Caribbean Art Criticism:

Fashioning a Language
Forming a Dialogue

A 3-day symposium presented by

AICA Southern Caribbean

August 28-30, 1998

Bridgetown, Barbados

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aica

association internationale des critiques d'art
international association of art critics
asociación internacional de críticos de arte

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INTRODUCTION

AICA Southern Caribbean is a newly formed chapter of the International Association of Art Critics and currently represents members from Barbados, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. One of the greatest challenges facing us with the establishment and growth of this new chapter of AICA is the problem of communication amongst the members in our various countries. But this problem is endemic within the visual arts in the Caribbean, and one of our heartfelt aspirations for AICA Southern Caribbean is that it will foster greater interaction amongst the critics of the region with increased opportunities for the sharing of information, documentation and support.

Certainly there needs to be a greater awareness and recognition of the role of art criticism within the Caribbean. We also need to assess the current state of art criticism in the region and attempt to foster a dialogue about its future development.

In an effort to facilitate such interaction and growth, AICA Southern Caribbean has undertaken to organize a three-day symposium on Caribbean Art Criticism. The symposium sets out to examine the present state of art criticism in the Caribbean and focus on the necessity of evolving a language or dialogue which describes and assesses the visual arts of this region. We hope that through this process, a greater understanding of the relationship between the arts in the English, Spanish, French and Dutch areas will develop. It should serve as a complementary event to the upcoming Carivista, (a festival of Caribbean visual arts organized as a lead-up to Carifesta VII in St. Kitts), which is scheduled to take place in Barbados in November 20 - December 7 1998.

THEMES

Theme 1
Defining Identity
"Caribbean Identity" is the theme for the upcoming Carivista. "Identity" - whether individual, national, regional, racial, sexual - has been a dominant focus for many contemporary artists and critics. This theme considers the content, range and necessity of such investigations in the Caribbean.

Theme 2
The Internationalization of Caribbean Art
The last decade has witnessed a growing interest throughout North America and Europe in Caribbean Art. This theme examines both the external and internal impact - the presentation of and response to Caribbean art abroad; and the ramifications within the Caribbean.

Theme 3
The language of Caribbean art criticism
This theme assesses the present role and standard of Caribbean art criticism including variations within the different language areas. Writings within the region as well as those about the region may be considered. In addition, the future of Caribbean art criticism, its aims and goals, is an important and challenging concern.

Allison Thompson
President
AICA Southern Carribbean

AUTHORS,
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3/THE LANGUAGE OF CARIBBEAN ART CRITICISM

THEME 1
DEFINING IDENTITY

Modernism, Postmodernism, and Caribbean Identity

BY

DAVID A. GALL

This paper investigates the relationship of modernism and postmodernism to Caribbean identity. Caribbean people have to decide whether the ideals embedded in the projects of modernism and postmodernism are continuous with their own aspirations and needs, in other words with the project of Caribbean identity construction. To do this they need to examine the three terms modernism, postmodernism, and Caribbean identity. We must have discussion about them so that we will begin to see how we think about these issues within the context of Caribbean visual arts. But most of all that we may have a better understanding of ourselves and how we should shape our lives.

Modernism and the Caribbean

Modernity, like most historical phases, is formed of contradictory aspects. Its most dominant aspect is the inflated arrogant human ego full of the presumption of its right to be dominant over others, its sense of essential superiority. Among its symptoms are the following: various forms of inflated nationalisms, racial, ethnic, and regional; inflated masculinity, the prevailing phase of gender inflation; of civilization to nature; of urban to rural living; of mechanically efficient industry to the insufficiency of human craft; of atomic individuality to community; of present knowledge to past; of rational to intuitive perception and representation.

Subordinate to that moment of modernity are the various contrary perceptions and expressions of life and human relations. There were/are those affirming our shared humanity; that self identity cannot be what it is without the other. There is its skepticism of dogma, its willingness to investigate things and life, its confidence in human creativity and ability to solve problems, its interest in knowing others. While these counter tendencies ameliorate to some extent the gross inflation of the dominant modernist trend, they nevertheless often complicitously serve its programme.

What is important from the point of view of countermodern perspectives is that from within the modernist moment itself they offer alternative modes of being that can displace and replace the "modernist" one.

Historically modernity began with the Caribbean as its site of confrontation; with the European attempt to reduce native Americans and Africans to the status of mechanical objects without subjectivity. Originally it is identical to the triumphant march of European imperialism and global dominance. By the nineteenth century modernism had moved, so to speak, out of its first and second gear in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into its third with the industrial revolution where it seemed set for the smooth sailing of "progress" in the twentieth. By then certain institutional features were firmly established: the nation state becomes the major political entity; capitalism—which includes the state capitalism of socialist countries—becomes the way trading relations are rationalized; industrialism the process by which the earth's resources are exploited and consumer items produced; mass education, formal and informal—i.e. either through established schools or through mass media—becomes the main means by which identities are informed and transformed. The twentieth century, however, exposed the many consequences that attend a progress secured by the flawed conceptions of self, human worth, and relationship with the earth that dominates modernism. Two world wars, the horror of the Nazi project of genocide, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, should have brought the human costs of modernity home to the world, especially to Europe and Euro-America. Instead it split them into competing spheres each of which fancied itself the champion of democracy and socialism respectively, to which other nations were to be wooed or coerced.

In spite of the diverse pointers to the contrary European and Euro-American assumptions of superiority persisted and pervaded their evaluations of the modern situation. This was as much the case within the visual arts as it was outside. Inflated with their colonial domination of most parts of the world, and with the scientific and technological progress that fed off and facilitated the degradation of others, most modernist European writers regarded the changes taking place on the European art

scene as expressions of European ability to transform the raw material of other "inferior" cultures into sublime realizations of "Western" culture. These changes on the European scene, generally regarded as starting in the nineteenth century but decisively in the twentieth, were labeled "modern art." But why wasn't European art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries regard as modern, especially since the engine of modernity was ignited in the seventeenth century (cf. Giddens, 1990)? Why have they been regarded simply as the historical elaboration of a Renaissance aesthetic? Why was the label "modern" pinned exclusively on European art of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, especially when they appear, stylistically at any rate, radically different to that of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through which the birth and development of modernism occurred? What did happen on the visual art scene in its early modernist phase?

The camera and industrialization effectively expanded the techniques of visual production, but also tended to send those who still employed traditional media of two and three dimensional representation into serious introspection about their social role and the assumptions of their tradition. Three camps of visual expression began to develop, with tension between them but also areas of overlap and interaction: those of film and visual mass communication, design in the service of industry, and those of "fine arts." Fine arts has come to mean those invested with the greater burden of personal expression and the avant-garde responsibility of being critical and of pushing the boundaries of European visual expression to colonize new areas. It is to fine artists and their products that the labels "artist" and "art" refers, almost exclusively. The two burdens mentioned, plus the tension with the other two streams of visual production, along with being situated in the commodifying context of capitalism, made endemic the insecurity of fine artists and drove them into a frenzy of appropriation, experimentation, and into sometimes dramatic, sometimes absurd, sometimes megalomaniac forms of expression. The succession of genres that have filled up the European and Euro-American fine art scene, subsumed under the categories of modernism and postmodernism, were symptomatic of its insecurity as much as, if not more than, its creativity. The task of distinguishing its insecurity from its creativity has been helped very little by a body of critical writing that was to a

great extent as enamored as the artists by this semblance of unceasing development in European fine art. The insecurities had to surface sooner or later, writers in the nineties have begun to probe the insecurities of modernism and postmodernism. However, if there are problems with application of the label "modern" to the phase of European art it is used to cover, we may legitimately wonder how illuminating the label "postmodern" is?

Postmodernism

A good place to start our examination of postmodernism is with Suzi Gablik's *Has Modernism Failed?*, a text in which she gives some general definitions of modernism and postmodernism and airs her views on them. Of the term postmodernism specifically she writes that:

> Its use arose synonymously with that of pluralism towards the end of the '70s, and at that point it referred to the loss of faith in a stylistic mainstream, as if the whole history of styles had suddenly come unstuck. . . . If modernism was ideological at heart—full of strenuous dictates of what art could and could not be—postmodernism is much more eclectic, able to assimilate, and even plunder, all forms of style and genre and circumstance, and tolerant of multiplicity and conflicting values. (1988, p. 72)

In her text Gablik clearly is not happy with postmodernism, she despairs that because of its pluralist ethic postmodern art has lost its moral centre; it has too much freedom she says, "arbitrariness is the pitfall of unlimited freedom. How can meaning survive when nothing acts as a regulating principle within the practice to regulate the presuppositions and interests involved?" (Gablik, 1985). Persisting in some of the fallacies of modernism herself Gablik contends that "choice is a modern idea; there was no choice in traditional societies" (Gablik, 1985). Certainly an exaggeration but she does recover the understanding that "tradition" stabilizes change while "innovation" disturbs regularity and mechanical convention.

Another critic, Andreas Huyssen, while not condoning a postmodernism of the "anything goes" variety, is less pessimistic about it as a whole.

> The postmodern sensibility of our time is different from both modernism and avantgardism precisely in that it raises the question of cultural tradition and conservation in the most fundamental way as an aesthetic and a political issue. It doesn't always do it successfully, and it often does it exploitatively. And yet, my main point about contemporary postmodernism is that it operates in a field of tension between tradition and innovation, conservation and renewal, mass culture and high art, in which the second terms are no longer automatically privileged over the first; a field of tension which can no longer be grasped in such categories as progress vs. reaction, Left vs. Right, present vs. past, modernism vs. realism, abstraction vs. representation, avantgarde vs. Kitsch.(Huyssen, 1990, p.267)

Quite insightfully Huyssen sees that at the core of the postmodernist "erosion of the triple dogma of modernism/ modernity/ avantgardism" is the problem of otherness (Huyssen, 1990, p. 269). He therefore counsels the need for a postmodern culture of "resistance" which must be context related. In other words both writers see the need for the reinsertion of a moral centre to art practice. Both these authors write from within the European Diaspora, and still carry—certainly in Gablik's case—some of the assumptions of modernism. This is why reading K. G. Subramanyan is like a breath of fresh air. About the pluralism that postmodernism affirms, he comments;

> Really speaking they have been living in the global village to a greater or lesser degree for quite a long time—even before McLuhan invented the term. And eclecticism of some kind or another was a constant (and in our view essential) factor of modern life (and art). But this was underplayed,

> even kept under cover, to save their thesis of the absolute originality and innovativeness of modern Western artists. (1992, p. 78)

In other words pluralism and eclecticism did not start with postmodernism but was there in early modernism smothered by the imperialist impulse of modern criticism. Certainly the "postmodern" admission of the inflation of modernist postures is a step forward, but looking from outside Western artists and art critics seem, to quote Subramanyan once more, "unable to lay aside the mantle of idiosyncrasy and innovation" (1992). They still have frontiers to crash and colonize for "art." And to do this they appropriate endlessly. In modernism it was from non-western cultures. In the less arrogant moment of postmodernism and after is there really much difference in their motives? For Huyssen it is the likes of Christo's running fence that recovers a posture of resistance. For Gablik, who would "reenchant" art with a more caring aesthetic, the models are the likes of Mierle Ukeles—handshaking performance with garbage collectors; Andy Goldworthy—who, impelled by environmental concern, trips for example to the north pole to make ice sculptures have them photographed and presented in metropolis; Dominique Mazeaud—makes a ritual of cleaning up the Rio Grande; Krzysztof Wodxzko--makes vehicles for homeless people. These models supposedly transcend the cynical openness of postmodernism. Yet they hardly seem less modern than their predecessors. Can one want anything more modernist and inflatedly "heroic" than Christo's running fence, Wodxzko "homeless" vehicles, or Goldworthy's *Touching North*, the ecological sensitivity of which chills my third world spirit with its wanton indulgence in the name of self expression?

Maybe Western theorists have jumped the gun a bit, modernism is not as behind us as the post in the postmodernism would have us think. Like Anthony Giddens (1990) I think we are more in a period in which modernity has become more radicalized and universalized, though my argument for such a position would disagree with certain aspects of his. The globalizing of modernist assumptions means; (1) that the competition between national egos is no longer dominated by European cultural hegemony to the extent that it was in the early phases of modernism, they have

begun to accept their cultural hybridity. The early concept of the nation as a homogenous racial, linguistic and cultural group of people tied to a specific geographical location has to be replaced by a concept that embraces the increasingly multicultural, plural, hybrid nature of societies. (2) That the simple tactic of seeing modernism "out there" in a western or European body blinds us to being aware of its presence within ourselves. Modernism is more subtle because it appears like a father, mother, brother or sister, but it is no less problematic than its earlier counterpart. Plurality, hybridity, eclecticism, individualism, all mean that art theory, practice, and criticism have to be grounded in principles that are far more broad based and subtle than those that we have inherited from both the crude and subtle phases of modernism.

Caribbean Identity and Countermodernity

Let me tie these reflections on modernism and postmodernism to the issue of Caribbean identity. First we need to understand the difference between our situation and developed countries such as Europe, United States, Japan etc., and other societies that have ancient traditions of art and manufacture and in some cases vast populations such as India, China, and countries in Africa. The Americas is the site that has borne the cost of modernity in the most totalized way, and of the Americas the Caribbean archipelago has remained the most vulnerable. It is in the Caribbean that the native American population was subject to near total extinction and loss of control over their homeland; here African populations were transplanted and put through the most horrible form of slavery and dehumanization; it is here that East Indian and Chinese peoples, through a subsequent indentureship plan came to be part of the Caribbean community. It is here, not in Europe, that European plantocracy and merchants lived in constant fear of rebellion and retribution. If Europe was/is the site of modernism's projection and celebration, then the Caribbean was/is the site of its resistance, lamentation, and terror. It is here that vulnerability, cultural displacement, plurality, hybridity, and constricted circumstances for the inculcation of atomic individualism, conjoin to make imperative the comprehension and adoption of countermodern traditions and philosophies.

Because of the parasitic character of colonialism and modernism, development in Europe meant underdevelopment in its colonies. This included underdevelopment in the three streams of visual production that have emerged with modernity, film/ mass communication, design for industry, and the fine arts. We should look carefully at the human and economic costs of reproducing in our context the fragmentation and tension between these three streams that may be less consequential in the context of large countries but severe in ours. What we have to recover from modernism is certainly not the distention of its schisms, but the complementary counterbalancing tension that was the objective of its countermodern insights

Let me briefly highlight some of these insights. Non-western art forms and "modern" European art forms are a position that exposes the fallacious basis of objective realist assumptions in which modernist thought had heavily invested. They exposed a variety of different reality levels and aspects existent along with and behind objective appearances and optical fidelity idioms of representation. As such they are important to any initiative that seeks to counteract the tendency within modern societies to mass produce identities seemingly more informed but less in control of the transformation of their subjectivity. While mass schooling has helped many it still remains an instrument that seeks to impose shapes on people rather than one that seeks to assist the growth of the individual. Visual mass media, which employs the realist idiom, is the primary informal instrument of mass information and mass identity formation; often it reproduces the social hierarchy expectations of modernism and colonialism because it is not at the service of the creative energies of Caribbean peoples.

From a different aspect of modernity, industrialization, came a similar threat to the development of a more sensitive individual and community both as a producer of objects and as a consumer. Countermodern aesthetics opened the door of self-representation through visual expression to a diversity of visual forms that were global in their idiomatic range, thus making visual processes potentially a more widely accessible instrument through which the average person could embark on a journey of substantial intuitive interaction with very different modes of being,

affecting thereby transformations of themselves through their own agency from within, rather than being shaped from without by the mechanical inertia of society and tradition. This larger potential accessibility to the self-transformative processes of art traditions that is an outcome of the confluence of cultures has been given little or no importance by modernism. Rather, the institutions that were precipitated by the forces of modernity, namely, museums, galleries, art criticism, art history, and art education, all tended to emphasize the exceptional character of the objects they displayed and of the artists who made them. In the context of modernism, especially in the presence of the nation state and capitalism, the net result of this emphasis was the creation of a pantheon of Olympian artist gods, with the museum and national galleries as their grand temple, and art critics and historians as their mediating priests. It is unlikely that we can accept these institutions in the form that modernism has conceived them. We will either have to transform them or create forms suitable to our needs.

What are the principles on which a countermodern thinking must be based, in which countermodern action must be rooted, and on which Caribbean identity must be founded? The answer lies in the term itself, we must look for the opposite type of attitudes and postures to those that are central to modernism. Following such a process leads to the following:

(1) If self inflation was the characteristic of modernity, then the counter position on which we must found our aesthetics is humility, less self-consciousness. This is nothing new and radical. Mature artists have long realized that in creative work one may begin with "personal ideas" but sooner or later these are superseded by what the work needs to make it "good," "beautiful," and true. This attitude is not necessarily adopted in other areas of an artist's life or the creative process, especially when, corralled as we are in the fine art circus the competitive aspects of art making seem to demand that you stay ahead of the global pack if you're first world or catch up if you are from the third. What we have to understand is that being in step with others does not necessarily mean being in step with our profoundest and true Self.

(2) As incomprehensible conflictual plurality dogs modernity, we must seek to recover from the plurality of our heritage a more comprehensive model of art theory and practice. By so doing the insecurities that plague the Western art scene will not be mindlessly reproduced by regional artists, or privileged by critics both desperate to look intellectual. In such a model non-Western traditions will not be reduced to mere tributary status to the heroic proposition of the West as world culture.

(3) As modernity secures the importance of innovation by denigrating the role of tradition and convention, and secures dynamism by presuming the socio-historical stagnancy or inflexibility of non-Western cultures, we must seek to recover the appropriate roles of innovation and tradition in the process of self-transformation, and the memory and significance of transformations in our non-Western heritage of visual art production. The latter is especially critical to our plural and hybrid situation for none of us in the Caribbean should entertain one sided histories of self.

(4) Where modernity, in its crude and subtle form, oscillates between inflated romantic notions of self identity and the empty cynical one of postmodernity—its meaningless buzz of shallow pluralities, there we must recover the different roles played by the moments of the formless and constructed personal self in a philosophy and practice of self-regeneration, not see them as competing terms. In essence we will be affirming all forms of expression, but also making it imperative that we ask when, where, and by what means can we realize the moments of humility/selflessness and Self-confidence—rather than self consciousness—in any instance of innovation, tradition or convention of art practice?

To summarize: Modernism and postmodernism are not so different as they are made out to be. Indeed, postmodernism carries forward the impulse of modernism. Identification of countermodern principles is imperative for Caribbean countries. These principles, if adopted, will carry us beyond the skewed polarizations of modernism, put us in touch with our deepest Self, and in step with its surest moves. Caribbean visual arts identity, ironically, will be secure and dynamic not so much by looking a particular way, that is by chasing after this form and that to be in fashion, but by being a particular way.

NOTES

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Imaging the West Indies: Visual Iconography as the Language of The Colonial Discourse

BY

ALISSANDRA CUMMINS

This paper is an attempt to explore some of the implications of the encounter of peoples, whether direct or indirect, within the "New World" of the Caribbean in the years which separated the unselfconsciously late-medieval explorer from the self consciously modern exploiter. It offers an interpretation of a number of interrelated and overlapping attempts to make some sense of the process of interaction which resulted from Columbus' accidental landfall in October 12, 1492. "Distant lands, and in particular the Indies," wrote the Spanish explorer Antonio de Ulloa, " strike the judgement of those who encounter them at a distance as very strange . . . From this it follows that when they recognize that what is in them is new, it is as if, in reality they passed over into another world." (1) The spaces that separated the European from those 'others' he was to encounter were spaces of dissolution, menacing areas where civility could so easily dissolve into barbarism. But isolation could never be so complete. For generations the settler looked to Europe as the source of legitimacy, and as a model on which to construct the new Spain, new England, new France. This paper is concerned with exploring some of the many ways in which the newness of the Americas was recognized, confronted and explained in visual terms, and the impact that this had on the history, and of course art history, of the region.

