

Edited by David A. Bailey,  
Alissandra Cummins, Axel Lapp  
and Allison Thompson

# CURATING IN THE CARIBBEAN

JHT  
GREENBOX

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DAVID A. BAILEY, MBE

## FOREWORD

*Curating in the Caribbean* is a unique document—unique in the sense of its Caribbean perspective and unique in how the project emerged out of the Black Diaspora Visual Arts (BDVA) programme. This programme began in 2007 as a strategic legacy of the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade commemorative year, led by the Barbados National Art Gallery Committee and the International Curators Forum (ICF)—a UK-based network set up to address emerging international issues and a range of themes related to contemporary curatorial practice in the Black Diaspora and visual culture in the twenty-first century.

The BDVA programme has included exhibitions, installations and arts events, as well as a series of salons, seminars, symposia and conferences hosted in Barbados and benefitting other parts of the Caribbean. Its aims include:

- Raising the profile locally, nationally and internationally of Barbadian visual artists and curators
- Inviting international visual artists and curators to Barbados to establish different fora for intercultural dialogue and professional development opportunities

- Preparing a 10 year strategic plan for the project in conjunction with the next 'Grand Tour' in 2017, during the Venice Biennale and Documenta.

A number of leading scholars, curators and artists have been invited to participate in intercultural dialogue and knowledge exchange at symposia held in March 2008 and February 2009, the latter taking as its starting point generational shifts in the post-war history of the Black Diasporic arts.

The third symposium in the series on 'Caribbean Curatorship and National Identity' took place in Barbados on 1 December 2009, as part of a broader conference in collaboration with the Museums Association of the Caribbean, the Barbados Museum and Historical Society and the International Council of Museums. The symposium focused on the intercultural competencies that support the professional development of cultural leaders and the promotion of formal and informal peer support networks with arts practitioners in Barbados and the Caribbean Islands across the Black Diaspora.

It was in support of BDVA's strategic plan, that the National Art Gallery Committee and the Barbados Museum and Historical Society collaborated with the Prince Claus Fund, the International Curators Forum and The Green Box on the production of a publication on the theme of Curating in the Caribbean as a forum for the visual arts. It was envisaged that this publication will document the ideas generated and progress made to date in artistic and professional quality with recommendations on frameworks and platforms for future international cultural and knowledge exchange across the Black Diaspora.

In this context it was always envisaged that the publication will be used as an advocacy document to raise the international profile of artists and curators living and working in the Caribbean Islands, and to promote opportunities for international exchanges between visual arts agencies and institutions across the Diaspora.

## Foreword

*Curating in the Caribbean* seeks to contextualise the cultural production of post-war Black Art against the background of generational shifts as a result of migration across the Diaspora. Furthermore the publication has proven both relevant and instructive for delivering a Caribbean agenda of social inclusion and community cohesion by using visual art as a medium for breaking the silences common in the post-colonial constellation of developing countries. The publication will be an important addition to the canon of Caribbean art literature.

Finally we see *Curating in the Caribbean* as a strategic platform for intercultural exchange between artists, curators, gallery directors and scholars living and working in the Caribbean and the broader region, helping to deliver globally new international working and adult education outreach programmes, through skills development and knowledge exchange. The publication acts as an agency to the power of culture, through providing intellectual ballast and new audiences for the canon of social commentary produced by Caribbean visual artists.

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## INTRODUCTION

In describing the contemporary condition in art of the Caribbean Diaspora, what he calls the “Third Moment,” Stuart Hall identifies two major factors impacting the movement to give greater visibility to work which has been excluded from the metropolis centres: globalization and a growing “curatorial drive.” But, he warns, let’s not fool ourselves: “Some people are more global than others just as some people are more visible than others.”<sup>1</sup>

In this conversation filmed specifically for the February 2009 Black Diaspora Visual Arts (BDVA) conference in Barbados, David A. Bailey invites Hall to elaborate on his formulation of three distinct moments of Modernity in the visual arts as experienced by its ‘others’ in a post-World War II Diaspora. In particular he urges Hall to articulate more fully the third moment, the present moment. This discussion provided a framework for an on-going series of discussions, symposia, exhibitions and workshops with the shared aim of bringing increased visibility to the art of the Caribbean region and strengthening networks and exchanges throughout the wider diaspora.

