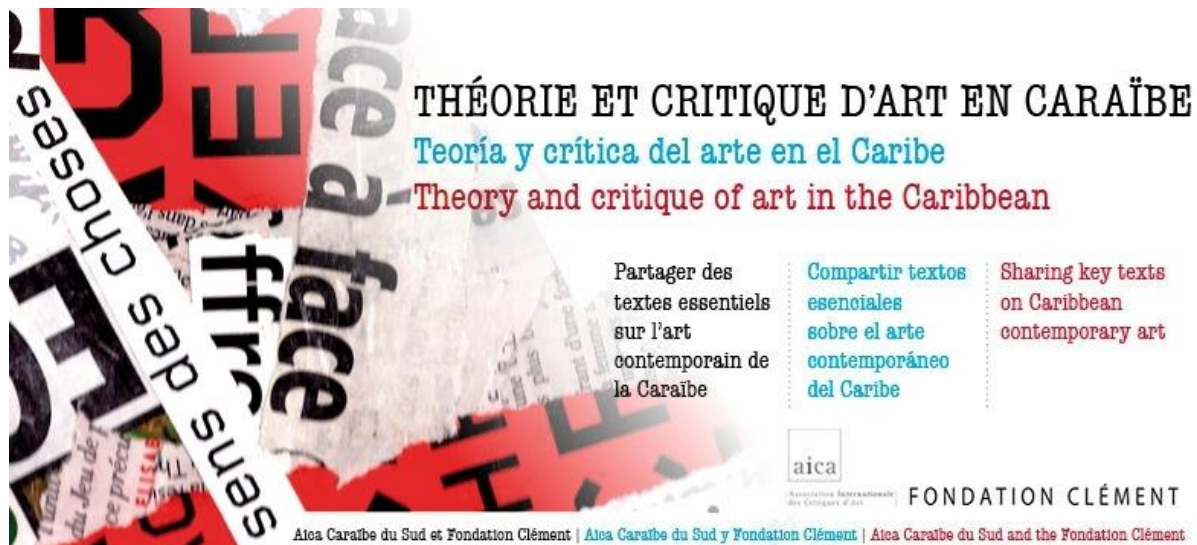


Theory and art criticism in the Caribbean

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:

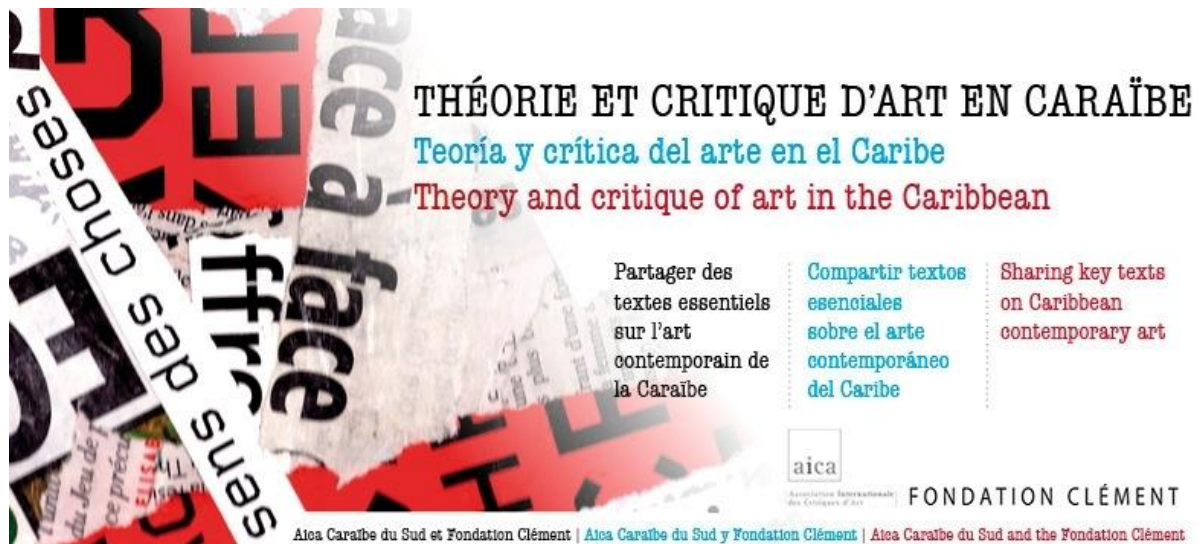
Key words.

