brutalist housing estates, though Barrington's work is lighter than it looks at first glance. (He lifts one to demonstrate.) He nods to a small, unfinished work that will include a sketch of Rihanna, rendered in pink on green carpet. She's smoking a blunt, he indicates with a laugh. The idea came to him when he was stoned, lying on a carpet, debating how he might impart that heavenly sensation to a painting. It succeeds. I have also lounged in a plush, smoke-filled room and felt enclosed in the drowsy softness of Rihanna singing 'Love on the Brain' (2016). You can lose yourself in that feeling. Other paintings are stacked beside it. On one canvas, a sign reads 'Market'; on another, I make out the word 'Splash'.



I don't have a feel for London. I just exist here. It's like what Paris meant to James Baldwin.

Alvaro Barrington



Upstairs, in his office, a chalkboard lists a schedule of exhibitions, projects and shipments. Barrington opens a video on his computer. Taken by a real-estate agent, it shows a two-storey house on Beach 97 on the Rockaways, then drifts to a large, empty lot that was formerly an outdoor restaurant. Barrington has rented both properties for the summer, and his plan is to paint and throw parties by the beach. This trip will be his first significant stay in New York in years. I ask if he's nervous that the city might have changed in his absence, whether he considers himself a Londoner now; secretly, I want to know if his ambition is to sweep New York like he swept the UK.

'I don't have a feel for London,' he says. 'I just exist here. It's like what Paris meant to James Baldwin.' He explains that the city has been generative: 'You don't have to worry about family distracting you from work.' I think of Baldwin's essay 'The New Lost Generation', written for *Esquire* in 1961, where he observes that living abroad offers room for an artist to develop 'vision': 'A man is not a man until he's able and willing to accept his own vision of the world, no matter how radically this vision departs from that of others.'

On the Rockaways, Barrington's parties will be more relaxed and conversational than those he threw in his youth in Brooklyn. The emphasis will be on family and community. I'm reminded of the float he made, in collaboration with United Colours of Mas and Socaholic, for the 2019 Notting Hill Carnival – one of his grander artistic statements in the UK so far. In a text for Sadie Coles, where he opened the first of his Garvey shows shortly after the two-day festival, Barrington summarized his practice as 'celebrating communities in the way that they celebrate themselves'. 'One of the challenges', he writes, 'is that galleries often have mostly white viewers and I'm talking about a Black man and Black relationships, and I think there are responsible ways to share these ideas and stories.' That celebration will continue, it seems, in a less concentrated form on the Rockaways, far from Mayfair.

Sitting in his office, Barrington develops an image of his coming summer. The North Atlantic is not gentle, nor especially warm, but it is edifying, especially on hot days. Evenings will be quieter: 'My partner and I can dance. Once in a while, I'll put music on and say: "OK, babe, let's go." There are constant reminders of your humanity, and the way you spend your time on earth, around you.' Beach 97 will be one such reminder. Pointing to a chalkboard where he has written 'What does TIME feel like now?' Barrington says: 'That's what I've been thinking about.' It's a question on my mind, and probably yours, too. It leads to another, one the artist leaves unsaid: Has COVID-19 changed how we experience time? Of course, the post-pandemic world will not look the same as the one before it; yet, as Barrington replays the realtor's footage, I sense in his plans for the beach a tentative hope for the revolutions upon which this new world might turn. They are coming regardless, and Barrington is ready **END**

Andrew Durbin is editor of *frieze*. His novel *Skyland* (2020) is published by Nightboat Books. He lives in London, UK.

Alvaro Barrington is an artist. In 2021, he had a solo exhibition at Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, France. Later this year, he will have solo shows at Emalin, London, UK (4 June–17 July), Nicola Vassell Gallery, New York, USA (September), and South London Gallery (1 October–19 November) and his work will be included in 'Mixing It Up: Painting Today', Hayward Gallery, London (9 September–12 December). From June to August, Barrington and Teresa Farrell will collaborate on 'Summer in the Rockaways at Emelda Market', a series of concerts, events and markets at their temporary studio in the Rockaways, USA. He lives in London and New York.



This page
Roof over my head \$ Wifi, 2021, acrylic, hessian, corrugated steel, cardboard, yarn, network cable, bin lid, 204 x 95 x 12 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris; photograph: Charles Duprat

Opposite page above
Alvaro Barrington x Socaholic, *Performance Float*, 2019, Notting Hill Carnival, London. Courtesy: the artist

Opposite page below
Alvaro Barrington, 2017, exhibition view, MoMA PS1, New York. Courtesy: the artist and MoMA PS1, New York; photograph: Pablo Enriquez

Open Season

- Gilda Williams

THE HARDEST PART of the first-ever London Gallery Weekend wasn't attempting to visit the 130 official galleries, plus dozens of unlisted events, in a city about twice the area of Berlin or New York. The real challenge was recognizing people you'd not seen in a year only from their eyes, peering above face masks. Resocializing after a year spent cocooned in one's tiny domestic bubble—relearning to chat with humans unable to finish your every sentence, for example—proved a newfound struggle. And is it safe to hug hello? Or must we perform that weird elbow rub, with its masonic secret-handshake feel? Each encounter offered a fresh social dilemma in this cautious post-hibernation return to the galleries, transformed overnight into a marathon. "It's like we're trying to see all the art we missed in a year in just three days," remarked artist Oswaldo Maciá (whose sound work *Something Going On Above My Head*, 1999, is currently on view at Tate Modern), whom I met at Michael Landy's twenty-year anniversary return to Break Down at

Thomas Dane. Back in 2001 the artist had, memorably, publicly destroyed his every possession. Today, after a year spent trapped at home with our tiresome piles of stuff, the prospect of grinding everything up and starting afresh suddenly looked rather appealing.

If I were a member of the Tate acquisitions committee, the work I'd have shoved beneath colleague's noses come Monday morning was Alvaro Barrington's *Street dreams are made of basketball*, 2021, at Emalin. It's a study in restrained power—the dead weight of the concrete sarcophagus-like base; the sturdy pull of the thick dropped chain down the center; the frenetic multidirectional stitching on the canvas; and the potential energy of the ball and plastic crate suspended above. I arrived too early to partake in Sunday's still-igniting gallery barbeque, but caught the artist cheerfully painting an external wall, and could congratulate him on an enviably productive lockdown.



Art Forum, 13 June 2021 [extract]

Three exhibitions to see in London this weekend

- Kabir Jhala

From Mohamed Bourouissa's drug dealer slang to Alvaro Barrington's homage to the late rapper DMX.

Alvaro Barrington: *Drug Culture: Vol ii. Trust your local drug dealer and 'My words will live forever-Fuck my Name'* Until 17 July, Emalin, 1 Holywell Lane, EC2A 3ET

The past 18 months have been a busy time for Alvaro Barrington, who has not one but two solo shows at Emalin. In the gallery's main space are painting and concrete-based works, including *Street dreams are made of basketball* (2021). On the frame of a canvas criss-crossed with coloured thread Barrington has placed a basketball inside a plastic crate. A taut metal chain extends like a spine from the crate to a hulking slab of concrete at the work's base, linking together the urban and the domestic spheres. An accompanying series of small, figurative acrylic-on-textile paintings based on

Tiktoks bear hurried daubs of bright colours to evoke the immediate and ephemeral nature of a one minute-long video. In one, a Black figure raises their hand: it is unclear whether this is part of a choreographed viral dance move or a symbol of political resistance.

In a second space a two minute walk away, Barrington is showing a series of imposing mixed-media works on whose concrete facades he has scrawled lyrics from the debut album of the late American rapper DMX. No stranger to borrowing from other artists, Barrington merges DMX's reflections on growing up poor in New York City with the childlike nature of mark making in wet cement to reflect on questions of ownership and industrialisation during the 1990s—a time of significant gentrification within the city. Embedded inside these dense, rough concrete frames are smaller acrylic paintings that invite a second, more intimate viewing experience.



The Art Newspaper, 18 June 2021 [extract]

The artist and his current haircut

■ Painter ALVARO BARRINGTON, 37, recently relocated from New York City to London, a move partly inspired by the US response to the Covid-19 outbreak and the increasingly

ALVARO tyrannical nature of the country's leadership. But ALVARO also just needed some time and space for himself. ■ The move

coincided with his chopping off the towering bundle of dreadlocks that had become something of a signature look for him, but also a burden. Now just one remains. ■ He's been painting all through the pandemic; he calls his works paintings even if they involve wood, yarn, found objects and often no paint whatsoever. They can be gigantic, or very small. They're a tribute to everyone and everything that has ever shaped him.

■ Unusually, he prefers to work with multiple gallerists per city, and has four in London alone. In all areas of his life, ALVARO insists on creative freedom and the right not to be defined or limited by others; see also the tattoo on the palm of his left hand.

Interview:
LOU STOPPARD

Portraits:
KUBA RYNIOWICZ

BARRINGTON

LOU: ALVARO! Your hair looks so different from the way it was the last time I saw you. Back then you had long, large dreads. Why did you cut them off? And why did you keep one?

ALVARO: I always wanted to keep one, because to me they are something of a symbol of letting your hair go on its natural journey. But I cut them off recently when they became too...when they became like an algorithm for me.

L: You felt they became too much of your identity?

A: Yes. So pre-Covid, I walked into a party and this girl came up to me and she was saying positive stuff, but in this reductive kind of way: "I know you, I think this, this, this." And some of it was true. That's the thing. It was about my vibe, and she said she could tell I was an artist. I just thought, "Oh man, it's that time." I felt like I was falling into a trap of myself. And one of the things that happens when you get older, especially as a certain notoriety comes to you, is you get trapped in a narrative of yourself; you get trapped in the one story of what you tell yourself about yourself. It becomes a self-repeating loop: you end up creating your own prison, your own algorithm.

L: Have you ever changed your hair drastically before?

A: I remember meeting someone who became very important in my imagination. At the time, I was the flyest kid on my block; I was the flyest kid in my school. I would spend, like, three grand on a pair of sneakers – JORDANS from the factory in China; this is 1998, 1999. I'm spending all this time figuring out how to get these sneakers so I can stunt on people. And this person said to me, "How do you know you're free if you walk into a room and everybody there has the same clothes on as you?" And I would walk into a room and I would have the most expensive version of everybody's clothes, but I still had the same clothes. That was really the pre-algorithm of the algorithms. And when that was posed to me, I realised I'd been set up; my imagination had been set up.

L: So what did you do?

A: One of the ways to break out of that was to start growing my hair, because at the time the best thing that you could have was waves. If your waves were good, the whole look was on point. There were two hairstyles you could have. You could either have waves or have braids. This was way before dreadlocks were a fashion statement. I remember wanting to break away from my mental slavery – from what the algorithms had fashioned for me – and growing my hair out like that became a way to shock people. It was a way to shock myself, even: I couldn't brush my hair, I couldn't put my durag on. It was about embracing Rasta culture, which was essentially about embracing who you were, naturally, and every step of what you were going through. It's also about fully

► CHOP





ALVARO was born in Caracas, Venezuela, raised in Grenada, the Caribbean, and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. For now, he lives in London. Photographic assistance by James Allen.

embracing who the people in front of you are. That's why I have "LISTEN FREELY" tattooed on my hand.

L: How do you get the right balance between constantly pushing against an idea of yourself and accepting yourself?

A: I thought about this the other day. I think my adult self is a self that lives without contradictions. As I'm getting older, and as I'm maturing, I can't be, "Oh, I want to be a better partner to whichever female I'm kicking it with," while also having certain, sort of misogynistic, attitudes. I think adulthood, for me, looks like losing that. It's like JAY-Z's '4:44' – your actions and your attitude have to match. You can fall into a narrative of your identity that holds on to all of the bad parts; people expect me to wild out, or people expect me to be the drug dealer or the carefree artist. That can be a space where you don't get to grow. I think part of being a free person is growing and maturing and listening. And this is the thing about artists, and the value of artists: artists allow us to grow. Watching BUJU BANTON, LIL' KIM, those artists have helped me understand the world in a more complicated and nuanced way. If you get to be a great artist, you always speak for your generation, and you create an imagination that people get to rock with. Artists get to do that. Their role is to feel that their reality is so powerful that they are not going to let any criticism tell them that they are not real. They are going to find a way to beat it into you until you finally see it.

L: Your work often seems to be very much about things that are real – tangible, tactile, even. Partly that's due to your use of yarns, especially, and fabrics; things that feel close to the body.

A: It's all a love letter, in part to growing up in the Caribbean with my grandma and my aunts. I think art exists in every culture – in a small village somewhere, in a large city – and certain things are going to be available to you in those places. In New York, it's easy to get a paint tube. If you're in a small cotton-picking community, yarns are going to be more accessible. And at some point, your curiosity about the ability to make something is going to come out, because that's just who human beings are. My aunts didn't grow up with paintings, but they knew yarns and sewing. The work that they made was so much more radically inventive than 99% of the painters that I see today, who are just making bad versions of a PETER DOIG or a LUC TUYMANS. The genius of what my aunts created doesn't get to live in the history books, because only white men get to be geniuses.

L: I always think of you as such a New Yorker. How do you feel about having moved to London?

A: I also think of myself as a New Yorker; all of my works are about that, in a way. But in London, I have more time and space. In New York I think I would feel incredibly frustrated. I don't know how

much I would be making. I think the anger would probably be getting to me. Because it's such a shit show. Being here, being myself – all my best friends are around me [he gestures around the studio to his paintings]. It has let me check in with the work. I think if I was in New York, I would feel super responsible: you have to be present for people, you can't lock yourself in. I think New York City is a great place, but it's got weighed down by a few things. One of them is the history, whether you're talking about in the art world or in music. We are so in our heads that sometimes we don't notice things beyond the city; we don't notice that the world is changing.

L: Talking about being weighed down by history, you have an interesting relationship with art history, which is what the show 'Artists I Steal From' was about. Do you ever feel weighed down, or categorised, by who people compare you to?

A: What I loved about the rap I grew up on is that it was really all about how many references you could throw into a song, but it still was your song. So, everybody was sampling 50 different people, and then mixing it up. It was never really about feeling the weight of history; it was more like, "Oh, I could take this and that. I'm going to chop this up. I'm going to screw that up a little bit." History, for me, was always a friend.

"I think there are certain things that are bigger than me."

L: You've said before that the first painting you made that you thought was really good, a painting where you weren't just copying, was the last painting you made as an undergrad: a close-up of a guy with a really hairy arm. Tell me about that painting.

A: It was a police officer. It's an image from 'The New York Times', from an article about what happens when you put police officers in school. I decided just to edit it down to his arm.

L: That sounds prescient of some of the conversations happening at the moment.

A: Well, I'm always in the same loop. I don't really let my subject matter change. At the time I painted it, I used to do a lot of community organising, and there was a realisation I had at some point that it was not normal that in the neighbourhood where I lived all my friends were either in jail or had got murdered. But it was so normalised. It took me until I was, like, 24 before I noticed the difference between me and my friends who were privileged, even though it had been staring me in the face. It hadn't dawned on me that they were living a different reality. Because at that moment, I only really hung out with people who loved hip hop and who loved Black culture. We were a different class and a different race, but we connected to the same culture. I think that erased, to me, the fact that they were going home to very

different realities. Then, somewhere in my mid twenties, I looked at my best friend, who was a white kid, and it dawned on me that his truth was so different from my truth.

L: I think we are seeing that a lot at the moment, in the wake of the murder of GEORGE FLOYD and the Black Lives Matter protests – the separation between people who believe in something in the abstract, or who support a cause in principle, and people who actually live it, each day.

A: I think there has been increased consciousness around what Black Lives Matter actually meant, during Covid. I certainly thought about it, watching homie fight for his last breath. And there was a moment that really, really fucked me up: the moment when he screams out "Mama." This was a grown man – this man knows he's being murdered. And that shit really fucked me. It really hit me, and it made me think about his truth, the truth of my family and friends, which then tapped into my own realisation of racial differences and class differences. And when I started making paintings, I was thinking about that. At the high school I went to, some parents were friends with the mayor, and he said that he wouldn't put police in the school because it would freak the kids out, so I was protected in that way, but my friends at other schools weren't. My nephew was going to school across the street, and he had to go through a metal detector. His school was in the basement – there were four schools in one building. And the top school actually has a painting of mine, but if he went up to see my painting, it would be trespassing and he would be arrested.

L: It's become very fashionable to talk about art as being urgent or necessary or relevant. These words are often applied to work by people of colour or queer people or women, and that sections it off from art as something aesthetic. It's meant to be supportive, but do you ever find that people see your work in that way and that it can almost be a way of pigeonholing?

A: Sometimes you have to do something with urgency, because you're in a moment and you have to address it. But sometimes you just make great songs. 'Keep Your Head Up' is a great song, 'What's Going On' is a great song. Ain't about it being urgent; it's just a great song. You score it against any song in the world and it's still just going to be a great song. I think there's a lot of false narratives with certain things. It's a false narrative to say that abstract expressionism wasn't about an urgency, in a sort of deeply existential way. Two of my professors who really helped me find a way into painting, KATY SIEGEL and CARRIE MOYER, both Jewish women, both of them pointed out to me that abstract expressionism happened in 1946, 1947, and World War II ended in 1945, and 90% of the people involved in abstract expressionism were Jewish: POLLOCK was the face of it, but his wife, LEE KRASNER, was Jewish; his best friend PHILIP GUSTON was Jewish; ROTHKO

was Jewish; HELEN FRANKENTHALER was Jewish. The people who wrote about it, CLEMENT GREENBERG, HAROLD ROSENBERG, were Jewish. These are people writing in 1947, after six million Jews had died. Do you think they weren't thinking about that? A lot of them died of alcoholism and deep depression and anxiety. Of course there was an urgency in their aesthetic response.

L: So, you don't feel that exhausted by, or cynical about, the rush for "Black voices" – whatever that means?

A: I think I was always aware of that. I always wanted to be a person who people granted a certain flexibility to, in terms of their imagination around me. I think there are certain things that are bigger than me. BASQUIAT was so much bigger than me, New York was so much bigger than me. I feel, like, even though I fully embrace my Blackness, maybe it doesn't hold in the way that I have seen other friends become a token of Blackness, in a quota situation. I've really just wanted to be an artist. And I've made sure that I have done that, carefully. And I've made sure that I've presented myself, carefully. I'm an artist, I'm Black, I'm a Black artist, but that Blackness can't be tokenised. I can make paintings about my grandma's friends, I can make a painting about a dude peeing in the fields, or the sunset, or me getting fresh, or colours next to each other, but I've never allowed my Blackness to feel very specific. I'm hoping that it becomes about an all-encompassing humanity and that it's very individualised. I think a lot of people unfortunately have been pigeonholed into presenting their Blackness in a tokenised way, as the only thing that they can offer to the white imagination. Because it's enough to get them through the door a little bit, it's enough to feed their family, to take care of bills, so they don't necessarily get to escape that – and I watch a lot of great artists fall into that trap. But I also watch many great artists getting to be themselves, whether you're talking PRINCE or TUPAC. PAC could be angry one moment, care about his mum, fuck bitches – all of it. It just felt like when you got PAC, you got PAC. But I think there's a lot of artists, where I'm, like, "You only got one idea of yourself."

L: It's interesting that you mention BASQUIAT, because there is a quote that relates to what you said about the flexibility of imagination, and about the idea of how broad, or how constructed, we allow our identity to be. It's from RENE RICARD, from a piece he wrote on BASQUIAT: "One must become the iconic representation of oneself in this town." It makes me think about what you say about the palatability of Blackness to white people.

A: Blackness is so deep and so diverse. As is being a New Yorker. But I feel like our minds are trained to try and identify things. It's how we survive: that's a snake, there's a stripe, it's poisonous. We are trained to be specific, and I think

that, currently, the algorithms – which are among the most oppressive forces in the world – are set up for that, set up to limit our imagination of people's humanity. People have always fought to be seen, and I'm really interested in that as a pursuit. It's part of the reason I chose to work with multiple galleries per city, because I needed to do something where I'd get to exercise as much as my identity as I can, where I don't have to fall in line.

L: You've mentioned algorithms a few times, but you see across culture and media and politics that it's not a moment that is particularly open to complexity or nuance or the notion of multiple versions of anything. Everything is binary, fixed.

A: I feel, in a way, that's the way it's always been. Power has always looked to erase and has never looked to find a way to see how differences can actually add up. I think our moment is unique in that you have the digital age, you have MARK ZUCKERBERG defining the beauty standard. Have you listened to that dude for ten minutes?

L: Instagram face. That one version of beauty: the lips, the high cheeks, the wide eyes.

A: It's complicated, because I've dated a lot of white women. In fact, one of

was a combination of listening to music and remembering when I had dreads – the best part about having bomba locs is they grow in different textures and different widths, and there's a way that you move your head when you're dancing. And with certain types of music – say BUJU – it's almost like you train yourself: there is all this muscle memory that lets you know how your head is going to move. Listen.

(We pause to listen to BUJU BANTON, 'Wanna Be Loved'.)

L: The lyrics are poignant: "I want to be loved/Not for who you think I am/Nor what you want me to be."

A: Yes! BUJU taught me things! He helped me to grow.

L: When you talked about dancing, you talked about how it's almost instinctive. How do you bring together things in your work that spark an instinctive reaction with things that demand reflection and nuance?

A: I was listening to an interview with MICHAEL JACKSON once, and he was talking about making songs, and he said, "I got this drum from these people in Africa, because once that drum hits, you got to go *uhhh*. And then I take this instrument from over here, because once this

my favourite paintings came about because my ex was coming out of the bed, and she looked and she said, "Damn, you've got a beautiful dick." And I could tell it was just about what had happened, and it was about being able to look at the beauty of each person, and that includes having this texture hair, or this colour skin, and finding the beauty in that, without the fetishisation of it. And that's what the painting was about – it was about the intimacy. White supremacy – and patriarchy – refuses to accept that everything can be valuable. And we have to get to the space where we can see that it is valuable and not have this concept of a beauty that is attached, not to the person, but to external factors that have defined your relationship to that person without that person even knowing.

L: And right now you are making some paintings about hair? Tell me about those.

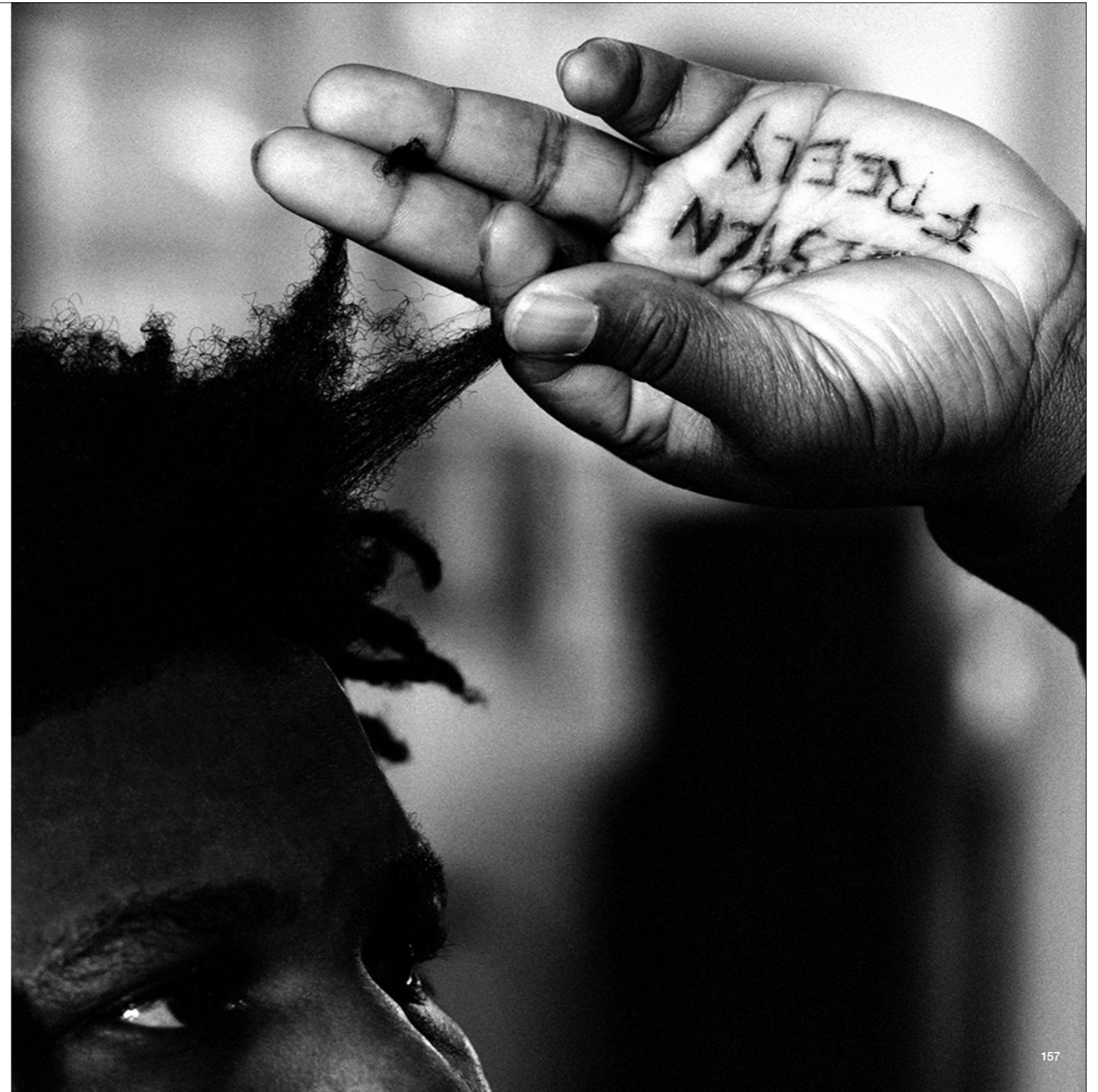
A: I've been doing these drawings of Rastas dancing. And we are doing a poster, a few different ones actually, to raise money for Notting Hill Carnival. It usually has to ask for sponsorship in order to be put on, and brands get so much cultural capital out of it, and will make so much more money out of it, so as an artist who is highly rewarded in this economic system, I felt it was important for me to pay a cultural tax to the culture that I've gained so much from. I like how hair moves. It's all about movement. Making the posters

one hits, you've got to go, *ohhh*." And I was thinking about it and realising I did make those sounds when I listened to his music. His brilliance was his ability to understand that my body was going to go *uhhh* and then *ohhh*. Good art is based on different things meeting. One is the science of our bodies: how we respond to colours, our senses, our DNA as human beings. And then there is the legacy of culture, which is another DNA that is embedded within us. That is based on the traditions of the past, how you grew up. It becomes engrained in you; you can't separate it at some point. What the drum does to Black people: it's just centuries of it being beaten into us, and now we feel it. Artists are always playing between both things – they make all of it into tools for what they are going to do and what they are going to create. And they are aware that they are going to do it.

