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'ARTISTS I STEAL FROM' AT GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LONDON

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Installation view, 'Artists I Steal From' at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London.

Throughout the history of art, artists have always borrowed from each other. However, they rarely reveal their sources, who they 'steal' from – and the reasons why – as openly as Alvaro Barrington in the latest exhibition at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London. Artists I Steal From is curated by Barrington and the gallery's Senior Global Director Julia Peyton-Jones, coming about following a conversation they had in which he revealed it was his dream to make a show of work by the artists that have influenced and inspired him. It brings together a selection of paintings, drawings, sculpture and photography by 49 artists, starting with a quote attributed to Pablo Picasso:

"Good artists copy: great artists steal."

The artists Barrington 'steals from' are presented on two floors. They range from individuals considered to be among the greatest of our times such as Andy Warhol, Louise Bourgeois, Jean-Michel Basquiat or Philip Guston, to 36-year-old Barrington's contemporaries such as Izzy Wood, Allison Katz or performance artist Janine Antoni. Also included are Afro-American artists from different generations such as Henry Taylor or Emma Amos, and – not to forget – Barrington's former art professor, Jamaican-born Nari Ward. Barrington describes Ward as a sort of ideological role model who taught him to work with the materials and techniques that connect to his own personal and cultural history, shaped by Barrington's upbringing in Grenada and Brooklyn, New York.

Quite quickly it becomes evident that Barrington's relationship with the artists in the show is based on close examination and thorough analysis, rather than simple theft. He states "Artists always look at how other artists have solved the problems they are wrestling with or have achieved the results they aspire to. The artists in

the exhibition are those I look to and steal from. It's the particular inventiveness or their practice that fascinates me, since it has opened up a whole world for me and introduced me to new possibilities within my own painting."

The works in the exhibition are organised thematically into sections such as *Line*, *Colour*, *Spatial Logic* and *The South*. They are accompanied by Barrington's personal annotations and commentaries, scribbled on post-it notes, pieces of paper, postcards or sometimes written directly onto the walls of the gallery. If not represented with actual work, stacks of books on the second floor, drawn from the artist's studio, represent other artists that have influenced the way how Barrington creates, thinks and sees.

It is refreshing that rather than merely focusing on Barrington's oeuvre, *Artists I Steal From* makes us approach an exhibition through the eyes of an artist. It openly reveals the usually private process of how an artist works, what they look at and what informs and educates their practice. It makes us aware that constantly going to museums and exhibitions, reading books and examining other practitioner's work is a key part of being an artist. The metaphor of 'stealing' also lays open the idea that the 'new', the 'authentic' and the 'original' that the art world seems to so desperately chase after does not exist, and that artists have always influenced each other.

Last but not least, the exhibition invites the viewer to make their own, often surprising connections, when wandering through the grand spaces of Ely House, the Georgian mansion in Mayfair that Austrian gallerist Thaddaeus Ropac revived in 2017.

There is only work by Alvaro Barrington himself in the exhibition. *Unc You the Plug* (2019) is a large-scale painting on burlap, a material that is used to carry cacao beans in the Caribbean, and incorporates stitching and sewing in a unique and exciting way. Barrington graduated from Slade School of Art in 2017 and not being very familiar with Barrington's oeuvre, *Artists I Steal From* makes me keen to see much more of his work.