Nature- the argument runs- had been created in a state of potentiality, as an inert driven mass whose actuality could only be recognized through the purposeful action of men. It was the European belief that to transform nature in this way was a crucial part of what it is to be a man; for Nature had been given by God to man for his use. Men were thus encouraged to see in the natural world a design of which they were the final beneficiaries. Those who understood this, and hence could use science to control nature, were 'civil' or ' civilized', and those who did not were either 'savage' or barbarian'. Discovery in this sense had always been, and has remained, the prime

objective of European science. And the discovery of the West Indies in particular, came to be described and then mythologized as a supreme example of a particular kind of scientific achievement. It was this supposition which led to the implied assumption that the 'discovery' of the Americas had, in some sense brought the peoples of these places into the real world.

In 1611 Shakespeare's last complete play the Tempest was performed before the Court at Whitehall. The play was written for an audience who would be more likely, Trincuto admits, ' when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will layout ten to see a dead Indian'. One of the most famous plays in the history of Theatre, the Tempest demonstrates on the theatrical stage the struggle for power enacted more than a century earlier on the stage of the Caribbean region, despite being situated in the Mediterranean. For the first time the character of an Indian is analyzed in a variation on the theme of a 'brave new world'. Caliban deprived of his territory, is presented as the incubus of Sycorax a 'foul witch'. Prospero deprived of his Dukedom, becomes the island's sole 'human' inhabitant and thus is established the balance of power enacted on a global scale. Prospero as a human equals civilization and thus automatically earns the right to take control from the disproportionately misshapen 'inhuman' orphan Caliban. At first the exiled Prospero being of superior mentality and spirit:

> Us'd thee
> (Filth as thou art) with human care, and
> lodged thee
> In mine own cell . . .

Indeed Caliban confirms this:

> When thou cam'st first
> Thou strok'st me, and made much of me:
> wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't: and teach me how
> To name the bigger light, and how the less
> that burns by day, and night: and then
> I lov'd thee

> And show'd thee all the qualities o'th'isle,
> The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and
> fertile..(2)

This generous sharing of knowledge and resources is one of the traits of the gentle Arawaks which Columbus first admires in a four page letter, initially published at Barcelona, and later published at Rome and at Basel as De Insulis Inventis Epistola in 1493. In it he recorded that the natives of Hispaniola, the Taino 'go naked as their mother bore them, men and women alike'. They are 'very well built, with very handsome bodies and very good faces . . . but they are amazingly timid'. Columbus continued in awed tones that 'when they have been reassured, and lost their fear, they are ingenuous and liberal with all their possessions . . . if one asks for anything they never say no. On the contrary they offer a share to anyone with demonstrations of heartfelt affection and they are immediately content with any small thing, valuable or valueless, that is given them'. In all the letter was published nine times in 1493. There were nearly twenty versions by 1500. It made an enormous impact but that initial generous admiration for the Indian soon disappeared.

The prints which accompanied the Basel Epistola were amongst the first European representations of the indigenous Amerindians and their historic encounter with Columbus. While they purported to represent a true image of this meeting, in fact they were little different from the norms of the period and could easily have represented any landscape, ship or people. In fact they may have been reprinted from pre-existing woodcuts in the printer's shop, with little connection to an actual record of Columbus' experience apart from the nakedness of the unknown tribe. Nevertheless the crude lines, limited format, indistinct landscape and nonexistent perspective do, in a rather unexpected fashion, manage to convey the essence of that first encounter. The tension and curious expectancy of the voyagers, and the timidity and gentle eagerness of the inhabitants. All of the elements of Columbus' wonderment at encountering these people is encapsulated in such a scene. Essentially then, this story of Columbus and the Indians has formed the basic matrix from which 500 years of human relations had emerged. Both text and image together ennoble a meeting

whose narrative of the Colonial/European discourse has repeated itself over and over again since the end of the 15th Century. Prospero and Caliban, John Smith and Pocahontas, Robinson Crusoe and Friday, Inkle and Yarico. Each of these is essentially a different version of the encounter between the primordial 'instinctive' Caribbean and the civilised 'intellectual' European. In effect these stories can be situated within the broader paradigm of the Colonial discourse.

The meeting between Amerindians and Europeans was decisive for both in completely opposite ways. For the Amerindians it meant devastating change in their cultural, political and economic landscapes - few societies survived the upheaval. For the European the meeting gave impetus to the drive for capitalist and empiricist goals - an expansion of their nation states to the colonies. The continuing theme which emerged was the claim of rightful title to territory in the struggle for possession. Therein lies the heart of the situation. One could not call it a dilemma because Columbus had no doubts at all about the appropriate nature of his strategies. In the Caribbean he had found a people who did not have any recognizable religious creed but 'believe that power and goodness dwell in the sky, and they are firmly convinced that I have come from the sky with these ships and people'. He further notes that this was not because they are stupid; indeed he found the Amerindians to be 'men of great intelligence'. Nevertheless, Columbus felt that all Indians were 'fitted to be ruled and to be set to work to cultivate the land'. In effect he had no difficulty in the inevitability of their slavery, a view which caused Las Casas some discomfort later on in his editing of the Admiral's logbook. By this time Columbus had encountered the ugly but fearless natives of the island of Caniba, or Carib, a name from which Shakespeare later created the anagram Caliban - a name reflective of the cannibalistic tendencies, with which every Amerindian became associated forever afterwards.

Discovery was however, only the first moment of the European encounter with America. What followed was a slow and somewhat painful process of assimilation. The conquerors and the colonizers did their best to transform this 'New' world and its inhabitants into a likeness of the Old. Caribbean flora and fauna (not excluding the indigenous people) were forced into classical botanical and biological categories.

The Amerindians, and even this term is fraught with consequences of which we should remain very much aware, were located and relocated in a variety of temporal and spatial relationships to the European, and also the Asian. These first impressions set the pattern by which everything which was observed was evaluated. The attitudes and assumptions enshrined in the literature, both written and visual, of this encounter, the bulk of which were produced by missionaries and merchants each with their own agendas, were quickly enhanced by the imagery of these people created by European artists. As I am dealing with ideologies rather than events, I have chosen to look at a few of these sources which seemed most clearly to reflect the climate of opinion. This has meant largely, though not exclusively, a reliance on printed works, as they would have received the widest circulation.

Theodore de Bry the German protestant engraver, was the first to illustrate the literature of American travel with any sort of consistency. His great series of printed books with their large number of beautifully executed copperplate engravings, brought to a broader European public the first popular visualization of the exotic world opening up across the Atlantic. America or the Americas if we would be more specific, brought to the 16th century world the need to explain and depict the curious and novel world of Caribbean people, animals and plants all treated at one and the same time with both the impersonal and deeply personal agendas of their several purveyors. In effect his *Historiae Americanae*, published in 14 volumes from 1590, was the first picture book of the New World. The fourth and eighth volumes were devoted to the West Indies (1614) and Guyana (1619) respectively. With the Renaissance of European science and learning running at full spate, accompanied by the development of highly efficient printing and engraving techniques, de Bry seized the opportunity to make widely accessible material which had until then, been largely restricted to a small segment of the population. Here once again we must examine the question of who was de Bry, what were his sources and what were his intentions? The successful Frankfurt engraver and publisher was one of a new breed of businessmen who saw the profit to be made from fueling and feeding the curiosity of the European public. De Bry spared no expense and no efforts to acquire the best

materials and to spend "diligent pains in engraving the pictures on copper plates, to render them clearer...".

De Bry selected his sources very carefully. French Huguenot Jacques le Moyne de Morgues, who was attached as an artist to the disastrous French settlement in Florida, produced a series of exquisite watercolours in the 1560s, most of which unfortunately no longer exist. John White, one of the pioneer settlers in Virginia in 1585, produced a comprehensive set of paintings of Indians, birds, insects and fish. It is important to note that by the association with other natural life White's work places the Indians automatically in the category of exotic wildlife. De Bry's third source was the sensational story of Hans Staden who spent nine months in the 1550s as a prisoner of the Tupinamba, cannibal Indians in Brazil.His account was illustrated with crude woodcuts. It was the latter which were to arouse the prurient curiosity of the public, and these images became the authoritative iconography of the American Indian without questioning their relevance to the Amerindian lifestyle of the West Indies. Certainly there were some significant comparisons, but the implied association with these other groups was by then overwhelmingly established as fact. The vastly increased output of prints had also led to a division of labour, which had its own consequences which we must consider. The intaglio or line-engraving process, printing and colouring of these materials all became generally speaking separate crafts interlocking for the sake of production at the behest of the bookseller, but not necessarily interacting for the sake of interpretation. The consequences of these several layers of interpretation must be evident. The organisation of the consequent trade in illustrated books must also be recognized.

There is yet another perspective to consider. That of the original artist whose work was later transformed into print form. The figures and shapes of the Amerindians seem to have presented considerable difficulty to artists trained in the European tradition . Indeed the French artist Jean de Lery complained of having problems with the anatomy of the Brazilian Indian recording that "Although I diligently perused and marked those barbarian people, for a whole year together, wherein I lived amongst them, so as I might conceive in my mind a certain proportion of them, yet I

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say, by reason of their diverse gestures and behaviours, utterly different from ours, it is a very difficult matter to express their true proportion" and then he goes on to urge that "if any covet to enjoy the full pleasure of them, I could wish him to go to America himself". (3) The solution to de Lery's dilemma lay of course, in a long recognized but little articulated tradition of unabashed borrowing, both of imagery and of technique. Recognizable references to the Antique not only elevated the subject, they proclaimed that the new image (and the artist as well) automatically belonged within a long and respected tradition. So that while he/she might deal in the strange curiosity of the other, he was nevertheless safely ensconced within the context of the Western tradition of art. The fact that we can recognise that this tradition continued well into the 20th century in terms of the output of local artists, where to a large extent they also confined their visual quotations to European sources, should be a sufficient justification for an extensive critical analysis of this subject as it impacts on our often uncritical acceptance of this work, which in essence ensures the same fate of dispossession experienced at the point of contact and beyond.

18th century - construct of colonialisation

As was stated in a forthcoming book *Art in Barbados* " the term ' West Indies' gained broad parlance within the 18th century literature about the region, referring more particularly to the English-speaking colonies. The origins of the term lie of course, within the historical construct of a European vision of where these countries lay, who its people were and what they could provide. Very little thought was given to when, in terms of the existence of indigenous occupation, or why these cultures were not to be tolerated but eradicated. In Barbados the colonial system took control with hegemonic determination and eagerly embraced a concept of themselves and their territory that was glaringly exclusionary, particularly of the Amerindian and African cultural systems that could never be accepted as their own. It was a process of deliberate deculturation which, even one hundred years after Emancipation from slavery, remained the unshakeable core to every aspect of human interface. The term "Caribbean," based as it was on an aboriginal etymology, emerged slowly from the

paradigmal changes endemic in the early decades of the 20th century, and in Barbados, only truly gained currency in the post independence period." (4)

By the 18th century printmaking had become so much more commonplace that the illustrative print became almost ubiquitous as part of the prodigious output of literature, including histories, treatises on slave management, explorations and examinations on a variation of themes. The sheer presence of the Caribbean therefore became an inescapable component in the European understanding of the past. It provided a marker between two epochs, a convenient date with which to begin a distinctively modern period in European history, a period in which the vision of human time as the steady unfolding of a divine plan, was replaced by the image of a constant process of perfection, of the evolution of purely human objectives. The discovery of the Americas also intersected with another powerful tradition in European thought. This was the dependence of all knowledge upon textual, and by the same token visual, interpretation. In this tradition all that could be known had to be made compatible with all that had been said by a recognized canon of ancient authors. In other words, a continuation on my earlier theme of classical quotations, and indeed with borrowings of earlier imagery, authenticating their veracity without the requirement to reexamine their context.

J.A.Froude's condemnation of the British West Indies, written in 1888 remarked that: " in the Caribbean [t]here has been romance, but it has been the romance of pirates and outlaws . . . [T]here are no people in the true sense of the word." (5) Of course there were people in the West Indies then, although Froude's ethnocentrism made them invisible to him, but it was also a question of representation. Froude was not a participant in the romance of pirates and outlaws, but that was how it was presented to him, and represented by him. Since this was the only form of representation of the West Indian experience he was willing to acknowledge, those others whose lives were not involved in this 'romance' were not to be seen - therefore there were no people there. The process of emerging as a true people then, involves both the valorization of experience *and* its representation. The shadow of Froude and colonial history in general, makes it imperative that when addressing Caribbean history, that

we first address those specific historical conditions which legitimized notions of a cultural vacuum, even amongst those sympathetic to the Caribbean situation. Why has the African presence in the Caribbean been neglected? Fundamental changes in the portrayal of Caribbean history only occurred quite recently. As mentioned earlier, Africans were regarded as unimportant. They were considered adjuncts to the European presence. Ironically as the research gathered impetus, vulnerable Caribbean countries fell victim to a new colonialism - that of the foreign institution which claimed access, and indeed custodial rights to the materials recovered. Much the same process has obtained within the art historical process. Once again , centuries later Caribbean peoples are experiencing a process of disinheritance just as acute as the transition to slave society, though with less bloodshed, and just as real.

"Colonization" as Anthony Padgen elucidates," and the dual experience of administration and acculturation which colonization involved, brought the hitherto semi-mythical 'savage' far closer to the European world than he had been during the Middle Ages." (6) The habit of objectification of the strange or the curious became embedded in European culture from an early date. But it was the process of colonization which brought this habit directly to bear upon the conflicts occasioned by the contact between different belief systems and different ways of life. It was colonization which forced the 'savage' and the' barbarian', and with them the problem of intelligibility of other worlds, fully upon the European consciousness. In Europe, and therefore the West Indies, the consequence of this was the gradual evolution of a powerful self-effacing myth, which in the early part of the 18th century, became known as the 'noble savage'. This creation was by no means a single unambiguous image. He was a universal type. What all men were before they became domesticated, a specific example of enduring, human nature. Real 'savages' in the Americas could therefore now be used to provide the empirical details required for conjectural histories of mankind, histories which, in some cases, were explicitly intended to replace the biblical account of the creation and diffusion of peoples. However that is as they say, a whole other story. Essentially then such imagery becomes emblematic of the character, role and status of the Negro in the New World, and spoke to the viewer instantly in a language he easily understood.

As indicated in the title, this paper is concerned with the use of visual iconography as the articulation of the colonial discourse and with the creation of a Caribbean identity through the media of prints. As a consequence one must be prepared to recognise and trace the emergence of symbolic lexicographies embedded within the context of gender, race and class. Nothing tells us more about the culture of a people than the absence or eradication of data which informs the subjective vision of self. I have chosen to offer for your consideration a simple counterpoint of imagery which is telling in itself. We need to recognise and explicitly contemplate the undercurrents generated in the subconscious juxtapositioning of such imagery. The counterpoint of male and female, the interlocution between black and white, the seesaw balance between authority and antipathy, the inequality of the ennobled white personage and the anonymous black thing. The discourse of the encounter between the old world and the new became grafted onto Western perceptions of reality, and helped erect and sustain the illusion of racial and social superiority and inferiority, purity and decadence, and the affirmation of empire. These constructed identities need to be recognized and treated as such in our interpretation of these prints in a variety of contexts, not least in museum exhibits acting as authorising agents of authentic histories. The manner in which these relationships shaped notions which entered 19th and 20th century philosophy and created an effect which was by no means gratuitous or accidental and therefore needs to deconstructed and decoded just as deliberately.

Thus, the juxtaposition of that imagery with supposedly contemporaneous examinations of history, exemplifies the double coded reference which typically must be read when reconstructing our regional historiography. The fact that an image is ' colonial' defines it as belonging to the national oppressor who is, in a peculiar way, himself oppressed - simultaneously the coloniser and colonised - a paradox which doubtless encourages love/hate quotation of classical sources. One recognises that no such ambiguity is evident in the earlier fine art quotations, where colonial images were simply replicated in newer styles and media. Instead, the region explodes into a full scale iconographization of the colonial 'landscape' from which we have yet to

recover. Witness for example the use and reuse of Brunias' images of West Indian lifestyles and cultural interrelationships which spiraled well into the 19th century and beyond. Here in Barbados the ubiquitous 'Barbados Mulatto Girl' has had many different incarnations - as the source of the national costume - ironically at the apogee of our independence clothing our self and our nation in a colonial construct; as the basis for a more recent imaging of the island, as a gilded replication by artist Stella St.John for the tourist market to name a few. One of the prime points for consideration is for example the utilization of that same image by Barbadian historian, Hilary Beckles in his watershed 'History of Barbados'. It seems to me ironic that the first new history of the island subsequent to Schomburghk's history of the 1840's, which engages the reader fully in a rigorous reassessment of our historiographical process, falls far short in applying similar boundaries and renegotiating the same space with its uncritical inclusion of this work. The challenge to historians and to art historians is therefore to use discretion in the employment of these images as we continue to rewrite history.

Print illustrations which appeared in the centuries following the first encounter served primarily to confirm the European's vision of what the peoples of the Caribbean looked like, how they dressed, their societal customs, their way of life. While some of these seem fairly accurate, it should not be forgotten that these scenes were often the artist's interpretation of an author's reality, which in turn was reinterpreted by the engraver's hand. The result was that this imagery was inextricably permeated twice over with European attitudes and expectations of the New World. We the viewers finally bring a third perspective into play as a result of our westernized education and upbringing. It may well take another 500 years to erase and reformulate our own ideology and to generate an indigenous iconography of the Caribbean. "The past", as L.P. Hartley so famously noted, "is a foreign country". Any dialogue which emerges as a result of its reappropriation in the present should benefit from a knowledgeable interpreter.

NOTES

1. Ulloa, Antonio de, Noticias americanas: entretenimientos phisicos-historicas sobre la America Meridional y la Septentrianal [sic]Oriental, Madrid, 1772

2. I examine this theme in greater depth in "European Views of the Aboriginal Population" in the publication The Indigenous People of the Caribbean, ed. by Samuel M.Wilson, University Press of Florida.

3. This passage was reprinted in Discovering the New World: based on the works of Theodore de Bry, edited by Michael Alexander, Harper and Row, New York, 1976

4. Quoted from the text of the publication Art in Barbados: What Kind of Mirror Image, A.Cummins, A.Thompson, and N.Whittle, Ian Randle Publishers, Jamaica, 1999

5. Froude, J.A., The English in the West Indies; or, The Bow of Ulysses, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888. , p.347.

6. Padgen, Anthony, European Encounters with the New World, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993

Reaffirming Identity: The Role of a National Gallery of Art

BY

LILIAN STEN-NICHOLSON

Barbados owns a National Art Collection of considerable historic, aesthetic and financial value. It contains work from prehistoric times and the days of colonial rule as well as contemporary art. Yet there is a prevailing misconception that the Visual Arts are a recent introduction to our culture.

Barbados as an independent country is 32 years old, Barbados as a nation goes way back past the first settlers into Arawak times. From the time of the first habitation, through the arrival of the first settlers, the labour of the Gaelic and African slaves, the rebellions, the political struggles, the building, the growing, the living in this island this nation was formed. And all through that time, artists commented on, recorded and interpreted the process.

We have remnants of large Arawak settlements .We have 500 year old houses, still standing, still in use. We have an African Baobab tree planted in Queen's Park 1000 years ago and we have families whose known roots are as ancient as that tree. And yet we are seen, and see ourselves, as a young, developing nation.

The perception of the Visual Arts and the political entity of the nation as young, recent, developing, are similar in their ungrateful denial of those who went before. But there the similarity ends. With the exception of the Visual Arts, the Barbadian heritage is in good hands. The National Conservation Commission looks after trees, parks and beaches. The National Trust cares for buildings of historic interest. The Barbados Museum and Historical Society tell our history through artifacts, books and pictures. The National Archives and the Library Service look after the written word in all its forms. The Political Establishment celebrates itself in and out of

Parliament. In each case there is a central agency, which documents, records, preserves and displays.

