



Spike Island

DENZIL FORRESTER
ITCHIN & SCRATCHIN

17 OCTOBER 2020
TO 17 JANUARY 2021

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Spanning more than 40 years, *Itchin & Scratchin* brings together a selection of paintings and recent drawings by Grenada-born, British artist Denzil Forrester. Pulsing with music and motion, these works depict scenes that are by turns intimate and ecstatic; singular records of Afro-Caribbean experience in the UK.

Born in 1956, Forrester moved with his family to London when he was ten years old. While studying for his BA in Fine Art from the Central School of Art he was a regular at the dub-reggae clubs of East London. There, while listening to the music of Jah Shaka and others, he began to make drawings of MCs and dancers, sound systems and strobe lights. On the dimly lit, smoky dancefloors he would sketch quickly, working on each drawing for the length of just a single track. Struck by the sheer number of bodies squeezed together dancing, the style of the Rastafarian members of the crowd, and the physical “punchbag” force of the mono speakers, Forrester’s goal was to capture the energy of the night and transfer it into his work. Returning to his studio to paint, these nocturnal sketches would transform into large-scale paintings, capturing rhythm, ambience and movement.

In the late 1960s, around the same time Forrester migrated, dub music was evolving in Kingston, Jamaica. Characterised by a strong beat and emphasised drums and bass, dub music remixes existing recordings, slowing their tempo, removing vocal lines, and manipulating them with echo, reverb and delay. Layers of sound effects with differing volumes are added, creating soundscapes that bring attention to the timbre and depth of the sounds, as well as the pauses between them. These effects are central to Forrester’s paintings, many of which are titled after dub records.

Across four decades, Forrester has continued to explore ways of seeing sound and capturing the energy of the nightclub. Now based in Cornwall, he visited Jamaica for the first time in 2019, making a new body of work shaped by his experience of Kingston’s sound systems and open-air parties. Several works from this series are displayed here at Spike Island.

Itchin & Scratchin is presented in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary. With support from Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

Image: Denzil Forrester, *Dub Dance* (1993) (detail)
Oil on board. Copyright Denzil Forrester.
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London

Large print and audio guides are available in the gallery and to download at spikeisland.org.uk

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located in Bristol’s harbour area.

Admission to the gallery is free. Join our events and activities online.

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