



JAMAICAN ROUTES

EBONY G. PATTERSON



LEASHO JOHNSON



ANDRE WOOLERY

STORM SAULTER



MATTHEW McCARTHY

CAMILLE CHEDDA



COSMO WHYTE

OLIVIA McGILCHRIST



ANDREA CHUNG

MARLON JAMES



ONEIKA RUSSELL

curated by
SELENE WENDT

JAMAICAN ROUTES
January 30 – March 2, 2016

Curated by
Selene Wendt for
Punkt Ø / Galleri F 15

Participating Artists:
Camille Chedda
Andrea Chung
Marlon James
Leasho Johnson
Matthew McCarthy
Olivia McGilchrist
Ebony G. Patterson
Oneika Russell
Storm Saulter
Cosmo Whyte
Andre Woolery

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PUNKT Ø

the global
art project

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DAG AAK SVEINAR

Director, Punkt Ø / Galleri F 15

FOREWORD

With the understanding that the concept of culture is composite and complex, our curiosity is peaked in relation to an exhibition that presents art from one culture in a completely different part of the world.

The idea of a nation state – whose population consists of a homogeneous linguistic and cultural group with a common background and common historical origins – spread like wildfire through Europe after the French Revolution. In Norway, the formation of the nation state started in 1814 and was first completed in 1905, when Norway was separated from Sweden. Jamaica achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1962.

Aside from both being young nations, the links between Jamaica and Norway are not very obvious. However, Jamaica, as an island nation in the Caribbean, and Norway, with its long coastline, have both received a multitude of impulses from abroad, which have stimulated the formation of a rich, composite and vital cultural identity.

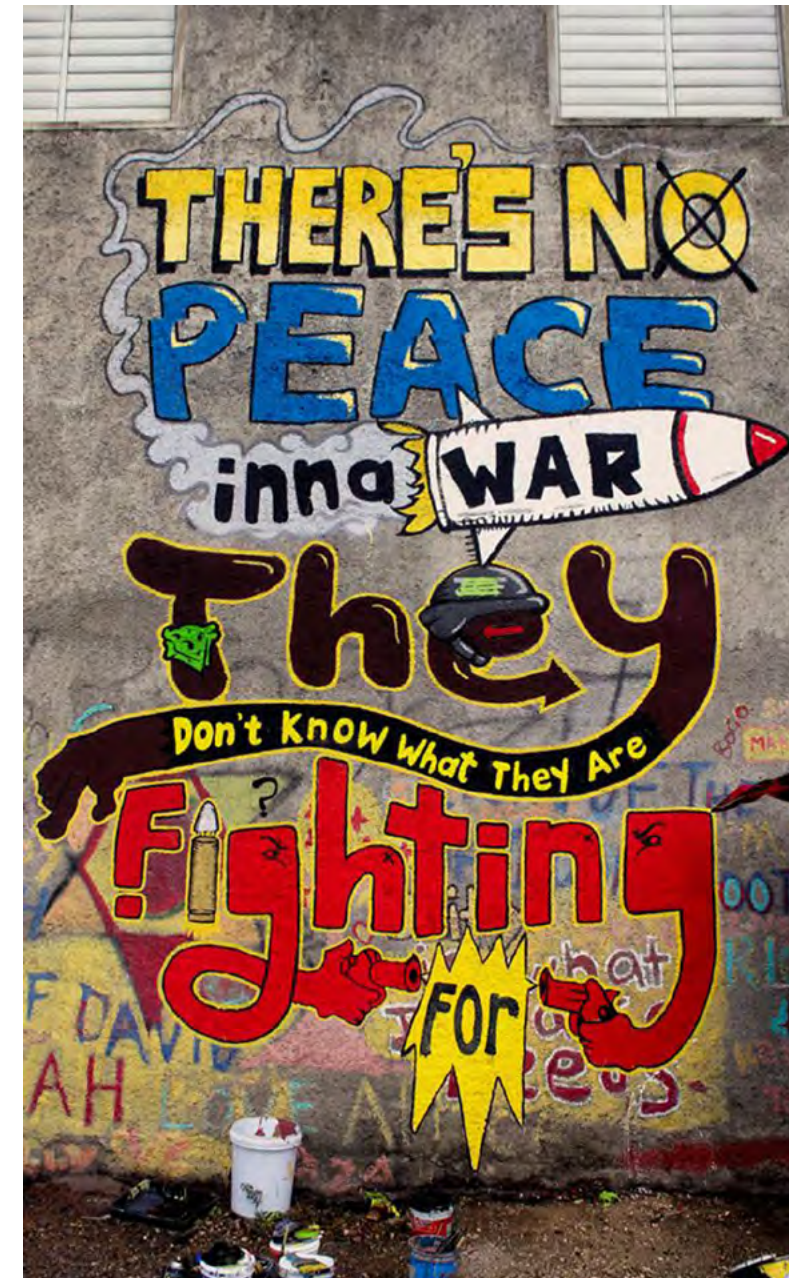
Contemporary art is often shaped by local contexts and environments, but is equally stimulated by international and cosmopolitan

movements, an aspect that is made evident in this exhibition.

An understanding of a country's culture is achieved through a combination of personal experience and knowledge gleaned from other sources. Although this process demands in-depth study, open-mindedness, and an intellectual grasp of cultural theory, personal experience is crucial to an overall understanding of any culture. For me, Jamaican culture brings to mind ska, reggae, James Bond novels, and Usain Bolt. More recently, I now also associate Jamaica with Marlon James' epic novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* for which he received the Man Booker Prize in 2015.

From January 30 to March 2, 2016, the entire space of Galleri F 15 has been designated to Jamaican Routes. I see this as a unique opportunity to widen my own perspectives and understanding of Jamaican culture through the works in the exhibition.

In this presentation of eleven young contemporary artists primarily from Jamaica, Selene Wendt presents a multifaceted, quality-driven, and socially engaged vision of contemporary art that has connections



back in time as well as real presence in its own time. The paintings, videos, works on paper, photographs, and installations come together to signal something fresh and visionary, and provide a glimpse of some recent trends within Jamaican contemporary art. These artists, who are already well known in Jamaica and the Caribbean, are quickly gaining international attention. For Galleri F 15 it is an honor to host the first exhibition dedicated to Jamaican contemporary art in Scandinavia.

I extend gratitude to Selene Wendt, who has used her in-depth knowledge of and appreciation for Jamaican culture, art, and music to create this exhibition.

Many thanks as well to the participating artists who have generously allowed us to borrow their work and to the writers who have contributed to this catalogue with insightful essays that help to further contextualize these works within a wider framework.



SELENE WENDT

WAKE THE WORLD AND TELL THE PEOPLE

COSMO WHYTE

The Well Traveled African

Previous:

MATTHEW MCCARTHY

There's No Peace Inna War

The Jamaican-born cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who made an extraordinary contribution to postcolonial discourse during his lifetime, suggested that one should think of culture not necessarily as a return to roots, but rather in terms of routes, an idea that fully embraces an expansive notion of culture. This includes the routes by which people travel and also how culture travels, moves, develops, changes and migrates.¹ The exhibition title ***Jamaican Routes*** pays homage to Stuart Hall, and also serves to emphasize that although rooted in Jamaica, the exhibition extends well beyond Jamaica. The routes of this exhibition are complex and intertwined, reach from past to present, and back again. These routes are as influenced by history as they are by personal experience, whether they extend from Jamaica to Trinidad, The United States to Mauritius, from Kentucky to Kingston, or whether they are local routes that lead from Half Way Tree to the hills of Saint Andrew.

Already well known in Jamaica and the Caribbean, the eleven participating artists featured in ***Jamaican Routes*** are young artists whose careers are on the rise internationally. The selected works have been carefully chosen to provide a nuanced impression of Jamaican contemporary art that reflects its formal and conceptual depth. The participating artists address a wide range of topics through their work, including, but not limited to the social, cultural and political implications of Jamaican music.

Through the years, the development of Jamaican music in its many forms has provided an unlimited source of inspiration for musicians worldwide. Jamaican music is a treasure trove in terms of how it reflects the sociopolitical climate of Jamaica, and continues to have a tremendous impact on popular music around the world. In fact, Jamaica is one of the few countries that can lay claim to planting the seed for

HIP HOP CULTURE WAS CREATED LONG BEFORE KANYE TO SAY

more than one contemporary musical genre. From Kingston to the world and back again, Jamaican music has been truly instrumental to the development of other forms of music. As such, the intricacies of Jamaican music, and its social, cultural and political implications, provide a powerful undertone for many of the works featured in *Jamaican Routes*.

For those who know a little about the history of Jamaican music both before and after Bob Marley, and who know that hip-hop culture was created long before the likes of Kanye had much to say, the exchange between reggae and rap music is a match made in heaven. Particularly for those who know their reggae royalty, from King Tubby to Prince Jammy, Lee Scratch Perry to Burning Spear, and who can differentiate between Grandmaster Flash and The Sugarhill Gang, the constant give and take between reggae, hip-hop, crossover, and other musical genres is simply in the mix. Not long after Lauren Hill, the queen of hip-hop, married Bob Marley's son Rohan Marley, she was in on an amazing remix of Bob Marley's *Turn the Lights Down Low*. The song was one of the main titles on what is probably among the most dynamic crossover albums ever, *Chant Down Babylon*, produced by Bob Marley's son Stephen Marley in 1999. For roots reggae purists the album is more rap than reggae, but it's really not far from a classic 'version' – a true Jamaican remix. Just listen to hip-hop prodigy Wyclef Jean at his most 'rootical' if you need proof that reggae is as relevant today as it was when Bob Marley was still alive. It's already been twelve years since Wyclef rocked the house with his crossover album *Preacher's Son*, and he continues to create positive vibrations with his unique mash-up of reggae/calypso/soca-inspired rap. Of course, true reggae enthusiasts know that the significance of reggae, if perhaps more prevalent than ever before, has been relevant ever since the seventies.

STORM SAULTER
Who Knows
Protoje featuring Chronixx
(Video still)

Next:
STORM SAULTER
Who Knows
Protoje featuring Chronixx
(Video still)

Then:
EBONY G. PATTERSON
Trunk, Stump, and Dominoes, 2014







While new generations continue to discover the magic of reggae, reggae music itself has also gone through some vital developments. A lot has changed since the good old days of conscious roots reggae, and even during the past few years. Somewhere along the timeline, in the gradual transition from roots reggae to the most provocative forms of dancehall, various cultural and social shifts have taken place that have tremendous ideological and sociological implications that are worthy of discussion within the framework of contemporary art. Especially right now, in the midst of the current reggae revival², with Chronixx, Protoje and Jesse Royal among the movement's rapidly rising stars, fascinating things are happening in Kingston that have implications far beyond Jamaica, both in terms of music and art. Just as the most relevant art and music anywhere in the world often reflects a bigger cultural phenomenon, Jamaican music, and dancehall in particular, is an ongoing source of inspiration for several of the participating artists in this exhibition.

Ebony G. Patterson's intricately detailed tapestries and installations encrusted with glitter, rhinestones, fabric, silk flowers, jewelry, sunglasses, toys, and other paraphernalia provide a fascinating visual platform for her ongoing investigation of topics that relate specifically to Jamaican dancehall culture. While it's easy to understand these strong and highly significant cultural links, her work is equally relevant within a wider international context.

When I first encountered Ebony G. Patterson's sparkling installations and tapestries they immediately brought to mind the work of Liza Lou. In Patterson's case, the politics of identity and fashion unfold in the shared space of contemporary art and dancehall culture. Deeply embedded within the complicated structures of both art and fashion is the notion of identity. Within this context, Patterson places dancehall style right where it shines most brightly – front stage and center. Of course, there is a lot more going on in the work than



‘simple dancehall pageantry’. Intricate patterns of identity are found in the glittering details that are meticulously hand-sewn into massive installations that rip dancehall style apart at the seams, offering up new and contradictory perspectives surrounding notions of gender, beauty and masculinity.