But the National Collection of Art has no permanent home. It is scattered through Ministries, schools, libraries, hospitals and banks. In 1987-88, an Organisation of American States (OAS) sponsored survey of the National Collection was undertaken by the National Cultural Foundation (NCF). A preliminary study by Annalee Davis, listed the location, the size, and to a small extent the condition of 141 pieces and 28 murals. A more detailed report by Pat Byer-Dunphy (in 1988) revealed another 145 pieces, described them in detail and stressed the urgent need for restoration and preservation of the work. Many pieces were found behind filing cabinets, in closets or leaning against walls. Many were rotting, foxing, exposed to the elements or cleaned with solvents. The OAS grant was also used to mount a Queens Park Gallery exhibition of the National Collection works of Ilaro Court, the Prime Minister's residence, and Government House, the residence of the Governor General. Ninety-Five works were gathered under the heading: "Looking Forward, Looking Back." Both collections contain historic and contemporary works of art. The historical pieces were executed by Colonial administrators and visiting Europeans, while the modern works represent a transition period in which the growing number of Barbadian artists, though still influenced by the great international artists of our time, were developing their own traditions. The turning point was in the 1930s, a time of political turbulence and rising black consciousness.

Art reflects society. It is an expression of the culture of a society. It reflects the power structure, the priorities and concerns of a society, not only in what is expressed, but in what is promoted and preserved, encouraged or ignored. The lack of indigenous artwork from the colonial period does not mean that the Barbadian people lacked talent or ability. It means that their cultural expression was to varying degrees ignored, discouraged or banned, while the artistic efforts of the rulers were seen as valid and therefore appreciated and preserved.

The 18th century portrait of Major David Parry (Governor of Barbados, 1784 - 1794) and Ras Akyem's "Prediction" (1987) faced each other on the cover of the exhibition catalogue and on the walls of the Queens Park Gallery. While attempting to insure the exhibition, "Looking forward. Looking back", we began to get an inkling of the value of the National Collection. The local insurance companies had no evaluation system for art. We had to consult with Lloyds in the UK. The estimated value of the portrait of Major David Parry was 50.000 pounds. The 24 Lionel Fawkes Watercolours were valued at 3000 - 5000 pounds each. They were badly foxed in 1988, due to exposure to the elements in the Ilaro Court atrium, but unless they have been unretrievably lost to further foxing their total market value should now be at least 120.000 pounds.

This means that the minimum current value of these 25 pieces, 1/16th of the National Collection, is $ 600.000. This may have been a wake up call. The need for a National Art Gallery was understood. The National Cultural Foundation was given a mandate to establish a Standing Committee with members drawn from '"key organisations and interested persons". The purpose of the Standing Committee was to prepare a comprehensive report on proposals for the establishment of a National Art Gallery. The Barbados Arts Council (BAC) and the Art Collection Foundation (ACF) submitted proposals. These were summarized and expanded in "Proposals for the setting up of a National Art Gallery." (Lois Braithwaite and Ruth White, NCF.1989)

The committee agreed on the following objectives:
The National Art Gallery will display, research, restore and document the National Collection. It will expand the collection using a stated acquisition policy. It will provide temporary and permanent exhibition space and create incentives for Barbadian artists at home and abroad. It will have space for the permanent exhibition of the National Collection, for temporary current, topical and special exhibitions as well as a Caribbean Collection. It was further recommended that a lecture theatre, an art department with studio space, a library, a workshop for restoration, conservation and framing, storage space, a conference room, administrative office

and parking facilities were provided. It was agreed that the building should be centrally located in order to provide easy access for walk in patrons.

There were differences in opinion about the proposed locations, advantages and disadvantages were explored. The parties also differed about the proposed organisational structure, on the one hand a private foundation subsidized by Government funds, on the other: a Government body assisted by private fundraising. There was also a demarcation of interests between the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, who wished to continue to be responsible for Historical collections, whereas The ACF, (now the Barbados Gallery of Art), wished to have sole responsibility for 20th century work. The NCF and the BAC insisted that a National Art Gallery must have a comprehensive collection of historical as well as modern work. The NCF report, however, only makes recommendations for a Contemporary collection. It was proposed that the report be submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture by April 30th 1988, for Cabinet approval by May 31st 1988 and that a possible site for the Gallery should be chosen no later than August 31st 1988. It is now August 1998. It is ten years later and we are loosing our National Collection to dust, termites and indifference. Successive governments have either looked over the project and dismissed it, or just overlooked it. It cannot be because of lack of funds, for the funds allotted to resituation of statues, commemorative structures and special events could have been used to finance and run a splendid National Gallery.

Neither were the disagreements in the standing committee strong enough to cause a dismissal of the project. What prevents the establishment of a National Gallery is not the lack of funds nor lack of ideas, but the prevailing attitudes towards art and artists, the divisions among the artists themselves and the contradictions inherent in the system. We are fortunate in that we have an amazing number of talented artists for such a small population. We are fortunate in that we have at least 7 organisations looking after the interests of art and artists: The National Cultural Foundation, the Barbados Arts Council, the Barbados Investment Development Corporation, the Barbados Community College, the Barbados Museum & Historical

Society, the Barbados Gallery of Art and the Barbados Chapter of ICOM, International Committee of Museums. We are also fortunate in that we have a transient population in the form of long stay visitors and tourists who will buy art. The international market comes to us. We do not lack talent, we do not lack infrastructure, we do not lack buyers. We lack focus. The scattered and neglected National Collection is symptomatic of a culture in which the indigenous is loved but not respected. Barbados, though small and outwardly portraying itself with a common identity, does in fact consist of many small units, which do not connect easily with each other. Because of this, efforts are often duplicated. A National Gallery provides focus.

The transient art market is seasonal, and although it is profitable, we lose some of our best work. Work which will have to be bought back when we wake up to its value. The way to deal with this issue is not by banning exports, but by instituting a sensible acquisition policy for the National Collection. A sensible acquisition policy is one that values all manners of art. For whereas artists are born, careers are made. Artists are born to all classes, colours and creeds, always have been, always will be. Their's is the vision, it is their job to interpret, record and enhance. When we select works for the National Collection, we need to remember the lesson of the former colonial masters: to preserve that which defines, records and enhances our own system. And to value it. This means that we have to go beyond the conventional Gallery Art and systematically document 'Street Art', the paintings on minibuses, pushcarts and shops, murals and 'miniparks'. All these constitute a wealth of truly indigenous work, a focus on the elusive 'identity'.

The main visual stimulus today is that of the fleeting images of the TV Screen. News, views and circumstances pour into our homes through many channels. Truths, half-truths and lies bounce off our heads at an alarming rate. The steady presence of a painting, to reflect on, to interact with, to love or to hate, creates some balance in how we see ourselves. At this time, when many of us identify with

brandname commodities, the presence of a focussed and accessible National Art Collection will assist us in our return to reality.

"Where there is no vision, the people will perish." Marcus Garvey said so, King Solomon said so too. It was true then, it is true now. So, presumably, when there is vision, the people will not perish. But only when the vision is followed by action, will the people flourish. The people of the Caribbean are gifted and will excel in anything they set their mind to do. The unprecedented flowering of the Jamaican arts in the 1970- 80s was not accidental. It was the result of political will. Development of cultural infrastructure and recognition of the value of indigenous culture. The further development of local and regional cultural infrastructures is necessary, only then will the rich talents of our people continue to flourish. A National Gallery of Art is more than a showcase of National Treasures, it is essential to the dynamic development of the Arts and the society they represent.

THEME 2
THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CARIBBEAN ART

The Caribbean, A Post-Modern Babel

BY

HAYDEE VENEGAS

Since the 1950's the existence of a Latin American art has been under discussion, innumerable exhibitions have been held and over a dozen of books on the subject has been published. All of them include only the Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries. When these publications consider the art of the Antilles, they study Cuba, the Dominican Republic and not always do they include Puerto Rico, let alone Haiti, nor the English, Dutch or French Antilles.

It has been during the 1990's, that the world has turned its eyes towards the Caribbean Islands as an art-making entity. Important investigators like the ones present in this symposium emerged. We are glad to see how the last Sao Paulo Biennial (1996) showed sixteen artists from the Antilles and the French Magazine *Revue Noire* has dedicated several issues to the literature and art of the Antilles. Recently the *Institute of Visual Arts* of London created a web site for promoting Caribbean contemporary art (enTRANSit). Many Antillean artists are now being included in the most important world exhibitions and biennials.

Many have already gained fame or prizes at international biennials such as Whitney´s and Kwangiu´s. In 1992 a travelling exhibition, entitled *A Look at the Caribbean* was organized in Paris. Also the exhibition *Karibische Kunst Heute* in Kassel in 1994, led to the entrance of some of our creators into the European artistic world. It was even thought to dedicate the 1998 ARCO to the Caribbean.

For three or four years a group of critics from the region have been doing research in their own countries in order to publish a history of Caribbean art. However it wasn´t until this year that we saw the first research that synthesizes and studies in depth the artistic production of so diverse a region. Two of this year´s most encouraging news items were the publication by Thames & Hudson, of the book Caribbean Art, commissioned to Veerle Poupeye, a Belgian who resides in Jamaica, and the

exhibition at Extremadura's Iberoamerican Museum of Contemporary Art, which includes 43 artists from all the Caribbean Islands, under the title Insular Caribbean: Exclusion, Fragmentation and Paradise. For this show, which is expected to travel to at least two other European cities, a comprehensive catalogue, beautifully illustrated and with brilliant essays by outstanding historians from this region, was published.

We can certainly say that the engine behind this interest, have been the two Caribbean Biennials. **La Havana Biennial**, created in 1984, which in the last two years Lillian Llanes has promoted and shown outside Cuba and the creation in 1992 of the **Caribbean Painting Biennial of Santo Domingo**, the most important exhibition specialized in the Caribbean. Marianne de Tolentino, its promoter, has made a point of including all the Caribbean countries, both the continental ones as well as the most remote islands. Looking at all these artworks at once, as well as the changes brought about in the last six years, has been truly revealing.

However, in order to study the Antillean art it is vital to consider a series of social and historical facts. Since the dispersion of races and the language imbroglio that took place in Babel, no where in the world had such a hybridization been seen. Multiculturalism was born in the Caribbean; the place where for the first time, the native American race (mistakenly called Indians by Columbus), mingled with white Spanish conquerors and with the enslaved Africans who began to arrive in 1518. During the XIX century large Chinese and Indian migrations arrived at our shores which also ended up integrated. Multiculturalism and the big African and Asiatic migrations which have been taking place in most large European and North American cities for the last two years, is something that the Antilles experienced 500 years ago. The confusion caused by the merging of races and the multiplicity of languages has been a theme and principal problem of our land, permeating politics, culture, art and literature. For instance, more than 20 words defining the degrees of racial mixture have been coined in the Spanish speaking Antilles: mulato, mestizo, moreno, trigueño, prieto, torna atrás, cuarterón, are only some of them. In the words of our writer Luis Rafael Sánchez: *"... the only pure thing in the Caribbean is impurity."* (2)

In this small geographic area, so different from the continent, six languages are spoken, Spanish, English, French, Dutch, Patois and Papiamento. The total Antillean population is over 42 million people. The Caribbean Archipelago comprises 29 countries. Our history is different from that of Latin America, in the mixture of three races, the polyglotism, the tropical climate, piracy and smuggling, the exodus or high mobility, the slave society, the plantations, the long colonial regime, extreme poverty, religious pluralism, syncretism, the social and political fragmentation and the long dependency from the Metropolis. We should remember that until the mid-fifties, only three Caribbean countries, - Haiti in 1804, the Dominican Republic in 1844 and Cuba in 1901 - had become independent nations.

In 1969, when Eric Williams published his book From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, he said: "Contemporary Caribbean is an area characterized by instability; political and economic fragmentation; constitutional diversity, economic, psychological, cultural and in some cases political dependence; large scale unemployment, economic uncertainty, unsolved racial tensions; potential religious conflicts, restlessness of youth, and an all pervading fear of the United States" and he added "...the future of the Caribbean can only be meaningfully discussed in terms of the possibilities for the emergence of an identity for the region and its people." (2) He vehemently encourages a unification of the Caribbean, something that Eugenio María de Hostos had attempted a century ago with his "Antillean Union" and which some are still trying to build at present.

At that time, according to Williams, although there was no "serious indigenous intellectual life", (3) a literature that fought the colonial illness of lack of self-confidence was emerging. Writers like Fanon, Walcott and the already mentioned Luis Rafael Sánchez, among others, were producing. Also the calypso and the afrocuban rhythms had already conquered the big metropolitan cities. Thirty years later, in 1998, huge changes have taken place. Derek Walcott, won the Nobel Prize for Literature and major writers sprang up in all the Caribbean languages. Salsa, merengue and reggae are favorite rhythms in Europe and Japan. I have even listened

to them in China. But what is most important to us, is that our painting is beginning to be noticed at international events.

What has caused this change that has affected the principal cultural productions, literature, music and the plastic arts? The reason is not only one, there are many, and some of them are contradictory. In the last three decades, the majority of the colonies have become independent, or have managed to achieve some autonomy. The Caribbean has become a tourist destination for both Europeans and North Americans. Reports indicate that the number of tourists who visit the region annually is larger than its population. Its economy, - Haiti and Cuba being an exception - has improved drastically. Many of the religious and social problems have been soothed. Museums and galleries have been opened and study centers are strengthened. The Internet communication, which has just begun, is rapidly integrating us to the global world, to these Islands geographically separated for so long. They are also full of problems, far from being the paradise advertised by travel agencies, hunger, prostitution, ignorance and drugs, flourish and drown our countries.

In the postcolonial age, the postmodernist offer of freedom, the proximity of the new millennium and the new social problems, have moved our creators to look inwards. To stop looking at the Metropolis and recover their self-confidence, liberating themselves, in most of the Islands, from the colonial reminders which were leading us to suffer a terrible alterity. They are becoming conscious of the great wealth we have in this cultural melting pot we were endowed with. The Caribbean artist of this last decade of the twentieth century, rejects the stereotypes of the colorful and traditional folklore we had been related to. The art at airports begins to be substituted by an art of introspection and that is inward-looking. It is an art that recognizes social and political problems. The installation medium flourishes with energy and dynamism and becomes the medium of denouncement. The true cultural signs of a pluralist society that is something other than beaches, dance and casinos and which is neither the paradise many tourist perceive, are reinterpreted and decoded.

Cuba has been the vanguard of these new movements of internal search. La Havana Biennial has forged a new wave of artists who are not afraid of facing and making public the big problems these people are facing. Since mid-80's, social criticism has been the prevailing subject matter of Cuban plastic art. (4) A major effort has been made to export this strong art whose capacity doesn't seem to get exhausted. Its artists win important events such as Kcho in the Kwangiu Biennial, Rodríguez Brey is chosen for the IX Documenta and this year won the Second Prize for his piece at Estandartes of Monterrey, in Mexico. José Bedia, Marta María Pérez Bravo and María Magdalena Campos-Pons are represented by the world's best galleries and they astonish ARCO 97, 98 visitors; while the Carpinteros currently show their works at the New Museum of Contemporary Art of New York. With their syncretic art, where they mix primitive elements, yoruba rituals and social criticism, they become extraordinary ambassadors and are examples of artists who are reflecting Caribbean realities the world doesn't know of.

The Dominican Republic has a group of outstanding installation artists, among which are Marcos Lora Reed, Tony Capellán, Jorge Pineda, Belquis Ramírez, Pascal Meccariello and Fernando Varela. All of them look at their reality and present us with the cultural, social and economic problems that Santo Domingo is facing: poverty, thousands of people who die in the attempt to emigrate, the human organs market, police violence, the hybrid Caribbean, the condition of Dominican women , especially household servants, the situation of Dominican prostitutes and the ecological issue mixed with elements of witchcraft and popular sayings where the profane and the sacred intermingle in an atmosphere charged with sensuality. We see these artists representing their country all over the world.

The new Haitian art, rejects the colorfulness of the famous primitivists. Edouard Duval-Carrie, Hector Hypolite, Andre Pierre, Pierre Barra, Mario Benjamin and Nacius Joseph among others, redefine each of them in their own language, the voodoo gods and rituals.

One of the most important Jamaican artists David Boxer, works with self-destruction, the tormented self. He sees art as a process of selection, purification, deconstruction and legitimization. He searches for images and elements of the universal culture to appropriate them and 'confuse' them in this great Antillean confusion where all ambiguities are merged. Albert Chong and Petrona Morrison, use objects of afroantillean rituals in order to interpret them in a new and vibrant language.

Puerto Rico, although not as consistently as Cuba, has had important achievements and international prizes. Three of our artists have won first prizes at international events: Haydee Landin at the Biennial of Lubliana, Marimater O'Neill at the Cuenca Biennial and José Morales at the Estandartes Show in Monterrey Mexico in 1998. The ceramic production also made us see how our artists, won prizes; Sylvia Blanco in 1983 and 1986, won the gold medal in Faenza, Italy. Three Caribbean Biennials of Santo Domingo, awarded gold medals to some of our people. Jaime Suarez and Arnaldo Roche have managed to have their work in important North American museums such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Chase Manhattan Bank Collection. Art News points out Nestor Otero for his striking installation at the last Sao Paulo Biennial, while Ernesto Pujol, became one of the favorite artists of La Havana (Cuba), Saaremaa (Estonia) and Johannesburg (South Africa) biennials. Pepón Osorio and Antonio Martorell had excellent criticisms for their presentations at the Whitney Biennial. The last two have managed to show their work around the world for the longest time. All these artists examine a great diversity of subjects: migration, AIDS, women's role, the clothing industry, racism, family relations, criminality and national and international politics. As children of the Caribbean, many of them work with diversity, pluralism, hybridization, polyglotism and the Caribbean kitsch.

In the Southern Antilles a series of artists stands out who are searching for their roots and are producing a dramatic art that we have seen at the Biennials and exhibitions already mentioned. One of the most brilliant is Mark Latamie from Martinique, who uses the theme of Antillean plantations, a distinctive Caribbean feature. He works with elements which made up our agrarian society; sugar, cotton, cocoa, coffee and

rum, adding to them words written in neon lights. In this way he blends the agrarian culture of the XIX century, with the new capitalist culture of the current century. Another artist who uses neon lights although in a different way, is Elvis López of Aruba. The references to the destruction of Monserrat, done by Veronica Ryan shake those who have seen her work in New York museums and galleries. The paintings and installations by Chris Cozier from Trinidad, are meant to be evaluated within his reduced or limited Antillean world. While Annalee Davis, strengthens her roots in this polarized, racist and classist society.

The Internet world that unites us, has fascinated and concerned several Antillean artists. Marimater O'Neill, a Puerto Rican artist, has created her own page on the web; *El Cuarto del Quenepón*, where she offers all kind of information on Puerto Rican art and culture. Steve Ouditt from Trinidad, has an on-line journal *Creole in site* - the pronunciation itself can create great confusion, since it can be read in several ways, Creole insight, creoling site, or Creole inside. On the other hand, Joscelyn Gardner, faces the web with great suspicion. Her installation with a huge spider web covering the artist, makes us think of the web danger looming over us. She suggests that in the post-colonial Caribbean we could be re-colonized by the electronic era or by transnational corporations.

The artists mentioned above are neither the only ones nor the most important creators of the region, they are the ones who have struck me most in the exhibitions I have seen in shows and biennials in Europe, the USA and Brazil. They are the ones who carry the message of the true Caribbean. They are the ones who contrary to the biblical Babel, where people became dispersed after the language imbroglio, they use the imbroglio as inspiration. All of them take from their roots and integrate in their art all kinds of themes and problems to create an art that is hybrid, diverse, charged with vehemence and passion, which at the end of this millennium, they begin to spread around the world.

NOTES

1) In his book *Latin American Art*, Edward Lucie-Smith, excludes all the Latin American countries that do not speak Spanish or Portuguese and also Puerto Rico, because he considers that "it is difficult to draw an absolutely firm line between twentieth-century Puerto Rican art and that of the United States". The author never visited Puerto Rico.

2) Luis Rafael Sánchez. No llores por nosotros Puerto Rico. San Juan: Ediciones Norte, 1997. P. 85

3) Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro: the History of the Caribbean. New York: Vintage Books, 1969. P. 503.

4) Ibid p. 501.

5) Luis Cannitzer. New Art of Cuba, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

The Internationalization of Caribbean Art

BY

TINA SPIRO

PART I

I am pleased to have been invited to address this august body of the International Association of Art Critics at this inaugural Southern Caribbean conference. I am addressing you as an artist and gallerist who, although New York born and trained, have lived in Jamaica for nearly thirty years, immersed in the Afro-Caribbean culture of the Caribbean. It has enriched not only my art work, but my perspective on race, history and culture to have been privileged to share these years with you.