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).



Daniel Lind Ramos and the Visual Politics of Race in Puerto Rican Art

Fabienne Viala - University of Warwick

Keywords

historical memory, national identity, racial identities, Puerto Rico, African cultural heritage, codes of representation

Abstract

This article discusses the work of the painter and installation artist Daniel Lind-Ramos. The Puerto Rican artist explores the complex relationships that exist between historical memory, national identity and racial identities in Puerto Rico; more specifically, he shows the taboos that weigh on African cultural heritage in the Estado Asociado Libre, through a style of painting that is always symbolic, sometimes allegorical and containing “keys” that bring the political and the metaphysical into a dialogue on canvas and in space. For Lind-Ramos, art is the expression of an Afro-Puerto Rican hyper-consciousness that claims the right to redefine the codes of representation and visual perception of a Caribbean socio-political reality that addresses its colonial status.

Contextualisation

This article was written in the context of Fabienne Viala’s participation in the RITA (Race in the Americas) research group and her collaboration with the Institute of Caribbean Studies at UPR (University of Puerto Rico).

Daniel Lind Ramos and the Visual Politics of Race in Puerto Rican Art

Fabienne Viala - University of Warwick

1. Race, Memory and Cultural Nationalism in Puerto Rico

Since Puerto Rico became a Free Associated State in 1952, cultural nationalism has shaped the representation of Puerto Rican identity on the island. National and cultural identities have been praised, taught, commemorated and monumentalised since the 50s as elements of an idealised, homogeneous and miscegenated society, allegedly enriched by the influence of two colonial powers at different times in history: Spain and the USA. Language, historical heritage and race currently continue to play a major role in defining Puertoricanness in the mainstream cultural, educational and political institutions on the island. The result is an ongoing taboo on black Antillean heritage and the subtle exclusion of slave-related cultural legacy from the collective imagination.

The guardian of Puertoricanness in the Free Associated State is the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Institute for Puerto Rican Culture), which promotes the mainstream and official culture on the island. Created in 1955 by Ricardo Alegría, the ICP resisted culturally to American acculturation mostly via the valorisation of Spanish culture. The seal of the ICP (fig1) shows the Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de Leon, who founded San Juan in 1509 after he travelled with Columbus in his second voyage, with a grammar book in his hands. He stands in between a taíno Indian holding a cemí (a religious statue) and a black slave holding a machete (used to cut sugar cane in the plantations). A caravel is in the background. On this seal representing the myth of a harmonious miscegenation, the three cultures - Spanish, Arawak and Black - are equally represented but with attributes that connote and denote, their different importance in the Puerto Rican imagination. The visual message of the seal is that Spain brought culture, language and civilisation; the indigenous Caribbean people encountered by the Spanish conquistadors are represented as possessing a religion, and therefore a soul, in the vein of Las Casas's defence of the Indians as creatures of God. But the black slaves are remembered only as a working labour force for the plantation.

The status of Estado Asociado Libre (Free Associated State) is ambivalent, in the sense that it defines Puerto Rico as free and, at the same time, as integrated to the United State. This resulted in ambivalent representations of Puerto Rican identity, emphasized since the 1990s, at a time when the status of the island was debated through a referendum. Since 1992, and the grand scale celebration of the fifth centennial of Columbus's arrival on the island, the Spanish heritage has been even more glorified, and Spanish became the official language on the island. But far from contesting the American belonging, praising Hispanic origins projected the image of Puerto Rico as an exceptional Spanish Speaking American colony. Another consequence of the 1992 anniversary is the overrepresentation of the Taíno heritage in the arts and education on the island, as opposed to the almost invisible representation of slavery and African heritage.