L: Does that mean making art is about control?

A: I don't think it's about wanting to control. I think it's about wanting to be seen. This thing that I've created, you're going to see it. You're going to really see it. And how you react after that is up to you, but in the moment, I have a feeling that you're going to feel. ■

"I can make a painting about a dude peeing in the fields, or the sunset, or me getting fresh."





Alvaro + June

CURATED BY JOSH

June Ambrose: Hey, how are you?

Alvaro Barrington: I'm OK. You know I saw you once at a Loewe opening in Soho, but we didn't meet.

June: Yes, everybody was abuzz about you.

Alvaro: When you walked in there was like an energy wave [June laughs]. It was just like, in the air. I remember I was with my friend who works at Supreme and I hadn't really followed fashion for a long time and was like, "Yo, who's that?" and she was like "Yeah that's June." I was like "June?" I know what you do, but what do you call yourself, if you call yourself anything?

June: Well aside from the obvious title of costume designer, I like to consider myself a cultural disruptor, you know? And the reason I use that term is because when I started 27 years ago, that's exactly what I was doing. I was disrupting culture and changing the narrative. I was tone-deaf to the perception of what Black music and hip hop culture was - I saw it in a different way. My aspirational vision for that time and that culture was very different to the norm. I disrupted it with the aspirations of kings and queens and luxury and story-telling through costume and character development in a way where you feel like you're watching a coming-of-age film. If you look at how that culture has changed and shifted, and how we have disrupted fashion and music - we're the number one genre in the world, they didn't see us coming, right?

Alvaro: You're someone who's done it for quite some time. Like you mentioned you're a disruptor, whether it was putting on a shiny suit or that moment where Missy [Elliott] really came out. . . It feels like there were two kinds of cultural disruption happening: within hip hop culture, and maybe what a video or the aesthetic of a video was supposed to look like, and then the larger cultural disruption, where you had brands not necessarily wanting to associate with hip hop and sort of distancing themselves. You're on the edge of both of them. One of the things that's interesting is this idea of getting deeper within yourself. Especially with *Black Is King* [Ambrose styled Beyoncé's 2020 visual album], do you think you're getting closer to a fuller expression of yourself? Whether it's digging into carnival culture or your mum's atelier... it feels like you've expanded the larger reach of all those histories.

June: The jumbie, the painting... *everything*, yeah. It's interesting because they refer to people of colour in America as African-Americans but I'm West Indian so I never look at myself as African-American. I'd prefer people called me Black. I think that's a more beautiful term. I remember back in the 70s and 80s people teasing me for being from the Islands and my mother having an accent or whatever. This is a culture I grew up around, understanding what all of the images meant and how important it was for us to be shiny and over the top and colourful and not be conformative. It's kind of like the culture was tribal in a sense. We figured our own tribes in America for music, the cliques - when you reflect back and look at it, it was like well, what was your tribe going to do to make it different? What were you guys going to do to change the way things were? And that's

kind of bible in tribal law theory, you move together, take care of each other and you try to make a difference, you try to survive. I think we have to constantly remind each other this is what we were brought here to do. And it's not to say that you don't grow outside of your culture, the goal is to help other cultures to have an understanding of it so that it can become the norm or not something that's so niche, or so secular. People would always say, "Oh I can tell that's June Ambrose's work" because I always kept that Bronx girl, that West Indian girl, that urban *something*, even if I was in a high-fashion place it was still present and I wasn't ashamed of that. I don't know if you feel that way too, there's always something about you, no matter where you've gone in the world or who you're speaking to, it's still you. They did it in music, too. Country music, Black music, pop music, everything was kind of put into these boxes and then hip hop translated through all those genres and you started to see all those collaborations. So we use that same conflict of storytelling through fashion and knocking on the doors of these fashion houses, having that same conversation and then it became more acceptable and global, so sometimes you have to go through the back door instead of knocking on the front. It's still provoking a conversation. I always want to keep a conversation of provocativeness going, so that we create these images and disrupt. We can talk about it in a way that affects change. I think Black music has done that for so many other genres, you're seeing these collaborations of country and hip hop. I mean it's so great because you realise they're finally listening to each other's stories, you know?

Alvaro: It makes me think about my folks emigrating from Grenada to Brooklyn in like 1990 and 91. Where we were in Flatbush it almost felt like you had to be West Indian.

June: But that's when it was cool. So we really and truly overcame some things. I grew up around Hispanics but then we'd moved to where there were more West Indians and then I just felt like, this isn't any fun. I wanted to move where there was less of me because I could help us be seen in another way. So I moved to Midtown Manhattan by the United Nations and the building I was living in, it's like you know, I only saw it because there was no other brown girl there. There was one African man who sold textiles who was always in and out but when I would go to the holiday parties I was the only Black face that wasn't working in the building. They would see me walk through and I was obviously donned in something fabulous and I thought that was really important, that I could confidently saunter around effortlessly. I always feel that with the conversations we're having now, it's not OK to just have them just amongst your own colour, we have to have to have them with other people of other races, they're the ones who need to hear the stories and the conversations and develop a sense of herd immunity. You know, we're a small minority but if they can see it and learn it. We've become comfortable being amongst them, so they just need to be comfortable, they need to see it because we're beautiful people, they just don't get access to it like they

should. So we just have to assert ourselves whether they like it or not.

Alvaro: I think that's so important. When I travelled, actually when I left New York, I think there were two moments that struck me as being very important. One was the effect of Obama's election on how I was then able to travel through Latin America. I remember I'd travelled pre-Obama and like literally, the cops being called on me because they thought, "What's this Black kid doing walking through this very rich neighbourhood in some Latin American country?" And then once Obama became President I'd walk in the street and they'd be like, "Obama! Obama! Obama!"

June: I love that you said that because some people say, "Well, what did Obama really do for people of colour?" I'm like, "He existed, he was in a place of power that no-one ever could imagine seeing themselves." So to me, that was, if nothing else, enough, because it gave me that experience. I recognise I have a responsibility not just to myself - to my family, to the culture, to the people that I come into contact with - but also for those who need someone to speak on their behalf if they don't have a voice. And it may not be the revolutionary way, it might not be the way that activists do it. I may take the longer road, but at the end of the day if I look back and I say, "Well, this was important because look what it did, fifteen and twenty years later and I can sleep at night." That's what this is about.

Alvaro: I was thinking about the diversity of Blackness and in some ways when you mention activism I think you need like a Stokely Carmichael but you also need a John Lewis, the guy who's not going to be like, "Oh yeah, let's just hug it out." I think you need all of it.

June: I listen to some of them speaking and sometimes I think, "Oh my god, I wish there was a part of me that could do that," but it's just not who I am, you know what I mean? I have soft gloves where they may have hard gloves, they might say, "*Ahhhh*" and I might say, "Let me hold you," like I know you are the way you are because you're hurt, and hurt people hurt people, let me hug you.

Alvaro: You brought up the idea of 'tribe' earlier. When you say that, it makes me think about community and what you're able to do in your art form, which is two-fold: be able to see people and their possibility, but also see the history within the possibility. You're also very much a student of history and you can see that within how you expanded from the 90s - both your ability to think about performance and the body, but also how we exist. I'm really fascinated by your relationship with Missy and performance, but also with Mary J. Blige. Mary came out and everybody just sort of came under her, like literally every girl in my neighbourhood wanted to be the next Mary, how they carried themselves.

June: Well I can't take responsibility for early Mary. I was part of her evolution when she started to become more of a woman and wanted to wear gowns and find a sophisticated part of herself. Whereas Missy, I worked from the inception up until now, so that relationship is really different. So I wouldn't say I could take responsibility for the inception of Mary, but we've had

moments. She'd look at me sometimes and be like, "Girl, where are you from? With these ideas you're so over the top," you know? I'm like, "I'm from the Bronx!" [laughs] and she's like, "I don't know any Bronx girls like you." At the core of it all, it comes from a place of love, of possibility. You see past the idea. That's one of the biggest compliments anyone could ever give me, to say that they see me in that way, because so much of what we do is invisible, our muses are the ones who take ownership of that and they deliver. We kind of fall into the backdrop of it. And that's OK, that's the magic of it, right? But the fact that you can see that is probably one of the biggest compliments.

Alvaro: In a lot of your interviews - especially in the 90s - you talk about this sort of fear you have when it's like, "Is this going to work?" And I wonder where that exists now for you in terms of these people, the clients you work with, whether it's from the fashion designers to the artists? There's a sort of knowingness that happens but then is there also a confidence in your growth, or is it still like breaking away from something that you don't feel comfortable with now? Are you like, "I got to go left?"

June: Well I don't put that kind of pressure on myself, to feel like the antidote is to not do what everyone else is doing. Because then that means I'm paying way too much attention to the wrong things. First of all, I get butterflies every project I do, whether I'm creative directing, designing, working with an artist to help develop a look or a photographer, whatever it is, I still get nervous, I still lose sleep. I'm developing something right now for consumers and when you talk about consumer goods it's different to working in music. In music you're creating this image that kind of sells the story. When you're working in consumer goods the consumer needs to trust that you are leading them down the right road. So whatever the scenario is, I think I pay less attention to feeling the pressure of, 'I have to go against it'. You don't always have to go against the current for it to be good, sometimes other people have done the work for you to make the storytelling possible and we have to recognise that. I don't want to ever be as arrogant to think that I'm reinventing the wheel. We stand on the shoulders of people who come before, amazing stuff that really helps us to draw our own interpretation of certain things. I heard you in one of your interviews say that you were so inspired by a particular artist and you can see it. And that's OK too, to pay homage and be inspired. So I think for me, it's more about what feels at the core. What has experience taught me in knowing that this is going to work? And you take risks, you have to, because if you don't, then you don't become the leader, you're the follower. So even though you may be inspired by this, you're still drawing your own interpretation and evolving it, that's where you make it your own. You can't be afraid to do that.

Alvaro: Well from the outside it's definitely seems like you're always having an internal conversation...

June: [laughs] God, how do you know these things?! I'm like, "What would the other June say?" Yeah.

Alvaro: But it also seems like it's not really about running away from yourself. Everything within you is enough and the more you go in, the further it reaches out. You see that with some artists - some are always very successfully running away from themselves and I think there's no real formula to whether it's right or wrong, they get a sense of creativity in disrupting the thing that they did. I think Picasso was famous for that in terms of figuring something out and then he's like, "I got to break myself away from that thing that I know and go somewhere else." Whereas it feels like you get deeper into yourself which allows you to go out more, it lets you go into different zones more organically.

June: Get uncomfortable, yeah. And I'm inquisitive, I'm always curious. I think curiosity is very important for creatives and I never want to *not* be curious. In meeting people, in experiencing, in discovering things. Even this experience is a learning one, you know? It's an unknowingness, because I didn't know what this conversation would be, but I showed up. That's the inquisitiveness and the beauty in learning. I got to meet you and that's part of growth, that's part of evolving.

Alvaro: You mentioned something earlier that I thought was really interesting. I think of you as someone who's very attuned to your body and the movements of other people's bodies and how they carry themselves through space. But it also feels like you are sort of a dancer, in a way. I went to LaGuardia High School and there were all these dancers who were just like...

June: *Moving*, right?

Alvaro: Yeah.

June: Well I was a theatre major in schools and did dance as a minor but movement for me was more about a release of energy. After my mum passed, I started social media. I felt so much emotion trapped inside of me and the only thing I could do was kind of throw it out, get it out and move. And because her spirit had left her body, I'd taken on all of this extra energy and what was I going to do with it? Another artist said to me, "I look at you dancing and it feels so free, so liberated, and I can see what it means to you." That was so meaningful because she's a dancer too and could see the energy, the pain or the happiness or the joy, she could see all of that through the movement. I knew I was doing it but I didn't think anyone else would know why, and for those who were super tapped in, they saw it and that was really cool. I would meet people on the street and they would say, "Your dancing made me so happy," or I would meet women who'd say, "The fact that you changed clothes in front of a camera at your age was so liberating, watching you I felt it was so daring." For me it's just that ownership, unapologetically I do it because I can and there's beauty in it, you know?

Alvaro: That makes so much sense. I never really thought about it before, but this idea of movement as letting go, as an energy going outwards as opposed to coming inwards, and then I consider all of that possibility, what that energy looks like... That actually kind of really blows my mind.

June: I always tell people when they feel like, "Oh I

don't like photos being taken of me," it's because you're thinking about the camera, but you should be thinking about the feelings. Tapping into an emotion. Are you feeling girly or are you feeling like a little boy, devilish? Whatever that feeling let that expression emote. It always helps. Whoever I've told that to, they come back to me and say, "I feel better now when someone wants to take a photo of me, I feel like I don't have to necessarily be as present as I think they need me to be, but I can be thinking about something that makes me feel." And that is a beautiful expression too, it's such a good exercise for those who hate being photographed.

Alvaro: You're talking about it in relation to the internal self and it makes me think about how you must see people. Like, you're looking at people and seeing this energy going out, which probably ends up feeding your own practice as an artist because it's coming at you. So it's like a synaesthesia of movement in a way that manifests itself in all these other forms. You spoke about this era being about movement again, like mumble rap is about movement in a way, and I wondered, what does that look like in terms of you challenging your imagination for what needs to be out there in the world?

June: I think that a sense of simplicity has been calling. There's this pressure cooker right now, especially in that genre of music - where you've got to have the biggest, most expensive outfit, big and loud. I almost want to pull back a little bit now and simplify it and add your sauce on top of that so we can see it's OK that it's just a t-shirt and maybe a leather pair of jeans, or just a cardigan, you know? It's like when we see a suit with no shirt underneath, it's very simple, but then all of a sudden you see the man in a different way. So letting other things breathe and be seen. Not to say that we won't go back to being flamboyant, I just think that what this pandemic has afforded us is the reality of excess: we're using too much and we need everyone to pull back a little bit.

Alvaro: That makes a lot of sense. I think about art movements - like minimalism in the 60s and 70s that kind of came out of American excess with pop art and Andy Warhol and all this in-your-face work, the next movement was just like, scaling back, it became about clearing out. If you think about hip hop as being close to a pop-era, because hip hop now - as much as it's rock 'n' roll - it's also pop.

June: When it was initially secular and underground it was like, naughty, and then, as you say, popular.

Alvaro: Now people's parents know who Snoop Dogg is, you know? Snoop's a father, a grandfather. But I think that's a really interesting theory and it actually makes a lot of sense if I think about waves and pendulums swinging. I do think that we entered that space where things felt over the top. I mean, it maybe could even be tied to having an over-the-top President, and now it's like, we just need to scale it back, we need to like...

June: Calm down.

Alvaro: Calm down [both laugh]. I love that because I'm always thinking about what the future is and now maybe is that moment.



PAINTING THROUGH FEELINGS

with Alvaro Barrington

THE CARNIVAL-LOVING ARTIST DISCUSSES HIS WILDLY COLOURFUL WORK WITH FASHION DESIGNER GRACE WALES BONNER

Alvaro Barrington has received a fair share of attention since bringing his energetic multimedia works to MoMA PS1 in 2017. At 36, the Venezuelan-born American just received a solo exhibition at Sadie Coles Gallery, London, and earlier this year co-curated a group show at the city's Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac featuring artists who have influenced him, from Jean-Michel Basquiat to Louise Bourgeois. With more projects ahead, ranging from a Paris exhibition to another round of Notting Hill Carnival shenanigans in the summer (he designed a float at last year's edition), the artist, whose work fuses painting and textile, is nowhere near stopping.

Barrington turns to his formative experiences for inspiration. After leaving Venezuela as an infant, he moved to Grenada with his grandmother, where he spent the majority of his early years. These distant memories

of a "romanticised Caribbean", as Barrington describes it, still shape his work today, filled with recurring vegetation motifs such as bright hibiscus flowers – the national flower of Jamaica. It was after moving to Brooklyn's Flatbush neighbourhood (aka "Little Caribbean") at the age of eight that the artist was exposed to a mixture of urban influences, from diasporic cultures to hip-hop and streetwear – all of which would contribute to shaping his practice. Under the recommendation of teachers, the young Barrington was sent to LaGuardia High School of Music & Art, where his growing grasp of art would soon merge with his early inspirations.

Now based in London, where he moved to study at the Slade School of Art in 2015, Barrington has developed a complex practice of intimate compositions where bright palettes and phallic symbols converse with thick yarns in a flamboyant celebration of collective memories.

"Carnival was probably the most influential artistic experience for me."



Action painter: Barrington in the studio

come out of how Europeans and white western culture preserved our identities and story, and then we go on and try and superimpose that on other cultures. A lot of my friends come from university and start asking the people around their community to start painting, and I'm like: "You're totally missing the fucking point. You grew up in hip-hop and Carnival, why the hell are you asking them to paint?"

GWB Can you describe the process of doing your float for Notting Hill Carnival?

AB I always knew I needed to. Being an artist, I felt as though I needed to be honest with who I was when I was 10 years old and be honest with the people I was around. That was the time when I was picked as an affirmative action kid. Somebody said, "You have the potential to be smart" and they picked me out from the school that I was in, which was overcrowded, failing.

They put me in a school where everybody had Apple laptops and a smaller class size and all of this stuff. So I always looked at that moment as, if I'm going to be an artist, I have to be an artist that responds to the 10-year-old me, not an artist that responds to being simply a person who was in a space of privilege for a lot of the time. The 10-year-old me loved going to Carnival, soca parties, Caribbean parties. I was getting into hip-hop and my family members who stayed in my neighbourhood are extensions of that. So I thought I'm going to make art, but I need to make art that connects to them.

GWB Why did you decide to stay in London?

AB While I was at grad school, I was planning to go back [to New York]. I thought, "OK, I'm going to go back to Brooklyn, do my thing with my friends, going to work on Carnival and work on some stuff that's happening in Carnival back in New York". I went back to New York and I was trying to figure out

how to do Carnival there, but there's such a pushback from the political system that I didn't really know how to navigate around it.

Here, because of the connections with Sadie Coles and a bunch of other people, things unfolded a lot easier. So I just thought I'd try to figure it out here. And also because of Grenfell and the rap culture here and the lack of support for poor folks [in the US]. In New York there's a huge antagonism against poor people. They kind of want to push poor black people from the imagination of New York and the physical space of being there. It felt easier to work through it here.

GWB Do you think you would be an artist today if you hadn't had that opportunity when you were 10 years old?



Grace Wales Bonner: What's unique to you about Caribbean identity?

Alvaro Barrington: I think Carnival, the way we dance, the energy that's there, how West Indians move. I remember one of my brothers, he's a homie. He'd just come up from Trinidad, but just how he spoke and how he moved... When he points two fingers and he's talking to you, it feels like a dance more than just an action, I guess.

I left Grenada when I was eight, and then I moved to a neighbourhood in Flatbush that was like a Little Caribbean. So these are all things that have the essence, but I think Carnival was probably the most influential artistic experience for me.

GWB Why is Carnival so important to you?

AB It's one of those things a lot of folks that I know in the black Caribbean community celebrate. If you're a painter, you may love going to Paris to go to the Pompidou or going to Venice. Us Caribbean folks, we love going to Carnival, and it's something that has become more global and bigger and bigger. Jamaica just started their carnival, LA has their carnival, Ibiza has their carnival. It's a thing that is maybe for Caribbean folks, their equivalent of the Tate, you know what I mean? People put energy towards costumes and a steel band.

As black people who are educated in certain types of academia, we inherit a lot of value systems that

AB Not in the way I am now, but I was definitely the kid in my neighbourhood who would always make clothes, draw, customise, so I think I would have been an artist in my neighbourhood and I would have been making a very particular type of art, whose history is kind of embedded in maybe streetwear? Whatever that may mean I'm not really sure, but it would be within that history. It wouldn't be within a canon that I'm now exploring as an artist. It would have been more specific.

GWB Would you say you see yourself as a painter or is it broader than that?

AB I think I'm a painter. I think I use paint as a way to work through things that I'm feeling, because it's the easiest medium for me to work through. I'm kind of dyslexic, so if I try to write and read, it's very hard for me to do. It's weird, I'll read something and then... That's why I try not to respond to people's text messages, because I'll read it, then a day later and I'll be like, "Is that what the fuck they even said?" I was replying to something completely different! I have to be in a certain headspace to read, and then I'm like, "Oh, you totally didn't say that shit."

GWB I want to create something that's beautiful but also has a meaning. Whether people engage with that meaning or not, I think beauty needs to seduce them in the same way that Kerry James Marshall understands the history and formality of painting. He's creating in a way that's very seductive but it also has a bigger purpose. He has the intention for it to be part of museum collections and black kids are going to see themselves represented at that scale. I'm really interested in beauty as a means to transform mainstream representation.

AB You can see that, man. I love that phrase, "black people who love black people", you know? It's like, we talked about Simone



Leigh, and what I love about Simone is that she's a black person who loves black people. You just feel it in her being. You talk to her for two seconds and you go: "Damn, that woman loves black people." And I think there are some politicians especially, they don't love black people. They love a particular type of black people. They love black people who are upper-middle-class, who have a certain education and speak a certain type of way, who move a certain type of way. They don't love black people, because if they did, they would love the poor people. They would love the black people who are in the streets or in the club, wherever. I feel like there's something within your work where there's love, but there's love of people's energy. The energy can be anybody's energy – like the Black Panther dude, or the guy you've just seen at the airport. There's no hierarchy.

GWB In my own work, I was very interested in '70s portraiture, Malik Sidibé, Seydou Kaita and blaxploitation films. This idea of people turning the camera on themselves and taking charge of representation. I feel like that was the starting point for me, the black gaze and looking at your people, representing them.

AB I feel like what's great about that series of films is that you're thinking through audience members also being black – the people seeing them are also black. There was this sense of black inclusion and moments centring blackness. When I'm doing a show at a gallery, it's very hard for me to be like, "Oh, I'm centring blackness in this gallery space", when 90 per cent of the people who visit galleries are white. How am I doing that? It's physically not possible. It's me being delusional.

Black people have a different experience that brings them to a different type of space. If you go to a hip-hop club in Brownsville, or a hip-hop club in East New York, that's a different type of blackness. You can't say you're centring blackness and then you put it in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, where black people can't even get in the door without some security following them.

I love galleries and I love looking at art. I think there's a quietness that exists in those spaces. It's one of my favourite places to be. I could be there for eight hours without feeling uncomfortable, but I do understand there's a culture for black people where, to go to Mayfair galleries may be uncomfortable for them. There's all these guarded gates that say, "You're not supposed to be here." In Carnival, there's a lot of openness to black folks. You can be here, you can party, you can be some type of way.



"I love galleries but I understand that going to Mayfair galleries may be uncomfortable for black people"

Art

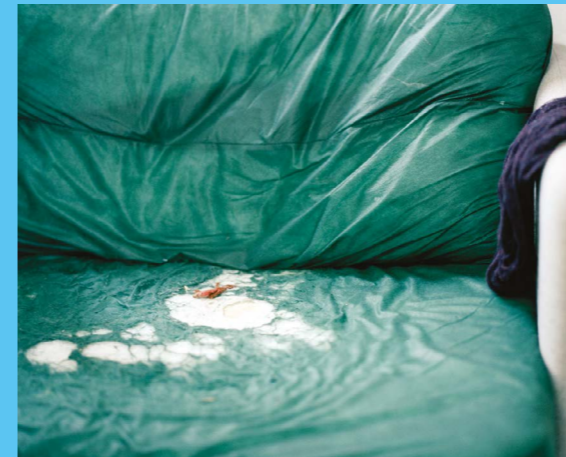
GWB I'm very interested in how music informs your practice and how you said you were thinking about yourself at 10 years old, filtering things through that kind of language. That feels very pure and beautiful. I guess those memories are quite fragmented – they're romanticised.

