



CUTTING  
EDGES | NEW MEDIA  
AND CREATIVE  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP



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## CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT ARTS JOURNAL

*The concept of CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT to provide a creative meeting place for Caribbean artists to share their thought-provoking ideas and works within a community of cultural producers, students, scholars, activists and entrepreneurs. The word 'InTransit' signifies the historical and contemporary global movement of Caribbean peoples and the opportunities for development that this movement offers. Caribbean InTransit's approach to the exploration of Caribbean arts and culture is not insular, thus it incorporates artistic practices and beliefs external to the Caribbean.*

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*The cover image is from Versia Harris' "Riding Swan Series", a suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7"). She created a narrative of an original*

*character to address the perceptions of self, as it compares its image with unrealistic standards. Her primary media includes pen and watercolour on paper. She also uses Adobe Photoshop to manipulate her drawings and create animations. Harris' work explores the fantasies and experiences of an original character which is introduced to Walt Disney animations and consequently layers what she desires from these animations onto her life, especially her physical self. Her perception of and her relationship with her world changes, as she compares her reality and the fantasy of Disney Animated stories. She struggles with her perception of self as she in complete contrast of the Disney princess. Sparked by her interest in storytelling, Harris created the character and story to generate a comparison between Walt Disney iconography and her reality. Despite the fabricated narrative, Harris addresses issues that intrigue her, such as how one can be influenced by media, and the process of comparing oneself to another of unrealistic standards.*

*Website: <http://versiaabeda.tumblr.com/>*

# CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT

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## CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT ARTS JOURNAL

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was born out of a  
collaborative conference  
project initiated by creative  
writer Alake Pilgrim.

We would first like to acknowledge George Mason University, specifically, Wendy Manuel-Scott and Mika'il Petin in the African and African American Studies Department/Program, as well as Dean Jack Censer, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Associate Dean of Research & Graduate Studies Matt Zingraff, for their continued support of Caribbean InTransit. We are grateful for their faith and encouragement this Spring, as we continue to make significant and imminent changes.

Notably, we launched our third issue on “Arts for Social Change” with a panel discussion featuring curatorial staff from the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Kim Sojin and Arlen Reiniger, as well as School of Art Faculty member Peter Winant, and Benedict Carton from the Department of History at George Mason University. We are also in the process of becoming a non-profit, with directors resident in the Washington DC area, and with individual, corporate and institutional memberships available. We have launched a new product, our Caribbean arts newsletter called the Arts Menu available via free subscription; we registered with the Digital Library of the Caribbean where all of our publications can now be accessed; and partnered with the Postgraduate Program in Cultural Studies in hosting our first symposium, as part of our inaugural annual arts festival “Caribbean InTransit: The Meeting Place” in Trinidad & Tobago. We extend sincerest thanks to all of our panelists, our new directors, partners, incumbent team members and new institutional members who have made these developments possible.

Changes extend to developments with our team as well. Congratulations are in order! Caribbean InTransit team members Katherine Miranda, Njelle Hamilton, Marsha Pearce and new team members Marta Fernandez Campa and Kathalene Razzano have successfully defended their dissertations this past year. As the terms of two of our key team members come to an end, we want to take the opportunity to thank them for their commitment and service in those roles. To Marsha Pearce, outgoing Managing Editor, thank you for taking us through the first stages of Caribbean InTransit especially in ensuring that we begin to put in place new structures that will prove invaluable as we continue. To Njelle Hamilton, Submissions Manager, thank you especially for your work in engineering a seamless transition to our new online submissions platform. Fortunately we do not say goodbye to Marsha and Njelle but look forward to their service in new roles as Content Specialist and Copy Editor respectively. We are also delighted to welcome five talented, qualified and experienced new team members on board.

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# FOREWORD: MOBILIZING CREATIVITY

Marielle Barrow, Editor - in - Chief

**A**rtistic practice in the Caribbean arises at the juncture of new/old histories: historical articulations of a past that many Caribbean persons have sought to revise. This 'moment' characterized by the contestation of officially written history through self-situating practices of memory exists amidst elements that further complicate it. Trans-national flows of information and the doubling of selves via cyber-space (an online self that supposedly mirrors the physical self) simultaneously allow for fluidity or continuity yet a tenuous asynchronicity through a doubling of place and time. Through increasing dependency on new Internet technologies, we truncate, create and re-create our communities and ourselves. Concomitantly, there is an infiltration or blurring of traditional institutional and class boundaries via online social networking spaces. In many ways, this issue of *Caribbean InTransit* is a phenomenological study of the ways in which these behaviors are historically situated and evolve into unique patterns that exist within and across the Caribbean and its Diaspora. Such patterns evolve as artistic practices and mobilize around Internet technologies in myriad ways: as a conjoining

of artistic and civic practice; as a new artistic and spatial practice of voice and visibility; as a possibility of connection, livability and livelihood.

Artistry manifests itself as a conduit emanating from various needs and desires: needs for ancestral connections and spirituality; community and belonging based on interest, gender or family; financial well-being; or a more integrated connection between various human needs in establishing a sense of wholeness. Artistic practice is a conduit- a connector or space that enables exploration of the deeper recesses of self as self exists within discordant spaces, where relevant questions can be raised and shared and a conduit to financial well-being through creative entrepreneurship. This issue of *Caribbean InTransit* is not an exhaustive resource but begins to explore these possibilities and actualities by focusing mostly on the visual arts and design but also by touching on film, dance and other elements. "Cutting Edges: New Media and Creative Entrepreneurship" is cutting in that the 'new' is always both old and new, cutting away at our categories, definitions and delimitations by exploring connections, in this case, exploring the coming together of New Media and Creative

## ABOUT THE EDITOR IN-CHIEF

**M**arielle is a Fulbright Scholar and currently Cultural Studies PhD candidate at George Mason University. She graduated with a BSc in Hospitality Management from The University of the West Indies, and the University of Technology in Jamaica and earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Arts & Cultural Enterprise Management and an MPhil in Cultural Studies at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

As an Arts Consultant Marielle helped create an Action Plan for the music and film industries for the

Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and presented at the 2009 CARICOM experts meeting in Haiti, on Cultural Industries, Trade and the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in 2009. She has co-chaired the Allspice Festival of Arts and Humanities in Washington DC and continues to pursue painting as a professional passion. She founded *Caribbean InTransit* in 2010 and continues to develop it as a model for academic interrogation and development of the Caribbean arts and culture industry of the Caribbean. She is a Fulbright scholar at George Mason University.

Entrepreneurship and the arts in the Caribbean. Further issues of *Caribbean InTransit* will pick up where this issue leaves off, in examining the policy implications of artistic practice in the Caribbean. Our call for papers articulates some of the questions that we offered as starting points for this sifting.

### **Call for Papers written by Katherine Miranda**

Throughout the Caribbean region and its multiple Diasporas, artistic form and practice are at risk. Since the beginning of a global economic crisis in 2008, the arts have been particularly impacted through severe losses of funding and institutional support. These ongoing global challenges to the practice and production of the arts affect the Caribbean in specific ways. Mobilizing the crisis as a critical point of departure, this volume of *Caribbean Intransit* seeks to examine both the inherent risks and possibilities of the intersection of new technologies, entrepreneurship and artistic practice. How might we deploy the cutting edges of artistry, technological innovation and business practices to find creative solutions to these challenges? How have entrepreneurship, electronic and digital networks, mobilities and artistic projects threatened or empowered the arts in times of crisis? Are indigenous or traditional practices at risk in the age of global communication and exchange? How can experiments in new media, performance, film, literature, music, art, and architecture articulate

financially sustainable aesthetic interventions in the contemporary moment?

This volume of *Caribbean InTransit* invites exploration of these cutting edges and their myriad interpretations as both pitfall and promise. Essays and creative works may explore but are not limited to the following possible topics:

Caribbean spaces and/or place-based art in digital representations

Nationality, transnationality and global citizenship

Narratives of cultural, entrepreneurial and/or community struggles

Locality and locatedness

Culture as a political, social and/or economic strategy

Case studies of cultural work, methods and iconographies

Intra- or cross-Caribbean spaces, engagements and discussions

Examinations of City/Country

Anti- and/or De-colonial aesthetics and transmodern strategies of re-existence

# INTRODUCTION

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN GUEST EDITORS:

*Journeys in “Hybridity”*  
*Journeys in “New Media”*

Keith Nurse, Alanna Lockward | Guest Editors, Issue 4

## JOURNEYS IN “HYBRIDITY”

KEITH NURSE

**A**s I write I am barrelling across Europe by train from the Netherlands to Belgium to present on the topic of diasporas and South-South trade. The intersection of diasporas and creative industries have dominated my recent work. This is an area I started working on early in my academic career and have returned to in the last few years because of the overwhelming interest in the topic in and out of the Caribbean.

There is hardly a Caribbean government or development agency that is not now interested in how they can tap into the dynamism of the diaspora and that of the creative sector. This newfound interest reflects a search for alternative modes of creative industry development given the poor performance of Caribbean economies and the low returns of traditional development strategies. It also signals that the entrepreneurship of Caribbean peoples wherever they are located has become the focal point of regional and international agencies for innovation and change. Cementing this process and ensuring that the framework for engagement is built on civic and community partnerships is vital to achieving the desired outcomes. Scholars, writers and artists have a critical role to play if we are to forge new possibilities.

The Caribbean diaspora, like other transnational communities, operates in a hybrid and global space which challenges conventional conceptions of the Caribbean. Meeting Alanna, the co-editor, reminded me of just this. Her Dominican roots and her multiple global projects (e.g. <http://decolonizingthecoldwar.wordpress.com/>) reinforced in my mind the significance of the Caribbean experience in contemporary globalization and the ways in which Caribbean personalities have shaped the multiple and contested strands of what we call modernity.

This issue of Caribbean InTransit contributes to this understanding of the Caribbean experience by bringing together a collection of works that explore the intersections of globalization, diasporas, hybridity and the visual aesthetic.

## JOURNEYS IN “NEW MEDIA”

ALANNA LOCKWARD

Asked by co-editor Keith Nurse to articulate a personal note in the same vein as his, here is a reflection on “New Media”.

Having spent many years writing about and presenting moving images from the Diaspora in three different continents, the term “New Media” has been crucial to my praxis. Here is a excerpt from an essay I published in 2008 with the title: “Towards and

Utopian Archeology. Moving-image, Decolonization and Continuities in Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic". <http://alannalockward.wordpress.com/caribbean-video-art/>

"Observed from a distance, the moving-image landscapes in the Spanish, French and Spanglish Caribbean could appear as a typical result of postmodernism, with its juxtaposed narratives, hybrid discourses and reinvention's undertakings governed by global hegemonic parameters. But this is not the case, or at least not completely. Different discursive genealogies of resistance assert themselves within each particular socio-historical context in the atmosphere of these three Caribbean scenarios.

I would like to propose and approach these genealogies from an invisible matrix that after flourishing in Haiti in the 1940's and 50's is back in business in the Caribbean, even though still incognito. In that respect, in order to position the complicated and dislocated experience of the moving-image in these islands – that are not three, but two, I suggest departing from Lev Manovich's ideas on the discursive continuity between film and digital media. While searching for some similarities and differences evident in recent video-art practices from Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic from the perspective of cinematographic discourse, I will focus on the use or non-use of found-footage\*, and on certain parameters of Otherness as well, which were introduced in cinema by the above-mentioned invisible matrix: director, theorist, writer, cinematographer, editor, performer and entrepreneur, Maya Deren.

In *HARDfilms: Pixels and Celluloids*, Kino Arsenal Berlin (2007), a curatorial essay that linked avant-garde, experimental cinema and video-art-, curator María Morata (1) focused on five principles established by Lev Manovich in order to define 'new media' and differentiate them from "old" ones:

- \* Numerical representation: new media objects exist as data.
- \* Modularity: the different elements of new media exist independently.
- \* Automation: new media objects can be created and modified automatically.
- \* Variability: new media objects exist in multiple versions.

\* Transcoding: a new media object can be converted into another format.

Manovich, who grew up in Russia, also insists on positioning his methodology as a direct result of dialectic materialism and therefore primarily addresses the conditions of production of hardware and software; the material structures -- an alternative standpoint to that of cultural and literary studies that give the final product the last word:

"That's why I published this article called "Avant-garde software" where I was trying to suggest that perhaps the real new media art or the real avant-garde art is the software itself. Because it's actually software -like Microsoft Word, or Final Cut Pro, or browsers, or... languages where you see the new principles at work; there's much more theory... But the finished cultural products... they're too conservative (2)."

I would like to agree with Manovich and Morata, that there is still no such a thing as a "new media", that experimental and avant-garde cinema is presented today in a digital format within the discursive positions of what we call: video-art. And also that the conditions of production are crucial to any attempt to approach video-art and any other form of art. In this sense, I propose that a pending decolonized utopian archaeology on video-art in Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic should discuss its conditions of production and also its different continuities related to Maya Deren's pioneering use of juxtaposition, dissolution and mimicry from/with the Other. There is, in my opinion, sufficient substantiation for a comparative analysis under these parameters. This discussion should ideally take place in an open forum directed and performed by the artists themselves. This is an introduction or motivation for this utopian forum that could start, for example, by commenting on certain parameters of Otherness signalled, as mentioned before, by the use or non-use of appropriated footage which functions as an indicator of the viewpoint of the subject with respect to the Norm, and to the hegemonic cultural reference represented by the appropriated images. Secondly, this forum could also take into account and comparatively analyse certain conditions of production that differentiate each scenario in these Caribbean landscapes. In the following pages, I will

offer some highlights on these perspectives as guidelines for future discussions.”

It is in such open dialogue that the current issue co-edited with Nurse has expanded my involvement with the subject. Consequently, let me take this opportunity to thank Marielle Barrow for introducing us. It has been a wonderful collaboration indeed.

## PERFORMING THE PERPETUAL EPISTEMIC SHIFT

In the combination of commercial and social entrepreneurship, the Caribbean arts landscape continues to perform a dance of perpetual re/invention. Co-editing this journal issue has become the ideal vehicle for me to keep track of this vitality, and the opportunity to expand Caribbean inTransit’s resonance in different languages and media has been a pure joy.

After meeting co-editor Keith Nurse, in London, in the flesh for the first time at the end of 2012, the ways in which our perceptions and experiences of the Caribbean and its Diasporas complemented each other was truly extraordinary. In fact, the serendipities were so abundant that I suggested making this introduction a mirrored interview. Fragmentation and distance, two essential components of the Caribbean Diasporic condition, made this original attempt impossible to achieve. In his own path as a cultural critic, Keith has nurtured an approach very similar to mine that can be summarized as envisioning Caribbean presence globally as one of the most under-discussed issues in cultural studies. A case in point that left me completely baffled was the fact that Eugene Chen, the Minister of Foreign Affairs to Sun Yat-Sen, the first president and founding father of the Republic of China, was in fact a Trinidadian. After Keith shared that, our conversation blossomed into a symphony of mutual reassurance.

A month before, also in London, I presented a paper in an inspiring meeting at the Victoria & Albert Museum entitled “Curating the Black Diaspora” with a strong focus on the Caribbean. Quoting the (almost fanatic) interest of a major international curator, Hans Ullrich Obrist, in the theoretical legacy of Edouard Glissant, Paul Goodwin magnificently illustrated the

symptomatic contradiction between the ubiquity of Caribbean influence in global affairs and its lack of recognition as such. Yes, the Caribbean thinker is crucial to Obrist’s current reading patterns while at the same time, Caribbean artists are absent in the vast scope of his curatorial projects. And this is why working on this issue of Caribbean InTransit is rewarding for reasons that go beyond the usual engagement of similar endeavours; it is indeed a very personal issue, something that deeply touches my work as a Europe-based Caribbean curator and writer.

Some of the contributions to this journal respond to the CFP guidelines rigorously, such as Arthur Asseo’s essay, “A Socially Responsible Design Business’ Approach to Puerto Rico’s Volatile Market,” which discusses the collaboration between Asseo and artist María de Mater O’Neill and their work at Rubberband, (their joint design studio) as an example of “how a social responsibility mindset with a design perspective can function in a volatile economy and under weak social stability”. The same inventiveness can be found in Patricia Grassals’ dismantling of coloniality in the prolific racialisation scenarios of the Caribbean, in her visual essay, “Mixing Art and Commercial Cosmetics: A Dominican Intervention on Hair Politics”.

Multitasking is an essential characteristic of performing the Caribbean cultural practice, and this particular talent materializes brilliantly in the collaboration between Glenda Martinus and her son Quinsy Gario, both originally from Curaçao and currently living in the Netherlands. Martinus has transformed her thorough knowledge of Microsoft Word into art; her drawings, accomplished exclusively with the tools offered by the software, perfectly complement the poetry of her son, who is a spoken-word performer, music video producer and an activist deeply involved in contesting racialising colonial legacies such as the figure of the Black Peter in the Netherlands. His campaign is called “Zwarte Piet is Racisme”. The same could be said about author and pop star, Rita Indiana Hernández, and Mónica Ferreras, who alternate between artistic practice and creating theatrical stage designs.

The relationship between these creative struggles of re-existence and the patronage and network that nurture them is given an insightful approach in the

essay by Yanique Hume, "Art Patronage in A Caribbean Context: The Awon And Akyem Connection." Hume explores the definition of Caribbean patronage based on the relationship between artist Ras Akyem Ramsay and architect and collector, Mervyn Awon. As a Dominican, I am particularly moved by this essay since it highlights the decisive influence that the Caribbean Biennial, initiated by the late Porfirio Herrera Franco, has had in the career of this Barbadian artist. Hume's analysis indeed fills me with a certain nostalgia for a golden era, given that I worked as Director of International Affairs on Porfirio Herrera Franco's first team, when he was inaugurated in 1987 as director of the Museo de Arte Moderno (then still Galería de Arte Moderno). Barbados is also the subject of a diagnosis by British cultural expert, Asif Khan, in "The Web's Obeah: Threads of Imagination". Always in conversation with the artists, Khan dialectically articulates the epistemic shifts in the trajectories of Ras Akyem Ramsay and newcomer Sheena Rose, and the dynamics

of Internet-based art practices in relation to public and private funding strategies.

It is in this mode that we offer this present issue, hoping that it will accurately reflect the phenomenal stamina of the region and its Diasporas, that these artistic and entrepreneurial achievements find a dignifying echo in these pages. Finally, our sincere thanks to the artists for sharing their visual essays with such generosity and panache. Your works mirror our epistemic endeavours with lunar precision.

### Works Cited

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## ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS

KEITH NURSE  
ALANNA LOCKWARD

### Keith Nurse

Director of the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services at the Cave Hill Campus (Barbados) of the University of the West Indies (UWI). Prior to that, he was senior lecturer at the UWI Institute of International Relations, president of the Association of Caribbean Economists, and coordinator of the postgraduate program in Arts and Cultural Enterprise Management at the Centre for the Creative and Festival Arts (UWI), Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Nurse is also a consultant to international, regional and national agencies such as the South Centre, FOCAL, Inter-American Development Bank, Organization of American States, CARICOM, CARIFORUM, UNESCO, Caribbean Export Development Agency, and the Tourism Industry and Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

### Alanna Lockward

Author, critic and independent curator specialized in time-based undertakings. In 1988, she was appointed Director of International Affairs at Museo de Arte Moderno in Santo Domingo. She is the founding director of Art Labour Archives and has been award jury of the 26 Bienal Nacional de Artes Visuales in Santo Domingo (2011) and V Bienal del Istmo Centroamericano in San Salvador (2006), among other competitions. Her theoretical work has been published widely in English, Spanish and German and she has worked as guest lecturer at the Humboldt University Berlin, Transart Institute, Goldsmiths University of London, Dutch Art Institute, University of Warwick and the Roosevelt Academy of the University of Utrecht. She is currently associate curator of the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse and general manager of the Transnational Decolonial Institute.



CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT LAUNCHES ITS  
**1st Annual Symposium**  
 Theme: Body | Institution | Memory  
**October 25, 2013**

CARIBBEAN INTRANSIT HOSTS THIS SYMPOSIUM AS A PART OF ITS FIRST ANNUAL FESTIVAL "THE MEETING PLACE", IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE POST-GRADUATE PROGRAMME IN CULTURAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES (UWI), ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD & TOBAGO.

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER:**  
**Dr. Erica M. James**  
 Assistant Professor, History of Art  
 and African American Studies,  
**Yale University**

**Erica Moiah James, PhD.**, is Asst. Professor jointly appointed in the Depts. of History of Art and African American Studies at Yale University. Before arriving at Yale, she served as the founding Director and Chief Curator of the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas. Dr. James earned an MFA from The University of Chicago and a PhD in Art History from Duke University. While at Duke, she was awarded several fellowships including the International Association of University Women and The John Hope Franklin Fellowships. Since that time she has served as a Clark Fellow at the Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute and as a post-doctoral teaching fellow at Washington University, St. Louis.



**CALL FOR PAPERS** for "Body | Institution | Memory"

# ESSAYS



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

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# ARTHUR ASSEO & MARÍA DE MATER O'NEILL

*Rubberband, LLP:*

## A Socially Responsible Design Business' Approach on Puerto Rico's Volatile Market

Keywords: Participatory design, corporate social responsibility, Caribbean design firm, socially responsible design, user-centered design, transformation design

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### **Abstract:**

Social responsibility is an issue for all creative industries. Using Rubberband, LLP's (the authors' design studio) operations with other businesses as a case study, the authors explore how a socially responsible mindset coupled with a design perspective might function in a volatile economy and under weak social stability. A short description of the current socio-economic context of Puerto Rico is presented. The studio's commitment to the social values of the design practice is explained in depth with a series of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives (CSR) . Other CSR and Socially Responsible Design initiatives in Latin America are discussed. Rubberband, LLP's user-centered design strategies and its design principles make up the methodology to work closely with the end users and anchored to their context. This has been a resourceful way to thrive under a challenging environment.

Paper originally presented at the Caribbean Intransit Symposium: Biennials & Art Practices in the Caribbean; Section 3: Power, Politics & Ideologies; June 28, 2012; Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington DC.

### **Introduction**

**D**esign, like Art, is a creative industry: both practices generate a creative economy, and artists and designers alike are cultural actors. Nevertheless, research and historical reflection on how design constructs knowledge and therefore, its role in society, began to appear barely 60 years ago at the most. At the moment, the domain of design has broadened and it is not necessarily market-oriented. Indeed, as Offenhenden and Borgoglio observe, "It is the removal of the focus on the product and its features, those strictly relating to its form and its function, to adopt a systematic gaze where

all links that make up the value chain are considered and then, that chain is interweaved with its social context" (author's translation) (5). Thus, a socially responsible designer (SRD) is aware of the social capital aspect that his or her practice generates without voiding design as a successful way to earn a living. An SRD practice integrates and collaborates with all stakeholders, these being: the client and the end users.

Using the authors' design studio operations with other businesses as a case study, the authors will explore how a mindset of social responsibility coupled with a design perspective might function in a volatile economy

and under weak social stability. The authors will discuss how the local economic crisis has shaped their design practice, based on their experience. When referring to crisis the authors speak in the context of the global economic recession (in some sectors depression) of the last and current decade that has affected many countries.

### ***1. Rubberband, LLP Design Studio and the context of Puerto Rico***

Rubberband, LLP is a transformation design studio founded by the authors, with its main operations in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The design studio promotes a practice where value-driven designers commit to how their creative decisions affect society. The studio is structured in a way that it can expand and contract based on the needs of both the project and the end user. It is an elastic enterprise -- like the rubber band from which the studio takes its name. The only aspect that always remains intact is our mindset of social responsibility. Rubberband, LLP uses an empathic approach toward the end user and assumes the role of a facilitator with clients. This is different from the normative design practice of the expert driven problem-solver designer that tends to be more aloof to the user. The studio promotes in its design team the development of new knowledge that integrates the specific circumstances of the community with Reflective Practice (Schön 69); thus managing quick, real-time adjustments in the decision-making process without improvising, which can sometimes be irresponsible and costly. Rubberband, LLP defines its approach, which is informed by Haraway's situated knowledge concept (581), as an act of sharing knowledge from the starting perspective of the local. The studio's commitment to the social values of the design practice is evidenced in:

- A mentoring program for emerging designers.
- An interest in tackling ill-defined problems – such as those of the health industry.
- Constant efforts to publish and disseminate Rubberband, LLP's research findings in diverse manners and to different audiences, not necessarily scholarly or design forums.
- The use of an open participatory methodology

with the client and user that builds collaboration, as well as autonomy for both the client and the user.

Rubberband, LLP's practice is anchored in the context of Puerto Rico, even though the members of the team work in co-location. The user-centered methodology that the studio has developed responds to the economic and cultural needs of the Island.

Puerto Rico is not considered by many as an underdeveloped country although 45% of the population lives below the poverty line (Bishaw 2). Since 1898, Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory – that belongs to but is not part of – the United States. That relationship with the United States provides both State and Federal social benefits (different from many Caribbean and Latin American nations). However this has made the island less resourceful in navigating the current economic environment. The financial magazine *The Economist* gave the island the top place for the worst Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecast of 2011 (n. pag.). The recession in Puerto Rico started in 2006, two years before the global recession. Bureaucratic clientelism and corruption have skyrocketed. The high crime rate has pushed Puerto Rico closer to becoming a Narc-Nation. *International Business Times* magazine labeled Puerto Rico as one of the top five dangerous places in the Caribbean with 26.2 homicides per 100,000 population (Dutile n. pag.). At the top of the list is Jamaica, with a murder rate of 52.1, followed by St. Kitts & Nevis with 38.2, Trinidad and Tobago with 35.2 and, Bahamas with 28 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 92).

Puerto Rico currently lacks a design policy, despite having one in the past. The current government is applying neoliberal practices that have even further eroded the economic and social environment. Similar situations have occurred in other countries. Therefore, it can be said that the present social-economic context in Puerto Rico is what we would consider a wicked problem. Wicked problems are defined as: "issues that prove to be highly resistant to resolution through any of the currently existing modes of problem-solving" (Brown 62). How design inserts itself into this discussion is the intention of the authors, as Caribbean designers, in this paper.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as:

Socially responsible business practices [that] strengthen corporate accountability, respecting ethical values in the interests of all stakeholders. Responsible business practices [are those that] respect and preserve the natural environment. Helping to improve the quality and opportunities of life, they empower people and invest in communities where a business operates. (qtd. in Hurst 8)

Socially Responsible Design (SRD) is a movement made up of individual designers who believe design has a social role and is not just market driven. Rubberband, LLP has a CSR initiative because the partners are SRD designers. A recent exhibition (2013) designed for the Casa Roig Museum of the University of Puerto Rico, Humacao campus is an example of how Rubberband, LLP used a CSR approach from the start to the finish of a project. For the design of interactive and educational games, Rubberband, LLP used a Participatory Design methodology with rural high school students. The idea was to address the education of science through an inclusive manner as way to promote responsibility to others and tackle school desertion. Students were taught to use peer-to-peer mentoring in the process of designing the games. An open and iterative process allowed the design decisions to be made with the students and their teacher, a university professor and the museum director. This type of methodology also replaces costly wanderings in the search for the design solution of communication pieces and educational objects with a timely heuristic process and cost effective decisions. Open and iterative processes allow clients to receive a level of design services that with other processes would be financially prohibited. This process is also used by Rubberband, LLP when working on Web design and mobile apps.

## **2. Corporate Social Responsibility in Latin America**

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) business model started in the 1980s. In the United States, it is a way to reduce payment on taxes. In Europe, it is focused on sustainable operations. Latin American multinationals have been using the Corporate Social Responsibility model since 1997 and are closer to their European counterparts. CSR has been criticized by the

Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, who said: “There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profit” (qtd. in Casanova 142). It is important to note that Friedman’s ideas were the framework of neoliberal practices during Pinochet’s military dictatorship in Chile (Doherty 1-2).

The Social Responsible Design movement began in the 1970s with strong advocates like the Austrian educator and designer Victor Papanek. It extended to several aspects of the practice, from activism in design, to the relationship with research in the social sciences. From Latin America, a more Marxist approach by German industrial designer Gui Bonsiepe, argued for a design that “contribute[s] to the satisfaction of local needs perfectly with local material and locally developed technology” (qtd. in Amir 69). Bonsiepe and others labeled Papanek’s vision toward design for the Third World ‘paternalistic’ and ‘naïve.’ Nevertheless, the authors feel that Papanek’s contribution is applicable to the contemporary practice because it highlights the fact that design needs to be contextualized and not blindly mass-produced.

There are other related initiatives from the academic realm, like Acunar (i), an interdisciplinary and participatory design / research project for small businesses, from the Industrial Design Department, National University of Colombia. Acunar focuses on product development with local artisans with the Gobernación de Cundinamarca. Another initiative, in Argentina, is the use of participatory design services to strengthen PYMES by Professor Beatriz Galán, from the Faculty of Urbanism, Design and Architecture, University of Buenos Aires. Their strategy is to:

distance ourselves from the stance that recognizes the existence of a “social design” as opposed to a “market design.” We understood that civil society is strategic actor in the innovation system and it is impossible to understand innovation without a network of actors that articulate from the local, the regional and the national level (the State, civil society and the private sector). The private sector innovates when the citizens’ behaviors generate new scenarios built on new sensibilities and values, while civil society promotes new strategies of community action

(authors' translation). (Galán 29)

Galán's venture began as a response to the Argentina's economic crash in 2001 when then President Fernando de la Rúa was forced to resign his post after masses took the streets, similar to recent events in Egypt in 2011. Over the last 20 years, Latin American nations have gone in and out of economic crises, "with currency devaluations of more than 300% overnight" (Casanova 136). By the same token, Argentina and Brazil are currently resourcefully surfing the current global crisis. As with many Latin American nations, they have benefitted greatly. Indeed, "the size of middle classes in the region has increased in every single country. Between 1990 and 2007, the poverty rate reduced by 12% and extreme poverty decreased by 9.1%" (Casanova 136)(ii).

There are historical precedents for socially responsible design in Latin America and the Caribbean, like Chile's Committee of Technological Research (INTEC) in the early 1970s, described as "the most advanced example in Latin America of design [policy] successfully integrated into a political-economic project in support of a social program" (Fernández 10). This was the result of President Allende's design policy (Palmarola Sagredo n. pag.) that created projects like: a dosing spoon for powdered milk (1973) to tackle malnutrition in babies of poor parents and a cyber-room to manage all state enterprises (SYNCO, 1971-72), among others (Medina 715).