Indeed, the 1992 commemorations in Puerto Rico were on one hand meant to encourage a total erasure of the violence of the past, and on the other hand, to celebrate the modernity of Puerto Rico as an ongoing process, from Columbus, who hispanised the island of Borinquen, to the integration of Puerto Rico to the USA as a *Estado Asociado Libre*. In terms of cultural memory, this resulted in praising the indigenous heritage, in quite a folkloric manner (taíno craft fairs, taíno beauty prizes, taíno bedtime stories for children, and all sort of essentialist consumption products), as examined by Arlene Davila: "The taíno constitutes the most easily evoked symbol of a legendary past that is mystified and permeated with nationalist overtones" (Davila 1997, p71).

A good example to understand the racial narration of history on the island is the series of historical comics *Historia Gráfica de Puerto Rico*, which was published at the time of the 1992 commemorations. In the first fanzine, we can see Columbus being congratulated by the Kings of Spain after returning from his first voyage. His caravels then leave for the second trip, and land on the island of Borinquen: the native people encountered on the shore ask the Spaniards for protection against the cannibals, that they call Caribs. The vignettes eventually present the habitat and the way of life of the Indians identified as Taínos. Each object is named in Arawak language, accompanied by a definition in Spanish. Such a graphic and didactic narration simplified history for the young and average Puerto Rican readers. The historical past was manipulated to promote the illusion of a Taíno-Spanish marvellous encounter.

The second fanzine dealt in the same romanticised style with slavery and the African slave trade. Yet, the focus was mostly on the trade and not on the plantation, and nothing informed the reader of matters concerning slave habitat, cultural practices, religion, or even sufferings, as it was the case in the fanzine focused on the indigenous people. Furthermore, the second fanzine on slavery was a limited edition that is now only available on the rare books collection of the University of Puerto Rico library, while the other one, dealing with the taíno culture, has been republished several times (Viala 2014).

The tale of miscegenation in Puerto Rico is mainly a Taíno/Hispanic one that excludes Blackness. The fact that the Black component was not integrated in the commemorative 1992 events had to do with the official definition of Puerto Rican cultural identity as the homogeneous result of a Spanish and Indian encounter. It goes without saying that such a limited representation of Puerto Rican identity does not suit all the Puerto Ricans. When it comes to cultural politics, many artists, journalists, historians and educators work towards a more complex representation of their society, acknowledging not only that racism exists in Puerto Rico, that racial discrimination remains a common practice, but also that race is a taboo with damaging consequences (Bonilla Silva 2010). The novelist, professor and activist Mayra Santos Febres analysed how the fear of "everything black" led to the silencing of Black Puerto Rican history in the school curricula and in the cultural representations on the island. Santos Febres showed that blackness is associated to irrationality, located in a cultural liminal space, characterised as non-intelligible, sensual, and primitive, as opposed to the values of civilization provided first by Spain, eventually by the USA. Black Antillean identity, in literature and arts, is associated with other Caribbean people coming from

countries considered underdeveloped, such as the Dominicans, the Cubans or even "worse", the Haitians (Santos Febres 2009).

This is when Daniel Lind Ramos's visual imagination becomes really interesting to understand and question race in Puerto Rico. Performance and visual arts are the cultural fields where the consensual cultural perspective of the Free Associated State has been strongly invalidated in Puerto Rico. More specifically, I consider Lind Ramos's art pieces, from paintings to installations, to be a laboratory for addressing issues of race in relationship to identity, memory and belonging in Puerto Rico. Merging the political, the mythical and the everyday life in the manner of chronicle of the unsaid, Lind Ramos unmasks the multiple components of Caribbean identities hidden behind the national delusions of his island, on the canvas but also thanks to daily objects transformed and displayed into symbolic art installations. The combination of painting, sculpture and religious altars contributes to unveil the taboos on colonial history that continue to produce anxiety and divide the Puerto Rican society according to skin colour and dependency complexes. Through his unconventional use of colours and figuration, Lind Ramos sheds light on the Afro-Antillean heritages that contributed to the transculturation of the Hispanic Caribbean societies, despite the fact that blackness was minimised and Caribbean identity deprived of its black component to fit in the standardised and racial definition of identity in the Free Associated State.

