

DRAACONIAN

SWITCHISS

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ROBERT YOUNG WORKER 4 3CANAL
JAMIT 10 RICHARD RAWLINS
BUTTON PROJECT 14 RODELL
WARNER CEPEP WORKERS 18
NIGEL ROJAS 20 COMMENTARY
24 JEMIMA CHARLES CONES 28
DWIGHT CAMPBELL FEBREZZED
HIS DOG 30

16

Welcome to the 12th issue of Draconian Switch, which just seems to feature quite a lot of people whose names begin with the letter "R". We welcome Mariel Rebecca Helena Brown to the writing fold as she does an article on Robert Young the "raise poor" Fashion Artist. Dave O. Williams comments on the Strangling of Carnival in the Mecca of Carnival. Rodell Warner has quite a few pieces in this issue as well. He chronicles in photo essay form the 3Canal (Wendell Manwarren, Roger Roberts, and Stanton Kewley) 2010 Jam It rehearsals, does the documentary for Dave's piece, and gives us a taste of his CEPEP workers project. We cover Richard Rawlins' Button Project, Dwight Campbell's really cool life lesson book- I Febrezed My Dog, Jemima Charles' Cones, and Indra Ramcharan- now relocated to London- does a piece on musician Nigel Rojas.



(This to the left here was the original cover.)

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Tracy J. Hutchings, Andre Bagoo **PHOTOGRAPHY** Brianna McCarthy,
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ROBERT YOUNG worker
mariel RH brown

I've been aware of Robert Young's fashion label, **The Cloth**, since the early 90s, when it seemed every other person owned one of their heavily appliquéd waistcoats or tunics. The Cloth clothes were utterly identifiable: impeccable tailoring, bright abstract graphics and layers of satin-stitched machine appliqué on a background of white cotton or ramie linen. It seemed to me that their clothes were worn by the trendy/ arty people of Trinidad and Tobago: calypsonian David Rudder, tv host Allyson Hennessy, artist Christopher Cozier and Robert Young himself were always decked in shirts and tunics that were unmistakably of Trinidad and Tobago, yet were one-of-a-kind.

In 1992, Robert did a design course at UWI's Creative Arts Centre. I was doing the same course as part of my degree, and I was struck by the fact that this - by then - well-established clothing designer, felt the need to learn 'design' - in a sense, after the fact. In fact, this feeling of being someone who makes clothes but is certainly not 'a designer' is one of the central conundrums of Young's life. The notion he holds, that design is something that other people do, has had a curious effect on Young's work. On one hand, it can reduce the value of his pursuit, because, if he doesn't believe it's design, then why should

anyone else. And yet, his complete lack of regard for the mechanics of design has also freed him from whatever rules and constraints trained designers impose on themselves. It gives Young's garments a whimsy and naivety that is both refreshing and quite unique - rare qualities in so much of what we call 'fashion'.

The Cloth began in the mid 80s as a loose collective of designers **Robert Young**, Camille Selvon- Abrahams, Adele Todd and Natalie Phillips. The group all came from Maracas, St Joseph (in Trinidad and Tobago) and shared a determination to challenge existing understandings of what fashion could be and a desire to work. At the time, Robert Young had been working as a lab technician, a job which, apparently, he wasn't particularly good at as he was fired twice. "The first time [I was fired] I cried and was re-hired. The second time, I started The Cloth." Young says he was looking for something that would allow him to feel a sense of value. He'd had some personal successes with making clothes - he'd sewn a few things for his brother, which people seemed to like. "It was one of the first things I'd done that gave me the feeling that I was worth something," says Young. "Money wasn't an issue. I actually could do something that people liked

and wanted."

From its inception, The Cloth was an experiment - a work in progress: in making garments; in forming a design collaborative; in using clothing as a canvas for making political statements. The group quickly came up with what **Young** calls, their **design bible**, a series of sketches and ideas that Young still uses today. Each member contributed ideas for garment design or for appliqués: Adele Todd came up with the layered tunics, which were inspired by Japanese design; Camille Selvon-Abrahams drew a lot of the early appliqué designs. They combined batik with strange textures and simple shapes, and often, they branded their work with political and anti-establishment messages about drug abuse, relationships, Mandela and, in Young's words, "super-power aggression". In a way, the clothes had a kind of art school defiance and anger about them. There was little concern over the structural integrity of the garments or even how they looked and sat while being worn, as though their function as items that enhance the look of the body, was incidental or even completely irrelevant. Very few of The Cloth's early pieces were what one would consider flattering (it would be years, for example, before Young would figure out how to put darts into his appliquéd

garments).

