

ALVARO BARRINGTON

A TASTE OF CHOCOLATE

LONDON ELY HOUSE

17 Apr 2018 - 16 Jun 2018



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Curated by Norman Rosenthal

18 APRIL 2018 – 16 JUNE 2018

Opening: Tuesday 17 April 2018, 6 - 8pm

37 Dover Street, London W1S 4NJ

"I think Alvaro Barrington is an artist to watch. He is an intense and serious artist who is both of his time but reaches back to artists like Phillip Guston, but there is no doubt that Alvaro connects in his mind and in his work with Joseph Beuys. He is somehow a very Beuysian painter and his work stands out." **Norman Rosenthal**

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London is pleased to present Alvaro Barrington's *A Taste of Chocolate*, curated by Norman Rosenthal and exhibited concurrent with *Utopia at the Stag Monuments*, the most significant exhibition of Joseph Beuys in the UK in over a decade. Barrington's own studio installation in the Ropac gallery plays on a 'Beuysian energy' perceived by the curator in the work of this contemporary Venezuelan-born, New-York based artist, and recalls the 1982 installation of Beuys' studio at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, curated by Rosenthal almost 40 years ago. With the title of the exhibition the artist plays on the idea of chocolate, a product of Grenada, being a metaphor for dark brown skin and on its associated sexual connotations. *A Taste of Chocolate* also refers to Big Daddy Kane's 3rd album, a rapper who, in Barrington's view, is one of the most important Hip Hop artist of his generation and a pioneer of the genre. The album was coincidentally released around the time Barrington immigrated to America from Grenada.

A Taste of Chocolate intends to reproduce the same energy as that found in the artist's studio and so to capture Barrington's unique approach. Barrington explains: 'seen in a new space this new installation allows different relationships to emerge'. The first iteration took place at moma PS1 in late 2017. Barrington is primarily inspired by spaces and prefers to avoid representation in favour of creating exhibitions for specific gallery spaces. In this vein, further to Barrington's current exhibition at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac's London gallery he will be showing in Ropac's Paris, Marais space in two years' time.

This new iteration, site specific to the London Gallery's Ely room, enables viewers to visit an active space in which Barrington's generative process is clearly visible. *'I've been thinking a lot about the history of Ely House: transitions of power from the Catholic Church to the merchant class... as well as its history as the first members club to accept women and this being the 100th year of women earning the right to vote in the UK. This iteration of my work reflects on this: paintings that explore the inferences of two pinks – one – a bubble gum pink – prominent in the Church in Florence, and – 'Flesh Tint', by Old Holland – that hints at the creation of 'whiteness', or the flattening of skin colour to a single tone. And then... the notion of pink becoming the colour 'for girls'...'.* Alvaro Barrington

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Barrington spent the first eight years of his childhood with his grandmother in Grenada. An underlying theme running through his paintings comes from this experience: paintings that feel like they belong in carnival culture, that give you a sense of time and space. They depict or contemplate on a romanticised Caribbean, one taken from memory and that no longer exists: *'I mean, it's that kind of idea of what's real and when you're thinking about the Caribbean, it can be anything. It's your Caribbean.'* Barrington's multimedia work is a result of his pulling apart of these childhood memories and extracting their materiality. Barrington began to sew as a way to explore historical and cultural references, connecting with his Grenadian aunts, who themselves were masterful sewers. The artist has explored the formal action of sewing as an access point into this otherwise traditionally gendered textile art practice. Norman Rosenthal states: *'There are unexpected affinities between the work of Joseph Beuys and Alvaro Barrington. An essential part of both artists' work is sewing. Alvaro himself sews directly on to his canvases, and even the night before Joseph Beuys died he was sewing a felt piece.'*

Using materials including textiles, painting, mixed media, drawing, photography and print, his intimate compositions focus on single subjects in close-up: flowers, vegetation, facial expressions and body parts. Recurring motifs such as the hibiscus, the national flower of Jamaica that can be found 'all over the Caribbean' or phallic symbols, are often inspired by the works of others, highlighting the importance of dialogue in Barrington's

work: influence and exchange are integral to his practice. His use of burlap to make painting canvas, instead of the traditional cotton, stems from his observation of cacao production in Barbados, where beans are packed in burlap bags. The same associative logic that underpins his inspiration can be seen to permeate the accumulation of various mediums, themes and practices present in this studio setting.