



ROCKSTONE
&BOOTHEEL:
contemporary west indian art

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Curated by: Kristina **NEWMAN-SCOTT** and Yona **BACKER**



Rockstone & Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art

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Foreword

The range of artistic ideas included in *Rockstone & Bootheel* is a vital and vivid reminder of the hybrid nature of culture and the contingent nature of taste. Curators Yona Backer and Kristina Newman-Scott joined forces to communicate something of what it is to be creating in a moment when questions are far more compelling than answers. Rockstone does not strive for acceptance; it does demand engagement.

As I look back on the Rockstone & Bootheel project, I'm struck by the resonance of the work we were so fortunate to house in our space.



We are fortunate in the Hartford region to have a strong and growing population with roots in the islands. The presence of a dynamic West Indian community presents an opportunity for us as a contemporary arts organization. From the installation in our galleries, to the film and performance events, to the public project at ACA Foods, and now with this catalogue, this is a project that reached far and wide for inspiration and inclusion. I'm pleased that Real Art Ways was able to support the vision of two talented curators, to support the work of such a remarkably varied array of artists, and to touch and be touched by our community.

Will K. Wilkins
Executive Director



Curatorial Statement

Yona **BACKER** and
Kristina **NEWMAN-SCOTT**

In 1989, three seminal visual arts exhibitions, shown in three cities across the world, broke new ground by featuring contemporary art from the Global South. These innovative shows did not introduce the traditional art or cultural artifacts that had previously represented non-Western artistic traditions in mainstream museums. Instead, *Magiciens de la Terre* at Centre Pompidou in Paris, *The Other Story* at the Hayward Gallery in London, and *Tradition and Contemporaneity* at the Havana Biennial, with their presentation of challenging, engaging contemporary art from outside the West, launched an important and lasting conversation about postcolonialism in the visual arts. All three concerned themselves with the question of how to place the artistic and cultural practices of the Global South within the so-called hegemonic Eurocentric art history and systems of dissemination. Despite their very different frameworks, the shows all challenged the exclusivity of Western art institutions and practices. Their strategies included presenting the work in a universalized framework, strategizing about ways to bring “alternative” art into the “mainstream” art world, and presenting the vitality of the ongoing dialogue among artists from the Caribbean, South America, Africa

and Asia. In the two decades since, many regional survey exhibitions have created shows that follow these basic paradigms, adopting and revising their propositions as they went, but fundamentally echoing and further exploring the ideas first brought out in 1989.

Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art emerged from our conversation regarding the problematics of regional survey exhibitions. Since the early 1990s, the kinds of surveys that gathered artworks from the non-Western world have not always challenged the presumed subordination of postcolonial societies to the Western world; in fact, some have even reaffirmed formulaic categories, like “marginal versus mainstream” and “subordinate versus hegemonic”. Ultimately, one problem we find with such exhibitions is that even as they claim to “complement” Western-oriented art history by adding more artists, genres, and countries to the canon, they fail to challenge its basic structures and assumptions, despite the fact that these assumptions exclude or denigrate the very kinds of work the shows are promoting. We feel, however, that survey exhibitions have the potential to inquire into the



distinctive methods, uses, and narrative forms at play in a range of artistic realms; and that they should aim to challenge and complicate the ideas of the Eurocentric art field, not simply hope to add a few more artists to it.

This is not to say that there is no value to simply giving space to non-Western artists in Western institutions. In fact, such an effort can be the start of a critical response to the limited scope of Western artistic production, and the exclusivity of art historiography. It can also, however, easily result in mere tokenism and spectacle, which only further inscribe the stereotyped identities associated with certain geographies. The curatorial efforts behind *Rockstone and Bootheel* recognize the possible shortcomings of region-specific generalizations, and invite the viewer to perceive the show as a critical take on the aforementioned limitations.

Rockstone and Bootheel brings together 39 artists who are either currently living on Caribbean islands—specifically the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago—or are part of

their diasporas. The show uses the term “contemporary art” in its title advisedly. For “contemporary art” has a signification that is more than merely temporal; it also implies certain symbolic and ideological characteristics. The formal and visual elements of contemporary arts have a language that makes them comprehensible to an international audience, regardless of their national origin. “Internationalism” is nevertheless a fraught category in the arts, for while it helps artworks to transcend their so-called “provincial” character, it can also risk reducing them to mere representations of regional dispositions. Aware of this dilemma, we chose to highlight fragments of artistic production, but also to focus on a set of artistic strategies and methods that seem particular to the English-speaking Caribbean.

The title of the exhibition draws attention to both the ineffably local character of these works, and to their participation in the universal language of contemporary art practice. “Rockstone and Bootheel” is taken from a song by Gibby & DubMetal; it is a local idiom for “taking a journey”.

The idea of the journey is the inspiration for the show, which aims to suggest the experience of travel through an unfamiliar region, where a traveler's experiences are mere fragments or episodes that offer glimpses, not a comprehensive vision, of the world through which he or she passes. Thus the show makes no claims to being a comprehensive survey of Caribbean art, but hopes instead to present a kind of illuminating patchwork that will also avoid reinscribing restrictive and demeaning cultural and historical paradigms, like those of the plantation economy, colonization, slavery, or tourism. The works chosen for the exhibition are by contrast heavily influenced by urban culture, and draw from less well-known cultural strains like carnival, Dancehall, and other dominant subcultures in the Anglophone Caribbean. The exhibition takes particular interest in the concerns of urban dwellers, including inner city crime and violence, as well as the politics of class, race, gender, and sexuality. It hopes to be a catalyst for artists to create a space for self-representation that demands engagement and recognition from the viewer.

Rockstone and Bootheel also aims to increase understanding of the continuities and differences between the categories of "Jamaican art," "Trinidadian art," and "West Indian art". To this end, it considers the way the visual arts have been institutionalized on the islands of the English-speaking Caribbean. After the Anglophone Caribbean islands declared their independence from colonial powers in the 1960s, they all sought to define their own distinct national identities;

creating a visual art history that could be representative of their cultures was a key part of this effort. During the postcolonial period, the National Galleries of Art in Jamaica and Trinidad—and in Barbados and Bahamas in the following decades—were founded, each a mandate to create a canon and to assert a specific national visual arts identity. As the governments attempted to historicize their nations, they championed modern art forms over others. However, such official art discourses still tend to be distanced from the more vibrant and more popular artistic forms and genres with which this show is concerned, like dance and music. *Rockstone and Bootheel* steps out of the museum, to focus instead on living artists who do not necessarily work alongside the official artistic canons.

Crucial to this discussion is the issue of the professionalization of artistic practices. In the Anglophone Caribbean, artists who often choose to go beyond modern art discourses position themselves independently from art institutions, commercial galleries, art fairs, and biennials; they work in a self-motivated and self-reliant fashion, often with little or no support from the state or from private patrons. In other words, in the Anglophone Caribbean, the most inventive and original artistic production tends not to be driven either by strong public sector support or by a thriving private art market. The downside of this situation is obvious—artists in the region must struggle mightily to produce their work and even to survive—but it results in a considerable amount of artistic freedom, so that the



Caribbean art world is far distant from, say, a Western country's professionalized field with its relatively rigid disciplinary boundaries. This is one of the reasons why artistic production in the West Indies features many crossovers between visual arts, film, fashion, music video directing, and DJ performances—all of which *Rockstone and Bootheel* incorporates into its programming.

The coupling of Caribbean-based artists and their diasporic peers is also at the center of *Rockstone and Bootheel*. The show tries to understand and demonstrate diasporic artists' strong cultural ties with the Caribbean, as well as the relative freedom with which they, like their peers at home, continue to experiment with various genres and types of artistic practices while moving beyond the hegemony of traditional visual arts discourse.

Rockstone and Bootheel is influenced by the region-specific art infrastructure and its relation to the diversity of artistic practices in the English-speaking Caribbean. Rather than simply celebrating

the concept of "interdisciplinarity," the exhibition suggests an interpretative frame and attempts to create a dialogue about diverse approaches to and readings of visual arts and culture. While collapsing assumed hierarchies between different art genres, the show aims to emphasize and celebrate the particularity of the creative culture in the region, and to capture its zeitgeist for audiences in the United States.



Some of us carry the whole world in our hearts. So that every gunshot, echoes pain in our ever shifting eyes. I have watched this war from amongst the rubble of a defunct dream. Watched my own face turn white, with the clouds of gun-smoke, and the disbelief of innocents that came too late. The price of war is high. There used to be a school here. Now clumps of chalk or is it bone, splinters of blackboards and black children or were they, you know we're all black when we burn. A mother tirelessly searches the heap of mangled concrete and steel for her child. It has been three hours since she last cried out to her...but hope is the bleeding of her hands for iron and steel are facts, so too are the intentions of rockets and she is not alone, the town is dotted with heaps of homes, the tips of mangled steel accuse every direction, they came from everywhere. Karachi screams and hopes the world has ears. The world waxes with sanctions and treaties, our hands are cut under the falling sound of empty threats. The knowledge we hold as truth is reduced to the spit of heresay in the courtroom of the oppressor, The CIA killed Rodney...is that so? Prove it, and Maurice, can you prove it? With phrases like "acts of genocide", "friendly fire" and "islamist insurgency", Language laughs at the charred carcasses of children and laps at the tear ducts of mothers, We laugh at the oxymorons...U.S department of Justice...Military Intelligence...independent Caribbean Nations...University Education, I intend to wear these poems wherever I go, Until it becomes fashionable to look like how this sound.

He said:

my gun is my only friend.
an if dey keep on callin him, he go answer and
he doh whisper he talk like thunder
he does wake the children up when the storms come home,
he does make ole women talk in they sleep and bawl for murder,
and he does make fathers sleep on the couch wit one eye
open and a three line close at hand, he does smell like
legislation and gun laws, five years for possession arms and
ammunition, rounds and rounds and rounds we go make a mas
dis year, ah playin robber but not ah ole tief, when blood
runnin in the streets ah wha yuh to understand that every
thing have a history, when steel and pink flesh meet spear
and shield meet bow and arrow and feather and religion,
meet centuries and gods, and history takes on its tones and
tastes, I sit at the crossroads with a pen, waiting for the
sound of truth, or a wind of change to blow this tension out
meh head before I explode and take meh whole race wit meh.



To the WIRL (WORLD)!

Annie PAUL

The gully getting deeper and the hills
are getting steeper, and the dance
dem getting sweeter...Gully creep! ¹

14 In the latter half of the twentieth century a number of European colonies gained political independence from their former rulers. In the Anglophone Caribbean it was the sixties that marked the beginning of full sovereignty for countries like Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Independent Jamaicans who had hitherto been constituted as British subjects were now in charge of their own destiny. However the model for producing suitable subjects in these newly independent nation states in the Caribbean remained that of the English middle class. This has produced a cultural politics of huge inequality in Independent Jamaica revealing a society divided between those able to wield its official language, English, and those excluded from the postcolonial banquet by virtue of the fact that they only speak Patwa, or vernacular Jamaican. English

is highly valued because of its status as a global language, whereas Patwa is considered to be limited by its purely local currency. Yet, ironically, as this essay attempts to show, it is the vibrant cultural production of the Patwa-speakers that has firmly placed Jamaica on the global stage and not the other way around.

There are not many places in the world where the masses who have been silent for two thirds of a century have found their voice(s) as volubly and effectively as in the Caribbean; here, using the medium of music, "low-budget" people persistently neglected by both state and society, have creatively married oral traditions with the most advanced technological innovation to create a highly mobile, popular, indeed, trend-setting, product that is competitive internationally with similar products from the most advanced societies in the world. One of the most paradigmatic instances of such vernacular creativity is Jamaican music, or Reggae, a product

that has successfully globalized itself, showing a remarkable ability to adapt to and exploit the informal, often illegitimate apertures created by successive waves of migration from the Caribbean to metropolitan centres and back. There are several genres of Reggae the most recent being Dancehall, with its natural links to hiphop and rap.

The term 'vernacular' here refers to certain subaltern practices of expressive engagement that derive from the dynamic, adaptive, innovative character of the local language, Jamaican Patwa or Creole that originated in the 17th century Plantation society of the region and is predominantly a mix of several different African languages and English. The product of creolization or cultural mixing Patwa has morphed beyond its original vocabulary by the emigration of Jamaicans to countries around the globe. Through them Patwa has remained in constant dialogue and negotiation with the international, the diasporic, the transnational and the 'global'. Creolized languages such as Jamaican Patwa have the ability not only "to articulate the experiences of people who do not have access to formal languages" but also to provide creative means of negotiating the obstacles, both local and international, its speakers often stumble across. They provide native grammars capable of creating and exploiting entry points into the world economic system, using the system rather than subverting it and "demanding that it deal with new actors, new operations, and unprecedented and flexible forms of accumulation."²

It is interesting to note that the paths that Jamaican music has taken successfully circumvented the inevitable trajectory of cultural production in the country, sidestepping the middle-class middlemen who would have leached it of its cultural specificity and refined it into their notion of what a Jamaican export should be. Traditionally, in countries such as Jamaica "If black culture was the wine, the middle classes were its bottlers."³ The reality, however, is that the Jamaican middle classes and elites (with the exception of Chris Blackwell, who promoted Bob Marley and one or two others) have yet to prove that they are capable of generating an internationally competitive cultural product which is the benchmark of creativity and innovation that Jamaican music represents. A striking example of the disdain with which Jamaican music is treated by the country's own privileged classes is the fact that forty years after independence there is not a single purpose-built arena for musical performances in the country. Rather, far from being honored, DJs and dancehall audiences are routinely criminalized and demonized by both agents of the state and civil society with the help of legislation such as the Night Noises Act and laws governing 'obscenity' and 'lewd' performances.⁴

The disconnect between official Jamaica and the vibrant cultural life of the country's Patwa-speaking majority manifests itself in many ways. As Carolyn Cooper recently pointed out, *The Story of the Jamaican People*, a popular history book published in the 90s, doesn't mention a single DJ in its pages; and although a museum of visual



art, the National Gallery, was founded in 1974 “to trace with ease, through the finest examples, and through important historical works, the intricacies of our artistic development,” there is no major institution devoted to the country’s musical traditions despite its international influence. Interestingly at the recently concluded International Reggae Conference at the University of the West Indies, local and foreign archivists, film-makers and cultural historians argued passionately for the creation of an official archive or museum documenting Jamaican musical history.

Yet even though there has been considerable investment by the state in the arts—a state-funded school of visual art supplements the museum, for instance (mystifying considering that Jamaican visual art is a product of almost purely local significance that lacks the international currency of Jamaican music)—the population at large has remained ignorant of and untouched by the local art scene. Partly this is because visual art by its very nature is generally an elite activity. This is certainly true in most societies, Cuba and Haiti being exceptional cases, where art is no longer the exclusive preserve of the middle and upper classes.

And because the curating elites in societies like Jamaica are usually so different in cultural, color and class terms from the citizenry they supposedly represent there is little or no common basis for dialogue or interaction between the two. In Jamaica, for instance, there is a sharp, almost unbridgeable divide between the formal public sphere in

which Standard English is the official language, and the informal cultural economy in which Jamaican Patwa, the much reviled and disdained oral language spoken by the majority of Jamaicans, prevails. Visual art in Jamaica has located itself exclusively in the formal sphere, its one concession being its strategic embrace of the popular, even if a rural, folkloric and therefore limited popular, in the form of so-called ‘intuitive art’.

The ideology guiding the state’s heavy investment in the visual arts seems to have been a belief that art with a capital A was necessary for the development of an independent, self-confident citizenry emerging from the shackles of slavery and then colonialism. Yet when Jamaicans find themselves on the world stage, it is to their country’s musical traditions that they turn to express pride in their national identity. In Beijing’s Bird’s Nest stadium after his spectacular performance at the 2008 Olympics, Usain Bolt, spontaneously broke into the Nuh Linga and the Gully Creeper, the latest dance moves that innovative Jamaican dancehall music had produced during the summer of 2008. (And shortly thereafter, Bolt’s trademark gesture of pulling back an imaginary bow and arrow—to the WIRL!—joined the pantheon of Jamaican dancehall moves). Bolt did not pull out a flag with Negro Aroused (the emblem of the Jamaican art movement) printed on it and wave it at global audiences; instead, he signaled his victory by reproducing the latest dance moves from the streets of Kingston!

Yes, we can...be worldbeaters! That was the message signalled by Usain Bolt from the Olympic stadium.