It's no surprise that so much of The Cloth's work was, and continues to be, used as a vehicle for promoting social change. Growing up, Young was surrounded by activists. His parents, Joe and Grace Young, were both Marxists. Joe was active in the Workers and Farmers Party of CLR James and George Weekes and Grace was a trade unionist. As a child, Young was inspired by **The Revolution**, and stories of his parents being arrested and jailed at various times only added to his sense of the rightness of challenging the status quo. According to Young, financial hardship was also a reality his family struggled with, and the fact that his father was absent more often than not. "No matter my father was involved in stuff, he never lived at home," says Young. "So my mother's salary supported everything." Of his father, Young says: "He was a strange person that would require quiet in the house when he came. But he was not around. My life would have been different if he was around." Robert believes it's unlikely he would have become a fashion designer if his father had been more in the picture, because (as he says) fashion **is** not something fathers want their sons to do. By contrast, Young's mother was open to her children's various creative explorations.



trained designers impose on themselves



"I never heard her say you can't or you shouldn't," he explains.

Grace Young is one of several pivotal women who have supported Robert's work. Although within a few years of The Cloth's formation, all but Robert of the founding collective had moved on to pursue other interests, over the years Young's romantic partners invariably became involved in the business, either as designers or managers. Young explains: "I got a lot of support from women in my life. They've taken up significant roles like jumping in the business and trying to run it." Of course, there were times when these interventions could have been a recipe for disaster! Yet somehow, Young has managed to protect the core that is The Cloth. As businesses go, it can seem like an haphazard set-up. But Young has found a loyal clientele both in Trinidad and Tobago and in the wider Caribbean. He continually shows his work at Jamaica Fashion Week, and, more recently at Trinidad and Tobago Fashion Week. His shows are always keenly anticipated, both for their stellar line-up of gorgeous clothes, and for their accompanying drama. Behind the scenes you never quite know how many pieces will make it to the catwalk, and onstage the models can carry tin buckets with leaves, or sit

on benches and draw things on the ground for no apparent reason.

Now, almost 25 years into his career as a fashion designer in a place like this, where such things almost don't exist, Young continues to challenge the establishment through his work despite (and he'll cringe to read this) his position as part of the Caribbean's fashion establishment. Young's genuine doubts about his status as a leading designer are confusing but perhaps understandable. When what you know is how to fight for a space of your own, what do you do when the space actually becomes yours? I suppose you do what you've always done, and for Robert, that is work. His clothes are continually evolving and have never lost their relevance. Of himself, he says: "I count my success as: I'm still doing this thing after 23 years. And making a mark in a place that doesn't allow it." And who can argue with that?



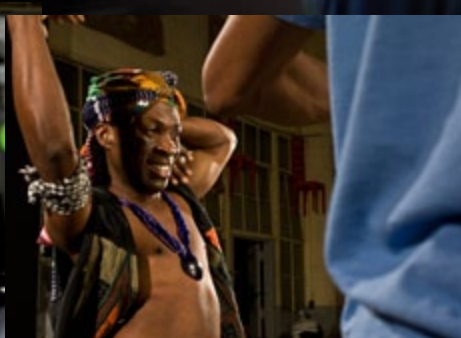


FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTES:

A chance once again to make a statement, to celebrate life, to claim a space and make a stage and say LOOK MEH! This is it, the moment in time we live for, a space and time once again to liberate your body and free up your mind in the spirit of those who came before and paved the way for we to celebrate today

3CANAL
jam it 2010 rehearsals

rodell warner photography © 2010





RICHARD RAWLINS button project

Button up

This was possibly the last Friday that my friend, a confessed and unabashed PNM party supporter, would have under the existing governing regime. And maybe this is why he - graphic designer and artist - Richard Rawlins, chose to make his statement at this moment, so pregnant with possibilities and pessimisms.

