ELLE DECOR
April 2011
ART SHOW

Hurvin Anderson

This London-based painter endows his moody landscapes and interiors with quiet power

By Vicky Lowry

Hurvin Anderson is a man of deliberate action. The British painter is as careful with the words he speaks as he is about the details he selects for—and just as often omits from—his haunting landscapes, interiors, and portraits. "Peter's Series," based on a barbershop, displays this talent for reductiveness. The eight paintings and 15 drawings, created over a three-year period, range from populated spaces (a lone client, furniture, hair clippings) to fields of almost pure abstraction (blue walls, a white ceiling). The small barbershop, run by Caribbean immigrants in his hometown of Birmingham, England, turns out to be where Anderson's Jamaica-born father went to have his hair cut. "I'm quite into the idea that there's more to a painting than what you are looking at," Anderson says, "and how you get that across with paint, color, and mood."

For each new piece, he usually starts with a photograph, which serves as a trigger for his memory, his imagination, and the ideas he wants to explore on canvas—including his sense of place in the world as a black man living in England and as an Englishman visiting the Islands.

"From there I go about re-creating that place in some way," says Anderson, who frequently paints scenes inspired by the Caribbean. "For me it's an entry. I kind of play with the photograph, reprinting images, drawing on them. Then I'll start a collage, adding layers." Eventually this leads to small acrylic drawings that, he explains, "head into a painting."

No wonder the artist completes just four or five canvases a year.

"The work develops over time," says Thelma Golden, who organized Anderson's first American one-man show in 2009 at the Studio Museum in Harlem, where she is director and chief curator. "He is an artist who is not in a rush. He doesn't make a lot of work, but he puts so much *into* what he does. Each painting is so full."

One of the artist's most striking motifs—recently revisited in lush new landscapes shown this past winter at the Michael Werner Gallery in New York—involves fences, which first appeared half a dozen years ago in the ironically titled "Welcome Series." Anderson had traveled to Trinidad for a two-month residency program and noticed the many security grilles in front of shops, parks, and tennis courts. While these barriers serve as artful elements in his paintings (a red starburst pattern in 2004's *Some People*; a grid of delicate curls in an untitled piece from 2010), as well as a device that lets him play with the relationship between the abstract and the figurative, their meaning has a darker side. "They're decorative," Anderson says, "but their purpose is security. In Trinidad, I saw the double-edgedness of the place itself. It's so beautiful, but then again Trinidad has its problems."

This duality—the push-pull of beauty and danger; the interplay of abstraction and figuration—is a hallmark of Anderson's work and helps to explain the attention the painter has garnered in the art world within the last decade, with solo exhibitions at the Tate Britain, Art Basel Miami Beach, and his London gallery, Thomas Dane.

The Studio Museum's Golden says she was "intrigued by the way he was reinventing landscapes, informed by both the historic tradition of British landscape painting, but also contemporary cultural history.

"All of Hurvin's work seems to me to incorporate an intense amount of depth," Golden adds. "Depth of field, depth of color, and even depth of subject."

It's telling that Anderson has "always been interested in the idea of silence, something being mute in the painting," he says. His provocative work continues to prove that a quiet approach can have a very powerful effect.