AB Growing up in Brooklyn, in the heart of hip-hop at a moment when it was being formed, I saw what happened when [rapper] Fabolous was wearing throwback jerseys – almost immediately within my neighbourhood, people started dressing a certain way, acting a certain way. I saw it shift from the early Tribe

Called Quest to a moment where Biggie was taking over and people moving, acting, their attitudes changed. My attitude changed. When Lil' Kim came out, my attitude changed. You could feel the immediate consequence of these things.

When Kanye came out, I immediately saw the consequence of Kanye. I saw kids who were getting beat up for wearing some type of clothes, then when Kanye came out people were just like: "Oh, you're doing that Kanye/Pharrell thing." And they got a pass. There was something about music that felt much more physically real to me than anything

“Painting made me have that moment, like when people go to church and when they see Michelangelo”



else that was happening in terms of cultural production.

I measure painting by that standard because painting made me have that moment like when people go to church and they see Michelangelo, and they feel better about themselves. They feel like God is looking out for them and this spirituality – same thing with gospel songs. Whatever fuckshit happened the day before or right out the church door, they felt good, they felt OK, they felt happy. I feel like there was something in me that brought those things, so I wondered if painting can have that kind of feeling. It's a thing that I love to do.



Travel

EATING & DRINKING FROM TOKYO TO CHICAGO

with Easy Otabor

THE CHICAGO-BORN OWNER OF INFINITE ARCHIVES AND SAINT ALFRED BOUTIQUE TAKES US FROM MORNING PANCAKES TO LATE-NIGHT GYROS

- 9am Downtown LA at Wild Living Foods with my friends David, GM of Cactus Jack, and Bizzu, A&R at Columbia Records, drinking a Summertime juice.
- 11am If I'm in Chicago, short stack pancakes, scrambled eggs, turkey bacon and a glass of orange juice with my friend Winta at the Original Pancake House.
- 1pm Downtown LA at Woodspoon with my mentor Don C of Just Don and RSVP Gallery eating lamb chops, clean kale, greens and rice.
- 3pm Hong Kong at La Rambla with my brother from another, Kpee, the co-owner of Clot and Juice among other things. Trying out some new dishes and the calamares fritos and tomahawk rubia gallega (grass and maize-fed, 21-days dry-aged beef).
- 4pm In Istanbul's Soho House for some Turkish tea with my G, Zohaer.
- 5pm When I'm in Houston, Texas, I head to Shipley Do-nuts with Chase B (one of the greatest DJs in the world) for a classic glazed doughnut.
- 6pm Chicago, at Eleven Eleven for drinks with my Saint Alfred crew (a great store to visit while in Chicago – it's been open 15-plus years). I get the Feathered Seat cognac, and am taken care of by the owner, Ahmed.
- 8pm Paris, France. I eat at the Senegalese restaurant, Waly-Faly, in the 11th. I always get the quarter chicken with white rice, no question.
- 9pm In Chicago, I go to Sunda for dessert with my work sister Alicia Gutierrez and good friend Torey Gaines, compliments of Mike, the head chef and co-owner. Without doubt get "The Ridiculousness" – it never disappoints. Vanilla ice cream core with carrot, caramel and pecans.
- 10pm Shibuya, Tokyo. Drinks at Grandfather's with my friend Avi Gold.
- 12am Seoul, Korea at Kompakt Record Bar with my fam and worldwide traveller KB Lee. I always hit him up whenever I'm in South Korea. He has all the keys!
- 2am Hazel Crest, Illinois. Late night, I go to Ariston for the best Greek food. It's the only gyros I eat.

'How Rising Art Star Alvaro Barrington Charmed London's Top Galleries Into Breaking Their Own Rules for the Chance to Work With Him'

– Kate Brown

The prolific artist is crafting his career with so much charisma, all six of his galleries have fallen into step.

It's unusual to hear about an emerging artist who has 10 years' worth of work already mapped out in his mind. It's even more unusual to hear that that artist is rolling out his magnum opus at top galleries—just two and a half years out of art school. But 36-year-old Alvaro Barrington doesn't let tradition dictate his career. In fact, he's made it a point to break the rules.

Most surprisingly, Barrington insists on having collaborative representation with six different galleries, four of which are in London. He also combines his erudite art shows with spirited happenings outside the white cube, like backlot concerts, a pop-up jerk chicken stand, and a Caribbean carnival float.

Since he graduated from London's renowned Slade School of Art in 2017, Barrington has rocketed from relative obscurity to the center of the city's art scene, where he's best known for his muscular canvases consisting of heavy paint on burlap. Though his works have not yet hit the open waters of the secondary market, his prices have been steadily rising and his schedule, growing increasingly packed. Prices now reach up to \$60,000 and all the works at a recent exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ—who represents the artist alongside Blum & Poe, Thaddaeus Ropac, Corvi Morva, Emalin, and Mendes Wood DM—were on reserve days after it opened.

The Sadie Coles HQ show came on the heels of another exhibition that Barrington curated at Thaddaeus Ropac last summer and, the year before that, legendary art historian Sir Norman Rosenthal curated one of his first gallery shows, also at Ropac. This year is absolutely bustling for Barrington: He will have a solo booth with Sadie Coles HQ at Frieze Los Angeles next month; his co-curated show "Artists I Steal From" sees a new iteration at Mendes Wood in New York; Emalin will relaunch a music-based summer event series organized by Barrington; and he will have a solo shows at Corvi Mora and Ropac Paris in September. There will also be more carnival, more street parties, more dancing.

In a market that's been known to milk young artists and leave them dry, how has Barrington taken such impressive control of his career, and avoided the kind of pressure and burnout that has plagued so many of his peers?

A Non-Monogamous Arrangement

On a recent autumn day, Barrington shows up to meet me at Emalin gallery on his beloved red Brompton bike. We stroll over and sit down for lunch where he listens intently to my questions and answers slowly, exuding sincerity and warmth while ordering one coffee after another.

A deep well of references bubbles up: Albert Oehlen, Simone de Beauvoir, Tupac Shakur, Joseph Beuys, Ghostface Killah, Picasso. He has a blueprint, he says, of a decade's worth of work already crystallized in his mind—and his galleries are on board to support him through it all. He's already in the middle of a four-part show dedicated to the life of Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey, the next chapter of which is at Corvi-Mora in London. ("How do you know what you will be making 10 years down the line?" I ask. "The 20th century's already been written," Barrington answers.)

The Tupac song "Keep Ya Head Up" was the first piece of art that captured his attention. "He was real, honest, and spoke a lot of truths," Barrington says. "He was so magical and it changed my life and gave me a lot of things to think about. Pac loved his community, he loved black people, and how complicated they were at a time where a lot of politicians, including black politicians, were asking for 13-year-old kids to be locked up forever."

Born in Venezuela and raised in Grenada by his grandmother, Barrington eventually moved to Brooklyn to live among a community of "aunties" after his mother died when he was ten. There, he learned a key lesson about the need for togetherness in order to survive, an ethic he applies to everything he takes on—including the art market.

When I ask Barrington about the collaborative nature of his gallery representation, he talks to me about that love he experienced growing up. "Each one of those people in my community that raised me gave me something different, and something wonderful about myself that allows me to navigate the world," Barrington says. "That situation provided a different freedom from other people who may have more stable relationships with the older people in their life."

His romantic relationships have been polyamorous, too. "It's all about encouraging who you want to be—that question always comes up somewhere along the way," he says. "You have got to let go of a lot of ego in those situations."

Ego is an interesting way to put it, especially when you flip the script and think about the situation for his dealers. One might initially suspect Barrington's arrangement comes from having a strong ego—most artists command seven-figure prices and long waiting lists before they manage to shake loose from a gallery's expectation of exclusivity (at least in the city where they are located). But every dealer I spoke to seemed to light up at Barrington's fresh take on the typical artist-dealer relationship.

Thaddaeus Ropac says he has always been supportive of his artists working with more than just his gallery, and is happy to share Barrington with three other galleries in

London. "As he says, it enables him to show a different part of himself, corresponding to each gallery's identity," Ropac tells me. "His connection with different collaborators and communities is integral to his practice and each gallery enables this in their own way."

Auspicious Beginnings

Before he began working with Ropac, in April 2018, Barrington had his first show in London with Emalin, one of the more prominent young galleries in London known for its work with emerging Europe-based artists. As his career continues to take off in new directions, he tries to work with each gallery in a way that plays to their individual strengths. With Emalin, he organized a summer series of musical events that took place in their Shoreditch gallery, which culminated in a playful exhibition that included works by Tt X AB, the collaborative practice he shares with friend Teresa Farrell. It's the kind of experimental, grassroots endeavor that wouldn't quite suit a blue-chip gallery like Ropac.

Of course, Emalin benefits in its own way from its association with Barrington and his blue-chip dealers. "He is questioning what exclusive representation means," says the gallery's co-founder Angelina Volk. "It forces us all to think individually about what each gallery can do for an artist, and what these unique circumstances can collectively foster. Different kinds of galleries can provide different kinds of audiences, spaces, and conversations."



Barrington implies that there may be a time in the future when things settle down for him. “I never wanted to be someone who allows the relationships through my art to determine what I can do in my art,” he says. “There are going to be moments where I might have to choose, make a commitment, and be responsible to it—like one day if I have a kid, I can’t be running around town like an asshole.”

Strong Roots

Back over to Emalin, the two of us hover over a few of his works. His paintings look both earthy and alien, coded with rich references. Brash strokes are meticulously layered and planned out, sketch by sketch, before he touches his brush to the burlap canvases. He often sews thick panels of yarn onto his works. Perhaps what is most beautiful is how he manages to weave seemingly disparate references into something immediately coherent: He brings together West Coast rappers, fraught histories of the Black diaspora, and German postwar art history into a smooth mix. In one work from his collaboration with Farrell, a portrait of a seated man was part of her design for an A\$AP Rocky music video before Barrington added a floating chicken leg and put it in the show.

A root-looking painting catches my attention; Barrington explains it’s part of an ongoing series about trees, inspired by German artist Albert Oehlen’s series of tree paintings, but also revolutionary American activist Assata Shakur, Tupac’s godmother who has been on the run from the FBI since 1977. “I imagine them as views she is looking at,” Barrington says.

At Sadie Coles HQ, alongside posters of Garvey, there are more of these treelike works, as well as dark brown roots and exploding hibiscus flowers. Barrington’s stream-of-consciousness manifesto is printed out as a large poster tearaway. The canvases in Pan-African colors had been hanging on the carnival float Barrington made for Notting Hill Carnival, a hugely important Caribbean festival and one of the world’s largest street parties. Barrington’s bright canvases hung from the float as 4,000 people danced around them. At this year’s edition, Barrington is hoping to roll out a duo of prizes related to the carnival: the Emelda Barrington Prize, named after the artist’s mother, and the Fredrica Graham Prize, named after his grandmother.

As his manifesto says, “art is about learning how to be,” all the way from Mayfair’s pristine white cubes to the graffitied walls of Shoreditch, to a breezy ride on his red Bronco from home to the studio; to memories of Grenada and running wild in Brooklyn. Barrington synthesizes the pains of loss (the paint hangs extra heavy

in places), the West’s troubled histories, political revolution and celebration, old friendships, intersectionality, and long fights to fight—it’s all woven up in the lines of yarn stitched across his painted flora. Both his practice and his enterprise as an artist are an invitation to see a whole world of relations not simply as a point of critique—more than that, he’s offering new ways of existing within it. And that seems to be a personal and a public mandate, and it’s teeming with life.

PAINTING ALVARO INNER BARRINGTON AND OUTER SPACES



Right:
Portrait of Alvaro Barrington
in his London East End studio
on July 23 by Henry Jones

Since his first solo show in 2017 at New York's MoMA PS1, Venezuelan-born ALVARO BARRINGTON has become one of the art world's rising stars. Earlier this year he co-curated, with Julia Peyton-Jones, *Artists I Steal From*, the sensational and enormously successful group show at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London.

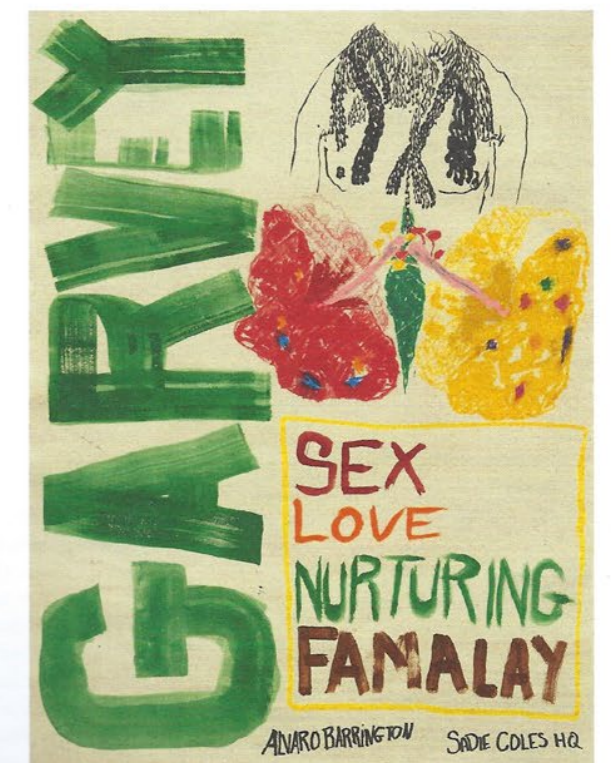
Now Barrington is preparing large-scale works on canvas for his first major solo exhibition at the Davies Street site of Sadie Coles HQ.

On July 23, YES & NO Editor-in-chief Cassius Matthias met with Barrington at his temporary East End studio to talk about the creative process for his upcoming show.



Left:
Barrington's London East
studio with details
of works in progress.
Photography: Henry Kenyon

Right:
Exhibition poster, Alvaro
Barrington, GARVEY:
SEX LOVE NURTURING
FAMALAY, Sadie Coles HQ,
London © Alvaro Barrington,
courtesy Sadie Coles HQ,
London. Photography:
Robert Glowacki



CASSIUS MATTHIAS: You're working on a big show of new work that will be presented at Sadie Coles HQ. Can you tell me what the show is about?

ALVARO BARRINGTON: This is the first chapter of a thirty-year project. But it's playing out the way the *Avengers* movies build up from one story to the next story, to the next story, and then you have this final *Avengers* movie.

CM: Like a universe?

AB: Yeah, this is similar. So this is the twentieth century story of black folks from the Caribbean and their interjection into multicultural cities. In London it starts with the story of Marcus Garvey because he's the godfather of pan-Africanism. And this first thing you're experiencing is called Birth. Because it's Garvey being born.

CM: Will the show be called Birth?

AB: It's called GARVEY: SEX LOVE NURTURING FAMILIAR, and it's the first chapter. I'll show you... This painting is a moment of inception but it's all told through the hibiscus flower, which is the English word for the national flower of Jamaica. In Spanish the word for it is xaymaca. So when you order a 'xaymaca' juice, you're ordering hibiscus juice.

CM: And that's where the name of 'Jamaica' comes from.

AB: Yeah, because the Spanish had originally colonised Jamaica, and Trinidad, and a bunch of other places.

CM: Do you have Jamaican roots?

AB: My stepmom is Jamaican, my mom is Grenadian, my stepdad's from St. Kitts, my dad is from Haiti, and I grew up with my stepmom since I was eleven.

CM: So you've absorbed the culture?

AB: Yeah, yeah.

CM: Because it's all quite different, the different islands in the Caribbean.

AB: Very different.

CM: My dad's from Trinidad, so I've always been aware of the differences in Caribbean culture—the same but different.

AB: Very, very different. A Trinnie is very different from... Grenada and Trinidad are very close because, mom's family, a bunch of them are from Trinidad... If you're Trinidadian or if you're Grenadian a bunch of your family's automatically going to be Trinidadian, or Grenadian, or vice versa... The hibiscus is the flower you can find all over the Caribbean. I think it's the national flower of Trinidad.

So, in the painting, the hibiscus flower is also a moment of impregnation. Everything is a metaphor but they are also what they are, what they clearly represent. Here you can see the legs, and then the dick, and then the branches are, sort of, the inside of the woman, and then the sperm going into it. And then we've got another one...

The woman, the nature, is everything. She's all over the place. And the man's more closed off. You get a different experience of it when you see

the detail close, or when you stand back and see the whole. It's internal, but actually it goes from being on top to, like, diving in. It's really external. But it's nature, it's representing internal parts. The branches are really the internal organs of the woman. And if you look up there you can see the green leaf, and then over there it's an outside shape of a woman, her back, her ass. The green leaf is always like the pussy and shit... And then it's the ass crack.

And that's going to be a kite painting. So when the baby is born it's like flying a kite... When you think about how a kite functions in the world...

CM: Like attached to an umbilical cord?

AB: Yeah, and then it's also free, it's up there... That's going to be the last painting in the show.

CM: These two are the first and the last?

AB: Yeah, I think so. It could change. This is actually not the first because there's foreplay, so there's some foreplay paintings out here...

CM: The upper section has a cosmic feel to it. What you were saying about the inside and the outside, it reminded me about how the inner body is also quite cosmic. I like how you're playing with that 'inside/outside' thing, the idea of messing around with space.

AB: Yeah, a friend of mine who came in and there was another painting that she just went on a weird trip about space. And I just thought, man, that shit is crazy what she's talking about! But then it stuck in my head because it was so crazy. Then it started making me think about how crazy it is just being born. You have God knows how many sperms trying to form, and all the majestic-ness that needs to happen. It's unreal. The chances that your parents met. The chances that they decided to have sex. The chances that that sperm meets that egg when there's a million sperms trying to get to that one egg. And if another sperm had gotten to the egg first you would be a whole different person.

CM: Exactly...

AB: Your whole DNA would change. You may be this colour, or lighter, or taller, male or female. It would be so different just because of that one moment of chance. It's incredible!

CM: It's mind blowing and it's, kind of, it's cosmic. It's a mystery because you wonder how can that happen? And once the egg is fertilised, when you think that fertilised egg then creates people...

AB: It's crazy.

CM: So, are these the kind of ideas you're addressing in this body of work?

AB: Yeah, the whole first chapter is all about birthing, the process of having sex and partnerships. It's also a story about my mom, who had me, I was her first kid with my dad, and then ten years later, after they broke up, she moved on and had my baby brother, Alex. So it's a story about my mom having me and my brother Alex, but it's also really



about Marcus Garvey being birthed into this earth. And, so, a lot of the colours are these pan-African colours—red, black, green, and yellow—which are like Garvey colours, your red, black, and green, and then later the yellow got added.

CM: Are the colours symbolic, do they have a specific symbolic meaning?

AB: In the paintings they do. But for Garvey, the red was the blood, the black was the people, the green was the earth, and the yellow was the gold, the natural resources. In this, the red is my dad, the yellow is my stepdad, the green, like the green opening, is always the vagina. The spines and nature are always the woman, so it's either going to be the outline of a woman, or it's going to be internal. It really allows you to go into multiple spaces.

But they're all symbolic of something. The idea is when you go through the show you're able to see the symbols and see the representations. And once you see the symbols you can follow the story, the sex, the moment of inception, you follow what's happening...

CM: Do you know how many paintings there will be in the show? Have you worked that out in terms of the chapters of the story?

AB: It's still getting... It gets added and taken away, added and taken away. Right now, today, the number is eighteen. But that could change tomorrow.

CM: In the same way like life can change tomorrow.

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah... Oh, so, what happens once she gets pregnant... Actually, this is the next painting, after the inception. This is the moment of conception. You see, this is the same painting but we blew it up because I designed a float for this year's Notting Hill Carnival. A lot of these paintings are going to be on a float. And then we brought up a bunch of musicians, we're going to do a concert on the Friday, Machel Montano, Mr Killa, he's from Grenada, Skinny Fabulous, he's from St. Vincent where my grandfather was from, Patrice Roberts, Bunji Garlin, and a few other musicians...

It's going to be pure madness in the concert but also these performers are going to perform for two days on the float, which is going to be crazy because it's something you would have to go back to Trinidad to get, and the artwork is going to be around it. I'm going to add more elements to it so that it can match more of the vibe of Carnival, because right now it's pretty quiet and slow.

CM: Compared to the painting, the reproduction is quite muted. It's interesting that you're using technology as part of the process.

AB: You mean in the print reproduction?

CM: Yeah.

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's a way of painting! You know the painter Laura Owens...?

CM: Yes.

AB: ...she does these digital prints, which I really love, and I wanted to tap into that. Also, because now it's a digital print, it allows me to do other things like certain gestures, and certain colour palettes, and it's going to be really crazy because then you can also see behind, it's transparent, it's going to be crazy. They also have an open weave so, when the singers are performing, sound needs to go through, it can't be solid because then it'll block out the sound... Once it comes back to the studio I can do other stuff to it, I could keep building it up and it would have had this incredible life, of being a part of the carnival.

CM: This looks quite different from the original painting. Is it an early print, before you got to that stage of the painting?

AB: No, no, no, it's just the material. Of course it's a different energy because it's plastic. This is burlap and then it's print, it's a digital print, it's really high quality but there's just elements of it that you can't get from that painting. I need

“Why I considered it as a project is because part of it is seeing little things and saying,

“This feels familiar but I don't know why. I don't know where this came from...”

to respond because this is going to be around the masqueraders, the musicians are there, so it needs to respond to a different type of energy. Whereas the paintings are going to be in a gallery, and that's a different type of viewing experience and a different type of feel. This has to have a certain type of energy, so, when the musicians are performing their songs, it matches their vibe.

So, a lot of it's me listening to the music, me falling in love with the different parts of the music and then responding to it, then it's going to match up with the bands and what the musicians are doing. This year's theme in Carnival is 'kaleidoscope', so it's going to have that feel and that energy. It's something I'm really excited about because one of the things that's always really important for me is that I never want to talk about black people to mostly white people, and then not have a space where black people... We're not like the museum-going crowd or the gallery-going crowd. We celebrate culture through music. We celebrate it through Carnival.

It was important that after I had a couple of shows and a museum show I realised then, the black people who came were my family, people I grew up with—they were happy for me, but I could see how uncomfortable they were because they had to pretend to know why Jackson Pollock is on the wall, and they don't know why... Some do, but not really, you know what I mean? It's not our culture. So it's really important for me to be responsible to my family in the way that they celebrate culture, and that's really part of Carnival. So, a big part of it's making sure that these paintings match the energy of Carnival.

CM: You were saying black people celebrate culture in a different way, or engage with it in a different way. Do you think that's changing?

AB: What do you mean?

CM: Do you think more black people are getting into going to museums and galleries, and not feeling that they can't engage in that kind of cultural space?

AB: I think there's a very particular type of black people, and I happen to be one of them, mostly it's college educated, middle to upper middle class black folks, who will go to the museums. That's one conversation... As black people you could be part of many different communities. You could be part of the Soca scene, then be part of the reggae scene, part of the hip-hop scene, part of the museum-going scene. I'm part of all of those scenes. For me it was really important to make sure that I touch each one of those scenes. But I think there are some people who, if you're into the Soca scene, you may not go to museums, you know what I mean? Or, if you're part of the reggae scene, you may not go to the Soca scene. Or, if you're part of the reggae scene, you may not go to the museum-going scene. Because Jamaicans move very differently from Trinidadians, or Grenadians.

CM: That's what we were talking about earlier.

AB: They dance differently, they act differently, they probably even speak a different language, when you really think about it. If you listen to some of my aunts who are real, real, real Jamaican and then I listen to Trinnie, or my cousins it's, like, How do you all even understand each other? It's a whole different scheme of speaking. But I do think as more black people are entering into the education system that does reflect more of us going to museums. And I think there's people who have done an incredible job of making that accessible. Someone like Thelma Golden and what she's done. She has opened up so many doors.

CM: Tell me about Thelma Golden...

AB: She runs the Studio Museum in Harlem. She's done so much to make it accessible. But it's accessible to middle-class college educated people. That's really the people who find a value in going to museums. I think there's all these different ways that we've found values. I don't think



[&] ALVARO BARRINGTON



Above:
Hibiscus Fruit-Red Yellow (two males uprising) with Anansi Spider, 2019
Photography; Robert Glowacki

Left and following spreads:
Details of artwork in progress 2019 © Alvaro Barrington,
courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photography; Robert Glowacki

that just because you go to a museum it makes you smarter or makes you more cultured. It doesn't. One of the things I wanted to do is make sure if you experience the story of Garvey on the float, you don't really need to go to Sadie Coles HQ, or go to the Tate. You've experienced all the things that need to be experienced in that moment.

