



THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

"Nothing Sacred But the Truth"

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER
PRINT EDITION



Hurvin Anderson's Beautiful Barber Shop

By **Alex Taylor**

July 23, 2009 | 2:49 p.m

"Hurvin Anderson: Peter's Series 2007-09" at the Studio Museum in Harlem is the British artist's first one man show at an American museum, and it is terrific.

This is not a surprise. The museum is often canny at hitting a perfect ratio of quality to art-world visibility.

This includes the large spirited group shows of aspiring youngsters and sleeper surveys of underappreciated veterans—so something for everyone.

Last fall's Barkley L. Hendricks retrospective left one feeling like he had sat in on an impromptu class at a neighborhood academy, taught by the New London wiseman himself.

And now, Mr. Anderson. Thelma Golden, the museum's chief curator, organized "Peter's Series," which has just finished a stop at the Tate Britain.

Mr. Anderson was born in 1965, the son of Jamaican parents who immigrated to London. The artist has exhibited regularly in the UK since the late 1990s, and has a growing reputation for lushly adorned Caribbean landscapes that push the abstract qualities of the work.



As paintings go, they are more emblems than they are descriptions, embedded in flat, semi-abstract space.

At the Studio Museum, Anderson is represented with, of all things, seven large paintings and nine

small works on paper depicting the insides of a small barbershop. Ms. Golden nails down the reference: a blue walled barbershop and hangout in a converted attic in Birmingham (England), one of the many commercial enterprises opened by Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s and 60s. It is the barbershop where Anderson's father went for haircuts, and where the son returned, to take the photos that are the basis for the "Peter's" series.

Painted over the last three years, the paintings adhere to a sequence. But the place I'd start is Peter's Series: Back (2008), near the middle of the series, and the most conventional. What are we looking at? That's easy. A man sits in a swivel chair, back turned towards the viewer. A purplish-yellow pinstriped towel hangs around his neck. He appears in another painting Peter's Series: Sequel (2009), similarly posed.

The feeling is hard to catch. Isn't it kind of blue? Well, yes, so is the barbershop, painted in depthless cobalt that looked like the Caribbean of dreaming intensity. Details, like the buzz clippers that dangle on the wall like a pair of cleats, appear in one painting but leave no trace in others.

One work, Peter's 3 (2007) is so minimal it appeared sacerdotal. In a way, it reminds you of one of James Turrell's radically simplified chapel rooms.

Here's another name: David Hockney. Hockney is a visible presence in Mr. Anderson's work, particularly the younger artist's spiky, shorthand strokes and the technique of setting a single detail against a flatly colored background.

Matisse is here too. A text accompanying the exhibition also mentions the unevenly regarded painter Peter Doig. Mr. Doig, a Scottish born artist who was raised in Canada, has lived in Trinidad, and taught in London, where he one of Anderson's professors at the Royal College of Art in the 1990s. The skeptic's line on Mr. Doig is that while the artist is plainly gifted his work uncomfortably charts contemporary painting's dawdling, present-day course and its aimless beauty. Mr. Anderson? Too early to tell. But the show at the Studio Museum sketches a moment of excitement, expectation, and anticipation. Mr. Anderson is plainly a painter to watch.

"Hurvin Anderson: Peter's Series 2007-2009" runs until October 25.