

Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Wire Magazine

Denzil Forrester reinterprets 'Three wicked Men (1982)

24 July 2019

WIRE

“Denzil Forrester reinterprets ‘Three Wicked Men (1982)’”



Denzil Forrester. Photo by Geraldine Rogers.

The artist borrowed his title from Reggae George's 1981 track

Denzil Forrester is working on a new commission for Art On The Underground. Called *Three Wicked Men*, it's a large-scale interpretation of the 1981 Reggae George track and it will go on display from 19 September 2019–April 2020 at South London's Brixton Underground station.

Forrester is using 1980s Brixton murals as his inspiration. This seminal work, now in the collection of London Tate, was originally painted while Forrester was studying at London Royal College of Art. Taking its title from the Reggae George track, it portrays “three wicked men” – a policeman, a politician and a businessman – along with Winston Rose, a friend of Forrester's who died while under police restraint in 1981.

Much of Forrester's early works documented rising tensions between police and the Afro-Caribbean community while focusing on the UK's underground reggae and dub scenes. “Music and dance were, and still are, my main sources of inspiration,” he notes. “I was lucky to be in Hackney at the right time – the 80s. I had access to all the major ‘dub’ blues nightclubs: Phebes, All Nations and Four Aces. For the very first time I was in a big space with dub reggae playing at maximum volume, it was a piece of heaven on Earth.

“I began to take my sketchbook, A1 paper and drawing equipment and draw. It was dark and smoky. I didn't care what the people looked like – I just wanted to draw movement, action and expression. I was interested in the feeling and energy of the crowd. Particular dance movements and clothing play an important part in my gesture drawings. In these clubs, city life is recreated in essence – sounds, lights, police sirens, bodies pushing and swaying back and forth and all in a smoke-filled room. Sometimes the atmosphere was momentarily broken by another group of people, dressed only in blue.”

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Denzil Forrester, *Domino Hunters*, 1985