A black artist and an art teacher in Puerto Rico, Lind Ramos claims back his Antillean belonging without denying his Puerto Rican identity. He questions the limits of the political tales produced by competing cultural nationalisms on the island, with a view to recover the syncretic cultural identity of Puerto Rico through art. Constructed as political riddles and Afro-Caribbean religious altars, his paintings, installations, and sculptures invite the spectator to remember race in Puerto Rico so to let his fellow subalterns see, whatever is their skin colour and blood descend. Without any didactic intentions, Lind Ramos offers a visual re-signification of the relationship between memory and heritage in Puerto Rico.

2. The Carnival as a way of seeing

Born in Loíza, where he still lives and has his studio, Lind Ramos integrates some typical elements of his hometown as symbolic fragments of local Antillean identity on the canvas. They are not illustrations of the local folklore, but meaningful elements that participate in the creation of a deeper metaphysical, political and visual riddle for the spectator to decipher. For the sake of clarity, I will briefly explain the socio-historical context of Loíza before analysing the way in which Lind Ramos creatively transforms the local cultural environment into a visual and symbolic riddle.

The town of Loíza is the blackest area of Puerto Rico, considered as a black ghetto by the whiter and privileged Puerto Ricans of San Juan. The population is mostly of African, slave and Yoruba descent. Loíza celebrates carnival, a popular festival inherited from slavery as almost all Caribbean carnivals, which were the opportunity for slaves to practice their religion in disguise. In Loíza, the carnival starts each year in the last week of July, on the day

of Santiago Apostol also called Santiago Matamoros (Saint James the moor slayer). Represented on his horse with a sword, St James comes from the Spanish catholic heritage, where he is a hero who protected Christianity against the moors. There are four major characters that perform the street procession: the caballeros (knights) who stand for the Spanish knights and dress in a colourful manner reminiscent of the Spanish hidalgos; the vejigantes, a name which combines the words vejiga (bladder) and gigante (giant); they represent the devils or evil spirits (the moors) and are dressed with colourful capes, and masks made of painted coconuts, on which long and sharp sticks are nailed; their role is to fly around and pretend to beat people with the inflated animal bladder they carry on a stick. The viejos (old men) represent the poorest and armless civilians, often performed by the local musicians who play music in the cortege; finally the locas (the queer) are men disguised in women, following the carnivalesque tradition of swapping around gender roles and appearances.

Santiago o la transformación de la memoria (fig2) is a free inspiration of the Loíza carnival in which Lind Ramos questions the meaning of historical memory in the Free Associated State. This art piece, mixing painting, sculpture and installation, invites to resist collective amnesia, and to claim back African and slave heritages into the collective imagination of the island. The main characters are displayed on the canvas following the tradition of divine apparitions and annunciations. In the middle, Santiago Apostol appears on a throne as a black slave, naked, muscular and holding a machete. He wears a white scarf on his head and a ring on his right ear. Around him, two vejigantes (top left and bottom right corner) and a caballero (bottom left corner) are trying to handle him the traditional objects associated with the Spanish Saint Santiago Matamoros: the helmet, the horse, and the sword; while at the top right corner, a ghostly, evil and black cherub attempts to cover Santiago's black face with a white mask, typical of the masks of the *comedia dell'arte* and of the Venice carnival. The mask is dazzling white, as the horse on the opposite left hand corner. The musicians representing the viejos are black; they play drums wearing bronze masks in the manner of Greek antique tragedy, as if they were performing a persona. Puerto Rican identity is about disguising blackness, either hiding it, either whitening it, with the varnish of Catholic, European and Spanish traditions.