Jamaica’s relentlessly resilient and resourceful underclass had proven yet again its ability to dominate global competition in arenas where its lack of Standard English doesn’t hold it back. This is Patwa power at its most potent: a lithe and flexible force, honed by adversity, flaunting its mastery of the universe of athletics.

This kind of vernacular confidence and self-possession wasn’t derived from the abjectly self-conscious, respectability-seeking, hymn-singing, English-speaking lower and middle classes; it was bred from the culture of the flamboyant, boisterous, in-your-face Patwa-speaking population. To underscore its point, Patwa hurled its most powerful lightning bolt at distant Beijing. Named Usain, this young and irrepressible son of Jamaican soil then re-inscribed forever the global significance of the word Bolt. In the forty years since the country’s independence, it is the vernacular moderns who have proved both through their athletic and musical prowess that they are ready to take on the world; and the Beijing Olympics proved that the world was more than ready for them (minus the prissy International Olympic Committee, head Jacques Rogge who berated the ebullient Bolt for not behaving like a ‘sportsman’). Both English- and Patwa-speaking Jamaicans united in celebrating Bolt’s extraordinary victories (he won three gold medals and broke world records in men’s 100m, 200m and the 40x100 races) and those of the nimble, determined young Jamaican team accompanying him. Over the two weeks of the 29th Olympiad they enthralled global audiences over and over again with their worldbeating skills.

For Kingston dancemakers like ICE and Shelly Belly, watching Bolt and the other Jamaican athletes celebrate their Olympic victories by performing their trademark dances in front of the global media was a rare kind of recognition. The video of Bolt doing the Gully Creeper went viral, propelling its creator, ICE, to instant, if brief, stardom during the second half of 2008. Unfortunately, he didn’t live to see the next year; like his mentor Bogle, a legendary dancemaker who was murdered in January 2005, he was shot and killed on December 26, 2008, a few short months after the Beijing Olympics.

The gully getting deeper and the hills are getting steeper, and the dance dem getting sweeter...Gully creepa!

Gully has another resonance in Kingston, where two words are scrawled on walls all over the city: Gaza. Gully. These names, so ubiquitous in the public spaces of Kingston and Jamaica, signify internecine zones of conflict competing for supremacy in the dancehall universe here. “Gully” signifies Singjay Mavado, the “Gully Gad” (God) of Gullyside in Cassava Piece, an impoverished community in the foothills of Kingston, while “Gaza” refers to DJ Vybz Kartel, who hails from a neighbourhood in Portmore that was once known as BORDERLINE.

And thereby hangs a tale. It all has to do with an actor called Keith ‘Shebada’ Ramsay, the star of a super successful series of Jamaican plays put on by Stages Productions. This company produces what is known in local parlance as ‘roots plays’, a kind of farcical, over the top production with picaresque characters



performing or acting out the issues of the day. Sex is a big part of it, and subtlety is not, but Stages Productions whose slogan is “Comedy is serious business” always plays to full houses. Shebada himself, whose stage persona is camp as they come and twice as provocative, sports a bleached face and gay-ish attributes that complicate the argument that Jamaica is unremittingly hostile to Gays.

The induction of the name ‘Gaza’ into the Jamaican firmament came about because in the very first insanely popular Stages Production, *Bashment Granny*, there is a scene where a policeman confronts the sinuous Shebada asking “Yu a man or yu a woman?” “Mi deh pon di borderline” declares Shebada unabashedly, emphasizing his retort with an exaggerated wag of his hips. The phrase became so popular in the context of discussions about sexuality that Vybz Kartel decided that the name of his community ‘Borderline’ had been irrevocably contaminated by association.

He therefore adopted the name of the most violent place he could think of at the time—Gaza in Palestine.

Despite his ambiguous sexuality Shebada rivals both Kartel and Mavado in popularity, and the more the DJs deprecate him in their songs, deriding his gay stage persona, the more popular he seems to become. “Battyman time now!” one of the badges on the mannequin in Lawrence Graham-Brown’s provocative work *Ras-Pan-Afro-Homo Sapien*, 2009, proclaims. Graham-Brown’s work engages with Jamaican popular culture on its own terms, in a lingua it understands—Patwa—the language of the street/gully. “OUT” shouts another badge defiantly, and “I heart boys,” announces yet another. He is single-handedly and bravely confronting the violent rhetoric of homophobia that, alas, is also a significant feature of Jamaica’s vernacular moderns.

Ebony Patterson’s *Gangstas for Life and Disciplez* series also references popular culture. The bleached faces of her subjects speak to the same social strictures and structures that produce a character like Shebada—with his ‘whiteface’ and stereotyped effeminacy. The most interesting art in Jamaica today engages the popular by speaking the lexicon of the streets. Peter Dean Rickards and Chris Irons are others whose work acknowledges and taps into the vernacular creativity blowing through the air in Jamaica.

The aggressive, explosive sound of contemporary Jamaican music registers “the disruptive force of the local—the vernacular, the indigenous, the ‘native ground’” by riding the rhythm of globalization rather than adopting the passively agonistic posture of many middle class moderns in the Caribbean. When more visual artists in Jamaica start taking a leaf out of the book of its musicians perhaps an interesting art scene might begin developing here.

1. Taken from “Gully Creepa” by Elephant Man, 2008.

2. Mamadou Diouf, “From the Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No 3, Fall 2000, 696.

3. Krista A. Thompson, “Black Skin, Blue Eyes: Visualizing Blackness in Jamaican Art, 1922-1944,” *Small Axe*, Volume 8, No 2, September 2004, 14.

4. Baz Dreisinger, “How Jamaica’s Volatile Dancehall Scene Can Avoid a Biggie vs. Tupac Tragedy,” *Village Voice*, 5 August 2008.



Ebony G. Patterson, *Gangstas for Life*, 2008



GOD

Picture

standing on newly formed earth, virgin to seed or root,
clouds rolled up mid calf

Chest heaving the beginning of the trades

Somewhere just south of here where we began,

And maybe intently,

He wanted to see how far He could make

that

flat

stone

skip

smooth in the psalm of its beginnings,

Or simply flung, flicked from His wrist,

head turned away in conversation with an angel,

Or maybe it wasn't the stone at all

these islands Where it skipped

BLOSSOMED

But God's laughter and amazement each

time the stone touched his waters

And gave them the voice of the

EARTH

MUHAMMAD MUWAKIL

GOD THE BOY

20

That Is Mas

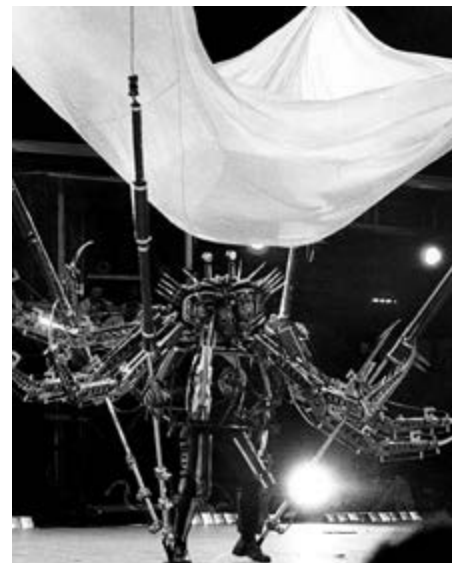
Nicholas LAUGHLIN

Over a thirty-year period beginning in the mid 1970s, the Trinidadian artist Peter Minshall created a series of nearly three dozen extravagant large-scale performance works, whose influence on contemporary Trinidadian and Caribbean art is not yet fully reckoned. Incorporating kinetic sculpture, dance, theatre, and music, realised in collaboration with scores of craftsmen and technicians and thousands of performers, requiring months of meticulous preparation, each of these works was performed a single time under unrepeatable circumstances, and for a massive public audience of tens of thousands.

Drawing equally on Caribbean folk tradition and ritual, global popular culture, and “high art” forms like opera and avant-garde theatre, Minshall’s works unleashed epic narratives in the streets of Port of Spain. *Papillon* (1982) and *Rat Race* (1987) were allegorical swarms of butterflies and rodents. *Paradise Lost* (1976) and *The Odyssey* (1994) re-imagined the literary narratives of Milton and Homer, and *The Lost Tribe* (1999) alluded to Biblical stories of a people wandering in the desert. *Hallelujah* (1995) was a band of angels celebrating creation; *This Is Hell* (2001) brought a visitation

from the underworld. The fantastic army of *Red* (1998) was an eruption of pure, glistening color in the heart of the city, symbolising love and hate and heat and blood all at once. The artist Christopher Cozier, writing about *Red* soon after its appearance, remarked: “If something like this were to happen in one of the alleged power locations for art theory, there would be miles of text.” This observation points to the crux of the dilemma Minshall’s work poses for Caribbean art history. His spectacles did not unfold within the chaste precincts of a museum or gallery, and were not shepherded or shaped by curators and catalogue essays. They were Carnival bands, created for Trinidad’s annual pre-Lenten festival and presented in the unruly company of hordes of costumed revellers and trucks bearing amplified music.

Both a form of state-sanctioned cultural display and a commercial enterprise, Carnival was designated Trinidad and Tobago’s “national festival” in the mid twentieth century, the era of Independence, and has come to embody a tangle of ideals, assertions, and debates about Trinidad’s cultural identity, heritage, and social change. But Trinidad Carnival is still not widely considered a location for serious art practice.

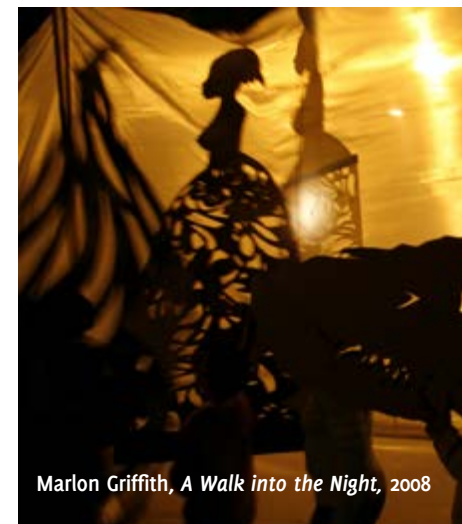


Minshall, *Mancrab*, 1983

As Cozier writes, “it is perceived to be a mere folk or street festival, the subject for more renderings of culture by local artists and foreign anthropologists.” The curator Claire Tancons adds: “the few books about so-called Carnival arts favour an anthropological perspective and tend to acknowledge tradition over creativity, and general Caribbean art books make little, if any, room for Carnival.”

Minshall’s body of work was and is a problem for Carnival itself, clashing with official cultural guardians and their ideas of the festival’s nature and purpose. And, as Trinidad’s major contemporary artist, working in a medium largely unrecognised outside his home country, he is also a problem for the Caribbean’s contemporary art narratives. The scale, scope, and ambition of his work are unprecedented and remain unrivalled. To astute observers, this was obvious as early as his first full-scale band, *Paradise Lost*, in 1976. Writing then, the photographer Roy Boyke suggested: “It is doubtful that

the work of any single individual has had so instantaneous and so searing an impact on the consciousness of an entire country.” For Christopher Cozier, almost a generation younger than Minshall, the decisive moment came in 1983, when *Mancrab*, the king of the band *River*, made its first public appearance. This giant bionic crab with pincers thrashing and spouting jets of blood emerged on the Carnival stage before an audience accustomed to sequined and plumed fantasias. *Mancrab* was an allegory of social and political violence that many in the audience took for a violent act in itself, an attack on Carnival and its traditions. It provoked anger and confusion, which only intensified when the full spectacle of *River*—a visual fable about the collapse of creole nostalgias and ideals — was revealed on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. At that moment, Cozier later wrote, “to be an artist began to mean something again in this society. . . . Since this period it has been difficult for our art to settle down. There was a turning point in our sensibility and in the demands that we made on our art.”



Marlon Griffith, *A Walk into the Night*, 2008

Other “fine” artists had designed Carnival costumes and bands before Minshall. But he was the first to approach Carnival masquerade not as a diversion but as his primary medium—and to theorise a version of Trinidadian art history that places the “folk” visual and performance traditions of Carnival at the core of indigenous art practice.

We are still trying to devise a conceptual vocabulary for work like Minshall’s. For much of his career, Minshall has been described, inadequately, as a costume designer. Some critics define his work as a kind of theatre, but that label too seems incapacious. Minshall himself has consistently and insistently referred to his medium as mas, the popular abbreviation of “masquerade”, and calls himself a masman. Cozier invented the term “roadworks” to emphasise the public and unpredictable nature of Minshall’s productions, unfolding on the street. With the help of his team of engineers and artisans, Minshall creates objects that are themselves extraordinary sculptural works, but they are never intended for singular or static display. Rather, they are mechanisms for the creation of events and experiences; “means for the human body to express its energy”, as Minshall says. And he has not hesitated to claim this as Trinidad’s quintessential creative form.

Or, as Cozier has more modestly expressed it, after Minshall “it became clear that objects and actions could function with equal agency in the social and cultural space, and that the arena for creative expression was inherently much wider.”

II

No other contemporary artist in Trinidad has embraced mas with Minshall’s existential fervour, or worked on a scale to match his, but his oeuvre—operating within the context of older masquerade traditions familiar to most Trinidadians—has deeply influenced visual practice in Trinidad in the past quarter century. Minshall’s work gave other artists a sense of license to explore Carnival’s visual traditions, and furthermore demonstrated that mas as an artform is capable of engaging any idea or ambition, of any degree of sophistication or complexity. For some painters and photographers, mas remains merely a subject to be depicted in two dimensions, but a number of younger artists have adopted and adapted its aesthetic of collaborative and improvisatory public performance.

The annual Carnival celebration itself remains a viable space for provocative art-making (with a guaranteed mass audience). In recent years, Robert Young, the fashion designer behind the label The Cloth, has led a small band called the *Vulgar Fractions*. Fully masked, and borrowing the music of “left-behind sounds from other bands,” the *Vulgar Fractions* physically and conceptually disrupt the flow of security-patrolled, “all-inclusive” commercial bands, in explicit confrontation with contemporary Carnival’s capitalist mode. In 2009, the artists Richard “Ashraph” Ramsaran and Shalini Seereeram made their own Carnival intervention with *T’in Cow Fat Cow*, a band of about thirty masqueraders, taking inspiration from a protest song by the rapso trio 3Canal. Minimalist black and white cow costumes—basically, cardboard sculptures worn on the masqueraders’ heads—and hand-



lettered placards made a strong contrast with the general revelry on the streets of Port of Spain, as the band portrayed a range of political and social messages, under the punning motto “The people must be herd.” The sequel for Carnival 2010 was *Cobo Town*, a flock of vultures in billowing black capes behind a flag blazoned “Let us prey.” One vulture wore an effigy of the Red House—the seat of the national parliament—as a crown. This commentary on government rapacity and official corruption referred to old traditions of protest and satire within Carnival masquerade, while the visual spectacle of a veil of black cloth swooping along the public roadway suggested a ritual of mourning and rage.

Individual artists also create playful actions within the bounds of the festival. In recent years Adele Todd has created sly public performances for J’Ouvert, Carnival’s raunchy opening act, when revellers covered in mud and paint and tattered clothing dance in the

pre-dawn streets. In 2009, inspired by Aubrey Beardsley’s erotic drawing *The Examination of the Herald* (1896), she sported an enormous phallus, emerging from under a white gown, an inversion of traditional masquerades like the Dame Lorraine, in which men dress as and parody women. “Men were stunned and women giggled,” she recalled afterwards. “The brave asked to touch.” Her performance a year later was a kind of companion-piece. Dressed in black tights and high heels, draped in black tulle, she carried a small sign asking, “What caused the destruction of man?” In her other hand was a small box with peepholes. She dared passersby to look inside, and documented their—sometimes stunned—reactions on her website.

The large-scale public processions Marlon Griffith has staged in Gwangju (*Spring*, 2008), Cape Town (*A Walk into the Night*, 2009), and other places are not simple replicas or recreations of Trinidad mas, though they are shaped and informed by the knowledge of structure, scale, movement, and timing that the artist acquired during his years of designing and building masquerade bands in Port of Spain and Notting Hill. Rather, these recent works investigate the ways that public spectacle can deal with questions of memory, history, and space—both specific to a location and more universally. Mas, Griffith says, is “public, participatory, and interdisciplinary.” These works are carefully planned but subject to the vagaries of circumstance, and they rely on teams of collaborators including curators, other artists, musicians, and (sometimes untrained) performers. Their success ultimately depends on their ability to arrest their street audiences, engage their imaginations,

and change their sense of the physical space where the encounter occurs.

