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**Pronouncing the Re-Turn:
Constructing and interpreting visual representations of the Caribbean
from a transatlantic, transcultural and diasporic perspective**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Heather Allison Thompson

to

The Graduate School

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2013

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Identity, which remains a central theme for contemporary Caribbean and diaspora artists, exists in tension with a long tradition of stereotypes and tropes employed by its colonizers to describe the region through the construction of difference and otherness. The European myth of “discovery” fashioned the Caribbean as an uncivilized paradise, constructed in contrast to the normative of Western modernism. The Caribbean is compelled then to repeatedly assert its identity as well as its contemporaneity within a highly contested and over-determined space. The model of diaspora positions the Caribbean within a transnational space of dynamic cultural exchange, emphasizing the experience of travel, whether forced or voluntary and the encounter of difference. The transatlantic journeys with their vertiginous consequences were a defining feature of modernity. Estrangement and displacement emerge as a recurring creative force which has impacted contemporary artistic practice within the diaspora and requires new methodological approaches of interpretation. A “re-turn” is proposed as a reconfiguring turn, a critical break or deflection which re-examines historical narratives and results in a paradigm shift. Four moments are proposed for consideration within a diasporic genealogy aimed at interrogating the past-present continuum to refigure the past, illuminate absences and develop methodological approaches that provide an expanded context in which to look at contemporary Caribbean art. The contemporary work of Sonia Boyce provides a model for re-assessing diaspora experience; the late sixteenth century illustrations of travel journals by Flemish book publishers, the De Brys were unprecedentedly influential in disseminating a constructed vision of the earliest transatlantic encounters; French post-impressionist Paul Gauguin re-framed his experiences of Martinique in the Volpini Suite through memory, allegory and myth; and Wifredo Lam and Aimé Césaire re-deployed surrealism’s language of conceptual revolution and aesthetic juxtaposition to foreground the African presence as a constituent part of Caribbean experience. Questions of language and authority as represented through the intersection of words and images recur throughout these examples. These four moments present an expanded spatial and temporal context in which to rethink the interpretation of work by four contemporary artists in Barbados beyond previously established nationalist paradigms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgments	x
Introduction: Starting Point (a constructed origin)	
An Introduction	1
Charting a Diasporic Genealogy	2
A Past-present Continuum	5
Lost in Translation	6
Black Transnational Culture	7
The Reconfigured Turn	11
Visual Analysis	12
The Caribbean – Exotic Place & Primitive People	14
Re-examine the Rubric	15
Roots in Reconstruction: Sonia Boyce	15
The De Brys’ <i>Great Voyages</i>	17
Gauguin in Martinique	18
Wifredo Lam and Aimé Césaire	20
Returning to Familiar Territory	21
Chapter One - Roots in Reconstruction: Locating the Caribbean in the work of Sonia Boyce	27
Migration and Memory	29
The Politics of Black Art in 1980s Britain	32
Journeys: Gilroy’s Routes and Boyce’s Roots	36
Multiple Meanings	40
The Archive	42
Performativity	45
The Caribbean Work – Travel Writer	48
Crop Over	49
Collective Identity – The role of folk culture	53
Masquerade	55
Carnival as Inversion	56
Return to my (alter) Native Land	57
Chapter Two - “Whether New or Rediscovered”: constructing the pictorial Caribbean in the De Brys’ <i>Great Voyages</i>	83
Interpreting Benzoni	91
The Interpretation: Compare and Contrast	93
Indian Woman of Cumana	95

The Launch of the Great Voyages	103
<i>America IV-VI: An introduction to the Caribbean</i>	106
Scenes of Slavery	113
Selective Representation and Absence	119
A Pictorial Legacy	122
Chapter Three - Souvenir de la Martinique: Paul Gauguin, memory and myth	143
Life in Myth	146
Exotic Encounters in Travel	149
Café Volpini at the <i>Exposition Universelle</i>	152
A Theme for the <i>Volpini Suite</i>	156
Scenes of Martinique	158
Old Engravings	165
Le Masurier	168
The Grasshoppers and the Ants: Memory of Martinique	172
The Martinique Pastoral (<i>Pastorales Martinique</i>)	179
The Primitive Pastoral	181
Chapter Four - The “Re-Turn” to a Native Land	211
Discovering Europe	213
Paradox of Primitivism	215
Black Consciousness: Césaire and Négritude	216
The War Years	218
Surrealism and the Caribbean	219
Arrival in Martinique	224
Return	229
Departure from Martinique	236
Re-Appropriation of the Primitive	238
Lam’s <i>The Jungle</i>	241
Paradox of Paradise	246
Enduring Collaboration	250
Chapter Five - Returning to Familiar Territory: Reconsidering Contemporary Barbados	265
The Caribbean and Contemporaneity	268
Sense of Place	275
Winston Kellman’s Black Atlantic	275
Visual Amnesia	283
Crisis of Duality	286
The Ghost of Slavery and Subjugation	288
The Dichotomy of Paradise	291
Memory and Tradition: Positioning the past in the present	292
Ras Ishi Butcher: Remixing History	295
A Personal Journal	298
Secret Diaries	299

Joscelyn Gardner's Creole Portraits	305
Appropriation of the Black Caribbean Woman	309
White Skin, Black Kin	315
Sheena Rose – Depictions of the Urban Space	319
Sweet Gossip	322
Projects and Space	324
One Person, Many Stories	325
Conclusion	367
Bibliography	369

List of Illustrations

Chapter One

- 1.1 Sonia Boyce, *Cricket Days? Domino Nights! Young arrivals/new home/homeless. The streets are paved with gold in this green and pleasant land*, 1986, pastels on photography, private collection, **63**.
- 1.2 Sonia Boyce, *Big Women's Talk*, 1984, pastels on paper, Arts Council of Britain, **64**.
- 1.3 Sonia Boyce, *Rice and Peas*, 1982, pastels and pencil on paper, Collection: Lubaina Himid, UK (photo courtesy of Denise Swanson), **65**.
- 1.4 Sonia Boyce, *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)* 1986, pastels on paper, Collection of Mima, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. Purchased with assistance from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund 1987/88, **66**.
- 1.5 Eddie Chambers, *Untitled*, 1994, Artist's collection, **67**.
- 1.6 Sonia Boyce, *From Tarzan To Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction*, 1987, mixed media, Collection: Tate Britain © Tate, London 2011, **68**.
- 1.7 René Magritte, *Je ne vois pas la [femme] cache dans la forêt*, 1929, © 2013 C. Herscovici, London / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, **69**.
- 1.8 Sonia Boyce, *Travel Writer*, 1997-2000, photocopy of drawing, Artist's Collection, **70**.
- 1.9 Sonia Boyce, *I am the Mother Sally*, 2007, pencil on paper, Artist's Collection, **71**.
- 1.10 Sonia Boyce, *Crop Over: I am the Mother Sally*, 2007, video still, **72**.
- 1.11 Sonia Boyce, *Crop Over: My Name is Donkey-Man*, 2007, video still, **72**.
- 1.12 Sonia Boyce, *Crop Over: Hello People of the World*, 2007, video still, **73**.
- 1.13 Sonia Boyce, *Crop Over: Grand Kadooment*, 2007, video still, **73**.

Chapter Two

- 2.1 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 2: Indian Woman from Cumana*, 1594, **126**.
- 2.2 Joos van Winghe, *Great Voyages Vol 1: Adam and Eve – The Temptation and Fall*, 1590, **127**.
- 2.3 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV: Frontispiece*, 1594, **128**.
- 2.4 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 20: How the Indians poured melted gold down the mouths of the Spaniards*, 1594, **129**.
- 2.5 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 22: Balboa meets Indians dressed as women who engaged in acts of sodomy*, 1594, **130**.
- 2.6 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 4: Cruelties against the enslaved Indians of Venezuela*, 1594, **131**.
- 2.7 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 2: The veins of gold ore having been exhausted, the Blacks had to work in sugar*, 1595, **132**.
- 2.8 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 1: Black Slaves Mining for Gold Dust*, 1595, **133**.
- 2.9 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 3: The First Revolt of Black Slaves*, 1595, **134**.
- 2.10 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 4: Slave Punishments on Hispaniola*, 1595, **135**.

Chapter Three

- 3.1 Paul Gauguin, *Volpini Suite: The Grasshoppers and the Ants - Memory of Martinique (Les Cigales et les Fourmis - Souvenir de la Martinique)*, 1889, zincograph, Cleveland Museum of Art, **193**.
- 3.2 Paul Gauguin, *Volpini Suite: Martinique Pastorals (Pastorales Martinique)*, 1889, zincograph, Cleveland Museum of Art, **194**.
- 3.3 Paul Gauguin, *Volpini Suite: Leda and the Swan*, 1888, zincograph, **195**.
- 3.4 Paul Gauguin, *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight*, 1887, oil on canvas, Private Collection, **196**.
- 3.5 Paul Gauguin, *Saint Pierre Roadstead*, 1887, oil on canvas, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, **197**.
- 3.6 Paul Gauguin, *Comings and Goings*, 1887, oil on canvas, Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, **198**.
- 3.7 Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur, *Nègre et Nègresses de la Martinique Dancing la Chica (Negre & Negresse de la Martinique dansans la Chica)*, 1805, colored engraving Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library, **199**.
- 3.8 Agostino Brunias, *Barbados Mulatto Girl*, 1779, colored engraving, The Barbados Museum and Historical Society, **200**.
- 3.9 Vincent Van Gogh, *The Sower*, oil on canvas, Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam, 1888, **201**.

Chapter 4

- 4.1 Henri Rousseau, *The Dream/ Charmeuse de Serpent*, 1907, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York, **254**.
- 4.8 Wifredo Lam *The Jungle*, 1943, gouache on paper mounted on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York, **255**.
- 4.9 Pablo Picasso, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York, **256**.

Chapter 5

- 5.1 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas, Artist's Collection, **329**.
- 5.2 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas, Artist's Collection, **331**.
- 5.3 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas, Artist's Collection, **332**.
- 5.4 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, watercolor on paper, Artist's Collection, **333**.
- 5.5 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, charcoal on paper, Artist's Collection, **334**.
- 5.6 Winston Kellman, *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)*, 2010-2011, watercolor on paper, Artist's Collection, **335**.
- 5.7 Vishni Gopwani, *Winston Kellman at Bathsheba, photograph*, 2012, **336**.

- 5.8 Winston Kellman, *Mud and Flowers Series: Plantation*, 2009, acrylic on canvas Private collection, Barbados, **337**.
- 5.9 Winston Kellman, *Mud and Flowers Series:Field*, 2009, acrylic on canvas Private collection, Barbados, **338**.
- 5.10 Ras Ishi Butcher, *400 Years: Remix*, oil on canvas, Private Collection, **339**.
- 5.11 Ras Ishi Butcher, *400 Years: New World Order*, oil on canvas, Private Collection, **340**.
- 5.12 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Triangle*, mixed media, Private Collection **341**.
- 5.13 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Diario Secreto*, mixed media, Embassy of the United States of America, Barbados, **340**.
- 5.14 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Piece of de Rock*, mixed media, Private Collection, **341**.
- 5.15 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Battlefield*, mixed media, Private Collection, **342**.
- 5.16 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Blazin'*, mixed media, Private Collection, **343**.
- 5.17 Ras Ishi Butcher, *Omega*, mixed media, Private Collection, **344**.
- 5.18 Joscelyn Gardner, *Creole Portraits* (2002-2003), lithographs on frosted mylar, **345**.
- 5.19 Joscelyn Gardner, *Creole Portraits II: A Collection of Singular & Scarce Creole Portrait Heads to perpetuate the Memory of the Women of Egypt Estate in Jamaica* (2007), wall installation with stone lithographs on frosted mylar with vinyl wall elements, **346**.
- 5.20 Joscelyn Gardner, *Creole Portraits III "bringing down the flowers" Bromeliad penguin (Abba)* (2009-11), hand colored lithograph on frosted mylar, **347**.
- 5.21 Joscelyn Gardner, *Creole Portraits III "bringing down the flowers" Mimosa Pudica (Yabba)* (2009-11), hand colored lithograph on frosted mylar, 348.
- 5.22 Joscelyn Gardner, *White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece* (2003), multi media video/sound installation, **349**.
- 5.23 Sheena Rose, *Town*, mixed media still from video, Artist's Collection, **350**.
- 5.24 Sheena Rose, *Many Streets*, mixed media, Artist's Collection, **351**.
- 5.25 Sheena Rose, *Sweet Gossip: She feels she's all that...*, acrylic on plywood, Private Collection, **352**.
- 5.26 Sheena Rose, *Sweet Gossip: All of his backside by the door!*, photograph courtesy of Adrian Richards, **353**.
- 5.27 Sheena Rose, *Sweet Gossip: I wonder how she does bathe...*, photograph courtesy of Adrian Richards, **354**.
- 5.28 Sheena Rose, *Sweet Gossip: Man I want piece of that*, photograph courtesy of Adrian Richards, **355**.
- 5.29 Sheena Rose, *One Person, Many Stories*, Performance, photograph courtesy of Adrian Richards, **356**.

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Introduction: Starting Point (a constructed origin)

An Introduction

My name is Sheena Rose. I'm a' artist too. I'm from Barbados.....[pause].....

Where? The Caribbean.....[pause]..... Color? What do you mean by color?

The young artist introduces herself in the opening moments of her recent performance entitled *One Person, Many Stories*.¹ At the young age of twenty-seven, Sheena Rose has already achieved considerable recognition, having participated in exhibitions and residencies throughout the Caribbean – Trinidad, Suriname, Martinique, Puerto Rico, Panama, as well as internationally – the United States, Europe and Africa. In many ways she embodies the diasporic or transnational artist.

Rose proceeds in the next two minutes to completely disrobe as she gauges her audience:

You tink I ginna talk bout Africa.....You tink I ginna talk bout race.

Completely naked now, she poses deliberately for the viewer:

You tink I ginna talk bout identity.

She rubs her hands over her breasts:

You tink I ginna talk bout sexuality.

You tink I ginna talk bout beauty.

She raises her hands up to either side of her face and along her dread-locks:

You tink I ginna talk bout my hair.

Rose proceeds to act out a number of the encounters she has had during these global travels, confronting her silent viewers with the preconceptions and expectations made about her and her work based on origin and ethnicity. Stereotyped preconceptions about Caribbean art and artists are not difficult to find: “Multiculturalist terms like identity, hybridity and diversity may sound like words from a dead language in Chelsea,” wrote *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter, but for contemporary Caribbean art, they are the “lingua franca.” In Cotter’s review of *Infinite Island*, the 2007 exhibition of contemporary Caribbean art at the Brooklyn Museum, Cotter expressed disappointment in the work that he found “warmed over and sluggish.” In his review titled “Caribbean Visions of Tropical Paradise and Protest,” he told his readers that what he was really hoping for was “a sense of risk or discovery.”²

Charting a Diasporic Genealogy

The tropes and stereotypes that continue to be associated with Caribbean art have a long tradition that can arguably be traced back to the “Age of Discovery,” when the Caribbean was described as a paradise, an Eden, a New World, home to a version of European mankind in its earlier, pre-civilized state, removed from the contamination of early modernizing forces, occupying a land of endless possibilities; but also a place of unknown dangers, a jungle home to savages and cannibals. Under these assumptions the present-day Caribbean is compelled to repeatedly assert its identity, to pronounce its voice within a highly contested space. Definitions have been the domain of the empowered, and traditionally power over the region has been an external force. In many ways, this is still the case.

The relationship between the local and the global has become a central focus in discussions of contemporary experience. Artist Sonia Boyce has argued that these two states are increasingly understood as intertwined, as are the personal and the political. Central to this sense of spatial flux is the concept of diaspora, which Boyce describes as “communities traumatically dispersed, in transit, or worse still, subsumed and invisible.” Diaspora exists in relationship to nationhood, which she points out is opposite to the transitory, requiring instead stability and locational allegiance.³ The focus of Boyce’s discussion is the experience of travel and encounters with different cultures, the problems of language and translation and the question of speaking; the process of representing (re-presenting and reproducing) that experience. In a post-colonial, increasingly globalized world, Boyce wants to explore the complexities inherent in the seemingly persistent pre-occupation with the question of origins (“Where do you come from?”), the experience of displacement and the possibilities of return.

In the introduction to his seminal text, *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, Nicholas Mirzoeff identifies the problem with representation of diasporas: “Diaspora cannot by its very nature be fully known, seen or quantified even – or especially – by its own members. The notion of diaspora and visual culture embodies this paradox. A diaspora cannot be seen in any traditional sense and it certainly cannot be represented from the viewpoint of one-point perspective.”⁴ Writing the history of diaspora visual cultures then, Mirzoeff argues, will require new methodological approaches, including multiple viewpoints. The main challenge, the “postmodern diasporic dilemma,” is the burden of tradition: “how can something be visualized that is adequate to guide us round what is so widely felt to be new, when all that is available is the discredited apparatus of the

modern?” One method he proposes is in constructing diasporist genealogies of the present “that refigure the past in order to facilitate the theoretical and phenomenological understanding of the multiple viewpoints of diaspora.”⁵ He later describes the genealogy as a framework for critical work in visual culture which he argues is “itself a key part of the formation of Western historiography.”⁶

Considering the nations of the Caribbean as part of a diaspora acknowledges and foregrounds the importance of a network of transatlantic, transcultural relationships that have been pivotal to the development and definition of the region and argues for the centrality of the Caribbean within the main narratives of Modernism. Contemporary Caribbean artists in their efforts to wrestle with their place in the contemporary moment, often address the great weight of tradition, the burden of representation which has shaped how the Caribbean has been conceived and depicted. With the intent of exploring expanded ways to consider meaning within contemporary Caribbean art, this dissertation proposes to chart a diasporic genealogy by pointing to moments which act as coordinates on that chart; moments in which transatlantic, cross-cultural encounters were influential in constructing visual representations of the region which have remained embedded in current discourse.⁷ Through a discussion of the constructed representations of particular works of art, I intend to interrogate the sources, processes and intentions at play as well as their ongoing influence as part of the evolving visual vocabulary that circulated through increasingly globalized networks as representative of Caribbean experience.

A Past-present Continuum

Referring to debates initiated by the post-colonial turn, Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera have argued that the figure of the “diasporean” is the one most prominently associated with postmodernity or the post-colonial with its “decentered and deterritorialized subject”⁸. Kobena Mercer agrees, noting that colonial encounters of the past created multiple trajectories in which “cultural elements were loosened and detached from indigenous traditions and set into motion across a network of traveling cultures.” He argues for the need for a more holistic understanding of the traumatic journeys of people who criss-crossed the globe during the era of modern internationalism as a necessary process to better understand and interrogate the cultural production of the present. This he argues would result in the need to rethink traditional conceptions of modernism and its relationship to nationhood: "Where migration and travel alter the outlook of the traveler and diversify the metropolitan environments in which relocated communities make their homes, the assumption that the nation-state is merely a neutral 'container' for artistic and cultural production is cast into doubt."⁹

It should not be surprising that post-colonial cultures often express a fundamental unease with conventional discourses of national, ethnic, and even racial identity. Within the Caribbean this unease is rooted in the enduring influence of European colonization (including language, education, political systems); national cultural agendas which were often structured in a reactionary stance to the colonial project stressing a more insular independence and embracing of African heritage; developing economies often dependent on larger western nations; and an insufficient recognition of the wider transnational relationships and exchanges that formed the foundation of modernity. This has often been

expressed through a sense of “doubleness” or ambivalent attitudes towards Western norms, not only through dichotomies of race but also ongoing marginalization. Expanding the scope of national and regional narratives as well as the dominant conception of modernism as a whole to embrace the wider transatlantic diaspora as an inter-relational network of people, cultures, influences and traditions provides an opportunity to address the intricate relationships of exchange and power dynamics which have shaped the presentation of these stories and representations.

Lost in Translation

Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier has described the incongruities and conflicts which exist between a “reality” and a foreign language that tries to describe it. This challenge to Caribbean artists and writers has a long tradition stretching back to the first encounters between Europe and its proclaimed “New World.” Carpentier asks: “Are we to suffer the anguish of Hernan Cortes when he complained to Charles V of not being able to describe great things in America ‘because I do not know the words by which they are known’?”¹⁰ The Caribbean has historically been described and defined using the languages, models, epistemologies and tropes of the colonizer; simultaneously a foreign and a dominant culture; both other and surrogate mother. The incommensurability and incongruity of its great and new realities could be given form within European languages or modes as difference, as deviation from a pre-acknowledged and empowered norm. But the construction and representation of the Caribbean has not been restricted to transatlantic impositions and assimilations; rather it has been a complex and dynamic process of transcultural translations, adaptations and reinventions.

The Caribbean itself is a constructed entity geographically and culturally, comprised of islands within the Caribbean Sea as well as mainland nations bordering the sea with diverse languages and ethnicities as well as political, social and religious structures reflecting the shifting colonial and anti-colonial struggles which serve as a common historical experience. With the near extinction of the aboriginal Amerindian population, the Caribbean was a primary site for the development of the model of plantation economies based on African slave labor which was then imported northwards into North America and south into Brazil. Subsequent migrations particularly from Asia, resettlement and creolization, have resulted in a multi-ethnic common experience of ‘otherness’ both from the European colonizers and from an origin located in a ‘somewhere-elseness’. Stuart Hall describes the Caribbean as a repopulated space whose displaced inhabitants do not belong here, but have developed a rootedness in the region.¹¹ Caribbean communities have been established across the globe, most notably in Miami, New York, Toronto and London. Hall points out that while the experience of “the in-between of different cultures” is often identified as a shared one amongst marginalized diasporic cultures, it has become a predominant phenomenon of contemporary global experience.

Black Transnational Culture

Paul Gilroy describes a model of diasporic modernity that proposes that nationalist paradigms for thinking about cultural history have failed when confronted by the intercultural and transnational formation that he calls the “Black Atlantic.”¹² In opposition to nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, Gilroy advocates taking the

Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis, as opposed to old and new worlds, to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective with an emphasis on transatlantic “routes” rather than the fixed polarities and absolute positions implied by its homonym “roots”.¹³ Focus is placed on the dialectic exchange of encounter rather than discovery, possession, submission and assimilation.

Gilroy uses the metaphor of the ship as a theoretical model to convey fluidity of change and proposes that we regard the African diaspora as a conceptual space in which we can examine those cultures that have been shaped by the traumas and legacies of transatlantic slavery. Arguing for the centrality of the experience of slavery to the project of modernity, Gilroy demonstrates how the original experience of diasporic blacks – the trans-shipment and relocation in the “New World” - was an entirely modern one, crucial to plantation economies and imperial capitalism and while the experiences of black people have been excluded from most contemporary writings about modernity, in fact they are seminal to it. He characterizes early transatlantic ships as “modern machines that were themselves micro-systems of linguistic and political hybridity.”¹⁴ The Black Atlantic then becomes analogous with the fluid vastness which simultaneously divides and links these entities; the transatlantic voyage represents the nomadic, transitional, trans-national experience of colonialism and post-colonialism – the monumental efforts to reach otherness or motherhood and the subsequent return. The experience of travel, the journey then becomes the means through which the diaspora is constructed, experienced and understood – the movement from one place to the other, the encounter, the transition, the emigration, the experience of distance and displacement, the contemplation of the

meaning of return. Accounts in the form of travel journals and diaries become important sources recording subjective experiences of travel, re-location and otherness.

Regarding the Black Atlantic as “one single, complex unit of analysis” acknowledges the contribution of divergent local or regional developments within culture, while at the same time relating them to a metaculture – what Gilroy described as a network or rhizome. Journeys, both real and metaphorical, both enforced and voluntary, constitute a network across the Atlantic. He argues that attention to the different moments of connectedness allows us to identify systems of cultural exchange and continuity. These commonalities reveal themselves in diverse and complex ways: what Gilroy refers to as “the changing same.” Gilroy draws on W.E.B. DuBois’ theory of double-consciousness to describe the psychological trauma of identifying with separate and conflicting cultures, a process central to the search for identity formation within the Caribbean.

This transnational, hybrid model is not something invented within the context of postmodern studies. On the contrary, it is recognized that the international marketplace and common concerns made by the Atlantic slave systems formed a unity in the pre-emancipation era which contemporaries, both slave and free, often recognized. It was only after emancipation that this more expansive perspective was forgotten, ignored, or suppressed as colonial territorial claims and later independence movements sought to shore up their delineated borders.¹⁵ In re-thinking these spaces as part of a networked diaspora foundational to the grand globalizing experience of modernity and with an expanded vision towards the diaspora as contrasted to notions of nationalism, we are challenged to open up to think about the more complex experiences of interaction and

exchange. The Caribbean people then can confront its marginalized outsider status and instead argue for its centrality to the project of modernity.

The relationship between Caribbean and metropolitan Western culture is, according to Veerle Poupeye, characterized by its “complexity and dialectic nature.”¹⁶ Fernando Ortiz introduced the term “transculturation” to emphasize that cultural influences are not unidirectional, but rather dynamic and multi-faceted. As Fernando Coronil has explained, Ortiz’s counterpoint of cultures demonstrates that in a world forged by the violence of conquest and colonialism, the dialectic between the West and its Other, black and white, male and female, high and low cannot be defined by rigid polarities.¹⁷ Mirzoeff points out that Du Bois’ double consciousness is also a past-present dichotomy. He cites Homi Bhabba who advocates a refiguring of the past as a contingent in-between space that interrupts the past-present continuum and calls for a new cultural translation which challenges the way people see themselves and one another.¹⁸ All agree that post-colonial approaches of hybridity and transnationalism developed to describe the Caribbean experience can stand as tools for examining a globalized world.

Kobena Mercer also acknowledges the critical and creative role of estrangement and displacement as a recurring event in the story of modernism and modern art as a whole.¹⁹ While the art world acknowledges the impact of migration and globalization, it is often de-historicized. Life-changing journeys that transplanted artists and intellectuals from one cultural context to another had “vertiginous consequences,” throwing ideas and identities into flux. This, Mercer asserts, has been the defining feature of modernity and yet its impact on twentieth century artistic formations has been only hazily understood. Referencing Gilroy, Mercer proposes that a diasporic world-view opens up a counter-

discourse of modernity: “When the historical past is opened to new forms of creative understanding at the point where concepts of intentional appropriation and discursive trans-coding in diaspora studies meet critical theories of bricolage and quotation in post-modernism, a more nuanced appreciation of how cultural elements travel and circulate opens up a connective approach.”²⁰ Mercer and Mirzoeff both reference R.B. Kitaj’s *First Diasporist Manifesto* (1989) which advocates “not a once-and-for-all break with the era of classical modern art but a critical *return journey* that uncovers previously hidden scenarios of aesthetic invention and hybridization in 20th-century life.”²¹

The Reconfigured Turn

According to Stuart Hall, we are currently witnessing the result of the cumulative effects of a series of “turns” which constitute the end of certain ideas of modernity and of history. He insists on the importance of the notion of the turn:

A turn is neither an ending nor a reversal: the process continues in the direction in which it was travelling before, but with a critical break, a deflection. After the turn, all of the terms of the paradigm are not destroyed; instead, the deflection shifts the paradigm in a direction which is different from that which one might have presupposed from the previous moment. It is not an ending, but a break, and the notion of breaks – of ruptures and of turns – begins to provide us with certain broad handles with which to grasp the current crisis of modernity....²²

The return is fashioned, not simply as going back to a point of origin or reversing; rather it can be thought of as a “re-turn,” a deliberate act of reconsideration, a re-evaluation, another look that allows us to identify moments and points of reference from which we can construct a “diasporist genealogy” that will not only interrupt the past-present continuum, but allow us to re-think the past, and illuminate its absences. To take

notice of multiple perspectives is not only to engage in dialogue between multiple locations but also an ongoing exchange between a past and a present.

Richard J. Powell introduces the term “Atlantic perspective” which he describes as “a view which takes into account an African past, legacies of slavery, revolutions won and lost, and colonialism’s pervasive hold on people’s futures.”²³ Such a perspective, he says, is implicitly contained in *Notebook of a return to the native land / Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, Aimé Césaire’s epic poem which pronounces a solidarity throughout the African diaspora in the face of institutionalized French colonial racism which would become known as *Négritude*. Written prior to his departure from Paris for his native Martinique, Césaire’s “return” referred not to his impending transatlantic journey home but rather to a psychic re-engagement with and denouncement of the French colonial rule that sought to marginalize and degrade the black population.

Visual Analysis

Kobena Mercer brings to the discussion of diaspora an emphasis on the need to re-examine the historical precedents, and as an art historian, he argues for the need to bring along to this theorizing of the experience of diaspora, a meaningful discussion of the work of art. He wants to examine the “otherness” of individual works of art, a goal which requires or indeed demands “a careful adjustment of the methodologies of historical research.”²⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff also advocates for the place of visual analysis. In *The Right to Look*, Mirzoeff returns to the model of a genealogy, focusing specifically on a genealogy of the plantation complex of the Atlantic world. The process of visualizing this history was an integral part of how Europe distinguished itself from its

others. He states the visual image is an archive in its own right which can “speak” for and about colonial histories rather than simply being illustrative of them, particularly in cases where textual evidence is absent. He argues for the importance of formal analysis of the image including analysis of “style, composition, and inference that is commonplace within the Western canon and its hinterlands.”²⁵ Mirzoeff describes visual culture itself as the “visual turn” which “sought to engage the deployment of visualized authority at its points of strength.”

It is through this formal analysis of specific works that the visual image is allowed to “speak.” As already stated, Sonia Boyce emphasizes that it is through travel and encounters with difference that the artist confronts “the problems of language, translation and the question of speaking.” Re-turning to particular moments and images that I propose have a place in the configuration of a genealogy for contemporary Caribbean art allows them not just to speak but to “pronounce.” To pronounce is to speak or utter in a certain way, to proclaim officially or to declare as being one’s opinion.²⁶ It is both an introduction and an affirmation of the individual. Pronunciation refers to the way in which something is pronounced, especially with reference to conforming to or departing from a standard or accepted norm. Pronunciation outside of the norm would be designated as a dialect such as Creole.

Images, particularly those regarded as documents, have been interpreted as placing before the viewer an objective re-presentation of reality. European depictions of the Caribbean emerged during the sixteenth century, coinciding with the rapid popularization of prints and illustrated books. There was a close association between image and text which reinforced the appearance of fact and authority. Re-turning to these

images allows the viewer to interpret them as pronouncements from a particular stance and operating with a specific intention.²⁷

The Caribbean – Exotic Place & Primitive People

The New World was not only described in terms of its physical terrain and climate, but also in terms of its indigenous inhabitants. Analogies to the biblical story of Adam and Eve were confirmed by the Amerindian's absence of clothing according to European norms. Just as notions of paradise were contrasted with wilderness and jungle, the representation of an original human as an earlier version of European development was also construed as the savage, the cannibal. Travel journals reflected ambivalent and changing notions of how to read the indigenous population and how to best make use of them, to possess them, to incorporate them. With constructed notions of difference, race came to form a central part, particularly with the importing of enslaved Africans following the decimation of the indigenous Amerindian population. Labor became a central function of assessment in efforts to make them productive and civilized, to modernize them. Resistance within the indigenous and slave populations was then interpreted as anti-civilized.

The translation and negotiation of transatlantic encounter in which juxtaposition of difference has been central, has profoundly affected representations of the Caribbean – the landscape, people and cultural practices. The imagery which emerges in response to the earliest European encounters with the New World are recordings of difference – as exoticized otherness represented comparatively using pre-established visual codes often for politically and/or ideologically specific purposes. Subsequent depictions of the

Caribbean continue to emphasize the representation of difference with the aid of pre-established iconography and conventions even when the political climate and artistic intent has changed.

Re-examine the Rubric

It is the re-turn, not simply as going back, but as a reconsideration, a re-evaluation, another look, that can allow us to identify moments and points of reference from which we can construct a “diasporist genealogy,” that will not only interrogate the past-present continuum but allow us to re-think the past, illuminate absences and develop methodological approaches that provide a more informed context in which to look at contemporary Caribbean art.

1. Roots in Reconstruction: Sonia Boyce

Chapter one begins in the contemporary moment with the work of Sonia Boyce, as a starting point for “thinking diasporically” and focuses on two works that were produced two decades apart. *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born ‘Native’ Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* (1987) is an important transitional work in Boyce’s oeuvre. It is a visual manifesto in which the artist confronts the tradition of racial stereotypes in popular culture and mass media, and the way this has impacted black diaspora identity in the United Kingdom at a time when “Britishness” was presumed to be synonymous with “whiteness”. As the first work acquired by the Tate Britain from a black female artist, it is indicative of the increasingly

visible and vocal role played by artists associated with the Black Arts Movement in Britain in the 1980s and of the slow institutional acknowledgment of the need to represent the diversity of British culture. It also, I will argue, presents a model for reconstructing dialogue around diasporic visual culture in general through a consideration of three themes: the archive, the performative and multiplicity.

Crop Over, made twenty years later in 2007 is a two-channel video, which marks Boyce's "re-turn" to Barbados and Caribbean imagery. The work takes as its subject the annual cultural festival of Crop Over as a celebration of collective national identity. While sharing many of the features of carnival as celebrated throughout the Caribbean region, Crop Over is distinct as a harvest festival celebrating the end of the sugar cane season, and as such is directly linked to the history of slavery in the West Indies. Boyce proposes an expanded discussion of the "origins" and meaning of this festival – looking at how Barbadian national identity is formulated and suggesting that its influences, its contexts and its complexities are much broader than may be acknowledged. While Boyce's intervention in this space and culture was not without some contestation locally, the questions posed in both works, as two points that span much of her oeuvre in general, open up established narratives of parameters and definitions for Barbadian-ness and Caribbean identities and the relationship with the diaspora.

Boyce has been a central figure in my own acknowledgment of the need to re-think national art histories and to understand what working within the model of diasporic art history, and a diasporic genealogy means. Stuart Hall references her work frequently in his discussions of three moments of diaspora, seeing in her work an example of the diasporic gaze, the confrontational engagement with the viewer as otherness. Beginning

the discussion with Boyce emphasizes her early interrogation of black diaspora identity as a significant model in looking at a diaspora genealogy but also deliberately disrupts the chronological narrative to insist on the circuitous, non-linear, multi-perspectival orientations of diasporic work.

2. The De Brys' *Great Voyages*

In rethinking the relationship between the contemporary and the past, this chapter introduces the work of Theodor De Bry and his two sons who published a thirteen-volume series known as the *Great Voyages* containing illustrated accounts of travel and exploration in the New World. While these texts had been published previously, the De Brys added a generous number of copper plate engravings which depicted the distant lands and indigenous people with unprecedented and often sensationalized detail. Organized, not according to chronology but rather influenced by the availability of texts and the contingencies of the book market, the series did not address the Caribbean until Volumes IV and V. Here the first stories of European encounter with the Caribbean were depicted and described.

Chapter two focuses on Volumes IV and V of the De Brys' *Great Voyages*, published at the end of the sixteenth century and devoted to Girolamo Benzoni's *History of the New World*. Benzoni's text presented his own travel account accompanied by extracts from earlier explorers from Columbus to Pizarro. Benzoni's text also included eighteen small woodcuts depicting images of Amerindian culture including boat building and cooking, but the De Brys ignored the majority of them. Instead they constructed elaborate scenes that highlighted the savage and pagan rituals of the indigenous

population but equally the brutal atrocities committed by the Spanish conquistadors. What becomes evident is that the De Brys, who never crossed the Atlantic to the New World, relied on pre-existing images and written descriptions, but also incorporated a long tradition of pictorial tropes representing otherness drawn from classical and biblical precedents.

Volume V commences with some of the earliest printed images representing African slaves working on plantations in the Caribbean, documenting a revolutionary shift in demographics, social construction and economy of the region. Technological developments in printing facilitated the dissemination of these accounts with extraordinary impact. From the beginning, the representation of the Caribbean was linked with the rise of the printed book and the commercial potential of audience appeal. The ambitious project commenced at the end of the sixteenth century, at a moment when knowledge production and dissemination took on great significance as part of the European desire to gain mastery over the world through the systematic collection, classification and dissemination of empirical knowledge. This colonizing project resulted in the transport of people and commodities on an unparalleled scale. Consequently, a vision of the world was constructed, divided it into new and old, in which the former was understood wholly in relation to the later.

3. Gauguin in Martinique

By the end of the nineteenth century, European colonial expansion had reached its height; slavery in the Americas had been abolished, and transatlantic travel was becoming accessible to a wider population. French post-impressionist artist Paul Gauguin

came to epitomize the fin-de-siècle nomadic bohemian artist, a mythological construction to which he contributed through his voluminous autobiographical writings and letters, a lifetime of transoceanic travel and a body of paintings, prints and sculptures devoted to an exotic otherness. In 1887 Gauguin spent four months in Martinique during which time he produced approximately sixteen paintings and a number of sketches. The focus of this chapter however is on two prints he produced two years later as part of the *Volpini Suite*. In these images Gauguin reconfigured images of his Martinique experience as seen through the pivotal symbolist developments that had occurred during the intervening two years. Undertaken with the express purpose of reaching a wider European audience, the *Volpini Suite* presented a summary of the artist's travels as a visual journal. Gauguin inscribed one of the images with the title "*Les Cigales et les fourmis: Souvenir de la Martinique*" – *The Grasshoppers and the Ants: memory of Martinique*. The title references one of La Fontaine's most popular tales, an allegory of the industrious and the lazy workers. Through his almost exclusive focus on Afro-Caribbean women set against an undeveloped tropical landscape, the artist presented a pervasive contrast of activity and passivity as well as adornment versus nakedness and psychological distance versus sexual availability, which implied the precarious tension between good and evil embodied within temptation and desire. His nomadic search for a tropical exoticism was a central preoccupation of his life and his artistic production. Gauguin deliberately, even compulsively sought out and tried to embody the primitive. In doing so, he echoed De Bry's imagery which incorporated literary tropes dating from Herodotus to Montaigne thus attempting to represent the uncivilized other. In Gauguin's case however, it was an otherness he tried to embody, pronouncing himself to be the "Savage from Peru."

4. Wifredo Lam and Aimé Césaire

Chapter four explores the theme of return through the collaborative relationship between Aimé Césaire from Martinique and Wifredo Lam from Cuba which began in 1941, shortly after they both arrived back in the Caribbean after a number of years studying and working in Europe. This collaboration endured during the four remaining decades of Lam's life. Martinique once again becomes the site of transatlantic encounter although this would be one more fully collective and collaborative in nature. Within the first few decades of the twentieth century the development of nationalist movements within the Caribbean coincided with the growing numbers of intellectuals who traveled from the colonies to Europe only to be confronted by marginalization. With the outbreak of World War II, many of these artists and writers were forced to return to the Caribbean, along with Europeans trying to escape the advancing German occupation. In 1941 Lam left Marseille aboard a ship bound for the Caribbean; he was accompanied by André Breton, leader of the Surrealist movement and anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. On reaching Martinique, Breton was first struck by the political and aesthetic force of *Tropique*, the journal of Caribbean Surrealism published by Aimé Césaire, his wife Suzanne and colleague René Menil. Césaire also shared with the visitors his recently published epic poem, *Notebook of a return to the native land*, described as “a mellifluent howl of protest against white cultural and political domination,”²⁸ a central expression of the anti-colonial struggle and an important formulation of Negritude.

The intense interaction and collaboration at this moment of global upheaval provided a fertile environment for what was arguably one of the most important reconceptualizations of Caribbean identity. The symbiotic nature of Césaire's ideas and

Lam's imagery is expressed in Lam's own epic depiction of return, *The Jungle*. Césaire's *Notebook* and Lam's *The Jungle* can be seen as complementary text and image that explore the theme of return in its full diasporic sense of refiguring the relationship between the past and the present moment; Europe and its colonized. The result is an assemblage, a bricolage of irregularly formed, hybrid elements that acknowledge diverse points of origin but which emerge as profound expressions of a syncretic Caribbean experience from within. It is a deliberate affront to a history of being represented and marks a politicized re-taking of identity formation.

The links between Lam's imagery and Césaire's writing were solidified when Lam provided the illustrations for the Spanish, French and English editions of *Notebook of a return to the native land* when it was published in book form in 1943 and 1947. The two men collaborated once again at the end of Lam's life on the *Annunciation* series which comprised seven etchings by Lam, a summary of his lifetime of images, accompanied by ten poems written by Césaire. Statements about modern Caribbean experience were now voiced from within as a process of self-definition and self-affirmation. It was a language predisposed to the hybrid, creolized experience of diaspora and displacement.

5. Returning to Familiar Territory –Reconsidering Contemporary Barbados

The different moments identified in the trajectory described in Chapters one through four set the stage for consideration of the contemporary moment in which artists continue to question their positions and roles in relation to both the local and the global - metropolitan centers, the wider diaspora, history and traditions. The discussion gives

particular focus to Barbados, examining the work of Winston Kellman, Ras Ishi Butcher, Joscelyn Gardner and Sheena Rose. Kellman, Butcher and Gardner are contemporaries of Sonia Boyce. Born in the years immediately preceding political independence, each of these artists has interrogated issues of identity in relation to history and place.

Winston Kellman explores the meaning of landscape and its potential to both reveal and redress history. He returns repeatedly to the same location, the iconic east coast of Barbados, the edge of the black Atlantic, a site which arguably has been over-represented through decades of artists' sketches, photographs, postcards and advertisements. This habitual return becomes a ritualistic meditation on how meaning is invested and extracted through the process of representation.

Ras Ishi Butcher's sustained series of paintings entitled "Secret Diaries" adopts a journaling format to archive images selected from the traditions of art history and popular culture, appropriating and positioning a barrage of sources that he inserts into his personal narrative. Both of these artists, Kellman and Butcher, adopt the format of a diary or journal of quotidian records as a mode through which to simultaneously take on the burden of representation, assuming but also refiguring the traditions of visual representation. The intention is to interrogate the ways in which contemporary artists have responded to a long and pervasive tradition of representing the Caribbean.

Joscelyn Gardner turns to the diary or journal of Thomas Thistlewood, a vivid and shocking retelling of the lived experiences and the quotidian violence that ordered the cohabitation of African and European within the Caribbean colonies. Gardner engages the language of historical prints and the purported documentary objectivity of their

precise delineations to focus on the under-represented experiences of African female slaves, the violence they endured but also revealing acts of resistance and expression.

An analysis of the work of Sheena Rose provides an opportunity to consider recent shifts in the region seen in the work of younger artists around questions of representation and identity. Writers on Caribbean art have identified a generational shift that is taking place as young artists voice a deliberate break with the concerns regarding the way in which the Caribbean should be represented. At the same time there is a meaningful continuity of language and posture that is more fully evident and understood if contextualized within an expanded diasporic genealogy.

Visual representations of experience in the Caribbean have been constructed through a dialectic of difference, as a response in large part to the necessity of using a language, a system of pre-existing visual structures and conventions to describe new phenomena in an attempt to make them comprehensible, to integrate them into an existing epistemology and power structure. Even when these power relations between the dominant and the dominated are in flux or overthrown and reconstituted in varying fashions, many of the tropes of this language continue to be circulated and continue to impact the way in which the Caribbean experience is represented and understood. Identifying and examining these moments as part of an expanded, transatlantic, transnational story provides opportunities for new readings of Caribbean art.

Endnotes

¹ Sheena Rose, *One Person, Many Stories*. Artist's Performance at Sukha Studio, St. James, Barbados, October 28, 2012.

² Holland Cotter, "Caribbean Visions of Tropical Paradise and Protest," *New York Times* (August 31, 2007). *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art* was curated by Tumelo Mosaka.

³ Sonia Boyce, "Global: Somewhere between the local and the global," Tate Channel – Contemporary Art and Globalization, 12th March 2005, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/contemporary-art-and-globalisation-study-day-part-4>. 12th March 2005).

⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

⁵ Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, 7.

⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xiv.

⁷ My reference to identifying particular "moments" is influenced by the writing of Stuart Hall, and specifically his essay, "Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three 'Moments' in Post-war History," *History Workshop Journal* Volume 61 Issue 1 1-24. The essay has been reformulated and expanded a number of times, notably as "Modernity and Its Others: Three 'Moments' in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts" http://www.artafrica.info/novos-pdfs/artigo_17-en.pdf which served as the basis for Hall's discussion with David A. Bailey filmed and presented as part of the Black Diaspora Visual Arts Symposium held in Barbados February 13, 2009.

⁸ Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher, eds., *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004) as cited in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (London and Cambridge: Iniva and MIT Press, 2008), 8.

⁹ Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 7.

¹⁰ Alejo Carpentier, "Problemática del tiempo y del idioma en la moderna novel latinoamericana", lecture given in Venezuela, 1975 in *Razon de ser* (Havana: Lectras Cuibanas, 1984) as cited in Andrea Giunta, "Strategies of Modernity in Latin America"

in Gerardo Mosquera, ed, *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary art criticism from Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1996), 53.

¹¹ Stuart Hall “Modernity and Its Others: Three ‘Moments’ in the Post-war History of the Black Diaspora Arts” http://www.artafrica.info/novos-pdfs/artigo_17-en.pdf. Also see Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998) 14.

¹² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993). While Gilroy is widely acknowledged for popularizing the concept of the Black Atlantic during the 1990s, the American art historian Robert Farris Thompson pioneered this concept, arguing as early as 1969 for a “transatlantic tradition” of African diasporic arts in the Americas (Robert Farris Thompson, *African and Afro-American Art: The Transatlantic Tradition* (New York: Museum of Primitive Art, 1969) as cited in Richard J. Powell, “Voyage to Atlantis” in *Black Jacobins and the Caribbean Pavilion* (Barbados: National Art Gallery Committee, 2011), 25.

¹³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 19.

¹⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* x.

¹⁵ Stuart B. Schwarz, “Foreward,” in Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil 1550-1888*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), vii.

¹⁶ Poupeye, *Caribbean Art*, 10.

¹⁷ Fernando Coronil, “Introduction” in Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), xxv.

¹⁸ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 7 as cited in Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, 7.

¹⁹ Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 7.

²⁰ Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 22. Mercer refers specifically to art critic Robert Hughes’ description of the installation by self-taught artist James Hampton, *The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations’ Millennium General Assembly* (c. 1950-64). Hughes wrote that the work “defies identification”; he admires it but doesn’t know how to classify it within the art and culture system. This echoes Carpentier’s story about Cortes’ frustration at not having the words to describe the new things he was

encountering (cited above). To be able to name or describe is a necessary part of categorizing.

²¹ Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 22-23. See also Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture* which reproduces Kitaj's complete essay. My emphasis.

²² Stuart Hall, "Museums of Modern Art and the End of History," in *IVAnnotions 6: Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj – Modernity and Difference*. Sarah Campbell and Gilane Tawadros, eds. (London: Institute of the International Visual Arts, 2001) 9.

²³ Richard J. Powell, "Voyage to Atlantis" in *Black Jacobins: the Caribbean Pavilion* (Bridgetown: National Art Gallery Committee, 2011), 26.

²⁴ Mercer, *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, 13.

²⁵ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, xv.

²⁶ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 956.

²⁷ The hyphen in "re-turn" is a visual insertion that, like an accent, affects the pronunciation, and therefore the meaning of the word. In Chapter Four I will refer to the importance of punctuation in the writing of Aimé Césaire, the master of pronouncing the significance of return. The emphasis here on pronunciation and language can be linked to the four major language groups which have been one of the most "visible" or apparent signs of the colonial separation of the Caribbean region. This separation exists terms of dividing the islands one from the other according to the official language established by former colonial governments, a separation which continues today so that we often speak about the Anglophone Caribbean versus the francophone or Hispanic or Dutch Caribbean. This "translates" into a segregation that has outlived the colonial era. As a result, a wealth of intellectual knowledge generated within the region has been difficult to access and disseminate across the different language groups. Even travel between islands that speak different languages often necessitates travelling thousands of miles in the opposite direction through Miami or New York, as was the case recently when I was travelling from Barbados to Aruba. The separation imposed by these colonial languages also refers to the paradox several regional writers have referred to in having to condemn the legacy of colonial rule using the language of the colonizer. The reference in the title to *Construction and Interpretation* is a deliberate reference the interdependence of image and text particularly in print culture and the way they have been used to reinforce and authenticate each other.

²⁸ Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 498.

Chapter One

Roots in Reconstruction: Locating the Caribbean in the work of Sonia Boyce

The concept of empire belongs at the centre, rather than in the margins of the history of British art.

Barringer et al., *Art and the British Empire*.¹

Sonia Boyce was late in coming to the Caribbean. *Crop Over* (2007), a two-channel video that addresses the annual national cultural festival in Barbados, was the artist's first major work produced and exhibited in the region. Her work, however has in many ways been immersed in the influences of Caribbean culture from the beginning of her artistic career, although up to the end of the twentieth century it was infrequently included in general discussions of Caribbean art. The publication of Veerle Poupeye's *Caribbean Art* in 1998 had an important impact on general conceptions of the topic throughout the region in part because it presented the most comprehensive overview of modern and contemporary periods up until that time.² As part of Thames and Hudson's *World of Art* series, the survey was a concise overview in a format that for the first time made the information easily available to a broad public. Particularly influential was Poupeye's decision to include artists from the diaspora as an integral part of the region's art history. This in turn encouraged other writers, curators and critics working in the region to re-examine existing national narratives that had structured much of the existing literature on Caribbean art and to give increasing attention to intra-regional and transnational dialogues. This included artists of Caribbean descent working in the diaspora, particularly but not limited to the United States, Canada and Britain.

The publication of Poupeye's book was part of a growing international interest in Caribbean art at the turn of the twenty-first century and resulted in increased visibility through exhibitions, catalogues and books. This coincided with artists based in North America and Europe considering, often for the first time how their artistic practice could engage in an expanded diasporic field. Sonia Boyce has stated that prior to being included in Poupeye's survey text, "Caribbean" was an adjective infrequently used to contextualize her or her work in the literature and Boyce has identified Poupeye's publication as the primary text to bring her work, as well as that of other diaspora artists into the discussion of Caribbean art.³ Boyce and her work would come to form an important marker in my own thinking of the parameters of Barbadian art and Caribbean art; after methodically setting out the canon of "Art in Barbados" it was through an examination of her work that I started to think about a larger and longer art historical story.⁴

In addition, Sonia Boyce's work played a critical role since the 1980s in the discourse around identity, and specifically black diaspora identity. Her multi-media works of the late 1980s exposed racist stereotypes that were pervasive in popular culture and focused attention on their impact on black identity formation. Through mocking the often unacknowledged offensive nature of these familiar images found in books, movies and advertising, Boyce proposed to reconstruct a more positive and authentic self-image and to assert its place within a constricted and exclusionary definition of British national culture. The importance of this work in calling for an expanded, more inclusive visibility of the constituents that comprise the national population, in forcing open a space for voices from the diaspora, in making visible the contemporary impact of a history of colonial empire, and in empowering the rights of black artists and by extension

citizens to reconstruct their own image of identity within the national forum, Boyce's work stands as a model of diasporic genealogy.