Lind Ramos has also remarkably worked the light and colour effects in this painting to create a bluish dark background, as if the scene was taking place under water or surrounded by a purple mist as in a dream. At the bottom of the painting and carved inside the frame, there is an installation typical of the altars of *santería* (the afro-Caribbean religion inherited from the Yoruba slaves, mostly present in Cuba, but also to a lesser extent in Puerto Rico). In *santería*, the altar is the sacred place to display the objects attached to an *orisha* (a god). Here, the machete, the sugar canes and the chains clearly stand for slavery; the sword and the cross represent the Spanish heritage, while the *cemi*, a religious terracotta recipient that the *taíno* Indians used in their religious rituals, represents the indigenous people of the Caribbean. Instead of the dark and gloomy vejigantes that are taking control over memory in the painting, we see in the altar the colourful coconut masks that they were during the Loíza carnival. The top part (the painting) is in dialogue with the bottom part (the installation) in the manner of a complementary, reparatory and inverted photographic negative. While the painting tells the

story of national amnesia, the objects below celebrate the transculturated Caribbean identity of Puerto Rico. While the protagonists of the carnival - vejigantes, caballeros, viejos - look like ghost figures attempting to manipulate memory, their attributes displayed in the altar, and carved by Lind Ramos himself, give a sense that transculturation is real while cultural nationalism is fake. The painting tells the story of a delusion, and makes it a visual illusion, while the altar performs the actual cultural reality of Puerto Rico as everyday life objects.

Besides, the altar is clearly associated with the orisha Oggun, the god of war, resistance and strength in santería. Oggun holds a machete, his metal is iron and his colours are black, red and purple. The bottom installation therefore invites the spectator to re-read visually Santiago Matamoros as the orisha Oggun, identified by the impassive and daring look of his eyes, the machete in his hands and the purple light all around him. While the painting narrates the ongoing exclusion of black heritage in Puerto Rico, the installation fosters resistance to amnesia, and invites to transform memory. This empowering effect culminates in the celebration of transculturation and of Caribbean belonging in Puerto Rico.

Lind Ramos neither claims his negritude nor does he preach black power in Puerto Rico. As a black Puerto Rican citizen and artist, he creates visual scenarios where black-Antilleanness is a way of seeing differently, in order to acknowledge the cultural and social reality of Puerto Rico. Blackness is not a topic represented on the canvas (that would be painting black people doing what white people think black people do); rather, blackness is part of a set of symbols that dialogue with each other to defolklorise the Loíza carnival and invalidate the stereotypes attached to black people in Puerto Rico. Lind Ramos's creativity resonates with what the black feminist and art critic bell hooks identified as visual politics in *Art on my mind* (1995) : talking about black art does not mean talking about black representation in art, but rather, it must be a "revolution in the way we see, in the way we look" (Hooks 1995, p4).

Lind Ramos paints to investigate the reality (Rivera 2009, p99); he belongs to those "black folks who are interrogating essentialist assumptions about black identity, and engaged in an act of decolonization of the mind that empowers and liberates" (Hooks 1995, p11).

3) Racial and Political Allegories: Black Skin, White Masks

For Lind Ramos, the mythical, the political and the everyday life are one single thing, as he said: "I take from here and from there and I create an image where everything is in a way atomized, this is my way to interrogate who we are, where we come from and where we are going /yo cojo de aquí y de allá y hago una imagen donde todo este de cierta manera atomizado, es una manera de investigar lo que somos, hacia donde vamos" (Rivera 2009, p100, my translation).

The act of painting, and the choice of art as a life occupation, indicates an awareness of, and a reaction against the censorship on racial issues in the mainstream Puerto Rican cultural politics. Lind Ramos considers that "the majority chose not to be black. We decided

to be white. Nobody wants to call himself black here". *El Elector* (fig3) examines the types of racial, cultural and political pressures that each artist must face in Puerto Rico. In the middle of the painting, the black painter kneels down on the floor where three colours are available on the palette: blue, red and green. Each colour represents a political tendency in Puerto Rico: blue is the colour of the PNP (Partido Nacional de Puerto Rico), claiming statehood; red is the colour of the PPD (Partido Popular Democrático), supporting the status quo and the semi-autonomy of the Free Associated State; green is the colour of the independent Party on the island, the PIP (Partido Independista de Puertorriqueño). While kneeling down to choose his colours, the artist is also holding a white mask with his other hand, half covering his face. The interpretation is left open whereas he is putting on or taking off the mask. In either ways, the artist's political choice seems to be conditioned by race and racial identity.