CM: *The float is a unique way to experience the art that you're creating. It's a collaboration with the performers, with the whole Carnival which is the context. And that's part of the culture, it's not the only culture. That's where I think what you're doing is particularly interesting because you're straddling two different worlds—the world of the Carnival and the world of more westernised museums and galleries, which are well-established, they have an international reputation—and you're able to straddle these two worlds with ease.*

AB: We're also doing something over at Emalin Gallery in Shoreditch, which is a younger gallery, they're about two years old. We're doing an August programme

at the gallery, which "It's so weird and I just thought, Man, I really needed to do my homework and try to learn about how cultures really exchange and helps shape new ideas and create new ideas." someone with a bit of economic wealth to say, "I'm going to go over there."

I've known for, like, twenty years. The first performance is on August 1st and it's Shamel Pitts who I went to LaGuardia with. I did drawing, although really badly, I was a horrible student. But Shamel continued with dance. He went to Juilliard, which is one of the best schools for dance in the world. One of the last times he performed was at BAM in Brooklyn, that's like our Carnegie Hall. He's performing here for sixty people, his body is incredible. Then we're going to do Jade [as performers Jade and Jonathan Carmelli are known as Blind Benny] who I also went to LaGuardia with and has the most incredible voice, and she sings at the church.

And then Tennile and Shaka. Tennile used to be and still is a musician but then moved out to Jamaica with Shaka, her partner, to raise their daughter. And so they're coming out from Jamaica to perform at Emalin, which is probably about as big as this studio space. I think the thing with both Carnival and Sadie's is that they're established and so for someone, that sort of an establishment isn't really about being personal. So, the thing with Emalin is more about a personal experience with the artist and with the audience. And afterwards when the performance has finished, you can talk and maybe have some coffee, we're going to make some jerk chicken on the day of the opening...

CM: *Sounds great...*

AB: ...and because they're only two years old we get to be a bit more crazy and do stuff like that, you know what I mean?

CM: *Why London? What brought you to here?*

AB: The Garvey project started, for me, officially maybe in 2001. In my old studio there's a picture of the philosophy and opinions of Marcus Garvey.

So it's coming on eighteen years since I started trying to figure it out...

CM: *In a nutshell, how would you characterise Garvey's philosophy?*

AB: Oh, so we're getting to why London. When I was picking grad schools a bunch of people, every smart artist, and curator, and professor said, "Get away from New York, go to London." And they're people who know me and know the art world better than I know myself sometimes. But I needed to find a value. So when I was going through my notes I was like, Oh man! here's this project that I kept coming back to for twenty years on and off. And Garvey left Jamaica and came to London to study, and then moved to Harlem...

CM: *I'm sure not many people knew that...*

AB: Yeah, I think what happened was... Garvey's an upper middle class Jamaican who's coming to London in the early twentieth century, which is post slavery, all of this stuff, and so you have to be

And then Murakami did the album cover art for Kanye's album "Graduation." I'm super aware of this cultural moment because as a black kid we like dressing fly and wearing Gucci and Louis Vuitton, and all that. So I'm in these cultures and I'm like, All these people are having conversations. Matisse is doing the jazz paintings but you're telling me he's not talking to any jazz musicians? Rothko is going up to Harlem to listen to jazz, but you're telling me they're not in conversation with any black person...?

because part of it is seeing little things and saying, "This feels familiar but I don't know why." "I don't know where this came from or what this is..." What I found missing from a lot of spaces were real conversations about how this thing existed. It felt like oftentimes history was just only attributed to white males in a weird way. Like, the other day, I'd just come back from Paris because Denise McMillan did this show at the Wallace Collection and it's all about the black figures in French culture. And there's this moment where she gets into Matisse and talks about him leaving Paris, leaving France, and going to Harlem on three separate occasions just to listen to the jazz greats, and then inviting them back to Paris to paint and draw and be partners with them.

And I just remembered MoMA doing this cut outs show and later getting into cut outs and then seeing the jazz paintings. But you never hear about Matisse in exchange with these jazz artists. But then with me growing up in hip-hop I'm super aware of the moment that Murakami linked with Kanye, linked with Marc Jacobs, and they did the Louis Vuitton fashion line.

And then Murakami did the album cover art for Kanye's album "Graduation." I'm super aware of this cultural moment because as a black kid we like dressing fly and wearing Gucci and Louis Vuitton, and all that. So I'm in these cultures and I'm like, All these people are having conversations. Matisse is doing the jazz paintings but you're telling me he's not talking to any jazz musicians? Rothko is going up to Harlem to listen to jazz, but you're telling me they're not in conversation with any black person...?

CM: *Yeah, exactly.*

AB: Did jazz come to them in some weird package completely devoid of black people? They go up to Harlem and there's no black person there? It just felt weird. It felt like somebody was telling the story and the imagination of a cultural exchange just wasn't happening.

The imagination of these Jews coming to America or being in America and listening to jazz and going up there and thinking about music and how that helps them make their own art? It just felt like, Man, this exchange is completely... I know what's happening in Harlem. I know what's happening in the Upper West Side and Soho, and Upper East Side. But I'm like, How come these people...? The Upper East Side and Harlem, the neighbourhoods are right next to each other. Harlem's there on 110th, Upper East Side is on 110th. So you're telling me these people didn't talk? It's so weird and I just thought, Man, I really needed to do my homework and try to learn about how cultures really exchange and how the exchange helps shape new ideas and create new ideas.

CM: *It sounds to me like you're connecting the dots...*

AB: I think why I considered it as a project is

& CONTINUED ON PAGE 100



been like, Oh, you're in a red dress.

IH: Yes. Absolutely. And it was more striking like this. And everybody told me about what was around the neck, which prefigures the head cutting, in a way, with the head being separated from the rest of the dress.

CM: Was that something that the costume designer [Jacques Reynaud] discussed with you?

IH: No. No, it's a very simple process. He did the dress... The costume designer is a regular collaborator with Bob. And, of course, Bob discussed details about the sleeves and things like this but, basically, the dress was all there from the very beginning.

CM: Do you think the purpose of acting—the way we, as spectators, receive acting and movies and theatre—do you think that that has changed over the years?

IH: No, not at all. Why would it change?

CM: I wonder... Because acting and movies and the moving image have become so engrained in our everyday lives?

IH: No. Believe me, it didn't affect acting itself.

CM: So you haven't felt that there's a change of perception?

IH: No. By no means.

CM: Honing your craft as an actress, has that changed over the years or do you just approach each role as if it's going to be unique?

IH: Yes. Exactly the same way. Absolutely. It's not like you're really talking about the nineteenth-century. I don't feel I'm coming from a different age of acting, by no means.

CM: Your episode of Call My Agent! was fascinating to me because it's almost like a reality TV show, especially as you're playing yourself. Watching that show, I was thinking, Is Isabelle playing Isabelle, a character named Isabelle Huppert or is...

IH: Sure. It's more about this, of course. It's acting.

CM: I wondered whether that kind of acting could have existed, say, in the early twentieth-century.

IH: Yes, of course. Nothing different.

CM: Is that because it's all about playing a role?

IH: Yes, I don't see any difference. What you're talking about, there might be a difference with acting, for instance, back in the '30s or in the '40s where I think it was, in a way, less true. And also the border between the good and the bad was more—it was a bit heavier. You had the good and you had the bad. Now there is more fluctuation between the good and the bad, and so we went into much more certainty and these type of things. So, if there was a change to define, it would be more between, as far back as roughly the '40s or the '50s. But not from the time I started.

CM: The borderline between good and bad, and all those extremes has gone.

IH: Yes. That has changed, for sure.

CM: You play highly complex characters.

IH: Yes.

CM: Obviously you work with the director, but do you also have your own personal way of getting into the head of a complex character?

IH: No, I don't do it, Cassius, I don't have a specific way. It's about intuition and understanding. In a way it's a very easy process for me. It's all about understanding, really, and how I can connect with who I am and how I can put it as, again, as true as possible and as natural as possible. But it's nothing theoretical and certainly not about a specific way or a specific method. It's just pure intuition.

CM: That's a beautiful way of thinking about it... In fact, I was going to ask you about intuition.

IH: Oh, yes, it's exactly what it is. Pure intuition and, let's say, also when I work with someone like Bob Wilson, it's the capacity to understand his will, his universe. You can imagine that he never relies on psychological explanations and process. It's more about movement, and it's all about that. And, again, yes, maybe even more so in the theatre than in movies each director has really his own world. But that's even more specific in the theatre than in movies, I would say, for some reason.

CM: Do you think spirituality plays a part in this? Because in a way you're tapping into a very deep spiritual place. When you're talking about intuition and we talked about concentration.

IH: Yes. It's a very pompous word for me to use... [Laughter]

CM: Oh, right. Well, I used it...

IH: ...but maybe it's about this. [Laughter] It's like everything in the world. Even watching a flower could be about spirituality, you know what I mean?

CM: Yes, I do.

IH: Or a painting or listening to music...

CM: The last thing I'd like to talk to you about is art, broadly speaking, and how you can connect...

IH: Well, that's not a word that belongs to my vocabulary. I never define myself as an artist, you know. It's okay for whoever wants to use that word but not for me...

CM: But in what you do I think there's a clear feeling of power, emotional power...

IH: Yes, I'm sure. Lots of it.

CM: ...that relationship between the individual spectator and the work of art...

IH: Yes, sure...

CM: ...and I think that's what's so beautiful about the way that you do what you do. You seem to connect with people on that level—call it spiritual?

IH: Hopefully. Yes, absolutely!

Alvaro Barrington

Continued from page 78

It's as much for me about learning too because with a lot of these paintings I'm learning as I'm making, and then the learning changes what gets made. But also one of the things is that I always start from my own personal story, so that it holds it together. This really is, like I said, about my brother and me being born.

CM: Movies often have this epic backdrop but they're mostly about one person who's striving to overcome whatever difficulty it might be. And that protagonist becomes the heart of the film. I love movies where you have the personal and the intimate set against the context of a great sweeping backdrop. Because of course we're all individuals and we're born alone and we die alone, and I think life is about trying to understand how we relate to this vast backdrop, which is the world we live in. So it makes sense what you're talking about, that your story starts with you, and your relationship with your brother, who's your half brother as well, I guess?

AB: I don't think of it that way but, yeah.

CM: Okay, interesting...

AB: Even my brothers who have a different dad and different mom, those are as much my brothers. But the second version, the New York version, is more about this wider community of family. But because this place is so much smaller, Sadie's on Davies Street, I had to think, Okay let me just keep it real.

But in New York it's really big because my mom, when she married my stepdad, he had three kids and then when she passed away he married my Jamaican stepmom and she had Brandon, my brother, so it was really like, all of it is like a real family.

And then my mom's friends, who started taking care of me, became my cousins and some of my brothers. In fact, the person who is my advisor in terms of who the performers are that are coming on the float is my cousin Fitz, who's my mom's best friend's son. Because you can ask me about Louise Bourgeois in 1960, or whoever, and I could tell you a lot about that. I could tell you about hip-hop, and I could tell you about Soca and stuff up to the early 2000 reggae. But my cousin, when I went off to get a formal education in University, he stayed in our community, he goes back to St. Vincent all the time... So he's actually the one who said, "You need Skinny Fab. You need Mr Killa. You need..." These are all the musicians coming through him because he's in every Carnival and if he feels it that means they're coming. Next year we want to get it bigger and keep getting it bigger, and bigger, and bigger. Each year we're trying to get more people. In the future hopefully we'll get someone like Bujú to come up and all that stuff. But Fitz is really the one and it's always a partnership with a bunch of different family members.

But as I'm looking at the painting... The last painting was the moment you saw the egg, the sperm going into the egg. This one is the ovary.

You see the outline of the woman again, that was at the end over there, that's her being outlined again. Then, if you look at the bleached thing, that's an ovary, so it's them going towards the ovary, like, the sperm.

CM: The outline of the woman, I'm not quite sure...

AB: It's a tree branch.

CM: It's representative of the woman, it's not a drawing of the outline of a woman?

AB: Yeah.

CM: What stage is this painting at? Is this your first go at organising the canvases? How far will you work on this? How far will you take this canvas? Do you know at this stage?

AB: I don't know. I always ask what it's doing. With a lot of these paintings the process can be a year to two years, sometimes even three years, to really lock down. I first bleached this canvas when I was at the Slade, three years ago.

CM: Okay.

AB: The first print happened, the first mark I made happened three years ago. Then I stretched it and I couldn't really... I was trying to get this other mark down... But when I finally looked at it two years ago it wasn't quite the mark but it was something... It was a mark that was doing something else. Then I looked at it, just the print, and I said, "Oh yeah, that's an ovary." Immediately I knew where the painting needed to go, but I didn't really know how to keep that there because with a painting, if you love a mark sometimes it doesn't mean that'll be what the painting needs. You may need to do something else. So I thought, Oh well...

For a year I left it on there because I wanted to make sure that that mark that I'd tried so hard to get would become something else, and then from there it was really about doing enough things around it. It's a slow build up of elements around it for it to finally get to this place. But I think right now it's doing exactly what it needs to do because when I tell people what the painting is, if people go, "I see it," then I know it's doing okay.

CM: What I see in the composition is a star shape, and there's a centre. Is that intentional?

AB: That's because they're going into... You can see the sperm is going into that.

CM: I get that because of how you've arranged the space around it. The arrangement of the space is asymmetrical so you really do get that dynamic whoosh!

AB: Yeah, when you talk about Star Wars it's like that moment when Luke is going into the hole... They all are trying to get to that hole.

CM: That's what I see... Is this the third in the series? After seeing the first two in the other studio, is this the third in the line, does it work that way?

AB: Not really because the thing with an exhibition is that you actually get the whole picture

at once, you get the overall experience. You may go to this painting; you may not go to that one... You may not necessarily look at them in sequence... It's kind of like you choose your own adventure.

This may be the first painting you go to. Because maybe the other paintings are too overwhelming, this is a bit more quiet. I think the idea is that I don't really know where you go first. I don't really know because all I know is that people are going to get it all at once and so I want them to immediately walk in and go, "Okay this is..." and then they find their way into each painting. But each painting is its own autonomous object.

CM: Goddard said something like, "Every film has to have a beginning, middle, and an end—but not necessarily in that order." What I feel you're talking about is that in your mind you have a sequence of events, but when we experience the manifestation of these events, the paintings, they may not necessarily be sequential in the same way.

AB: They're not going to be.

CM: Why should they be?

AB: It's almost impossible.

CM: Each picture has its own autonomy. You already have a complete sequence within the frame of a canvas, that's the story.

AB: That's the thing with the painting, within the painting I want an autonomous moment. So you could look at this painting and get all the things... You don't need to see any of the paintings that go next to it because ultimately that's what's going to happen. These paintings are going to get sold to different collectors and institutions, and so you're never going to really experience it all at the same time. But I think, also, when you go into the gallery, it's going to be a lot of work and so I want viewers to feel like they can choose where they go. Then if they decide to follow the narrative that I'm putting forward, they could do that.

CM: They have the choice... In a way, it's how we watch media today, with a movie you don't have to sit down and watch it from beginning to end, you can speed through it, you can rewind it, you can pause it. And that's part of how we are experiencing the world today.

AB: Aren't we always taking up a story at some point? Like, as you're saying that, aren't we always picking up a story somewhere in the middle?

CM: Yeah, I think we are. As you and I just met earlier today, we're picking up on each other's stories from that moment on.

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're always in the middle and at the end. We're always at the beginning and at the end. I think that's part of the beauty of painting. You get to go wherever you want to go, and then be in love with whatever moment you want to be in love with. So, this is the moment of inception, and then here you see the egg and the fertilisation getting bigger, so it goes from this to it getting bigger here.

CM: This is the fertilised egg? That shape is recurring because we've got this shape here?

AB: Yeah.

CM: Will that shape appear in this canvas?

AB: It probably will. I just have to figure out how.

CM: Sequentially this comes after this...

AB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And at the end as it becomes bigger, and her belly becomes bigger, then she becomes this spider. The next one is like the full pregnancy, like this dancing figure that... Do you know Anansi the Spider, the story of Anansi?

CM: No, I don't actually.

AB: It comes out of Africa but it's more like a Jamaican story. And its Anansi who's like a father. Anansi the Spider.

CM: This is the pregnant woman?

AB: Yeah.

CM: As a spider dancing?

AB: Yeah.

CM: Why a spider?

AB: Because of Anansi the Spider.

CM: Okay.

AB: And also the painter, the artist Louise Bourgeois had spider and this idea of the spider it's like a nurturer. The spider for her was a metaphor for her mother, and so it's a link between West Indian, African, and art world culture, which are the three primary audiences who are going to be experiencing this art. People who go to Carnival and the concert, and then people who are going to Sadie's. They will be people who probably know who Louise Bourgeois is, and then on the Carnival end, people who know who Anansi the Spider is.

CM: You've often mentioned Louise Bourgeois...

AB: I love her, yeah, yeah. In this particular story I found her to be a really good reference point for a lot of stuff because she was dealing with so much of her personal history. It felt like she was a good reference point for a lot of... Even the intestines, which in my painting's are the tree branch... A lot of women are referenced in the paintings. The bleaching comes out of Helen Frankenthaler, and then me remembering my grandma cleaning clothes back home. And then back in Grenada we used this thing called bluing, which is to clean white, it's like a blue pebble. So these blue paintings come out of that, when we wanted to turn a white shirt back, after it started yellowing and turning dirty we'd use this blue ink that came out of England, and you can find it all over former British colonies. In the painting it's actually the moment where Garvey moves from Jamaica to England, it's a Blue Sea Hibiscus. So, it's a sea hibiscus which is usually found by the ocean and then the blue, which is from the bluing.

& END

CM: Marcus Garvey would have taken a boat to come over to England.

AB: Probably... The whole thing is about looping into himself. So the show is going to loop into itself. You go from, it's still a figure, it's got two legs; it's got one arm, it's not quite a spider. But by the time you get to this painting... Because the idea is this first show is all painting and then in the last painting it's a combination of paint and yarn. One of the traditions with the women in my family is that they all sew, a lot of them sewed, and so you're going from this moment of the spider and then this weaving that I'm doing in the painting...

CM: Which relates to the spider's web...

AB: Yeah, and my family, my younger brother.

CM: And the women you've grown up around who used to use yarn.

AB: Yeah.

CM: Is it thought out to the nth degree, where you know exactly where the last thing's going to end up? Do you know exactly how you'll get to that end point? The end point in the second part of the story is next year, is that right?

AB: It's four shows over ten years.

CM: Okay.

AB: It's weird, I guess it's like the whole Marvel Universe because I grew with that, I was big comic book kid, where you know certain key points... This is the last painting that's going to be in the show, it's by Sadie's office, when you go upstairs, it's an all white room. So after Garvey has left you're going to bump into these all white paintings. I know the overall projected ideas, how the paintings are going to be constructed for each chapter.

CM: Have you figured out how this picture's going to work?

AB: No, no, no, what I'm thinking about here... So each one of these sketches is like the shape of the belly, her looking down, and her intestines. But here I wanted the background to suggest a notion of time passing by. There's a great Matisse cut out where, when you look at it, you realise, Oh he's showing movement in the ocean, and so it's a couple of years ago since I saw it and I've been trying to figure out, how do I get that... He was looking at *The Great Wave*, the Japanese print by Hokusai.

So he looked at it and realised, Oh shit, just by shifting between white, light blue, and dark blue, he's created this notion of movement in the wave. And Matisse then realised in his cut outs, Oh if I do this it can become movement. So, I thought, Okay how do I do that? Because this is all happening around the Jazz era...

CM: The 1920s...?

AB: Yeah, so Garvey goes back to Harlem, is funding people, buying homes and Jazz is happening, the Harlem Renaissance is happening while he's there. So most of these paintings are

referencing the language of painters who were making work within that era.

CM: I read somewhere that, technically, Jazz was born in 1921 in Harlem.

AB: Oh, I thought it was born in Louisiana.

CM: Okay, I read a different narrative.

AB: Maybe, yeah...

CM: In what I read, they were saying that Jazz came out of the Harlem Renaissance from 1921. But that's just a date that an historian has given it. There's probably a much deeper and more meaningful history that we don't really know about.

AB: Well what's happening with Harlem at that time is you have, unlike a lot of other major American cities, which mostly had black people moving from the South, it was the time of the great migration, so you had them moving to Chicago... What's happening in New York City, and in particular Harlem, is that you have black people from the Caribbean, black people from Puerto Rico... It was one of the first waves of Caribbean migration, documented in the twentieth century. Here you had that wave but you also had then the next wave, which documented the next chapter, or the next thing of the Windrush Generation.

CM: That's mid twentieth century...

AB: Yeah. So in the early twentieth century, the first part in Harlem, you had those groups of people who were emigrating from the Caribbean and creating this melting pot in Harlem. So it wasn't just black folks from the South, it was black folks from Louisiana, it was black folks from Jamaica, all moving to Harlem, and so you had this multi-cultural, multi-blackness thing that's happening, this meeting point...

CM: Fantastic...

AB: ...so it creates all this diversity, which then creates an imagination that then becomes art, music, poetry, painting... It becomes culture.

& END

ANNA BLOMEFIELD'S Column

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At the centre of the south and north sides, two houses rise above the rest: these are the Pavillon du Roi and the Pavillon de la Reine. They're fitting residences for royalty, though the only monarch to have lived in either of them was Anne of Austria, wife of Louis XIII, for whom the hotel's restaurant is named. I looked out from my balcony to the courtyard and the Pavillon's tall windows, gracefully festooned with creepers. Were these buildings a product of the head rather than the heart? Maybe. Were they beautiful? Unquestionably. Some think this the most beautiful square in Paris, though that's a tough one to call.

I set off on my favourite walk, crossing the

Seine at the pont d'Arcole. On the Ile de la Cité, I followed the hordes towards the west façade of Notre-Dame. From where I stood beside an avenue of young chestnuts, things appeared more or less normal. The two bell towers stood unashamed and mercifully intact. Plastic barricades, the grumble of a digger and the presence of a handful of police were the only signs that anything was wrong, and it felt ghoulish to walk around to the classic viewpoint on the quai de la Tournelle. Instead I pressed on, up the rue de la Montaigne Sainte-Geneviève to the Église Saint-Étienne du Mont, where the prayers of thanks given by the faithful to Sainte Geneviève for cures and sundry other miracles have been inscribed on plaques set into the walls. These voices are now part of the fabric of the building. Further on, past the Jardin du Luxembourg, I took a right turn down the rue Servandoni, at the end of which lies another favourite of mine: the Église Saint-Sulpice, now gloriously liberated from the straitjacket of scaffolding that had encased it for so much of the last two decades. On the north side, I noticed, a section of masonry had come away, revealing another great landmark's wooden guts.

A little further west in my old stamping ground, past the Eiffel Tower, the chunky glass profile of the arriviste Tour Totem still spiked the skyline. Beaugrenelle, I found, has been tarted up considerably. Its shopping centre, billed as The Parisian Shopping Mall, is a destination in its own right, and it is, naturally, open on Sundays. Turning back to the Pavillon de la Reine, I wondered who was now living in my old apartment. It's still very special to me. It may not still have a Pierre Cardin kitchen and brown silk walls, but I contain something of that tower, and that tower contains something of me. Tour Totem was built in 1979. Imagine all the stories hidden in the walls of Notre-Dame.

& END

Tea-Lovers of the World Unite

Continued from page 87

they make certain things the same size so they can stack, especially in the busiest firing. It means that every time I do that, it's different. The challenge becomes interesting. It's almost on a par with failure, because if you work it all out, regimented, then you know, and it just becomes formulaic.

JF: This brings me again to Japanese question, which is the whole idea of wabi-sabi, you know, that it isn't perfect. It's impossible to predict, it's a process.

SH: Exactly that...

JF: Tim, how does that idea play out in your world?

TFO: Well, I have to blend very effectively so that there are no failures. The other thing about wabi-sabi is this idea of the patina they get. So it's to do with good use and if something breaks, you repair it. That longevity of objects is another big part of wabi-sabi and this beauty that comes

'Finding Sex, Love and Famalay with Alvaro Barrington at Sadie Coles'

– Rianna Jade Parker

The artist looks to the life of Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, to foster a kind of kinship you can literally hold.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey was galvanized by an apparently imperious mission: to lobby British MPs and government ministers into reforming the social and economic conditions of British colonial citizens of African descent living in the West Indies. Jamaica's most forthright political leader, he visited England several times before settling in London in 1935. He met with the Black seamen in the East End who distributed his papers to other seamen at various ports across the UK. An excellent orator, he would often amass small crowds at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, preaching about the philosophies and practices of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) – a movement that eventually coerced the British Parliament into commissioning a report on the quality of life for all

workers. Although banned in many countries, the radical literature he published for the down but not defeated Black masses was reflected in *The Negro World* (1918) and *The Black Man* (1933) both printed on presses owned by the UNIA.