This current book, *Curating in the Caribbean*, is a direct outgrowth of these discussions. Ten authors, many of whom

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participated in one or more of the BDVA events which took place in Barbados, Martinique and Liverpool were invited to contribute essays which explore the current curatorial drive within the Caribbean. This theme of curatorship has been considered in its broadest context. It encompasses a wide range of projects and initiatives aimed at creating a platform for the visual arts; making visual art 'visible' by bringing it to a wider audience and broadening the critical discussion around it. The authors, all of whom were born and/or work in the Caribbean, were encouraged to draw on their own experiences and projects in assessing the terrain and in making proposals for the future. As a result, there are a range of approaches to the topic of curating.

At the most recent BDVA event—the symposium 'Black Jacobs: Negritude in a post global 21st century' which took place in Barbados and Martinique in February/March 2011—contributors to the book were invited to make presentations on the theme of their essays and engage in dialogue with the other contributors. In this way, the project has been as much about documenting the current state of the profession as it has been about establishing dialogue and linkages for future projects.

José Manuel Noceda Fernández (Cuba) reminds readers that there have been various approaches to defining the Caribbean region based on its geography, history, racial composition, culture, or a combination of these. He argues that the Caribbean exceeds all possible classifications, and that in fact various Caribbeans coexist as a result of the asynchronicities or asymmetries across the region including such factors as access to art education, varying stages of development in the infrastructure of cultural entities including museums and galleries, as well as the overall economic development and stability of the region. In his essay, "Islands in the Sun: Caribbean Art in the 1990s," Noceda focuses on Caribbean art in that decade, identifying certain 'discursive orientations' in the production of this period that

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challenge stereotypical notions of the Caribbean and instead informs audiences about the space of culture and identity. He sees an expanded sensibility across the entire chain of islands and territories, including the Caribbean Diaspora. He describes this as a 'new aesthetic', a 're-articulation process' by artists interested in finding their own language and working from their space-time possessions, but simultaneously with an informed glance towards the 'outside', and their intersections.

Claire Tancons (Guadeloupe) takes as her starting point the overseas metropolitan art centres and their attempts to curate Caribbean art. In particular she examines the role of carnival in efforts to conceptualize these exhibitions, but also its absence in their realization. In her essay "Curating Carnival? Performance in Contemporary Caribbean Art" Tancons proposes as fundamental questions about whether or not Carnival should be curated at all, and if so whether or not its place is outside of the traditional exhibition and museum context. She examines various efforts to address Carnival as an artistic and curatorial object, and offers her own contribution to the debate and practice of Carnival, as part of the discourses and practices of contemporary Caribbean art, as well as performance art within contemporary art. Carnival has been "marginalized at best, left out at worst" in contemporary Caribbean art exhibitions in the United States and the United Kingdom and has been virtually absent from all contemporary art exhibitions, whether Caribbean in focus or international. But given the centrality of performance art within mainstream contemporary art discourse, "what more propitious a time could there be for the advancement of the debate on the place of, not just Carnival but of performance in general within contemporary Caribbean art practice?"

The earthquake that devastated Haiti on 11th January 2010 destroyed much of the country's artistic heritage including the frescoes of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Port-au-Prince. Barbara

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Prézeau Stephenson (Haiti) writes that it also marks a shift in artistic practice, even if the country had been witnessing significant change during the preceding decade. In her contribution to this book, “Haiti Now—The Art of Mutants,” Prézeau proposes a number of factors contributing to these changes and highlights their consequences. Chief amongst these is the international recognition earned by artists from the area in Port-au-Prince known as Grand Rue, which has played a decisive role in the revalorisation of sculpture in Haiti, and the relationships between artistic creation and the hardship of daily life in the country’s urban centres. The success of this group, self-titled *Atis Rezistans* (Resistance Artists) has debunked the myth of the naive peasant artist and circumvented the traditional network of Haitian gallery owners and dealers. Communications technology has also facilitated the circulation of information on Haitian art and artists. Collaborative initiatives by artists and independent critics have proven that this network is no longer necessary and that the dissemination of art is following different paths today. While the centres of creation are still the shantytowns, the availability of modern technology has empowered these artists to forge contacts with the rest of the planet. With the literal collapse of the major art centres and institutions during the earthquake, Prézeau asks what is the future of traditional networks of Haitian art; what of the professional methods and practices developed in terms of the dissemination and conservation of works of art? While these questions are not new, after the earthquake there is an increased sense of urgency to develop new strategies.

