

CITYSCAPES

"You don't invite the kids round to your home. It doesn't work like that. It's not the way it's done. That's why I use a video camera in the first instance"

Exploring the under-belly. By John Swinfield

The corrosive sense of alienation and menace palpable in the inner cities is captured by Matthew Small, 32, who feels the power of his work is enhanced by his choice of materials. He frequently paints on discarded iron or slabs of concrete. "Such materials are characteristic of the environment young people in these areas inhabit," he says.

Classically trained, he gained a BA at Westminster College in 1998 and an MA in illustration at the Royal College of Art in 2000. He now has a studio in Camden, London, based in a hostel for the homeless. His method of working is unusual. He uses a video camera to film his subjects, often young people, freezing those video frames from which he wishes to work.

Small – his late mother was English, his father is West Indian – says: "I suppose I'm part of this cross-cultural thing. I'm aware of the racial and cultural tensions within the urban areas. I'm not Asian but I try to appreciate the very difficult and fundamental British-Asian problems. I'm looking at their lives as they really are."

His painting, *Asian youth*, is on ply block, a material more often found on building sites. "I know it looks like a Union Jack on his face, but I didn't intend that when I began. I've always used red, blue and black in my work. Some people see

red as blood. I don't necessarily see it that way. If the colours add to the relevance, if it helps to bring a focus to the blight of urban living, that's fine by me."

Using oils and acrylics, sometimes mixing in a diversity of other materials to create various textured effects, and utilising detritus as his canvas, Small is committed to drawing attention to the plight of the inner cities and their young residents whose lives, and those around them, can be dangerous and marginalised.

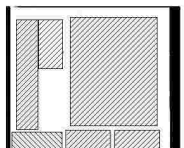
It's a closed world; sometimes tribal, suspicious of outsiders, even, at times, feral.

"You don't invite the kids round to your home. It doesn't work like that. It's not the way it's done. That's why I use a video camera in the first instance, to catch them as they really are, in their own world, in their own habitat."

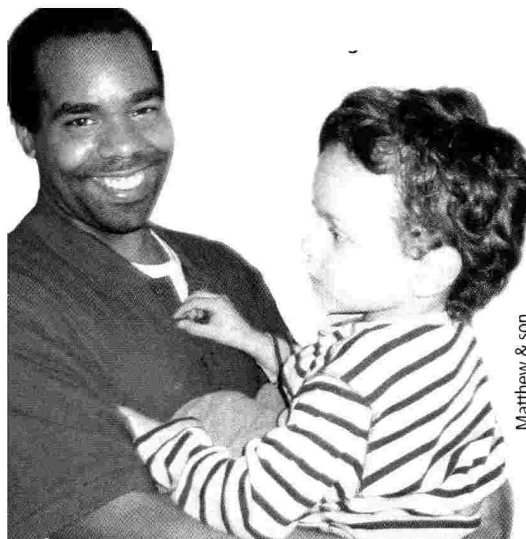
He has contributed to many group exhibitions and held several solo shows. His awards include the well-thought-of Villiers David Prize for portraiture, and he has been previously nominated for the prestigious National Portrait Gallery BP Award.

With the work of photographer Tim Brown, Matthew Small's powerful paintings can be seen in an exhibition at the novas gallery, part of the novas charity which, through the arts, focuses on homelessness and urban deprivation. The exhibition is backed by the Arts Council.

Underexposed, *novas gallery*, 73 Parkway, Camden Town, NW1, until 1 June.



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Matthew & son



Asian youth, oil and acrylic on found materials, 70x60cm