Taking heed of Garvey's emphasis on self-publishing, Alvaro Barrington produced a full-colour 66-page magazine alongside his first solo exhibition at Sadie Coles at their Davies Street London location. The inaugural issue of *Garvey!: SEX, LOVE, NURTURING, FAMALAY* (2019) borrows its glossy paged, image-centric layout style from the now defunct African-American teen magazines *Word Up!* and *Right On*. In a similar editorial fashion, *Garvey!* features a letter from the editor quoting the rapper 2Pac, an interview with Lauren Du Graf and a bedroom-wall-ready, pull-out poster of his recent work. But in addition, there is political commentary on how

two-party political systems affect families attempting to cross borders, systems affect families attempting to cross borders, Instagram screenshots of pop culture highlights, photo essays, sketches from his studio, recipes for a hibiscus cocktail and hazelnut butter – all penned by the family he has reaped around the world. Turning to the centrefold of *Garvey!* is Barrington's manifesto, best not to be read as a linear statement but rather a stream of consciousness, sharp utterances and things you would hesitate to repeat in mixed company: 'BURN BABYLON', 'IT'S MY FLESH THAT HOLDS ON TO THE TRUTH', 'NEW WOMEN, OLD WAYS, GOTTA KEEP A BALANCE' and 'I'M FROM THE FAR SIDE OF A SMALL ISLAND'.

Walking through the gallery, Barrington explains that this collection of work, 'Birth' (2019), is the first chapter in a story of Garvey and other Black figures with well-remembered lives in London and Harlem, New York, in the early 20th century. He posits: 'at the same time as Garvey was looking at Africa while studying here in London, Gauguin was visiting Martinique, Picasso was looking at African sculptures, Matisse was visiting Harlem to listen to Jazz.' In Western metropolises, artists were outstretching to other continents, looking for divine reasoning of themselves.

Barrington makes an interesting analogy between Garvey figuratively giving birth to the malleable principles of Black liberation and unity and the story of his own family, especially his mother's. He imagines his parents' romance through gestures and motifs, reawakening the conditions required to build his famalay. On the first floor, oversized and mostly square canvases, made of burlap instead of cotton, are embellished in green, red and black paint – the colours that make up the Pan-African flag, which Garvey designed in 1920. Phallic shapes figure as close-ups of his father and stepfather (in yellow and red respectively). Yarn-like strands represent the sperm that fertilized his mother egg (typically green). In one image, she bridges the gap between the two men. Ghanaian fertility signs are used as motifs, as well as Caribbean vegetation, such as the hibiscus flower, reminding viewers of the cultural and geographical context of the family picture.

Another extension of Barrington's famalay is on view at Emalin, where a co-competition with his artist-friend Teresa Farrell is presented under 'Tt X AB: TALL BOYS & A DOUBLE SHOT ESPRESSO'. The two shows bear almost no relation in theme and style – a bed-frame is planted in the middle of the room, life-size portraits and expressionist canvases take up majority of the wall space. But each require a certain attentiveness to catch the finer details. The mixed media painting, *Tall Boys & A Double Shot Espresso* (2019), traces a much smaller collaboration

between the two artists. Two shot glasses are depicted steaming in the right-hand corner, while hand-drawn caricatures of Teresa and Alvaro stretch out their arms in the background, as if energized by the coffee spilling over the canvas, giving the surface a washed brown tone.

Born in Venezuela to Haitian and Grenadian parents, Barrington's cultural and lateral ties to Central America, the West Indies and the USA informs his internationalist view. Although his interest in painting was piqued during his travels in central America, he was formally trained at Hunter College in New York before completing his MFA in painting at London's Slade. An impressive trajectory for a young man born in 1983, the same year of the United States invasion of Grenada, where he would live until the age of eight with his grandmother, sharing the same bed. Whilst embracing, he was comforted both by the sound of the heavy tropical rain pelting the rooftop and by the kind of kinship you can literally hold.



‘Gratitude: Alvaro Barrington’

– Chiara Moioli

“You asked me what family is
And I think of family as community
I think of the spaces where you don’t have to shrink
yourself
Where you don’t have to pretend or to perform
You can fully show up and be vulnerable
And in silence, completely empty and
That’s completely enough
To show up, as you are, without judgment, without ridicule
Without fear or violence, or policing, or containment
And you can be there and you’re filled all the way up
We get to choose our families
We are not limited by biology
We get to make ourselves
And we get to make our family”

—Blood Orange, “Family,” from *Negro Swan* (London: Domino Recording Co. Ltd., 2018)

“A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots,” noted Marcus Garvey, Jamaican political activist and pan-Africanist. For what is it that, in the face of difficulties, makes count all of the reasons why we’re not lost in the world? Our families; our extended families; our communities. Identification is key in the making of one’s personality and sensibility: the people we are exposed to and the situations we find ourselves in are the pillars of what we’re made of. Alvaro Barrington knows this all too well and is grateful to all the people who have bequeathed him ways of seeing and being, so much so that he wants to celebrate their preciousness in his life through his work—work whose boundaries are as blurred as it’s natural for them to be.

With *GARVEY: SEX LOVE NURTURING FAMALAY*, currently on view at Sadie Coles HQ, London, Barrington—who lived his early years in the Caribbean before moving to New York as a child—takes Garvey as a starting point to show the outsize contributions black and Caribbean culture have made on the world at large. He also looks at birth, his memories of his mother being pregnant with his younger brother and the ways in which the hip-hop and rap music scenes that flourished around him as a

teenager living in Brooklyn have shaped his view of the world. To accompany the show, Barrington worked with independent publisher Pacific to create *GARVEY!*, a magazine inspired by *Word Up!* that includes contributions from friends and activists as well as his own writings and images. Barrington also collaborated with *Socaholic* and the *United Colours of Mas* to participate in the Notting Hill Carnival. Barrington is a firm believer in the political power of art as a tool to change larger cultural conversations. He calls for introspection through social intimacy because, as he asserts, life can be tough—and we should celebrate the folks in our lives more.

CHIARA MOIOLI: The paintings in *GARVEY: SEX LOVE NURTURING FAMALAY* are the departure point for a four-show exploration of the life of Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) and his relationships to London, the Caribbean, and New York. Garvey was a Jamaican political activist, a pan-Africanist, the founder of UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League), a key influence on Rastafarians, and the first recognized Jamaican national hero, but also a controversial and polarizing figure. He already was a recurrent character in your previous works. What drew you to further investigate his life? What does he represent to you?

ALVARO BARRINGTON: I grew up loving drawing, loving making. I used to draw at every moment and people around me knew me as “the kid who could draw.” Often I was the go-to for anything creative. Somewhere around high school and getting an education and life (I was a horrible student in high school, never went to class, partied a lot), I lost my way and I found myself in situations that were dead-ends. I barely got into college. I had been an A student in junior high—a nerd, very studious—and at nineteen I was a different person. One of my best friends at the time use to say I went “from geek to chic.” I was more concerned with high fashion and girls, but then I wanted to return to the person who lived up to his potential. My last semester in high school, my art history teacher, Ms. Dell, started the class by showing a few artists of color and women artists, and told us that even though the rest of the semester she was going to teach us about Michelangelo, et cetera, women and people

of color were creating as well. They weren’t going to be on our state test, which we needed to pass in order to graduate, but she wanted us to know this other part of art history. I graduated high school wanting to find the value in what I loved to do, which was make in relationship to the people I care about.

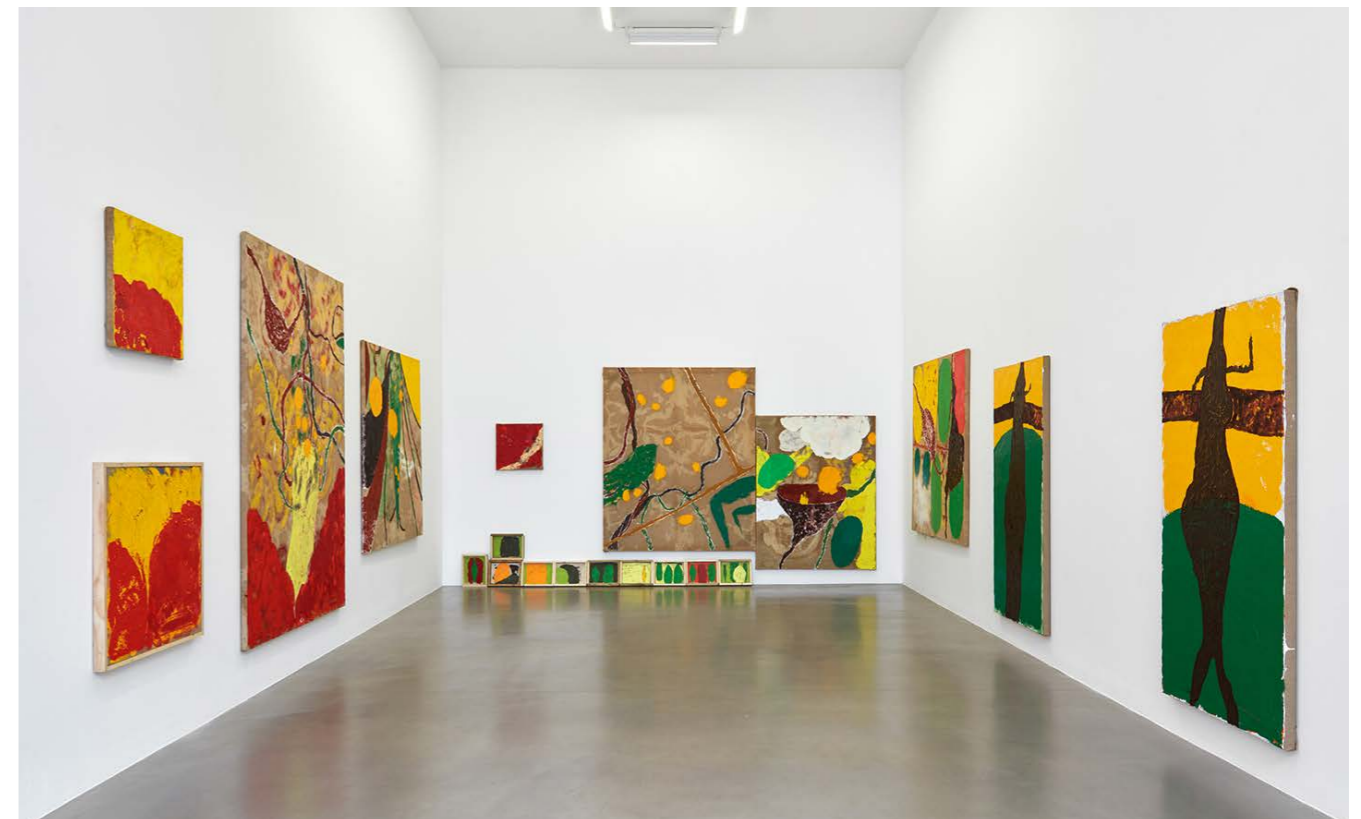
My elementary and junior high school art teacher, Mr. Ortiz, was a Rasta, and around my way in Flatbush where there was a huge Caribbean American community. One Rasta used to make these sci-fi Caribbean landscape paintings, and he was the first painter I knew. After high school I wanted to return to a younger self who had had possibilities. I made a lot of changes in my life. I bought *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, I started listening to conscious reggae like Jah Cure and Sizzla—musicians who in the early 2000s were having a moment and breaking into the U.S. market. I started growing my dreads out and *Garvey* became a gateway for me to begin to understand that black culture, Caribbean culture, the culture I grew up in, had such an impact on the world. *Garvey* was the father of pan-Africanism and his movement became a catalyst for black folks to understand that their history was way deeper than slavery. His most famous saying is, “A tree without its roots is bound to fall.” We are small islands, but we were creating large conversations with the world.

CM: How did you approach the challenge of recounting black relationships in this show?

AB: The paintings are about my mother’s relationship to my father and my brother’s father, and her giving birth to my brother, Alex. It’s really about her relationship to men. She passed away right after she had Alex. I never knew her really—I met her when I was seven and she passed away when I was ten, but I watched her being pregnant with Alex and her belly growing and I wanted to make interesting and inventive paintings that told that story and other Afro-Caribbean stories in relationship to artists like Agnes Martin, Helen Frankenthaler, and Louise Bourgeois.

CM: As part of the solo show at Sadie Coles HQ you launched a new publication: *GARVEY!*. Its title is an obvious reference to the notorious pan-Africanist, while the design of the booklet is a riff on *Word Up!*, a U.S. magazine focusing on entertainment and music (especially rap, hip-hop, and R&B) that was popular among teens in the 1980s. In line with this, you filled *GARVEY!* with quotes from rappers’ hits (2Pac, 21 Savage) but instead of giving voice to million-dollar celebrities, you lend the microphone to caring human beings sharing their touching humanness. Could you tell me about the genesis and purpose of *GARVEY!*?

AB: I think the description “notorious” for *Garvey* is problematic because it centers the idea of black criminality around a very complicated person and I’m not into defining anyone in such terms. Black folks in America know how violent mass incarceration is because we have positioned



black men as criminals for so long that we now have thirteen-year-old kids in jail for life. I think all humans are complicated and shift and hopefully we can begin to no longer define someone by their worst characteristics, like drug addict or whatever, because folks grow and change all the time. But to your question, I have such a wonderful community and interesting folks around me and I meet interesting people all the time. I met the writer Lauren Du Graf on a flight from Paris to New York. I wanted to have these voices heard because these folks help inform who I choose to be, and listening to them makes me understand life deeper.

I got the idea for the magazine when I was at the Rauschenberg residency. Elizabeth Karp-Evans (whose imprint Pacific published GARVEY!) was showing me photos from a show she did and I noticed a publication in one of them, and all of a sudden I knew that a magazine would allow me the freedom that traditional exhibition catalogues don't. It was exciting because I think magazines are kind of like art now because folks no longer read them the way they used to. Print publications are at a moment where they need to redefine themselves because they are dying. I think this was a great first edition and I'm excited about pushing it in the next edition and really making it a work of art.

CM: Would you discuss the side projects that you produced in collaboration with Socaholic and United Colours of Mas for the recent Notting Hill Carnival?

AB: I grew up going to Carnival in Grenada and in Brooklyn on Labor Day. It was such an important part of being in Brooklyn and it's always been important to me to maintain that relationship. Notting Hill Carnival is such a big part of London—two million people attend—and I wanted to do something special there. I asked Nadia Valeri from Socaholics and my cousin Fitzgerald Jack, who goes to Carnivals all over the world, what would be special, and they came up with the One Famalay concert, where musicians like Bunji Garlin, Machel Montano, Fay-Ann Lyons and Mr. Killa performed and then we had them perform on the float as well, so it was like a free concert for everyone at Carnival. Growing up in Brooklyn I remember how musicians like Biggie and Lil' Kim would perform on the Hot 97 floats and then Jay-Z did "Big Pimpin" down at Trinidad Carnival and I wanted to tap into this thing that made being from Brooklyn so special—we wanted to bring it to London for the show, and it was beyond a success. I designed the float for the Colours band and they won first place during Carnival.

CM: Any insight about how the shows dedicated to Marcus Garvey are developing?

AB: Garvey is part of a larger twelve-chapter show happening in London and New York over the next thirty years. I think of it sort of like the Marvel universe starts with Iron Man and then grows to Endgame. Garvey is like Iron Man in that it kicks off the franchise. I kind of already know the overall arc of each show—what keeps it together and how it leads to the next. It's just about making the work for each show because the twentieth century has already happened and I'm writing about the nuances that have shaped my ideas and life. The first chapter is now on view at Sadie Coles HQ, London, and next year the second chapter will be at Corvi-Mora, London. The show at Sadie Coles focuses on birth; the second chapter is about seeing people; the third chapter is about Garvey at the height of power and in his ego; and finally the last chapter is about his fall and how he regains himself.

CM: "Art is always who we are. It's about community—sharing ideas through music, dance, painting, performances," reads the first line of the press release for GARVEY: SEX LOVE NURTURING FAMILAY. This single sentence encapsulates many key points of your practice, for instance sharing as opposed to the idea of a solitary genius creating things out of nowhere (the leitmotif underlying your recently co-curated show Artists I Steal From).¹ Or the importance of provenance and traditions, and celebration as a means to awaken a community's sense of belonging. Would you expand on these topics?

AB: I'm so grateful to the folks who have given me ways of seeing and being. I just want to celebrate them because life is hard and I think we should celebrate the folks in our lives more. I'm so grateful to all the folks who have taken the time to talk with me because they didn't have to, but so many people have taken time to explain things I don't understand. I'm grateful for the musicians who helped me know what a feeling feels like and to the painters who invented ways of seeing that in turn help me understand what's happening inside of me.

CM: In your opinion, what do you think art can do in our current sociopolitical situation? Do you believe art carries a political agenda?

AB: Art is always political. Someone once told me that privilege is not being aware of yourself, so as man if I'm in a room with twenty men I wouldn't necessarily

be concerned, but a woman may feel differently. I think art that claims to not be political is like me in a room of men. I grew up in hip-hop and I saw how rappers like 2Pac and Ghostface Killah and Lil' Kim gave voice to folks who were dismissed by society—black men who just came out of jail, women who weren't allowed to own their sexuality. I saw how rap changed larger cultural conversations. I saw folks feel empowered because their experiences became voiced. In the Caribbean like everywhere else we are having conversations about LGBTQ issues. The creative director of the float I designed for Carnival UCOM openly supports the gay community. The musicians who performed on the float gave an energy to the masqueraders who were wearing Paul's designs, and that gave an energy to the design I made. It all came together to open up space for anyone to be welcomed, and I think that's why they won first place.

CM: As a child you grew up in the Caribbean, the birthplace of dub—a genre of electronic music that sprung out of reggae in the 1960s—which is all about copying and remixing. "Dubbing" literally meaning using previously recorded material, copying it, modifying it, and recording a new master mix. When you moved to Brooklyn at the age of eight, you found yourself immersed in the emerging hip-hop culture, and the rise of DJing. Do you recognize these musical influences and their creative methodologies as substantial in the unfolding of your artistic path?

AB: Yes, one of the best facts of my life that I grew up in the golden age of hip-hop with Nas, Notorious B.I.G. "Biggie," Timbaland, Pharrell Williams, Dr. Dre, Kanye West, Jay Z, Missy Elliott, Busta Rhymes, Lil' Kim, Snoop Dogg, all these innovators. During that era in hip-hop it was about how much you could throw at a song and still make it sound like your song, your voice. Pulling apart hip-hop has made me make better paintings because I look at all the things that made a classic hip-hop album and I wonder if my painting sits next to Nas's "Life's a Bitch" where you have AZ, this young energy, rapping like fuck it I'm young, I'm ready to blow it all, and then Nas who has a more mature young voice comes on the second verse and he is more pensive, and then Olu Dara, Nas's father, comes in with the cornet and ends the song with an atmospheric vibe with no words—just an old man who is listening to the two younguns, maybe aware of his own energy. In the upstairs of Sadie's show are these white paintings that let you be in your thoughts after the explosions of these scenes of colors, sex, and pregnancy downstairs and I wonder if they can be next to a great

Basquiat, who was thinking about all these elements of his life—hip-hop, Haitian jazz, Rauschenberg, the Lower East Side, Madonna, et cetera, and putting it into painting. The show ends with this blue hibiscus painting that pulls together a lot of those elements.

CM: Most of your production is intertwined with and indivisible from your personal place—your history and past experiences, your family and community. Motifs from your Caribbean youth, the usage of certain colors, and the integration of craft practices inherited from your family (like sewing) open your art to nonhierarchical forms of expression.

AB: I think I experience is important and has value, by which I mean a way to understand how to be present. I live to try to learn more, to be more sensitive, to feel and be more aware, and then I get to paint it. I get to see what Louise Bourgeois is doing and what Fay-Ann Lyons is doing and then I get think through that and find a way to paint that. The paintings are telling a story of everything I experience and in that story that I'm putting out in the world, I'm responsible for how those voices are put out there. In a conversation everyone should be heard, but being heard isn't about equal speaking time; it's about responding to how each person's words sit next to the last idea. We know that conversations can fail because maybe one or two people are speaking all the time. My hope is that I'm able to balance a lot of voices in the paintings..

Throwing open the gallery doors: the art world darlings keeping it real'

– Louisa Buck



Both Oscar Murillo and Alvaro Barrington are proof that even major art market players can still keep it real. Colombian-born Murillo is known for working with his immigrant family and communities that have nothing to do with art, and in the weeks leading up to his current exhibition at Carlos/ Ishikawa, he installed a working kitchen in the East End gallery and lent it out as a social space. Over the past month, it has been used for activities including children's parties, meetings of a Spanish-speaking feminist group and his aunt's catering business.

"I wanted to eradicate any veneer of gallery space. People assumed it was a community hall, like those that exist with social housing," he says. A Colombian dinner cooked for the art crowd by Aunt Chenene marked its transition back into a gallery, and the now-defunct kitchen remains at the centre of the show, surrounded by his artworks to allow for "friction to exist between realities". Another reminder of Murillo's view that "human capital is material" was his radical scheduling of the opening to run from 5am to 7am, an early rise for bleary art worlders but familiar to many others, including Murillo himself, who got up every day at 4am while working as a cleaner to pay his way through the Royal College of Art. "The art world is unable to engage with notions of difference, particularly within the context of race and identity," he says. "It's very good at representations of difference but doesn't engage structurally or sincerely."

These concerns are shared by Alvaro Barrington, another rising star determined to reach audiences beyond the art world. "I don't only want to talk about my blackness to a predominantly white crowd," says the artist. To this end he recently organised a packed-out One Famalay concert at

the Troxy music venue in east London, flying in big-league soca stars Skinny Fabulous, Machel Montano, Mr Killa, Bunji Garlin and Fay-Ann Lyons. The musicians took to the streets, performing at the Notting Hill Carnival on a Barrington-and-Sadie-Coles-sponsored float covered by his paintings, much to the joy of soca-loving revellers. This one-man dynamo—who was born in Caracas, Venezuela, grew up in the Caribbean and Brooklyn and graduated with a Slade MA in 2017—has also been mixing things up across the London art world. Back in the summer, while he was filling up Thaddaeus Ropac's Mayfair Gallery with a blue-chip array for Artists I Steal From, he was also rolling out a programme of musicians, choreographers and performers, many of whom he'd known since junior high school, at Emalin Gallery in Bethnal Green. The live acts were a prelude to his current show of paintings at Emalin, shared with his friend the Brooklyn artist Teresa Farrell. The duo opened with Brooklyn bands and a free jerk chicken truck on the same night that the indefatigable Barrington also unveiled his solo exhibition of paintings at Sadie Coles's West End gallery. These vivid works are based on the early years of Marcus Garvey and his time in London, intertwined with Barrington's own personal history. "Art is always who we are. It's about community," he says. Thanks to both Barrington and Murillo, the community just got a bit wider.

• Oscar Murillo's Trades Hall and Institute, Carlos/ Ishikawa, until 19 October

• Alvaro Barrington's Garvey: Sex Love Nurturing Famalay, Sadie Coles, until 26 October; Teresa Farrell and Alvaro Barrington, Tall Boys and a Double Shot Espresso, Emalin, until 26 October

'In the carnival groove: Georgia Lucas-Going gets everybody going at London's Emalin gallery'

– Louisa Buck,



What better way to blow away those end of summer blues than to hit the dance floor? There was precisely that in abundance at Emalin gallery this week with *You Asked and Told*, a stirring performance by Georgia Lucas-Going, which involved some formidable singing and dancing by both the artist and her professional-singer mother, Cheryl Beckles. And it all ended with most of the audience joining in too.

Accompanied by Cheryl's long-time percussionist Robert, the mother and daughter double act belted out a medley of numbers that ranged from Madness to Prince, with Cheryl delivering an especially impressive version of "Purple Rain". The songs were based on the artist canvassing people on what they danced to with their own families. The duo soon got pretty much everyone on the move, with some especially stylish shapes being thrown by such illustrious crowd members as the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac director Julia Peyton-Jones and the design critic

Alice Rawsthorn, along with that perennial dancing queen, Pauline Daley of Sadie Coles HQ. Only the Serpentine Gallery's Hans-Ulrich Obrist remained stationary in order to film the proceedings for his Instagram live post.

Lucas-Going's danceathon marked the finale of a summer-long programme at Emalin, put together by fellow artist Alvaro Barrington, who Lucas-Going met when they were both doing the MFA at the Slade School of Fine Art. ("His voice, his dedication to working and his trainers" were what she first noticed about him.) With Barrington organising a "One Famalay" carnival concert in East London's Troxy venue tonight, featuring multiple Soca music stars, and hosting an entire float of musicians at the Notting Hill Carnival this weekend, ahead his *GARVEY: SEX LIOVE NURTURING FIMALAY* exhibition opening on 7 September at Sadie Coles, it looks as if the dancing is set to continue well into the autumn...



‘When you look at my paintings, you’re encountering parts of my identity’

– Joe Lloyd

The New York-based painter talks about the artists he steals from, integrating his lived experience into art – and being the first artist asked to design a float for the Notting Hill Carnival.

When the curator Julia Peyton-Jones approached the New York-based artist Alvaro Barrington (b1983) about doing an exhibition, the two came up with a bold conceit. *Artists I Steal From*, now on at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London, is exactly as it sounds. Barrington has assembled 48 artists whose inventiveness he has imported into his own practice. Taking in modern masters and contemporary luminaries, largely painters, but also sculptors and performance artists, it is a remarkable demonstration of the breadth and depth of Barrington’s interests, and the correspondences between diverse artworks. Among these riches, Barrington has inserted a single piece of his own.