Akuzuru is another contemporary artist whose work is inspired (obliquely) by the mas artform. Born in Trinidad and trained in fashion and textile design in Britain and Nigeria, she creates large site-specific installations that “costume” or disguise a physical environment. Her sculptural arrangements of fabric and natural materials make a room, a garden, or a grove of trees into a kind of masquerade. Semi-scripted, semi-improvised performances presented in these transformed spaces then subtly allude to mas as a means of claiming, charging, or even destabilising a physical space. *Vein*, a performance work Akuzuru created in Port of Spain in 2009, began with a nighttime gathering of costumed women in a small public park, which then turned into a street procession. Under a light rain and the haze of streetlamps, moving at a funereal pace, the artist led her audience into the driveway and back courtyard of the art space Alice Yard. As she silently completed a series of rituals, the other performers looped ceaselessly from the courtyard out into the street and back, setting up a circulatory system linking the city’s interior and exterior, private and public zones. As puzzling as it was eerily beautiful, *Vein* gradually revealed itself as an allegory of injury and recuperation, incomplete until the entire procession, escorted by its audience (now huddled under umbrellas), returned to the public space where it began.

Trinidad’s Carnival masquerade tradition offers a context and opens a creative territory for this kind of performance work. It seems to equip both artist and audience with certain ways of looking at and understanding the human form moving in a given space, and with certain attitudes to and expectations of public performance and ritual. (So that, to give two personal examples, my instinctive reaction to the baroque choreographed and costumed films of Matthew Barney is a phrase of admiration often heard on the streets of Port of Spain during Carnival: “That is mas!” And when I first saw the bizarre sculptural figures from Hew Locke’s *Kingdom of the Blind series*, assembled from thousands of cheap plastic objects, I wondered how these stiff humanoids could be made to move into and through the streets outside the gallery.)

Mas also bequeaths Trinidadian artists a repertoire of techniques and forms, a visual lexicon, and a model for collaborative process. An enterprise like Alice Yard, for instance—which is both a physical space for making and showing work, and a network of collaborators in visual, musical, and literary media—is informed by the model of the traditional mas camp, the site where costumes are designed and built. A mas camp is at once a workshop, a design laboratory, and a master class where skills and ideas evolve. Sean Leonard, the founder of Alice Yard, has studied the ways that particular spaces shape social interactions, and vice versa. His architectural practice, and his work in theatre and as a Carnival designer, have shaped the evolution of the urban back yard where since 2006 he has quietly instigated a series of events and exchanges among



Akuzuru, *Vein*, 2009

dozens of creative practitioners, among them Cozier, Griffith, and myself.

Through its website, aliceyard.org, the collective is also a central node in a growing network of artists’ blogs, small magazines, and online galleries and screening-rooms. In the past two or three years, these have shifted the Trinidad contemporary art world’s centre of gravity towards a virtual, hyperlinked, and inherently international space. Alice Yard is now a portal for artists in Trinidad and their contemporaries elsewhere to work and imagine collaboratively, and to extend their particular Caribbean-inflected ways of seeing into a global economy of attention. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to recognise these interactions also as a process with roots in Carnival masquerade. Traditional forms and characters culturally sanctified by the passage of decades were often influenced by the global visual culture of their moment of origin. Indian mas and the midnight robber were inspired by images of, respectively, Native Americans and Mexican bandits from very early cinema; sailor mas parodies early twentieth-

century American imperialism; and many “golden age” pretty-mas bands of the 1950s and 60s derived their themes and decorative details from Hollywood epics. Mas has always been a medium in which to imagine relations with the world outside Trinidad, to creatively negotiate the worries, dreams, and aspirations arising from our awareness of our place in global narratives. In this way too it is a resource for our contemporary artists as they play themselves on the international art stage.

Walking

My concern was the boy's knees
 Don't mind I am a muslim, bartender
 Give me a nip of brandy and laugh all you want
 Gossip don't need food really
 But if your conscience hungry
 Here is a story for your slow nights.
 All I know is my son will stand stronger
 If I can sap his knees with this liquor
 So while you playing Russian roulette with your liver
 Don't bother to ask me if I need a glass with ice
 I done tell you what this liquor is for.

Weaning

He sat in the corner staring at my breasts
 Like I had betrayed him
 And I dared not move to close
 Because even at three years old
 The boy would not be teased
 And his little sister with milk on her breath
 Was his sworn enemy in my arms
 I try to tell him he don't need it anymore
 But you cant reason with nature and love,
 His first word was Ummi
 Who would have thought the second utterance
 Would be thief.

Wishful Thinking

When I call them for food,
 No matter what he doing
 He reach first
 And I too love him so I glad to serve
 But he is one boy among four girls
 And they want to say I love him more
 So I sorry man child but
 As long as they face set up
 Like gray clouds with pigtaails
 You will eat last ,but I
 Will still hide
 an extra piece of meat
 under the rice.

A SHARED VISION: NOTES ON DEVELOPING A BLACK DIASPORA VISUAL ARTS PROGRAMME IN BARBADOS

David A. **BAILEY** and Allison **THOMPSON**

30 February 2009 marked an important moment in the history of Barbadian visual art. For the first time artists, writers, critics and curators from the Caribbean, North America and Europe converged onto Barbados in a program of events that included discussions, gallery based works and public installations across the main capital of the island. In this article David A. Bailey and Allison Thompson (part of the curatorial team along with Alissandra Cummins and staff from the National Art Gallery Committee of Barbados (NAGC)) reflect upon this historic moment. The point here is that in order to develop a conceptual and physical infrastructure that would begin to cultivate a Barbadian and Caribbean 21st century movement a number of things needed to be put into place. This article is about the development of these infrastructural processes.

For us, in order to discuss February 2009 we need to identify some of the key events both locally in Barbados and internationally which led to this moment and mark out the key players that were involved. During December 2005 to December 2006 significant discussions took place in Barbados that led up to producing the February 2009 event. The first outcome of these discussions was

to invite British based artist Sonia Boyce to come to Barbados to deliver a series of master-classes with local Barbadian artists and to also explore the possibilities of commissioning a new piece of work in Barbados. This initiated a process of cultivating and mentoring local Barbadian artists and also bringing an international artist to develop a major project in Barbados.

In June 2007 at the Venice Biennale the International Curators Forum (ICF) was launched. The ICF is an organisation, which marks the changes, disruptions, and interventions that occur across major biennials and documents these processes to allow future and emerging curators to discover, learn and develop their professional practice. The ICF achieves this by being a truly international forum with key individuals and partners who are fully committed in bringing groups of people together in different global settings. Venice provided the launch of the first gathering which included mainstream institutions with European, Caribbean, Asian, American and African curators and partners.

It was at this event that members of the NAGC, a major partner with the ICF, were introduced to these various international

curatorial and artistic institutions. More importantly, it was also at this event that it was announced that discussions were being explored into the possibility of hosting similar events in Barbados. From June - December 2007 several discussions took place to realise a series of events for Barbados which would complement the mandate of the NAGC. Three objectives were identified:

- To raise the profile locally, nationally and internationally of Barbadian visual artists and curators.
- To invite international visual artists and curators to Barbados to establish different forums for dialogue and professional development opportunities.
- To prepare a 10 year first term plan with a series of symposiums and exhibitions that would lead up to the next Grand Tour (the term used to describe the coinciding of key international visual art events, notably the Venice Biennale and Documenta) in 2017 by which time Barbados would be a major venue in this arena.

In January 2008 it was decided that the theme of these events would be organized under the title of "Black Diaspora Visual Art: A Series of Symposiums, Film Presentations & Exhibitions." Initiated as part of the planned events marking the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, a series of symposiums and exhibitions were envisioned to explore visual art in the Black Diaspora. Over the course of the decade, a number of leading scholars, curators and artists who have made key contributions in this area will be invited to Barbados to participate. These events will provide an opportunity for the Barbados art community and wider audience to

participate in the forums; and will present contemporary Barbadian art and artists to a panel of distinguished experts in related fields. The first of these events was a two-day symposium on March 24th and 25th 2008 held at the Barbados Community College. The success of the March event enabled the project to swiftly move forward with the next stage, which was to invite local artists to produce proposals for an exhibition of site-specific works in public / outdoor spaces in Barbados. To coincide with such an event it was also decided to host a major visual art conference to bring an international audience to the work as well as a local and regional one. It was at this point that we decided that the conference take as its starting point the work of Professor Stuart Hall and specifically his essay "Modernity and Its Others: 'Three Moments' In The Post - war History of the Black Diaspora Arts" in which he describes a genealogy of diasporic artists in Britain, and attempt to map Hall's proposed trajectory onto a Caribbean and specifically Barbadian context with particular focus on the contemporary experience.

Hall points to the challenges of reconciling the logic of images and the logic of language. In organizing the Black Diaspora event, there was a fundamental commitment to integrating the production and exhibition of art works with the following objectives:

- That local artists be commissioned to make new work for public spaces within Bridgetown as public interventions that visually engage their audience and enhance the Bridgetown experience but also demonstrate that visual art has a life outside the gallery experience as well.
- That international artists be invited to produce artworks for Bridgetown



that would dialogue with the local artist commissions.

- That galleries and museums be given the opportunity to work together under a cohesive framework to produce a series of exhibitions that promote the work of local artists.

A total of seven site-specific works were commissioned from local and international artists and/or installed in public spaces in and around Bridgetown. The third generational 'moment' identified in Hall's essay refers to artists beginning to investigate new media, specifically installation. Many artists in Barbados had expressed an interest to work in this way but with limited occasion and support to do so previously. In addition the absence of a permanent National Gallery of Art and lack of sufficient exhibition space necessitated the incorporation of alternative venues. The obvious benefit was the opportunity to raise the public awareness of art, to make it visible and to expand the popular experience of public art beyond bronze monuments, and expose audiences to a wider range of contemporary art forms, some of which were interactive in nature.

Five of the projects were produced by local artists. Indrani Gall's "Separated by 'A' Skin" was an interactive work installed at the Central Post Office where passersby could map their own portraits and identities onto a faceless crowd of silhouettes. Sheena Rose's short animation *Town* was shown in two venues including a pharmacy window on the main street through Bridgetown where curious crowds were cautioned by police for blocking traffic. Ewan Atkinson and Ingrid Persaud collaborated on *Starman*, an alter ego which Atkinson stealthily

projected throughout the city in the days leading up to the February event and then archived along with Persaud's commentary as both observer and stalker. Joscelyn Gardner's audio and video installation "words...just words..." came alive each night in the front entrance to the recently closed Public Library, haunting the abandoned building with torrents of waves and words.

A project commissioned from Arthur Edwards and Frances Ross, "Beyond A Boundary," presented pairs of portrait busts of heroes of West Indies cricket contemplating themselves within the neo gothic West Wing of Bridgetown's Parliament Buildings. Also on view was Caroline Holder's *Homeland Insecurities*, a ceramic dinner set recently acquired by the National Art Gallery Committee, which records the artist's experiences as a 'foreigner' in post 9/11 New York City, and installed by NAGC curatorial assistant Nerys Rudder within a traditional mahogany dining room.

The West Wing of Parliament was also the site for two video projects commissioned from UK-based artists exploring their own relationships to the Caribbean. In *Belonging in Britain*, Ingrid Pollard examines her role as custodian of her parents' memories in the form of letters and photographs recording their migration from Guyana to Britain in the 1950s. And Gary Steward and Trevor Mathison collaborated in "Trace", a three-screen installation presenting an evolving accumulation of images and sounds of Bridgetown which appeared to emanate from the porous coral stone walls.

"The Road to Many Towards a Genealogy of Barbadian Art", curated by Zemicon



Sheena Rose, *Town*, 2009

Gallery director, Therese Hadchity presented the work of 28 artists covering three generations of art production in Barbados as a local response to Stuart Hall's proposed three moments. A total of 38 artists were represented in the event, 35 of them from Barbados. The two-day symposium opened with a thoroughly engaging feature address by Stuart Hall in the form of a filmed discussion with Bailey which will undoubtedly stand as an important document of the ideas of this great intellectual. Renowned Barbadian author, George Lamming's response was itself a richly textured assessment of the migration experiences and proposed his own key 'moments' in the story of diaspora during throughout 20th century. This dialogue provided fertile terrain for further presentations and panel discussions on a range of issues and questions for Caribbean art in the 21st century. Integrated into the programme were presentations and discussions by artists Kara Walker and Alfredo Jaar whose work spoke powerfully to many of

the issues under deliberation. The result of the symposium in tandem with the exhibitions was a recurring shift between the local and the global, the national and the diasporic.

The February 2009 event was a gathering that tried to explore collegiate ways of working and communicating with each other as artists, curators, critics, writers, and cultural producers. The event also addressed three key curatorial issues that are infrastructural development, institutional continuity and financial support. Today the situation in relation to curatorial practices in the Caribbean and its relationship to globalisation has to be engaged and be pre-occupied with the following question, which is as follows. Where would one go to find the historical documents that tell you that there has been a significant curatorial presence of individuals, groups and organizations that have helped to re-define what constitutes Caribbean art? Because of this severe lack of a coherent picture of this curatorial history, one that includes the



Caroline Holder , *Homeland Insecurity*, 2006



Caroline Holder , *Homeland Insecurity*, 2006

mainstream major galleries as well as self-organised initiatives by black and white artists who have made it an important part of their life to curate exhibitions of black and white artists work. Over the last twenty-five years there have been only a handful of under-resourced organisations and individuals, which has consistently taken a lead in this area. Now and today the time is ripe to reflect upon what curatorial initiatives have been developed, think about what 'blue sky' opportunities can there be for curatorial research and projects, and what areas around professional development and networking need to be examined and enhanced. If anything at all came from this event is that there has to be a forum or forums, which address or focus on the relationship between arts activity in all of its various guises and curatorial practice. Of course this forum should be and will be about profile, cultivation and strategic intervention but it should also allow for established, mid career and most importantly emerging curators and artists a substantial period for critical reflection, research, dialogue, experimentation and exchange to enable a much bigger project to be realized in the future working equally alongside the institutional support, intellectual stimulation and leadership that this February 2009 event provided.



a letter to prince charles, dated fourth
march in the year of oh my god! 2008,

i have no high language for you,
nothing to tell you but that i have
nothing to tell you but this,
kissed a black lipped frog turned prince,
a million bastard tadpoles left behind in a thick pool of salt,
weeping to dilute circumstance,
counting grains like meditation but
never seeing how it's seeping,
until is less flavouring and more poisoning and more
everything and anything more go spoil d pot,
but,
we wasn't cooking in d first place,
jus trying to add something to taste,
wet we appetite for the we we had been starved of for so long,
yes this is a song, an out pouring drum,
St Anns river and the east dry one coming down,
oh how i long to be free, so long in this captivity,
in the name of sister nanny i rebuke you,
in the name of marcus garvey i regret to inform you
that there is no reverence left here for you,
what you receive are formalities not love,
tokens not gifts,
grin teet no smiles,
and all the while we waiting for an opening to
deliver the message we holding for you and your
MOTHER and your whole cursed lineage,
we don't like you,
we the plant from d seed,
we don't like you,
we the product of your greed,
we don't like you,
we here not because but in spite of those
like you we don't like you,
and them black seed who don't know better,
standing up waving to you round the savannah...brother,
tomorrow is bitter remembrance of shadows,
welcome to Trinidad...take a trip up d
hill, tell dem yuh mudda sen yuh.



THE DANCEHALL STORY – EXPLORING MALE HOMOSEXUALITY

Donna P. HOPE

Buju Banton performing at New York's
Apollo theater during the 26th International
Reggae & World Music Awards (IRAWMA)
source: Wikimedia Commons

Jamaican dancehall culture is vibrant, rich, and a fascinating locus for the central issues that concern the country today. In particular, it is a place where important conversations about gender and sexuality take place, conversations which are vivid, funny, and exciting, but which might sometimes shock the sensibilities of “politically correct”

Western observers. For the gender debates of Jamaican popular culture take place within the wider context of Jamaica's social and cultural history. From the country's fundamentalist religious traditions, both Christian and Rastafarian, to its colonial legislative framework, notably the Offences Against the Person Act of 1864, which made certain sexual

acts illegal, and which has long been used to prosecute homosexuals, there is a long history of conservative attitudes towards sexuality in Jamaica. Notions of citizenship and nationhood are seen through the lens of creolization; this has had the effect of reifying rigid class, gender and sexual hierarchies that tend to privilege certain categories of people above others. Such social hierarchies are perhaps particularly evident in dancehall society, and are often used to support and validate its attacks on male homosexuality in particular. For in Jamaica, patriarchal culture is enforced through rigid policing of masculine boundaries – policing that is perhaps most powerfully manifested in the colourful slang and flamboyant performances of inner-city popular dancehall culture.