While Liza Lou became famous for transforming well known cultural symbols into extraordinary objects and magnificent installations, doing with Tide, Budweiser and Barbie, what Warhol did with the Brillo box and the Campbell’s soup can, Patterson hones in on the specifics of Jamaican dancehall culture, with Vybz Kartel, Bounty Killer and Shabba Ranks as likely suspects in her investigation of a wide range of identity issues that typically challenge preconceived notions of beauty, gender, sexuality and race. Most importantly, she unveils some of the fundamental driving factors behind the primping, preening and peacocking that is integral to dancehall culture. If Liza Lou captured

Top Left:
LIZA LOU
Kitchen
(detail)

Top Right:
EBONY G. PATTERSON
Lily, Carnation and Rose Budz
(detail)

Right:
EBONY G. PATTERSON
Swag Swag Krew

Next:
EBONY G. PATTERSON
Lily, Carnation and Rose Budz
(detail)



everyone's attention by transforming the mundane into the dazzling, Ebony G. Patterson is well on her way to becoming equally renowned for pimping up the bling.

In a statement about her own work, Ebony G. Patterson explains it succinctly:

My ongoing body of work explores constructions of the masculine within popular culture - while using Jamaican dancehall culture as a platform for this discourse. My works seeks to measure the masculine by looking at how popular culture has contributed to these transformations. The early work looked at the fashionable practice of skin bleaching, followed by investigations of so-called 'bling culture' and its relationship to the masculine within an urban context. While still making references to dancehall culture, my work raises larger questions about beauty, gender ideals and constructs of masculinity within so-called 'popular black culture'. It examines the similarities and differences between 'camp aesthetics' - the use of feminine gendered adornment - in the construct of the urban masculine within popular culture. This body of work raises questions about body politics, performance of gender, gender and beauty, beauty and stereotyping, race and beauty, and body and ritual.³

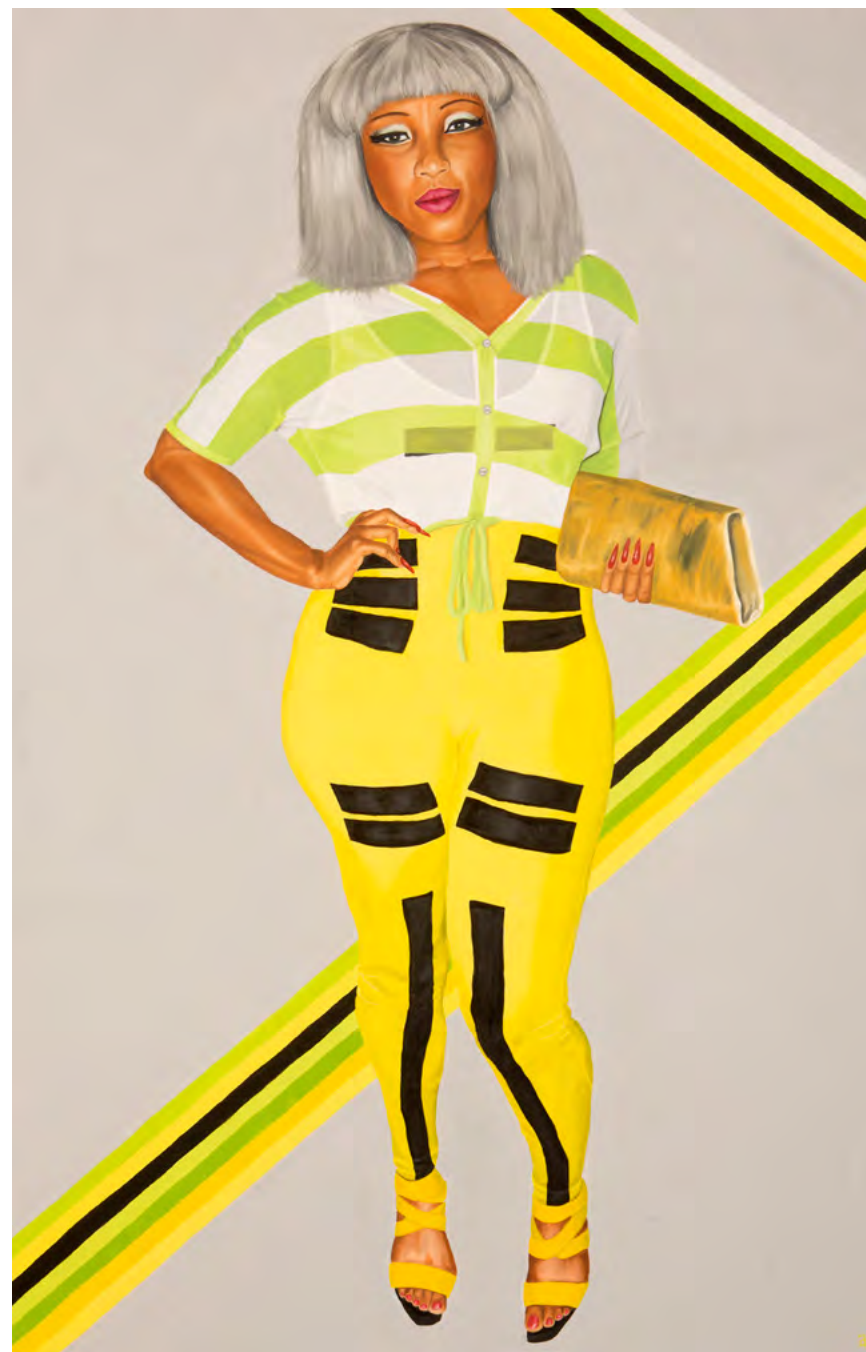
Throughout her work Ebony G. Patterson makes the invisible visible, pushing this idea to the utmost extreme to the extent that the final result almost morphs into camouflage. The implications of this tension between the visible and invisible are crucial to her work. Works such as *Trump, Stump and Dominoes*, 2014, featured in *Jamaican Routes*, or *Lily, Carnation and Rose Budz*, 2014 occupy the space with a glittering sea of seemingly innocent details, including flowers, toys, dolls, baby shoes and party clothes. These shimmering, sparkling works immediately come across as almost celebratory. To the contrary, they are based on crime scene photos. What might seem like an unlikely source of inspiration is precisely what anchors Patterson's work within a serious critical framework.

Beyond the overwhelming visual impact, Ebony G. Patterson's work reveals the complicated politics of a hypervisual negotiation for visibility. She captures our attention with pure optical overload, and subsequently forces us to consider and reconsider a whole range of topics that relate to gender, race, beauty and sexuality. For instance, the flamboyantly dressed men in her large-scale installations challenge traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, she demands our attention in very much the same way that dancehall participants compete for the spotlight by making themselves visible. These guys are all dolled-up in flowery over-the-top outfits that, from a conservative perspective, would be





ANDRE WOOLERY
Hot Gyal



ANDRE WOOLERY
Boss Lady

WHAT IT MEANS

considered effeminate. This is the very distinct visual currency used to buy and secure visibility within male-dominated dancehall culture, where the ultimate badge of masculinity is actually unabashedly feminine.

Andre Woolery's work is similarly entrenched in dancehall culture. In a recent statement about his own work he explains, "My subject matter is the exploration of Black identity, culture and history. Too often the narratives surrounding Black experience and existence are undocumented, altered or one-dimensional. What it means to be Black is not static or a monolithic term that has to succumb to historical context. Blackness links the experiences of the African diaspora so it remains a dynamic and moving target. I want to create visual language that defines who we are through identity, captures our power through culture, and defines our paths through history."⁴

I can almost hear Barkley L. Hendricks' wise, articulate voice in those words, which reminds me that there are also some interesting similarities between Hendricks' *Passion Dancehall* series and Andre Woolery's *Freedom of Expression* series. As one of the foremost American painters of our time, Barkley L. Hendricks' work has become a source of inspiration for some of the hottest young artists today, such as Kehinde Wiley and Jeff Sonhouse. His iconic portraits stand out in their grandeur, with a sumptuousness and attention to detail similar to Renaissance masters. With the talent of a master painter and an eye for style comparable to a high fashion photographer, Hendricks creates cool, ethereal portraits that capture the individual presence and attitude of his subjects. Hendricks' painterly skill is coupled with humor, subtle irony, and a healthy dose of rebelliousness that serves to question and challenge all kinds of preconceived notions and stereotypes.⁵ It's worth mentioning that Hendricks, although he is not Jamaican, has spent a considerable amount of time in Jamaica over the course of the past 30 years and has a true and nuanced understanding of Jamaican culture, as seen in his *Passion Dancehall* series in particular.⁶

While Andre Woolery's *Freedom of Expression* series bears similarity to Barkley L. Hendricks' *Passion Dancehall* series, Woolery's paintings lack nothing in terms of originality. The divas in his paintings come across, first and foremost, as proud individuals. This is fashion with an attitude as it plays out in full dancehall style, where plunging cleavage, tight-fitting jeans, flashy jewelry and dangerously high heels are pretty much the norm for women. Woolery

CONTEXT.

ANDRE WOOLERY
Rude Gyal



ANDRE WOOLERY
Miss Original





Barkley L. Hendricks
Passion Dancehall #3

succeeds in capturing all this in an elegant and respectful manner. Hendricks' paintings reveal every sexy detail between couples on the dance floor, and are undeniably powerful in their own right, while Woolery's paintings pay tribute to dancehall fashion itself. These portraits are all about attitude, and the enviable confidence of street style at its best, reminiscent of South African artist Nontsikelelo Veleko's iconic portraits of urban youth in Johannesburg. These kinds of connected voices are quite relevant to Woolery's approach to contemporary art practice. He speaks about placing emphasis on a collective perspective that engages with what it means to be Black through a cross pollination of Black perspectives, and this is precisely what he achieves through his work as an artist.

In **Leasho Johnson's** ongoing investigation of Jamaican dancehall culture he pumps up the volume with brightly colored works that practically jump out from the wall, making us think twice about what we are looking at, both visually speaking and in terms of content. As a painter, illustrator and designer, Johnson is quite adept at combining elements of graffiti with a Pop Art-inspired aesthetic in his ongoing social commentary of contemporary Jamaican culture. He simultaneously pushes all boundaries while also managing to keep the visual language neat, precise and surprisingly approachable.

His interest in various aspects of dancehall culture such as the highly sexualized and aggressive form of dancing known as 'daggering', and the raw, loud, and edgy music associated with ghetto youth culture are translated into complex works that challenge existing hierarchies between 'high' and 'low', institution and street, and between art and design. The blatantly dirty imagery and what it represents almost seems to contradict his clean and meticulous approach to illustration and painting. His work is imbued with irony and humor that consciously plays with various perceptions and pre-conceived notions about Jamaican culture in a very playful and refreshing way.

Using the visual language of cartoons enables Johnson to approach rather disturbing issues in a very direct manner. The results border on the humorous, conveyed with just enough seriousness to keep it real. Just imagine if the subject matter of ***Back a Road*, 2014** were photographed, painted, or drawn more realistically. The simple neon orange cartoon-like forms somehow transform bawdy and indecent scenes into fun and playful social critique. There is definitely a lot to take in, but don't be shy. Look carefully and observe every detail, because that's where you will find the underlying messages that make Johnson's work pop.

With ***Back a Road*, 2014** the contrast between the flat mural and the three-dimensional sculptures is quite significant. What plays out in the acrylic and cut vinyl mural is amplified in the speakers featured next to the mural. As such, these painted speakers highlight important details that are worthy of emphasis. For instance, the speaker painting **6.30** features a woman bending down suggestively in front of a banana leaf, which emphasizes the idea of a banana as a symbol of masculinity, and can also be interpreted as a reference to the banana plantations of colonial Jamaica. Throughout his work, Johnson plays with the hidden and not-so-hidden meanings of the images and titles he chooses, heightening the impact through the use of clever wordplay, often borrowed from Jamaican Patois and sometimes taken from the titles of well-known Jamaican dancehall songs. His vibrant visual language typically includes sound system speakers, sugar cane, bananas, banana leaves, dogs in heat, faceless helmet-clad women with huge lips, gyrating and fornicating couples, as well as the occasional pimped-up Red Stripe or liquor bottle. All in all, Leasho Johnson's works are stunning, but what they depict is not exactly pretty, which is the perfect combination for a contemporary artist who is committed to addressing important social and identity issues throughout his work.