## **2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of the Authors' Design Studio**

In the preceding sections, the authors have briefly described the effects on the region of the recent economic crises in a bid to consider what new design practices have these crises produced. The authors briefly discussed the various socially responsible approaches to tackling these wicked problems from different realms (from business to academics) in some regions of Latin America and historical precedents. As Brown suggests,

Whether a result of the financial crisis, the public perception of massive over consumption, or global climate change, designers are increasingly motivated "to do good for society." This interest seems to manifest

itself primarily in two ways. First, designers and design companies are behaving in more socially responsible ways in their product development. A focus on the use of recyclable materials, the rejection of child labor, and the use of sheltered workshops are possible consequences of such an attitude. Second, designers are using their design skills to tackle social problems. In these cases, designers apply design thinking and design methodologies to social issues to create innovative solutions. With this interest, education, safety, and health care have become domains for designers. (qtd. in Tromp, Hekkert & Verbeek 1)

Throughout history, SRD has been attached to poor, handicapped and vulnerable communities, among others. Rubberband, LLP does not make that distinction, since it understands the importance of the designer as citizens of society. Rubberband, LLP has embarked on educational projects and collaborations with cultural nonprofit organizations, as well as individual clients, all related to CSR. The CSR initiative used in the design studio addresses all the stakeholders, which are: the team, end user, clients, and suppliers, among others.

## **3. Rubberband, LLP's Design Strategies**

Rubberband, LLP works mostly with small and medium-sized enterprises (companies or cultural institutions) in which design serves as a catalyst for behavioral change. The type of client that approaches the design studio recognizes that there is a need for a paradigm shift to tackle present social-economic conditions. They are willing to implement new methods to ensure the wellbeing of their team and the fiscal health of their company or organization. They want to acquire new knowledge in a pro-active manner and be more autonomous with the final design service they receive. They all shared an initial understanding of design as a craft-oriented discipline and were surprised to learn of the broader capabilities of design as a tool for organizational strategy.

Two types of problems most common in clients are: well-defined problems, and wicked problems, those of which the effects are felt but the cause has not been identified. Wicked problems are hard to tackle because they are all multi-causal, dynamic and interrelated to other

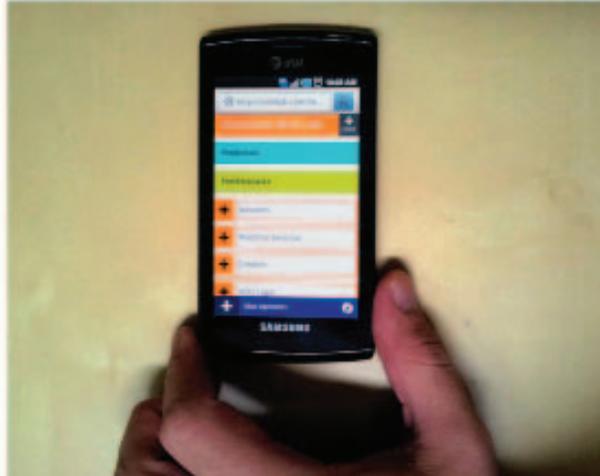
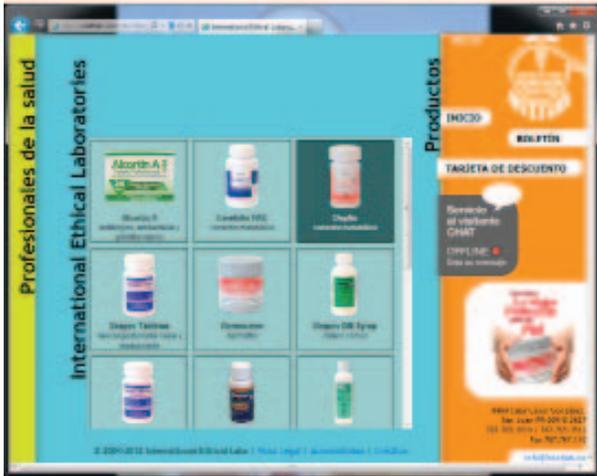
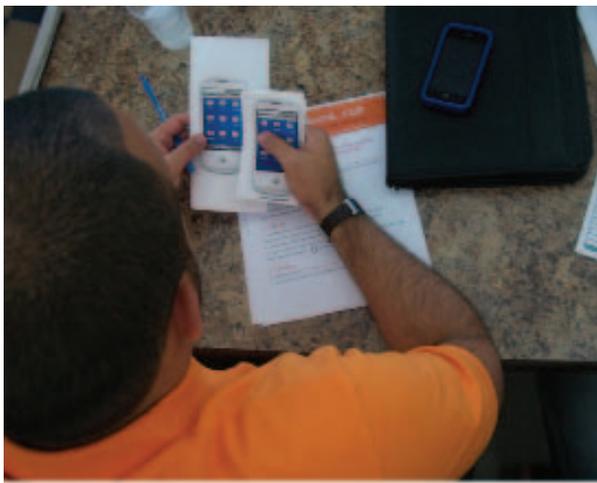


Fig. 1. INETLAB, Interactive Design, 2012: User center and generative tools methodologies for Web based and mobile application. Generative tools is a term that defines the method of tools for the user (in this case medical sales representatives) that they used to design their owned tools.



Fig. 2. Proyecto C (Project C), communication design, 2013: Systematization workshop with cancer survivors at cultural non-profit Beta Local, Old San Juan. The aim is to articulated graphically the resilient strategies concerning the relationship between doctors and patients. This is a peer to peer mentoring participatory research and design. On far left, Rubberband's consultant Dra. Heidi Figueroa and on far right, Rubberband's Head researcher María de Mater O'Neill. This is an initiative of O'Neill sponsored by a grant from the Instituto de Cultural Puertorriqueña and private donors.

wicked problems (Rittel and Webber 1983). Rubberband, LLP uses a transdisciplinary approach, focused on the user, that allows the tackling of complex problems with the client. The client is part of this process; that is why it is a transformative experience. Projects are started with a research phase in order to identify a framework to address the client's predicament through design. Following the work of Bruce L. Archer, all of Rubberband, LLP's designed research projects are of axiological nature precisely because of the designers' awareness of the role of design in society. Solutions are contextualized or anchored in the reality of the company, its employees, the user and the national context. It is a combination of creative thinking with the rigor of rational thought known as design thinking (iii). Rubberband, LLP provides tools that encourage the client and its users to be proactive.

### **3.1 Rubberband, LLP's Design Principles**

Rubberband, LLP's design strategy can be summarized in eight principles:

I. Citizen Designer: It is the designer that inserts him/herself into the society and accordingly, acts responsibly with the non-designers from his/her position as a designer. It is the practitioner of democratic design who uses design for the benefit of all groups of society. His/her practice is sensitive to the needs of different groups of users.

II. Open Process: Designers are not magicians. They have no need to hide their process. An open process helps to educate others (designers, users and clients) about what design is and how it works; also, it invites others to improve upon it making it an iterative process. It also allows Rubberband, LLP to do prototype testing in a cost effective way, a method used in high-income nations and is usually costly in a peripheral context. Since the process is open (from research to production and budget management) and iterative, it promotes full collaboration between client and designer (design principle number four). Clients understand the need to do user testing in a project with a controlled budget to avoid costly end results that cannot be afforded in a volatile market.

III. Reflective Practice: Decisions need to be evaluated in real time and not after taking them. This is based on Donald Schön's "learn by doing" concept, but adapted to

the local context.

IV. Client-collaborator: The client is part of the creative team. In the end, it is their project, and with an open process, the client becomes an accomplice in every decision. Design solutions are a shared responsibility.

V. Do No Harm: Everything is personal; we are all people, even in business, and everything affects us on a personal level. Design is a tool of social change, it is important to use it responsibly, for the common good and not to do harm. Promoting cultural corporate ethics is good business (Cragg 7-8).

VI. Transdisciplinary Practice: A "Liquid Design" practice that crosses the boundaries of the design profession, like water, it is formless; it adapts its shape accordingly. Professionals from various disciplines are invited to join the Rubberband, LLP team, thus getting another look beyond the perspective of designers and making the product better designed in all respects for the user.

VII. Researcher Practitioner: Rubberband, LLP does not make a move without researching and makes sure to publish its findings. Research in the practice is essential because theory feeds from practice and practice from theory. Research should be disseminated, so lessons are shared. This is crucial in peripheral countries where tabula rasa operations are in place (iv).

VIII. Education of a New Generation: The responsibility of experienced designers to mentor new emerging colleagues. A designer's education does not end after design school; that is only beginning. Rubberband, LLP has a commitment to emerging designers to inform them of alternative ways of developing a design practice. The design firm does not seek to create clones of itself, but to give access to tools that promote a sustainable, glocal and responsible practice of design.

### **3.2 Strategies to Tackle Weak Understanding of the Culture of Design**

The context of the design practice poses a great challenge in Puerto Rico. Although throughout history Puerto Rico has had many achievements in the creative field, it lacks an understanding of the culture and discourse

of design. Many confuse advertising with design because advertising agencies offer a version of graphic design or communications services, and usually with lower costs because their profit comes from a percentage of media placements. The studio also shares the drive to develop a formal design industry in Puerto Rico where design opportunities can be identified in its different realms

Action Research project, such that the process book is a part of the communication between all the stakeholders. A generative tool that works as an interlocutor between clients and designers. Additionally, it is a documentation tool that records how the project was developed. The process book is periodically shared with the client so he/she remains informed of the process while it occurs.



Fig. 3. Casa Roig Museum, Exhibition and Game Design, 2013: For science exhibition concerning NANO. Educational games were design thought participatory methodology with local students. Design was anchored to the technological and economical reality of the museum. Augmented Reality and industrial design was used to teach about science and architecture thru exploring the museum with the visitor owned mobile.

(those that are not State regulated like Architecture and Interior Design) beyond Graphic and Web design, and more into

“language and action theory” (qtd. in Fathers 51) but not disregarding other design approaches. To strengthen the culture of design in its context, Rubberband, LLP has taken a series of steps:

1. In response to the lack of understanding of design work, Rubberband, LLP incorporated the process book tool to its projects. It documents the research and design process allowing the client to understand and comment before the solutions to be offered are identified. It also includes errors, questions and doubts, based on Schön’s Reflective Practice. In some cases, when clients’ reflections are also included, it becomes a Participatory

2. An internship program for design students to promote the researcher/designer methodology and allow them to expand their education in practice. Participants in the program learn the Rubberband, LLP methodology while working on projects for real clients. The Rubberband, LLP method breaks apart from the mimetic methodologies traditionally used in the industry. Instead of designing with an emphasis on the visual and the aesthetic, inspired by the work of other designers, Rubberband, LLP promotes designers to function as facilitators, guiding the client in the process to identify and address their needs. Interns also learn to listen and learn from the client.

3. Rubberband, LLP is launching two research projects about Puerto Rican design history in collaboration with master designers Mara Robledo (Design Council for Puerto Rico) and Mary Anne Hopgood (Graf). The latter was presented at the 5th International Conference on Typography and Visual Communication at the University of Nicosia in Nicosia, Cyprus (June 5-8, 2013). Puerto Rico and the wider Caribbean have a need to know the history of their local design industries. New generations have the right to know what has been done and the potential that Caribbean designers possess. In Puerto Rico there are glimpses of what might be an accomplished design industry over the past 70 years, but people do not know about it because its history has not been written, thus it is not taught in universities. Exemption should be noted in the field of architecture, where books on local architecture by architects like Jorge Rigau, Andrés Mignucci and Enrique Vivoni have addressed this issue.

### 3. 3 Working With What is At Hand and With Others

With the economic constraints of the glocal context, Rubberband, LLP has minimized operational costs by taking advantage of technological tools. The small size

and elastic structure of Rubberband, LLP allows working in diverse ways with the tools that are available to us. Rubberband, LLP uses what the authors call the At Hand tool, meaning there is no reason for lament; challenges present opportunities for new knowledge and innovation in design (process, product and service). The At Hand tool is part of a set of nine resilient tools for designers under stressors called “Bounce & Design” (O’Neill 5).

The scaffolding and structure of the design business have to be designed in order to be efficient and resourceful in an ethical manner under volatile economic circumstances. To avoid the common failure of many small businesses because of poor management (independent from their imaginative creative ideas), Rubberband, LLP has made an effort to surround itself with consultants that help tackle strategic, administrative, accounting, and managerial tasks, as well as past design businessmen and businesswomen who offer advice on how to run a design business. Because of the open process, Rubberband, LLP’s clients have been also a source of new knowledge regarding the business and project management aspects. This is achieved using

the Intertextuality tool, another one from the resilience toolbox already mentioned. The Intertextuality tool is the acknowledgment of one’s role in society. It is a way for the partners of Rubberband, LLP to distance themselves from the designer as author (expert driven) and recognize themselves as stakeholders. Paraphrasing Rubberband, LLP’s assistant designer/researcher Gabriel Miranda, many times the context of the client’s business is the same as Rubberband, LLP’s context (Asseo, O’Neill, Miranda and Tossas 5).

#### 4. Conclusions

From the Rubberband, LLP viewpoint, crises, as painful as they are, can be approached as learning opportunities that might bring a paradigm shift. This is the approach that the authors have taken as owners of a design firm. As Caribbean designers, the authors approach design from outside of its established structures, and accompany it with a transgressive attitude to the perceived limits of the design domain in all its disciplines. Presently design has become more cognitive demand-oriented due to technology and communications. Therefore, for many



Fig. 4. Froyo World Puerto Rico, Service Design, 2013 - Contextual design led research to evaluate service design operation of local owned yogurt franchised. Allowed owners to validated their services operation, including employees experiences in order to replicate in other stores.



designers it has become more about the user and less about the consumption of the user. As Donaldson suggests, “Understanding user needs is not just about individuals but also the economic environment, infrastructure, and society” (37). The most important point for a responsible social designer working in a challenging environment is the immersion with the users in an ethical and not manipulative manner as well as being in-situ, but with a sense of been part of a global community. This in itself is challenging, but nevertheless doable.

Based on their experience, the authors’ recommendations to other practitioners are: 1) anchor projects in their context without disconnecting from the global community, 2) develop an iterative process and 3) document every move. Art and design projects should try to match themselves to their own paradigms. For examples, art events, like a Caribbean InTransit Biennale, needs to be contextualized, from the design of posters to the relationship between the objects shown and their exhibition space. Organizers should decide what role the intended audience will have: passive or active. If the latter is chosen, decisions about how the art events will be constructed should come from the transnational audiences that will be affected by it. If stakeholders are consulted, it should be all through the process, not only once at the beginning. Finally, every move in the development of design and art projects should be documented and shared in real time with the global community, fighting tabula rasa on doing. Social responsibility is not only an issue of design, but of all creative industries, including art (v).

#### Notes

- (i) <http://programaacunar.com/web/>
- (ii) Casanove defines the poverty rate as those living with less than US\$1.25.
- (iii) Here our use of “design thinking” is informed by R. Buchanan’s essay “Wicked Problems in Design Thinking.”
- (iv) For more information on peripheral design practice, see G. Bonsiepe’s *El diseño de la periferia: debates y experiencias*.
- (v) The authors acknowledge Arq. Andrés Mignucci’s critical reading.

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# YANIQUE HUME

## *ART PATRONAGE in a CARIBBEAN CONTEXT:* The Awon and Akyem Connection

Keywords: Art Patronage, Ras Akyem, Mervyn Awon, Caribbean Art, Art Collectors

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### **Abstract:**

With the absence of sustained formalized structures to support the development of the visual arts in Barbados, artists have had to depend on a diverse array of patronage structures to support their profession. While cooperate patronage has been particularly significant, art collector and patron Mervyn Awon has been instrumental in promoting the arts of Barbados and shaping the careers of artists such as Ras Akyem-i Ramsay.

**W**hen we speak about art patronage within the Anglophone Caribbean context, to what exactly are we referring? Is the assumption that our governments are the principal agents charged with providing public subsidies to further the development and support of the arts? Should cooperate investors assume the role of patron in the absence of formalized infrastructural frameworks and institutions? Perhaps we believe it's the role of politicians or the ruling elite to invest in philanthropic ventures that support certain artists or movements, and by extension "legislate taste" (Paul 1998). Indeed, the answers to these queries are quite complex and far from uniform when we take into consideration the diverging colonial histories, structures of power, as well as the socio-political and economic landscapes that have developed in the region before and after independence.

Whether we are talking about the individual donor, governments, or multinational companies, the economic power and social capital of patrons can be activated to promote, as well as provide visibility and value to the arts, institutions, artists and aesthetic movements.

While never neutral in their intent, patrons endorse particular artists through their financial investments and by extension increase the worth of their own collections. As arbiters of taste, they also legitimise artists through first providing an outlet for their exposure, while simultaneously elevating certain artists to prominence and creating an aura around particular works. On another level, the lending of monetary assistance, not just at the point of purchasing a work of art, but also through subsidizing artists through the financing of exhibitions, supplies, training and/or a studio space, all become important vehicles in safeguarding the development of an artist and his/her craft.

The contemporary global reality of multinational corporations has shifted earlier patronage structures. There has thus been a move from the early models of the noble patron and private entrepreneurial and charitable foundations, to the transnational cooperate networks operable today. Regardless of the longevity and expansion of differing patronage systems, however, artists in the Anglophone Caribbean have not consistently benefitted from formalized institutional structures. The

uneven development of the arts, insufficient domestic and regional frameworks, smaller pools of resources and investment opportunities, limited access to global markets, or the lack of sustained political will or socio-economic incentive have negatively impacted the development of a formalized visual arts industry (1). Yet artists in the region have continued to create against these odds and a fortunate few have managed to gain visibility through a variety of channels of patronage or support.

## **2. Contextualizing Patronage in the Anglophone Caribbean**

While I use the term patronage in my discussion, it is important at this juncture to acknowledge its rather expansive and diverse meanings within the context of the Caribbean. The patronage structures are quite diverse and while the forthcoming discussion of Mervyn Awon's role as collector, facilitator and benefactor of the arts speaks to a more targeted or direct client-patron relationship, examples from Barbados indicate that support takes on many forms with a variety of players operating in distinct spaces both locally and internationally.

The earliest form of art patronage within the Anglophone Caribbean was established during the colonial period with several 18th and 19th century itinerant painters receiving support from colonial administrators. The 18th century Italian artist Agostino Brunias who was supported by Governor Young of Dominica, British painter George Robertson who produced work for planter and estate owner William Beckford and French painter Michel Jean Cazabon who worked under the auspices of Lord Harris in 19th century Trinidad, provide examples of the patronage structure of the time. Other artists including Edward Goodall, James Hakewill, Issac Mendes Belisario and Joseph Kidd reveal the extent to which the patronage structures of Europe extended to those producing art in the colonies. Moreover, the depiction of the "tropical picturesque" in prints,

sketches, lithographs and painting served to chronicle life in the colonies from a European imperialist gaze (see Sheller 2003; Thompson 2007; Mohammed 2010). At the same time, this body of work would also come to constitute the early art history of the Anglophone Caribbean (see Thompson 2007 and 2008). Thus the influence of foreign capital, criticism and taste would become an enduring legacy that would shape artistic production and patronage structures in the region well into the postcolonial period (see Donkor 1998).

In subsequent years the support for the arts would continue through political patronage and the establishment of institutions that would help foster their development. Jamaica, for example, emerged as a critical site through the establishment of a dedicated infrastructure that would promote and facilitate the growth of the sector. The institutional framework was first established by the Institute of Jamaica founded in 1879 and would later be invigorated by the formation of the Jamaica School of Art and Craft in the early 1940s, (which would become one of four schools in the Edna Manley College for the Visual and Performing Arts), and the founding of the National Gallery in 1974.

In tandem with political patronage was the



Fig. Ras Akyem in his studio. Recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award in the Visual Arts. Barbados, October 2010

development of cooperate sponsorship as another critical avenue for artists to get exposure and sell their work. This particular medium, spearheaded by national banks, local business/entrepreneurial personalities, would prove particularly significant to development of the arts in Jamaica, the Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago as well as Barbados. Indeed, Barbados presents an interesting case worthy of reflection for in lieu of a national gallery or museum space that exhibits the nation's artistic treasures (2), cooperate sponsors, most notably the Central Bank, The Republic Bank, Bank of Nova Scotia, Barbados Light and Power, Sagicor function as key patrons acquiring and housing national works of art. Outside of these large cooperate entities; businesspersons such as Andy Toppin and former co-owner of the Casurina Hotel, Bonnie Cole-Wilson were instrumental in supporting artists through acquiring their work and providing a public forum for viewing. In terms of the latter, the hotel lobby functioned as a gallery space displaying major works by local artists for purchase by Barbadians as well as visitors to the island. Patronage also took the form of small private organizations including the "Arts Collection Foundation" (ACF-founded by Norma Talma) which actively acquired pieces that would eventually form part of a national collection (3). The ACF also held annual exhibitions and competitions and awarded purchase prizes. Additionally "The Collectors Club" (a small group of collectors and art enthusiasts) undertook the organization of the "Lifetime Achievement Awards" which honoured a senior artist and produced a retrospective exhibition with a catalogue documenting the chosen artist's work(4).

Given the patronage structures operating in the Anglophone Caribbean, what might an exploration of the relationship between Trinidadian born collector Mervyn Awon and Barbadian artist, Ras Akyem-i Ramsay reveal about the intricacies and meanings of "assistance" and support of the arts? To what degree did Awon's intervention impact Akyem's visual production, career and the visual arts tradition of Barbados? While not being able to fully address the questions posed in the space delimited here, what follows is an exploration of some of the definitive moments and opportunities that served to seal a friendship and animate the symbiotic reciprocity that undergirds the relationship between an artist and a collector.

### **3. *The Seeing Eye: The Intersections of Collecting and Supporting***

Driven primarily by his keen appreciation and love for the arts, Mervyn Awon, an architect by profession, would attest that collecting paintings and sculptors presented him an opportunity to further elaborate on his childhood fascination with accumulating objects of interests(5). While his pursuits of amassing works of art has more aesthetic value or potential socio-economic impact than his beloved marbles, stamps and coins, Awon would argue that at no time was the act of collecting envisaged as a means to procure future financial gains. Instead, his passions were driven by the sheer pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction he garnered from identifying pieces of great aesthetic merit.

It is Awon's 'eye' and ardent search of the 'right' piece that led him to that fateful meeting of both Ras Akyem and fellow painter and brethren, Ras Ishi in 1992. Although they all knew of each other, it was renowned Guyanese painter, Stanley Greaves who instigated the initial contact that would in turn change the course of each of their lives. Akyem recalls his first meeting with Awon as being one of great significance. It was three years after the notorious 1989 VEXX exhibition, which catapulted both Akyem and Ishi into the public eye as social provocateurs. Although the exhibition attracted record numbers, it received ambivalent reviews in the press. The revolutionary ethos of the exhibition and the physical presence of Akyem and Ishi had challenged the social mores of polite society. Akyem's visual explorations of the Caribbean mindscape and social condition of the displaced diasporic African – which is represented through his use of primal marks, depictions of amputated and disfigured limbs, and bold orchestration of colours and textures – transgressed the sanctity of the romantic picturesque landscapes that had come to define the visual arts of the 'tropics' produced in Barbados (see Hadchity 2010). The overt message of VEXX regarding the ostracization of Rastas and the disregard for the visual arts in Barbadian society did not translate into any noticeable shift in public perception. Even though they had subsequent shows, both artists had fallen out of favour with certain circles and the struggle for visibility and a consistent economic base from which to pursue their art would remain a constant battle.



Fig. 2. "House of King David" 1985 ( Oil on Canvas) 44"x60" National Collection

Discouraged by the isolation and lack of sales from his painting and desperate to make a living, Akyem turned to ceramics in an attempt to sell his work in the tourist market. It was at this critical juncture that Mervyn Awon entered his life and for the next decade would lend his support through providing professional advice, moral support, monetary assistance, food, art supplies, in addition to collecting and promoting his paintings and facilitating the further development of Akyem's craft and international exposure.

One of the more noted acts of patronage, which underscores Awon's role as facilitator, if not enabler, was when he secured a two-year (1995-1997) artistic residency for both Ras Akyem and Ras Ishi at the prestigious Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Cuba. Having exhibited their work to great acclaim at the 1992 and 1994 Santo Domingo Biennial, Awon believed they had developed enough of an international reputation and collection to have their own show. In order to assist with financing their studies and also to affirm and validate their work as artists, Awon organised and curated two solo exhibitions and secured potential buyers for their work. It was the first time in their careers that the two "renegade" artists exhibited separately. Akyem's exhibition, "Art Animal: Retentions and Redemptions" opened to critical

praise at the Barbados Museum. Although well attended, audiences still had difficulty relating to his graphic iconography and arresting raw visual language. In his two-year sojourn in Cuba, Akyem's unique stylistic disposition was meticulously honed and perfected. However, perhaps the most noted change happened off the canvas, for being in Cuba provided a moment for Akyem to experience living in a country that not only supported and admired artists, but also validated their presence as critical to the social fabric of any society.

Akyem's artistic production in Cuba served him well when in 1996 Awon for the third consecutive time selected paintings by Akyem and Ishi in addition to works of art by several other Barbadian artists (e.g. Arthur Atkinson, Alison Chapman-Andrews, Annalee Davis, Nick Whittle and Santley Greaves) to be judged at the Santo Domingo Biennial. By this time, Awon had developed not only a keen eye for selecting winning pieces (both Ras Ishi and Stanley Greaves took home gold in 1992 and 1994), but also masterfully understood the rules of engagement involved in selecting works for international biennials. In 1996 the submission entry in its entirety won a gold for Barbados and Ishi and Akyem both won individual gold medals. Following on the heels of this success Awon received further invitations to submit

Fig. 3. "Negus" 2001 Acrylic and collage on canvas, 32" x48". Private Collection.



work in other international biennials of global repute, including Sao Paulo and Cuenca. Through his personal investments in selecting works of art, innovating a system to stretch and transport large canvases and financing the submission of works of art, Awon single-handedly made an indelible mark in introducing Barbadian and Caribbean art to a larger international audience. Simultaneously, Awon began to develop a reputation as being a renowned collector and arbiter of taste, thus validating his own passions and opening up markets that were hither fore closed to him. Unfortunately, 1996 encapsulated both the peak and eventual demise of such a successful collaborative showing of Barbadian artists on an international scale.

#### 4. Closing Remarks

What can we glean from this rather abridged account of Awon's role as supporter of the arts? At one level, patronage in this context cannot be removed from the act of collecting. Indeed, Awon's collection cannot be separated from his role as patron and curator. According to art critic Therese Hadchity, "while some of

the collection's artists were well-established before he even knew of them, the status and recognition of the others grew alongside the collection or even (as in the case of Ras Akyem and Ras Ishi) at least partially as a result of Awon's patronage" (2010:11).

Interestingly Awon often collapses the varying roles as indicated in his statement, "I am not a patron of the arts, I am a collector...what I do is help and I help those who I feel need it most." This "help" as we see was profoundly critical and influential to those who received it. However, the individual patron's support cannot fully sustain the growth and development of the arts on a wider national level. Awon recognized the pivotal role he played and in fact wanted to see a more active visual arts scene supported by collectors and other patrons. However, he also acknowledged the tensions and criticisms that arose because of his fervent interests and investments.

What this case reveals more than anything is that the creative and entrepreneurial approaches to



Fig. 3. "Migration" 1996 Acrylic on canvas 48" x 52". Private Collection.

funding from private individuals has to be mirrored by the public sector and cooperate investors. In the contexts of these small-island territories, cooperation between the various entities is essential for developing and sustaining a patronage framework that can positively impact the growth of arts. One of the critical consequences of Awon's intervention was his ability to identify Akyem's raw talent and the subtext of his work beyond its

aesthetic value to its broader existential concerns. This acknowledgement also allowed Awon to be recognised internationally. Each in a way thus affirmed the other. The mutuality of their existence benefited Awon and his passion for collection but also contributed to the development of an internationally renowned visual artist. The question remains, in the absence of an integrated patronage system that recognises and supports the arts,



Fig. 4. "Art Animal X" (1995) Acrylic and oil pastels on canvas. Private Collection.

how do upcoming Caribbean-based artists attain and sustain visibility and economic independence at home and abroad?

#### Notes

(1) While regional corporate entities such as LIME and Digicel invest portions of their marketing budgets yearly in sponsoring the arts, the majority of this support goes to events with mass attendance such as island carnivals and music festivals. Consequently the



visual arts have not received the same level of visibility or economic support.

(2) Although lacking a national gallery, Barbados has numerous gallery spaces and boasts several private collections including Mervyn Awon Caribbean Collection; Bonnie Cole-Wilson Collection; Collections of Dr. Albert Graham; Arthur Atkinson Collection; Terry Gwyn Collection and the Ilaro Court Collection). The Queen's Park Gallery for example is one of the principle venues for showcasing the visual arts. It functions under the aegis of the National Cultural Foundation (NCF), which was formed in 1984 with the mandate of promoting the arts in the community.

(3) In Barbados, the national collection for the most part refers to a totality of randomly acquired works that remain inaccessible to the public, visiting researchers, curators and others with an interest in Caribbean art.

(4) I would like to extend my gratitude to Rodney Ifil (visual arts cultural officer NCF); Janice Whittle (curator, Queen's Park Gallery) and Therese Hadchity (art critic and curator) for assisting with providing information on the patronage structure in Barbados. For more see Cummins, Thompson and Whittle, *Art in Barbados*

(5) Information provided in the section comes from interviews conducted with Mervyn Awon and Ras Akyem in Christ Church, Barbados in March and April 2011.

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#### **About the Author:**

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# ASIF KHAN

*'The Web's obeah':*

## The opportunities and threats in using the Internet to increase the Caribbean voice.

Keywords: Globalization. E-Commerce. Digital Inclusion. Cultural Policy.

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### **Abstract:**

The digital divide between so-called First World and Developing nations is rapidly shrinking through the global distribution of smartphone technology, providing access to virtual realms for voicing opinions, sharing digital content and developing communities of interests. There is, therefore, at least a possibility that this shrinking technological divide can help surmount the barriers to exposure and investment currently experienced by many Caribbean artists. The Internet might serve to amplify a bigger voice for artist communities, and Caribbean arts professionals may also be better served by creating new bodies of legitimization via online resources, a technological spell or 'obeah'. The Internet can provide a great opportunity to establish a connectedness and dynamism that has been held back from Caribbean artists by the institutions that are supposed to serve them. We cannot afford however to assume that exposure leads to sustainable cultural impact. Public money can provide the necessary infrastructure and resources with which to compete on the international stage, for example by building studios with access to super fast broadband. However, public institutions would better serve artists by setting an example through buying their artwork..

