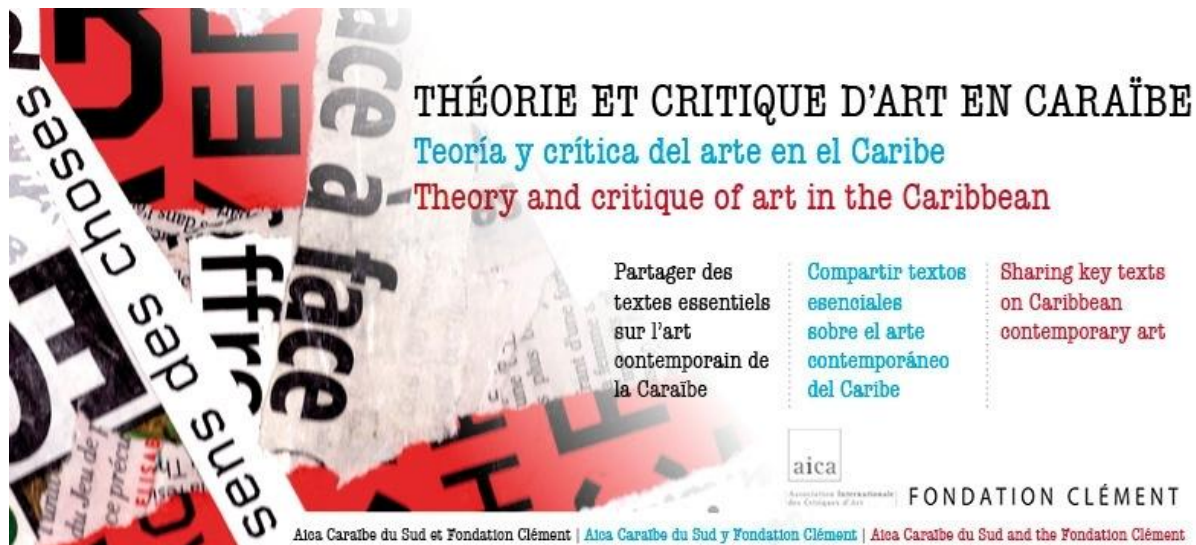


Theory and art criticism in the Caribbean

Sharing essential texts on Caribbean contemporary art

Aica Caraïbe du Sud and the Fondation Clément



Theory and Art Criticism in the Caribbean

During the 1980s, the artistic development in the Antillean archipelago went hand in hand with a will to analyze and contextualize in a critical manner the artistic activity in the region. Gerardo Mosquera, Sara Hermann, Annie Paul, Kobena Mercer, as well as Christopher Cozier and Yolanda Wood, attempted to redefine the notions of art criticism in the Caribbean. In so doing, they broadened the horizons of artistic practice in the region. This stance made it possible to transcend the frontiers of the Caribbean archipelago, and help bridge the gap between the different artistic disciplines.

This movement expanded thanks to the creation of reviews and magazines such as *Arte Cubano*, *Small Axe*, *Arte Sur* and *Arc Magazine*, which facilitated the development and diffusion of critical writing.

Beyond the art world, a group of Caribbean thinkers became attuned to the vitality of the region, adding their vision to the theoretical corpus of the time. Benita Rojo, Stuart Hall, David Scott, Edouard Glissant and Michael Dash developed a new analysis of the Caribbean, placing it at the heart of the cartography of contemporary thinking.

This project, initiated by two members of l'Aica Caraïbe du Sud, **Dominique Brebion** and **Carlos Garrido**, has the aspiration to provide access to fundamental theoretical texts to researchers, students, critics, curators, art lovers and visual artists from the three language

areas. The project's goal is to encourage exchanges thanks to the development of such a shared theoretical base.

L'Aica Caraïbe du Sud, www.aica-sc.net, a section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), intends to help enlarge the influence of visual artists from Martinique and the Caribbean, and create a network of connections between the different cultural partners of the Caribbean, thus overcoming the linguistic and geographical fragmentation of the region.

The Fondation Clément, the corporate foundation of the Groupe Bernard Hayot (GBH), aims to help stimulate the arts and the cultural patrimony of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. It supports contemporary artistic creation by organizing exhibitions at the Habitation Clément, it builds a collection of recent artworks representative of the Caribbean creation, and co-publishes artists' monographs. The Fondation Clément also manages an important documentary collection composed of private archives, a library on the history of the Caribbean, and an image bank. It also contributes to the protection of the Creole patrimony by stressing the value of traditional architecture.

Together they will guide this evolving project forward, making available a corpus of theoretical texts and critical essays on contemporary Caribbean art in their individual sites.

