

Alvaro Barrington

Sea Both Sides

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MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to present Alvaro Barrington's first personal exhibition in Italy: *Sea Both Sides*, on view at Casa Corbellini-Wassermann in Milan until December 6th, 2022.

Referencing both Jay-Z's "I keep one eye open like CBS" and Frank Ocean's "I see both sides like Chanel" Barrington's *Sea both Sides* is a very personal take on this play on words: having moved to the United Kingdom, Barrington reflected on his experience in London, across the *sea* from New York City, and being able to *see* new, multiple sides of the United States from his new vantagepoint.

Sea Both Sides premieres Barrington's first sculpture: *NO Work on the Block, aka Gated Community, Milan, 2022*, is a monumental structure that resolutely, imposingly inhabits the space that used to be Casa Corbellini-Wassermann's central living room. Its volume, chain and metal structure is as intimidating as it draws the viewer towards it. All gravitating around this central sculpture, the gallery's adjacent rooms feature four woven works and ten new concrete portraits, their muted gazes directed towards its spellbinding, haunting presence.

NO Work on the Block, aka Gated Community, Milan, 2022 is the fruit of Barrington's exploration of sculpture as a medium. In New York, the "block" is a cornerstone of the city's layout: imposing, monolithic, the block's structure dwarfs anyone meandering among them, making the sky feel small and far removed above. Barrington translates this energy, and the sensation of being locked within the narrow city blocks and gazing up at the sky into this powerful, yet inaccessible structure.

Thoroughly mindful of the context within which he presents his work, Barrington was especially intrigued by Casa Corbellini-Wassermann's interior architecture, and particularly by the marble frames that structure the home's doors, floors and windows.

As a response to this, the works in *Sea Both Sides* are framed in materials ranging from metal to cardboard and mirrors thus create a new dialogue with the home's turn of the Century architecture. Indeed Barrington sees cardboard as a "new marble": it is the epitome of our contemporary reality, at once

reminiscent of "arte povera", as much as a ubiquitous reminder of our online Amazon delivery age.

The cement portraits in *Sea Both Sides* find their starting point in Barrington's study of Picasso's work, which was profoundly impacted by the Spanish flu and World War Two, and resulted in his figurative paintings representing heavy, corpulent female bodies modeled after sculptures. It quickly became clear to Barrington that almost one century apart, similarly harrowing experiences are influencing his own practice, with war and the pandemic still looming, but also the silent pandemic of the opioid crisis that is plaguing our contemporary societies.

Rather than paint sculptures himself, Barrington chose to paint with cement, translating this same heaviness directly onto the soft, textile surface of his velvet carpet canvases. His application of cement to outline each figure's silhouette is swift and gestural, creating an elegant balance between their structures complex, long construction and the painting's spontaneous, gestural process.

Finally, *Sea Both Sides* presents four medium-sized woven works, entirely woven by Barrington at the gallery in the days leading up to the exhibition. Composed with colorful wool yarns crisscrossing vertically and horizontally across the delicate, almost transparent surface of the raw jute canvas, these works are uniquely compact and loose at once, presenting an exquisite connection between the home's *mille righe* – thousand lines linear marble features, the lines and blocks of New York City, and a humble nod to the notion of manual labour that is central to Barrington's practice.

Alvaro Barrington was born in Venezuela (1983, Caracas) to Haitian and Grenadian parents and was raised between the Caribbean and Brooklyn, NY. His artistic practice is multidisciplinary, reflecting on histories of cultural production and their exchange.

Whilst firstly considering himself a painter, his process to image-making is wide-ranging, as his works include the application of diverse non-traditional materials such as concrete, wood, textiles, yarn, burlap, cardboard, clothing, and postcards, prints, drawing and photography. For the artist, each media has numerous possibilities, and each is a tool to represent both individual as well as collective cultural narratives.

Recurrent subject matters are close-ups of faces, parts of the body and equatorial plants.

References are seen in his use of imagery such as hibiscus flowers, the 20th century Harlem Renaissance, Marcus Garvey, hip-hop culture of the 90's such as Tupac, and inspiration from other artists' practices such as Willem de Kooning, Joseph Beuys and Robert Rauschenberg, especially, the latter's application of objects onto the canvas such as carpets and drums.

His works explore diverse thematics, such as migration, nationality, self-hood, sexuality, time and the digital realm.

Barrington is also actively involved in various community practices such as charities, concerts, performances and shows. Believing art needs to be accessible to communities in public sites, Barrington has - since 2019 - been participating to the organization of the Notting Hill Carnival. In 2022, he has been the producer of Queen of the Caribbean, the main concert stage at the Notting Hill Carnival.

Barrington studied at Hunter College (NY) and Slade School of Art (London) where he graduated in 2017 and where he also started lecturing in 2019. The same year of his graduation, he had his first solo show curated by Klaus Biesenbach at MoMA PS1, Queens in 2017.

Since then, his works have been exhibited in several solo exhibitions such as: Blum & Poe, Los Angeles (2022); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg (2022); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2021); Emalin, London (2021); Nicola Vassell, New York (2021); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris (2021); Corvi-Mora, London (2020); Sadie Coles, London (2019); Emalin, London (2019); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London (2018); Emalin, London (2018); and MoMA PS1, New York (2017).

Barrington currently lives and works in London.