The digital divide between so-called First World and Developing nations is rapidly shrinking through the global distribution of smartphone technology, providing access to virtual realms for voicing opinions, sharing digital content and developing communities of interests. There is at least a possibility therefore that this shrinking technological divide can help surmount the barriers to exposure and investment currently experienced by many Caribbean artists. The Internet might serve to amplify the voice of artist communities, and Caribbean arts professionals may also be better served by creating new bodies of legitimization via online resources, i.e. creating a technological spell or 'obeah'.

Since writing the international visual arts strategy for Barbados, in 2009, I have kept up with a variety of threads of opinion and work produced by Caribbean artists and curators through the Internet. Sheena Rose, one of the emerging Bajan talents whom I interviewed for the strategy, is a friend on Facebook. Sheena regularly posts the musing, "What is the next project? Where is the next space? You tell me." (Rose 2013). Rose's comment hints at the possibilities of using social media and the Internet to turn the concept of artistic expression on its head by adopting a social or multi-agent approach to expression. In creating online fora for discussion, Rose reveals a possible work-around to the barriers encountered by Caribbean

artists trying to establish themselves in more conventional media.

Rose herself has benefited in recent years from international residencies in places such as Cape Town and Suriname and has had work displayed at exhibitions as far afield as Martinique, New York and Havana. I saw one of the artist's animations at the screening of *The Cinema Club* as part of the International Curators Forum's intervention at the Arnolfini in Bristol, in November 2011. In one of her recent initiatives, the artist helped to bring about a network of nearly 800 creative practitioners to collaborate on interventions in the public and private sphere, in response to a lack of appropriate exhibition and studio space in Barbados. The enterprising movement is called *Project and Space*. Rose took part in a TEDxYouth conference in Bridgetown, Barbados in October 2012, where she spoke about her experiences of working and exhibiting abroad, of setting up *Project and Space* and of growing the Bajan arts community by information sharing. This is her lapidary dictum on *Project and Space*: "Everybody has got an iPad and computer, so I said 'Do you know what? The Internet can be my art gallery.' So I spread this thing like gossip, put it all over the Internet for people to share it on every social network; Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram - you name it, you got it." (Rose 2012).

The evidence for using the Internet to stimulate artistic expression through public debate is not all positive. Political theorist Alex Demrovic, for example, warns that the public arena is a social relation that continually transforms itself through criticism, competition and conflict where, "some social groups are better able to live with this continual transformation than others, because this is a form of life from which they profit." (Rose 2013). Demrovic contends that what is made public through the Internet is returned to private property by those vested interests that command the voice of authority. As a result, one would be rightly cautious in jumping to the conclusion that, just because emerging digital platforms provide open source resources, start-up opportunities through crowd-funding and a plethora of distribution channels and potential markets, this would necessarily result in more inclusive, equitable and profitable opportunities for artists from the Caribbean region.

The potential sensitivity in using the Internet as a spring-board for greater exposure was typified when I contacted Sheena Rose in February 2013 in response to a Facebook post. Rose had expressed her concerns to a politician during the election preparation that the poor investment in the provision of spaces, such as galleries and studios, was hindering the development of talent and public understanding and appreciation of visual art. She wrote on Facebook, "Lucky for us, social networks on the Internet let us have a bigger voice on the global stage." <sup>3</sup> Rose had deleted the quote when I revisited her Facebook page while researching this article, saying that she had removed the conversation in anger at what had been written in response to her comments. This redaction highlights the often-transient nature of communications on the Internet. The technological shift from analogue to digital has also exposed the paradox of the distinction between public and private spheres.

Rose and I continued our conversation on whether her work was selling. I could not recall reading references to commerce in any of the Caribbean

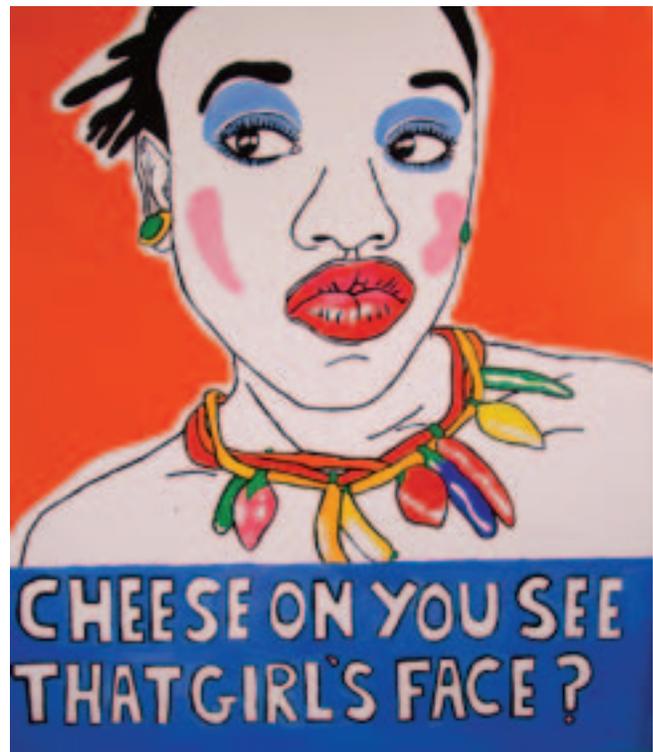


Fig. 1 Too Much Make Up Sweet Gossip 2013, Arcylic. Courtesy Sheena Rose

artists' discourse that I had read on the Internet. The Martinican art critic Dominique Brebion echoes much of Rose's frustration when she asks whether, in an environment where the international art world sees the Caribbean as terra incognita, "Is it necessary to start by creating our own bodies of legitimisation by means of a dynamic network of inter-Caribbean dissemination?" (Brebion 2012). The key word here is 'dynamic', as the sheer pace of innovation has led to breakthrough technologies being talked about in the same breath as breakthrough markets. Legitimising art is a contentious area.

Artists that I had interviewed often perceived Caribbean institutions as being at odds with the artist's role as a critical cultural worker, who is "capable of transforming the social fabric through acts of visual magic with his or her obeah-threads of imagination." (Akyiem-I 2010). In the three short years since I wrote the strategy one might argue that more information has become accessible about art and artists from the Caribbean islands than in the previous thirty years put together. Much of this can be attributed to the migration of what was once private information into the public arena via the Internet. One of the key recommendations in my strategy was the publication of a book, which would articulate the region's priorities for the art sector and signpost contemporary movements in Caribbean art.

As a result of a successful funding application to the Prince Claus Fund, the Barbados National Art Gallery Committee published *Curating in the Caribbean* in partnership with the International Curators Forum and The Green Box. The book, which was launched at the Havana Biennale in May 2012, contains essays by José Manuel Noceda Fernández (Cuba), Claire Tancons



Fig. 2 Sheena Rose: portrait. Courtesy Jaryd Niles- Morris

(Guadeloupe), Barbara Prézeau Stephenson (Haiti) and Sara Hermann (Dominican Republic) among others. As access to online resources becomes more affordable and commonplace, the authority of print over electronic media in art criticism and commentary will likely be challenged.

As Roxanne Burton suggests, the effects of a global cultural exchange are:

"...viewed with varying levels of apprehension or hope, depending on how the social changes that result are seen to be beneficial or deleterious. These opposing positions can be examined by exploring the cultural dimension. Culture interchange is one of the main areas affected by the developments resulting from and facilitating globalisation. The main tool for the transfer of cultural values from one

country or location to another is through various communication channels such as the media, the Internet, other telecommunication tools and trade. This is where developments in technology and the liberalisation of markets all over the world have resulted in the exchange of music, films, television shows..." (Burton 2009)

Burton makes a valid point that while the Internet and social fora can certainly help increase the exposure of Caribbean culture, its place in a public arena open to comment and critique could lead to dilution and commodification of a precious artistic resource.

Others, such as the Tanzanian Academic Paula Uimonen are more positive:

When it comes to identity formation, the Internet represents a means with which 'one can become what one thinks one really is' as well as 'what one could be' (Miller and Slater 2000: 10–11). Based on my ethnography of Internet pioneers in developing countries, I have argued elsewhere that perceptions of the Internet are closely intertwined with a cosmopolitan appreciation of global interconnectedness, the Internet representing a medium that promotes a sense of being part of world society (Uimonen 2001). Conversely, lack of access reinforces the sense of 'abjection', of being left behind, that characterises much of Africa's 'place-in-the world', a continent where globalisation tends to 'hop' rather than flow. (Uimonen 2009)

My experience is that both perspectives hold true, that the Internet can provide a great opportunity to establish a connectedness and dynamism that has been kept from Caribbean artists by the institutions that are supposed to serve them.

We cannot afford however to assume that exposure leads to sustainable cultural impact. Returning to the subject that prompted Rose's Facebook message, underinvestment in the arts is a common complaint of artists, wherever they live and work. Stakeholders in the region, including artists, have not adequately championed the economic and social return on such an investment. Public money can provide for the necessary infrastructure and resources to allow Caribbean artists to compete on the international stage, for example by building studios with access to super-fast broadband. However, public institutions would better serve artists by setting the vital example of buying their artwork.

This essay is the beginning of an interrogation into the praxis of artist Sheena Rose specifically, her championing of social media in challenging the lack of systematic support of the arts. It signals the need for further investigation, including other examples of the uses of the Internet, in promoting Caribbean artists and their works.

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#### **About the Author**

Asif Khan has led on projects across the arts: as Britain's senior national policy adviser for the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and manager of both Bristol's European Year of Intercultural Dialogue programme and YARDSTICK African Diaspora literary festival. Asif wrote an international visual art strategy for Barbados as a leadership associate of Arts Council England (2009).

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# WINSTON O'YOUNG

## *Caribbean Street Art: Wayside Livelihood or Alternative Route?*

Keywords: Street art, Kingston, informal arts sector

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### **Abstract:**

In the academic literature, economists have described the informal sector as a shadow economy, thus belying the notion that formal sector activity is substance and all else presumably ephemeral. In the Caribbean context Sookram, Watson and Schneider (2009), Witter and Kirton (1990) and Thomas (2003) have documented the relevance and applicability of informal sector studies and analyses to the cases of Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Guyana respectively. Similar research papers have also been completed for other areas of the Caribbean. It is perhaps instructive that for the Caribbean, the informal sector is still one area in which the region's cultural workers such as visual artists, must continue to struggle to eke out a livelihood in the face of great economic challenge.

This paper focuses on the case of Jamaican street artists but, of course this trend is by no means confined to that island as visits to any one of the region's capitals from Havana in the north to Paramaribo in South America will attest

### **Historical Context**

**B**orn out of the higglering/huckstering tradition that has been peculiar to the Caribbean and moreso in Jamaica, retail market sales of produce and small items have been a common feature of the region's commercial landscape.

Ever since the period of slavery during which time slaves were permitted to cultivate small plots of land for their own and for commercial usage, there has been a retail trade in agricultural produce.

Mintz in a seminal study of pre-independent Jamaica stated that such trade was not restricted to agricultural items only. He records

“Basketmakers, pannier makers, leatherworkers, woodworkers, and other artisans...who worked at their crafts or at other jobs for their masters during the week, were enabled by the market system to exchange the products of their skills for foods and other necessary goods.”

The historical antecedents of such a phenomenon of sale of artisanal items that could have later arguably evolved to include visual artworks, can be traced as well in the historical record for Jamaica.

Higman in an analysis of the post-emancipation Jamaican censuses of 1844 and 1861 determined upon

the occupational profile for the 1844 census as seen in Table I. The table indicated that 108 individuals were classified as “artists” though no certainty can be attached to whether in fact, such a description would correspond to the professional occupation of artist that would be entertained in the modern period.

Nonetheless, there is probably some close connection to the description of artist as described in the 1844 census with the profession of “sign painter” which was not an unknown category in which many an individual who practised art found themselves described as they attempted to negotiate the colonial economy of that period.

One should also note that even earlier that century, the 1816 census of the island of Jamaica revealed for Kingston one individual in the category of jurors meriting the description “artists/limners.”

Notice the open vehicle from which the vendor also seems to be operating.

The historical antecedence for street artists in Jamaica thus displays some significant lineage and is not to be easily dismissed as of recent vintage. Newspaper

records also confirm this interpretation of the development of visual art in the island’s economy through the early phases of independence and beyond.

### **Street Art**

Street art is no recent phenomenon in the Caribbean, a good example of this practice is to be found in Kingston, Jamaica. As far back as the mid 1970s itinerant vendors of paintings could be seen in the vicinity of the Terra Nova Hotel on Waterloo Road in Kingston so indicating that this is not just a feature of that island’s contemporary art scene.

Street artists are also to be found in several regional capitals and their suburbs such as in Port of Spain, Paramaribo and of course also in Port au Prince, Havana and in Santo Domingo. In Roseau, Dominica one can find sales of art at the shopping complex at the port and elsewhere in the region, street artists are never too far from the tourist locations whether one visits St. George’s or St. Maarten, to cite but two instances at either end of the Eastern Caribbean.

Street artists do, however, tend to cater for domestic clients as well and in fact, some have indicated that their



Fig. 1. *Sale of Art on the Roadside, Paramaribo, Suriname. March 2006*

principal business is transacted with local purchasers.

In respect of Jamaica and in close proximity to Devon House, a well-known architectural place of great interest, the sales of art on the margins of one of Kingston's major thoroughfares heading north from New Kingston was one that must have sustained not a few artists.

Occasional street sales of art have been recorded elsewhere in Kingston such as on Lady Musgrave Road and on Olivier Road and it is not unknown to encounter sculptors attempting to sell their works on the Mona campus of the UWI. Street sales of art are also not confined to the urban settings as any trip out of the capital will attest. Sales of art at locations, such as when one emerges from Fern Gully and on the entrance to Ocho Rios have been taking place for a long period.

In regard to Trinidad and Tobago, street sales of art have been a relatively recent phenomenon compared to elsewhere in the Caribbean. One location that is known has been at the margins of the main thoroughfare leading to one of west Trinidad's chief shopping malls. This location developed in the early 2000s and the two artists involved had been interviewed and provided interesting information on their involvement in the sale of their work.

### **Conclusion**

The Caribbean art market continues to evolve. From itinerant artisans seeking to eke out a living in the interstices of peripheral and dependent colonial economic structures, the region finds that a new era appears to be heralding with the dawn of ICTs. The way in which this trend will develop is arguably any one's guess. As a classical author wrote "carpe diem." It is up to the region's artists to seize the moment, to "strike the iron while it's still hot" and enter the global art market believing that their time has now come.

### **About the Author:**

Winston O'Young is a PhD candidate at the Institute of International Relations at the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago. His research thesis, submitted in 2012, is a comparative study of the structure of the visual art markets in Jamaica and in Trinidad and Tobago.

# ARTIST ESSAYS



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

# RAÚL MOARQUECH FERRERA BALANQUET

## *Writing the Decolonial Mariposa Ancestral Memory (Excerpt)*

### **Olodumare: African Ancestral Gnosis**

Molluba Oloddumare loguó embelese oboddumare.

**T**he Dogon's creation story tells how creator Amma sat upon nothing. Dogon Cosmology are classified as "mother signs" bummo na (this demonstrate the importance of female energy and women place within African gnosis). Amma formed four pairs of androgynous twins inside of the po, a seed that represent Amma on earth (Livingston 2004).

### **Oddúdua: Ori / Eleda**

Understanding African polyrhythmic temporalities, Mariposa Ancestral Memory places itself in different locations at different historical times, and at multiple paths, each representing an androgynous deity from the Yoruba, Lukumi and Rada pantheons: Olordumare, Oddúdua; Obatala, Ochumare/Damballa Weddo, Olokun/La Sirene/Agwe, Inle, and Shango/Ibeyis/Marasa Dosa Dosua.

As a Caribbean born, I understand the self as a multi geometric entropic process always connected with the communal self (Benitez- Rojo 1995). I do not seek history as a way to find points of origins, but to articulate historical locations in a traveling interconnected knowledge system that provides solutions for my subjective migrant experience. In a deeper process, the encounter with these places of interceptions, the crossroads, could become

turning points to return, do depart, to convey, and to arrive to the present. African Aesthetics still nurtures contemporary artistic practices in the Caribbean, as well as in Africana Americana Diaspora and the US/Latino Diaspora.

### **Oddúdua and Obatala: Decoloniality**

Decoloniality explains how colonization, and its modern/coloniality/rationality system, is storaged in the body and the mind of the colonized. It is a deep and violent internalized psycho-emotional and spiritual imposition that substitutes the knowledge and ways of living of the colonized for that of the colonizer. De-linking from coloniality/modernity/rationality requires a transgressive de-learning and re-learning process, which provides the tools to create access to the structural foundations of African ancestral knowledge.

V. Y. Mudimbe expresses how Eurocentric colonial discourse proposes a temporal logic of progression and development where non-European epistemologies such as African ancestral knowledge are displaced to the exteriority of modernity classifying them as "primitive," "backward," and "outdate" (Mudimbe 4).

### **Shango/Ibeyis/Marasa Dosa Dosua: Decolonial Writing**

As an act of epistemological disobedience, of Cimarronaje, I disengage from linearity, chronology, and

Fig. 1 Dambalah Osumare

from the three-dimensional imaginary of the Cartesian grid, which are the basic constructions of structural thought in Western epistemology in relation to time and space.

My Haitian paternal grandfather's and his family's migration was a product of the 1915 US invasion, which brought many Haitians to the shores of Eastern Cuba.

After beaten by the police when they came home looking for my father, my mother lost twins a few months before I was born. In Haitian Voodoo, I am Marasa Dosou Dosa, the third one in relation to the twins. The Lwa Marasa inhabits the crossroad with Papa Legba. The Vèvè representing this Lwa includes the twins' relationship to the child born after them, the Dosou (boy) or Dosa (girl), to articulate the power of the third child. Vèvè are geometrical patterns associated with power of the Lwa and expressing itself through space and time. Rigaud argues that the Voodoo Lwa: "...represented by the magic diagrams have the



Fig. 2. Ancestral Memory

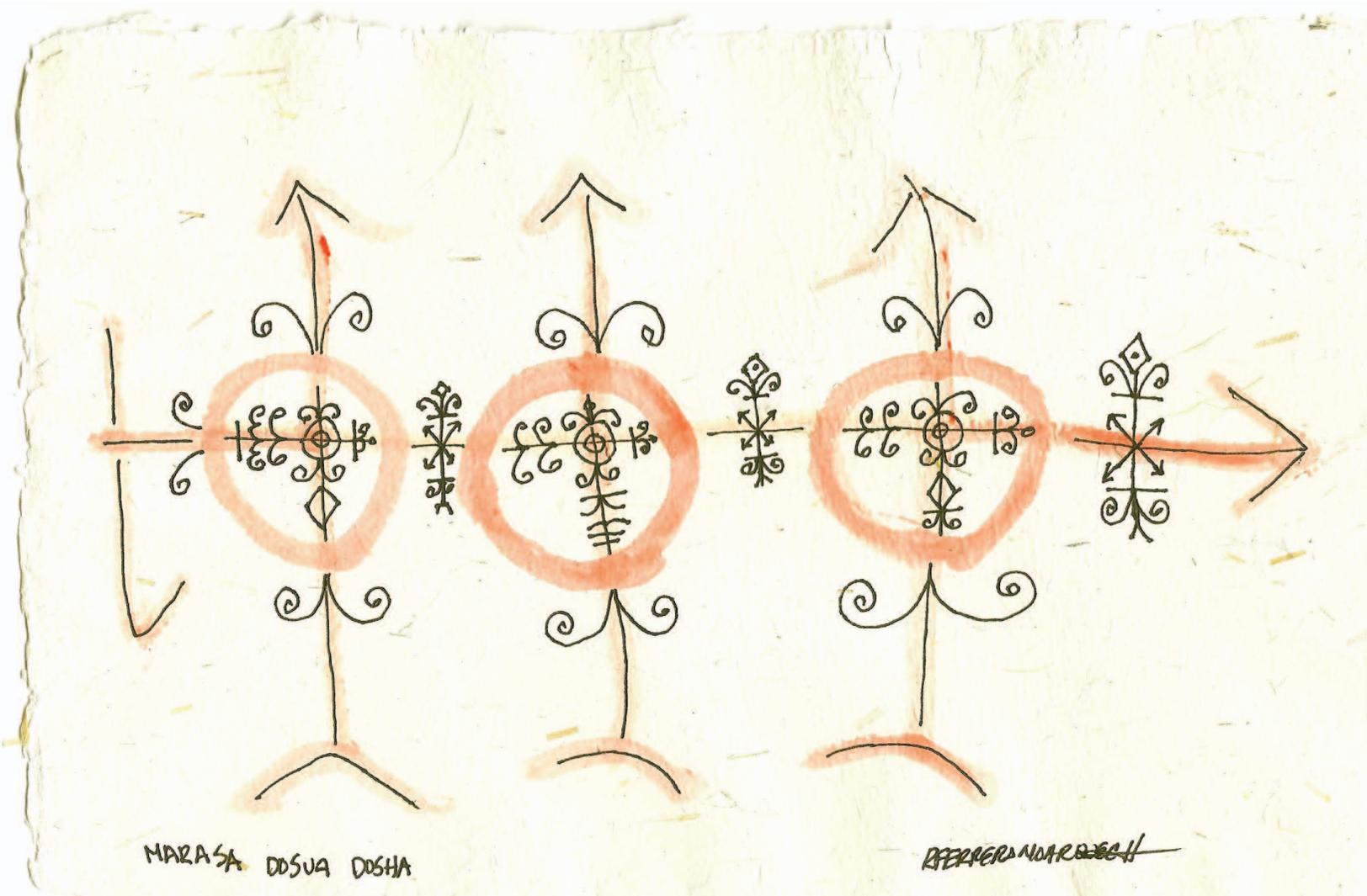




Fig. 3-6. Performance of *Mariposa Ancestral Memory* by Raúl Moarquech Ferrera Balanquet at Be. Bop 2013. *Black Europe Body Politics. Decolonizing the “Cold” War.* Curated by Alanna Lockward for Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, Berlin. Photos by Wagner Carvalho. Courtesy of Art Labor Archives.

characteristics of the molecular principle of physic. The atoms of the bodies blend together to become geometrical designs because it is this geometry that give bodies their properties and faculties” (Rigaud 73).

In the early 60s, when I was attending a Jesuit Christian elementary school in Cuba, I was severely punished for writing with the left hand. “La voz del diablo,” decía aquella maestra que me obligaba todas las tarde a escribir con mi mano derecha la misma oración en aquel cuaderno de papel periódico trazado con líneas azules.

**Ochumare/Damballa Weddo:  
Ancestral Erotic**

Oká lelel lebu

Akitan se kee gbile

Osumare ego ni ile

Afiditokum

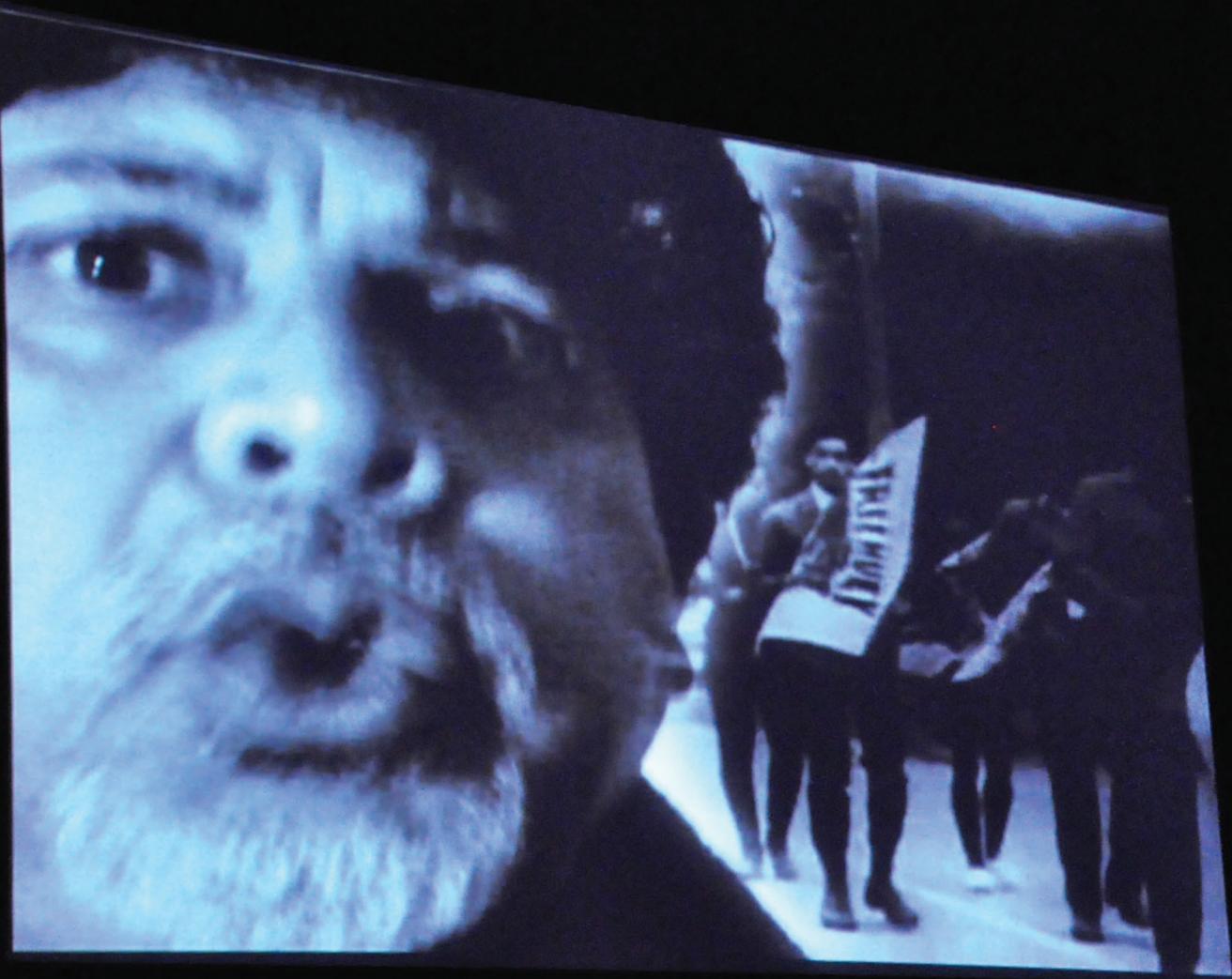
Afehintosa

Agboju Olorum a gaga

Da fun Olofin

Ofo aiku. (Eji 54)





When understanding the androgynous essence of the creators in many West African cultures, the western Eurocentric constructed notion of biological gender and sexuality cannot be used to explain how desire is manifested in Afro Caribbean communities. African knowledge and wisdom are characterized by their cosmological relations where the human body is not the center, but another element of the complexity of “a system of thought arising out the people’s history and culture that addresses issues of reality and creation, truth and value, meaning, process, and that people’s place within creation” (Agyei).

Wahneema Lubiano affirms: “...it is also the case that Black male prisoners or those who will be in prison or could be in prison internalized the warrior ethos, with its attendant homophobia and patriarchy, that is relayed elsewhere. This is in large part a result of the invisible cultural hand of the state, which imposes upon most of the groups its own ethos, an ethos that seems to exist as if it did not have state sponsorship” (Wahneema).

Since Slavery, African heterosexual males have systematically allied with the patriarchal European colonizer. There we trace the existence of patriarchy and homophobia in contemporary Afro Caribbean spiritual practices as the products of the violent and petrifying internalization of the Western Christian ethos, which produced these oppressive alliances.

Starting a ritual ceremony of unlearning, I hear the voice of Audre Lorde: “...the deepest understructure of which was Hatred, that societal death wish directed against us from the moment we are born Black [queer, disabled] and female in America. From that moment on we have been steeped in hatred—for our color, for our sex, for our effrontery in daring to presume we had the right to live” (Lorde 146).

### ***Olokun/La Sirenel/Agwe: Variable Geometry and Temporal Relations***

Glissant argues for an African relational aesthetics founded in a cosmology interconnected with nature, emotions, sensorial, psychological affectivity and memory (1). As a decolonial gesture, I delink (Quijano 1992) from

the colonial matrix to a traveling position, activating a constant process of re-existence. I am petrified, sea sickened by the movement of the vessel and its friction with the motion of the waves, which brings the vessel up and down as it continues toward its destination, El Norte. A historical spiral takes me back to an ancestral place: the images of dead enslaved Africans at the bottom of the sea, holding Yemaya Olokún’s hand appears and then, I am taken to the future, projecting a reverse image of all that had been left behind. The spirit of Glissant appears: “We know ourselves as part and as a crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We carry our poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone”(9).

### ***Inle: Migration***

Inle mákue ara kabo araguá

Ni le Aragua Inle aránguánille.

Once again, at an uncertain moving territory, my mind is overflow with fast moving memories: two male students at the high schools insulted me with derogatory nouns —pargo, maricon, cherna, loca— because I am wearing a shirt with a written sign that says “Gay Power” and I had let my afro grow, protesting the incarceration of Angela Davis; after a night of being retained at a police station in Havana because of the way I dress, I was taken to court and sentenced to ninety days at a correctional facility called “El Morro;” at a political rally at the university repudiating the Cubans seeking asylum at the Peruvian embassy in 1980, I am expelled from the Superior School of Construction. I was not the ideal man Marti dreamt of for the Cuban revolution. Along with many members of the Cuban LGTB communities such as the late well-known writer Reinaldo Arena, I was forced into exile. These recurring memories are bringing me back, in a spiral turn, to a familiar, yet a distinct place. The terror I felt in Havana is connected with the psychological alliance between the police apparatus, the state ideology, and the imperial patriarchal norms. The systematic police prosecution of gays and lesbians in the Cuban social space, the anguish due to the imprisonment of many of us during our adolescences, and the inability of the “revolutionary Cuban educational system” to provide a safe environment for our growth.

I live in occupied America, the land that was taken from the natives, la tierra robada de los Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux, Mesquaquies, the other's territory.

In this performance of unrest, I am dismantling the fixed structures of modernity/colonialty when I engage with African and Mayan/Indigenous epistemologies and ways of sensing. I detach, delink, turn away and move on into the re-creation and re-existence of my affective responses. I am now relating, poetically, with epistemologies inherited in the territories of the body, the ancestral memory of my ancestors.

In an act of Cimarronaje, I make my invisibility my power, my warrior power dancing with the spirits. I am not here and I am. The physicality of my body transgress the borders of physics because, in the poetic realm of the death, Iku, I am memory and memory can not be visualized by the colonial techno empire. I am invisible; I disappear like the phantom of neurological memories deprogramming with my knowledge the pain of exile, of the coloniality of patriarchy, of racism, of homophobia and more.