Each text will be inserted in English, French and Spanish, accompanied by:

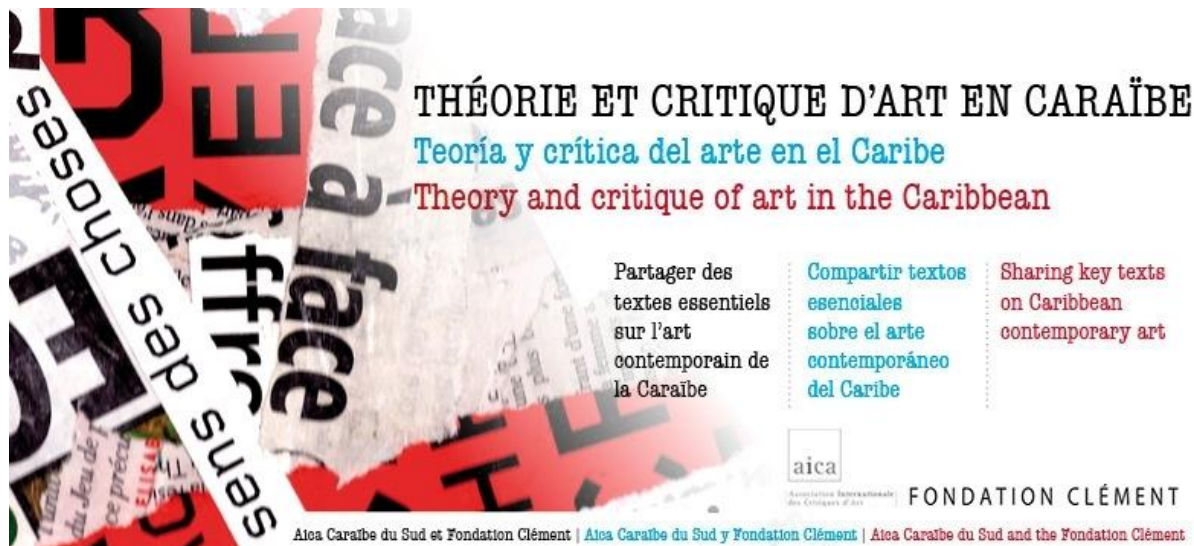
Key words.

An abstract.

A contextualization within the corpus of theoretical texts (what is its importance regarding other texts).

A biography of the author (1000 characters)

The precise reference of a work (title, author, editor, date of publication, ISBN and eventually an order form).



Keywords

Contemporary Caribbean art, international resonance, regional integration

Summary

The dynamic international expansion of Caribbean art in the first decade of the 21st century has brought it a new visibility, long after the Latin-American boom or the rise of Africa, however. It is true that attempting to give a general overview of the Caribbean is difficult due to its geographic dispersion, to the uneven economic development resulting from the after-effects of colonisation and to the structural asymmetry between the Lesser and the Greater Antilles. As a result, the Caribbean presence in major international events has remained limited. The restrictive approach that was in vogue until the 1980s, which mainly highlighted Afro-Caribbean mythologies, primitivism or magic realism, did it no favours. Yet, at the end of the 1980s, the Caribbean began to explore new visual languages. Although the promotional efforts underlined the lack of regional inter-connections.

The main events, originating in the Caribbean or outside, are then analysed. Their curatorial errors, linked to an uncertain geocultural definition of the Caribbean or to a principle of egalitarianism in the selection of regions, are highlighted.

On the other hand, the beneficial contribution made by the Havana Biennial, with its rigorous curatorial profile, opened the doors of international resonance to an emerging generation and gave rise to a new approach to Caribbean art from critics.

Context

This text, published in the *Atlantica Internacional journal* in 1999 and in an updated version in volume 2 of *Arte Sur* in 2010, examines an issue that is still topical: the progressive but difficult spread of Caribbean art to the international circuit.

International Circulation in the Caribbean

José Manuel Noceda

The second half of this decade is closing with great activity for the international circulation of visual productions from the Caribbean. At the end of 2007, the Brooklyn Museum inaugurated *Infinite Island*, the third large sample focused on the region after *Caribbean Vision*, 1995 and *Caribe insular. Exclusión, fragmentación, paraíso*, 1998. In the meantime, in recent months *Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art* opened November 14 at the Real Art Ways with 39 artists from the English-speaking Caribbean, particularly from Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados and The Bahamas, and *Global Caribbean-A Caribbean Contemporary Art Exhibit*, curated by Haitian Edouard Duval-Carrie for the Art Basel Miami Fair appeared early in December with 23 guest artists.

