

ALBERT BIN HUIE ALBERT.

ALBERT HUIE:

The man and the artist

By IGNACY EKER

WE WERE at the Bolivar Gallery, Albert Huie and myself, looking at the paintings in his one-man show, mounted in honour of his being appointed an Officer of the Order of Distinction, and in front of his self-portrait I put a leading question to him:

"Would you agree that your self-portrait is not a good likeness?"

'I wasn't aiming at it,' he replied, 'likeness is not important, but if you examine it carefully you will see that there is much of me in it - the wide-set eyes, the sensuous mouth and the tuft of hair on top of the head. I painted myself as the rugged countryman that I am - that is how I would like posterity to remember me.'

Well, who is to dictate to an artist how he should paint himself? The great Rembrandt painted himself once as

an Oriental in a turban, attired in sumptuous robe, with only a hint of his real self in it, so why can't Huie see himself as a rugged countryman? It is certainly nearer to the truth.

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• Huie was born in Falmouth in 1920. As early as he can remember he liked to draw and paint, but this was disapproved by the family which viewed his activities without a shred of sympathy or understanding, save for his grandmother whom he recalls with great affection.

✱ His first introduction to art came when he saw a reproduction of *Hope*, an allegorical picture by the British painter Watts at the home of Rev. R.A.L. Knight, and the original portrait of William Knibb in the Old Baptist Church. These pictures left a lasting impression on him and strengthened his determination to become a painter. But what remained of this unhappy, misunderstood childhood was destined to vanish without a trace. 'The 1944 hurricane destroyed my old home and all my early paintings,' he says with a note of regret in his voice.

In 1943 Huie had 'a big show' of his paintings which brought him a scholarship and enough money to go the following year to Canada where he studied at the Ontario College of Art. His dreams had become a reality, for he later received a British Council Scholarship and travelled to England to train at the Camberwell College of Art.

Victor Pasmore, the well-known British painter was the teacher who inspired him most and of him Huie says: 'He was a very shy man, but he was also very generous. He did not stint his time and would stay with the students after school-hours, holding long, personal discussions. I learned a lot from him.'

Huie returned to Jamaica in 1949 and that same year he married. The marriage was a happy one and far from conflicting with his career, it in fact roused him to greater activity; it disciplined him and he met

his new responsibilities by working harder than ever. No artist could earn a living in those days by selling his pictures, so he taught, illustrated, designed stage-sets, book-jackets and Christmas cards. 'I have a strong sense of reality and that is how I've managed to survive,' he says.

In 1950 Huie was active, together with Edna Manley in formation of the Jamaica School of Art (formerly the Jamaica School of Art and Crafts). In its early days it had only about 90 students and the teachers were Edna Manley, Albert Huie, Cecil Baugh, Jerry Isaacs and Angus Grant; and it was also Huie who introduced life-classes into the school, though he initially encountered fierce opposition. Many people thought it outrageous that young students should draw and paint nudes. On one occasion six women teachers walked out in protest against what they considered "shocking immorality".

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Huie: more than a superb craftsman



Young Smoker.

Was it difficult to find models? "It most certainly was," he says, "I once persuaded a girl to pose at the school, but when she undressed and sat on the dais she was petrified with embarrassment. When the class ended she slipped out unnoticed and didn't even ask for her money."

But the situation improved steadily. There was more sympathy with the artists and their aims. When in 1954 I became the manager of Hills Galleries, which firm then mainly dealt in antiques, I persuaded the directors, Norah and Christopher Hills to show paintings and encourage artists to have one-man shows.

"But who should be our first painter?" they asked, and I replied without the slightest hesitation 'Albert Huie.'

"I remember this event very well," says Huie. It was Mrs. Cecil Lindo who opened the show. It was quite an occasion and I sold quite a few paintings that evening. But after the opening I went home by bus, alone. I didn't know as many people then as I do now and had no one to talk to. I felt lonely and helpless."

Sensitive

Here then is another aspect of Huie, and it seems that the rugged countryman's exterior conceals a very sensitive and very vulnerable man. Was it the aftermath of months of strenuous effort, nervous tension and sheer excitement? "It was partly that," Huie says, "but that is not the whole story." And then a shadow passes over his face, signalling that he knows the reason but is not prepared to disclose it.

Huie did not have another exhibition until 1970 because he has never shaken off the feeling of 'up-tightness' when faced with a prospect of a one-man show. However, during the intervening years his reputation soared to such heights that he could sell his work without them. His style deepened and ripened, and while many younger artists were changing theirs, trying desperately to catch up with swiftly changing fashions, he put his faith in Nature by painting out of doors and bringing to his landscapes and seascapes that 'open-air' quality, so much sought after by the Impressionists.

It is this quest that prompted him to be a frequent visitor to my home in Stony Hill in the early sixties and he fell in love with its environs. I am not surprised at this because Stony Hill has a

certain magic which it is almost impossible to describe in words.

"Do you remember?" Huie says, "I used to come up to Stony Hill village to paint. I would leave my paint-box at your house before going home in the evening and pick it up in the morning." And then he pays me a charming compliment.

"You introduced me to Stony Hill."