JOHNSON'S
WORKS ARE
STUNNING,
BUT WHAT
THEY
DEPICT
IS NOT
EXACTLY
PRETTY



LEASHO JOHNSON
Back a Road

Next Left to Right:

LEASHO JOHNSON
Back a Road:

6:30

Yah-so-nice

Mangy Dog

Near By Bushes

Lost At Sea

Best Kept Secret





Matthew McCarthy is a street artist, muralist and illustrator with a fascination for Jamaican street signs, old school dancehall illustrations, and global street art movements. He cleverly combines these various sources of inspiration into a comprehensive artistic project that is firmly grounded in urban Kingston with roots that extend in various creative directions. McCarthy, who is also known as 'Eye-dealist', is as comfortable creating a live painting on the stage of a Protoje concert as he is spreading words of wisdom through his underground magazine *Regal Zeen*, or collaborating with other artists to implement street art as a tool for societal change.

As an artist who actively engages with the community outside of the art world, he is committed to art that is made for and speaks from the streets. Although his work is influenced by the trend towards politically engaged street art worldwide it continues to grow and flourish locally. His work speaks the language of conscious roots reggae, with just enough of a rebellious and satirical tone to give the red, green and gold added layers of meaning. His distinct visual style is not only inspired by reggae consciousness, it actually embodies its principles. With social consciousness, collaborative creative practice and a desire to create change as three of his fundamental ideals, Matthew McCarthy is more than an artist who happens to be interested in the visual culture of reggae; his work embraces its highest ideals.

As with many of the artists featured in the exhibition, Matthew McCarthy's work is driven by social critique and a youthful dissatisfaction with the systems that structure our social reality. Collaborative art practice is at the core of his creativity, which contributes to making his work relevant within a contemporary global context that extends beyond the art world. He is dedicated to creating change on the grassroots level to the extent that this influences each carefully chosen word and phrase and every cartoon-like illustration. On the same note, this sets the tone for his various interventions and punctuates every aspect of social commentary that runs throughout his work. McCarthy is driven by clearly defined ideals that he sums up beautifully in a description of the Paint Jamaica urban renewal project, "Walls that once bore the marks of opposing political parties, fuelling the negative aspects of urban tribalism are now transformed into mediums of artistic expression. My work looks at issues as well as the strengths of how we connect in our social spaces."⁷



Previous:
MATTHEW MCCARTHY
Raging Fyah

Top:
MATTHEW MCCARTHY
Regal Zeen

Right:
STORM SAULTER
Better Mus' Come
 (Video still)

Matthew McCarthy's *Regal Zeen* is an integral part of his art practice. *Regal Zeen* is a print and online 'zine' that makes regular interventions into Jamaica's social and artistic environments. There is an interesting double entendre at play here. A 'zine' is understood as an alternative magazine or newspaper published outside of mainstream media, typically printed on a photocopy machine, with an unpolished layout and bold designs. In this case, the word has been adapted to 'zeen', which means 'OK' in Jamaican Patois. According to McCarthy, *Regal Zeen* manifested out of the need to establish a sustainable and artistic lifestyle archive among young like-minded creative individuals, with the greater intention of inspiring a productive change in the environment, and represents a significant shift towards increased social consciousness. Indeed, *Regal Zeen* is a vital part of McCarthy's generous approach to contemporary art practice that is fuelled and driven by pure reggae consciousness.

Perry Henzell's classic 1972 film *The Harder They Come*, starring and featuring the music of reggae legend Jimmy Cliff, has maintained its position through the years as the most well known Jamaican film worldwide. The movie conveyed the crime-ridden atmosphere of Kingston in the seventies and captured people's hearts with the infectious lyrics and rhythm of its classic reggae soundtrack. **Storm Sauter's** 2011 film *Better Mus' Come* is also set during the seventies, when Kingston was caught in the crossfire of politically fueled gang warfare. Straight out of jail, the main character Ricky becomes drawn into partisan fighting between the ruling People's National Party and the Jamaica Labor Party. Adding to



SAULTER'S WORK

his struggle, Ricky's romance with Kemala is also threatened by the pervasive atmosphere of violence that looms over Kingston. The narrative culminates in a scene inspired by the Green Bay Massacre of 1978, in which soldiers killed several suspected gang members. It's an intense visual journey into a particularly tumultuous time in Jamaican history.

In addition to a special screening of **Better Mus' Come** at Nordic Black Theatre the exhibition features two additional works by Storm Sautler that give a sense of the full range of his practice as an artist. Similar to how the New York-based artist Andrew Dosunmu works freely between the worlds of art, fashion and music, Sautler's videos and photographs balance perfectly between the worlds of music and art. Few filmmakers have made an equally captivating music video as Storm Sautler's take on Chronixx and Protoje's hugely successful hit-song **Who Knows**. Sautler's ability to translate a massive hit into an interesting visual narrative certainly contributed to it spreading like wildfire beyond the shores of Jamaica.

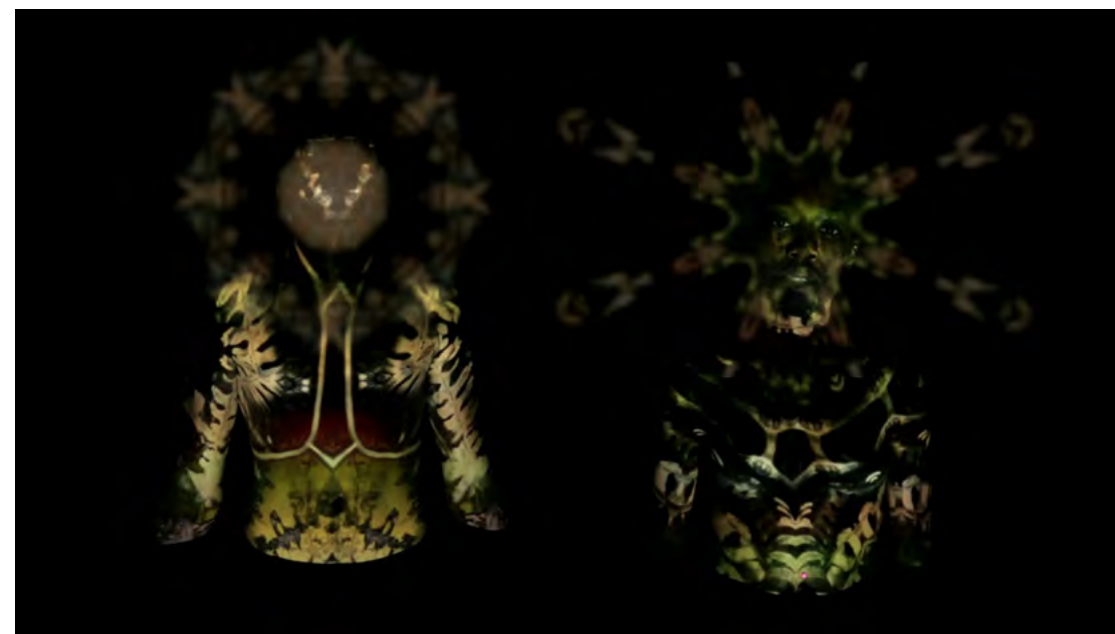
Storm Sautler's work reads like a top-ten list of the hottest names on the island, and directs attention towards some of the fresh young voices that are following in Bob Marley's footsteps. All in all, Sautler's work reveals his obvious understanding of the personalities behind the people he chooses to photograph or film, whether a talented musician or the fastest runner on the planet. Further anchoring Storm Sautler's position as an artist that has one foot set firmly in the music world and the other in the art world, **Jamaican Routes** also features **Dark Morass**, a collaborative work between Storm Sautler and visual artist Rodell Warner.

References to the culture and history of Jamaica are a recurring source of inspiration for **Cosmo Whyte**. Whether he is working with photography, performance, video, installation, or works on paper, he approaches topics linked to a shared Jamaican cultural inheritance in ways that are universally relevant. Among his most striking works is the diptych drawing **Ginal**, based on the famous photograph of the main character Ivanhoe Martin in the film **The Harder They Come**, in which he poses defiantly as a fashionable 'rude boy' and gunman. The work appropriates a very specific detail from Perry Henzell's famous film that is immediately recognizable to most Jamaicans. Choosing to create a drawing out of such a familiar image without it coming across as derivative or outdated was certainly no easy



STORM SAULTER
Better Mus' Come
(Video still)

STORM SAULTER and
RODELL WARNER
Dark Morass
(Video still)





task. Yet, he proves his artistic talent by appropriating this iconic image of Ivanhoe and turning it into a fresh contemporary artwork.

As significant as these references are, the power of Cosmo Whyte's diptych also transcends its cultural specificity. From a strictly formal standpoint this meticulously drawn work is enough to secure his position as a highly talented artist. He demonstrates a keen understanding of drawing techniques on a par with the best contemporary artists anywhere. He seems as conscious of the power of an eraser as Rauschenberg so famously was, and is clearly aware of the effect of each and every line and detail. Beyond the subtle nuances in shadows and tones and the stark contrast between light and dark, ***Ginal*** conveys a sense of movement that is further emphasized in the shift from one panel to the next. What is clearly defined in the first panel is subsequently deconstructed, twisted and abstracted in the next, resulting in a drawing that captures the intensity of Ivanhoe's trials and tribulations in the film.

Extending the cultural references to Africa and the United States, ***Jamaican Routes*** features Cosmo Whyte's new sound-based work ***The Well Traveled African***, 2015. The installation includes a traditional Jamaican pushcart with speakers that play a soundtrack compiled of samplings of reggae and dancehall music mixed in with news bytes and fragments from sociopolitical speeches. This little pushcart amplifies its message with the force of a full Jamaican sound system, with emphasis on the politics of race in particular. We enter into occupied territory, where the sweet voice of Dennis Brown and Augustus Pablo's soulful melodica compete with Stephen Marley, Capleton and Sizzla who steal the 'rock stone' from Bob Marley's 'Talking Blues' and turn it into their own pillow. This is pure rebel music that echoes all around the world. Listen carefully and you just might hear the voices of great thinkers such as Stuart Hall, James Baldwin, Marcus Garvey and Fela Kuti. ***The Well Traveled African*** is one of three parts in a larger body of work that also includes a stacked sound system (***Wake the Town and Tell the People***) and a photograph of a handheld megaphone (***Town Crier***). While the pushcart and sound system are immediately associated with Jamaica, the megaphone widens the geographic context of the work to also include West Africa, where its use has gradually replaced the traditional use of drums. These components come together as the core aspects of a body of work that, according to Cosmo Whyte, "addresses issues surrounding diaspora identity at a time when the racial climate in the US homogenizes the black experience both for the need of solidarity and oppression."⁹

COSMO WHYTE
Ginal (diptych)



This is precisely the kind of political and social engagement that defines Cosmo Whyte's work. He fits into the category of cosmopolitan artists who typically move back and forth, up and down, between here and there, constantly navigating the landscapes of their mind that are rooted in multiple locations and cultures. These artists are often influenced by memory and driven by shared histories and dreams that consistently translate to a rich visual language that has no geographical boundaries. Whyte navigates the ever-shifting terrain of dislocation, defined by past and present, here and there, dream and reality. This is the kind of work that encourages us to reflect upon the specificity of personal experience as understood within a historical context that is deeply imbedded within the trajectory of postcolonial discourse, and is as relevant in relation to Cosmo Whyte's work as it is to several of the other participating artists in the exhibition.

