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WELCOME to the NIGHT GALLERY! 8



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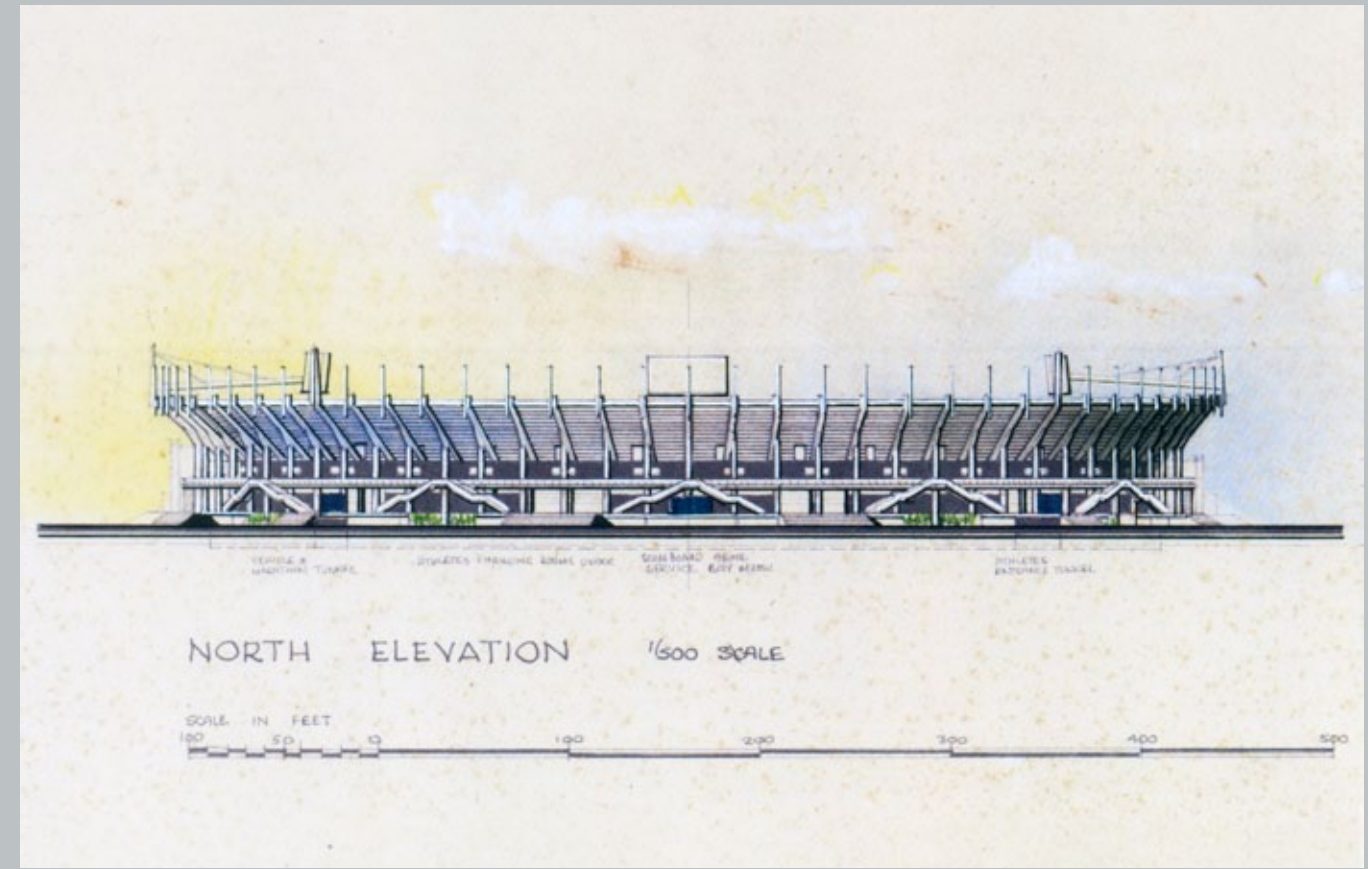


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THINKING ABOUT COLIN LAIRD AND HIS PUBLIC SPACES

The current exhibition at The National Museum and Art Gallery of Trinidad and Tobago of architectural plans, perspective drawings and to-scale models of Trinidadian architect, Colin Laird's public spaces has got me thinking about lots of things – Laird himself, civic spaces, Trinidad and sailing. The latter, because Laird, like my father, was an ardent sailor throughout my childhood. La Baleine was the gorgeous ketch that Laird used to sail, either on his own or with his grandsons, during the racing season in and around the Gulf of