The Internationalization of Caribbean Art is not a distant event, but a process which has already been embarked on with some success and some shortcomings. It is not always easy to understand a complex series of events that result in long-term trends, especially while being immersed in the events themselves (is the fish aware of the water it swims in, and where it is being carried by the current?).

Added to the novelty of Caribbean Art in the international art forum is the fragmentation of the Caribbean Art movement as a result of geographic distances, disproportionate size and levels of development among our island nations, and language barriers. Within each Caribbean cultural movement are the further complications of living in a small place, with all its attendant hierarchies and jealousies.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Caribbean Art is fast gaining international attention. I would like to address in this paper some of the groundwork laid down by the emergence of Latin American Art as a mainstream Art movement, some

thoughts on the integration of Latin American and Caribbean Art, suggestions for breaking language and legal barriers, and some ways to prepare ourselves via communications to present an objective, ongoing account of our region so that the internationalization of Caribbean Art might be comprehensive, united and as thrilling as the art works themselves.

Latin American Art has gained increasing recognition and influence in the last half of the 20th Century. The landmark exhibition of Latin American Art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the 1970's was at the time a pioneer event in the field of Latin American Art studies. This was followed by a more current exhibition of Latin American Art at Museum of Modern Art in the early 1990's. An art movement which has evolved in the multi-cultural Spanish-speaking nations of South and Central America over centuries, with the support of Hispanic traditions of education, suddenly became recognized by the English-speaking world.

The ease of travel in the second half of the 20th Century took important Latin American artists to North America and Europe, thus spreading their stylistic and cultural influences: especially Wifredo Lam to Paris, where he absorbed Picasso's African Art influences, then dispersed them to the Caribbean and Latin America.

The 1978 exhibition of Haitian Art at the Brooklyn Museum organized by influential New York art critic Seldon Rodman further extended recognition of art occurring south of the U.S. borders into the Caribbean. Unfortunately the stereotyping of Haitian Art as "Primitive" which resulted from the curatorial preferences of the exhibition, resulted in international recognition for the non-classically trained artists of Haiti at the expense of the more classical. At this point in time, the classically-based "Haitian School of Beauty" and abstract welded metal sculpture (two important contemporary trends in Haitian Art) are little-known outside of Haiti.

Several important lessons are to be learned from these key events that marked the introduction of Latin American and Caribbean Art into the U.S. Firstly, metropolitan exposure can confer international reputation to an art movement. Secondly, that

exposure in New York, the art capital of the world, is important to this perception. Thirdly, that if the introduction of a previously unrecognized art movement into the international mainstream is biased, incomplete or ignores important developments due to stylistic or cultural preferences, that it may take decades and much effort to correct these misinterpretations.

Recently, the exhibition "Caribbean Visions" funded by the Reader's Digest and curated by an artist and specialist in African Art, introduced a previously unknown field to North America as it toured the U.S. Unfortunately, in its effort to show the world the Caribbean Art is very up-to-the-minute (which it is), the exhibition favoured modernist works and African retentions over more classical and Afro-European forms of Caribbean Art; and did not include art from Cuba, thereby eliminating several stylistic streams and major artists from the introduction of this topic into the art mainstream. This exhibition did not fully cover the rich diversity of Caribbean Art, and according to Francine Birbragher of Art Nexus,"...the exhibition failed to escape the stereotypes from which it was trying to escape."[1]

Unfortunately, this incomplete account of what is actually transpiring in Caribbean Art was reinforced by the recent publication by Thames and Hudson of the book Caribbean Art [2] . Hopefully, these limited accounts of what is the significant art of our region will be corrected by future scholars such as yourselves, who as critics and art historians, will approach their subject objectively, without agenda or bias, and with the cultural familiarity lacking in some of these efforts.

By way of illustration I would like to point out that in the otherwise handsome and important book *Modern Jamaican Art*, I am referred to as an "artist influenced by Colin Garland" [3] by both Dr. David Boxer and Veerle Poupeye. I would like to go on record and state that I am not influenced by Colin Garland, despite these claims otherwise. I am, after all, still alive, and know who I am influenced by, and have made this clear on several occasions. This use of conjecture as fact, thereby creating repetitious inaccuracy, should be avoided so that a fair account of the art history of the region can prevail.

I appeal to you as art critics to discuss with living and accessible artists their work so as to better understand their intent and content, which can then be noted and critically evaluated against the results. Your role in the recording and perception of Caribbean Art is a crucial one in directing international attention to it. The unique and multi-cultural appeal of the region, the dreaming, edgy flow of diverse histories and cultures through our art work, can be sensitively conveyed through your pens to an international audience eager to experience depth and meaning in their art; not to mention the responsibility bestowed upon you to render an accurate account of the art of our times.

Eventually, the study and marketing of Caribbean and Latin American Art could become integrated as one topic even as the two streams maintain their identity. This is important in maintaining accuracy for historical and marketing reasons. The art of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Haiti have already been absorbed into Latin American Art in the major auction houses, thereby extending the geographical definition of Latin American Art into the Caribbean. It would thereby be inconclusive to exclude the English, French and Dutch-speaking Caribbean from this regional integration. Although the culturally diverse island nations of the Caribbean have divergent histories, their art, which is Afro-European with strong American influences, is universal.

World Art, particularly that of the developing countries, shares a rich vibrancy and magic that enriches the artists' interpretations of international trends. Eneid Routté-Gomez writing in ARTnews accurately defined Caribbean Art as a "Cultural spectrum" defined by African, European, Amerindian and Asian influences. "Magic Realism is one powerful force in much of Contemporary Caribbean Art...the region is a gorgeous mosaic of magic and myth." [4]

PART II - Marketing

As Caribbean Art is making its debut on the world stage, it is important for all of us in the region to come to terms with the traditional practices of art marketing as they

have been structured in the rest of the world. Due to the absence in most Caribbean countries of a significant number of local collectors and patrons to sustain a viable art market, the local artists have taken things into their own hands, producing art marketing hybrids that are not generally practiced in the rest of the world.

The reasons for this are not entirely economic, and derive from such diverse sentiments as resentment of the gallery system (which many artists consider unfair), anti-metropolitan feelings, socialist economies which are not in sync with world business practices, the desire for privacy in the presence of harsh local critics, and a scarcity of art galleries operating on international standards.

One of the more interesting developments to be found in the Caribbean is a proliferation of artist-run galleries, of which Chelsea Galleries is one. Some of these galleries have remained local in scope, while some of us have focussed on international marketing. I know at our gallery in Jamaica it has been part of our mission to present high-quality Jamaican Art which does not always find exposure through official channels, and to create artistic cross-fertilization by inviting artists from the rest of the Caribbean to exhibit in Jamaica, (which lies mid-way on the central axis between North and South America).

If we are to swim in the mainstream (as now seems imminent), it is important that we learn the basic principles by which the majority of world art, and certainly its most prominent artists, are marketed. To begin with, there is only one system by which, in our times, artists come to international prominence, and that is the gallery/museum/auction house system. It is generally considered unprofessional for artists to market their own work; and despite the absence of gallery commission when selling directly from the artist's studio to collectors, the artist's values and reputation will remain limited.

New York has been the capital of the art market since the second half of the 20th Century, and should continue to be so well into the 21st. At present, there is no top ranking New York gallery specializing in Caribbean Art, despite the wealth of talent

to be found here. Perhaps some visionary person will be inspired to seize this opportunity. Fortunately, there is a department of Latin American Art at New York University, under the direction of Professor Edward Sullivan, who has made an effort to bring Caribbean Art into the fold. Further research, exhibitions and more complete publications on Caribbean Art are much needed to establish an art historical context as well as a basis for marketing the art of the region.

In the long term, what is needed for the internationalization of Caribbean Art is a museum dedicated to the region. This could be located in any major urban center from Atlanta to Tokyo, but would probably best serve the region if located nearby, both locally and overseas.

Miami at this time holds the potential to become a center for the art of the Caribbean. There are already a number of top galleries in Miami carrying the work of Caribbean artists, as well as a large number of Caribbean artists resident there. Barbados, in inviting regional artists to exhibit here, and holding this conference, is creating a much needed initiative which can lead to regional cultural integration.

At some point we will have to take a close look at the knotty problem of the conflicting laws in the region governing the import and export of art works. Some island nations restrict incoming art works, imposing duties and taxation. Other nations consider out-going art works patrimony, and require copious documentation for its export. The free movement of art works within the Caribbean should be petitioned for at the highest levels of government to allow for the Caribbean to establish true cultural exchange internally as well as internationally.
An arguable case in point is the United States, which allows the free movement of art works (regardless of value) both in and out of the country, where even the art of Cuba was deemed "educational material" by the judicial system. In-coming art work, if it stays unsold, remains in the country as a cultural asset. If sold, it becomes a cultural ambassador and provides tax revenue. This free flow of art works, I believe has made New York the art capital of the world, as much as the formidable power of the art media based there.

PART III - Electronic Communication

Many artists and galleries are looking to the Internet as a potential marketing opportunity for their art. From my experience dealing with collectors, I doubt very much that the sale of original art works would occur via electronically received information at its present level of technology; for the simple reason that whoever purchases the art needs to inspect the original. However the Internet holds vast potential for the sharing of information, education, promotion, electronic commerce, and other services not yet dreamed of. A multi-lingual web site for Caribbean and Latin American Art would be an invaluable facility for information on the art and artists of the region.

We of the Caribbean belong to a geographical and cultural entity of great strength and beauty, which needs to find a voice despite linguistic differences. This can be facilitated in the future by multi-lingual computer programs which bypass the tedious word for word translation process. I would like to commend the International Association of Art Critics on their thoughtful and intelligent provision of translation facilities for this conference, which has made it possible for us to hold this current dialogue with a clear understanding of each other.

The dream of a multi-lingual web site for Caribbean Art is a near and obtainable goal, and exempt from distance and language barriers. We should take the opportunity of this gathering to form an electronic committee for immediate implementation of this necessary presence in the field of global communications. The work presented should be only of the highest quality, with the selection process being both inclusive and selective.

Some essential ingredients for managing such a project would be:

1) A professionally designed web page

2) Inter-active and video presentations of regional exhibitions

3) Interviews with artists explaining their work

4) Listing of regional galleries, museums, art schools and activities

5) Integration of art and tourism (promotion of cultural tourism).

6) Application of art historical criteria.

7) Objectivity

8) Selection of material for presentation by 'good eyes'

It is further important to maintain high standards and artistic integrity in the creation and presentation of the art works. May we all join hands to bring about the overdue recognition that the art of our region deserves.

1 Art Nexus, January - March, #19, Revue "Caribbean Visions"

2 Caribbean Art, Veerle Poupeye, Introduction

3 Modern Jamaican Art; "Jamaican Art 1922-1982" by David Boxer (p. 21); "Contemporary Jamaican Art" Veerle Poupeye (p. 87)

4 ARTnews Summer 1995, Eneid Routté-Gomez "Myth, magic and the Mainstream"

THEME 3
THE LANGUAGE OF CARIBBEAN ART CRITICISM

The Island as Signifier in Caribbean Aesthetics: Toward a Hermeneutics of Caribbean Art Criticism

BY

GLADSTONE L. YEARWOOD

Introduction

Prevalent assumptions about art, aesthetics and criticism in the Caribbean emanate from a social structure and ideological center that is alien to Caribbean realities and repressive of the Caribbean idea. If Caribbean art is to flourish, the need exists for artists to explore artistic forms and signifying processes that are informed by Caribbean history. If Caribbean art criticism is to come into its own, it is imperative for critics to articulate hermeneutic systems based on Caribbean social reality as opposed to the social, political, racial and gender categories of a Eurocentric world. Art criticism in the region will be strengthened through the development of a critical tradition that helps define the nature of the artistic text, clarifies important intertextual relationships and their signifying systems, and establishes the appropriate cultural context that gives primary meaning to the artwork. This paper will address some basic questions facing Caribbean art criticism such as: What is Caribbean art? What are its aesthetic values? Is Caribbean art a phenomenon in its own right? What is the role and purpose of Caribbean art criticism? In my view, art is a specific type of human activity. It is a form of social consciousness that emerges through aesthetic comprehension of the world. While art is affective and offers sensory pleasure, it has a special capacity to foster intellectual activity that can provide insights about Caribbean life. Art is a mode of expression that helps to make meaning out of our lives and the world. It is a key epistemological activity that serves to articulate and develop systems of knowledge. Artistic creativity is a discourse that we use to fashion a symbolic world, thereby opening a window for

observers to witness how a culture resolves fundamental questions relating to the human condition.

Basic Issues in Caribbean art

Caribbean art is a primary cognitive activity capable of producing knowledge of Caribbean society. Given the social and economic contingencies facing the Caribbean, an elitist, class-based aesthetic that privileges "art for art's sake" would be irrelevant and arrogant. However, attention to issues of form and technique is important so that we never lose sight of the fact that the fundamental characteristic of art is that of an expressive medium. Art can have social relevance and artists can explore their aesthetic sensibilities without imposing didactic and polemical values on the artwork. As a matter of fact, social and political considerations have been integral features of Caribbean art. Politicians throughout the region can get "nuff licks" from Calypsonians. Certainly, this kind of commentary is part and parcel of our expressive tradition. The aesthetic requirement our society imposes on the artist demands that the song or image be done well. It emphasizes the primacy of the artwork because the subject matter must be treated artistically and should be technically appropriate. No subject is off-limits to the artist; but art should not become a substitute for polemics and propaganda. In Caribbean art history, good artwork has always been capable of deepening our knowledge of society. Insofar as the art of the calypsonian/poet and the carnival/masquerade reflect a particular artistic, social and cultural consciousness that exudes a powerful "Caribbeanness," they give significant intertextual support to this formulation of Caribbean aesthetics.

Artistic production in the Caribbean can be described as a cultural process that emerges from the historical priorities and epistemological categories of Caribbean people. A fruitful strategy for understanding Caribbean art focuses more on the functioning of artistic expression and the production of images, that is, how these are filtered through the lens of Caribbean culture. This approach is process oriented and is less concerned with issues of subject matter. It is a question of how Caribbean people process information and how the formal structures of the Caribbean experi-

ence inform and shape subject matter. Different cultures use their own historical experiences to create their own approaches to artistic production. It follows that we are foremost concerned with the way cultural mechanisms and historical experiences shape raw material to produce an artifact or artistic experience.

A semiotic analysis of bread – an item that is shared by many different cultures – can help clarify how different cultures use similar raw materials to create their own unique expressions. Although the basic ingredients are generally the same, a most important factor has to do with how basic ingredients are utilized within the specific context of local bread making practices around the world. Processing is the most critical step. It involves the transformation of the raw materials using the culture's specific formal values to create a unique kind of bread. Particular forms of mixing, baking, kneading, shaping, cooking or frying are used to produce a unique local product in different cultural settings. The French baguette is long and crusty. In Mexico, the end product is a wafer-thin tortilla. Middle-Easterners and North Africans may favor the flat bread called pita. Jamaicans prefers a hard-dough bread or a small flattened cocobread. In the Southern Caribbean, the dough may be fried in small balls and used as a breakfast food we call "bakes" in Barbados. As in bread making, the raw materials, tools and techniques of artistic production do not differ widely across cultures. However, the specific cultural use of technical elements to shape raw material through formal means plays a key role in artistic production.

An artwork is not a randomly produced object or activity. It has form, which is the totality of its imagery, methods, expressive quality and techniques. The artwork's formal system represents the unity of relations that exists among the various elements of the artwork and which gives shape to it. Artistic form is not universal; it emerges in a specific artwork. It is what makes the artwork unique. Because form is a product of history, artistic form arises only within specific historical settings. Although form may have cross-cultural ramifications, it is best understood as a product of a particular culture, which provides a context for insights on how the artwork's formal system functions. Let us contrast the use of form in 20th century Western art and African traditional art. Western art foregrounds a use of formal

elements in terms of abstraction within a European cultural context. For example, formalism is a variety of art criticism that was developed to address this artistic movement. On the other hand, African traditional aesthetics favored the expressionistic use of form, but integrated the artwork into everyday society thereby retaining a powerful connection between art and lived reality. By specifying the "Caribbeanness" of the artwork's formal system, the critic can avoid the narcissistic historical and ideological biases of Western aesthetics and philosophy of Western art.

While art is capable of being appreciated cross-culturally, we should recognize that any artwork resonates deeply among its primary audience. The cultural setting within which the artwork is produced provides a rich tapestry of signification that viewers use to engage the artistic text. In other words, Caribbean people provide the best framework for understanding the formal, symbolic and textual characteristics of their art. Although art is the product of a particular culture, it is also capable of speaking to wider audiences. The international popularity of Reggae music offers an excellent example from the region. The move to position Caribbean people as the primary audience for Caribbean art is not meant to make an isolationist appeal or to suggest that international art history and criticism are irrelevant to the Caribbean. The principal concern here is to delineate a critical space within which we can do justice to local art by examining how artists utilize the expressive strategies of the Caribbean experience to produce images.

Historical assumptions about the Caribbean reflect a colonial perspective in which European powers saw the islands as havens of rich bounty. In the 20th century, popular images depict the region as retreats for escape and relaxation. The tourist industry is constructed on a paradise view of the islands. These images primarily reflect a Caribbean that is seen through the eyes of the outsider, and not from the perspective of the people who live on the islands. A key element in formulating an indigenous hermeneutics is the manoeuver to regard Caribbean art as a phenomenon in its own right, having its own cultural traditions and expressive norms. Using the perspective of Caribbean art as a phenomenon in its own right, we are privileging a view of the Caribbean from the inside looking out. The view of the island from

the North contrasts with this interior view that islanders articulate in their art forms and cultural expressions. This phenomenological stance empowers Caribbean people by positioning them in active terms as creators or producers of the image and not only as consumers because artistic languages involve the power to name and legitimize; thereby they constitute a site to contest power. In the colonial period, artistic languages functioned as instruments of oppression in their desire to visually codify an unequal system of social and political relations. As a tool of empowerment, Caribbean art resists this oppressive history of colonial and neo-colonial domination. An indigenous hermeneutics gives critics a clearer picture of the richness of Caribbean art through a phenomenological stance, which places the artwork within its proper cultural tradition.

Aesthetic values in Caribbean Art

The search for a methodology of Caribbean art criticism cannot be isolated from the priorities of the lived experiences of Caribbean people. In their daily lives, Caribbean people organize their reality in ways somewhat different from other cultures. For example, there is less emphasis on industrial time and in hierarchical spatial organization that is prevalent in European-based cultures. The region is home to large populations living in small, compact spaces. Family relations and communal values continue to play an important social role. There is a spiritual reverence for nature. In addition, Caribbean society revolves around a series of natural cycles related to the environment, which are then reflected aesthetically in art through the use of elements such as rhythm and color.

Caribbean society is the result of a rich syncretism. At the heart of the Caribbean, one finds a Creole experience that cannot be adequately validated using the categories of European and North American experience. Edouard Glissant (1981) suggests that creolization is fundamental to Caribbean experience, and it functions to shape and influence a Caribbean worldview. The Creole experience relates to the postmodernist notion of cultural continuity, the existence of multiple narratives and the mosaic of the multicultural society. Postmodernism is a 20th century theoretical model ad-

vanced by scholars to rehabilitate European-based categories of knowledge so that they can better account for cultural difference and cultural exchange. However, it is a condition that has existed in the lived experience of the Caribbean for several hundred years. What is described as the postmodernist experience is a peculiar phenomenon prevalent in diasporic cultures. Antonio Benitez-Rojo explains that the syncretic nature of Caribbean society is better understood as a process of creolization. "Creolization does not transform literature or music or language into a synthesis or anything that could be taken in essentialist terms, nor does it lead these expressions into a predictable state of creolization. Rather, creolization is a term with which we attempt to explain the unstable states that a Caribbean cultural object presents over time. In other words, creolization is not merely a process (a word that implies forward movement) but a discontinuous series of recurrences, of happenings, whose sole law is change" (1998, p. 55). Edward Kamau Brathwaite views creolization as a cultural action, which "is a way of seeing the society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate unities, but as contributory parts of a whole" (1971, p. 307). Creolization is a way of life for Caribbean people and is a powerful stimulus in the development of Caribbean values. Its existence functioned as living proof of the system of colonial repression because it transcended the hierarchical social positions advanced by the binary colonial epistemology. As a process, creolization involves redefinition, self-acceptance and self-assertion.