In “Unconscious Curatorships,” Sara Hermann contemplates the physical proximity of Haiti to her native Dominican Republic (the two countries share the island of Hispaniola), while acknowledging its invisibility within the general consciousness of the Dominican population. Hermann was inspired to explore the connecting channels between the two countries and production

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of meaning generated in the field of Dominican and Haitian contemporary visual arts. The visible results—exhibitions and artistic production—up to the beginning of the 21st century, revealed that the position and role of the curator in the Dominican Republic did not respond to real cultural needs. There was a general absence of specific content and critical analysis, and a deficiency in methodological rigour, as well as a lack of objectivity in the curatorial discourse. Hermann looks at how the figure of the curator as a negotiator appears in the field of Dominican arts at the end of the twentieth century, in response to changes in cultural production and the roles of the cultural institutions and actors.

In her essay, “How to Install Art as a Caribbeanist,” Krista A. Thompson (Bahamas) considers how Caribbean art is positioned within the museum. She deliberately refrains from defining what ‘qualifies’ as Caribbean art but rather asks “what are some of the aesthetic practices and structures of visibility in the region that influence Caribbean art and how might they inform our understanding of our curatorial approaches to it?” To address this Thompson examines an art project staged by Trinidadian artist Marlon Griffith in the Bahamas in December 2010 as part of the national festival, Junkanoo. She urges readers to pay attention to structures of visibility in curatorial practices, given a lack of in-depth attention to visual aesthetics in the discursive frames that surround Caribbean art, both in terms of exhibition spaces and their accompanying catalogues. In a discussion that in many ways complements Tancons’s essay, Thompson cites the 2007 ‘Infinite Island’ exhibition organized at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. While curator Tumelo Mosaka is credited for his bold curatorial choices, Thompson argues that the categories into which he organized the show belie the challenges of translating curatorial visions into corresponding exhibition practices and narrative frames, falling back on interpretative categories that speak less to the aesthetics of the work and more to their status

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as documents and reflections of ‘Caribbeanness.’ More recent terms such as *créolité*, hybridization, or syncretism continue to rely on anthropological approaches instead of engaging what the work does visually. The processes of vision and the aesthetic concerns that inform artists’ work may offer curators and writers a more ‘nuanced’ approach to presenting and discussing Caribbean art.

The work of art in the Caribbean, according to Winston Kellman (Barbados) has been subjected to a number of external definitions, a legacy of colonialism that has meant that the aims and ideals of political Independence such as cultural self-definition, have never been fully realized. In “The Invisibility of the Visual Arts in the Barbadian Consciousness,” Kellman argues that social divisions established in colonial times have persisted, resulting in fragmented and divisive visions of Barbadian cultural identity. The visual arts have failed to live up to early post-Independence expectations and thus have remained in a state of ‘invisibility’. A community with a capacity to express and disseminate its culture through the arts, demonstrates and affirms its autonomy and reflects the ideals of the Independence era. In Barbados this process has suffered from a lack of support from governmental institutions whose mandate it was to encourage and support this development. And so culture has reverted back to colonial models, relying on validation from ‘outside.’ Like several of the authors, Kellman takes issue with the recent rise of the overseas ‘Caribbean exhibition’ which has typically featured works by artists based in the metropolitan art centres such as New York and London, part of this ‘latest Diaspora.’ He sees these exhibitions as pandering to ‘international taste,’ undermining the lived experience of the artists based in the Caribbean, and exhausting limited resources.

In “Curating in Curaçao,” Jennifer Smit recounts her own experiences as an independent curator during the last two decades

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on the Dutch Caribbean island where she has acted as “the only so-called ‘qualified’ curator.” What has this ‘luxurious’ position meant? Smit too laments the insufficient institutional infrastructure, due in part to the fact that the Dutch ‘cultural policy makers’ have always considered culture in the Dutch Caribbean islands to be a pale imitation of Europe. ‘Carib Art,’ an exhibition which was pivotal in bringing the Caribbean region together in the Dutch Antilles, helped to foster a new focus on the region, rather than on the Netherlands. Despite this, the visual arts in Curaçao are regarded as a luxury while at the same time deemed to fall below international professional standards, so that the role of the curator is not acknowledged. Smit discusses the recent exhibition ‘Antepasado di Futuro (Ancestors of the Future), Curaçao Classics 1900–2010,’ curated by Smit and Felix de Rooy for the Curaçao Museum, on the occasion of the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, and the declaration of Curaçao as a constituent country. Nevertheless, organizers still had to rely on funding from the Netherlands, in this case the Mondriaan Foundation, to ensure its realization. The curator continues to be required to employ creativity, improvisation and above all, perseverance, in the face of insufficient cultural infrastructure and professional acknowledgement.

