

THE ARTS

www.jamaica-gleaner.com

OCTOBER 22, 2006

SECTION

Anthea McGibbon
Gleaner Writer

A PROFESSOR of painting at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, Jamaican-born Bryan McFarlane dares to venture where others have not, in his skilful blend of abstraction with realism. His collection of recent works on display at the Mutual Life Gallery is exceptional, as he brings to fore the emergence of a dynamic Third World artist in a world where much emphasis is placed on European and American artists.

Last Thursday, October 12, his 18th solo exhibition, 'Recent Paintings' was launched, showcasing 23 pieces executed from 2001-2006. The works all reflect the intense talent and character of this soft-spoken artist, who thinks beyond the natural realm, challenging contemporary art critics.

Abstract art for McFarlane occurs in varying degrees. However, he shies away from being labelled an abstract artist, and claims not to be influenced by any particular art movement.

IMPRESSIVE RÉSUMÉ

Emerging from a family of highly skilled artists and intellectuals, McFarlane has an impressive résumé of training, honours, awards, contributions to the progression of humanity. Through his art he prompts his viewers into self-examination, just as much as he himself thinks beyond the surface.

He describes his work as his way of inviting the viewers to venture beyond the realm of the plain and ordinary into what life truly is about – their purpose, self-worth and potential as individuals. The viewers must "surrender all excessive idiosyncratic attitudes to understand the works." This is the opinion of the artist who claims his work is open to varied interpretations, based on the 'exposure level' of the viewer.

His art is not polemical, but bears strong reflection of the history and culture of the lands that he has visited. These include Asia, Africa, Middle East, United States, South America and Europe where his work is extensively collected and admired. He takes us on a journey from the hardships of Africa, the flicker of hope onto the confidence found in Brazil.

EGGS AND CANONBALLS

In this present showing, the egg and the canonball are dominant in the larger portion of his works, which also bears hints of fruit, reflecting the artist's consciousness of the slave castles (which he has visited on several occasions) along the coast of West Africa, more specifically Elmina, Ghana. He is passionate about the unexploded ordnances left carelessly behind by those who colonised Ghana in the early 17th century. His works expose the energy and dynamics of this era, as metaphors are cleverly manipulated to connect the viewers with the grotesque reality.

The canonballs reflect the imprisonment of the era, but simultaneously, the circular representation of egg-shapes symbolises potential, hope, transformation and fertility that can be grasped and explored on the wheels of time.

BALANCE AND HARMONY

The strength of the exhibition is in the individuality of each work, which all together resonate well the objective of the artist with balance and harmony of the composition's elements.

His works rendered in oil on linen, with colours ranging in tones, presents his determination to evince and place in proper perspective the 'terror and militarism' that carved the success of the economic enterprise of slavery that continues even psychologically today, and in Western civilisation.

In the work titled 'Towards the Dark and Post Colonial Self-Hate', suggestive images of a half-hidden wheelbarrow, an almost fading pregnant woman and a policeman engulfed by an impending storm

Beyond the natural realm



McFARLANE



'Nesting II'



'Nesting And Aim Your Canons'



'Booo'

represented by a large passage of black, and banked by canonballs and eggs are rendered.

The visual elements and the intrinsic narrative, are cleverly incorporated for Jamaicans to easily identify with the phenomenology of the slave trade and colonialism of their African counterparts. McFarlane is not himself political, but uses his art to instruct his viewers on the worth of humanity as expressed in this piece.

In another painting 'Booo', his subtle animal images placed with the eggs and canonballs in a floating sea of light colours brings us into a bitter-sweet spiritual experience.

In less opining pieces, the works are more abstract in images, but

real in how the viewers are allowed to relate to passage into another reality, in the balance of the geometrical elements that continues, only this time the application of paint deftly adds perspective and illusory space.

The hinted pieces of fruit in 'Egg Valentine I & II' are welcomed pieces, as they promote the sweetness of fertility, a new beginning and hope.

The 'Nesting and Aim Your Canons', 'Ritual Objects', and 'Floating Ritual Objects', explode with energy in no particular order. This order, however, is represented in the successful perspective use of colour and geometry in 'Unexploded Ordinance Nesting with Egg', 'Ritual Objects', and 'Boiling'.



'Interior of Mystery With Piss Pot'

'Floating Ritual Object' displays an unusual philosophy of independence, where one can stand unaffected and liberated, despite threatening danger.

Ultimately 'Outpouring at the Door of No Return' promises finality to an era where powerful armies can subdue people to the whims and fancies of those who are in fact fearful of those forced into compliance.

DOOR OF NO RETURN

This piece is reflective of the actual door of no return as exists in Elmina, Ghana. In Elmina this fearful door leads directly in the ocean where the ships would come in for human cargo – somewhat like an inmate's last walk to the electric chair. McFarlane, however,

is positive in this piece, promoting potentiality and hope.

Bryan understands all too well the aesthetic theories of abstract art, just as well as he epitomises the exact manipulation of colours and innovation in the creation of his masterpieces.

Director of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston, Dr. Edmund Barry Gaiher, who was guest speaker at the exhibition's opening, describes McFarlane, as one who through his approach, "has become a major contributor to the visual arts, meriting serious attention and praise". [Bryan] "engages contemporary art criticism and cultural theory in the interest of helping to establish the international presence of Third

World artists in art historical discourse" says Gaiher, who is also curator at the Museum of Arts in Boston.

Professor Rex Nettleford, S. Gaiher, Pat Ramsay, Cecil Co and Carolyn Cooper are among those who lend support this rebody of works.

The show continues to November 7, and can be viewed from Mondays - Fridays, 10a-6:00p.m. daily and Saturdays, 10a.m.-3:00p.m.

■ Anthea McGibbon, a graduate of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts has over 10 years experience in the fields of fine arts and journalism. Send your feedback to islandartattack@yahoo.com or anthea.mcgibbon@gleanerjmi.com