At the time of dancehall culture's evolution in the 1980s, Jamaica's masculine ideal was an extremely conservative one, with the perfect man defined as wealthy, educated, employed and most definitely heterosexual. Expensive cars, liaisons with multiple attractive women, and absolute control over his domestic arrangements were among the appurtenances and traits of idealized Jamaican manhood during and after the 1980s. Such visions of masculinity have now become codified and are interwoven with a variety of identity debates that flit across the stages of dancehall culture and are reflected in the highly sexualized lyrics of its music. In a culture comfortable with flamboyant display, the ritual performance of heterosexual masculinity is very prominent – but as homosexual discourse begins to enter the mainstream, gay styles of performance manifest

themselves prominently as well. Soon, ritual enactments of sexual identity are played out on the dancehall stage, now a battleground of competing gender displays. Such performances feature extreme role-playing, presenting on the one hand the ultra-macho hero, who celebrates the domination and suppression of the feminine, the promotion of promiscuous and even polygamous masculinity, aggression and violence, conspicuous consumption and masculine posing, on the other a flamboyant male homosexual figure who serves as the hero's foil. Dancehall's sexualized male-on-male contests display a marked hostility towards the figure representing male homosexuality. (Dancehall performance is in general such a male province that its homophobia is exclusively male-directed; female homosexuality is simply not at issue).

Buju Banton's *Boom Bye Bye*, for example, is a famous song and performance that was a direct response to the emergence of male homosexual identity into public spaces from which it had previously been excluded. Dancehall's absolute rejection of male homosexuality represents a denial and refutation of any kind of feminization. Perhaps what is truly at stake is an anxiety about male disempowerment that resonates strongly with Jamaica's disempowered lower classes. In what has been called the “Delilah complex,” the female is sometimes perceived as a danger to the masculine, a force that can weaken a man's dominance and strength.



LYRICAL RENUNCIATION

Jamaican slang and dancehall lyrics are vivid, imaginative modes of expression that are the ultimate manifestation of the vernacular culture of the Jamaican urban underclass. DJs and other dancehall figures make use of them to paint colourful pictures of male sexuality, both hetero- and homosexual. Among the many epithets they have devised for homosexuals are “pungai man,” “battyman,” “batty bwoy,” “funny man,” “Chi-Chi man,” “gay guy,” “Mr. Faggoty” and “Mr. She.” These labels generally construct a gay male as either someone involved in anal sex (e.g., battyman or batty bwoy—“batty” means “buttocks”) or as a man who wilfully renounces the accepted behaviours, aesthetics and practices that denote ‘true’ masculinity (e.g., Mr. She, gay guy, funny man). These labels are also used in ordinary dialogue or verbal confrontations, and are frequent verbal missiles to be used in conflicts with other men, whether actual homosexuals or other male rivals.

The term “Chi Chi” gained prominence in dancehall culture at the turn of the millennium as a modern label for male homosexuals. It identifies homosexuality as a corrupt and socially unacceptable form of masculinity. “Chi-Chi” means termite or ‘wood-borer’ in Jamaican Creole, and in her book about Jamaican dancehall culture, *Sound Clash* (2004), Carolyn Cooper “wonders if the chi chi man slang extension of the meaning is intended to represent the homosexual as a diminutive man. In addition, since ‘wood/hood’ is a Jamaican Creole metaphor for penis, chi chi man could also suggest the vulnerability of the homosexual’s manhood to chi chi of all kinds.”

But however the male homosexual is figured, dancehall culture seems to insist that real men must police the boundaries of heterosexual masculinity or leave the territory themselves. Thus, there is an overwhelming pressure amongst DJs and other dancehall habitués to lyrically ‘out’ other men’s feminized traits or homosexual tendencies. The more intense and extreme the homophobic lyrics, the more macho and heterosexual are the creators and supporters of these lyrics—or so the story goes.

Dancehall’s ubiquitous anti-gay-male homophobia is glaringly apparent in the genre’s many songs on the topic. Male homosexuality is deplored in explicit and extremely degrading terms, while female homosexuality is virtually ignored. Most likely, lesbianism is less threatening because it does not involve the ‘misuse’ of the key signifier of male power and domination: the penis. In dancehall culture, the anatomical signifier and definer of male identity is constantly celebrated in lyrics and slang that assert the dominance of the penis, and its value in conquering and subduing the female. Dancehall lyrics insist upon the ‘truth’ of the fantastic, hyper-masculine and all-powerful penis—and have an enormous vocabulary that describes it. “Anaconda,” “rattler,” “grizzle,” “nozzle,” “dicky” are just a few— and some of the tamer— of the many nicknames for that essential organ. Wayne Marshall is a dancehall artiste whose song “I Forgot Them” is an interesting example of a contemporary shift in the medium’s relation to male homosexuality.

You remember dem guys from
when (Ah fagot dem)

We an dem are no longer

friend (Ah fagot dem)

Dem switch, I done wid

dem (Ah fagot dem)

Dem can’t come back pon

we ends (Ah fagot dem)

No, wi nuh like dem trends

(Ah fagot dem)

[Do you remember those guys from
way back when? (I forgot them)

They are no longer our

friends (I forgot them)

They have switched (roles)

and I am through with them

(I forgot them)

They can never visit our personal

spaces (I forgot them)

No, we don’t like their current

trends](I forgot them)

The term “guys” makes clear, in case the rest of the lyrics do not, that the men in question are homosexuals, or “gay guys.” To “switch” is to cross over from heterosexuality to homosexuality. Marshall’s former friends, having

“switched,” are now social outcasts who have been ‘forgotten’. There is no longer the possibility of any form of social interaction with them: “dem can’t come back pon wi ends.” The repetition of the term “Ah fagot dem” in Jamaican Creole literally means “I have forgotten them,” but it is also translatable as “They are faggots”.

Although most dancehall songs about homosexuality are quite direct, some few make use of clever double-entendres to mock or otherwise disparage homosexuals. In “Mi ah Nuh Astronaut”, Marshall’s pronunciation of ‘ass-tronaut’ makes clear what is his real subject. His “rocket,” he insists, will not be flown through any black hole that negates ‘breathing.’ As anyone even a little familiar with a Jamaican accent can imagine, “breathing” here is a homophone for “breeding,” and the singer is insisting that his rocket/penis will not enter this black hole because it cannot breathe (breed) in that space. The barren black hole swallows all and eliminates the productive capacity that is the mark of true masculinity. Every line in the song is another double entendre: “I am not an astronaut so I am not going to Uranus” pretty much speaks for itself.

Contemporary lyrics like Wayne Marshall’s “I Forgot Them” (and others like his “Mi Nuh Astronaut”) highlight a critical loop in dancehall’s construction of male homosexuality that goes beyond the sanctions proposed in other dancehall lyrics. In fact, however, anyone who has experienced the contemporary Jamaican dancehall environment, with its nubile young men dressed in skin-tight pants and flamboyant shirts, dancing and striking exotic poses, will



Ebony Patterson, *Gully Godz in Conversation*, 2009

likely have experienced some justifiable skepticism about the true nature of the Jamaican masculinity so celebrated in dancehall. After more than two decades of delivering such lyrics to a receptive local audience, dancehall culture seems caught between a rigid local code of sexual signification and the much freer parameters of a global culture which is influential on dancehall in other ways. Yet as Jamaica moves towards an undefined future, and different styles of masculinity jockey for position on the dancehall stage, it is clear that defining masculinity and citizenship only in terms of aggressive male heterosexuality is becoming more and more restrictive for both men and women. The corrupt gender and power dynamics that encourage Jamaican men, especially those from the lower classes and from Kingston's inner city, to indulge in extreme patriarchal fantasies of power, demand radical transformation. Masculine role-playing that is shaped by and oriented towards more constructive male identities like that of the father, the provider, or the protector in the long run offer the promise of greater social and political empowerment for both the men and the women of Jamaica's lower classes.



1119 dead bodies was found on his front lawn
 And the neighbours accustom to the stink saying nothing,
 They quiet like worms doin their work
 Of which no body will speak but every body will eat eventually
 And too besides
 It is such a privilege to live neck and neck to him
 And ever evening,
 Well...used to be so
 So...ever night,
 Well...used to be so,
 So take my words for it, whenever they feel like
 Whenever they like to feel like they could feel,
 A drama is to unfold just beyond his gates
 Groups of black flies, some say they is
 butterflies (not to be mistaken)
 Others forget how to fly,
 Following the scent of the memory behind the blood
 Clash with a borrowed thunder in front the piles of bodies
 And when the lightening say so,
 Some fly loose their wings
 Some lose their head
 And some find that they didn't have no belly in the first place,
 And the guards draw swatters from the holster,
 And make blurred sketches of flies faces
 And all the flies look the same
 And when the storming is over,
 hE send some one to make a statement
 That one day flies will stop liking the smell of rotted flesh
 A maggot with a mouth full of meat (give
 tankxs to the fly dem), agreed sayin:
 (chew) "they was good insects" (chew)
 But the way how hE walk and watch the bodies piling,
 The way how hE eyeing the sky and keeping silent

Till it seem like his neck is not to look down
 And hE have to ask the guards:
 "what is that noise coming from the ground?"
 The way hE check the height of the pile
 and the tone of his voice,
 It look like hE has forgot what the bible
 (stitch to his forehead) say
 About towers and clouded vision,
 And so hE take to climbing and asking the
 guards (after hE strike oppose)
 "how whY look?"
 But most just glad hE gone
 Send one to say: "Higher! Higher!"
 And the limbs pile and pile til any message they shout
 Take three days to reach his ears
 And black flies banging thunder on the lawn
 sound like firecrackers to him
 And clouds in his nose make him so high
 That anything hE say can only be madness
 "build!" hE say, "Build!" because
 "I want to talk to God, to see if what I think is true,
 hE say, because in truth hE hope, that when hE
 get up there, all he will find is a mirror,
 but he died to find that heaven is more
 distant than a fevered dream,
 and cannot be surmounted even when one is climbing on souls,
 but if he could look down from where he lay he would have seen,
 his endless line of offspring climbing
 and calling his name in vain.

Interview with Filmmakers Horace Ové and Maria Govan

Melanie ARCHER

**All Port of Spain is a twelve-thirty show
Some play Kojak, some Fidel Castro**
—Derek Walcott from “The Spoiler’s Return” (1981)

46 Consider a twelve-thirty show in the Caribbean, circa 1950: quite likely there is a Western or Hollywood romance playing and the cinema is dominated by men of questionable employment (it is midday, after all). They shout during the movie—sometimes at each other but mainly at the actors on the screen, a fight breaks out every now and then in “pit,” a section of the cinema where the tickets are cheapest, and, come time to leave, satisfied by the reiteration that the good guy always wins, patrons exit the cinema with an extra swagger or swoon in their step à la John Wayne or Humphrey Bogart.

Either subconsciously or with full awareness, these Caribbean cinemagoers were searching for a way to temporarily step into a fantasy role completely outside of themselves and their national identity, and it could be argued that that much holds true in the Caribbean today. From its advent in the late 1800s to its popularity in the mid 1900s and through to the present, film has been integral to the economic, social, and cultural development of the Caribbean, but the

role of the Antillean islands has been more along the lines of consumer and backdrop for foreign stars than producer of our own stories. “There are hundreds of foreign films that have been shot in the Caribbean or are about the Caribbean, and they in large part have influenced how many outsiders view the region, a view so stereotypical at times as to be negative,”¹ one critic writes, and Paul Gilroy once argued that consumers of Caribbean culture are “at risk of being moved by what they consume.”²

It is widely accepted that “a society’s culture, its *grosso modo*, determines the direction its films will take.”³ If this much is true, the odds appear stacked against the possibility of a viable, Caribbean film industry. Lacking is infrastructure, governmental and institutional support, critical discourse, equipment, distribution and viewing systems for local works, and perhaps most crippling, an audience willing to set aside the glitz of Hollywood and the prevalence bootleg (yet through some odd copyright glitch not technically illegal) DVDs for a more introspective gaze.

However, with all of these factors working against contemporary film in the Caribbean, over the past couple decades there has been a promising rise in the number of directors from



and films being produced in the region, and Caribbean-focused film festivals have popped up in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and Barbados. But is this promise enough to carry the region’s film industry onwards? What are the difficulties that are still faced? Two filmmakers of different generations share their paths to becoming filmmakers and offer up their views below on the state of contemporary Caribbean film.

HORACE OVÉ

Horace Ové was born in Trinidad in 1939 and moved to England in the 1959, where he went on to direct such critically acclaimed films as Baldwin’s Nigger (1968), Pressure (1976, holder of the Guinness World Record for the first feature film to be made by a black British director), and Playing Away (1987). In 2009 he directed The Ghost of Hing King Estate (2009), which was shot entirely on location in Trinidad and won the People’s Choice Award for best film at the 2009 Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival.



Did you have to leave Trinidad in order to pursue a career in film?

Yes, I was interested in filmmaking and photography

because of all the American films that were showing [in the 1940s]. Churchill gave the Americans the right to build bases in Trinidad. There were bases all over and that encouraged locals to put up more cinemas to entertain the American soldiers. At the time there was no opportunity to make films. In late 1959/60 I came to live in England and stayed for a while. By 1962 they were making Cleopatra and I got a job in it as a Roman soldier because they needed a guy with a tan. The film moved to Rome and I went there to work in it. Rome blows my mind because so many great filmmakers are from there and I discovered a lot of filmmakers making films based mainly on the real and surreal world that we were living in, and that is what moves me even today. Then I came back eventually and went to the London School of Film and studied film and started to make my own.

Given the popularity of film in the mid-1900s, why do you think locals didn’t make films then?

Oh come on! No one had any money. And no one thought of it. You couldn’t compete with Hollywood—that’s where all of the money came from. No one thought of it at the time. But things are different now. There’s money in the region and movies are just as popular.





Horace Ové, *Pressure*, 1976

Why are there not more films made here now?

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Because people don't see themselves. All you get is America America. Trinidad is a great island in the arts and there's great ability for creating and doing and designing but you don't see it. Maybe you see more cricket and football in Trinidad. But talent comes out of the normal person in the street. Carnival upsets me, all the girls just looking sexy. If you look back on Carnival images and what they created . . . it was incredible and you can really see that ability of people to recreate things and create things that are in their minds.

OK, so there's the talent. Why aren't there more films?

Because people there are just looking at America but we have it there. We have to keep all of that together and go with it. What I'm telling you is very

very important to Trinidad: we have the ability but we have to change the attitude. Trinidadians have to be able to see their work. Not only is Trinidad losing it, Jamaica had it, Cuba made interesting films. There were good films. Well done films. But there's just a lack of interest. I don't know how this changes. We're going to have to find those people to change things. India and Nigeria have filmmakers. You've got the talent here amongst everybody—Blacks, Indians, and you've got a great mixture of people who come out of all types of history. There's lot to be done, but the question is how you create it. Someone would have to make a major feature that would make the rest of the world recognize them. As long as it's interesting and well made that's it. It's not an easy business but we've got to do something. There's too much wasted talent.

MARIA GOVAN

Maria Govan was born in Miami but, after two days, her parents took her back to Nassau, where she was raised. At 16, after completing high school in The Bahamas, she moved to the US to further her education. She returned permanently to The Bahamas at age 22 and, with limited technical experience, began making documentaries touching on local issues. Her first feature film, Rain (2008), aired on Showtime in February 2009, and was screened as part of the Rockstone & Bootheel film series.

It's argued that the Caribbean has been exploited as a backdrop for foreign stars for films about voodoo, spies, pirates and such. Do you agree with this and, if so, have you seen any developments over the past few years towards moving away from this stereotype?

Yes, well, certainly in the Bahamas. I know a few people here making films that are indigenous of this place and raw and in a way a critique of our tourist driven economy. And the Bahamas has invested a lot in its image. Trinidad and Jamaica, for example, are less attached to the tourist economy. What's sad is that it's difficult to see each other's work in this region—we tend to focus on other's experiences and regions.

Bearing that in mind, is a Caribbean film industry viable?