Dominique Brebion also examines her own experiences with in the island of Martinique, which in the 21st century still remains a department of France. In her essay, “Act Locally and Think Globally,” Brebion observes that within much of the Caribbean, curating remains a complementary or secondary activity, very often carried out by volunteers; a passion more than a profession. Pointing, like Smit and Kellman, to the insufficiency of existing structures in the smaller islands or Lesser Antilles, she notes that in the Caribbean, there are more independent curators and artist-curators, than curators employed by institutions. With the central themes of exhibitions typically tied to

national identity rather than a more general or universal theme, as is seen more frequently in exhibitions organized in mainland France, Brebion suggests that the role of the curator may be compromised as he / she has to reconcile curatorial demands and regional promotion: “Is the fact of being a sort of *ambassador* for the visual arts of our respective islands, and playing a supporting role for artists from the Caribbean zone at the front of the scene an obstacle to a curator’s work or, on the contrary, a fruitful constraint?” The Fondation Clément is one of the few institutions which has had the vision to provide opportunities for individuals to conceptualize and present more adventurous exhibitions. Nevertheless, the Caribbean remains a *terra incognita* for the international art world. Brebion asks then how should we proceed in the future?

In “Curating in the Caribbean—Changing Curatorial Practice and Contestation in Jamaica,” Veerle Poupeye traces the earliest calls for a black art patronage to the anti-colonial, nationalist stirrings of Marcus Garvey in the 1930s. The eventual establishment of the National Gallery marked the beginning of the professionalization of curatorial practice in Jamaica, and indeed of the English speaking Caribbean, and included the laying out of a canonical national art history under its first director, David Boxer. While the prominence given to artist Edna Manley was predictable and reinforced what had already been institutionalized, the canonization of the ‘Intuitives’ was controversial and threatened the emerging hierarchies of Jamaican art. Poupeye identifies other challenges to established notions of art which, in hindsight, could have been understood as institutional critique and inspired new curatorial strategies to increase audience investment, but these possibilities were not acknowledged or pursued at that time. Vocal public criticism from the artistic community claiming exclusionary practices, and controversy surrounding works such as Laura Facey’s *Redemption Song*, gained

in importance with initial defensive positions slowly giving way to curatorial change. Recent exhibitions such as the ‘Curator’s Eye’ series with invited externally based curators and the ‘Young Talent V’, have indicated a promising new direction in the local curatorial practice, making a meaningful connection between the critical interventions of contemporary art and its intended audiences.

In the end, there are only nine essays. Haydee Venegas (Puerto Rico) died on 31st December 2011 after a determined battle with cancer. Her commitment to remain active and involved as an art critic and curator was evident to all as she attended the AICA annual congress in Paraguay in October, as a member of the AICA executive board. Haydee was a fierce Caribbeanist and a proud Puerto Ricena and worked with grace, humour and strength to make a space for Caribbean art in the international arena. We dedicate this book in her honour.

1

Stuart Hall, “Keynote Address: Modernity and its Others: Three Moments in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts” (Barbados, 13th February 2009). The original article appeared in *History Workshop Journal*, 2006, 61 (1), pp. 1–24.

DOMINIQUE BREBION

# ACT LOCALLY AND THINK GLOBALLY<sup>1</sup>

The French Departments of the Americas, Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana, *discovered* by Christopher Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century and maintained as French colonies until the middle of the twentieth century, entered the modern age about fifty years ago. There is a void in their art history, as a result of years of slavery and colonisation, between the period of Pre-Columbian art and modern-day art. Between the prehistory of Martinique, from 3,000 BC to the arrival of the first Europeans at the start of the seventeenth century, and modern artistic production, stretches a three centuries long period of silence. And today, cultural structuring is still in progress. There is not yet a museum or art centre devoted to the dissemination of visual art.