These and other international actions grant the visual productions of this part of the planet an international visibility that would have been unthinkable decades ago. Toward the eighties and nineties the boom of Latin American art took place thanks to considerable endorsement of curatorial projects originated in the United States and Europe. Also of impact were Africa's symbolical representations, very well documented in large group exhibitions sponsored by museums, particularly from the Old World. However, the art from the Caribbean still had to wait in order to see its progress rewarded by greater attention at world scale.

The insular or scattered nature of the Caribbean cartography, the colonial, neocolonial and postcolonial condition of its enclaves, historically tied to different metropolitan centers articulating the Spanish, English-speaking, French-speaking and Dutch territorial extensions, and the plurality of languages derived from it, have a negative weight when projecting the region as a whole. It has also been a zone of noteworthy abysses between the Greater Antilles and those islands or territories with much weaker institutional, expository and educational infrastructures or with marked time differences in the updating of movements and trends in culture, art and thought. Those asymmetries should be taken into consideration when judging the international circulation eventually attained by its expressions and artists and from the point of view and demands established nowadays for art by international events.

I recall how Federico Morais, in the today anthological essay on the ideology of international biennials, 1979, explained the scarce echo produced by the Caribbean vision and the subsequent exclusion in those days of the art of that origin from the central circuits, mainly based in the metropolitan enclaves. I refer to the words of Morais because they place us before a fierce exclusion of the Caribbean visual arts which hardly began to be shyly overcome in the decade of the nineties. The essay gave a detailed study, statistics included, of the curatorial principles of selection and awarding that guided the great sanctuaries of art promotion, like the *Kassler dokumenta*, the *Venice Biennials*, the *Paris Biennial* and the *Sao*

Paulo International Biennial. In the first three, few Caribbean names appeared in the lists of participants. In the Sao Paulo International Biennial –an extension in the western hemisphere of the profile imposed by the main international expositions that preceded it, particularly the Venice Biennial– the role of Latin America, with very few exceptions, was «... almost always that of increasing the statistics of foreign participation. Very good for this purpose are countries like the Dutch Antilles (6 participants), Barbados (1), El Salvador (5), British Guiana (2), Haiti (8), Honduras (2), Jamaica (1), Nicaragua (6), Panama (6), the Dominican Republic (7), Trinidad & Tobago (6)...»

The sustaining circumstances and experiences in Morais' essay are no longer the same. Toward the end of the eighties, the Caribbean visuality enters a phase of exploration and use of the new languages that will enable it to oxygenate its expressive language references and, starting in the nineties, to project more strongly a very different image of wide spectrum. If at sometime in the past isolated names like Wifredo Lam, Hervé Télémaque, Peter Minshall, Antonio Martorell, popular Haitian painting or the intuitive art from Jamaica were held as paradigms of a reality apparently non-existent beyond them, at present contemporary art attains a relative mobility beyond its frontiers. Today it is normal to find artists from the Antilles, Suriname, Guyana and the French Guiana well-positioned in circuits of New York, Miami, London, Paris or Berlin, enjoying artist grants and residence programs or taken into consideration for solo shows or group exhibitions. This entrance to the world scene corresponds to the logic of an age in which the global dynamics of culture and post-modernity, with its defense of fragments, favors the design of open, porous texts from the pluralism implemented by the axes of power. That «inclusivist» boasting encourages a better access to the circuits of dissemination and circulation of those productions considered secondary. The very crowded universe of old and particularly new biennials –estimated in more than 200– or the thematic macro expositions open space for the artists from the South after having ignored the cultural peripheries for years, although it is recommendable to observe cautiously this opening spirit; «pluralism may be a prison without walls», since almost always the environment in which these artists move continues to be secondary.

Many glances began to notice this ignored and «ultra peripheral» cartography, symbol par excellence of the cultural hybridism and of the plural identities defended by post modernity. But the evolution of that access to the global circuits is complex and not always very fortunate. First of all I mention other exhibitions in and outside the hemisphere that also responded to rather excluding mechanisms such as those described by Morais, and presented the Caribbean only from the point of view of the «primitive». It is therefore no surprise that *Arte fantástico latinoamericano*, paradoxically so familiar with some of the most exploited facets in the Caribbean, included only Wifredo Lam, José Bedía (Cuba) and Arnaldo Roche (Puerto Rico). Or that *Los magos de la tierra*, also in tune with much brandished concepts, was much more «selective» at the time of defining or pigeonholing the Caribbean spirit.