Within Boyce's extensive oeuvre, this discussion pays particular attention to two major works made two decades apart, spanning the artist's career and providing opportunity to explore the evolving form and language of her argument. These two works are *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed / Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction*, a large mixed media work from 1987 in which the artist addresses questions of race, origin, colonialism and nationhood; and *Crop Over* (2007), a two-channel video which examines Barbados' annual national cultural festival as an expression of collective identity rooted within a history of colonialism and slavery. *Crop Over* is indicative of much of Boyce's work that followed *From Tarzan to Rambo*. From the 1990s her work became more performative and participatory. The artist withdrew from the work in that she was no longer the overt subject. Instead she invited others to perform, usually in largely unscripted scenarios of encounter and collaboration. Whereas *From Tarzan to Rambo* presents a pronounced, declarative reconstruction which I regard as a model of diasporic genealogy, *Crop Over* provides an insightful and arguably better-suited model in the contemporary environment, one that illuminates spaces and stages opportunity for encounter, with the possibility of mutual collaboration and critical reflection.

Migration and Memory

Sonia Boyce was born in England in 1962 to parents who had emigrated from the Caribbean, her mother from Barbados and her father from Guyana. As a black female living in London during the decades of conservative politics spanning from the 1960s and Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" speech which issued racist challenges to immigration, through to the

right-wing policies of Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s, Boyce was aware of her marginalized status within the constructed facade of British national culture. As “Britishness” was presumed to be synonymous with whiteness, Boyce recalls being frequently asked where she was “really” from.⁵

Boyce’s early works focus on the domestic sphere of London’s Caribbean communities; her mother’s fertile stories of life “back home” in Barbados had captured her childhood imagination and continued to inspire her early works, large pastel drawings such as *She Ain’t Holding them up, she’s holding on (Some English Rose)*, or *Rice and Peas*, both produced in 1986. Her parents had migrated to Britain in the 1950s as part of the ‘Windrush’ generation, migrants from the British West Indies who left prior to political independence in the 1960s in the hopes of finding opportunities and financial prosperity – a better life - in the United Kingdom.⁶

In the two decades between the end of World War II and Barbados’ political independence from Britain (1945-1966) men, women and children emigrating from the West Indies to the United Kingdom established neighbourhoods, communities and networks with strong Caribbean ties and traditions. This was a significant repositioning of the Caribbean population within the Atlantic Diaspora and a shift in the demographic makeup of Britain.⁷ According to Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, migration has been deeply embedded in the psyche of Caribbean peoples over the past century and a half and eventually became the main avenue for upward mobility through the accumulation of financial and social capital.⁸ Migration, she notes, is a dynamic process, reflecting the interplay of international, national as well as highly personal circumstances. Key amongst these factors has been labor requirements and employment opportunities and the resulting economic and social inducements. But migration, she cautions, is not a passive reaction to internal pushes or external pulls: “Within this wider international and

national context, migration is part of a dynamic set of negotiations at all levels. For whether ‘free’ movement or refugee, there is a selective process that operates at the interface of the needs of the immigration country on the one hand and the potential for migration in the emigration country on the other.”⁹

The cultural and social disconnect between Britain and the colonies and the profound experience of dislocation undoubtedly bolstered the cohesion within the newly settled Caribbean communities and was responsible, at least in part, for the strong nostalgic sentiments for the familiar experiences of “back home”. For the next generation who were born in the UK and / or educated and raised there, allegiances to and experiences of the Caribbean were one step removed, but belonging within the British mainstream was arguably no less conflicted. In fact this generation within which the Black Arts Movement would emerge assumed a more politicized, more outspoken position in claiming space and visibility within British culture and society. “Migrations”, an exhibition organized by the Tate Britain in 2012 that addressed the long tradition and contribution of immigrant artists to “British art” noted that while Britain is one of the most ethnically composite nations within Europe, ethnic influences are “scarcely visible” and usually unacknowledged.¹⁰ One review of the exhibition noted that “Exile is almost a condition of post-Renaissance art [in Britain]: eleven percent of Britons were born overseas, more than twenty percent have a foreign born parent, and migrant artists were foundational in establishing “British art”. The critic, Jackie Wullschlager noted, “British art history is eccentric, uneven and multi-stranded precisely and uniquely because it has always merged foreign and vernacular influences into an art of compromise.”¹¹

Stuart Hall refers to the phenomenon of “vernacular cosmopolitanism,” which he explains is globalization’s accompanying shadow, the individual’s experience of being embedded in certain cultural languages and at the same time reaching across into other ones with no absolute distinction between a here and a there, inside and outside.¹² It is a strategically constructed mode of negotiating, reasoning and self-empowerment, a mode of making sense of the world but within the experience of diasporic nomadism and colonial subjugation it is particularly resilient. In describing the phenomenon Hall refers to Boyce’s work of the mid 1980s, specifically the photo-based work *Cricket Days? Domino Nights! Young arrivals/new home/homeless. The streets are paved with gold in this green and pleasant land* (1986) (figure 1.1) which he says illuminates the disparity between the optimistic expectations of arriving in Great Britain as colonial subjects, and the subsequent dismay when confronted with their reception as others or outsiders:

These shots were taken at the big London rail-stations, where the steamers spewed out their human cargo at the end of their long journeys.....People dressed up to the nines, formally, for ‘travelling’ and even more, for ‘arrival’. Wearing that expectant look – facing the camera, open and outward, into something they cannot yet see...the new life...just before you step off the end of the earth into...Britain, the ingrained, embattled nature of whose racism you do not yet know...because it hasn’t yet hit you between the eyes...liminal movement caught between two worlds, hesitating on the brink.¹³

The Politics of Black Art in 1980s Britain

In 1982 while still an art student at the Stourbridge College of Art and Technology, Boyce took part in the *First Blk Art Group Convention* at Wolverhampton Polytechnic.¹⁴ She later described the complete sense of isolation she had experienced at art college where she had no exposure to the work of contemporary black artists and the exhilaration of collaborating with diaspora colleagues. She later explained: “It’s very easy to orientate yourself towards the

Eurocentric distortions of art history at college particularly when there is no visible alternative. Consequently it was difficult for me to know where I stood. How could I start to work with the ideas I had? How was I to start?”¹⁵

Organized by Keith Piper and Eddie Chambers, along with Marlene Smith, and Claudette Johnson the conference was a revelation to Boyce. This group of artists, all of afro-Caribbean descent, came to form the core of the “Black Arts Movement.”¹⁶ The term “black” was used in a very broad sense to encompass the “others” who had been marginalized within the dominant discourse of British nationalism, encompassing artists of African, Caribbean as well as Asian descent who emigrated from British colonies, or increasingly were born in Britain as part of the generation succeeding the wave of migration during the fifties. Throughout the decade of the 1980s the group organized a series of exhibitions and advocated for visibility and representation within the mainstream art scene as well as within the traditionally constricted and circumscribed narrative of Englishness. The institutional racism of Britain’s art establishment was part of the impetus for the exhibition *The Other Story*, curated by Rasheed Araeen at London’s Hayward Gallery in 1989, a major event in bringing visibility to these artists and their collective messages.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the multi-national, multi-racial group of artists that came together around the Black Arts Movement and the “Other Story” exhibition encouraged an awareness of a diasporic networks and a shared dissatisfaction with the dominant narrative inherited through systems of British education and the church.

Boyce found particular solidarity with black women artists who were generating a distinct idiom. In 1983 she participated in her first public exhibition – a group show of black women artists organized by Lubaina Himid.¹⁸ Writing about the work by these women, Gilane Tawadros identified the use of “feminine” materials such as fabric, pastels, chalks and decorative

paper in the creation of works which she describes as monumental, both in physical scale and political scope: “Like patchwork and collage, the use of pastels reinforced the idea of an ambivalent femininity which defied simplistic categorisation as inherently passive and apolitical. In this context, the home and domestic environment could be seen as a space in which the past and present become fused together. The domestic realm is perceived as a manifestly political space where there is no comfort from the configurations of history or lived experience.”¹⁹ Sonia Boyce gained recognition in the mid-1980s for her large pastel drawings which focused on the domestic space of her childhood, growing up in East London and by extension, the Afro-Caribbean communities in Britain. She was drawn to the nostalgic stories told by her parents and their friends about their earlier lives in the Caribbean. Referring to the 1984 work, *Big Women’s Talk* (figure 1.2), a colorful pastel drawing of a young girl, presumably the artist herself in her youth, resting dreamingly within the richly patterned folds of her mother’s dress, Boyce recalled:

I was thinking about when I was a child and how my mother used to take us to all her friends and the houses used to be really full, and kids running up and down the house, and people in the kitchen baking bread and someone else in the living room talking about back home and stuff like that....I’m talking about the stories and the tales that our parents brought with them when they came from the Caribbean, that whole lifestyle; it’s like cutting short a continuity... and keeping hold of those tales is really important to me, it gives me a sense of knowing what I am about. I’m from here but from there as well....²⁰

Boyce’s reference to “tales” conveys the mythical quality that those narratives must have had on the young artist who relied on these nostalgic recollections to create her own understanding of what the Caribbean was and how it featured in her growing sense of identity which was based on two sites of origin or homes.

Three recurring elements that featured in this early work were the centrality of the self-portrait, the strong graphic quality of the drawing and the frequent use of text. An example is the large pastel and pencil drawing on paper, *Rice and Peas* (1982) (figure 1.3) in which the artist, now a young adult, gazes directly out at the viewer, a spoon in hand. The bottom half of the work is barren except for a number of words scrawled in pencil, as if taken from a page of a child's school book or diary. Here she provides a list of typically Caribbean foods, emphasizing the close associations between food and culture, and between food and parental nurturing suggesting the way in which the second generation Caribbean community continued to be nourished by the traditions of their parents.

One of the best known works from this period is *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)* of 1986 in which Boyce again confronts the viewer with a very direct gaze (figure 1.4). Balanced on her two upraised hands are the figures from an earlier family portrait: a younger Boyce along with her mother, father and sister. The family members are dressed in their best Sunday clothes, posing stiffly as they wait for the camera to capture their image. The black rose design on Boyce's printed dress references the British Tudor rose, emblem on the United Kingdom's royal coat of arms and traditionally red in color with a white and yellow center.²¹ Boyce's decision to substitute a black rose forces to the fore the stranglehold of national imagery and inserts the issue of race. Boyce balances the weight of her family above her head. But as she explains in her colloquial transgression of standard, 'proper' English language, she "ain't" holding them up. Through this extended body of self-portraits she carves out a space for own voice somewhere between the Caribbean immigrant experience of her family and her own British education and acculturation.

Journeys: Gilroy's Routes and Boyce's Roots

Echoing Paul Gilroy's argument on the centrality of the Atlantic diasporic experience to the project of modernism, Boyce stated: "One of the key things that I felt when I was at college was that modernism, though it posed as a universal language, curtailed the idea of me being a modernist simply by virtue of my being black and female." The challenge, she recounts, was to find a visual language to adequately describe the diasporic experience: "Representation itself was under great strain, while at the same time we were being told that, as a black person, one stands as a representative figure for all black people. So of course, depictions of one's own image as well as other representational images formed part of the deconstruction process."²² Her interest at this time was in making connections between a colonial past and a migratory present. A predominant feature of this was the resurgence of the figure, specifically the black body in art in the 1980s in opposition to abstraction. Content and the critique of modes of representation were privileged over aesthetics. Part of the focus on content, Boyce explains, was the urgency of what the artists were struggling to say: "We were all looking for a language with which to articulate the experience of that time."²³

Paul Gilroy addresses the place of race in the conceptualizing of British nationhood in *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (1987). He describes an oscillation in the dominant British ideology between "black as problem and black as victim" as the principal mechanism by which race was de-historicized and instead constructed as natural and inevitable:

This capacity to evacuate any historical dimension to black life remains a fundamental achievement of racist ideologies in this country....Racism is not akin to a coat of paint on the external structures of social relations which can be scraped off if the right ideological tools and political elbow grease are conscientiously applied to the task. Seeing racism in this way, as something peripheral, marginal to the essential patterns of social and political life can, in its

worst manifestations, simply endorse the view of blacks as an external problem, an alien presence visited on Britain from the outside.²⁴

The challenge, according to Gilroy is to represent a black presence outside of these categories. He refers to the ethnocentric dimensions of the field of cultural studies and the forms of nationalism endorsed by the discipline which “tends towards a morbid celebration of England and Englishness from which blacks are systematically excluded.”²⁵ Gilroy argues that culture does not develop along ethnically absolute lines but rather in “complex, dynamic patterns of syncretism in which new definitions of what it means to be black emerge from raw materials provided by black populations elsewhere in the diaspora.”²⁶ Gilroy has been credited with the construction of a “diasporic intervention” which is described as a diasporic history, aesthetics and politics that stands as an alternative and a critique of capitalist hegemony and can serve as a basis for a reconceptualising modernism and postmodernism. It would be a “transgressive youth culture” that would present a resistance to the limits of the nation as constructed by the Conservative government of 1980s Britain.²⁷

Education was the primary conduit for induction in the codes and conduct of proper British behaviour and values in Britain no less than in its colonies. Austin Tom Clarke’s memoir, *Growing up stupid under the Union Jack*, first published in 1980, describes his colonial boyhood in the conservative and stratified society of Barbados in the 1940s under English rule. Written from a distance after migrating to Canada, Clarke’s remembrances highlight the tensions and inequities between the imperial system as indoctrinated through education, and village life for his poor family, particularly the intensified patriotism and the deprivations that characterized the war years.²⁸ It was the next generation of afro-diasporic subjects, the children of the Windrush generation, who were demonstrably more aggressive in challenging the symbols of Empire. Rasheed Araeen describes a young Eddie Chambers in 1979, not long after Margaret Thatcher

came to power “with her racist anti-immigrant speeches” tearing up an image of the Union Jack and reorganizing it into an image of a swastika, a hybrid of national symbols which he proceeded to rip up into smaller pieces (*Deconstruction of the National Front*, 1980).²⁹ It was also Chambers who produced the controversial Union Jack in Rastfarian colors of red, gold and green (*Untitled* (1994)) for a project at the Liverpool Town Hall. Chambers imposed a black identity onto the British flag in much the same way that Boyce had refashioned the Tudor rose (figure 1.5). For Afro-Caribbean diasporic writers and artists, the act of referencing, appropriating, transforming or deconstructing those images of British Empire deemed to be sacred was a cathartic gesture in refiguring their own identities, and in insisting on visibility for black subjects within British national identity.

Paul Gilroy’s subsequent publication, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) was to be particularly influential in positioning the black British experience and the issue of race within the wider context of the diaspora. Gilroy highlighted the failure of nationalist paradigms for thinking about the realities of a complex and diverse cultural history which was formed by the intercultural and transnational space that he calls the “Black Atlantic.” The Black Atlantic model emphasizes the instability and mutability of identities which are always being remade.

Reflecting on the importance of Gilroy’s theorizing of the Black Atlantic for visual artists, Petrine Archer observes that while as a result of this historic rupture of transatlantic slave trade, return is impossible, diaspora citizens need to embrace a global citizenship that is syncretic in its makeup and culturally diverse.³⁰ The exhibition *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (Tate Liverpool, 2010) used Gilroy’s text as a starting point and theoretical framework to chart the impact of black Atlantic culture on Modernism, and “map out visual and cultural

hybridity in modern and contemporary art that has arisen from the journeys made by people of Black African descent.”³¹ Responding to Gilroy’s description of the black Atlantic as a counterculture to European modernity and modernism, the exhibition sought to identify artists and works that challenged the established dominant or hegemonic narrative of Modernism with expressions of alternative visions, experiences and interpretations. The exhibition attempted to identify tactics used by contemporary artists to explore the complexities of black diasporic subjectivity. These tactics included appropriation, the use of vernacular and popular culture, the practices of sampling, recycling and accumulation, and the exposing of racist images - strategies which the curators equated with what Gilroy called the “polyphonic qualities of black cultural expression” and which they argued could facilitate a transnational and transhistorical revision of the story of modernism.³²

Included in that exhibition was Sonia Boyce’s *From Tarzan To Rambo: English Born ‘Native’ Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* (1987) (figure 1.6). Boyce has identified this as a transitional work in which she moves beyond the personal domestic sphere which featured in much of her earlier pastel drawings and addresses the realm of popular culture and its influence on the construction of identity. The title itself is lengthy and loaded with references and double meanings. Boyce turned to collage and photography, media which allowed her to assemble a range of pre-existing images to better interrogate the multiple layers that make up representation. “The whole work,” she explains, “sets out to challenge the construction of myths from reality.”³³

Multiple Meanings

There are three elements that are key to reading this complex work and which remain major concerns for the artist throughout her career. These are the multiple, the archive and the performance. Multiplicity is immediately evident in the mirroring and repetition of images. Boyce's self-portrait remains the primary feature in this work but now it is repeated twelve times: two rows of three heads repeated twice. The duplication of the image suggests that there is no original and no authenticity. Boyce identifies herself in the title as the "English born 'native'" and proposes to consider the relationship between her own "self-image" and the one constructed for her by society. Her multiple self-portraits reflect both the instability of identity as well as the double meaning of the word "native" which the artist places in quotation marks. Native refers to a person born in a specified place, united in nationhood with all others born there; but also it is used to describe an indigenous person and specifically non-white as regarded from the perspective of the colonizer - the primitive or the savage.³⁴ It is both sameness and difference. It is belonging to a place, but also deviance from the process of civilization. The double meaning connotes ambivalence; the doubleness that is the diasporic experience of living between two spaces and never feeling at home in either one. The absence of singularity and distinctiveness is a requirement of stereotype. Boyce interrogates stereotypes constructed and disseminated through popular culture and mass media and the impact that has on the viewer, particularly when the viewer is black. The relationship between 'roots' and 'routes' as laid out by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantics*, sets out a dialogue between the question of origins versus transience; authenticity, purity and fixity as opposed to flux and multiple, shifting and evolving meanings.³⁵ The young artist mounts a manifesto-style challenge to both the confined and exclusionary notion of British citizenry as well as the racist stereotypes widely and freely disseminated

through popular culture as part of her efforts to assert her own position and self-definition as a black British woman of Caribbean descent.

Multiplicity is integral to the making of the work which is in fact a photographic enlargement or reproduction of a small untitled collage of approximately eighteen inches (present location unknown). The work appears as a diptych with the repetition or doubling of two main 'frames' like a stereoscopic photograph or two pages of an open book. Within the repetition there is variation. The photo booth portraits on the left are over exposed and faint while the ones on the right are under exposed and some tinted with brown wash or shaded with ink hatching. The pairing or doubling of the two halves of the composition invites comparison as the viewer glances from left to right and back again in an attempt to identify the markers of differences. But equally, Boyce is interested in the center fold, the gap or in-between space shared by the two panels.

The use of the photo booth pictures has specific precedents for Boyce. One of these is the cover of the French Surrealist magazine, *La Révolution surréaliste* (Paris, no 12, 15 December 1929) which features a painting by René Magritte of a female nude (*je ne vois pas la [femme] cache dans la forêt*, 1929) (figure 1.7), framed by photographic portraits of members of the Surrealist artists – all male, and all with their eyes closed, a reference to their collective interest in the subconscious and realm of dreams and trances. Another precedent is the *Photomat Midnight Self Portraits* made by Susan Hiller throughout the 1980s. Using the multiple images mechanically produced by the automatic photo booth, Hiller was also exploring the multiplicity of identity and the individual as a dynamic outcome of a process of representations.³⁶

The Archive

Throughout her career, the process of documenting and archiving has held a vital place within Boyce's practice. In this work, Boyce wanted to document the way in which mass media and popular culture, and specifically representations of otherness and blackness had an insidious and destructive impact one's sense of identity and worth. As Boyce alludes in the title, although it is a self-image, it is also an image that has been constructed for her through representations of 'otherness' in mass media, particularly film, cartoons, children's stories and comic strips.

Boyce has collected a body of images that she had been assembling since 1982 from a range of sources that are both diverse and familiar. The left border of the composition is made up of two rows of six 'gollywog' heads, again twelve faces repeated but not identical, taken from a *Rupert the Bear* comic of the 1920s.³⁷ The gollywog presents a mocking of race, originating with white actors and comics wearing 'blackface,' literally constructing or 'making up' racial difference or otherness. On the left half, Boyce inserts two images traced and enlarged from a comic entitled *Terrifying Tales* (no. 14, September 1953) which she purchased at a comic fair in Hackney. The first is a line drawing of two African 'natives' emerging from a tropical jungle, identified by the abbreviated imagery of their naked bodies, spears, and banana leaves. The speech bubble reads "the buzzing bird sends us a victim". In its original context the buzzing bird referred to an airplane overhead in the sky but the natives, represented as existing outside Western modernity, can only understand it as a mythic creature bringing white men for them to sacrifice or consume. The theme of cannibalism is an ancient one frequently associated with Africa and transferred to the Caribbean from the very first European contact. According to one source, Boyce explained that "buzzing bird" also referred loosely to cockerels and hens that serve as sacrificial animals in voodoo (sic) ceremonies.³⁸ "Voodoo", as the popularized /

vulgarized characterization of afro-Caribbean vodou practices, was also a popular subject for Hollywood ‘B’ movies of the mid twentieth century, promoting images of blacks as blood-thirsty, trance-induced savages. Boyce has referred specifically to the influence of the films of Val Lewton (1904-1951), American film producer and screenwriter best known for a string of low-budget horror films during the 1940s, notably *I Walked with a Zombie* (USA 1943, directed by Jacques Tourneur) which was set in Haiti and which exploited the practice of vodou amongst the slaves as a source of terror.³⁹

Boyce combines a range of materials, the meanings of which are multivalent and inferred through associations with other imagery. Other elements collaged onto Boyce’s original modello include two fern branches laid over the photographs. In the enlarged final work, they echo the banana leaves of the jungle on the left. Also included is a photocopy of one of the artist’s scarves with an African print. Boyce has referred to her consciousness at that time “of the Afrocentricity of many black people living in Britain and the USA, which led to a revival and celebration of what they considered to be genuinely African, such as a traditional medicine based on herbs and natural healing”, a reference to the fern fronds as well as the printed fabric.⁴⁰ Boyce interrogates the popular ideology around the broad conception of Africa, the ways in which diasporic populations appropriated aspects such as dress in constructing an afro-centric identity.

The piece of fern laid across the right hand frame or page can also be imagined as a botanical specimen pressed between the pages of a Victorian scrapbook amidst an assemblage of portrait photographs and other collected images with their loosely associated meanings. While these scrapbooks have traditionally been considered to be a feminine domain of expression and creativity, they are also related to the travel journal with its collected accounts and recollections.

Both formats often privileged specimens, sketches or descriptions of rarity, curiosity or the exotic, souvenirs and recollections.

Ekow Eshun has described how images of Africa in popular culture such as those of Hergé, the creator of the 1931 children's adventure *Tintin in the Congo* and Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* equate blackness with savagery and simplicity. In the books of Edgar Rice Burroughs, "Africans are only ever the backdrop upon which to demonstrate the blood and innate good breeding of the young Tarzan, whose name, in the local African language of the books, means White Man."⁴¹ Boyce's work, according to Eshun, offers the viewer a reconfiguring of the iconography of race: "The pickaninny that wouldn't be out of place in Tintin's African adventure is still there. The jungle savages of Hergel and Rice Burroughs remain. But Boyce herself is also in the frame as the subject, the architect of her own representation, no longer the object, and the victim of racial myth."⁴² By inserting herself in the center as one of the players in this narrative, Boyce confounds any arguments that these images that proliferate through the entertainment industry are somehow benign in their racist depictions.

The second image taken from the same comic book is the almost invisible, ghostly figure of Tarzan which she has drawn onto the left side of the large photographed work in black felt-tip pen and then painted over with white and pink acrylic paint so that the image is almost erased.⁴³ The image of Tarzan is literally obscured by his own whiteness, barely discernible other than through his naming in the title of the work. By contrast the African "natives" are revealed to the viewer as the white background seems to part, allowing them to emerge through a fan of banana leaves, a typical sign of tropical jungles in both Africa and the Caribbean.⁴⁴ Boyce recalls being confused by the presence, within popular culture narratives, of this white European man in the

wild jungles of Africa. The question was not so much “where did Tarzan really come from?” but rather, “how did he get there?”⁴⁵

Performativity

Performance would become an important part of Boyce’s work during the nineties so it is interesting to see its emergence here in *From Tarzan to Rambo*. For Boyce the starting point for the work was thinking about films from the 1930s and 1940s,

...particularly the jungle adventure films or films where black people seemed to have been most obviously represented. I supposed what I was thinking about at the time, was the way in which, as a child watching these films, these images became almost like a mirror in which I would see myself mimicking them – as if they were some kind of true representation of what black people were supposed to be like. And when I was making this piece, I was thinking about the irony of these representations – as being not just a model for white people to think about black people but for black people to think about themselves.⁴⁶

Her intention with the work was to question the process by which identities and stereotypes are constructed through the consumption of images by an audience. Her focus was specifically black stereotypes which Boyce wanted black people in particular to confront through her work.

Boyce’s epic-style title infers a timeline or tradition of Hollywood performances from the first silent films depicting Tarzan in the early twentieth century to the violent films of the 1980s starring Sylvester Stallone.⁴⁷ These iconic heroes celebrate white masculinity as rebellious warriors alienated from civilization. Boyce describes this as a crisis of white identity that seeks to alleviate itself through the ‘othering’ of the black figure, a distorted racist projection against which a positive image of white identity can be constructed.⁴⁸ The films are examples of popular culture produced by a white-dominated mass media for a predominantly white audience. While

Boyce's work draws attention to the racial stereotypes inherent in these movies, she is primarily concerned with how black audiences are impacted.

The artist inserts herself as a player in this narrative, interrogating how her own identity is constructed against the narrative of these stereotypes, and how in turn her own production as an artist can respond to this visual tradition. Within the repetition of her self-portraits, the artist opens her eyes wider and wider in mock astonishment or nods her head up and down as if in religious rapture or trance. Boyce acts out a range of emotional responses or stereotypes established, as the title of the work suggests, from the tradition of black Hollywood characters. In addition to the work of the male surrealists like Magritte, Boyce cites the work of American artist and film maker Maya Deren whose documentary black-and-white film *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti*, shot in Haiti during 1947-1954, provided riveting footage of vodou practitioners in the moment of spirit possession, abandoning conscious control of their bodies as their eyes roll back.⁴⁹

The long horizontal format of the work itself references the size and shape of movie cinema screens as well as public billboards, emphasizing the position of the viewer as audience or public as well as Boyce's desire to speak out in a more public forum, in contrast to the more intimate domestic interiors of the pastel works.⁵⁰ Boyce has continued to explore the tension between private and public realms and the duality of identity as both privately and socially constructed. *From Tarzan to Rambo* was the first work by a black woman to be acquired by the Tate, and only the second by a black artist to enter the collection (the first was Frank Bowling's *Spreadout Ron Kitaj*, acquired earlier that year). It was also only the fifth work by a female artist to enter the Tate's permanent collection. These facts reflect the very conservative, restrictive purview of the Tate prior to that date but also point to the impact the Black Arts Movement was

having at the time and the leading role Boyce's work was playing in challenging perceptions of race and gender in contemporary art and the wider contemporary society.⁵¹ Boyce was only twenty-five years old and only four years out of the Stourbridge College of Art

Through the title of her work, Boyce emphasizes the continuity and perpetuation of these stereotypes in popular culture along a time-line spanning the twentieth century *From Tarzan to Rambo*. The films as well as the animated characters are examples of popular culture that were produced by a white-dominated mass media for a predominantly white audience. Boyce hoped to draw attention not only to the racial stereotypes but also to how black audiences are subjected to and impacted by these same images. "By using the comic as a source Boyce hoped to illuminate how popular culture contributes to the process of self-identification for black people, despite the fact that it is often produced for a white audience."⁵² But more to the point, the origins of these stereotypes can be linked to early colonial projects of representation that ultimately presented it as permissible, desirable and entertaining.

This is ultimately the message of Boyce's work – not to merely expose these racist stereotypes which continue to proliferate in popular culture, but to acknowledge their impact on identity formation and through exposing them, to reject them, and to reconstruct a more positive and authentic self-image. Boyce became more interested in her role as an observer as the subsequent work became more participatory and improvisational, performative and interactive. She uses the term "improvised collaborations" to describe her attempts to open up the work, to remove the authorial and authoritative stance of artist as creator and instead, to set up opportunities for relational happenings. The core intention remained a desire to expose cultural differences but increasingly her focus was on how difference might be "articulated, mediated and enjoyed."⁵³

The Caribbean Work – Travel Writer

In 1997, Sonia Boyce participated in an artists' residency and workshop held in Havana Cuba.⁵⁴ Drawing on a personal encounter as a starting point, Boyce described an incident when she was entering her Havana hotel, and was followed into the elevator by a man who began speaking very fast in Spanish. Boyce tried to explain that she did not understand what he was saying because she did not speak Spanish, but he was very insistent. She realized he could not comprehend that she was English because she was black; his assumption was that if she was not a maid, she must be a prostitute. This encounter provided an interesting counter-part to *From Tarzan to Rambo* as an occasion to rethink how physical appearance and cultural practice intersect in the construction of identities. The man's misreading of who Boyce was inspired the piece she made in Havana titled *Travel Writer* (figure 1.8).

During the course of the workshop, artists spent the days in the studios and discussed their production together in the evenings. An interpreter was on hand to translate for those who needed his assistance but Boyce soon realized the three English artists were the only participants who relied on the interpreter since the majority of the other participants could speak more than one language. While English is regarded as the global language of commerce – a legacy of British and subsequently American imperialism, its “native” speakers are simultaneously handicapped by the presumed lack of necessity to speak any other language. To produce *Travel Writer*, Boyce asked a number of people at the workshop who spoke several languages to translate the phrase “I don't speak Spanish” into another language. She then wrote and rewrote the phrases over and over again in a repetitive fashion akin to “writing lines” as a form of punishment for disobedient schoolchildren. Boyce found the repetitive exercise to be cathartic. The encounter in the hotel elevator reminded her of earlier experiences of travelling in Europe in

the 1980s: “People would say ‘Oh where do you come from?’ or they would assume I was American and I would say ‘No I was born in England’ and they would say ‘No, really where are you from?’ So I’m really kind of curious about this idea of travel and who travels and particularly of the travel writer as this leisurely figure who has this wander-lust.”⁵⁵

Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs have noted that writing and travel have always been intimately connected, observing that the traveller’s tale is as old as fiction itself.⁵⁶ The experience of travel is often first mediated by the writings of earlier travellers whose recollection and the re-telling set the stage, establishing a set of expectations; and subsequently the experience of writing about travels involves a process of re-membering, processing events and encounters into narrative. Translation adds another dimension to travel, emphasizing the challenges and deficiencies in the attempt to establish equivalencies not only between languages but between cultures.

Crop Over

Crop Over, like all carnivals, is an opportunity to challenge, mock and subvert well-entrenched social hierarchies by performing identities within a controlled space that for a brief period sanctions an excessive display that is the marker of parody. It is the ideal space in which to question notions of identity, and yet through its annual, ritualized repetition, meaning itself often becomes masked. For Sonia Boyce, Barbados’ national festival known as Crop Over provided a rich opportunity through which to explore many of the themes her work has continued to wrestle with, notably the construction of identity in relation to social forces, role playing and cross-cultural negotiation.

Boyce's *Crop Over* project was undertaken in response to two invitations, one by Harewood House in Leeds, and one from the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, to make work based on Boyce's explorations of her diasporic ties to the Caribbean. The result was the two-channel video entitled *Crop Over*, that looks at the Barbados cultural festival that takes place annually during July and August, as itself a constructed presentation and celebration of history, nostalgia and memory. What fascinated Boyce about the Crop Over tradition was that unlike many of the carnivals in the Caribbean region, this festival does not originate as a religious pre-Lenten celebration, but rather marks the end of the sugar cane season. It is at its core a harvest festival and as such, directly ties the subversive elements and power inversions of traditional carnival to the sugar economy of the Caribbean, and its historical dependence on slave labor.

Boyce's *Crop Over* begins with a panoramic shot of the formidable and expansive façade of Harewood House, a grand eighteenth century estate built by the Lascelles family in Leeds in Great Britain. Against the sound of water trickling, and amidst shots of ornamental fountains, flowering plants, classical statues and Grecian urns of the formal gardens, an intruder appears. A stilt walker in carnivalesque costume steps into the scene and begins to perform a series of acrobatic tricks before settling next to the stone face of a marble sphinx. He turns and stares deliberately directly at the camera, engaging the viewer with the directness of what Stuart Hall has described as a "diasporic gaze," a destabilizing and subversive intrusion of otherness.⁵⁷ That direct, unflinching look at the viewer is reminiscent of Boyce's early self-portraits. While the masquerader appears like an intruder moving unimpeded through the formal gardens, haunting the space, there is in fact a connection to be revealed. Suddenly the scene shifts and the viewer is moving through the dense sugar cane fields of Barbados, set against a dark and distant sky.

Although never overtly stated in the video, it was these fields of cane, and the slave labor that harvested them, that fed the fortunes that enabled the construction of Harewood House. And it was the annual end of the sugar cane season, and a break from that hard labor that was celebrated in the Crop Over festivities.

Harewood House remains to this day the property of the Lascelles family. The family co-sponsored the video project along with the Barbados Museum and the National Art Gallery Committee in Barbados as part of their respective programmes planned to mark the 200th year of the abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade.⁵⁸ The interest on the part of the Lascelles family to address the history and legacy of their Caribbean connections was in part inspired by the recent discovery of records dating back several centuries that document the family's Caribbean business operations and holdings including both plantations and slaves.⁵⁹

Harewood House was built by Edwin Lascelles and completed in 1771. Edwin Lascelles (1713-1795) was born in Barbados, the base for the family business which had grown to a sizable fortune during the eighteenth century. Established in Bridgetown by his great grandfather, Edward, at the end of the seventeenth century, the business flourished under the direction of Edwin's father, Henry and Henry's two brothers who amassed the large family fortune through their activities as sugar merchants, money lenders, slave traders, plantation owners, and suppliers to the Navy and as Collectors of Customs for Bridgetown. Between 1713 and 1717, Henry Lascelles had acquired a financial share in twenty-one slave ships and numerous sugar plantations through defaulting loans, and as a result assumed responsibility for the trading of thousands of slaves. By the end of the eighteenth century the Lascelles family were financially involved in forty-seven plantations across the West Indies. While the vast majority of

land was in Jamaica (more than 20,000 acres), the Lascelles family owned twelve plantations in Barbados, amounting to over 4000 acres.⁶⁰

In the same way that Boyce's video leaps suddenly from Harewood House to the cane fields of Barbados, the scene once again jumps into the bustling, crowded streets of contemporary Bridgetown as the culminating activities of the month-long Crop Over festival get underway. Crowds, street vendors, traditional folk characters and performers weave together in a lead up to the manic, noisy street parade known as Kadooment. Boyce was particularly interested to investigate the traditional folk characters that have become associated with Crop Over. Like the celebration of carnival itself, these hybrid characters can be seen as sites of transgression, equally comical and menacing, aggressively performative.

In the initial installation of Boyce's *Crop Over* at Harewood House in late 2007, names of these folk characters were drawn onto large scrolls of paper which were hung at the entrance to the exhibition space like large playbills announcing featured performers (figure 1.9). Conflating the tasks of writing and drawing, the images present the names of folk characters such as Shaggy Bear and Mother Sally inscribed like large doodles on hanging scrolls of paper, with the letters surrounded by undulating and expanding lines, a technique Boyce had used in earlier works from the *Devotional Series* honouring black female singers.⁶¹ Writing has had a significant presence in Boyce's work and seems to tie together her interest in narrative, documentation or archiving, and drawing. In earlier works such as *Rice and Peas*, text is prominently featured. In later works like *Missionary Positions II* or *From Tarzan to Rambo*, the inclusion of the extended, epic titles are included in cursive script in the manner of colonial-era prints identifying the significance of the images portrayed. A more conceptual work such as *Travel Writer* is comprised exclusively of written text. In the *Crop Over* drawings, the amplified

names of the folk characters served to announce the featured performers appearing in the video projection in the adjoining room. Distinctions between the domains of the work of art, documentation and museological display or curatorship are blurred so that the constructed nature of the work and the manipulated processes through which the work gets to the viewer can be glimpsed.

The two-channel video was projected on two facing walls in a small gallery in the basement of the estate, next to the kitchen. In this space, hidden from the lavishly decorated rooms of the main house where the slaves and servants would have worked, the contemporary viewer stood in the center of the projected activities, surrounded in a relatively constrained space by the projected images of dense cane fields and the cacophony of ecstatic street revellers. In this space, the viewer felt immersed within the Crop Over activities.

Crop Over looks at the expression of collective national identity through the staging of a national festival and how this festival, as carnival, is both an ‘acting out’, a temporary subversion of traditional power structures that characterized the colonial history of the island, but also a contemporary re-staging of a folk culture tradition aimed simultaneously at establishing an “authentic” and official cultural celebration and appealing to the tourism sector that has replaced sugar as the primary industry. In this piece, Boyce explores the intersection of collective memory and cultural amnesia.

Collective identity – The role of folk culture

“I am the Mother Sally. **I** am the Mother Sally.”

There is a scene in Boyce’s *Crop Over* where two seemingly identical masqueraders sit back to back, one the double of the other, in a contest of wills to assert an authoritative identity

within a highly contested space. “I am the Mother Sally,” the first figure announces. “**I** am the Mother Sally,” the second counters emphatically. Which one is real? Which one can the viewer believe? The Mother Sally is one of the main folk characters associated with Crop Over, traditionally played by a man dressed as a woman with exaggerated, well-padded bosom and buttocks. In more recent times the figure has been acted out by a young woman in an attempt to make the character less vulgar, more palatable to the tourist. In this scene, one Mother Sally is performed by a woman, while the other is a more burlesque portrayal by a man. The tension between the traditional character and the newer incarnation is performed as a competitive display between the pair (figure 1.10). The excessiveness, strangeness, unnaturalness of the transvestite Mother Sally is accentuated by the presence of its identical, if more restrained twin. Mutation is presented as parody. The figures sit shoulder to shoulder, reflecting one another. They assume regal postures, very much at home now within the plantation house they have come to occupy.

Boyce’s invitation to the characters to enter into the plantation house to perform is itself an act of transgression, since these figures traditionally would have been confined to the plantation yard. Mother Sally, along with Donkey-man, Shaggy Bear and Moko Jumbie would usually be accompanied by a three-piece ‘tuk’ band, consisting of a base drum, snare drum, fife or penny whistle and a triangle. They would appear not only at Crop Over but also during Christmas time when they would perform in front of houses in the expectation of compensation for the entertainment in the form of coins, food or drink to appease any potentially aggressive antics on the part of the lively performers. The buxom Mother Sally would approach spectators with her provocative and sexualized dance gestures, more recently referred to as ‘wukking up,’ inviting them to join her and play along with her miming of exaggerated womanliness.

Seeing two Mother Sallies simultaneously throws into question the authenticity of identity into which the spectator had been seduced into participating. To seat these imposters at the planter's mahogany dining room table, in this colonial-era house frozen in time, throws into relief the strangeness of these characters.⁶² In the surrounding rooms, folk characters leap across the furniture and duck precariously through doorways. The tradition of the domestic plantation house and the plantation yard, the site of labor, have intersected, seeping into one another across invisible yet well acknowledged barriers. The Shaggy Bear and Stilt Walker (Moko Jumbie) haunt the otherwise silent interior in their own private carnival.

Masquerade

Stuart Hall refers to the rich subterranean tradition of masquerade, specifically the stock of folk characters who represent the meeting of Catholic pre-Lenten carnival or European masked ball traditions with the West African masking ceremonies to produce the "playing mas" of the carnivals. But, he points out, they embody "the darker end of the spectrum" where the slaves consciously parodied and mocked the excessive elegance and vulgar refinery of the planter class: "The doubling of registers, the complex symbolic reversals by which the terrors of servitude are simultaneously 'normalized,' rehearsed, and 'replayed' as violent parodic masquerade."⁶³ This is the subversive element of the carnivalesque that often resulted in its prohibition on the estates, sometimes with riotous consequences.

The half animal, half human Donkey-man, the transvestite Mother Sally, the elongated Moko Jumbie: these are mutated, hybrid characters. Mark Crinson describes hybridity as the antithesis of stereotype, and the concept that has become the master trope of postcolonial theory. According to Crinson, the hybrid, or the "creole" evoked guilt, anxiety, and revulsion in colonial

regimes since it represented a challenge to the balance of oppositions on which colonial power was based. However, hybridity still retains and reiterates the binary logic of the colonialist mentality: “pure is now bad because it betokens racist thinking, ... hybrid is now good both because it stands for intermingling as inherent to cultural identity and because it projects admixtures of disparate elements as essential to creativity”⁶⁴

Carnival as Inversion

Crop Over is fluid and evolving in terms of the format of its presentation. It is narrative in its overall structure with a beginning, middle, and end with a rising crescendo, a feeling of expectation, a mounting euphoria or mania that reaches a climax in the final celebration of Kadooment, the bacchanalian street parade. The confrontational performance of the folk characters emphatically pronouncing their hybrid roles – I am the Mother Sally; I am Donkey-man – and staking out their presence within contested spaces – is magnified and multiplied within the scenes of Kadooment. The spectator encounters the collective mass of participants through the lens of Boyce’s camera which serves to amplify the scene as revellers are anxious to perform and act out. Against a background of calypso music, steel pan and hollered salutations, participants in skimpy and revealing costumes jump and gyrate, in an overt display of sexual mimicry which is both playful and aggressive. Participants find themselves in a transgressive space which must be shared and negotiated.

Much of Boyce’s work since the 1990s has revolved around creating situations and spaces of encounter, exchange and negotiation. She invites participants to perform, usually by doing something they already know how to do.⁶⁵ Boyce frames the context but does not manipulate the action, nor is she sure of the outcome. Instead she looks for the improvisatory,

provisional negotiating between stakeholders. Boyce observes that it is the encounter of the carnival (Kadooment) in the street when the piece “comes alive” although the relation the participants have with the camera is very troubling.⁶⁶

Return to my (alter) native land

The theme of **return** has been a central one in the formation of a Caribbean modernist and diasporic ideology. The experience of living between two spaces, whether between Europe and her colonies or within the margins of a minority status, this is the doubleness described by DuBois to refer to the psychological trauma of identifying with conflicting cultures, and which Gilroy notes is central to the process of identity formation within the black Atlantic. Aimé Césaire’s *Return to the Native Land (Cahier d’un retour au pays natal- 1938)* has been described as a prescient testament to what we now refer to as the Black Atlantic. In contemplating the legacy of this classic text for today’s artists and scholars of the African diaspora Richard J. Powell refers to an “Atlantic perspective” – “a view which takes into account an African past, legacies of slavery, revolutions won and lost and colonialism’s pervasive hold on people’s futures” –and asks if this can offer a progressive model for thinking about the diaspora or not.⁶⁷ Césaire’s text, along with CLR James’s *Black Jacobins* which was written in the same year, asks the reader “to consider the historical and imagistic landscapes of lives shaped under the double-yoke of oppression and exploitation and, once considered, to rise up from the depths of those harrowing experiences and initiate a change for the betterment of all humankind.” Césaire and James proved what Powell calls an *alternative modernism*, which imagines “a return to a black diasporic/Caribbean space that, in light of current geo-political conditions and one’s capacity to

conceptually isolate and parcel that ‘native land’, never really existed or, tantalizingly, is unreachable.”⁶⁸

Acknowledging Paul Gilroy’s theorizing of the Black Atlantic and the efforts of exhibitions such as the Tate’s *Afro-Modern* to link Gilroy’s ideas to the works of modern and contemporary artists throughout the diaspora, Powell both expands and re-focuses the discussion by proposing lines of continuum between these foundational Caribbean thinkers (Césaire and CLR James) and contemporary visual arts practitioners in the Caribbean and the diaspora. Powell’s concepts of an “Atlantic perspective” and “alternative modernism” focus attention not only on Gilroy’s argument that the transatlantic middle passage and the experience of slavery is seminal to the story of modernism, but that a consideration that focuses on the experience of diaspora can provide an alternative narrative of modernism.

Powell proposes that Sonia Boyce’s *Crop Over* can be seen as a visual counterpart to Césaire’s concept of Négritude: by pairing the “symmetry and decorum of an eighteenth century English estate” (Harewood House) with the “bacchanalian cacophony of drummers, dancers, and stilt-walkers” from the carnival parade, Boyce’s work projects Césaire’s fascination with cultural surprise and wonderment as experienced in the lives and rituals of common folk. “Like many of Boyce’s video projects, *Crop Over* argued against a doctrinaire, one-dimensional cultural identity, replacing that caricature with masquerading and gyrating philosophers, whose worldview juggled serious discourse and the pleasure principle in a delightful admixture.”⁶⁹

While the conventional meaning of diaspora has included the notion of fixed origins and clear genealogies, Stuart Hall has argued that the tendency within the diaspora to recoup the past in the present, does not easily accommodate absolute beginnings, unilinear progressions or finite closures.⁷⁰ It has been the job of the contemporary artist to redress the omissions that hung over

these historical accounts. To illustrate this point, Hall turns to the group of British black diaspora artists who emerged in the 1980s including Sonia Boyce. He warns that it would be a mistake to try to identify any unbroken lines of connection between contemporary black diaspora artists and the legacies of the earlier colonial artists, largely because the “diasporic lines of influence” have shifted from metropolis to periphery in the past, to now largely from the margin to the center. But while it is a shift, it is not a break: “The diasporic, whose ‘logic’ persists in recuperating the past in the present, reworking and translating as it goes, does not...easily accommodate absolute beginnings, unilinear directions, or terminal closures. Quite contrary to its conventional meaning, which is organized around ideas of fixed origins, chosen peoples, sacred homelands, exclusive identities, and redemptive returns, the diasporic continues in fact to recombine, disseminate and proliferate.”⁷¹

Hall points specifically to Boyce’s early pastel drawings such as *She Ain’t Holding Them Up, She’s Holding On (Some English Rose)* where the artist’s willingness to engage directly with issues of race and gender is conveyed through her own confrontational gaze. Works such as these are a challenge, Hall points out, to the “erasures and marginalizations inscribed in the visual field itself,” and an attempt to try to establish “a certain ‘presence’ within the frame, to come ‘into the field of vision.’”⁷² That same confrontational gaze exists in *From Tarzan to Rambo*. With the repetition of Boyce’s self portrait, the artist raises her head up and down, rolls her eyes, closes and opens them in filmic sequencing before settling and fixing her site on the viewer. Coupled with the repeated head of the gollywog, the artist implicates the viewer through the gaze, silently invoking – “You! Do you see this?”

The carnival stilt-walker who appears in the lavish gardens of Harewood House also turns and stares with this diasporic intensity into the camera. In all three cases, there is an

emphatic silence suggesting complicity as if the stillness and the intensity of the fixed gaze unmasked an underlying truth. It is the absence of words, the sustained silence. In the first two examples, the extended titles function as labels, describing to the viewers what in fact they are looking at and how the images themselves can be read. *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)* and *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed / Self-Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* both present a juxtaposition of how something may appear to be and how it functions "in reality"; the deception of images, of appearances, of history. Gilane Tawadros points out that the works are not photographs, but rather pastel drawings and photocopies based on photographs with added pen and wash. As a result, she argues, "they contest the very notion of the 'real'. They are realist works approximating to the real, to the outward appearance of everyday things, but at the same time they declare themselves to be fabricated images. They are not substitutes or facsimiles of the real but rather self-conscious reconstructions of reality which, in turn, reflect themselves as Boyce makes explicit in her title[s]."⁷³

Tawadros points out that Boyce intertwines text and image to underline the constructed nature of what appears to be real. Boyce's images, she explains, do not document the real as much as represent past memories and experiences, mediated and transformed by the artist in the present. Tawadros finds parallels in Caribbean diaspora literature of the period, referring to "linguistic phrasing," and she cites Stuart Hall's references to "inflections on the image", "the marks imprinted over a memory or representation by another period or...another generation."⁷⁴ Boyce presents images from both a personal and collective archive, imprinted with her own inflections to emphasize the manipulated processes of history and representation. Her own intervention in the form of her own self-portrait is her intervention, her interruption, her

declaration for a re-turn or alternative reading. The title is used emphatically as the artist's own words, pronouncing her reading as a challenge to the dominant or presumed significance.

Boyce has described *Crop Over* as a work about origins, or more specifically about the ideas and assumptions that surround the question of origins, both as a site of beginning and also as a criterion used to establish belonging, authenticity and entitlement. The question – or myth - of origins is a complex and contradictory conundrum that fascinates Boyce. While cultural historians map out the dual African and British associations of the Donkey-man (figure 1.11) and the Tuk Band, a number of exhibitions on Carnival and masquerade have also pointed out the recurrence of certain types of figures across a wide range of festivals.⁷⁵ Boyce sees the imperative to designate where something originates from as some kind of symbolic gesture. “There isn't this simple binary between white Europe and Africa. The circulation is complex.”⁷⁶ An important facet of origins is memory as a process of recollecting, literally re-collecting pieces that are then reconstituted.

Boyce notes that where the video comes alive is with the final scene which takes place at Kadooment (figures 1.12 and 1.13). What Kadooment shares with Mother Sally and the other folk characters is performance which in turn implies spectatorship. The strategies employed by the folk characters not only invert the traditional power structures of the society, they also demand visibility for the participants. To perform is to expect to be seen, to have an audience. The diasporic gaze is the response, asserting control over self-representation, a reconstructed self-representation. Boyce identifies these moments in *Crop Over* – most emphatically with the Mother Sally and the Kadooment revellers.

Carnival is frequently described as an inversion of traditional power structures within a limited context –sometimes officially sanctioned and sometimes not. The dynamics between

artists, participants and audience can be ambiguous and unpredictable. It is in the editing process that Boyce is able to structure the material. She speaks of recouping the remains of an encounter and through the reconstruction in the editing process, a story line emerges. Three central elements of Boyce's work – multiplicity, archiving and performativity. Through the process of archiving, the pre-existing documents that have contributed to and impinged on identity are assembled; performativity looks at the acting out of identity. If archiving is an internal gathering in, performance is an extroverted public display. This is nowhere better seen than in folk culture and carnival. It is the quintessential expression of diaspora, emerging out of historical forces and as an express that counters those forces, all the more fascinating in its sanctioned, negotiated context.



Figure 1.1 Sonia Boyce – *Cricket Days? Domino Nights! Young arrivals / new home / homeless. The Streets are paved with gold in this green and pleasant land, 1986*
Pastels on photocopy
Private Collection



Figure 1.2 Sonia Boyce – *Big Women's Talk*, 1984

Pastels on paper

Collection: Arts Council of Britain (Photo courtesy of Hayward Library and Archive, London).