In this relatively unfavourable context, artists often play a key organising role as events producers, scenographers, technicians, mediators and press officers. In effect, these specialities are not yet recognised as being essential and are only gradually, and with much difficulty, becoming established among the few rare

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structures in charge of dissemination. The same applies to the position of curator or exhibition organiser.

It appears to be essential to distinguish the *work* of the *curator – selector* of one or more artists with a view to the organisation of an international event based on a pre-defined theme<sup>2</sup>, from that of the *role* of *curator – exhibition organiser*, a person who designs a collective exhibition. In the Caribbean, regional cultural figures, art critics, art professors and cultural advisors are sometimes called upon to play the role of curator – selector with a moral contract to promote the region's artists. These figures may then be asked to design collective exhibitions. Conceptualising an exhibition is the product of a multitude of experiences as critic, art historian, art teacher or cultural advisor.

In the archipelago, more than in other regions of the world, curating remains a complementary activity to other activities in the art world. It is a complementary career, a secondary activity, very often carried out by volunteers. It is often a passion more than a profession, which requires great personal investment and human qualities. Curating demands a wide range of skills, often acquired through the multifaceted experiences which dominate the sector, even more so in those regions where culture is less well structured. There is also great irregularity in the organisation of exhibitions.

Of course, there is the abstract work of conceptualisation, and the aesthetic exercise itself, which involves exploring and selecting artists, something that is regularly followed by a listening and advisory phase. The more technical aspects of fund raising and searching for a suitable exhibition space are also important. Installing the exhibition, writing the catalogue, and communication are the final steps involved.

Therefore, it is a recent function, still secondary and complementary to other activities in the sector, often carried out by volunteers, the professional outline of which is in the process of

being defined. There is not yet a strong professional identity. In the Caribbean, there are more independent curators and artist-curators than curators employed by given structures.

Nevertheless, since 2008, the Fondation Clément has been working to create the conditions for carrying out this function in Martinique by entrusting regional cultural figures with the conception of exhibitions presented in Martinique, such as 'Atlantide Caraïbe,' 'Entre-Vues,' 'Entre mythes et réalités,' 'Flore Raisons Nouvelles,' and 'Vous êtes ici.'<sup>3</sup>

Some multi-disciplinary festivals such as Vibrations Caraïbes also offer the opportunity to present collective exhibitions, such as 'Noir(s)-Noir : trans-missions' or 'Femmes en Mythologies.'<sup>4</sup>

In these cases, the central theme is often related to the territory or the island's identity rather than a general theme, as for certain exhibitions in mainland France such as 'Dreamlands,' 'Le mouvement,' and 'C'est la vie.'

The contemporary art developers, these intermediaries which curators represent, need to adapt to the regional context, to its shortcomings, and, more than their mainland counterparts, find themselves engaged in a long-distance race scattered with pitfalls. From the outset, they are faced with a number of problems:

How to link together the regional works to be promoted?

How to conserve the energy for renewal, how to amass and provide support for the questions from artists based in this *scattering of islands* of the Lesser Antilles?

Is an exhibition designed in the same way for a local audience as it is for an audience from an artistic capital?

How to reconcile curatorial demands and regional promotion? Is the fact of being a sort of *ambassador* for the visual arts of our respective islands and playing a supporting role for artists from the Caribbean zone at the front of the scene an obstacle to a curator's work or, on the contrary, a fruitful constraint?

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Should they be exhibited as representatives of their home country or gathered together according to their artistic approach? Does the labelling as *Caribbean contemporary art* favour their integration into the international art world or not?

Every exhibition is a new experience, always different from earlier ones, even more so when a person is not a full-time curator. Thus, the two recent exhibitions I curated for the Fondation Clément, ‘Atlantide Caraïbe’ and ‘Vous êtes ici. You are here. Usted esta aqui. Se ici la minm ou yé, Bo ta aki’ met clear objectives and targeted different audiences.