In articulating an indigenous hermeneutics, we find that an island sensibility is at work. It informs the deep structures of Caribbean experience and functions as a grand signifier in Caribbean aesthetics. This island sensibility is produced by codes that are derived from local histories and internal realities, which give birth to conditions that expression to the aspirations of Caribbean people. The island signifier is influenced from historical, geographic and symbolic structures that produce a worldview different from that of North Americans and Europeans. It suggests a hopefulness that rejects the arrogance and closure of an absolutist individualism. Islands dramatize our limitations and accentuate our need to reach out, our need to engage each other. The island signifier reaffirms the seeds of intercultural exchange and mutual understanding. Although by definition, islands

are separate spaces, the Caribbean islands are not discrete isolated entities. The Caribbean islands comprise a community, which is marked by a series of continuities arising from factors such as history, geography, culture, travel, and inter-island migration. Today, the island experience represents a third way. It is different from traditional hierarchies based on binary positions (black-white; master-slave) in which a superior defining discourse creates a master narrative that is believed to be superior to all others; and different from a cultural relativism that reaffirms individualist notions of each in his own way. In the island experience, individual narratives engage each other through negotiation and participation.

The search for a critical language and an aesthetic framework appropriate to the study of Caribbean artistic texts finds its roots in the folk traditions of the region. Our folk culture has generated a kinesthetic sensibility and a set of aesthetic values closely related to the everyday lived experiences of Caribbean people. Narrative knowledge is an integral feature of our folk tradition. As a result, narrativity and narrative function as rich purveyors of our epistemological experience. A rich folk tradition is vital to a vibrant art because it furnishes a powerful reservoir for artistic creativity. The vernacular languages and art forms of the folk tradition function as tools of empowerment and subversion against domination. Vernacular languages also help produce an expressive structure that can transcend or destroy the colonial ideologies. Caribbean artists can glean seminal lessons from successful music forms such as Soca and Reggae, which incorporate elements borrowed from other cultures, but their vernacular roots infuse them with powerful expressive ideas based on indigenous values.

The Role and Purpose of Caribbean Art Criticism

The assumptions that our methodology brings to art criticism help shape the questions we ask and the answers we produce. Theoretical and methodological advances in Caribbean art criticism bear a direct relationship to our acceptance of an indigenous Caribbean philosophy. Some educators, philosophers and art historians may scoff at the suggestion that an indigenous Caribbean philosophy exists. How-

ever, if we accept a view of philosophy as an analytic tool for apprehending knowledge, then Caribbean philosophy can be defined as a way of reflecting on how Caribbean people think about the world. We can identify movements and progression of ideas in Caribbean philosophy – extending several hundred years – in the work of the great writers, artists, activists as well as political and economic thinkers that the region has produced. It is our loss when our institutions of higher learning prefer to exercise a fixation that looks backward to Classical Western ideas without giving adequate attention to the strong intellectual and philosophical tradition that has developed in the work of important Caribbean artists and intellectuals. Caribbean art criticism cannot flourish if it is based principally on the standards of Western aesthetics, which assumes that Eurocentric art forms produce a superior discourse to the artistic expression of other cultures. Traditional Western art criticism is incapable of fully comprehending Caribbean art because its critical object privileges the "beaux arts" of European-based cultures as superior to the arts of non-Western peoples and the popular arts of the working classes. Furthermore, Western aesthetics generates a series of historical biases that has tried to limit the artistic text to an object or activity created principally within European spaces and times.

Although the notion of the island as a grand signifier in Caribbean aesthetics begins with a Caribbean viewpoint as opposed to that of the other, let me reiterate that the Caribbean is an arena built on a history of cultural exchange and engaging the other. Our history is replete with waves of migration. As a matter of fact, our known history begins with people who migrated through the islands from South America. Today, our tourist industry is built on the spirit of hospitality and welcome that we give to strangers. Many visitors live among us. A basic tenet of the island signifier is that we are not alone, so much so that Caribbean people are known as avid travelers and migrants.

Cultural exchange has a critical role to play in Caribbean art. Certainly, European and North American art patrons have made important contributions to the development of art in the region. Books by Samella Lewis (1989) and Veerle Poupeye (1998) or the consultant work that Rick Powell (Chair of the Art Department at Duke

University) has been doing in Barbados contribute immensely to artistic development in the region. Expatriate interest has fuelled a romanticized genre of travelogue art featuring Caribbean landscapes and architecture. On the one hand, this patronage has helped to preserve aspects of the region's folk cultural heritage and has provided some economic support and international exposure for artists. On the other, the emphasis on the romanticized exotic image presents a special challenge for Caribbean artists. A word of caution is necessary because cultural exchange can easily become cultural imperialism. However, despite the physical limitations and constraints of being small islands, the Caribbean experience is identified by the way Caribbean people adopt and transform cultural influences that enter the region, creating forms that comprise significant elements of Caribbean identity. The game of cricket or Caribbean cuisine would stand as cases in point. Some observers fear the overwhelming influence of the North over the South. However, in examining relationships between large states and smaller ones, it would be incorrect to reduce these contacts to the "bullet-theory model" or a simple one-way flow. It is not a missionary situation in which the European-based cultures are bringing civilization, religion and knowledge to ignorant islanders. In the communication process, receivers have the power to accept or resist the message. They might even use the message for purposes the sender had not envisaged. While it is ill-advised to adopt an isolationist stance and deny any relevance of European traditional aesthetics to Caribbean art, the over-determination of our art forms by European and North American concerns is a cause for concern.

The theoretical and methodological work necessary for developing a language of Caribbean art criticism should begin with the text, focusing especially on how Caribbean artists use their aesthetic sensibility to shape raw material in the creative process. Caribbean art criticism is concerned with how the Caribbean experience informs artistic expression and image production. Any important theoretical developments in Caribbean art criticism should take into account the historical interaction of artist, commentator/art critic, Caribbean audience and the region's cultural history. Given the cultural diversity of the region, an indigenous hermeneutics of Caribbean art criticism cannot overlook the importance of an archeological

function in the critique of artistic expression. Archeological excavation as a critical strategy focuses on revealing layers of signification that reflect the mosaic of cultural influences that make up the Caribbean. It seeks to excavate knowledge that reflects ways of knowing unique to the Caribbean, but which have been repressed and marginalized. The process of creolization at work in Caribbean culture presents a special challenge for art criticism because there is need for a semiotic process to speak to the multi-layered textures and resonances of our art forms. It highlights the need for artists and critics to excavate Caribbean cultural spaces and temporalities.

Toward a Hermeneutics of Caribbean Art Criticism

In developing a methodology for Caribbean art criticism, the opportunity exists for Caribbean people to name and validate our lived realities as opposed to repeating the epistemological priorities of a Eurocentric reality and its social, political, gender and racial categories. Caribbean art assumes its historical importance when artists move to reject and transform colonial and neo-colonial discourses. The invocation of a Caribbean hermeneutics that uses the island as a grand signifier is a critical step in articulating a methodology of Caribbean art criticism. It redefines artistic space and image production, sharpening the view of the artwork as a text that emerges from the experience of Caribbean people. It also provides intertextual grounding for Caribbean art, providing historical sources and extrapolating cultural relationships that help us to better understand the work of Caribbean artists. It also positions the region and its people as a primary contextual framework for Caribbean art. The island signifier is related to an interpretive system that reaches into the belly of New World history to uncover a Caribbean worldview that informs a unique aesthetic and critical tradition. The Caribbean is the product of several cultures and histories. Its particular history encompasses, but is greater than its constituting parts. Despite more than 500 years of contact with Europeans and several hundred years of colonial rule, the Caribbean still exudes an island sensibility that foregrounds a unique set of cultural values, which reflect but differ from North American, European and African cultures. Where we come from is important, but through the process of creolization

we learn that where we are now and where we are going remain more fundamental questions.

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Contemporary Art Criticism in Jamaica: Dialogues or Monologues?

BY

VEERLE POUPEYE

Compared to other Caribbean countries, particularly the Hispanic Caribbean, Jamaica does not have a strong critical tradition, at least not in the visual arts. Jamaican art criticism has been slow to develop and has, with few exceptions, always lacked intellectual substance. To compound this, the work of certain prominent critics has been marred by controversy and there has been considerable debate about its relevance, its quality and, even, its integrity.

The lack of a pertinent, well-informed critical context has in turn been a significant problem in the development of Jamaican art. I should point out, however, that the writings of Jamaica's published critics do not necessarily represent the prevailing views in the Jamaican art community and elsewhere in Jamaican society. On the contrary, the most interesting and pertinent arguments rarely reach publication, mainly because so few in Jamaica are willing and able to put their views to paper and, more so, to have them published, an issue we certainly need to look at.

It would be instructive to examine the historical roots of Jamaica's critical problems but in the interest of time, I have limited my paper to a case study of the sort of art criticism that appeared in Jamaican newspapers and journals in the eighties and the controversies that then erupted. I had moved to Jamaica in 1984 and was working at the Jamaica School of Art and the National Gallery of Jamaica at the time. My affiliation with the National Gallery and my own early efforts as a writer about Jamaican art confronted me very directly with the problems I am about to discuss and these experiences helped to shape my current views about the challenges facing Jamaican art criticism. My paper therefore concludes with an examination of certain general questions and perceptions that surround contemporary Jamaican art criticism.

At the start of the eighties, there were in essence three major art critics in Jamaica — Andrew Hope, Gloria Escoffery and Archie Lindo— although a few others were also writing. They represent three distinct perspectives that are each characteristic of Jamaican art criticism of that era.

Andrew Hope, whose birth name is Ignacy Ecker, is of Polish-German origin. He came to Jamaica somewhere in the 1950s, after living in London for some time where he claims to have studied at the RCA, and he worked for several years with the Hills Galleries, then the major commercial gallery in Kingston. I was unable to ascertain when exactly he started writing but he had become a household name by the 1970s (then still as Ignacy Ecker). He remained the *Gleaner*'s principal critic until a few years ago. For those of you who are not familiar with the Jamaican press: the *Gleaner* is Jamaica's main daily newspaper. It has been in operation since 1834 and was the only major daily newspaper in publication in Jamaica during the 1980s, making it effectively a monopoly. Although he has occasionally exhibited his drawings and at one point worked with Barrington Watson's gallery, the Contemporary Art Centre, art criticism has been Andrew Hope's main professional activity for some thirty years and he is arguably Jamaica's only professional critic.

Andrew Hope is also Jamaica's most controversial critic and much of the uneasiness that surrounds the subject today can be traced to his interventions. His views on art are conservative, blatantly Eurocentric, dogmatic, often simplistic and ill-informed and, many will agree, hopelessly out of touch with what is current in Jamaican art and culture. He has consistently favoured the rigidly academic approach to painting epitomized by the Jamaican painter Barrington Watson (and I should add that in pointing this out, I am not making a value judgement about Watson's work - a necessary disclaimer in Jamaica's current critical climate where what I have not quite said or written seems more important than what I have actually said or written.) Predictably, therefore, he has questioned the legitimacy of the self-taught, 'intuitive' artists and his most famous argument is that the National Gallery of Jamaica has promoted these artists at the expense of Jamaica's legitimate, formally trained 'masters'. Equally predictably, he

has repeatedly expressed his disapproval of the formal and conceptual experiments of the generation of artists that emerged in the eighties and nineties.

It is often overlooked, however, that Andrew Hope's ideological and aesthetic perspectives and even his assessments of Jamaican art are merely matters of opinion, which he is free to express whether we agree or not. The real problem with Andrew Hope is that his writings — and, therefore, his ideological and aesthetic perspective — dominated Jamaican newspaper criticism for more than a decade, without significant alternatives or easily accessible opportunities to respond to his comments, a situation caused in part by the *Gleaner* monopoly during those years.

Other questions surrounded his writings of the eighties, however, such as the manner in which his personal affiliation with certain artists and galleries appeared to affect his critical assessments. Exhibitions by 'out-of-favour' artists and galleries, if he reviewed them at all, routinely got very negative, often scornful comments while the efforts of his associates were invariably written into the stars. Most of all, he was notorious for his tendency to resort to protracted, vitriolic personal attacks in response to what ought to have been professional differences. In the 1980s, he relentlessly attacked the National Gallery of Jamaica, the self-taught artists and, predictably, the Gallery's chief curator David Boxer, often using unacceptable strategies, such as the deliberate misrepresentation of his opponents' words.

Gloria Escoffery, who is a Jamaican-born painter, journalist, poet and English teacher, has also published in the *Gleaner* but she is best known for the reviews and essays she wrote for *Jamaica Journal* during the 1980s. *Jamaica Journal* is the quarterly journal of the Institute of Jamaica, dedicated to the arts, literature, history and natural science, and has been in publication since 1967. Gloria Escoffery's writings were idiosyncratic but thoughtful, well-informed and intellectually solid. Although her views were at times also Eurocentric, her writings stood out because of the even-handedness of her comments and her tolerance of different world views and artistic approaches. Her critical writings presented a pluralist picture of Jamaican art that allowed her to discuss artists as diverse as Barrington Watson, Edna Manley, Everald Brown and Robert Cookhorne

(now Omari Ra) in one single article, without pitching one against the other — a sharp contrast with the 'divide and rule' tactics of Andrew Hope.

As Gloria Escoffery wrote almost exclusively for *Jamaica Journal* during those years, there was little direct interaction between her writings and those of Andrew Hope. He did taunt her repeatedly, however, among others calling her the 'vainglorious Gloria' and she did write an angry letter when he called her a 'village explainer' — two examples, by the way, of the name-calling Andrew Hope was infamous for. Gloria Escoffery lives in the rural market town of Browns Town in central Jamaica, nearly two hours driving from Kingston, where she has surrounded herself with one of the best art libraries in the country, and her somewhat isolated position has surely contributed to her ability to distance herself from the power struggles of the Kingston art world. I should mention, however, that she sat on the board of the National Gallery of Jamaica for many years so she was not an entirely neutral observer in Jamaica's increasingly divided art world.

Archie Lindo, who was also a photographer, was probably the least controversial of all Jamaican critics. He wrote for the *Star*, the Gleaner Company's evening tabloid, which is geared towards a wider, less 'literate' audience, and he also wrote and presented a radio commentary programme for RJR. Archie Lindo was a kindly man who tried valiantly to say or write something positive about every exhibition he reviewed although his comments rarely went beyond the descriptive. Some of us may scoff at the lack of substance of Archie Lindo's articles and commentaries but he was nonetheless the only Jamaican critic ever to dedicate himself to bringing what happened in Jamaica's increasingly cloistered and elitist art community to a wider audience.

Although Gloria Escoffery and Archie Lindo were well respected, Andrew Hope was undeniably the dominant art critic of the eighties, perhaps merely because of the controversies he generated. The response to him was not always civil and it is no secret that some attempted to have him removed from his position at the *Gleaner* although none succeeded, at least not at that time. More constructively, several attempts were made to create a more balanced critical climate. One such initiative was the establish-

ment of the *Artist's Eye* column in the early eighties, which was negotiated by a group of concerned artists and art lovers with the management and editors of the *Gleaner* as an alternative to Andrew Hope's columns. (This group included Tina Spiro who is present at this conference.) The idea was to write from an artist's point of view, as the name of the column suggested, and the group aimed to review all local exhibitions, including those that were usually ignored by Andrew Hope. (As of 1985, I occasionally contributed reviews.) Although I appreciate the historical relevance of the group's efforts, I had difficulty with its guiding philosophy that it was our calling in life to support the good cause of Jamaican art and that our writings should therefore not rock the boat. In an artistic community which was becoming increasingly commercialized at the time, the danger of such views was that it helped to reduce art criticism to a toothless promotional tool, which is how many interests in the Jamaican art world would still like to see it today. Furthermore, I felt that Andrew Hope's arguments had to be challenged, if only for the sake of those he victimized, but the column did not offer any room for such polemics.

In this context I should also mention *Arts Jamaica*, Jamaica's only art journal to date, which came about through the efforts of roughly the same interest group that initiated the *Artist's Eye* column and reflected similar ideas about Jamaican art and art criticism. (It is, in fact, in *Arts Jamaica* that I published my first Jamaican article in 1985). *Arts Jamaica* appeared as a quarterly from 1982 to 1985 and was edited by Margaret Bernal who was also the curator of the Frame Centre Gallery, then a very active Kingston gallery. Although several important articles were published in the journal, it suffered from a certain amateurism in content and presentation. Recent attempts to revive it have so far been unsuccessful.

The *Artist's Eye* initiative, meanwhile, petered out in the mid 1980s . Crescencia Leon-Medhurst, a Jamaica School of Art graduate who worked at the *Gleaner* and initially served as the column's in-house coordinator, became its sole contributor and, consequently, the Gleaner's only alternative to Andrew Hope. Although usually well-meant, her articles were at best incoherent and raised questions about her competence as a critic and a writer but more so about the editorial policies of the Gleaner, who should

never have allowed such poorly written articles to reach publication. Yet, amazingly, Ms Leon received an award for her contribution to Jamaican art criticism from the Caribbean Press Association, in 1988, if memory serves me right — an illustration of how clueless Jamaica's press is when it comes to the arts.

In February of 1988, when the Andrew Hope controversies were at their peak, I organized a symposium entitled *The Crisis in Criticism* for the National Gallery of Jamaica, in an effort to stimulate a more structured debate on the subject of Jamaican art criticism. Rex Nettleford presented the keynote address and spoke about the disparity between the views of Jamaica's most controversial critics and the prevailing ideological perspectives among Jamaica's artists and cultural organizers. Pamela O'Gorman, a musicologist and music critic, spoke about the state of music, dance and drama criticism in Jamaica, an equally controversial subject. Sonia Jones, a lawyer and then the chairperson of the Institute of Jamaica, examined the legal rights of the critics, the criticised and the publishers of critical texts — particulary the vexed question of when criticism becomes libel. Gloria Escoffery examined the editorial issues arising in the Gleaner's art page — a timely reminder that we cannot look at the state of Jamaican art criticism without looking at the state of the press. The proceedings were closed by David Boxer who spoke about the right of artists to talk back and cited examples of artists who had done just that in their work, usually in a satirical form. I regret to this day that the *Crisis in Criticism* symposium became too much of a counter-attack against Andrew Hope and, more unfortunately, Crescentia Leon-Medhurst and that we did not focus enough on how to get Jamaican art criticism on a more productive course. Predictably, the situation became even more adversarial in the months that followed the symposium and I can therefore not claim it helped in any measurable way to improve the state of Jamaican art criticism, at least not at the time.

What has since then happened to the protagonists of this paper? Archie Lindo died a few years ago. Gloria Escoffery, who is getting older, has published very little since the early 1990s. She has withdrawn almost entirely from the increasingly controversy-ridden Kingston art world and now focuses mainly on her painting. Andrew Hope started toning down his comments in the early 1990s — presumably because he was finally

pressured to do so by the *Gleaner*'s new editorial teams. His columns disappeared suddenly and without official explanation from the *Gleaner*'s pages a few years ago but he has since reemerged as a regular contributor to the *Observer*, Jamaica's youngest daily newspaper. The *Gleaner*'s damaging monopoly has thus been broken in the nineties although it has been difficult for the other daily papers to survive and to compete against the *Gleaner*, which is heavily supported by the dominant financial and mercantile interests in Jamaica. Although there is still the occasional minor gibe at the National Gallery, Andrew Hope is now clearly avoiding controversy. His recent writings have in fact become very feeble, which may stem from his deteriorating health, and he has lost most of his visibility and influence.

Crescencia Leon-Medhurst, finally, continued writing on art for the Gleaner until very recently and also made a career as the editor of *Children's Own*, the Gleaner company's newspaper for children. She left the Gleaner's staff about a year ago, apparently because of a disagreement concerning *Children's Own*, but has now reappeared as a freelance contributor on art to the *Herald*, another recent but financially troubled addition to the Jamaican press. Even though her articles still lack substance and direction, they are better written than before which probably also means that they are better edited.