It's absolutely viable and in its early stages. But it's sad that, in New York, for example, you can access so much more of what's happening in the Caribbean than you can here. I honestly feel as though we're outside of it. One thing to think about would be to approach BAM in Brooklyn to have a Caribbean retrospective. I'd love to have that conversation, to look as far back as



Maria Govan, *RAIN*, 2008



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The Harder They Come, to look at a range of time and how we perceive ourselves has changed. *The Harder They Come* is archetypal in that it's a real reference and a truly independent film and it feels that way. It broadens the range of Caribbean stories.

Rain does that as well.

Yes. I think of the Bahamas as an interesting place. It's perceived as incredibly American and that may be true in parts but there's an Afro-Bahamian, Black culture that's really not American, and that's the soul of the country so that's what I'm interested in. For instance, there's a huge growing Haitian population here. It's becoming a lot more nuanced and layered. It's a place of transition and that's being shown now in film.

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Do you agree with Aimé Césaire's argument that, "What we have suffered from the most, more than any other people is really alienation, in other words, lack of knowledge of oneself. This seems fundamental to me. The Antillean being is a human being who is deprived of his own self, of his history, of his traditions, of his beliefs. In a nutshell, he is an abandoned being. I believe the type of foreign films we have been exposed to in the Caribbean have contributed greatly to this state of affairs."⁴

I think that's true in speaking of films that use us as a location and sketch incredibly one-dimensional caricatures of Caribbean people. But it's so hard for



those of us who don't leave our homes to see ourselves clearly. Cinema creates objectivity for the viewer to look at ourselves, but it's only when we step outside of ourselves that we can see ourselves more clearly. Cinema can be an interesting way to do that. It's incredibly important for Caribbean people to set up and tell authentic stories, especially in places where we perpetuate these lies about ourselves. I like to refer to the Bahamas as a "pretty blond girl." People come and spend a weekend but don't want to have a conversation about how she lives. She or we need to start understanding that, if we don't have more than our good looks, we're going to have a hard time in the future. But it's shifting slowly, this sense of self.

What particular challenges did you face in making *Rain*?

Rain was really blessed—it was funded by Bahamians who were in a position to give money. With that somewhat wealthy private equity money and some

government help, it came together. But there's a limited group of people who have that kind of money and who care for the arts. I've tapped that well. It's expensive to film here, you have to bring in a lot of crew and equipment. In the Bahamas there's incredible talent in terms of casting, but it's not so common that you find people who are schooled in acting and have developed their craft. It was difficult for me as a first time feature film director to know how to draw that talent out of them.

Could you compare the reception *Rain* has received in the Bahamas and the Caribbean vs in other places?

In the Bahamas, does "outside" recognition still matter more than local? It's funny. With *Rain* people seem to love it although it's incredibly flawed to me, but I've had to make peace with that. People are more interested in the Bahamas having seen *Rain* than they were before. The government somehow feels that if you show dirty laundry, people are going to run, but it allows you to connect with people at a human level, a heart level, and people become more engaged. It's interesting seeing how people have responded to it. What people have consistently said is that the film has heart. It has a true spirit that people can feel. Perhaps because it shows that we're the same, no matter how different we may seem on the outside.

¹ Bruce Paddington and Keith Q. Warner, "The Emergence of Caribbean Feature Films," *Black Camera, An International Film Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (Winter 2009), 92.

² Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 130.

³ Paddington and Warner, 91.

⁴ Marie-Line Sephacle, "Interview with Aimé Césaire," in *Ex-Iles*, ed. Cham, 360.



Hungry for words

Nicholas LAUGHLIN

The worldwide Caribbean diaspora—those millions of Caribbean emigrants and their offspring living and working in other, usually bigger and colder, countries—has unexpected footholds. Hartford, the capital of the US state of Connecticut—just over a hundred miles north of New York City—is famous for its insurance companies, and less so for its community of Caribbean residents, the third largest in North America, by some counts. They have their Caribbean Trade Council, their Caribbean American Society, their West Indian Social Club, and their Jamaican patty bakeries. And, of course, their supermarkets: culinary and cultural lifelines to “home.”

ACA Foods, on Hartford’s sprawling Main Street, is decorated with the flags of more than a dozen Caribbean countries. Its aisles are stocked with goods imported from islands thousands of miles away: everything from the necessary staples for a traditional West Indian Sunday lunch to medicinal concoctions like sulphur bitters and bay rum. In March

2010, regular ACA Foods shoppers were surprised by the appearance of a different kind of product: rows of books from and about the Caribbean—novels, poetry collections, biographies, books about history, music, and art—carefully arranged among the supermarket’s tins and bottles and packets.

Artist Karyn Olivier’s *ACA Foods Free Library* is exactly what its name suggests: a lending library open to all customers of the supermarket. (The project was commissioned as a public art component of *Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art*, an exhibition at Hartford’s Real Art Ways visual and performance arts centre, curated by Kristina Newman-Scott and Yona Backer.) At once an installation, a performance, and a kind of creative activity that stages an opportunity for social engagement, *Free Library* provides a practical service to Hartford’s West Indian community. At the same time, it provokes reflection on the diverse ways that cultural phenomena—whether food or literature or art—are

expected to construct personal memory, social history, and national heritage.

Seeing these books tucked neatly into the supermarket shelves—Walcott’s *Collected Poems* among bags of dried peas, C.L.R. James’s *Beyond a Boundary* beside plastic tubs of preserved fruit — recalls some Caribbean writers’ symbolic shorthand of food as a stand-in for cultural authenticity or desire, or simply as a hint of the exotic to tantalize foreign readers. Olivier—born in Trinidad, now based in the US—is herself a member of the Caribbean diaspora. But *Free Library* is no sentimental gesture on the part of the artist, or simple assertion of belonging. Rather, it asks questions about cultural consumption, perishability, and digestion. And, of course, it is also a type of social experiment: what might the supermarket customers’ reaction to these books tell us about the practical relevance of the intangible “heritage” of Caribbean literature?

In early July 2010, via email, Olivier answered a few questions about *ACA Foods Free Library* and her other recent projects.

Nicholas Laughlin: We often talk about books and literature offering “food for thought” or nourishment for the imagination. Did *ACA Foods Free Library* start from a similar notion?

Karyn Olivier: Yes, absolutely. I even thought of putting a banner at the entrance saying “Food for Thought”, but settled on *ACA Foods Free Library* instead, which just seemed more direct. My hope was for this library to expand what we imagine the “consumables” of a market to be—particularly when that market inadvertently traffics in nostalgia for home. I was thinking it could be a place where we could really slow down, browse, and relish the sights, smells, tastes, sounds, and, yes, the imperishable produce of our West Indian heritage. I really liked the idea



of borrowers returning the books when they were finished “digesting them.”

NL: How did you choose the books for your library? Are they all books you’d read, or ones that had a certain significance for you?

KO: When I first conceived of the idea, I was thinking of the relationship I have to Trinidad and my assumption that I am still tied to it intellectually, spiritually, and politically. This “given” was stoked by certain affinities I’ve inherited from the culture—say, Carnival, soca, and—jokingly—even my love of roti. But then I started to think of other signifiers of a culture, like books, and how often (or rarely) I read literature, poetry, or even non-fiction from the Caribbean. I quickly realised that my tie to this place I still consider home was on some level a superficial one. Yes, I took a Caribbean literature class in college, and yes, I had read many classics by writers like Earl Lovelace and V.S. Naipaul, but honestly, I’m much more versed in “western”

writing. This library was unexpectedly a remedy. I knew most of the Trinidadian writers and titles I wanted to include—I really love some of them, like [Merle Hodge’s] *Crick Crack, Monkey* and [Naipaul’s] *Miguel Street*—but I had to do a great deal of research to uncover the gems from the other islands.

NL: How did the library actually work? Were you able to keep track of how many books were borrowed, how many returned, and which titles were most popular?

KO: What was most exciting for me was the fact that this would be a trust library—no library card necessary, no proof of residence required, no specific date of return. I wasn’t surprised by most folks’ initial response to the library. They approached it with suspicion; surely nothing is ever really free—especially in a retail establishment, which exists for the sole purpose of exchanging goods for money. But once the customers realised this was just the relocation of a

library (that ideally should already exist in this Caribbean neighbourhood) into an unexpected place (a site of commerce), they were really excited about it.

My hope is for the store to potentially be a meeting place—wouldn’t it be great to expand the function of a grocery? By day a market, at night the location of book club meetings? A utopian idea, yes, but anything is possible. The library was a gift—in turn, the West Indian community of Hartford was left to do with it as they saw fit. Will some people never return the books? I am certain. But perhaps most will understand the value in this free library—what it means metaphorically and literally, its value as “a gift of knowledge.”

NL: Inside the supermarket, how did you decide where to place specific books? Was it random, or did you work out a pattern or system beforehand?

KO: I spent time in ACA Foods combing the aisles and the products they housed, coming up with an approach. All libraries have a classification system. This library followed suit and organised itself in a similar fashion by category (i.e., region, history, children). It was critical for the books to be arranged on shelves alongside the customary products sold in the store. I liked the idea of a customer browsing through the aisles and coming across a certain title next to a desired provision—maybe it would turn out he or she actually “needed” the book more. Certain categories were easy to decide on, like the children’s section—these books were nestled among rows of biscuits and cookies. I wanted the political books, which included charged titles like *Slavery and Social Death* [a comparative study of slavery in many societies by Orlando Patterson] and *Avengers of the New World* [a history of the Haitian Revolution by Laurent Dubois] to rub up against the hot pepper sauces—it seemed only fitting! Jamaican literature was found between loaves



of hard dough bread and what seemed like endless rows of jerk seasoning.

At other times I wanted to call attention to the factions and fractions of contemporary Caribbean life. Books on culture, ranging from Trinidad's moko jumbies to a biography of Bob Marley, were surrounded by "energy" drinks with names like "Bedroom Bully", "Stud Power", and "Lion King", as well as hundred-year-old concoctions of "wood root tonics." Nothing reminds me of happy childhood memories more than the Trinidadian black cake we make at Christmas, so I put the Trini literature near the candied fruits, in almost Proustian homage.

NL: How do you see this project fitting into the wider context of your other recent work?

KO: ACA Foods Free Library is aligned with the ideas of relational aesthetics, whose tenet is for art to create a social environment of shared activity. For the

past six years, my work has increasingly been in the public realm—making work literally for the general public. This began when I made a functioning amusement park carousel for a single rider (It's not over 'til it's over), and placed it in a multi-purpose park in Long Island City, New York. Similarly, this past fall I completed another very public work titled *Inbound: Houston*, in which I converted thirteen billboard advertisements along some of the city's busiest freeways. Each billboard hosted an image of what was located behind it—in other words, what commuters would see if the billboard wasn't there. At moments, the billboards seamlessly disappeared into nature, performing a deft optical trick that I hoped would soothe daily commuters—a reprieve from the constant inundation of advertising imagery. Perhaps the billboards would also provoke commuters to reflect on what these "ads" might possibly be selling—of course, they're not selling anything except (maybe) a moment of existential awareness. But, like the library project, I considered this



to be a small gift to Houstonians—an unexpected moment of wakefulness or intrigue emerging from the otherwise numbing driving experience.

Another project more directly related to my Caribbean ancestry is *Grey Hope*, a performance/procession that was performed on the opening night of the Gwangju Biennale in 2008. I used Trinidad's Carnival tradition as my jumping-off point. This tradition—over one hundred and fifty years old; a populist art form—creates a collaborative space, perhaps one of the first examples of relational art! So the library project, with its demand for participation from the general public, has some old and traditional roots. It is, hopefully, also a reminder to all of us—art makers, viewers, and participants—to show up, act, give, create—perhaps the only way to know we are really present, we are here.



ROCKSTONE & BOOTHEEL: CONTEMPORARY WEST INDIAN ART

CURATED BY KRISTINA NEWMAN-SCOTT AND YONA BACKER



The exhibit is named after
the Jamaican dub-metal song
“Rockstone and Bootheel”
(by Ginny). It is a colloquial phrase
that means “taking a journey.”





Akuzuru

Trinidad and Tobago, born 1966
Trans-Portal // The Ascent, 2007
Digital Print, dimensions variable



Ewan Atkinson

Barbados, born 1975

Left page: *Left Hand Turn*, 2006 Mixed media on panel, 12" x 12"

Right page: *Dog Track III*, 2006 Mixed media on panel, 30" x 22.5"



Sonya Clark

USA/Jamaica, born 1967

Iterations, 2008

Plastic combs, 8" x 120" x 60"

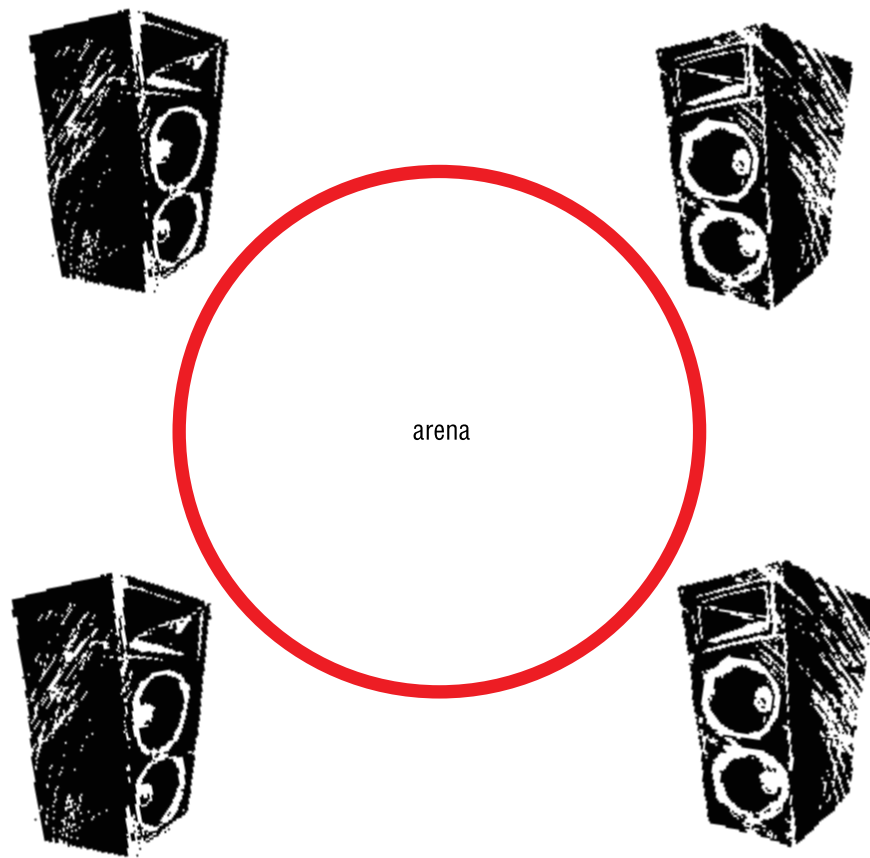


Christopher Cozier

Trinidad and Tobago, born 1959

Sound System, 2008

Sound installation



it real nice

Renee Cox

Jamaica, born 1960

Jump Off, 2008

Pigment print, 31.5" x 39"



Blue Curry

Bahamas, born 1974

Untitled, 2009

Conch shell, stroboscopic lamp (flash rate variable)

7" x 8" x 5"