‘Atlantide Caraïbe’ was designed as an ancillary event to accompany an international conference. The aim was to present artists from Martinique—Victor Anicet, Alex Burke, Ernest Breleur, Valérie John, Hervé Beuze, Julie Bessard and Jean-François Boclé—to the invited international guests and establish a dialogue with a limited number of artists from other Caribbean



Bertrand Grosol, *ORI*, 2003–2008,  
acryl on glass and vinyl, 89.2 x 86.6 cm



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memory: Amerindian past, African inspiration, slave society, breakdown in relationships. *Itinéraires incarnés* dealt with the problems of violence, emigration, the painful relationship with others. Finally, *Itinéraires d'envol* explored the human condition in the modern-day world.

On the other hand, 'Vous êtes ici. You are here. Usted esta aqui. Se ici la minm ou yé. Bo ta aki' was part of the Fondation Clément's 2010/2011 programme and was open to a wide audience for a period of five weeks with the aim of promoting artists from the Caribbean, famous in the West Indies, but less well known in Martinique. For several of them, it was their first exhibition in Martinique. I selected works which met the brief and which depicted the vision that these artists had of their home region. How do artists from the Caribbean perceive these tropical islands, these *Islands in the Sun*<sup>5</sup> which, regardless of whether you were born there or you live there, quickly reveal another side of paradise. What insular world do these works point at? A puzzling island? A sinister island? A captivating island? When turning the spotlight on yourself, you are immediately faced with a critical analysis. The writing of the exhibition's synopsis preceded the choice of works, with the key aspect being that the installation would highlight the connections which I wanted to establish between them.

"Acting locally and thinking globally. Acting here at the same time as you are thinking there means ensuring that your action is also a counteraction,"<sup>6</sup> recommends Édouard Glissant. That is why exhibiting in Martinique, a remote region, and using works with roots established in the territory, inspired by Caribbean questions but nevertheless completely in line with the Centre's contemporary artistic problems, was so dear to me. In this way, it revealed a belief in the Caribbean legitimacy because it is right here that we are able to act, if possible without any concessions.



Installation view: 'Vous êtes ici. You are here. Usted esta aqui.  
Se ici la minm ou yé, Bo ta aki.'

The Creole language very often insists on *ici - là minm, ici - là même, nulle part ailleurs* (right here, right here, nowhere else). How do Caribbean artists perceive this *nowhere else* which represents such an exotic and distant location for non-natives? "During my successive visits to the United Kingdom, my friends listed countless exotic islands, trying to remember where I lived but only just managing to recall that it was a tropical island without being able to situate it with any precision,"<sup>7</sup> said Rex Dixon.

These *Islands in the Sun* are far from the exotic beauty depicted by Charles Baudelaire:

*A lazy isle to which nature has given  
Singular trees, savoury fruits,  
Men with bodies vigorous and slender,  
And women in whose eyes shine a startling candour.*<sup>8</sup>

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The works selected clearly depict the artist's position and his vision of the Caribbean. Often critical and ironic, they draw opposing images of the traditional vision of exoticism.

Thus, the exhibition opens with the eponymous work by Marcos Lora Read, *Vous êtes ici*, but where is *here*?

*Ici - là minm* (right here) represents this region, which is peripheral as much from an economic as from an artistic viewpoint, where the relationship to the centre is being redefined constantly by new communication technologies.<sup>9</sup> But, contrary to what Paul Ardenne<sup>10</sup> believes, information circulates better and more quickly, the centre remains the place for aesthetic validation and remote regions remain subject to the dictates of the centre.

Three installations, *Mémoire des Amériques* by Alex Burke, *Tropical Night* by Christopher Cozier and *Hatchlings: a requiem* by Annalee Davis, all based on a similar principle of juxtaposing small elements, embroideries, drawings or painted eggs, inaugurate the circuit while formally depicting the historical, geographic, political, linguistic and economic fragmentation of the archipelago.

A certain degree of interactivity was involved in the creation of Alex Burke's work since he asked inhabitants of the Caribbean to choose a significant date from their region's past, and then embroider it and explain the reasons for their choices. The only instruction given was the size of the fabric to be used. In some countries, the choice of the date and the embroidery were taken together in very lively workshops. These thirty-three embroideries from the Caribbean mainland and islands encourage spectators to think about how each person creates his own relationship to history without always being able to escape a certain degree of subjectivity. Twenty-three dates have been taken from the twentieth century, while the thirteen other dates stretch from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Two of them depict the discovery of the Bahamas and Guadeloupe by Christopher Columbus

Dominique Brebion

in 1492 and 1493. Six others depict the dates when countries achieved their Independence: USA, Haiti, Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina and Trinidad. Three celebrate the abolition of slavery: the three French Departments of the Americas. Three others depict the creation of States: Panama, Bermuda, Florida. One of them has flouted the instructions and bears nothing but the name Rosa Park. It is for each person to find their own key date.

