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SIX ARTISTS RESHAPING OUR WAY OF SEEING

by Baya Simons and Rosanna Dodds



Alvaro Barrington in his Hackney studio © Adama Jalloh

Alvaro Barrington 38, London

It's not often that an exhibition at a major art gallery borrows its title from a lyric by Drake, the Canadian rapper. But then Alvaro Barrington, the Venezuela-born, Grenada-then-Brooklyn-raised painter, is no ordinary artist – but one as likely to draw inspiration from Busta Rhymes or Lil' Kim as Mark Rothko or Kerry James Marshall. You don't do it for the man, men never notice. You just do it for yourself, you're the fucking coldest, which opened at the Marais, Paris outpost of Thaddaeus Ropac gallery in March (one of eight prestigious galleries around the world he works with), is a show of new paintings by the artist that respond to the events of the past year.

"I really wanted to do a show that felt like we were dealing with what was going on in the moment," he says. "I thought this was a moment to think more positively about the things people are starting to do for themselves; it reminded me of that line from Drake's "Fancy". The paintings became things that people do in isolation; a moment of internally loving yourself."

The new works are semi-abstract depictions of people in bold hues. "I reduced all my friends to these colours, so they're almost like caricatures," he says. One painting looks down on a silhouette of a woman in a bath of orange paint, with a candle and a glass of wine. Another shows a grey figure in the compass yoga position, one leg held high above their head against a background of baby pink.

The title of the show and the playful tone to the paintings tap into something Barrington has been vocal about prioritising: accessibility, and the need to represent the cultures he grew up in, in Grenada and Brooklyn. "There's certain ways we enter

spaces,” says Barrington. “Some of it is very inviting for some people and some of it is not inviting for other people. Artists need to be responsible to their generation and to the people they fuck with. They have to be the voice of those people.” From the rich variety of locations in which he shows his art to his show titles, and bold, engaging work, Barrington’s practice is about opening art outwards.

“My paintings are never meant to make anybody feel dumb. I think an artist’s job is usually just to say: this is what I’m experiencing. And if it resonates with you, then that’s real; if it doesn’t, it doesn’t.” - BS