Omissions aside, up to the eighties the regional visual production exploited precisely themes that were very close to the profile of *Arte fantástico*..., that cornered it with proposals

derived from Afro-Caribbean mythology, the real-marvelous or García Márquez' magic realism, defining a particular line of creation based on the «cult» or the ontological interpretation of the cos-mogonal and philosophical schemes of ancestral Africa, which placed Caribbean art between the word –i.e., the myth– and the wall. Also focused on that sector of the myth-popular legacy was the project African Art. Ancestral Legacy at the Dallas Museum: Rigaud Benoit, Robert St. Brice, Gabriel Bien-Aimé, Edgar and Murrat Brierre, Georges Liautaud from Haiti; Everald Brown, Wil-liam «Woody» Joseph, Kofi Kayiga, David Miller, Sr., David Miller, Jr. and Osmond Watson from Jamaica; Amos Ferguson from the Bahamas and Ademola Olugebefola from the Virgin Islands. Only certain actions succeeded in granting a more anthropological turn to this approach of the African presence in the Caribbean; on the other hand, many derived in extremist speculations on the colorful formalism, the mask and the folklore. A segment of the critics drew benefit from this last orientation, boosting a race to the mythological attached to the syndrome of identity and condi-tioned at the time by market imperatives.

Historically, the geopolitical and linguistic fragmentation rein-forced inter-regional disconnections. That isolation is immedi-ately perceived when analyzing the promotional efforts of its arts. Following Arte del Golfo y del Caribe, organized in 1956 by the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, perhaps one of the pioneer projects as to the projection of this treasure, the region sank in not too ambitious attempts focused on solo shows, group exhi-bitions or bilateral exchanges between countries. Quite a few of these actions were subordinated to the umbilical cord of the metropolis and reinforced the rhizomatous nature and insularity of the context. This explains the late appearance of Caribbean Art Now, 1986, the first contemporary art group show of the English-speaking Caribbean, sponsored by the Londoner Com-monwealth Institute, or the presentation in 1989 of Vida y Color at the Stedlijk Museum of Amsterdam, with works by 27 artists from the Netherlands Antilles.

It should be highlighted that in the eighties and nineties several projects born in Europe to counteract North-South polarity schemes included artists from the Caribbean. This happened with *Al sur del mundo* and *The Other Story*, both in the United Kingdom and with artists from the English-speaking Caribbean; and with *Territorios de ultramar* and *Otro país. Escalas africanas*, which invited Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal and Raúl Speck (Cuba), Maria Mater O'Neill and Arnaldo Roche (Puerto Rico), Marcos Lora (Dominican Republic), Bruno Pédurand (Guade-loupe), Mario Benjamin and Franz Lamothe (Haiti), Stanford Watson and Robert «Africa» Cookhorne (Jamaica), Francisco Cabral (Trinidad & Tobago) and Marc Latamie (Martinique). These two exhibitions were sponsored by the Atlantic Center of Modern Art of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (CAAM), at times when the brothers Octavio and Antonio Zaya and Orlando Britto were curators at that institution and endorsed an unusual communication with the Caribbean, very much in tune with the three-continental policy proclaimed by the authorities of that Spanish autonomy in island territo-ries located in the periphery of the Euro-pean Union that favored a glance both to the neighboring African continent and to the islands on the other side of the At-lantic Ocean with which they are better identified from the geographical, cultural and idiosyncratic points of view.

In like manner, 1492-1992, *Un Nouveau Regard sur les Caraïbes* presents a solid review of the Caribbean curated from France by Espace Carpeaux on the occasion in 1992 of the Fifth Centennial of the Discovery and Evangelization of the New World, even though it preferred the representative nature to curatorial principles that would grant discursive clearness to the proposal.

Significant efforts also took place inside the Caribbean. In 1991 the International Trade Center in Curaçao was venue to *Gala de Arte*, with creators from Aruba, Curaçao, Suriname, Saint Martin, Saint Lucia, or French and Dutch resident artists in those territories. Two years later, in 1992, two punctual initiatives flourished for the region. I refer to the *Painting Biennial of the Caribbean and Central America* in Santo Domingo and *Carib Art*, a group exhibition in Curaçao, which covered an extensive but controversial range of thematic preferences, trends, styles, expressions and artists. Both options aroused great expectation for the so much cherished space of dissemination in the aim of constructing the «common destiny of the Caribbean», although their cultural efficacy was overshadowed by uncertainty.

Carib Art was a project of the National Commission of the unesco of the Netherlands Antilles that sent invitations to 35 countries in the region. Its philosophy granted each country an equitable opportunity of participation –a maximum of five works– and included a traveling show to the Caribbean and Europe for the main sample and one of reproductions. *Carib Art*'s concept was ballasted by an old axiom when it stated that «the use of loud colors is one of the most important features of the artists», thus confirming a perverse stereotype and false picturesqueness rather extended along the years when defining the visual identity of the region.