Lind Ramos invites the spectator to examine politics and race as the two sides of the same coin in Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican artist is trapped in a socio-political situation where he is compelled to become a perpetual elector without being fully free to create, tied by the short-sighted and antagonistic choices given to Puerto Ricans in terms of identity and cultural belonging. Fanon's views in *Black Skin White Masks* are here transferred to the Free Associated State where racial identity is not only judged according to the racist and moral criteria of the acculturated and colonised mind, but also made subservient to a political determinism responsible for tearing apart the Puerto Rican community. On the palette, a black mask recalling the mask of a vejigante stands for another cultural belonging, Afro-Caribbean, in resonance with the figure of a king in the background : it is Changó, the Yoruba god of thunder. His burning spear is pointing to the right hand corner of the painting, in opposite direction to the one towards which the black character is kneeling at the bottom left corner of the canvas. The African heritage and religious syncretism remain in the background, as something that is not an obvious choice for the painter and that he cannot see because of the white mask that covers his eyes. But it is Changó in the background who represents strength and action, creating a hurricane represented by the red ball of winds coming from his spear. Changó is the orisha in charge of justice and he is celebrated in the background as a reparatory figure that could mend memory and cure the identity complexes of the acculturated Puerto Ricans. The need to accept one's roots is urgent in Puerto Rico, as suggested by this painting.

Encrucijada de la Burundanga (fig4) is another variation of the same racial and political dilemma. The main character this time is a black woman holding her head in her hand, something that could mean despair, doubt, worry or sleepiness. She is naked with a white scarf on her head, representing slavery. Here it is not historical slavery but mental slavery, and the limits of willpower in Puerto Rico, that is the main theme of the painting. To understand the emotional drama represented on the canvas we need to put together the many symbols displayed on the painting. The crossroad in the title is a strategic place in *santería* (as it is the case in other afro-Caribbean religions like voodoo in Haiti). The orisha associated with the crossroad is Elegua in Cuba and in Puerto Rico (and Eshu in Haiti). He is the god of destiny and destination and he holds in his power men's ability to decide for themselves and make choices in their mortal life. The crossroad in this painting appears as a variation of the

notion of election that was pressuring the artist in *El Elector*. The crossroad appears here in the shape of a black vejigante mask with arrows pointing at the four cardinal points. The political struggle between the three main parties on the island is represented with the house on the background, at the right hand corner, where we can see the three political colours, blue, red and green. The nation is a source of sorrows for the Puerto Rican subject, who cannot identify with any of them. Changó and his spear appear in this painting like in *El elector*, but this time he is a half-human/half-animal creature; a hurricane is also beginning to roar in the background. At the top of the painting, bottles and other objects are displayed as containers awaiting for offerings to the orishas, while at the bottom, the objects of an altar in *trompe l'oeil* are painted to represent the divine forces at stake in the painting and to question the power of illusion. The whole art piece is an invitation to see by ourselves and question the meaning of things. The name *Burundanga* in the title has also several meanings. In Caribbean Spanish, a *burundanga* is a mixture, often used to qualify a dish made of several ingredients and improvised on the spot. A *burundanga* also refers to something that is incoherent, and in contemporary Puerto Rican Spanish, it has taken the negative meaning of nonsense, cacophony and chaos. Lastly, the *burundanga* is the name of a drug used to annihilate the willpower and the consciousness of the victim (mostly used in rape crimes). In this painting, the crossroad of the *burundanga* symbolises the unconsciousness of the Puerto Ricans, whose aptitude to choose and think by themselves is numbed by the acculturated status of the Free Associated State. Lind Ramos is not giving answers, but assembling visually symbolic elements to trigger multiple questions. The painting aims at educating the spectator's willingness to reflect on his own identity, instead of adopting the racial and political belonging that has been predefined by cultural nationalism on the island.

