

The New York Times

Art & Design

By THE NEW YORK TIMES

Published: September 10, 2009

HURVIN ANDERSON

Peter's Series 2007-2009

Studio Museum in Harlem

144 West 125th Street

Through Oct. 25

The deft oil paintings of Hurvin Anderson, born in England in 1965, fall within a familiar genre of architectural interiors that play it both ways: they combine the cozy details of everyday life with various geometries and paint textures that verge on the abstract. The results are capable but also familiar, and too clearly based on photographs.

The subject in all the works is a room seen from an unchanging perspective.

It is an attic barbershop in London that caters to Caribbean immigrants like Mr. Anderson's father. While the museum's press release emphasizes the racial and social framework of the paintings, the works make little reference to it, except for occasional glimpses of a young black man, seen from the back sitting in the barber's chair. For the most part, Mr. Anderson uses a familiar scene to dissect his medium.



Thomas Dane Gallery

A Hurvin Anderson painting at the Studio Museum in Harlem.

In his hands this unassuming motif is subjected, from painting to painting, to a formal process of subtraction and addition. The seven canvases and nine works on paper create a kind of glacially slow stop-action animation in the gallery, where the viewer, rather than the image, moves.

One painting presents only an angled band of vivid turquoise: the walls of the room. In several others blank shapes in the turquoise suggest mirrors or photographs hanging on these walls; a reddish floor is added, along with a console arrayed with abbreviated forms of objects.

The male figure appears in one painting in the complete room. In another a figure sits before a blank expanse of turquoise wall surrounded by white, like a painter studying a canvas.

The images are thinly painted, almost like watercolor, sometimes with patches of white showing through that adds a decidedly unrealistic note. The result is a fragile, transient realm where little is reliable or solid. You could call it an immigrant's world, or a place, shot through with a gentle melancholy, where we have all been at one point or another.

ROBERTA SMITH