Barrington’s multipronged experience – he was born in Caracas, but spent his childhood living with his grandmother in Grenada, before moving to Brooklyn at the age of eight – informs his practice, which often takes the form of large, ecstatic paintings that layer motifs from the Caribbean of his youth. In recent years, he has integrated the sewing practices of the women in his family to create works integrating yarn, and made canvases from the burlap used in cacao importation. His practice to date has dealt with memory and nostalgia, with travel and with cultural exchange, embodied through figures such as the Pan-Africanist activist Marcus Garvey and including moments such as the Harlem Renaissance. In addition to painting, he is engaged with performance and opening art out to non-hierarchical forms of expression.

Based in Hackney until October – a return to London after studying for his MA at the Slade in 2015 – Barrington is engaged in a flurry of making. He is designing a float for August’s Notting Hill Carnival, the first artist invited to do so, and bringing musicians from the Caribbean to join the celebration. The same month, a collaborative exhibition with his friend Teresa Farrell opens at Emalin in Shoreditch, east London, with a programme of performance. Later this year, he has a solo show at Sadie Coles HQ, Davies Street and, in 2020, he will present a yarn-based show at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac’s branch in Paris’s Marais.

Joe Lloyd: How did *Artists I Steal From* come about?

Alvaro Barrington: Last year Julia [Peyton-Jones], who is Ropac’s global director, suggested we do a project together. About 10 years ago, when I decided to focus on becoming a painter as opposed to just doing creative things, I would go to museums – I’m sort of a nerd, a real student – and look at a painting and ask myself: “What is that painting doing?” Eventually, through looking and sketching, I would begin to see the ways in which the artist was thinking, and also the long history that they were working through. So I showed Julia my notes, and said this was something I’d been thinking about, that these were some of the artists I steal from when I’m thinking about a painting. She said: “Why don’t we do an exhibition of artists that you steal from?” I’m pretty shy, so I tried to run away from that title and idea for a while, but I trusted her. So that’s how the exhibition came about.

JL: The exhibition features one work of your own and 48 by other artists. How did you choose your single piece, *Unc You the Plug* (2019)?

AB: I didn’t want the exhibition to be about me: I wanted it to be about the folks I was seeing. There were a lot of works in my studio that could have fitted in to different sections, but I chose that particular selection because of a show I am exhibiting next year, at Ropac Paris Marais, which is purely yarn-based.

JL: Yarn is an unconventional material to use in painting. Why did you decide to adopt it?

AB: I couldn’t paint black faces. Well, technically, I could, but I could not find an inventive way of making a face. There was a sort of jet black, like Kerry James Marshall does; it’s a sort of caricatured black face, a sort of gestural black face. I felt like it was covered, and I didn’t really know how to be inventive in depicting something that I live with every day: my own face!

Then I remembered Chris Ofili talking about why he started using elephant dung, because he knew that, if he put it in, then he would have to resolve the painting, so you don’t walk away and just go: “There’s elephant dung in that painting.” And I remembered my aunt’s sewing, and I realised it was something that connected to my personal history, so I tried to use it as a material.

At first, I was simply putting it on to the painting, which I still do from time to time. But I wanted to resolve the paintings with yarn, so that you don’t just go, “Oh, there’s yarn!” when you look at the whole thing. I don’t want to be a painter who just uses a material because they want to be crazy, or whatever, and I think in every painting you need to feel intuitively why the decisions have been made about what is there. Then I decided I needed to make paintings that have no paint, so I took the paint out of the equation.

JL: When focusing so intently on the works of others, do you ever worry about the anxiety of influence?

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JL: Would you say there is a commonality tying together all your selections?

AB: The only thing is that I look at them! In this show, we tried to organise it based on certain elements of their work.

JL: Such as line, colour and the south ...

AB: Yes, the south as an area. In Europe, you had the Italian *arte povera*, which talked about a certain economy of making. That didn’t really happen in the UK, because the UK had a different cultural climate and an idea of space. A movement such as *arte povera* could only come out of Italy. Similarly, in the American south, there’s an energy that brings about a certain way of making.

JL: How would you define this southern approach?

AB: When you think about the north-eastern artists, especially in light of Greenbergian formalism, there’s this idea of flatness: it’s about getting as close to the wall as possible. Whereas, in the south, there are back yards and front yards and side yards, and the sky has stars.

Looking at someone such as Robert Rauschenberg – who was born in Texas, got his education at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, and then made most of his work in Florida – you see that his work is always coming off the canvas. I think that’s a big part of what happens when you have the space and you have the access to materials. You do have access to materials in New York, but it’s very different. And in New York, in London, in Paris, we have a very different emotional connection to space, just because of how we manoeuvre the physicality of being in a cityscape.

JL: Going back to the start, what led you to choose painting as your main medium?

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JL: At your 2017 exhibition in MoMA PS1, you exhibited drawings and notebooks besides paintings. Is process a significant part of how you conceive your practice?

AB: It is a major part of how I conceive my art, yes. I think the Post-it notes and the writings are all parts of it. The first show I did at Ropac was with Joseph Beuys, and in this show we have a Beuys chalkboard, which is from his lecture series. I was really inspired by those artists who consider art as a living process, not only as a painting that appears on the wall. One of the early American philosophers was John Dewey, who talks about art as lived experience. As much as possible, I’m someone who processes my lived experiences through making, or writing, or listening.

JL: So, would you say your work is a distillation of your lived experience?

AB: It goes hand and hand. I’m looking at yarn, at glue, a piece of corn, which are drawn from my experience. But it’s not solely diaristic; it’s not: “This is what I ate this morning.” I think my goal is for a work to show a complete month or a complete year. And your year is never



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as lived experience. As much as possible, I'm someone who processes my lived experiences through making, or writing, or listening.

JL: So, would you say your work is a distillation of your lived experience?

AB: It goes hand and hand. I'm looking at yarn, at glue, a piece of corn, which are drawn from my experience. But it's not solely diaristic; it's not: "This is what I ate this morning." I think my goal is for a work to show a complete month or a complete year. And your year is never surrounded by just one thing, your day is never just one thing that happened. It's always a long series and many different things: whether the train was grounded, or the food you ate was good, or you had a crazy thought, all of those things are part of the day. I guess I get to have time to think about all of those things and, hopefully I can bring many of them to a painting.

JL: A lot of your work to date draws on motifs – hibiscus, yams, Caribbean vegetation – from your childhood in Grenada, but you have lived in cities for much of your life since. Do you plan to introduce urban imagery to your work?

AB: There's a painting I made of my friend's suicide, and that's all about his migration and his mental health illness, and his journey in New York to figure that out. The hibiscus was a way of starting from the beginning. When I was thinking about what to paint, I realised that you could start from so many places, so many weird places. So, I thought I would start from the beginning. The hibiscus is also an organic way to blend in the history of painting flowers, as Alex Katz does today. So, it was a good place to start.

I think that when you look at a lot of my paintings, you're encountering many parts of my identity. So, even though I think of myself as a New Yorker – I've lived there for about 30 years ago – I spent several years in Grenada, which was very influential. And when I moved to New York it was to a Caribbean-African neighbourhood in Brooklyn, and I studied in Manhattan and in London. If you're going to spend a day with me, you're going to notice all these elements of my personal experiences, and with my paintings I'm always hoping you'll notice many of these elements.

JL: You are making a float for the Notting Hill Carnival this year, the first artist to do so, with the carnival arts organisation United Colours of Mas (UCOM). What is the story behind this?

AB: I'm working in Notting Hill on an entire float, with costume designers and performers. One of the things I found challenging when I decided to become a painter was that I was usually the only black person in a room. I realised over time that it didn't mean that black people weren't participating in art because I grew up in art, I grew up in carnivals. It wasn't necessarily "fine art", which I don't actually think is a real category. To bring it back to Beuys, I grew up in that culture where it was

really about erasing hierarchies, where we're all participating in cultural production.

I wanted to figure out a way to make sure that the art I was doing felt relevant to as many people as possible. If you look at Andy Warhol, he's designing an Aretha Franklin album cover; Warhol was really about trying to reach people within his language of painting, he was bridging it. That felt like a great place to be. As I'm from the Caribbean, I asked if I could design a float, and if I could bring musicians over. And [UCOM] was very excited about it, because they do it with limited means, and we were able to open up the budget a little more.

JL: So, you want to bring art from beyond the confines of the gallery?

AB: Yeah! One of the first places where I experienced painting was in a church. When you go to a church, especially when you go to a black church, it's full of gospel music, it's full of life, it's full of energy. Art has always existed within a context. Later, people separated it and put it into a gallery. But the truth is that, for most of its long, long history, art was always in the context of people's lived lives, whether on cave walls or in a church.

JL: There is this Linnaean sense that the world needs to be divided to be made comprehensible, whereas I think if you divide it down into parts, you lose so much.

AB: We're always trying to figure out how we can separate things into alphabets, which I think is a human trait, because we all experience things within a lot of different contexts, and the contexts give meaning to it. But I think when you're always trying to isolate something, it ends up losing its meaning, its power and its value, because you have separated that thing and created a false narrative.



“Artists I Steal From’ at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London’

– Christine Takengy,

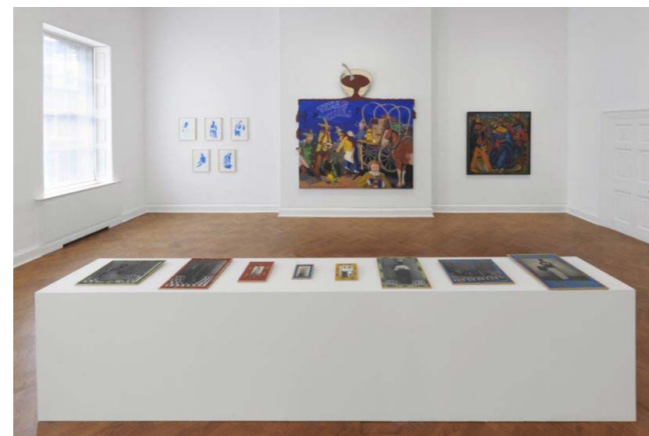
Throughout the history of art, artists have always borrowed from each other. However, they rarely reveal their sources, who they ‘steal’ from – and the reasons why – as openly as Alvaro Barrington in the latest exhibition at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London. Artists I Steal From is curated by Barrington and the gallery’s Senior Global Director Julia Peyton-Jones, coming about following a conversation they had in which he revealed it was his dream to make a show of work by the artists that have influenced and inspired him. It brings together a selection of paintings, drawings, sculpture and photography by 49 artists, starting with a quote attributed to Pablo Picasso:

“Good artists copy: great artists steal.”

The artists Barrington ‘steals from’ are presented on two floors. They range from individuals considered to be among the greatest of our times such as Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois, Jean-Michel Basquiat or Philip Guston, to 36-year-old Barrington’s contemporaries such as Izzy

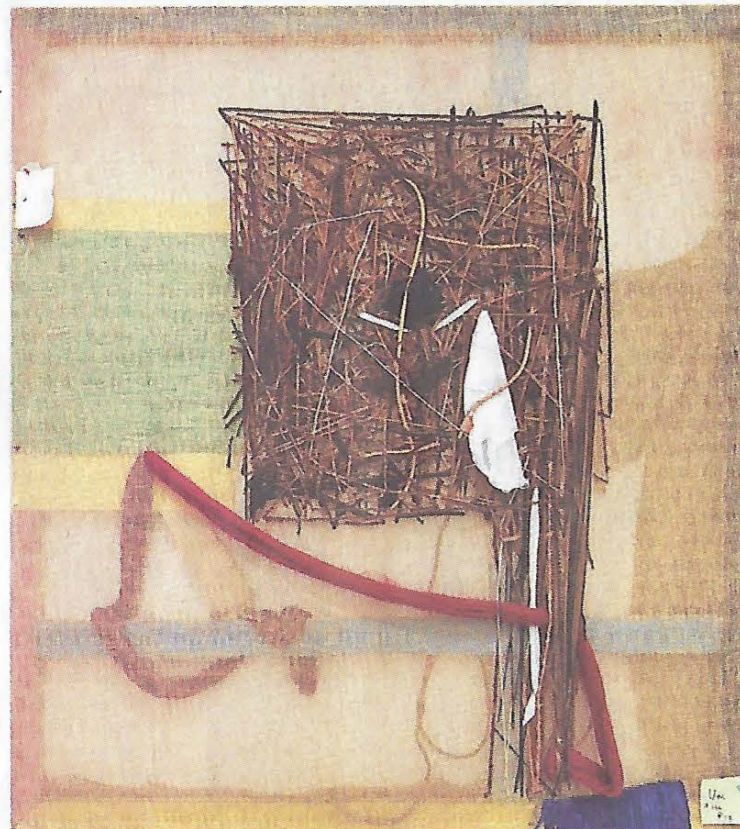
Wood, Allison Katz or performance artist Janine Antoni. Also included are Afro-American artists from different generations such as Henry Taylor or Emma Amos, and – not to forget – Barrington’s former art professor, Jamaican-born Nari Ward. Barrington describes Ward as a sort of ideological role model who taught him to work with the materials and techniques that connect to his own personal and cultural history, shaped by Barrington’s upbringing in Grenada and Brooklyn, New York.

Quite quickly it becomes evident that Barrington’s relationship with the artists in the show is based on close examination and thorough analysis, rather than simple theft. He states “Artists always look at how other artists have solved the problems they are wrestling with or have achieved the results they aspire to. The artists in the exhibition are those I look to and steal from. It’s the particular inventiveness or their practice that fascinates me, since it has opened up a whole world for me and introduced me to new possibilities within my own painting.”

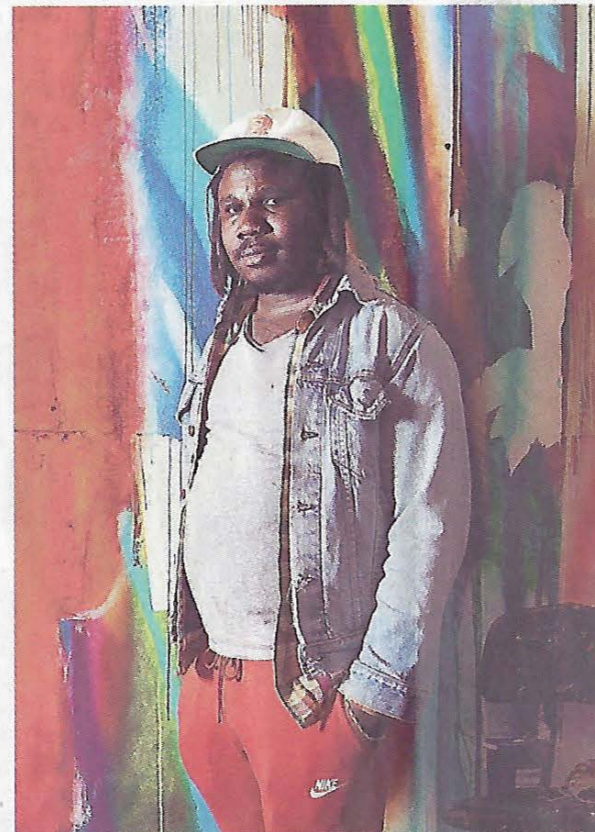


THE ART OF COLLECTING

Alvaro Barrington steals, but in a nice way



ALVARO BARRINGTON/GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LONDON, PARIS, SALZBURG



POULOMI BASU FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

LONDON

He is showing a selection of works by artists who have influenced him

BY FARAH NAYERI

On a drizzly June morning, the artist Alvaro Barrington led visitors around his new London exhibition. There was only one work by him in the entire gallery.

"Artists I Steal From" at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Mayfair is a selection of paintings, drawings, sculptures and photographs by 49 artists who have influenced Mr. Barrington. The New

York-based painter incorporates textiles, stitching and sewing in his work. His lone piece in the show, "Unc You the Plug" (2019), is a painting on burlap of a square-shaped head stitched with yarn.

The artists he "steals" from include Abstract Expressionists (Willem de Kooning, Cy Twombly) and masters of color (Robert Rauschenberg, Howard Hodgkin), African-American painters (Henry Taylor, Jacob Lawrence) and female pioneers (Louise Bourgeois, Agnes Martin). The show, which runs through Aug. 9, is spread across two levels of Ropac's London headquarters, a grand Mayfair mansion that once housed a bishop. On the upper level are stacks of art books Mr. Barrington owns.

The exhibition grew out of a visit by Ropac's senior global director of special projects, Julia Peyton-Jones, to Mr. Bar-

ington's New York studio. He told her then that he dreamed of exhibiting artists he loved.

"I always think it's a very interesting process to look at art through the eyes of an artist," Ms. Peyton-Jones said.

Describing Mr. Barrington as "incredibly knowledgeable" and "a very interesting mind," she noted that he was constantly going to museums and exhibitions. "It's really part of his process of being an artist," she explained. His art is "what he does with all that looking."

For a reporter, touring the London show with Mr. Barrington felt at times like a very personal art history lesson. Certain works inspired particularly emotional commentary. Pointing to Philip Guston's small 1968 acrylic of a high-heel ankle boot, Mr. Barrington noted that Mr. Guston used painting as a

way of "dealing with his own anxieties." Standing before a lined 1965 oil-and-pencil canvas by Ms. Martin, he recalled that she drew very straight lines to clear her mind during a period of mental illness. "You couldn't get deeper than her," he said.

(Works by Ms. Bourgeois are among those being shown at the Masterpiece fair, through July 3 at the Royal Hospital in Chelsea.)

Another admired artist, the German painter Anselm Kiefer, was present in the flesh, gazing at the works on the wall (none were his). After stopping to greet him, Mr. Barrington settled in the gallery's living room to talk about his life and career.

Now 36, Mr. Barrington was born in Venezuela. His Haitian father was a construction worker by day and a D.J. by night, and his mother was a nanny. When he was a year old, he moved to Grenada to be raised by his grandmother and aunts while his mother worked in the United States. His aunts "were the ones who kept me in line," he recalled. "I was a really, really bad kid: no discipline. I would cut school, play soccer — there's probably too many things to talk about."

It was an idyllic life of trips to the beach, outdoor activities and a society "where everybody knows everybody," he said. When he cut class, a stranger would walk up, ask him who his family was and take him back to school. "There was a sense of protection and community," he recalled. "When you go to a place like America, one of the first things they tell you is, don't trust strangers."

When he was 8, he moved to New York with his mother and settled into Flatbush in Brooklyn, where the Caribbean lifestyle of his neighborhood reminded him of home. He was simultaneously immersed in hip-hop culture, a major formative influence. Yet the little boy also witnessed violence and the crack epidemic at its worst. Did he like the United States? "I love-hated it, which I still do," he said.

When his mother died two years later, he was left in the care of his stepfather and his mother's friends — nannies who found the time and resources to keep him in New York, fulfilling what they

said they believed were his mother's wishes.

His penchant for art became apparent early on. "I was the kid in my neighborhood who was drawing, who was designing quilts for people, who was making stuff," he said.

Recommended by teachers, he attended LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and spent 12 years in college, mostly at Hunter in New York. "If somebody mentioned a name or a political ideology and I didn't understand, I would try to find a class," he said. When he received his bachelor's degree, he said he had 244 credits — more than twice what was required.

"A lot of my time at Hunter was spent copying artists that I loved and hated," he recalled. "It was sort of my way of un-

"A lot of my time at Hunter was spent copying artists that I loved and hated."

derstanding what they were doing. It was a way of looking, learning, making, in a sort of circle." In 2015, he moved to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Art.

After graduation, he initially produced "didactic art" consisting of signs and inscriptions. He then began embracing, and evoking, his life experiences. His art incorporates sewing, which he watched his Grenadian aunts do; fabric, such as the hemp used to make cocoa sacks; and the hibiscus flower. It also reflects the influence of the innumerable artists he has studied, admired and emulated.

Mr. Barrington says his mission is to demonstrate that black culture is central to the history of art and not an exotic side show. Mark Rothko "was going up to Harlem to listen to jazz," he said. When Henri Matisse made a line drawing of a jazz subject, he was not "imagining it," but rather "having a conversation with these great jazz musicians" whom he met on trips to New York.

Art has "always been about an exchange," Mr. Barrington said. "And unless you tell that story in an accurate way, you're doing these communities an incredible disservice."

Artistic license

Alvaro Barrington in front of "Untitled" (2019) by Katharina Grosse. Her work is among those he has assembled for his show "Artists I Steal From," at the Ropac gallery. At far left is "Unc You the Plug," Mr. Barrington's only work in the show.

'Alvaro Barrington'

– Alain Elkann,

In *ARTISTS I STEAL FROM* the 36 year old artist Alvaro Barrington and Julia Peyton-Jones, the very well appreciated contemporary art curator, bring together works by 49 artists who influence Alvaro's work. The exhibition is at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London from 5th June to 9th August 2019.

A.E: Alvaro, you are from Venezuela?

A.B: My parents met there, and after my mom got pregnant the family moved to New York. I moved to Grenada to live with my grandma, to have a real childhood. My parents separated and my mom remarried. When I was 8 I went to Brooklyn to be with her, but she passed away when I was 10.

A.E: What kind of a child were you?

A.B: I was a lot of different things, but after my mom died I became a very quiet kid who would draw a lot. That was the thing everybody around me celebrated. I always drew, and eventually I realized there's a world out there that supports people who make things.

A.E: When did you decide that art would be your career?

A.B: It was after I went to Hunter College on Lexington Avenue, which has a great art program with a lot of visiting artists. Carroll Dunham the painter said, "If you hate an artist you should understand why, and if you love an artist you should understand why. And you should go look at every show at every gallery." I started by making bad versions of paintings by the people I love, like Anselm Kiefer and Francis Bacon. They're all in the garbage

A.E: Why?

A.B: Because painting is a language, and you can't just land in Germany and expect to know the language. You learn the language by studying people who are great at it and understanding what the language is. A.E: Do you find a common thread between artists like Kiefer and

Rauschenberg and Basquiat?

A.B: I take from all of them. In that one painting is everyone from Aaron Douglas to Jacob Lawrence to Rashid Johnson. There are some images of Grenada. Matisse is in there. Ultimately it's a composition.

A.E: Why have you stitched together rags and canvas?

A.B: Chris Ofili used elephant dung in his painting as a way to throw himself off, as a way to resolve the question: How do I put elephant dung in the painting that makes you look at it and not think, Oh that's elephant dung? I need to throw something in the painting that I have to resolve, and I remember my auntie sewing, and so I thought I could use sewing as a way to throw me off, as a way to resolve the fact that I didn't know how to make an interesting portrait.

A.E: Will Alvaro Barrington be remembered for sewing and yarn?

A.B: I hope that history never remembers me as using yarn! You learn that artists did this one thing, but when you see their long history you go: How come they didn't tell me about this? That's a huge disservice that we do to artists. Picasso was smart in that he was able to figure out how to change, but most artists were very diverse.

A.E: You are a younger generation than people like Urs Fischer, Dan Colen, and Mark Grotjahn. Does their work interest you?

A.B: I love Mark's work. How he is able to fit so much into every line is really brilliant. Also artists like Jonas Wood.

A.E: As a young artist, how did you come to work with the well-known curator Julia Peyton-Jones?

A.B: I feel very privileged. People saw me around for a long time and remembered me. If you're consistent you are supported, and there were artists in my community who knew certain dealers and they said: Hey, this is a young artist. I think you should check him out.

A.E: Which is your community?

A.B: Teresa Farrell and Richard Kuan and I used to go to MoMA and look at one painting for eight hours.

A.E: You were born in Venezuela but are very much from Brooklyn?

