

Alison West Martin

Biography

Born in the South of England in 1953, in a rural farming community, Alison West Martin was educated at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, and at the Hornsey College of Art (now Middlesex University) in London. On graduation from art school with an undergraduate degree and teacher training, she felt the need to broaden her horizons, and headed for Jamaica in 1976 where she has resided since.

She has taught design and drawing at two tertiary institutions, the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts from 1983 to 2006, and the Caribbean School of Architecture since 1989. She has also been a practicing, exhibiting artist since 1980, and her work incorporates motherhood, as well as the balance between the natural environment and man. West Martin has also been involved in interior design, mural-making and more recently illustration projects in collaboration with the Department of Archeology at the University of the West Indies. This illustration work focuses on analysis of pre-Colombian artifacts of the Taino Indians.

West Martin's most recent work, is inspired by the pre-Colombian civilizations of Mexico, examining mostly the sacred places of ceremonial centres in the highlands around Mexico City, and more recently the Mayam Puuc sites in the Yucatan.

Artist Statement

My current body of work looks at Islamic Sacred Spaces, and has been developing from thoughts gathered over the last few decades. The ideas behind this work found their roots in some of the underpinnings of Colonial architecture in Mexico. I was studying for my MFA (Master of Fine Arts) in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato. My work then was an investigation of Pre Colombian sacred space, and looked at the archaeological sites of Teotihuacan, El Tajin and Tula.

I was at the same time noticing the influence of Islamic architectural underpinnings in the Colonial architecture, both in residential and other typologies. The austere outside appearance suggests fortification; the inside, hidden, enclosed gently like a womb, introverted, secret space of the

courtyard; the typical Mudejar arch which imitates the joining of the head to the torso at the neck; the intricate ornamentation and detail, were all carried to New Spain at the time of the conquest of the Americas, soon after the expulsion of the Moors from Spain.

In 2013 I spent a month in Istanbul, primarily focusing my research drawing and photographing the mosques in the walled part of the historic peninsula. The architectural language and their carved and tiled ornamentation speak to the scientifically and philosophically complex Moslem mind.

The outcome of this research was a series of images which examined the geometric underpinnings and the philosophical/spiritual meaning behind this sacred geometry. The three dimensional geometry of the domed spaces, as well as the tile patterns which decorate these spaces have cosmic significance and seem to explain everything from the microscopic to the macroscopic, from the atomic and cellular, to the revolutions of the planets and the solar system.

In 2015 I spent time in Granada Spain, especially the Nasrid Palaces and other notable structures of the Alhambra, and in Tangier, Morocco, especially the Kasbah and Dar-el-Makhzen or Sultan's Palace.

The paintings examine space, light, surface pattern and geometry. They are full of metaphor of the arch as a threshold to beyond, and the journeys of life. I have looked at the concept of hidden, rather than revealed, which applies equally to architecture and to dress, both of which contain the human person. Enclosure and mystery, as opposed to openness and revealed.

The media and technique I use continues a lifetime of developing my surfaces and imagery from tiny coloured, as well as black and white, pen and ink circles, dots and strokes...which is also philosophical as well as physical, and relates to my understanding of the cosmos...That all matter consists tiny specks of substance and light from the minute to the massive.

The resulting images carry the viewer back in time; through from an Occidental mindset to an Oriental one; from one religious standpoint to another; through shaded archways into enlightened space.

My visual investigations have opened for me a door of clearer understanding of another equally valid way of thinking; through intricacies of surface, light, form and structure of Islamic sacred spaces, and into the minds of those who created them and paid homage within. Delving into sacred spaces of a different religious group help in the understanding that after all we are all basically and intrinsically human. We all have a need to try to understand our mortality and our place in the cosmos. I have found that the sensory and sensual experience in the mosque or the Islamic Palace reaches to the deep inner core of human essence

At this time in the international political arena, where exclusion is more favoured than inclusion, I believe it is all the more important to voice images that encourage tolerance and understanding, that bring to the viewer something of greater meaning, insight and relevance than the volatile and shock inducing negative imagery perpetrated by the mass media.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

SOLO.

