

## The rhythm of diasporic language in the works of Mohammad Barrangi and Andrew Pierre Hart

Jessica Taylor

For the installation *The Mystical Creatures of Eden*, Mohammad Barrangi has produced five, mural-scale works, using his signature paper transfer technique. He created the imagery for these works using a combination of drawing with calligraphy pens and digital collage. These designs were then printed in response to the dimensions of the gallery walls and reverse transferred onto canvas by hand.

Each work features female and animal figures. The women depicted have inspired Barrangi, either through the personal connections he has with them or by virtue of their professional or life experiences. Using photographs of these women, he generates representations of their visages, and either depicts them riding animals or creates hybrid characters that are part animal, part human. In each piece, trees laden with fruit reference life and growth, speaking to Barrangi's belief in a heaven filled with nature. Barrangi also alludes to birth and fertility through two instances in which we see female figures with heads protruding from their stomachs. These images are inspired by Iranian miniature paintings of horses donning ornate saddles carved to resemble animals.

In one work a monkey sits atop a peacock with a woman's masked face. Barrangi's use of masks, which he designs himself, began when he was commissioned in Iran to illustrate a re-publication of the historic Sufi poem *The Conference of the Birds*. In response to pressures to remove depictions of women from his illustrations, Barrangi introduced masks, which he continues to include in his work as a commentary on the metaphorical masks that people place on themselves in public life.

The mystical world that Barrangi has built for Diaspora Pavilion 2 is an assemblage of traditional Iranian motifs and patterns, fantastical creatures like a unicorn zebra, and symbolic references to diasporic journeys. The colourful segments of the peacock's body are patterns taken from Persian and Indian carpets, and evidence Barrangi's ongoing exploration and celebration of artistic traditions and mythology. The inclusion of birds in four of the works, some of them with human heads, speaks to Barrangi's journey to the UK from Iran as a refugee and the movement across borders that diasporic subjects undertake.

Another element that Barrangi includes in his work is Persian calligraphy, as can be seen on the arm of the woman riding the fox. Since Barrangi uses a reverse transfer technique to create these works, it is not our reading of this lettering that he is interested in, but instead the process of mark-making and the rhythm of the strokes created by the calligraphy pen, which he likens to prayer.

The importance of rhythm, the process of assemblage, and the need to pay homage to fellow travelers and to those who came before us are considerations shared by both Barrangi and Andrew Pierre Hart. It is the rhythm of Brixton – real and imagined – that has inspired Hart's work and it is rhythm that he uses to move us through his installation, *genre pain -ting ; An Ode to Brixton*. Rather than producing a representation of Brixton, Hart is responding to his idea of the place. He is deconstructing some of the constitutive elements

that make up Brixton as it exists to him, such as sounds, memories, objects, movements and images, and re-positioning them here.

Beginning in a darkened annex of the gallery, Hart brings together references – the buzzing of hair clippers, the texture of leather and reflections of light off black and white mirror tiles - to recall the space of the barbershop. Here he honours Kerry James Marshall and Hurvin Anderson's paintings of barbershops and Joy Labinjo's mural of a hairdressers at Brixton station, while offering a vibrant re-conceptualisation of the medium of painting through his expanded engagement with sound, light, and built installation.

In the main gallery, Hart offers us traces of the record shop, the food market and the house party. His inclusion of Eddy Grant's *Electric Avenue* on vinyl, Dunn's *River green pigeon peas* and texts such as *Dread Poetry and Freedom* by David Austin foster a call and response with Brixton's Afro-Caribbean community. The painting of house plants, titled **Mums**, hangs behind brick walls that Hart laid himself, offering an invitation to gather and sit, with a playful nod to the etymology of Brixton as the stone to mark a meeting place.

There is an interplay between Hart's embrace of the ideas that one has about a place and his references to the physical act of building structures and sustaining a space or a community. Underlying both approaches to making sense of the diasporic experience is sound and its potential to re-order the universe. Music and voice are essential to Hart's engagement with sound. The painting ***Ode- a playlist for Brixton*** is a visual-sonic mash up of text and music, where the acts of composing and listening become one when visitors access Hart's playlist via the QR code on the work. With ***This is a dedication...*** Hart is paying homage to great speakers like Angela Davis, Bob Marley, Mia Mottley and Malcolm X by name, and artists like Denzil Forrester through his rendering of the sound system.

Both paintings are components of a mural unfolding across the longest wall of the gallery. Acknowledging the abundance of murals throughout Brixton, while refusing the two dimensionality often associated with the medium, Hart has created a sculptural installation comprised of raw materials, patterns, photographs, paintings and sound.

This approach to assemblage is also present in the moving image work projected on the back wall of the gallery, ***Sonic Ordering – Brixton Responsive***, which is titled after the foundational sonic architecture underlying perception. For this film, Hart invited two dancers – Kanika Skye and Vasiliki Papapostolou – to improvise and respond through movement to sounds he shared with them, upon which he layered multiple audio tracks. Hart's ongoing exchange with other creative practitioners continues in the public programme for the exhibition, which will take place in the gallery.