Figure 1.3 Sonia Boyce – *Rice n Peas*, 1982
Pastels and pencil on Paper
Collection: Lubaina Himid, UK (Photo courtesy of Denise Swanson)

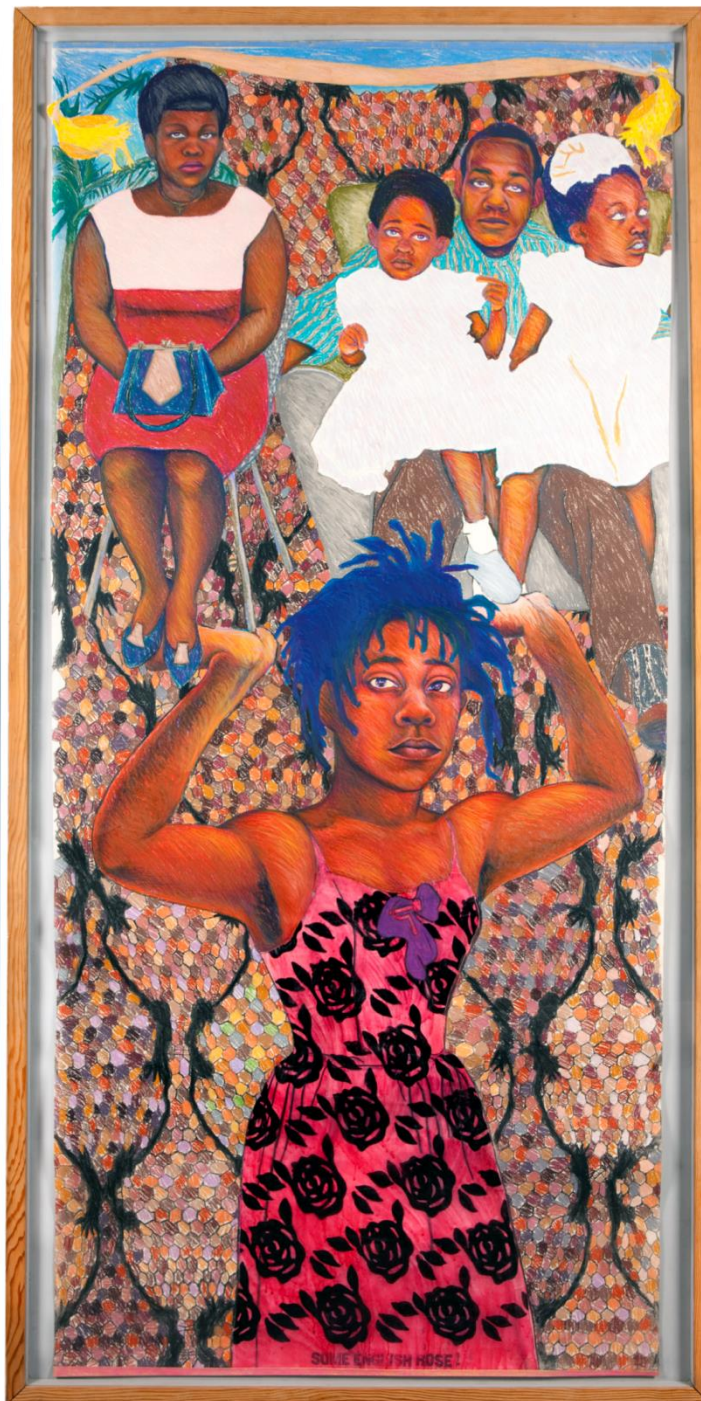


Figure 1.4 Sonia Boyce – *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)*, 1986, Pastels on paper. Collection of Mima, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art. Purchased with assistance from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund 1987/88.



Figure 1.5 Eddie Chambers – *Untitled*, 1994
Artist's Collection

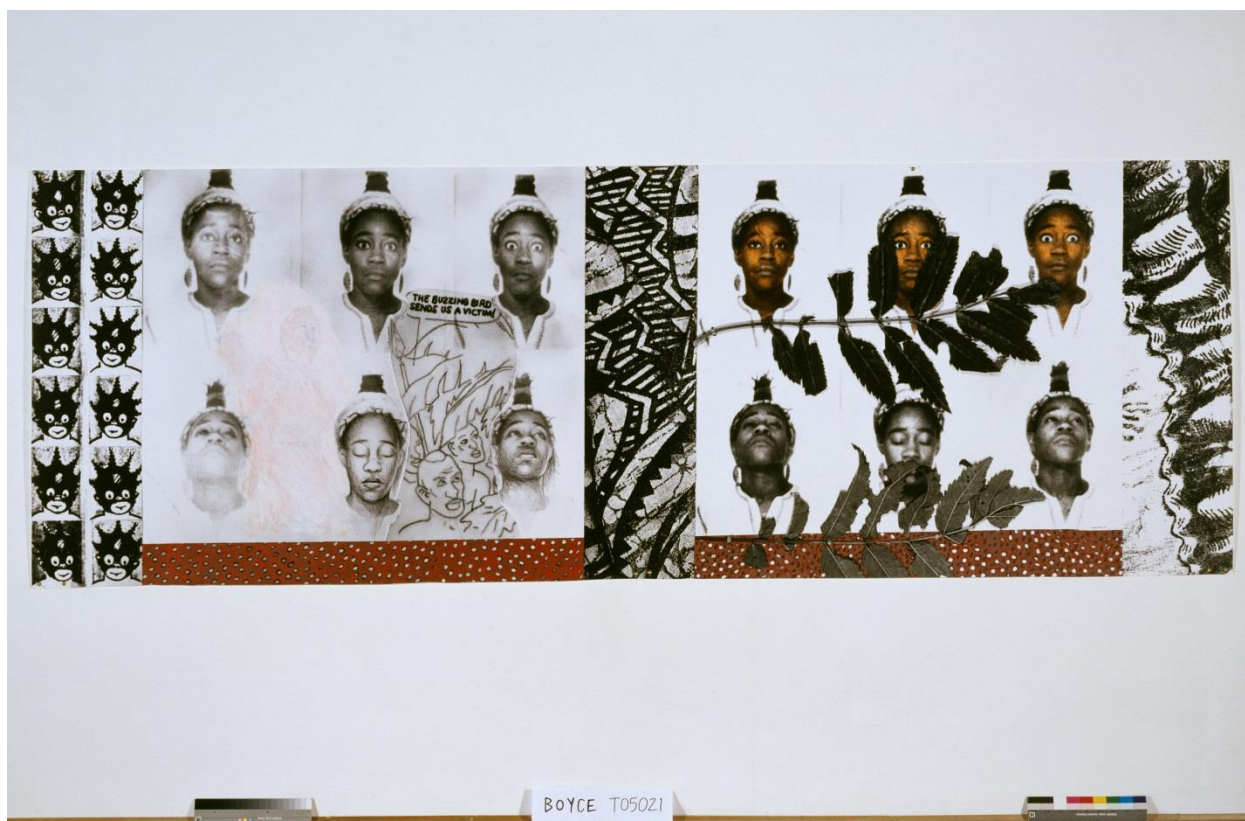


Figure 1.6 Sonia Boyce – *From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born 'Native' Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction, 1987*

Mixed media on Paper

Tate Britain

© Tate, London 2011



Figure 1.7 René Magritte – *Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt*, 1929
© 2013 C. Herscovici, London / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Figure 1.9 Sonia Boyce – *I am the Mother Sally*, 2007
Pencil on paper
Artist's Collection

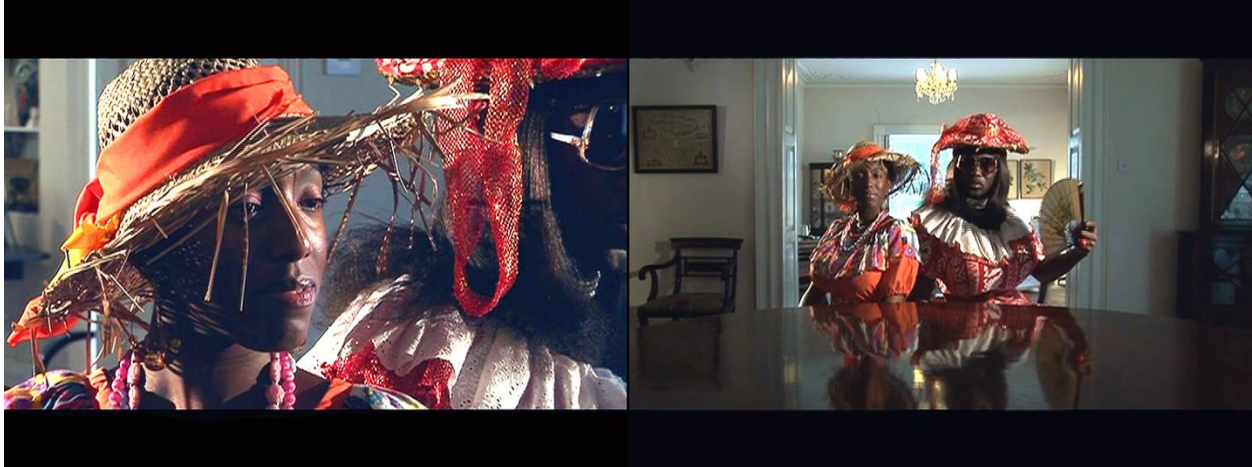


Figure 1.10 Sonia Boyce - *Crop Over: I am the Mother Sally*, 2007
Video Still
© Sonia Boyce



Figure 1.11 Sonia Boyce - *Crop Over: My Name is Donkey-Man*, 2007
Video Still
© Sonia Boyce



Figure 1.12 Sonia Boyce - *Crop Over: Hello People of the World*, 2007
Video Still
© Sonia Boyce



Figure 1.13 Sonia Boyce - *Crop Over: Grand Kadooment*, 2007
Video Still
© Sonia Boyce

Endnotes

¹ Timothy Barringer, Geoff Quilley and Douglas Fordham (eds), *Art and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) 3.

² Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998). According to the summary on the back cover, Poupeye's book is regarded as "the first ever book...to present and discuss the diverse, fascinating and highly accomplished work of Caribbean artists, whether they are indigenous or from the diaspora."

³ Sonia Boyce, "Crop Over: A Conversation" (presented by Sonia Boyce and Allison Thompson at the *Curating the Black Diaspora Symposium*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, November 16, 2012).

⁴ In a review of *Art in Barbados: What kind of mirror image?* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999) a survey of twentieth century art in Barbados which I co-authored with Alissandra Cummins and Nick Whittle, Jamaica-based art historian Veerle Poupeye remarked in a written review that the book presented too circumscribed a view of Barbadian art by not including artists from the wider diaspora who had Barbadian connections. Most notably she cited Sonia Boyce. See Veerle Poupeye, "Review of Art in Barbados: What kind of mirror image", *Nation Newspaper*, n.d.

⁵ Sonia Boyce, personal interview (Bridgetown, August 2, 2010).

⁶ The SS Empire Windrush arrived at Tilbury Dock, Essex in June 1948 with 492 passengers from the Caribbean. The majority of the Windrush passengers were ex-servicemen who had been invited to come to Britain following the end of the war to assist with labor shortages. Despite later hostility towards migration, in reality the response to the call for labor was minimal; by 1958 only 125,000 Caribbean workers accepted the offer to relocate to Britain. "The Windrush Generation," BBC Caribbean.com Archive, updated 20 June, 2008, http://www.bbc.co.uk/caribbean/news/story/2008/06/080620_windrush2.shtml.

⁷ Initially all immigrants from Caribbean basin dependencies and countries were classified as "West Indians" but due to the shifting political status of territories within the region during the period of decolonization (1958–83), the concept of what it meant to be West Indian shifted across time, thus making it impossible to say with certainty how many immigrants came from Barbados. Also, migration from island to island within the Caribbean was common, making statistics after the 1960s less than reliable. In the narrowest sense, the term West Indies refers to the English-speaking territories of the western Atlantic and Caribbean Basin, including Jamaica, the Bahamas, Bermuda, the Leeward Islands (St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat, British Virgin Islands), the Windward Islands, (St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Dominica, Grenada), Barbados, Trinidad, Tobago, Belize, and Guyana. While these were all still British dependencies, they were often treated more or less as a single unit. "Barbadian Immigration," *Encyclopedia of Immigration*, published January 31, 2011, accessed May 27, 2012, <http://immigration-online.org/31-barbadian-immigration.html>. Also "West Indian Immigration," *Encyclopedia of*

Immigration, published March 6, 2011, accessed May 27, 2012, <http://immigration-online.org/315-west-indian-immigration.html>.

⁸ Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, "Trends and Patterns of Migration to and from Caribbean Countries", 1986, published by ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America), accessed May 27, 2012, www.eclac.cl/celade/proyectos/migracion/ThomasHope.doc, 1.2.1.

⁹ Thomas-Hope, "Trends and Patterns of Migration to and from Caribbean Countries," 1.2.1. The author also points out the deficits created by mass migration, with the depleted reservoir of human resources and the negative implications for national development, often referred to as "brain drain." As a result there are numerous conflicts of interest within both the receiving countries and the sending countries at the national and local levels between the costs and benefits of migration.

¹⁰ Penelope Curtis, "Foreword," in *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 10.

¹¹ Jackie Wullschlager, "Displacement Activity," *Financial Times* (February 3, 2012). The reviewer's primary criticism is that in attempting to map out this history, the exhibition "cruelly omits almost every single highlight". He notes specifically the absence of Hans Holbein, Lucien Freud, Paula Rego and Anish Kapoor.

¹² Stuart Hall, "Museums of Modern Art and the End of History," in *Annotations 6: Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, Modernity and Difference*, ed. Sarah Campbell and Gilane Tawadros (London: Iniva- Institute of International Visual Arts, 2001), 18-19.

¹³ Stuart Hall, "Reconstruction Work," in *Critical Decade: Black British Photography in the 80s, Ten-8*, vol.2, no. 3, Spring 1992 as cited in Gilane Tawadros, *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in Tongues* (London: Kala Press, 1997), 33.

¹⁴ See "keithpiper/blk art group research project 2012", accessed October 15, 2012, <http://www.keithpiper.info/blkArtGroupRes.html>. On October 27, 2012, the group held the second Blk Art Group Symposium on the 30th anniversary of the original event with speakers including Sonia Boyce. See <http://www.blkartgroup.info/>.

¹⁵ Sonia Boyce, from John Roberts, "Interview with Sonia Boyce," *Third Text*, 1 Autumn 1987, 60.

¹⁶ See David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce, eds. *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian artists in post-war Britain* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1989).

¹⁸ Gilane Tawadros, *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in Tongues* (London: Kala Press, 1997) 16 and 27. The exhibition, entitled *Five Black Women Artists* also included work by Claudette Johnson, Houria Niati and Veronica Ryan. Boyce acknowledged the important collective support among black women artists in the UK at that time, much of the activity organized by Himid. In 2012 Himid curated along with Paul Goodwin *Thin Black Line(s)* at Tate Britain which documented five of the exhibitions of work by black women artists which she organized in the eighties.

¹⁹ Tawadros, *Sonia Boyce: Speaking in Tongues*, 16.

²⁰ Sonia Boyce quoted in Sandy Nairne, *State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980s* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990) 235-6.

²¹ In addition to appearing on the royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom, the rose also appears on the British twenty pence coin, military dress uniforms and the symbol of the English Tourist Board among numerous others. See Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, (Elibron Classics, 2006), 270, accessed February 10, 2011. http://books.google.com/books?id=tybAuoY18EEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

²² Lizzie Carey-Thomas and Paul Goodwin, "Sonia Boyce," in *Migrations: Journeys into British Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 114.

²³ Carey-Thomas and Goodwin, "Sonia Boyce," 115.

²⁴ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.

²⁵ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'*, 12.

²⁶ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'*, 13.

²⁷ Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Foreward" in Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'*, 5-6.

²⁸ Austin Clarke, *Growing up Stupid under the Union Jack: A Memoir* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980). Clarke later emigrated to Canada where this memoir was written.

²⁹ Rasheed Araeen, "The Success and the Failure of the Black Arts Movement," in Bailey, 22.

³⁰ Petrine Archer, "Negrophilia, Diaspora, and Moments of Crisis," in Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 28.

³¹ Tate Liverpool, “Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic,” <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/afro-modern-journeys-through-black-atlantic> (Tate website accessed November 24, 2012).

³² Tanya Barson, “Introduction: Modernism and the Black Atlantic,” in Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 22-23. While Paul Gilroy’s discussion give significant attention to music, the visual arts does not play a major role in his arguments, with the exception of his discussion of JMW Turner’s *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*. Nevertheless, Gilroy knew, admired and acquired Boyce’s work.

³³ “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*. <http://www.tate.org.uk/artworks/boyce-from-tarzan-to-rambo-english-born-native-considers-her-relationship-to-the-to5021/text-catalogue-entry> (accessed June 16, 2012).

³⁴ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th Edition, R.E. Allen, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 789.

³⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

³⁶ Mel Gooding, *Art Monthly*, 1985, in <http://www.susanhillier.org/Info/artworks/artworks-MidnightSP.html>, accessed January 26, 2013.

³⁷ “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*. Rupert the Bear first appeared as a children’s comic strip character created by the English artist Mary Tourtel in the *Daily Express* newspaper in 1920. In 1935 Alfred Bestall took over the job as illustrator and introduced the *Rupert Annual*. He continued the comic strip until 1965 and the Annual cover until 1973. A 1946 issue by Bestall “Rupert on Coon Island” presented the island’s inhabitants called “Coons”. The Coons made a number of appearances in later editions, notably on the cover of *The New Rupert: The Daily Express Annual* of 1954 and the story of “Rupert the Castaway,” and in the 1960 *Rupert Annual* which contained a story “Rupert and the Diamond Leaf” in which the bear again visits “Coon Island.” (“Rupert Bear gets 21st Century makeover,” *The Independent*, 6 November 2006, accessed August 16, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/rupert-bear-gets-21st-century-makeover-423115.html>). The origin of the term ‘golliwog’ is credited to Florence Kate Upton who was born in Britain in the late 19th century and studied art in New York. After returning to London, she wrote a children’s book in 1894 entitled *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwogg*, which was later turned into a series, illustrated by Florence and written by her mother Bertha. The name was changed to ‘golliwog’ by toy companies who produced dolls of the character that Florence and her mother had failed to trademark. The dolls were enormously popular, surpassed only by the Teddy Bear in the mid 20th century and appeared on a range of commercial products including as the mascot for Robertson’s jam. Other children’s authors,

including the widely popular Enid Blyton, also feature a golliwog character. (Marcus Dunk, “How the golliwog went from innocent children’s hero to symbol of bitter controversy,” Daily Mail, updated February 5, 2009, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1136016/How-golliwog-went-innocent-childrens-hero-symbol-bitter-controversy.html). . In 1985 Boyce had seen an installation by her contemporary, Eddie Chambers entitled *The Black Bastard as a Cultural Icon* (Pentonville Gallery, September 1985) which examined the social meanings of the ‘gollywog’ to demonstrate how white society and mass media had made extensive use of racist stereotypes in children’s books and advertising campaigns and revealed the effects of this on the black self-image.

³⁸ “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*.

³⁹ For a discussion of the challenge of spelling Vodou terminology, see Donald J. Cosentino, ed. *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995) xiii.

⁴⁰ “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*.

⁴¹ Ekow Eshun, “From Tarzan to Rambo: Points of View,” Tate, accessed June 20, 2012, www2.tate.org.uk/tarzantorambo/pointsofview.htm. Hergé was the pen name for the Belgian-born comics writer and artist, Georges Prosper Remi (1907-1983), best known for his “The Adventures of Tintin” series which he wrote and illustrated from 1929 until his death. His pen name was based on the French pronunciation of his reversed initials, “RG”. In 2007 the UK Commission for Racial Equality demanded that one book in the series, Tintin in the Congo be banned, claiming it contained imagery and words of racial prejudice.

⁴² Eshun, “Points of View.”

⁴³ Tarzan is a fictional character originally created by Edgar Rice Burroughs in the 1914 novel *Tarzan of the Apes*, first published in magazine form in 1912. The pervading fascination with the story and its wide popularity are attested to by the twenty-five sequels which followed, three authorized books by other authors and innumerable works in other media. The character has appeared in films, radio, television, comic strips and comic books. The first Tarzan movies were silent pictures adapted from the original Tarzan novels, which appeared within a few years of the character’s creation. Among the most popular were twelve films produced between 1932 and 1948 starring the former Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller. Weissmuller and his immediate successors portrayed the ape-man as a pidgin-speaking noble savage, in marked contrast to the cultured aristocrat of Burrough’s novels. Particularly popular in the years before Boyce’s work was the 1984 British film version, *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*, directed by Hugh Hudson.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the use of plants and fruits in the construction of “tropicality”, particularly in Jamaica and the Bahamas, see Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ Sonia Boyce, “*From Tarzan to Rambo: English Born ‘Native’ Considers her Relationship to the Constructed/Self Image and her Roots in Reconstruction* 1987 Audio transcript,” Tate, accessed June 16, 2012, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/boyce-from-tarzan-to-rambo-english-born-native-considers-her-relationship-to-the-t05021/text-audio-transcript>.

⁴⁶ “From Tarzan: Tarzan”, Tate website accessed June 20, 2012, www2.tate.org.uk/tarzantorambo/tarzantorambo_2.htm.

⁴⁷ Rambo refers to the character in the 1982 film *First Blood*, directed by Ted Kotcheff and starring Sylvester Stallone as a former United States Special Forces soldier who fought in the jungles of Vietnam, but when angered by the insults of a police Sheriff, goes on a rampage through the jungle. This was followed by *Rambo: First Blood Part II* in 1985, this time directed by George P. Cosmatos, in which the hero returns to the jungles of Vietnam on a covert mission to locate POW’s who are still being held there by the sadistic Vietnamese Captain Vinh. Rambo starts killing every enemy in sight while focusing on his intention to rescue the POWs.

⁴⁸ “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*.

⁴⁹ The film *Divine Horsemen: The Living gods of Haiti* was completed in 1981 by Deren’s third husband Teiji Ito and released in 1985. Deren’s book, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti*, was published by Vanguard Press in 1953.

⁵⁰ Boyce’s involvement during the mid to late 1980s with the Docklands Community Poster Project, based on the Isle of Dogs, which involved erecting large billboards with photomurals around London has also have been identified as an influence “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*. For the Docklands Community Poster Project see Nairne, 182.

⁵¹ Correspondence from Sonia Boyce, August 28, 2012. Tate Britain purchased the work through the gallery Gimpel Fils as a result of the efforts of Caryn Faure Walker, a New York critic and curator who had moved to London in the 1970s and was involved with feminist art debates. Boyce’s work was initially introduced to Gimpel Fils by British artist Susan Hiller who was also represented by the Gallery. In addition to purchasing *From Tarzan to Rambo*, Tate also purchased the pastel drawing *Missionary Position II* (1985). Sonia Boyce’s works are also included in the Cleveland Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum Collection, Britain’s Government Art Collection and the National Art Gallery Collection in Barbados. In 2007 Boyce was made a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in recognition of her contribution to the visual culture of Britain.

⁵² The Tate Gallery, “Sonia Boyce.” “Sonia Boyce: *From Tarzan to Rambo*,” in *Tate Gallery: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*.

⁵³ Sonia Boyce, unpublished notes, 2008.

⁵⁴ Sonia Boyce, “Contemporary Art and Globalisation Study Day – Part 4”, public lecture at the Tate Modern, 12 March 2005. Tate Channel, accessed January 28, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/contemporary-art-and-globalisation-study-day-part-4>. The Cuba residency was coordinated by the Triangle Arts Trust. Recently renamed the Triangle Network, the Triangle Arts Trust was founded by Sir Anthony Caro and Robert Loder in 1982.

⁵⁵ Sonia Boyce, “Glocal: Somewhere between the local and the global,” lecture presented at the Contemporary Art and Globalisation Study Day – Part 4, in Tate Channel: Context & comment, presented March 12, 2005, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/contemporary-art-and-globalisation-study-day-part-4>.

⁵⁶ Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 2-3.

⁵⁷ Stuart Hall, “Afterword: Legacies of Anglo-Caribbean Culture – A Diasporic Perspective” in Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, eds., *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2007) 179.

⁵⁸ The British abolished the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 (Slave Trade Act). Slavery was officially abolished in the British Empire in 1834. This did not include the territories in the East India Company, Ceylon or Saint Helena. Full emancipation was legally granted in 1838.

⁵⁹ Digital copies of all these records have recently been donated to the Barbados Museum and the University of the West Indies.

⁶⁰ *Harewood 1807: A commemoration of the bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade and the Yorkshire election in 1807 contested by William Wilberforce, Henry Lascelles and Lord Milton*. (Harewood House, 2007).

⁶¹ In fact at the same time that *Crop Over* was on view at Harewood House, Boyce presented *Devotional: Portraits of Black Women Singers* at the National Portrait Gallery in London (16 June -27 November, 2007). The *Devotional Series* has been an evolving project for the past decade and has assumed differing presentation formats in response to the context and requirements of the site. Focusing again on collaboration, collective memory and archiving, the work documents and celebrates black female singers in British entertainment from the early twentieth century to the present. Begun in 1999 at a workshop developed by Boyce and held in Liverpool in which participants were asked to recall the first record they ever bought, the

assembled list of names has grown over the last decade as Boyce has continued the dialogue with members of the general public about collective memory and music.

The work was first exhibited in a graphic format as a computer generated, color-coded list of names organized chronologically and printed on a vertical panel like an honour role celebrating their contributions. *Devotional* (1999-2004), in the collection of the Government Art Collection, lists eighty-four names beginning with jazz singer Elizabeth Welch in the pre-1960s section and continuing to Lisa Maffia from the beginning of the present century. The intention is that the list not only documents and celebrates the individual within the pantheon of great singers, but it also triggers within the viewer memories of the associated songs and lyrics. By 2005 *Devotional II*, which was installed in the European Union Headquarters in Brussels had expanded to four-times the length, standing nine metres high, spanning a height of three floors and recording the names of 180 women.

In the recent National Portrait Gallery installation, Boyce departed from the grid-like chart of performers and began to meticulously inscribe free-hand the names directly on the gallery walls in pencil over a two-week period. Like the drawings included at the Harewood exhibition, the names are surrounded by concentric irregular rings reverberating out like sound waves. But instead of the singular name inscribed on each sheet, here the high walls of the relatively confined space are covered with this meandering labyrinth of rippling lines, inflating the names like graffiti text on the pristine surfaces of the gallery walls. Again, Boyce's subtle challenges to institutional practices and traditions reinforce the subversive underpinnings, recording the names of these marginalized performers and simultaneously critiquing the hierarchies that have neglected to do so previously. The archivist as anarchist. In addition to the listing of names, the installation included photographic portraits of eighteen of the performers, some from the Gallery's permanent collection. The National Portrait Gallery website provided access to complete biographies of each of the singers.

⁶² This scene was filmed at Wildey Great House, a property owned by the Barbados National Trust and operated as a museum.

⁶³ Hall, "Afterword: Legacies of Anglo-Caribbean Culture," 181.

⁶⁴ Mark Crinson, "Fragments of Collapsing Space: Postcolonial Theory and Contemporary Art," in Amelia Jones ed., *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 457.

⁶⁵ Sonia Boyce, "Talking about For you, only you," in Paul Bonaventura, ed. *For you, only you: A project by Sonia Boyce* (Oxford: Holywell Press, 2007) 26.

⁶⁶ Tony Best, "Does Wukkin' Up lead to sex?" *Nation Newspaper*, December 8, 2007, updated March 20, 2009, http://archive.nationnews.com/archive_detail.php?archiveFile=2007/December/08/Life/49925.xml&start=0&numPer=20&keyword=wukkin+up§ionSearch=&begindate=1%2F1%2F1994&enddate=12%2F31%2F2009&authorSearch=&IncludeStories=1&pubsection=&page=&Includ

Chapter Two

“Whether New or Rediscovered”: Constructing the pictorial Caribbean

in the De Brys’ *Great Voyages*¹

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the visual conceptions of the Caribbean as well as the rest of the Americas, for most Europeans, came from the engravings of the workshop of Flemish printmaker Theodor De Bry and his sons.² In fact the engravings contained in his *Great Voyages*, an epic series of thirteen volumes of travel narratives, were so impactful that their influence was felt for centuries and arguably continue to affect popular conceptions, particularly regarding the indigenous peoples and lesser known areas of the Americas. But the De Brys never travelled to what became known as the New World. Instead they based their work on the travel narratives and images they purchased from sailors, explorers and artists who participated in these transatlantic expeditions throughout the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Their records and recollections, combined with engravings startled European readers with their tales of encounter with lands and peoples previously unknown, a “merging of fact and fiction” that helped to shape an Old World on the brink of a burgeoning early modern era, fed by a reconfigured globalizing terrain.³

The lavishly illustrated volumes of the *Great Voyages*, produced by Theodor de Bry and his sons, were important, not only for their ground breaking developments in book publishing but also the enduring impact made by the often startling imagery, especially the illustrations produced for *Volumes IV and V* of the *Great Voyages*, where the Caribbean is first introduced. These illustrations depict the earliest moments of transatlantic encounter between Europeans and

Amerindians as described in Girolamo Benzoni's *History of the New World*, beginning with Columbus' journals and extending to the introduction of African slaves. Presented with a level of detail and comprehensiveness that here to fore had not existed, these images significantly impacted how the Caribbean was first envisioned by a European audience and influenced subsequent traditions of representation. The growing knowledge of the New World did little to negate the interest in De Bry's work. By the late eighteenth century inaccuracies were acknowledged. This however did not diminish their attraction and desirability. In fact, from the outset, much of the popularity of the accounts and particularly as they were depicted in the engravings, was due to their ability to amaze the reader; the fascination lay in the fact that they seemed unbelievable. Corresponding within the narratives and official reports of renowned men, the De Brys provided illustrations and additional captions that would maximize the impact of their accounts of these foreign lands and strange people. A comparison between Benzoni's original text and the accompanying eighteen small woodcuts with the engraved interpretations and accompanying descriptions in the *Great Voyages* provides insight into the De Brys' editorial strategies, interests and motivations. These engravings proved to be extremely popular and because their influence was pervasive they established a number of enduring tropes and conventions.

“It is at the heart of Paradise that the exile's destiny is presented.”⁴ In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva refers to the Renaissance as the threshold of the modern era, and the starting point for comprehending modern notions of otherness. Acknowledging the great classical precedent of the story of Ulysses, the archetypal seafarer and wanderer, Kristeva, like Paul Gilroy appropriates nautical imagery and an analogy of the sea over which these early sailors travelled as a kind of psychic investigation to emphasize how encounters with a distant

and foreign otherness were ultimately journeys of self-definition. Kristeva shows how voyages and exile inspire or inform intellectual, creative work or meaningful contemplation and ultimately art (literature). Simultaneously, however, this is also a process of self-knowledge, so that the voyage is equally an inner one of self-discovery.⁵ Renaissance ideology, with its co-mingling of classical precedents and Christian morality, framed the re-telling of European trans-Atlantic encounters with their New World. Throughout the centuries, the word “paradise” encompassed both a Golden Age and a Garden of Eden; it would be used to describe this new world slowly surfacing into European consciousness, a world that would be fashioned as the long-sought destination of the wanderer’s desire. Atlantis, Utopia, Arcadia, El Dorado: “it was potentially all things to all people, the source of unknown wealth and power for monarchs, merchants and missionaries.”⁶ Yet simultaneously it was the site of fabricated beasts and savages as well as epic atrocities.

Early European conceptions were based on a western, classical tradition dictated, according to Hugh Honour, by its temporal situation during the transition from the High Renaissance to the early modern era:

The study of antiquity and the sciences were interdependent in the Renaissance, and the widening horizons opened up by scientific and geographical discoveries were scanned through classical lenses. Just as botanists earnestly tried to identify plants from the New World with those mentioned by Dioscorides and Pliny, so artists strove to fit America into a classical scheme of things artistically.⁷

It is now well acknowledged that Europeans did not discover America so much as “invent” America.⁸ This construction was founded on well-established tropes fostered by exaggeration, fantasy and fear. Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs point out that writing and travel have always been intimately connected and that “the traveler’s tale is as old as fiction itself...”, referring to its tendency towards creative elaboration and the ancient traditions which have

endured as templates for this genre. Both biblical and classical traditions provide numerous examples of travel writing, both literal and symbolic – Exodus, the punishment of Cain, the Argonauts, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* – which have provided models for later writers. In particular, Homer’s Odysseus provides the template not only for the epic journey but also the complexities of homecoming.⁹ The rediscovery of ancient Greek texts such as Ptolemy’s *Geography*, Strabo’s *Geography* and Pliny the Elder’s influential *Historia naturalis* provided Early Modern readers with instructions for navigation and stories recounting marvelous and fantastic races and monsters that awaited the explorer. According to Michiel van Groesen, the recurrent transmission of these fabrications passed on from antiquity into the Renaissance resulted in an established image of distant lands and natives that was difficult to banish after 1492: “the Amazons and the Antipodes, as well as the one-eyed, the one-footed, the long-eared, and dozens of other disfigured races remained relevant throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both in texts and in emblematic pictorial material.”¹⁰ Cannibalism was one of the most popular and repeated legends which persisted from classical texts into early modern journals documenting travels through what would become known as the Caribbean as well as Central and South America.

Classical traditions of describing strangers in foreign lands persisted in the Middle Ages. Several manuscript copies of *The Travels of Marco Polo* (c. 1298), the Venetian merchant’s account of his journeys through Asia in 1271-95 contained illustrations of the “Plinian races” and promised the reader both truth and marvels, acknowledging that this text was based on things he had observed as well as the things he heard from others.¹¹ The fourteenth century *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, first published in 1360 and translated into ten different languages by 1500, also clearly reveals Pliny’s influence and did much to further popularize the notion that distant lands

that lay across the oceans were home to strange monsters including cannibals and men with no heads but eyes in their shoulders. In Chapter XX of the fourteenth century *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, the author described the Isle of Lamary, summarizing in two short paragraphs a list of tropes that would signal the Caribbean more than a century before Columbus arrived:

From that country go men by the sea ocean, and by many divers isles and by many countries that were too long for to tell of....In that land is full great heat. And the custom there is such, that men and women go all naked. And they scorn when they see any strange folk going clothed. And they say, that God made Adam and Eve all naked, and that no man should shame him to shew him such as God made him, for nothing is foul that is of kindly nature....And they wed there no wives, for all the women there be common and they forsake no man....And also all the land is common; for all that a man holdeth one year, another man hath it another year; and every man taketh what part that him liketh....But in that country there is a cursed custom, for they eat more gladly man's flesh than any other flesh; and yet is that country abundant of flesh of fish, of corns, of gold and silver, and of all other goods. Thither go merchants and bring with them children to sell to them of the country, and they buy them. And if they be fat they eat them anon. And if they be lean they feed them till they be fat, and then they eat them. And they say, that it is the best flesh and the sweetest of all the world.¹²

Nakedness justified by the precedent established in paradise, sexual availability or deviance, unclaimed land, tales of cannibalism, and slavery; all of these themes would unfold in Theodor de Bry's imaging of Europe's early encounters across the Atlantic. The acknowledgement that the narratives of both Mandeville and Marco Polo contained fantastic elaborations had little effect on their popularity or influence, and in fact these texts marked a new direction in the late Middle Ages with increased emphasis on curiosity about other cultures.¹³ The indigenous inhabitants, along with its flora and fauna, were regarded as exotic curiosities and were assessed and described according to their usefulness or impediments in the quest of expansion and economic revenue.

Developments in printing and publishing were integral to the wide-spread popularity of these travel accounts. Increasing numbers of texts and images treating previously un-known

regions and peoples began to appear and were quickly disseminated. But as William Arens points out, with this “veritable explosion of potential knowledge....the possibilities for the dissemination of errors and thus the spread of a new kind of ignorance also expanded apace.” Both processes, Arens asserts, took place with equal facility.¹⁴ Attempts to describe and record observations became more comprehensible, more attractive, more consumable when compared to the well-ensconced Christian belief in an Eden, or a classical myth of a Golden Age. But parallel to the notion of a new world paradise was the myth of the new world savage, a construction which equally had its origins in antiquity and the bible.

European audiences during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries undoubtedly found the newly published volumes of the De Brys’ *America Series*, popularly known as the *Great Voyages* riveting and shocking. Michiel van Groesen has referred to the De Bry Collection of Voyages as “one of the most monumental geographical publications of the early modern period.”¹⁵ Susanna Burhartz has identified it as the most ambitious publishing project of its time devoted to the visual representation of the world outside Europe.¹⁶ The collection as a whole, known as the *Collectiones Peregrinationum in Indiam orientalem et occidentalem*, is comprised of twenty-five volumes divided into two series: the *Great Voyages* (*Grands Voyages*, 1590-1634) – also known as the *America* or the *India Occidentalis* (*Western India*) series- which is made up of thirteen volumes reporting on the New World; and the *Small Voyages* (*Petits Voyages*, 1597-1628) which is comprised of twelve books devoted to Africa and the Orient. Together, they present nearly fifty travel accounts of European expeditions.

While the scale and comprehensive nature of the collection was impressive, the revelation of the De Brys’ publications was most profoundly felt, not in the texts, all of which

had been published previously, but rather it was the illustrations, presented as folios of copperplate engravings executed in large part by Theodor de Bry and his sons, that were startling. These publications provided the first large scale pictorial narrative of the New World a century after Columbus' first transatlantic journey. The copperplate engraving technique permitted a new level of clarity and wealth of detail so that these foreign lands, unknown people and strange customs, could be represented with unprecedented dramatic impact. Approximately six hundred large copper engravings illustrated the twenty-five volumes of the *Great and Small Voyages* produced between 1590 and 1630, providing early modern Europe with what Groesen has described as "the first comprehensive iconographic representation of the overseas world and its inhabitants."¹⁷

The De Bry collection was the epitome of European self-definition, providing one of the first embodiments of the concept of Europe, according to Groesen, even if no such concept existed as we know it today. The series presented an assemblage of Dutch, English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French travel accounts, unified through their assemblage into one format and translated into one language, either Latin or German, undivided by political or religious boundaries. "As such, the collection both reflected and moulded a self-styled European identity which left little room for confessional divisions or attempted to gloss over the ruptures which had affected the Old World since the Reformation. The overseas world as a whole, *whether new or rediscovered*, provided the perfect counterweight for rebuilding European satisfaction and self-confidence."¹⁸ The concept of European-ness was constructed and designed through its difference and opposition to the New World. Towards this end, the De Bry collection, while purporting to present scenes of encounter between these two worlds with unprecedented clarity and sensationalized detail, in fact very knowingly conformed itself to widespread

expectations of the overseas world as uncivilized. De Bry's representation of the New World gave heightened focus to the Amerindian population as it was revealed through the narrative of European encounter, observation and interpretation, recorded and reproduced in the form of travel diaries. As such, these scenes are always described in opposition to a European norm, originating at the point of otherness, that which is strange, foreign and extraordinary. While representations of Amerindian violence were countered if not surpassed by scenes of Spanish and Portuguese atrocities, these were ultimately scenes of European acts of discovery which have been read as scenes of New World revelations. The Americas and the indigenous Americans were first imagined within the journals of these early explorers and then transcribed to image by the De Brys in a presentation of unprecedented opulence, detail and scale. The impact was so great that its influence endured for centuries and its veracity was of only secondary relevance.

While the motivation for this epic project has often been linked to Theodor de Bry's Protestant, anti-Spanish stance, more recent scholarship has interpreted the editorial strategy of De Bry and his sons as directed primarily by commercial considerations.¹⁹ If the importance of the Americas was almost immediately assessed according to its economic potential for the European colonizers, its representation was structured by similar concerns. Describing the images as some of the best and most lavish copper plate engravings in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe, Susanna Burghartz notes that from the very first volumes, the De Brys established new standards in the history of representations of the New Worlds, both in terms of the quantity and quality of their elaborate illustrations.²⁰ The quality of the illustrated books was immediately and widely regarded as being "second to none," and the booksellers who were De Bry's contemporaries frequently bought copies at the semi-annual Frankfurt book fairs to sell to their customers throughout Europe.²¹ As a result, the collection remained popular for

centuries after its initial publication: Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, in the entry on the *Indies* in their *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopaedia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts and Crafts*), referred to the rare and desirous De Bry collection; and in 1789, two centuries after the initial publication, Thomas Jefferson is known to have purchased the *Great Voyages* at auction when serving as an American minister in France.²² While Jefferson would use the words “original” and “authentic” to describe the books, he also recognized that two centuries after their publication there were obvious inaccuracies, noting “[...] fact and fable are mingled together.”²³ The continued mingling of fact and fiction, describing the new as a re-discovery of a lost or earlier state, became an imbedded framework in which the Caribbean would be repeatedly described.

Interpreting Benzoni

The earliest accounts of European encounter with the New World and representations of the Caribbean occur in Volumes IV and V of the *Great Voyages* which reproduce the written accounts provided and assembled by the Milanese merchant-explorer, Girolamo Benzoni, in his book, *History of the New World (Historia del Nuovo Mondo)*.²⁴ A comparison between Benzoni's original text and the accompanying eighteen small woodcuts with de Bry's more numerous and elaborate engraved interpretations along with the accompanying descriptions provides insight into his editorial strategies, interests and motivations, particularly considering that neither Theodor De Bry nor his sons had ever crossed the Atlantic to the New World to observe the geography and its inhabitants first hand. These engravings proved to be extremely popular and because their influence was pervasive they established a number of enduring tropes and conventions.

What is of particular interest is not only which aspects of the narratives the De Brys chose to represent and how those images were visualized and constructed, but also how they were labeled. Each plate is accompanied by a written description supplied by the artist which connected the image to the travel narrative and which also frequently provided interpretation that was independent or outside of the main narrative. The relationship between text and image, particularly in the case of prints, where it functions as a directive to the viewer on the meaning of the work, is complex and multi-faceted. For example, this descriptive text would sometimes differ between the Latin and German translations, presumably catering to the perceived tastes of the different audiences.

The De Brys constructed visual narratives based on written descriptions of the region, and supported by visual evidence of indigenous cultures in Virginia, Florida and Brazil, which had been the subjects of the narratives in Volumes I to III. Questions still surrounded how best to make use of these lands and these people, first the indigenous Amerindian and later the imported African. Questions of how best to make use of these resources were not inseparable from questions about how best to present them. Notably the De Brys are amongst the first artists to produce prints depicting the introduction of African slave labor into the Caribbean. Providing remarkably detailed interpretations of the transition from Amerindian to African slave labor and the proto-industrial processes of sugar production, they clearly delineate the human cost extracted in the name of early modern advances. Development and civilization is contrasted constantly with scenes of savagery, violence and depraved humanity, both European and indigenous.

The Interpretation: Compare and Contrast

The travel narrative written and assembled by Girolamo Benzoni in *The History of the New World* is quite remarkable in its ability to convey to the reader the absolute new-ness of this overseas world and its people. At the same time, the events were interpreted with considerable compassion and admiration for the Amerindians and Africans he encountered and with an insightful awareness of the process of obvious transformation that was taking place. Benzoni observed the activities that were taking place around him, including the obvious decimation of the indigenous population and a general disregard for and absence of basic humane, Christian values that should have governed their treatment, and warned of the potential for revolution.

Benzoni presents a summary of the history of the new world from Columbus to Pizarro, interwoven with his own observations so that the narratives of renowned historical figures, expeditions and wars are combined with personal observations ranging from detailed descriptions of the flora and ethnographic descriptions of daily practices including indigenous vocabulary. He details the violent attacks on the Spanish including mutilation and cannibalism. However, this is outweighed by the graphic account of the brutality against and the betrayal of the indigenous Indians and the torture of African slaves. Benzoni questions the nature of Christian virtues in the face of such atrocities and even warns, in the case of Hispaniola but also elsewhere, that there is the potential for revolt and the extermination of the Spanish, and the implication that this would not be-unjustified.

Volumes IV to VI of the *Great Voyages* were devoted to the three “Books” or chapters that comprise Benzoni’s *History of the New World*. Eighteen woodcuts, approximately three by four inches, were included by Benzoni, likely based on his drawings and converted into roughly

cut woodblock prints that convey his ethnographic interests in the daily lives of the Amerindians including modes of navigation at sea, sleeping in hammocks, methods of making bread and wine, tending to the sick, the construction of houses, as well as studies of various trees and fruits. None of these were of interest to the De Brys. Of the eighteen woodcuts, the De Brys opted to produce versions of only four of them, a dramatic departure from the earlier volumes where they had relied more directly on visual imagery supplied to them along with the texts. What is of particular interest is not only what the De Brys opted to omit but the additional scenes they added; the De Brys produced twenty four illustrations for Volume IV, twenty two for Volume V and twenty eight for Volume VI.²⁵ A comparison between the original scenes included by Benzoni and the versions of those produced by the De Brys provides useful insights into interpreting the constructedness of the New World, and in particular the Caribbean as presented through these influential publications.

At the beginning of his text, Girolamo Benzoni explains that he set out as a young man of twenty two years of age on a journey, “being, like many others, anxious to see the world, and hearing of those countries of the Indians, recently found, called by everybody the New World, I determined to go there.”²⁶ The journey would last fourteen years. He returned in 1556 and published his account in Italian nine years later, illustrated with eighteen small woodcuts. He added to this narrative the earlier accounts by Spanish conquistadors, including Columbus, Cortez, Pizarro and Balboa in order to construct his critical history of the New World.

Benzoni begins his account by describing his trans-Atlantic voyage and the first sighting of land in what is now the Caribbean. Acknowledging the precedence of the “invincible Christopher Columbus”, Benzoni notes that the islands are inhabited by Indians whose only characteristic which is noted is that they are cannibals:

“There are many islands, but the largest is called by the Spaniards *Guadalupe*. They are mostly inhabited, and full of Indian Caribbees who eat each other, or rather I should say eat their enemies.”²⁷ Inspired by Columbus’ own journal and Mandeville’s before that, Benzoni’s Caribbean or rather its inhabitants became synonymous with cannibalism, so much so that Benzoni’s first mention of one was immediately followed by reference to the other.

Indian Woman of Cumana

According to Benzoni’s description, his expedition continued south along the Caribbean coast of Venezuela to the site of the first European settlement there at Cumana. Admitting that by now his intent is “equally as desirous to see men and countries, as to become rich” with the promise of “El Dorado”, he notes that “... already the Spaniards had almost destroyed this country; for out of the great multitudes of Indians that there used to be, there only remained a few petty chiefs, whom the Spaniards had spared for their own wants. Others had retired to some uninhabited places, only to escape from the domination of the Christians.”²⁸ He then described the incident which is the subject of the first woodcut, a visit by the wife of one of the Indian rulers or caciques, emphasizing his “wonder” at seeing the physical appearance of this woman. This is his first detailed description of encountering any of the indigenous population of the New World.

Whilst we remained at *Cumanà* there came an Indian woman, wife of one of the principal chiefs of the province, with a basket-full of fruit, such a woman as I have never before nor since seen the like of; so that my eyes could not be satisfied with looking at her for wonder. On her arrival she entered the Governor Pedro Herrera’s house, and having placed the basket of fruit before him, without speaking a word, she seated herself on a bench; her appearance was like the following:

She was quite naked, except where modesty forbids, such being the custom throughout all this country; she was old, and painted black, with long hair down to her waist; and her ear-rings had so weighed her ears down, as to make

them reach her shoulders, a thing wonderful to see; she had them split down the middle and filled with rings of a certain carved wood, very light, which wood, in their language, is called *Cacoma*. Her nails were immoderately long, her teeth were black, her mouth large, and she had a ring in her nostrils, called by them *Caricori*; so that she appeared like a monster to us, rather than a human being.²⁹

The accompanying woodcut in Benzoni's account, entitled *Indiana maravigliosa in Cumana* depicts an Amerindian woman resting on a rocky or earthen mound before three Spaniards, separated by and seated behind a table; their astonishment indicated by hand gestures. A fourth Spaniard enters on the right, carrying a covered dish, implying that the men are about to eat, and indeed plates and provisions have already been placed on the table.³⁰ What is most notable about the woman's representation is that her naked body is covered with a crisscross pattern, an effort presumably to represent the black paint described in the text, but instead it appears like tattoos.

When the De Brys translated Benzoni's text for volumes IV to VI of the *Great Voyages*, they not only published the account in German and Latin, they incorporated a total of twenty-four illustrations, four based on Benzoni's original woodcuts but the majority of their own design and interpretation. A comparison with the corresponding copperplate engraving in the De Bry edition indicates that while the De Brys preserved the basic story line, they introduced a number of modifications and elaborations that alter the comparison between the naked Indian woman and the Spanish men.

In the original woodcut, the encounter takes place outside. The Spaniards are shaded by a roof, propped up by a pole while the Indian woman sits on a rock. The translator of the 1857 English edition adds a note: "Benzoni's expression is *sopra una banca*, and his view represents the lady seated on a *bank* of earth. But "banca" is also a bench, and the De Brys figure her as sitting on a regular bench. The discrepancy is more in manner than in matter. (Trans.)."³¹ In the

De Bry version (Figure 2.1), the encounter takes place within the governor's European styled house, its large square windows affording views of the landscape outside and its tiled floor establishing the rational Alberti perspective of the architectural space. The Cumana woman is depicted twice, once arriving on the right (the composition is reversed from Benzoni's) and again seated before the men. The dramatic crisscross pattern that Benzoni intended to represent the black paint with which she is covered is omitted by the De Brys.

Instead the De Brys focus on the large piercings in her ears and nose, as well as her claw-like hands, also seen with Benzoni, and her masculine musculature. The offering of the basket of fruit is placed on the ground, between the Cumana woman and the Spanish men, but the De Brys emphasize its placement in the center of the composition, opening up the shape of the basket to give greater emphasis to the tropical fruits within. The woman is now confronted by six men, one seated and the others standing, all of them much more dramatic and expressive in their erect gestures, conveying their 'wonderment', if not their abhorrence at the appearance of this woman who in contrast, sits slouched over with her long-nailed hands resting on her knees. She is passive, presenting herself and the fruit openly before the men in an act of welcome. The men appear engaged in excited, frantic conversation; she, as Benzoni recounts, is silent. Much more attention is given to the men's varied elaborate costume. Combined with the exaggerated poses, they appear like costume plates. With the table now omitted, there is no separation between the Europeans and the Amerindian, only a gulf of open space marked by the basket so that difference is more emphatically exposed. Comparison is set up between outside (nature) and inside (architecture), female and male and most emphatically nakedness and clothing. While the Cumana woman enters on the right in the de Bry version, with her hands raised to balance the basket on her head, her nakedness but for a small loin cloth is fully on display to the reader; all

the more exposed or bare, with the painted or patterned covering omitted. Theodor De Bry stated that nudity was “unacceptable for anyone, let alone for Christians,” but such disapproval did not prevent him from embellishing his illustrations with these details. Groesen recounts examples where de Bry regularly depicted the indigenous population as naked even when the original narratives provided no such commentary.³²

Both Benzoni and the De Brys provide labels to guide the astonished reader who undoubtedly is drawn first to the pictures before turning to the main text. Benzoni’s heading, *Indiana maravigliosa in Cumana*, is translated as “the marvelous or wonderful Indian woman in Cumana.” Marvel and wonder were words frequently used to describe European reactions to unfamiliar sights in the New World. In studying the initial reactions Europeans had to America, Stephen Greenblatt describes wonder as an instinctive recognition of difference which causes heightened attention which happens in the face of the new; what Descartes describes as “a sudden surprise of the soul.”³³ But it was also used to describe indigenous reactions to European men, their customs and artifacts. Reactions of wonder and marvel were employed to convey the incommensurate nature of difference.