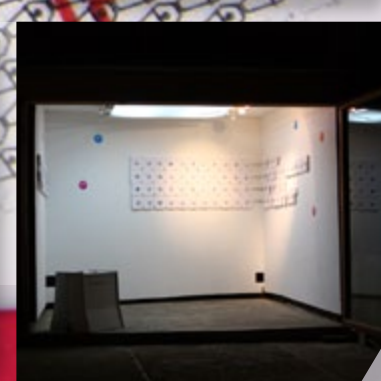
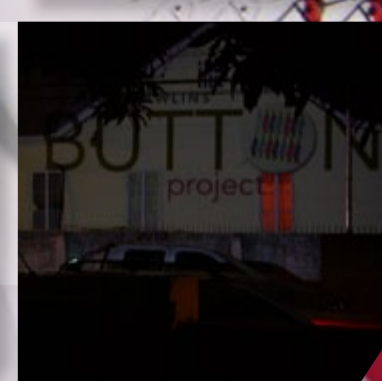
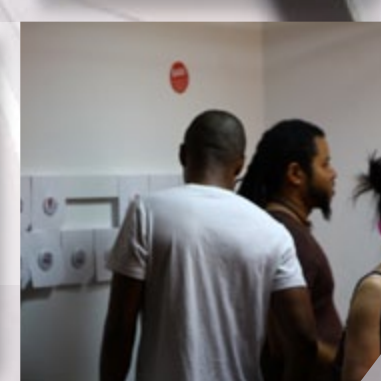
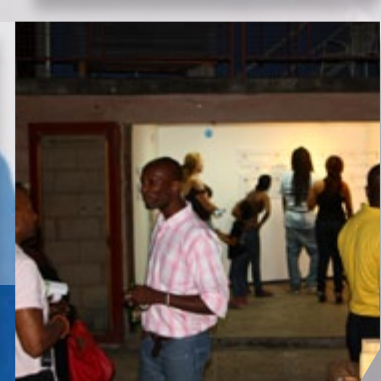
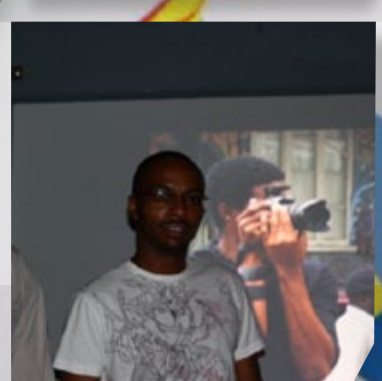
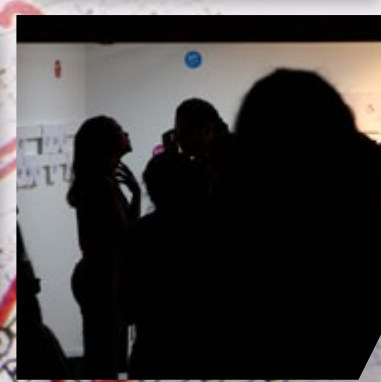
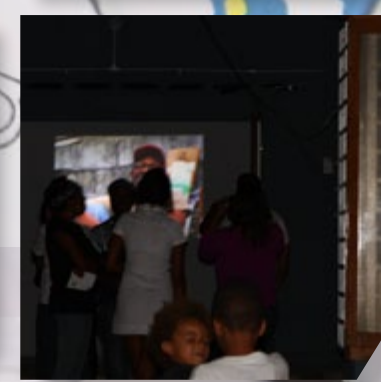
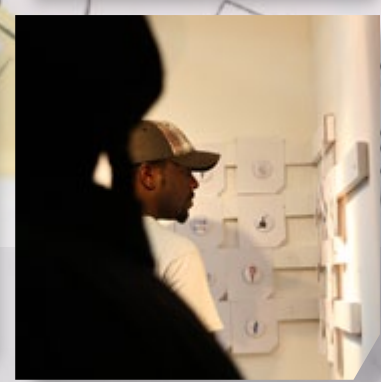
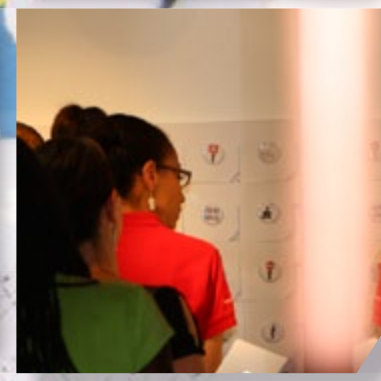
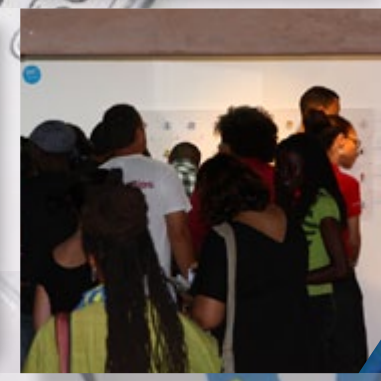
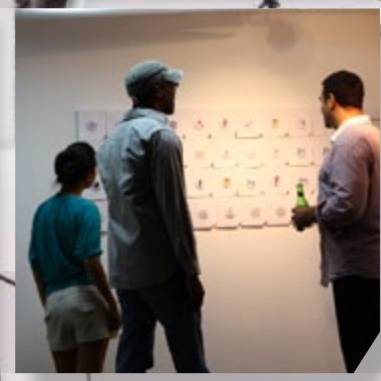
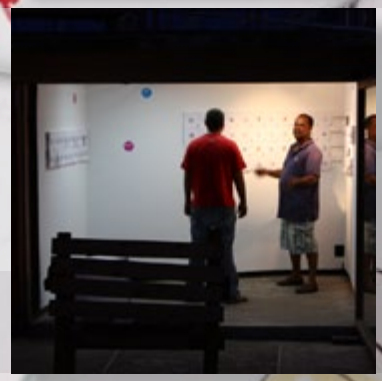
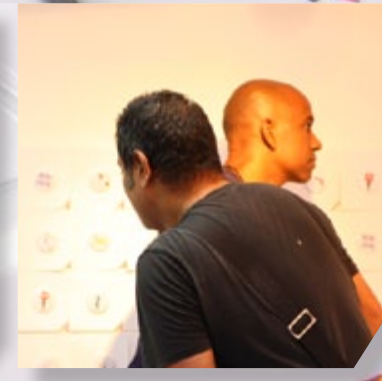
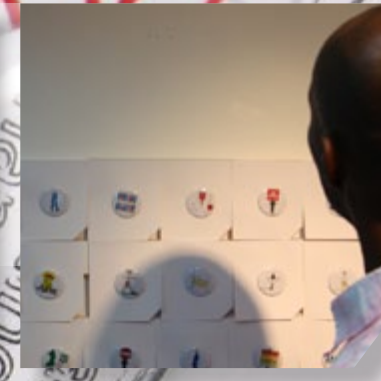
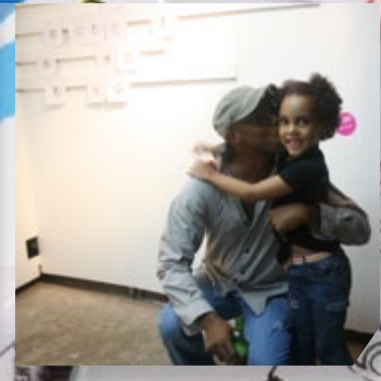
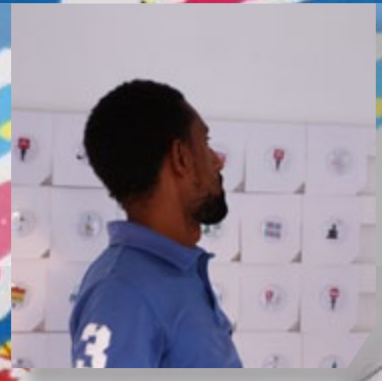
The Button Project: an art-commerce event, unusual on the Trini artscape where artists are never supposed to be seen as having any commercial connection to their work, other than via red dots and well-spoken, well-commissioned, socialite gallerists. This project was independently staged and funded by the artist and pieces were designed and priced to go. From the price patches which were themselves larger than the actual pieces, to the volume discounts you could receive with the size of your purchase; the commerciality was a gloriously refreshing affirmation of independence, creativity and sustainability.