Santo Domingo presupposed a better prediction. Beyond the handicap of emerging as appendix of the whole fanfare in favor of the Fifth Centennial displayed during the term of office of President Joaquín Balaguer –the event was based on decree 171-91– it had its origin in the Caribbean itself, in the Antillean country with the greatest tradition in national biennials. Convoked by the Museum of Modern Art of Santo Domingo, the event comprised the entire basin. As in *Carib Art*, the invited nations enjoyed alleged equity since they could send between six and twelve artists each.

After four editions, earnest contradictions and restrictions obliged the biennial's leadership to reconsider some of its foundational principles. Its too traditional concept carried the aura of those mid 19th century Carré Salons at the Louvre –in which everything was accepted and which, as expressed by Francisco Calvo Serraller, caused a fracture between artists, public and critics– distant from contemporary forms of art and related events. From 2000 on, the existing painting biennial expanded its action range to the remaining disciplines and forms of art, making justice to a contemporariness that is ever less restricted to the pictorial bi-dimensionality but attached to the new artistic practices and supports, whether three-dimensional, photographic or using the video support. However, three years later it interrupted its cycle, although everything seems to indicate that the Museum of Modern Art plans to convoke it again at an early date. If its doors are reopened, in order to become a true option of plural interpretation and a tribune for meetings and the systematic review of the so

much de-manded visual happening, Santo Domingo needs to correct its curatorial and selection postulates as well as abandon false wishes of massiveness and egalitarianism that, in the long run, underline the abysmal dispro-portions between the territories in possession of a tangible tradition –Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica...– and the small enclaves with a budding progression –Antigua, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermudas, Curaçao, Grenada...– by considering participation restrictions when a numerous attendance becomes unsustainable. Also ineluctable is the har-monization of the criteria of the national selections with the expectations of the bi-ennial's curatorial team, capable of foster-ing its own discourse to avoid the anarchy of micro-selections through a common ar-ticulating principle; to question the role of prizes and jurors; to draw a better outline of the thematic interests of each meeting, and to eliminate the obsolescent ordering by countries and the incongruities posed by the unification of contexts with quite dif-ferent cultural physiognomies, such as the Central American isthmus, the continental Caribbean and the Antillean arch.

Apart from these and other possible considerations, both Carib Art and Santo Domingo should be regarded as part of a network of preceding events and initiatives that include the Carifesta, the actions displayed by Casa de las Américas or the Caribbean festivals, which favored the meeting and contacts of artists and critics at their inaugurations and the theoretical symposia that always accompanied them. In the particular case of the Santo Domingo Biennial, it has been the cultural territory in which the largest number of artists and poetics come together and con-front in the entire Great Caribbean.

The complexities that Santo Domingo was not able to solve had a different approach in Caribbean Vision, 1995. Exhibited at the Center for the Fine Arts of Miami, Florida, it rivaled with the large exhibitions of Latin American art curated on U.S. soil and pretended to be the first great group show of the Carib-bean. Its catalog had been endorsed by the texts of Derek Walcott, Peter Minshall, Shifra Goldman and Rex Nettleford. Francine Birbragher pointed out the follies of Caribbean Vision based on an inadequate conceptual definition in geo-cultural terms. «According to the introductory essay in the catalog –ex-pressed Birbragher– the Caribbean includes sixteen indepen-dent countries, five British colonies, one republic or «Common-wealth», one U.S. territory and six semi-autonomous members of The Netherlands (Kurlansky, 1992). Another definition also includes the countries of Central and South America border-ing the Caribbean Sea or the Atlantic Ocean, to the extent that these share with the islands the same colonizing history and cultural identity (Lewis G., 1969)». In the end, the critics con-cluded that the selection of the eleven participating nations did not abide by either one of the definitions.

Greater contradictions emerge beyond the catalog. Caribbean Vi-sion focused on the islands and Guyana. It evidently operated from the English-speaking Caribbean –Jamaica, I guess–; hence the fact that from 56 creators selected, 34 had that origin. The exhibition also reduced the number of nations involved. It invited Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, Haiti and Trinidad & Tobago, scantily represented small islands like St. Thomas and St. Vincent and ignored Martinique, Guadeloupe and the Dutch Caribbean. That selection, in turn, contained unjusti-fied disproportions. Jamaica was favored with 14 artists,

while the Cuban, Puerto Rican and Haitian participation was restricted to 6 artists. The Dominican Republic received only 4 invitations. Less understandable are the criteria for the artists' selection, since in some cases the original context and trans-territorial experiences were analyzed while in others, like Cuba, they settled only with the migration, fatally ignoring the rich artistic scene that survives all contingencies in the largest of the Antilles.