Within Benzoni’s detailed recounting of the encounter, specific adjectives and phrases reflect his personal assessment: the woman’s long ears “so weighted” by the wooden earrings as to reach her shoulders convey excess and yet are described as “a thing wonderful to see;” the length of her nails is “immoderate,” suggesting that their excessive length is a result of poor judgment; her mouth is large and her teeth are black – all suggesting excess, with the final judgment being that she appeared like a monster (some translations say “mythical animal”) rather than a human being. This written description along with the woodcut provided the material on which the De Brys based their more elaborate illustrations. It is unfortunate that Benzoni was

unable to capture the woman's impressions of the Spanish men who must have themselves, appeared excessively dressed in the Caribbean climate.

The text accompanying the De Bry plate states that: "After he had spent several days on the island of Cumana, one of the wives of the king of that province came to Governor Petro Errera bearing an enormous basket of fruit grown on the island. This woman was so deformed and hideous in appearance ("deformis & prodigiosa") that Benzoni was stupefied and could not look at her new and strange figure. She looked more like some sort of monster than a human being."³⁴ Where does the de Bry version take liberties? Benzoni does not describe the basket as enormous, nor does he depict it as such in the print and while it must be clearly understood that the fruits would be indigenous, Benzoni never explicitly states this as the De Brys did, so that the presence of the fruit is given added emphasis both in the De Bry text and image.

The De Brys characterize the woman's overall appearance as "prodigiosa", translated as hideous here, but also prodigious which is closer to marvelous and well within Benzoni's tone. The De Brys' use of the adjective "deformed" (deformis), meaning her body is mis-shapened (as opposed to Benzoni's original references to the color of her teeth and painted skin) could be based on Benzoni's description of her long pierced ears and nails may seem extreme. However, Groesen points out that Theodor De Bry's Protestant ideals included a rejection of all forms of bodily mutilation including self-mutilation, considered by Europeans to be "an intolerable offence to the corporal integrity of that divinely created entity in God's own likeness."³⁵ Murder, warfare, rape, and torture were all present throughout the De Bry volumes, hardly surprising since these accounts were endemic to the original text. They were however, not the primary focus of Benzoni's images. The De Bry volume IV devotes twelve prints, or fully one half of the illustrations to scenes of drowning, execution, imprisonment, warfare, murder, massacre,

cannibalism, torture and mass suicide. Self-mutilation, which included tattooing and piercing however, was more conspicuous in the De Bry collection than in the assembled original accounts. The most noteworthy contradictory statement from de Bry is that Benzoni “was stupefied and could not look at her new and strange figure,” when in fact, Benzoni states that he could not turn away: “such a woman as I have never before nor since seen the like of; so that my eyes could not be satisfied with looking at her for wonder.” Whether this is a deliberate departure or a mis-translation, the co-mingling of repulsion and desire that lies at the heart of the encounter with difference is encapsulated here.

Benzoni provides the indigenous terminology given to the type of wood and the rings, valuable records that fall outside of the details the De Brys opted to highlight in their lengthy caption and so these artifacts are unnamed. Benzoni unfortunately does not note the indigenous name of the woman; instead her label refers only to her ethnicity and place of origin. The display and evaluation of the female body as a site of difference involves an analogy to the exchange of fruit. The woman is associated with nature, fertility, lusciousness, taste, but also with temptation and sin.

If Sir John Mandeville attempted to contextualize the naked foreign strangers of the mythical island of Lamary through reference to biblical precedence established by Adam and Eve in paradise, the De Brys invoked a similar rationale, choosing to preface *Volume I* of the *Great Voyages* with a full scale, elaborately detailed depiction of the *Temptation and Fall* (Figure 2.2). The first volume of the *Great Voyages* opens, not with an image of the New World or a depiction of its indigenous population but instead with an image of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This image serves to guide the reader in the interpretation of the initial volume and eventually through the series as a whole. It establishes an immediate comparison between

the New World and a European concept or construction of Paradise. And it indicates that the European readers should glean a morality lesson through the study of the inhabitants of these little-known places and form a comparison with their own civilization. The naked Adam and Eve, facing us and backing us respectively, stand in the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge at the moment of temptation, represented by the hybrid half serpent- half human.

Volume I of the *Great Voyages* reprinted Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* and included twenty three copperplate engravings reproducing the extraordinary watercolors painted by John White, the artist who accompanied the British expedition of 1564. The presentation of this biblical scene at the beginning of the volume has been explained as a preface to the first attempt to establish an English colony in America, and as such is "...emblematic of Europe's hope that the western hemisphere would prove a new Eden of peace and plenty."³⁶ The plate could be interpreted more broadly as a preface to the *Great Voyages* series as a whole. While de Bry seems not to have envisioned the scope of the series at this early stage, for later readers and consumers of the epic project, this remained the introduction and entry point to the assembled recounting of the New World. The image of Adam and Eve was a reminder to readers of a long lost paradise and established a comparison with the New World as revealed in these volumes. The depiction of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the subsequent Fall had traditionally referenced man's relationship to the natural world with its unlimited fertility which required cultivation, and the vast array of creatures which needed to be tamed, implying man's right to rule over both animals and plants. The natural world was the prime demonstration of God's omnipotence, created to accommodate and nurture humanity.

The De Brys' engraving is based on an original image by the Netherlandish artist Joos van Winghe (1542/44, Brussels -1603, Frankfurt).³⁷ The engraving is accompanied by an

introduction by Theodor de Bry addressed to the reader which contextualizes his decision to begin with this image:

Although (friendly Reader) man by his disobedience was deprived of those good gifts wherewith he was endowed in his creation, yet he was not bereft of wit to provide for himself, nor discretion to devise things necessary for his use, except such as appertain to his soul's health, as may be gathered by these *savage nations* of whom this present work treats. For although they have no true knowledge of GOD nor of his holy word and are destitute of all learning, yet they pass us in many things, as in sober feeding and dexterity of wit in making, without any instrument or metal, things so neat and so fine as a man would scarcely believe the same, had not the Englishmen made proof thereof by their travels into the country.³⁸

De Bry explains that despite the expulsion from paradise, man was ingenious enough to provide for himself in the world, and this is confirmed by “savage nations” of the New World such as that presented in *Volume I*. This suggests that the Algonquin Indians who featured in Hariot's report, and by extension the Amerindians of the New World, provide contemporary access to a distant, biblical origin for Europeans, but also that this paradise continues to exist across the Atlantic Ocean and can in fact be regained. De Bry goes on to explain that although the indigenous inhabitants have no learning and no knowledge of God, they surpass the European “in many things”. De Bry refers specifically to their more modest eating habits and their ingenuity in making objects required for daily living. He credits the exploits of the English expedition with providing ‘proof’ of these advances; far from advocating European domination over these people, de Bry suggests Europeans have much to learn from observing – through his publication – the ways of these overseas people.

Adam and Eve appear naked in the fertile setting of the Garden of Eden, which provides effortless access to food for the picking. The consequences of the Fall can be seen in the small vignettes in the background depicting scenes after their expulsion from paradise: physical pain

(child rearing) and labor (husbandry). The image establishes the precedents for much of what readers would see in the following illustrations; nudity or a lack of clothing by European standards, and pristine, original nature as a provider of ready sustenance are two themes that would become indelible tropes in representations of the New World and particularly the tropics. In particular it is the subject matter of the image, the temptation, the seduction of man symbolized by the offering of fruit that encapsulates man's expulsion from safe haven, paradise, now vulnerable to all the unknown threats that lie beyond. The depiction of women, particularly the naked woman offering fruit would be indelibly associated with sexual availability. The distant scenes of child rearing and crop cultivation would also reappear in depictions of the first two volumes of the *Great Voyages* as part of their intended purpose was to encourage Europeans to migrate west.

The Launch of the Great Voyages

The De Bry collection of voyages is remarkable for its heterogeneity; the texts were drawn from a variety of authors from different periods, and assembled together, translated into a unified language and then illustrated. The thirteen volumes of the *Great Voyages* were not published in the chronological order in which the historical events occurred. Instead, texts were chosen as they became available, and according to the contingencies of the book market, among other factors. As the series developed, Theodor de Bry and his sons took increasing liberties in editing the texts and particularly in constructing the images. As a result, the reading of the volumes is not a straight-forward exercise. A brief description of the first three volumes helps to contextualize the structure and appearance of the subsequent volumes.

The illustrations in the first two volumes of the De Bry collection were accompanied by captions that commented positively on the indigenous inhabitants the English and the French encountered. Groesen suggests that the positive tone was also closely related to consecutive crop failures in Europe in the early 1590s, as a result of adverse climatic conditions. Influenced as well by Protestant doctrine endorsing moderation, Volumes I and II reveal a critical view of European decadence and excess which would be associated with the Protestant beliefs of the De Brys. Agricultural scenes and references to moderate eating habits, prevalent in the early volumes, would largely be absent from the ensuing twenty-three volumes of the collection. Groesen also points out that the De Brys were particularly concerned with the immorality of overindulgence when it came to the consumption of alcohol since excessive drinking was associated with sinful behavior, including lust and sexual activity.³⁹

The carefully detailed ethnographic records provided by these drawings by White which were rare in illustrations at this time, served as important models for the De Brys' future publications. For the next four volumes of the *Great Voyages* which were published before his death, Theodor de Bry, along with his sons, began to work more independently in the creation of the illustrations, having only rudimentary woodcuts from the journals of Hans Staden (reproduced in Volume III) and Girolomo Benzoni to guide them. At the same time, a number of significant changes occurred. The indigenous figures became less idealized or classicized in their representation. In addition, figures of Europeans were often added to illustrations to emphasize contrast in posture, dress and mannerisms so that scenes of the New World were understood in comparison and in opposition to a normative Europe.

A notable shift is evident in the series beginning with Volume III, published in 1592. The De Brys, who had become booksellers and publishers by this time, began taking more liberties

with the compilation of both text and images. This volume, devoted to the Tupinamba Indians in Brazil relied on two texts: one by the German adventurer Hans Staden, a member of the Spanish and Portuguese galleons who was held prisoner by the Tupinamba for nine months; and the text by the Protestant Jean de Lery, who accompanied Villegaignon's expedition to Brazil in 1557.⁴⁰ The De Brys paraphrased much of Lery's text, and lacking the carefully documented illustrations that had been available to them when publishing the first two volumes, they devised an iconography from a variety of sources in a liberal and sensational manner. Bucher said of Theodor de Bry's strategy, "He scorned no evidence or document and did not scruple to interpret or plagiarize every illustration he encountered whether it concerned the subject of his book directly or had only a distant relation to it."⁴¹

The subject matter commencing with Volume III was much more sensational, graphic and violent, focusing more on the brutality of the Spanish colonizers but equally with the sensationalized images of cannibalism among the Tupinamba. Relying on the small, rough woodcuts included in Hans Staden's original 1557 account of his year-long trials as a captive among the Tupinamba tribe in Brazil, de Bry devoted nine of the twenty-nine illustrations in Volume III to the execution and ritual preparation and eating of prisoners as described by Staden, giving the subject unprecedented focus. Bucher has described the different compositional devices de Bry used to transfer the narrative's temporal relations into the rectangular space provided by the page and the book. These formats include the monoscenic view in which a single action is depicted in its entirety in a single plate; the simultaneous method in which several actions take place at the same time in the same plate; a cyclic method in which actions which occur in sequence are represented in one plate often in a circular order that reproduces by contiguity, the temporal order in which they took place; and the serial method in which the narrative is broken

into several plates, somewhat like present-day comic strips. Bucher notes that the way de Bry chose to arrange these events in one or several plates is significant in itself and presents significant interpretation of the reported facts. It was this last method that de Bry used for his graphic and detailed recounting of the Tupinamba cannibal rituals, images that became synonymous with the series as a whole and had lasting impact.

America IV-VI: An introduction to the Caribbean

In Volume IV, the De Brys presented the origins of the European encounter with and exploitation of the New World, beginning with Columbus' 1492 transatlantic voyage and arrival in the Caribbean as relayed by Benzoni. Each volume was introduced with an elaborate title page which was paradigmatic in several respects, condensing the major themes to be found in the ensuing pages. Maïke Christadler has written about the deliberate use of the frontispieces as a part of the De Brys' advertising strategy. The design became identifiable with the series as a whole and the artistic quality easily distinguished them among contemporary European books. They also provided cues to the content of the individual volumes, typically featuring portraits of famous explorers or conquistadors, cartographic material and ethnographic depictions of foreign 'savages' with particular emphasis on the more sensational or exotic themes. Christadler also argues that collectively, the frontispieces reveal changes in the intent of the representation as the series progressed.⁴²

The frontispiece for *Volume IV* provides an interesting contrast to its predecessors in *Volumes I to III* and indicates immediately that the reader is in new territory.⁴³ While all present a centralized text announcing the content of the book, the first three volumes frame this within an elaborate classical temple facade. It is within this architectural structure that the tropes of the

New World are inserted. In the frontispiece for America III, the decorative pediment is supported by two piers with alcoves, each housing two Brazilian Indians, naked with classically proportioned bodies. The male figure on the left is identified with the New World with his feathered headdress, as is the female on the right with a young infant tied to her back. But most sensationally, they are in the act of devouring human limbs. The enthusiasm for cannibalism is emphasized by two more figures perched above the pediment. In the lowest register of the page, between two alcoves with Greek vases there is a scene of fire with roasting limbs. It is the decontextualized juxtaposition of imagery, one representing the height of classical, ordered, rational civilization, and the other sensationalized savagery that makes the image so astonishing.⁴⁴

The frontispiece for *Volume IV* (Figure 2.3) maintains the same structure of three alcoves arranged vertically in the center of the composition but now the solidity of the architecture is replaced by an expanse of open ocean above which rises an untamed, rocky landscape, home to an orgy-like arrangement of variously adorned Amerindians who are for the most part naked. The rocky arched opening at the bottom affords passage to the three European sailing ships that accompanied Columbus' first voyage. Dwarfed by the scale and wildness of the landscape, the explorers seem to be disappearing into an unknown and uncivilized realm to be revealed in the successive pages. At the summit in a rock-hewn alcove is a monstrous winged figure. He sits enthroned with a wolf-like head and most astonishingly, a second monstrous face revealed on his chest. This recalls the early representations of the Blemmyes, a nomadic Nubian tribe from antiquity, described by the geographer Strabo and renowned for their cannibalistic practices and their strange appearance, having "shoulders so high that the face seems to be in the chest," which was precisely how they were depicted.

Ann Rosalind Jones identifies a total of seventeen idols depicted throughout the De Brys' collection, all hybrids combining and reconfiguring a variety of animal attributes. She describes this frightening idol presented on the frontispiece to *Volume IV* as a new invention by the De Brys beyond the descriptions provided by Benzoni and suggests a possible source for the mysterious second face appearing on the figure's chest: the Christian iconographic tradition of the mouth of hell. By way of example, Jones cites the Flemish artist Hans Memling's *Reigning Devil* painted on the right front wing of the *Triptych of Earthly Vanity and Divine Salvation* (ca. 1485) located in Musee des Beaux-Arts in Strasbourg.⁴⁵ The worshipping of idols was particularly repugnant to members of the Reformed church who considered the adoration of any images blasphemous; in subsequent commentary added to Benzoni's own, the De Brys, in a snub to Catholicism linked such New World heathenism to the adoration of deceased saints.⁴⁶

The title page, as the introduction to the volume overall, presents the reader with a wild, uncultivated landscape of naked and frenzied Indians worshipping satanic idols, all familiar tropes described by Mandeville and others, every marker of savagery except cannibalism. That and more however would be detailed in the illustrations. There is this curious contrast between symbols of classical beauty and savagery indicating the great distance between them and yet they are incorporated into a system of balance and hierarchy. The nude figures, paired as male and female New World Adams and Eves reaching out to this hybrid idol and praising him as their deity, clearly establish the challenge to the sailors below in their Christianizing mission.⁴⁷ Jones describes the scene as "a motley crew of disorganized naked Indians. Their bare buttocks and scrambling motions contrast vividly to the elegantly dressed and poised Europeans depicted elsewhere in the De Brys' prints, in which the dignified carriage associated with Old World civility is set against the strained, contorted bodies of the Indians."⁴⁸ She credits the De Brys

with deliberately sensationalizing the more balanced and ethnographic material presented by Benzoni. Groesen on the other hand notes that Benzoni's blatantly anti-Spanish commentary was the most controversial and politically problematic text to be included; the De Brys had to make a number of adjustments to "water down" down his criticism when turning the full texts into captions "where the sharpest edges of Benzoni's often polemical reports and the even more contentious annotations by the Genevan editor Urbain Chauveton were blunted. Several vivid details of Spanish cruelties were not considered suitable for repetition in the captions, a remarkable feat as the De Brys seemed to thrive on precisely such spectacular details in other volumes, regarding other issues."⁴⁹

This overview of the first three volumes and a description of the basic format provide some context in which to understand how the De Brys proceeded with the production of images for *Volumes IV to VI* to illustrate Benzoni's text. The travel narrative written and assembled by Girolamo Benzoni is quite remarkable in its ability to convey to the reader the absolute new-ness of this overseas world and its people. But equally he also interpreted with considerable compassion and admiration, the process of obvious transformation that was taking place around him and the very real potential for its devastating consequences in this violent clash of cultures.

Benzoni's original woodcuts were direct and somewhat clumsy, probably copied from his original drawings onto blocks by an unskilled artist. They are quite different from the much more detailed woodcuts and engravings possible at the time. Nevertheless, Jones notes they still communicate his ethnographic interests clearly.⁵⁰ But the majority of these were apparently of no interest to the De Brys. Only four of these were translated into copperplate engravings, three for *Volume IV*, one for *Volume V* and none in *Volume VI*, these being the three volumes that

correspond to the three “Books” contained in Benzoni’s *History of the New World*. The De Brys produced a total of 78 engravings for the three volumes (*IV, V, VI*), only four of which were based on Benzoni’s woodcuts. What then did they add? In *Volume IV*, the De Brys created seven engravings depicting the exploits of Christopher Columbus and his men. This spans from an allegorical depiction of Columbus discovering America, guided by the classical deities Diana and Neptune along with a host of sirens based on an earlier drawing by Stradanus, through depictions of the major events of his three voyages concluding with his arrest and eventual vindication. But the majority of scenes and arguably the most impactful ones focus on the extremely violent encounters between the Spanish and the Indians.

The second scene by Benzoni which the De Brys chose to translate from woodcut to engraving, Plate 16, is one of the most exotically violent, involving torture, murder, mutilation and cannibalism as well as nudity, and is entitled *How the Indians poured melted gold down the mouths of the Spaniards*. Several of Benzoni’s anecdotes focus on the Spaniards’ insatiable greed for gold and provide detailed descriptions of the deplorable punishments inflicted on the Indians when they did not supply what was requested, and sometimes even when they did. Plate 20 (Figure 2.4) depicts one incident in which the Amerindians exacted revenge against Balbao’s men, rising up in rebellion and crying out “Die the wicked, treacherous, rascally Christians, who do not deserve to live on the earth.” Benzoni describes the fate of those conquistadors they caught alive, particularly the captains: “they [the Indians] used to tie the hands and feet, throw them down on the ground, and pour gold into their mouth, saying: “Eat, eat gold, Christian;” and the more to ill-treat and disgrace them, with knives made of flint, some cut off an arm, some a shoulder, others a leg, and then roasting it on the embers, eat it, dancing and singing, suspending the bones in their temples, or in the houses of their chiefs, trophies of victory.”⁵¹

The original woodcut accompanying Benzoni's text contains eight figures, all approximately the same size: in the right foreground corner two Indians use long pieces of bamboo reed to blow on the fire to melt the gold, while one Indian pours the liquid metal down the mouth of a bound Spaniard and another brings more of the liquid metal. In the distance a crouched figure cuts off his victim's limbs and beyond that, another sits by a fire munching the roasted limbs. All the figures are nude and there is very little to distinguish them beyond torturer and victim. In the De Brys' engraving there are now a total fourteen figures, eleven Amerindians and three Spaniards in a scene of increased complexity and drama. The captive Spanish captain is now more prominently laid out across the foreground of the composition, set upon by no less than five Indians as the melted gold is poured into his mouth. The Spaniard is fully dressed to more emphatically differentiate him from the Indians and to emphasize the extent of his disrobing in the subsequent scenes of punishment as a metaphor for the stripping away of his civility. The Indians in a number of dramatic and twisting poses are muscular and nude except for small loin cloths, all but the central figure with a cape, hat and nose rings, directing the actions. There is an attempt to indicate tropical rather than generic trees (even though Benzoni had studied and identified specific trees) and the inclusion of three huts which have been extracted from Hans Staden's depictions of the Brazilian Tupinamba.

The De Brys counter this with a scene of sadomasochistic cruelty on the part of the Spanish not depicted by Benzoni: "Following the South Sea, traversing the Isthmus of Panama, Balboa meets Indians dressed as women who engaged in acts of sodomy (Figure 2.5). Balboa threw forty indigenous Indians to attack dogs he used in his travels." Once again the most violent and gruesome events are laid out before the viewer in the foreground. The Indians, naked except for their small loin cloths, are ferociously attacked by dogs the size of lions that proceed to rip

the victims apart amidst decapitated heads and bones. Behind them a frieze-like band of Spaniards look on with apparent amusement. The De Brys again emphasize the elaborate and varied details of their dress and affected postures, including all manner of helmets, swords, canes, standards and flags. By highlighting the contrast between lavish adornment and inhumane savagery, the De Brys emphasize the artifice of Europe's civility. The composition is divided in two, between which there is no indication of empathy or common purpose. Clothing served as a primary marker of civility and social hierarchy and the De Brys employed it to full advantage to accentuate the contrasts between Europeans and non-Europeans. Within Volume IV, the scene of Columbus' arrival in Hispaniola and greeting the Amerindians for the first time; the Spanish conquistadors poised as spectators as dogs attack and devour Indians accused of sodomy; the woman of Cumana bringing a gift of fruit to the newly arrived Europeans – in all cases the composition is divided, presenting the elaborately costumed Europeans standing imposingly in front of or over the naked aborigines. Not only did they routinely elaborate the Spanish costume, on a number of occasions they depicted the Amerindians naked, even when the source material clearly indicated otherwise. Perhaps the clearest example occurs in Volume V in the last of the four scenes depicted by both Benzoni and the De Brys. Benzoni describes in the text and a small woodcut, the Indians of Nicaragua dancing. He explains the stages of the Nicaraguans' *mitote* (dances) and illustrates pairs of men and women, some holding branches and flowers, skipping in a circular formation which recalls Arcadian dances. The men and women are all fully and completely dressed. In the De Brys' interpretation, the transformation is nothing short of scandalous. The dance is now solely the occupation of men, all young, muscular and virtually all naked. It becomes an opportunity for the De Brys to illustrate these classical physiques in a

shopping list of physically challenging poses, bowing, leaping, skipping, seen from the front as well as from behind while a group of women watch passively from a distance at the left.⁵²

Scenes of Slavery

One of the most remarkable additions to *Volume V* which Benzoni did not translate into images, indeed one of the most remarkable contributions to the *Great Voyages* and ultimately the history of the printed image, is the four engravings documenting the introduction into the Caribbean, and specifically Hispaniola, of African slaves. These are amongst the very earliest depictions of African slavery in the New World and are all the more remarkable given the prominence of those figures within the scenes. Ernst van den Boogaart explains that the subject of slavery was both familiar and strange to European audiences. At the time these volumes were published at the end of the sixteenth century, Spain, Portugal and Southern Italy each accommodated a small slave population but in France, England and the Netherlands slavery was forbidden by law.⁵³

The theme of slavery is first introduced by the De Brys in Volume IV with plate 4 (Figure 2.6) depicting the enslaved Amerindians, men, women and children, on the coast of Venezuela being readied for transport to the Caribbean islands. The emphasis is on the devastating and fatal effect the brutal treatment of the Spanish has had on the indigenous population who are on the brink of extermination. This serves as an introduction for Volume V in which the first four plates were devoted to the subject of African slaves in Hispaniola. Van den Boogaart emphasizes that Benzoni did not provide any images of this subject and that Theodor De Bry is responsible for introducing the theme of “overseas slavery” into the illustration of printed European travel reports.⁵⁴ Presuming that the De Brys were without

pictorial representations to rely on, van den Boogaart states that they were dependent on Benzoni's written text. Book Two of Benzoni's *History of the New World* begins:

When the natives of this island (Española) began to be extirpated, the Spaniards provided themselves with blacks (Mori) from Guinea, which was a conquest of the king of Portugal's, and they have brought great numbers thence. When there were mines, they made them work at the gold and silver; but since those came to an end they have increased the sugar-works, and in these and in tending the flocks they are chiefly occupied, besides serving their masters in all else.⁵⁵

The text which the De Brys added to accompany each of the images makes it clear the introduction of African slave labor was intended to make up for the failed attempts to enslave Amerindians. The first plate is devoted to the use of African slave labor in the on-going mining for gold dust, an enterprise which is soon exhausted. The second plate, titled *The veins of gold ore having been exhausted, the Blacks had to work in sugar*, introduces the sugar cane plantation, depicting the process of production within this proto-industrial setting (Figure 2.7). Slaves bring the harvested cane in from the back fields where it is ground with a large mill wheel rotated with manual labor, boiled in the large metal tayche and stored in smaller clay pots or moulds. Two youths in the foreground sorting the cut stalks of cane reinforce the circular composition, emphasizing the cyclical production based on division of labor. The De Brys have captured the stages of production from harvesting to refining that took place within the plantation yard; they captured in visual form one of the first known recordings of these new commodities, sugar as well as the African slaves as the new labor force that would replace gold as the material wealth that fed Europe. But none of this is described in Benzoni.

Some of the best known early images of sugar production in the New World describe plantations in Brazil, notably those by Frans Post, but these date to the middle of the seventeenth century. The De Brys must have relied on additional sources to provide them with the

information required to create such a complex scene, and given the details of process and tools, it is presumed that they had the benefit of visual source material. In addition to standing as one of the earliest images of African slavery in the New World, they are also one of the first known illustrations of sugar production in the New World according to Jerome Handler, calling it “the fanciful depiction of the De Bry brothers...based on a brief passage in Benzoni (and perhaps other voyagers).”⁵⁶

The earliest known sugar mill in the New World was located in Jamaica at the Sevilla la Nueva and dates from 1513 although it did not begin milling sugar until 1515 when Francesco de Garay, the second governor of the then-Spanish island arrived.⁵⁷ Garay was a former slave trader in the Bahamas who had made his fortune in Caribbean gold mines before turning to his considerable wealth in part towards the construction of a water-powered mill in Sevilla la Nueva, capable of churning out 150 tons of sugar a year for European markets. This example embodies the specifics of what Benzoni was describing, this transition from gold mining to sugar cultivation, the establishment of plantations and factories, and the importation of slaves beginning in the early part of the sixteenth century. Antonio Benítez-Rojo records that by 1516 Hispaniola had its first hydraulically powered mill and by 1518 a royal decree from Charles V licensed the importation of four thousand slaves from Africa to the Antilles, half of these to Hispaniola. This was followed by the importation of another four thousand Africans in 1523, despite the slave rebellion recorded the year before.⁵⁸

The African slaves depicted by the De Brys are exclusively adult males, and are represented as being both strong and industrious. This is perhaps most evident in Plate 1 (Figure 2.8) representing gold mining, where the Africans deposit baskets of gold dust literally at the feet

of the Spanish who stand or sit idly by. Again the composition is organized to emphasize difference: in addition to the juxtaposition of African labor to Spanish idleness, the elaborate Spanish costumes contrast with the African bodies dressed only in loincloths or shorts, as well as architecture backing the Europeans with landscape behind the slaves.

These labor intensive scenes set the stage for the next two images highlighting the brutality (Figure 2.9) and exploitation of Spanish slave system: *Slave Punishments on Hispaniola*; followed by resistance of black slaves depicted in *The First Revolt of Black Slaves* (Figure 2.10). Here Benzoni's commentary was more extensive:

And there being among the Spaniards some who are not only cruel, but very cruel, when a man occasionally wished to punish a slave, either for some crime that he had committed, or for not having done a good day's work, or for spite that he had towards him, or for not having extracted the usual quantity of silver or gold from the mine, when he came home at night, instead of giving him supper, he made him undress, if he happened to have a shirt on, and being thrown down on the ground, he had his hands and feet tied to a piece of wood laid across, so permitted under the rule called by the Spaniards the Law of BAIONA, a law suggested, I think, by some great demon; then with a thong or rope he was beaten, until his body streamed with blood; which done, they took a pound of pitch or a pipkin of boiling oil, and threw it gradually all over the unfortunate victim; then he was washed with some of the country pepper mixed with salt and water. He was thus left on a plank covered over with a cloth, until the master thought he was again able to work. Others dug a hole in the ground and put the man in upright, leaving only his head out, and left him in it all night, the Spaniards saying that they have recourse to this cure because the earth absorbs the blood and preserves the flesh from forming any wound, so they get well sooner. And if any die (which sometimes happens) through great pain, there is no heavier punishment by law than that the master shall pay another (slave) to the king. Thus, on account of these very great cruelties in the beginning, some of them escaped from their masters, and wandered about the island in a state of desperation. They have gradually multiplied, however, to such a degree, that they have caused, and still cause the Spanish population a deal of trouble.⁵⁹

Benzoni estimates that by this time in the middle of the sixteenth century there are upwards of seven thousand African slaves on the island of Hispaniola. He recounts a slave

uprising which occurred in 1545 while he was resident there, in which the “Cimaroni” or maroons had joined in a general rebellion, “scouring every part of the island, and doing all the mischief they could.” The Spanish admiral Don Luigi Colombo, sent messengers to negotiate peace, offering to send priests or monks to instruct them in Christian doctrine. They responded, according to Benzoni, that “they believed in the doctrine of Christ and wished for it but would not accept of Spanish friendship, for they did not trust in their promises.” Benzoni warned in his final commentary, “Many Spaniards prophesy for certain, that the island in a short time will fall entirely into the hands of these blacks.”⁶⁰

Van den Boogaart’s study offers a comparative look at the depiction of slavery in both the Americas (*Great Voyages*) and Africa (*Small Voyages*) and suggests that this broad perspective impacted European thinking on slavery in two ways: it supported the argument that slavery was justified because of its wide-spread practice across diverse cultures; but it also highlighted the “paradoxical bifurcation” between north-western Europe where slavery and servile labor had disappeared and the colonies where unfree labor, particularly by black Africans had expanded. This may have influenced European thinking around this time which no longer was consensually regarded as universal, but rather differentiated by geographical and climatic factors and distance.⁶¹ The De Brys were not advocating for abolition; they were illustrating one more way in which the abhorrent exploitation of the Spanish equalled, if not exceeded, the savage and uncivilized actions of the ‘natives.’ Nevertheless, the dramatic and graphic nature of the De Bry volumes and their extensive popularity ensured that they were impactful. But in addition, because these four images of African slavery are without known precedent, their importance was all the greater and it has been proposed that they may have strengthened the argument that slavery was “morally polluting and historically anachronistic.”⁶²

These images with their emphasis on the inhumane violence of slavery in colonial America were, according to Van den Boogaart, “invented by the De Brys and [were] unequalled until the abolitionist campaigns of the eighteenth century.”⁶³ The term “invented” which is also used by Groesen along with “constructed” would need to incorporate an understanding that there were most likely additional sources available at the time that informed these illustrations and suggest a wider availability of imagery than has survived to the present time. But this also emphasizes the improvisatory nature of assembling written and visual material to describe the New World, not all of which may have originated in descriptions of the region. For example the De Brys’ illustration of sugar production in the 1590s may have depended on images of similar facilities in Brazil or the Canaries, Madeira or Cape Verde Islands.

In addition to the innovation of representing this subject matter, the prominence given to the African figures in these early prints is also remarkable and as Boogaart has already noted above, was not equaled for more than a century.⁶⁴ The other innovative strategy that was expertly utilized by the De Brys was the use of narrative sequencing of images, strengthened by the interdependent captions. In this way, across the unfolding of the first four plates, the De Brys present the introduction of African slavery as an outcome of the genocide of the Amerindian population; the rise of the sugar plantation to replace the exhaustion of mining; the proto-industrial system implemented on the plantation that would be the basis of unprecedented wealth production for the colonizers; the transformative mode of proto-industrial production based on slave labor that would make sugar the “new” gold of the overseas world; but also the link with violence and rebellion.

Selective Representation and Absence

It is worth reflecting on what the De Brys chose not to show as well as how they altered what they did take from Benzoni. Of the eighteen images accompanying Benzoni's text, fifteen show peaceful scenes depicting specific details of Amerindian life including boat building and the making of cassava bread. In an article comparing Benzoni and De Bry, Ann Rosalind Jones is full of admiration for what she describes as Benzoni's balanced and ethnographic study of the Amerindians, noting that while he represents them as "strange," his text makes them "comprehensible as members of cultures he has lived in and whose ways of life he has observed for years." On the other hand, she finds that the De Brys exaggerate the otherness of the Indians, keeping them at a thrilling remove, "in a realm of untouchable alterity."⁶⁵ The De Brys, Jones explains, offered a completely different appeal to potential book buyers: "fascinated horror." Using the large folio format and the expressive detail made possible by the technological advances of copperplate engraving, the De Brys created crowded action scenes filled with naked bodies rendered to create a "riveting spectacle." Selecting episodes that lent themselves to startling graphic treatment, multiplying the number of figures in the greatly expanded pictorial scenes, emphasizing the savagery of the Indians by focusing on their naked bodies, and further crowding the images by inserting buildings and other details appropriated from other sources, the illustrations which were collectively organized at the back of each volume created an effect that was "overwhelming." Their intention was "to snow the viewer with a blitz of details, amazing events, and eye-popping atrocities..." that would channel "thrilled horror at naked savages and vicious Spanish conquistadors into an incitement to buy these massive, expensive books."⁶⁶ Jones accuses the De Brys of sacrificing Benzoni's objective neutrality and simplicity conveyed through his woodcuts through the overly-theatrical scenes of the engravings which she describes

in terms that make them seem akin to contemporary video games, as well as the luxurious and expensive objects which were the books themselves.

Groesen provides a very different interpretation. While the commercial success of this ambitious publishing venture was clearly their primary concern, the De Brys had to negotiate a highly volatile political terrain and were conscious at every step that they were under the watchful eye of Spanish Reformation censors. *Volume IV*, like all the other volumes, contained a preface that, like the title page, helped to frame and contextualize the contents of the volume. This introduction tried to assuage any possible political controversy over Benzoni's very antagonistic anti-Spanish content. In it Theodor De Bry warned readers:

But in order to have nobody attribute these vices as dishonorable and slanderous to the Spanish people, everyone should think for themselves what other people in other nations do. [...]Therefore we should not readily rebuke the Spaniards, but instead question ourselves if we are any better than they are, for I know many God-fearing and devout Spaniards, no fewer than in any other country. [...]For who does not know how gruesome the French, the Germans, the Walloons, and others have behaved in all expeditions and wars?⁶⁷

While Jones concentrates in her article on the images when comparing Benzoni and the De Brys, Groesen's in depth study primarily focuses on the De Brys' choice and manipulation of text. Groesen devotes painstaking detail to interpreting variations between the Latin and German editions as an indicator of publishing strategies and commercial interests in appealing to a wide and varied audience and appeasing Spanish and Portuguese censors. Jones describes the avant-garde publishing adventure undertaken by the De Brys as somehow comparable to the European colonizing exploits in the New World. While it could be argued the production of these books revolutionized the trajectory of modernism in much the same way that these travels did, Groesen is deliberate in presenting the *Great Voyages* as carefully manufactured, "doctored" representations of New World experiences. Theodor De Bry was living in a Europe held in the grip

of the Reformation where he knew what it was to live under the threat of persecution and this may have enabled him to better understand the transitory, shifting and provisional experience of an evolving New World. But ultimately Theodor De Bry never witnessed the subject of his illustrations with his own eyes. His images were always constructed from a position of removal. The challenge of translating lived experience into written words or images, from one medium into another, from one language into another is a matter of bridging a gap, or multiple gaps. The De Brys' distance was not just a physical distance, a matter of proximity to the action. It was also a question of intention. Jones wants to prioritize Benzoni's intention as an altruistic voice of the Amerindian, and Groesen argues that De Bry's intentions are ultimately commercial. But it is important to remember that Benzoni, like the De Brys, was producing a book. He inserts his own voice amongst the narratives of Columbus and Pizarro, giving equal visibility to his own discoveries. In such company he is thinking of his readers and his legacy. He is a contemporary of Las Casas and others who are taking a very vocal stance against Spanish colonization that is not without its own political manoeuvring. Ultimately the words and images of Benzoni as well as the amplification provided by the De Brys are assemblages of stories homogenized as encyclopedic eye-witness accounts turned back towards an eager Europe. They are both part of this mass production of ideas and imagery, synthesized, condensed, codified, edited, bound, distributed in a form that encapsulates the ambitions of the Enlightenment but which also launched the trajectory of accelerating and amplified dissemination of information circulating within a newly revealed, globalized world.

A Pictorial Legacy

The De Brys lacked the ethnographic expertise required to document the geographical range covered by what was eventually a fully globalized reach enveloped by the *Great and Small Voyages*. As a result, different indigenous groups spanning great distances and centuries were indiscriminately grouped together in the category “Indians.” Lacking real models, the De Brys made liberal use of the iconographic material that was available to at the time, borrowing widely from the Tupinamba of Brazil to the Algonquins of Virginia. According to Groesen the most frequent omission in transcribing and illustrating these accounts was the omission of clothing. Clothing was an important marker of identity and the civilizing process during the early modern period and as such, nakedness erased distinguishing characteristics of identity and instead conveyed uniformity. “Depicting many inhabitants of the New World and southern Africa in the nude blurred the cultural boundaries between adjacent and even geographically detached indigenous groups.”⁶⁸ Groesen notes that one representational instrument which the De Brys could have used to differentiate the wide ranging populations addressed in these texts was skin color. Travellers often did comment on the color of the indigenous peoples they encountered, and the De Brys accurately copied these statements, but refrained from conveying this information in the corresponding illustrations. It was only in the later seventeenth century that the discourse of racism emerged, and the degree of blackness become a powerful representational tool.⁶⁹ Instead, the wide-ranging nudity of the figures, even when illustrations or written descriptions indicated otherwise as well as the seemingly indiscriminate insertion of elements such as feathers or hair styles suggested that all inhabitants of the western hemisphere were to some extent interchangeable.

While these authors have posited differing and sometimes conflicting arguments concerning how these images should be read or what the De Brys' intentions were, they all acknowledge the highly constructed nature of the De Bry images and the published works as a whole. And all acknowledge the enduring popularity and influence of the images, fuelled by this very mingling of fact and fable. These reports of foreign lands and peoples were framed as fantastic and exotic, using models that had been established within classical literature. The De Brys published many different types of books which incorporated copperplate engravings but none had the wide scale and enduring impact of the *Great Voyages*. This was certainly due in part to the nature of the travel journal which captured readers' imaginations in much the same way as space travel must have consumed audiences in the twentieth century. While the unprecedented spectacle of the accompanying images made the books significantly more desirable, the structure remained influenced by the long-standing traditions of travel writing.

During the sixteenth century, documentation became an essential part of travelling. While sponsors expected reports and maps which were often kept secret, there was also a growing public interest in these stories of distant and little-known places and this interest was an important way of attracting investment and eventually, settlers. With the mounting rivalry between European nation-states, the publication of travel accounts became a semi-official business and at the same time established the beginnings of imperial histories.⁷⁰ Sponsored expeditions were expected to document their ventures. They were instructed to keep careful records of their movements in order to direct the travelers who would follow in their footsteps, and to fill in the gaps of geographical knowledge, but as William H. Sherman points out, these instructions often included advice that specific and particular attention be paid to seeking out and

documenting that which might be “strange” to Europeans.⁷¹ Emphasis then became placed on difference, which was established through comparison with what was familiar.

Through its ambitious, revolutionary publishing enterprise, the De Brys influenced the European vision of the New World and in turn of Europe itself as it related to a newly reconfigured globe. While the thirteen volumes of the *Great Voyages* presented travel reports which had all previously been published, they were reformatted and represented with a series of lavish copperplate engravings, illustrating with unprecedented detail the lands, people and cultural practices described in the texts. While the De Brys relied on visual material provided for them for the first volume, they began to exercise increasing editorial liberties, inventing new images in a process that was analogous to the presumption of discovering new lands – claiming and renaming resources to reconfigure – in a narrated mingling of fact and fiction, what was new and rediscovered. Many of these constructions were based on familiar iconography, copying elements from other prints and paintings, and recontextualizing these scenes within the existing imagery of the New World. This technique was common practice in the early modern period and Groesen suggests this may have helped readers to better read and comprehend the illustrations.⁷² The Garden of Eden as paradise and a place of origin was also symbolic of man’s capacity for sin. This imagery intermingled with myths of savages, monsters and cannibals as the occupants of distant lands. The conflation of these two sources continued to function as analogy and context for the narratives of the New World.

These modifications to the previously published travel accounts had a major impact on how these reports were consumed by a European audience. The formal changes, notably upgrading of the often cheaply produced original accounts to large and heavy folio-sized books, changed the status of the publication. The translations from the vernacular into Latin, and

certainly the addition of skillfully made illustrations all combined to enhance the status and appeal of the accounts substantially. The impressiveness and lavish quality of the object itself – the book – affected its reading. The reader could not help but be impressed by these publications which in themselves became objects of desire and impacted significantly the way in which the New World came to be understood and continued to be valued for generations.

Volumes IV-VI of *The Great Voyages* were the last to be completed before Theodor de Bry's death in 1598. After his son Johan Theodor died 1623, his widow and sons-in-law continued to run the firm for a few years but by late 1626 the De Bry firm ceased to exist. The impact of the *Great Voyages* however, would endure for centuries.

Ad Praefectum Erreram feruntur munera
ab vxore Reguli Prouinciæ Cumanæ.

III.



DV M in Cumanam oratur, ad Petrum Erreram Praefectum venit precipui eius Prouinciæ Reguli vxor, qua illum patriis fructibus plenum gestans, oris corporisq; habitu tam deformis & prodigiosa specie, vt rei noua miraculo stupefactus Benzonijs, eam intueno oculos explere non posset: monstri enim cuiusdam potius, quam humanam speciem habebat.

Crude-

Figure 2.1 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 2: Indian Woman from Cumana*, 1594
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Figure 2.2 Joos van Winghe, *Great Voyages Vol I Plate 1: Adam and Eve – The Temptation and Fall*, 1590

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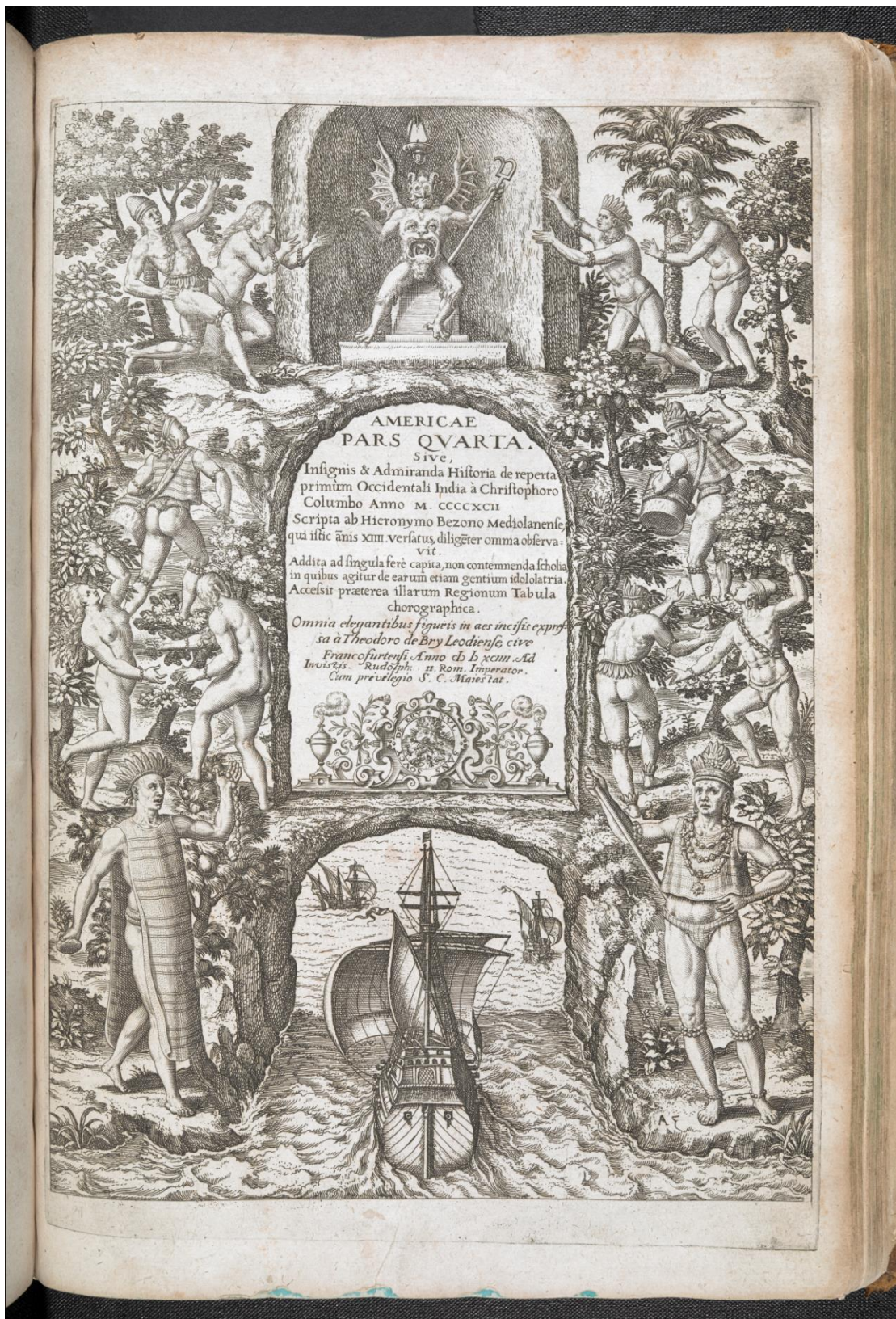


Figure 2.3 De Bry, *Great Voyages* Vol IV Frontispiece, 1594
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Indi Hispanis aurum sicientibus; aurum lique- XX.
factum infundunt.



INDI Hispanis offensi propter nimiam eorum tyrannidem & crudelitatem, atq; auaritiam, quoscunq; capiebant viuos; militares praesertim duces, reuinctis manibus pedibusq; proyciebant in terrā: mox auro in os iacentis infuso, cum hac exprobratione auaritia; Ede, ede aurū Christiane: ad maiorem cruciatum ac probrum cultellis lapideis, alius brachium Hispani, alius humerum, alius crus, abscindebant & subiectis prunis torrentes mandebant.

F Indi

Figure 1.4 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 20: How the Indians poured melted gold down the mouths of the Spaniards*, 1594, © The British Library Board. (G6627)

Valboa Indos nefandum Sodomix scelus com- XXII.
mittentes, canibus obicit dilaniandos.



VALBOA in ista ad montes profectioe Regulum in Esquaragua superat & cedit cum multis Indis: pagum deinde ingressus Reguli fratrem & alios quosdam muliebri vestitu ornatos: valde admiratus, causam sciscitatur: intelligit casum Regulum & omnes eius aulicos nefando illo peccato natura aduerso infectos: Attonitus Valboa adeo detestabile scelus ad istos Barbaros penetrasse, corripit omnes iubet numero sorte quadraginta, & canibus quos circumducebat, lacerandos obicit.

F 3

Indi

Figure 2.5 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 22*: Balboa meets Indians dressed as women who engage in acts of sodomy, 1594, © The British Library Board (G6627)



IN Amaraicana ipso commorante, Petrus de Calyce Tribunus militum quatuor millia mancipiorum trahens, venit, plures adducturus, nisi lassitudine, penuria, & animi aegritudine permulti in via partim defecissent: partim nonnullis, quum agmen raptim ductu, impedimentis Hispanorum onusti facile sequi non possent, Hispani latera & pectora ferro traiecissent.

B Indi

Figure 2.6 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol IV Plate 4: Cruelties against the enslaved Indians on the coast of Venezuela*, 1594, © The British Library Board (G6627).

NIGRITÆ EXHAUSTIS VENIS METALLICIS
conficiendo saccharo operam dare debent.

II



Nigritarum ergo opera vti sunt Hispani initiò in scrutandis venis metallicis: verùm postquam illæ fuerunt exhaustæ, horum ministerio vti cœperunt ad molas trusatiles quæ sacchariferas cannas comminuunt, ad saccharum coquendum & cogendum: in quo ministerio etiamnum hodie magna ex parte occupantur. Nam cùm ea Insula humida sit & calida, minimo negotio sacchariferæ cannæ siue arundines succrescunt; ex quibus contusis, deinde in lebetes coniectis, & decoctis, postremum ritè repurgatis & in saccharum concretis, magnum quantum facere solent. Vtuntur præterea istorum Nigritarum opera in pascendis armentis, & reliquis rebus administrandis quæ necessaria sunt ad suos vsus.

A 3

Nigritæ

Figure 2.7 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 2: The veins of gold ore having been exhausted, the Blacks had to work in sugar* (1595) © The British Library Board (G6607)

NIGRITÆ IN SCRVTANDIS VENIS METALLICIS I
 ab Hispanis in Insulas ablegantur.



A Tritis, & penè absumptis continuo labore Hispaniolæ Insulæ incolis, Hispani aliunde mancipia conquirere cœperunt, quorum ministerio in perfodiendis montibus, venisque metallicis perscrutandis vterentur. Itaque redemptis sua pecunia, & accitis ex Guinea Quarta Africae partis Prouincia mancipijs æthiopicibus siue Nigritis, illorum porro opera vti sunt, donec temporis successu quidquid in ea Insula metallicarum venarum inesset, exhaurirent. Nam vt Lusitani eam Africae partem quam ipsi Guineam (Incolæ Genni aut Genna appellant) sibi subiectam reddiderant; singulis annis aliquot incolarum centurias exteris nationibus diuendebant, quæ mancipiorum vicem supplerent.

A 2 Nigrita

Figure 2.8 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 1: Black slaves mining for gold dust*, 1595, © The British Library Board (G6607)

NIGRITÆ NON ABSOLVTO QVOTIDIANO III
penſo, crudeliter ab Hiſpanis habentur.



SED vt extrema quorundam Hiſpanorum crudelitas eſt, contigit plerunq; vt volentes caſtigare mancipiorum ſuorum vel negligentiam in abſoluendo penſo, aut delictum admifſum, aliamve ob cauſam: cum noctu domum redibant, non præberetur illis cœna, ſed induſium (ſi quod habebant) detraheretur, in humum abijcerentur, & colligatis pedibus manibusq; nudi caderentur, vel loris aut funiculis, donec vniuerſum corpus ſanguine perfunderetur. Hoc peracto, picis libram, vel alioqui feruentis olei oliuarum ſenſim inſpergebant in vulnera, denique capſici ſiue braſiliani piperis pollinem aqua maceratum illinebant, atque in menſam ſubſtratam ſiue aſſerem extendebant, ſuper iniecta mantica aut leui tegumento, atque ita relinquebant, donec hero ſuo fatiſ validi viderentur, ad opus perſequendum.

