

PAINTING VISIONS IN COLOUR

“I’M INSPIRED BY NATURAL BEAUTY AND HARMONY, I LOVE TO PAINT.”

A Jamaican, even the city dweller or diaspora member, finds his or her story in landscape. This exhibition is filled with sonorous landscapes - montane, agricultural, domestic, peopled. Through these everyday and yet unfamiliar scenes, laden with cultural and social references, Rudi Patterson’s visions of colour open the gates of memory, addressing his people’s story.

Jamaican society was created despite displacement and noted for its defiance, its “irieness”. What you see in these paintings is not as edenistic or arcadian as it seems. Rudi’s remembrances are seldom singular in their meaning. For those unfamiliar with island life, the depiction of an orange or mango harvest can be appreciated simply for the intricate representation of the fruit laden branches or vibrant use of palette and tone. The cleverly skewed perspectives, the ripeness of the fruit, the solidity of the mountains are all evidence of the artist’s skill.

But if the garden is so magical why are the people often looking away? In a Patterson painting the many rivers to cross are not metaphorical; most Jamaican kids of his era had the chore of journeying to the river every day for water. Colonial, Depression and wartime era Duckenfield was tough. Crops are not for decoration but sustenance. Most dwellings are small. Order is disrupted by hurricanes. Nature’s colours clash.

Slavery was instituted to grow plants with ruthless efficiency and was a not so distant memory in Rudi’s youth. But it was the very abundance of indigenous species cultivated in the rich red soil; the endless varieties of fruit and vegetables such as mangoes, ackee,

breadfruit, cocoa - perhaps 40 in a small back garden plantation - that enabled Jamaicans and other West Indians to emancipate themselves from physical and mental slavery and to become, like Rudi, creators in new and old worlds.

As his contemporary Bob Marley wrote in *Redemption Song*:

But my hand was made strong
By the ‘and of the Almighty.
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly.

“Intuitive” was the term he used. These powerful images came into his head like the duppies (Jamaican for ghosts) he remembered from childhood evenings walking down unlit lanes. The paintings took weeks of work – perhaps assisted by an image from a book of historic plantation houses, a potted tropical plant or a trailing purple *Tradescantia pallida* in the window.

The Intuitive frees him from rules, and transports us to his visual universe. These pictures represent the New World, but a world inextricably yoked for centuries to Western classicism. There are whiffs of Impressionism, Rousseau, Lowry, Fauvist colours. Patterson presents a uniquely recognisable painterly style. He manifests memories of lush orchards, the beauty of hibiscus, the powerful wind tilting the palms, the engulfing heat of bush fires and recreates his heritage within the four walls of a Notting Hill concrete high rise.



Rudi working at home