Indeed, I am glad I have because Huie painted there some stunningly beautiful pictures, such as for example **Thursday Afternoon, Stony Hill**, which evokes poignantly the dusty road, the whole atmosphere of the village in the late afternoon when the low sun turns to pale gold the grey walls of Mas Alvin's shop.

Secret

To elicit such poetry from so humble a scene you have to be more than a superb craftsman. You must know how to wrest beauty from drabness, ugliness even. Huie knows the secret of it and he likes to recite the poem which Philip Sherlock wrote in which '... and beauty too of twisted trees... are the words he loves most.

But time has run out and I shoot my last question.

"What does he think of our present art scene?"

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"Our artists have talent," he says, "but they lack dedication — they seem to be occupied with matters other than art. When I go abroad I see that artists there are completely absorbed in their work."

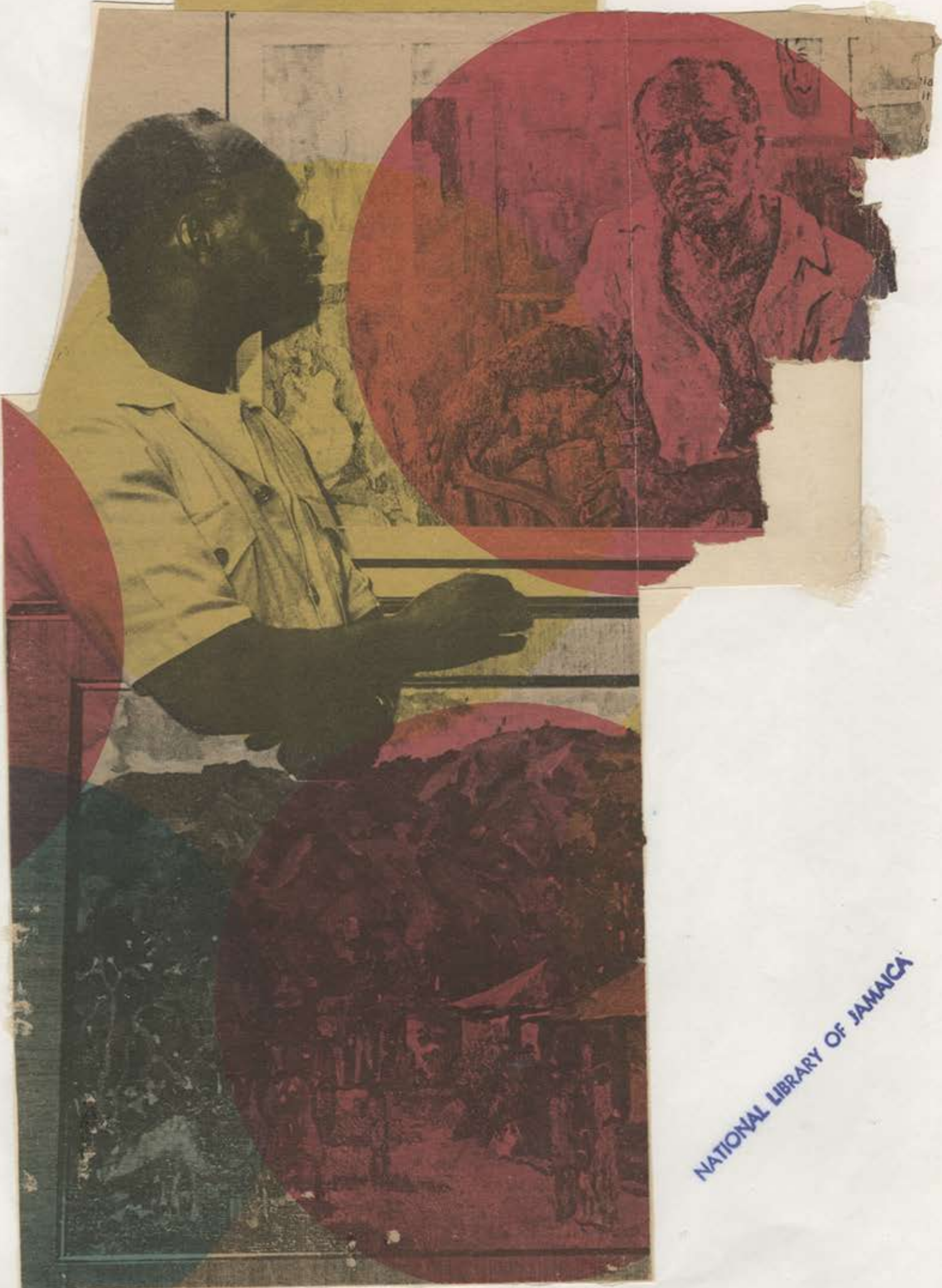
Perhaps this is the secret of Huie's success. He is a totally dedicated man.

On Heroes Day this year, at the National Stadium, Huie became the first Jamaican artist to receive the Order of Distinction, a well-deserved tribute indeed.

H/N - Artist - Ja. - Huie, Albert

ALBERT HUIE with his self-portrait at the exhibition of his paintings at the Bolivar Gallery, mounted in honour of his being made an Officer of the Order of Distinction. At right he receives his insignia from the Governor General, the Most Hon. Florizel Glasspole, at the Heroes' Day Ceremony on October 15.

Below is THURSDAY AFTERNOON - STONY HILL, the nostalgia evoking Huie painting.



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