

Photographs

Backdrop features the many studies, photographs, and collages that provide the foundation for Anderson's painting. The artist's diaristic large-format photographs document his experiences in Trinidad and offer the viewer an opportunity to shuttle between objective documentary photography and the subjective nature of painting.

Marval Side Street (2005) depicts an isolated house notably absent of any inhabitants. With no path connecting the lot to the main road, viewers are made eminently aware of their status as outsiders. Yet, traces of human narrative are perceptible—piles of rubble and debris suggest ongoing labor, while a utility pole and cables allude to communication.

Anderson often takes multiple photographs of the same scene, merging them to form one composite image. Taken at different times at alternate angles, the individual photographs lack tonal and spatial continuity, producing a feeling of unease that reinforces the viewer's estrangement. Seen together with the paintings they inspired, these works drift into the subjective, recalling the merging of different social and cultural histories and the melancholy of not belonging.



Marval Side Street, 2015. 3-panel inkjet print mounted on aluminum. 40 x 61 1/4 inches, 40 x 61 1/4 inches, and 43 1/4 x 40 1/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.



Side Street (Dead End), 2015. 2-panel inkjet print mounted on Dibond. 30 1/2 x 46 1/4 inches and 38 3/4 x 25 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Hurvin Anderson (b. 1965 Birmingham, United Kingdom) lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Art Now: Hurvin Anderson*, Tate Modern, London (2009), which traveled to the Studio Museum, Harlem, New York (2009). Recent exhibitions include *New Works*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London (2013), *Reporting Back*, IKON Gallery, Birmingham (2013), *Subtitles*, Michael Werner Gallery, New York (2011). Anderson has been included in group exhibitions at notable institutions including Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2013) and the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery in England (2000).

This exhibition is generously supported by Iris and Adam Singer; Anonymous; Alexandra and Guy Halamish; Jimmy Jamieson; Larry Mathews and Brian Salimon; Thomas Dane Gallery, London; Michael Werner Gallery, New York; and the British Council.



Hurvin Anderson: Backdrop is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Jeffrey Uslip, Chief Curator.

Related Events

Artist Talk: Hurvin Anderson

Saturday, September 12, 11:30 am
Preeminent British artist Hurvin Anderson is joined by Chief Curator Jeffrey Uslip for a conversation about the artist's practice and his work on view.

Sunday Studio: Beyond the Brush

Sunday, October 25, 1:00 pm.
\$10; free for members. Register at camstl.org/studio. Inspired by Hurvin Anderson and Wyatt Kahn, St. Louis-based artist Amy Reidel leads participants in a workshop on contemporary modes of painting, including masking, spraying, and pouring.

RE: The Barbershop

Sunday, November 8, 2:00 pm
CAM's new program series RE: ("Regarding") features in-depth conversations on a variety of cultural topics. Responding to Hurvin Anderson's barbershop paintings, this season's RE: explores the role of community barbershops and beauty salons in contemporary culture.



Contemporary Art
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Hurvin Anderson: Backdrop

British artist Hurvin Anderson is best known for evocative paintings that engage with charged social histories and shifting notions of cultural identity. His depictions of lush Caribbean landscapes and urban barbershops explore themes of memory, place, and the indelible connection between the two. Anderson applies paint with deceptive ease, as if eager to capture the scene before it drifts away; figure and ground blend to create compositional spaces where subjects fluidly project forward and recede back into permeable picture planes. The most comprehensive survey of Anderson's work to date, *Backdrop* examines the artist's practice in depth, presenting new and recent paintings alongside previously unseen sculpture, photography, and works on paper.

Anderson was born in Birmingham, United Kingdom, to Jamaican parents. His source material often stems from formative experiences in Birmingham's Afro-Caribbean community as well as in Trinidad, where he was an artist-in-residence and became intimately familiar with Caribbean topography and aesthetic motifs such as decorative fences and metal grilles. The artist's recent work continues this trajectory through a focus on the liminal; each work compresses a memory and flattens it into the two-dimensional picture plane, creating compositions that appear distant and imbued with longing.

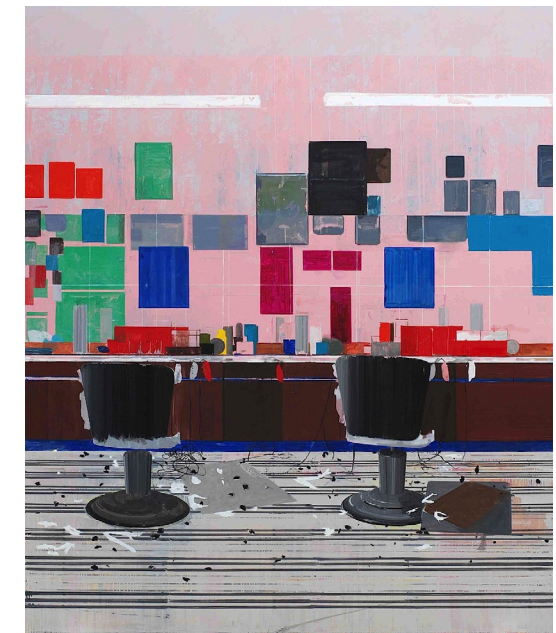
Anderson's sculptures, many on view for the first time, explore the role of everyday objects in the construction of personal identity. Transforming mass-produced, disposable food containers into unique permanent works of sculpture, Anderson shifts the objects' form and meaning. Never-before-seen diaristic large-format photographs provide a point of departure for his paintings and offer the viewer an opportunity to shuttle between seemingly objective documentary photography and the subjective nature of painting, providing insight into the artist's process.