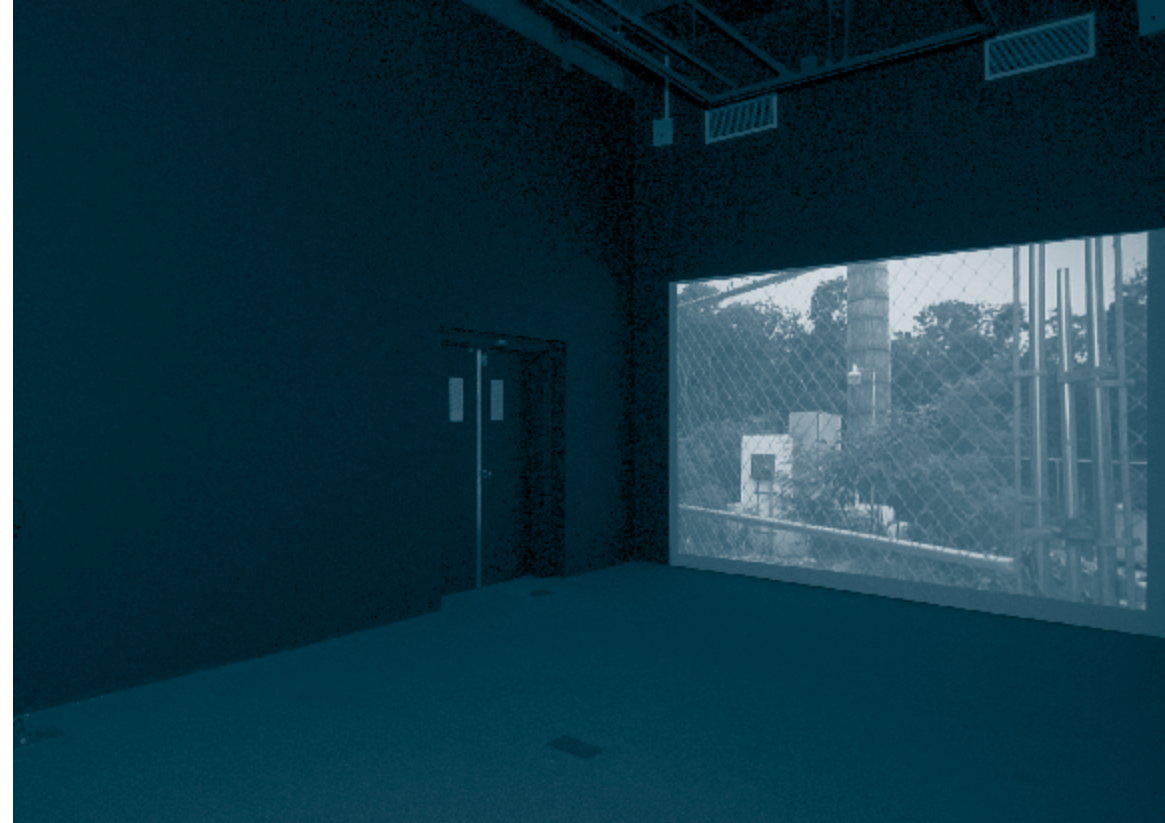


Annalee Davis

Barbados, born 1963

On the Map, 2007

Single-channel video, TRT: 30 minutes



Khalil Deane

Jamaica, born 1977

Blood Soaked Skies, 2007

Triptych – Acrylic paint on canvas, 34" x 92"



Zachary Fabri

USA, born 1977

The Big Pay Back, 2009

Single-channel video, TRT: 1 min 58 sec



Joscelyn Gardner

Barbados, born 1961

Left page: *Hibiscus esculentus* (Sibyl), 2009

Hand-colored stone lithographs on frosted mylar,
9" x 18"

Right Page: *Mimosa pudica* (Yabba), 2009

Hand-colored stone lithographs on frosted mylar,
9" x 18"





Lawrence Graham-Brown

Jamaica, born 1969

Ras-Pan-Afro-Homo Sapien, 2009

Mixed media mannequin, 36" x 18" x 12"





Marlon Griffith

Trinidad and Tobago, born 1976

Left page: *Tribal, Powder Box (Schoolgirl series)*, 2009

Digital print on gator board, 48" x 32"

Right page: *Louis, Powder Box (Schoolgirl series)*, 2009

Digital print on gator board, 48" x 32"



Satch Hoyt

UK/Jamaica, born 1957

Rimshot, 2009

Chrome wheel rims with soundscape,

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Wheel Design Group



Christopher Irons

Jamaica, born 1973

Printa, 2008

Single-channel video, TRT: 4 minutes



Leasho Johnson

Jamaica, born 1981

Orange Boy series, 2008

Mixed media orange juice boxes, 3" x 3" x 5.5"



Ras Kassa

Jamaica, born 1974

The Trod, 2000

Single-channel video,

TRT: 30 min 16 sec



Jayson Keeling

USA/Jamaica, born 1966

Listen without prejudice, 2007

Single-channel video, TRT: 43 seconds





O'Neil Lawrence

Jamaica, born 1977

Re-Identified III, 2008

Digital print on gator board, 24" x 36"

Simone Leigh

USA/Jamaica, born 1968

Cage, 2009

Steel suspended on wall, 264" x 75" x 89"

Yellow Stack, 2009

Mixed media, dimensions variable

Containers, 2009

Mixed media, dimensions variable



Canada/Jamaica, born 1983

Handcrafted chromogenic prints, 23.5" x 19.3"

Courtesy of Wedge Curatorial Projects



D FI SEH. AT DAT TIME BEFORE
D WID WAT ME HAD ACHIEVED. I
D AN INSURANCE CO. DEN ME W
SOULJA WID DE BRITISH ARMY.
LEST AT 98 LBS. ME WAS EEN
AL ARMY CORP. WEN JAMAICA
NT, ME WAS KEPT ON AS A CIVIL
LEF FROM FI COME FI CANADA

—AUNTI LORNA

Jaime Lee Loy

Trinidad, born 1980

The Roach, from Roaches and Flowers: War in the Home, 2007

Live flowers and silk pins, 42" x 24"



Dave McKenzie

Jamaica/USA, born 1977

Present Tense, 2007

Single-channel video, TRT: 19 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Susan Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects



Wendell McShine

Trinidad, born 1973

Prosper, 2009

Animation, TRT: 4 min 30 sec



Petrona Morrison

Jamaica, born 1954

Landscape, 2009

Single-channel video, TRT: 1 min 57 sec

she asked him if it was real.... nobody'



Karyn Olivier

Trinidad and Tobago, born 1968

*Site specific installation at ACA food store,
Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut*





Zak Ové

UK/Trinidad and Tobago, born 1968

Blue Devils from the Transfigura series (9 works), 2001-2009

Gicle prints on aluminum, 55" x 39"



Ebony G. Patterson

Jamaica/USA, born 1981

Endz – Khani + Di Krew I-III, 2009

From the Disciplez series

Mixed media on paper with petals
and pussy bulletz, dimensions variable





Makandal Dada (a.k.a. Khalfani Ra)

Jamaica, born 1958

Birth-rite of restoration, 2009

Mixed media with nails on fabric, 54" x 28"





Omari Ra

The Book of the Dead: Illustrations of the patois Bible, 2008
Mixed Media collage/assemblage, dimensions variable



56 Arbor Street Hartford, CT 06106 p: 860.232.1006 f: 860.233.6661 www.realartways.org e: info@realartways.org



Thursday, October 8, 2009

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter is to confirm that Real Art Ways Contemporary Art Center in Hartford Connecticut requested two (2) art works from established Jamaican artist and art teacher Omari Ra a.k.a Afrikan to be shipped to Real Art Ways from Kingston, Jamaica for an exhibition on contemporary West Indian art that opens at Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut on November 14, 2009. Founded 34years ago, Real Art Ways is one of the leading contemporary arts organizations in the United States, with a record of linking artists, innovation, and community. Omari Ra's art works were selected by Real Art Ways' exhibition organizers when they saw the works at the National Gallery of Jamaica's National Biennial Exhibition in April 2009.

The details of the two pieces requested are as follows:

1. Title of work:
1865 Still on the Agenda: God Bless the Child that got his own
Mixed media on wood
107 cm
(wooden toy gun with image of Christ)
2. Title of work:
The Book of The Dead:
Illustrations of the Patois Bible
Mixed Media collage/assemblage
(bible, with small plastic blue toy gun embedded)

Omari Ra is a respected member of the artistic community in Jamaica who has exhibited internationally and has been on the faculty of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts for over 10years. The exhibition organizers thought it was important to include works by this distinguished artist in the exhibition.

The artist is known to make 'assemblage' sculptures using found objects, 'trash', and other non-traditional materials. Similarly the aforementioned works, which were seized by security, are made from a variety of different materials. Though we had seen the sculptures on view at the National Gallery of Jamaica, we were not able to inspect them closely. We were unaware of the complete contents of the art works, and had no knowledge that anything - that could be considered illicit - was part of the work. We apologize for this oversight and for any confusion caused by this situation.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in resolving this matter and please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions and/or would like further information. We can be reached at 860-232-1006.

Sincerely,

Will K. Wilkins
Executive Director
Real Art Ways

Kristina Newman-Scott
Director of Visual Arts
Real Art Ways

Peter Dean Rickards

Jamaica, born 1969

Proverbs 24:10, 2008

Single-channel video, TRT: 2 min 36 sec

If you falter in times of trouble,
how small is your strength?

Proverbs 24:10



Nadine Robinson

USA/Jamaica, born 1968

Laquita, 2005

Synthetic hair fiber, mbf board, and hair pins

144" x 96" x 2"

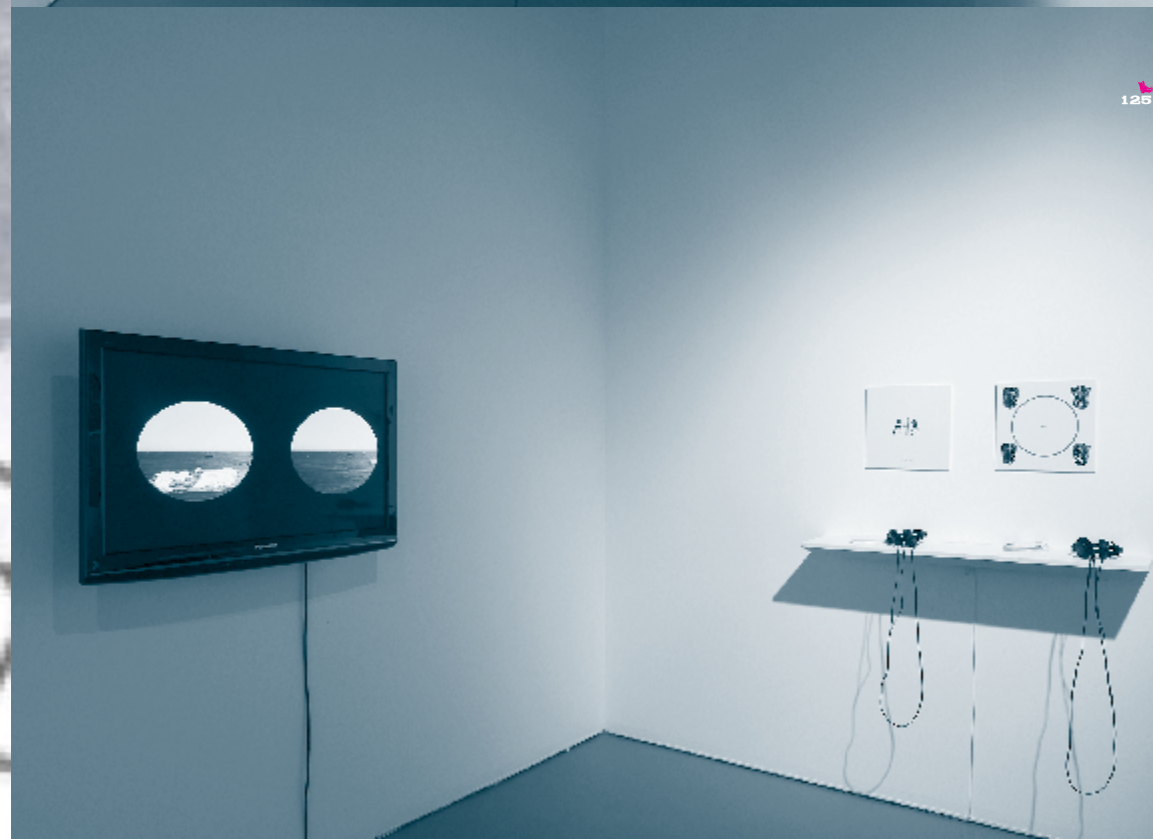


Sheena Rose

Barbados, born 1985

Town, 2009

Silent single-channel video, TRT: 2 min 39 sec





Oneika Russell

Jamaica, born 1980

Porthole, 2008

Single-channel video, TRT: 3 min 47 sec

Heino Schmid

Bahamas, born 1976

North Star, 2008

Single-channel digital video, TRT 6 min 23 sec

Courtesy of the artist and the National Gallery of the Bahamas



Phillip Thomas

Jamaica, born 1980

Study, 2008

Mixed media on paper, 18" x 24"

Courtesy of Russell Wilkinson



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Nari Ward

USA/Jamaica, born 1963

Lazarus, 2006

Metal stand, taxidermy turtle, plastic, electrical tape, plaster St. Lazarus, thermometer, brushes, and plastic intravenous bag with Chinese herbs

51" x 21" x 21"

Courtesy of Lehmann Maupin Gallery



Jay Will

Jamaica, born 1979

It's All About Dancing: Jamaican - U - Mentary, 2006

Single-channel video, TRT: 100 minutes

Performance



Dave Williams

Trinidad and Tobago, born 1964

Mannequin and Me, 2010

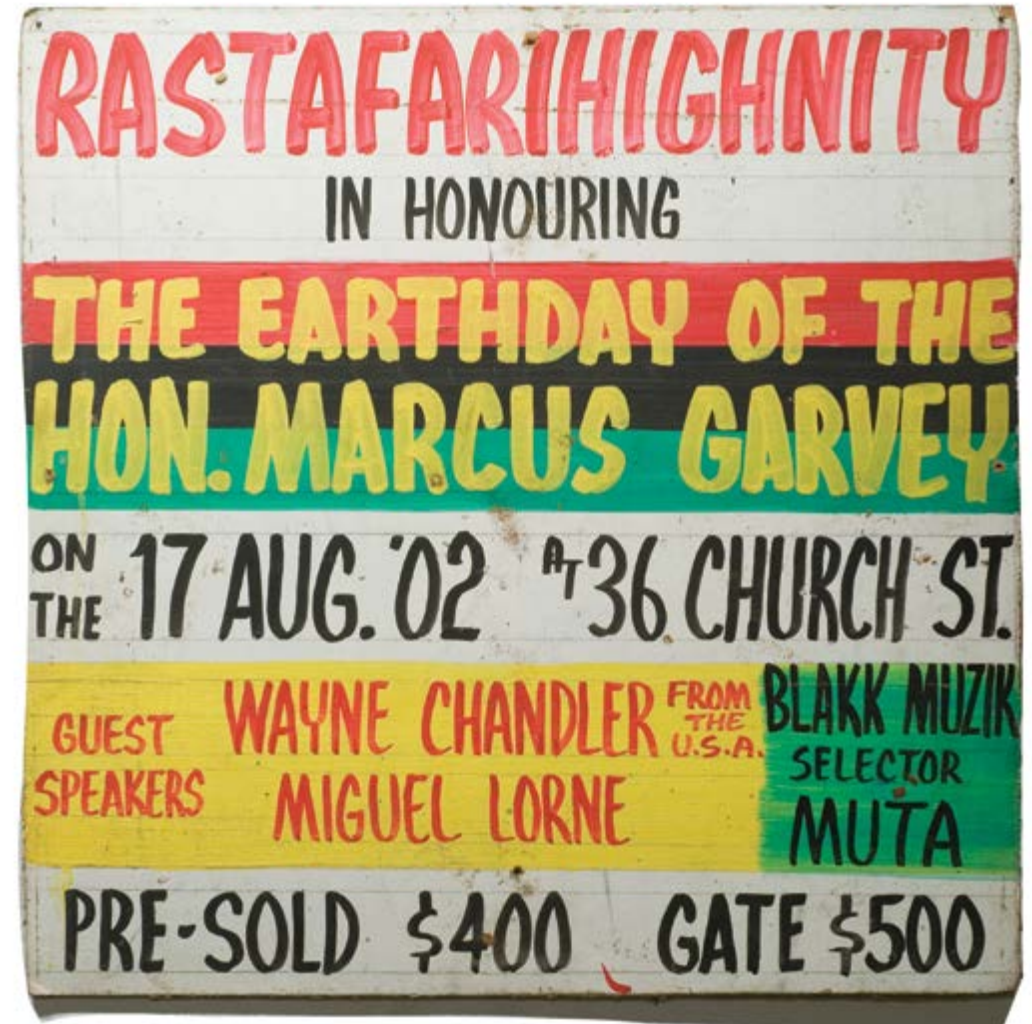


The Collection of Maxine Walters

Jamaica

Dancehall Posters, 2000 – present

Dimensions Variable



Biographies



Akuzuru

AKUZURU (b. 1966, Trinidad) studied art and fashion design in London, and received her MA in textile design in Lagos, Nigeria. Her work has been presented in many solo and group shows in Nigeria, South Africa, St Lucia, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, and Trinidad and Tobago. Akuzuru received the Prince Claus Fund in 2002 and the Commonwealth Scholarships Award in 2007. She currently lives and works in Trinidad and Tobago.

Ewan Atkinson

EWAN ATKINSON (b. 1975, Barbados) received his BFA in 1998 from the Atlanta College of Art in Georgia. He has had artist residencies at Caribbean Contemporary Arts in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad in 2002, and at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson, Vermont in 2007. Atkinson has exhibited in Barbados, France, the United States, and Trinidad and Tobago. He currently lives and works in Barbados.