Stuart Hall was not the first to discuss the concept of roots versus routes, but his specific implementation of and elaboration upon the inherent difference between these two words is a topic that he discussed throughout his career. In relation to what Stuart Hall observed as a deep concern about identity and ones relation to the present and the past, he posited that this relationship could not be accurately expressed in terms of a return to roots. Stuart Hall's approach to cultural identity theory, influenced as it was by concepts of fluidity, heterogeneity and hybridity, was a breath of fresh air for everyone who felt suffocated by the idea of cultural identity as strictly defined by shared similarities and a fixed, unchanging relation to history. In his seminal essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Stuart Hall laid the groundwork for the kind of critical thinking that would come to define his work as a leading cultural theorist, describing cultural identity not only in terms of shared similarity but also in terms of difference.

There is, however, a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.¹⁰



CAMILLE CHEDDA
Wholesale Degradables
 (details)

Next:
CAMILLE CHEDDA
Wholesale Degradables



Stuart Hall stated that cultural identity is “always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental ‘law of origin’.”¹¹ This is precisely where many of the artists in this exhibition are positioned. Perhaps not so much ‘positioned’ as in a state of transition and growth, which is inspired both by historical and contemporary issues, and equally linked to the past and present as to the future.

EACH

Camille Chedda investigates themes of identity, class and race in work that speaks about notions of disposability and temporality. Her innovative approach to painting and drawing often involves the use of common materials such as garbage bags that she transforms into intriguing mixed-media installation works. As she explains it, “In my work, the bag functions in varied ways depending on the type of bag used, where it is placed and how it has been manipulated. The portrait subject, whether it has been painted or drawn on the bag, often functions as an object or commodity, which inevitably expires with time and display.”¹²

PORTRAITS

ALSO

For **Wholesale Degradables** Camille Chedda implemented the kind of cheap plastic bags that are prevalent throughout the Caribbean. In Jamaica these are known as ‘scandal bags’. Typically, these are black and opaque, thereby making it possible to conceal their contents. Although predominantly used for carrying groceries, criminals also use ‘scandal bags’ to conceal weapons, drugs, stolen goods and even body parts. Chedda is interested in the idea of these bags’ role as a keeper of a person’s social identity. With these ideas as her point of departure she painted portraits on translucent bags, providing a window into various identities. Each portrait also functions as an object, as a container of identity. Of course these bags are not only containers they also represent waste. ‘This Bag is 100% Degradable’ is stamped on the bottom of some of the bags—not biodegradable, but degradable.

FUNCTIONS AS

If these bags are to be understood as containers of identity, the reference also seems to extend to the individuals whose portraits are depicted both on and in the bags. Clearly, to be degraded is to be shamed or humiliated, yet these individuals appear relaxed and nonchalant; at least the ones on the outside – the visible ones. In stark contrast, the portraits painted on the inside come across as decidedly less at ease, less comfortable, less visible. Their identities are concealed, similar to the objects that might be hidden within these bags. This subtle play between visibility and invisibility, between what is perceptible and what isn’t makes **Wholesale Degradables** resonate on many levels. By the time these bags finally do disappear and dissolve, perhaps beyond the lifetimes of these individuals, their identities will also be erased, creating a profound visual metaphor for temporality.

AND

A CONTAINER

OF IDENTITY.

A STRONG SYMBOL FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF BOTH A COMMUNITY AND A TRADE

Andrea Chung takes us far away from Jamaica to an island off the East coast of Africa with her installation ***Sink & Swim***. Chung's work typically examines the complexities of previously colonized countries. She often makes use of archival material such as photographs or tourist brochures to reconstruct critical narratives that challenge preconceived notions and misconceptions about a particular culture, equally relevant in relation to Mauritius as it is to Jamaica. For instance, by manipulating tourism imagery she investigates how island nations are sold to tourists through picturesque, idealized fantasy. She thereby inspires us to question fiction versus reality as we try to make sense of these conflicting narratives. Environmental issues, the power structures of labor, and an exploration of migration patterns are also recurring topics that tend to influence her work. As such, she consistently exposes the bare and complicated roots of a particular place, revealing the extent to which certain cultures have been created through the influence of what she describes as multiple 'mother cultures'.

To create ***Sink & Swim*** she cast liquor bottles out of sugar to reference a method of fishing used by some Mauritian fishermen. The bottles are hung in the space accompanied by small replicas of fishing tackle, wrapped and tangled in fishing line, and left to the elements. Depending on the environment where the work is created, the bottles will crack, shatter, and slowly disappear over time, resulting in a strong symbol for the disappearance of both a community and a trade. Beyond the visual impact and fragility of the work, there are numerous subtexts that give the work additional impact. Andrea Chung's description of the historical events that inspired this work sheds important light on the installation, "After the abolition of slavery in Mauritius, many newly freed slaves (also known as Creoles) became fishermen and subsequently established small fishing villages, particularly in the southern part of the island, rather than return to the cane fields to work for their former enslavers. Many of these fishing villages remain today and these fishing traditions have been passed down for generations. Unfortunately the trade is now threatened due to over-fishing."¹³ Although this relates specifically to Mauritius, it is an overly familiar narrative throughout the world.





Previous:
ANDREA CHUNG
Sink & Swim
(detail)

Next:
OLIVIA MCGILCHRIST
Otherness
(Video stills)

What might be described as the reconstruction of picturesque landscapes seen throughout her work brings to mind what bell hooks describes as diasporic landscapes of longing.¹⁴ In a text about the work of Carrie Mae Weems bell hooks discusses the return to a dreamed-about home and the belief that every bit of history and experience is essential to the unfolding of one's destiny. She continues with a discussion surrounding the commonality of longing, of the shared experience of yearning for connection, for home Africa as present and yet far away, as both real and mythic. As an artist born in the US of Jamaican and Trinidadian heritage, who is clearly interested in and influenced by more than one culture, it is easy to see how aspects of cultural connectivity and longing contribute to Andrea Chung's unique artistic perspective.

Olivia McGilchrist explores translocation and physical expressions of various emotional states in photographs, performances and videos that relate directly to issues of cultural identity. She frequently implements her alter ego 'whitey' in her artistic investigation of Jamaica, which she describes as a space of utter difference. Born in Kingston to a French mother and a Jamaican father, and educated in France and the UK, her work is directly influenced by an ongoing exploration of her own cultural identity. In general terms, she incorporates her body in her own practice, often repositioning it within the context of a picturesque tropical space. She describes her approach as a means of questioning the shifting spaces in which she appears to belong, from the female body in a postmodern space to a visibly white postcolonial creole identity.

For *Otherness*, an ongoing project that began in 2013, she collaborated with the octogenarian Guyanese-Jamaican actress, playwright and storyteller Jean Small. This body of work deconstructs the physicality of postcolonial bodies through videos that are presented as an installation that evokes a live performance, either directly in the space or re-

A MEANS OF
CULTURAL LONGING
TO BELONG



ONEIKA RUSSELL
Notes to You

Next:
ONEIKA RUSSELL
Notes to You

presented as an interactive element in the space. As such, she conveys thoughts about identity and race in a very direct and compelling manner. In this two-screen projection the visual language of otherness is defined formally by clear, strong contrasts that emphasize the topics of identity and race that are addressed through her work. The visual details of her clean and precise formal approach have a strong representational function that gradually emerges in the slow, measured performance that plays out between Jean Small and Olivia McGilchrist.

Otherness is carefully set up in a manner that places viewers in an indefinable space in between, which thereby intensifies our experience of the work. The fluid and measured push and pull between the two women turns into a captivating performance that speaks beyond the personal implications of McGilchrist's own role in the work. In this graceful and gentle meeting between two souls there is a sense of something unresolved that lingers in the space. As viewers, we are physically situated in a space of duality and opposites that inspires us to consider the significance of each and every glance and movement. Similar to complete strangers who eventually become friends, an initial sense of confusion, skepticism, and possibly even fear are subtly transformed to understanding, compassion, intimacy and playfulness. We focus on the hands and faces of each, both separately and as one, as the camera spans back and forth, up, down and around these two women. We play an active role becoming the 'other' suspended in an ever-shifting space of identity as we search to understand the specifics of each individual and their relation to one another.

Drawings are an important aspect of **Oneika Russell's** work, which she often integrates into installation format. This is particularly evident in ***Notes to You***, which I had the pleasure of seeing for the first time when it was installed at Devon House as part of the Jamaica Biennial, 2014. It's difficult to imagine a more ideal site-specific setting for this work. Russell's small works on paper heightened the air of nostalgia that



already lingers in the air of this historical mansion. Walking into the furnished bedroom to discover small notecards with colorful drawings and notes felt like I was being let in on an intimate secret. The notecards were carefully placed around the room, not hanging on the walls, but tucked among the sheets of the canopy bed, dangling from the mosquito netting, and snuck between a perfume bottle and a silver brush on the commode. Within this particular setting, the drawings seemed caught in limbo between past and present, evoking strong associations to themes related to memory, loss and displacement.

The short hand-written texts on the inside of each notecard create an intriguing play between text and image that facilitates the search for underlying meaning. The notes range from highly dramatic; “You ran away like a wild animal” to melancholic; “You learned to keep your head down and your heart shut and your scope small”. One could easily get swept away in the romanticism of it all if it weren’t for the fact that these are more than delicate little drawings. Although there is beauty in every detail, there is something else looming in the shadows, which gives the work a necessary forcefulness and edge. These aren’t simply portraits of some lovelorn woman, or traces of something that may have transpired in this particular place. These drawings touch upon something that reaches beyond the specificity of a particular time and place.

Looking carefully at the portraits we see faces that tentatively peek through the foliage and flowers. We also see faces that are decorated and dotted to the extent that the most predominant facial features are the eyes. Saturated colors and geometric patterns cover many of the



ONEIKA RUSSELL
Notes to You



MARLON JAMES
Stefan and Camille

faces, transforming them into powerful masked individuals. These come across as proud, confident, and imposing. Alternately, the faces fade into a sea of grey and white and almost verge on abstraction. As such, these portraits balance a very fine line between visibility and invisibility. However, it shouldn't go unnoticed that these portraits depict different qualities in the same individual. Whether seen carefully peeking out from behind verdant leaves, or completely hidden behind a pale greenish-gray pattern these portraits are clearly about presence and absence, as well as the idea that one's identity is constantly shifting and shaped by many factors, including environment and experience, as well as cultural and natural surroundings. With this work we discover the unique confidence that seems to arise from the constant restructuring of one's identity within the fluid and ever-changing context of synthesizing past and present, here and there, dream and reality.

Marlon James, not to be confused with the award-winning author by the same name, is a prominent Jamaican photographer who resides in Trinidad. He is committed to straight photography and creates striking images that command the viewer's full and undivided attention. His experience as a fashion photographer contributes to an open-minded approach that is coupled with an unfailing ability to connect to his subjects. He has an unusual talent for finding beauty in the ordinary and mundane, and seems to enjoy challenging traditional notions of beauty and power. Even the artists, filmmakers and musicians that he photographs, who are celebrities in their own right, are chosen as his subjects not because they are stars but because they are people whom he knows well. First and foremost, he is interested in delving beneath the surface of his subjects and to have them unveil in front of the lens rather than to dress up and pose for the camera.

These portraits capture our attention with the power of a glamorous photograph of a supermodel, extending beyond the limits of traditional fashion photography and inspiring us to consider the realness and humanity of the subjects instead. Marlon James has a keen eye for rough, urban beauty, consistently conveyed in a photographic approach that strips his subjects bare.