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Contemporary Art
Museum St. Louis

September 11–
December 27, 2015



Together, Anderson's paintings, sculptures, and photographs suggest the many physical and emotional distinctions between a space and its beholder. No matter how familiar the subject of these works may become, the viewer must contend with visual obstacles in order to contemplate the lush scenes, seeking access to a complex reality that is ultimately the domain of the artist alone.



Flat Top, 2008. Oil on canvas. 98 3/4 x 81 1/4 inches. Courtesy Thomas Dane, London.



Audio Tour
Download the CAM app at camstl.org/app or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the curator and artist on the audio tour.

Landscapes

Anderson's landscapes are often rendered in fields of subtle tonal variations, alternately employing wide swaths of evenly applied paint and rapid brushstrokes to suggest lush, inviting backdrops. In the foreground of these works, Anderson frequently constructs geometric veils or barriers—exclusionary objects to be peered through, but never fully accessed. Planes composed of incomplete circles, intersecting lines, and repetitive dots symbolize metal grilles, fences, and beaded curtains that appear to hover above the composition, unanchored and drifting.



Maracas Series — Eccentricity, 2010. Oil on canvas, 19 ¼ x 25 ¼ inches. Collection Gordon VeneKlasen, New York.

For Anderson, the trope of the painted grille is “a means of distancing the viewer” from an image’s—or a memory’s—full potential. In some paintings, the landscape itself functions as a physical obstacle: the solid, color-blocked leaves on the surface of *Diego* (2013) transform the seemingly invisible fourth wall into a physical space. The painting’s green foliage is forced forward into the foreground, as if pressed against a transparent windshield.

The impenetrability of the thickly painted surface, compounded by fence-like obstacles, restricts the viewer’s experience of the works. Vibrant colors become muted, as though viewed through the haze of another’s memory. Each painting suggests human narrative and emotion, exuding a poignant sadness, and ultimately instilling curiosity and longing.

Anderson’s expressive and evocative canvases invoke contemporary issues of dislocation and disillusion. As the artist states: “When you paint grilles, you feel like you’re cutting into the landscape, a sacred thing. They’re anti-landscape.”



Beaded Curtain — Red Apples, 2010. Oil on canvas, 94 ½ x 59 inches. Private Collection, New York.

Sculptures

Less well-known than his paintings, Anderson’s sculptures explore how consumer products are integral to the construction of personal identity. *Juici* and *Mother’s Chicken* (both 2006), for example, reference restaurant chains in Jamaica that serve “authentic patties,” a mainstay of traditional Caribbean cuisine and an important symbol of the artist’s youth. Anderson replicates food containers by hand-painting wooden boxes, creating a trompe l’oeil effect that challenges both the process of mass production and the construction of racial stereotypes. Unlike the familiar *Brillo Boxes* of 1964, in which Andy Warhol famously

eliminated the artist’s hand in favor of the seriality of factory production, Anderson’s boxes celebrate the individuality of the handmade. The chicken legs, beef patties, and logos that decorate the exterior of these sculptures emphasize the subjectivity of the brush to reveal the personal, imperfect marks of the artist.

Transforming mass-produced, disposable food containers into unique permanent works of sculpture, Anderson shifts the objects’ form and meaning. Through this body of work, Anderson mines an archive of racial stereotypes to foster critical dialogue about cultural heritage.

Barbershops

The acclaimed *Peter’s Series* (2007–09) situates viewers inside local Afro-Caribbean barbershops in Birmingham. These salons were created by the post-war generation of Caribbean migrants who encountered various forms of racism upon arriving to the UK in 1948, including the unwillingness of white barbers to cut their hair. In response, Afro-Caribbean communities fashioned their own improvisational barbershops by repurposing areas of private, domestic spaces. Born out of exclusion, these salons doubled as both a place for cutting hair and a site of communal discourse.

The *Peter’s Series* recalls the artist’s childhood memories of his father in the attic barbershop of Peter Brown. Each painting from this series uses photography as a point of departure, but ultimately imagines this history through the lens of personal memory. Interior spaces are reduced to geometric forms in a saturated palette and are delineated by precise perspectival lines. Sitters are positioned before opaque cobalt-blue mirrors that fail to reflect their surroundings, suggesting the disorienting experience of negotiating an Afro-Caribbean heritage with a British identity.

Peter’s: Sitters II (2009) depicts a man seated in a barber’s chair with his back to the viewer. A patterned red smock is draped over his shoulders as he stares into a blank blue abyss that is both mirror and wall, foreign and familiar. The subject’s downcast head is at once anticipatory and vulnerable. For Anderson, the space of the barbershop functions on multiple levels: it resonates as both “a personal space and someone else’s private space.”

In Attic (2013) the barbershop’s rectangular walls become the subject. Migrating from background to foreground, the compositional space becomes shallow and threatening. Devoid of people, the attic barbershop is, according to Anderson, “not only a personal space loaded with imagery, but also bears the stamp of political, economic, and social history.”



Peter’s: Sitter’s III, 2009. Oil on linen, 73 ¾ x 57 ¾ inches. Private Collection, Oslo.



Extra Black (display), 2015. Acrylic on board, 24 parts, 8 ½ x 1 ½ x 1 ½ inches each. Courtesy the artist.



Mother’s (take out), 2015. Acrylic on board 6 parts, each 5 ½ x 7 x 4 ½ inches. Courtesy the artist.