

Spike Island

PRESS RELEASE
DENZIL FORRESTER
ITCHIN & SCRATCHIN
17 October 2020 to 17 January 2021



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. 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 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 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 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.

Now based in Cornwall, Forrester visited Jamaica for the first time in 2019, making a new body of work shaped by his experience of Kingston’s sound



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systems and open-air parties, many of which are displayed here at Spike Island. Across four decades, Forrester's work has explored ways of seeing sound and capturing the energy of the nightclub.

– Ends –

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

For further information and high-resolution images please contact Jane Faram, Communications Manager at Spike Island on jane.faram@spikeisland.org.uk or +44 (0)117 9292266.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

- Denzil Forrester (b. 1956, Grenada, based in Truro, UK) studied at the Central School of Art, London in 1979 and at the Royal College of Art, London in 1983. Recent solo exhibitions include: *A Survey*, Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2019); *From Trench Town to Porthowan*, Jackson Foundation, St. Just (2018); *White Columns*, New York; *Tramps*, London (both 2016), all curated by Peter Doig and Matthew Higgs; *Two Decades of Painting*, The Edward Wilmot Blyden Project (2002); *Memory and Images*, Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery (1996). His work has been included in group exhibitions at Somerset House, London (2019); Tate Britain, London; Metro Pictures, New York (both 2017); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2000); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1997); Barbican Art Gallery, London (1995); Whitechapel Gallery, London (1986) and Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1984). He was awarded a scholarship by the British School at Rome in 1983-85 and a Harkness Fellowship in New York in 1986-88. Forrester's commissioned work, *Brixton Blue*, a reinterpretation of his seminal work *Three Wicked Men* (1982), is on view at Brixton Underground station in South London until September 2020.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- *Itchin & Scratchin* is presented in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary with support from Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.
- Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located close to Bristol's harbourside. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of internationally relevant exhibitions, events and activities, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses. The link between the production and presentation of art on this scale and under one roof is unique within the UK. Spike Island's programme emphasises the commissioning of new ambitious work and often provides artists their first significant gallery exhibition in the UK. Spike Island Exhibition Services support the development of commissions, including in-house post production facilities for artists' film and video, audio visual technical services and equipment provision for ambitious moving image installations, on site fabrication workshops, resin rooms, skilled art technicians and fabricators.

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