A very different reading is obtained from *Ante América-Cambio de Foco*, 1991, and the Havana Biennial. Louis Camnitzer considers *Cambio de Foco*... the first great Latin American exhibition produced in Latin America. In its cyclopean effort to design a model of inter-cultural interpretation coherent for the region, of presenting an America «within a very flexible concept, as a multicultural and meta-formation, additionally united by historical, geographical, economic and social ties», it included the Caribbean (André Pierre, Haiti; José Bedia, Cuba; Everaldo Brown and Milton George, Jamaica; Martín López, the Dominican Republic, and others).

In turn, the Havana Biennial emerges in 1984 in the field of the great international exhibitions as promotional alternative for the Third World –an expression that was very much in vogue in the golden era of political peripheries and their cohesion in the Non-Allied Movement and conclaves of underdeveloped or developing countries– without making it a programmatic target. Its outline soon found an echo in the global perception of the visual productions of the South, and favored substantial changes in the projection of the arts and artists from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. With that laboratory nature, as baptized by Louis Camnitzer, rather than with a vocation to imitate established events, Havana inserted itself in the debates on the otherness from the otherness itself by offering spaces to human, social, political and cultural reflection, and tackled issues and problems whose ideo-aesthetic zigzags do not turn their back to North-South relations but have a better approach to the South-South dialog or the inversion of the logic toward South-North impulses, which in the long run intensifies the cracks in the domination discourses from an openly subordinated position. In this regard, it has been a de-centralization experience beyond the overwhelming preeminence of the «Euro-American centrism». Following Havana, another wave of biennials was unleashed: Johannesburg, Cuenca, Kwangju, Ushuaia, Valencia, Istanbul, Prague, Moscow..., that attempt to evade the Venice-Sao Paulo model or that of regional events such as Lima, Mercosur, Santo Domingo, Mesótica in Costa Rica, the Biennial of the Central American isthmus... all of which widen the platforms of international dissemination for that art.

The Cuban initiative was much more profitable for certain zones from the South that had nothing to lose and much to gain, like the Caribbean. In the New World, the geo-cultural cartography was well delimited. North America was the guarantor of the mainstream. Latin America (i.e., Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela) maintained a position of privileged subordination with majority spaces ensured: *Arte Fantástico Latinoamericano*, Indianapolis, 1987; *El Espíritu Latinoamericano. Arte y Artistas en los Estados Unidos*, 1920-1970, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1989 (traveling until 1990); *Art in Latin America*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1989; *Lateinamerikanische Kunst*, Ludwig Museum, Cologne, 1993; *Latin American Arts of the Twentieth Century*, The

Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1993, just to mention some examples. The Caribbean was then an invention disarticulated by colonial remainders and the expectation of fragmentation.

The Cuban forum never established discriminatory distinctions for the Caribbean inclusion. A simple glance at the participation statistics of the ten editions celebrated up to the present shows a balance of more than 450 creators from the Caribbean invited to the event. With a massive participation in the first biennial in 1984, open calling and no selection criteria, the lists have notoriously decreased in the last seven biennials due to the logical adjustments in a much more rigorous curatorial profile imposed by time. Neither did it create fixed generational compartments; there we have the always novel poetics by Antonio Martorell (Puerto Rico), Peter Minshall (Trinidad & Tobago), David Boxer (Jamaica) and other established artists, in dialogue with artists with a shorter career.