Paria. He and my father always raced in the same class, and I would marvel at his quiet confidence. He wasn't the sort of person to sail recklessly, choosing instead to push hard and pinch, pinch, pinch. It was remarkable to me that he would sail such an enormous boat on his own – but then, it was designed in such a way that most of the key functions of the boat could be performed from the cockpit. More than that though, I admired, from across the water, his comfort with solitude and something I think all serious sailors must share:

a profound and abiding love of the sea.

Although as a child I knew that Colin Laird was an architect, I didn't fully become aware of his work until the Promenade was built. I don't know if people remember the Independence Square of the 80s. (In truth, I can only remember it when I think hard!) It was a virtual shanty-town of scruffy lean-tos and parked cars. It in no way reflected the fact that it was the civic heart of the city, surrounded by the centres of finance, business and govern-



p4. PUBLIC SPACES exhibit entrance, National Museum, Trinidad and Tobago. p5. NATIONAL STADIUM, north elevation, Colin Laird, 1978. p6. various PUBLIC SPACES exhibit views and QUEEN'S HALL, interior perspective, Colin Laird, 1958. p6. NATIONAL LIBRARY, sketch design perspective, Colin Laird, 1997.



ment for the country. It was embarrassing. I don't recall the construction process, so, in my memory, it's as though one day Independence Square was a slum, the next day, there was a promenade with benches and chess tables, little performance areas and well-considered landscaping. And the people of Port of Spain adopted the Promenade as though it had always been there – using it in every way in which Laird could have imagined and hoped – to meet and chat; to read the papers; to buy a doubles; to walk to work in beautiful surroundings; to hold performances and markets. The Promenade operated, from the get-go, as the beautiful and beating heart of the city.

For years in the 90s, it seemed as though the National Library on Hart Street – which Laird designed – was doomed to be a political football – planning and construction threatened, stopped and started. As

a reporter, I saw a model of the planned building, and can remember one person observing that Laird had honoured the recurring grids and 45° angles of the early urban planners of Port of Spain. Until then, it hadn't occurred to me that the streets of Port of Spain followed a very deliberate grid, and that if you walk around the streets of the city, key buildings, such as the Red House, can be viewed from numerous vantage points. And when the Library was eventually opened in 2003, I got goose bumps and burst into tears when I first walked through its rooms. It was beautiful – a building that honoured knowledge – both the storing and sharing of it. A building of great optimism and respect. The new Library was a bold statement of intent for the society – it provided large informal areas where people could meet and lime or look at performances; there were lots of small, bright places for individual study; there were comfortable

easy chairs for reading; there was internet access for all members of the library, and everywhere, shelves and shelves of books, journals, newspapers and magazines. The multi-storey atrium is a beautiful thing to look at. The Library filled me with pride and optimism. It reminded me of how the aspirations of a society could be represented in the design of a building.

These days, once again so much of downtown Port of Spain is an eyesore – with empty lots like raw scars everywhere and an abundance of badly designed buildings. In such a scenario, places like the Promenade and the Library are signs of hope that things may not always look as terrible as they do now.

When I start despairing for Trinidad (as so many of us are wont to do from time to time) I wonder if people would notice, if one day, the government or some minister were to decide to pave over the Savannah. And even if people noticed, would they try to do anything about it – about the paving of the jewel of Port of Spain, arguably the most well-used of public spaces in the city. Just like I wasn't surprised that hardly a murmur was sounded when the new "Grandstand" was erected (with bricks and concrete) without any consultation or real planning – no inspiration for one of the most inspired national festivals in the world. So much of the populace either didn't notice what was going on, or, if they did, were too distracted by the idea that the stage would be returning to the Savannah. Wow, how we sold ourselves short there. And so, as I was saying, I wonder if people notice. But then, during my life it's been a comfort to know that someone like Colin Laird not only notices, but makes public spaces of thought, integrity and inspiration; spaces where, as he puts it, we can be encouraged to "live fully".