Sonya Clark

SONYA CLARK (b. 1967, Washington, DC) received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Arts in Michigan, her BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago, and her BA from Amherst College. She is the recipient of many awards and fellowships, including a Virginia Commission for the Arts Fellowship, a Ruth and Harold Chenven Award, and a Lillian Elliott Award. In 2006, Clark received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant and had a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio residency in Italy. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the United Kingdom, Brazil, Canada, France, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Australia, Austria, and the United States. She is currently the Chair of the Craft/Material Studies department at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Art.

Christopher Cozier

CHRISTOPHER COZIER (b. 1959, Trinidad) received his MFA from Rutgers University and his BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art. He is Senior Research Fellow of the Academy at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and was an Artist-in-Residence at Dartmouth College in 2007. His work has been exhibited in various venues in the U.S., including the Museum of the Americas in Washington, DC, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Chicago Cultural Center. He has shown extensively around the world, at venues like the 7th Havana Biennial, the Bag Factory in Johannesburg, and TENT in Rotterdam. Cozier is a part of the editorial collective *Small Axe, A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, published by Duke Press, where he also edits the online blog 'sxspace'. Cozier has also worked as the editorial advisor for *BOMB Magazine's* Americas issues (Winter 2003, 2004, and 2005). He lives and works in Trinidad.

Renee Cox

RENEE COX (b.1960, Jamaica) earned her MFA in fine art photography at the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and her BA in film studies at Syracuse University. She has exhibited and curated shows nationally and internationally, at venues like the Rush Art Gallery and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, the 2004 Busan Biennial in South Korea, and the 2006 Jamaican Biennial at the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston. Cox has received a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Aaron Matalon Award from the National Gallery of Jamaica. She is based in New York.

Blue Curry

BLUE CURRY (b. 1974, The Bahamas) has an MFA from Goldsmiths College in London, a BA in photography and multimedia at the University of Westminster in London, and a BS from Skidmore College. He has exhibited at the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas; Muse Gallery, London; Poortgebouw, Rotterdam; and the 1st International Triennial of Caribbean Art, Santo Domingo. He was profiled in a BBC documentary titled "Goldsmiths: But is it art?" which aired in the United Kingdom in 2010. He lives and works in London.



Annalee Davis

ANNALEE DAVIS (b. 1963, Barbados) has an MFA from the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art. She has exhibited her work extensively throughout the Caribbean and abroad, including at TENT gallery in Rotterdam and the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid. She has participated in biennials in Ecuador, Brazil, South Africa, and Cuba, among others. Davis has also worked as a teacher, and as a writer and editor for various art publications. She is the coordinator of the *Lips Sticks & Marks* traveling show, which has been presented in Jamaica, Trinidad, and India. She lives and works in Barbados.

Khalil Deane

KHALIL DEANE (b. 1977, Jamaica) graduated with honors from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica. His work has been exhibited throughout the Caribbean, Mexico and the USA.

Zachary Fabri

ZACHARY FABRI (b. 1977, Miami, FL) holds an MFA in video, performance and sculpture from Hunter College, and a BFA in graphic design. Fabri's work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally at Sequences Real-time Festival, Reykjavik, Iceland; Nordic Biennale: Momentum, Moss, Norway; Gallery Open, Berlin; NabLab, Chicago; and the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art, New York. He recently completed a residency at the Jardim Canadá Art and Technology Center in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. He currently lives and works in New York.

Joscelyn Gardner

JOSCELYN GARDNER (b. 1961, Barbados) holds an MFA from the University of Western Ontario, a BFA in printmaking, and a BA in film studies from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Her work has been exhibited in both the 1994 and 1996 Sao Paulo Biennials. More recently she has participated in group exhibits at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City, the National Art Gallery in Barbados, the Harrington Street Art Center in Kolkata, India, and the Little Haiti Cultural Center in Miami Florida. In 2010, she received the PUMA Creative Mobility Award. Gardner teaches in the School of Contemporary Media at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario. She divides her time between Canada and the Caribbean.

Lawrence Graham-Brown

LAWRENCE GRAHAM-BROWN (b. 1969, Jamaica) is a self-taught multimedia artist based in New Jersey. His work has been shown at El Museo del Barrio in New York; the National Gallery of Jamaica in Kingston; the Institute of Jamaica's Museum of Ethnography in Kingston; the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica; the Shanghai and Beijing Biennials in China; and at the Lutz Rohs Gallery in Duren, Germany. Graham-Brown is the recipient of the Juror's Award for the New York University international small works show. He lives and works in New Jersey.

Marlon Griffith

MARLON GRIFFITH (b. 1976, Trinidad) attended the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. He is a self-taught artist who began his career as a carnival designer and still works in that capacity for the Trinidad Carnival and for the Notting Hill Carnival in London. Griffith completed a residency program at the Bag Factory and City + Suburban Studios, both located in Johannesburg, South Africa, and at the Mino Paper Art Village in Japan. He has presented work in numerous international group shows, including the 7th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; *MAS': From Process to Procession* at the BRIC Rotunda Gallery in Brooklyn, NY; and *South-South: Interruptions and Encounters* at the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, University of Toronto. He was awarded the 2010 Commonwealth Connections International Artist Residency and is currently an artist in residence at the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Marlon Griffith divides his time between Japan and Trinidad.

Satch Hoyt

SATCH HOYT (b. 1957, London, UK) draws on his background as a professional musician and composer to create his visual work. He has exhibited extensively, most recently at the Nasher Museum of Art in Durham, North Carolina; St. Paul's Cathedral/Docklands Museum in London; and the Wuertembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart. Hoyt has recorded with many artists, including Grace Jones and Louise Bourgeois, and is currently a member of Greg Tate's band, Burnt Sugar. He is at work on a solo album, "Griots and CyberCrooks". He is based in Berlin.

Christopher Irons

CHRISTOPHER IRONS (b. 1973, Jamaica) graduated from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston. He works as a sculpture and video artist, and he received the Commonwealth Arts and Crafts Award in 2002. Irons has exhibited his work across the Caribbean and at the Pendulum gallery in Lagos. He is currently a teacher at Ascot High School in Greater Portmore, Jamaica.

Leasho Johnson

LEASHO JOHNSON (b.1984, Jamaica) is an interdisciplinary artist. He has a BFA in visual communications from the Edna Manley College. He has exhibited in numerous group exhibitions, including shows at the National Gallery of Jamaica, Studio 174 and the CAGE Gallery in Jamaica. Johnson is based in Kingston, Jamaica.

Ras Kassa

RAS KASSA (b. 1974, Jamaica) is a television and music video director. He directed Damian Marley's acclaimed video *Welcome to Jamrock*. He is a co-founder of Music +, a Jamaican cable station, and serves on the board of the African Caribbean Institute of Jamaica. He has worked as the creative director for various television stations, including JNN and RE-TV, and has his own production company, Guru Films, which he founded in 2007. Kassa is currently a guest lecturer in the Kingston School District, as part of an inner-city creative awareness project. An installation of his video work has also been exhibited at the National Gallery of Jamaica, and he recently received an award for innovation at the Caribbean Tales Film Festival in Toronto. He lives in Kingston.



Jayson Keeling

JAYSON KEELING (b. 1966, Brooklyn, NY) attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. His recent exhibitions include *Lush Life*, a group show that was jointly presented at nine New York City galleries (2010); *Bunny Redux: Contemporary Artists Rethink the Iconic Playboy Bunny* at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, (2010); *Jamaica Flux: Workspaces and Window*, at the Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning in Queens, NY (2010); and *30 Seconds Off an Inch*, at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2009). Keeling has participated in numerous artist residencies, among them apexart's Outbound Residency in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (2009); Swing Space Residency (2009); and Workspace Residency (2009) at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. Keeling is based in Queens, NY.

O'Neil Lawrence

O'NEIL LAWRENCE (b. 1970, Jamaica) grew up in Montego Bay. He graduated from the University of the West Indies, and studied photography and graphic design at the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts. His most recent exhibits have been held at Entre-Vues Photographie Contemporaine en Caraïbe at La Fondation Clément in Martinique and at Rush Arts Gallery in New York. Lawrence currently resides in Kingston, Jamaica, where he works as a Curatorial Associate at the National Gallery of Jamaica.

Simone Leigh

SIMONE LEIGH (b. 1968, Chicago, IL) completed her studies in 1990 at Earlham College. She has shown in the U.S. at Rush Arts Gallery and the Kitchen, both in New York, and at the Living Room, in Miami, Florida. She has also exhibited internationally at L'Appartement 22 in Rabat, Morocco, and at AVA Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa. She is currently an artist in residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem, one of many residencies she has undertaken; she has also received numerous awards, including a 2009 fellowship in sculpture from the New York Foundation for the Arts, and an Art Matters grant. Her work has been written about in *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Trace Magazine*, *Artnet*, NY 1 News, and *Flavorpill*. Leigh lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Christina Leslie

CHRISTINA LESLIE (b. 1983, Scarborough, Ontario) earned her BFA in photography at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Her work has been exhibited at Oakland University Art Gallery in California; the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; and the FAMU, Prague; she participated in the Mark McCain residency program at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Leslie currently lives and works in Toronto.

Jaime Lee Loy

JAIME LEE LOY (b. 1980, Trinidad) received her M.Phil. in literature and her BA in literature and visual arts from the University of the West Indies, from which she graduated with honors. She has received grants from the Reed Foundation, New York; the Prince Claus Fund, The Netherlands; the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company; and Atlantic LNG, Trinidad. She has held residencies at Caribbean Contemporary Arts, Trinidad; the Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT; and the *three islands workshop*, at Triangle Arts Trust in Hoy, Scotland. Lee Loy produces documentaries and short videos, writes short stories and novellas and creates installation works. She resides in Trinidad and is working on a novella, "Fine and Loose Rope".

Dave McKenzie

DAVE MCKENZIE (b. 1977, Jamaica) studied at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine, and attended the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, from which he received his BFA in printmaking. He has held residencies at the P.S.1 National Studio Program, New York, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. McKenzie has exhibited extensively around the United States, including at 40000 Gallery in Chicago, REDCAT in Los Angeles, The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, and the Kitchen, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Queens Museum of Art and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, in New York. In 2005, McKenzie was awarded the William H. Johnson Prize and in 2006 won a Louis Comfort Tiffany Award. He lives in New York City.

Wendell McShine

WENDELL MCSHINE (b. 1973, Trinidad), otherwise known as "Shine", studied in London and at the University of Navarra-Pamplona in Spain. He is a visual animation artist whose work has been featured in magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Juxtapose*. He has shown at numerous international venues, including Laboratorio Urban Art Gallery and the Festival Internacional de Cine Contemporáneo, both in Mexico City, and at Anno Domini Gallery in San Jose, California, where he had his first American solo show. In 2009, McShine won a grant from the Belle Foundation. He lives in Mexico City, Mexico.

Petrona Morrison

PETRONA MORRISON (b. 1954, Jamaica) received her MFA from Howard University in Washington, DC, and her BA in fine arts from McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. She has participated in artist residencies at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1994, at the Contemporary Caribbean Arts in Trinidad in 2002, and at the Bag Factory in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2007. Morrison's work has also been presented in numerous group exhibitions, at the National Gallery of Jamaica and the Havana Biennale. She is currently the Dean of the School of Visual Arts at the Edna Manley College in Kingston, Jamaica.

Karyn Olivier

KARYN OLIVIER (b. 1968, Trinidad) holds an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art, and a BA in Psychology from Dartmouth College. She has exhibited internationally at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston; the Gwangju and Busan Biennials in Seoul, South Korea; and the Uferhallen, Berlin, Germany. Olivier has received many awards and grants, including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Biennial Award, and a grant from the Creative Capital Foundation. She has participated in residency programs at the Studio Museum in Harlem and at the Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. She currently teaches at the Tyler School of Art at Temple University in Philadelphia and is based in Brooklyn, NY.

Zak Ové

ZAK OVÉ (b. 1966, London, UK) earned a BA in film as fine art from St. Martins' School of Art, in London. His film career evolved in New York City and London. In 2007, he participated in an artist in residence program at the Caribbean Contemporary Arts in Trinidad. Ové's work has been screened at venues and festivals worldwide, including the Toronto Film festival, MTV Europe, and the Kunsthalle Museum in Zurich, Switzerland; and more recently at the Bamako African Photographic Biennale, Freies Museum in Berlin and at the 8th African Photography Biennale at the IZIKO South African National Gallery in Cape Town. He divides his time between London and Trinidad and Tobago.

Ebony G. Patterson

EBONY G. PATTERSON (b. 1981, Jamaica) received her MFA in printmaking and drawing from Sam Fox College of Design and Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She also graduated with honors in painting from the Edna Manley College for Visual and Performing Arts. She has exhibited at the National Gallery of Jamaica, the Kentucky Art Museum, and the CIAC summer Exhibit in Pont Aven, France. Her most recent solo show was at Seeline Gallery in Santa Monica, California. Patterson was awarded a Vermont Studio Center Artist Fellowship in 2008 and the Prime Minister's Youth Award for Arts and Culture in 2006. She is an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, and divides her time between Lexington, Kentucky and Kingston, Jamaica.

K. Khalfani Ra (Makandal Dada)

K. KHALFANI RA (b. 1958, Jamaica) was educated at the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica. He has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America in Washington, D.C; participated in the III Bienal del Caribe, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale; and at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. He is also a regular contributor to Jamaica's National and Jamaica Biennials. Khalfani lives and works in Kingston.

Omari S. Ra

OMARI S. RA (b. 1960, Jamaica), born Robert Cookhorne and also known as "Afrikan", received his MFA from the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth and his BA from the Jamaica School of Art, in Kingston. He has exhibited throughout the Caribbean and in South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. He has exhibited at the National Gallery of Jamaica and has been included in several Jamaican biennials. In 2004, he received the Aaron Matalon Award and showed in *Curator's Eye I*, organized by Lowery Stokes-Simms then director of the Studio Museum in Harlem. He is the head of the Painting Department at the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts.

Peter Dean Rickards

PETER DEAN RICKARDS (b. 1969, Jamaica) is a self-taught artist who works in a wide range of media, including photography, video, film, and writing. Rickards has a BA from the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica, and from the University of Trinity College in Toronto, Canada. His work has been shown at Milieu Galerie/Artspace in Bern, Switzerland; Real Art Ways in Hartford, CT; and Third Streaming in New York, City. Rickards divides his time between Kingston, Jamaica, and Brooklyn, New York.

Nadine Robinson

NADINE ROBINSON (b. 1968, London, UK) spent her early years in Jamaica before moving to New York City. She earned her MA in studio arts from New York University and her BA at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. She has been artist in residence at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and at the Studio Museum in Harlem. In 2003, she was awarded the William H. Johnson Prize. She has had solo exhibitions at the Studio Museum in Harlem and at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. She has also participated in numerous group shows at venues including the Museum of Modern Art, Queens, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, and at the California African American Museum in Los Angeles. She is based in New York City.

Sheena Rose

SHEENA ROSE (b. 1985, Barbados) is a recent graduate from the BFA program at Barbados Community College. She has shown at Zemicon Gallery and in the *Sign of the Times* digital art exhibition at Queen's Park in Bridgetown, Barbados. Her work has also been exhibited at Alice Yards in Trinidad and at Barbados Community College Gallery as a solo show. Rose lives and works in Barbados.



Oneika Russell

ONEIKA RUSSELL (b. 1980, Jamaica) has a BA in painting from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, and an MA in interactive arts from Goldsmith's College in London. In 2007, she received the Commonwealth Foundation Arts and Crafts Award, which funded an artist residency at the Post-Museum in Singapore. She also won the 2007 Monbukagakusho Research Scholarship awarded by the Embassy of Japan, and the 2003 Dean's Purchase Award and Studio Space Award, both from the Edna Manley College. Russell is an editor for *Art: Jamaica*, a blog about contemporary art from the perspective of a young Jamaican artist. She has exhibited her work at the Morlan Art Gallery at Transylvania University in Lexington, KY; the Post-Museum, Singapore; the Novosibirsk State Art Museum, Russia; and the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston. She currently resides in Japan where she is conducting postgraduate research at Kyoto Seika University.

