

Artist Andrae Green of Amherst asked to exhibit painting at Louvre in Paris



Artist Andrae Green in his Amherst apartment/studio with one of his works that will soon hang in the Louvre in Paris. -Don Treeger

AMHERST – Artist Andrae Green, of Amherst, is a paradox – a man whose native country, Jamaica, was seared by colonial oppression, but also an artist who has been trained in classical European techniques and who names the 16th-century Italian Caravaggio as his favorite painter.

Far from inhibiting Green, those contradictions have resulted in powerful paintings and increasing attention. One of his works was recently accepted by the Louvre Museum in Paris for the 152nd international three-day “salon” of the Societe Nationale des Beaux Arts in December.

Green likes to paint human figures on a huge scale. “Anything over your body size is almost as if you have willed something to life,” he said with his radiant smile. “It’s an incredible feeling. In my spirit I’m 35 feet tall.”

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Green began drawing at an early age, inspired by comic book heroes. “When my dad saw me drawing,” said Green, “he usually would take away my sketchpad and say, ‘Read a book!’” (His mom would give it back.)

As members of the “working poor,” his parents worked hard to send Andrae to a private school called St. Cecilia’s.

There Green benefited from an “awesome teacher” named Michael Archer, who opened up for him the possibility of a career in art. It was Archer, said Green, who encouraged him to enroll at the Edna Manley College of Art in Jamaica. Green then went on to earn a master of fine arts degree at New York Academy of Art in this country. He has exhibited in cities from Beijing to Providence, R.I.

He has also taught college art courses. “Teaching is in my blood,” he said. Both his parents were teachers, and his brother is a teacher.

Green put his teaching skills to work most recently for the Performance Project, an arts program in Springfield. In February, Evelyn Aquina, chief facilitator at the Performance Project, saw his one-man show at the University of Massachusetts and recruited him to teach wayward teen boys to paint a mural.



Artist Andrae Green in his studio in Amherst
-Don Treeger

The teens, all in the custody of the Department of Youth Services, were resistant at first, but in the end produced an eye-catching mural on Chestnut Street. “I love working with kids,” said Green.

Compared to his usual massive scale, the painting that is going to the Louvre is relatively small, about two feet wide. The subject is a historical figure with special meaning for Green. Sir Percy Wyndham was English, but he had many allegiances.

Wyndham fought for the French in the 1848 Revolution, then for the Austrians, then for Garibaldi in Sicily and even distinguished himself as an officer in the Union Army in the American Civil War. He was a person who didn’t know where he belonged, said Green, and “that’s the kind of situation I find myself in. In a certain context I’m a Jamaican artist,” he said, “but I try to engage a wide cross-section of people.”

Green loves history, and does “a lot of reading and research” for his paintings. He says his work always hints at the history of slavery in Jamaica, even if it’s not in an overt way. “History is a kind of substrata that you have to launch yourself from,” he said.

His portrait of Wyndham has multiple silhouettes that vibrate like a photograph of someone in motion. “A lot of my work deals with that shifting, not being able to have a fixed point,” said Green.

In 2012 Green married Priya Nadkarne, a graduate student in studio arts at the University of Massachusetts. “I came to Western Massachusetts for love,” said Green. To learn more, go to andraegreen.com.