Non deſunt tamen qui alia ratione in ſua mancipia animaduertant: nam in hunc modum caſa, in terram ſcrobe facta defodiunt, vt præter caput nihil extet, prædicantes ſe id in mancipiorum commodum facere, vt ſcilicet humus ſanguinem concretum & corruptum diſſoluat, corpusq; integrum conferuet. Cæterum ſi quis peccat (vt ſæpe euenit propter doloris vehementiam) liber eſt herus (ſecundum Hiſpanicas leges) ſi alterum, deſuncti loco, Regi donet.

Nigritæ

Figure 2.9 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plat3 3: Slave Punishments on Hispaniola*, 1595, © The British Library Board (G6607)

NIGRITÆ OB HISPANORVM CRVDELITATEM FVGI IIII
 unt, aliquot Hispanos cædunt, sed tandem ab Hispanis va-
 rijs supplicijs adficiuntur.



HIS crudelitibus Hispanorum, irritati Nigritæ nonnulli, secessionem à suis heris faciunt & diffugiunt, atque tanquam desperabundi per Insulam vagantur, ergastula confringunt, suæ nationis mancipia cogunt, quotquot comprehendere Hispanos possunt, cædunt, & in talem numerum excrefcunt, vt plurimum negotij Hispanis facescant. Qua re considerata Admirallius Ludouicus Columbus re cum Præside & Auditoribus consilij (quod apud S. Dominicum est) communicata, militem cogit, mancipia persequitur, eorum nonnulla spe libertatis propositâ, ad se allicit & corrumpit, illorum operâ, reliquorum diuerticula agnoscit; noctu quædam somno sepulta, vt pecudes occupat, cædit & quædam ad exemplum de arborum ramis suspendi iubet. Ea res iniuriâ Hispanis satis commode quidem cessit, sed mancipia suo malo edocta, diligentio-rem in posterum adhibuerunt operam in excubijs faciendis, & subinde fuerunt superiora Hispanis.

B

Hispani

Figure 2.10 De Bry, *Great Voyages Vol V Plate 4: The First Revolt of Black Slaves*, 1595, © The British Library Board (G6607)

Endnotes

¹ The phrase “Whether new or rediscovered” comes from Michiel Van Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590-1634): Editorial strategy and the representations of the overseas world*, Dissertation (Academisch Proefschrift), University of Amsterdam, April 12, 2007, 272. The dissertation was subsequently published as *The Representations of the overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590-1634)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Groesen has provided the most systematically thorough analysis of the De Bry publications. This phrase, referring to the De Bry engravings, alludes to the way in which experiences and observations which were new or unfamiliar to Europeans were often described through reference to pre-existing sources, notably classical and biblical ones.

² University of Minnesota, “Imperialism and Colonization: Racial Encounters in Colonial America,” <http://www.globalrem.umn.edu/teachingmodules/themes/imperialcolonial.php?entry=133625> (accessed October 8, 2011). With regard to the reference to the Flemish printmakers, sources usually refer to the De Brys, a collective reference to the father, Theodor and his two sons, Johann Theodor and Johann Israel. With regard to the spelling of their names, Michiel van Groesen spells the artist’s first name with an “e” – Theodore, while the majority of other sources including Bernadette Bucher spell it without the final ‘e’ and I have opted for this version. The artist's name appears in his publications in its Latin version, “Theodorus.”

³ The phrase “merging of fact and fiction” is attributed to Thomas Jefferson, Millicent Sowerby (1952-59) IV 176: Jefferson to Adams, 11/6/1812 in Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 4. In 1815, after British troops had burned the library at Capitol Hill in Washington DC, Jefferson sold his entire collection of books to the Library of Congress. Jefferson’s de Bry volumes remained there until 1851, when another fire destroyed two-thirds of the library’s holdings, presumably including Jefferson’s books since they have not been located since that time.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Stranger to Ourselves*, trans., Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 106.

⁵ Kristeva, *Stranger to Ourselves*, 115.

⁶ Kim Sloan, *A New World: England’s first view of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

⁷ Hugh Honour *The European Vision of America* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1975), 1-2.

⁸ Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America* (Bloomington 1961) is an early example cited in Honour, 2.

⁹ Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁰ J. B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA 1981), 4-25 and P. Mason, *Deconstructing America, Representations of the Other* (London and New York 1990) chapters 3 & 4, in Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 19.

¹¹ Marco Polo, "The Travels of Marco Polo," in *The English Literatures of America: 1500-1800*, ed. Myra Jehlen and Michael Warner (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7. The original title of Marco Polo's account was *Divisament dou Monde* (Description of the World).

¹² Sir John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* Project Guenberg EBook , January 1997, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext97/tosjm10h.htm>.

¹³ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 20-21.

¹⁴ William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 44.

¹⁵ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 2. The author writes that it ranks alongside treatises like Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, and Joan Blaeu's *Atlas Maior*.

¹⁶ Susanna Burghartz, "The Imagine Worlds of de Bry and Sons, Publishers," in *Inszenierte welten: die west- und ostindischen Reisen der Verleger de Bry, 1590–1630 / Staging new worlds: de Brys' illustrated travel reports, 1590–1630*, ed. Susanna Burghartz and trans. Pamela Selwyn (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), 13–17.

¹⁷ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 2.

¹⁸ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 272 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 272.

²⁰ See Burghartz, *Staging New Worlds*.

²¹ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 15.

²² Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 2-3.

²³ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 4.

²⁴ Benzoni's text occupies Volumes IV to VI but the Caribbean is featured primarily in Volumes IV and V.

each for volumes IV and V, and two maps for Volume 6. See Groesen Appendix 3, 371 for tables identifying sources for the engravings.

²⁶ Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World*, ed. and trans. by Rear-Admiral W. H. Smyth, Hakluyt Society 1857. This represents the first complete English of *La Historia Del Mondo*

Nuovo Di M. Girolomo Benzoni Milanese. La Quai tratta dell'isole, & mari nuovamente ritrovati & delle nuove ditte da lui proprio vedute, per acqua & per terra in quattordici anni, 1

²⁷ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 2.

²⁸ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 3.

²⁹ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 3-4.

³⁰ Benzoni's *History of the New World* is available online at http://books.google.com/books?id=lmcMAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false. The image of the Indian Woman from Cumana is on page 4.

³¹ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 4.

³² Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 140. Groesen recounts one example where the De Bry illustration portraying the relationship between humans and llamas in Peru in Jose de Acosta's *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, depicted the natives as barely dressed, supposedly based on Acosta's observations despite the fact that the Jesuit missionary had nevertheless noted that these same llamas yielded wool, and that "the Indians made stuffs of this wool, which they used to clothe themselves" (Groesen, 141, footnote 52). Statements that the llamas favoured cold areas and were sometimes covered with ice and frost which would have contradicted the scenes as presented were omitted by the De Brys.

³³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions. The wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Cited in Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 11.

³⁴ The full Latin text is as follows: Dum in Cumana moratur, ad petrum Erreram Praefectum venit praecipuis eius Promiscuae Reguili vxor, quasillum patriis fruetibus plenum gestans, oris corporieq, habitu tam deformis & prodigiosa specie, vt rei noue miraculo stupefactus Benzoni, eam intuendo oculos explere non posset: monstri ensm cuiusdam pot quam humanam speciem habebat.

³⁵ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 136, footnote 34.

³⁶ "Treasures Revealed from the Paul Mellon Library," Virginia Historical Society, http://www.vahistorical.org/exhibits/treasures_tour_harriot.htm.

³⁷ Grove Art Online. According to Karel van Mander, (Schielderboeck, 1604), Joos van Winghe (also referred to as Jodocus van Winghe) spent four years in Rome before returning to Brussels in 1568 where he began painting for ecclesiastical and private patrons. Van Winghe served as painter to Alessandro Farnese, Governor of the Netherlands in 1578. In 1584 he moved to Frankfurt, probably, to escape Spanish rule. Frankfurt documents identify van Winghe as a portrait painter, but his only surviving works are history paintings. His figure drawings reveal the influence of Italian Mannerism, and he is thought to have been acquainted with the second school of Fontainebleau, which has led scholars to suggest he stayed in Paris

on his return from Italy.

http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T091840pg1?q=Joos+van+Winghe+&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit. The engraving is signed “Theodore de Bry fe.,” after a design by the Netherlandish artist Jodocus van Winghe. After De Bry’s death in 1598, Johan Theodor added “Jo.[han]” to his father’s name, indicating that it was he who deserved the credit for it. Although the brothers assisted their father from the beginning in 1590, their name never appeared on any of the title pages. See Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 58. Van Winghe was also responsible for the design of all seventeen pictures used for the publication of Las Casas’ *Brevissima relación*, which was published separately due to its strongly anti-Spanish stance. Groesen notes that while the De Brys made great efforts to remain ‘politically correct’ or at least avoid censorship, they truly did focus on anti-Spanish sentiment by adding anti-Spanish engravings by Van Winghe. See Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 172.

³⁸ Thomas Hariot, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*. Facsimile edition accompanied by the modernized English text. (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 59 (my emphasis).

³⁹ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 130.

⁴⁰ The first edition of Staden’s account, published in Marburg in 1557, included a few woodcuts based on sketches by Staden and another of the expedition’s sailors. De Bry based his depiction of the stockaded Tupinamba village where Staden was held on these early prints. And his depictions of the Tupinamba Indians drew details from Lery’s “Voyage to Brazil,” which included several woodcuts in the original 1578 publication. Lery’s illustrations, drawn from memory in Europe, were themselves indebted to Thevet’s “Singularities de la France antarctique.” – the first visual portrayals of New World inhabitants, Bucher, 15-16.

⁴¹ Bucher, *Icon and Conquest*, 15.

⁴² See Maike Christadler, “The Collection Being put on View: The Title-pages of the Americas,” in Susanna Burghartz, *Staging New Worlds*.

⁴³ See http://www.infoamerica.org/museo/expo_bry/bryiii/bryiii01.htm for an image of the frontispiece from Volume III.

⁴⁴ It can be noted that scenes of battles with giants and animal-human hybrids as well as cannibalism (Saturn devouring his children for example) are common in classical mythology and were frequently represented as part of temple decoration.

⁴⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones, “Ethnographer’s Sketch, Sensational Engraving, Full-Length Portrait: Print Genres for Spanish America in Girolamo Benzoni, the De Brys, and Cesare Vecellio.” *Journal of Medieval & Early Modern Studies* 41:1 (Winter 2011): 137-171.

The image can be seen at:

http://www.musees.strasbourg.eu/uploads/images/imgs/oeuvres_choisies/musee_ba/primitifs%20onordiques/044_memling_enfer.jpg.

⁴⁶ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 169.

⁴⁷ By contrast, the title page of Volume V is still dominated by the wild landscape but now Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro are depicted along with the priest Hernando de Luque swearing an oath to cooperate in obtaining the riches of Peru. At the summit now, the pagan idol is replaced with a scene of conquistadors erect a cross. Although they are claiming the land in the name of Christianity, the business agreement below makes it clear that their mission is one of pillage.

⁴⁸ Jones, “Ethnographer’s Sketch,” 141.

⁴⁹ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 171. For example, when Benzoni is describing the Spaniards, the De Brys remove the phrase “such terrible murderers and ruthlessly horrible tyrants,” Volume IV, 113 (German edition).

⁵⁰ Jones, “Ethnographer’s Sketch,” 147.

⁵¹ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 72-73.

⁵² Groesen also considers body language as an indicator used by the De Brys to distinguish levels of civility: “An erect position was regarded as a sign of civility, whereas, by contrast, violently swirling or stooping human bodies indicated an overall lack of composure. Such depictions of peasants, wild men, beggars, and other groups perceived as socially inferior were widely recognised in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.” (Groesen, 145).

⁵³ Ernst van den Boogaart, “Slavery in the De Bry Collection: The Formation of a Worldwide Comparative Perspective.” In *Migration, Trade and Slavery in an Expanding World: Essays in Honor of Pieter Emmer*, Wim Klooster, ed. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2009), 166.

⁵⁴ Boogaart, “Slavery in the De Bry Collection, 167.

⁵⁵ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 93.

⁵⁶ Jerome Handler and Michael Tuite, “The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas,” Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and the University of Virginia Library, <http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/details.php?categorynum=7&categoryName=&theRecord=39&recordCount=96>.

⁵⁷ Heather Pringle, “Sugar Masters in a New World” in *Smithsonian.com*, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Sugar-Masters-in-a-New-World.html>.

⁵⁸ Antonio Benítez-Rojo. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 93.

⁵⁹ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 93-94. The editor’s note refers to the code produced at Burgos in 1512 – the Law of Baian.

⁶⁰ Benzoni, *History of the New World*, 95. The Spanish translation for maroons is “cimarrones.” More than two hundred years later, (1791-1804), the African population in Saint-Domingue, which was then a French colony, eventually led the first successful black revolution, and the second successful revolution to achieve independence from a European colonial power. The newly independent state was renamed Haiti.

⁶¹ Seymour Drescher, “Moral Issues,” in *A Historical Guide to World Slavery*, ed. Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 283-284 as cited in Van den Boogaart, 185.

⁶² Drescher quoted in Boogaart, “Slavery in the De Bry Collection,” 185.

⁶³ Boogaart, “Slavery in the De Bry Collection,” 185.

⁶⁴ Kay Dian Kris has noted that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, illustrated books about the Caribbean tended to depict African slaves either as small-scale figures in topographical landscape views or as highly abstracted types in schematized scenes showing the cultivation and refinement of sugarcane. “Although sub-Saharan African slaves commonly featured in such West Indian imagery, they, unlike Native Americans or South Pacific Islanders (or indeed African peoples living in Africa), were not routinely made the primary subjects of printed illustrations that isolate a single figure or a small group of individuals in order to render in detail physical characteristics, clothing, body ornaments, and accessories.” See Kay Dian Kris, “Belisario’s ‘Kingston Cries’ and the Refinement of Jewish Identity in the Late 1830s,” in Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 163. Kris explains in a footnote that this is a general assessment of tendencies in illustrated books devoted to the subject of the (British) West Indies: “One can find illustrations of West Indian slaves in the eighteenth century (most appeared toward the end of the century, however), but the preponderance of imagery relegated these figures to the status of staffage (incidental figures).”

⁶⁵ Jones, “Ethnographer’s Sketch,” 155-56. Jones also discusses the work of a third artist, Cesare Vecellio towards the end of her essay.

⁶⁶ Jones, “Ethnographer’s Sketch,” 140-141.

⁶⁷ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 170. The quotation is taken from Volume IV, A4v in the German edition.

⁶⁸ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 142.

⁶⁹ Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 142.

⁷⁰ Hulme and Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion*, 3.

⁷¹ William H. Sherman, “Stirrings and Searchings (1500-1720)” in Hulme and Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion*, 17.

⁷² Groesen, *The De Bry Collection of Voyages*, 97. The De Brys did most of the engraving themselves, although many volumes, including the ones published under the auspices of Theodor de Bry, reveal different hands and styles of design. Throughout the project, the De Brys received help from other accomplished engravers. A few of the more important and specialized contributors such as Gijsbert van Veen, in 1590, and later Georg Keller were allowed to sign their work, a rarity in the collection, as the De Brys never did so themselves, with the exception of *India Occidentalis* I, where Theodor used the monogram TB. Keller's use of his monogram GK is not only testimony to his co-operation in the years between 1602 and 1606, it also shows that he was almost exclusively responsible for a certain type of illustrations, namely seascapes and bird's-eye views of naval battles. Of a total of fifteen engravings signed by Keller, only one or perhaps two can be considered of ethnological value. Interestingly, the exact number of illustrations varies for the two translations. The Latin version contains 588, the German version 595 illustrations.

Chapter Three

Souvenir de la Martinique: Paul Gauguin, memory and myth

*Pour en revenir à la Martinique voilà une jolie existence...
.....c'est un paradis.
(To return to Martinique, this would be an enchanting life...
.....it's a paradise.)*¹

Paul Gauguin is one of the artists most popularly associated with depictions of the tropics. During the late nineteenth century, he produced a body of work documenting his travels in the Caribbean and later Polynesia that has come to characterize the European artist's representation of a colonized otherness. Travelers and tourism promoters throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to describe the islands of the Caribbean as both a "Lost Garden of Eden" and an "Earthly Paradise."² In 1887, that is what Paul Gauguin hoped to find when he arrived in Martinique for what would be a six-month stay, following a failed attempt to obtain work at the Panama Canal. It would prove to be a formative if short experience. Writing to his friend Charles Morice shortly before departing for Tahiti several years later, Gauguin reflected back on the significance of his stay in the Caribbean: "My Martinican experience [...] was decisive. There alone have I felt truly myself, and it is in what I brought back from there that you must seek me, if you want to know what I am, more even than in my Breton works."³

Gauguin's reflections back on his "Martinican experience" also took visual form in two zincograph prints produced in 1889 on the occasion of the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris. Two

years had passed since the French Post-Impressionist artist had lived and painted on the small French island in the Lesser Antilles. One of the images, *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* (*Les Cigales et les Fourmis*) was subtitled *Memory of Martinique* (*Souvenir de la Martinique*) (Figure 3.1), signaling Gauguin's conscious psychic return into the past to recollect those experiences and attempt to synthesize their significance. Combined with *Martinique Pastoral* (*Pastorales Martinique*) (Figure 3.2), these two prints were included in a folio of ten that made up the *Volpini Suite*. Together they provide, according to Karen Pope, "an iconographical connection between Gauguin's Martinique sources and the beginnings of his Symbolist period."⁴ They document the lingering impact of his stay in the Caribbean; and they represent a condensed or filtered impression of his experiences; a vocabulary distilled from a dozen paintings executed while he was in Martinique that reveal what he took away from his stay there and serve as another potent contribution to the tradition of representing the region.

Like the De Bry engravings which illustrated the *Great Voyages* of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Gauguin's imagery was acknowledged as merging fact and fiction and yet continued to exert an influence on perceptions of the tropics that flourished in successive generations. Like the De Brys, Gauguin presented images that appeared to document places and people as observed in their daily practice, but were consciously produced with a European audience in mind. As a result, the images that were created existed in a supposed relationship of comparison with a European norm. Gauguin's prints depicting Martinique, unlike the paintings he executed during his stay in the Caribbean, record his recollections formed from the distance of time and space, produced two years after his return to Paris.

Like the De Bry prints, Gauguin's images are often considered and interpreted in conjunction with texts. In Gauguin's case however, the travel journals (or letters) are his own. In

addition to the significant body of correspondence that provides reports on the artist's extensive travels and insights into his state of mind, Gauguin was a bibliophile, as his friend Stephan Mallarmé would call him, and the works of art he created, particularly those produced during his symbolist period, were often linked to works of literature. Mallarmé dedicated a copy of his book *L'Après-midi d'un faune* to Gauguin with the words: "To the wild man and bibliophile."⁵ Mallarmé recognized this doubleness in Gauguin's identity: he fashioned himself as the savage with an Amerindian origin traced back to his ancestors in Peru that he imagined resisted civilizing influences, and equally he maintained a love of books, a characteristic which was also in his genealogy dating back to his grandmother, Flora Tristan, herself a renowned author and revolutionary figure.⁶ Prints, like books could, through their reproducibility, disseminate ideas and influences more widely, spreading new ways of seeing and new ways of knowing, but equally perpetuating old ones.

The prints Gauguin made after his return to France present an altered reflection of their subject matter. These works were not his observations of life in Martinique, but rather constructions based on his memories, reconfigured recollections of his experiences. The paintings were the tangible "souvenirs" that the artist took with him on his return to France. Over time, the impact and significance of those experiences continued to reveal themselves. These paintings would appear in fragments, like scraps or would be combined as the impact of his stay seeped further into his consciousness. At the same time, Gauguin appears to have become more liberal with his retelling of his adventures as these became intertwined with other references and tropes.

While Gauguin's images of Tahiti have received more attention, due in part to the fact that he spent more time there and produced more paintings, his first focused attempt to paint the

tropics was in Martinique, an experience recorded in sixteen paintings and a number of sketches, and referred to in a number of subsequent works.⁷ While not as extensively discussed, his stay in the Caribbean was a formative time when many of the conceptual and stylistic innovations emerging in his work would be developed. According to Karen Pope, "...Gauguin's trip to the Caribbean represents the first of his geographical escapes from the 'decadence of the West' into the imagined purity of a primitive tropical society."⁸ While Pope along with a number of other authors have established the importance of Gauguin's time in Martinique to his subsequent development, the focus here is rather on the way in which Gauguin's representations of the Caribbean and the tropics in general were influenced by earlier descriptions of the region and their impact on subsequent depictions.

Life and Myth

Gauguin has been described as a "Maker of Myth." Belinda Thomson explained that this referred not just to the artist's careful and deliberate construction of his persona but also the construction of narratives in his work. She uses the term "narrative strategies" or "self-promotional strategies" to describe how he deliberately constructed his own biographical account, largely through his journals and letters, but also and inseparably in the making of his art. More than that, it encompassed the way he lived out, or performed his life. Thomson explains:

The phrase "narrative strategies".... is used here to encompass not only the deliberate, conscious ways Gauguin had of conveying meaning through picture-making and written commentary but also the whole apparatus through which he projected himself into public consciousness, engaged with contemporary debates and generated critical discourse around his work. Attuned to and comfortable with the verbalization of meaning, Gauguin was a past master at getting himself across. If he turned his extraordinary manual and imaginative skills to good account, he

also turned his life story, his personal failings and misfortunes to the work's advantage.⁹

Thomson also refers to the “Gauguin phenomenon:” Gauguin has been seen as a hero of modernism, challenging attitudes about the use of bold and contrasting color and representationalism as well as the expressive power and formal beauty of so called “primitive” art. But she emphasizes that what the postmodernist writings have stressed is that these formal elements are inextricable from the narrative aspects of story-telling, fable and myth. Gauguin's commitment to suggestive meaning within imagery coincides with the acceleration of the global colonizing project, making cross-cultural advances or insertions more accessible than ever before.¹⁰

Gauguin led a nomadic life, with his earliest trans-oceanic journeys dating back to his childhood. His experiences in Tahiti and Brittany are perhaps the most familiar to viewers, but recent scholarship has pointed to the importance of the Martinique stay in the development of his mature style, particularly the symbolist works. Gauguin's time in Martinique came near the end of a five-year trajectory in his development beginning in 1883 when as a young artist working alongside Camille Pissarro he was immersed in ideas of Impressionism, and leading towards the manifestation of his interests in symbolist painting. Tomàs Llorens calls this change, “one of the most significant within the history of art,” involving not only the formal devices of painting but also its relations to social and cultural contexts. Symbolism critiqued Impressionism's belief that painting had to approximate nature and integrate itself into modern life. This included a deliberate break away from modern life to propose “a new return to origins.”¹¹ Llorens explains that this was conceived of in terms of a flight or escape, but also as a return, and this relied on

the retrieval of motifs of a familiar pastoral tradition derived from antiquity which could still be found in modern European culture.

In a later phase of Gauguin's work, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the "amenable tone of this pastoral evocation" was invaded by a more conflicted confrontation between the artist and modern life. Llorens describes this as an "anti-modern future."¹² The references to the desire for escape as well as a return to a site of origin, reflect both the constant and multi-directional travel that recurred throughout the artist's life, as well as a yearning for escape from the demands and pressures of modern life. His search for a site of origins is linked to the utopic idea of paradise, one linked to an antique Golden Age but also linked, within his own mind, with a Garden of Eden. His nomadic diasporic wandering was linked to the angst of modernism and the search for an anti-modern, an alternative home as refuge.

As Tamar Garb points out, Gauguin has been "alternately lambasted and lionized" for the way in which he represented faraway places and the encounter between a French subject and its colonial other. Martinique was the first of his "painterly incursions" into the French colonies and was decisive in the construction of his identity as the savage and his ambivalent identification with the place and people he set out to paint. Gauguin acknowledged in his own writings that the experiences in Martinique were decisive for his later development, a "curious and complex assertion," according to Garb; Martinique lay thousands of miles away across the Atlantic and yet was inextricably linked to France as one of its most important colonies. So that while the experience is regarded as an early and critical catalyst for change in Gauguin's work as well as his projected sense of himself as an isolated outsider, "Martinique is both far and familiar."¹³

Edouard Glissant would describe Gauguin's sojourn, like that of his contemporary Lafcadio Hearn, the American writer of *Martinique Sketches*, as "slumming at the limits of an

alterity they hoped to influence (to accommodate, to appropriate for themselves),” even if the complex reality of the Creole culture they confronted remained incomprehensible to them and they found themselves searching, in time, for more “authentic,” “pure” and ancient civilizations with which to merge.¹⁴ Like the earliest explorers of the Caribbean, Gauguin set out from Europe with a set of presumptions. As Garb points out, Gauguin’s writings from Marseille before he left indicate he was hoping to find “himself” far from the company of men and nourished by freely available fish and fruit. He had a whole set of assumptions in place, imagining a place where he would be free from the financial and familial obligations of Europe, despite the fact that he had already extensive experiences from previous travels. It was as if his longings and desires overpowered the empirical knowledge of his earlier experiences. But according to Garb, Gauguin’s “incomprehension” of the island was actually to prove fruitful; while what he produced was not purely descriptive or accurate, nor was it only mythic and imagined, “but one that registers both his doomed desire for fusion and his tragic recourse to objectification, made manifest in a tangible profusion of pigment (the blur of benighted vision), recycled figural types and over-determined vignettes.”¹⁵

Exotic Encounters in Travel

Travel had been part of Gauguin’s life from an early age, having sailed to the Americas as a young boy with his family when they traveled to Peru where he spent six years. In fact throughout his life he identified with this early experience and his family origins, referring to himself as the “Savage of Peru” (his maternal great-grandfather was Peruvian). It was in this way that he would ground or authenticate his outsider status. His use of the word savage was a reference to the Inca – the indigenous Amerindian inhabitants of Peru, even though his family

was well-to-do, Creole (locally born) of European descent. Gauguin fully embraced and exaggerated the issue of identity and origin. He constructed his identity as half European, half Amerindian. Opportunities to travel continued when he joined the Merchant Marine as a young man; he sailed through the Caribbean and up and down the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of South America which included a stopover in Martinique in 1867, twenty years before his well-documented and longer stay as an artist.

Gauguin was a very experienced traveler with a good knowledge of a wide range of different cultures. Following his decision to pursue a career as a painter, Gauguin continued to move, often complaining about the financial burdens of life in Paris. Pope points out that Gauguin's persistent thoughts of leaving France for the tropics separate him from most of his colleagues, who did not consider leaving the country in order to alleviate their economic problems.¹⁶ Despite this, Gauguin had selective vision; he was very deliberate and focused in terms of what he chose to paint. Belinda Thomson refers to Gauguin's very selective use of the material he encountered during his many travels: "He circumnavigated the globe several times and sampled, or experienced more fully, life in the Americas (Peru, Panama, Martinique), Europe – from its cultural heart (Paris) to the far polar north (Tromso) and extreme west (Finistere) – and Oceania (Tahiti and the Marquesas). But he used the data he gathered highly selectively."¹⁷ She also emphasizes that although his travelling involved long months at sea, Gauguin rarely made reference to the trans-oceanic experiences and never recorded this directly in his artistic work.

All of these experiences were the raw material from which Gauguin could construct the narrative of his life and the world around it. He presented himself often as the victim of circumstance – of modernism, of poverty, of psychological compulsions and physical illness and

this compelled his search for refuge. He established a model of diasporic myth for the modern artist. Little understood and therefore never “at home,” he adopted an existence of wandering in search of a mythical resting place. This restlessness he linked to his savage, pre-modern or anti-modern origins. But it was a very self-consciously constructed and styled persona which he conveyed through his eccentric costume, recorded in a number of self-portraits. Thomson describes his deliberate dandyism with “an embroidered Breton waistcoat, personalized canes and clogs, a Magyar-style cloak, large-brimmed Bolivar hat, astrakhan fez....”¹⁸ With this elaborate costume, he presented a very deliberate posturing that was eclectic, bohemian and nomadic; global and anti-modern. This was reinforced in his letters and other writings. In this way, his image, his artistic identity was established and projected through images and words. Gauguin’s geographical expeditions were framed very much in the language of self-discovery. Gauguin would later write to Emile Bernard, “What I wish [to explore] is a still undiscovered corner of myself.”¹⁹

As Gauguin traveled through the Caribbean and Central America in 1887, it was a space in the midst of transformation. Almost three centuries after the earliest stages of colonization as depicted in images such as those by the De Brys, the small remaining Amerindian population was sequestered into geographic pockets, and slave labor had been abolished. After three centuries of plantation economies reliant on forced labor, slavery finally ended in the French colonies in 1848, fifteen years after the British colonies; Cuba did not abolish slavery until 1886, and Brazil followed two years later as the last nation in the Western hemisphere to do so.²⁰ Even since Gauguin’s last short visit to Martinique twenty years earlier, by 1887 the transformations of life in the Caribbean must have been impactful.

Café Volpini at the Exposition Universelle

Two years later, in 1889, Paris hosted the *Exposition Universelle*, a world's fair that showcased French industry and technological progress, the arts and applied arts and colonial expansion. The event was the fourth in a series of such events typically staged in Paris by the state every eleven years beginning in 1855. The 1889 fair, which marked the centenary of the start of the French Revolution, was particularly ambitious and popular, attracting an estimated twenty-eight million people over the course of its six-month run.²¹ Gauguin and many of his friends had been rejected from the official exhibitions for the visual arts in the *Palais des Beaux-Arts* in the *Champ de Mars* in Paris. Gauguin joined with a group of eight artist friends and organized a separate statement, parallel to the official one, following the experience and style of independent Impressionist exhibitions as well as the displays of past artists who had been rejected, notably Gustave Courbet in 1855 and Edouard Manet in 1867.

The location chosen for the event was the *Café des Arts*, situated within the exposition grounds near the entrances to the *Palais des Beaux-Arts*. Titled *L'Exposition de Peintures du Groupe Impressionniste et Synthétiste*, this would become popularly known as the Volpini Exhibition, named after the proprietor of the *Café des Arts*. The exhibition opened June 8th 1889. The small catalogue produced for the event listed the names of the participating artists and the titles of the paintings on display in the crowded café. The artists who exhibited with Gauguin were Charles Laval (who had travelled to Martinique with him), Emile Schuffenecker, Emile Bernard, Leon Fauche, Louis Anquetin, Georges Daniel, Louis Roy, and Ludovic Nemo. Gauguin presented seventeen paintings produced during 1886-1888, most of them landscapes including *Fruit Picking (Mangoes)* from Martinique. The catalogue also made reference to two albums of lithographs, one by Gauguin and another by Émile Bernard, that were available for

viewing upon request. The selling price for each album was twenty francs. Appropriately for a World's Fair, the series of ten prints presented by Gauguin, which became known as the *Volpini Suite*, was inspired by his recent global travels. Included were two images derived from his experiences in Martinique during May to October 1887. He also included images from his second stay in Pont Aven (February to October 1888) and his time in Arles (October to December 1888).²² In addition to the ten images that made up the album, Gauguin produced a cover image for his folio of prints (*Leda and the Swan*) as well as two lithographs reproduced as illustrations for the catalog, (*Aux Roches Noires*) which appeared on the frontispiece along with a list of the participating artists, and *Les Faneuses* which appeared on the following double page spread along with a list of the seventeen paintings by Gauguin included in the exhibition. The album by Bernard, with the title *The Bretonneries*, also consisted of ten prints but these were all based on his depictions of Brittany. Gauguin's participation in the exhibition along with his choice of paintings as well as subject matter for the prints is generally regarded to have been intended to raise his international profile, please the public and find buyers.²³

In January of 1889 Gauguin had returned to Paris from Arles, following his emotionally wrought and violent stay with Vincent van Gogh, and he began preparing for the exhibition. There is some suggestion that Gauguin had already begun some of the prints in Pont-Aven in 1888 before going to Arles but by the 20th of February he wrote saying he had completed the series of ten images. The *Volpini Suite* was Gauguin's first attempt at printmaking. The prints are zincographs, a variation of lithography that calls for drawing on zinc plates rather than lithographic stones. It was Theo van Gogh, Vincent's brother and his dealer, who advised him to use this process as an economical way to produce an album of images that could be offered for sale, while at the same time hopefully attracting wider attention for his paintings.²⁴

Gauguin produced two editions of the *Volpini Suite*. The first was an edition of fifty, printed on saffron yellow vellum between January and February 1889 in Paris.²⁵ It was not unusual for albums of etchings to be occasionally printed on colored paper at this time but typically subtle tones of blue or blue green, not the bold canary yellow used by Gauguin. Moyna Stanton has provided a summary of the in depth analysis of the paper which determined that it was made in a limited production, and not widely available.²⁶ Yellow paper was associated with Japanese ukiyo-e prints and was also used in popular posters at the time as well as for book covers of publications by avant-garde authors, as seen in Manet's *Portrait of Emile Zola*, and so it has been suggested that it was associated with avant-garde printing.²⁷ It may also have been influenced by Van Gogh who often used the color yellow as background or a reference to the sunflowers for Gauguin's room in the Yellow House in Arles where he spent the autumn of 1888 in the months preceding the start of the *Volpini Suite*; as late as 1894 Gauguin wrote of his yellow room with yellow sunflowers, yellow light and yellow curtains. The strong vibrant flat color was probably considered to be very modern, in keeping with recent symbolist paintings, and yellow was associated with warmth and emotional intensity, with the sun, energy, the south, and with Gauguin's search for a paradisiacal, tropical destination.

Although the zincographs were conceived as a suite, many historians and critics have remarked that there is no apparent order to the prints, no thematic unity and no accompanying text other than the titles written on or below some of the images.²⁸ Noting that the *Volpini Suite* is a sample of themes taken from earlier works, Caroline Boyle-Turner characterizes it as a sort of "showcase" which Gauguin designed in order to sell his recent paintings with the only linking thread being "the idea of people as a reflection of their environment."²⁹ Richard Brettell observes that the prints are not based literally on earlier paintings except in a couple of cases but rather are

very free reinterpretations which explore themes of transgression, growth, nudity, adolescence, old age, prayer, desperate cleanliness and spoiled paradise;”³⁰ and more recently Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers summarized the content of the series as touching on the issues of “sexuality, good and evil, innocence and guilt.”³¹ Each of these interpreters of Gauguin’s work refers to the grand narrative summarized by the theme of the Garden of Eden, a pre-modern paradise but also a site of temptation and transgression.

Stylistically the group of images is linked by a common emphasis on boldly-drawn figures, predominantly women, as well as the suppression of modeling and dramatically contrasting bounded, patterned areas of dark and light which was characteristic of the Synthetist style. The bright yellow paper on which they were printed enhanced the boldness of the images. The ten main images are linked, at the very least, as “re-presentations” or summaries of Gauguin’s travel experiences in the remote French districts of Brittany in the north and Arles in the south, as well as the distant French island colony of Martinique; the places and subjects of Gauguin’s activity of the preceding two and a half years, or since about the time of the last Impressionist group exhibition. Karen Pope proposes that in subject, the prints represent the three locations where Gauguin explored the primitive and non-urban society which he increasingly preferred and sought.³² The zincographs all present pairs or groups of figures, the one exception being *Dramas of the Sea, a Descent into the Maëlstrom*. Other recurring images are trees, animals and the sea. Guillermo Solana suggests that the Suite can be read as “a compendium of the pastoral world and its fall.” He proposes that the ten images can be divided into two equal and symmetrical groups of five which collectively depict the dialectic of the pastoral and the anti-pastoral; an exaltation of bucolic life versus its dark side; the idyll and tragedy.³³

A Theme for the *Volpini Suite*

In addition to these ten images, Gauguin also designed a cover page for the front of the folio which provides some direction in terms of the reading of the series as a whole (Figure 3.3). Within a circular frame, Gauguin positions a female head seen from behind, shadowed by a large, long-necked bird and surrounded by smaller motifs and text. Solana proposes that the design, while appearing to be a simple sketch, in fact can be read as an emblem which condenses a complex process of iconography summarizing the paradoxes of the folio as a whole and can be broken down into three different levels. The first and most overt representation is that of a young country girl with a goose, a pastoral motif characteristic of the artist's works painted in Brittany. The second level of representation is the mythological scene of *Leda and the Swan* contained in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to Greek mythology, Leda was seduced or raped by the god Zeus who disguised himself in the form of a swan.

Gauguin had a lifelong interest in literature, particularly fables and mythology with their hybrid cast of anthropomorphic characters and a curious mix of transgressions and moral-yielding consequences. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, gods and humans were often transformed into animal forms in stories of temptation and transgression. While the stories provided moralizing analogies on conduct, they also presented a form of sanctioned, even revered salaciousness. The subject undoubtedly owed its popularity to the paradox that it was considered more acceptable to depict a woman in the act of copulation with a swan than with a man.³⁴ Surrounding the central images of the woman and bird, Gauguin adds a number of smaller motifs including pairs of flowers and small birds suggesting coupling and fertility. The two small swans seen on the right of the composition have been identified by Solana as alluding to the Dioscuri, the twins Castor

and Polydeuces. Following her seduction by Zeus, Leda gave birth to two sets of twins: Helen and Polydeuces (or Pollux) who were the children of Zeus; and Castor and Clytemnestra, children of her husband Tyndareus, the King of Sparta. Castor and Polydeuces, who together were known as the Dioscuri, were considered twin brothers but each from a different father. With their mixed parentage, they were described as half-god, half-human. As sailors and members of the crew of Jason's ship, the *Argo*, they were regarded as the patrons of travelers. Combined with their hybrid genealogy they appear as ideal symbols of diaspora.³⁵

At Solana's third level of interpretation, the snake seen on the opposite side of the roundel that echoes the sinuous neck of the swan seducing the woman, along with the apple on the opposite side link the erotic pagan image to the biblical Temptation, and Leda to the fallen Eve. The pairing or doubling of Eve and Leda conflates the seductress with the seduced and points to the moral ambiguity or hypocrisy that seems to be the target of Gauguin's imagery. The all-important text which typically provides the interpretive bridge for the intended reader of the prints is in Gauguin's design inscribed within the upper curve of the tondo frame. Written in reverse in the printed version, the phrase is taken from the motto of the Order of the Garter: "*Homis [sic] soit qui mal y pense*", meaning "Shame on him who thinks evil of it." Solana interprets this as an "ironic and perverse sense of the transformation."³⁶ Gauguin's motto serves to ward off moralistic judgments. It is a syncretic pairing of classical and Christian narratives of divine and mortal encounters; stories of desire, temptation, seduction and surrender, surrounded by references to pairing or twinning which continues throughout many of the scenes in the *Volpini Suite*. Gauguin's travels in the remote north-east and southern ends of France as well as the Caribbean French colony, and his reflections on otherness and the "primitive" that are situated there, are given meaning by these two interwoven narratives that frame western

civilization and morality. As a tale of temptation and seduction, Gauguin's introductory cover design was not unlike Theodor De Bry's introductory plate of *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* which was also regarded as providing a classical, universalizing theme through which to incorporate the subsequent travel narratives which while contemporary, were drawn from a daily practice that was distant from and foreign to that of the intended reader.

Scenes of Martinique

The two prints in the *Volpini Suite* devoted to Gauguin's Martinique experiences provide an important opportunity to assess how the artist extracted meaning from his observations in the Caribbean and how this was integrated into the larger themes addressed in his work. Pope observes that while many of the prints in the *Volpini Suite* are derived either entirely or partially from Gauguin's paintings, the two Martinique prints are the only ones for which this is not the case, and so should therefore be regarded as testimonies to "Gauguin's return to the Martinique of his memory and emotions rather than to the Martinique of his sketchbooks and paintings."³⁷ As such, they present a more distanced reflection on his Martinique experiences which could account for the strong literary or allegorical associations that do not exist in the Martinique paintings and sketches of 1887. They also attest to the enduring impact his six month stay on the Caribbean island had on the artist. During his time in Martinique, Gauguin's attention was focused on the rural landscape between Fort de France and Saint-Pierre, and the daily routine of activities that transpired there. The two lithographs referring to Martinique are different. They are condensed, combining elements from a number of paintings and also introducing some features that are new. Perhaps inspired by the graphic printing medium, they take on allegorical

associations more common to book illustrations. Created with the intention of encouraging wider distribution of his work and thereby enhancing the popularity of the artist and his paintings, the prints were a synthesized summary of Gauguin's impressions, a 'souvenir' as he titled one of them, of his time in Martinique.

The Grasshoppers and the Ants: Memory of Martinique (Les Cigales et les Fourmis: Souvenir de la Martinique), along with *Martinique Pastorals (Pastorales Martinique)* are, according to Pope, two of Gauguin's "most illuminating revisions of Martinique imagery," stylistically and iconographically.³⁸ The first print presents a frieze of female figures along the beach, silhouetted against a bay of water with mountains rising in the distance. The location is identifiable from paintings which Gauguin executed in Martinique depicting Le Carbet and the beach at Anse Turin with the bay of Saint-Pierre in the background, although the composition is reversed in the print. This area is located on the west coast of the island along the main route between the two major centers of Fort de France in the south and Saint Pierre further north. Le Carbet is famous as the site where Christopher Columbus disembarked when he arrived in Martinique in 1502. The beach is within close walking distance from the present day Gauguin Museum, thought to be located near the site of the cottage where Gauguin lived during his six month stay in Martinique. This footpath that ran between Le Carbet and St. Pierre appears in several of the paintings he executed in Martinique but in this print, new and unprecedented prominence is given to the figures. These women, clearly identified as being of African descent, were well known in Martinique as *les porteuse*, women who carried goods – fruits in particular – from the plantations further inland to the city of Saint Pierre, in large baskets or trays (called "traits" in Martinique) balanced on their heads. Gauguin made specific reference in his

correspondence to the graceful gestures of these women: “Their gestures are very distinctive and the hands play an important part in harmony with the swaying of the hips.”³⁹

Particularly prominent are the two figures seated in the foreground with a third, less clearly define body reclining on the left. Pope describes these figures as “lounging or indolent figures.”⁴⁰ This comment references the title Gauguin assigned to and inscribed onto the print below his own signature: *Les Cigales et les fourmis*, translated as *The Grasshoppers and the Ants*. In this way the link to a literary source is inescapable. Unprecedented in his earlier depictions of Martinique, Gauguin has here adopted the title taken from a fable by Jean de la Fontaine (1621-95). Unlike the simple descriptive titles assigned to the Martinique paintings such as *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight* or *Fruit Picking*, the title of this print refers to the first of the *Fables* of La Fontaine, and specifically *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, first published in 1668.

According to Belinda Thomson, La Fontaine was one of Gauguin’s favorite authors and the artist cited his *Fables* often in his letters.⁴¹ La Fontaine was in fact a popular source of inspiration for artists of the period: “examples possibly known to Gauguin include artists as diverse as Charles-Francois Daubigny, Gustave Moreau and Louis-Maurice Boutet de Monvel.” But according to Thomson, Gauguin was characteristically oblique in his allusions to the author. One of the examples she cites is the strange ceramic pot with horned rats which Gauguin included in two paintings that may be derived from the relatively unfamiliar fable of the *Combat des Rats et des Belettes* (The Battle of the Rats and the Weasels).⁴²

In the original fable of *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, La Fontaine describes the story of the grasshopper (or cicada) who after spending the summer singing, finds herself during the winter without anything to eat. She begs her neighbor the ant to loan her some wheat and she will pay him back with interest. The ant refuses, noting that the grasshopper has wasted her time

singing.⁴³ La Fontaine's popular tale was derived from *Aesop's Fables*, a collection of ancient stories credited to Aesop, a slave believed to have lived in ancient Greece during the fifth century BC. These tales which often featured animals were used popularly for moral education across several centuries although with some variations. Wayne Andersen explains that La Fontaine's fables were used as part of the acculturation of slaves newly arrived to the French Caribbean. In addition to instruction in rudimentary French or Creole, La Fontaine's "moralizing tales" embodied and conveyed European ideals: "*The Grasshoppers and the Ants* was a favorite selection, for it advertised the virtues of hard labor." Andersen suggests that Gauguin was probably aware of this practice through the writings of a French travel writer Charles Mismier, author of *Souvenirs de la Martinique et du Mexique*, in which La Fontaine's fable is mentioned as "an instructional, moralizing tool for elevating the savage to 'the first level of civilization.'" ⁴⁴ Henri Dorra, noting that Gauguin changes La Fontaine's original title to the plural, referencing two groups rather than two individuals, summarizes the fable as follows: "...the wise, industrious, parsimonious, and unglamorous ant, having worked through the warm season to accumulate stores for the winter, survives its rigors, while the ever-singing, carefree, and lazy grasshopper has to beg for a loan from the ant in the hope of lasting through the winter – only to be told that rather than singing it should spend that season dancing."⁴⁵

Belinda Thomson points to a reversed anthropomorphism in Gauguin's *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* where the irresponsible grasshoppers and hard-working ants are Martiniquaises:

[C]ross-cultural fabulist narration went to the heart of what Gauguin was trying to do in his art: condensing stories into their most elegant and economical forms, keeping moralizing intentions well-disguised behind outward playfulness, handing over the action to animals – these were narrative maneuvers from which Gauguin derived valuable pictorial lessons. The foxes, geese, dogs, pigs, snakes and lizard that begin to assert their presence in his work from 1886 on were rarely

gratuitous and frequently became charged with meaning. His own preferred self-image, first used of him in 1893 by Degas, was that of the collarless wolf from La Fontaine's fable *Le Chien et le Loup*.⁴⁶

The analogy which presumably is made in this print is to the contrast between the two seated women in the foreground who are rubbing their feet while a third figure reclines behind them, her body defined only by a loosely undulating line (the grasshoppers) and the four erect figures behind them carrying their heavy bundles and baskets of fruit (the ants). Pope points out that Gauguin's imagery from 1886 onward is based primarily on the activities of women and especially on their domestic and agricultural labors.⁴⁷ The contrast of working and resting figures, with emphasis on such a clear narrative statement is rare before the two lithographs with Martinique subjects but was soon to become one of the central themes of his art. Pope points to the influence of his Martinican experiences, but more specifically the importance of Gauguin's "reinterpretation of his experiences," his memories. As a result, the two lithographs can be seen as "an iconographical connection between Gauguin's Martinique sources and the beginnings of his Symbolist period."⁴⁸

Gauguin, who Dorra calls "always the fabulist," was drawn to the depiction of peasants in the tradition of Jean Francois Millet, infusing their representation with moralizing allusions and the socialist zeal of his grandmother: "Frequently he opposed the weight of religious and social traditions dating to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages with his own Enlightenment liberalism, colored by the easy morals of contemporary bohemian Paris, and in the process urged the liberation of the oppressed (most particularly, seduced and abandoned women). He did so with a fervor and compassion reminiscent of the writings of Flora Tristan."⁴⁹

With the social transformations taking place within the post-emancipation Caribbean, the depiction and valuing of labor became a charged subject, as did the representation of indolence.

The choice of subject matter recalls Gauguin's comments in a letter to Schuffenecker expressing his disappointment with the island of Taboga and the indolence of the indigenous Indians: "Here I am settled in the wrong island! With the cutting of the Isthmus life has become impossible even in the most deserted places. The Indians of the hills are not tilling the ground or doing anything, neither will they part with an inch of land." Gauguin continued that Martinique would be preferable precisely because "life is cheap and easy."⁵⁰ Agnieszka Juszcak proposes that the singing grasshopper is the artist providing entertainment to the hard-working ant, but who in return receives insufficient acknowledgment and support. The ant is the bourgeois, and the grasshopper is the bohemian. She explains that La Fontaine was ironically criticizing the lack of appreciation for artists but the fable was traditionally misinterpreted and was used instead to advocate for industriousness.⁵¹

Although different authors relate *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* to different paintings, it seems most clearly tied to *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight*, depicting the bay of Saint-Pierre (Figure 3.4). The figures are bounded by a faint outline resulting from the transfer of drawings to the canvas, a technique Gauguin used regularly, which explains the repetition of certain stock silhouettes in various compositions. Wildenstein points out that the location of this view which is also repeated in *Saint-Pierre Roadstead* (Figure 3.5) was identified by the spur of white rock which appears on the right of the composition, hiding the town of Saint-Pierre to the north which was then the capital of Martinique. At that time only a narrow passage ran through the rock separating Turin from Latouche Bight, requiring travelers to set down their cargo and drag it behind them through the opening; it has since been considerably enlarged, and today the coast road runs through it.⁵² Gauguin set up his easel immediately south of the mouth of the Turin

Bight River. In the distance the iconic Mount Pélée rises but the bustling city of Saint Pierre, which was described as the Paris of the South, remains hidden.⁵³

One late nineteenth century travel journal described the fruit-porters' path and the women who travelled along it daily: "...winding along the coast, through the greenery, indistinct beneath the rocks then again clear on the beach. It is much frequented from early morning on, this narrow path; along it go the Le Carbet negresses who lengthen their stride in the effort to reach Saint-Pierre and sell their coconut milk early [...] you see them running, bare foot, dress lifted to the knee, carrying on their heads wooden buckets, here called 'traits,' full of coconuts still in their green shells."⁵⁴

The zincograph has also been related to the painting *Comings and Goings* (Figure 3.6). The title was given to the work by Gauguin in 1891, apparently referencing the daily travels of *les porteuses* along the famous fruit path. In a letter to Emile Schuffenecker written from Martinique, Gauguin remarked on the "continual coming and going of negresses decked out in tawdry colors, their gracious movements infinitely varied," making particular note of their hand gestures swaying in harmony with the movement of their hips.⁵⁵ The critic Felix Fénéon described the painting when it was exhibited at *Boussod et Valadon* shortly after Gauguin's return to Paris:

...A Martinican landscape, which – with its pink thicket, the dense foliage of its central tree under which women are dozing off, its ochre path with two natives carrying baskets – *brings to mind old engraved illustrations of the islands*. Through the weighty green of the foliage comes the shout of a red roof, as in any true Gauguin. Barbarous and melancholy in character and rather lacking in atmospheric 'feel', with its colors laid on in a shower of diagonal brushstrokes falling from right to left....⁵⁶

Two observations in Fénéon's review are particularly interesting when considering Gauguin's Caribbean imagery. Fénéon notes that the composition and choice of subject matter in

Gauguin's painting fit easily into traditional modes of representations, both his own and that of the region. The prominent red roof seen through the "weighty green foliage" is, according to the critic, typical of Gauguin's landscapes and Fénéon acknowledges the artistic license employed in constructing these scenes. In addition, the composition harks back to earlier prints depicting the West Indies where Afro-Caribbean figures are shown both laboring and sleeping within the lush tropical landscape. The implication is that we see both the work that they are supposed to be doing and the work they are neglecting. This trope links directly back to scenes of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden such as that depicted in the opening pages of the De Brys' *Great Voyages* where the image of the first man and woman in an abundant paradise is juxtaposed with the distant scene of laboring to reap their crops. The depiction of a fruit-bearing woman is the hinge between the two states. Eve's action results in their expulsion from the idyllic paradise, where all one wants is effortlessly available so that now man and woman must toil in the fields to sustain themselves. This duality is reinforced by Fénéon's characterization of the scene as simultaneously barbarous and melancholy in character, and yet somehow still lacking in "atmospheric 'feel.'" But it was the growing number of printed images representing Europe's Caribbean colonies that appeared in the wake of De Bry's publications throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly those representing an idealized, Arcadian re-fashioning of the daily activities of the afro-Caribbean and Creole population that Fénéon was referring to.

