

Alvaro Barrington

GARVEY: SEX LOVE NURTURING FAMALAY

Sadie Coles HQ 1 Davies Street

07 September – 26 October 2019

Opening: 06 September, 5-7pm

Art is always who we are. It's about community – sharing ideas through music, dance, painting, performances. I grew up first in the Caribbean and then in a Caribbean American community in Brooklyn, and have studied art for over twenty years, including at the Slade here in London. On my first visit to London, I stayed with my Jamaican aunt and extended family. My practice is always concerned with celebrating communities in the way that they celebrate themselves, and the diverse cultural languages in which we celebrate ourselves, so I am responsive to both carnival and the millions who



celebrate it as I do, and also those of us who love to go to galleries and museums to see paintings. Working together with United Colours of Mas (UCOM) and Socaholic allowed us to create an experience that links communities and ideas. The concert is one kind of experience because it's short, packed, and relatively small. Carnival is another: it's massive, two days long, a lot of bodies and energy. You probably will lose your friends but find new friends. The show at Sadie Coles HQ is on for nearly two months. It is another way of viewing the paintings in relative quiet with your own thoughts. You can get deep into your thoughts with the paintings. All these experiences are valuable and touch on the different ways we process art and community. The paintings are the beginning of a four-show run about the life of Marcus Garvey and his relationships to London, the Caribbean and New York. It's the first chapter, so it starts with birth, sex, nurturing and family (famalay) which is the first relationship we have in the world. One of the challenges is that galleries often have mostly white viewers and I'm talking about a black man and black relationships, and I think there are responsible ways to share these ideas and stories. So I knew I needed to go to black folks in a way that allows them to become part of what's happening, to be in the conversation. And Caribbean folks celebrate carnival so it was my job to reach them in a space that is organic to the culture, which we are doing in a delicate collaborative manner. The people who have made the choices – like who performs, where we perform – are folks whose careers are centred around carnival. We've used our resources to make it happen. The overall experience, from the concert to carnival to the show, hopefully highlights the exchanges formed in a multicultural city like London while at the same time acknowledging the long history of those exchanges. At the same time as Garvey was looking at Africa while studying here in London, Gauguin was visiting Martinique, Picasso was looking at African sculptures, Matisse was visiting Harlem to listen to Jazz. Many of the elements of Africa can be found in Carnival, they were all finding new ideas, passing on old ideas through exchanges, through making, although in a specific cultural context. An underlying story in the paintings is Anansi the spider, mixed with Louise Bourgeois's spider, who then becomes a stand-in for my mom (as the spider was for Bourgeois) and my mom's relationship with my dad, giving birth to me, remarrying my stepdad ten years later, and then them having my brother.

Alvaro Barrington, 2019