- ❖ February 2014.
"Sacred Geometry: Images from Istanbul"
UTech Centre for the Arts.
- ❖ November 2010
"Amatl Drawings of Yucatecan Mayan Edificio"
Bolivar Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ October 2004.
"Stairways to Heaven"
Mutual Gallery. Kingston Jamaica.
- ❖ July 2004.
"Stairways to Heaven"
Pergola Gallery. San Miguel de Allende. Gto. Mexico.
- ❖ October 1998.
"Places I Go."
Mutual Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ April 1993.
Environetics Gallery. Mandeville. Jamaica.
- ❖ March 1993.
"In His Garden."
Galerie 14. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ October 1992.
Jamaica Tourist Board Promotional Show.
Miami International Mall. Florida. U.S.A.
- ❖ October 1991.
Women Incorporated. Featured solo artist.
Oceana Hotel. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ December 1987.
Frame Centre Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.

❖ January 1987
Citi-Lites. Stony Hill Hotel Jamaica.

❖ January 1985.
“Cosmic Thoughts”
Mutual Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (selected)

❖ Liguanea Arts Festival: Dec 2016

❖ Liguanea Arts Festival: June 2014

❖ Liguanea Arts Festival: April 2013

❖ Liguanea Arts Festival: April 2012

❖ Liguanea Arts Festival: April 2011

❖ Liguanea Arts festival: April 2010

❖ December 2008. Biennale.
National Gallery, Kingston Jamaica.

❖ December 2006. Biennale.
National Gallery, Kingston Jamaica.

❖ February 2005. The Art of Drawing
Mutual Gallery, Kingston Jamaica.

❖ December 2002. Biennale.
National Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.

❖ 1995. Annual National Exhibition
National Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.

❖ 1994. Women’s Show.
Frame Centre Gallery. Kingston Jamaica.

❖ October 1990.
Group show “Two Women Artists.”
The Bay Gallery. Montego Bay. Jamaica.

- ❖ 1989. Jamaica School of Art Tutor's Show.
Heritage House. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ 1988. Women's Art.
Mutual Life Gallery.
- ❖ 1986. Organized and participated in Anti- Apartheid Show.
(Proceeds to A.N.C. South Africa.)
Makonde Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ 1985. Annual Exhibition.
National Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ November 1985.
Paintings by Alison West Martin with Jewellery by Corinne Wakeland.
Makonde Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ September 1985.
International Group Exhibition.
Gallery Light Centre. Cambridge. Massachusetts. U.S.A.
- ❖ 1984. Women's Show.
Mutual Life Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ 1983. Jamaica School of Art Tutors Show.
Port of Spain. Trinidad.
- ❖ 1982. Jamaica Art and Craft Teachers Assoc.
Upstairs Downstairs Gallery. Kingston. Jamaica.
- ❖ 1981. St. Ann Parish Exhibition.
Ocho Rios. Jamaica.

COMMISSIONS

- ❖ 1988. Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica.
- ❖ 1993. N.E.M. Insurance Co.
- ❖ 1994. Consolidated Insurance Co.
- ❖ 1998. Ceramic Mosaic Mural.
Chapel Altarpiece. Claver Home. Widcombe. Jamaica.

PUBLICATIONS

- ❖ Illustrations for educational CD Rom. of James Lee Collection.
- ❖ Taino ceramics and stone artifacts. In conjunction with Dept. of Archaeology. UWI.

- ❖ Illustrations for “Pre Columbian Jamaica” authored by Philip Allsworth Jones. published by Alabama Press. 2008. (Taino ceramics, shell and stone artifacts. In conjunction with Dept. Of History & Archaeology. UWI.)

CONFERENCES

- ❖ Co Author on Paper: Temple University. Philadelphia.

- ❖ April 2012. “Learning to See: Teaching Innovative Design through the development of the Seeing Eye.”

- ❖ April 2012. UWI 10th Archaeological symposium.
“The measured survey drawings of Caribbean School of Architecture”
Co Author of presentation with Arch. Michael Lorde.

- ❖ April 2014. UWI 12th. ASJ Conference 2014.
Poster Session. “Images from the Mosques of Istanbul.” Paper. “Layers of Civilization. Photo Journal and discussion on the History of Istanbul.”