The night air was wet and humid with the pound and echoes of passing music trucks proclaiming in soca verse and rhythm "We love you so, we take good care of you only the PNM understands," the chorus of this year's PNM. In this dewy political ether, Richard's illustration-clad buttons offered for sale in the small box room at the Alice Yard seemed to resonate sentiments that were in stark yet entertaining contradiction to this patriarchal mantra of patronage; and even to his own political alignment.

The project features, in miniature, satirical commentaries that he had been cathartically rendering over the past two years, like a conversation between he and himself - to me, an illustration of a deeper rift between him and his faith in loving systems that were "taking care of us". Now, on Election Day, today, I wonder if he has reconciled himself between his own genetically engrained political camaraderie, and the voice of dissent of his protestative, but humourous work. I wonder if he has yet cast his vote, and I wonder of the agonising moment he would spend in that tiny box. *dave o.williams [24.05.10. Election Day]*



LA REVOLUCION
YA COMIENZA
AHORA!





RODELL
WARNER
photographer

In Trinidad & Tobago the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) employs close to 6,000 people (total population 1.3 Million). They can be considered to be from the less privileged classes. CEPEP works like an unemployment relief programme without the 'unemployment'.

This very easily CHANGES employment statistics. In the post-colonial (British) construct, social class CHANGES everything. The CEPEP workers (mostly women) perform a more janitorial and maintenance function than do they an environmental protection one. Their work consists mainly of unskilled cutting, trimming, cleaning and grooming of roadsides and public spaces around the country.

CEPEP WORKER PORTRAITS

They can usually be seen along roadways in the early to mid morning. In the sunrise, these costumed characters play out a street drama in slow procession. A drama that has amazingly little to do with CHANGE and everything to do with maintenance - maintenance of a status quo.

This project documents one aspect of this drama - the costuming. How people CHANGE themselves into street warriors to protect themselves from occupational hazards - not only flying projectiles dislodged by their weed whackers but also how they CHANGE their identities to maybe protect themselves from the passing judgements of commuting eyes.



[music]

As a pre teen and teen listening to 95.1, I would hear local rock bands' music played on the radio. I knew the names and had some favourites: Max Bit U, Black Rose and Incert Coin were some of the ones that stuck. Don't ask me to recall any of the songs because I can't.

What happened to local rock? What happened to hearing it on the radio and all the music festivals in Anchorage where we could hear and see the bands?

The one band that still remains in my mind and whose songs I can actually recall (at least most of them); the one band that is still releasing albums even if they think that everyone is, 'the last middle finger sticking out of the grave at the world': The Orange Sky.

I always loved the unique and interesting sound of the lead singer's voice. His journey through life to today is just as interesting. Nigel Rojas, is without a doubt, a Trinidad and Tobago Rock icon who has been musically inspired by the 70s. With his father being a huge fan of Bob Marley, Lord Shorty and The Bee Gees, Rojas saw his future self on a stage with a guitar in his hands from the age of 9. His initial inspiration

came from his mother's sister who was a guitar-carrying nun he likens to Julie Andrews in The Sound of Music. She showed him chords on the instrument and taught him how to play hymns that he eventually adapted to other music he liked. Soon, a ten-year-old Nigel was teaching his 6 year-old-brother Nicholas how to play guitar too. At that age and even through his teen years Nigel says it was never about writing music, it was about absorbing lyrics and building the data to have the ability to express emotion through words.

By the time Rojas was 18, 80s rock was in full flight. It was the era of the lead guitar not the songwriter.

Rojas was sent to London to study marketing, but quickly realised that it was not something he wanted to do ever, and with no plan "b", he returned to his home in Trinidad and worked in his father's office. Even there, he was more interested in going into the bush and the springs of North West Trinidad with his guitar than being groomed to take over the family business.

Sitting by himself in nature with his guitar is when the actual songwriting started with lyrics that were very honest. It led to him the creation of his first

band with friend Dwight: a duo called Sticky Mango Juice.

After playing the music circuit in Trinidad they decided to take the act to London and try their luck there. But the plan was a non-starter. Dwight had a mental breakdown and Nigel was back to square one. So, although he never liked the sound of his voice, Rojas started to sing.

He formed the group Orange Peel Groove, a 'rapso fusion 90s grunge mix up kinda ting' that exuded total expression. This too was short-lived, but that fusion of musical styles would become one of the defining features of Rojas' sound for years to come.

Rojas also flirted with death metal when he formed the band, Lucifix, with his brother and cousins. It was death metal at its finest and it was brutal. The band took on an extreme theatrical momentum as they all portrayed themselves as devil worshippers to force the point 'screw what you think the church is... nothing is real'. Adam, the youngest member of the band, made some large wooden crosses that they would wear upside down and do strange things in public such as walking into large grocery stores to buy bread. The theatrics worked as the

word quickly spread that the four boys and the band were possessed. So when they got onto a stage it was just another chapter in their bigger story that had many subplots. Adam suffered a nervous breakdown during which he was reciting lyrics of Lucifix. His mother called a priest to see him and the band room as she thought he was possessed. After performing an exorcism, the priest declared that Adam had been possessed by 17 demons as a result of being in the band and invoking the devil and evil spirits with their music. And Lucifix broke up.

