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Picture of Birmingham front room to adorn UK embassies
Hurvin Anderson's painting is first in series for diplomatic buildings around world



Detail from Still Life with Artificial Flowers, by Hurvin Anderson. Photograph: Hurvin Anderson

A still life with artificial flowers, flock wall paper and lace doilies is to be the first in a series of government art commissions which will see prints being sent out to embassies around the world.

Details were announced on Monday of a £500,000 scheme commissioning 10 artists over 10 years to create limited edition prints for diplomatic buildings. The first commission is the painter Hurvin Anderson.

Anderson was asked to come up with a work about Britain and responded with a snapshot of his mother's front room in Birmingham. His parents were part of the Windrush generation and the glass vase is one of his mum's prized possessions, which travelled with her from Jamaica.

Given the works will be on embassy walls, Penny Johnson, the director of the Government Art Collection (GAC), said they had to work within certain parameters when commissioning the artists. No nudity, for example, or bodily fluids, and not too much politics.

"We are not going to choose an artist who is heavily political because we know we can't show their work." There was, though, much work in the wider collection that was political, Johnson said.

The idea is that 30 prints will be made, with 15 going out to diplomatic buildings across the world. A further 11 will be sold by the Outset contemporary art fund to raise money for the GAC, and the remainder will be held by the artist and their dealer.

The ambassador to Paris was at the GAC last week and had already asked for one of the Anderson prints, Johnson said. The money raised from print sales would be spent on acquiring works by emerging artists.

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“It is very important for our collection that we continue to acquire and show and reflect the society that we’re living in,” she said.

The money for the initiative, called TenTen, is being given by the Walmart heir Sybil Robson Orr, a film and stage producer, and her husband, Matthew. It follows a similar scheme they funded in the US.

Anderson was shortlisted for last year’s Turner prize displaying paintings of the Birmingham barber’s shop his father went to alongside lush landscapes of an imagined Jamaica. Anderson, born in 1965, was the youngest of eight siblings and the only child not born in Jamaica, which has instilled an interest in his dual identity that can often be seen in his work.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/sep/24/picture-of-birmingham-front-room-to-adorn-uk-embassies>

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