With the series of drawings *Tropical Night*, a work started in 2006, a little like everyday note-taking which is constantly changing, Christopher Cozier keeps a sort of diary in which he perceives and expresses the reality of island life. Objects from everyday life in the West Indies are reproduced in an iterative manner, such as the *ti – banc* (a small bench: ‘petit banc’), also present in the work *Sur le banc*, 2007, by Patricia Baffin.

The small flags painted on eggs in *Hatchlings: a requiem* by Annalee Davis, huddled and isolated in their nests, laid out in a



Polibio Díaz, *La isla del tesoro* (Treasure Island), 2006,  
video installation

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funereal box on a torn copy of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, symbolise the fifteen member states of CARICOM which, according to the artist, did not keep its promise.

The third group of four works by Tirzo Martha, Tony Monsanto and Annalee Davis criticise the tourism development policy of certain islands which have given over their most beautiful areas to investors to the detriment of the local population. The same theme is presented in the protest video by Polibio Díaz from the Dominican Republic, *La Isla del Tesoro*, shown in the exhibition 'Atlantide Caraïbe.' Davis's work, *Just Beyond My Imagination*, stigmatises the organisation in Barbados of international golf tournaments, which require the creation of magnificent courses whereas the sport itself remains out of reach of the Barbadian population. The audio part of *Barbados in a Nutshell*, distorts the Barbadian national anthem with the addition of a negative: "These lands are no longer our own," and highlights Davis's concept bringing together a display case of emblematic objects, a concentrate, a summary of her native island.

Similarities and contradictions create an itinerary for visitors around the exhibition and shine a light on the Caribbean reality. The semantic and iconographic field of piety, the words 'paradise,' 'pilgrimage' and 'holy' in the titles of Tirzo Martha (*Pilgrimage to the Holy Caribbean*, 2009) and Tony Monsanto (*Welcome to paradise*, 2009), Martha's *Christ*, and Davis's *Holy Bible*.

The word 'welcome' on the painting by Monsanto is repeated on the welcome rug by Martha which takes the opposing stance to "Members preferred" on the rug in *Just Beyond* by Davis.

Very Caribbean too, the resounding call of the cockerel, the cosmic timekeeper of all agrarian societies, omnipresent in these regions, is depicted no fewer than twelve times by Wifredo Lam, under the title *Coq antillais* or *coq caribéen*. Although it is crowing the triumph of the day, it is also attempting to awaken the Caribbean in order that it opens its eyes to its own reality.

Dominique Brebion

The problem of the relationship to oneself, to one's own corporal diagram and to the Other is interpreted in a very different manner by three artists: the aspiration to superimpose oneself on to a dominant model by Oneika Russel, the irony of *Peau noire, masques blancs*<sup>11</sup> with the sardonic laugh and ogre's gullet by Thierry Alet, a sociological interrogation on the subject of chemical skin whitening products in the world of dancehall by Ebony G. Patterson.

The diasporic experience of Caribbean people today is the subject of the photographs and videos by Ingrid Pollard (*Belonging in Britain*) and Polibio Díaz (*Yautia*). The recognition of Antillean emigration as a diasporic experience has been contested for many years, especially in the French-speaking world of academia. English speakers adopted it much earlier with Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. This emigration meets certain criteria of the diasporic model: the collective dispersal following a trauma, the



Trevor Mathison and Gary Stewart, *Encounter*, 2010, installation, video and sound, photographs, dimensions variable

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maintenance—following dispersal—of a cultural identity born from a common history and territory. The site-specific interactive installation *Rencontre* by Trevor Mathison and Gary Stewart also deals with this theme of the relationship to history and territory.

All these works are contemporary in the sense that what is important is the concept and the position of the artist expressed through artistic practices today: installations, videos, photographs, interactivity, sound. In this manner, the Caribbean, without turning its back on its roots, is proving that it also belongs to the modern era.