A.B: I think of myself as being from Brooklyn because I have been there for 30 something years. It's a ten minute bike ride from my house to my studio, and each and every corner means something to me. That's the corner that I made out with that girl, or that's the corner that I got into an argument with my ex-girlfriend. By the time I come to the studio I have to unwind from all these experiences,

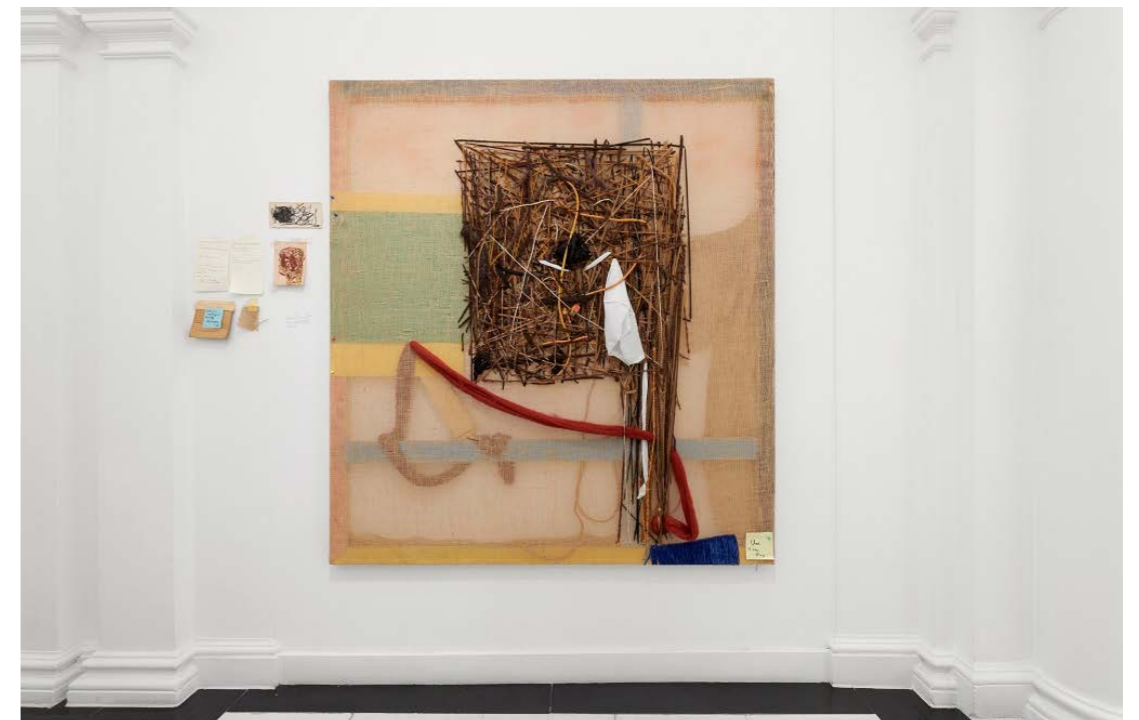
because when I'm in the studio it's about being present with the work and the painting.

A.E: Do you always work alone in your studio?

A.B: It's about me being in conversation with that painting. Sometimes Teresa and I will collaborate and she'll be there, but I have no assistants.

A.E: How many hours do you work?

A.B: Sometimes I'm in the studio for two weeks by myself. I work on a lot of different things. I take no showers. I don't go home. Nobody comes in and I'm just there, and after two or three days food and deodorant is delivered and clean socks, which is really important. I have a bad phone addiction, but most of my friends don't message or call me because they know I am working.



Unc you the plug, 2019 by Alvaro Barrington, including painted wooden stretcher bars, burlap in place of canvas, yarn, coloured paper, pen/pencil notes on paper, coloured pins, an orange plug and cord taken from his Rauschenberg residency on Captiva Island and two du-rags (one white, one black).



‘Artists I Steal From review’

– Eddy Frankel

Time Out Says: ****

Summer group shows in London galleries are the worst. They're just naff excuses to sell leftover art in the quiet months, helmed by some curator who's insisted on writing something on the wall about how the show focuses on physical spatiality or the violence of poetics or some shit. Urgh.

But this one, somehow, isn't awful. Young Venezuelan-American artist Alvaro Barrington has been given free rein to fill this ludicrously ostentatious spa-like space with art the he likes, is influenced by and nicks from. I mean, most people have no idea who Barrington is so it's a bit of a useless premise, because why should we care who he's nicked ideas from? But walking through the show, you realise that, damn, Barrington's got taste.

The titles are scrawled in pencil on the walls and the themes are splodged in ink as you enter each room. There

are Post-Its and postcards tacked next to paintings, while some things are hung too close together, some too far apart. It's great: informal, approachable and fun.

And the art isn't half bad. There's an incredibly dark Jean-Michel Basquiat self-portrait, a pendulous Louise Bourgeois sculpture, a Robert Rauschenberg chunk of car, a cracking Philip Guston and a hilariously dumb Georg Baselitz painting of Hitler, for some reason.

And that's just the big names. There's the graffiti-influenced scribbles of Gerasimos Floratos too, and a lovely Denzil Forrester work, all hung near a framed panel from the 'Spawn' comic book.

You could definitely do with a bit more of Barrington's own work here for the sake of context, but if you ignore all that, this just becomes a really accessible, fun, interesting group show. It's tongue-in-cheek, full of good art and nonsense-free. What more could you want?

‘Art Basel diary: celebrity-spotting, nimble octopi and a bratwurst that cuts the mustard, Plus, Alvaro Barrington has designs on Notting Hill Carnival’

Alvaro floats our boat

The Venezuela-born artist Alvaro Barrington is throwing himself into the spirit of the Notting Hill carnival by designing a float for London's raucous street party that takes place every August bank holiday weekend. Barrington tells us that "he is bringing a few musicians from the Caribbean to perform" on the float, including the singer Mr Killa. The Notting Hill extravaganza will coincide with the artist's show at Sadie Coles HQ, which is also offering his works at Art Basel. "My cousin Fitzgerald Jack is organising the musicians for the float with me, and Sadie is sponsoring it," Barrington says. "And Mr Killa is from Grenada where my mum comes from."

‘Great artists steal: Alvaro Barrington’s new show reveals eclectic range of influences’

– Louisa Buck

All artists use other artist’s work, but few are as candid about it as Alvaro Barrington. Artists I Steal From is the frank title of the show that he has put together at Thaddaeus Ropac, which brings together 49 artists who have been a key influence on the Caracas-born artist who graduated from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2017. His starting point is the statement supposedly made by Picasso that “good artists copy, great artists steal”. However, Barrington’s relationship with the show’s artists—who range from Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois and Philip Guston through to contemporaries such as Lisa Brice and Chris Martin—is based on close examination, analysis and unexpected discovery rather than simple theft. The works are organised thematically into sections such as line, colour or gesture, which are then accompanied by Barrington’s annotated commentaries that are scribbled on scraps of paper, post-it notes and sometimes written directly onto the gallery walls.

As well as offering a revealing insight into an artist’s thought processes, there’s also the treat of seeing an eclectic array of some truly great works, many of which have scarcely been seen in public before. These include a rare late De Kooning painting of 1987 and a 1960s Cy Twombly drawing getting its first showing directly from the artist’s estate. Some works have also been made

especially for this exhibition, most notably Katharina Grosse’s expanse of a spray-painted studio, which is in fact a vivid trompe l’oeil digital print on silk.

However, just before yesterday’s opening Barrington did confess to one direct steal. The only example of his own work included in the show is Unc you the Plug (2019), a mixed-media piece which has a dense central panel made from overlapping strands of wool, string and various forms of thread sewn into a burlap backing. Coiling through these fibrous layers is a vivid orange extension-plug, sprayed with patches of fluorescent paint which the artist admits he pinched from out of the Robert Rauschenberg estate. “I was down in Captiva [Florida] where Rauschenberg was living and I noticed this cable that had an incredible discolouration—I knew I could do something interesting with it and so I took it”, he told me. But honesty also prevailed: “I went straight out to Home Depot and I bought a new one—and I told them, ‘Hey, I’ve taken your chord but I’ve got you a new one.’” Apparently there were no repercussions, which for Barrington confirmed another maxim that he has also taken to heart. “As an old Armenian friend always said to me, it is better to ask for forgiveness than to ask for permission.”



‘Interview: Alvaro Barrington - Seeing Together’

– Christopher Schreck

CS: This September, you'll be presenting a solo show at Sadie Coles HQ: the first in a four-chapter series tracking the imagined life stages of Marcus Garvey.

AB: Right. This first chapter is Garvey being born into the world—not literally, in terms of his biography, but metaphorically. It's a reimagining. The work does have art historical references, but reaches into different parts of culture as well—like reggae, where women are usually referenced as Mother Nature. Bob Marley's Uprising, flowers, etc.

CS: What drew you to Garvey as a subject?

AB: He's the father of Pan-Africanism, part of the first wave of Caribbean immigrants to the UK and America, and I was thinking about how that wave, and those that followed it, were responsible for me being in Brooklyn now. But I've been making work about him for years. There's a community garden next to my stepparents' house in Flatbush with a mural of him. I remember being there, thinking, "Man, I wonder if Marcus Garvey liked flowers?" So I went home and made a painting. Then I went back and did it again. I just kept going back, spending all this time with this imagery, even after I went to London for grad school. It kept developing, and when I was talking to Sadie about doing a show, it just felt like the right work for the space. It felt organic.

CS: That same month, you're mounting a two-person show at Emalin in London with your longtime friend, the artist Teresa Farrell. You've included her canvases in your own prior exhibitions at Emalin and MoMA PS1; will this show similarly find your works in dialogue, or are the pieces themselves collaborative?

AB: It's collaborative. Our relationship's always been like that; I've known Teresa for years—we met at Hunter, but we're both from Brooklyn, and had people in common way before that—and she's done so much to make me a better artist. We have different styles, but we have very

similar eyes. When we look at the canvas, we see the same thing—it's just what we do after seeing it that's different.

A lot of times, when you look at collaborative work, you can tell who did what. Like when Basquiat and Warhol worked together, it was obvious, because each of them was using their signature moves. With Teresa and me, we wanted to be sure you couldn't tell who made which decisions. It wasn't like, "You do your thing, I'll do mine"; it was more about responding to the work, trying to give it what it needed. Making pieces with her, it's all about what makes each other laugh. We're just trying to get to that place where we're both seeing the same thing.

CS: You and Teresa share a penchant for overlaying manifold references in a single work, be they personal, historical, cultural or aesthetic. To that end, there's a line in your manifesto that stood out to me—a quote from Kerry James Marshall: "I don't want my work to be a zone of free association." This seems like a stance that could be as easily aimed at your viewers—their readings, their points of entry—as to yourself as an artist, and the way you conceive, create, and even speak about your work.

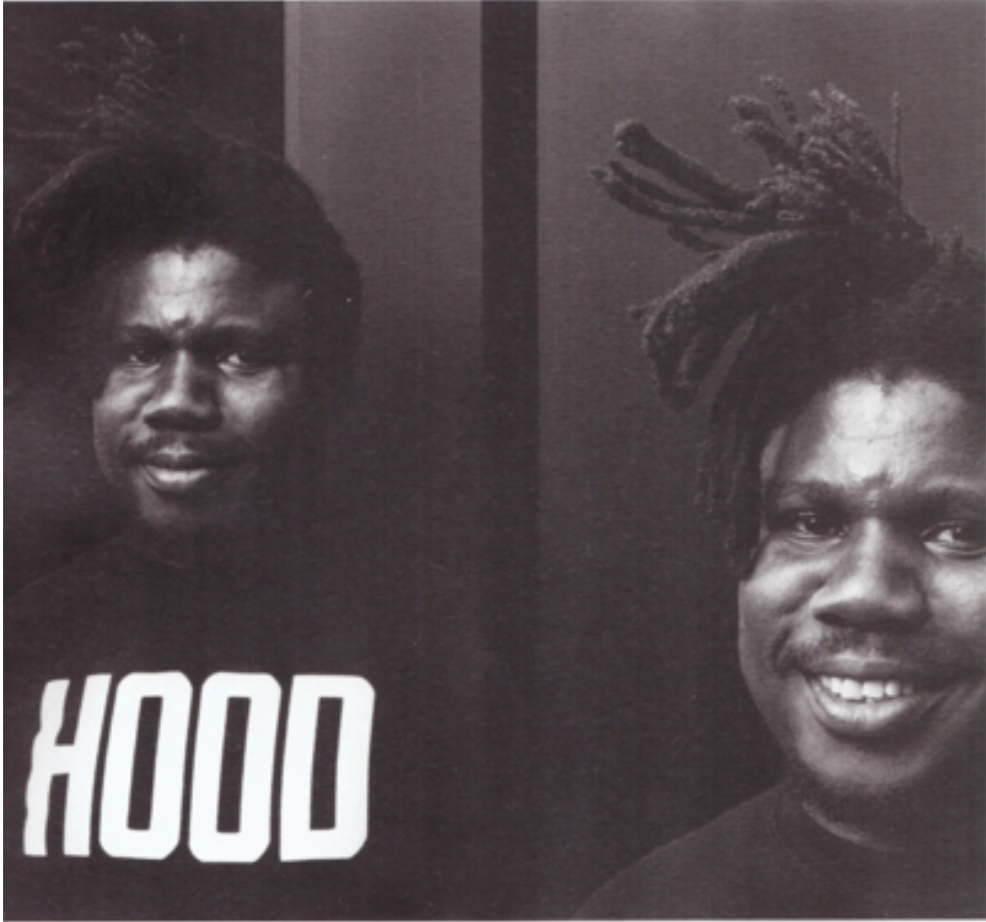
AB: People are always going to see their own thing in the paintings, which is totally cool—but the work is saying something, and that has to be recognized first. That's what I took from Kerry James' statement. It's something I thought about a lot with the Garvey paintings, because I want to make sure I'm not making work that people, especially black people, can't access. There are a lot of layers to the paintings, but not everyone has the same art historical touch points, so I make sure the work never deviates from the central ideas. Part of that is understanding what the work needs, and not letting my own ego or mood get in the way. Every work has its own tone or energy—but some of the paintings take two years to complete, and it's not like I'm in that same mood all the time, so I have to adjust what I'm doing to fit the painting. It's the work that decides what happens next.



Image courtesy of The Artist and Emalin, London. Photo Credit: Elisa Gomera

‘Say More Feel More Create More’

“Art should be beautiful. It needs to live in our souls.”
ALVARO BARRINGTON



HOOD

Alvaro Barrington What made you want to be an artist? Wanting to see art that I knew only I could make. What makes you happiest about making work? That moment where what I see in my mind, is also what's in front of me. What was your earliest experience of art? There was a Rasta on my block in Flatbush who made these paintings of six-6 Caribbean landscapes. You use everything from painting to textiles to photography to found images in your work; what connects these different elements? Look at a lot of art and want to be in conversation with so many artists. I think anything I experience can be in conversation with the history of art, it's just a question of how do I do that responsibly to the materials, the medium, myself, the larger world. Should art be beautiful? Yes, it needs to live in our souls. What do you think are the most important things happening in the art world today? That the larger western art community is pushing against the narratives that opened spaces for only a specific group. The theme of the issue is about breaking the establishment. Discuss... Burn
Babylon. PHOTOGRAPHY MAXWELL TOMLINSON. GROOMING SHIORI TAKAHASHI. PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANCE RORY JAMES COLE. GROOMING ASSISTANCE MEGUMI SANO.

THE ARTISTS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE UNITED BY THEIR FIERCE INDIVIDUALITY, BY THE WAY THEY EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITH BRAVERY AND CONVICTION. IT'S A CELEBRATION OF ALL THE PERSONALITIES i-D LOVES IN THE ART WORLD TODAY. THEY ARE OLD AND THEY ARE YOUNG. SOME ARE STILL AT SCHOOL. SOME ARE TURNER PRIZE WINNERS. FIND THEIR WORK. GO TO THEIR EXHIBITIONS. TAKE THEIR LEAD. BE INSPIRED. START CREATING.

‘Alvaro Barrington & David Weiss: A Different World’

– Gabriella Nugent

In the American sitcom, *A Different World*, *The Cosby Show*'s Denise Huxtable goes to college. The series, which aired on NBC from September 24, 1987 to July 9, 1992, centered on students at the fictional historically black Hillman College in Virginia. The series is often cited for encouraging African American students to view college as a viable goal. It is from this sitcom that Brooklyn-based artist Alvaro Barrington's series of vintage postcards of European landmarks, sewn and tied with several types of thick yarn, takes its title.

Matted chestnut-colored thread wraps around Munich's Cathedral of Our Dear Lady. Beige strings descend from the sky overlooking The Statue of the Crowned Virgin in Lourdes. Brown yarn conceals our view of the church tower submerged in Lake Reschen, while curled shades of copper twine similarly covers Fountains Abbey. The Paris Opera emerges through tightly woven yarn, and the Norwich Cathedral, through grey and orange strings.

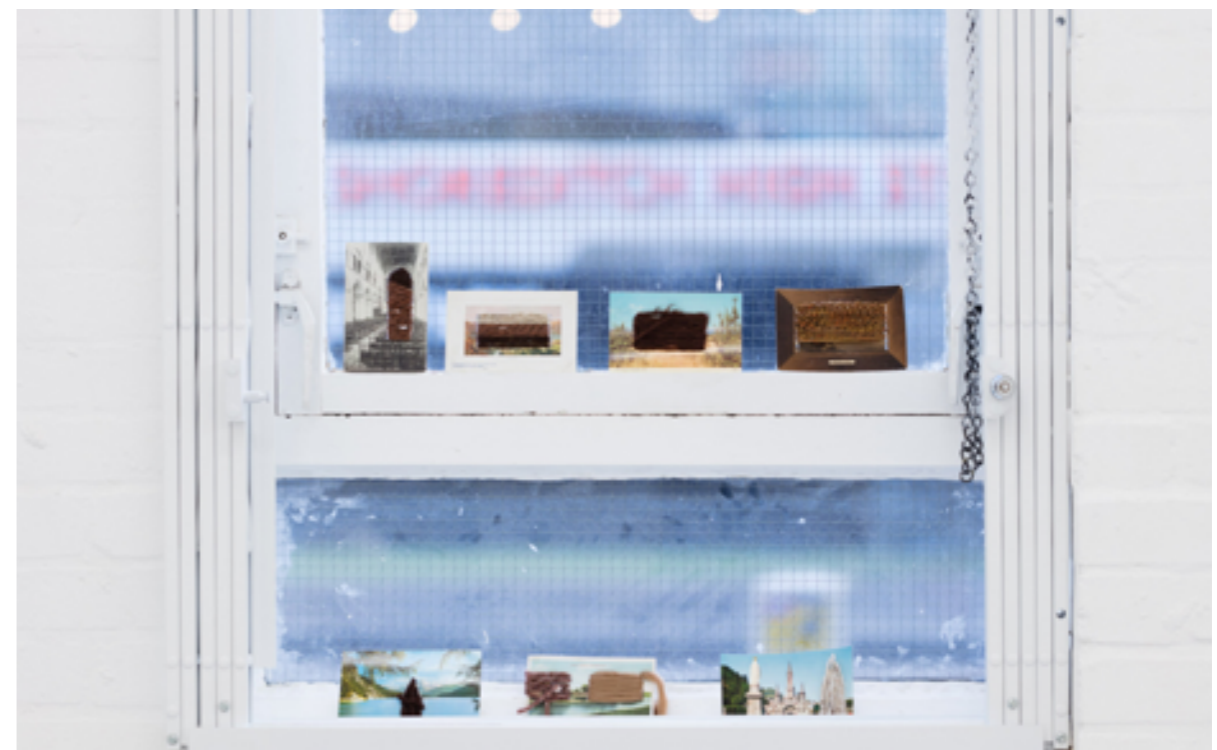
Working chronologically through the sitcom, every exhibition of Barrington's series employs a supplemental title taken from an episode of *A Different World*. His show at the London gallery Emalin takes its name from season 1, episode 8—*If Chosen I May Not Run*. Here, Barrington's work is shown alongside the early drawings of the late Swiss artist David Weiss in collaboration with the Basel-based gallery Weiss Falk for CONDO, a program that stages gallery shares across London. (This is the first exhibition of Weiss's work in the United Kingdom that is separate from the collective Fischli/Weiss.)

In *A Different World*, Barrington alters voyages already taken. Situated on the windowsills of the gallery, the series constructs an alternative vision onto the world. Through the act of weaving, Barrington engages an extended tradition of women's work, from the Greek myth of Penelope to the textiles made by the artist's own aunts in Grenada. Barrington inscribes the labor of women in empty vistas, church crevices, and tower walls across Europe. Furthermore, the series simultaneously speaks to the 1960s slogan on the afterlives of colonialism in the United Kingdom, "we are here, because you were there." Barrington challenges the deceptively easy, whitewashed world conveyed in the photographs: a world enabled by the work of others, expropriated wealth, and the endless

expansions of capital. This is the same world in which Denise Huxtable had already intervened—the one that is erected on the remnants of slavery, that wilfully operates through violence, oppression, and exclusion.

In Weiss's *Wandlungen* drawings from the 1970s, the artist creates a series that expands over several sheets of paper. Entire scenarios—even a city—emerge from a circle, a curlicue or an arrow. Ink stains serve as the origins for anamorphic expressions. This generative capacity is echoed in Barrington's work, which likewise operates serially whether through an ongoing motif or a collection of photographs. Situated on the ground against the wall of the gallery, Barrington's series of small paintings take their titles arbitrarily from the year 1947 onwards and when they were executed (1947-2017 to 1960-2017). Hibiscus flowers rendered in pastel pink are layered onto swirls and smears of earth hues. Their stamens seem to explode from the ground in vivid colours and woven yarn, conveying a sense of fecundity.

Weiss and Barrington's generative capacity speaks to their shared ability to create endless worlds and to envision and struggle for other existences beyond the here and now. This capacity is echoed across the exhibition's multiple temporalities, from Weiss's work in the 1970s to Barrington's timeworn postcards and hyphenate date ranges. Furthermore, the call for "a different world" is reiterated in the curatorial mandate of CONDO, which attempts to engender connections across Europe against the background of Brexit and the growth of xenophobia. This situation is emphasised in *A Different World*—*If Chosen I May Not Run* 5, where woven yarn obstructs the entryway through the Fence of Gibraltar. We could therefore say that the supplemental title to the series, *If Chosen I May Not Run*, enacts a call to arms or a refusal to escape. Indeed, it is about staying with, in, and of the world yet simultaneously clamouring for more. Making worlds is always ongoing.



(T): Installation View, Condo 2018, Emalin showing Alvaro Barrington and hosting Weiss Falk, showing David Weiss. Courtesy Emalin Gallery.

(B): Alvaro Barrington, *A Different World – If Chosen I May Not Run* 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 2017, yarn, found postcards, each: 14.5 × 10.5 cm. Courtesy Emalin Gallery.

'Studio Visit: Alvaro Barrington at MoMA PS1'

–Matthew J. Abrams

Matthew J. Abrams: So you studied at the Slade School of Fine Art in London.

Alvaro Barrington: Yeah.

MA: And then somehow Klaus found your studio. Is that right?

AB: When I graduated, I thought, if I could leave grad school with one painting that gave me a way forward, then I'd be okay. Chris Ofili just had a show at David Zwirner, and there are so many possibilities in how he could make like ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred, four hundred more paintings; and I thought if I could leave school with just one painting that allowed me to have a solid couple years of exploration, I'd be okay.

MA: It seems like you managed to make that painting.

AB: After I finished school I rented a studio and started working, and Hans Ulrich Obrist brought Klaus over on a studio visit. He called me a week later to say that he was still thinking about the work. So we talked more about what the work was doing and what I thought art could do, and it was a really productive conversation.

MA: Who had the idea to import the whole studio, so that the logic of the space is its functioning as your studio.

AB: It was a conversation. I was telling Klaus that I was

shipping my studio to New York, and he was like, "Why don't we just detour it to the museum?" (Ha-ha.) And I think we both knew we wanted it to be a studio, as opposed to being a curated show.

MA: But during museum hours, you won't be here, right? This is your studio, but you won't be here making work in the studio, correct?

AB: Yeah, I won't be here. I know people do that. I know Henry Taylor did that.

MA: Edgar Arceneaux has done stuff like that too.
AB: I think that'd be too emotional for me.

MA: It sounds like the studio is an important space for you to remove yourself from the world and think about things in an almost meditative way, and that's hard to do with people milling around and wanting to chat.

AB: And then they'd be like, "You should really make a red painting!" (Ha-ha.) But that's just it, because for me a lot of the paintings, they're speaking, but at maybe a "1" or a "2," and somebody could come and they could just whisper one sentence, and their voice is like a "40". And I remember something Kerry James Marshall said: "I don't want my painting to be some zone of free association." And for me it's more about letting go of my ego and trying to listen to that "1," to what each painting wants to say.



Although the Carolee Schneemann retrospective exhibition has overtaken most of MoMA PS1, in one small room on the ground floor, Klaus Biesenbach, the museum's director, has installed Alvaro Barrington's studio in toto. Fresh out of graduate school in London, the studio was transplanted into the museum, marking the emerging artist's first solo museum exhibition. I did a "studio visit" with Alvaro after the opening, and we talked about the project.

–Matthew J. Abrams

‘CONVERSATIONS, COMBINING HISTORIES: ALVARO BARRINGTON’

– Dana Kopel

Alvaro Barrington's paintings attend to combinations of materials, movements, and references both art historical and cultural in a broader sense. Bright hibiscus flowers evoke bodily forms and tones, while thick yarns more explicitly delineate body parts: a grasping hand, a penis, a face. The son of migrant workers, Barrington was born in Venezuela and spent his early childhood in the Caribbean before moving to Brooklyn. An engagement with the personal and collective histories of these places—along with a consideration of the ways in which identity narratives come to structure understandings of artistic practice—forms a core concern of his work. Barrington's current exhibition at MoMA PS1 in New York features an extensive selection of his recent work, including a number of paintings, sketches, and experiments that the artist describes as “still in process.”

DANA KOPEL:

Much of the framing around your exhibition at MoMA PS1 focuses on your Caribbean heritage and early upbringing in Grenada and elsewhere. Could you talk about how your relationship to the Caribbean has influenced your work?