#### Notes

(1) The term decolonial was first introduced by Catherine Walsh in order to accentuate the option of disengaging from the Salvationist rhetoric of coloniality/modernity at a meeting of the Modernity/Coloniality working group in 2004 at Duke University. The following year, she developed the term in an essay titled "(Re)Pensamiento Crítico y (De)Colonialidad, published in *Pensamiento Crítico y Matriz (De)Colonial*, Catherine Walsh Ed., Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar-Abya Yala: Quito, Ecuador, 2005.

(2) Anibal Quijano proposed as *desprendimiento*, the action of departing and/or moving away from the Modernity/Coloniality's matrix in an essay first published in 1992. For more information

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#### **About the Author:**

Raul is a PhD candidate of Romance Studies at Duke University. Executive Curator of *Arte Nuevo Interactiva*, Ferrera-Balanquet has exhibited at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße Berlin, Germany; Queens Museum of Art, aluCine Toronto, MOLAA Long Beach, MAAP Australia; CCCB Barcelona. His writing has appeared in *Artecubano*, Vol.3-4; *SalonKritik* Madrid; *Bienal de La Habana Para leer*, Universitat De Valencia; *PublicNo. 41*, Toronto; *Escaner Cultural*, Santiago de Chile, *Inter*, *Art Actuel*, No 102.

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# NICOLÁS DUMIT ESTÉVEZ

*Searching for Refuge:  
Spreading the Word at the Armory*

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*“What you could neither grasp nor see,*

*A lively faith will yet affirm*

*Beyond this world’s design.”*

*—Saint Thomas Aquinas(1)*

I came across the non-definition of performance art after having practiced it, only to find myself several years later in urgent need of sustaining my claim to be performing, or more specifically, to be a performance artist. RoseLee Goldberg’s statement that performance art is a medium that purposely avoids “...precise or easy definition...” had suited my work for close to a decade, yet it did not spare me from becoming the subject of scrutiny by a security guard at the New York 2006 Armory Show (2). I arrived at this event in answer to an invitation to perform issued by Franklin Furnace and following an inner call to spread the word about the medium in question. In fact, I had brought with me Goldberg’s book *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. Tucked under my arm, the publication acted as a bible I could go to when in need; I merely had to refer to one of Goldberg’s psalms.

Voids exist in relation to what surrounds them, serving the purpose of pointing to spaces already taken,

occupied, and no longer available. In many instances they assume the presence of what is actually in front of us but is not readily available. Yves Klein’s interest in the void lead him to enact a series of leaps in which he inhabited, if temporarily, the domains of immateriality. For similar reasons, he disposed of an art piece in the Seine while the buyer burned his check. Speaking of voids, I have always felt an unfounded reservation about using the words nothing, never, and nobody, but lately have come to realize that these words exist because of an unstated need to give “absence” a presence, to name it. Hasn’t the magic wand of capitalism managed more than once to materialize the unseen, for example, by making the sale/acquisition of air rights a legitimate business? Klein’s backstage landings were, in the end, a reminder of our debt to physicality.

The afternoon I appeared at the Armory Show neither the Yves Klein blue chasuble I wore nor the message I came to deliver were valid reasons for the

organizers to grant me a free leap into one of the world's leading art fairs. My destination was Pier 90. At the door I claimed the ticket that was purchased for me and paid for in advance by Franklin Furnace. This slip of paper gave me immediate access to the art acolytes that were in full supply in the hallways of the building. Nonetheless, inside, I found myself preaching to deaf dealers selling their wares; was dismissed by those who visited the event for the sole purpose of looking at ART; and was gracefully validated, indeed blessed, by a woman who whispered to her companion in Spanish that I was in fact an artwork (3). As if in a reenactment of Piero Manzoni's 1961 *Living Sculptures*, these words gave the commentator in question unrestricted authority to sign me as a walking art piece.

While delivering the Word, I refrained from making predictions of who would end up in art hell or who would reap the fruits of admission to art heaven. As fairgoers scanned the show avidly searching for the specific artwork that would redeem them from purgatory, scores of visitors claimed from me, unquestioningly, a free-of-charge copy of the pamphlet that described my mission.

Performing performance art has become one of my works in progress. In my encounters with potential believers amongst students, friends, passersby, colleagues and reporters, I have come to accept the challenges of the task. Some have remained unconverted because of the lack of a definition to encapsulate the field. Nevertheless, I believe that with the same care that Joseph Beuys explained pictures to a dead hare, I myself could succeed in talking about performance art to two attentive Catholic sisters. On that occasion I mentally, almost telepathically, resorted to Linda M. Montano's book *Art in Everyday Life* to deliver an improvised presentation in the lobby of their convent (4). Two attentive nuns stood listening to my message, one of them adding to the conversation with a comment, formulated more like a question, on the relationship of performance art with

postmodern art.

Working the art crowd at the Armory Show turned out to be more challenging than conversing with the nuns. I recall strolling up and down, over and over, step by step, with the Word always in my hand. Interactions were brief, scant, a smile, the handing over of a pamphlet and a thank you to the recipient. One more seed sown. Art bless.

Association continues to allow the Armory Show to be named after the 69th Regiment Armory that once housed the fair. Similarly, I thought the Yves Klein blue



Fig. 1. Spreading the Word: With RoseLee Goldberg's Book *Under my Arm*  
Photograph: Ka-man Tse. Courtesy of Nicolás Dumit Estévez

vestment I wore would allow me in this context to be able to disseminate freely the message of performance art. Instead, my participation in the fair was brought to a halt, allegedly because of complaints that I was too close to the portion of the voids galleries had paid for to sell their wares. In the minutes to follow I was questioned by two security guards. One of them claimed to understand what I was doing; the other was a frightening captor demanding

a concise definition of the medium I was presenting at the event. With no other weapon than Goldberg's canonical gospel at hand, I enticed the frightening guard to give me her own answer to "what is performance art?" Her response was simply to dismiss my proposition with a rosary of unrelated comments. I finally understood the correspondence between the idea of voids defining their surroundings with performance art's ability to define

Searching for Refuge: Spreading the Word at the Armory is part of Spreading the Word with RoseLee Goldberg's Book under my Arm, which is a component of For Art's Sake, a series of pilgrimages through which I sought to reverse the traditional relationship between art and religion. In For Art's Sake, religion becomes a tool in the service of art as I endure seven arduous journeys that begin in Downtown Manhattan and conclude at seven museums. Upon completion of each penance, a museum director or appointed official sign a credential that I carry, thus confirming that the journey has been successfully completed. For Art's Sake has been developed for the Franklin Furnace Fund for Performance Art and Workspace, the residency program of Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. The pilgrimages include a devotional guide printed with the support of The Center for Book Arts in NY and produced in collaboration with Ana Cordeiro and Amber MacMillan. Special thanks to those who blessed these pilgrimages: Alanna Lockward, Edwin Ramoran, Sara Reisman, Yasmin Ramírez, Martha Wilson,



Fig. 2. Pamphlets  
Courtesy of Nicolás Dumit Estévez

through its own lack of definition. My day's work was done!

After the organizers contacted Franklin Furnace I was free to go, receiving authorization by the show to continue Spreading the Word. I was permitted to remain in the facilities with the sole understanding that I was to circulate throughout the fair, and not spend more than five minutes standing at any given location. This was fine with me. I was happy with just tickling the void and leaving the place as quietly as I arrived.

Nicolás Dumit Estévez

April 20, 2006

Written while in residence at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York.



Erin Donnelly, and Juliana Driever.  
Fig. 3. Logo for pilgrimages  
Courtesy of Nicolás Dumit Estévez

## Notes

1. Aquinas 105.
2. Goldberg 11.
3. While relying on my own understanding of ART, art and Art, I am borrowing here Linda Mary Montano's use of caps. In this case, and in my view, ART refers to a prescribed and commercialized approach to, or perception of the aesthetic experience.
4. The work and generous mentorship of Linda Mary Montano, a prominent figure in the field of performance art and art in everyday life, has had a tremendous impact on the pilgrimages I developed and on my art practice in general.

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### ***About the Author:***

Nicolás Dumit Estévez is an interdisciplinary artist working mainly in performance art and experiences where the quotidian and art often overlap. Estévez has exhibited and performed extensively in the U.S. as well as internationally. Residencies attended include P.S. 1/ MoMA, Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. He teaches at the Transart Institute. Born in Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros, Dominican Republic, in 2011 Estévez was baptized as a Bronxite in the Bronx River.



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# INTERVIEWS



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

# NEYSHA SOODEEN

*Interview by Marielle Barrow*

Caring, Competitive, Creative:  
Neysha Sooden, CEO, MACO Magazine

Terms such as good corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility are subject to multiple interpretations by enterprises and within academia. Corporate social responsibility retains underlying philanthropic principles of stewardship and charity (Marrewijk 97- 98). However evolving societal contexts that require strategic responses often complicate these values creating a brand of corporate social responsibility that fit the marketing, communication, finance, quality management and even human resource management purposes of enterprises (Marrewijk 96). Where are the creative business models that find a balance between stewardship and the individual needs of a business?

Neysha Soodeen's passion, warm heartedness and sensitivity have driven her to create a business model that not only facilitates a deepening awareness of Caribbeanness but aspires to moral obligations. Through her creative products Soodeen has taken up the cause of the unsung hero giving space to voices and stories that our news media have given little opportunity. She has created openings for the development of other businesses through direct promotion, positively intervening in the infrastructure of the design industry of the Caribbean. Perhaps even more significantly, Soodeen has remained accessible and down-to-earth, willing to allow her humanity to surpass the importance of profit. While her enterprise may not perfectly align with the academic definitions of

the triple bottom line approach to business, she continues to emphasize the importance of support and respect for people, quality of product and a focus on the environment within her company. Her business approach in some ways begins to lean toward social entrepreneurship, a model of practical engagement that emphasizes innovation, a form of business which privileges social impact over profit, emphasizing community orientation, reformation and sustainability.

This paper takes a mixed approach by punctuating the interviewee's responses through the application of a critical academic lens following each response. A journalistic presentation of the complete ideas of the interviewee, I hope, lends readability and objectivity so that each might come to his or her own conclusions by enjoining Soodeen's responses to networks of personal and social experiences that construct Caribbean realities. By casting this net that is at the same time personal and enlarged through an understanding of Soodeen's approach, readers' critical apprehension of the arguments presented may stimulate new ways of thinking about the possibilities of our Caribbean space. This structure intentionally strays from typical academia, which integrates critique with citations or places voices of the interviewee in footnotes. It strays from this format based on the underlying belief that the interviewee is capable of representing him or herself. Through this adjustment of format, I attempt to use the essay format as a process or

manual for re-thinking evolving practices of academia in the Caribbean. This text then has two objectives:

- i) Examination of an existing business as a case study or workshop for thinking developmental strategies within the Caribbean
- ii) Imagining the determinants of a preliminary stage or leaning toward social entrepreneurship as a late-capitalist methodology in engineering Caribbean progress.

Success can be emotionally and socially defined and in speaking the language of entrepreneurship, strategic design including fiscal plans, marketing and relationship development become embedded within the entrepreneurial rubric. President Jimmy Carter, in an address delivered at the Skoll World Forum describes a quality of social entrepreneurs that can be understood as determining the success of social entrepreneurs -- faith: "a special kind of faith... faith in oneself -- and, perhaps more importantly, faith in other people" (Carter 13). Where does such faith exist within our community and business practices, and more importantly, how is such faith cultivated within schools or through mechanisms of informal learning and citizenship, such as the products we develop and how we develop them? Do Soodeen's practices cultivate such an environment -- one of faith? Does her enterprise lean toward a social enterprise in meaningful ways? Whereas governmental, philanthropic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses have been unresponsive to the needs of the human situation of the masses, social enterprises seek to motivate, stimulate and empower individuals and groups and improve lifestyles to enable sustainable contribution to community. How do the values promulgated by Soodeen and her enterprise fit with these social entrepreneurship matrices? My first question to Soodeen sought to discern how her theoretical definition of success has influenced her modus operandi and how it is made operational within her business.

*MB: How do you define success? What makes a successful*

*entrepreneur and what has made you a successful entrepreneur?*

*NS: As a businessperson success obviously means being able to generate a profit but when I started publishing, it was about breaking through barriers in the Caribbean. I started in 1998. Back then the graveyard for magazines was huge. There were very few that were successful in the region, either in flight magazines or island specific. The official tourist guide of each island would survive but that was it. Neither retail nor regional magazines worked. There were no locally or regionally published magazines distributed internationally. Having lived in Canada then Europe and then coming back to the Caribbean, I loved everything Caribbean -- cheesecake with sapodilla, tropical fresh cut flowers rather than lilies. But Trinidadians always seemed to be imitating what was foreign -- using the colors that these foreign magazines thought were the hottest colors of the year, for instance. I couldn't understand it. Everything foreign was better. I wanted to showcase the sophisticated side of the Caribbean and it needed to be showcased in a sophisticated publication. I wanted my readers to imagine what they could do in a kitchen, a house, an office. It was about valuing and appreciating what they had in front of them, which is a major cultural set back for everyone in the Caribbean. I see the Caribbean more as followers than as leaders.*

*If everyone is playing on a level playing field, there is no need to better your product. So if a good quality publication is launched everyone feels the need to now up their standard. In the late 90s, production costs were high. In 1999, I charged \$3000 US for a full-page advertisement in MACO and everyone thought that I was mad, as \$3000 US was a year's worth of advertising in the newspaper. It was an educational process for the advertisers as they were not used to spending that kind of money and did not understand what it meant to advertise in a gloss magazine.*

*When you are young you are fearless so youth worked in my favor. Perhaps some would describe it as reckless, but you have to be a bit bold to succeed. You cannot play it safe if you want to push the status quo. I was fortunate that my product*

was really well received. I was able to offer my advertisers a new value to advertising. My business model involved not making a huge profit on one publication but rather, making smaller profits on ten publications. Most publishing companies relied on one or two publications. I always had a plethora of magazines with a small profit. This helped with cash flow, which is a major problem for a lot of publishers as when you send your magazine to print you have to pay 50% up front and the remainder within 30 days. You have to pay for your entire magazine. The advertisers often do not pay until after they have seen the printed publication and sometimes take many months to pay.

Recently I presented on this topic so I would like to share what I believe are the eight tools for successful entrepreneurship:

**NETWORKING:** I am a firm believer in 'its not what you know, but who you know'. And always remember, that there are very many people out there who are a lot smarter than you are, and have something to say which could benefit you and your company in some way, shape and form. But you have to LISTEN, and learn from them. Networking with others in your field as well will only benefit you, will give you a greater understanding of the wider scope of the industry, and issues which others or other companies are facing.

**COMPETITIVENESS:** Competition is good. Welcome it. It will naturally push your company to strive for more, to be better, and that hopefully will translate into more revenue for you, unless your competitor is giving you a good whipping. Understand your competitor and decipher their weakness. Keep ahead of the bell curve and know that someone out there is looking and waiting to do exactly what you or your company is doing, but better!

**ADAPTABILITY:** To run a successful business, one must be able to adapt to the changing times. And KEEP adapting. Once you get the formula right, understand that you will have to change the formula again to keep your business competitive. You also have to be able to adapt to changing technologies, to newer trends, to the changing economic times.

**HUMAN RESOURCE, LOYALTY & EMPOWERMENT:** An entrepreneur is only as good as his or her staff. A company is only as good as its staff. Without amazing human resource,

your company will suffer and thus, you have to empower your staff to be loyal to you, your brand and your company. Firstly, you need the talent to identify, hire, and nurture others with talent. To run a successful business, you are the one who needs to be out there networking and bringing in new business. Your human resource therefore needs to be home on the range, making sure that your company is running successfully without you.

Empower them to make decisions and reward them when that decision augers well for the company. Instead of berating staff when they have made a bad decision, be happy that they had the guts to make a decision on their own and work with them to solve the problem caused. If you have chosen your staff wisely, they will learn and be in a better place for having made the mistake in the first place.

**PARTNERING & SHARING:** In the Caribbean, we have a bad tendency of stepping on the heads of others to push ourselves up, instead of partnering with each other to gain a bigger piece of the pie. In my opinion, we in the Caribbean are still quite primitive, in that regard.

**BEING INNOVATIVE & CREATIVE:** Lets not re-invent the wheel again! In the Caribbean, we are all big fish in a small pond. There is so much here in the Caribbean that has not been done as yet, so many things that we need and so many ways to make money.

**THE POWER OF MARKETING:** Do not be afraid of spending money on marketing. And never miss an opportunity to promote your asset.

**CASH FLOW:** Any accountant is probably nodding their head. This is possibly the first and main reason companies go out of business.

Soodeen presents strategies for developing Caribbean entrepreneurs -- a template for the foundation of structuring a winning enterprise. But how do we engage her story on a deeper philosophical level that can underpin new directions for Caribbean entrepreneurship and Caribbean identity?

Soodeen seemingly operationalizes her theoretical definition of success. However much of her definition hinges on valuation derived through the co-



mingling of desires and beliefs from experiences both in the Caribbean and the global north. Indeed the values of educated Caribbean peoples are so often shaped by the global north touched by Caribbean nostalgia, due to pervasive mixed exposure to both landscapes. While Soodeen does cite many of the tenets of social entrepreneurship -- focus on human development, innovation and creativity, adaptability, and self and community value, what does her mixed sensibility mean for Caribbean aspirations (as her products are so well known within the Caribbean)? Are MACO presentations of Caribbean success and aspirations leaning toward this 'othered' or mixed sensibility of Caribbeanness (mix of global north and Caribbean) or do they challenge us to form alternative/new visions of ourselves, to shift our perspectives toward an 'authentic' 'wealth' of healthy Caribbean selves including practices of faith described above?

I would like to propose a framework for thinking about the effect of the identity propositions wittingly or unwittingly put forward through Soodeen's success map above and MACO's spreads. Perhaps one useful rubric in which to consider the MACO product is Hall's conceptualization of identity. In what ways can these presentations be used as teaching tools within a classroom to discern how we want to or should articulate what Stuart Hall describes as identity as process versus a fixed stereotypical Caribbean identity? Do MACO representations of Caribbeanness present Caribbean identity as an "already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent" (Hall 392) or do they challenge individuals to recognize their identity as a "production; which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (392)? In many ways the glossy-paged magazine presents Caribbean identity as a desired end of chic forms and brilliant color, as a Caribbean self always in process of becoming a 'glossy identity'. But taken together with MACO people, 'becoming glossy' is recognized as incomplete and Caribbean identity can be recognized as production and process fueled by constructive defiance of the odds with which

underserved Caribbean peoples are often met.

I submit that Soodeen's personal vision and business practices position her (and others who critically examine her project), to attain another level of Caribbean self-realization. This possibility instigates defiance of the rubric of 'publishing as business' with the view of understanding publishing as identity project. Such a shift in the lens through which publishing is regarded also implies a pushing of the definition of success. Can MACO magazines function as a space of self-critique in recognizing the potential ill of glossy veneers? Glossy veneers (perhaps unrealistic and sometimes unattainable lifestyles for many) may seem negative to some if taken as the completeness of Caribbean identity. But glossy veneers are not categorically negative if formed coincident to a deeper critical self-determination that is made visible. How would embracing a social entrepreneurship agenda enable such recognition, self-critique and visibility through MACO? This possibility requires the inclusion of a social entrepreneurship module as part of the MACO agenda. Posing the question of impact of her product within the Caribbean elicited a response that falls toward social entrepreneurship:

*MB: How do you think your magazines have affected the Caribbean?*

*NS: Within the industry I have seen more and more magazines launched and survive in all the islands ever since MACO came out in 1999. I work with publishers helping them with distributors and editorial outline. On the level of the readers, I see and hear that the magazine has inspired them to paint their house a totally wild color. I want readers to take the risk... it is just paint, paint your room bright green. Get ideas from the magazine and experiment. Surroundings really help with everything that has to do with a person and a family, how you feel when you wake up in the morning when you are playing with your kids. Surroundings set the tone of daily life. Wonderful surroundings help to enable a wonderful life. Eat well. Caribbean persons should not be eating anything out of a can because we have fresh fruit around us. I am an advocate of sustainable farming.*

*Through MACO people, Barbados and Trinidad – I try to create alternative celebrities. Most of the celebrities are in the music industry. Those are our stars but that kind of stardom should not be the sole focus of our peoples – young persons helping sick kids, for example, should begin to be recognized as stars. I am trying to bring to light all the do-gooders and persons from within the creative industries and great business people who are pushing the envelope.*

MACO people lays a foundation for examining the definitions of success and for performing some level of self-critique and in so doing begins to take up the social entrepreneurial agenda from an awareness standpoint. Missing in terms of visibility to the reader however, is the application of practical steps toward change that should follow self-critique. Entrepreneurship is a key discipline that facilitates this kind of learning of the transferrable practice/skill of critique and strategic and tactical planning: it is a skill that can be applied on both a personal and professional level. Soodeen's response that follows demonstrates the foresight, adaptability and sustainability that result from critique. Critique in this sense can be on a personal level but more generally it can be understood as the survey of current internal and external status of an entity.

*MB: What strategies has your publishing company Toute Bagai effected to remain competitive in these challenging economic times?*

*NS: It is always important to shift your basket of goods while remaining true to your core. We do all of the publishing for Sandals resorts. We actually picked up a lot of new contracts during the recession even though we dropped specific products at the beginning of the recession. Other companies look at their spend and who they are spending it with. Sandals did this as well. Most of their publishing was done through a US publisher. Times were tough so they decided to look inward, that is, within the Caribbean rather than externally for their publisher. So Toute Bagai was able to pick up that contract. There is work out there but it requires networking and good human resources. While I am out there networking I have to rely on the people in my company at home. If you are stuck in*

*your office day in day out micro-managing you are never going to be out there gaining.*

A critical aspect of the social entrepreneurial agenda within the Caribbean should involve a process of deeper self-recognition, critical self-apprehension at the primary and secondary school levels, that includes an in-depth examination of the kinds of projects and products that shape our everyday Caribbean existence. Following this, practical steps toward change can be explored as students are enabled to recognize the power that they have to shape their world positively. This somewhat unwieldy marriage of entrepreneurship with cultural education may seem somewhat unorthodox at the primary or secondary level. However, it takes place through tertiary level Marketing and Public Relations, Arts & Cultural Enterprise Management or Cultural Studies programs that are often at the post-graduate level. Cultural and entrepreneurship training of this nature is relevant not only to those who attain to tertiary level education but is critical to the seven year olds or twelve year old who are surrounded by more aggression or gang warfare, fear, lack of self-worth or lack of access to opportunities than many college educated persons may have had to face. An entrepreneurial mindset is about leveraging seemingly negative circumstances.

One may attempt to determine the potential role of social entrepreneurship as a piece of the educational puzzle at the primary and secondary school levels: perhaps social entrepreneurship training initiates incremental modifications in power dynamics and eventual changes in ownership patterns and labor in a late-capitalist economy. While communist and socialist paradigms are decried in favor of democracy, capitalist values that reign under democracy foster a society rife with inequality often accompanied by violence. If widely employed and written into government policy and the policy of enterprises such as Soodeen's, to what extent can these entrepreneurial practices alter class structures through the re-distribution of wealth? Fundamental to these movements is the redress of values that belie concepts of progress and wealth, in addition to a progression from individual interests to community welfare. Such values determine whether

entrepreneurs emphasize profit or social benefit and thus which ideas should be pursued.

*MB: Often entrepreneurs have many ideas. How do you determine which idea/ideas to pursue and how do you prioritize?*

*NS: Entrepreneurship is about adapting to the times so I place priority on those things that are most pressing in terms of the space and time that we find ourselves in – based on the current trends which should give foresight into possible futures. You have to be adaptable. I have launched a Maco travel portal for example as the technology of our times and our changing socio-economic climate has made the need for this change apparent. Advertising budgets are changing. Companies are placing more time into digital and less into print and glossies. Having taken fifteen years to understand the best of each island, their unique organic features for example, the travel portal became a feasible and meaningful initiative. The travel portal is a digital version to the magazine but with increased usability.*

*Trends also have to do with what is missing, though. It is important to identify gaps and challenges. Ensuring that our tourism product is sustainable is one of the challenges faced by many Caribbean islands so the portal promotes intra-regional travel. If we are totally reliant on foreign markets we could find ourselves in difficult circumstances at any time. If we rely on each other, during slow periods or in general, we have increased the probability of creating sustainable tourism. Our portal also creates a more personal experience for visitors that tap into the culture and the people. It tells you the best music festival to visit, the best people to hang out. The millionaires do not want to sit down in a resort, they want to go trekking, diving with the locals; they want a cultural experience.*

*Everything is also based on what my team and I want to read. My team is a like-minded group of women. Editorial meetings are used to bounce ideas off of each other. So it is selfish in one sense as it is what we would want to read and want to see – bed and breakfasts, fish fries. For us the fabulous does not necessarily translate to 4-star or 5-star hotels or restaurants.*

The portal generates a social and welcoming atmosphere by presenting colorful, up-to-date events, offers and sites of the Caribbean. By combining a conversational blog format with practical reservation usability, a personal

and customer friendly platform ‘generates’ the Caribbean as a warm, service oriented destination. The art of the blog integrated into the portal becomes one that is in keeping with social media advantages -- it facilitates the sharing of the community space or community event on almost equal footing to that of the established touristic chain hotel. In putting the small businessman in conversation with the tourist, the exchange becomes one that is dialogic rather than simply a touristic gaze -- it is a conversation that is more ‘social’ rather than paternal.

But at what point does this conversation touch underserved youth or at risk communities? At what point does it become social in the sense of social welfare and social enterprise? Is it simply through the positive domino effect of generating income for small enterprises that touches communities that lives are changed? Beyond enhancing the access of the rich and famous to the riches of the Caribbean, this portal can plant seeds of enterprise within communities. Only one step further along this trajectory could embed alternative principles in the minds of youth that initiate long-term development for communities. Small programs at schools in these communities orchestrated by MACO could serve to explain how youth can work within their environments to start economic cooperatives augmenting the livelihood of those communities. These cooperatives would access the MACO portal that in turn would allow for a mutually beneficial relationship.

There are several pieces to this puzzle that should be taken into account and while this text is not inclusive of the gamut of considerations that may be necessary for such an entrepreneurial venture, one pertinent aspect is within the purview of the larger project of open access academic portals. Open access platforms create the opportunity for students to freely access learning material whether they attend a secondary or tertiary institution or not. Whereas journal articles and other archives come at a high cost to university libraries and are offered as part of the tuition package to students, open access platforms offer free content to readers. Learning materials can be compiled and offered online for the further development of students. Not only would their markets be in dialogue with these young entrepreneurs (through MACO portal for example) but

they would have the opportunity to engage in systematic learning, exchange, skill sharing and networking within communities of interest via open access platforms (that also include blog formats). Questions such as the following three, would be an example of the kinds of motivational and practical issues that can be addressed via such a platform.

*MB: What kinds of risks would you encourage young entrepreneurs to take and which would you recommend that they avoid?*

*NS: You cannot really avoid any kind of risk but at the same time if something does not work you do not want to be left with absolutely nothing. It is a tenuous balance. You do not want a negative \$200,000 in your account. You do have to put everything on the line though and not do anything mediocre.*

*There are several persons who I look at who are all risk takers. It is how they live their life not just in work. Felix Dennis, Maxim Magazine, PC World, The Weekly, which features the news around the world in one magazine. Those entrepreneurs are all risk takers. When Felix's magazine first came out he hired all of his sexy girl friends, [and] had them put on boots and 'pumpum' shorts during winter to distribute the magazine. You need to be daring, you need to network, know what is happening in the industry and rise above it. The industry was dying when I started according to my bank manager but I explained to her that I understood this but I knew why magazines were not working -- they looked like crap, the writing was just ok and on the whole they were boring. They needed to up the ante.*

The arts are not forgotten in the dynamic and potential being advocated here. Andrew Senior describes the connection between the Internet as portal or access to the market and the creative product. Connection is not only ascribed to the embedded agency of social media platforms but to the agency of individuals in activating such platforms to the economic benefit of themselves and their communities. Senior suggests that in order to construct a competitive and sustainable creative economy, the 'creative entrepreneur' is an essential element. "Creative entrepreneurs provide the bridge between creative talent and the market, what we might call 'creative consumers'.

They navigate the topography of the business world of creativity; spotting the talent, stimulating the market, negotiating the contracts, ensuring that the revenue comes in" (Senior 93). Producers, curators, agents and publishers can all be described as creative entrepreneurs -- they have always taken their slice of the fiscal pie. In thinking of social enterprise, that is, social benefit over financial gain, the work of another type of agent is at issue: the cultural entrepreneur. Cultural entrepreneurs are community-minded and seek to be "change agents who leverage cultural innovation to create thriving economic systems" (Aageson 93); that is, they do not seek their own ends but that of the community over themselves. According to Aageson, they have the power to shift the economic trajectory of an entire community (92).

The potential role of art in MACO and in Caribbean society goes beyond Soodeen's consideration of it presented in her responses below. Nevertheless the MACO platform opens a possibility for such cultural entrepreneurship.

MACO involves various forms of artistry-photography, layout and design, paintings and sculptures within homes and architecture. What do you think is the role of art in Caribbean society and how would you characterize its role in MACO?

We need to recognize, define ourselves or re-define ourselves as Caribbean people. A lot of that has to do with our art, our creativity, sculpture, music, our colors, our food -- food is art, creating a recipe is art. That is why people should want to come to the Caribbean for our art, for the stimulation of the senses on a deeper level. The number one form of revenue is tourism from Cuba all the way down the islands. So we need to get people to visit our islands and our arts could be a large part of this draw. Panama for example produces sand blast artwork. No tourist leaves the country without acquiring one of these. So re-defining who we are and the development of the creative industries is a large part of the puzzle.

Soodeen has begun to entertain the possibilities of a new Caribbean but such a project is manifold requiring the inter-relationship of and synergizing of various

communities including scholars, artists, communities and policy makers in addition to businesses who make corporate social responsibility a priority. The ways in which MACO's specific activities fit with this re-visioning of Caribbean self becomes apparent in Soodeen's response that follows, as her magazines seek to highlight projects that fit with her belief and agenda.