"Old Engravings"

Tamar Garb refers specifically to the very popular prints by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur depicting the *Nègre et Nègresses de la Martinique* of 1805, (Figure 3.7), "in which

‘happy negroes’ (dressed like French peasants) dance barefoot amongst fruit-laden trees and luscious plants. And idyllic scenes of laundresses, load-bearing carriers and semi-dressed, dark-skinned bathing nymphs were widely known.”⁵⁷ It is images such as these that Felix Fénéon was referring to in 1888 when he likened Gauguin’s Martinique paintings to “old engravings of the islands.” The engravings by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur (1757-1810) were particularly popular. He was a contemporary of Agostino Brunias, the Italian artist who accompanied the British officer Sir William Young to the West Indies as his official artist and in fact his work is heavily indebted to Brunias.

Grasset de Saint-Sauveur was born in Montreal, Canada before leaving for France at the age of seven where he eventually pursued a career as a writer, engraver, publisher and diplomat. He published approximately twenty books, most notably *Voyages Pittoresques dans les Quatre Parties du Monde ou Troisième édition de l’encyclopédie des voyages...suivis d’un précis historique sur les moeurs de chaque people*, published in 1806. The first volume was devoted exclusively to the description of people of Europe, the second to those of Africa, Asia and the Americas.⁵⁸ While the global survey of Saint-Sauveur’s project recalls the De Brys’ *Great and Small Voyages*, the French artist’s focus on the figure, giving particular attention to costume as well as ethnicity is clearly akin to Brunias’ intentions and in fact a comparison of Grasset de Saint-Sauveur’s *Martinique Mulatto Woman accompanied by her slave (Femme Mulatre de la Martinique accompagnée de son esclave)* (1805) and Brunias’ *Barbados Mulatto Girl* (1779) (Figure 3.8) reveals that the French artist has in fact appropriated Brunias’s work almost entirely and has done little more than eliminate much of the Barbados landscape in the background, omit the seated fruit seller on the right and change the inscription below.

Grasset de Saint Sauveur, like the De Brys, was never required to visit those places he was representing but rather could rely on the information available to him based on the observations of others and when that information was not available, he was free to improvise, substitute and approximate. The composition is now reduced to an exchange between two women, the mulatto and the half-naked slave still carrying the basket of fruit, a relationship now more clearly defined by the new title. The mulatto woman, or *mulâtresse* was particularly associated with Martinique although she became a much exoticized figure throughout the region, renowned for her beauty, her fashion and her sexual appeal. Martiniquan poet Edouard Glissant wrote, "...in Martinique, and probably all through the Caribbean, the *mulâtresse* (the offspring of a White man and a *négresse*) would be set up and kept practically as an official mistress when her turn came. I believe that in Mississippi she would have answered to the name of Belle just as the bighearted servant was called Mammy."⁵⁹ Glissant makes the link between these two "types" of black women well ensconced in the European classifications, ratified in popular culture, perpetuated through print culture and later Hollywood films. These were the mulatto woman and the Mammy, a more mature and weighty figure, a category within which the folk character Mother Sally could fit.

Brunias' images in particular with their staged types of the newly creolizing Caribbean gained currency and came to stand for the representation of categories and classifications of human beings throughout the region in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Brunias's prints were a rich source of information on the changing West Indian demographics and were widely dissemination and redeployed in a variety of forms and for a range of purposes; Brunias visited Barbados in 1765 when he probably made the original image of *The Barbados Mulatto Girl*, and the print dates from 1779, twenty six years before the publication by Grasset

de Saint Sauveur.⁶⁰ Fénéon did not specify the particular works when he compared Gauguin's painting of Martinique to the "old engraved images of the islands." Rather because these compositions had been repeated and refashioned for decades with minor alterations to costume and setting, they were simultaneously representatives of an exotic and distant place and also a familiar, categorized type, situated, classified and labeled within an expanded and globalized terrain. Gauguin's representations of Martinique were highly selective, omitting any reference to the modernization of its urban centers and transformation of its population. They were meant to record, not a developing French colony but a remote utopian existence far from the harsh realities of Paris. But for Fénéon the work fell easily into the category of picturesque geographic and ethnographic surveys.

Le Masurier

The painter Le Masurier (active 1769-1775) provides a more independent record of the newly creolizing population in Martinique and although his works do not seem to have been reproduced as prints, as was the case with the majority of artists discussed thus far, his paintings provides some interesting perspectives on the themes addressed. *Mulatto Woman with her White Daughter Visited by Negro Women in their House in Martinique* (1775), once again identifies the location and ethnicity, now distinguishing three distinct racial categories of "mulatto," "white" and "negro" but avoids recording the name of the family despite the specificity of details in the painting.⁶¹ Three women are seated around a table, accompanied by the young white girl who stands next to her mother. The artist devotes attention to distinguishing the various skin tones of the figures that can be seen together not only within the same social gatherings but within the same domestic space and literally within the same family. If the well-dressed gentleman who

enters from the back is the mulatta's husband, the suggestion is that he is not the girl's father. The artist also pays a great deal of attention to the costume, and here now we see the significant distinctions between that recorded by Grasset de Saint Sauveur (based on Brunias) and that by Le Masurier. The brightly colored fabrics and elaborate head ties are reserved for the mulatto woman and her daughter, while the large woven hat that perches on the high head tie of the black woman indicates that she is visiting. Through the doorway the viewer can see not only the banana tree, locating the scene clearly in the tropics, but also the distant coastline. The large rock formations leading down to the sea or located off the coast serve to identify the exact location and assert the artist's presence in recording the scene "from life." The artist also devotes attention to detailing the objects in the interior setting including the large hammock draped across the back wall, a Caribbean detail that would have been familiar to European readers from as early as Benzoni's *History of the New World* which established the origins of the hammock with the Amerindian population. A particularly noteworthy detail is the still life of fruit, elaborately arranged in the bottom right hand corner of the painting, clearly a decorative compositional device meant to refer back to the main subject. The great variety of fruits, most of which would be strange to European audiences emphasizes the otherness of the Caribbean colony in a whole new lexicon of the products of nature that were being revealed and displayed.

For writers and artists based in Martinique and travelling through the islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the creolized culture which manifested the intermingling of both European and African presence was a source of fascination and became a focus for description. Very few of these details which came to stand as well-established markers of Martinique culture are evident in Gauguin's paintings or the later prints. While the geographical details in the backgrounds of the scenes situated along the beach have allowed viewers to

identify his location, Gauguin eschews any reference to Martinique's Creole population, their cities, ports, plantations, architecture, domestic settings, interiors, furniture. Gauguin was drawn to foreign cultures and peoples and it is well-documented that he collected a wide range of sources and influences which he could incorporate into his own work. Despite this, he relied on a relatively confined vocabulary of themes and images that he reconfigured, seemingly as part of a process of amplified simplification and reduced specificity of detail. What Gauguin does however, is to give focus to the black figure exclusively, without the necessity of comparison to an 'other' as was a preoccupation in the De Bry images and numerous other subsequent print series.

With reference to the difference in representation including costume as presented in the images, another painting by Le Masurier may prove useful. *Madeleine de la Martinique et sa mere (Le nègre pie)* painted seven years later in 1782, presents a portrait of an individual identified now by location *and* name, as well as ethnicity although now more blatantly and problematically displayed as strange, and it is for this reason that the specificity of her name is regarded as important enough to record.⁶² The unnamed figure of the mother wears the loose fitting clothes and simple head tie typical of the women seen in Gauguin's paintings and prints. The white cotton of her blouse is voluminous enough to slip off her shoulder as she leans to one side to balance as she supports her tottering young daughter. The child, Madeleine, is really the focus of the painting. The young girl suffers from a skin pigmentation condition which identified her at that time as a "piebald Negro," a reference to piebald animals such as horses, dogs, pigs and cattle that have a spotted pattern of large unpigmented areas of skin or hair. Originating interestingly enough in the late sixteenth century, the word was formed from "pie", referring to the black and white magpie bird, and "bald", meaning "spotted white." The adjective also refers

to “of mixed character, mongrel.”⁶³ Persons with this condition were often exhibited in sideshows and circuses throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. Although the young girl is identified in the title as coming from Martinique, she was born in St. Lucia in January 1782 to a slave woman. When Le Masurier painted her portrait she was being exhibited in Martinique, prior to being sold, apparently for a large sum of money, and not under the conditions which normally applied to slaves intended for labor but with the intention of exhibiting her in Europe. There were a number of well-known cases of “piebald Negro” children being exhibited including a young girl in Portugal, painted by Joachim da Rocha in 1786 and George Alexander Gratton, born in St. Vincent in 1808 and taken to Bristol the following year to be shown at the Bartholomew Fair where he was compared to a Dalmatian. In all cases the children were exhibited nude. Although the underlying genetic cause is related to a condition known as leucism, “piebald Negroes” were often explained as resulting from the mixing of races and continued to be included in “freak shows” until the 1930s.⁶⁴

The inclusion of the fruits, notably the bananas on which the young girl rests one foot, again contextualizes the scene within the tropics but simultaneously invites comparisons with the variegations and oddities found in nature. The child is presented as a part of the strange array of flora and fauna that characterize the New World but more so, points to the irregularities and deformities that emerge, presumed at the time to result from a mixing of the European and African populations. The child, as the word “piebald” connotes, is displayed as a mongrel, a mixed-breed, a hybrid now confined to a life of exhibitionism. While this representation may fall within the tradition of the representation of the “mirabili” or monsters, it is problematized by the very human affectionate bond between mother and child. Le Masurier presents Madeleine as a lively and aware child, enjoying the affection of her mother who displays her before the focused

attention of the viewer. Recalling the larger genre of depictions of Mother and Child, the archetype of which is the Christian Madonna and Christ child, the scene invites contemplation and reflection.

The Grasshoppers and the Ants: Memory of Martinique

While surviving sketches indicate Gauguin invited women to pose for him in Martinique, none of the paintings or prints approach portraiture and none of the women are named; the emphasis instead is on the gesture and movement of the women which he described in his letters and their personal, seemingly unguarded interactions. The figures in *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* take on a new prominence within the overall composition which was an amalgamation of parts of several paintings as well as independent sketches and studies. While *Fruit Picking (Mangoes)* is the one painting from Gauguin's stay in Martinique that gives comparable prominence to the figures placed in the immediate foreground, the painting, *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight*, (Figure 3.4) most closely resembles the overall composition of the print, presenting a line of porteuses silhouetted against the coastline south of St. Pierre. Two seated women in the foreground have set down their trays of fruit in the shade of a large tree, seemingly to rest during the long trek. Facing one another, the figure in the foreground backing us, the two are apparently in conversation.

In the print, the women walking along the path are more prominent and now balance baskets on their heads rather than the traditional trays. The two women seated in the foreground bend forward, rubbing their feet. According to written descriptions, the women walked these long routes in bare feet, the strain made more intense by the heavy loads they were carrying on their heads. Another significant change which appears in Gauguin's print is the inclusion of the

half-nude woman in the immediate foreground. In none of Gauguin's paintings or sketches executed during his time in Martinique are any of the women exposing their breasts nor is it described in any of his correspondence however, a similar figure appears in the prints by both Brunias and Grasset de Saint Sauveur (Figure 3.10). Here the female figures on the left of the prints previously described are deliberately identified as slaves, of lower status to the other, more fully and elaborately dressed women. These images, produced in the years leading up to the abolition of the slave trade, used indicators such as skin color, social customs, and most importantly clothing to identify the clearly articulated and evolving complex class structures within the Caribbean.⁶⁵

The seated women are now without trays and baskets. Behind them the body of a recumbent sleeping figure is only faintly indicated, her turbaned head turned towards the sea. One of the walking figures (possibly male as he looks to be wearing suspenders) stops and turns towards the group to observe, comment or reprimand them. The whole space has been compressed; the figures are much closer to the foreground and to each other. The processional aspect is heightened as the up and down wave-like flow of swaying arms unites one figure to the other and here the alternating front and back view heightens that sense of graceful movement. At the same time the traditional rectangular wooden trays seen in *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight* have been replaced with large spherical woven baskets, their contents piled up to the brim so that the loads are now much larger but at the same time, the curved shape accentuating the sensuous curves of the women. The women in *Fruit Picking (Mangoes)* use woven baskets with handles that the woman in the foreground balances on her head; these may have been more commonly used in picking fruits, but the traits were used specifically for market. In addition to the heavy load, the women clearly make this long journey barefoot so that rubbing their feet seems to be an

indication of the strain of the hard physical labor rather than carefree relaxation, indolence or laziness.

Laziness is not a concept that is associated with either Arcadia or leisure time as depicted by the Impressionists. When does the concept of ‘laziness’ emerge? *The Bible* associates idle time with waste and immorality. Slothfulness is listed as one of the seven deadly sins. Proverbs is especially filled with admonitions concerning laziness: “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6); and “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor” (Proverbs 12:24). Krista Thompson points to written accounts by visitors who held the view that the West Indies was a Garden of Eden where the fruits of the land were so abundant that the natives could simply live off them, without the need to work – a preconception which Gauguin shared. The abundant fertility of the land was credited to nature or to God so that the black population, according to historian Frank Taylor, “had neither to toil nor to spin to make a living, since little effort was required to maintain human sustenance in the tropical Garden of Eden.”⁶⁶ Some reports however, adopted a judgmental and moralistic position. One traveler to Jamaica in 1903 was quoted in the *Daily Gleaner* as saying “It’s a strange world, is Banana land. You see bananas grow so easy down there they’ve nothing to do but lie down in the shade and let them grow. If it wasn’t for that they’d never raise any, they are so lazy.”⁶⁷ Thompson notes that the travel literature singled out the black male, particularly after emancipation. She quotes a writer for the United Fruit Company’s publication, *The Golden Caribbean*: “The freed Negro, ignorant and long accustomed to hardship and compulsory labor, would not work for hire; ...yet the wonderful abundance of wild growing native fruits permitted him to exist with but little effort”⁶⁸

Interestingly, in studying these accounts Thompson identifies a “fault line” running between representations of black labor as depicted by Americans as opposed to British commentators. American tourists denounced blacks as lazy, while the British stressed the industriousness of the island’s black population, presumably in an effort to support post-emancipation colonialism. Americans countered British claims and instead supported the importation of Indian indentured servants for cheaper labor.⁶⁹

Gauguin focused almost exclusively on the Afro-Caribbean population in Martinique, a fact which Garb points out is extraordinary, given that the island had one of the most diverse and mixed populations during the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Pope emphasizes that it is important to indicate the racial variety which characterized Martinique in the late nineteenth century to demonstrate just how narrow or particular Gauguin’s artistic vision was at the time. Martinique’s indigenous Amerindian population was eliminated soon after the French colonists arrived and African slaves were imported throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to support the sugar plantation system. By 1830 the slave population numbered about 100,000, outnumbering the rest of the population by a ratio of 8:1. This included the whites (Europeans from France), the creoles (whites born in the colony), and the people of mixed race, further subdivided into groups according to the proportion of white to black in the admixture such as the *gens de couleur* (colored) , or *mulâtres* (mulatto). In 1890 the black population was still counted at about 100,000; 20,000 whites and creoles; and about 50,000 *gens de couleur*.⁷¹

After emancipation in 1848, Africans continued to be brought to the colonies through “voluntary engagement.” After arriving in Martinique they would receive instruction in the *créole patois* and work as indentured laborers for ten years after which time they were declared to be *hommes libres*.⁷² By contrast to the men who were characterized as lazy, the *négresses* of

Martinique were renowned for their animated movements which Gauguin made careful note of, as well as their hard work. American Lafcadio Hearn wrote at length about the beauty and strength of these women in one of his “Sketches” devoted to *Les Porteuses* in his book *Two Years in the French West Indies*. Published in 1890, the book recorded his observations in Martinique during a two-year stay that commenced in 1887 and overlapped with Gauguin’s time there although there is no record that the two men ever met. Hearn writes:

Now the creole *porteuse*, or female carrier, is certainly one of the most remarkable physical types in the world; and whatever artistic enthusiasm her graceful port, lithe walk or half-savage beauty may inspire you with, you can form no idea, if a total stranger, what a really wonderful being she is....Those who believe that great physical endurance and physical energy cannot exist in the tropics do not know the creole carrier-girl.⁷³

Hearn goes on to describe how the *porteuses* were trained from a very early age to carry fruits and other goods in traits on their heads. Using these traits, they transported most of Martinique’s light merchandise on foot, walking barefooted up to fifty miles each day, supporting loads that weighed 120 to 150 pounds for which a person would earn thirty francs (about six dollars) a month. Summoning numerous superlative comparisons to antiquity, Hearn states that these well-toned figures would make you dream of Atalanta, “and all, whether ugly or attractive as to feature, are finely shaped as to body and limb. Brought into existence by extraordinary necessities of environment, the type is a peculiarly local one, - a type of human thorough-bred representing the true secret of grace: economy of force.”⁷⁴ Hearn’s descriptions type-cast these women in much the same way as the mass-produced prints, revealing, despite his ebullient praise, the enduring stereotypes of an anti-modern “half-savage.”

Pope notes that due to their grace, agility, and stamina, the *porteuses* were “considered by numerous visitors to be the finest specimens of natural exotic beauty.”⁷⁵ But it was not just travel accounts and print folios that disseminated this message. Garb demonstrates that by the middle

of the nineteenth century, the image of the happy and industrious Negress became a marketing tool, her face appearing on trademarks, labels and advertisements for Martinican rum. “So when he emerged from his hut, sketchbook in hand, to draw the folk that he saw,” Garb writes, “Gauguin was already furnished with a set of internationalized images and stereotypes that would delimit his choices and predispose him to certain figural constructions.”⁷⁶

Given the well-engrained image of the strength of Martinican women, particularly the renowned *porteuses* who are the subject of Gauguin’s print, it is difficult to comprehend his choice to form a link with Fontaine’s story of the grasshopper and the ant. In the seventeenth century, Jean de la Fontaine introduced his *Fables* with the story of “*La cigale et la fourmi*.” In illustrations accompanying the story, the grasshopper and the ant were traditionally depicted as women, reportedly because both words for the insects are of the feminine gender in most Romance languages. In La Fontaine’s text, while the grasshopper is clearly female, the gender of the ant, although not overtly stated, seems to be male since the insect refers to the grasshopper as ‘dame’ and ‘ma’am’. Illustrators of the fable also tended to set the story within a winter landscape, the point at which the grasshopper, according to La Fontaine, approached the ant for assistance. While the grasshopper has clearly been left in a vulnerable position as a result of her own negligence, La Fontaine presents the ant as incapable of demonstrating empathy or charity, despite the offer to repay the loan with interest.⁷⁷

The theme of the grasshopper and the ant was a popular one among nineteenth century artists, often with political as well as moral allusions. The popularity of La Fontaine’s fables spread to the French colonies and by the middle of the century, a number of versions had been translated into creole, one notable example being François-Achille Marbot’s *Les Bambous*,

Fables de la Fontaine: travesties de la patois creole par un vieux commandeur of 1846.⁷⁸ The title page depicts two men, a shirtless slave seated on the ground pointing to the left, while a well-dressed white man indicates he (or they) should be fleeing in the opposite direction. Above them is a small palm tree, indicating the tropical setting, and in the distance, a group of armed soldiers approaches. Above the image is a quote from Fontaine: “On ne considère en France que ce qui plait...” (“One only considers in France that which pleases us”), seemingly an appeal from Marbot for emancipation of slaves which would come two years after the book’s publication. Marbot (1817-1866) was born in Fort de France in Martinique, a first generation creole in the original sense of the word, his father having come from Brittany. He had a career in the navy, eventually becoming superior officer of Guadeloupe. Creole versions of fables continued to grow in popularity with the most popular version being Georges Sylvain’s *Cric? Crac! Fables de la Fontaine racontées par un montagnard haïtien et transcrites en vers créoles* (La Fontaine’s fables told by a Haitian highlander and written in creole verse) which appeared in 1901.⁷⁹ Translating Fontaine’s fables into creole was specifically intended to make these moralizing tales more accessible to black and mulatto populations. Gauguin’s intention in linking his depiction of les porteuses with Fontaine’s writings, however, is not as directly evident.

There is inherent irony in Gauguin relating this allegorical tale of the value of labor. Gauguin abandoned a career as a stock broker to pursue a life as an artist, placing himself as well as his wife and five children in financial peril for the remainder of their lives. Much of his subsequent nomadic wandering was due in part to his need to escape the financial hardships of life in Paris. Theo Van Gogh attributed this behavior at one point to nature or biology – that is, Gauguin’s own supposed Amerindian ancestry. Theo explained Gauguin’s actions as a result of this racial and cultural makeup: “it’s evident that Gauguin, who is half Inca, half European,

superstitious like the former and advanced in ideas like certain of the latter, can't work every day in the same way.”⁸⁰

Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh famously debated the value of painting from observation as opposed to memory, with Gauguin arguing on the side of memory. The first part of the title of this print emphasizes the role of remembering: “souvenir.” For Gauguin, piecing together images recorded two years earlier was a process of re-collecting, in a graphic form intended for reproduction. *The Grasshoppers and the Ants*, along with *Martinique Pastorals* were to be representative of his Caribbean experience as a whole and at the same time contribute to the coherence of the folio of images that made up the *Volpini Suite*.

Martinique Pastorals

The other image representing Gauguin's experiences in Martinique to be included in the *Volpini Suite* was *Martinique Pastorals (Pastorales Martinique)* (Figure 3.2). While *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* depicted the *porteuses* descending down towards the west coastline of Martinique, this scene depicts the interior lush tropical landscape with a view of rolling hills descending into the distance. Introducing the theme of the pastoral places the Caribbean landscape within the tradition of the golden age of myth and allegory, what Raymond Williams has called “myth functioning as a memory.”⁸¹ If *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* was identified as a “souvenir” or memory of his time spent in the Caribbean; this image with its designation as a pastoral can equally be seen to function as an allegory based on his by then distant experience on the island. Once again, Gauguin gives a new prominence to the figures in the landscape, this time three women. The composition is most closely related to the Martinique painting

Conversation in the Tropics, or Negresses Chatting (*Conversation Tropiques*), of 1887 (Figure 3.15) but Gauguin has made a number of alterations such as removing the small tree that obstructed the full-length view of the figures in the painting, so that now the two women in the foreground appear closer to the viewer.

In the painting, two women are depicted supporting trays of fruit – one on her head and one on her right hand, as if they have paused in the midst of their work. In the print they are no longer *porteuses*; the figure in the foreground seen from behind extends both arms, one of which wraps around the neck of her companion in an affectionate embrace, while her other arm and hip extend out in a graceful sway to the right in a silhouette, reminiscent of the central figure in *The Grasshoppers and the Ants*. She seems to gesture towards two goats – a mother and her suckling kid. These have replaced or amalgamated the lone goat and a small cat drinking from a bowl as well as the boy picking fruit from a bush, and a laundress squatting in the background by the river depicted in *Conversation in the Tropics*. Instead a third standing female is seen along the left edge of the composition. Seen from the back, she appears to be Caucasian or Creole, certainly lighter skinned than the two women engaged in conversation, one of the very few such references to racial diversity in Gauguin's work. The large abstracted form of a tree trunk on the right creates a dramatic compositional contrast to the more intricately detailed forms of the receding landscape that now seems to fall away into a distant and panoramic view. The forms of nature are much larger, dwarfing the figures; the monumental tree trunk on the right seems to extend infinitely beyond the height of the composition and the gigantic serrated leaves of the banana plants that frame the female figures. Although Fénéon referenced earlier prints as supplying the familiar imagery, the carefully constructed drama of this composition recalls late nineteenth century travel posters (Figure 3.13).

As the title, *Martinique Pastorals*, suggests, these women are not laboring but are rather relaxing in a lush rural setting of ease, contentment, and natural sustenance, a message reinforced by the suckling kid. Gauguin often used the evocation of classic western themes. Following in traditions of the pastoral going back to Jean-François Millet, and before him to Claude Lorrain, descending from classical literature and descriptions of Arcadia and a Golden Age, the pastoral evoked themes of idyllic peasant life with moralizing overtones of pre-industrial purity and closer embracing of religion in life. Simultaneously, these scenes often alluded to ideas of a physicality and base desires. Translated into the Caribbean, the Afro-Caribbean figures that form the primary human presence in Gauguin's Martinique paintings and prints assume the role of peasants. But this is not a simple and unproblematic "translation" and reflects Gauguin's ongoing constructed fantasies of a tropical paradise, unhindered by the lived experience of the African population.

The Primitive Pastoral

The pastoral was a theme that for Gauguin could translate easily into any tropical setting. Solana refers to a later painting entitled *Pastorales Tahitiennes*, which Gauguin described to his friend Daniel de Monfried in 1892, explaining that he had given it a French title because "I did not find a corresponding title in Canac."⁸² But Gauguin's limitations with translation were not confined to linguistics; he remained confined within the tropes of western vision. Solana points to a paradox in Gauguin's use of a European word – pastoral – for an Oceanic painting, as he had done previously in the Caribbean: "Gauguin has come down to us as the *Überläufer*, the cultural refugee, fleeing from European civilization to find shelter in a different and alien culture.

However, when this fugitive comes to give a name to the experience of passage towards the other, he makes use of a concept – the pastoral – derived from Greco-Latin antiquity and one which embodies better than any other the classical values of the western tradition.”⁸³

Despite Gauguin’s stated aim to escape modern France, his destinations were focused on her colonies, ensuring that he was never completely removed from the civilization he knew well and kept in contact with through his considerable correspondence with friends and family. In addition, Martinique itself was not as removed from modernity as Gauguin projected. Gauguin was situated just a few miles from Fort de France in the south and even closer to St. Pierre in the north, both busy urban centers with regular arrivals of ships from Europe. In fact, St. Pierre was often referred to as the “Paris of the West Indies.” The challenge then becomes how to reconcile Gauguin’s invocation of a classical pastoral tradition with his much vaunted primitivism. This duality which lay at the heart of Renaissance ideology was a consistent feature throughout the De Brys’ *Great Voyages*, that epic pictorial essay that accompanied early travel narratives through the New World.

Solana argues that the way in which Gauguin chose to represent the “natives” of Martinique and later Tahiti, as well as the Breton peasants (and in all cases these were primarily women) was an attempt to adapt the rhetorical tradition of the pastoral with its praise for the simple and humble to these locations and cultures by invoking primitivism. Gauguin found in both primitivism and in the pastoral a route to a state of reclaimed innocence.⁸⁴ Lawrence Gowing introduced the term “the pastoral of the primitive” to describe how Gauguin “renewed” the pastoral tradition.⁸⁵ The pastoral of the primitive was created first in Martinique and developed in Brittany. According to Solana, Gauguin believed he had “discovered a world of

perfect innocence, a prelapsarian world, prior to the Fall.” He subsequently underwent a crisis around 1889-90. In his efforts to empathize with the primitive world of Brittany,

...he developed an anti-naturalist and visionary type of painting linked to literary symbolism, but it is precisely this *supernaturalisme* (to use Baudelaire’s term) which ended by muddying the purity of the pastoral mode....[F]rom 1888, with the appearance of Christian subjects and ideas, the notions of evil and guilt perverted this paradisiacal innocence. Pastoral inspiration would appear again later in Gauguin’s Tahitian paintings, but profoundly altered by that major crisis.⁸⁶

This transition or “crisis” that Solana identifies falls squarely between Gauguin’s time in Martinique and the production of the prints for the *Volpini Suite* on the occasion of the *Exposition Universelle* in 1889. His suggestion that it is the prevalence of Christian themes, notably the concept of sin that distorted his vision of paradise could find validation in the *Volpini Suite* where the title page bearing the image of the classical Leda doubling as a fallen Eve, sets the stage for the assembled depictions of Gauguin’s journeys beyond the perceived city limits and borders of modernity.

The prominence of the massive tree trunk on the right of the composition in *Martinique Pastorals* recalls the work of Vincent Van Gogh, notably the single diagonal tree trunk that dominates the composition in *The Sower* (1888) (Figure 3.17), or the monumental singular *Trunk of an Old Yew Tree* (1888) which could have been the model for Gauguin’s drawing with the anchored roots at the base and its verticality emphasized by being cut off at the top of the composition.⁸⁷ In contrast, *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* introduces the rhythmic repetition of three slim tree trunks alternating with and framing the lyrical sway of the female *porteuses*. This compositional device is another fabrication and is not seen in the earlier paintings, nor is it a feature of the beach in Martinique. The two trees on the left are papaya which do not typically grow on the beach but do reference the fruit carriers. Van Gogh’s pair of paintings, each titled

Falling Autumn Leaves (1888) (Figure 3.18) also presents a line of vertical trees, undoubtedly influential since the works were executed at Les Alyscamps in Arles where the two artists went together in late October to paint, and these paintings subsequently hung together in Gauguin's bedroom during his stay in Arles.⁸⁸ The yellow and orange backgrounds that appear in these work as in so many other works by Van Gogh at this time (notably the *Sunflower* paintings), may also have inspired Gauguin's choice of yellow paper when printing the *Volpini Suite*.

In *Martinique Pastorals* the three women are silhouetted against a patch of banana trees with their distinctive broad leaves; banana leaves do not appear with this kind of prominence in the landscapes painted in Martinique. In discussing the construction of "tropicality" in representations of the Caribbean during the late nineteenth century, Krista Thompson outlines how much of the flora found in the colonized Caribbean actually originated elsewhere: sugarcane was imported from India and later from the Pacific Islands and Malay Archipelago in the seventeenth century; and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bamboo, royal palms, coconut palms, bougainvillea, hibiscus, oleander, and poinsettia were brought into the Caribbean along with breadfruit, citrus, mangoes and bananas.⁸⁹ Bananas along with palm trees (which did feature in the paintings executed while Gauguin was in Martinique) were central components of touristic images in part because in addition to being recognizable markers of tropicality, they signified that the "anarchy" of tropical nature had been tamed or subdued through their cultivation and imperial transplantation.⁹⁰

In addition to the tourists, the so-called "naturalists" who traveled to the region to record the flora and fauna at this time typically gave preference to new or unfamiliar forms of nature that were specifically exotic and strange. This preference predetermined not only what they

chose to represent, but also how. The result was that the vast majority of representations focused on only a small part of the islands' environment, typically excluding indigenous vegetation as well as urban settings and the more modern aspects of daily life. Thompson notes that like the colonial botanical transplants, the presence of African slaves, and later their descendants, was also reworked through picturesque aesthetics to seem "natural" components of the landscape.⁹¹ In written descriptions, "native" inhabitants meant those of African descent who were described as being picturesque, an attribute that was equated with being orderly.⁹²

In the same way that the De Brys' *Great Voyages* began with texts intended to encourage European settlement in the Virginias, written accounts of the Caribbean in the nineteenth century as well as pictorial images were often aimed at attracting visitors or settlers. To this end, the colonizers and elite members of the society – the ones who would profit – had to project images that would counter associations with a history of insurgency and insurrection among the black inhabitants – "uncivilized behavior." The Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 was the most dramatic example but there were more recent examples such as Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, and the Cuban War of Independence (1895-98). Thompson argues that part of the tradition of depicting the colonized Caribbean was the depiction of the landscape and inhabitants as disciplined and orderly. Whether to encourage settlement and investment or to attract visitors, those who commissioned the making, reproduction and distribution of these images usually had a vested interest in presenting the region as being under control, orderly, disciplined, safe and even welcoming. This constructed presentation of the Caribbean Thompson refers to as the "tropicalized" image. The majority of these images focused on the representation of black population as not only peaceful and unthreatening, but one which had a marginalized relationship to modernity.⁹³

Gauguin's stay in Martinique coincided with a transitional time in the making of the modern, post-Emancipation Caribbean. The plantation system, and specifically sugar, which had been the economic backbone of much of the region, had been in sharp and steady decline during the late nineteenth century. The abolition of the slave trade, followed by Emancipation had dramatically impacted the economies within the region which had been built on slave labor. To compensate, deliberate efforts were made to promote the islands and tourism increasingly appeared to point the way to a new prosperity. Referring to similar efforts in what was referred to as the "New Jamaica," Krista Thompson cites statistics showing that in 1870 sugar had contributed 44.5 percent to agricultural exports but by 1900 it had fallen to less than one quarter of that. The number of estates declined from 316 in 1867 to less than half that amount by the turn of the century.⁹⁴

Sugar cultivation which had radically altered the landscape of the West Indies, clearing away and destroying much of the original vegetation, was followed by the rise in tourism which needed to promote the image of a tropical paradise. This process of tropicalization, then, was tied to a new economy and new ideas about labor. Thompson argues that with the decline of the sugar industry and the rise of the tourist industry, visibility gained increasing importance; heightened attention was paid to how the islands were presented and represented, particularly in terms of their appeal for "sightseeing." This is well-documented in the increasing availability of photographs and particularly postcards and travel posters of the Caribbean – images specifically manufactured to project a desired image of the visitor's experience of the Caribbean back to European or North American family and friends. There was a direct, but often contradictory relationship between the project of modernization and the promotion of tourism. While tourism required certain modern amenities including ports, hotels, internal transportation and reliable

utilities, the image of the Caribbean that was marketed was one that was distant and removed, both geographically and temporally. The analogy of “discovering” the island was often invoked. Thompson quotes one late nineteenth century tourism promoter in Jamaica who predicted the island would “be ‘discovered’ in the modern sense, and if we succeed in pleasing the fastidious taste of the class [of tourists] that will shortly visit us we may also in the modern sense be ‘made’”⁹⁵ Although Gauguin would not identify himself as a tourist, his paintings fell well within the parameters of what the colonies wanted to project, namely a focus on a tropicalized nature, home to an equally exoticized and picturesque “native” Afro-Caribbean population existing peacefully in a paradise removed from all trappings of modernity.

The image of the half-naked woman in the foreground of *The Grasshoppers and the Ants* is inserted into the print, not because this is a scene Gauguin recorded from observation but rather as a trope appropriated from earlier images of the Caribbean such as Brunias’ *Barbados Mulatto Girl* or even Theodor De Bry’s image of the *Indian Woman of Cumana* and ultimately the Garden of Eden. Gauguin gives this figure prominence, setting her in the foreground. At the same time he inscribes the title, associating the image with Fontaine’s allegory of labor and laziness. She is not a beautiful young woman such as those that would feature in Gauguin’s later works from Tahiti, but rather she is an older woman. Gauguin’s intention is to remove her from the civilizing, modernizing transformations. But her nakedness is also presented as a signifier, not just of her indolence but of her refusal to work. At the end of the short fable, the grasshopper is remorseful because as winter is coming, she has no reserves to sustain her. This is exactly why Gauguin was attracted to the Caribbean – his romanticized notion that with the temperate climate and lush vegetation of the tropics, food was always available for the taking and one need not labor simply to survive. Gauguin’s “souvenir,” his memory of a now distant Martinique is in fact

a constructed one which conflates his own preoccupations with pre-existing tropes of tropicality and paradise.

Solana has noted that the pastoral was traditionally linked to the idea of “youth and adolescence, ages expressive of innocence and purity prior to the Fall.”⁹⁶ The pastoral image of the Caribbean landscape was linked to its description as a prelapsarian paradise where fruit grew without effort or labor and was freely available. This was the ideal which Gauguin was seeking. The native population (the Afro-Caribbean population) was not in fact native in the sense of being indigenous to the islands but rather had been forcibly brought to the region as enslaved labor and remained associated with labor. Martinique, as a colony and possession of France (as it still is today), was maintained primarily for its ability to generate wealth. With the recent memory of the French and Haitian Revolutions, the uneasy relationship between the black population and the white persisted beyond Emancipation, despite efforts to project an idyllic existence. In fact, with the rise of tourism, the image of this idyllic existence was supported by free, and then cheap labor. The daily transatlantic arrivals during the late nineteenth century did not just accommodate passengers but rather ferried services between France and its Caribbean colonies; one well-documented example is the white linens that were sent to Martinique to be washed and bleached in the sun before being returned to France. There emerged an uneasy relationship between the notion of labor and servitude; a blurred line between the absence of the imperative to labor and the refusal to do so. Leisure was a privilege that belonged to the wealthy. Laziness was ascribed to those whose labor was in the service of someone else.

While Gauguin invokes the theme of the pastoral to frame his landscape, Krista Thompson refers to the ‘Picturesqueness’ in the Caribbean, referring to the landscapes’ conformity to these exoticized and fantastic ideals of the tropical landscape; one that seemed like

“the dream of tropical nature.”⁹⁷ The concept of the picturesque emerges in eighteenth century Britain, as described by clergyman and artist William Gilpin as a way of seeing the British landscape in pictorial terms “free from the formality of lines, preferring instead uninhabited or uncultivated areas where nature was free to grow unhindered or wild.”⁹⁸ Nevertheless, untended nature was still presented using formulaic compositional structures set out by Gilpin. The picturesque was therefore a way of seeing, drawing on pre-existing representational models which helped to foster the intended outcome which was an emotional response.

The pastoral and picturesque both present nature as being in the service of man, providing both physical and spiritual sustenance. This is in contrast to the sublime which presented nature as untamed and overwhelming.⁹⁹ Curator Lauren Rabb, in addressing these categories in nineteenth century landscape distinguishes the pastoral landscape from the picturesque:

Pastoral landscapes celebrate the dominion of mankind over nature. The scenes are peaceful, often depicting ripe harvests, lovely gardens, manicured lawns with broad vistas, and fattened livestock. Man has developed and tamed the landscape - it yields the necessities we need to live, as well as beauty and safety. The Picturesque....refers to the charm of discovering the landscape in its natural state.¹⁰⁰

Gilpin was an advocate for picturesque travel with the aim of “discovering” beauty in unspoiled Nature. According to Krista Thompson, the picturesque is a British aesthetic category which when applied to the Caribbean, and filtered through the demands of colonialism and the trope of tropicity, acquires its own variation. Art historian Jill Casid has introduced the term “imperial picturesque” to describe an aesthetic that is intimately connected to British imperialism in the West Indies. This variant of the picturesque presented the landscape as altered through the

process of colonialism, whether through the imposition of the plantation, or the importation of both plants and people with the aim of presenting these features as naturally occurring and aesthetically pleasing. According to Thompson, “these ‘imperial picturesque’ views would create a visual template for still enduring representations of a ‘tropical’ island.”¹⁰¹ The inclusion of banana, papaya and palm trees would then be elements of the imperial picturesque.

Thompson also identifies a moralizing component that has been associated with the Caribbean picturesque. She cites the British artist and architect James Hakewill (1778-1843) who published his accounts of his tour of Jamaica in 1820 and 1821 in *A Picturesque Tour of the Island of Jamaica* (1825) where he claimed to distinguish himself from his contemporaries by providing not just a description of the external appearances of the country but also an assessment of its “moral condition.”¹⁰²

“He sought to sketch a moral geography, an ethical appraisal of the political institution that so dominated the landscape – slavery.” But in addition to what the picturesque purported to depict, Thompson also refers to “the aesthetics of concealment,” noting that the picturesque or tropicalized depictions provided a screen or a “ready-made mask” through which planters, colonizers, the elite and the artists they commissioned could disguise the conditions, violence, and brutality of the plantation.¹⁰³

Within all of these representations there is a presumption of invisibility on behalf of the artist. It is presumed as if the presence of Gauguin within these rural spaces of work and leisure is not intrusive and that the Martinican women were unaffected by his act of capturing their images and later exhibiting them. Krista Thompson documents the way in which the Afro-Caribbean population began by the turn of the century to argue against the tropes of representation that had been mass-produced to market their islands and their hospitality.

Jamaican Garveyite and mayor, H.A.L. Simpson, spoke at a meeting of the Universal Negro Improvement Association in January 1915, where he criticized the advertisements, particularly postcards in their depictions of the local black population and denounced photographers for paying blacks “to pose in almost any manner they (the photographers) wanted” and for selectively focusing on the most economically disadvantaged persons.¹⁰⁴ The primary concern was with how these representations would be viewed overseas and their role in perpetuating stereotypes. Thompson also describes how postcards were “tropically enhanced,” by hand painting the original photographs of black Jamaicans posed holding fruits to emphasize the fruits and erase the electrical lines hanging overhead to remove any overt signs of modernization.¹⁰⁵ This type of altered re-presentation supported written accounts that described abilities of “the natives” to simply live off the fruits of the land that proliferated in the Garden of Eden.

The Grasshoppers and the Ants: Memory of Martinique (Les Cigales et les Fourmis: Souvenir de la Martinique) and *Martinique Pastoral (Pastorales Martinique)* were produced by Paul Gauguin as part of the *Volpini Suite*, to present to a European audience attending the grand 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, a synopsis of his recent artistic preoccupations with symbolism and simplified form, and also his obsession with what he regarded as remote and pre-modern societies. In fact these were all French territories – Pont Aven and Brittany in France, and the Caribbean island of Martinique and his representations of these spaces was selective. Although the intent was to publicize Gauguin’s oeuvre to visitors to the colonial exhibition, these images, which by their nature as prints made the imagery accessible to a broader public, also reflect Gauguin’s particular perceptions of these locations which were informed by a range of influences and which in turn, due to the extensive popularity subsequently of Gauguin’s work, have continued to impact public perceptions of the tropics. In the case of the two zincographs

devoted to Martinique, the images were not simply translations of paintings he produced during his time in the Caribbean two years earlier. Rather they are deliberately manipulated representations of the imagery. The links to story-telling traditions are all the more overt in these prints because the titles are inscribed onto the plates, titles that link the works directly to fables of La Fontaine, the personal recollections of memory and the classical traditions of the pastoral. What the recent writings of Caribbean art historians such as Krista Thompson have emphasized is that by the end of the nineteenth century, Caribbean citizens were increasingly cognizant and critical of the skewed representations. By the middle of the next century these concerns with representation would find a charged and politicized voice both in words and image.



Figure 3.1 Paul Gauguin - *Volpini Suite: The Grasshoppers and the Ants – Memory of Martinique (Les Cigales et les Fourmis – Souvenir de la Martinique)*, 1889

Zincograph

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1954.55.10



Figure 3.2 Paul Gauguin - *Volpini Suite: Martinique Pastoral (Pastorales Martinique)*, 1889.
Zincograph
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund 1954.55.9

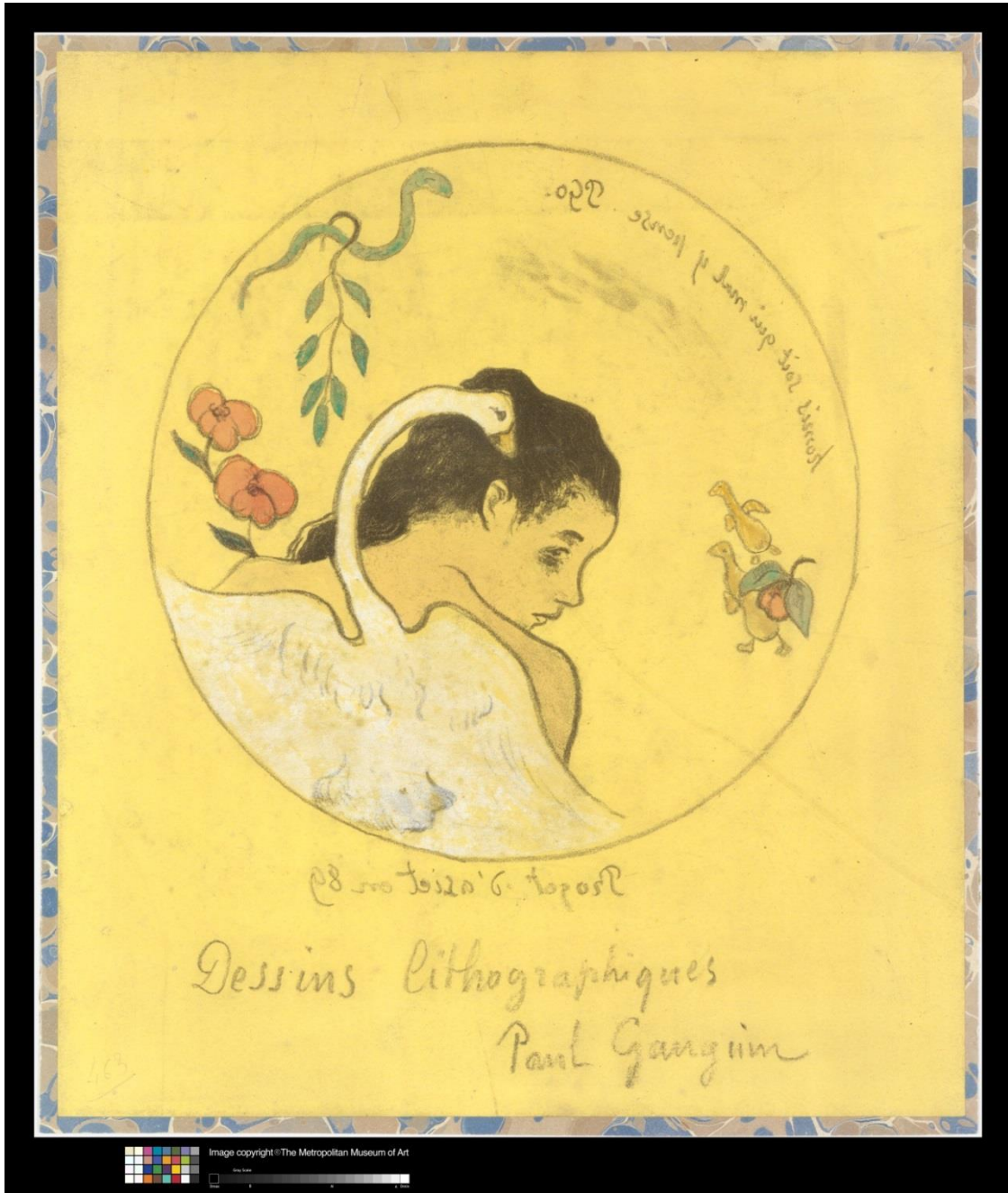


Figure 3.3 Paul Gauguin – *Volpini Suite: Leda and the Swan (Design for a Plate)*, 1889
Zincograph
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source:
Art Resource, NY



Figure 3.4 Paul Gauguin – *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight*, 1887

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; Photo courtesy of Kharbine-Tapabor / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY



Figure 3.5 Paul Gauguin – *Saint-Pierre Roadstead*, 1887

Oil on canvas

Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen; Photo courtesy of Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY



Figure 3.6 Paul Gauguin – Comings and Goings, 1887

Oil on Canvas

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J. G. S. Sauveur. del.

Lachaussee j.° sculp.

*Negre & Negresse de la Martinique
dansans la Chica.*

Figure 3.7 Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur – *Negro & Negress of Martinique Dancing la Chica (Negre & Negresse de la Martinique dansans la Chica)*, 1805, colored engraving
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library



Figure 3.8 Agostino Brunias – *Barbados Mulatto Girl*, 1779, oil on canvas
The Barbados Museum and Historical Society



Figure 3.9 Vincent Van Gogh – *The Sower*, 1888, oil on canvas
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; Photo courtesy of Snark / Art Resource, NY

Endnotes

¹ Paul Gauguin to Mette Gauguin, Letter 52 (Panama: Undated, early May, 1887) and Letter 53 (Saint-Pierre: 20 June, 1887) in Maurice Malingue, ed. *Paul Gauguin: Letters to his Wife and Friends*, trans Henry J. Stenning (Boston: MFA Publications, 2003), 81. I have altered Malingue's translation of "Pour en revenir" from "To go back" to "To return."

² See Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 54 and 71.

³ Charles Morice, *Paul Gauguin* (Paris: Floury, 1919) 81 as cited in Daniel Wildenstein, *Gauguin: A savage in the Making – Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings (1873-1888)*, 2 vols. Milan: Skira, 2002, 321.

⁴ Karen Kristin Rechnitzer Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, Dissertation, Austin: The University of Texas, May 1981, 182.

⁵ Gilles Manceron, "Segalen et Gauguin," in *Gauguin. Actes du colloque Gauguin*. Paris, Musée d'Orsay, 11-13 January 1989 (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1991), 47, as cited in Guillermo Solana, ed. *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*. (Madrid : Philip Wilson Publishers in association with Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and Fundacion Caja Madrid, 2004), 17.

⁶ Flora Tristan (1803-1844) was Gauguin's maternal grandmother. She wrote several works, one of the best known of which was *Periphrasies of a Pariah* (1838,) a travel journal of her own journey to Peru to claim her share of her family's fortune but also her fight to gain independence from her husband at a time when divorce in France was illegal.

⁷ In an undated letter to Emile Schuffenecker written in Martinique in September 1887, Gauguin states, "I shall bring back a dozen canvases, four of them with figures far superior to my Pont-Aven period." (Letter 57, (Martinique: Undated, September 1887) in Malingue, 86). In his catalogue raisonné, Daniel Wildenstein identifies sixteen paintings executed in Martinique.

⁸ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 1.

⁹ Belinda Thomson (ed.), *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*. (London: Tate Publishing, 2010) 10. *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* was curated by Belinda Thomson, Christine Riding and Amy Dickson with Tamar Garb for the Tate Modern, London (September 20, 2010 – January 16, 2011).

¹⁰ Thomson, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, 10.

¹¹ Tomàs Llorens, "An anti-modern future," in Guillermo Solana, ed., *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism* (Madrid: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004), 13.

¹² Llorens, “An anti-modern future,” 13, (my emphasis).

¹³ Tamar Garb, “Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other: The Case of Martinique,” in Thomson, 24.

¹⁴ Edouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 1996, trans. Barbara B. Lewis and Thomas C. Spear (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), as cited in Garb, 26.

¹⁵ Garb, “Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other,” 26.

¹⁶ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 49.

¹⁷ Thomson, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, 12.

¹⁸ Thomson, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, 13.

¹⁹ Paul Gauguin, Letter to Emile Bernard, (undated, end of August 1889) as cited in Henri Dorra, *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin: Erotica, Exotica, and the Great Dilemmas of Humanity*. Berkeley (Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007), 3.

²⁰ France first abolished slavery in 1794 but it was re-established by Napoleon in 1802 and lasted for another forty-six years.

²¹ Belinda Thomson, “Gauguin Goes Public,” in Heather Lemonedes, Belinda Thomson and Agnieszka Juszczak. *Paul Gauguin: Paris, 1889*. (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 2009), 29.

²² The works that make up the *Volpini Suite* are as follows:

Joies de Bretagne – Joys of Brittany

Baigneuses bretonnes - Breton Bathers

Bretonnes À la barrier - Breton Women by a Gate

Misères humaines – Human Misery

La laveuses – Washerwomen

Les drames de la mer, Bretagne - Dramas of the Sea, Brittany

Les drames de la mer, une descente dans la Maëstrom – Dramas of the Sea, a Descent into the Maëstrom

Pastorales Martinique – Martinique Pastoral

Les cigales et les fourmis: Souvenir de la Martinique - The Grasshoppers and the Ants: Memories of Martinique

Les vieilles filles À Arles – Old Women in Arles

²³ Thomson, “Gauguin Goes Public,” 62.

²⁴ Chris Stolwijk, “Devoted to a Good Cause: Theo van Gogh and Paul Gauguin,” in Lemonades et al., 75.