4) Motherland, Belonging and Popular Culture

El bautizo (the Christening) pushes further the questions of cultural origins and racial identity in Puerto Rico (fig 5). The figure on the left is the Puerto Rican singer Tego Calderon. He is painted in the manner of a street mural, with the texture typical of colour sprays used in graffiti art. Tego Calderon is a very important figure of Puerto Rican music and popular culture. He gained international recognition for his style of musical fusion, mixing reggaeton and African bomba. Born in Santurce, a popular neighbourhood of San Juan, Tego Calderon has dedicated many of his songs to criticise the hypocritical assumption about harmonious miscegenation in Puerto Rico. He has openly protested against racism and racial discrimination. More specifically, he showed solidarity with the black people of Loíza, and stood against the negative stereotypes attached to them.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find him in Lind Ramos's imagination. Calderon, like himself, is an artist who believes in the richness and importance of popular culture in Puerto Rico, stemming from different racial and cultural origins, in which the African influence was essential. In the painting, Tego Calderon becomes the main protagonist of a christening, which is the ritual corresponding to the initiation in the *santería* religion. Interestingly, the initiators are here characters of the Loíza carnival but they are performing a role that is far

more obscure than their usual role in the carnivalesque folklore. The vejigante on the top right corner, in red, the caballero kneeling at the bottom right corner, wearing dazzling golden colours, and the loca, a bluish naked character with both feminine and masculine traits, are reaching one hand towards the initiated. In the middle of the painting but in the background, two unidentified figures wearing black masks recall the ghost figures of vejigantes that were present in Santiago or the transformation of Memory. One is holding a sword, the other a white carnival mask. They stand in the background, without being much involved in the initiation and they seem to be powerless witnesses. The white horse of Santiago appears in the left hand corner, as a blurred fragment of the Spanish holy legend of Saint James.

The Bautizo celebrates the existence and the vivacity of Afro-Caribbean roots in Puerto Rican popular culture. Tego Calderon, with his left arm, is holding a newborn bathed in bright red light. The red and black mask in the altar below the painting indicates that the newborn is actually Oggun, the orisha of war and resistance. Tego Calderon, together with the character of the carnival, are performing the role of initiators in the ceremony. The christening of a newborn within a syncretic religious ceremony implies a voyage back to origins, mixing the political and the spiritual and therefore designing a new holy Puerto Rican family. Tego Calderon, as a figure of contemporary popular culture contextualises the relevance of Afro-Antillean beliefs in the present, while the visual representations of the traditional characters of the folklore of Loíza, representing the past, are transformed in the painting so they can participate in the celebration of the original and culturally mixed identity of the island.

The painting *Viaje a la fertilidad* (Voyage to fertility, fig 6) gives a sense that returning to their forgotten and repressed origins is a necessary path for the Puerto Ricans willing to acknowledge their extra-national cultural roots. The black woman seems to be looking at the moon and at the horizon, longing for a return to a native land, echoing the middle passage and the forced displacement of people attached to the history of slavery in the Caribbean. A turtle is symbolically carved with ceramic pieces in the manner. It is a taíno symbol of fertility and abundance. The turtle is also an animal that symbolises the island, and that is an endangered species: Lind Ramos wants to foster a sense of solidarity and unity among his fellow citizens. *Voyage to fertility* gives a sense that it is urgent to keep the cultural origins of Puerto Rico alive, and particularly the African roots of the Puerto Rican people. The jars and bottle on top are typical of the containers used to represent the essence of the orishas (copper, iron, clay, sand). At the same time, those painted glass bottles are touristic items that Lind Ramos transformed, from commodified tokens of folklore to religious symbol of a real altar.

Daniel Lind Ramos's visual politics questions the peripheral and subaltern situation of African and Caribbean identity in Puerto Rican culture, arts and humanities. Not only is Puerto Rican blackness culturally silenced, as examined by Santos Febres, but it is also the case with Puerto Rican Art, which is not as visible as it could be, internationally as well as in the field of history of arts. The art critic Nelson Rivera showed that Puerto Rican artists are not included in the most recent anthologies of Latin American Arts, because they are considered as American; they do not participate easily in Caribbean art events since Puerto Rico is a Spanish speaking American territory, considered either Latin American or North