*MB: Your various publications intervene in Caribbean development in significant ways filling gaps in information and infrastructure. Some of them actually address specific causes for example the unsung hero. Firstly, what do you think are the missing elements in the Caribbean landscape that you would like to see others address? Secondly, what kinds of models – business, development models – can be examined in shaping the Caribbean that we live in?*

*NS: Missing elements... I believe that we need to re-define ourselves. That involves changing the way we think about ourselves. For example, I am tired of seeing the same thing in every other Caribbean restaurant – seared tuna with asparagus on mash. Our chefs need to understand that people are coming to the Caribbean to eat what is home grown. Chefs need to push the envelope. Sustainable farming is also something that deserves much greater attention – governments, restaurants and hotels need to get involved. Governments need to teach farmers how to fish, how to farm, how to invest.*

*I wanted to go to a fishing village in the BVI that has hundreds of islands but curiously there were no fishermen. Instead persons many persons work at restaurants importing fish. I've also found that prints of foreign artists are always sold in the Caribbean and I wonder why we have not invested in doing prints of the works of local artists.*

*I have never looked at it that way – as my magazines as addressing causes. I suppose I have always thought of them in terms of development orientation or promotion of social responsibility. People Barbados, for example, may feature a young person battling*

*a disease or overcoming some challenge. People Barbados addresses social topics in order to foster social responsibility. MACO also always has a green feature – it could be painting with environmentally friendly paints, saving our islands through recycling for example. I work with a like-minded editorial team. They are socially conscious and health conscious.*

### **'Alternatives' to COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST**

Communities of interest are understood as coming together not based on hierarchy or strictly along the lines of existing social networks but around a common interest. These communities thus encompass a cross-section of classes and groups but are still held together by features that Ismail Serageldin and Grootaert refer to as indicative of social capital: shared behavioral norms and a sense of belonging (Serageldin and Grootaert 2000: 44). This format has proved common and fertile especially supported through social media platforms, which makes synchronous and asynchronous communication between these varied classes possible. But perhaps it is 'communities of value' as well as communities of interest that are relevant to the forward movement of Caribbean peoples. Communities of value would synchronize based on what they value or their processes of valuing for example "identity as a process" much in the same way government ministries are equipped to address issues of "social development", "cultural diversity", "sustainability" or "Works and transport" for example. Members would not possess the same skill set but rather the same objective that must be supported by a diverse array of skill sets. Character and attitude and faith (as mentioned above) have much to do with the plausibility of 'communities of value' and what they might accomplish. Such character development has been the result of adversity for Soodeen but adversity has left the door open for key foundations necessary to the development of 'communities of value' -- an open door policy,



accessibility and friendship without or despite hierarchy. The following segment of my interview with Soodeen highlights these qualities.

*MB: One of the things that I found surprising about you is your accessibility and your willingness to help. What has birthed this attitude?*

*NS: When I was starting MACO, I approached many persons for help. I was able to get an audience with significant companies and well-positioned individuals but there was a catch if they were willing to assist. They always wanted a part of the company. No one had a heart to give anything for free and so it was a struggle for me. This is the mentality that keeps Trinidad from developing at the pace that it should. If we develop competition in our field, it helps us all to rise to a new level. So in this regard, I promised myself that I would be different. I would be accessible, open, helpful and not ask for anything in return. I welcome the growth that new innovative players in the marketplace can bring.*

*MB: What have been your favorite photo shoots for your magazines and why do they stand out in your mind?*

*NS: I think my favorite and most memorable photo shoot was in Cuba because there were three or four girls bopping around Cuba. Nothing was pre-planned. We went there on a whim and tried to figure out what to shoot on spot. It was not simply the images that we left with that made it special but the stories that we experienced. It was incredible fun.*

Finally, in teaching entrepreneurship, one would be remiss in not discussing one of the critical challenges that comes with the domain -- balance. It is perhaps an issue that many entrepreneurs struggle with throughout their careers and one to which there is no one, fixed or correct approach.

*MB: In a recent interview, you spoke about the need for balance, can you speak about this process of striving for balance with family life, self-care and career, do you think balance has different configurations depending on stage of life?*

*NS: To be very honest, before I had my son, Tej, I would do*

*speeches about being a female entrepreneur and I would say, “forget about balance; you need to be an entrepreneur. Just go for it”. But Tej has changed so much in my life. Now, I have no clue how to find that balance. I am just trying to figure it out. The nice thing about being a woman, we can do it all... Even though we don’t feel it... If you leave a man to do it, they would collapse or forget to feed the kids, forget to pick them up or wear socks that don’t match. I think you have to make a conscious decision to find balance; maybe put it down like an appointment – on Tues at 10:00 am: find some balance.*

This essay takes both a denotative but also a connotative and prescriptive approach by engaging in the philosophical underpinnings of Soodeen’s project as well as its unexplored potentialities. It has only begun to explore new ways of thinking of how we use the tools available to us within the Caribbean space in forging a path to productive and sustainable lifestyles and meaningful community engagement. Several aspects are posed as possibilities within a framework for this development including communities of value and faith toward the development of social enterprise models. Further and more in-depth case studies in this regard would alert us to whether these postulations can undergird replicable models for Caribbean development.

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# ALANNA LOCKWARD

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Entrevista con Mónica Ferreras”

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“...-la vida, cuándo fue de veras nuestra?, cuándo somos de veras lo que somos?

Bien mirado no somos, nunca somos  
a solas sino vértigo y vacío,  
muecas en el espejo, horror y vómito,  
nunca la vida es nuestra, es de los otros,  
la vida no es de nadie, todos somos  
la vida -pan de sol para los otros,  
los otros todos que nosotros somos-,  
soy otro cuando soy, los actos míos  
son más míos si son también de todos,  
para que pueda ser he de ser otro,  
salir de mí, buscarme entre los otros,  
los otros que no son si yo no existo,  
los otros que me dan plena existencia,  
no soy, no hay yo, siempre somos nosotros,  
la vida es otra, siempre allá, más lejos,  
fuera de ti, de mí, siempre horizonte...”

*Octavio Paz*

Video: El Del Pikete - <http://vimeo.com/52473373>

De la mano de una combinatoria dialógica ancestral, Mónica Ferreras ha creado un cuerpo de trabajo excepcional en las artes visuales de República Dominicana. Este carácter único se articula de manera contundente en sus actuales tótems urbanos. La ritualidad que define sus esculturas e instalaciones, inauguradas en su ya legendario “Obelisco de Casabe” (1996) se plasma en el minimalismo de las esculturas dialógicas que ha elaborado en consonancia, y nunca mejor dicho, con jóvenes de barrios marginados de Santo Domingo. Las bandas sonoras que ha producido en colaboración con los raperos de “Capotillo Nasty Club” van en camino de convertirse en un verdadero fenómeno discográfico. Y hay que recordar que la industria local favorece desde hace décadas la producción musical autosuficiente, como por ejemplo, la bachata, un caso único en el Caribe y América Latina, con excepción de Brasil, donde también la industria local prescinde de los parámetros y logísticas externas para alcanzar el éxito comercial.

Sin embargo, la obra de Mónica Ferreras, lejos de buscar la inmediatez del aplauso y la remuneración metálica se ha mantenido rigurosamente en el ámbito de la investigación psicológica, junguiana, para ser más específicos, sociológica, formal, matérica y ahora, como sabemos, musical también. En su sentido más amplio, estas pesquisas nos conciernen a todas y todos. Hay una resonancia con los muertos, que como nos explica más abajo, paradójicamente están bien vivos; y con los vivos que duermen el sueño de un consumismo exacerbado como el que permea actualmente a la sociedad dominicana.

Un humanismo liberador se percibe en las llamadas de atención de obras como “El del pikete” (2011), un videoarte donde un títere caricaturiza la ostentación y el despilfarro de pobres, ricos y casi ricos. El fenómeno



diaspórico de las remesas ha creado una generación indiferente al esfuerzo de quien trabaja hasta la extenuación para mantenerlos. Reflexiones similares se encuentran en obras como, “In You We Trust”, (2007) de Ana Urquilla (San Salvador, 1979), consistente en hamacas con este lema “incrustado” en los bordes. La parálisis resultante de estas condiciones existenciales precarias y artificiales, además del malgasto (o derroche), podrían interpretarse también como hilo conductor o leit-motif que trasciende todas las clases sociales. Con esta indiferencia hacia el bien común, hacia metas conjuntas como grupos sociales, comulgan por igual los estratos e instituciones de todo género, con contadísimas excepciones.

Mónica Ferreras plantea sus interrogantes sobre esta miseria humana en las voces mismas de los protagonistas de un drama translocal y diaspórico. El resultado de su cuestionario, en su dimensión urbana, se organiza en un sentido escultórico, es decir, tridimensional: probando-viendo-escuchando, estas realidades. Es esta una puesta en escena donde la teatralidad del videoarte, la ritualidad totémica de la escultura y la sonoridad atmosférica de la pintura se intercambian fluidamente la producción de sentido. La artista devela el misterio del ser en sintonía con la individualidad íntima y en resonancia como nos recuerda Octavio Paz, “...[con] los otros que no son si yo no existo...”.

P. En tu obra reciente hay una sistemática praxis dialógica. Me recuerda el “OM” colectivo que como participantes de tu performance en la apertura de tu individual durante la IV Bienal del Caribe (2001), nos invitaste a entonar. ¿Estás buscando esa resonancia mística o se trata de un experimento artístico-social?

R. Es más bien un experimento artístico social porque mi intención con este cuerpo de trabajo es reflejar cómo nos percibimos pero tomando como punto de partida la propia voz de los habitantes de los barrios. Es vernos desde el mar hacia adentro. El mar como frontera, como muro y ver qué pasa aquí adentro, con el contenido. El tótem por definición es un elemento de diferenciación de una tribu con respecto a otra. Aunque puede tener un componente místico y de protección, primordialmente es un símbolo, un logo, un apellido para la tribu. Entonces lo que hice fue transformar esa simbología a nuestra



realidad barrial. Nuestros barrios tienen su identidad propia, les gusta diferenciarse de los barrios colindantes, tienen su narrativa específica. Hice una encuesta sencilla preguntándole, a los jóvenes sobre todo, cómo ellos se describirían, las cosas buenas que ellos entienden que tienen y qué les distingue de otros barrios.

P. La liturgia totémica desde el Obelisco de Casabe (1996), ese ánimo contemplativo que buscas en tu audiencia se reproduce en esta obra reciente. A nivel matérico, ¿pueden compararse o existe otro parámetro más adecuado para analizar estas convergencias?

R. Pienso que sí se conectan a través de los materiales que elijo pero sobre todo en la forma en que los organizo. Ese aspecto formal sobrio, contemplativo, que ha caracterizado muchas de mis obras siento que aporta a su lectura. Me gusta la sencillez, no me gustan los ruidos ni visuales ni auditivos. Es mi manera de inducir al público a reflexionar porque se encuentran delante de una obra que sugiere cosas pero a la vez hay que descubrir muchas otras que están ahí pero exigen

una atención especial.

P. Has realizado obra dialógica con nuestras culturas ancestrales, ¿Qué se siente hablar con los muertos? ¿Cómo palpitan estos diálogos en tu obra actual?

R. Hablar con los muertos es saludable porque ellos son los guardianes de diferentes tipos de sabiduría. Los muertos “buenos” nos aportan el orgullo de ser, de pertenecer, de que se puede. Son la base de lo que somos. Los muertos “malos” nos recuerdan el potencial destructivo que tenemos y me señalan hacia donde no quiero ir. Los muertos en sentido simbólico son nuestra conciencia ancestral. Forman parte de nuestro inconsciente colectivo, de nuestro ADN. Creo que hay una fuente infinita de aprendizaje cuando podemos hacer contacto con esas fuerzas que paradójicamente están vivas. Curación, crecimiento, perdón, impulso creativo para la vida, humildad, alegría, redención, en fin, innumerables asuntos dignos de tener en cuenta.

Estos diálogos están presentes a veces de manera muy clara como en la exposición “Mayaní Makaná” (1996) y otras más sutilmente como en la pieza “Totem para Capotillo” (2011). Esos diálogos han sido vitales para la realización de mi trabajo, se sienten en la atmósfera misma que desprenden las obras. Los elementos: casabe, jabón de cuaba, cascabeles, neumáticos, sonidos, madera, hierro, cuerdas con los colores patrios y demás contribuyen a plasmar esta atmósfera.

P. Tu camino junguiano es muy reconocible tanto en los laberintos de tus pinturas como en la instalación con los jabones que realizaste en el X-Teresa Arte Actual (2000). Sin embargo la sexualidad brilla por su ausencia en tu obra. Me intriga esta privacidad extrema conociendo tu incisividad crítica, en especial respecto de los tabúes sociales de la sociedad dominicana.

R. Excelente pregunta y reflexión. No me había percatado. Honestamente no sé a qué se debe eso, porque como bien dices, soy totalmente abierta con mi orientación sexual y en momentos de mi vida me he visto ligada a movimientos que luchan por los derechos de nuestra comunidad GLBT. Tendría que analizar esto con más profundidad, y créeme que lo haré. Pero de entrada, quizás el mismo hecho de que estoy en paz con ese aspecto de mi vida hace que no sea tema de resabio, por lo menos hasta hoy. Se me ocurre pensar que



lo no resuelto o a medio término por resolver; lo que está ahí y no puedo ver pero quiere salir, así como también las inconformidades que sí puedo ver son la fuente de inspiración para mi obra.

P. Tus escenografías teatrales, ¿Cómo se infiltran en tus videoartes, y viceversa?

R. Amo el teatro y muchos de mis videoartes tienen formalmente una estructura teatral como “CAE” (2005), “Directrices” (2005) y más recientemente “El del Pikete” que realicé con un títere como único protagonista. Es más bien que mis escenografías se infiltran en mis videos. Siento que formalmente hay una fuerza enorme en el lenguaje teatral que he aprovechado a mi favor: es claro, estructurado, cada movimiento tiene un porqué. Ese cuidado en los movimientos aporta a la lectura de la obra y me permite lograr una obra clara y limpia, según sea mi propósito.

P. Y eso de componer música, ¿desde cuándo; debemos prepararnos para otro fenómeno Rita Indiana, que por cierto hizo su debut en videoarte como personaje de tu videoarte “Directrices”?

R. ¡Nada por el estilo de Rita Indiana! Escribir siempre me ha gustado y hace varios años compuse varias canciones. Luego un día, creando uno de mis videoartes, me di cuenta de que necesitaba para la banda sonora algo especial que

se integrara totalmente con lo visual. Entonces, buscando y buscando algo que se adaptara, me llegó la idea de que yo misma podía hacer las letras de las canciones y buscar quién las interpretara y también un arreglista. Me puse en marcha y conseguí un arreglista muy bueno, a quien conocí en la producción “El 28”, del Teatro Guloya, donde estuve a cargo de la escenografía. Me había gustado el trabajo que hizo como musicalizador de esta obra, hablamos y como se dice aquí: “Fuego a la lata”. Luego coincidió que trabajando en Capotillo, haciendo las entrevistas, conocí a dos chicos que son los raperos “Capotillo Nasty Club” y me gustó lo que hacían, los puse de intérpretes e hicieron un trabajo buenísimo. Esta experiencia fue super enriquecedora y excitante para mí. Gustarón muchísimo las tres canciones que producimos y tenemos planes de lanzar un CD con ocho canciones. Actualmente buscamos financiamiento para este proyecto.

P. ¿Cómo conectas en tu obra la iconografía urbana caribeña a través de la música?

R. En los tres últimos videos que realice el año pasado hay una conexión bien clara a través del rap en versión urbana dominicana. Esos chicos de “Capotillo Nasty Club” son representantes fieles del movimiento urbano musical de nuestro país. También conceptual y formalmente hay una relación totalmente vinculada al movimiento urbano dominicano: ¿“Qué e lo k se mueve y no c empegota”?

P. Te invito a co-fundar conmigo un museo feminista multidimensional: “Gineceo. Mujer y Creación Dominicana”. Hay artistas, arquitectas, merengueras, periodistas, fashionistas, editoras y escritoras, también algunos hombres excepcionales que han dignificado a la mujer en su obra pueden entrar a la colección. Mi lista empieza con Celeste Woss y Gil, Abigail Mejía, Soraya Aracena, Sonia Pié, Ana Mitila Lora, Josefina Báez, Lourdes Periche, Mónica Ferreras, Charo Oquet, Milly Quezada, Jenny Vázquez, Raúl Recio y Jorge Pineda. ¿Y la tuya?

R. En mi lista estarían: Marilí Gallardo, Elvira Taveras, Carlota Carretero, Nuria Piera, Nereyda Rodríguez, Sonia Silvestre, Xiomara Fortuna, Soucy de Pellerano, Mamá Tingó, Elenita Santos y muchas otras.

ENGLISH VERSION

<http://arteporexcelencias.com/en/articles/2012-12-07/set-can-fire-interview-monica-ferreras.html>

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# ALANNA LOCKWARD

*This interview was first published by “Arte por Excelencias”, Issue 16*

“Set the Can on Fire”

Interview with Mónica Ferreras”

ENGLISH VERSION

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“...life, when was it really ours?, when are we really what we are?

all things considered we are not, we never are,

alone, but vertigo and void,

grimaces in the mirror, horror and vomit,

never is life ours, it is others’

life is no one’s, we all are

life –sun bread for the others,

all the others that we are-,

I am another when I am, my acts

are more my own if they are also everyone’s,

for me to be I must be another,

to leave myself, to look for me among the others,

the others that are not if I do not exist,

the others who give me full existence,

I am not, there is no me, it is always us,

It is another life, always there, farther,

Out of you, of me, always a horizon...”

– Octavio Paz

By the hand of an ancestral dialogical combination, Mónica Ferreras has created an exceptional body of work in the visual arts in the Dominican Republic. This unique character is overwhelmingly articulated in the current urban totems. The ritualism that defines her sculptures and installations, inaugurated in her already legendary *Obelisco de Casabe* (Cassava Obelisk) (1996), is expressed in the minimalism of the dialogical sculptures she has elaborated in keeping with, and never better said, the young people from marginalized neighborhoods in Santo Domingo. The sound tracks she has produced in collaboration with the rappers from “Capotillo Nasty Club” are on their way to becoming a truly discographical phenomenon. And we must remember that the local industry has been favoring for decades now, the self-sufficient musical production, the bachata for instance, a unique case in the Caribbean and Latin America, with the exception of Brazil, where the local industry also disregards the parameters and external logistics to reach commercial success.

However, the work by Mónica Ferreras, far from seeking the immediacy of the applause and cash remuneration, has rigorously kept to the area of psychological research, Jungian, to be more specific, sociological, formal, material and now, as we know, also musical research. In their widest sense, these inquiries concern us all. There is a resonance with the dead, that, as she explains to us below, are paradoxically very much alive; and with the living, which sleep the dream of an exacerbated consumerism like the one that currently permeates the Dominican society.

A liberating humanism is perceived in the calls of attention of artworks like *El del pikete* (2011), a video art where a puppet caricatures ostentation and waste by the poor, the rich and the almost rich. The diasporic phenomenon of the remittances has created a generation indifferent to the effort of those who work until exhaustion to support them. Similar reflections are found in artworks like *In You We Trust*, (2007) by Ana Urquilla (San Salvador, 1979), consisting of hammocks with this motto “set” in the edges. The resultant paralysis of these precarious and artificial existential conditions, besides the squander (or waste), could be interpreted also as a

thread or leitmotif that transcends all social classes. On this indifference towards the common good, towards joint aims as social groups, the strata and institutions of all kinds, with very few exceptions, equally agree.

Mónica Ferreras raises her questions over this human misery in the very voices of the protagonists of a trans-local and diasporic drama. The result of her questionnaire, in its urban dimension, is organized in a sculptural sense, that is, a three-dimensional one: trying-seeing-listening to these realities. This is a production where the theatricality of the video art, the totemic ritualism of sculpture and the atmospheric sonority of painting smoothly exchange the making of sense. The artist uncovers the mystery of the being in tune with the intimate individuality and in resonance, as Octavio Paz reminds us, “... [with] the others that are not if I do not exist...”.

*In your recent work there is a systematic dialogical praxis. It reminds me of the collective “om” you invited us to intone as participants in the performance at the opening of your solo exhibition during the IV Caribbean Biennale (2001). Are you trying to find that mystic resonance or is it about an artistic-social experiment?*

*It is rather an artistic social experiment because my intention with this body of work is to reflect how we perceive ourselves, but taking as starting point the very own voice of the inhabitants in the neighborhoods. It is about seeing ourselves from the sea to the inside. The sea as a frontier, as a wall; and then seeing what happens in here, with the contents. The totem by definition is an element of differentiation of one tribe with respect to another one. Although it may have a mystical and protective component, it is fundamentally a symbol, a logo, a surname for the tribe. So I transformed that symbology into our neighboring reality. Our neighborhoods have an identity of their own, they like to differentiate from the adjacent neighborhoods, they have their specific narrative. I made a simple survey asking young people above all, how they would describe themselves, the good things they understand they have, and what distinguishes them from other neighborhoods.*

*The totemic liturgy from Obelisco de Casabe*

(1996), that contemplative mood you seek in your audience, is reproduced in this recent work. To a material level, can they be compared or is there another more suitable parameter to analyze these convergences?

I think they can, they are connected through the materials I choose, but above all, in the way in which I organize them. I feel that formal, sober aspect, contemplative, that has characterized many of my works, adds to their reading. I like simplicity; I do not like either visual or auditory noises. It is my way of inducing the audience to reflect, because they find themselves in front of an artwork that suggests things, but at the same time, many other things that are there are to be discovered, though they demand special attention.

You have made a dialogical work with our ancestral cultures. How does it feel to talk to the dead? How do these dialogues palpitate in your current work?

To talk to the dead is salutary because they are the guardians of different types of wisdom. The “good” dead bring us the pride of being, of belonging, of the “it can be done”. They are the basis of what we are. The “bad” dead remind us of the destructive potential we have and point out to me towards where I do not want to go. The dead in a symbolic sense are our ancestral conscience. They are part of our collective unconscious, of our DNA. I believe there is an infinite source of learning when we can make contact with these forces that, paradoxically, are alive. Healing, growth, forgiveness, creative impulse for life, humbleness, joy, redemption, all in all, innumerable issues that are worth taking into account.

These dialogues are present sometimes in a very clear way, as in the exhibition *Mayaní Makaná* (1996), and some others more subtly, as in the piece *Totem para Capotillo* (*Totem for Capotillo*) (2011). Those dialogues have been vital to carry out my work; they are felt in the very same atmosphere the artworks give off. The elements: cassava, cuaba soap, bells, tires, sounds, wood, iron, ropes with the national colors and the like, contribute to give expression to this atmosphere.

Your Jungian path is quite recognizable both in the labyrinths of your paintings and in the installation with soaps you made at the *X-Teresa Arte Actual* (*Current Art X-Teresa*) (2000). Nevertheless, there is a distinct lack of sexuality in your work. I am intrigued by this extreme privacy knowing

your critical incisiveness, especially with respect to the social taboos in the Dominican society.

An excellent question and reflection; I had not noticed. Honestly, I do not know why that is, because as you very well say, I am totally open with my sexual orientation and in times in my life I have seen myself bound to movements that fight for the rights of our LGBT community. I would have to analyze this in more depth, and believe me I will. But for a start, maybe the fact itself that I am at peace with this aspect of my life makes it not an issue for aftertastes, at least not until today. It occurs to me that what is not solved or is about halfway to be solved; what is there and I cannot see but it wants to come out, as well as the inconformities that I can indeed see, are the source of inspiration for my work.

Your stage sets, how do they infiltrate into your video arts and vice versa?

I love theater and many of my video arts formally have a stage structure like *CAE* (2005), *Directrices* (2005) and more recently *El del Pikete*, which I made with a puppet as unique protagonist. It is rather that my set designs infiltrate into my videos. I feel that formally there is an enormous force in theatrical language of which I have taken advantage of in my favor: it is clear, structured, every movement has a why. That attention to movements adds to the reading of the artwork, and it allows me to achieve a clear and clean piece, according to what my purpose is.

And that about composing music, since when? Should we prepare ourselves for another Rita Indiana phenomenon, who by the way made her debut in video art as a character in your video art *Directrices*?

Nothing of the sort of Rita Indiana! I have always liked to write and several years ago I composed several songs. Then one day, creating one of my video arts, I realized I needed something special for the soundtrack that could totally integrate into the visual aspect. Then, searching and searching for something that could adapt to it, the idea came to me that I myself could do the lyrics of the songs and find someone to interpret them and also an arranger. I set out to it and got a very good arranger, whom I met in the production of *El 28* (*The 28th*) by the *Guyola Theater*, where I was in charge of the scenography. I had liked the work he did in the

musicalization for this play, we talked, and as we say around here: “set the can on fire”. Then it coincided that working in Capotillo, making the interviews, I met two boys that are the rappers “Capotillo Nasty Club” and I liked what they did, I made them the interpreters and they did a very good job. This experience was super enriching and exciting for me. People liked a lot the three songs we produced and we have plans to cut a CD with eight songs. We are currently looking for funding for this project.

*How do you connect in your work the Caribbean urban iconography through music?*

*In the last three videos I made last year there is a very clear connection through rap in a Dominican urban version. Those boys from “Capotillo Nasty Club” are faithful representatives of the musical urban movement in our country. Also conceptually and formally there is a totally connected relation: ¿“Qué e’ lo que se mueve y no c’empogota?” (What moves and does not get sticky?)*

*I invite you to cofound with me a multidimensional feminist museum: “Gineceo. Mujer y Creación Dominicana”. (Ginoecy. Woman and Dominican Creation). There are female artists, architects, merengue singers, journalists, fashionists, editors and writers; also some exceptional men that have dignified women in their work can enter the collection. My list starts with Celeste Woss y Gil, Abigaíl Mejía, Soraya Aracena, Sonia Pié, Ana Mitila Lora, Josefina Báez, Lourdes Periche, Mónica Ferreras, Milly Quezada, Jenny Vázquez, Raúl Recio and Jorge Pineda. And yours?*

*In my list there would be: Marilí Gallardo, Elvira Taveras, Carlota Carretero, Nuria Piera, Nereyda Rodríguez, Sonia Silvestre, Xiomara Fortuna, Soucy de Pellerano, Mamá Tingó, Elenita Santos and many others.*

# VISUAL ESSAYS



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

*The first seven of these artists presented represent components of a visual essay compiled by cover curator Annalee Davis. The final four artists are individual submissions.*

# ANNALEE DAVIS

***“Logic will get you from A to B.  
Imagination will take you everywhere.”***

– Albert Einstein

# NEW MEDIA AND IMAGINATION ENTER THE PUBLIC SPACE

VIA STARMAN,  
A LONG NECKED  
SWAN AND  
SANDCASTLES  
ON THE STREET

This suite of images includes work by creatives working out of Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago. Ewan Atkinson, Versia Harris, Malaika Brooks-Smith-Lowe, DJ Afifa, Rodell Warner, Alicia Milne and Luis Vasquez La Roche. They are creatives who function within the domain of “new media” or “new genre” art, working with new media technologies such as digital art, animation, computer graphics and interactive art, among others. Although their use of new technology is central to the ways in which they work, their work does not conform to a set of prescriptive rules that must be adhered to in order for the works to qualify as “new media” or “new genre” art. The excitement is in the unexpected ways in which new media is being used to offer all kinds of possibilities for creatives to respond to our ambiguous realities.

Some of the artists in this selection make works that are often ephemeral, lasting only for a short period of time and existing thereafter only through its documentation. At other times, the work may require audience participation for completion or might be placed in a public space for wider access – offering ownership to a general audience who may lay claim to the work and its ideas.

The new media art platform is rich with possibilities, supporting cross-fertilization among creatives who collaborate in what may often operate like a cultural laboratory. Given the lack of contemporary gallery spaces to display works made by contemporary Caribbean based creatives, new media art offers viable options for artists to engage with alternate spaces and a growing critical audience hungry for something fresh.

Ewan Atkinson’s fictional character, ‘Starman’, is searching for a location to construct his wigwam to wind up the moon. Atkinson plasters Starman’s

body across Lord Nelson's statue, Bridgetown's parliament buildings, the observatory, across the fence of a sugar factory, an abandoned theatre and the exterior wall of a home. Starman soars, poses and brandishes a telescope, searching for a place to belong. Who is this peculiar character dressed in a playful all in one, hooded, bodysuit and why is he in our country? What is his relationship to the public space, and how dare he play himself against our serious monuments?

Versia Harris' animation also uses fantasy as a way to understand self-perception and the way in which our sense of self has been shaped by externalities. References to the omnipresence of Western media and to Walt Disney princess characters in particular, inform her exploration. Versia's unusually long-necked swan, cycles through a road flanked by rolling fields of sugar cane and wild grasses. Part of a short video still developing, these digital stills are part of a growing body of hand drawn animations attempting to reckon with self-confidence as a young woman often forced to measure herself against unrealistic standards.

Malaika Brooks-Smith-Lowe's 'Off Track, Moving Forward' is a 4:30 second triple split screen video short - a collaborative piece between herself and actor Varia Williams. The work 'poses questions about our internal landscapes as we navigate this rushing stream of forward motion.' Her contemplative work brings together a swirling palm

frond reminiscent of alveoli (think breathing) and the brain (think thinking); a mahogany pod being carefully put back together and a young woman forced to reckon with her self from within a confined space at the end of a long white corridor. The contemplative work begs the viewer to draw associations between simultaneously shifting imagery. The meditative gesture of rebuilding the pod begs us to quiet the mind while at the same time being challenged to process the many thoughts racing through it every second. The rapid and constant absorption of data, the desire to advance, to be ambitious and successful in a contemporary capitalist driven society; seemingly contradicts the need to be still or introspective as a means of self-preservation.

Pinky and Emigrante are a collaborative duo working in Trinidad curating encounters in the streets, gifting their practice to all who encounter it – whether an apparent sand castle on a sidewalk, zines sent through the postal service, pastings plastered on poles or walls in the streets, street installations, public exhibitions and murals – P&E constantly force meetings between the maker and the public using the image as the conduit for the encounter. Video works impose flashing, geometric designs on to constantly flickering, shifting landscapes.

Pushing this encounter further, DJ Afifa Anzinga and Rodell Warner presented Binary Solved

# ANNALEE DAVIS

at the NLS in Jamaica over the course of two nights in February. Audience participation was critical to the realization of the work, the result of a 48-hour residency. Members of the audience wore black clothing the first night, becoming the figure for the work; followed the second night by wearing all white to function as the ground for the projections. Visual artist, Rodell worked with image while performance artist, DJ Afifa, worked with sound. Their collaborative temporal work had a 360 degree span, blending the outdoor space and the audience with sound and images to produce a sense of pure integration, experienced in the moment.