²⁵ The prints were 50 x 65 cm in size. Two sets were cut and glued on cardboard to be colored in watercolor by Gauguin himself. Later, Ambroise Vollard published a second, smaller edition of thirty copies on Japanese paper, ivory in colour and only 32 x 47 cm in size. These were printed by Auguste Clot, presumably between 1893 and 1895, coinciding with Gauguin's stay in Paris between the two trips to Tahiti, although there is some indication that the edition was posthumous.

²⁶ Moyna Stanton, “Gauguin’s Yellow Paper,” in Lemonades et al., 109.

²⁷ Stanton, 112, refers to “Arrangement in Yellow and White,” the 1883 exhibition organized by James McNeill Whistler, featuring his Venetian etchings and held at the Fine Art Society in London where even moldings, velvet curtains, sofas and chairs were yellow.

²⁸ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 176. Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 51 also states that “The Suite Volpini has troubled many scholars by its apparent lack of thematic unity.” Moyna Stanton has proposed a chronology for the work based on the refinement of technique, stating that Gauguin worked on the Suite for four to six weeks, during which time an increase in technical confidence and evolution of style is evident across the eleven zincographs. The Martinique images are considered to be one of the last prints made in the series along with *Breton Woman by a Gate* and *Joys of Brittany*, the four which Stanton concludes have the greatest mastery of lithography (Stanton 108).

²⁹ Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven. Prints and Paintings*. (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1986), 38-42, as cited in Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 51.

³⁰ Richard Brettel, Françoise Cachin, Charles F. Stuckey, and Claire Freches-Thory, *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), 132 as cited in Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 52.

³¹ Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 277 as cited in Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 52.

³² Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 176-7.

³³ Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 52. The first, idyllic group consists of three prints of Brittany (*The Joys of Brittany*, *Breton Bathers*, *Breton Women by a Gate*) and two of Martinique (*Martinique Pastoral* and *The Grasshoppers and the Ants*). The second group consists of the two prints devoted to *Dramas of the Sea in Brittany*, and the three on subjects from Arles: *Old Women from Arles*, *Washerwomen* and *Human Misery*.

³⁴ See Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods, How Renaissance Artists Rediscovered the Pagan Gods* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁵ Polydeuces as the son of Zeus was immortal while Castor was human although according to mythology, when Castor was killed, Polydeuces asked Zeus to let him share his own immortality with his twin and they were subsequently transformed into the constellation Gemini. As a result, there were inconsistencies in accounts contained in the Iliad, the Odyssey and other classical texts as to their mortality or immortality.

³⁶ This translation is provided by Agnieszka Juszczak, “The Iconography of the Volpini Suite,” in Lemonades et al, 120. Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 52-53 translates the motto as “Evil be to him who evil thinks.”

³⁷ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 179.

³⁸ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 174.

³⁹ Gauguin to Schuffenecker, Letter 129 (Martinique: Undated, early July 1887) in Victor Merlhès, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: Documents Témoignages* (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), 157 as cited in Juszczak, 144.

⁴⁰ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 179.

⁴¹ Thomson, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, 20.

⁴² Thomson, *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*, 21.

⁴³ La Fontaine’s fable, *The Grasshopper and the Ant* is as follows:

A grasshopper gay
Sang the summer away,
And found herself poor
By the winter's first roar.
Of meat or of bread,
Not a morsel she had!
So a begging she went,
To her neighbor the ant,
For the loan of some wheat,
Which would serve her to eat,
Till the season came round.
I will pay you, she saith,
On an animal's faith,
Double weight in the pound

Ere the harvest be bound.
The ant is a friend
(And here she might mend)
Little giver to lend. How spent you the summer?
Quoth she, looking shame
At the borrowing dame.
Night and day to each comer
I sang, if you please.
You sang! I 'm at ease;
For 't is plain at a glance,
Now, ma'am, you must dance.

The Fables of La Fontaine. Trans. Elizur Wright, Jr. (New York and Boston: H. M. Caldwell Co., Publishers, 1881). <http://www.litscape.com/author/Jean-de-La-Fontaine/The-Grasshopper-And-The-Ant.html> - accessed 12.11.11

⁴⁴ Wayne Andersen, *Gauguin's Paradise Lost*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 47.

⁴⁵ Henri Dorra, *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin: Erotica, Exotica, and the Great Dilemmas of Humanity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007), 71.

⁴⁶ Thomson, *Maker of Myth*, 21. Scholars have pointed to both Indian sources as well as the Jewish Talmud as origins for *Aesop's Fables* from which La Fontaine's tales were derived.

⁴⁷ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 181.

⁴⁸ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 182.

⁴⁹ Dorra, *The Symbolism of Paul Gauguin* , 59.

⁵⁰ Gauguin to Emile Schuffenecker, Letter 51 (Panama: Undated, end of April 1887), in *Malingue*, 79.

⁵¹ Juszczak, "The Iconography of the Volpini Suite," 149.

⁵² Wildenstein, *Gauguin: A savage in the Making*, 322.

⁵³ The volcano would famously erupt fifteen years later on 8 May 1902, razing Saint-Pierre and killing 30,000 inhabitants and incinerating everything that lay in its path as far as Le Carbet. The capital moved to Fort-de-France.

⁵⁴ Louis Garaud, *Trois ans à Martinique: etudes de moeurs, paysages et croquis, profïles et portraits* (Paris: A. Picard et Kaan, 1892), as cited in Pope, 101.

⁵⁵ Gauguin to E. Schuffenecker, early July 1887 (Merlhès 129) as cited in Wildenstein, *Gauguin: A savage in the Making*, 328.

⁵⁶ Felix Fénéon, “Calendrier de décembre. V. Vitaines des marchands de tableaux,” *La Revue indépendante*, (15 January 1888) 170, as cited in Wildenstein, *Gauguin: A savage in the Making*, 328.

⁵⁷ Garb, “Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other,” 26.

⁵⁸ <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/books-manuscripts/grasset-de-saint-sauveur-jacques-voyages-pittoresques-5151864-details.aspx>. While Grasset de Saint Saveur is acknowledged as the artist, Labrousse is recorded as having made the engravings.

⁵⁹ Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*, 82.

⁶⁰ One of the most interesting examples of the popular use of Brunias’ images is on a set of ivory buttons recorded as belonging to Toussaint L’Ouverture and located in the collection of the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York.

⁶¹ See http://www.latribunedelart.com/spip.php?page=docbig&id_document=16035 for an image of the painting.

⁶² See <http://lunettesrouges.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/01/13/l%E2%80%99autre-l%E2%80%99etrange-le-sauvage-ou-les-fantomes-du-jardin-dacclimatation/le-masurier-le-negre-pie-madeleine-de-la-martinique-et-sa-mere/> for an image of the work.

⁶³ Douglas Harer, Online Etymology Dictionary, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=piebald&searchmode=none.

⁶⁴ Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, “Madeleine of Martinique” in Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage* (Paris: Musée du Quai Branly, 2012), 71. The artist is identified only as S. Le Masurier (with no dates or biographical details) and the painting is mistakenly dated 1872.

⁶⁵ An article in the *Warwick Argus* of July 4 1899 titled “Les Porteuses of Martinique” described the female carriers of the West Indian island of Martinique: “Her erect carriage and steady, swift walk impress the observer with an idea of strength and liveness; and the puissant shapeliness of her semi nude torso, ruddily swart like statue metal. . . .” <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/76631418>

⁶⁶ Frank Taylor, *To Hell with Paradise: A History of the Jamaican Tourist Industry* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 107 as cited in Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 75.

⁶⁷ *Daily Gleaner* (Kingston, Jamaica: 20 February 1903) cited in Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, endnote 31, 315.

⁶⁸ *The Golden Caribbean* (Boston, 1903), 2 as cited in Thompson, 75-76.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 76-77.

⁷⁰ Garb, "Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other," 27.

⁷¹ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 83.

⁷² Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 86, footnote 101.

⁷³ Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 81-82.

⁷⁴ Hearn, 82. Atalanta was an Arcadian princess from Greek mythology who took an oath of virginity to the goddess Artemis.

⁷⁵ Pope, *Gauguin and Martinique*, 86-87.

⁷⁶ Garb, "Gauguin and the Opacity of the Other," 28-29.

⁷⁷ Other sources also empathized with the grasshopper: one example is Jules Massenet's two-act ballet *Cigale*, first performed at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 1904, which portrays the cicada as a charitable woman who takes pity on "La Pauvrette" (the poor little one) but La Pauvrette refuses to reciprocate when the situation is later reversed. And Cigale is left to die in the snow at the close of the ballet.

⁷⁸ La Fontaine, *Les Bambous, Fables de la Fontaine: travesties de la patois creole par un vieux commandeur*, trans François-Achille Marbot (Martinique: Librairie de Frédéric Thomas, 1869). The book is available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54240082>.

⁷⁹ Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, *Textes anciens en créole français de la Caraïbe* (Paris, 2008), 259-72.

⁸⁰ Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh, Letter 830 (Paris: 22 December 1889), vangoghletters.org. cited in Thomson, 12.

⁸¹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 43.

⁸² Gauguin to Monfreid, Letter, (Undated, end of December 1892), in *Lettres de Paul Gauguin À Daniel de Monfreid*. Précédées d'un hommage par Victor Segalen. (Paris: Georges Crès, 1919), 103 as cited in Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 17.

⁸³ Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 17. The theme of the pastoral is rooted in literary traditions, originating in the third century BC with Theocritus' *Idylls*, followed two centuries later with Virgil's *Bucolics* which provided the model for Renaissance authors such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Agnolo Poliziano and above all Jacopo Sannazaro, with his enormously successful *Arcadia*. These poets entrenched the idealization of rural life, embodied in the simple existence of the shepherd and shepherdess. The pastoral tradition in painting was most successfully embraced during the Renaissance by Venetian artists Giorgione and Titian, and continued throughout the Baroque period through artists such as the Carracci, Domenichino, Poussin, Claude, and later Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard. This continued into the nineteenth century in the very classicized paintings of Puvis de Chavannes but also informed gestures towards realism such as those of the Barbizon School, finding renewed enthusiasm via the skepticism aimed at modernism's industrialization and urbanization. See Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 17 for an in depth overview of the pastoral tradition.

⁸⁴ Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 21.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Gowing, "The Modern Vision," in Robert C. Cafritz, *Places of Delight. The Pastoral Landscape* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 238 as cited in Solana, 18.

⁸⁶ Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 21.

⁸⁷ See <http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/vincent-van-gogh/trunk-of-an-old-yew-tree-1888> for an image of this painting, located at the Helly Nahmad Gallery in London.

⁸⁸ Wildenstein, *Gauguin: A Savage in the Making*, 524.

⁸⁹ Jill Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization in the Eighteenth Century*. PhD diss., Harvard University, 15 as cited in Thompson, 40.

⁹⁰ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 65.

⁹¹ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 41.

⁹² Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 67.

⁹³ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 16.

⁹⁴ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 311.

⁹⁵ *Daily Gleaner*, (Jamaica: 9 January 1893), as cited in Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 29.

⁹⁶ Solana, *Gauguin and the Origins of Symbolism*, 36.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 21.

⁹⁸ William Gilpin, "Observations on the River Wye" (1782) as cited in Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 35.

⁹⁹ See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, David Womersley, ed. (London: Penguin Classics, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Lauren Rabb, *19th Century Landscape: The Pastoral, the Picturesque and the Sublime* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Museum of Art and Archive of Visual Art, October 9, 2009 - March 2, 2010) www.artmuseum.arizona.edu/events/event/19th-century-landscape-the-pastoral-the-picturesque-and-the-sublime.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 36-41. For her discussion of the Imperial Picturesque, see Jill Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

¹⁰² Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 38.

¹⁰³ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Daily Gleaner (Jamaica: 18 January 1915) as cited in Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, 75.

Chapter Four

The “Re-Turn” to a Native Land

The trouble is...that I'm fifty-per-cent Cartesian, and fifty-per-cent savage.
Wifredo Lam¹

...if I am who I am today, I believe that much of it is due to my meeting with André Breton. [It was like] a great shortcut toward finding myself.
Aimé Césaire²

Cuban artist Wifredo Lam and Martinican writer Aimé Césaire both acknowledged the complex construction of their own diasporic identities, informed by historical circumstance as much as lived experiences that both hindered and fostered the process of formulating a language to express that identity in an authentic voice as a pronouncement of self-assertion. A forty year collaborative friendship that originated in Martinique during the Second World War with the gathering of a group of Surrealism's intellectuals including its leader, poet André Breton, was seminal to the formulation and projection of an expression that was representative of African diasporic and Caribbean experience.

The artistic collaboration between Aimé Césaire and Wifredo Lam and their interaction with European intellectuals such as André Breton resulted in a reconceptualization of Afro-Caribbean identity. This conceptualization was expressed in Lam's images and Césaire's poetry. Book production and printmaking, the relationship between words and images, lay at the core of their association but the mutual influences were not limited to this; one of Lam's most important

paintings, *The Jungle*, is closely linked to his intellectual exchanges with Césaire and the experiences of the first years of World War II. Predicting in 1943 the revolutionary impact Césaire's epic *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*) would have on a post-war modernism, Breton referred to the poem's "transfiguring gaze" which he described as a promise of redemption.³ Prefiguring Stuart Hall's description of the self-affirming diasporic gaze, Breton announced the emergence of a new and forceful Afro-Caribbean voice. For Lam and Césaire, the return to the Caribbean, a requirement of circumstance rather than choice, was also a *re-turn* as a shift to re-envision the region, filtered through a heightened awareness of the diasporic experience that would result in a counter-narrative to the stranglehold of colonialism and traditions of representation and open up a way forward.

During the 1940s, various and divergent black modernist practices from multiple sites became "self-consciously diasporic" for the first time. According to Kobena Mercer, the imaginative epicenter of black modern culture – or Afro-Modernism, migrated to the Caribbean as artists and writers saw themselves as part of a new trans-national movement in twentieth-century art and culture rather than one confined to a national milieu. What this did, according to Mercer was to "break apart the prevailing image of 'Africa' in the West and thus open a space for new understandings of black cultural influences as a core feature of global modernity."⁴ There was a flourishing of transnational artistic networks across the Anglophone, Francophone and Spanish-speaking regions which fostered major transformations in Afro-modernism. But ironically much of this confluence happened in Europe where young West Indians were sent to be trained as middle-class professionals, or pursue the requisite artistic training and initiation into the avant-garde. While the trans-Atlantic journey from west to east, from the Caribbean to

Europe represented not only the pinnacle of academic, professional and social success and an escape from the insularity of the Caribbean, in reality the experience demonstrated the fallacy of colonial integration and its skewed narrative formulation of modernism. In Europe the transnational dialogue that these young intellectuals discovered amongst themselves would eventually translate back to the Caribbean and provide a model for a trans-Caribbean and broader diasporic creative community.

Discovering Europe

Lam and Césaire never met in Paris although their time there briefly overlapped. Wifredo Lam, who was eleven years older than Césaire, arrived in Europe a decade before him in 1923 to study in Madrid with the academic painter Fernando Sotomayor, Salvador Dali's former teacher. He immersed himself in the galleries of the Museo del Prado in order to obtain a solid grounding in European academic traditions.⁵ Lam must have felt an affinity with this imagery as Cuba had a well-established tradition of academic art. The *San Alejandro* Academy in Havana was the oldest such institution in the Caribbean, founded in 1818 to provide, according to art historian Giulio Blanc, "solid training based on European antecedents."⁶ Lam was admitted to the century-old institution in 1916 and spent five years there before leaving for Spain. In addition, the National Museum of Fine Arts of Havana (*Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de la Habana*) had recently been opened in 1913 with a collection of European paintings and sculptures as well as a collection of ancient art. Nevertheless, a respectable training as a professional artist required a lengthy stay in Europe, immersed in its ateliers, museums and bohemian artists' quarters.

In Madrid, Lam was soon drawn to the more avant-garde *Academia Libre* but eventually moved south to Cuenca for financial reasons, becoming involved in the local art scene and

developing a circle of patrons. He also became increasingly involved in Spanish politics, eventually enlisting in the service of the Republican party during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Lam reached Paris in 1938, already influenced by the work of Henri Matisse and enthusiastic about the work of Pablo Picasso which he had seen firsthand in an exhibition that toured Spain. Through a letter of introduction to meet Picasso, the two Spanish-speaking artists quickly became friends and it was Picasso who would introduce Lam to André Breton, the founder of Surrealism.⁷ Lam would later describe his encounter with Surrealism as his “deliverance from cultural alienation.”⁸

Lam reached Paris the year before Césaire left to return to Martinique to take up a teaching post. Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) travelled to Paris in 1932 to further his formal education as part of the established trajectory in preparing him for a career in the French colonial civil service. He had gained a scholarship to the *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* and in 1935 passed the entrance exam for the *Ecole normale supérieure*. It was in Paris that Césaire encountered fellow students from the African diaspora and this interaction had a profound effect on his subsequent writings and philosophy of black experience.

For young “New World” intellectuals, migrating to Europe during the 1920s and 30s involved a process of integration, locating and establishing a space within the heady atmosphere of a vibrant European modernism and somehow finding a voice. Europe presented a more liberal and culturally diverse environment than the often conservative social structures of the Caribbean islands, particularly among the more bohemian artistic communities where African culture was embraced as a sign of anti-bourgeois, avant-garde modernity. Petrine Archer-Straw has described the short-lived fascination with black culture that arose in Europe and specifically in Paris between the two World Wars. She uses the term “negrophilia” to describe the vogue for black

culture among the Parisian avant-garde as a signifier of modernism and a provocative challenge to bourgeois values.⁹ But this was often achieved through a theatrical exoticization of black culture, most famously exhibited in the performances of Josephine Baker which could feature the topless singer wearing a skirt made of bananas or swinging in a gigantic bird cage.

Paradox of Primitivism

At the same time in New York, there was a flourishing of African American artistic life referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. This increased visibility of black or African diaspora culture was often cloaked in well-established notions of tropicality and exoticism. In *An Eye for the Tropics*, Krista Thompson cites the example of Harlem's famed Cotton Club, where black musicians appeared in front of a jungle backdrop. Increased visibility, Thompson argues, did little to advance more discerning imagery as familiar tropes and racially loaded signifiers remained prominent. While greater visibility may have been equated with more acceptance, it was an image rooted in performativity that reinforced stereotypes associated with the jungle and the savage, a modern celebration of the mythical primitive.¹⁰

What was required was a diasporic perspective of modernism. Artists and writers from the Americas would return home from Europe after having participated in the artistic traditions and circles, to the realization that many of its precepts did not translate globally. In particular, intellectuals from the Americas and the African diaspora knew through their own direct experience that modernism's obsession with primitivism revealed itself to be flawed. Artists from Europe's perceived global peripheries realized that modernist practices and ideologies could not be transplanted, adopted and incorporated fully. It required critical adaptation. Returning to Sao Paulo from Paris and the studio of Fernand Leger, Brazilian artist Tarsila do

Amaral along with her partner Oswald de Andrade would develop the concept of *Antropophagia* in their manifestos of 1925 and 1928 to articulate this relationship through a satirical appropriation of the trope of cannibalism which lay at the heart of every discovery story of the Americas as the marker of the savage. This group of Euro-Brazilian artists and writers vowed to become the cannibals, devouring European culture and absorbing only what was good, and rejecting, literally excreting - vomiting or shitting out all that was irrelevant and useless for them.¹¹ Césaire and Lam also would find, through their disorienting experience of return to the Caribbean, a reformulated language of adaptation, rejection and invention through which to articulate their own perceptions of their Afro-Caribbean realities.

Black Consciousness: Césaire and Négritude

It was in Paris that Aimé Césaire joined together with fellow students from the Caribbean and Africa to affirm a positive black identity as a rejection of colonial assimilation policies and the proliferation of racial stereotypes, embracing blackness to counter a legacy of colonial self-hatred.¹² Césaire's activist ideologies during this period have traditionally been linked most closely with those of his fellow students, Léopold Senghor (1906-2001) from Senegal and Léon Damas (1912-1978) from French Guiana and with the publication of the surrealist-inspired journal *L'Étudiant Noir* (*The Black Student*) with its articulation of their shared ideology of *Négritude*. As the full title of the journal indicates, *L'Étudiant noir: Journal des Étudiants Martiniquais en France*, the publication was primarily a forum for students from the French Caribbean island, although Senghor was the one African student who did contribute to what is considered to be the one and only issue, published in March 1935. Edward Ako has clarified that although Damas described the publication as "a journal of combat with the objective of ending

tribalization, the clannish system in force in the Latin Quarter,” he did not actually participate.¹³ Despite this, his later view that “One ceased to be an essentially Martinican, Guadeloupien, Guyanese, African, Malagasy student, in order to be only one sole and same black student. It was the end of life in isolation,” clearly expresses the ideal of a diasporic unity that their shared time in Paris could create. Brent Hayes Edwards also points out the lack of a clear and unified ideological perspective within the publication. Edwards describes Senghor’s holistic humanist approach as “tepid” in comparison to Césaire’s approach in his article “Négreries: jeunesse noire et assimilation” which calls for a “sharp and complete break with Western civilization and with assimilation espoused by the ‘elders’.”¹⁴ Despite the often repeated assertion that *L’Étudiant Noir* first presented Césaire’s philosophy of *Négritude*, Edwards argues that he is short on specifics, never calls for the end of colonialism and does not actually yet use the word *Négritude*.

Négritude, as an ideology and literary movement eventually went in different philosophical directions, but it initially acted as a rallying cry for a subjective sense of black authenticity hitherto denied expression by the internalization of a Eurocentric worldview.¹⁵ The French colonial policy of assimilation and its attempts to obliterate “difference” under the dominant culture became a focal point of resistance. This experience inspired Aimé Césaire to write in the *Notebook*: “Accommodez-vous de moi. Je ne m’acommode pas de vous!”¹⁶ Like *Anthropofagi*, *Négritude* subverted and reclaimed what colonizers had denigrated. The word “nègre” had previously been a pejorative term, much like the English word “nigger,” but was defiantly redeployed in the ideology of *Négritude* as a deliberately provocative redefinition of the language aimed at inverting meaning so that it became a signifier of black pride. Archer-Straw describes the terminology as a challenge to Western fallacies about black culture, a rejection of the historical connotations of primitivism and an indictment of colonialism.¹⁷

Although as an ideology and a literary movement *Négritude* would eventually branch off into different philosophical directions, it initially acted as a rallying cry for a subjective sense of black authenticity which had not previously found expression within a Eurocentric worldview.¹⁸ After his return to Martinique, Césaire would continue to develop and assert his ideas around black authenticity and power as a direct challenge to prevailing and widely circulating racist projections. This would find its most forceful voice in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* whose written imagery would inspire form in Lam's work upon his own journey back to the Caribbean.

The War Years

During the period of 1939 to 1945 the whole world changed. The Old World – Europe – was imploding with the devastating extent of World War II. Imperialism and its attendant project of colonialism began to quickly unravel. People – notably artists and intellectuals – fled Europe for the “New World” as the global axis shifted. New York emerged as a new urban land of opportunity, a modernist Eden, a chance to start over again. With this shift, the relationship between the Caribbean and the rest of the world was altered and a wealth of intellectual and creative production emerged. Thompson identifies the inter-war years as the beginning of a historiography of African diaspora art history. She credits anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits as one of the earliest to argue that West African cultural retentions could be discerned in the cultural and social expressions of blacks in the Americas:

Herskovits contended that African traditions thrived, to different degrees, in the New World, at a time when it was widely assumed that blacks had no longstanding cultural heritage – no past, no history – on which they drew. He argued against those who saw the Middle Passage as ushering in an emptiness or blank slate that erased and estranged New World blacks from the continent of

Africa and those with a vested interest in highlighting the Americaness (and not Africaness) of the Negro in the New World.¹⁹

Mercer credits *Négritude* for the new focus on the Caribbean.²⁰ The significance of the work of writers such as Aimé Césaire or C.L.R. James and later Frantz Fanon was only fully acknowledged with the dismantling of modernism, and the emergence of post-modern and post-colonial counter-narratives to bring global acknowledgement to the seminal work of these Caribbean thinkers. These revolutionary ideas centered around diasporic identity which emerged out of confrontation with Europe and a subsequent *re-turn*, not as a linear about-face but as a circuitous re-thinking about the unmasking of the colonial process, the colonial charade. It acknowledged and celebrated the African presence within the Caribbean. Many of the metaphors put into play by the postcolonial literature of the 1980s – hybridity, syncretism, créolisation – were first registered, according to Mercer, in debates of the 1940s that saw cross-cultural exchange as a source of fresh aesthetic possibilities, brought about by the global conditions of modernity. The double-consciousness necessitated by the historical realities of the Black Atlantic spoke to a trauma of dislocation that came to reflect a wider global experience and as such was seminal to complexities of an evolving and fracturing modernity.

Surrealism and the Caribbean

Surrealism was regarded as a mode of apprehending and articulating the desire for revolutionary change and under its broad ideological umbrella, artists and writers, individually and in collaboration with one another, produced some of their most important and radically innovative work. Surrealism had already clearly established its sympathies with anti-colonial movements as part of its generalized revolt against the very foundations of Western Civilization and its morality. The Surrealists had protested against the 1931 colonial exhibition in Paris,

labeling it “colonial piracy” and staging a counter-exhibition entitled “The Truth about the Colonies”. Its underlying theme was a quotation from Marx: “A people which oppresses others cannot be free.”²¹ It provided a rallying point for intellectuals from the diaspora and served as a kind of counterweight to the exoticist tendencies within modernist primitivism which had been used to describe the Caribbean.

A short-lived “Caribbean Surrealist Group” had established itself in Paris in 1931 and managed to produce a single issue of a modest journal called *Légitime défense (Self-defense)*, which has been called “the first publication in which colonized blacks collectively sought to speak with their own authentic voices”.²² Its title was taken from a short publication by Breton, who encouraged the students to concentrate their discussions on the links between politics, aesthetics and anti-colonialism, though without emphasizing the Caribbean context. *L'Étudiant Noir* arose in response to a perceived unwillingness in *Légitime défense* to engage with Caribbean and African issues but rather to “slavishly adhere to appropriated European models of surrealism and Marxism”²³ Despite the contested ground amongst these young intellectuals, Surrealism, and in particular the writings of André Breton provided an ideological foundation. His presence then in Martinique in 1941 and his enthusiasm for Césaire’s writing was immensely significant for the young writer newly returned to his small island.

Surrealism provided a language through which both Lam and Césaire could articulate the position of the black colonial subject in Europe and the experience of re-acculturation back into their respective native lands and an acknowledgement of the centrality of the Afro-Caribbean experience. Its challenge to western conventions spoke to the disintegration of civilization during World War II and the collapse of the colonial project. Breton was a significant influence for Césaire and Lam. Césaire would later acknowledge the importance of his great friendship with

Breton as pivotal in the evolution of not only his own writings and ideology but his sense of self: “...if I am who I am today, I believe that much of it is due to my meeting with André Breton. [It was like] a great shortcut toward finding myself.”²⁴

For Wifredo Lam, his involvement with André Breton and the surrealist circle began in Paris just prior to the outbreak of war. With the entry of German forces into France in June 1940, all forms of avant-garde and alterity were viewed as subversive and a number of artists were forced to flee censorship, persecution and incarceration. With the establishment of the Vichy regime in the south, millions took to the roads to escape the Nazi threat. Many headed to Marseilles with the hopes of finding eventual passage to the “New World”, leaving behind a failed one. Césaire was already back in Martinique. He had completed his studies and married fellow Martinican student Suzanne Roussi (1915-1966) with whom he had a young son and was obliged to return to Martinique to take up a position as a teacher. Lam, on the other hand, had a dramatic escape from Paris, entrusting the contents of his studio to his friend Picasso. He arrived in Marseilles at the end of July 1940 and was soon reunited with André Breton and his companion (later wife) Helena Holzer at the Villa Air Bel (also known as Bel Air) along with other members of the Surrealists including Max Ernst, Victor Brauner, Oscar Dominguez and Andre Masson. During a long eight-month stay, (July 1940 to March 1941), Lam along with the others was reliant on assistance from the Emergency Rescue Committee headed by Varian Fry, as well as Peggy Guggenheim, as they all anxiously awaited some means of escape. While it was to be a difficult winter with the shortage of supplies and amenities becoming increasingly severe, the artists fostered an environment of collaboration and creative experimentation.²⁵

Lam participated with Breton and the other Surrealists in the collaborative artistic improvisations including drawings, collages, *cadavres exquis* or exquisite corpses, automatic

writing, and games. It was here that Lam produced the *Fata Morgana* drawings, illustrating Breton's poems of the same name which were inspired by his recent trip to Mexico. Holzer would translate the poems into Spanish and read them to Lam who would select a passage that evoked an image for him and proceed to make his own graphic interpretations. Lam produced more than thirty drawings from which eight were selected for use in the book.²⁶ Sims sees in these drawings a chronicle of "the terror, anxiety and uncertainty *experienced* by Lam and those around him"²⁷ The anxiety she refers to was not without foundation. Breton had been arrested in Marseille and detained for four days as a "dangerous anarchist" and in February-March 1941 the Vichy regime censors forbade publication of *Fata Morgana* along with another of his books, *Anthology of Black Humor*.²⁸ It was in this fertile if unsettled environment that Lam began to develop what would become his signature or mature style featuring cross-gendered, hybrid figures rendered in elegant graphic line that would continue throughout his six-year stay in Cuba during 1941-47. This period of great uncertainty was also one of exceptional collaboration and experimentation that established a foundation for the development of work during the 1940s.

Finally in March 1941²⁹, Lam and Holzer, along with Breton, his wife Jacqueline and daughter Aube, boarded the freighter S.S. Captaine Paul Le Merle at Marseilles, bound for the French Caribbean island of Martinique. More than three hundred passengers were crowded onto the ancient freighter. Victor Serge, an early supporter of the Russian Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky and a key figure during the Villa Air Bel sojourn, described the ship as "a can of sardines with a cigarette butt stuck on it."³⁰ Whereas Gauguin had not described the nature of his trans-Atlantic crossings in any depth, there are several written descriptions of this dramatic journey of 1941. Breton's biography describes a voyage of great hardships and deprivations, with barely enough food to sustain the passengers. The most graphic recordings however are

provided by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who was also on board and who quickly befriended Breton. In his autobiographical *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), Levi-Strauss recounted how the ‘marvelous crossings of the thirties’ amongst the first-class passengers which he had made as a young teacher assuming duties at the Sao Paulo University in Brazil were a sharp contrast to the journey of March 1941, a voyage, he later wrote, “which I had not suspected at the time of being so extraordinarily symbolic of the future.”³¹

His shock at seeing so many passengers herded onto the freighter and into the hold like deported convicts only worsened as the journey progressed. In an effort apparently to escape inspection by the British Navy, the ship made its way through the Mediterranean and down the coast of West Africa before heading west across the Atlantic. The climate became hotter as they approached the Caribbean, making it “impossible to remain below, and the deck was gradually turned into dining-room, bedroom, day-nursery, washhouse and solarium.”³² By comparison Lévi-Strauss’s conditions were enviable, since he occupied one of only seven available beds in the only two cabins. This privilege he owed to his friendship with the captain who remembered him from his earlier travels to Brazil. He nevertheless had to contend with the wretched toilet and bathing conditions that he described at some length.

Lévi-Strauss records that among the “riff-raff, as the gendarmes called them, was included...André Breton.” The 33-year-old anthropologist met the 45-year-old surrealist poet for the first time during this voyage but it was a friendship that would be sustained for many years. Lévi-Strauss described Breton as “very much out of place *dans cette galère*, [striding] up and down the few empty spaces left on deck; wrapped in his thick nap overcoat, he looked like a blue bear.” A lasting friendship developed as they exchanged letters during that voyage, discussing “the relationships between aesthetic beauty and absolute originality.”³³

Of course it wasn't Breton's first trans-Atlantic crossing either. He had visited Mexico in 1938, where, as the guest of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, he had met Leon Trotsky and had co-written with him the manifesto, "For an Independent Revolutionary Art." Breton had been invited by Yves Tanguy and Kay Sage to return to Mexico as an escape from occupied France, but this prospect proved too upsetting for Breton following Trotsky's assassination.

Nevertheless, Breton maintained many fond memories of his time in Mexico and the mutual admiration for Native American culture would have been one of several points of common interest with Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss would later recount his meetings with Breton in New York where together they would frequent antique shops selling so-called primitive and folk art. Lévi-Strauss noted that they were often attracted to the same objects, but for different reasons:

Breton had an instinct about objects he loved, and he sometimes made me appreciate things I otherwise wouldn't have seen or appreciated. We once came upon an object that had obviously been made to be sold to whites; to my mind, it had no cultural function, and therefore was not interesting. But Breton stopped short in amazement, and after a while I, too, understood that it was nonetheless very beautiful. He wasn't a purist or trained; but because of this he saw things that I didn't.³⁴

Arrival in Martinique

After approximately one month at sea the freighter reached Fort-de-France in Martinique. The passengers were escorted to a former hospital at Les Trois Îlets where they were reportedly interrogated and confined. This experience has been described variously as an "internment" and as a makeshift accommodation necessitated by such an unprecedented influx of people to the small island.³⁵ Although New York was the intended destination for Lam, Breton and Lévi-Strauss (who had been invited to join the New School of Social Research), it took over six weeks before authorities could verify the status of the passengers and arrangements for their departure could be organized. Lévi-Strauss provides a dramatic description of these events:

...the passengers were soon to learn that their filthy, overcrowded boat was an idyllic refuge, in comparison with the welcome they were to receive almost as soon as the ship docked. We fell into the hands of soldiers suffering from a collective form of mental derangement, which would have repaid anthropological study, had the anthropologist not been obliged to use his entire intellectual resources for the purpose of avoiding its unfortunate consequences.³⁶

Lévi-Strauss, due to his favorable relation with the ship's captain, was allowed immediate and free entry into the country. Nevertheless, he was deeply troubled by their reception in Martinique and saw it as evidence of a more universal decay of civilization:

I reflected on the painful scenes which had just taken place and tried to link them with other experiences of a similar kind...I knew that, slowly and gradually, experiences such as these were starting to ooze out like some insidious leakage from contemporary mankind, which had become saturated with its own numbers and with the ever-increasing complexity of its problems...In that particular French territory, the sole effect of war and defeat had been to hasten the advance of a universal process, to facilitate the establishment of a lasting form of contamination which would never entirely disappear from the face of the earth but would re-emerge in some new place as it died down elsewhere. This was not the first occasion on which I had encountered those outbreaks of stupidity, hatred and credulousness which social groups secrete like pus when they begin to be short of space.³⁷

Lévi-Strauss devotes the third chapter of *Tristes Tropiques* to a description of the West Indies. In it he provides a less-than-flattering description of Martinique's capital city, Fort de France, as "a dead town; it was impossible to believe that anyone lived in the ramshackle buildings which bordered the long market-place planted with palm trees and overrun with weeds, and which was more like a stretch of waste-ground with, in its middle, an apparently forgotten statue, green with neglect, of Josephine Tascher de la Pagerie, later known as Josephine de Beauharnais."³⁸ Disillusioned as he was with the standards of Martinican civility, he was much more inspired by the island's nature. He found Martinique to be "much more classically exotic than the South American mainland. It was like a deep arborized agate set in a ring of black,

silver-flecked beaches, and in the valleys, which were brimful with a milk-white mist, one could only just sense the presence – more perceptible to the ear, through the sound of dripping moisture, than to the eye – of the huge, soft, feathery fronds of tree-ferns, rising above the living fossils of their trunks.”³⁹ Lévi-Strauss’s disdain for the urban capital is juxtaposed by his rapture before nature which he describes as classically exotic and exemplifies through a list of similes and metaphors, removing it from modernity.

The first impressions of both Lévi-Strauss and Breton echo familiar tropes well-entrenched in descriptions of the Caribbean, this despite the fact that both men had already spent periods of time in the Americas. Lévi-Strauss criticized the dreariness of the capital city, Fort de France, preferring instead to indulge in the pleasures of an exotic nature which he envisioned as a primitive and animated jungle which contained within its depths, the secrets of life’s origin. He found in front of nature,

...a vast chaos, which leaves one free to choose the meaning one wants to give it. But, over and above agricultural considerations, geographical irregularities and the various accidents of history and prehistory, the most majestic meaning of all is surely that which precedes, commands and, to a large extent explains the others. A pale blurred line, or an often almost imperceptible difference in the shape and consistency of rock fragments, are evidence of the fact that two oceans once succeeded each other where, today, I can see nothing but barren soil....When the miracle occurs, as it sometimes does...when at the same time, two ammonites with unevenly intricate involutions can be glimpsed in the rock, thus testifying in their own way to a gap of several tens of thousands of years, suddenly space and time become one: the living diversity of the moment juxtaposes and perpetuates the ages. Thought and emotion move into a new dimension where every drop of sweat, every muscular movement, every gasp of breath becomes symbolic of a past history, the development of which is reproduced in my body, at the same time as my thought embraces its significance. I feel myself to be steeped in a more dense intelligibility, within which centuries and distances answer each other and speak at last with one and the same voice.⁴⁰

It is not just the physical beauty of the island that inspires the anthropologist, but rather its unique ability to reveal a point of origins – here a geological one rather than a biblical or

mythological one but nevertheless filled with the emotion of sublime mysticism. Following in the tradition of reinforced by Gauguin, the visitors eschewed the built urban environment, focusing their praise for the exotic nature and also the female population. Breton's first impressions of Fort-de France refer particularly to the Martinican women, already made famous by visitors such as Grasset de Saint-Saveur and Lafcadio Hearn and described to Breton by his friend and fellow surrealist Paul Eluard as "more beautiful than any others."⁴¹

French painter André Masson arrived in Martinique a few days after the others and set off with Breton to "explore their philosophical and aesthetic impressions of the Martinican landscape." These are recorded in *Créole Dialogue* which Masson illustrated with sketches of "the rich island vegetation and the native women."⁴² The black and white drawings present screens of varied plant forms – palm trees, banana leaves, heliconia – as well as rock forms. Faces emerge in some of the drawings – a black woman with a traditional Martinican head tie or *tignon*, or a Pan-like nature spirit; while in others, naked female bodies anthropomorphize into the baskets of fruits carried on their heads. *Créole Dialogue* was included in Breton's publication, *Martinique Charmeuse de Serpent (Martinique Snake Charmer)* of 1948. The title refers to the 1907 painting by Henri Rousseau, *Charmeuse de Serpent* or *The Dream* (Figure 4.1) and in the text, Breton ponders the dispute concerning whether that European master of "naïve painting" ever visited America, since Breton feels in Martinique to stand before his canvases: "We are smitten by the force of vegetation and yet what could be more significant than the overwhelming need we have felt to maintain regular forms in a place of nature where it is precisely the formless, I mean the lack of framework, that seems to predominate?" Breton then proposes taking as a symbol a canna flower, an aspect of nature, so that it may be "the heraldic

expression of the reconciliation we seek between the graspable and the desperate, life and dream.”⁴³

Sims also refers to the discussion between Masson and Breton about Rousseau’s painting, in particular the untamed vegetation of the tropics, noting that the arbitrariness that the Surrealists seek in landscape finds its definition there. Masson’s disorientation in the lush tropical setting reminds him of a story related to Captain Cook who again, never visited the Caribbean but one experience of the tropics is easily equated with another. On one of Cook’s expeditions to the South Seas, one of his sailors finds himself at a literal loss for words while in a “voluptuous reverie” with an island woman, despite the lack of a common language. The untamed, exotic landscape of the tropics continues to be equated with women, sexual temptation and impaired reason which is linked to the insufficiency of language.⁴⁴ The discussion between the two European men, Breton and Masson is titled *Creole Dialogue*, suggesting that even they need a new or modified vocabulary to describe the sights and sensations in this new place.

In describing his reaction to this tropical setting, Breton refers, not to Gauguin’s paintings of Martinique but Rousseau’s tropicalized fantasy, a dense jungle which features a naked female reclining on a Victorian chaise longue, and a tiger among other creatures. This is so clearly not the Caribbean, but rather epitomizes the tropical jungle of fantasy. It is also a painting by a self-taught artist rendered in what was described as a primitive or naïve style. Throughout the 1940s this was the style of painting most commonly associated with the Caribbean and in fact was presumed to be the only art that authentically represented the region. The Haitian *Centre d’Art* established by the American teacher Dewitt Peters in Port-au-Prince in 1944, brought the work of self-taught artists to international attention and helped to establish naïve art as synonymous with all art from the Caribbean. Ten years later, in 1954, established, academically trained artists

in the region expressed dismay when the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) launched a Caribbean-wide art contest with the stated intent “to bring together for the first time *native fine art* truly representative of the entire Caribbean area.” The New York exhibition of 137 works clearly reflected the vogue for brightly colored paintings by visibly non-academically schooled artists. A group of curators from American museums awarded the grand prize to Castere Bazile, one of the original artistic personalities to emerge out of the Centre d’Art a decade earlier.⁴⁵ The organizers stated in the call for submission that their intention was, in essence, to chart new territory. This exhibition would be the first of its kind because it would represent the entire diverse region of the Caribbean; it would be native fine art (organizers explained participants must be born in the region or had been residing there for at least fifteen years); and it was to be truly representative of the region. Native in this context clearly meant naïve, primitive or unschooled. This association with, or expectation of Caribbean art would continue for the rest of the century.

Return

The Caribbean, and specifically Martinique, was undoubtedly experienced by Breton, Lévi-Strauss and Masson in a way that differed substantially from that of Aimé Césaire and Wifredo Lam. Césaire had returned to his native land after an absence of almost a decade (1932-39), an experience memorialized in his epic poem, *Notebook of a return to the native land* (*Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*). Written in 1937 while he was still in Paris and only 24 years of age, the poem was first published in the journal *Volontés* in 1939, the year Césaire returned to Martinique where he took up a teaching post at the Lycée Schoelcher in Fort-de-France. In his efforts to establish a forum through which his ideas about *Négritude* could continue to develop,

Césaire, along with Suzanne Césaire and fellow Martinican writer and philosopher René Ménéil (1907-2004) founded the journal *Tropiques*, devoted to local poetry and cultural polemics.

Tropiques declared itself to be a journal of “international surrealism” with the additional function as both a focus for a developing black consciousness in Martinique and as a covert locus for the anti-Vichy struggle. Describing Surrealism as “the tightrope of our hope,” the editors aimed to take a cautiously critical approach towards Surrealism that directly addressed Martinican realities.⁴⁶ Using the Brazilian modernist “antropophagi” analogy of cannibalism, the editors explained they would ingest what was useful in Surrealism and reject what was not. Nevertheless, the editors found Surrealism to be an ideal platform for their concerns and interests. Ménéil explained that “cultural appropriation, which is a fact of universal civilization, could not in the present case be reduced – prematurely and in a simplistic way – to being more than a negative colonial phenomenon of political assimilationism.”⁴⁷

Fortuitously, during his brief three-week stay in Martinique on his way to New York, André Breton wandered into a small haberdashery in the streets of Fort-de-France to buy a ribbon for his daughter and found the first issue of the surrealist-inspired literary journal.⁴⁸ It was the classic story of unintended discovery. Breton later wrote: “I could not believe my eyes. What was said there was what it was necessary to say, expressed not only in the best but also in the most powerful way it could be said.”⁴⁹ A meeting was arranged with Césaire and the two poets spent the remaining days of Breton’s stay in Martinique discussing West Indian literature and folklore as well as “discovering the tropical exuberance of the island’s flora.”⁵⁰ The meeting was a decisive moment for both Césaire and Breton, as well as Lam.

The impact of Breton’s encounter with Césaire’s writing, and subsequent meeting with the poet himself is best recorded in an essay Breton wrote for a 1943 issue of *Tropiques* and

which subsequently served as the introduction for the French and English editions of Césaire's epic work, *Notebook of a return to the native land* (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, published in book form in 1947. "Un Grand Poète noir," (A great black poet) is how André Breton labeled Aimé Césaire, as the title to his essay. Breton does not immediately label him according to his point of origin, identifying for the reader where that "native land" might be. He indicates his profession as a poet, he qualifies him as exceptional, and he identifies the color of his skin. While Breton will go on to identify Césaire's home, mentioning "Martinique" twice, "Fort-de-France" twice and "West Indies" once throughout the introduction, he mentions "black" eight times and "colored" another three.

Clearly race is a significant issue in Breton's discussion of Césaire's writing. It is not overtly linked to Césaire's role as one of the acknowledged originators of the literary and ideological movement known as *Négritude*, which Breton never mentions. Rather he acknowledges he is surprised to meet this young black man after stumbling across the first issue of his publication *Tropiques* and being so impressed by the eloquence and urgency of the writing. That a black man might possess the intellectual power, literary skills and creative insight to join the ranks of acknowledged great poets was a foreign idea to most Europeans at that time; of course these xenophobic and racist preconceptions had provided the impetus and context for the three young men to establish *Négritude*.⁵¹

Breton remarked in this introduction on the effects that war-time censorship had on publishing in France and its territories (in early 1941 his own *Fata Morgana* had been censored by the Vichy regime) and so he was shocked by what he read in Césaire's text: "For what was said there was what had to be said and it was said in a manner not only as elegant but as elevated as anyone could say it! All the grimacing shadows were torn apart, scattered; all the lies, all the

mockery shredded: Thus the voice of man was in no way broken, suppressed – it sprang upright again like the very spike of light. *Aimé Césaire*, such was the name of the one who spoke.”⁵² The importance of Césaire’s message, according to Breton transcended the specificity of Martinique and even the African diaspora; he emphasized that, “This land he was revealing...it was my land too, yes, it was *our* land that I had wrongly feared obliterated by darkness.” In that sense, Martinique was inconsequential. Césaire had omitted this specificity of place in his own title to the *Notebook*, and while it’s translation into English has sometimes been interpreted as “*my* native land,” the more widely accepted translation is the more general and unspecified “*the* native land.”⁵³

Breton is as effusive about Césaire’s accomplishments as he is oblique in his references to World War II which was ravaging Europe and drawing in the Americas and Asia on either side into unprecedented global chaos. What he does acknowledge is the hope that Césaire’s work provides him for the future: “This had to mean that the world was not in perdition: It would regain its soul.”⁵⁴ Framed within this religious analogy, Césaire becomes nothing less than a New World savior. He refers to Césaire as “a sign of our time;” one capable of “defying single-handedly an era in which we appear to be witnessing the general abdication of the mind, in which nothing appears to be created except for the purpose of perfecting the triumph of death, in which art itself threatens to congeal in obsolete schemes, the first revivifying new breath capable of restoring confidence comes from a black.” He goes on to say Césaire represents not only blacks but all of man and stands as the “prototype of dignity.”⁵⁵ He calls for the lifting of taboos, eliminating toxins that fostered a belief linked to nations and races.

Breton was one of the first to recognize the powerful significance and revolutionary potential of Césaire’s epic work which he pronounced as nothing less than the greatest lyrical

monument of our times, while observing that it must have passed unnoticed in 1939 when it appeared in the modest journal, *Volunté*. Its most important accomplishment, according to Breton, was its “power of extraordinary transmutation,” a quality which allied it clearly with the surrealist objectives.⁵⁶ If Breton’s description of this work seems hyperbolic at points, it is significant to recognize that the praise reflected not only Césaire’s accomplishment, but Breton’s own avant-garde vision in “discovering” it.

The title, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, speaks to the core conflict that most affected the author, one which Breton says he must, at all costs, transcend. The poem was written in Paris as Césaire was about to return to Martinique, an island which Breton observed possessed an irreconcilable doubleness – its physical beauty and the nostalgia of home, coupled with the darkness of its colonial history. Breton described this conflict:

Behind this floral design there is the wretchedness of a colonized people, their shameless exploitation by a handful of parasites in defiance of the very laws of their mother country and without any qualms about dishonoring it; there is the resignation of this people, geographically disadvantaged by being a mere scattering of islands here and there. Behind all of this, only a few generations back, there is slavery and here the wound reopens, yawning with the entire width of a lost Africa, with ancestral memories of abominable tortures, with the awareness of a monstrous and forever irreparable denial of justice inflicted upon an entire collectivity. A collectivity to which the returning poet belongs body and soul, as enriched as he may have been by all the teachings of the white world and thereby at that moment all the more torn.⁵⁷

The *Notebook*, is “an arena for revindication,” one that is the most legitimate in the world and one that the white (European) population should grant, but Breton acknowledges, this is only just beginning, timidly to be put on the agenda. He quotes Pierre Cot, French politician and a leading figure in the Popular Front, who calls for an end to the exploitation of colored people and to social and political racism. Breton adds that this is not just a case for the colonies but also criticizes wide scale segregation and discrimination in the work force. “If this expectation is not

met by the international settlements that will come into play at the end of the present war,” he warns prophetically, “one might be forced to endorse, once and for all and with all that it implies, the opinion that the emancipation of colored people be brought about by themselves.” But for Breton the real strength of Césaire’s writing is that it transcends any specificity and speaks to a universal cause which is the imperative behind Surrealism – “the imperious need to do away with the deadly division of the human spirit.”⁵⁸

Surrealism and the name of André Breton went on to feature regularly in *Tropiques* after that point. The journal published a total of fourteen issues until the end of the war years. Breton contributed a number of poems including one dedicated to Suzanne Césaire. She in turn wrote about Breton’s poetry and Aimé wrote a poem for Breton’s daughter, Aube. Also included was Breton’s essay on Aimé Césaire, “A Great Black Poet”, which was later published in the 1947 French and English editions of *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and republished in Breton’s *Martinique, Snake Charmer* the following year. In the October 1943 issue of *Tropiques*, Suzanne Césaire published “Surrealism and Us”, proclaiming Breton’s surrealism to be more relevant than ever before: “When Breton created surrealism, the most urgent task was to liberate the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called reason. But in 1943, when liberty itself is threatened throughout the world, surrealism (which has not ceased for a moment to remain resolutely in the service of the greatest emancipation of mankind) can be summed up with a single magic word: liberty.”⁵⁹

The inventive force of Aimé Césaire’s epic poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* also found resonance with the work of Wifredo Lam. When they met for the first time in Martinique in 1941, they must have immediately realized they had much in common. They had both eagerly embraced Surrealism and its strategies of formal experimentation, its deliberate

rejection of naturalism and its anarchistic embrace of revolution which included a critique of colonialism. Surrealism acknowledged the hybrid. It hungered for it and devised various exercises to enable its adherents to tap into alternative or parallel experiences.

Artists from the colonies, particularly from the African diaspora knew this doubleness. They didn't need to undertake metaphorical journeys to tap into dreams, or the subconscious. They had crossed the Atlantic more than once. If the disorientation of the colonized subject in Europe paled in comparison to the unprecedented atrocity of the Middle Passage, the accumulated four hundred years of under-acknowledged subjugation indelibly marked the African diaspora experience. Cuba had been one of the last counties in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1887, only fifteen years before Lam was born. The systemic racism that structured society throughout the Caribbean ensured that both Lam and Césaire were born into families without the financial means to send children overseas for an education; both young men had to demonstrate exceptional talent, intelligence and ambition to gain scholarships and grants which enabled them to “escape.” Ironically it was in Europe that they encountered Africa: Lam most likely saw African sculptures in collections in Madrid.⁶⁰ Subsequently he would see African artifacts that Picasso and his circle of artists accumulated in their studios and observed how they channeled their perceived “Primitivism” into their work. Césaire encountered Africa through debates with fellow students from the African diaspora, including discussion around the writings of authors such as Leo Frobenius, whose *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas* (1933) was translated into French (*Histoire de la civilisation africaine*) in 1936.⁶¹ While the African presence throughout the Caribbean had been seminal for four hundred years, it was in the context of their own displacement in Europe and subsequent re-integration into the Caribbean that its full meaning for them, as distinct from its interpretation by Europeans came more acutely into view,

and this experience was shared by both Césaire and Lam. The full impact of Césaire's radical ideas on Lam's visual language began to fully manifest itself once the Cuban painter had returned to his own native land. The synergy between the two would find expression in a number of collaborative projects that spanned the remainder of their respective long and productive careers.