The controversies of the eighties may seem like a somewhat quaint and unfortunate episode in the history of Jamaican art criticism but they are in fact still surprisingly relevant to the present day, even though some of the protagonists have changed. Perhaps the most valuable lesson to be learned here, is that Jamaican art criticism will never generate anything more than an endless series of petty attacks and counter-attacks if our critics (and, admittedly, their critics) do not learn to separate the personal from the professional, one of the most infuriating side-effects of the small size of the Jamaican art community. Art criticism is, after all, supposedly about dialogue — and Jamaican art surely needs it — but dialogue cannot take place when such an essentially self-serving adversarial climate is cultivated. Since the press seems unwilling or unable to address the problem of ethical standards in Jamaican art criticism — never forget, controversy sells — critics who want to have any credibility will have to set their own standards and, of course, adhere to them.

Another problem that concerns me is the dogmatism that informs so much of what is still today written about Jamaican art. One fundamental problem in the writings of Andrew Hope is that he has approached Jamaican art from a pre-existing model of what it should and should not be and that he approached himself as an arbiter of artistic legitimacy. Too many of our critics still indulge in such canon wars yet seem alarmingly irresponsive to what our artists are, in fact, doing and why. This is particularly obvious today and local critics have in essence failed to respond to the critical challenges posed by contemporary Jamaican art and its rapidly and fundamentally changing context, particularly the departures from the conventional notions of Jamaican art and 'Jamaican-ness'.

Critics are not the only ones in the Jamaican art world to think dogmatically, however, and, although this in no way absolves Andrew Hope, we should acknowledge that the powers that be in the Jamaican art world are not partiuclarly tolerant of opinions that challenge the conventions of the Jamaican school, especially not when the dissent comes from persons who are perceived as outsiders, as I have personally experienced on several occasions. In order to have a vibrant critical discourse, however, there must be room for diverging views on the nature of Jamaican art and culture, no matter how they contradict each other.

At the start of this paper, I made a remark about who writes and who gets published in Jamaica and it is indeed peculiar that most of Jamaican critics and art writers are foreign-born (as the representation at this conference well illustrates) and that most others also come from the upper classes and are foreign-educated. One major reason is that, much more so than being exhibited or recognised as an artist, publishing about art is a matter of social privelege in Jamaica (and elsewhere)that depends on one's social and professional access to those who control the local press and other publications. Moreover, writing about art does not pay particularly well in Jamaica and there are quite a few people who would be very competent critics who simply cannot afford to do it or, for that matter, to attend conferences such as this one.

This leads me to another vexed issue, namely what qualifications should be required from Jamaican art critics. I fully agree that anyone should be allowed to express their opinion on Jamaican art and do not believe that one needs to have an advanced degree in art history to be a competent critic. With the right to express one's opinion comes the duty to be well informed, however, and it is in this respect that art criticism in Jamaica is often lacking in newspaper criticism, which is again an illustration of the inadequacies of the local press.

The bottom line is, however, that Jamaica is not producing its own art critics. What Jamaica really needs is a larger, more varied and better qualified corps of critics and art historians and it is essential that these be educated locally and on local issues. While the Edna Manley College contributes to this through its word-based courses, this will not be achieved until students can do postgraduate work in these fields. The lack of such facilities is another reason why there are so few Jamaican critics and art historians. The onus is therefore on the University of the West Indies to give the study of the visual arts a more significant place in its curriculum and to establish firm links with other disciplines such as literature and social history.

The ineffectiveness of the local critical response has in turn compounded a more serious problem: the general public's estrangement from contemporary Jamaican art. Most of the recent debates about art have taken place within Jamaica's increasingly incestuous art community, with little or no involvement from the larger public. The biggest challenge facing contemporary Jamaican art criticism is therefore perhaps to take some lessons from Archie Lindo and to live up to its responsibilities towards the general public.

On Her Own Terms: Nation-space and Some Problems of Criticism in Contemporary Caribbean Art

BY

GABRIELLE HEZEKIAH

The issue of nationalist rhetoric and its implications for the inclusion and exclusion of artists from "national" bodies of work has already been alluded to by Christopher Cozier at this symposium.[1] I would like to elaborate on this theme and suggest that ideas of nationhood are constructed, deconstructed and replicated in our curatorial and critical practices in ways which might prevent a more detailed examination of the art object and the artist's intention. At a symposium such as this, where a body of critics and a body of critical discourse around Caribbean art are being formed, it is important to examine this process. I shall refer to the exhibition "Lips, Sticks and Marks" (currently housed at the Art Foundry and an official visiting site on the symposium's agenda) as a way of sketching what I believe to be some of the key elements of this process.

I take as my starting point the work of Benedict Anderson and his characterization of the nation as an "imagined community"[2]. This work points to some fundamental questions of belonging, boundaries, imagination and community. Anderson suggests that notions of shared history (origins), geography (space) and community (shared relationships across the divides of issues such as class) make up the idea of the nation. The boundaries of the nation - what separates "us" from "them" - exist in our imaginations as very real and concrete markers of national identity. In the current situation, we might suggest that these markers may be extended to include notions of regional (Caribbean) identity - particularly where one might try to define the region in terms of its culture, history and geographical space. For the purposes of this reflection, I shall define Caribbean "nation formation" as such.

Homi K. Bhabha[3] has pointed to the importance of discourse in nation formation and the ways in which an examination of the narratives of nationhood can reveal the

inherent instability of the national idea. Bhabha's contention is that there are several voices within the nation-space which challenge the idea of the homogeneous "shared" nation and that there exist boundaries within the space as well as without. An examination of the discourses of nationhood - of the ways in which the nation is written - points to the voices which are excluded from official versions of nation-hood.

The work in "Lips, Sticks and Marks", while perhaps not setting out self-consciously to (re)present the nation or to challenge the ideas which support national identity, calls into question some of the issues surrounding belonging, boundaries, imagination and community. The exhibition is the work of seven women from Aruba, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago - "working individually but thinking collectively"[4]. Their styles and media are quite divergent though conceptually their work is similar. They appear to perceive themselves as sharing certain artistic and philosophical/political preoccupations and this, coupled with the fact that some of them have shared similar educational, generational and gendered experiences, makes them into a kind of community. It is a community not commonly included in mainstream definitions of what it means to be "Caribbean" but it is their very Caribbeanness which these women appear to claim as one (geographical and psychological) point of departure for the formation of community. What does it mean to produce particular kinds of political art as a female artist in the contemporary Caribbean? These women do not offer easy answers but their work points to several avenues if we return to the idea of the nation as imagined community.

The idea of origins or the history of the nation (community) is explored in some detail by Joscelyn Gardner and Irénée Shaw. Gardner's "In the Chamber of my Birth (a Repeating Voyage to my Self)" narrates the story of the arrival of various races to the Caribbean. It is a story of journeying and arrival. The telling is specifically female, the sea-faring vessels and sarcophogi serving as wombs/tombs perhaps signifying the death of old cultures and the formation of new. It is this work's contention that Caribbean community is grounded in geographical space. Many of its members may originate elsewhere but the history of the region begins with

various arrivals and belonging is tied to the sea and land. Caribbean history and culture are birthed in this place and this birthing cannot be divorced conceptually from the female body. Irénée Shaw's "Adam" and "Eve" interrogates the Genesis narrative of foundations and beginnings. It presents an Adam and Eve engaged in a very human process of reflection in an environment which could very easily be Caribbean. Eve's countenance suggests more than the religious narrative might imply and the viewer is urged to ask which voices might have been displaced from that narrative of origins. "Adam" and "Eve" force us to rethink the "naturalness" of the creation myth and lay bare its constructedness. In Shaw's work, the origin of community is not fixed and this calls into question the nature of the community as it currently exists.

Notions of space abound in this exhibition and this is perhaps where the work presents its most successful challenge to ideas of the nation-space and what may be contained therein. Annalee Davis' interrogation of the domestic space raises several issues - the relationship between the private and the public, the ability of grand familial narratives to contain disparate voices and experiences and the ability of marriage as an institution to engender notions of shared community among its members being chief among these. Davis's musings on her struggles within marriage and the implications of its failure for her role as a mother - rendered more acute by her awareness of the fact that as an institution this is supposed to make her happy - are underlined by an implicit struggle around identity. The family as the microcosm of society, creating productive citizens and guarding against the vagaries of the outside world (a haven), is a useful point of entry into this work. While the nuclear family unit is assumed in some versions of the national narrative to offer protection, it is Davis who seems to feel that she must offer her spirit some protection against the confining structure of what we expect of the family and our roles within it. Davis' insistence on blurring the line between private and public also opens the way for a different kind of community based on the sharing of intimate experiences which occur within the boundaries of the home. The experience of marriage does not appear to have drawn Davis any closer to feelings of belonging or community.

In fact, it seems to have drawn her into a very individual struggle for the assertion of identity.

The work of Roberta Stoddard is also particularly interesting in its conceptualization of space and what that might mean for an investigation of community. Stoddard addresses an interior, emotional and psychic space which moves beyond the traditional boundaries of community. It suggests a more malleable set of boundaries - as yet uncharted - and a free movement between the spaces of the abyss and the "everyday world"[5] . Stoddard's paintings suggest a fascination with the world beyond: her angels and cemeteries are poignant images both of rootedness and transcendence. Her angels' combination of earthly and unearthly qualities suggests a world in-between. Her work questions the idea of "spaces we all occupy" and suggests that, if there are such spaces, they are to be found not in the exterior world but in the psyche. The sharing of space here appears to be bound not by geography but by a notion of suffering and transcendence.

Relationships to origins and space therefore find themselves examined and redrawn in this exhibition. The feeling of connectedness to which Anderson refers (connections across barriers to people whom we have never met but whom we imagine to form part of the same nation) is evidenced in the curating of the exhibition. "Lips, Sticks and Marks" can be seen as a response to a curatorial void left by organizers who enter the Caribbean from the outside and produce exhibitions not truly reflective of the diversity of work within Caribbean borders. It speaks to the exclusion of female voices engaged in contemporary art practice. Essentially, it is a response to a nationalist question and, in so framing its position, it moves inevitably into the realm of defining itself in relation to others. This is where some of the greatest potential for reinscribing nationalist agendas lies.

These artists are seen to share a culture which is based on a pre-existing Caribbeanness - departing from the existing narratives by its focus on aspects of female and intimate culture and cutting across linguistic and cultural barriers. Philosophically they address many similar questions in their work but the work

itself represents such a wide range of styles, techniques and conceptual points of departure that one cannot but wonder how the work might be interpreted if taken on its own terms. The critic who is concerned with notions of what constitutes Caribbean art may seek in the work these very attempts at redrawing Caribbeanness - instead of work which comes from very many places/spaces which may all happen to be Caribbean. The problem here is the reliance on a notion of shared community based on a notion of Caribbeanness which is constructed as a necessary tool for understanding and interpreting the work presented. There is a taken-for-grantedness in this representation itself which places restrictions on the ways in which the work might be interpreted. How might one reconcile the traditional relationships to land and origins found in the work of Gardner and Martinez with the more interrogative stance of Shaw? How might the critic organize the bodily experiences suggested by the work of Dayal and Muyale? How is the work of Davis similar to that of feminist artists exploring the public/private dichotomy in other parts of the world? What is the contribution of this work to work constructed elsewhere? And the contribution of the work from elsewhere? How might we allow artists to imagine themselves as part of a larger and more fluid community? What is it about this work that artist and critic believe to be Caribbean and at what point does it cease to matter?

The very disparate nature of the work itself (and the challenges it poses to any uniform relationship to nation and community) does not seem to suggest to many of us critics, that the organizing interpretive framework (of the nation) is insufficient for tackling the task at hand. The nation as an ideological construct serves as a fruitful point of departure for investigating the ways in which the artists and their work come to be produced but without an examination of this process both artist and critic may replicate the national idea as a sort of imperative to which the work and its interpretation must eventually subscribe. And an engaged critique of the work may not be allowed to surface.

I want to suggest here that the act of criticism in this context must be able to investigate and pull away the assumptions that are made about the conceptualization,

process, intention and exhibition of the work. A criticism which does not meet the work on its own terms may be doomed to repeat a kind of marginalization of the work. This is not to suggest that the critic ought not to bring her own positions to the work. It should be possible, however, to address the work in terms of what it does as well as what it represents. In this way, contemporary and conceptual work such as that in this exhibition may be discussed as a contribution to particular forms of art practice and may be allowed to find community in new ways.

My contention, therefore, is that the instability of the national/regional idea makes it a deeply productive but insufficient category for an investigation into contemporary art practice in the Caribbean. The idea of the nation will continue to organize and inform our interpretive categories as we confront the very real issue of belonging but it ought not to become the definitive marker of identity. Definitions and categories will perhaps always be with us but we must attend to the ways in which these can limit or liberate the artwork and the artist as well as the context and practice of art criticism.

NOTES

1. I refer to the presentation by Christopher Cozier, "Some Questions on Contemporary Histories...", on the opening day of the symposium.
2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, [1983] 1991).
3. Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation." In Homi K. Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 291-322.
4. Susie Dayal, excerpt of artist's statement, in Lips, Sticks and Marks [exhibition catalogue], edited by Annalee Davis for the Lips, Sticks and Marks Collective (Foursquare: The Art Foundry, 1998).
5.The artists whose work was represented at "Lips, Sticks and Marks" spoke about their work on August 29 as part of this symposium. Here, Stoddard referred to her experience of the "abyss" and suggested that it was a space which might be commonly though not uniformly shared.

Whose Jamaican art ? Whose Caribbean art ?

BY

ANNIE PAUL

I

As a coffee table book *Modern Jamaican Art* is quite successful. The layout and design are pleasing and the colour reproductions of artwork in it are of a high quality. To consider it the authoritative text on Jamaican art which it has been billed as, however, is highly problematic.

The text in the book consists roughly of two sections. First there is what seems to be a reprint of the essay "Jamaican Art 1922-1982" written by David Boxer to accompany the Smithsonian travelling exhibition in 1982. Its a pity that Boxer could not have brought himself to update that essay and add a few lines about new developments in Jamaican art. As Curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica since 1975 he is in a unique position to do this. As recently appointed Curator Emeritus it is important that the Jamaican public have the benefit of his views on the drastic shifts which have taken place in the art scene between 1922 when he chooses to situate the beginnings of a Jamaican art movement and the present. For this however, readers have to rely on an essay called "Contemporary Jamaican Art" by Veerle Poupeye. Poupeye is an art historian from Belgium who accompanied her husband to Jamaica in the early eighties and has been resident here ever since. During that period she has worked closely with Boxer at the National Gallery and written quite a bit about Jamaican art. She has also recently authored a book called *Caribbean Art*.

Both Boxer and Poupeye are given to an uncritical use of the language of Euro-American art criticism. "Art" is talked about as if it is a known and easily quantifiable entity and definitions and concepts developed in Europe are transplanted to the

Jamaican terrain with little or no concern for the new context in which they are being deployed. A good example of this is the treatment of so-called "primitive" artists in the Jamaican context. The concept of the "primitive" in art first arose in Europe in the late 19th century. As English writer and art critic, John Berger puts it, "Art-historically the word primitive has been used in three different ways: to designate art (before Raphael) on the borderline between the medieval and modern Renaissance traditions; to label the trophies and "curiousities" taken from the colonies (Africa, Caribbean, South Pacific) when brought back to the imperial metropolis; and lastly to put in its place the art of men and women from the working classes -- proletarian, peasant, petit-bourgeois -- who did not leave their class by becoming professional artists." It is this last category of artists we are concerned with here, art produced by working class men and women with no formal training in art.

In Jamaica rather than call such artists "primitive" Boxer came up with the title "intuitive" which though it was a change in name only was felt somehow to be an improvement over the term "primitive". Why it was felt that this concept of a primitive "other" against which Europe could set off its superior, cultured self should be reproduced in the land of the other, by the other, is never explained or even reflected on. Instead there is an easy separation of Jamaican art into "mainstream" and "intuitive". The language in which "intuitive" art is described conforms exactly to the way in which European art history discusses what it calls "naive" or "primitive" art. "They were born with it, this special gift that I call the Intuitive Eye, and it spills out directly, unmediated and in a totally honest fashion onto the canvas or into wood", Boxer says of the intuitives, "who form an impressive counterbalance to the increasingly cosmopolitan Mainstream artists" (p. 25). What separates the sheep from the goats where untutored art is concerned seems to be class, however. An untutored working class artist is an intuitive while an untutored middle class artist, aware of art and art history is part of the "mainstream". An intuitive can however contaminate the "freshness" and "innocence" of his vision by exposure to "the works of the mainstream, to art books, and to reproductions" as happened to Sidney McLaren (p. 24) but this is no threat to the vision of middle class untutored artists who can safely straddle the mainstream, charging higher prices for their art-historically aware work!

Poupeye too is given to these naive theories about the so-called intuitives although she does seem to realize that "there is no clear distinction between the intuitives and the 'mainstream' who after all work in the same general cultural and historical context". What is problematic about her essay is that it is never clear what the criteria are for inclusion or exclusion in her narrative about contemporary Jamaican art.

Again this is most obvious in her discussion of the intuitives where Euro-American art language is bandied about such as her description of Leonard Daley as a seemingly "prototypical 'outsider' artist". Again, outside what? To whom? Who's inside, who's outside?--These are questions that go unreflected on. Is Daley 'outside' Jamaican society? Of course 'outsider art' is a specific term in the Euro-American context but why should we assume this commonality of language in our context?

Poupeye describes the sudden appearance since the late 80s of a whole host of intuitives "including Paul Perkins, Dennis Minott and, most recently, Eli Jah, a mystic and church leader from downtown Kingston. Remarkably she had been exhibiting in Switzerland for several years before coming to the attention of the local art establishment in the mid-nineties." Note the necessary intervention from Europe that is required here. Apparently for these apparitions to "happen" on the scene there has to be a fortuitous meeting between the unschooled and unrecognized intuitive with the cultivated and knowing eye of the European! "That there must be other unknown intuitives is also suggested by the case of Dennis Minott who was discovered accidentally in 1989 by a Kingston collector on a trip through Portland" she burbles. But what is the context in which these people produce work? What is their relationship to the communities they come from? None of this is considered important. Are we to understand that these individuals are wandering around the countryside with their masterpieces hoping to stumble on educated European eyes? In the case of Eli Jah we're told that her "work is interwoven with her religious activities" but that's about all. But why is it alright for these semi-religious works to be transported out of their context and re-inserted in new and alien worlds of meaning?

In her book *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* Sally Price talks about "the plight of objects from around the world that - in some ways like the Africans who were captured and transported to unknown lands during the slave trade have been discovered, seized, commoditized, stripped of their social ties, redefined in new settings, and reconceptualized to fit into the economic, cultural, political, and ideological needs of people from distant societies. Although the devastation wrought by this twentieth century brand of cultural imperialism is of an entirely different order from that of its slave trade precedent, it, too, diminishes the communities that are its suppliers."

Concomitant with the privileging of what is considered art in Europe there is a disregard for what Jamaicans themselves consider art or those who function consciously (as opposed to the unconscious art seemingly produced by the intuitives) as artists in the Jamaican context. This is most strikingly apparent in the complete exclusion of an artist like Ras Daniel Heartman from a supposedly authoritative text on Jamaican art. Ras Daniel Heartman was the image-maker par excellence of Rastafarian Dread. Unlike the artists championed by Poupeye as making unconscious use of"Rastafarian symbols" in their work (Ras Dizzy, Leonard Daley etc) Heartman consciously iconized personifications of the philosophy of Rastafari. In the seventies his black and white pencil portraits of Rastafari subjects were made into posters and prints and disseminated widely in Jamaica, the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora. Nevertheless his work is not to be seen in the national collection and is not considered to have any intrinsic value. A history of Jamaican art that excludes Heartman is a seriously flawed history and once again this raises questions about the narrow lens used by the would be historians and custodians of Jamaican art.