These creatives use the new media genre to project their creative imagination into/onto the civic arena, encouraging us all to visualise our public spaces differently. These works, by their very nature, suggest fleeting, transitory spaces not grounded in anything certain or clear. It is as though we are all being forced to navigate our way through an uncertain terrain – on our bicycle, with a telescope, in our mind. Although these artists reflect a sense of precariousness inherent

in these times, their imagery calls upon us to conceive another possibility. We are working in a region still deep in economic recession with no immediate signs of abating, compounded by crises of leadership. Since we cannot find logic in much of what our 'leaders' are doing and we don't seem to be moving from A to B....let's use our imagination to secure another vision for ourselves and see where it may take us.

# EWAN ATKINSON

## ***About the Artist:***

Ewan Atkinson was born in Barbados in 1975 and received a BFA from the Atlanta College of Art in 1998. He has exhibited in regional and international exhibitions of Caribbean contemporary art, including most recently The 2010 Liverpool Biennial, "Wrestling with the image: Caribbean Interventions" at the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington DC, and "Infinite Islands" at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Atkinson has taught in the BFA program at the Barbados Community College for over a decade and also works as a freelance illustrator and designer.

Website: <http://www.ewanatkinson.com>



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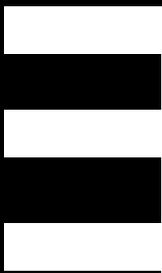






Starman was created as part of the ongoing “Neighbourhood” project that started with the fiction exhibition in 2007. When I was a child I would regularly interrupt my father to ask him what he was doing. He would reply that he was “building a wigwam to wind-up the moon.”

This confounding phrase became the key to Starman’s mission. He was to search for a place to build his own wigwam to wind-up the moon. His quest investigates the role of the “outsider” in a tight-knit community and questions the purpose of structure as monument or a symbol of belonging, claiming space. Projecting various images of the character onto Barbadian structures both recognisable and mundane became a way to map personal connections to physical spaces. Sliding along a continuum that lies between fantasy and reality, significance becomes ambiguous.



# VERSI A HARRIS





#### Riding Swan Series:

Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

#### Artist Statement

"My work explores the fantasies and experiences of an original character. This character is introduced to Walt Disney animations and consequently layers what she desires from these animations onto her life, especially her physical self. Her perception of and her relationship with her world changes, as she compares her reality and the fantasy of Disney Animated stories. She struggles with her perception of self as she in complete contrast of the Disney princess. Sparked by my interest in storytelling, I created the character and story to generate a comparison between Walt Disney iconography and her reality. Despite the fabricated narrative, I address issues that intrigue me such as how one can be influenced by media and the process of comparing oneself to another of unrealistic standards."



### **About the Artist:**

Versia Harris is a Barbadian artist living and working in Weston, St. James. She graduated from the Barbados Community College BFA in Studio Art programme in 2012, with an award from The Leslie's Legacy Foundation for the most promising student, and will be taking up a residency at the Vermont Studio Center in March 2013. She created a narrative of an original character to address the perceptions of self, as it compares its image with unrealistic standards. Her primary media includes pen and watercolour on paper. She also uses Adobe Photoshop to manipulate her drawings and create animations.

Website: <http://versiaabeda.tumblr.com/>





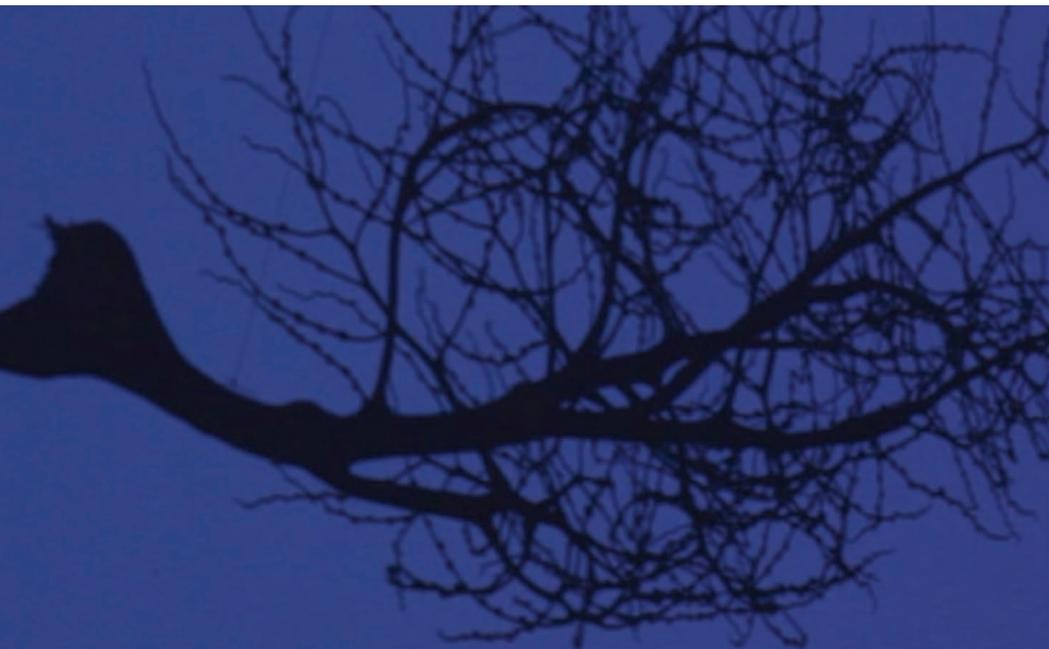


“Off Track, Moving Forward” Video - 4:30 seconds

### Artist Statement

“Within the context of a global culture of “progress,” this video piece (4:30 sec) poses questions about our internal landscapes, as we navigate this rushing stream of forward motion. In the midst of it all, we often find ourselves spinning in whirlpools of our own thinking: caught up in our past experiences and our potential future ones. What are the repercussions of denying ourselves the opportunity to cultivate a sense of completeness? How do we find satisfaction within the smallest moment, before running off on a trail of other thoughts?”

We are ‘doing’ all the time, often even when we think we are not. We are constantly consuming materials, ideas, other people and their perceptions, with a skilful ease. So ‘connected’ that it becomes easy to confuse solitude with loneliness or boredom. Even in the company of others we often fall under the deadening weight of our doubts, fear and anxiety. We keep ourselves occupied, thinking, but as we feel the familiar murkiness of negativity, what happens when we allow ourselves to pause, become aware and just sit with whatever arises... What are the possibilities then?”





### **About the Artist:**

Malaika Brooks-Smith-Lowe was born in Grenada just four years after the end of the People's Revolution. She is currently working on a Master's thesis in Cultural Studies, which focuses on memory and the aftermath of the Revo and US invasion, through the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago. Malaika is a Mellon Mays Fellow who received her BA in Studio Art, with a focus on digital photography and video, from Smith College, Massachusetts, USA. She sees the process of creating and engaging with artistic production and art based community development as avenues for radical social change. Website: <http://www.malaikabsl.com>



# MALAIKA

## BROOKS SMITH LOWE



# RODELL WARNER

# & DJ AFIFA

Rodell Warner and DJ Afifa collaborated to create an interactive sound art installation for the NLS 48 Hour Residency. Warner and Afifa use the two-day format of the residency, to play with and attempt to blow perceived dichotomies of existence. Binary Solved is an undertaking by the two artists to link the real with the imagined, the other with the self, the digital with natural, and, ultimately, existence with freedom. Each night of the residency performance functions as a counterpoint/contrast to the other.

The project consists of a fusion of projected moving images with sound that are installed to encompass a 360-degree space of the outdoors through which audience members traverse. Against a pre-existing backdrop the entire audience will wear all-black (on which the projected images cannot show), or all-white (on which the projected images do show), either carving







out their own body image in the artwork or conversely becoming one with the projection respectively. *Binary Solved* first examines how the world is understood by drawing its conceit from the formal components of designing a work of art— using a ground (the surface on which the image rests) and the figure (the image that rests on this surface)— to create an experience that challenges the splintering of the two.

The first night of *Binary Solved* took place on Friday, February 1 at 7:30 p.m. On this night audience members wore all-black, functioning as the figure for the complete artwork. The second intervention took place on Saturday, February 2 at 7:30 p.m. during which audience members wore all-white functioning as the ground.

This art piece is a unique and exciting step for contemporary art in Jamaica in the cross-disciplinary collaboration of visual artist Rodell Warner, with sound and performance artists DJ Afifa to create an artwork that requires audience participation for its completion. The aesthetic of the resulting project is one that embraces and merges digital art into the realm of public performance by audience and artist. Ephemeral in nature the project is grounded in immediate sensorial experience and accessibility.

### ***About the Artist:***

DJ Afifa is a Jamaican sound and performance artist who investigates the transformative nature of sound on our lived experiences and environment. Her sound performances are typically accompanied by political text-based art and other visual elements that encourage the audience to filter the music she plays. She regularly performs at alternative art spaces as well as more established venues such as the National Gallery of Jamaica. She is co-founder of SO((U))L, a program that creates alternative community spaces promoting the discovery and exploration of music, art, culture, social justice, equality and self-reliance.





### ***About the Artist:***

Rodell Warner is a Trinidadian artist whose works are best described as stations of crystallisation along a journey, perpetually in progress, characterised by the resolution of binaries / realisation of oneness. His most recent works bridge various digital media and elements of performance to turn illustrations of and musings on oneness into sharable real world situations. Recently Warner has exhibited at NIROX Projects at Arts on Main in Johannesburg; The CAG[e] Gallery at Edna Manley College, Kingston; Art Museum of the Americas, Washington, DC; Alice Yard, Port of Spain; The Beaver, Toronto; and The Internet.

Website: <http://www.rodellwarner.com>

**RODELL  
WARNER**



# PINKY & EMIGRANTE



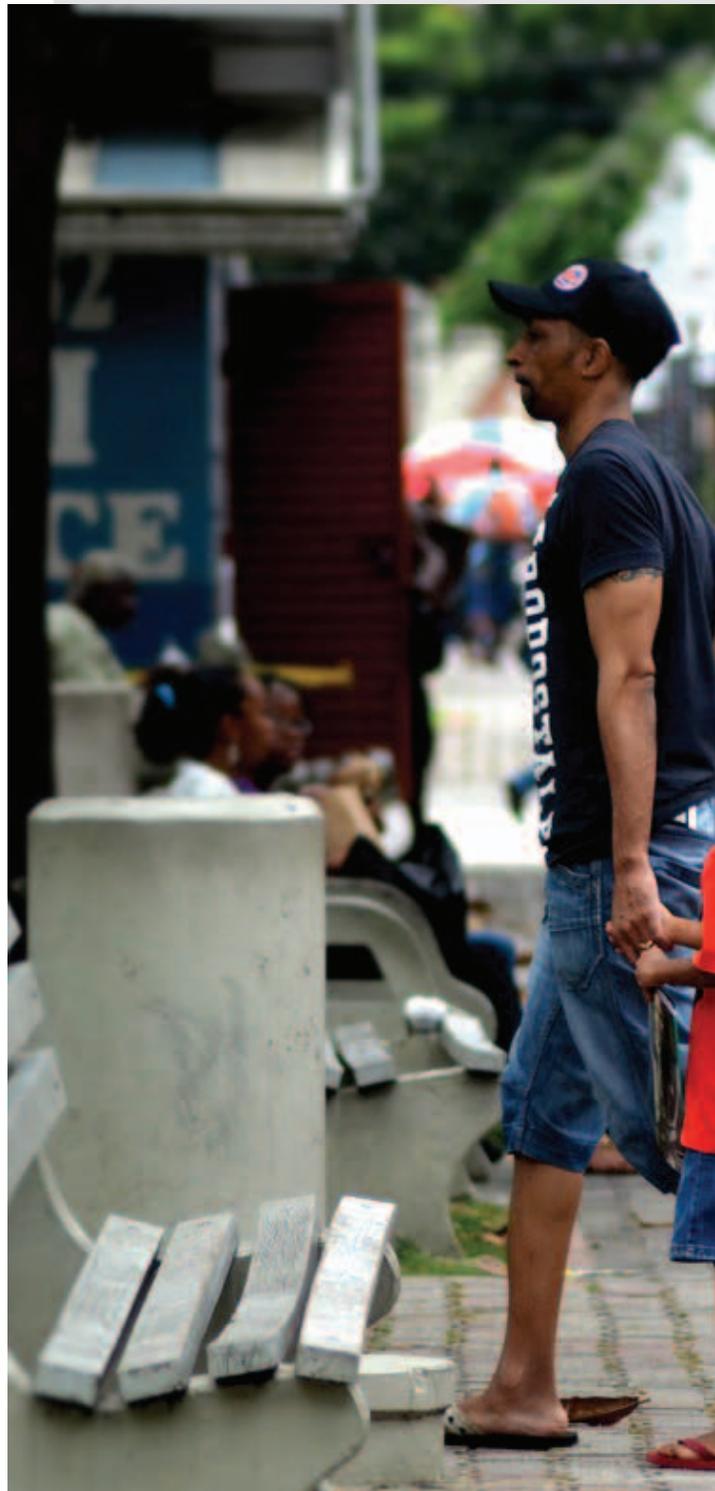
P & E section- *Urban Heartbeat Mural*, Port of Spain. Emulsion & spray paint, 2012. Photo by Luis Vasquez de la Roche

Visual artists, Luis Vasquez La Roche and Alicia Milne have been producing work together in the public space in Trinidad since 2011. Their tag, P&E, meaning Pinky & Emigrante, is a playful reference to their shared interests in ideas of home and perception. While they both maintain individual artistic practices, they also collaborate in creating street installations and pastings, zines, exhibitions and murals. They have participated in the Trinidad leg of the Urban Heartbeat mural project in the Queen's Park Savannah (March 2012) and were specially invited to send work for an installation of their street pastings at the WOMA exhibition in Grenada (April 2012). In July 2013 they will be artists in residence at Open Ateliers Zuidoost Artists in Residence (OAZO AIR) program in Amsterdam, Holland.

### **About the Artists:**

**Luis Vasquez** La Roche was born in 1983 in Caracas, Venezuela. He moved to Trinidad and Tobago in 2002. He later studied Visual Arts at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. His works are explorations of personal experiences and his new adopted space and culture. He has participated in a several group shows such as Erotic Art Week in Trinidad (2010), Mensajes Positivos in Chile (2011), PFC (pon una foto en la calle) in Venezuela (2012) and special guest as P&E (Pinky and Emigrante) at WOMA in Grenada (2012). He has also been part of a few urban art projects: P&E (2011), P&E untitled (2012 - 2013), Who Am I? (2012) and Urban Heartbeat (2012). He had his first solo exhibition titled "The Search - La Busqueda" in Trinidad (2012).

**Alicia Milne** is a Trinidadian artist who enjoys working with tactile materials. She also has an interest in manipulating moving images. Her drawings, plaster, ceramic and video works have been exhibited in Trinidad, Grenada and the USA. Having been on a voluntary sabbatical while settling into a teaching art in a local secondary school, she is currently working on a series that merges digital and drawn images on tactile surfaces.





“We place our work in the streets and curate encounters with the public. Existing in the landscape, the work no longer belongs to its creators, it becomes art for all”

-Pinky and Emigrante.

Sand Installation Port of Spain, Cardboard, Paper and Sand. Dimensions variable, 2013. Photo Luis Vasquez de la Roche.

# JORGE LUIS PORRATA

## THE EXILED, THE SERVANT & THE ENLIGHTENED



““The Exiled, the Servant and the Enlightened,” is an ambiguous and imaginative work open to multiple interpretations. I see it as an exploration of different phases in the spiritual evolution of humanity. I created this piece in the Fall of 2012 under the spell of the end of the Mayan Calendar. “The Exiled” talks about the separation from Oneness, a human hybrid who is exiled from a stage of completion. It is hard not to draw connections from the fact I’m also an exiled from Cuba, departed from my own kind as an eternal foreigner. “The servant” is a

character who embodies power struggles, who is enslaved but defiant in his ultimate service. The servant secures the liberation of humanity bringing the human hybrid back to a state of enlightenment. The images I used were created from stream of consciousness exercises and as I played to animate them an intuitive narrative unraveled. New to this media I am thrilled to extend the frozen story of a 2D image through time. Experimenting with sound has been the most joyful discovery and reward.”

Vimeo video Link <https://vimeo.com/54067984>

### ***About the Artist:***

Jorge Luis Porrata was born in Camagüey, Cuba, and is poet and an artist. He has illustrated six books for the Cuban/Cuban American publishing house Homago, based in Miami and published poetry in literary magazines of Mexico, Cuba, and the Southwest USA. His artwork explores the interconnectedness between diverse themes, such as text and image, cultural backgrounds, spiritual beliefs. His works cross a variety of disciplines, including writing, printmaking, drawing, performance art, and more recent, video/animation. He currently lives in Fairfax, Virginia where he teaches art courses at George Mason University.



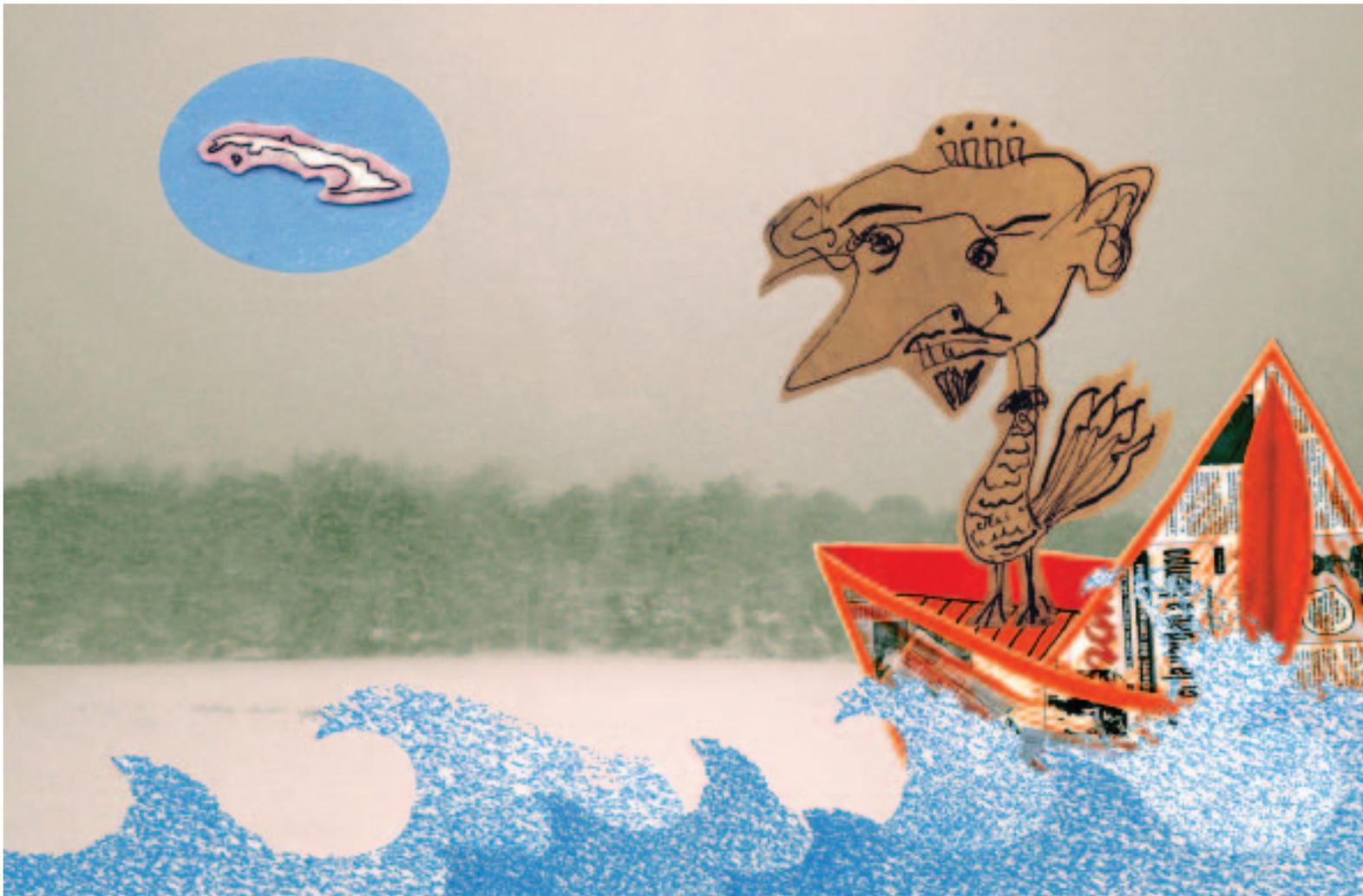
# IN BETWEEN: AN IMMIGRANT'S PORTRAIT



"In Between: an Immigrant's Portrait", 2012

"“In Between” is a direct reflection on my condition as an exiled from Cuba and on the liminal space, immigrants like me, usually inhabit. Having left behind my native country, eleven years ago, when I visit my relatives in Cuba I have the sense that I don't fit in there anymore. At the same time it is hard to indentify myself as an American. It is in that space in between I am caught, like an eternal foreigner. On the other hand as a Cuban, there is also an unsettled feeling that I carry wherever I live. I have departed from my island but cannot really leave it due to my concerns about its political and economical situation.”

<http://vimeo.com/55913307>



"In Between: an Immigrant's Portrait", 2012

# ROSHINI

## KEMPADOO

## NOTES FROM THIS ISLAND OFF EUROPE

We had to march again yesterday.

This island – off Europe – is causing me to fret again, to reminisce of things that have gone on before, to get cantankerous about being here, to be concerned about future prospects.

Yes. It is causing worry. About the young ones, about the elders just as I did, back then.

You remember.

First time around – Guyana - 1970s living the postcolonial nightmare with a dictator who seemed to think that he was entitled to all the money and power.

Second time around – England – 1980s, Thatcher's Britain, ditto.

It's making me to take comfort from what my parents taught me. My BGI parents –Anglofiles?... maybe ... moving to England and looking for opportunity?... maybe...wanting to keep their children safe as best they can?... definitely... looking for the best they could offer their children?... I heard them.

So I have started making photographs as visual commentaries. This descendent of the postcolonies has been taught a trick or two.

I

BG

–

British

Guiana.

Guyana

before

independence

from

Britain

in

1966.

Fig. 2. Sometimes you have to play bad





Fig. 1. When your hand short... catch some rest 'til next time.



Fig. 3. Take care, he said...because if you slip, you slide.



Fig. 4. Make sure you turn your hand



# ROSHINI KEMPADOO

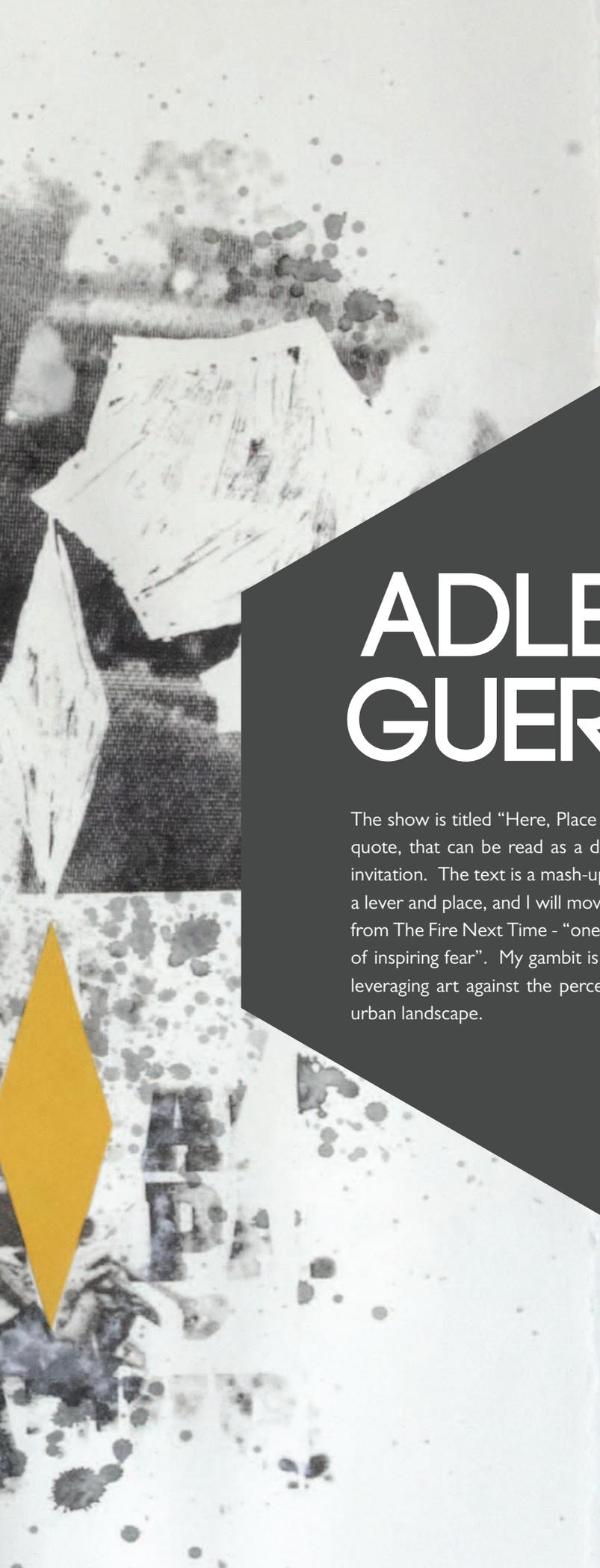




ROUPS O  
TLE

MORE  
GOOSE

S



HERE, PLACE  
THE LEVER

# ADLER GUERRIER

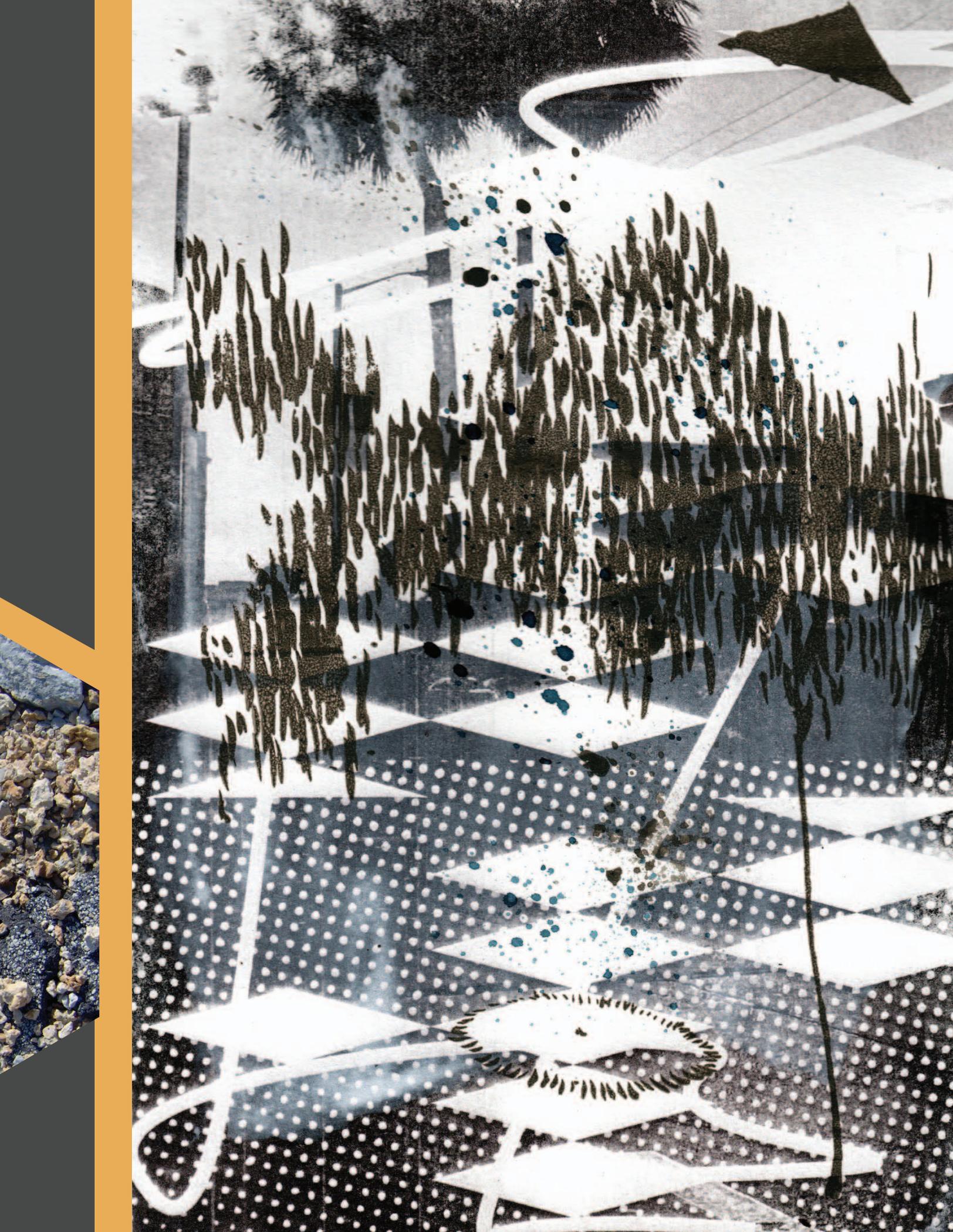
The show is titled "Here, Place the Lever". It's an unattributed quote, that can be read as a dare, an order, instruction or an invitation. The text is a mash-up of the Archimedes - "Give me a lever and place, and I will move the world" and James Baldwin from *The Fire Next Time* - "one needs a handle, a lever, a means of inspiring fear". My gambit is to make works that involve the leveraging art against the perception, narrative and poetics of urban landscape.

## ***About the Artist***

Adler Guerrier is an artist based in Miami, Florida. He has recently shown "Here, Place the Lever" at David Castillo Gallery, Miami, Florida and participated in "Almanac" at Newman Popiashvili Gallery, New York, New York.

# GUERRIER







# PATRICIA GRASSALS

## MIXING ART AND COMMERCIAL COSMETICS. A DOMINICAN INTERVENTION ON HAIR POLITICS

In the Dominican Republic hair is a big subject politically and socially. The way people wear their hair is very important in determining what socio-economic level they belong to.

Lately, hair has also been a big issue because people are slowly beginning to change the perception that only straight hair is acceptable to wear in public. As a result, many women are feeling empowered and have decided to stop using relaxers or straightening tools and instead opt for a more natural and easy-going hairstyle.