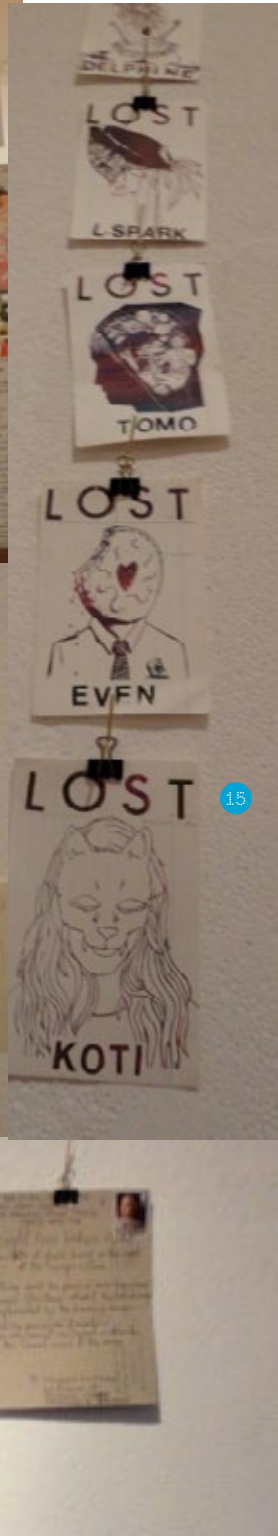
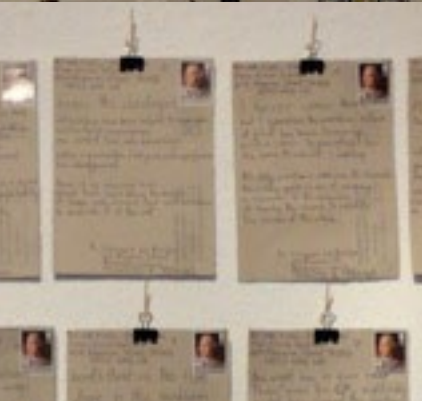
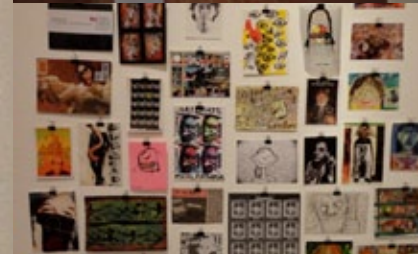
There's a new artspace in Woodbrook. Formerly Bohemia, and now dubbed the Night Gallery at 33 Murray Street, organisers Richard Mark Rawlins and Dave O. Williams hope to create another vehicle by which the public can come in off the street and see art often and with no predisposed agenda. The Night Gallery, (actually the front house portion of Bohemia) is no stranger to art, being the main (read 'riské') command center gallery for Erotic Artweek three years in a row. Rawlins hopes that the Night Gallery will serve as a space for independent up and coming artists with perhaps a limited amount of work, who welcome the opportunity of showing within a space that has a decidedly open-door ethos. Williams and Rawlins hope the Night Gallery will be another experiment that will write its own path into Trinidad's artscape. Off to a good start, the gallery has already housed the Postal Art Project, Marilyn Morrison's Little Black Girl and CURRENT the party. Stay tuned to this space...

CURRENT the party
tags: current,wanderoller,vannavee,lazabean,mogulrecords,kevonwalker





POSTAL ART
tags: raquelvasquezlaroche,postal art,arte correo





thieving **WE-SELF** from WE-SELF

A large part of the Switch readership is in advertising. And I know that these images will elicit the kind of condescending design accolades that can only slip out of our upwardly mobile mouths because we're well above that kind of thing as designers ourselves.

But consider this before you acknowledge the naivety of the ghetto fabulousness.

Advertising, PR and marketing communications take place in just about every moment of our lives. Once a person becomes anxious enough about a situation or circumstance that s/he feels s/he can or should make a difference, s/he will produce a communication aimed at alleviating that anxiety. Whether it's goods you need to get off your hands, someone you need to get out of the way of an oncoming bus, a timely change in sexual positions, eloquently iterating the idea that swings the argument in your favour, or the instruction that creates a star student. They're all the same as the communication challenges that ad agencies confront in every client brief. So why then do local agency productions cost clients so much while so often missing the mark.

The images reproduced here, images not unlike those you come across in any Caribbean civilisation on a daily basis, seem to communicate simply, but with a clear intimacy, personality, efficacy and immediacy that so often escapes agency fodder.