Marlon James' portraits of Camille Chedda, Ebony G. Patterson and Storm Saulter convey an attitude and presence that is difficult to capture in a photograph without seeming staged and posed. The fact that James really knows his subjects somehow enables him to strip



MARLON JAMES
King Yellowman



MARLON JAMES
Gisele Doll

Next:
MARLON JAMES
Akiri



his compositions down to the absolute essentials. Yes, these artists are budding stars, but there is something more genuine and more interesting at play in these ‘bad-ass’ portraits. Ordinary person or superstar, friend or foe, unknown or famous, James’ photographs are all about substance. Equally impressive are his portraits of dancehall legend Yellowman and drummer Akiri Cooper. Contrasts between shadow and light add dramatic effect to portraits that convey real presence, which has nothing to do with fashion and everything to do with style. With the exception of Yellowman, who is all decked out in a three-piece suit and hat, it’s interesting that although the subjects are wearing little more than a tank top, at most, their inner style really shines through. Gisele is possibly the most stunning example. She sits regally on a worn upholstered chair as if she were the queen of Jamaica, yet she

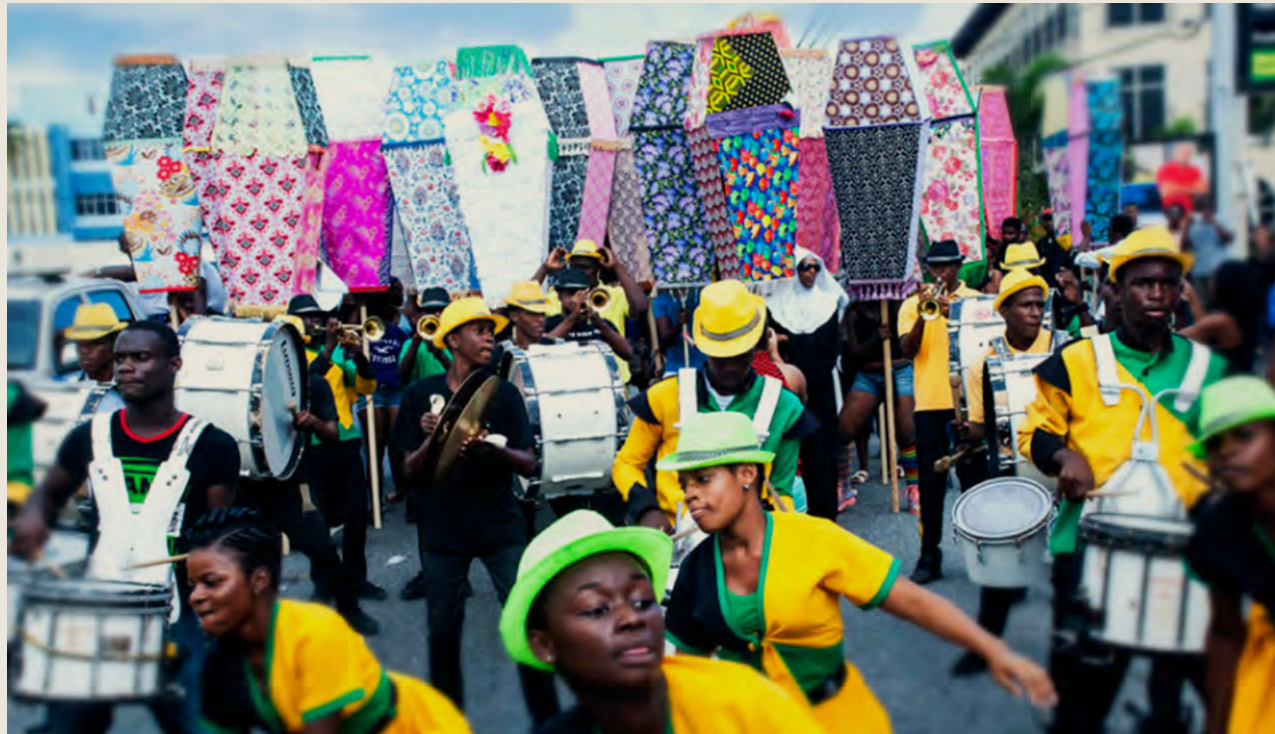
is dressed in simple running shorts, a tank top and flip-flops. It’s impossible not to notice the scars on her arm, but this doesn’t detract from her beauty in any way because she possesses the kind of real beauty that comes from inner strength and dignity.

It is important to keep in mind that the works featured in ***Jamaican Routes*** stem from completely different experiences and perspectives. The photographs, installations, films, sound-based works, paintings and drawings included in the exhibition reflect both similarities and differences in cultural identity, visualized through various formal and conceptual approaches. Keeping an expansive notion of cultural identity in mind extends ***Jamaican Routes*** in as many directions as the roots and routes that inspired these works. If these artists are not easily pinpointed it’s because they are part of something that is fluid, changing, and rapidly expanding into the larger framework of international contemporary art practice. As such, ***Jamaican Routes*** moves back and forth, between cultures and time zones, shifting between past, present and future, revealing the individual stories and shared histories of a global narrative. Borrowing from U-Roy’s classic seventies dancehall hit ***Wake the Town and Tell the People***, it’s time to wake the world and tell the people about these young contemporary artists who are coming your way.

- ¹ From Annie Paul’s interview-based article *Stuart Hall: Culture is Always a Translation* featured in *Caribbean Beat*, issue 71 (January/February, 2005) on the occasion of a conference held in Stuart Hall’s honor at The University of the West Indies at Mona.
- ² It should be noted that the term ‘reggae revival’, although widely used, is a contentious term for some based on the idea that something that hasn’t died cannot be revived.
- ³ Ebony G. Patterson artist statement from her website
- ⁴ Andre Woolery artist statement from his website
- ⁵ This is adapted from my essay “A Fresh Approach to Contemporary Painting”, featured in *Fresh Paint*, Edizione Charta, Milan, Italy, 2012
- ⁶ Barkley L. Hendricks’ deep understanding of Jamaican culture is also reflected in his Jamaican landscape paintings as well as iconic portraits such as *Roaring River Apostle (Serious Smoker Series)*, 2004.
- ⁷ Matthew McCarthy artist statement
- ⁸ Ginal means ‘tricky person’
- ⁹ Cosmo Whyte artist statement
- ¹⁰ Stuart Hall ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ from ‘Identity: Community, Culture & Difference’ Johnathan Rutherford, Editor (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 2003) p. 225
- ¹¹ IBID p. 226
- ¹² Camille Chedda artist statement from her website
- ¹³ Andrea Chung artist statement from her website
- ¹⁴ Bell hooks, ‘Art on My Mind’ (New York: The New Press, 1995), pp. 65 – 73.

ANNIE PAUL

'DANCEHALL A MI EVERYTHING': ART AND MUSIC IN 21ST CENTURY JAMAICA



EBONY G. PATTERSON
Invisible Presence: Bling Memories
Kingston, 2014

When I published my essay 'No Grave Cannot Hold My Body Down' in 2007 I could not have imagined that less than ten years later a Jamaican artist would produce a performative work using 'bling coffins' to highlight the controversial killing of 73 civilians in what has become known as the 'Tivoli incursion'. Ebony G. Patterson's *Invisible Presence: Bling Memories*, part of the performance series En Mas, mobilized 50 highly individualized, beautifully decorated coffins held aloft by carnival masqueraders who danced them through the streets of Kingston during Jamaica Carnival 2014.

At the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s it was impossible to connect the visual art produced in Jamaica to the musical output of the island. Though both were made in Jamaica they seemed to be the product of vastly different worlds; one delicate to the point of fussiness, ethereally abstract and distant, anxious to signal its spiritual marronage from the profanity-laden, verging-on-vulgar exorbitance of street Jamaica, the culture that had given the island its global stature.

I found out later that this was a deliberate strategy, a taking of the 'high' road on the part of the art establishment, a desperate desire to gloss Jamaican art as high, cosmopolitan and familiar with metropolitan art trends. Not for the Jamaican art world what was widely regarded as the 'raw as ever', ignoble savagery of post-70s, free market-driven dancehall (Think Shabba Ranks: "big dutty stinkin' Shabba!"). Virtually the only music to be heard in the cloistered confines of the National Gallery of Jamaica then was that of various European classical ensembles, the occasional flautist or harpist or the studied refinement of the National Folk Singers.

¹ "Dancehall A Mi Everything" is by Vybz Kartel. It is one of the hits that he released since his imprisonment in 2014.

This seemed particularly odd to me as the National Gallery sits on Orange Street, known until the early 80s as Beat Street or Music Street because it was the epicenter of Jamaica's fertile music scene. It took me years to find this out, as there is no sign either in the National Gallery or elsewhere on the street of the area's remarkable cultural history. If the Gallery seemed obviously deaf to the music-soaked site it occupied, in return the area's residents were imperviously blind to the visual treasury that constituted the National Gallery.

This mutual evasion continued into the twenty-first century with few indications that change was on the horizon. The decade of the oughties saw dancehall segue from hardcore gun and gang lyrics to fun and dance-laden styles with the likes of Elephant Man or Bogle and his dancers calling the tunes and the moves. You could be forgiven for thinking that some of the male dancers in troupes like Bogle's were gay...their eyebrows plucked, their faces bleached, clad in tight pants, they swiveled their hips with abandon, creating new vocabularies of dance moves the poncy National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica could only dream of.

The often-male dance troupes would unleash a series of stylized, staccato steps in synch to the latest hits, choreographing everyday gestures into their vigorous dances. One moment they were sweeping the ground, the next they were riding motorbikes or dodging police bullets. The atmosphere crackled with energy, fizzing and sparkling like a newly opened bottle of Prosecco and good humor abounded, everyone happy for the brief but crucial economic opportunity of buying and selling drinks, chewing gum, weed, peanuts and jerked meats of various kinds.

The Sounds of New Economies

In an earlier essay I touched on the political economy of dancehall, contextual info that's worth repeating here. Unlike musical forms such as rap and hip-hop that rapidly became mainstreamed in the United States, generating big bucks for giant transnational record companies, dancehall has remained a collective, almost communal activity. Record sales have rarely been the motivating factor in the production of this music which revolves instead around cultural products such as live performances, street dances and dub plates that in turn generate entire cottage industries around them, providing livelihoods for a range of



small hustlers and operators for whom the formal economy of the postcolonial State had not catered in its five-year plans.

In fact the new hybrid business forms created or spun off by the Jamaican music industry even presaged the shift that would take place in the American music industry in the 21st Century. Reeling from low record and CD sales caused by new modes of music consumption via the iPod and Internet downloads, American music companies are now focusing on concerts and live performances as the primary profit creators, even giving away CDs to create interest in particular singers. Success is no longer measured in record sales alone.