Next for Rojas was the band Jaundis-I which he was invited to join. They were signed by Amar Studios and became the first band in Trinidad to release an actual CD. Although considered a local success with radio airplay and sold out shows, the band members didn't get along and Janudis-I soon split. It was then that Rojas formed The Orange Sky.

The new band was to represent the triumph of music through tragedy. It had been a sweet and sour journey up until that point but Nigel knew that everything, as they say, happens for a reason. The band met quick local success as they were very well received by the public

Di NIGEL ROJAS indra ramcharan Capo Tutti

The band met quick local success. They were very well received by the public and after 3 albums the band decided to enter the Decibel Showcase for international Producers and CEOs from record labels against 15 other bands from the region and Latin America. But even though they won by a large margin with 96% on their scorecard The Orange Sky was unable to get signed because of the size of the band.

Rojas restructured the band, breaking it down to a five piece set up, and started to write rock that was slightly different from the Reggae Rock Caribbean influenced fusion that he'd had going before. Through all the formations, break-ups and restructurings, it was Nigel's voice that remained. He refused to try to sing with an accent. After writing songs like 'Alone' and 'Dogs' the band had enough songs to record another album. They were signed to Granite Records and had their album released across the States and went on a 44 city tour in the US that

was packed. But, according to Rojas, no money was put into marketing the band. There were no radio interviews and no magazine articles. After the tour the label informed the band that they had gone bankrupt. With their bubble popped the band returned home depressed. Nigel started writing immediately and decided the band would release their last album, a 'last middle finger sticking out of the grave to the world'. If they were going down they would do it with a bang. After opening for Kansas at a concert at home however the international world of opportunity smiled on them again and waved a finger in their direction. They were signed to Star City Records the correct way with a proper retainer and advance with a tour. In July 2008 The Orange Sky left Trinidad to do an 88 city tour of the States. At that time the band was made up of Nicholas Rojas, Nigel Rojas, Dion Howe and Obasi Springer. The shows they did were small but they planted the seeds of The Orange Sky. However, once again the marketing was not there. There was no follow through except the realisation

that the label was spending thousands of dollars a week to keep the band on the road but not a cent on marketing. The band left the label and returned home once again depressed and slightly suicidal.

As he had always done, Rojas turned again to songwriting. There was nothing going on in Trinidad at the time and Nigel decided to record a solo album 'Nigel Rojas and The Blue Emperor' at Random Design Studios to "stay sane". At that time he saw it as the end of The Orange Sky and likened the band to that of a beautiful caterpillar. Because the music was rock its success was limited. The caterpillar emerged as The Blue Emperor butterfly hopefully to soar to places that it never thought it could go, the name representing what was actually going on at the time. Nigel's attitude then was 'fuck it... just play Caribbean positive vibes music written from the soul'. It was a success and the act that had nothing to do with The Orange Sky played the usual Port of Spain Trinidad circuit and was well received. December of 2009 was the launch of their 6th album the new 'last middle finger sticking out of the grave to the world' Dawn of the Living Dread.

Today, Rojas has decided to leave everything up to fate and see what will happen.

Beyond the band, Nigel has been trying to push himself and his music. He took on the role of Pilot in the local production of Jesus Christ Superstar. The Rock opera idea also appealed to him greatly and he even got the original version by Deep Purple. He and his daughter will both be in another local musical production that he is excited about (but I will not say what it is because I really don't know if I'm supposed to. Hard luck dey readers!) When asked if he would produce a Rock Opera of his own he admits that is an idea to use some songs from The Orange Sky and do that using the ritual that was done by the band from its inception before they played any show. The projects Nigel is working on at the moment are vast and encouraging as they include musical education and advancement of the youth of Trinidad and Tobago. Being the local rock music icon that he is he will be able to push and motivate the youth to want to go further as Nigel has been among those in the front with a cutlass clearing the way for us to pass in his own way trying to make us see that 'Far beyond the hills lies the other side where the horizon meets the orange sky.'



Some see the scene where the Moor king, Othello strangles his wife Desdemona in her bed as one of the most powerful scenes in all of Western theatre history. By this single act Othello puts an end to one conflict and sets in motion a cascade of other, less overt but equally destructive ones.

A good deal of the planet's cherished artistic, cultural and entertainment practices have been results of conflict. Socio-political conflicts have given rise to the Japanese Butoh dance form, a direct result of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Picasso's famous depiction of the Spanish Civil War in his Guernica; American blues and rock sprung from the slavery experience and civil rights movements; and of course, all martial arts have come from conflict, including our local stick fighting. These are just a few forms that dot the spectrum of art.