American by the English Caribbean countries (Rivera 2009). For Nelson Rivera, Puerto Rican art nevertheless exists as a national art, "hyperconscious of his specific identity, critically conscious of its colonial status and claiming to be visible". Lind Ramos's visual imagination is representative of Rivera's manifesto. Hyperconscious of the overwhelming political issue in Puerto Rico, Lind Ramos criticises official history to invite the spectator to decolonise his perspective on race, heritage and memory and to claim back syncretism and metaphysics as a cultural legacy.

i Ricardo Alegría is considered a pioneer in anthropological works on the Indian taínos of Puerto Rico.

ii The status of Free Associated State is almost unanimously considered by the Puerto Ricans as a euphemism to name what is a colonial status. They disagree on the benefits that such a status can bring to the island. Three different political tendencies on the island are in constant struggle: the annexionists (estadistas), in favor of statehood: they want to become a state of the United States fully, with all the citizenship rights that come with it (like voting for the US president); they are represented by the PNP (Partido Nacional de Puerto Rico). The autonomists want to keep the current status quo, they are represented by the PPD (Partido Popular Democrático). A minority claims total independence (Partido Independista de Puerto Rico).

iii The Governor at the time, Hernandez Colón, encouraged grand scale celebrations that included the architectural embellishment of the colonial buildings of San Juan, a boat race (Regata Colon 92) with the replicas of Columbus's three caravels, the visit of the King Juan Carlos of Spain, and the creation of a cultural commission for the quinqucentenary that promoted thousands of cultural events related to the Hispanic colonial times. For more on this, see my work, *The Post-Columbus Syndrome* (Viala 2014).

iv The Arawaks, the Caribs and the Taínos are the main groups that were leaving in South America and the Caribbean when Columbus arrived in the region. In the Spanish Caribbean, colonial history has often divided the Caribs, considered as cruel cannibals, and the Taínos, idealised as the "good indians".

v While in Cuba, santería became part of national identity with the Revolution, it was repressed and debunked as folklore in Puerto Rico, considered as a sign of savagery, superstition and irrationality coming from black people. Lind Ramos is not santero. He respects it as a cultural and essential element of black, African and syncretic cultural identity in Puerto Rico.

vi Gloria Watkins, academic, educator and activist, defined the concept of intersectionality as a way to address gender issues in relationship to race, class, politics and history. She chose to call herself bell hooks as a decapitalized pen name, for feminist and ideological reasons. *Art on my mind* in 1995 was the first anthology of black art critic.

vii Reggaeton is a musical genre in the Caribbean that fused reggae with Spanish lyrics, soca, dancehall and hip-hop. Bomba is a traditional African music and dance inherited from slavery in Puerto Rico.

viii Words of Nelson Rivera, whom I interviewed in San Juan de Puerto Rico, in February 2013.

Biography

Fabienne Viala, Associate Professor, University of Warwick (United Kingdom)

Holding a PhD in Comparative Literature (Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2004) on the historical novel and philosophies of history (parallels between the work of Marguerite Yourcenar and Alejo Carpentier), and specialising in Caribbean and Latin American Literatures and Comparative Cultural Studies, Fabienne Viala teaches Latin American and Caribbean Literatures (Hispanic, Francophone and Anglophone) as well as comparative cultural analysis at various universities, such as Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, the University of Yucatán in Mexico, Cambridge University and King's College London in England.

She is currently a Professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Warwick and Director of the Yesu Persaud Centre for Caribbean Studies. Her research focuses primarily on the Caribbean as a transcultural and cross-linguistic space (as a region of archipelagos in contact) and is committed to promoting dialogue between the various actors in the Caribbean world, going beyond national, political and idiomatic boundaries. In recent years she has specifically explored the issue of memory and historical legacy from a pan-Caribbean perspective, based around various works on the visual and performing arts, and literature.

Her latest book, *The Post-Columbus Syndrome* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) is a comparative analysis of the various ways in which Christopher Columbus and the “Discovery of the New World” were commemorated at the fifth centenary in 1992 (in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic) and anti-commemorated (in Martinique, Jamaica and Haiti) according to political and nationalist agendas on the one hand, and artistic, national and supranational agendas on the other.