The change in sound between classical reggae (exemplified by the lyrics of Bob Marley and Burning Spear or groups like Black Uhuru and Steel Pulse) and dancehall, which made its entrance in the early 80s with a form of "creativity and imagination grounded in extravagance, free flows, excess, surplus and an economy of pleasure" was so profound that despite its global profile none but the youth could hear anything of merit in the current dancehall music². The new music was considered intolerably loud, aggressive and brash by the now middle-aged (and respectable) Jamaican music consumers who had had to defend ska and reggae

²Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011

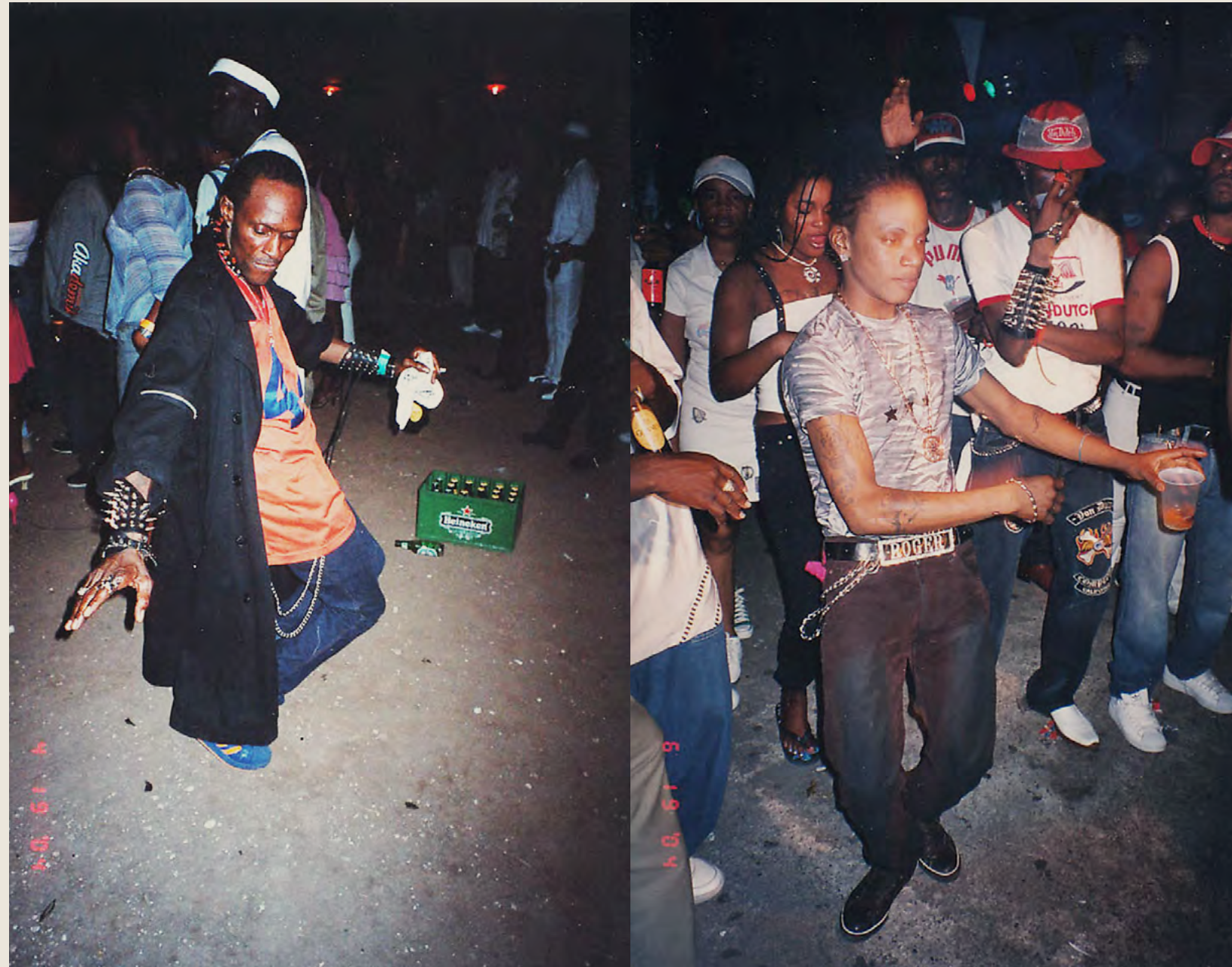
against similar criticisms by their respective parents' generations. If they could have had their way as gatekeepers they would have firmly suppressed the growth of the new sound. They saw nothing creative, original or innovative about this latest version of the music. As far as they were concerned dancehall music was just noise.

Fortunately sheer popular demand for riddim-driven music saved the day. Despite dancehall's many naysayers it has had enormous staying power, the manic violence of its riddim-driven dynamo dominating the decades from the early 80s till now. Edward Seaga, Prime Minister of Jamaica in the 80s and architect of the garrison, Tivoli Gardens, a music promoter himself, said with exasperation of dancehall "Things come and go, but I don't know why, for the love of me, this one won't go." He was talking in 2009 at the height of the internecine rivalry between the fans of top DJs Mavado and Vybz Kartel.

Caper, cavort, frisk, frolic, skip, prance, gambol, jig, leap, jump, hop, bounce=dancehall³

Though I had started listening to dancehall in the 90s, hooked by the lyrics of truculent warlord Bounty Killer, it was in 2004 that I became irrevocably infected with the lively virus of dancehall music. An Indian friend,

³ The words on this list, all synonyms for the word 'dance', capture the playful and lighthearted nature of dancehall.



Tejaswini Niranjana, was in Jamaica with Remo Fernandes, an Indian singer, and a film crew. They were touring Kingston's dancehalls under the aegis of Sonjah Stanley-Niaah, author of the book *Dancehall: From Slaveship to Ghetto* in an attempt to instigate some kind of musical collaboration. I went along for the ride and by the end of the first night I was hooked, enslaved for life by dancehall's rollicking riddims and frolics. We started the evening at Stone Love's headquarters on Burlington Ave (one of Jamaica's oldest and most popular sound systems) getting there around 11.30 pm because we'd been told these events started late. We were puzzled because within half an hour of arriving the sound started fading and people began streaming out of the venue. Belatedly we were informed that it was Weddy Weddy Wednesday, a weekly event, when patrons would start the evening at Stone Love, before moving on to two other street dances in different parts of the city. So when the music suddenly came to a halt at midnight we followed the rapidly evaporating crowd all the way across the city to August Town, to the ferocious battleground known as Jungle 12, where another street dance was in full swing.

Such mean streets were not meant for strangers to walk on let alone dance or prance in, except on nights like this. Gangs

of women, turned out to puss back foot as the saying goes, lined the streets, their shadowy shapes shimmying into life when the videographer shone his light on them, performing to the max in their 15 seconds of limelight. Dancehall Queen Stacy Ann was the exception, the Indian camera crew had followed her to her home as she got dressed for Weddy Weddy, where she took particular care to choose her panty, fussily rejecting several before picking one, a nicety whose importance would soon become evident.

The videographer, as Krista Thompson notes in her latest book, *Shine*, has become an indispensable fixture at dancehall events, an accomplice to patrons intent on performing their visibility. In fact this is one of the reasons I enjoy street dances and dancehall events so much. You can photograph and take video freely here, with people willing and happy to perform for the camera, unlike daytime Kingston, when people are going about their business and resent having lenses pointed at them.

But this was dancehall territory and time and as the video light focused on the Dancehall Queen, she slowly and deliberately sank into a muscular squat, miniskirt riding up to reveal her powerful thighs and panty of choice for the night. As the camera lingered lovingly on her groin, Stacey Ann's



'private parts' were made public, displayed in all its glory on screens dispersed in strategic locations. Dancehall music thumped us in our chests as we greedily imbibed the vibes and electric atmosphere, only dimly realizing the exorbitance of the vernacular ritual we had witnessed.

A couple of hours later the sound system in Jungle 12 started to wind down and once again the partyers took flight with us in tow, this time heading to ground zero--Tivoli Gardens--where Passa Passa, the street party to end all parties, was just beginning to bubble. Starting late, that is to say early morning, 4 am onwards, Passa Passa was the meeting ground for patrons from warring communities downtown, but also for middle and upper class 'uptown' folk, especially youth, to mingle with 'downtown' folk, for English speakers to come and goggle at the exploits of the urban, Patwa-speaking vernacular moderns of Kingston: second-class citizens by day, masters of the universe by night. In certain ways dancehall has much in common with 'voguing' and 'ball culture' except that instead of being a space where gays can be 'out and bad', it's a space for the poor, those without a stake, to quote Achille Mbembe, to flaunt their visibility and simulate celebrity life by dressing up and partying till they drop to the hypnotic thump of dancehall's riddims.

Realpolitik

Set plumb in the middle of legendary West Kingston—Tivoli Gardens—where Passa Passa was sited, was virtually an independent territory, a state within the state of Jamaica, efficiently governed by a ‘don’ or overlord named Dudus or Prezi, short for President. The shadowy Dudus was said to command an elaborate transnational network servicing the gun and drug trade. Nevertheless Passa Passa patrons could attend the dance secure in the knowledge that they had been granted immunity from crime and criminals for the duration they were in attendance. On any other day of the week no one from uptown could walk these streets without risking life and limb or so it was believed.

Late in the oughties the police started to crack down on street dances in earnest using the Noise Abatement Act of 1997 which legislated that 2 am was the cutoff time for events with very loud sound systems. Passa Passa managed to keep going till the wee hours of the morning until 2010, when Tivoli Gardens officially lost its ‘independence’ after its ramparts were breached by Jamaican security forces attempting to arrest Dudus whom the Americans wanted to extradite for transnational gang-related activities.



It was during the May 2010 Tivoli incursion that 73 or more civilians were slaughtered during what was named Operation Key West or Operation Garden Parish, depending on whether you were in the Jamaica Constabulary Force (Police) or the Jamaica Defence Force (Army). It was this massacre and the State’s refusal to provide any information at all about those who had been killed, not even disclosing their names, much less holding anyone accountable for what looked more and more like a ‘cleansing’, that led Ebony G. Patterson to focus on these mass killings in her work.

In *Of 72* Patterson created sequined, bejewelled Haitian-inspired *drapeaux* or flags for each victim; no two flags were alike, depicting mugshots of masked individuals, alluding to the lack of information about their identities. Who were these people? Why the official amnesia about them? If they were armed and deadly how had so many of them been killed in an ostensible battle in which a negligible number of security forces died or were injured in comparison? Why was the nation so reluctant to demand answers about these civilian killings?

Patterson followed this up less than a year later with *Invisible Presence: Bling Memories*, influenced by her residency at Alice Yard in Port of Spain, where she had first produced a series of coffins—nine in number—one for each violent death featured in the news while she was there.

EBONY G. PATTERSON
9 of 219
Alice Yard, Port of Spain,
2011



In *Bling Memories*, because of budgetary limits Patterson was only able to build 50 coffins instead of 73, the official number of civilians killed in Tivoli.

In producing these performative works Patterson was attempting to harness the in-your-face, flamboyant style and fashion of dancehall culture, its spectacular staging of visibility, the refusal to die either a social death or a physical one by staying buried and invisible. By her insistence on focusing on the Tivoli massacre she extended the afterlife of the nameless, faceless citizens who had been killed during a statal intervention that few other writers, singers or artists have chosen to comment on or memorialize in song, dance or verse.

Performance of Loss

Works such as *Of 72* and *Bling Memories* align Patterson with the commemorative work of dramaturge Honor Ford-Smith whose recent series *Letters from the Dead*, transnationally executed in Canada and Jamaica, grapples with the politics of memory, of how to remember trauma, how to represent it in the public sphere, and of memorializing the victims of violence. Ford-Smith's work is more community-oriented, often involving the bereaved in the planning and performative process.

In Ford-Smith's words public acts of remembering and commemorating become a way of "mobilizing a response to each other in the present." The way that we remember will



determine how we imagine our relationships in the present, she says, because "what we remember encodes our desires, our fantasies, our dreams. Our memories of the past... help us to envision how we want to live in the present...practices of commemoration are ways of imagining how we want to move in the present and the kind of space we want to live in together as communities...Mourning collective violence is...not just a matter of creating personal closure, but a way to link memory and forgetting with reconciliation and reparation in the present."

Writing about Chilean filmmaker Patricio Guzmán, Ratik Asokan, said: "For an artist, it is a great challenge, perhaps the greatest challenge, to operate at the bloody crossroads where art and politics meet. And this challenge is only intensified when exploring issues that most people are trying to forget."⁴

Disruptive Dancehall Aesthetic

Just as dancehall disrupted the existing soundscape of Jamaican music, the work of Ebony G. Patterson, Leasho Johnson, Matthew McCarthy, and other members of a new generation of visual artists in Jamaica, represents a rupture with earlier models of art making in Jamaica. Disruption as it is called is very much part of the 21st Century. New business models generally disrupt from below, attracting clienteles that incumbents either weren't servicing at all or were servicing inadequately and dancehall is the paradigmatic instance

⁴ Ratik Asokan, When Remembering Becomes a Political Act, New Republic.com November 20, 2015

of this. Even the dancehall industry's use of technology was groundbreaking; the creation of the sound system for instance, its mobility and raw power is captured in this quote from *Sonic Bodies* by Julian Henriques.