Yet, it is clear that, as Philippe Régnier<sup>12</sup> highlighted at the seminar organised by AICA Southern Caribbean in Martinique in 2008, the Caribbean is a *terra incognita* for the international art world. With the exception of Wifredo Lam (Cuba), Hervé Télémaque (Haiti) and Kcho (Cuba), very few artists from Caribbean islands have crossed the international market barrier. A quick consultation of the Internet operators who have positioned themselves at the confluence of the market of knowledge and the market of goods by providing a database of works, documentary and iconographic resources as well as an opportunity for online sales, is enough to show that even the artists most exhibited in recent large-scale international events devoted to the Caribbean are not listed. What common strategy should be developed to facilitate the Caribbean's entry into the international market? Do the islands of the Caribbean have the ability to join emerging markets by focusing on publications, or a few collectors among its own Diaspora? Will its ability to update scenographic concepts by offering exhibitions designed according to the model of the carnivalesque masquerade, as Claire Tancons and Krista Thompson have started to do, help to attract and focus the attention of critics, galleries, collectors, museums and art centres? These two young curators explore the specific development of

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performance in modern-day Caribbean art. Is it necessary to start by creating our bodies for legitimisation by means of a dynamic network of inter-Caribbean dissemination? Is there another possible path in the search for an original museography in line with the works presented such as these two enjoyable attempts: the name plates for the exhibition ‘Sculptures Urbaines’ presented in Barbados in 2003 or the presentation supports for ‘Objets de Corps’ made from old corrugated iron, crushed bricks, severed nails, ground glass and straw.

This programme, *Curating in the Caribbean*, by bringing together about a dozen curators from Caribbean islands for shared reflection, is a decisive step in the process to promote contemporary artists from the geographic area, something which has been our objective for more than a decade.

### 1

Édouard Glissant, “La saison unique,” in: *La Cohée du Lamentin*, Paris: NRF Gallimard, 2005, p. 31.

### 2

Dominique Brebion, ‘Triennale de la Caraïbe République Dominicaine – Art & Environnement,’ 2010; Suzy Landau, ‘Photoquai 2007, Biennale des Images du monde,’ Musée du Quai Branly; Dominique Brebion, ‘Biennale de Lyon Partage d’exotisme,’ 2000; Dominique Brebion, ‘Biennale Internationale de São Paulo 1996 – La dématérialisation de l’art;’ Dominique Brebion, ‘Biennale Internationale de São Paulo 1994 – L’éclatement du cadre;’ Allison Thompson, ‘Biennale Internationale de São Paulo 1994 – L’éclatement du cadre,’ Allison Thompson, ‘Biennale Internationale de São Paulo 1996 – La dématérialisation de l’art.’

### 3

‘Atlantide Caraïbe,’ 28 November – 8 December 2008, Curator: Dominique Brebion; ‘Entre-Vues,’ 5 February – 15 March 2009, Curator: Suzy Landau; ‘Entre mythes et réalités,’ 18 December 2009 – 24 January 2010, Curator: Luz Severino; ‘Flore Raisons Nouvelles,’ 21 May – 27 June 2010, Curator: Ernest Breleur; ‘Vous êtes ici. You are here,’ 28 October – 5 December 2010, Curator: Dominique Brebion.

### 4

‘Noir(s)-Noir : trans-missions,’ October 2009, Curator: Suzy Landau & Valérie John; ‘Femmes en Mythologies,’ 4–14 November 2010, Curator: Suzy Landau and Valérie John.

### 5

*Islands in the Sun* is the title of an installation by Alex Burke (Martinique) – installation: photocopies, lettres adhésives, packaging and various objects – 1997; it is also the title of a

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novel by Alec Waugh, and of an American film with Harry Belafonte from 1957.

6

Édouard Glissant, 'La saison unique,' op.cit.

7

Rex Dixon, "Where to find me," in: *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 29, July 2009, p. 90.

8

Charles Baudelaire, *Parfum exotique*, in: *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857.

9

Samir Amin, *Le développement inégal*, Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1973.

10

Paul Ardenne, "Contemporary Art and Global System," in: *Arts & Societes*, 2006, <http://www.artsetsocietes.org/a/a-ardenne.html>.

11

Frantz Fanon, *Peau Noire, masques blancs*, Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1952

12

Philippe Régnier, Editor in Chief of the arts journal *Le Marché de l'art dans la Caraïbe*, in a seminar 2008.

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