ALVARO BARRINGTON:

It's a very romanticized Caribbean for me. It's a Caribbean that I left when I was seven or eight and it's just all in my memory, so things have to be bigger and brighter and not quite what they are. I think I have a deep fear of going back to Grenada because it's so not what it is anymore. And so the work is a way of trying to process this very romanticized idea: What would Grenada look like if I had to make a painting about it? Could this look like Grenada in my memory? The flamboyant flower, the hibiscus flower or jamaica in Spanish, all of it is a reference to the Caribbean. Even this blue in one of the hibiscus paintings came through Lisa Brice, who lived in Trinidad for a while. She paints with that sort of blue, but I remember she was telling this story of how that particular blue was spread from England all over colonies that were once owned by the British Empire. It was a way of bleaching clothes. And so even though there's no hibiscus flower that exists in that color, I thought it was interesting that

I could make this blue hibiscus flower, with a blue that was spread through colonialism.

DK: These overlapping histories of the Caribbean and colonization don't necessarily resolve into clean, easily legible images—of an accurate hibiscus flower, for instance.

AB: When Lisa was telling the story about how she paints with that blue, how it reminded her of being in South Africa and using that blue, all of a sudden it sparked this memory of my grandma washing clothes. And I thought, maybe I need to make this sort of combined history, blending all these things. I think hip-hop does that a lot, Carnival does that a lot, Black culture tends to do that a lot—just throw a bunch of things together and then figure it out.

DK: Maybe it also has to do with this idea of Grenada and the Caribbean for you as a site of memory and nostalgia, a place that's simultaneously real and imagined. You mentioned your grandmother and I wanted to ask about your relationship to the traditions of the women in your family, especially sewing, which appears in your paintings and in the a different world series.

AB: It was more my aunts who used to sew, or who I remembered seeing sewing when I was growing up. I remember being fifteen and my aunt giving me a really bright red tablecloth that she had sewn, and I just thought, “The last thing I need is a tablecloth.” [Laughs] You know what I mean? As a fifteen-year-old boy, I'm like, “Where's the Jordans?” or some shit, you know. But as I got older, that tablecloth stuck in my mind and I remembered how imaginative and inventive it was. When I started painting again, it felt like I was bumping into histories that I didn't necessarily know how to position myself within—a lot of histories that were deeply European. And I thought, “Well, here's a history that I know is connected to my family, so let me just try to do it.” But I also didn't want to sew how they sewed, so I thought I could just explore the formal qualities of sewing, and then through that maybe figure something else out. But then, the more I did it, the more

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DK: And also this collective memory, and the way those two are intertwined. I remember an early painting that you showed me a while ago, of a school near where we were both living in Bed Stuy. I feel like you've moved away from more social-architectural investigations in your recent work—aside from the postcards in a different world, in which you disrupt the pristine pictorial space of the postcard image with your sewing, which is very thick and textural and abrupt. Could you discuss how

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AB: During my BA, I thought I needed to copy everybody, but not quite copy. It wasn't necessarily about the school; it was more so a way to sort of think about cubist space. That school was something that I was just walking by, and then I thought, let me explore how Jacob Lawrence

explored space. He painted these really weird buildings that were super funky, and I was going through that to see if I could do something else. I remember copying a lot of people, making shitty Glenn Lignons and shitty Chris Woolls and so on.

DK: That's what school is for, in a way—to copy and confront the artists you look up to, to explore different ways of working.

AB: It helped me figure out a lot, figure out ways of seeing. If I hated an artist, I would copy them to figure out what they were doing that was so bad or why I couldn't stomach it, or if I loved it. And I still do, to this day. I usually keep those to the side, because it helps me figure out something else in my work. I remember copying Lee Lozano a long time ago, just a few copies. At the time, I couldn't quite understand what she was doing, but then all of a sudden, a year ago, I was really uncomfortable with the hand, and the finger, in *Garvey Loves Flowers Too* (2015–16), and I was like, "Why am I so uncomfortable with it?" And then she had a show at Hauser & Wirth in London, and I walked in, and I said, "Oh! That's that finger right there." It was the exact finger. I had just stored it in my memory bank from forever ago.

DK: So then, did you change the finger in your own work?

AB: Nah, I left it, because I love Lee Lozano and I just think that's something that painting can do, point to different people. I don't really like when a painting rests in one person's zone too much, but it can definitely point to a lot of different people.

DK: Many of your references, and also the language you use to talk about your work, feel very painting-specific. Are other painters your primary influences, or what other references are you looking at?

AB: When I was trying to figure out how to make the hand in *Audre Lorde Flamboyant* (2015–17), I was thinking about a particular sort of Caribbean dance. It felt like, back in the day, after *The Matrix* came out, you'd go to dancehall parties and everyone would be doing this specific dance movement with their arms—I just thought, how do I get a hand or a finger that felt like it had the weird sort of movement that that dancing is trying to give off? The hand in the painting also happened to follow the stretcher bars, but it really was coming from a sort of dancehall image that was stuck in my head. Like my homeboy Celo, he's really skinny and like six-something feet tall, with really long arms, so he was able to contort them in the weirdest ways. His hand felt impossibly long, and just able to move in a certain way. I was thinking, if Celo's dancing, how would it look in a painting?

DK: In a way, the paintings feel really bodily, but the specific parts of them don't necessarily, for me, immediately read as parts of the body. So there's a parallel between abstraction in terms of the process of art-making and also in the way you're talking about the body abstracting itself through movement. Many of the paintings also exude a

sense of profusion and generativity evoking both sex and nature. How do you think about the way sex plays into your work?

AB: A lot of the paintings touch on sex and power. Sometimes I want to be able to say that's just nature, like the vertical red flower in this drawing. A friend of mine said, "That's super phallic!" And I was like, "It's just a red flower." You know? The flower isn't concerned with that, it's just the flower. But then sometimes it's more direct. In *Garvey Loves Flowers Too*, the stamen of the hibiscus flower is a standin for a white dick. That painting has a really long history, but part of it was that I was in London and listening to this guy talk about Jamaican homophobia, and the way he talked about it wasn't really about homophobia—it was this sort of deeper, embedded racism that I felt really uncomfortable with. The painting is about a lot of other things, too. The character is an avatar for me, and he's coming around and he's touching the dick: the stems become the buds, the buds become cum flying all over and ideas coming out. In my mind, and based on some intimate conversations about sexuality I was having at the time, new ideas, new ways of seeing, started becoming more deeply embedded in me.

DK: A major concern of your practice seems to be bringing together a number of different, often contrasting things—materials, ideas, histories—to explore what those combinations can generate over time. Several of the works on view at MoMA PS1 are unfinished, and presented in an in-progress state. Would you discuss the way you work with materials, and how that attention informs your process?

AB: I try to let a painting work itself out over a year to two years. That way I can get the ideas down into the painting. Never try to rush a painting. All the materials are highly selective, and I try to have a conversation with the material as opposed to just using the material or dominating it. So when I picked up the burlap, it was like, what can burlap do that cotton can't do or linen can't do or other materials can't do? It has its own energy and its own vibe and its own materiality. And it really became about looking, trying to figure out what could I do with this material that makes it feel like it came here with a purpose. Actually, I remember walking to get some coffee beans and there was a burlap sack and I think it said the coffee beans were from Barbados, and I remembered being in Barbados for a couple months when I was young, and I thought, "Oh, there have to be a bunch of workers who are packing these coffee beans." And so I stretched a whole bunch of burlap canvases and tried to figure out how to make it work. I think art is always about the process, it's not necessarily about the actual painting for me; the art is always me processing. Even when my mom died, the first thing I did was draw in a corner somewhere. The only place I felt safe was making little notes, drawing little things. So for me, it's always been that process of making, of going through stuff, of looking, making, seeing. It's really the only the thing that matters, at least on my end, in terms of what's in the studio. And then hopefully in the outside world it generates certain conversations.



“Good Art Always Gives”: Alvaro Barrington’s Generous First Solo at PS1.

- Cristine Branche

Brooklyn-based artist Alvaro Barrington views Marcus Garvey as “an abstract avatar...like a saint or a north star of some sort.” It’s one of the things that drew him to London, where he attended the Slade School of Fine Art for graduate school in 2015—and where I befriended him. He describes his time there as a “pilgrimage,” often citing Garvey’s life in London in relation to the body of work he made there:

[Garvey] died poor in London. It wasn’t until decades later that Jamaica—where he was born—realized his influence and began to celebrate him. I imagine London being where the first real shift in his radical thinking early on in his life took place, and later [where] he had to take in his failures and the forces that destroyed his movement.

Alvaro’s painting, Garvey loves flowers too is the header image for his first (ever) solo show, at MoMA PS1 in New York, which opened October 22 and runs through December 31. The painting is large and arresting, made on burlap and partially woven with brown yarn using techniques orally passed on to him by his Grenadian aunts. The series represents the progression of Garvey’s life. Alvaro described the process to me:

I used really high quality paint, Old Holland, in [Garvey loves flowers too] so the colors are vibrant; the last painting will be made of cheap quality house paint that will lose color and vibrancy quickly. It will be [Garvey] at the end of his life, confronting himself and where he might have went wrong.

After a studio visit, Klaus Biesenbach invited Alvaro to show his work at PS1 shortly after he graduated. The intention of the exhibition is to reproduce the same energy of that visit and capture Alvaro’s approach to painting, one that is more process-oriented and less product-based. Alvaro decided to include two works he did not make that are important to him: Transaction in the sky, a painting by Brooklyn-based artist Teresa Farrell and A clock with no hands, a porcelain sculpture I made. I was curious about his decision to include Teresa’s and my work but mostly wanted to discuss his own. As the resulting conversation shifted back and forth between our practices it became clear how much we influence each other’s work, and also how much the very act of dialogue and exchange are paramount to Alvaro’s practice.

Alvaro Barrington: As a way of making, everything comes from a personal place. All my material choices are things that were part of past experiences. The imagery’s usually taken from something, then I push it. For example, I am making this dick painting based on Chris Ofili’s Pimping ain’t easy. I thought maybe I could do something with it, ‘cause I got where Chris was coming from but didn’t feel the same way. So I took the graphic structure, which is just a black dick that goes from the top to the bottom of the canvas, and as I was sewing it, I remembered my grandmother used to hang clothes outside to dry and I thought maybe I needed to bring some clothespins into the painting.

But also before I got the idea to make a dick painting, I had bleached burlap thinking about Helen Frankenthaler and her staining, and my grandmother bleaching clothes to remove stains so I thought it would be cool to make a painting that starts with my grandmother, goes into a dick, then ends with my grandmother.

I started sewing ‘cause I remember my aunt had made me a tablecloth when I was like 15, which at the time I didn’t really appreciate but kept using it for months ‘cause I knew she would appreciate that I used it. The memory of her color choices always stuck with me and now I realize she was actually a quite brilliant artist.

Cristine Branche: It’s interesting how you weave canonical works in with your personal history. It feels like you start with a purpose when making work but the purpose functions more as a point of departure, allowing the subconscious to consciously creep in.

AB: The studio is really the place that I process my own subconscious thinking, like, what images I pay attention to. Then I spend a year or two working through that particular image till it becomes something and in turn, my ideas change in the process too

Cristine Branche: I can relate to that.

Alvaro Barrington: I remember you being very slow in your making.

There is something important about your speed. I always think about your work in relationship to time, which is why I asked if I could put A clock without hands in the show.

Cristine Branche: I’ve never considered the actual time I’ve spent making work in relation to its conceptual framework. Time, or more specifically, lost time, really restores with me because it comes with feelings of erasure or non-being, yearning, and memory loss. The way you use material maternal figures in your life did also speak to time and the preservation of being, almost as a way to canonize your family and give them space to be seen. Your decision to accentuate the presence of time in your paintings is what I chose to make absent with A clock without hands.

Its inclusion in your show is poignant and poetic.

Alvaro Barrington: Art is always about visibility and being seen.

It’s what makes hip hop so powerful, it’s the voice of people that society may not see. I was raised by mostly women and incorporating the materials they use is my way of trying to see them. It’s like taking that journey with them and listening or being ready to listen cause I have a hint of what they went through.

Cristine Branche: How do you think about time in relation to your own work?

Alvaro Barrington: Time more recently is something that

sits in an abstract place for me because I have the privilege of choosing how I exist in it. When I was working shitty jobs—getting paid \$5.15 an hour—it was deeply tied to the idea of time as having a monetary value because it dictated so many aspects of my life. In the studio though, it’s not so much about time but about what the work needs and sometimes it needs a quick gesture. Other times it needs a slow working that can take months. The cultural history in my work is very romanticized because I left Grenada when I was 8 and it’s no longer the Grenada that I knew. But I make paintings that reflect that my early childhood was formed there. I’m a lot of cultures blended together ‘cause I think that reflects the immigrant experience. Cultures become a tool for me to use, to pick up and drop off, to think about my experiences. I guess because paintings get preserved, it’s automatically a preservation of that. Maybe somewhat like you being Puerto Rican but not quite being Puerto Rican. I remember years ago us talking about what some would call code switching, but I think when you talked about it—about existing in these different cultural spaces in Florida, then China—it felt like you were talking about you and not the label of an action. It was like you were talking about things that can be labelled but really it was about you, not the label.





Cristine Branche: I think it's hard to feel rooted anywhere when my parents moved to the U.S. to raise me. Miami is particular in that it's a microcosm of Latin America. So almost everyone I grew up with was a first generation American, taking on both Latino and American cultural characteristics. My identity is very specific to Miami but it changes when I go to Puerto Rico or when I'm in places outside of Miami in the U.S., or like China and Europe. In China people often didn't believe I was American because I don't have blonde hair or blue eyes, in Europe people were surprised when I told them I was Puerto Rican because they thought Puerto Ricans were all black. In other parts of the U.S. I was often put in the position to defend my identity often hearing "Where are you really from?" when I'd first say I was from Miami. It's a burden and a gift.

Alvaro Barrington: It always leaves me at a place of comfort and discomfort 'cause I like the mobility aspect of my identity and as an artist I get to play with it. But I imagine it's very different when your identity is grounded. Like, I see my two youngest brothers who were born in Brooklyn, and it's amazing to see how very secure in their narrative they are. I look back at when I was 20 and I felt so lost.

But I'm curious about how you end up with your material choices and also your reduction of specific objects, like Beware of Dog. It feels like they hint at things that you don't give away... I'm glad we are having this conversation 'cause I never really want to ask you about your work. I think your work is the thing that people need to look at, not your personal history.

Cristine Branche: I think about material so much. It's very important to me that the material contradicts the objects it occupies, pointing to a space between (English) words. I think about what weight certain objects carry, associations that people typically project onto them and then think about how I can heighten that mood by making the object using an equally thought out material. Most successful work tends to open up and poke at emotional coordinates within psyches without being too explicit or arriving at any categorical statements. It also gives the viewer an opportunity to take a step into the grey area people often have so much trouble sitting still in. It's great to talk about methodologies and process but it's important that the conversation doesn't make the work.

Ultimately, the work needs to complete itself.

I felt that sense of completion the first time I saw your work. You have such a firm grasp on the formal qualities of painting, its history, and use of color and composition. When you add how carefully considered your subject matter and choice of material are, like the burlap and yarn, I am left with a strong feeling of closure with regards to the inner motions that occur in viewing it. It feels like an ardent trip that is very big and present yet doesn't dominate me. I think the way you handle abstraction and figuration helps navigate this process for the viewer.

Alvaro Barrington: Giving is really important in art in that it's the artist's personal experience of making it, but someone who is experiencing it feels like they have space in there. I think that's what holds me to your work 'cause it actually situates itself far less personally than my work does. I'm always screaming for attention.

Cristine Branche: [laughs] But you manage the demands for attention well. The big presence, both visually and emotionally don't dominate or try to control me.

Alvaro Barrington: I think that's the presence part 'cause as I was an orphan, I never felt quite seen after my mom died. But I also want to be someone who can move without responsibility to stay. Control is tied to responsibility for me.

Cristine Branche: Your install at PS1 is a very immersive feat.

Alvaro Barrington It was meant for folks to question their own experiences so that it has to go back to the viewer. A lot of young artists make the mistake of thinking art means doing what they want to do and you look at the work and it takes from you emotionally 'cause it's not very giving. The artist is very selfish, but good art always gives. So when you say you're thinking about the materials in terms of how folks understand it, you're having a conversation with people about possibilities in their life. I always make so that I don't have to explain to my brother too much. So that he gets it from his own experiences or can just look and get enough of it. The intention with the work and the installation was for him and the community I grew up in could be in PS1 and feel like there is a space there for them. One of my cousins who never goes to museums or galleries said he felt comfortable in the room and that meant everything to me.

Cristine Branche: Yeah I think I remember a conversation we had about that, I remember saying something along the lines of "if my grandma can take something away in the viewing of the work then I've succeeded." Art became a language through its history and context, hence its study. It is so niche it winds up alienating a lot of people who haven't learned its language and history when the work is solely operating on a conceptual level. I really don't like to make people feel stupid, which is why I think layers are important. They allow the work to be accessible to different kinds of viewers. It's confusing because art is often considered universal, though, contemporary art rarely is. It's a parallax that needs to be accounted for depending on the level of connectivity you're after.

Alvaro Barrington: Art always happens in a community and that history has told the wrong story. It often isolates artists, especially black artists. You and Teresa [Farrell, also in the PS1 show] along with a lot of other folks are in my community. Your ideas and how you make helps push me. Like you and Teresa work opposite of each other in that she is a maximalist like Hieronymus Bosch and anything can end up in her work, including gum or a guy she had a relationship with, a TV show she saw, music she listens to. It can all end up in a single painting. And you're a minimalist in that you reduce things through a very considered diliberation. I like working between the two of you. I don't arrive at my ideas out of nowhere. It comes from our conversations about life and art, the same with my community and ways of seeing. The show is really about looking



ALVARO BARRINGTON'S PAINTINGS TAKE A LIFETIME

– Osman Can Yerebakan

The 39-year-old artist swapped New York for London, where he transposes his history, community and experiences into grand, loving canvases.

Alvaro Barrington worked at a streetwear store called OMG in New York's Soho in the early 2000s. When Prada opened its much-hyped Epicenter boutique right across the street, he immediately bought a pair of its America's Cup sneakers. Wearing the kicks to church that Sunday – rather than the typical Clarks dress shoes – all eyes were on Barrington. "I was one of the few kids who was commuting from Brooklyn to Manhattan for school, so I would always observe the fashion and culture happening around the city," the artist says.

All these years on and we're sitting around the corner from his old boutique job in a corner booth at Balthazar. Fittingly, Barrington is wearing a Prada leather bag today. But much has changed for him over the last two decades: the 39-year-old has moved to London (it "tried me hard at first" and he was ready to leave, "but now I cannot run away from it – I will be here for a while") and seen himself reach extraordinary new heights, storming the global art scene with his absorbing paintings.

"Unlike the circles I hung out with here, my friends in London are almost all from the art crowd," he says now. This was the direct outcome of his decision to move to the city in 2015 to get a graduate degree at the Slade School of Fine Art. He and his classmates would spend all their days obsessively discussing paintings, to the point where, "if I were around people who didn't participate, I would just walk out of the conversation and not feel guilty about it."

We saved each other': Alvaro Barrington's 90s hip-hop exhibition

– Janelle Zara

For his debut solo exhibition in Los Angeles, London based artist Alvaro Barrington hosted an all-day barbecue in the Blum & Poe gallery parkinglot and invited Ghostface Killah to perform. From the pop-up stage, the Wu-Tang Clan scion looked out on the crowd and bashfully called it "mixed"; there were adult Ghostface fans as well their children, plus moneyed artcollectors who had come to buy new, very in-demand work. What ensued was, in modern parlance, iconic – a half-hour singalong of Wu-Tang hits, with bonus tracks commemorating the late Biz Markie and Marvin Gaye. There were even productsamples of Killah Bee, Ghostface Killah's gold-speckled, cannabis-infused brownies. The opening was uplifting in every sense of the word. "The show wouldn't have been complete without Ghost," Barrington said. His exhibition, 91–98 jfk –lax border, on view at Blum & Poe through 30 April, is an acutely personal look back at the 90s through hip-hop, an unvarnished record of an era ripe for closer examination.

In 1990, when Barrington was eight years old, he left his home in tropical Grenada. He and his mother moved to Flatbush, Brooklyn, the West Indian enclave of a much larger, concrete island. With the same approach as recording an album, he organized his show to include features – that is, guest appearances – by other artists who resonate with elements of the community: Teresa Farrell, Aya Brown, Paul Anthony Smith, Jasmine Thomas-Girvan, and his teenage cousin, Ariel Cumberbatch. The wall-mounted sculpture by Thomas-Girvan bears "a kind of magic realism that is so deeply Caribbean", Barrington says, in its sinuous assemblage of wood, costume feathers, and strands of brass curled to resemble plumes of smoke. He compares her work to a trumpet solo that Olu Dara, Nas's father, played on a track of the Illmatic album: "It's reaching down to the roots, but it's also reaching to the heavens. It gets you to this place of serenity."

Brown's portraits of Missy Elliott, Lauryn Hill, and Li'l Kim, rendered in soft pastel on brown kraft paper, had reminded him both of a specifically New York style of drawing, and the way punk rock had influenced the work of Elizabeth Peyton.



Alvaro Barrington - This week 25 years ago Buffy Rose, 2022. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo. Photo: Josh Schaedel

“In music, you understand the role of a feature; it’s kind of the antithesis of painting, where we think of the painter as an individual genius,” Barrington says. “But Aya looks at these women in a way that I can’t represent myself. The lesson I learned from hip-hop is that it makes more sense for her to speak in her own voice.”

In his own works, Barrington chose materials that would evoke the textures of his childhood, assembling basketballs and milk crates, rebar and cement, into homages of two of the greats, 2Pac and DMX. “I see Pac and X as a continuation of each other; they both tell the story of the war on drugs as a war against working-class black communities,” the artist says. “When politicians were calling young Black men newly released from prison super-predators, X was talking about what being locked in a hole would mean for a 14-year-old’s mental health.” Homages to DMX bookend the exhibition, beginning with two floating monuments mounted to the gallery walls. Cut-out images of the rapper, microphone in hand, are encased in cement boxes that Barrington inscribed with lyrics while the cement was still wet:

The two years in a box, revenge, the plots/
The 23 hours that’s locked, the 1 hour that’s not/
The silence, the dark...
Those 23 hours reverberate into a separate gallery space, where, in contrast to the colors and textures of the show as a whole, a row of cold steel frames line the perimeter of completely white walls. Within each frame, a cardboard panel cut with the digits of a quartz alarm clock bears a time, from 00 to 23h00. They amount to a day in solitary confinement the way that DMX had described – a prolonged, silent procession of hours.

In both nostalgic and mournful turns, this is a show about history, both public and private, and who counts as a reliable narrator. Looking back at the 90s, Barrington describes the decade as a “fundamental shift in the American imagination”, where neoliberalism’s veneer of prosperity glossed over increasingly punitive measures against communities of color. He recalls Bill Clinton charming Black audiences on Arsenio Hall, while simultaneously vilifying the so-called “inner city” and its “superpredators” in a campaign of fear. Former mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani, meanwhile, was crediting aggressive law and order policies as having “cleaned up” the city: “There was a rising media culture that used Black people as an excuse to cut whatever social program they wanted to cut, and enforce whatever kind of policing they wanted to enforce.”

In contrast to the denigrating media narratives, Barrington’s community swaddled him in affirmation. At a young age, he found his truth: “I grew up in places where the majority of people looked like me, and everything in my life to that point reinforced my dignity, and my sense of self.” When his mother died in 1993, the artist was looked after by a network of aunts, and found solace in his cousins’

music. It was the golden age of hip-hop, a new, intimate era of storytelling that aligned with the events of his life. “There was a one-to-one in terms of what Ghost was saying and what I was going through,” Barrington says, referencing the lyrics to All I Got Is You. “There are lines about ‘15 of us in a three-bedroom apartment’, and there were eight of us in a one-bedroom apartment. His mama passed away, and my mama passed away.” The song ends with lines about looking up at the stars and looking forward to tomorrow. “If I didn’t have that song,” the artist says, “I would’ve had to find another way to cope with the situation I was in.”

In *91–98 jfk –lax border*, hip-hop fills holes in the historical record, recounting a contentious decade as Barrington remembers it. His recurring use of cement adds a sense of weight and permanence to stories that have been subjected to erasure. “Through making, I’m putting out ideas of what I think I know,” he says. “I might be right, I might be wrong.” He’s also adamant about his work always being accessible, and reaffirming his community: “It’s important that my family don’t feel dumb because they don’t know who Rothko is.”

Foregoing the traditional gallery dinner, Barrington opted instead to throw a small concert by one of his all-time favorite artists. (Blum & Poe co-founder Tim Blum says that he first heard that Ghostface would be performing at his gallery on Instagram: “You’ve really got to stick along for the ride with Alvaro”.)

Writing his own press release, the artist described the exhibition as “my thank-you to some of my heroes ... Biggie, JAY-Z, and Lil’ Kim gave us the commandments to get fly and carry our heads high ... [Ghostface] made us want to ground our souls and reach for the skies.” And where the 90s were filled with conflicting accounts, “The only real narrative was that we saved each other.”

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