"With the sound system, bodies are placed inside sound, whereas with earphone listening it's the opposite; sound is placed inside bodies. It hits you but you feel no pain – instead pleasure – swimming in the sea of sound, between cliffs of speakers towering almost to the sky, sound stacked upon sound – tweeters on top of horns, on top of mid, on top of bass, on top of walk in sub bass bins. There is no escape, not even thinking about it, just being there alive, in and as the excess of sound. Trouser legs flap to the bassline and internal organs resonate to the finely tuned frequencies, as the vibrations excite every cell in your body."

In the Jamaican art world artists such as Leasho Johnson and Ebony G. Patterson have drawn a fluorescent line between their work and that of earlier generations obsessed with reproducing polite versions of the Euro-American artistic avant-garde. They, like many other Jamaicans of their generation and since, were cradled within the womb of sound Henriques so eloquently describes. They are connected to it umbilically as well as by socialization and cannot think or make work outside of it.

Johnson's *Ghetto Mother and Child Remix* is as far in worldview from the Edna Manley sculpture—*Ghetto Mother*—he's lampooning. As Nijah Cunningham noted at the recent Small Axe '1960s in Jamaica' symposium Manley's work portrays the Ghetto Mother as respectable but abjectly poverty-stricken and helpless, terrified children hanging on her skirts, as she faces a gunman. Johnson's remixed Ghetto Mother is also poor, but is portrayed as a loud and lurid figure wearing little but a scowl, surrounded by her precocious brood, all with mouths agape wailing, though one wields a knife behind his back and another positions her pum pum or vagina in your face. In the former the ghetto mother is victim to a random act of violence, while in the updated, remixed version, *Ghetto Mother* and her children embody the effects of the state's economic violence and everlasting 'structural adjustment'.

Vernacular Creativity

Ebony G. Patterson's *Cultural Soliloquy* quotes Dawn Scott's 1985 installation *A Cultural Object* while enunciating her distance from it with demotic vigour. Scott's installation is pessimistic, vividly objectifying the signs and effects of tribal politics in Jamaica. Patterson's installation foregrounds a small blinged-out car on a platform, as in a showroom, manically pumping dancehall tunes out of its interior. Criticize its 'vulgarity' and loudness if you must but at least this cultural object has wheels and is capable of going somewhere.

In these revisions or quotations of earlier, much cherished Jamaican artworks, a new generation of Jamaican artists capture some of the seismic shifts that have taken place in artistic and other languages in Jamaica. The shift, for instance, from standard English to Rasta talk to the pungent urban Patwa (Patois) of today can be mapped onto the 19th Century English realism of Barrington Watson, the Rastafarian-inflected work of Dawn Scott, and Patterson's new work, which raps fluently in contemporary Jamaican.

The broader point I want to make is that even if younger artists are not explicitly referencing or invoking the current incarnation of Jamaican music, they are making work in a world profoundly altered by the furious cornucopia of dancehall and the new social soundscapes it has engendered. This is true whether they live at home or in the diaspora, for dancehall has deftly woven its web by fluidly tacking back and forth between this small island and the far-flung net of its burgeoning diasporas. How could visual art in and of Jamaica ever remain immune from this virus of vernacular creativity?



NICOLE SMYTHE-JOHNSON ROOTING ROUTES

“Totality’s imaginary allows the detours that lead away from anything totalitarian.”

-Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*¹

What is a Jamaican Route? And how might this exhibition map one, or several? Is it a straightforward route, or an itinerary of stops that take you from point A to B? Or is it more circuitous? Like a bus route, intersecting with individual riders’ more apparently linear trajectories, but always converging only to diverge.

How are the routes presented here particular? What do they tell us about Jamaican contemporary art? What is the relationship between roots and routes? And how might contemporary art routes relate to roots? Let’s take it one question at a time.

The exhibition title is a reference to Jamaican-born scholar, Stuart Hall’s 1999 comments on the theory of the subject. According to Hall:

Instead of asking what are people’s roots, we ought to think about what are their routes, the different points by which they have come to be now; they are, in a sense, the sum of those differences. [...] These routes hold us in places, but what they don’t do is hold us in the same place. We need to try to make sense of the connections with where we think we were then as compared to where we are now.²

This exhibition can seem to go against the grain of Hall’s primary insight, proposing as it does a single place to which these works are tethered. Is it possible to think roots and routes together?

¹ Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. trans. by Betsy Wing. (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2010) p. 18

² Hall, Stuart. “A Conversation with Stuart Hall”, *The Journal of the International Institute*. Vol 7, Issue 1, Fall 1999. (Michigan Publishing: Michigan, 1999) Online.

Jamaican Roots

It’s an interesting time to think about Jamaican-ness, the idea has such currency now.

In a 2013 Volkswagen Superbowl commercial, Dave, a white office worker from Minnesota, infuses his grey workplace with laid-back, good vibes through the adoption of a “Jamaican accent”. A Google search will yield ample evidence of the controversy that surrounded the popular commercial; *USA Today* asked: “Racist?”³

Jamaicans took notice, but few held serious objections to the commercial, finding it funny. Many thought it was good for “Brand Jamaica”. The Jamaica Tourist Board had the same idea, developing a follow-up series of videos, under its “Jamaica Mi Happy” campaign, which even featured the actor from the VW commercial.

“Brand Jamaica” has continued to gain dominance locally and globally. EDM outfit Major Lazer is selling it⁴. Vogue.com dedicated 15 articles to it in October. Tommy Hilfiger’s 2016 Spring Collection cites it. There’s a whole “Jamaican” thing happening. Is it happening for Jamaica though?

Not really. For a nation with a reputation for laid-back happiness, things are pretty tight. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the nation signed yet another IMF deal, and austerity has taken its toll. Between 2012 and 2013 alone, the annual average exchange rate went from \$88.99JMD to \$100.77 (to 1 USD). Managing Director of the IMF, Christine Legard has said of the ceaseless devaluation: “I don’t like to use the word devaluation. I prefer to use the word ‘right-valuation’”⁵

So, for all its currency, in at least one important way, “Jamaican” is not worth much. It’s hard to be laid-back when your belt is strapped so tight it’s hard to breathe.

“Brand Jamaica” is hailed as the nation’s much-needed economic salvation, if only we could activate its potential. *The Jamaica Gleaner* proclaims “Brand Jamaica Worth \$Billions”.⁶

³ Horovitz, Bruce. “VW Jamaica-theme Super Bowl ad: Racist?” *USA Today*. 29 January 2013. Online. Accessed: 18 November 2015.

⁴ “Watch Major Lazer Trace Their Reggae Roots on a Wild Journey to Jamaica”, *Rolling Stone*. 4 March 2015. Online. 11 November 2015

⁵ Reynolds-Baker, Athaliah. “‘Right Valuation’ Has Made Jamaica More Competitive – Lagarde” *Jamaica Information Service*. 1 July 2014. Online. 11 November 2015.

⁶ Myers Jr, John. “Brand Jamaica Worth \$Billions” *The Jamaica Gleaner*. 24 November 2014. Online. 12 November 2015.

Still, with all the fanfare and rush to improve “competitiveness”, an uneasy minority exists. Cultural critic Annie Paul writes:

For many of us the discourse of branding is problematic, doubly so when it’s related to countries like Jamaica with its history of slavery, of human beings treated as property whose abject ‘thinghood’ was burnt into their flesh with branding irons.⁷

There’s definitely something unpleasant about the concept of a brand, more so the continuous process of “branding”. The way it flattens, reduces. The way it makes a claim. I think of Jamaican poet Kei Miller’s *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, in which a Rastaman and a cartographer debate. When the cartographer says: “My job is...to guide you out from cul-de-sacs into which you may have wrongly turned.”

The Rastaman replies:

...now that man’s job is never straight-
forward or easy. Him work is to make thin and crushable
all that is big and as real as ourselves; is to make flat
all that is high and rolling; is to make invisible and wutliss
plenty things that poor people cyaa do without
(...)
And then again
the mapmaker’s work is to make visible
all them things that shoulda never exist in the first place
like the conquest of pirates, like borders,
like the viral spread of governments...⁸

This evasive relation to being catalogued, the unwillingness to be rendered knowable that Miller’s Rastaman indexes, is as Jamaican as reggae. “Brand Jamaica” remains such a hot topic, not merely because of its economic potential, but also because Jamaican-ness always has been stubbornly elusive. In fact, the creation of “Jamaican-ness” was fraught with contradiction, and it has haunted the tiny, fetishized nation ever since.

⁷ Paul, Annie. “To Brand or Not to Brand Jamaica...” *Active Voice*. 5 August 2015. Online

⁸ Miller, Kei. *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014.)

Roots of “Jamaican”

The National Gallery of Jamaica is the oldest and largest public art institution in the English-speaking Caribbean. It opened in 1974, just over a decade after Jamaica secured independence from British colonial rule, and national cultural policy sought to articulate the foundations of a national identity that would enable rapid political and economic development.

Of course, Jamaican culture had always been there, but for hundreds of years it had been discursively and legislatively subjugated, overwritten by English culture. Jamaica’s founding fathers (and their sons) needed to develop a “national cultural narrative” that would appease the postcolonial drive to right historic wrongs, while maintaining and developing the existing political and economic structures (those inherited from the recently departed colonizer).

Institutions like the NGJ, the Jamaica Cultural Development Commission, and others were established to celebrate and define the new nation’s cultural fibre. Under the National Motto “Out of Many, One People”, cultural policy sought to redeem the historically oppressed majority, while charting a united, modern future.

It wouldn’t quite gel though. Something in the characters of modernity and redemption kept separating, like oil and water. Redemption was most lucidly articulated in various strands of Black Nationalism; most famously in the life and work of National Hero Marcus Garvey and the indigenous religion of Rastafari. Modernity’s narrative of progress favoured the “creole multiracialism” of Jamaica’s middle class political elite.

A disjuncture would become increasingly apparent as the young nation entered its second decade. The political elite’s modern vision, often found itself out of step with the “cultural forms and institutions that Jamaicans evolved during slavery”⁹. Not surprising, since these evolved in resistance to the ostensibly different, but similarly modern vision of the recently departed colonizer. As Anthropologist Deborah Thomas points out:

⁹ Thomas, Deborah. “Public Bodies: Virginity Testing, Redemption Song, and Racial Respect in Jamaica” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*. Vol 11, No 1 (American Anthropological Association: 2006), p.12

The irony, then, is that while nationalist intellectuals and activists, who were overwhelmingly middle class, sought to confer recognition upon working-class Afro-Jamaican forms and institutions by using them as the foundation of a national cultural identity, they also saw them as hindrances to political and economic development.¹⁰

This paradox is particularly visible in Jamaica’s cultural production, precisely because the nation’s cultural policy is so rooted in the contradiction.

Thus, in the galleries housing the NGJ’s permanent collection, you find a clear trajectory. We begin with “The Historical Galleries”, exhibiting “Art in Jamaica c1000 to 1900” - a selection of “artworks and artefacts”¹¹. Artefacts refers to the small Taino exhibit that prefaces the collection. The Taino are the civilization that occupied Jamaica at the time of Columbus’ arrival in 1494, they were almost completely wiped out by the time the English captured the island in 1655.

Artefacts also references the shackles and slave restraints positioned in the centre of the room that houses a small collection of works by travelling 18th century European artists. The narrative? In the beginning, only Europeans were associated with art, everyone else produced artefacts.

That is followed by the Edna Manley Memorial Collection. Manley was a British-trained artist, wife to founder of Jamaica’s first nationalist political party, founder of the national art school, and mother of two-time Prime Minister—Michael Manley. Her work—mostly sculpture in wood, stone and bronze—reflects her increasing interest in nation-building. Iconic examples are “Negro Aroused” (1935), and “Ghetto Mother” (1981). I could say more, but I won’t.

