

# The arts join forces

*Bringing together two forms of artistic understanding in a stunning display of passion and colour, the opening night of Al Ebanks's exhibition at the National Gallery, Dancing to Art, featured professional Caymanian dancers who brought their own interpretation of some of the work on display. Business Editor, Lindsey Turnbull speaks with one of the dancers, Susan Barnes Pereira, to hear her experience of the event.*

Native Son artist Al Ebanks has been painting professionally for 16 years and his current exhibition at the National Gallery features some of his most recent and most passionate works to date. He uses a mixture of oil, acrylic and acrylic with sand on canvas to produce brightly coloured and rhythmic abstract pieces that, say the dancers, were both a joy and a challenge to interpret.

Al explains the background to the exhibition, "After discussions with the National Gallery director, Nancy Barnard, about my solo show, we decided that, based on my figurative style and involvement in carnival in Cayman, we should combine visual arts and dancing."

Four local dancers, Lorna Reid, Patrice Donalds who partnered with Roger Thompson and Susan Barnes Pereira were each given the challenge to communicate their thoughts and

feelings of one particular painting via the medium of dance, a medium that they have all been intrinsically involved with for many years, having each supported the other in a tightly knit group of dancers who have grown and developed their art together over time in Cayman.

Susan Barnes Pereira, director of Barnes Dance Academy, who has been dancing since middle school at George Hicks and is a founding member of the Cayman Islands dance company, Dance Unlimited, explains her reaction when Al Ebanks first unveiled the artwork that Susan was to interpret, called Red Dawn. "The painting had an immediate physical as well as emotional effect on me when I first set eyes on it. I was actually quite terrified at the prospect because the painting was so powerful and intense, with swirling reds and a great deal of movement and passion; it was almost overpowering. However, I

approached the subject with a determination that if you do not challenge yourself you do not grow."

She continues, "I studied dance at New York University and the University of Tampa and we were taught to carefully analyse movement and then define it in terms of qualities such as effort and flow (whether the flow is free or bound). A free movement it is one where you just cannot possibly stop, you just have to make that extra turn or move. That is how I looked at defining Red Dawn. I very much wanted to commute my emotional response to the painting through movement, rather than the literal translation of what the artist had painted."

Susan says that her favourite types of dance movement include those that are freer than traditional dance steps used in ballet, for example. She says she enjoys breaking free of constraints, and thus her own style of looser, and more intuitive movement perfectly suited the painting.

She explains, "I was schooled in ballet and other traditional dance and this gives the dancer a terrific base line in form, technique and discipline. However, I was always drawn to dancers that displayed more freedom of expression in their

work, such as Martha Graham, and Paul Taylor, both leading dancers from the United States with a technique unlike any other."

Susan says that the style of dance performed in Cayman by herself and her fellow dancers has had many different influences, from classical ballet to popular jazz to African rhythms and that the small group of professional dancers with who she has trained with over the years have developed a style that is unique to Cayman.

She says that collaborating with Al to bring forth the artistic message along with her fellow dancers was a great chance to provide a united front to the viewing public, as she says, "It gave us the opportunity to show respect and support for our fellow artists, which can only further the cause of promoting the arts in Cayman as having a valuable contribution to society."

Nancy Barnard, director of the National Gallery says, "One of the reasons I selected Susan to dance at this exhibition (apart from the fact that she is one of Cayman's top dancers) is because I have always been impressed with her steady, determined application to dance, to developing her own dance school.

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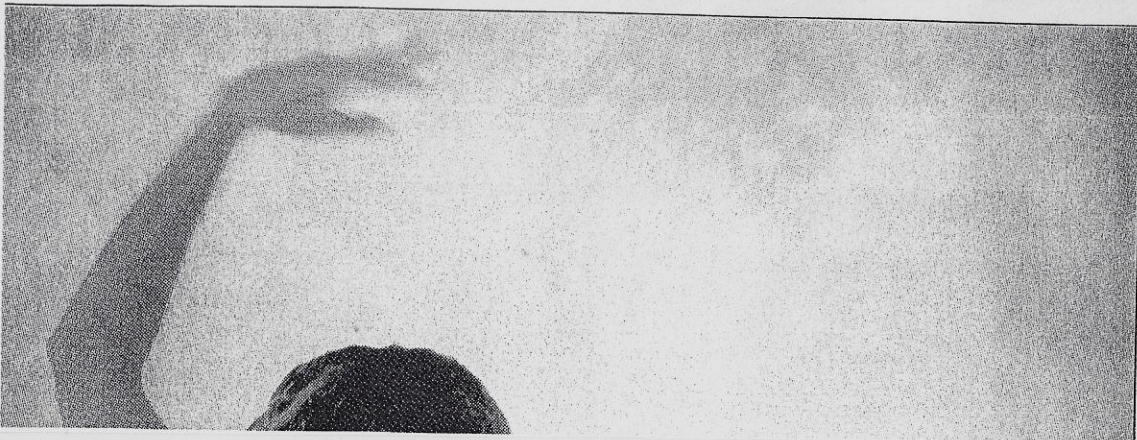
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When she talks about dance whether you are a dancer or not her imagination and passion for her art really draw you in; from the simplest step to the most complicated set of movements Susan really knows and loves her work. I have a tremendous amount of respect for her."