Unquestionably outstanding as one of its greatest successes was to project artists with scarce international visibility starting with the fourth and fifth biennials, particularly an emerging generation whose discourses operate as turning points of concept, themes and language in favor of a renewing image displayed in terms of inter-texts, hybridism, contents and forms, with a questioning attitude of recovery of the critical sense of art, that practically connect the entire Caribbean: the islands and their continental portion, the large and the small territories. I refer to Osaira Muyale, Elvis López, Árida Martínez, Glenda Heiliger, Ryan Oduber, Aruba; Annalee Davis, Ras Akyem, Ras Ishi, Barbados; Belkis Ayón, Sandra Ramos, Abel Barroso, Los Carpinteros, the groups Galería DUPP, Enema and the Departamento de Intervenciones Públicas (DIP); Alexis Leyva (Kcho), Tania Bruguera, Eduardo Ponjuán, Carlos Gálvez, Esterio Segura, René Francisco Rodríguez, Wilfredo Prieto, Duvier del Dago, Cuba; Yubi Kirindongo, Tirzo Martha, Curaçao; Edouard Duval-Carrié, Mario Benjamín, Barbara Prezeau, Roberto Stephenson, Jean-Ulrich Désert, Haiti; Petrona Morrison, Omari Ra, Nari Ward, Charles Campbell, Albert Chong, Jamaica; Thierry Alet, Alex Burke, Ernest Breleur, Marc Latamie, Serge Goudin-Thebia, Martinique; Pepón Osorio, Anaida Hernández, Juan Sánchez, Víctor Vázquez, Chemi Rosado, Allora & Calzadilla, José A. Cruz, Néstor Otero, Charles Juhász-Alvarado, Nayda Collazo, Puerto Rico; Marcos Lora, Raúl Recio, Martín López, Belkis Ramírez, Raquel Paiewonsky, Tony Capellán, Jorge Pineda, Fausto Ortiz, Nicolás Dumit Estévez, Colectivo Shampoo, the Dominican Republic; Remy Jungerman, Suriname; Francisco Cabral, Christopher Cozier, Steve Ouditt, Abigail Hadeed, Trinidad & Tobago, among many others.

It is odd how these Caribbean formulas are perceived by the critics. In 1994, in an interview granted to the *Granma* daily of the Cuban capital, the Ludwig museums curator Becker praised the art of the Antilles he saw at the Fifth Havana Biennial. At the same time, its multiplying effect favors the international circulation of that production with the subsequent presence of Havana attendants in other events. Inaugurated months after the Havana meeting of 1994, the 22 Sao Paulo Biennial called together Elvis López, Stan Burnside (the Bahamas), Annalee Davis, Yubi Kirindongo and Marcos Lora. Likewise, during the opening week of that edition, the Cuban capital was visited by Hamdi El Attar, who was working in his project *Karibische Kunst Heute* for the Documenta Hall, so-called counter-dokumenta Kassel, and

invited artists he had met in Havana: Elvis López, Alida Martínez, Annalee Davis, Yubi Kirindongo, Víctor Vázquez and Christopher Cozier.

The Havana Biennial became an adequate promotional space for the Caribbean visual arts, since it emerged in circumstances in which that art was not promoted beyond its geo-cultural hinter-land. On Cuban soil, the peculiarities of Caribbean art interact and converse with productions from other contexts. As a result of that feedback, it enjoys a wider opening, a deeper contact with contemporariness. The Biennial makes Caribbean artists abandon the regionalist ghetto, rejects the Cubanization of the Caribbean commented by Alana Lockward, replaces the color, landscape and folklore perception schemes with those of identi-tarian processes, ethnicity and marginality, in the midst of a con-figuration that transcends national, regional and hemispherical frontiers in favor of an open spiritual dynamics.

It must be admitted that other initiatives taking place in the Caribbean territory have little impact upon the region. The Latin American and Caribbean Biennial of Engraving, the oldest international event of the Caribbean, today turned into the Trienal Poligráfica de San Juan, takes into consideration the graphic disciplines with little tradition in a web dominated for decades by painting, drawing and sculpture, with the exceptions of the host country, Cuba and Puerto Rico. In turn, M & M Proyectos organized Puerto Rico 00 (2000) and Puerto Rico 02 (2002) in San Juan. As interventions of public and urban spaces, they were attempts to regard the world from the Antilles that unfortunately disregarded the context and their neighbors pretending to gain access to certain mainstream circles. These two interrupted editions scarcely had the presence of Caribbean artists other than those from the host country.

However, a balance of the last ten or twelve years shows events like the ones mentioned at the beginning of this text, with greater dividends for the projection of the Caribbean artistic practices beyond their regional frontiers. With María Lluisa Borrás and Antonio Zaya as curators, *Caribe insular. Exclusión, fragmentación, paraíso* revealed the maturity attained by Caribbean post-colonial contemporariness. It exhibited works by 43 artists, all of them with systematic incidence in the local and regional circuits. In 1998, the 30th International Painting Festival of Cagnes-sur-Mer was fully dedicated to the Caribbean on the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, gathering 51 guests at the Grimaldi Château-Museum. Much more recently –start-ing in 2002 and under the direction of Régine Cuzin– *Latitudes. Tierras del Mundo*, has included numerous Caribbean creators both in Paris and in their travels. In 2007, *Infinite Island* aimed at the younger generations with an uneven list of participants. Still unrevealed are the points of view defended by *Global Caribbe-an-A Caribbean Contemporary Art Exhibit* and *Rockstone and Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art*.