Trinidad & Tobago Carnival has been the realm of public art for almost 200 years. From its beginnings with the fight for freedom in post-Emancipation Port of Spain when ex-slaves used the Canboulay celebrations that marked the cane harvest, or the burning of the cane, to assert their new civil rights. They carried torches, beat drums sang songs and they also armed themselves with weapons - stones, bottles, knives and their famous sticks. Weapons were used not so much to create a hostile environment, but to respond to one. These were free black people - ex-slaves and of course these nighttime processions brought a great degree of dis-ease to the ruling classes - the ex- slave owners. It is now almost totally discarded that Carnival was born solely from slaves looking in on their master's fancy dress balls and simply trying to imitate and parody them. Carnival comes from a far deeper and malignant place than mere buffoonery.

dave o.williams

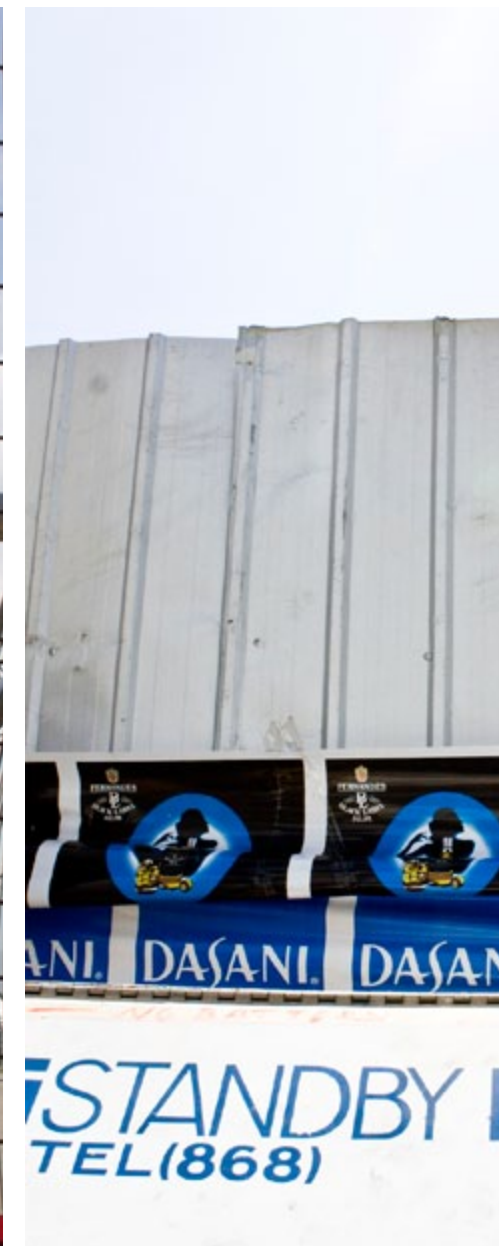
IS STRANGLING ART AN ART FORM IN ITSELF...

Photos of Carnival Auschwitz follow.
A study of the new Savannah
Rodell Warner

The organised, competition-based carnival we see today is the direct result of a multitude of attempts to mutilate and manicure the once volatile and unpredictable civil rights phenomenon. Competitions where mostly rum prizes were used to draw the uncontrolled hordes into orderly, more palatable divertissements have become the hallmarks of our modern Carnival. And today every major national Government-hosted, public carnival event is based around competition and winning. The heaving of a civil rights movement never discussed, battled, nor won are now sublimating, waiting to be reborn as some other conflict... some other dysfunction... some other art form.



Circa 2010.
If art can be characterized as one of the things that is born of dis-ease, is this the new art of Carnival? Whatever the answer, the Queen's Park Savannah remains the showcase for Carnival art.



[spaces]

“And then there were the normals. More android than Cindi Mayweather, less human than their kind suggested. Individualism diminished. Prognosis grave. Pained and in silence he walked on. Until he saw a light, emanating from an inanimate created by an animate. And he realized, there was life on his planet. Her name was AMMA (the humans called her Jemima Charles). He needed to know more. he set upon himself seven questions that would reveal how this light created, that light” - Excerpt from “Hi, I’m a brain. And you are...?”