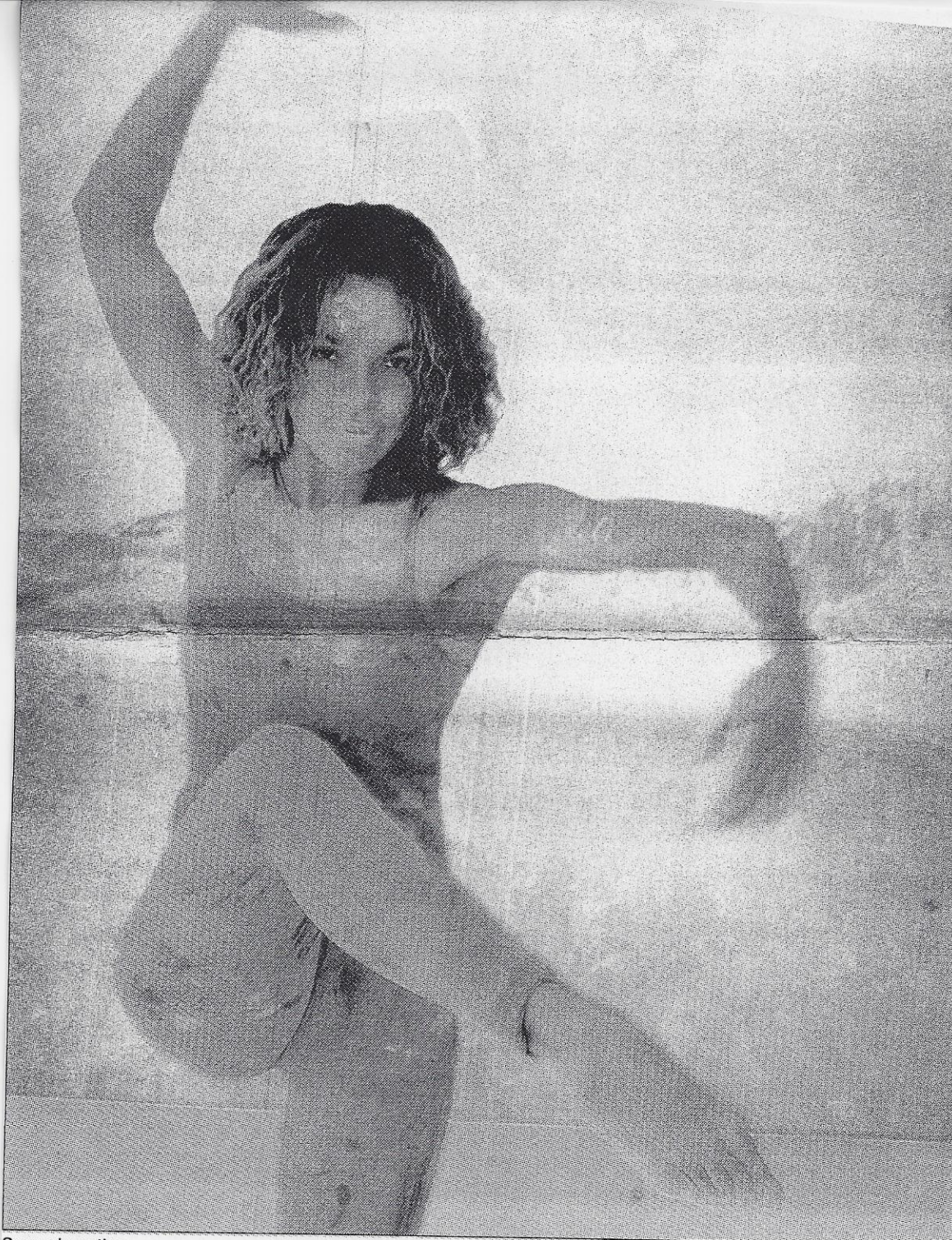
Al confirms Nancy's thoughts "With Susan's passion for dance I thought her interpretation of my painting was powerful."

He continues, "I have always been a supporter of combining visual and other forms of arts and like people coming together. I am always coming to new ideas."

Nancy says that the opening of the exhibition was extremely well represented, with more than 100 guests enjoying the proceedings, dancers and the Gallery alike but that this will only be the start of future collaborations.

Al has one final word, "I want to thank the National Gallery sponsors of the event, Rawlinson & Hunter, along with all my supporters."

The dances will be shown on a large screen at the Gallery along with Al's paintings and will run through early January 2006.



Susan in action

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Photos: Patrick Broderick