In these examples of everyday PR, marketing and advertising, content is low and context is high. By context I mean the

media and the physical and social cultures in which the communication is achieved. The contexts are also familiar to the intended audiences. Another thing is the technology quotient - exceptionally low. Much like the technology quotient of our daily lives outside of IT use.

Because of the abject familiarity with the applied technology (media, language, location) the creators of these works truly have control over the content and the context of these communications. Taken for granted, this control makes the communications true to the cultures in which they exist - nothing is "foreign". As a result they are implicitly effective. Each speaks volumes about the communicator, and to the audience. This creates a brand architecture that only falls short in the omission of a brand name.

Caribbean spaces, like these communications, remain largely low-tech environments. Of course, low tech doesn't make advertisers money nor does it pump the upwardly mobile egos of rising caribbeanites. Who wants to be seen as charming, backward or outside of the global tech or design loop? In our attempt to escape these descriptions are we denying unique communication aesthetics of our unique sub-cultures and in so doing denying the evolution of our own necessary, indigenous and advanced technologies?

Interestingly though, no matter how fast or hard we run towards the buzz of a Times Squared, Wi-Fied, LEDed, billboarded, twitterd up advetiscap, our culture seems to rob us the cool slickness we seek. Our





ads never look quite like Coca Cola's or Mac's or Geicos.

Maybe the reason is the foreign technologies and design cultures that we subscribe to cultures we neither create nor have any real control over.

There is a part of us, like falling mangoes, that no matter how we fight, always crashes our high sheen ad dreams and brings us back. We always land right in the middle of that which we thought ourselves above, ending up with neither fish nor fowl. We have an aesthetic trajectory and it's not going to land us in Times Square. We have to find back what we thiefting from weself. But that would take a brave designer.

p14. ZABUCCA THEFT. Morne Leotaud, 2012.
p18. FALLING MANGOES. St. James, 2012. p19.
YOU WILL COME AGAIN. Symond Valley Road, 2012. p20. BLACK SUPREMACY. Beetham Estates, 2012. p21. GETTO LOVE, Symond Valley Road, 2012.

PICTURES FROM PARADISE

A SURVEY OF
CONTEMPORARY
CARIBBEAN
PHOTOGRAPHY



Our World is *not* flat

The idea of a flat world has long been challenged. Greek astronomers conceived of and established a world with great dimension as early as the sixth century BC. Yet seeing the world in the round is not only possible through the cosmographic lenses of astronomy or even geography. The lens of experience can offer sight of a world whose “roundness” is constituted in multiple, varied stories. A Caribbean world, however, is still largely characterised in the popular imagination by a single, dominant story: a plot of paradise. Many images that are created and circulated perpetuate a paradisaical narrative. But single stories are deceptive. In her talk at the 2009 TED Global conference, storyteller and Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells us about the danger of a single story. She observes that insistence upon a single story “flattens experience.” According to Adichie: “The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” The book (released 2012) entitled *Pictures from Paradise: A Survey of Contemporary Caribbean Photography* addresses stereotyping and incompleteness through its feature of the works of 18 artists from seven Caribbean countries. Its multi-faceted visual content demonstrates that a Caribbean experiential world is not flat.



Pictures from Paradise, edited by Melanie Archer and Mariel Brown, is the first in the Contemporary Arts Series by Trinidad and Tobago's Robert & Christopher Publishers. Through an array of photographs that fit into and overlap the categories of Tableau Vivant, Documentary, Transformed Media and Portraiture, stories that go beyond the veneer of sun, sea, sand and palm tree are told. Silenced stories, overlooked stories, alternative stories are presented in full-colour boldness. From engagements with masculine identities, Caribbean warrior heroines, gang life, vernacular fashion and dance, classical painting, traditional carnival characters and quotidian details to visual confrontations of such issues as memory, slavery, religion, erosion, displacement, homosexuality, eroticism and intimacy, the book tells stories that deviate sharply from those narrated by tropical stock photography.

Stories oscillate between past and present; they straddle myth and the real. Some stories are autobiographical or personal while others are collective, communal. Yet the photographs all serve in a way, which allows the prefix "re-" to function as a kind of protagonist of each story. The photographic works reinvent, reinterpret, recontextualise, record, re-envision, reimagine, recreate, recombine, remind, relate, rearrange, re-evaluate, reconsider, rebirth and reveal a complex Caribbean. It is noteworthy that these "re" words not only become evident through a close reading of the book's photographic presentation but they are actual words that appear again and again in the various artist/photographer statements published in the last section of the book.