While Jamaican artists are routinely written out of their own history expatriate artists from other countries easily find a place in the history of Jamaican art by virtue of having lived and worked here for several years (others missing without explanation are Judith Salmon, Colin F, Bryan McFarlane, Cheryl Daley Champagtue and no doubt many others, after all if all and sundry are eligible to be considered Jamaican artists why leave out someone like Rachel Fearing? Prudence Lovell, Samere Tansley

and Rex Dixon are three such favoured artists from England and one hopes that they realize how honoured and fortunate they are because in the reverse situation of Caribbean artists who live and work in England for lengthy periods the same hospitality is not forthcoming. A case in point is the career of Aubrey Williams who though he spent close to 30 years painting in England is never noticed by histories of English art except under the heading "Black British Art". Its interesting to note that the only major revision to Boxer's Smithsonian essay in this book is the addition of the artist Susan Alexander. No explanation is given, her name is simply slipped into a list of artists who were active in the sixties. Alexander is American-born, married to a Jamaican and resident here for many years.

Again the terms in which the work of these artists is discussed is simplistic in the extreme. Dixon for example is described by Poupeye as arriving in Jamaica during a period of social unrest so that "the work he created in response to Belfast [where he came to Jamaica from] evolved seamlessly into work inspired by the Jamaican environment." Mind you there was little clue from the subject matter of these paintings which were the Irish ones and which the Jamaican. Being abstract they all looked similar but are we to assume that it is the violence in both places that they have in common? Is life as simple as that? And while the book is careful to document the supposed contribution of these resident foreigners it chooses to overlook many more interesting details such as the fact that Aubrey Williams visited Jamaica regularly between 1973 and 1979 and participated in an art scene in which A.D. Scott and Parboosingh were prominent. In fact the role of important patrons like Scott and influential critics like Gloria Escoffery and others is completely unreferred to, making this a very one-sided look at the development of Jamaican art.

One must also question the rigidity and arrogance with which Jamaican artists are classified and categorized. Apart from the arbitrary nature of the intuitive/mainstream division there is also the tendency to classify artists as "new imagists" "neo-expressionists" and such like. Terms which have no relevance in the Jamaican context and very limited relevance even outside where traditional ways of historicizing art have been challenged. More disturbing is the fact that African or Omari Ra as he

now calls himself, who is categorized as a neo-expressionist by Poupeye is reported by Petrine Archer-Straw in the catalogue to the show New World Imagery, as firmly rejecting such classification. Nevertheless Poupeye feels confident about ignoring this and naming him as she sees fit. Shades of imperial anthropology. Other fallacies are also reproduced such as the anomaly that while mainstream art is capable of judging and understanding so called "intuitive" art, the intuitives are not considered capable of having opinions on the work of mainstream artists and are always in a subaltern position to the so-called "mainstream" artists! This is a contradiction dealt with by Sally Price in her discussion of the European treatment of the "primitive".

Finally the limitations of this book are to some extent heralded by its title Modem Jamaican Art. On the verge of the twenty-first century the "modern" and modernism are concepts that have been thoroughly interrogated, deconstructed and to some extent reinscribed by the ravages of postmodern scholarship. It is necessary for all historians and would be scholars to be aware of these shifts in paradigm and thought, for they affect the way in which we think and write about ourselves.

II

Veerle Poupeye's book *Caribbean Art* opens with the line, "The Cuban painter Wifredo Lam (1902-82) was the first Caribbean artist to be acknowledged in the West as an important figure in modern art history..." She goes on to say that his most famous painting, *The Jungle*... has been described as "the first visual manifesto of the Third World." To me what is interesting about Lam is the fact that as Cuban critic, Gerardo Mosquera has pointed out, great as he is, Lam's famous piece *The Jungle* decorates the coat room at the Museum of Modern Art. The greatest artist of the Caribbean has been allowed no further into the hallowed portals of modern art.

It is against this background that I feel we must examine Poupeye's statement that an artist like Bismarck Victoria's minimalist sculpture Avis Rara might be excluded from publications on Caribbean art because of preconceptions about what Caribbean art should look like. Apart from telling us that Bismarck "was studio assistant to Isamu

Noguchi for 10 years" we are not enlightened as to why such a piece should be considered art in the Caribbean context. It is also assumed that we know who Isamu Noguchi, an American sculptor and architect, is.

I hope the fundamental asymmetry that I am pointing to in this juxtaposition of artists whom Veerle chooses to open her book with is now obvious. While Lam whose achievement Mosquera describes as displacing "the focus from forms to meanings, in a coherent, natural and spontaneous manner, something that had never been achieved before in modern art" is relegated to the periphery of the centre's story of modern art we in the periphery must unquestioningly accept art and artists merely on the basis of their metropolitan credentials.

For me this is the crux of the problem with books like *Caribbean Art*. When Veerle says "For this book Caribbean art is therefore defined in its widest sense, both as art made in the Caribbean and as art made by artists of immediate Caribbean descent" it is assumed that we all agree on the definition of art. The term "art" is used in an uncritical way as if the author is unaware of or refuses to recognize the crucial asymmetry at play here or the fact that to quote Mosquera yet again, and as many of us from the third world know from experience:

> The history of art has, to a large extent, been a Eurocentric story. It is a construction 'made in the West' that excludes, diminishes, decontextualizes and banishes to bantustans a good part of the aesthetic-symbolic production of the world. It is becoming increasingly urgent especially for Latin Americans to deconstruct it in search of more de-centralized, integrative, contextualized and multi-disciplinary discourses...

So its not a question of demanding as Veerle complains many misguided critics and curators do, that Caribbean art be measured by its "independence from the Western artistic canons" but that art critics and historians such as Veerle enlighten us as to the contribution made either to the Western canon or the Caribbean by pieces like Avis

Rara by Victoria. Can we demand that good Caribbean art not only display the markers of metropolitan authenticity but show that it was generated by the dynamics of Caribbean culture, so that it is possible to talk of the internal cultural demands that produced it and not merely the fact of its creator's apprenticeship to a minor American artist?

While the work of approved artists is often assessed in terms of their adherence to a Euro-American tradition of art, their grasp and use of precedents set elsewhere, what we are never told is "the nature of their participation in it; if and how they add to or modify it; or if within the context of that tradition, they have any real relevance or not." About 30 years ago, in an essay called "Caribbean Critics", Kamau Brathwaite said of the first book of literary criticism which attempted to analyse the work of West Indian writers that "...individual writers are commended to our attention without our being given very much indication of their artistic skill or significance. For to have satisfactorily illustrated the artistic skill and significance of the West Indian writers under their review, our critics would have had to demonstrate, it seems to me, not only their authors' use of European elements, but their use and transformation of their own local raw material. It is not what Mais got from Turgenev or Conrad that is finally important, but what he got from the people of Kingston and the way he was able to use it."

Broadly then I have detailed what my general problems with the book Caribbean Art are. Before I go any further however I would like to say that the book's value lies in the fact that it contains beautiful reproductions of work by a wide cross-section of Caribbean artists. While I may have problems and doubts about the commentary that accompanies the luscious visuals I am nevertheless grateful for the opportunity to compare so handily the work Jamaican artists for instance, against the work of artists from other Caribbean territories.

I am now going to list a selection of my doubts about the text in this book:

1. Keeping in mind the questions that I raised in relation to the use of the term 'intuitive' in the book *Modem Jamaican Art* I think that Veerle's use of the term 'intui-

tive' in relation to Jamaican art only, 'primitive' in relation to Haitian art and 'popular' in all other cases is curious to say the least. She also credits Jamaica's David Boxer with the use of the substitute term 'intuitive' which she says has gained some international currency. Where else is this term used in this context for instance?

2. Veerle claims that because of the "polemical context" of Caribbean art it is important to identify the "ideological perspective of publications since this may significantly affect the presented narrative." For once I completely agree but surely the author should begin by identifying her own ideological perspective. Or is it assumed that she has none and that her scholarship represents an objective, unbiased and therefore authoritative voice? On what grounds is this assumption made?

3. In relation to the point just made a couple of small examples will suffice to show the problems inherent in such an assumption. On page 11 she avers that "The term West Indies, which once applied to the entire region, is still used to describe the English-speaking part of the region, although the term Commonwealth Caribbean is gaining currency as a post-colonial alternative." Actually as far as I know, and I've checked this with several highly reputed Caribbean scholars, the term "Commonwealth Caribbean" is a contentious and contested one which is highly unlikely to be adopted as "a post-colonial alternative" anywhere in the Caribbean. Similarly in her discussion of Rastafari which she persistently refers to as a "cult" Veerle talks of this religion as "a conscious African nationalist alternative to Christianity and Creole nationalism." Elsewhere she talks about "The nationalist character of the cult". These too are contentious issues. Some object strenuously to Rasta being characterized as a cult. Finally in talking about the St Lucian artist Llewellyn Xavier Veerle complains that some of his collages "are overly decorative, with rather precious details like ribbons". This is an example of a straightforward bias against art which may incorporate decorative elements and shows a certain dated modernist resistance to the reinscription of the boundaries between 'high' and 'low', 'art' and 'craft'. How many artists have been excluded from this narrative because of similar biases on the part of the author?

4. In her discussion of Haitian art the unreflexive reproduction of the categories "mainstream" and "primitive" raises interesting questions and sheds light on the "ideological perspective" which colours Poupeye's narrative. In Haiti so-called "primitive" artists vastly outnumber so-called "mainstream" ones so wouldn't it be more logical to term them "mainstream" in the Haitian context? On what basis is a minority of artists privileged to be called "mainstream" in this context?

5. In discussing Trinidadian artist/critic Christopher Cozier's work (p. 196-7) Veerle says the following:
"While Cozier is primarily concerned with local issues, other Caribbean artists have added a broader perspective to their social commentaries". She cites with approval and contrasts Cozier with Moroccan-born Martiniquan artist Moulferdi in whose piece Deforestation "the point of departure was a toy belonging to his child and the association between children and the future led to a poetic statement on the world's ecological problems". To me this is another area where Veerle trips herself up because she seems to suggest that a focus on "local" without amplification into a world-wide declaration renders art which devotes itself primarily to local matters somehow inferior. This would explain her elevation of the work of artists like David Boxer over others like Cozier, although, when speaking of Cuban or Haitian art no subject seems too local. In speaking of Edouard Duval-Carrie's work she has no problem with his focus on "the magic and mystery of the Vaudou universe" and his comments on "Haiti's history and socio-political realities". Again in her discussion of Cuban artists like Kcho and Pedro Alvarez whose work explicitly refers to the local realities of the Cuban revolution it is not considered problematic that they focus on the "local".

I want to end by suggesting that there is still a task to be undertaken in articulating a meaningful Caribbean art history. What is produced in the book *Caribbean Art* is yet another narrative attempting to impose outdated metropolitan theories on Caribbean visual art. It must be accepted that the Caribbean is not merely another passive location for the reproduction of the myths of modern art but a vibrant region with a history and culture which interact with and transform metropolitan art practices.

Experience this reading of Peter Minshall's 1998 band Red by Chris Cozier and see what I mean:

> His [Minshall's] 1998 production called Red consisted of a few thousand mas-players moving through the city. The presentation symbolized an incision into the superfluous glitter and bikini parades that have taken over the streets in recent years. This red, bleeding fissure proclaimed that the mechanism called Carnival is still alive and hurting and as a people we still have a soul. A silent figure perhaps representing the artist himself, as if offering consolation, embraced a broken heart whose jagged black and white lines suggested the national flag
>
> The band was like a signal or a warning to those in authority who constantly fuel the divisive political circumstances in which we had found ourselves. In keeping with the 'popular' process of transforming everyday objects, his participants were provided with red chairs which they carried in their hands, on their backs, wore on their head like the horns of a bull waiting to charge or like a lion tamer in a circus fending off the beast.
>
> For many of us his works, have been interpreted as sociopolitical theatrical commentaries played out by the people in the streets. Thousands witness and participate in performances designed and orchestrated by this artist and his Callaloo company. If something like this were to happen in one of the power locations for art theory there would be miles of text. So far it is perceived to be a mere folk or street festival, the subject for more renderings of culture by local artists and foreign anthropological case studies.

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An afterword: reflections in this time

BY

ALLISON THOMPSON

(From A. Cummins, A. Thompson, N. Whittle, *"Art in Barbados: What Kind of Mirror Image"* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishing, 1999))

There is a natural hesitation, or is it academic caution, which makes one wary of assessing our present situation, of getting "too contemporary" or making predictions for the future. Instead we feel we should maintain some decorum of historical distance, which presumably lends the possibility of more objectivity. But the writing of a history is always marked by the values of the time in which it is formulated. History is a selective process which bears witness to the judgements and prejudices of its time. The significance of this art historical documentation is hopefully as a record for the future. But for us the writers, its more immediate and heart-felt value is as a reflection in considering our current situation - as an evaluation of the present so that we may better chart our directions for the future. So that while we may be wary of fixing ourselves too firmly within this specific time in which the book is being written, in truth and fact, it is not possible to completely avoid doing just this.

Today in Barbados, visual artists are articulating some of the most significant comments on existence and identity within Barbados, the Caribbean, and the developing world. But to whom are these artists speaking? Literature has benefited from theoretical studies within university settings and music has become entrenched in popular culture, but art has not. Particularly within the English-speaking Caribbean, and specifically within Barbados, art still is perceived as lying outside mainstream culture.

The primary impediment to the development of the visual arts is the lack of adequate infrastructures. These should include flexible, varied, purpose-oriented facilities for exhibitions; support staff of curators, conservators, critics, historians and other related professionals; informed media coverage; support from public and private sectors; enhanced resources for artists including studio space, scholarships and bursaries, availability of materials (duty-free as in other manufacturing sectors); and most importantly informed procedures and policies governing all of these. This situation, combined with the current focus on international exhibitions has meant that frequently artists' most ambitious work is produced for and/or shown in overseas shows. In many cases neither these shows nor the glossy illustrated catalogues which accompanied them reached a Barbadian audience. So that while this work may be speaking about the Barbadian experience, frequently there is not the opportunity for it to speak to Barbadians. The overseas exhibitions have brought a certain recognition and prestige to Barbadian art and artists but it is essential that these events be an extension and reflection of national activity. More emphasis needs to be placed on integrating the visual arts into the experiences of the Barbadian people. To do this, Barbados needs to develop infrastructures which can facilitate its development and make it accessible to the public - to encourage discourse between Barbadians and their art.

One of the first requirements is the establishment of a National Gallery of Art. A permanent collection and exhibition which comprehensively documents the evolution which has taken place in the visual arts is vital to defining our artistic tradition. The continued absence of a National Gallery despite decades of requests both symbolises and perpetuates the perception that this tradition does not exist. Attempts by the Art Collection Foundation to establish a permanent collection culminated in late 1996 when the organization, renamed the Barbados Gallery of Art (BGA), opened new if modest headquarters in the Garrison area. The 140-piece collection is significant given the absence of any other attempt to publicly display an overview of Barbadian art. The BGA has provided some important documentation of Barbadian art, particularly during the pioneering years, but as a result of limited

resources, it has not been able to adequately collect and exhibit the scope of Barbadian painting, particularly the more contemporary developments.

Inadequate resources have also resulted in some institutions compromising their original mandate. While the BGA could be commended for exhibiting the Barbados submission following its success at the Third Santo Domingo Painting Biennial , it was necessary to completely dismount the two-room gallery to do so.[1] The result was that none of the permanent collection was on view. Titled "Gold for the Nation", this display focussed, as did the ensuing public attention, on the odd phenomenon of gold military-like medals as symbols of artistic achievement. The real significance of the achievement was as an indication and recognition of the growth and development of Barbadian painting, as well as the importance of skillfully curating the national submission to the Biennial (by Mervyn Awon): as a landmark in an ongoing process, rather than of crossing the finish line first. Displaying these works in conjunction with an historical collection would have emphasized their significance in the context of a developing tradition. This was an impossibility, and instead, in an unintentional act of irony, they were seen as existing in complete isolation, once again.

Coinciding with the opening of the BGA was the establishment of two ambitious gallery spaces, the artist-oriented Art Foundry, and the more commercial Kirby Gallery. This reflects the growing confidence in the developing professionalism and widening appeal of the visual arts and has broadened the scope of available facilities for artists. In addition, many of the organizations continue to play central roles in the growing arts community. The Barbados Museum throughout its sixty-year history has supported the visual arts by hosting exhibitions of local and visiting artists. It has taken the forefront in documenting the history of Barbadian art through the production of catalogues for a series of retrospective exhibitions of pioneer artists, as well as producing the Barbadian Art database and this book, the first written history of art in Barbados.[2] The Queen's Park Gallery continues to host exhibitions ranging from retrospective exhibitions of leading artists to displays of craft and fashion. However financial constraints have meant a reduced capacity to

promote and document these shows through the production of catalogues. The National Cultural Foundation also makes use of the Central Bank's Grande Salle for their annual crop-over exhibitions. While the towering glass walls afford views of the work to passersby, most of the works are awkwardly displayed on screens. Its potential however as an exciting venue for sculpture has never been realised. The Barbados Arts Council, which celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 1997, has survived through perseverance and continues to operate modest exhibition space at Pelican Village which caters to a broad range of artists, professional and amateur. Barbados, however, still lacks any purpose-built exhibition space.

The key elements are diversity and accessibility. It is important to provide a range of opportunities for artists and their audiences, to afford both a broad scope of art experiences. Also, given our limited resources it is essential that institutions and individuals work in a spirit of collectivity to avoid unnecessarily duplicating and to overcome the isolation in which our artists have often operated. With the developing professionalism and achievements of our visual arts, there is a growing interest in marketing this art, particularly given the centrality of both tourism and foreign exchange to our economy. This situation presents artists as well as institutions with a tenuous balancing act - the lucrative potential of the commercial tourist market, the often conservative tastes of a local audience, the more challenging expectations of regional and international venues, and artistic integrity in the midst of all these conflicting messages.

As our own artistic traditions and identity are articulated with increasing clarity and confidence, the ensuing attention both within and outside of the region raises questions of control, ownership, re-colonisation. In addition to the many international exhibitions, a growing number of publications are consciously expanding their global visions to embrace previously marginalized communities. Several Barbadian artists have been included in recent books on black artists, and Thames and Hudson has published an overview of Caribbean art as part of its "World Art Series".[3] While we take pride in this well-deserved recognition for Barbadian artists, it is essential that these studies are supported and responded to by our own voices and dialogues.

We have long recognized our tendency to seek and value acknowledgments from abroad above those from within. Where are our own national honours for the contributions to national development which our artists have made? Within our own visual culture - the images which surround our daily lives in our environment, on our currency and our postage stamps, in our school books or local media - whose language are we using? And whose values are we reflecting? What kind of mirror image?

Education continues to play an important role in these developments. Many artists through choice and necessity have devoted years as art teachers and have inspired subsequent generations of artists. The Division of Fine Art of the Barbados Community College has devised and revised programmes over the past two decades in attempts to respond to the changing demands of the art community. In September 1996, the Division of Fine Art expanded its two-year associate degree program into a full Bachelors Degree in Fine Art. While the impact this will have on the visual arts is not yet evident, the Division of Fine Arts is gradually attracting students from within the Lesser Antilles, and has the potential to serve as an important link within this region. In July 1996, the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture released a draft proposal for a "Plan of Action for Cultural Development" which recognized the "undeniable interrelationship between culture and national development", and sought to identify measures to be taken by the public and private sectors to ensure the integration of culture into the process of nation building:

"As the world stands poised to enter the twenty first century, more and more it is being recognized that the Culture of its people must feature significantly in the development plan of any nation. It has become clear, as we reflect on the effects of technological changes of the post World War years, that the development of our people, the liberation to the maximum of their innate creativity must be a prime consideration in any plans for the future of the country."

Proposals for the visual arts rearticulate the need to establish a National Art Gallery, as well as provide support for existing art galleries, develop public education

programmes, and promote the growth of craft industries. What is fundamental here is to articulate a vision of the significance of the visual arts in this country and how to facilitate its integration within the society. Then and only then can we set about developing infrastructures that will best achieve these ends. For these we will certainly benefit from the study of pre-existing models. But we need to match political Independence with an independence of vision, and the confidence to formulate systems which serve our unique existence.