All these events and exhibitions produce and favor a network of scholars, curators and gallery owners interested in a better articulation of the international projection of the Caribbean artistic panorama. They likewise represent valuable taxonom-ic attempts to understand and disseminate that visual reality at different scales. They act like a sort of Eleguá, the god of Yoruba mythology who opens doors and roads by creating higher visibility for those poetics with the greatest impact and extending their expressive achievements in the world's cultural network. But to a great extent they are still actions conceived and «plotted» from outside, and

therefore subject to points of view and outlooks that do not originate in the Caribbean, a region that must encourage endogenous efforts like those of Santo Domingo, Curaçao, Havana and others to project its others to project its contemporariness with its own voice.

Notes

This is an updated version of the text «El arte del Caribe y la alegoría de Eleguá», published in *Revista Atlántica Internacional*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 1999.

I refer to the text «Ideología de las bienales internacionales e imperialismo artístico». In *Artes plasticas na America Latina: do transe do transitorio*. Civilização brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 1979, pp. 189-209.

Ob. Cit. Morais mentions Cuba among those exceptions, «...country that regularly appeared biennial, usually with numerous delegations In 1961, for example, with 41 artists».

Arte Fantástico Latinoamericano was prepared as cultural action for the Pan American Games of Indianapolis, USA, 1987.

Eva Cockcroft mentions this exhibition in the essay «Los Estados Unidos y el arte lati-noamericano de compromiso social: 1920-1970». In *El Espíritu Latinoamericano. Arte y Artistas en los Estados Unidos, 1920-1970*, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, 1989-1990, p. 202.

CAAM and its magazine *Atlántica Internacional* became significant spaces of dissemination for the artists from the Caribbean. Under the leadership of Antonio Zaya, the *Revista de arte y pensamiento Atlántica Internacional* became an exceptional editorial platform for those authors interested in the study of the art of the cultural peripheries, including the Caribbean and Central America. For example, number 31 from 2002 was entitled *El istmo dudoso: Centroamérica*, a monographic issue dedicated to that strip of land that connects both Americas. Also significant has been the inclusion in its pages of texts on the Caribbean and projects of Caribbean artists. After leaving the CAAM, Orlando Britto continues that opening task on behalf of Caribbean contemporary art through diverse projects and spaces. Special mention deserves *Espacio C* in Camargo, Santander, which unfortunately collapsed due to the official intolerance of the government of that Spanish region. At the moment of writing this article, Orlando is touring the Caribbean with a view to include artists in *Horizontes insulares*, an exhibition proposal included in the project *SEPTENIO*, Canary Islands.

See catalog of the exhibition, p.4.

In 1992, I published the article «El Caribe a la vista» –supplement *Ventana* from *Listin Diario*, Santo Domingo, October 11, p.2– in which I valued with optimism the role that the Santo Domingo Biennial could play as part of a network of preceding events and initiatives that included *Carifesta*, the actions undertaken by *Casa de las Américas*, The festivals of the Caribbean and the Havana Biennial itself.

Francine Birbragher. «Visiones caribeñas. Pintura y escultura contemporánea». *Art Nexus*, Bogota-Miami, number 19, January-March, 1996, p.100.

See the presentation of the project curated by Gerardo Mosquera, Carolina Ponce de León and Rachel Weiss. *Luis Angel Arango Library*, Bogotá, 1991, p. 10.

For example, one of the first technical actions of the event was to convoke the International Symposium of Caribbean Visual Arts during the II Havana Biennial, in 1985, with attendance among the lecturers of Robert Farris Thompson (USA), Gerardo Mosquera, Yolanda Wood, Adelaida de Juan and Roberto Segre (Cuba), Juan Acha and Rita Eder (Mexico), Denis William (Guyana) and Antonio Martorell- Rosa Luisa Márquez (Puerto Rico).

From a massive participation that reached almost 41 guests in 1984, including the Cuban artists, already in 1994 it went down to 35 participants.

Much has been said about the rise of Cuban artists during the Havana Biennials, particularly during the Fifth Biennial in 1994. This was the so-called «weed generation» –a term coined by Gerardo Mosquera–, which replaced the huge void left by the mass exodus of its predecessors. However, this edition and subsequent ones also introduced a significant number of young, already established Caribbean creators.

Biography

José Manuel Noceda is one of the curators of the Wifredo Lam Centre and of the Havana Biennial. He is a specialist in Caribbean and Latin American art. He was the curator of the Cuenca Biennial in Ecuador in 2009 and the Triennial of Contemporary Art in the Dominican Republic in 2010.