Pictures from Paradise foregrounds artistic practice that engages with light as a medium – for photography is writing with



light – and in doing so it tackles light in its own way. The book operates like a prism with refracting surfaces that can take the light of paradise and separate it into a spectrum of colourful stories. Such stories add dimension to a Caribbean world. To echo Chimamanda Adichie here, *Pictures from Paradise* saves us from a single story.

Pictures from Paradise: A Survey of Contemporary Caribbean Photography. 222pp. Edited by Melanie Archer and Mariel Brown with an introduction by O'Neil Lawrence. Released: 2012. Book layout and design by Richard Mark Rawlins. Publisher: Robert & Christopher Publishers. www.robertandchristopher.com

p22. Cover image: James Cooper, *Fishing Line #2* (2010). p23. O'Neil Lawrence, *Re-Identified 5* (2008). p24 Radcliffe Royce, *Nor Easter* (2011). Marlon James, *Janus* (2010). Holly Bynoe, *Imperial* (2010). Ewan Atkinson, *Paradise Terrace and a Mouthful of Water* (2007). p25. Gerard Gaskin, *Jayron Remy, Musician* (2011).

doubles with slight PEPPER



THE SCENE is a hospital. An elderly man is about to have a critical operation. But he has one request before he is wheeled into the operating theatre.

“Sumintra, I want to taste we doubles,” the man, Ragbir (Errol Sitahal), says to his wife.

“You cannot have that now, you are going for an operation,” his son Dhani (Sanjiv Boohu) replies as Sumintra gives in to the request.

“Just give me a piece. Break off a little piece,” Ragbir says. He is fed doubles, the popular Trinidad dish sold on the street and consumed there (though some may

ferry a few home or elsewhere for family breakfast). When Ragbir asks for piece, he is asking for peace of mind.

The scene is both comic and poignant. It points to the fact that *Doubles With Slight Pepper* is not really about doubles but the rituals that surround it. Ian Harnarine’s short, award-winning film is impressive: joyful yet melancholic, with good casting and a true heart.

Ragbir (who is called “a scamp” for most of this short film) has come back home to Trinidad after migrating to Canada. He had left behind Sumitra and Dhani, who works as a doubles vendor in the interim. Ragbir

tells himself he will to send for them when he begins to make enough money. “I still saying that,” he says, years later in the family kitchen after returning home at Christmas in a surprise visit.

Christmas affords the film some spectacular and unforgettable images: Dhani, dressed as Santa, cycling to go sell doubles; the family dancing in the living room, Christmas food and rum all around, the closing shot, with Christmas lights above Dhani’s head.

Like doubles itself there are many layers and many secrets are laid bare after Ragbir’s return. The revelation of one

secret in particular seems to hint at a transformation on Dhani’s part. At the start of the film he has a short voice-over monologue which works as both a form of characterisation and a lesson to audiences not familiar with Trinidad’s history of indentured labour, which, along with slavery and the genocide of the native populations, is the historic backdrop to the arrival of East Indians on the island. Dhani says: “I am a 104th generation Brahmin. That’s a lie. I come from a long line of poor and stupid coolies. I work under the blazing hot sun for donkey years.”

But by the end of the film, something has changed within his family, even if the ritual of doubles remains constant. “I am a 104th generation Brahmin. That’s a lie. I come from a long line of poor and stupid coolies,” he says. “They work under the blazing hot sun for donkey years, making English man rich rich. They make children that do the same thing. That’s me.” No longer, “I work” but “they work”. Will he leave it behind?

WINNER: Best Live Action Drama Short at the Genies 2012 (the Canadian Academy Awards). Selected as one of Canada’s Top Ten Short Films 2011. WINNER: BEST CANADIAN SHORT FILM at the Toronto International Film Festival 2011. Director: Ian Harnarine Executive Producer: Spike Lee Starring: Errol Sitahal, Sanjiv Boodhu, Susan Abraham-Hannays

*Trailer: <http://vimeo.com/27255211>
Website: <http://doubleswithslightpepper.com/>*

