

# Rejecting the cliches

By Crescencia Leon Medhurst

THE turning point for Bryan McFarlane came in 1976 when he graduated from The Edna Manley School of the Visual Arts formerly The Jamaica School of Art. He had won the Karl Parboosingh's scholarship in painting and began what was a frustrating four year wait before he could leave Jamaica.

Although Bryan did not take up the scholarship until 1980, he said that between the time of graduation and the time that he left Jamaica, he began a search for his own synthesis and style. Previously, his style of painting was realistic and heavily influenced by the older generation of artists like Albert Huie or Barrington Watson, being academically trained he was acquainted with the historical reproductions gleaned from art books.

"Jamaican artist tend to paint the typical scenery and themes, expected of them. I did not want to seek after 'the cliches'. I wanted to personalise my art. I began to take a surrealist-symbolic look at life, painting self-portraits and making visual comments about myself in my studio like the painting of 'Artist Studio', which was exhibited at Bolivar Gallery," Bryan said.

In moving to graduate school in his pursuit of his Masters degree, Bryan was given the freedom to search out his own style and theme. The result of the search began with "Dream Scapes" and developed to "Memory Scapes" which were centred on images of his Maroon childhood in Jamaica.

## Great significance

"Moore Town, Portland where I was born, is for me very important. The mountains, especially, had a great significance, it represented something which sheltered me within. I started in Boston, to take the memories I had of what I knew abstracted them. The form and figure is the culmination of everything that is perfect in nature, nude or clothed, but I took the figure out of its context, and space and experimented. Dance movements with the figure fascinates me, and I



Artist Bryan McFarlane in studio, 1987, in the United States.

sought after a universal element which could make the figure relate to all cultures."

Bryan was commissioned by the corporation of Philip Morris to do twelve portraits of major black journalists throughout the U.S.A., including the late-Jamaican-born, John Ruswurm for its calendar. "Eight of the journalists are living. Of the other four journalists, I was particularly interested in John Ruswurm, not only because he came from Jamaica but because he had started the first black newspaper, *The New York Age* which put forward the notion of Black/American philosophy for the minority and spoke on its behalf. The newspaper closed down in the early part of the century, but through it came the birth of other newspapers with its basic inspiration," Bryan said.

"Included in the exhibition at the Frame Centre are 12 works executed on high-quality paper. I like working on paper. I have done a lot of watercolours, and drawings. My subject-matter in

the joint exhibition with Mr. Karl 'Jerry' Craig is 'the human figure'. There are five Jamaican portraits, but they are more than portraits, the focus is on the sitter's expression and the metamorphosis which takes place on the face of the sitter through emotion," Bryan said.

"Right now, I have to the middle of August to finish painting a show, 'Tropical Landscapes' which is to be in Boston later this year. I really enjoy Portland, the mountain and sea are wonderful. Since, 1980 I have visited Jamaica about four times. More and more of my time will be spent in Jamaica. It is extremely important to me to maintain the contact with my friends and people," the artist said.

The joint show which opens today at the Frame Centre has as its main speaker the Jamaican-born painter and Professor of Art, Keith Morrison, of the University of Maryland. Professor Morrison has explored the Afro-American legacy to illustrate two aspects of history, the history of art itself and racial integration.

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