1. WHAT is Jemima Charles and WHO are The Cones?

Jemima Charles is a student artist and her art work usually reflects connectivity. She believes that we are all connected and her pieces communicate person to person connections, things humans connect to, or things which allow these connections to take place.

Cones deals with visual perception and the role of the retina. Perceptions can be influenced by social connections, political connections, spiritual connections and many more. Cones allowed the viewer an opportunity to leave their individual perception (mark) of intimate relationships (connections) they have with specific colors. Each participant were given a specific color palette and told to paint onto a cone whatever connections they made with the colors. The cones are a reflection of each individual’s visual perception.

2. How far into the evolution of Jemima Charles did the Cones appear?

Jemima evolves daily, every interaction made between another human and herself is a connection which maybe meaningful towards future art productions. Cones an interactive exhibition of light transparency transformed Alice Yard into a community of connectivity. This activity is still assisting in Jemima’s future as an artist.

JEMIMA CHARLES CONES

tracy j Hutchings

3. What are their true purpose?

The true purpose of the cone is to capture the thoughts of an individual. The exhibition was set up in such a way that the marks made by the public were only restricted by the color palette. Every mark made reflected the perception they held of a particular color and the medium presented. These interactions inspire future areas to be explored within the medium.

4. What is Jemima's [purpose]?

Jemima believes because we exist we are creating art. Jemima's purpose is to have a meaningful existence.

5. How did Jemima feel after the installation of the Cones?

She felt very encouraged by the responses of the public and the artistic fraternity. Cones was a necessary part in the development of the artist's confidence specifically in the area of conceptualizing an idea and it being successfully portrayed to the viewer. She feels very confident in her craft.

6. What is she creating now – any spoilers?

Jemima is working on the human figure... drawings on paper sculpture and mono glass prints.

7. FORECAST – in three years Jemima will have been made into... ?

In three years Jemima would have been made into a carrot...just kidding. In three years Jemima would be made into...time and the work she produces within that time will tell. For now she is working towards exhibiting internationally.



[review]



BOOK: *i febrezed my dog*
Author: *Dwight Campbell*
Available on LULU
reviewed by:
Andre Bagoo

1. Philosophy is a good read.
2. I Febrezed My Dog is a book of philosophy.
3. I Febrezed My Dog is a good read.

A student of philosophy (and many others) will recognise the above as a syllogism; a logical argument with premises and a conclusion. I Febrezed My Dog is full of many syllogisms; is a book about life and philosophy and its author—Dwight Nickolai—is not afraid to deal with the heavy stuff.

The book is a series of reflections on some of the great problems of life,

organised around themes like 'LOVE DEFINED', 'AGING', 'PETS' and 'DON'T TRUST A FOGY'. Let's quote some snippets for you to have a better idea. Take, for instance, the following which are taken from different chapters across the work:

(a) "The people who say they like their jobs are not only ignorant but delusional. What they don't realize is this - they really just hate their current job less than they hate their previous one. Either that or they're 'newbies' to the unforgiving working world and they will come around soon.

Join me in acknowledging this and it will bring you great comfort. It will set you free. Knowing that your fellow man is not buzzing with joy at the sound of his alarm clock, at whatever ungodly morning hour will help you get through countless days of wanting to shoot yourself in the head.;"

(b) "Communication is the source of all misunderstanding"; and

(c) "No one knows us better than we know ourselves. We know all our good, our bad and our ugly. We are the only ones who can read our own minds. We are the only ones we can't keep secrets from. Yet somehow the idea that our friends might have a less biased view of who we are sits easily within our minds."

I could go on, but I think you get the point. For me, it was a good read. But that's because of the syllogism of the opening, which not everybody will agree with.

For instance, premise number one is far from uncontroversial. Having studied moral philosophy and jurisprudence at school myself, I agree wholeheartedly with the statement: "Philosophy is a good read". However, not everybody chooses to study moral philosophy and jurisprudence at school. Hence the first difficulty for potential readers of I Febrezed My Dog.

The second premise also has uncertainties. After all, I Febrezed My Dog, is not entirely a work of philosophy. It's also personal and is very relaxed, casual and-in parts—funny. It's kinda like having a long conversation with a buddy over beer. A smart and sensitive and fun buddy.

The third premise is plausible for more reasons than one. It will hold true for fans of philosophy. But it will also hold true for people who just like smart conversation. However, the book, which has been elegantly designed, is a bit monotonous and could have done with more variety in its vignettes. It's a good read, but I wonder if it could have been better? Philosophy or not.