Understanding where all the idealization of straight hair comes from is very important to me. I deal with hair everyday in my personal, commercial, and artistic life. Since going natural over a decade ago, I've struggled with understanding how to manage my own kinky hair, how to manage intolerance to unrelaxed hair in a work environment and even in my friend's circles. In an effort to help others deciding to go natural, I created the website Go Natural Caribe to share what I've learned over the years – from how to style natural hair to homemade concoctions made from ingredients found in our kitchens.

This led me to start making my own hair products that I commercialized and sell successfully. For my

The hair market in the Dominican Republic is very big, but it is still difficult to find products that are derived from natural ingredients and do not contain harsh chemicals. Right now I have placed my products in two beauty salons and in one organic store with a good demand. I also offer my services as a natural hair expert in a beauty salon. I find it quite interesting mixing art and commercial cosmetics into a career because people do not necessarily make a connection between the two. Some people find it unusual that the same person who cuts their hair can also design costumes for a movie, work as a newspaper columnist, teach yoga classes and later bake them a banana cake! To me, all of these different elements work seamlessly together. I find there are no boundaries between the different disciplines and I as an artist can simply choose the medium that best suits my current inspiration.



products I am very clear of what is the line I want to follow, I do not use harsh chemicals, sulfates, mineral oil, parabens, or any other ingredient I think can be harmful to our health. Right now I produce two hair butters, two natural body splash, satin pillow cases, all homemade by me. I also import other hair related products such as sulfate-free shampoos and conditioners, as well as henna and indigo hair dyes. My ultimate goal is to be able to produce a wide variety of products designed by me and made here in the Dominican Republic with local ingredients, so that natural hair-care can be available and affordable to people here without depending on imported products.



For me, art and hair go hand in hand. The “dream-catchers” piece I made for the “Merodeos” exhibit. I sewed and braided dream-catchers using hair donated from my salon clients. The dream-catchers with bleach-blonde locks symbolized the juxtaposition of reality with our idealization of beauty engrained into our minds as little girls. Another dream-catcher is interactive and made of “tiras”, elastic strips of fabric used to pull hair into buns. The hairstyles created from these tiras can inflict pain and over time result in balding. I designed this piece so that visitors could seek revenge by twisting, pulling, and knotting the tiras as they did to us as children.

Another project I was involved in where I used a hair theme was when I participated in a group project for painting the murals of Fray Antón de Montesinos Monument in Santo Domingo. “De mi barrio a tu barrio” was sponsored by the Goethe Institute and promoted the interaction of artists from different parts of the world and different backgrounds.

For my part of the project, I painted two figures on columns overlooking the ocean: a female figure painted on a red background and a male figure floating on a blue background (a young version of Candelo and Ana Isa Pye). Their hair was grown out, reaching out towards the top of their canvases as a sign of liberation. Under the female figure lies an afro pick, a symbol of stereotypes being left behind. Looking toward the horizon, the two figures stand guard, protecting the island from intolerance and prejudice.

We still have long ways to go before widespread acceptance and tolerance of our African roots becomes the norm in the Dominican Republic, but things have already improved dramatically in the 14 years since I stopped relaxing my hair and they look to only get better from here on out.

## PATRICIA GRASSALS

### **About the Artist:**

Grassals is a multi-disciplinary artist from the Dominican Republic. With an Arts Associate in Fashion Design from Altos de Chavon School of Design, Grassals moved to Yucatan Mexico in 2003 where she designed costumes for theater, participated in several group exhibitions and created her own clothing line and accessories named Mofongo. She has taught Fashion History and participated in the filming of several local and international films. In June 2011 Grassals founded Go Natural Caribe. This website promotes the importance of appreciating our natural hair as part of our beauty and discusses topics related to hair in the social sphere, shares techniques for hair care, and has a store of specialized natural products for this hair type. Patricia currently lives and works in Santo Domingo as a wardrobe stylist for film, image consultant and multidisciplinary artist, combining her knowledge of textile and hair, in creating installation and performance.

# POETRY & NON FICTION



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

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# QUINSY GARIO

*Nets have many holes (images by Glenda Martinus)*

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## *Nets have many holes*

the heavens to hallways

and spaces filled to the brim with the

touches

of the extra terrestrials.

Terre de la patria

and women bring us to the outreaches

of the boundaries

that need to be materially transcended.

Contact springs to mind

as images of white beaches

translate the energy of stars

that reside in the open palms

of the arresting and

cardiac arrested-

hold your breath

talk to me beyond your tongue

- beings who walk among us.

They've uncovered the silences

inherent to the discovery of where they're

from.

Collectively recollecting

the collection of universalities because

we've saved the best jokes for

our wakes.

Let's say goodbye

to easy and comfortable generalizations

lain to rest among

the ashes of the suspension of disbelief.

We are the invaders and squatters

of the modern art plantations

# QUINSY GARIO

that drive us to and beyond the brink  
of sanity and the sanitarium  
and the sanitized.

Un-proper conduct defies our  
understanding of places and cement  
cages.

Bodies inherited navigations  
constellations that move limbs  
and tremble trees that trace  
lines of faces unseen and felt.

Disturbed into freedom  
through the separation of negation  
from false consensus and  
consciousness.

Here is the call for an identity  
based on achievements  
and beyond the beauty of  
localized categorizations.  
Brought together development must  
be  
shrugged off  
expression given the air to breathe,

sigh

about slavery being our common link.

The sweet smell of division  
the necessity of

multiple fences

so we seek a balance

that exchanges roots and beets

with sugar cane and fish hooks.

Nets have many holes

and thus we puncture the whole

to move the center and the margin

and the cliché and the unexpected.

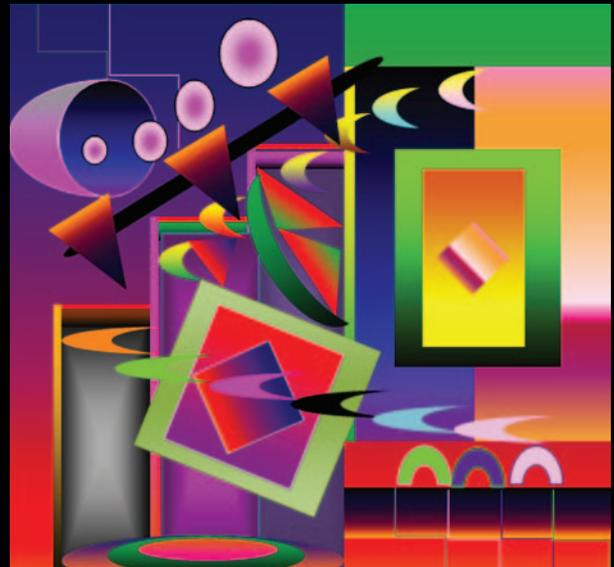
We become through the other

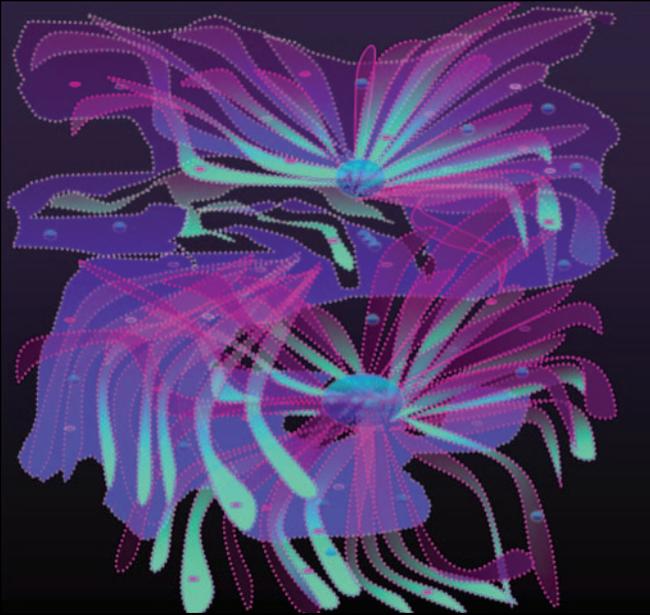
and our exceptionality is identified

through the loss of awareness.

Michael stands up

IMAGES BY  
GLENDA MARTINUS





and reveals the romantic politics  
of kissing the future.(2)

We deal with the present  
through the possible realities of the future.

My body now asks my fingers  
why English is shared  
and Remy notes the history of economic  
power.(3)

Divided and conquered scars  
of privilege reveal themselves  
in the kinship of time with proximity.  
Pride through distance.

Absolutes versus shifting sands of  
the definition of humanity.

# QUINSY GARIO

Curated to disavow the energies  
on stage

the stage uplifts what was created  
to deny them existence.

Reimagining the center through the center  
is no change at all

just tokens in the same broken slot  
machines.

Symbols appear that deny their indexes  
recognizable through stripping away

bark from wood  
exterior from interior.

Names come after actions  
and resistances lead by sacrificing shade.

Let's loop the post  
return to sender

dub the steps  
and not the stairs

escape the discipline  
of otherworldly definitions.

We're here to talk

about our work  
about our locations  
about our bodies  
about ourselves

selves that move  
in and out of sight  
between the pauses  
of time and space  
and beyond  
the notion of what is slightly  
unsound or edited.

***About the Author:***

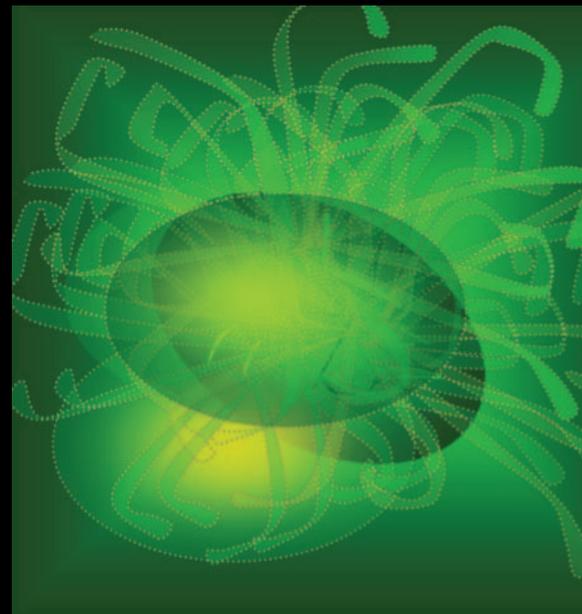
T. Martinus was born in Curaçao and raised in St. Maarten, Curaçao and the Netherlands. He is a writer, playwright and performance poet who has performed in the Netherlands, Britain, France, Denmark and Germany. He infuses his work with postcolonial, decolonial and gender studies themes. He was a member of the first performance poetry group of the Netherlands Poetry Circle Nowhere and the Dutch Caribbean writers collective Simia Literario. Currently he has started his own association called Roet In Het Eten for the emancipation of black Dutch citizenry. He has been published in the Dutch newspaper NRC Next and in september 2011 self released his first collection of poetry called The Bearable Ordeal of the Collapse of Certainties. In November 2012 he won the New Dutch Theatermaktersprize.

(1) Written and performed on May 26th  
2012 during the artist roundtable  
discussion Close Encounters of a Caribbean  
Kind with Pepón Osorio, Tirzo  
Martha, Mario Benjamin, Jean-Ulrick Désert  
and Remy Jungerman  
moderated by Francio Guadeloupe  
produced by Framer Framed during  
Who More Sci-Fi Than Us that was curated  
by Nancy Hoffmann at  
Kunsthal Kade (Amersfoort, The  
Netherlands)

(2) Michael McMillan

(3) Remy Jungerman

**IMAGES BY  
GLENDA MARTINUS**



# RITA INDIANA HERNÁNDEZ

## NOMBRES Y ANIMALES, capítulo 3

(images: Raúl Recio)

### **Abstract:**

“He says nothing,” said the Satyr. “Men have voices.”

A mi abuela se le cruzan los cables.

Esto viene de lejos, yo creo que desde siempre, pero ahora que cumplió los ochenta como que se nota más.

A mí no me gusta cuando mi mamá se enoja porque mi abuela la llama tres veces seguidas para contarle el mismo cuento de un travesti que le tocó la puerta para pedirle trabajo como cocinera o de unos perros que vienen a sentársele en el frente de la casa y que ella espanta con una olla de agua fría. Primero porque a la abuela le pasan tan pocas cosas recientemente que es normal que las cuente una y otra vez, enojarse con ella por eso es como enojarse con alguien por ponerse el mismo pantalón cuando sólo tiene uno. Lo otro es que la abuela cuando hace el cuento del travesti lo goza tanto, porque no se acuerda que ya te lo contó, que es, por lo menos para mí, como si me lo contara por primera vez, eso sin añadir que cada vez que lo cuenta el travesti tiene algo nuevo y ese algo, un pañuelo, una voz de ultra tumba, unas medias de nylon por donde se cuelan pelos de medio centímetro de diámetro, hace que a la abuelita se le iluminen los ojos y si uno tiene suerte, ella hasta hace la señal de la cruz, riéndose.

En la primera versión ella está recostada, porque la abuela nunca está acostada sino recostada, cuando ve una mano de hombre que entra por la ventana. Son las tres de la tarde y la mano le ha amargado la siesta, la abuela se levanta y dice, “¿quién es?”. Y una voz de hombre le responde “Ramona”. Luego ella corre a despertar a mi abuelo, que está siempre también recostado y él se levanta y encuentra con la mano pesada un martillo que tiene debajo de la cama junto a la bacinilla y con el que ha matado para la gloria de no se sabe qué santo más de 7 ratas y ratones.

La abuela se le engancha del codo y él se engancha de su andador y van los dos a dos pasos por minuto arrastrando las pantuflas hasta la puerta, lo que quiere decir que les toma su buena hora y media llegar hasta donde está Ramona, preciosa, tocando el timbre como si la luz eléctrica no costara dinero. El timbre de la casa de la abuela es otro tema y yo creo que es parte

del problema, es un ding dong que sólo se encuentra en telenovelas, en baladas de los setenta y en la casa de mi abuela, que es como decir que el timbre es casi imaginario o que es el último timbre que queda en toda la República con ese sonido y para probarlo sólo hay que ir conmigo (como hice una tarde) tocando todos los timbres del vecindario y escuchar el brrrrr, el buzzzz o el bididididi.

Cuando los viejos llegan a la puerta están listos para cualquier cosa, desde que unos ladrones se metieron en la casa de al lado para robarse un radito de pilas y dejaron al señor que cuidaba amarrado a una silla y con el cerebro afuera. Los viejos están listos para cualquier cosa. Por eso cierran las puertas de madera que dan a la galería día y noche, abriéndolas cuando vengo yo o cuando viene algún vecino con el teléfono cortado a hacer una llamada.

Mi abuelo ya tiene levantado el martillo cuando mi abuela abre la puerta, Ramona se presenta y dice que sabe lavar, planchar y cocinar, tiene experiencia y se sabe

todas las canciones de Marisela. Mi abuela habla entonces con una voz que oyó una vez en alguna emisora de radio en los años 30 y le dice que no necesitan una sirvienta que ya están viejos y despacharon a las que tenían, que ahora comen de cantina, una comida desabrida y que llega cada vez más tarde, que mis hijos vienen a vernos y nos traen empanadas y helado de ron con pasas.

Cuando al abuelo el brazo con el martillo se le cansa, sale de atrás de la puerta para encontrar a su esposa recostada de la puerta contándole a Ramona el cuento de cuando ella vio unos submarinos alemanes en la Romana y Ramona que tiene tiempo para escuchar el cuento tres, cuatro, cinco veces, se sienta encima de una maleta color carne y va añadiendo detalles a la historia. Cuando la abuela le dice que ella vivía en un ingenio azucarero, Ramona dice, “como una princesa”. Cuando la abuela dice que el ingenio estaba cerca de la playa, Ramona dice: como en una película. Cuando la abuela



Raúl Recio, Creole Landscape I, 2013. Mixed media on carton paper, 70" x 26", courtesy of the artist and Art Labour Archives.

le dice que ella tenía un caballo, Ramona dice: fabulosa. Cuando la abuela entra en detalles sobre el vestido de organdí y las botitas de charol, Ramona dice, “con bucles de agua de azúcar y camomila”, y cuando la abuela se da cuenta de que el abuelo está de pie junto a ella con un martillo colgándole de la mano no lo ve a él sino a Felina, la negrita que llegó al ingenio cuando ella tenía 3 años y que sus papás criaron “como a otra hija” y le dice, “ve cuélate un cafecito, ¿no ves que tenemos visita?”.

Ramona, en lo que la doña vuelve a lo de los submarinos, le vocea al viejo que si aparece un pan con un chin de nada se lo traiga y el viejo emprende el largo camino a la cocina, a tres milímetros la hora, lo que quiere decir que en lo que llega a la cocina la abuela ya ha terminado el cuento de los submarinos y ha comenzado el cuento de los submarinos y para cuando el abuelo ha vuelto, con una bandeja con café y galletitas de soda con mantequilla, Ramona ya sabe por qué el segundo hijo de la abuela se llama Fin y adonde estaba mi papá cuando mataron a Trujillo.

En la segunda versión del cuento del travesti el abuelo no aparece si no hasta al final o está tan enfermo que no puede levantarse y mi abuela se la bandeja sola en medio de la oscuridad, porque esta vez es de noche y hay un apagón del carajo y lo que la despierta es una voz igualita a la de su madre, o sea mi bisabuela, diciéndole que juegue el 14 o el 78 o el 36. Mi abuela dice que cuando oyó la voz se puso a llorar y a decir, “ay mamá, es como si estuvieras viva” y que al decir esto cogió tanta energía que quiso levantarse de la cama como si fuera a pitchar un juego de béisbol. “Y cuando me vi en el piso lo único que alcance a hacer fue a tirarme un pote de alcoholado en la cabeza, un potecito que tengo siempre junto a la bacinilla por si acaso. Cuando de repente oigo pasos en el callejón. Ese maldito callejón que yo no sé cuántas veces le he dicho a mi hermano Rolando que termine de clausurarlo, eso es una madriguera en la que cualquier tigre va a terminar metiéndose, y nos encontrarán a tu abuelo y a mí, panqueaos, como dos turpene, mejor sería que nos cogiéramos de la manitas y saltáramos del Malecón y ya nadie tendría que bregar con nosotros”.

A este último fragmento siguen unas cuantas lágrimas que yo le seco a la abuela con la manga de mi t-shirt para que me siga contando y ella sigue, “después

de tres avemarías y un padre nuestro logre sacar fuerzas y me levanté, mejor dicho, me levantó Jesús, porque yo la verdad no fui, cogí la linterna, acuérdate que no hay luz, y cuando la prendo no tiene pilas, mierda, lo raro es que encontré las pilas dentro de una cartera dentro de una gaveta en el cuarto que era de tu tío, no me preguntes cómo llegue porque no sé, sería Jesús también, que es la luz de este mundo. Cuando cargué la linterna los pasos seguían en el callejón, pasos con tacones altos, caminé hasta la puerta que da al patio y pregunté, ¿buenas noches? Y una voz gruesa me dijo, Ramona. Abrí la persiana e iluminé con la linterna una boca y luego unos ojos pintados de azul violeta, la voz me dijo que quería trabajo y yo le dije que aquí no había y además que mi esposo tenía muy mal genio y dos pistolas cargadas y que si se despertaba se iba armar un lío, la tal Ramona se fue corriendo y yo le oí los pasos con tacos saliendo del callejón, empecé un rosario a esa hora pero me quedé dormida como al quinto avemaría”.

En la tercera versión el abuelo llama a la policía y a Ramona le parten el sieso. La abuela dice que le dio pena porque, “se ve que por lo menos el muchacho quería trabajar y que si hubiera encontrado una mano dura a tiempo no anduviera dando pena en una falda”.

Como mi mamá no es muy buena hija que digamos y mi tío Fin está muy ocupado haciendo avioncitos de papel en su consultorio, la tía Celia se ha encargado de mantener a mis abuelos por lo menos aseados. Ella le paga a una enfermera para que venga una vez por semana y los meta obligados a la bañera y los restriegue con una esponja a ver si se les sale ese olor a sofá orinado que cogen los viejos con el tiempo. Tía Celia también le paga a otra muchacha para que venga una vez cada dos semanas y le pegue manguera a la casa, levante las alfombras, sacuda los cojines y los muebles de caoba centenaria y oiga el cuento de los submarinos, de Ramona y de cómo mi abuelo se ganó la lotería en 1939. Las muchachas, al menos que tía Celia se quede para supervisar, terminan haciendo nada, comiéndoselo todo y viendo televisión, al abuelo lo empolvan y a la abuela le echan un chin de colonia en la cabeza, la hacen cambiarse la bata y la sacan al sol del patio una hora para que el olor a moho se le evapore. Pero, como dice tía Celia, a esos viejos hay que bañarlos y como nadie es indispensable,

que es otra cosa que tía Celia dice todo el tiempo, me saca del hospital veterinario los días que las muchachas van a casa de los abuelos para que yo las supervise. Este trabajito, la verdad, es peor que la clínica, se supone que yo les diga lo que tienen que hacer, pero al final termino yo haciéndolo todo, barriendo el patio, desempolvando los biscuits, estrujando con agua y jabón las espaldas arrugadas de los viejos, que tienen que sentarse en una silla de plástico dentro de la ducha porque tenerlos allí de pie en la superficie mojada y hacerles un chiste sería una manera muy sencilla de aniquilarlos.

Un día, sin aviso, tía Celia llegó con dos haitianos y como diez galones de pintura blanca. Pusimos a los viejos en la habitación del fondo con las ventanas abiertas en lo que los haitianos pintaban la sala. Luego rodamos a los viejos a la habitación del centro y allí les rodé también el tocadiscos con un LP de Eduardo Brito para que escucharan una musiquita. Cuando le tocó a la habitación del medio, los rodamos al patio y allí se quedaron toda la tarde muy callados preguntando, más por quedar bien que por interés real, qué cuánto cobraban los haitianos por pintar la casa. Tía Celia, que es arquitecta e ingeniera y tiene haitianos hasta para regalar, les dijo que no se preocuparan por eso, que eso era un asunto entre ella

y sus haitianos. Cuando empezó a atardecer la abuela se quejó de frío y le traje un suéter color fucsia que a ella le gusta mucho y al abuelo un pedazo de pan para que lo repartiera a las palomas. Allí estuvieron entretenidos un rato y cuando llegó la hora de la cena los entramos a la casa que olía a pintura fresca y adonde habíamos encendido todos los abanicos para que se secara. Mi mamá llegó con unos pastelitos y tío Fin trajo varios envases de foam con bollitos de yuca y pica pollo, un big leaguer de Coca Cola y un tetra pack de leche, nos sentamos en la mesa del comedor y les servimos a los viejos primero. Mami le corto todo en trocitos al abuelo, que derramó sin querer su vaso de leche sobre el mantel de plástico.

Mi mamá, como nunca hace nada por los viejos, se siente un poco culpable y se pone muy nerviosa delante de tía Celia, así que o habla de un problema en la oficina o hace muchos chistes muy malos de los que sólo se ríen ella y mi abuela. A pesar de los chistes todo el mundo estaba contento, incluso yo, si mantenía la posición de mi cabeza, tratando de no ver a los viejos masticando con sus dientes postizos aquel vendaval de comida rápida y buenas intenciones. Cuando terminamos tío Fin trajo café y leche y todos quisimos, de repente la abuela levantó la cabeza de su taza y con la cuchara del azúcar todavía en la



Raúl Recio, Creole Landscape II, 2013. Mixed media on carton paper, 70" x 26", courtesy of the artist and Art Labour Archives



Raúl Recio, Creole  
Landscape III, 2013. Mixed  
media on carton paper, 70”  
x 26”, courtesy of the artist  
and Art Labour Archives

mano preguntó, “¿y dónde es que estamos? ¿Y de quién es esta casa?”. Tío Fin, como un papel crepe al que le cae un chorro de sopa, se acercó muy rápido y tocó el hombro de su mamá apretando y soltando, diciendo, “oh mamá, en tu casa, esta es tu casa”, y ella volviendo a meter la cuchara en su café con leche dejó escapar un “ah”.

Desde ese día la abuelita está convencida, aunque esto sólo me lo dice a mí, de que la llevaron a otra casa, idéntica a la suya y que está en la misma cuadra que la suya, pero que no es la suya



o, y esto me gusta más, que su casa la han rodado, o sea que esta es su casa de antes pero que la rodaron unos cuantos metros y aunque nadie se da cuenta ella sí. Yo imagino a tía Celia con sus dos, tres, mil haitianos poniendo la casa sobre un conveyor belt para rodarla y confundir a la abuela, pero la abuela se las sabe todas y se da cuenta comparando el espacio que hay ahora en el callejón adonde antes cabía un policía dándole macanazos a tres ramonas y ahora solamente cabe una bicicleta.

Raúl Recio, Creole Landscape IV, 2013. Mixed media on carton paper, 70" x 26", courtesy of the artist and Art Labour Archives



### **About the Author:**

Educated at a Catholic school, she went to university to study History of Art, a course she left along with design school to start writing her first novel, *La Estrategia de Chochueca*, 2000. - See more at: [http://www.cccb.org/en/autor-rita\\_indiana\\_hernandez-39440#sthash.obrPv65H.dpuf](http://www.cccb.org/en/autor-rita_indiana_hernandez-39440#sthash.obrPv65H.dpuf). She produced the disc *Altar Espandex*, with Miti Miti, a mix of naïf, electro, merengue and gaga, rated by the NY Daily News as one of the top five in indie music for 2008. In 2009 she formed *Rita Indiana y los misterios*, a project that served to fuse her main interests: conceptual art, popular music, Afro-Caribbean magical religious traditions and social criticism. The project was rapidly acclaimed on YouTube, Facebook, etc., and made the singer a celebrity first in the Dominican Republic and then in Puerto Rico and the Antilles in general. - See more at: [http://www.cccb.org/en/autor-rita\\_indiana\\_hernandez-39440#sthash.obrPv65H.dpuf](http://www.cccb.org/en/autor-rita_indiana_hernandez-39440#sthash.obrPv65H.dpuf)

# REVIEWS



Riding Swan Series by Versia Harris  
Suite of seven digital stills (each 11.6" x 7.7") from an animation in progress

# EMBODYING CONTEMPO

COCO Dance Festival, Trinidad



# MARIELLE BARROW

Louis Althusser claims that new growth comes out of the gaps, the schisms, the mistakes of one regime which provide an opportunity for those prepared persons who have been working behind the scenes to rise up through this gap and to shift the status quo. It is through affective terms that Deborah Gould explains shifts in social movements, she suggests that “attention to affect illuminates an important source of social reproduction and social change” (26). Gould describes the Aids Activist movement of ACT UP as straying from the rationalist paradigm where “political opportunities” are a “prerequisite to action (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996b, 8)” (as qtd. in Gould 10) but ACT UP “emerged at an inopportune moment”(11). In lieu of the rationalist explanation, Gould submits that an ‘emotional turn’ provides a more accurate framework for understanding the movement. She formulates her own approach with a focus on affect, the- “nonconscious, noncognitive, nonrational aspects of feeling” that provide a framework “for thinking about the emotional and the social together that takes seriously the bodily components of emotion.” (16).

While it would be rather far fetched to describe COCO as a political movement in the popular sense of the term political, COCO can reasonably be described as a new political sensibility- a shift from the formal, traditional institutional practice of the arts to new uses of space and new forms of engagement through space. Social cause is also underscored along with affect. Gould’s description of the emotional turn as characteristic of social movements presupposes a social cause. Is there an underlying social cause for COCO and how does it operate through an embodied affective component? How can we begin to understand the potential implications of this new movement?

Fig. 1. “My Other Me”. Choreographed by Bridgette Wilson.



Fig. 2. Choreographed and performed by Michelle Isava. Photo by Jeffrey Chock

A series of interviews with COCO's directors present a range of views and insights into the motivations behind the festival, the linkages formed between institutions and groups as well as the outcomes and possibilities generated through this event. Following this, an article written by one of the choreographers presents an additional dimension to our understanding. We invite readers to consider questions of affect, social movements and social cause in pondering comments by the interviewees.

Initiated by Sonja Dumas, COCO is run by a team of dancers who are also choreographers and teachers- Nancy Herrera, Dave Williams, Nicole Wesley and Dumas. With the exception of visiting lecturer Nicole Wesley, the COCO team has known each other for over a decade as friends and colleagues and they are all well known in the Trinidadian dance-scene. Herrera describes the dynamics of the quartet: "We are all very different personalities but we share a passion and an interest in getting quality and excellence. Dave is the most experimental, most avant-garde. All of

the choreographers work in Trinidad so their styles are very much influenced by the style and language of the Trinidadian body. Nicole who is American has found that when her work is mounted here it looks different due to the multilingualism of the Trinidadian body.

The company was born through what some may describe as 'happen-stance'- Herrera explained that the National Dance Association of Trinidad & Tobago was carded to have a festival but were not able to access funding. The Association had already booked Queens Hall, one of the premier concert halls on the island. Since Dumas was aware of the challenge faced by the association and that the space was already booked and available, Dumas called the other dance teachers together and proposed that they put on a festival – a contemporary one. They would showcase work that would not ordinarily be seen.

It was clear to all involved that Trinidad lacked opportunity for the sharing of contemporary choreography although many contemporary practitioners were present. The creation of a space for contemporary arts practice, in this case contemporary choreography was needed. Dumas characterized this lack of opportunity as a kind of risk-aversion coupled with inadequate infrastructure- "There's not enough of a platform to take risks. We needed to provide a platform to help dancers to take those risks. Not everything in the festival is avant-garde or postmodern but at least the dancers take a risk in terms of putting their work out. Even if they are not taking a creative risk, it is a personal risk".

In addition to the absence of structure in terms of space and an organized forum, Herrera added that experimental work lacks a market. It is widely understood in cultural policy literature that markets for the arts can only be developed if the appetite for that work is created. An appetite can only be generated through tasting and sampling, that is through education. (provide citation from cultural policy field) which can be achieved informally through showcase or institutionally through formal educational programming.

Other systemic gaps exist in the Trinbagonian space- Herrera explained that usually a choreographer would only have the opportunity to choreograph if he/she was associated with a company. Within Trinidad there are many talented dancers and contemporary choreographers who free-lance. "What if you cannot get your work into an art gallery? How would you be showcased?" Herrera prompted.

The team was also concerned that theatre was not being represented- that is, the ways in which theatre and dance intersected in the creation of contemporary styles of dance. "Spaces are expensive and so you have to have your audience and market so it is difficult to have a show like that as any one person is going to find it difficult to produce a show and pay their costs, and there is no form of government funding."