Next, “Jamaican Art; the Twentieth Century”. Before we were looking at “Art in Jamaica”, now we are looking at “Jamaican Art”. From here, we have the work of self-taught artists like John Dunkley, Everald Brown, Sidney McLaren and David Miller Senior. These works are positioned as icons of what Jamaican art historian Petrince Archer-Straw has called, “an indigenous Jamaican art movement, the roots of which were said to be inspired by Africa.”¹²

¹⁰ Thomas, p.12

¹¹ National Gallery of Jamaica website, “Art in Jamaica c1000 to 1900”

¹² Archer-Straw, Petrince. “Face of Jamaica- The 1963-64 Exhibition” *About Face: Revisiting Jamaica’s First Exhibition in Europe*. (University of Florida George A Smathers Libraries: 2012) Online. Accessed: 12 November 2015.

There's also work by more traditionally trained artists, like Albert Huie, the NGJ's founding Chief Curator, David Boxer, Barrington Watson, Carl Abrahams and so on. Those artists engaged more directly with modernist artistic principles and promoted an internationalist outlook, with grounding in local concerns.

The permanent galleries end with the Kapo Galleries. Mallica "Kapo" Reynolds is the most recognised of Jamaica's "intuitive" artists. "Intuitive" was coined and promoted by Boxer as an alternative to the more obviously problematic "primitive" or "naïve". Even the more politically correct "Outsider Art" is not a good fit, since as art historian and Director of the National Gallery, Veerle Poupeye has pointed out, in Jamaica the Intuitives are "the ultimate cultural insiders".¹³ Kapo was the first Jamaican artist to have a gallery in the NGJ dedicated to his work.

The way "Jamaican art" is bookended, by Manley's modernist art on one end and Kapo's "visionary symbolism"¹⁴ on the other, recalls the tension that Thomas identifies in broader cultural politics. In its early years, the NGJ "was mandated to document a national (and nationalist) Jamaican art history."¹⁵ [emphasis added] The articulation of the Intuitive canon, arm in arm with a modernist, progressive lineage with Manley as figurehead is another two-step. Of course, there were contradictions here too.

Boxer dedicated much of his career as an art historian and curator to writing about and exhibiting work by the Intuitives, arguing that they challenged European artistic convention *and* art historical hierarchies. It was important work, and "intuitive" is certainly better than "primitive", but something doesn't sit well nonetheless. Yes, intuitive means innate, which has its merits, but it also suggests "instinctual," "natural," "unreflecting". As opposed to the "reasoned" and "calculated" approach of artists trained/working in the European tradition?

I'm not denying the category of "intuitive" any critical value. It serves to value and institutionalise indigenous Jamaican aesthetic and ideological approaches. The trouble is, it also implicitly reinforces a binary central to the colonial project; that between the enlightened reason of the West and the instinctual, body-bound other.

My point is not that Boxer thought less of the work of the Intuitives than that of his more modernist counterparts. In fact, I think that is explicitly un-true. I am more interested in the way that Boxer's art historical discourse proved incompatible with his ideological aims. The very language of the academy, of history, of art could not accommodate escape from a hierarchy of value that posited some people(s) as modern or developed, and others as merely developing.

I want to ask, how does a language describe people in the same time in different tenses?

How could such a place be contemporary?

Routes

In one way, the contemporary art scene in Jamaica is in decline. In a nation of approximately 2.8 million people, there are no significant museums or galleries dedicated exclusively to contemporary, or even modern art. The NGJ is the only dedicated art exhibition space left, and they have given increasing attention to contemporary art. But there are limitations, a national museum is not designed to foster a nation's art, so much as define and protect it.

The Mutual Gallery, the last real commercial art gallery in Kingston, closed in 2013. There are a few framing shops that sell art, but they are not really galleries.

There are some important artist-run initiatives. New Local Space (NLS) has a strong residency programme and a fairly regular schedule of exhibitions, talks and online engagement. There are also spaces like Studio 174 and the Institute for Social Leadership that engage art as a means for social intervention. The decade-old Kingston on the Edge festival is another important event.

These organisations do valuable work, but the Kingston metropolitan area is home to a million or so people. In Port-of-Spain Trinidad, a city of only 300,000, I know of at least five art spaces in addition to the National Gallery. Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, also has about 300,000 inhabitants, and they have over half dozen commercial art galleries, in

¹³ Poupeye, Veerle. "Intuitive Art as a Canon", *Small Axe* 24. October 2007. P 73-82. (p 78)

¹⁴ Archer-Straw, "Face of Jamaica".

¹⁵ Poupeye, p.74

MARLON JAMES
Storm

Next:
ANDREA CHUNG
Sink & Swim
(detail)

RICHARD MARK RAWLINS
Finding Black: Teacha



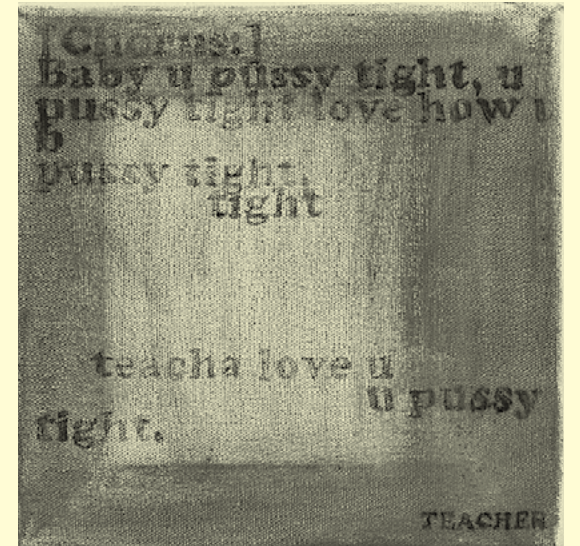
addition to the National Gallery of the Bahamas and a smattering of experimental spaces.

The Jamaican art market collapsed in the early nineties. There isn't a strong culture of art-collecting or museum-going. There are no state grants available to artists. According to a 2012 study conducted by NLS, only 30% of artists reported ever receiving funding to support their work and most of that was from private sources. Over 80% of participating artists reported that funding and space to create work were the biggest challenges in their practice. Things are tight.

Jamaica is as much determined by its geographical borders, as it is by its massive diaspora (many plausibly claim that more Jamaicans live outside Jamaica than in). And of course, it has a disproportionately significant impact on global culture. Jamaican-ness is increasingly dispersed, stretched, appropriated (as it is appropriating).

So how you talk about "the Jamaican art scene", depends on where Jamaica ends for you. Does it stretch to Kentucky, and Montreal, and California, and Trinidad, where Ebony G. Patterson, Olivia McGilchrist, Andrea Chung, and Marlon James live? Do we follow the lead of the NGJ, which regularly exhibits the work of diaspora artists like New York-based Renee Cox? In 2014, the NGJ took things a step further, inviting a selection of Caribbean artists to participate in the Biennial, and rebranding it "Jamaica Biennial", as a (paradoxical) way to accommodate new transnational yearnings.

Speaking of Caribbean artists, what to do with Richard Mark Rawlins, the Trinidadian artist who designed this



catalogue and references dancehall lyrics and Jamaican Patois in his work? And Leasho Johnson, who has only ever lived, worked and studied in Jamaica but counts Japanese Manga and Kawai aesthetics among his major influences. Or Oneika Russell, whose work explores a perspective on herself, as a Jamaican woman who evolved while doing her PhD in Japan? Maybe Japan is just a regular stop on a Jamaican route.

These questions may seem banal- we all know nations are imagined communities, right?- but in Jamaica they are highly contested. Yet, Jamaican-ness remains at a premium, even in Jamaica.

The Contemporary

So where does the contemporary fit into all this? What do we even mean by that? It is clear that we do not mean only “living or occurring at the same time” or “belonging to or occurring in the present”. All of these artists are living, but that’s not really why their work is contemporary.

In his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Terry Smith offers a compelling history of the concept. He argues that although for the past century or so, “modern” and “contemporary” were used interchangeably in art contexts, recently “usage has nearly equalized and the buzz is with ‘contemporary’.” He asks, “Why did it happen? How deep does it go? Why is it at once so easy yet also so strange to itself, so estranged from itself?”¹⁶

For Smith, what distinguishes contemporary art is its contentious relationship to time, history, space and place. This new worldly art is not entirely distinct from its art historical forebears. Smith identifies three major currents; the first is the “Retromodernist, retro-sensationalist, and spectacularist tendencies (...), which continues to predominate in Euro-American and other modernizing art worlds and markets.” So in some ways, contemporary art is merely a “continuing modernism”.

Luckily, “continuing modernism” must now contend with two other major currents. One, “art created according to nationalist, identitarian, and critical priorities (...), especially from previously colonised cultures.” And a third current, which “proliferates below the radar of generalization”, and has led to the “spread of small-scale, interactive, DIY art (and art-like output) that is concerned less with high art style or confrontational politics and more with tentative explorations...”.¹⁷

¹⁶ Smith, Terry. *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. (Independent Curators International: New York, 2012) p. 33-34

¹⁷ Smith, 34



ONEIKA RUSSELL
Notes to You



ANDREA CHUNG
Sink & Swim

These three currents are not discrete. They flow together, only really perceivable as the ebb and flow of the medium they animate. Smith stresses that these currents “occurred and continue to unfold in different and distinctive ways in each cultural region and in each art-producing locality around the world...”¹⁸ To think contemporary art then, is to think contention and destabilization, alongside, in-step with and informed by continuity. There is something agonistic about contemporaneity. Something basically unsettling about the recognition of a symbolic order that must be undermined, that is constantly being undermined, but is all we have.

In a blog post on the occasion of Trinidadian experimental art space, Alice Yard’s ninth anniversary, Nicholas Laughlin (one of the Yard’s founders) wrote:

This dynamic of “place” versus “space” is an open question at the core of our evolving understanding. It is a question in contention with the restrictive idea of a “territory” requiring a boundary patrol or a price of admission — an idea inherited from the particular history of the Caribbean. (...) We are fascinated by mobility within, across, outside, and returning to a space that is simultaneously here and everywhere.

This is as good an explanation of the workings of Jamaica’s contemporary art scene as any (never mind that Laughlin is describing Alice Yard).

It is not easy to map that kind of route. That kind of route rejects maps’ claims. That is why it is hard to speak of a Jamaican contemporary art scene. This is why it is possible to say “it is in decline *and* flourishing”. Like the contemporary, a route can hold here and there, then and now. It can be intuitive and modern. It’s all very paradoxical, but if we are to accept Smith’s argument, it is also very contemporary.

¹⁸ Smith, 33-34



MARLON JAMES
Kat C.H.R. Williams

Next:
STORM SAULTER and
RODELL WARNER
Dark Morass
(Video still)

RELEVANT WEBSITES

Camille Chedda	http://camillechedda.webs.com
Andrea Chung	http://andreachungart.com
Marlon James	http://www.marlonjamesphotography.com
Leasho Johnson	http://www.leasho.com
Matthew McCarthy	http://www.protoje.com/indiggcollective/2015/9/11/matthew-mccarthy-talks-art
Olivia McGilchrist	http://oliviamcgilchrist.com
Oneika Russell	http://www.oneikarussell.net
Ebony G. Patterson	http://ebonygpatterson.com
Storm Saulter	http://stormsaulter.com/portfolio/uncategorized/yard
Cosmo Whyte	http://www.cosmowhyte.com
Andre Woolery	http://www.andrewooleryart.com
Selene Wendt	http://www.theglobalartproject.no
Richard Mark Rawlins	http://www.richardmarkrawlins.com
Annie Paul	http://anniepaul.net
Alice Yard	http://aliceyard.blogspot.no
Draconian Switch	http://www.artzpub.com/draconianswitch
NGJ	https://nationalgalleryofjamaica.wordpress.com
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Ebony G. Patterson // Oneika Russell // Storm Saulter
Cosmo Whyte // Andre Woolery

Essays by Selene Wendt, Annie Paul, Nicole Smythe-Johnson