Our expanding participation in the "international artistic discourse" while providing us with many of the benefits and opportunities available in the wider forum, must never compromise our inner imperative to know who we are.[4] As this book has attempted to document and reflect upon the last six decades of artistic activity in Barbados, it contributes to this process of self awareness. The multiplicity of images reflect individual insights, as well as the realities and aspirations which we share.

1.The Barbados submission to the III Biennial of Painting of the Caribbean and Central America was exhibited at the BGA for a four-month period during April-July 1997.

2.Retrospective exhibitions/catalogues produced by the BMHS include Golde White, Hector Whistler, Ivan Payne, and the forthcoming Aileen Hamilton exhibition.

3.Richard Powell, Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997) and Veerle Poupeye, Caribbean Art(London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).

4.This phrase is borrowed from Dawn Ades, Art in Latin America (YaleUniversity Press, 1989).

Looking at Art - Imagers '21
"At Five O'clock in the Afternoon"
BY
HUGH CORBIN

Discussion of the print works in the Art Foundry exhibit using the dynamic theory of interpretation.

The prints in this show, prepared by ten local artists, present a variety of styles and techniques, even though the same, fixed parameters were set for the artists. The works are primarily in black and white, and as is usual for prints, they are relatively small in dimension. As a result of these and other set limitations, the aspects in the works that have been selected for analysis will be easily highlighted for this discussion.

Pictorial Dynamic

Although a few of the works appear to be abstract, actually, all of them are representational, depicting either real or imagined figures, objects, scenes. They range from the explicit depiction of a runner in Ellon Lewis' *Struggle with the Wind.* to Nick Whittle's idealized organic forms of shells, seeds and sperm, *Ithaka II.* The artists use the figure well to tell their special stories.

Lilian Sten-Nicholson's winged image evokes past myths and legends. The ancient power and mystery of woman is given a name - "Aje" and as *Mother of Nightbirds* the artist suggests the eternal spirit woman, protector and holder of the life force. Is she also the feathered or firebird of the carnival mas?

Alison Chapman-Andrews seems to capture her tales as she finds them from working the materials. The *Smoke Signal* emerged from experiment with natural forms and the swirls and blackened stalks

reminded her of illicit fires in the night that had been occurring in Barbados.

Each of Joyce Daniel's prints unearths not only a specific message but a whole ethos as well. *The Protectors* continues her message of the need to offer special care for the young in our time of abandoned values and lost heritage. *Spiritual Nurturing* subtly touches on a whole world view that asserts the natural and energy based connections we have one to another and how we can exchange and enhance each others powers.

Indrani Nayar-Gall opens up a timely story with commentary on the lottery madness going on at the present time. Her series of prints, *Red Ball, Off They Go* and *Ball Games* depicts the crucial running of the numbered balls so familiar to us from TV. The grasping hands and falling tokens of wealth compete with natural images of turtles and eggs and things of real, ultimate value.

David Gall conveys something of the same social comment as he tells the story of the *Stiltman and Black Birds* who has suspended himself unnaturally. Black birds attack him as he staggers and stumbles in front of a traditional house. Within the house, we see a humble mother-figure diligently working at a sewing machine in sharp contrast to the prideful figure.

Emotional Dynamic

Although most of the prints are in black and white, the lack of colour does not lessen the presence of an emotional dynamic in several of the works. Other factors help to create a feeling response in viewers.

Joscelyn Gardner achieves quite an emotional impact, especially in one of her four prints called *A Repeating Voyage to Myself.* It shows an

enshrouded figure, lying in a coffin or canoe like box, crowned with thorns and presumably suffering from Christ-like stigmata as well. The figure culminates the set which shows the artist within the same box but seen as Amerindian, African and European. The voyage ends with her assumption of a full Creole identity, but not without the accompanying suffering and sacrifice.

David Gall creates humour for us in his *Kadooment Creature*. The multi-headed, six-legged beast elicits anxiety and wonder in the onlookers in Baxter's Road. Questions arise. What is he? Where has he come from? What is he all about? Gall seems to be having fun mocking our 'jump-up', 'wuk-up', madness. Another of his prints, *Postmodernism Well Installed*, mocks the lady of the house, surrounded by the material objects so necessary to modern living, lounging in a rather compromised position and the artist suggests, "What will happen when her husband comes home?" There is humour too, in Alison Chapman-Andrews', *Big, Big Canoe*. This female response to the popular song is cleverly wrought.

Symbolical Dynamic

Symbolic expression abounds in this exhibit. Works such as Lilian Sten-Nicholson's *Nightbirds*, Indrani Nayar-Gall's *Ball Games*, Ellon Lewis' *Dream and Reality* send significant messages about life and living through idealized images. The symbolic rendering of reality or the process of aesthetic metamorphosis appears to be the essence of a great deal that is considered true art.

Very many of the pieces pay homage to our ability to see and interpret metaphors of what the artist is saying. For some of us the challenge of decoding and gaining the key to the meaning of a work heightens our enjoyment and appreciation. For others it may seem unnecessary and awkward for the artist to put obstacles in the way of our immediate understanding of what is being presented. Yet the power of metaphor is everywhere present in these works.

Stanley Greaves' fascinating objects give us much to ponder. The seeming levity of the items - crackers, buttons, spoons, egg and butterflies, hides the serious intent of his messages. *Caribbean Breakfast* implies the paucity of a poor man's meal. Serious allegations underlie *Cortes' Soup*: figures symbolic of Amerindians falling to the Spanish conqueror's sword and installation of spoon-fed Chrisitianity.

The organic forms in both Nick Whittle's and Rosemary Pilgrim's work carry the symbolic act into the deepest dimensions of inner self. *Ithaka I & II, Growing Through Patterns, Rooted,* illumine the journeys of discovery and help us to confront our personal realities in unique ways. As with the work of Joyce Daniel these prints suggest the commonality humans have with all things. We may marvel at the way these artists use symbols to play out their life scripts and explore inner experiences.

Structural Dynamic

Understanding how works are created requires us to appreciate the artist both as craftsperson and as messenger. In the structure of these prints we witness both attributes at work. Each print correlates the artist's unique conception with universally accepted notions of scale, balance, movement, proportion. How to organise the personal vision and original idea such that it will not conflict with time-tested forms of expression, as in perspective and use of colour? Over and again we find that there is a vital interaction between the artist's idea and the form it assumes.

The swirling circular forms in Sten-Nicholson's *Nightbirds*, capture the grace of flight, as well as the encompassing gesture of the protecting mother. This rhythmic patterning also simulates wing feathers, fire and 'aje' - the mystic power of the female.

Daniel's *Spinner* is both creator and sustainer. The spinner becomes part of the wheels and webs she weaves. Similarly the overarching arms of *The Protectors* create an enfolding composition as they protect the offspring of her imagining.

Process and form are causally linked in Chapman-Andrew's collographs as in *Dawn Chorus* where she pulls meaning from the effects she discovers as she works.

Ellon Lewis seems to integrate the figures or objects in his prints so well that the whole image supports and strengthens his message. *Windy, Struggle with the Wind* and *Turbulent Wave* all feature this unity of form. The clever gouging of the space around the runner in *Struggle* clearly demonstrates the structural dynamic at work.

Through her use and reuse of a single image, as the basis for all four prints, Gardner stresses the repetition of her self-discovery. It is clear from her title - *A Repeating Voyage to my Self* that each variation represents significant aspects of her Self, the act of composition itself becoming a procreative journey, capturing the unity of craft and vision.

Conceptual Dynamic

Two important things have led to the need for a category of conceptual dynamics. One is a natural evolution which has taken place during this century, of the shift from an emphasis on subject matter, to an emphasis on the conception of subject matter as the artist has seen it. The images themselves are rendered in unfamiliar and personal ways requiring a scrutiny that was unnecessary in previous times. New methods, media and materials have further transformed the way in which visual art is presented.

Since the coming of the photograph the celebration of natural or physical beauty has seemed to be a necessary but not sufficient goal of the fine artist. Some pressure has been placed on artists to 'say' something, i.e. to have a theme, a message or a meaning beyond the mere representation of things. As a result almost every professional work of art must have an inherent idea, underlying theme or concept. Few works rely solely on the realistic rendering of scene or image for their value. The conceptual dynamic is about these inherent or underlying ideas that artists carry out in their work.

Usually, the notion of the conceptual dynamic arises only when the character of a work is not immediately discernible, as is the case in abstract, non-figurative and non-representational works. Most works can be shown to have some inherent idea or concept underlying their creation but it is when the meaning of a work rests primarily on ideas, or is completely dependent on the conception of the artist, that the work is said to have a conceptual dynamic. Even though the works in this show are not truly abstract, the conceptual dynamic is present and some basic notion or concept lies at the root of each print.

Joscelyn Gardner's voyage, the objective of her set of four prints, is a more overt journey in search of the self than that shown in the prints of either Nick Whittle or Rosemary Pilgrim. Yet the basic concept of charting some kind of passage of self discovery is shared by all three. The shells, seeds and organic forms of Whittle's *Ithaka* prints and the root transfigurations of Pilgrim's *Tale of Possibility* and *Growing Through the Patterns* demonstrate that simple metaphor can powerfully reflect personal issues and human sensibilities.

Spiritual ideas underlay all of the works of both Joyce Daniel and Lilian Sten-Nicholson. They find effective use for specific cultural, philosophical and anthropological concepts. While social commentary pervades the concepts in the works of Stanley Greaves, Indrani Nayar-Gall, and David Gall.

The extent to which these works depend on the viewers' grasp of the underlying concepts determines the extent to which the conceptual dynamic within the work has succeeded.

Technical Dynamic

The Imagers '21 Exhibition exemplifies the importance of technical skill to printmaking. The production of a limited edition of hand-pulled fine prints is a laborius and exacting work. In order to achieve the precision of alignment, register and multiple production, the works require expert use of a wide range of tools and technical processes, as well as a careful knowledge of chemicals and their reactions.

The artists technical skill has resulted in some works that are intricate and complex in design while others are powerfully sharp and simple. The marks of the wood and linoleum cutter, the levels of inking, the layering of patterns and images, the manipulation of negative and reverse space, become dynamic qualities that test the expertise of the printmaker.

> For example, the complexity in David Gall's prints, particularly his work in *Kadooment Creature* and *Reserved* and the detailed observation in the composition of *Postmodernism Well Installed* shows his ability to work in several planes. A similar intricacy is achieved in *The Spinner* and *Spiritual Nurturing* of Joyce Daniel.
>
> The wealth of detail and textural variety is most evident in Indrani Nayar-Gall's prints and also in *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* of Alison Chapman-Andrews.
>
> Both Daniel and Chapman-Andrews have made reference to what happens to their creative insights as they use different tools and techniques and how reflection on the resulting effects has helped to guide them in the final determination of design. They delight in the

unusual collage-like effects and surface qualities that they have created.

It is possible to discuss the technical achievement of each of the artists and of each work. The same can be said of all the six dynamics listed above. What has been attempted here is not a thorough examination of the works nor an evaluative summary. Rather the sole intent is to look at a specific set of terms and to see if there is some validity to their use in the analysis and interpretation of works. It is hoped that the terms and the framework of analysis that is presented here can encourage the lay public to become more familiar and comfortable with contemporary art as they are able to understand what artists are saying and to have the means of interpreting works for themselves.

APPENDICES

Annual General Meeting
PRESIDENTS REPORT 1998

It is a pleasure to welcome members to the first Annual General Meeting of AICA Southern Caribbean, organized on the occasion of our first major event, the three-day symposium on Caribbean Art Criticism, entitled " Fashioning a Language, Forming a Dialogue". It is very satisfying and encouraging to see that in our first year we are able to bring together members from Martinique, Trinidad, Guyana, and Barbados. Several of us are meeting each other for the first time, and the opportunity to interact with our colleagues within the Caribbean is in itself a rewarding success.

For those of you who may be unfamiliar with the origins of AICA Southern Caribbean, I thought I should begin with a brief description of how this chapter came into being. The International Association of Art Critics, whose headquarters is in Paris, France, has over sixty chapters throughout the world and four within the Caribbean prior to our own formation - that is in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In its efforts to reach out to other critics within the Caribbean, the Puerto Rican chapter invited Alissandra Cummins and I, and any other professional art critics we knew, to apply for membership to their chapter. Alissandra Cummins, Nick Whittle, Rupert Roopnaraine (Guyana), John Jowers (Virgin Islands) and I were accepted as full members of the Puerto Rican chapter in 1995.

The following year, at the 3rd Biennial of Painting in the Dominican Republic, a meeting of AICA members, including the then General Secretary of AICA, Marie-Claude Volfin was held, and from that meeting, I was invited to set up a regional chapter which could include representatives from those Caribbean countries which individually did not possess enough members to form their own national chapters. (A minimum of ten members is required within any given country/chapter). And this is what we did, submitting applications for members from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad, and Guyana.

Much debate ensued about what to call our chapter. The debate was very humorous but also very indicative of the need to examine terminology in identifying and

defining our experiences within the Caribbean. Initially, "Aica Lesser Antilles" was suggested to us but members from Paris indicated that "Lesser" seemed derogatory so they suggested "Aica Antilles". This caused some objection since pre-existing chapters are also part of the Antilles. We were asked to change back to Lesser Antilles. Each time this involved revising our proposed statutes. At this point we decided to raise our voices in this debate and select our own name. We chose Aica Caribbean - we felt that "Caribbean" was a more current, accurate term - Antilles refers to the islands only - and was no less specific than their first suggestion of AICA Antilles. Again there was dissent from some members of the other chapters.

In an attempt to intervene and moderate this debate, executive members at the Paris bureau asked that we "stop this arguing" and call ourselves "Aica Micronesian Caribbean". This seemed to be a particularly humorous, if not surreal suggestion, yet perhaps not more so than the term "West Indies".

At this point we compromised and suggested Aica Southern Caribbean. We did not choose Eastern Caribbean because we were hoping and continue to hope that we can involve critics from the Netherlands Antilles. When making this suggestion to Paris and the other Caribbean chapters I wrote: "While I think that Paris has perceived this ongoing process as "arguing", I believe it needs to be viewed as a dialogue about terminology and identity which is so vital to the arts of this region; a process of evolving and defining a language for ourselves and to the larger community."

Undoubtedly this experience inspired the theme for this symposium: Fashioning a Language; Forming a Dialogue.

Our statutes, based on the model supplied by Paris, state that officers of the board are elected every three years at the General Meeting, and that the term is renewable twice but can only be subsequently renewed after an interruption of two years. When we wrote our statutes, one requirement placed upon us from the governing body was that "Within the Chapter of the Southern Caribbean, the seats of Officers of the Board should rotate between the various participating countries." This should encourage us to work towards increased involvement from members outside Barbados, and should ensure the 'regional' focus of the organization.

Our chapter was presented and formally approved at the AICA Annual Congress held in Northern Ireland last September 1997. I attended the Congress along with our treasurer Alissandra Cummins. Myrna Rodriguez and Haydee Venegas, president and general secretary respectively of the Puerto Rican chapter were also there. It was particularly appropriate that these two women were present since they were both instrumental in the establishment of our chapter. They offered support, encouragement and valuable advice throughout the process and I would like to thank them both for this. Again, I am very pleased that they are participating in our symposium where they both will present papers. As well, we should congratulate Haydee who was elected as one of the vice presidents of AICA during the Annual Congress in Ireland. The other Caribbean participant at the Ireland congress was Carlos Francisco Elias from the Dominican Republic chapter.

As a new chapter representing several countries, we are faced with a number of challenges. One is to expand our membership both within countries where we are already represented as well as in those where we are not. These include Suriname, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Aruba, Curacao and others. Critics from Jamaica can also be encouraged to join until such time as they decide to form their own chapter if they wish.

We can also encourage associate members. These are defined by AICA as art critics who are accepted by the national (regional) section but who have not yet offered themselves as candidates or been accepted for full international membership. To apply for full membership, one must be able to prove that one has functioned as a regular and professional art critic for at least three years. I encourage all members to actively invite other critics to apply for full and associate membership.

Another major challenge is to improve communication between members in different countries. The artistic communities within the Caribbean often operate in relative isolation from one another and documentation and information concerning art activities is frequently difficult to obtain. AICA Southern Caribbean can act as a conduit for more interaction between art critics and by extension, the artistic

communities of the participating countries. This also extends to enhanced exchange between the different Chapters.

Nevertheless, it is not easy. Often it is time-consuming and expensive. We need to examine the best way to communicate - to involve all the members in our activities, to distribute minutes and disseminate documentation on the arts in our countries.

One of our first projects in our attempts to improve communication between critics within the Caribbean has been the organization of this three-day seminar on Caribbean Art Criticism. Discussions about a conference on Caribbean Art Criticism predate the formation of our chapter. Our treasurer, Alissandra Cummins, through her involvement with ICOM, formulated early proposals for a workshop on art crticism. The subsequent formation of AICA Southern Caribbean appeared to be a suitable organization to further explore such a venture.

We were certainly encouraged by AICA's plea at the Ireland congress inviting proposals for UNESCO funded projects. Our project, which involves several countries, seemed ideally suited for such funding. I originally applied to UNESCO for a sizable grant to assist us in covering the costs of the symposium, including airfare, accomodation and per diem for 8 critics, as well as conference facilities, interpreting and translating. As the last AICA newsletter (number 12) explained, UNESCO Participation Program turned down 7 of 9 proposals submitted by AICA so that only ours and one from Zimbabwe were still being considered. I was told by the General Secretary and others that our chances were good. Unfortunately, we have heard nothing since then. And our symposium starts tomorrow.

From the outset I have insisted that we would hold this symposium with or without this funding. We have operated with a plan A (that is , money) - and a plan B (that is, no money). We are functioning under a modified Plan B. A small group of dedicated members, both full and associate, have worked very hard to raise funds. This has enabled us to host the symposium in the comfort of the Sherbourne Conference Centre, to provide some translation facilities, to make copies of all papers available to participants and to provide some sponsorship of coffee breaks and meals. These members have donated a great amount of their own time and labour to the organiz-

ing of this symposium. I cannot thank them enough for all their truly dedicated efforts over the past months.

Our other efforts have included the submission of four articles to the selection committee of Art Planet, AICA's proposed journal of art criticism. We were invited to submit a maximum of five articles but only four were submitted to our executive - these were by Alissandra Cummins, Orlando Hernandez, Allison Thompson and Nick Whittle. We have not heard any further information on this project. There have also been a number of smaller initiatives including a meeting with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Culture, Mr. Elsworth Young. The secretary, Nick Whittle, will elaborate on some of these projects.

I should also mention that the 32nd Annual AICA congress will take place in Tokyo during September 27th - October 1st 1998. Unfortunately we do not have any funds to cover participation in this congress, and none of our members will be attending. This is another area that we need to consider. We need to make it easier for our members to attend regional and international events which benefit our roles as art critics.

I certainly feel encouraged by what we, as a small and newly formed chapter of AICA, have accomplished in only one year. Once again I need to acknowledge the generous and dedicated work of several of our members, and I look forward to increasing interaction and participation from our other members as well as new members to come.

Allison Thompson
President, AICA Southern Caribbean

Caribbean Art Criticism Symposium, 1998
organised by AICA Southern Caribbean
GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

The publication of the proceedings of the first Caribbean Art Criticism Symposium, organised by AICA Southern Caribbean, should be seen as tangible evidence of a growing cadre of critics within the region who are prepared to articulate philosophical treatises which are as challenging as the works to which they refer.

For those readers who did not attend the symposium, I am confident that upon reading these texts, you will be able to identify those issues which provoked a high level of discussion. Throughout the symposium over sixty delegates from around the region listened and responded to fourteen presentations with clarity, vision and passion.

The importance of the symposium should be seen as providing a forum and a catalyst for the exchange of diverse philosophies rather than any hope of reaching an agreement or consensus. It is only through such a discourse that the possibility exists for the growth of a Caribbean language of art criticism. Just as the artists of the region are creating their own language and iconography, it is vital that any accompanying critical writing should be liberated from the reference points of Europe and North America.

Nick Whittle
General-Secretary, AICA Southern Caribbean

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Hugh Corbin
Alissandra Cummins
David Gall
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