Fig. 3. Choreography by Anika Marcelle. Photo by Jeffrey Chock



Fig. 5. "Man". Choreography by Heather Henderson. Photo by Karen Johnstone



### ***The Festival Format- Interventions into spatial dynamics***

With dance performances taking place both inside and outdoors within and around the fountain at Queens Hall, the first edition of COCO was a novel experience for audiences. A contemporary dance artist, known as Acazulu performed around the fountain and trees of Queens Hall. Herrera explained that the festival attempts to inspire different ways of thinking about space and work. Wesley describes this form of interaction as an 'architecture of space' which is more intimate and requires the audience to engage in a different way. Acazulu's performance produced a visceral response in audience members who did not ordinarily attend dance shows. One guest related that Acazolou's dance was

considering water and he felt the water, " I felt that I was involved in something". Such an emotive response is positive confirmation that the show is achieving its intent of using alternative formats to help the audience move to imaginative spaces.

Staged at contemporary art spaces Alice Yard and Bohemia in Woodbrook, Port of Spain, the second iteration took on an even more dynamic and varied format. The event became known for a site-specific dimension and a sense of evolution was fashioned as the first half of the show moved from Alice Yard to its second part at Bohemia. Acazolu mounted her choreography so that the audience would follow her work on the street from Alice Yard to Bohemia. What in reality is a five-minute walk became a half- hour journey as audiences



Fig. 6. "Germination - Part I". Choreographed and performed by Akuzuru at the fountain at Queens Hall, Port-of-Spain. Photo by Jeffrey Chock

engaged with the dancer between the two spaces. While this format introduced new meaning and aesthetics it was also functional. Wesley explains this form of interaction as performance and proscenium versus interaction. The audience was mobile creating performance art in contrast to a seated contemplative space.

Site-specific art is in some ways a nascent form of engagement in Trinidad & Tobago in terms of a formal or formative context, yet ironically Dumas and Wesley helps us to understand that a lot of our work in Carnival is site-specific. It is done in the context of the environment. Site-specific work is part of the creative process, which differs from making space business worthy. In the European or American construct of performance, site-specific work has been formalized and written about for the last 40-50 years but it has been around for much longer. Space is co-opted and made part of the performance. On one level Trinbagonians have always performed in this way- through an informal engagement of space and acknowledgement of it then a process of formalization. But the gut of site-specific work still lies in the backyards and in the streets. Creativity comes to life through the movement of the people, not in a theatre but in a huge space like a street or an open stage. World renowned costume designer and mas' maker, Peter Minshall has always understood this- if someone cannot dance a costume allowing it to interact with its space, it will not have the resonance it is meant to have. It is an interesting proposition within a dance show for the audience to have to

move, following the performance as it goes from one space to the other. In Carnival the audience has a right to be there, but in a processional, audiences are allowed to enter into the space. For example with Acazulu, there was still a boundary between where the audience felt they were and where the performer felt she was. There was some crossing but it was not continuous. Procession is different from parade in this way. Parade would be a subset of a procession that has different features.

### ***The Festival Process- Interventions into Educational Dynamics***

There are two full time degree programs in dance at the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Students from both institutions and other persons from small dance groups wish to choreograph so those who desire to be a part of the festival are invited to submit a work via DVD to be critiqued by a jury. Made up of a number of practitioners outside of the tertiary institutions, for example Kerry Springer from Caracas and Heather Henderson who has her own dance school in Trinidad, the jurying framework facilitates objective critique outside of the school grading paradigm and allows young choreographers to explore their own emerging aesthetics. Jurying and critique ensures high standards



Fig. 7. "Pleased to Meet You". Choreography by Nicole Wesley, performed by students of the Academy for the performing arts at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Photo by Karen Johnstone

the sentiment of the movement'. As the collective has to be fair to the more experienced choreographers, students have to hold their own against someone coming from Canada for example. Rather than having a negative effect, this potential tension is productive. When experienced choreographers present their work at rehearsals, the less experienced are forced to raise their standard.

### **Movement**

Each choreographer in the festival brings something unique but there are certain elements in terms of address and use of space that often form a unifying thread as they are common to many Caribbean dance forms. Dumas describes both dance style and the global-local dynamic that influences its aesthetic "Caribbean dance forms are 'in yuh face', bold in their address- they use a different type of weight distribution in the body and their engagement with the stage is direct. Even though there are constant outside influences through social media for example, young people are much more global. Youth know that they are connected to the world but they don't necessarily connect to the world in the way that I would so that their aesthetic qualities are informed and influenced by the imagery and their choice of music influenced by the web but they are still Caribbean. So their understanding of their connection to the world vis a vis their global connections produces a level of freedom-they operate without boundaries. But this is as Caribbean as anything else in the Caribbean. They are doing it their way."

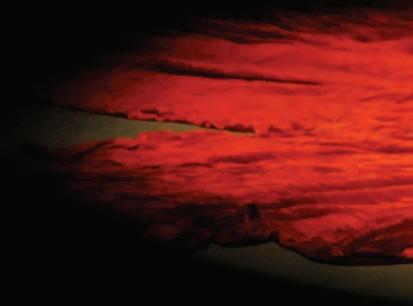




Fig. 8. "Scan" - solo choreographed and performed by Dave Williams. Photo by Jeffrey Chock

Wesley. Wesley describes some of the striking differences in experiencing the Caribbean space that has translated into her dance. On coming to Trinidad, her work was feminine, athletic and aggressive but she has found that the Caribbean experience has leant more of a vulnerability to her style both in her approach to dance and other aspects of life. She remarks that “people in Trinidad are usually extraverted and it comes from such a place of love and care. It has really influenced the way that I approach work, I am more exposed and more direct.” These seeming contradictions of vulnerability and directness reveal the paradoxes of Trinbagonian richness. Wesley was impressed by the level of maturity by young dancers that she encountered in the local Metamorphosis dance company. Their level of performativity and understanding of movement did not seem synchronized with their young ages. Each body, Wesley explained, is a vessel with information and these young bodies were fraught with knowledge produced from all kinds of fusions. The synthaesia of varying elements from music to dance to Carnival are able to coalesce in the body as they all involve movement- whether the energy radiates through sound, image or costume.

### **Call and Response**

The call or proposition that this contemporary dance platform seeks to put forward is that risk-taking can be productive. Dumas suggests, “You might discover something about yourself or someone else might discover something, that’s how art grows, that’s how society grows. If I get 10 persons out of the entire festival audience to be more interested in learning about art or about how dance can be constructed, then we are on our way to a fresher way of thinking, it is almost on one level building a tolerance.” The response has been both positive and concerning. Herrera comments that, “We had very full houses but not a lot of coverage in the newspapers. They would do a little bit of coverage at the beginning but there aren’t critical reviews. If the press does attend, they will report on the running order of the program. We don’t have a discerning critical press.”





The Strange Tale of An Island Shade - choreographed by Sonja Dumas, performed by Continuum Dance Project

Media critique for a contemporary dance show should encompass the quality of lighting, directing and of course choreographic styles, the vocabulary of the movements and the consonance or dissonance of the music with the dance form and what is achieved through the drawing together of all these elements. Nonetheless, Herrera is hopeful. "Even though I am over-programmed, there is so much growth and it is rewarding, not financially but success brings success. When we started we did not have that many choreographers and now we have people from the rest of the Caribbean wanting to come and they are finding money to come to us." Dumas is heartened by the excitement of young local dancers concerning COCO. She good naturedly recalls their conversations "oh my goodness, what are you going to do for COCO, what music are using, will you be in my piece, oh my goodness she is in too many pieces, I have to find another dancer."

There are still critical gaps to be addressed. There needs to be a greater sense of urgency and implementation of infrastructure for dance in Trinidad and Tobago. Herrera comments, "It is very difficult to convince someone that an empty room is a good investment- some showers, changing rooms, mirrors. a space for the musicians. We need to explore different instruments, more live music- that is where the risk comes in, the exploration of new ways to use instruments. We need to come into the contemporary way of thinking about space: the traditional way was : they have community centres what more do they want- given or allocated by the government. Think about commercial use of just a floor...how can you make that into a commercial studio so that the rent pays for the space? We need to be more contemporary in terms of business models that make spaces financially viable.

How do I make this a viable proposition and still give myself room to be creative? What can you do with an unfurnished space?"

What the future holds for COCO is unsure as funding continues to be a challenge but Dumas is hoping that the team will be able to access funding more easily as time goes on. Wesley's hope for the festival is that it will become a beacon of what a contemporary festival could be, at a world standard. She hopes that the educational component of the festival will develop and that it will grow as an interdisciplinary platform. The next festival is expected to take place on October 8th 2013.

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# ADETOUN KÜPPERS ADEBISI, MICHAEL KÜPPERS ADEBISI

*Diaspora Documentary Art as Political Intervention Strategy  
and the question of Decolonial rePrezentation of the Black  
Berlin Renaissance.*

*Keywords: Kaieteur, Environment, activism.*

Times were particularly interesting after the Berlin Africa conference in 1884. The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Diaspora art movements had their influx on the African scenes. This changed their role in the context of the independence movements and they were partly employed by the new national states from 1960 in major exhibitions. The time from 1990 to 2010 re-presents a strong globalization that implements the post-colonial topics of body-identity and memory-politics, history, urbanization and migration in the contemporary art forms of performance, media, installation and photography.

Documentary art often involves an 'us' constructing narratives about 'them' for consumption. Artists are exploring diverse modes of opening spaces available to the voices of the 'other' and reflexively questioning their own authorial presence. Any attempt to destabilize the position of the artists as purveyor of 'other' cultures also questions the dominant idea of the image as evidence. This shift towards a more complex

relation between signifiers of sound and image begin to destabilize comfortable subject positions and demands that viewers actively engage with the art work questioning its truth claims.

In their exhibition 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance – the curators Adetoun and Michael Küppers-Adebisi discuss German colonial genocide in Namibia/Africa (1904-1908) as context for contemporary, neo-colonial racism against people of African descent in Germany. Contemporary visual knowledge management strategies unite the struggle of a Black German and African Diaspora in Germany with the struggles of the survivors of the Namibian Genocide and their descendents in the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance. Social activism and Performance combined with media and photography intervene in the structural racism of German mainstream discursive imagery aimed at re-empowering African communities and the images that exist about them (occupy.Black). The exhibition shows prints of documentary photographs,



Fig. 1. Mixed Media DIN AO. Black & White. Members of the Namibian delegation on the steps of the Berlin clinic Charité during the memorial ceremony for the victims of the German genocide © AFROTAK TV cyberNomads 2011

videos and prints of visual poetry.

### **Mixed-Media Battle of the Archives**

The interactive exhibition 'occupy. Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Berlin Renaissance' shows works of survival created by the Black German and the African Diaspora in Germany. In 2002 Okwui Enwezor became the first African to be appointed curator for Documenta the internationally acclaimed art forum in Germany. In 2010 the House of the Cultures of the World, a major German culture institution put on the Berlin Documentary Forum to interrogate the role of documentary strategies in contemporary art. Enwezor, again involved as curator, this time focused on the specific workings of cultural reality-construction based on signs, images and symbols. One of the questions was how art can step beyond the borders of self-referential artistic systems into the realm of social reality. The existence of a Berlin 'African Quarter' itself is a relic of the colonial practices up to date neglected by a German mainstream psyche not

coming to architectural terms with its past. Many street names in Berlin and Germany still praise white German male heroes who participated in the historic raping of Africa under colonial German rule. Contemporary racism structurally perpetuates discrimination against people of African descent in the city's architectural practice and discourse (Mohrenstrasse – Negro Street). The images discussed in this article infuse their discursive potential of visual intervention with street-art strategies. The white German practice of denial of racism against people of African descent is countered by a history-conscious neo-realism that renders documentary media for anti-racist, gender-mainstreamed and decolonial cultural paradigm change.

In 2004 the UNESCO honored the May Ayim Award – the 1st Black German International Literature Award as German Project for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition as part of the Black Atlantic Project and the Black Media Congress Berlin (From Berlin Africa Conference 1884 to Afro futurism.) In 2011 the

exhibition 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' exposes the killing of a people for standing up against Germany exploiting African resources. There were German colonial concentration camps in Africa way before the Nazis installed them in Europe. The exhibition visually renegotiates the historic event of September 2011 when Germany finally returned what had been stolen over 100 years ago. The human remains of the victims of the German genocide in Namibia were handed over to the victims' descendants. Skulls reduced to exotic, medical artifacts and held captive by white German racist scientists and their medical studies to prove the moral and ethical inferiority of the victims. And as they failed to do so these skulls have been stored away in the cellar archives of the Charité. The documentary photographs in the exhibition are primarily empowered by a contemporary and globalized dialogue and inspired by the higher mobility of non-Eurocentric perspectives on representation. The mainstream postulate of a discursive break in the way female and male people of African descent have been treated in the Kaiser Reich, Republic of Weimar, Nazi-Germany, post-Nazi East and West Germany, as well as in contemporary post-reunification Germany, is effectively bridged from the Afro-German, Afropean and African perspectives.

Major archives and written discourses of Africa in Timbuktu and Alexandria have been destroyed or replaced into confinement of European institutions and museums. For some time now new multimedia-based Diaspora-knowledge-databanks are growing as part of the new lingua franca visual movement in Africa, in Afro-Europe and the African Diasporas of the Americas. Global access to African images and narrations spread in connection with major Art infrastructures in cities like Dakar and Johannesburg that connect to the global

Mixed Media DIN AO. Black & White. Members of the Namibian Delegation in a Church in Berlin attending a Memorial Service for the victims © AFROTAK TV cyberNomads 2011



information-superhighway of post-modern culture and its affection for music, dance and video. The Jewish diaspora in Germany already has integrated the Nazi attack on their people into visual and cultural discourses have led to state-financed memorials for the Shoah victims. In December 1970 the German Chancellor Willy Brandt knelt down in front of the Polish memorial in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw. A German memorial has been built close to the central Brandenburg Gate by the New Berlin after re-unification. In colonial acts of crime against humanity German archives were filled with African human skulls. Finally the history behind the German colonial involvement can also enter into the white mainstream. Commander-in-chief von Trotha ordered the first German genocide in Namibia destroying the lives of approximately 60,000 children, women and men. The exhibition 'occupy.Black. Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Berlin Renaissance' narrates the 2011 handing over of heads of the victims as Namibia is still waiting for that an official excuse from the German government. The exhibition tells the story of how female and male Namibians come to claim the humanity of their ancestors as well as their own. The Namibians travel continents to pay tribute to their anti-colonial resistance fighters. They come to re-integrate the stolen heads and return the souls to their home country to at last bring peace to the spirit of their people.

They wear the traditional dresses of their foremothers and the military outfits of their forefathers. A people claimed by Germany as subjects. Their descendants in 2011 paraded in front of the Charité clinic in Berlin with strength and an almost surreal pride. The leaders of the Herero and Nama people kneel down on the front steps of the Charité in respect to their ancestors, including a minister and 60 representatives. The photographs question stereotypes of Africans representation in the visual German mainstream. The documentary strategy aims beyond pure re-production or even re-construction of reality. The images of the Namibian delegation flavor a sense of post/neo-real as they arrive to fill the abyss of absence of historical perspectives in the white German Africa-imagination. Real in these photographs has been double-charged by textual comments digitally integrated into the creolization of images. The inscriptions direct the viewer's visual attention to the construction of cultural reality-discourses. Signifier (image), signified (colonialism) and cultural subtext (racism) are re-defined as part/war of cultural discursive histories. They are viral like graffiti tags on urban walls. In cloud-computing the speed of information depends on combined capacities. Meaning of visual communication gathers speed as part of an overall national knowledge management system through recourse to the specific cultural and historic backgrounds.



Mixed Media DIN AO. Black & White. Members of Namibian Delegation in anatomical theatre of the Berlin Charité clinic at handing over ceremony of heads of victims of genocide © AFROTAK TV cyberNomads 2011

Up to date white Germany has not incorporated these narratives into its canons of knowledge. Contemporary Germany pays development-aid instead with the taste of blood money. Reconnecting the roots of contemporary racism to a colonial history the exhibition addresses clinical aphasia in the German culture. In this exhibition it re/connects German racism and genocide in Namibia. In 2012 the German parliament voted against the recognition of the genocide. The battle of the archives

### ***The Loud Silence of Death***

No. These heads have seldom squinted against the sun. More than one century long they did not. Twenty of them have now been released into freedom by the Charité in Berlin. Twenty out of estimated 6,000 remains of human heads throughout Germany! Those finally released have not been issued proper coffins. The documentary photographs of the exhibition 'Faces of the African Renaissance' confront the visitors with metaphors of neutrally grey and square cardboard boxes of about 20 times 20 centimeters representing nameless pain. They have been marked with signs and numbers. An eerie silent atmosphere rules in the images of caged heads who have been victimized by white German scientists.

Incorporating the social sciences' input of cultural criticism the exhibition strategically approaches German knowledge archives of denial with a visual guerilla attack. The images are inspired by the more than 25 year struggle of Afro-German organizations like Initiative of Black People in Germany (ISD) and the African Women's Organization (ADEFRA) teaming up with African diaspora communities fighting contemporary racism in Germany. These images are meant to assist the general German psyche. To undergo a sustainable decolonial healing process as post-colonial (white) meets its neo-colonial (Black) after-images inflicting psychological as well as physical hurt of victims in Germany and on the African continent. The strategy of 'occupy.Black. Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' incorporates scientific knowledge accumulation as extension of political lobbying and intervention.

Visually un-penetrable spaces protect the heads from nosy glances. But the boxes also hide the real horror. There are eleven card box cartons on one side and seven on the other. They represent eleven Herero and seven Nama victims. To put it ironically Pars Pro Toto - or a part represents the whole. The silence is pregnant with the afterglow of one hundred years imprisonment in German archives. The boxes are indexed with alpha-numerical codes instead of names. Like the victims in concentration camps were tattooed with numbers. The focus in the photographs is a little off. The imperfect neglects the perfection of artistic production as being apart from life. One of the heads of each group is presented in a 60 times 20 centimeters transparent Plexiglas box. The photographs make the hollow eyes of the skulls in boxes seem to look into the eyes of the on-lookers. There is no memorial in Germany for the victims of the genocide in Namibia. A first step in understanding the exhibition's potential impact is to suspend judgment on the singular photograph until overall impact of the project's content is accessed. The formally signified successfully emancipates into being the signifier as individual viewers can participate in the exhibition by letting a photograph of them being taken with the sign 'No Amnesty on Genocide' that is constantly re-integrated as part of the thus growing exhibition.

### ***Hacking the Presence for Cultural Paradigm Changes***

The exhibition narrates the complexities of the encounter of the African victims with the white German public initiated by the combined forces of activists from the white civil society together with the German African diaspora. The images presented in the exhibition have been taken within one week in 2011. 'occupy.Black. Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' starts with photographs of the press conference organized by a NGO-committee composed of African diaspora, Afro-Germans and white German activists. It visually narrates the public discussion panel organized in cooperation with and at the House of the Cultures of the World and continues with the handing over of the Namibian human remains at the anatomical theatre of the Charité to end with the images of the

demonstration at the Reichstag for the recognition of the Genocide and reparations.

There were but a few visual moments available to the public eye before, revealing the specific German way of dealing with Africa and they came from a mediated white perspective or from a perspective of the diaspora not being part of the German experience. Examples are the black and white photographs of around 1908 of white German military personnel from a white German perspective. Surviving Namibian women had been forced to first boil the bodies of their murdered people and then to scrape the flesh of the bones as preparation for the shipment to Germany. The white German males are smoking cigarettes and smile straight into the camera while packing Namibians skulls from piles into coffin-like wooden boxes.

Images of concentration camps taken around 1945 by US-American liberation forces show Afro-German and African diaspora victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Modern semiotic theories look for meaning

not in the individual signs, but in their context and the framework of potential meanings that can be applied. Both in colonial Germany and in Nazi-Germany exotic subtexts were constructed through exhibiting Africans as objects in the 'Völkerschauen' (people shows). In 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' the change in perspective is twofold. Change becomes visible as a democratic act of self-emancipation in the unity of the Africans in Germany who mirror themselves in the fate of their Namibian brothers and sisters. Illustrating the representation of the mainstream media coverage, images of images are also part of the exhibition. A Berlin daily paper subtitled the photograph of an Afro-German woman present at the event with 'A Namibian Woman'. Here white media does not differentiate between the members of the Namibian delegation and the Berlin residents of Namibian, Eritrean, Cameroonian, Nigerian, South African, Jamaican, African American, and Afro German or of Afro-European descent. Colonial hierarchies and contemporary identities are once more constructed through on the basis of 'race'

Mixed media DIN AO. Black & White. Members of Black German and African Diaspora in anatomical theatre of the Berlin Charité clinic at handing over ceremony of heads of victims of genocide © AFROTAK TV cyberNomads 2011



and colour. They are Black so they must be Namibian and of course non-German. Thus it is possible that in the 21st century still, namely in fall 2012 a white south-African artist is commissioned to stage a 'Völkerschau'-exhibition called "Exhibit B" with financing by the Goethe Institute. The exhibition roused a lot of anger in the Black and African communities because of three major points. 1) A white German institution commissions a white artist from outside Germany (SA) to exhibit Black German and African Diaspora people re-enacting colonial hierarchies in order to teach white people about the horrors of their history. 2) The voice of the Black German and African Diaspora artists as audience is thus neglected and as producers silenced once more. 3) Racist artistic techniques like Blackface are applied in the work on top.

The exhibition 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' deconstructs the propagandistic nature of this type of 'truth' and representation of Africans. This exhibition disappoints the hunger for exotic sensations as contemporary German zoos and commercial productions still take recourse to folkloristic and racist traditions. The exhibition refuses to focus on the spectacular instead referring to the normality of African resistance. The exhibition also focuses on the 'normality' of bodiless African heads amongst white and Black audiences and activists, Charité representatives, administrators and also local, national and international media as professional image producers. The images of the exhibition can also be read as discredit to the attempt to strip racism of the historic dimension and to level its victims into one line with so called anti-Muslim discrimination cases against white people-of-colour based on religion (religious racism) or so called racism against the old (Altersrassismus). Thus only a few white people-of-colour can be found in these documentary photographs. In the alliance against discrimination and xenophobia, the discourse on racism in Germany has been politically high-jacked by white people-of-colour in the scramble for scarce resources in public anti-racism and minority funding.

The curators have chosen small black and white, mixed-media oversized DIN AO formats to mark their

points. It is exactly the curious explosive silence and disciplined self-denial that highlights the images' truly immodest importance. The images are concerned with a historic perspective and refer all the way back to the starting point of modernity when white people initiated a racist image-system based on cultural dis-representation to ethically justify their economic exploitation of the non-white other. Science, medicine and art were the media used to re-negotiate the economic hierarchies. Modernity in question is visually dismantled as rhetorical cover-up operation for a cultural 'desert storm' and white propaganda attack on people of African descent.

### ***Social Media Strategies of Documentary Interventions of Truth***

The heightened speed of information distribution on the Internet, through digital media productions and social media networks has attributed them with a life and dynamics of their own. It has also led to new possibilities of artworks in the times of their digital reproduction. The images of the exhibition show a Black German woman being framed by white male press charging her with over-dimensional cameras from the left. The Nigeria born Afro-German is part of a group of the African Diaspora Germany. Just like her they are holding up signs that read 'Entschuldigung Sofort' (Apologize Immediately) and 'Reparationen' (Reparations). The scene is implemented as a play on the representation of pop-culture heroes being stalked by the press. This kind of photograph stands at the abyss of what generally is accepted as documentary image. Documentary images are not meant to manipulate the recipient. Truth has to be self-evident. The Black woman holds up a camera that is directed at the state secretary. Thus she is not only object but also an independent image-producer of her own.

The photographs (and visual poetry) of the exhibition 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' have also been inspired by the musical strategy of sampling and remixing. The digital retouch of the artist as Basquaian DJ changes established historical and linear flows. The integration of local German and global English text-samples into the architecture of contemporary documentary works reloads

the matrix of meaning. The texts challenge mono-cultural reality construction defining specific contexts and Black perspectives. The inclusion of social and philosophical dynamics of production points beyond the traditional limits of Eurocentric definitions of semiotics and its neo-colonial domination on global discourse and local meaning in art.

As an example this can be observed in the photographs of the German state secretary for the ministry of foreign affairs. Mrs. Cornelia Pieper in her speech referred to the handing over as an event of 'high symbolic value'. Limited to white subtexts regarding the context of her own vocabulary she really said that it was the reminder of a 'dark and painful chapter' full of 'bloody suppression, savagery, forced labour' and 'atrocities'. She consented that its 'inhuman racism' would be reflected in discursive categories degrading the victims as 'research material'. But instead of asking for forgiveness she only invited to reconciliation and the one word she did not offer was: genocide! Some initiatives and individuals booed at Pieper for not speaking out an official apology. Pieper let this historic opportunity pass by, - in line with the official policy of the German government. The photographs show her leaving through the backdoor and causing a diplomatic *éclat* because of dissing the Namibian Minister Kazenambo by not attending his speech as representative of the Herero and the Nama people. A digital in-script is part of some photographs reading 'Zeugen des deutschen Völkermordes' (Witnesses of German Genocide) to glocalize the images and open space for historical contextualization.

Already in 2010 another strategy contextualizing the German cultural landscape with a global perspective was practiced in the major Berlin art-exhibition 'Who knows tomorrow' co-curated by Chika Okeke-Agulu. There was resistance in the Black German and African Diaspora communities because a curator from outside Germany (even though Black) was commissioned instead of choosing a Black curator from within Germany. The exhibition focused on post-colonial perspectives by international artists in the 125th year anniversary of the Berlin Africa Conference. These works in a German

context can be read as quotations from a global and thus abstract perspective. The sculptures by Pascale Marthine Tayou of oversized African people looking over and into the city from the plateau at the 'Neue Nationalgalerie' (New National Gallery) nonetheless temporarily changed the architecture of Berlin's imaginary landscape. In 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' the documentary images are also refer to a globalised discourse but they are culturally charged by an insider diaspora perspective and their mnemonic performance reminds of a Trojan virus within digital architectures and designed to change a white host.

### ***War of the Archives in times of Web 3.0***

The exhibition deals with the coming to terms with the effect of 60,000 black Namibians having been murdered by white Germans. The perspective of the photographs also includes the larger picture. There have been communities of Africans from the German colonies and their black German descendants in Berlin and other parts of Germany since around 1900. There has been racist propaganda against the descendants of the French black Rhineland troops. They are part of German society ever since and they have been victims of the Nazis. Despite their West German citizenship about 3,000 descendants of the African-American troops have been taken away from their white German mothers and given away for adoption in the USA. Others have been sterilized. About 400 children from Mozambique growing up in East Germany were 'sent back' to an African culture they did not know as part of the collateral damage of German so called re-unification. Apartheid has not only happened in South Africa. A civil rights movement for the rights of Black people is not necessary in the USA only. Passport laws are still enacted even in today's Germany.

The exhibition sets a missing link in-between in negotiating the genocide within its historical frame. Especially in a time that witnesses the neo-Nazi terror and its victims among the white People-of-Colour German-Turkish and Greek families who suffered as they have been attacked after German re-unification. The first victim of post-re-unification racist terror in 1990 against black

Germans and the African diaspora was Amadeu Antonio Kiowa. He came from Angola and was one of the East German so-called contract workers. Sexism, racism, xenophobia, structural disadvantages in the workforce and housing, racial profiling and physical violence against migrants and asylum seekers are to stay the 'unknown' part of German society as long as a re-processing of the historic dimension does not account for the perspective of African Diaspora victims like Oury Jalloh who in 2005 was burnt alive in a German prison cell.

The exhibition is an important missing link because it questions accepted truths of representation. And it combines the threads of documentary photography with knowledge management strategies show-casing how the borders in-between art and social reality can be re-arranged in favour of new insights and truths. It is this knowledge that the photographs of 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Black Berlin Renaissance' communicate to a broader public. By the way, more than 4,000 people have been waiting at the airport in Namibia for the return of the delegation to receive the human remains of their ancestors with tears of joy and pain. Today still an estimate of 80 per cent of the country is in the hands of white Namibians. Those are mainly the descendants of white Germans from colonial times who mostly also are in possession of a German passport.

The beginning of this text referred to Okwui Enwezor who by now has been named director to the major Munich museum 'Haus der Kunst' (House of the Arts). There he expanded the frame of Neo-German potential perspectives with an exhibition on the art of the Nazis. The shift towards a more complex relation between signifiers of sound and image begin to destabilize comfortable subject positions and demands that viewers actively engage with the art work questioning its truth claims. After the Black Atlantic Project exhibition 2004 - 'occupy.Black.Diaspora.berlin – Decolonial Strategies of The Berlin Renaissance' is a vital contribution from within the Black German and African Diaspora to the history and development of modern and contemporary art in the context of the decolonization of the representation of Africa. Documentation, contextualization &

decolonization turn into neo-liberation metaphors and perspectives, artistic guerilla tactics and media warfare powered by Diaspora bank accounts of diaspora and nomadic knowledge. Social Media Activists apply artistic interventions to counter the impact of neo-colonial 20th and 21st century cyber wars for Iraq, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Libya and Syria that off-balanced the social equilibrium and thirst for freedom and justice in Africa. The exhibition is a necessity of mental survival in an attempt to re/unites fragmented histories against a sea of troubles and institutional structures. These strategies aim at collapsing the architecture of Western canons of knowledge, memory and identity like the towers of Babylon. The war of the archives has only just begun.

The exhibition has been shown at LIMA Media Conference 2012, KENAKO Africa Festival 2012, Anti-Racism Festival Berlin 2012, Day of Memorial Berlin 2012 and Young African Scholars Conference Berlin 2012. Multimedia parts of the exhibition can also be accessed online via AFROTAK.com.

### **About the Artists:**

Adetoun Küppers-Adebisi – studied economical engineering. The Lagos born publisher curator and editor is a German economical and production engineer and founder and director of the Black German Media, Culture and Education Archive called AFROTAK TV cyberNomads – The Black German Media, Culture and Education Archives. In 2012 she received the Yaa Asantewaa feminist Award for Social engagement and is preparing her trans-disciplinary PHD on Gender Studies and Neo-Colonial Waste Management Discourses in-between Germany and Nigeria.

Michael Küppers-Adebisi studied literature, media and art. As Afro-German author & curator, publisher, filmmaker Multi-Media-Artist and Social Media Activist is co-founder of AFROTAK TV cyberNomads and presently finished a fellowship of the North Rhine Westphalia State Theatre that lead to the production of the interactive play on postcolonial Germany 'The Reichstag/ Kafka in the Mix.' co-written by Adetoun Küppers-Adebisi.



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