Heino Schmid

HEINO SCHMID (b. 1976, Bahamas) holds an MA from the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design in the Netherlands, a BFA in photography from Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, and an AA in art from the College of the Bahamas in Nassau. He is the recipient of numerous awards and scholarships. Among his past exhibitions are *Equilibrium* at Alice Yards in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, *City States: Three Moments*, Contemporary Urban Centre, as part of the Liverpool Biennial; and *Work!*, Diaspora Vibe Gallery, Miami. Schmid is an adjunct lecturer at the College of the Bahamas and is curator of the Central Bank of the Bahamas Art Gallery and exhibitions director of Popopstudios Centre for the Visual Arts in Nassau, where he currently resides.

Phillip Thomas

PHILLIP THOMAS (b. 1980, Jamaica) graduated from the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts. He has been involved in several group shows, including the 2008 Jamaica National Biennial at the National Gallery of Jamaica and at Bolivar Gallery in Mayland. He won an Albert Huie Award for Painting in 2003, and the Aaron Matalon Award in 2008. He lives and works in New York City.

Adele Todd

ADELE TODD (b. 1965, Trinidad) received her BFA in graphic design from the Pratt Institute in New York City. She has exhibited at the Consulate of Trinidad and Tobago in Canada, 101 Art Gallery in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and at the National Museum of Trinidad and Tobago. She lives and works in Trinidad.

Nari Ward

NARI WARD (b. 1963, Jamaica) holds an MFA from Brooklyn College and a BA from Hunter College. He was included in the Prospect 1 New Orleans Biennial in 2008, the Whitney Biennial in New York in 2006, and Documenta XI in Kassel in 2003. His work has also been exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Detroit, among many other venues. Ward has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. He currently teaches at Hunter College and lives in New York City.

Jay Will

JAY WILL (b. 1979, Jamaica) is a filmmaker and director. He worked at CBS Television and MTV before establishing his own company, Jay Will Films, where he directs documentaries, music videos, television shows, and commercials. In 2008, Will directed Shaggy's video "Bad Man Don't Cry," which won numerous awards, including Jamaica's Excellence in Music and Entertainment Video of the Year Award, Best Dancehall Video Reggae Academy Award in 2008, Director of the Year, Hype TV Award in 2008, and Director of the Year, RETV Award in 2008. He also received the CVM TV's Director of the Year and Best Documentary Award at the Flashpoint Festival in 2006.

Dave Williams

DAVE WILLIAMS (b. 1964, Trinidad) is a performance artist and choreographer. Williams has performed extensively in Trinidad, most recently at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting at the National Academy for the Performing Arts. He was also artistic director of DAM 25, a production of the Noble Douglas Dance Company. Williams lives and works in Trinidad.

Notes on Curators and Contributors

Melanie Archer

MELANIE ARCHER is the former managing editor of D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers in New York, and the senior writer, associate editor, and co-designer of *The Business of Holidays*, a collection of essays on the commercialization of holidays edited by Maud Lavin. Based in Trinidad since 2007, she is currently the art director of the Trinidad+Tobago film festival, and sits on the editorial committee of Robert & Christopher Publishers. She also works as an independent design consultant and has written on design, contemporary art, and architecture for magazines and journals including *PRINT*, *The Caribbean Review of Books*, and *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. In 2008, she was an essayist and managing editor of *Che Lovelace: Paintings (2004–2008)*.

Yona Backer

YONA BACKER is a producer, curator, and consultant working in the fields of contemporary art, film, and fashion. Over her fifteen year career in the arts, she has been a curator, a program developer for arts and culture spaces, and a grantmaker with a special focus on underserved groups. She is co-founder and executive director of Third Streaming, an interdisciplinary art gallery based in SoHo, New York. Previously, she was Senior Program Officer at the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Before that, she was Director of Visual Arts at the Americas Society and Gallery Director at Throckmorton Fine Art. Born in Jamaica and raised in the Netherlands, Backer came to New York in the early 1980s. She has a master's degree in art history and archaeology from Columbia University, and a bachelor of arts in art history and history from Hunter College.

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David Bailey

DAVID BAILEY is an independent curator and founder and director of the International Curators Forum. Over the course of a twenty-year career, he has specialized in exhibitions on history, race and the representation of cultural difference. Among the shows he has organized are *The Critical Decade: Black British Photography (1990-92)*; *MIRAGE: Enigmas, On Race, Difference & Desire* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1995; *Rhapsodies In Black: Art From the Harlem Renaissance*, at the Hayward Gallery in 1997, *Back To Black and Shades Of Black*, 2005; *Veil*, 2003; the *Black Moving Cube* project for the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol and London, 2006; and the current human rights public memorial project *Remember Saro-Wiwa: The Living Memorial, 2005 – 2007*. In June 2007 he was made a Member of the British Empire for his services to the visual arts in Great Britain. He divides his time between Barbados and London.

Donna P. Hope

DONNA P. HOPE is Senior Lecturer in Reggae Studies at the Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of the West Indies, Mona. An avid fan and student of Jamaican music, she has published two books—*Inna di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (2006) and *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall* (2010). Since 1998, she has produced journal articles, academic papers, and conference presentations on the subject, and has participated in numerous media discussions in Jamaica and abroad on Jamaican music and dancehall culture. She organized the International Reggae Conference held at the U.W.I., Mona in February 2010. She has a BA in Mass Communication and a Masters in Philosophy from the U.W.I., Mona. A Jamaican Fulbright Scholar to the USA, Dr. Hope completed her Ph.D. in Cultural Studies at George Mason University in 2006.

Nicholas Laughlin

NICHOLAS LAUGHLIN is a writer with a particular interest in Caribbean literature and art, and the editor of *The Caribbean Review of Books*. His reviews and essays have been published in a number of journals and catalogues, and many are also available at his website, nicholaslaughlin.net. He is also co-director of Alice Yard, a contemporary art space and network based in Port of Spain. He was born and has always lived in Trinidad.

Kristina Newman-Scott

KRISTINA NEWMAN-SCOTT is the Director of Programs at the Boston Center for the Arts. From 2005-2010, she was Director of Visual Arts at Real Art Ways in Hartford, Connecticut. There, she curated over 65 solo exhibitions, six major multi-disciplinary group shows, and four public art projects. Born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica, Newman-Scott received her BFA from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston. Before coming to the U.S., she was an art consultant in Kingston for eight years, and also worked as an on-air television host and producer for CVM, TVJ and RETV, and as an announcer for radio station Fame FM.

Annie Paul

ANNIE PAUL is a Jamaica-based writer and critic. Head of the Publications Section at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of *Social and Economic Studies* at the University of the West Indies in Mona, she is also managing editor of the journal *Social and Economic Studies*. She was a founding editor of both *Small Axe*, an online journal of Caribbean art criticism, and of the *Caribbean Review of Books*, and has published in various journals and magazines, including *Slavery and Abolition*, *Art Journal*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Wasafiri*, *Callaloo*, and *Bomb*. She has also been a contributor to the Gwangju Triennale, Documenta11, and the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) International Congress and Symposium at the Tate Gallery of Modern Art, among many other publications. Paul's current project is a book on visual art and popular culture in postcolonial Jamaica; she has received a grant to support it from the Prince Claus Fund.

Richard Mark Rawlins

RICHARD RAWLINS is the designer of the special 5 issue *Rockstone and Bootheel eMag* and this catalogue. Rawlins is a graduate of York University, and George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology Toronto Canada. He is an actively working contemporary artist living and working in Trinidad and Tobago. He is the publisher of the online magazine *Draconian Switch* (www.artzpub.com), a co-founder of Trinidad and Tobago's *Erotic Art Week* exhibition, and collaborator in the Alice Yard contemporary art-space initiative.

Allison Thompson

ALLISON THOMPSON is an art historian and critic based in Barbados. She is the director of the Division of Fine Arts at the Barbados Community College, and has worked with a number of regional arts organizations, including the National Art Gallery Committee in Barbados, AICA Southern Caribbean (of which she is the founding president) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Barbados. She has written numerous articles and essays on Caribbean art and is a co-author, with Alissandra Cummins and Nick Whittle, of the book *Art in Barbados: What Kind of Mirror Image*.



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About

Real Art Ways

Founded in 1975, Real Art Ways is one of the country's early alternative arts spaces. Real Art Ways presents and produces new and innovative work by emerging and established artists, and serves as a crucial connection for audiences and artists regionally, nationally and internationally. The organization has sustained itself through committed support for new ideas and disciplines, and has steadily built a diverse and unique audience that crosses lines of color, sexual orientation, economics and age.

Real Art Ways began when a group of visual artists and musicians took over a rambling upstairs space on Asylum Street in downtown Hartford. The founding members created a bare bones salon in which they lived, worked and presented the work of others. The idea of alternativity to the mainstream is central to Real Art Ways – the organization arose at a moment when alternative ideas were being explored (e.g. alternative foods, alternative medicines) and alternative institutions were being established (e.g. alternative newspapers, alternative schools, food co-ops, alternative health care programs). Through the latter part of the decade and into the 1980s, Real Art Ways became a necessary venue for artists and performers to be seen and heard, with presentations in innovative music especially notable. Rapid

commercial real estate development led to Real Art Ways losing three spaces in ten years. The final eviction in 1989 left Real Art Ways teetering on the edge of extinction, and the organization landed in a small space at 56 Arbor Street in the culturally mixed neighborhood of Parkville. Under the new leadership of executive director Will K. Wilkins, Real Art Ways regrouped after the move to Parkville. Wilkins ushered in a second life to the organization by commissioning a series of vigorous public art projects, which have been placed in sites throughout the city. Real Art Ways obtained a 30-year lease on a large warehouse space, and began the development of a unique center for arts and culture. At the same time, Real Art Ways has been very involved in the Parkville neighborhood, and has participated in planning processes for a redesign of the central commercial district, and for neighborhood gateways. The Real Art Ways Cinema opened in the fall of 1996, showing first-run, independent films seven nights a week. The galleries were renovated and re-opened in June of 1999. The Real Room and Loading Dock Lounge were renovated and opened in November of 2002. The quality and diversity of Real Art Ways' work have earned it repeated funding from national sources, including the National Endowment for the Arts, The Andy Warhol Foundation, the Ford

Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation as well as key local funders including United Technologies, Aetna, Travelers, Bank of America, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, The Hartford, the Greater Hartford Arts Council, and many more. Real Art Ways' projects have generated regional and national media coverage, including pieces in Art in America, ArtNews, ArtForum, National Public Radio, the New York Times, Associated Press, Sculpture, Details, the Source, and Rolling Stone.

In 2004, Real Art Ways organized and presented the landmark exhibition None of the Above: Contemporary Work by Puerto Rican Artists. The exhibition was shown at the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico in 2005, the first exhibition of contemporary Puerto Rican art organized off the island to be shown in Puerto Rico. Building on the success of None of the Above, in the fall and winter of 2005-06 Real Art Ways produced Faith, a multidisciplinary project centered around an exhibition curated by artist James Hyde, and including work by Patty Chang, Mat Collishaw, Rachel Harrison, Nancy Haynes, Shirazeh Houshiary, Christopher Lucas, Josiah McElheney, Walid Ra'ad (The Atlas Group), Sabeen Raja, Archie Rand, Arlene Shechet, and Nari Ward. Real Art Ways collaborated with the Hartford Seminary, and presented nine films that addressed

various aspects of faith, along with several live arts events, including concerts, poetry readings and performances.

In 2006-2007, we produced POZA, a multidisciplinary project centered around an exhibition curated by art historian, critic and poet Marek Bartelik. POZA brought together work by artists, writers, filmmakers, and thinkers with direct and indirect ties to Poland. Taking as a point of departure specific national and cultural distinctions, which could be called "Polishness," the project offered an open-ended proposition that treated such distinctions as matters of choice and awareness, rather than linking them to a specific locality or place of birth. Featuring 31 visual artists, POZA also included literary events and an original film series, with 18 films and discussions guided by community leaders.

Today, Real Art Ways is widely regarded as one of the country's outstanding contemporary art spaces, one that has a special link with its own community. With films, concerts, performance, readings, exhibitions and a lounge where people gather before and after events. Real Art Ways is a unique meeting place for people of widely varying backgrounds to come together around art and ideas.



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Staff Photographer

Acknowledgements

This exhibition and catalog would have not been possible without the help of many wonderful and dedicated people from across the globe.

First of all, of course, we must thank the artists for their outstanding contributions to the exhibition and their generosity in making their works available to us. Their talent, energy, enthusiasm, and support have been the inspiration for, and the driving force behind, this exhibition.

The show would also never have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the staff of Real Art Ways. Will K. Wilkins, its executive director, provided steadfast support throughout the project. His trust in us at every stage gave us the freedom to produce an exhibition that we think is unique in its dedication to new and unexplored artwork from the Caribbean region – for many of the artists, this was their first show in the United States.

Erinn Roos, RAW's extraordinary visual arts coordinator, used her impressive administrative skills and boundless creative energy to bring the show together. She took on the challenging task of coordinating thirty-nine artists spread across the Caribbean, Europe and North America, and bringing almost one hundred of their works to Connecticut. All this she accomplished flawlessly, while remaining an outstanding problem solver, sounding board, and friend.

John Morrison, the film programmer, coordinated the film program with great aplomb, while RAW's exceptional team of preparators, C.J. Day, Joel Vanderkamp and John Groo worked tirelessly with us to ensure that the artworks were presented at their very best. We thank them for their skill, patience, and their creative solutions to the challenging issues of space that are always present when hanging a show. John Groo also provided us with excellent documentation of the exhibition, while the the dedication of the Board and the members of Real Art Ways provided underlying support for the show.

The exhibition was greatly strengthened by the thoughtful contributions of the writers who provided critical responses to the work. Insightful essays by Melanie Archer, David Bailey and Allison Thompson, Donna Hope, Nicholas Laughlin, and Annie Paul provide essential context for the exhibition; their scholarship deepens the show greatly. We would like to thank the poet and activist Muhammad Muwakil for his contribution to the book. We are also extremely thankful to writer Özge Ersoy for her unwavering dedication, for her astute research, and for producing the informative artist entries with the assistance of Camila Moreiras-Vilaros under short deadlines.

Richard Rawlins of Draconian Switch produced a uniquely designed graphic look for all the exhibition's materials, including the e-catalog and publication, while Sophia Padnos, editor, helped to polish the text of the book.

An exhibition of this size cannot be produced without the support and generosity of many individuals and galleries. We thank Lehman Maupin Gallery, Wedge Curatorial, and The Barbados National Art Gallery as well as Russell Wilkinson and Maxine Walters for generously making works available to us.

Other organizations and individuals, both local and abroad, also provided essential support during the years leading up to the exhibition. We are proud to celebrate our first joint partnership with the West Indian Foundation in Hartford, CT. In addition, we are grateful to Yvon Alexandre and his staff at ACA Foods in Hartford for their willingness to open up shelf space in their food market for Olivier's installation, part of Karyn Oliver's Library Project. Scott's Jamaican Bakery also deserves thanks for its generous donation of delicious baked goods for the opening reception and other events and Ron Geraci of Wheel Design Group LLC, for his generosity and support of Satch Hoyt's project.

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During our preparations for the show, we visited many artists in their studios. Although we were not able to include all of them in the final exhibition, we learned a tremendous amount from the dialogues and exchanges we had with each. We are very aware that studio visits are intimate experiences, not undertaken lightly, and we appreciate the generosity with which the artists opened their studios, and often their private homes, to us.

Finally, the show would never have taken place without the generous funding and other support it received from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Edward C. and Ann T. Roberts Foundation, the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, The Reed Foundation, Inc., the J. Walton Bissell Foundation, the Maximilian E. and Marion O. Hoffman Foundation, Inc., Lincoln Financial Foundation, the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign, Travelers Foundation, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Sandy and Howard Fromson, Marjorie Morrissey, Gary E. West, Robinson and Nancy Grover, and Real Art Ways' members.

Yona Backer and Kristina Newman Scott

Websites

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Richard Mark Rawlins www.richardmarkrawlins.blogspot.com
Real Art Ways www.realartways.org
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Installation images: **Real Art Ways/ John Groo, the Artists**

To the WIRL (WORLD): **Annie Paul**

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A Shared Vision: Notes On Developing A Black Diaspora

Visual Arts Programme In Barbados: **Sheena Rose, Allison Thompson**

The Dancehall Story – Exploring Male Homosexuality: **Wikimedia Commons,**

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Interview with Filmmakers Horace Ové and Maria Govan: **Melanie Archer, Horace Ové**

Hungry for words: **Karyn Olivier**