Departure from Martinique

On the 16th of May 1941, André Breton, Wifredo Lam and André Masson departed from Martinique. They stopped in the Dominican Republic to visit the Spanish Surrealist painter and poet Eugenio Granell who had been granted asylum in 1939 after being imprisoned in France.⁶² From there, Breton headed to New York, but Lam who was without the necessary visas and finances, had little choice but to return to Cuba with his companion, Helena Holzer. Lam had left Cuba in 1923 and had spent nearly two decades in Europe, most of his time in Spain and only the last three years in France. He had not intended to return to Cuba but under the circumstances he had virtually no choice. He later described the profound sense of disorientation he initially experienced:

Since I had left everything behind me in Paris...I had to start from scratch, as it were, and I no longer knew where my feelings lay. This filled me with anguish, because I found myself in the same situation as before I left Cuba, when I had no great horizons before me. If you want to know my first impression when I returned to Havana, it was one of terrible sadness...The whole colonial drama of my youth seemed to be reborn in me.⁶³

Lam's return to Cuba in August 1941 however would prove to be a turning point in his artistic career and pivotal for the development of what would become known as his mature style. Sims explains that with an Afro-Cuban mother and a Chinese father, Lam's personal and

spiritual orientations were grounded in Africa and Asia while his education and artistic training was grounded in Europe. Lam had been introduced to the Afro-Cuban religious practice of Santería during his youth although he later said that he had consciously distanced himself from this early influence. This internal conflict Sims describes as “a bifurcation peculiar to the reality of colonized peoples.” Lam would later state, “The trouble is...that I’m fifty-per-cent Cartesian, and fifty-per-cent savage.”⁶⁴ This split-personality between rational / European and savage / New World had also been invoked by Paul Gauguin more than fifty years earlier. Attributes such as the cannibal or savage were appropriated to describe and validate a non-conformist artistic temperament which was also inseparable from a personality trait, and ultimately was attributed to the artist’s biological, genetic makeup and therefore inevitable, inescapable and pre-ordained. It could be re-fashioned as a privileged short cut to an authentic essence of experience in opposition to the saturated, over-cultured civilization of Europe.

Upon later reflection, Lam admitted that although he went to Europe to escape from Cuba, he encountered in Europe other problems as oppressive as those he left behind: “My return to Cuba meant, above all, a great stimulation of my imagination, as well as the exteriorization of my world. I responded always to the presence of factors which emanated from our history and our geography, tropical flowers, and black culture.”⁶⁵ By the early 1940s, *Afro-Cubanismo* or *cubanidad* had become readily identifiable with Cuban national identity in intellectual circles. Anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, and poet and writer Alejo Carpentier played important roles in this process. Carpentier, one of Lam’s most important supporters, had himself been closely associated with the Surrealists in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s, and wrote on Cuban music for the Surrealist journal *Documents* during that time.⁶⁶

Lam's own "return to his native land" however, would prove to be one his most formative and productive periods. Nor was it completely without orientation to his early work. While the trauma of Lam's flight from France and harrowing re-entry into the Caribbean are undeniable, Lam was not as directionless as he may have first felt. Rather the journey from its very beginnings contained an abundance of source material for the subsequent development of his mature style and Lam was able to draw on imagery that had first emerged in Marseille. The *Fata Morgana* series marked the introduction of the *femme cheval* or horse-woman, a figure that would become prominent in much of Lam's subsequent work. Sims links the *femme-cheval* to Picasso's images of the Minotaur of the mid-1930s; but Picasso's influence can also be seen in the bust length images of single figures with the combined profile and frontal views, the vertical eyes, multiple facial features, mask-like flatness, simplified geometric forms as well as the lyrical graphic quality. While the drawings reflected his close association with the avant-garde artists in Paris, particularly the Surrealists, Lam was evolving those features that would become his own characteristics. Another example cited by Sims is the visual punning of the bulbous chin which evokes both the papaya fruit (*la fruta bomba*) and testicles.⁶⁷

Re-Appropriation of the Primitive

The visual language that Lam had begun to develop in Marseilles with its human, plant, and animal forms and visual puns must have found an easy complement in the imagery evoked in Césaire's *Notebook* and in fact Lam would become known as the most prominent and successful "Negritude artist."⁶⁸ Commentary on the poem has observed that it does not fall into any formal category: while it contains a considerable amount of prose, it is considered to be more of an extended lyric or serial work than a narrative poem. Césaire deliberately called the work a

“notebook,” suggesting that it was a collection of ideas in preparation for a more finished piece and its reference to a return journey links it with the tradition of travel journals.

The poem is erratic and non-linear with irregular punctuation. And while it is much shorter than a typical epic, its ambitious and weighty approach has evoked this association. It has been described as having “an epic sweep” and a heroic narrator who struggles to affirm his racial identity and destiny through a series of “complex interactions between a self-in-formation and his colonized country.” The incredible burden of the poem, according to contemporary editors of the *Notebook*, Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith is nothing less than parthenogenesis, “in which Césaire must conceive and give birth to himself while exorcising his interjected and collective white image of the black.”⁶⁹ *Négritude* has been described as a literary “exercise in linguistic mutability and in neologism, language in the constant process of being made.” While corresponding visual imagery which built on the ideological foundation laid down by the founders of *Négritude* may have been inconsistent, it gave rise to “important visual manifestations...that constitute a challenge to canonical versions of modernism.” Wifredo Lam was consistently identified as the artist who most effectively and powerfully critiqued the subversive language of “assimilation” and “affinity” within European modernism and simultaneously reclaimed modernism’s appropriation of “primitivism” from the perspective of Afro-Caribbean culture.⁷⁰

When Lam and Césaire first met in Martinique in 1941, *Notebook* had been published in journal form only, in the Paris based *Volontés*, issue number 20 in 1939. Undoubtedly encouraged by the enthusiastic response his work received from Breton and the other Surrealists, Césaire was exploring ways in which he could give his work greater exposure. He contacted Lam and Holtzer shortly after they had re-settled in Havana to ask for assistance in translating his

poem into Spanish and publishing it in book form in Cuba. Lam entrusted the translation to his good friend, Cuban anthropologist Lydia Cabrera and arranged for an introduction by the French surrealist poet Benjamin Peret. Lam provided three illustrations including one for the cover. Julia Herzberg makes the point that with the text by Césaire, illustrations by Lam, translation by Cabrera and introduction by Péret, who had recently passed through Cuba on his way to Mexico, the four collaborators represented three different countries but were united by their common interest in negritude and surrealism.⁷¹

In *Retorno al pais natal*, published in 1943, the synergy of ideas and imagery shared by Lam and Césaire took on concrete form for the first time. The cover image depicts a four-legged, two headed dog with a spiny back and sweeping tail hybrid guardian, Cerberus with multiple heads and serpent's mane. The drawing was printed against a canary yellow background like that used by Gauguin in the *Volpini Suite* and although there is no indication that Lam was inferring any connection, he like the French post-impressionist who had also visited Martinique fifty years early, constructed an identity of alterity fashioned as the savage. The other two line drawings included in the publication indicate how quickly Lam was developing his Santeria-inspired cast of characters incorporating sexualized horse and bat imagery.⁷² Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* was eventually published in French and English editions in 1947. Both versions included Breton's essay, "*Un Grand Poète Noir*," and a reproduction of an early gouache painting by Lam, a single totemic figure dated 1939. While Césaire chose a work painted before the two men met, his decision to include this as the only image in both editions is indicative of the continued affinity he felt with Lam's work.⁷³

Lam's *The Jungle*

The most substantial example of synergy between the ideas of these two Caribbean men is seen in Lam's own epic work, *The Jungle (La Jungla)* (Figure 4.2) of 1942-1943. Arguably Lam's best-known work, *The Jungle* demonstrates his attempts to resolve the tension between European influences, particularly Surrealism, and Afro-Cuban experience.⁷⁴ The painting presents monumental anthropomorphized figures, emerging nude from dense, verdant foliage. Although the title describes this as a jungle, it is in fact primarily stalks of sugar cane, a plant that is not indigenous to the Caribbean and which has strong ties with the history of slave labor and economic dependency in the region. The leaves however, are not those of the sugar cane plants and more resemble tobacco, a plant indigenous to the region and also associated with the agricultural industry in Cuba.

The large, almost square format of the work with its screen of standing, posing figures, the shifting forms, the tonal colors are closely allied to Picasso's large painting, *Demoiselles d'Avignon* (Figure 4.3) of 1907.⁷⁵ Whereas Picasso's work is oil on canvas, Lam achieves his more luminous, atmospheric setting through the use of gouache on paper. Picasso's painting refers to an area of Barcelona frequented by prostitutes and in earlier studies for the work, the presence of a sailor confirms the very bold, sexually aggressive posture of the figures. It has been suggested that Lam contemplated a similar theme: under the dictatorship of Battista, rampant prostitution had turned Cuba into a playground for wealthy Americans, a development that was distressing for the artist. But it is difficult to confirm that Lam's figures are female, or even human for that matter. Using techniques developed during his period in Marseille, Lam's figures are composite, hybrid creatures, voluptuous camouflaged poseurs. Picasso's *Demoiselles*, transitioning from Egyptian to Iberian to African stylistic influences, while they notoriously

caused shockwaves even amongst his avant-garde colleagues, appear decidedly ‘old world’ next to the inhabitants of Lam’s jungle, painted thirty-five years later. They are truly emerging as transformational with limbs like stalks of cane and mask-like faces in the shapes of broad leaves, rounded breasts, buttocks and testicles like hanging fruit, animated in the full sense of an animistic nature fully alive and spirited, filled with creatures with raised arms in gestures of salutations, crescent faces turned to the arriving viewer with that “gaze” that Breton had attributed to Césaire, welcoming the viewer with a revised vision of the new world.

Lam had been influenced by Picasso’s “Africanizing of form” as early as 1936 when he saw a retrospective of the artist’s work that toured Madrid, Bilbao and Barcelona just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.⁷⁶ Once he was back in Cuba, Lam’s work began to reference the *orishas* of *Santería*, such as *Ogun* with his iron scissors or the double bull horns of *Oya*. *Santería* is a syncretic pantheistic, Afro-Cuban religion combining elements from West African Yoruba traditions with elements of Catholicism. Lowery Stokes Sims has described how *Santería* iconography reflected syncretistic survival strategies devised by Africans in the Americas, such as masking or encoding that allowed African slaves to camouflage the practices of ancestral rituals: “They correlated metaphysical qualities and powers, comparable color attributes, or accoutrements shared by saints and *orishas*. In some cases this resulted in a type of transgendering exemplified in the masking of *Chango*, a male *orisha*, with Santa Barbara, a female saint. The red and white garments associated with the saints were the same as those attributed to the *orisha*.”⁷⁷

Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera cautions, however, that there is no precise symbolism in Lam’s work and that references to Afro-Cuban religious-cultural complexes are very indirect: “Lam was only trying to transmit, through the topological medium of modern art, a cosmic

vision conditioned by the living African factors in his culture of origin, and a general mystical sense that emanates from it.”⁷⁸ As a result, Lam is free to bring in his own hybrid constructions such as the *femme-cheval*, which first emerged in the *Fata Morgana* drawings from Marseille. The *femme cheval* is part human - part animal, and also part female – part male. The same transgendering that Sims identified in the syncretic pairing of *orishas* and catholic saints is also evident in the recurring hermaphroditic characteristics of Lam’s figures, “specifically the chins that mimic testicles on the *femme cheval* and the flowing beards from such formations.”⁷⁹

Kobena Mercer links the “enigmatic iconography” of the *femme cheval* directly to Afro-Caribbean rituals Lam would have witnessed in Cuba and later in Haiti during his 1945 exhibition and visit there with Breton. The *femme cheval* references, according to Mercer, “the luminal trance state whereby the *loa* or gods take possession of the *lucumi* worshipper much as a rider takes control of his horse.” This analogy of spirit possession in which the participant is ridden like a horse was also referenced in Zora Neal Hurston’s ethnographic travelogue *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938) and Maya Deren’s *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953) based on her experiences in the Caribbean country during 1947-51. But Mercer contextualizes this hybrid character so central to much of Lam’s iconography within the transformational time of the mid twentieth century and highlights the position of an artist such as Wifredo Lam to draw from his own syncretic experiences of transcultural encounter both within the Caribbean and externally:

In a world where Enlightenment beliefs in the perfectibility of humankind were being violently torn apart by the global conflagration of the Second World War, the search for a ‘new man’ took numerous forms. ...Against the backdrop of this profound crisis of humanism, Lam’s voyages into the contact zone of Caribbean syncretism pursued a quest for the transformation of subjectivity through the process of ‘transculturation’, whereby different cultural identities change their self-conception as a result of their mutual encounter. Lam’s *femme cheval*, in this view, is a hybrid go-between who travels between material and spiritual worlds,

and journeys from the lost African past towards the uncertain future of the West. In Lam's pictorial space of modernist transculturation, symbolic boundaries are transgressed and the ecstatic loss of self brought about by ritual trance puts the very identity of universal 'man' at risk.⁸⁰

The femme cheval is both primitive and post-apocalyptic.

Mercer has described the transformative process that writers and artists such as Césaire and Lam confronted not only during their time in Europe but also in the return home. He specifically references folk culture or popular culture as a potent authentic expression that these young intellectuals would tap into; they returned to the Caribbean with altered perceptions of the region's indigenous cultures as a potential route towards the higher reality or sur-reality that would transform the experience of everyday life.⁸¹

It is important to emphasize Lam's choice of medium here for what he clearly regarded as a major work, arguably an epic work in response to Césaire's own manifesto. Certainly the scale of the painting suggests an ambition on the part of the artist to make a statement. To take up the challenge posed by Picasso's pioneering cubist work is a bold gesture. And yet the work is essentially a drawing on paper. While there are other large works from this period on paper, there are also many on canvas. The paper however is arguably better suited to the strong graphic elements of the work. Lowery Stokes Sims has written at length about the primacy of line in Lam's work and the "co-tangency between painting and drawing [that] would abrogate the practice of making studies for paintings and, indeed, preparatory drawings in the traditional sense are almost non-existent in Lam's oeuvre."⁸² It serves as an interesting point of comparison to Césaire's own epic which he framed in the format of a notebook, a "cahier," an assemblage of inconsistent notations in the process of evolution, as a condensation of centuries of invisible, unrepresented, unspoken weight. Lam's response in translucent washes of gouache on paper convey a similar transience. Only in the black Atlantic would this epic appear as notations in a

notebook or washes of color on paper, as hybrid ideas and characters emerging out of the dense opaque foliage at the brink of the jungle of mythology and history.

Césaire begins his poem with a barrage of images, many bitter and cruel, but also nostalgic and lyrical. He is describing Martinique – the river of turtle doves and savanna clover but also the Antilles pitted with smallpox and dynamited by alcohol. In his descriptions of a living, breathing nature and transforming images, run on sentences collaging disparate references with frequent suggestions of colors, moisture, textures, senses, Lam's images are easy to summon. Césaire writes:

I would rediscover the secret of great communications and great combustions. I would say storm. I would say river. I would say tornado. I would say leaf. I would say tree. I would be drenched by all rains, moistened by all dews. I would roll like frenetic blood on the slow current of the eye of words turned into mad horses into fresh children into clots into curfew into vestiges of temples into precious stones remote enough to discourage miners. Whoever would not understand me would not understand any better the roaring of a tiger.

And you ghosts rise blue from alchemy from a forest of hunted beasts of twisted machines of a jujube tree of rotten flesh of a basket of oysters of eyes of a network of straps in the beautiful sisal of human skin I would have words vast enough to contain you and you earth taut earth drunk

earth great vulva raised to the sun

earth great delirium of God's mentula

savage earth arisen from the storerooms of the sea a clump of Cecropia in your mouth

earth whose tempestuous face I can only compare to the virgin and foolish forest which were it in my power I would show in guise of a face to the undeciphering eyes of men

all I would need is a mouthful of jiculi milk to discover in you always as distant as a mirage – a thousand times more native and made golden by a sun that no prism divides – the earth where everything is free and fraternal, my earth⁸³

Lam conjures up his native land as a jungle. It is a tropicalized jungle, constructed from a conflated imaginary of otherness, made up in Lam's imagination of sugar cane and tobacco leaves, home to monstrous creatures that seem strange rather than threatening. It is unclear why

Lam would designate this work, *The Jungle*. Only in the minds of foreigners travelling along rural roads could these tall dense fields of sugar cane seem exotic. Cane fields were sites of backbreaking labor, vermin and injury from a too-quick cutlass or an overseer's whip. In a later passage, Césaire refers to the impenetrable jungle but it is in the context of a long list of tropes used by European explorers and Christianizing missionaries to describe New World populations: lazy, obscene, perverse, adorned with feathers and animal skins:

I have assassinated God with my laziness with my words with
my gestures with my obscene songs
I have worn parrot plumes musk cat skins
I have exhausted the missionaries' patience
insulted the benefactors of mankind.
Defied Tyre. Defied Sidon.
Worshipped the Zambèze.

The extent of my perversity overwhelms me!
But why impenetrable jungle are you still hiding the total zero
of my mendacity and from a self-conscious concern for nobility
not celebrating the horrible leap of my Pahouin ugliness.

voum rooh oh
voum rooh oh
to charm the snakes to conjure the dead⁸⁴

Paradox of Paradise

The jungle is presented as the impenetrable darkness of Europe's unknown Africa of myth and exoticized defamation. Defying the ancient biblical cities of Tyre and Sidon in favor of Africa's Zambeze river, Césaire repeatedly recites the shamanistic incantation of the snake charmer. André Breton had been reading Césaire's *Notebook* during his three weeks in Martinique at the same time that he and Masson had paid homage to the vision of Henri Rousseau's snake charmer, proposing that surely it was this new world they were experiencing that had been the subject of the self-taught artist's dream. A decade later on the occasion of

Lam's solo exhibition in Sweden, writer Ingemar Gustafson discussed the "contrapuntal relationship" between his work and that of Henri Rousseau: "[e]ver since Rousseau painted *The Dream*, his vision that the jungle was the place where myth originated has awaited confirmation." For Gustafson, Lam's *The Jungle* was that confirmation. While Rousseau depicts the "serenity and the fresh marvelousness of ...Eden," Lam's depiction is described as "violent, suffocating ardor." What both artists share is a depiction of the jungle's "inexhaustible vegetation," and "unstoppable growth," but whereas Rousseau found inspiration in the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris, Lam's image, according to Gustafson, is based in "reality" in that it is based on lived experience, as extraordinary as that may be. He calls Lam the "initiator....It is he who opens the 'gate of mysteries,' it is he who is our interpreter."⁸⁵ Lam would later seek to clarify the comparison to Rousseau: "He was a magnificent painter, but not the same kind...as me...Look at my monsters and the gestures they make. The one of the right [referring to *The Eternal Present*] is flaunting its rump, like she was an obscene whore."⁸⁶ Rousseau's naked woman stretched across her Victorian chaise longue before the black snake charmer seems no less modest but what is clear is that Lam was in the process of defining for himself a primitivism which was distinct from that of both Rousseau and Picasso, particularly with reference to works made three decades earlier and an ocean away. Lam's dilemma, like Cesaire's was how to bridge the disjuncture between the diasporic experience he sought to describe and the existing language replete with its structures and precedents that he felt compelled to use.⁸⁷

Cosmological concepts in Afro-Cuban religions hold that deities inhabit the bush and literally merge with and emerge from the vegetation.⁸⁸ The vegetation depicted in *The Jungle* is very specific, and in fact is not really a wild jungle of indigenous flora but rather consists of sugar cane and tobacco plants, crops cultivated as the economic backbone of colonial Cuba. Lam

pointed out that the title of *The Jungle* had nothing to do with the real countryside of Cuba, but rather “was intended to communicate a psychic state”, not a geographical phenomenon. Suzanne Garrigues has pointed to Fernando Ortiz’s 1940 analysis of various agricultural products in the Cuban economy which equates “sugar” with “slavery” and “tobacco” with “liberty” and the national and political hegemony of Cuba. Garrigues concludes that “Given these racial, economic, political and historical associations with sugar cane, it is clear that the predominance of this motif in Lam’s work in addition to being a symbol of femaleness, fertility and carnality is, on a socio-politico-historical level, also a symbol of slavery, exploitation, colonialism and capitalism.”⁸⁹

Pierre Mabilie’s article, “*La jungle: De l’importance prise par la critique d’art a l’époque contemporaine*”, published in Césaire’s *Tropiques* in January 1945, was the most significant assessment of Wifredo Lam’s work up to that point in time.⁹⁰ Mabilie indicted European colonization and its effects specifically in the Antilles, which he too designated “the new Eden,” noting that Europeans, Africans, and Asians were all *transformed* in this environment while retaining memories of their respective ancestral continents. Mabilie compared the significance of Lam’s painting to the discovery of perspective in fifteenth-century Italy and signaled Lam’s achievement as one that would influence Western art. He also highlighted the important ways in which Lam’s paintings echoed Césaire’s concerns: “Above all, Lam’s work established a means to explore a specifically American sensibility in dialogue with Europe: it opened a means of communication between New and Old World sensibilities to the enrichment of both and in which neither was subsumed to the other.”⁹¹ Mabilie’s writing was very much in keeping with the overall tone of *Tropiques* and its call for things uniquely Caribbean, an “Antillean identity.” Césaire wrote about Lam’s work, rooted in an Antillean context, in a 1947

article in the Parisian journal, *Cahiers d'Art*.⁹² Césaire notes Lam's ability to unite humanity and the surrounding world, validating the Antilles as a site of creation rather than as a "bastardized amalgam of others." Alejo Carpentier, also writing about Lam's work in 1944 described it as something that was specifically and profoundly Antillean.⁹³

Lam's observations also point to primitivist generalizations that often accompany popular notions of the tropics, where the distinct biological and botanical natures of "forest," "rain forest," and "jungle" are undifferentiated.⁹⁴ "*Tropiques*" or "tropics" features as the title of Césaire's journal as well as Lévi-Strauss's travelogue which recorded his time in Martinique and subsequently Brazil. Although there is overlap in the meaning of jungle and tropic, there are also significant differences in connotation. Jungle refers to vegetation, specifically overgrown, tangled or wild, although particularly vegetation associated with a warm or tropical climate. It also refers to a place of bewildering complexity or confusion or a struggle for survival.⁹⁵ When Lam refers to the savage half of his identity he is simultaneously claiming an authentic affiliation with the African diasporic culture that Picasso references more superficially, but also mocks European fears and stereotypes of foreign lands. His hybrid characters who are inseparable from their environment such as the *femme cheval* are strange, familiar or recognizable in parts but indecipherable. Césaire would later write, "When you look at Wifredo Lam's paintings, you can find the jungle, Voodoo, Macumba, and Santería in them. You find in them the fundamental gods, the fundamental paganism of the African." Referring to his interest in Santería, he added, "All of Wifredo's work continues his rendering of this primitive initiation."⁹⁶

The "tropics" is a geographical designation referring to the zone of latitude around the equator bounded by the Tropic of Cancer to the north and the Tropic of Capricorn to the south. In adopting this term, Césaire is identifying the diasporic space with which they are concerned

and a desire to re-imagine the Caribbean. The tropical space is one more conducive to living; connoting a warm climate and exotic fruits, it is more closely aligned with fantasies of paradise or utopia. The word derives from *tropikos*, *tropos*, which in Classical Greek meant “turning,” and as such is related to *trope*, meaning “metaphor.”⁹⁷ The tropics then, by its very definition is imaginary, described through analogy and comparison, lacking its own autonomous identity.

Enduring Collaboration

In 1945, with the support of the French Communist Party (PCF), Césaire was elected mayor of Fort-de-France and deputy to the French National Assembly for Martinique. He was one of the principal drafters of the 1946 law making former colonies into departments, a role for which politicians advocating independence have often criticized him. Although *Tropiques* ceased publication at the end of 1945, Césaire went on to publish a number of seminal texts, notably *Discourse on Colonialism (Discours sur le colonialism)* (1950) and *Toussaint L’Ouverture* (1960).

Wifredo Lam left Cuba in 1947 with Helen Holtzer whom he had married in 1944. Initially heading to New York, he eventually divided his time between Paris and Italy while maintaining his ties with Cuba. Lam did however insist on one final collaboration with Césaire. In 1969 Lam began work on an ambitious, synthesizing project that functioned like a summary of his artistic career – the *Annunciation* series. The work, which would turn out to be the last major project of his long career was conceived by Lam as a collaboration with Aimé Césaire as a testament to the profound nature of their relationship. Lam began to work on a suite of etchings that synthesized much of the imagery he had developed over the last twenty or thirty years. Sims describes them:

Within the intermediate hues are suspended figures who in Lam's work have represented entities that go back and forth between the physical and ethereal realms, between the foreground and the background. Present also are the girl with the long hair – first seen in the drawings for Breton's poem *Fata Morgana* in 1941 – the *femme cheval*, and the winged apparitions that refer to Lam's childhood encounter with the bat, the horned creatures that synthesize the Christian cherub and the Afro-Cuban orisha Eleggua, as well as knives, bowls, masks, etc.⁹⁸

Printmaking became a major part of Lam's artistic output from the 1950s. Drawing had always been an integral part of Lam's art making, even retaining a predominant role in his paintings; Jacques Leenhardt credited Lam with restoring the status of drawing in painting in the post-World War II era.⁹⁹ Given the pervasive graphic quality throughout his oeuvre, the move to etching seemed a natural trajectory. Lam produced a suite of seven etchings for the *Annunciation* series, each one printed in a single color or in tonalities ranging from dark browns to deep greens and orange.¹⁰⁰ A cast of hybrid characters are presented against the atmospheric background in a range of mutating forms. The emphasis on gesture through his focus on hands and feet recall the intense emotion of northern renaissance or early modern painters, and invests in Lam's *Annunciation* a sense of profound, if staged drama. By 1981, Lam's health had deteriorated significantly and with the *Annunciation* series still not completed, he asked Césaire to resume work on the project. Césaire responded to his request, writing ten poems in all. The etchings were finally published in 1982, the year of Lam's death.

Césaire's ten poems became a tribute to the late artist and were published in his book *Moi, Laminaria....*

Moi, laminaria... (Me, Laminaria...) is divided into three sections: the first part, also titled "*Moi, laminaria...*" is a collection of 53 poems by Césaire; the second is a single poem dedicated to the Guatemalan poet Miguel Angel Asturias; and the third section is his homage to Wifredo Lam with the ten poems accompanying Lam's seven etchings. Gregson Davis points to

the “resounding *moi*” in the title, a “self-proclamation of the speaking subject...[that] is separated by a crucial comma from the appositional noun *laminaire*, which is richly polysemous.”¹⁰¹ He also refers to the “trailing punctuation (...)” which he says should not be underestimated for a writer who is normally very parsimonious in his use of punctuation marks. The term *laminaria* refers to seaweed or kelp found along the shoreline. Davis draws our attention to the poem “Algues” in the first section, which most conspicuously foregrounds this theme:

The re-launch is made from here
by the gust that comes from Africa
by the dust from the tradewinds
by the prowess in the foam
and in the force of earth

bare
the essential is to feel bare
to think bare thoughts
the dust from the tradewinds
the prowess in the form
and the force of earth
the re-launch is made from here by the influx
even more than by the afflux
the re-launch
is made
seaweed *laminaria*

The significance of the re-launch, *la reliance*, can not to be underestimated with a poet made famous through his manifesto of return. Davis describes the re-launch as the “re-dedication to the struggle”¹⁰² “The re-launch is made from here,” Césaire repeats, referring to a metaphorical ship carried by the intangible forces of wind and foam, propelled outward from here – referring presumably to his native land, the Afro-Caribbean. It succeeds and repeats the re-turn, as an ongoing and ceaseless commitment to the space of the black Atlantic.

The title, in a manner typical for both Césaire and Lam, is also a pun on the Cuban artist's name. "Césaire not only deeply admired Lam's art, but also felt a very close kinship with his basic aesthetic stance. Both Martinican poet and Cuban painter had arrived at their distinctive idioms by the fecund route of Parisian avant-garde movements, in particular the surrealist circle of creative writers and artists." They also shared a profound interest in Afro-Caribbean religions and Césaire dedicates one of the poems to Montonica Wilson, Lam's godmother and guide to the practice of Santería. Reminding the reader that the epithet *Laminaire* stands grammatically in apposition to the word for "self," *moi*, Davis states, "By conspicuously referring to his lyric persona in the overall title of his volume as "*Laminarian*," then, Césaire pays the Cuban painter the ultimate compliment that a poet can bestow on another artist: he acknowledges his aesthetic affinity by incorporating the name "Lam" into the very texture of the poetic identity that he has fashioned for himself."¹⁰³

In one of the ten poems which is named specifically for the artist, "Wifredo Lam,"

Césaire asks:

my brother
what are you looking for through these forests
of horns of hoofs of wings of horses

The sustained, life-long collaboration between Wifredo Lam and Aimé Césaire is illustrative of Paul Gilroy's assertion that the long complex history of African diasporic culture is specifically transnational. The concept of return referred to a conceptual repatriation and a re-affirmation of "moi," of self not as singular identity but as collective expression of shared experience.



Figure 4.1 Henri Rousseau - *The Dream/ Charmeuse de Serpent*, 1907, oil on canvas, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller
Museum of Modern Art, New York; Photo © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

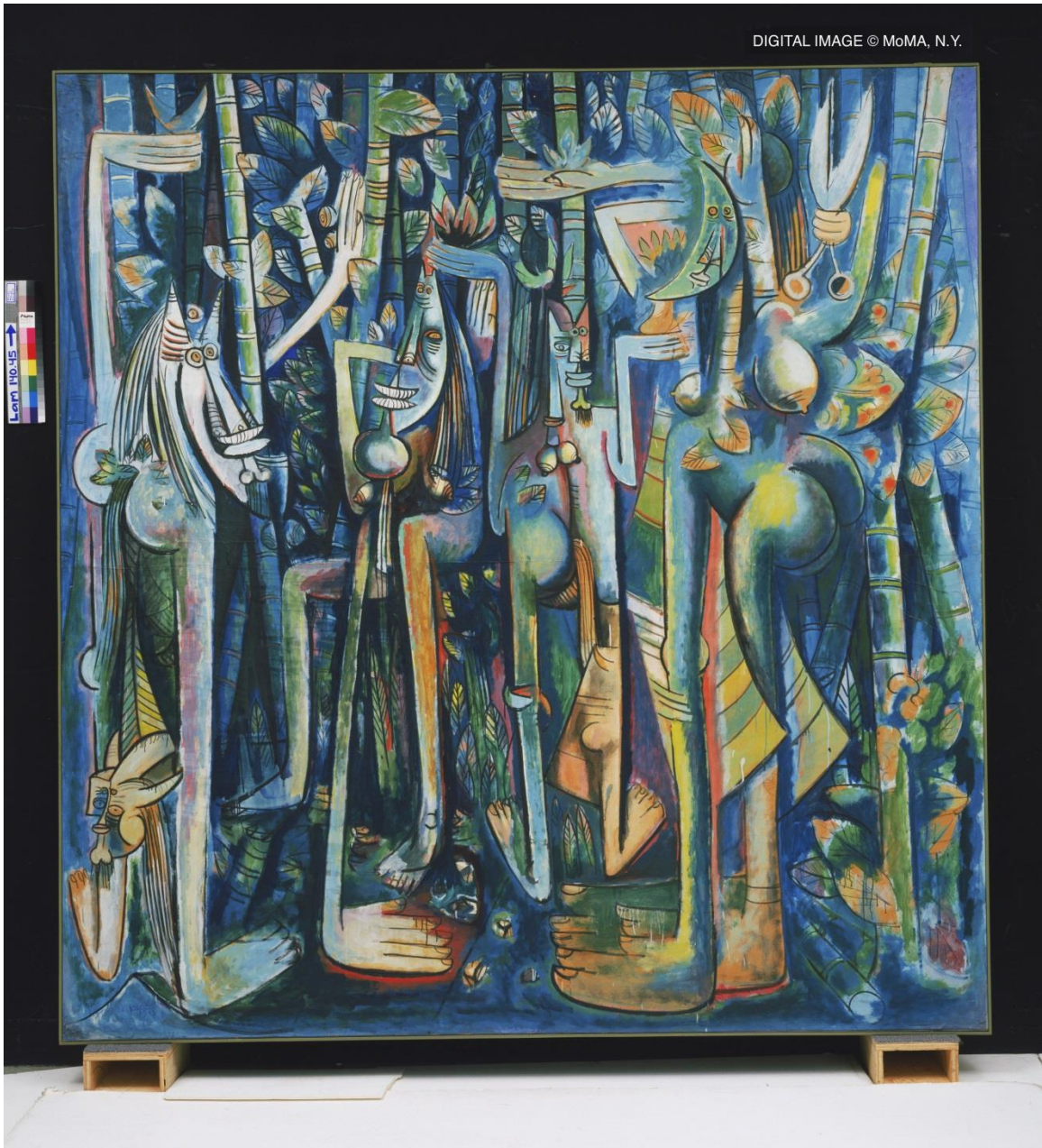


Figure 4.2 Wifredo Lam *The Jungle*, 1941, gouache on paper on canvas, Inter-American Fund © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris Museum of Modern Art, New York; Photo © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY



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Figure 4.3 Pablo Picasso – *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, oil on canvas
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Endnotes

¹ Wifredo Lam in Max-Pol Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, S.A., 1976. Reprinted Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art, 1989), 45 as cited in Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923-1982* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 35.

² Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) 498.

³ André Breton, "A Great Black Poet," in Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land / Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, trans. Mireille Rosello with Annie Pritchard (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1995), xvii.

⁴ Kobena Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones" in Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, eds. *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2010) 40.

⁵ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 11.

⁶ Giulio Blanc, "Cuban Modernism: The Search for a National Ethos," in Maria R. Balderrama, ed. *Wifredo Lam and his Contemporaries 1938-1952* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1992), 54.

⁷ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 11-18.

⁸ Jean-Louis Paudrat and Anne Egger, "Wifredo Lam – biography," accessed November 14, 2012, www.wifredolam.net.

⁹ Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000.

¹⁰ Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 148.

¹¹ See Andrea Guinta, "Strategies of Modernity in Latin America," in Gerardo Mosquera, ed. *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 53-67.

¹² Meredith Goldsmith, "Biography: Aimé Fernand Césaire," in *Poetry Foundation*, accessed November 20, 2012, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/aimae-fernand-caesaire>.

¹³ Edward Ako. "L'Étudiant noir and the myth of the genesis of the Negritude movement," *Research in African literatures* 15 (3), Fall 1984, 341-353. Damas' quote is taken from an unpublished essay by Léon-Gontran Damas cited by Lilyan Kesteloot in *Les Ecrivains noirs de*

langue française: naissance d'une littérature (Brussels: Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1963), 91.

¹⁴ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 180.

¹⁵ Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones," 43.

¹⁶ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land / Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, trans. Mireille Rosello with Annie Pritchard (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 1995)100. "Accommodate yourself to me. I won't accommodate myself to you!"

¹⁷ Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia*, 12.

¹⁸ Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones," 40.

¹⁹ Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States." *Art Journal* 70:3 (Fall 2011), 12. Melville J. Herskovits's essays appeared in Locke's *The New Negro* and Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934), in his *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941).

²⁰ Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones," 40.

²¹ Michael Richardson, ed. *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (London: Verso, 1996), 4.

²² Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, 4.

²³ Senghor later collaborated with Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote "Orphee noir" ("Black Orpheus"), his influential introduction to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache* (1948).

²⁴ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 498.

²⁵ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 29.

²⁶ Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) as quoted in Sims, 29. A limited number of copies were printed and only five remain today, including one in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. See <http://www.wifredolam.net/en/works/drawings> for reproductions of six drawings from the Fata Morgana series.

²⁷ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 29.

²⁸ Franklin Rosemont, "Introduction," in André Breton, *Martinique: Snake Charmer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 3.

²⁹ Polizzotti says Breton boarded March 25; Sims gives the date as March 24.

³⁰ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 494. Lévi-Strauss provides a vivid description of Serge as an asexual-looking spinster in *Tristes Tropiques*, John and Doreen Weightman, trans. (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 25.

³¹ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 23.

³² Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 24.

³³ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 25.

³⁴ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 505.

³⁵ Sims records that the freighter landed at Fort-de-France and the passengers were "lodged in a former hospital on Trois Isles" (32), referring to La Lazaret, a former leper hospital located across the Baie de Fort-de-France at Pointe du Bout, north-west of Les Trois Îlets. While Lévi-Strauss records that Breton and the other passengers were interned in a camp called Le Lazaret "on the far side of the bay," Polizzotti describes Breton's stay with his wife and daughter as a confinement in a prison camp located at Pointe-Rouge which is on the other (eastern) side of the island (497). Dominique Brebion, Visual Arts Officer with the Department of Culture (DRAC) in Martinique confirms that Breton and Lam were placed in sanitary quarantine at the Lazaret (personal correspondence).

³⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 25.

³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 29-30.

³⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 29. Josephine de Beauharnais (1763-1814), the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte and the first French Empress was born in Martinique to a wealthy white Creole family. A statue of Josephine was erected in La Savane Park in Fort-de-France in 1859 when Josephine's grandson, Napoleon III was ruler of France. Vandals removed and stole the head of the statue in 1991 and spattered it with red paint a few years later which is how the statue has remained. This is due to the fact that it is believed that Josephine convinced Napoleon to reinstate slavery in the French colonies in 1802 following its abolition in 1793 to benefit her family who owned a sugar plantation in Martinique.

³⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 33.

⁴⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 56.

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- ⁴¹ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” ix.
- ⁴² Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 497.
- ⁴³ André Breton and André Masson, “Creole Dialogue” in Michael Richardson, ed. *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (London: Verso, 1996), 190.
- ⁴⁴ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 107-108.
- ⁴⁵ Alcoa Steamship Company Exhibit brochure, 1956, as cited in Alissandra Cummins, Allison Thompson and Nick Whittle, *Art in Barbados: what kind of mirror image* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999), 84. The judges were Hyatt Major, Curator of Prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, John J. Gordon, curator at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and Vernon C. Porter, Director of the National Academy of Design (my emphasis).
- ⁴⁶ Suzanne Césaire, “1943: Surrealism and Us” in Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, 126.
- ⁴⁷ Richardson, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, 15.
- ⁴⁸ The fabric shop was owned by René Ménil’s sister who organized Breton’s meeting with Césaire.
- ⁴⁹ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 498.
- ⁵⁰ Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of Andre Breton*, 498.
- ⁵¹ Linda Nochlin’s classic essay, “Why have there been no great women artists?” sets out a series of historical circumstances that ultimately contribute to a definition of “great artist,” excluding women as it does all groups that fall outside of the dominant domain of white male. See Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There been no Great Women Artists?” in Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker, *Art and Sexual Politics* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 1-39.
- ⁵² André Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” x.
- ⁵³ See for example *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land; Cahier d’un retour au pays natal - Bloodaxe Contemporary French Poets Series 4*, English and French Edition, translated by Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard (Bloodaxe, 1995) or *Return to My Native Land*, translated by John Berger and Anna Bostock, (Penguin Books, 1969).
- ⁵⁴ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” xi.
- ⁵⁵ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” xii.

⁵⁶ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” xv.

⁵⁷ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” xvi.

⁵⁸ Breton, “A Great Black Poet,” xvii.

⁵⁹ Suzanne Césaire, 124. Suzanne Césaire’s praise of liberty was no doubt influenced by recent political events in Martinique. The political conservatism of the island’s Vichy government played an important role in radicalizing the Blacks of Martinique. Part of the French fleet loyal to Vichy was blockaded in Fort de France by the Americans and 10,000 openly racist sailors had the run of the island. When a rebellion broke out in the summer of 1943, the government was overthrown and de Gaulle’s Free French assumed power. Suzanne Césaire’s article came out in the next issue of “Tropiques” following the uprising. (Robert Linsley. “Wifredo Lam: Painter of Negritude” in *Art History*, Vol II, No. 4, 1988. 529

⁶⁰ Jacques Charpier, *Lam*. (Paris: Editions Georges Fall, Musée de Poche, 1960) 26 as cited in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 11. Sims refers to comments by Jacques Charpier that Lam came to know the sculptures of Guinea and the Congo by the mid 1930s and demonstrates the existence of examples of African art in the collection of the Museo Antropologico in Madrid from 1910.

⁶¹ Goldsmith, op. cit.

⁶² See Aurelio Torrente Larrosa, *Eugenio Fernández Granell* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 2003).

⁶³ Max-Pol Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam* (New York: Rizzoli, 1976), 183.

⁶⁴ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 35.

⁶⁵ Lam in an unpublished interview, quoted in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 35.

⁶⁶ There are a number of important links between Cuba and Surrealism and Dada, including Francis Picabia, who was born in Cuba. Picabia’s poems were published in the 12th issue of ‘Tropiques’ (January 1945).

⁶⁷ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 30. Sims points out that these images of the femme cheval are conceptually linked to the horse figure in Picasso’s ‘Minotauremachie’ suite of the mid-1930s.

⁶⁸ Tanya Barson, “Introduction: Modernism and the Black Atlantic,” in Barson and Gorschluter, eds., *Afro Modern*, 14.

⁶⁹ Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, “Commentary” in Aimé Césaire, *Notebook*, 54-56.

⁷⁰ Barson, Introduction: Modernism and the Black Atlantic,” 14.

⁷¹ Julia Herzberg, “Naissance d’un Style et d’une Vision du Monde: Le Séjour à la Havane, 1941-1952” in Jean-Louis Paudrat and Christiane Falgayrettes-Leveau. *Lam Métis*. Paris: Musée Dapper, 2001, 111. Peret stopped in Cuba with his companion, painter Remedios Varo on his way to Mexico.

⁷² A reproduction of the cover can be seen at http://jacbayle.perso.neuf.fr/livres/Martinique/Cesaire_Lam.html

⁷³ The painting is in a private collection in Martinique.

⁷⁴ *The Jungle* was publicly exhibited for the first time at Lam’s solo exhibition held at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in 1944 for which Andre Breton wrote a short article for the exhibition’s brochure. This was held at the same time as the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) exhibition of Cuban art from which Lam had withdrawn, citing personal conflicts with some of the other Cuban artists. MoMA subsequently purchased *The Jungle*.

⁷⁵ The two paintings are very close in scale: Lam’s work is 239.4 x 229.9 cm while Picasso’s painting is slightly larger at 243.0 x 233.7 cm.

⁷⁶ Lowery Stokes Sims. “The Painter’s Line: The Drawings of Wifredo Lam.” In *Master Drawings* Vol 40 No 1, Spring 2002, 60.

⁷⁷ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 55.

⁷⁸ Gerardo Mosquera, “Modernity and Africana: Wifredo Lam on His Island,” in Fundació Joan Miró, *Wifredo Lam*, (Barcelona: Fundació Joan Miró, 1993), as cited in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 64.

⁷⁹ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 55.

⁸⁰ Mercer, “Cosmopolitan Contact Zones,” 45.

⁸¹ Mercer, “Cosmopolitan Contact Zones,” 44.

⁸² Sims, “The Painter’s Line,” 60.

⁸³ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 12-13.

⁸⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return*, 19-20.

⁸⁵ Ingemar Gustafson, "Wifredo Lam," *Salamander* 3 (1956), 29 as cited in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 107. The solo exhibition was held at the Colibri Gallery in Malmö, Sweden in 1955.

⁸⁶ Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam*, 199 as cited in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 107.

⁸⁷ Césaire was strongly criticized by other writers from the French Antilles, notably Raphael Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau and Jean Bernabé for what they termed the Créole paradox, his refusal to write in the "native" language of Martinique. Césaire was equally criticized for his political stance on the "departmentalization" issue, the status of the French Antilles as "overseas departments" without advocating for full independence from France. See Gregson Davis, *Aime Césaire*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁸⁸ Sims, "The Painter's Line," 67.

⁸⁹ Suzanne Garrigues Daniel, "The Early Works of Wifredo Lam: 1941-45" Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1983, as quoted in Sims, "The Painter's Line," 63.

⁹⁰ Pierre Mabilie, "La jungle: De l'importance prise par la critique d'art à l'époque contemporaine." *Tropiques* 12 (January 1945):173-187. Paris: Edition Jean Michel Place, 1978, as cited in Sims, "The Painter's Line," 69. Mabilie, who had been an active participant with the surrealist group in Marseilles before departing to take up a post as a surgeon in the French island of Guadeloupe, continued his involvement with the Surrealists during his stay in the Caribbean.

⁹¹ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 70.

⁹² Aimé Césaire, "Wifredo Lam des Antilles" in *Cahiers d'Art* 20-21 (1945-46): 357-359.

⁹³ Alejo Carpentier as cited in Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 70.

⁹⁴ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 64.

⁹⁵ R.E. Allen, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, eighth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 641.

⁹⁶ Davis, 176.

⁹⁷ R.E. Allen, ed. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1309. Levi-Strauss's title, prefaced by "Tristes," is overtly nostalgic in its poetic alliteration, fatalistically professing that paradise has already been lost. The title of the 1974 English edition was not translated from the French at the request of Lévi-Strauss, who felt that "sad tropics" or "tragic tropics" could not adequately convey its meaning or implications, which was closer in spirit to "Alas for the tropics."

⁹⁸ Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde*, 203.

⁹⁹ Jacques Leenhardt, "Wifredo Lam," in *Gravures de Wifredo Lam*, exh. Cat. With essays by X.X. Sheng and J. Leenhardt, Central Institute of Fine Arts, Beijing, 1991, p 18-21, as cited in Sims, "The Painter's Line," 57.

¹⁰⁰ See <http://www.wifredolam.net/en/works/etchings> for an example.

¹⁰¹ Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 165.

¹⁰² Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 168.

¹⁰³ Davis, *Aimé Césaire*, 176.

Chapter Five

Returning to Familiar Territory –Reconsidering Contemporary Barbados

If the past is indeed “another country,” the return journey promises to make strangers of us all.
Kobena Mercer¹

When *New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter derided Caribbean artists for their continued obsession with “identity, hybridity and diversity,” themes he declared to be “uncool” and outdated, if not “dead,” he reflected long-standing stereotypes that placed the Caribbean outside modernity.² Reviewing the Brooklyn Museum’s 2007 exhibition *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*, he observed that while the once-hyped forms like installation art and neo-conceptual objects may be disdained by Manhattan tastemakers, they continue to be embraced in the Brooklyn show which presented eighty works by forty-five “emerging and established” artists working in the Caribbean, the United States, Canada and Europe. Finding the work “all over the place stylistically,” Cotter blamed curator Tumelo Mosaka’s choice of clichéd thematic categories: “History and Memory”; “Politics and Identity”; “Myth Ritual and Belief”; and “Popular Culture”, describing them as “perceptual straitjackets rather than enlightening guides,” and identified that the main problem was that “much of what’s here treads ground already covered, in very similar ways, by other art over the years.” Cotter, like virtually every other reviewer, could not resist discussing the Caribbean as a problematized paradise. *Village Voice* critic, Daniel Kunitz, noted that the Caribbean is still called “Eden,” although one with a “seamy underbelly.”³ The fact that more than a third of the artists included in the exhibition lived

outside of the region further problematized the definitions and presumptions made about the Caribbean as a context for framing and evaluating the work.

One way that artists, curators and critics based in the Caribbean responded to this conversation that was taking place without them, was through the group show and accompanying catalogue, *Art for Export: an exhibition of works of art, which have represented Barbados abroad* (Zemicon Gallery, Barbados 2007). The initiative for this exercise, according to curator Therese Hadchity, was a desire to respond to the reviews of the *Infinite Island* exhibition, and the perception that the Barbadian arts community was ready to re-visit the discourse about the international representation of Caribbean art. Hadchity began her introduction in the *Art for Export* catalogue by summarizing her view of Cotter's critique: "In a tone, which alternates between sarcastic disenchantment and gruff approbation, Cotter chides the museum, the curator and the artists alike for, essentially, having the audacity to launch this tired exercise on the Manhattan-establishment." Considering the exhibition and the media responses from the distanced perspective of the "lived" Caribbean experience, Hadchity adds, "From a Caribbean vantage-point Cotter's review is something of a tolerance-test: be it as it may, that many well-respected and influential artists have been left out of the show in favor of others (sometimes virtually unknown in the Caribbean) with more aptitude for engaging an international audience. But to have several of these in turn, overruled for embracing themes here decreed out of fashion, can only cause this constituency to feel both robbed and run-over."⁴

In my own contribution to the *Art for Export* catalogue, I focused on the problematic preconceptions about the region which were evident, not in the work or the exhibition, but in the reviews themselves: "The hegemonic lens through which the Caribbean is viewed is nowhere more evident than in the journalistic reviews of *Infinite Island* which in general are

disappointing, not because they are frequently critical of the exhibited works, or the ‘clichéd’ themes of the exhibition itself, but because they are often littered with characterizations of the region which are themselves facile and clichéd. None of the reviews could discuss the Caribbean without referring to tourism, most resorting to references of tropical paradise, gentle breezes and sandy shores. Ariella Budick begins her article by dividing the Caribbean population into the rich who visit and the poor who live there, noting that many of the artists have already left this ‘wounded paradise’.”⁵

This chapter discusses the work of four contemporary artists from Barbados with particular focus on their interrogation of the traditions of representing the Caribbean, their relationship to a wider globalized space and to constructed notions of modernity and contemporaneity. Winston Kellman, Ras Ishi Butcher and Joscelyn Gardner, all of whom are contemporaries of Sonia Boyce, emerged as artists in the 1980s. They share with Boyce an awareness of their work within a wider context, both in terms of time and space through a conscious engagement with traditions of representation. They share a concern with the burden of representation as an inherited language as well as a burden of history, questioning how this tradition or language rests in dialogue with the contemporary work, both as an acknowledged assumption and a point of departure, a source of critique, a deliberate attempt to wrestle with these traditions. There is a concern with the ways in which personal narrative and memory inform representations of the Caribbean as a constructed, distanced process. The fourth artist is Sheena Rose, a young practitioner of the next generation whose understanding of the relationship between the local and the global has emerged in tandem with the rapid expansion of the internet as a space of communication, exhibition and identity construction. Rose is representative of a

new generation of artists within the Caribbean who occupy a different position in relation to representation in the past and visibility in the present.

The Caribbean and Contemporaneity

Leon Wainwright has argued that contemporary Caribbean art continues to be received in the United States and Britain as both “out of date” and “behind the times” – phrases that evoke both space and time. Writing on Caribbean art in the contemporary moment and its reception within the larger, globalized art discourse, Wainwright describes the way that the region has remained distant from the mainstream: “The Caribbean is a region that art history has hardly noticed, even as it embarks on its current rethinking along more global lines. If our aim is to understand the modalities of connection that make up an expanded field of art history, and to mistrust the discipline’s older limits, then the Caribbean has a large part to play.” Following Paul Gilroy’s argument that the Black Atlantic is seminal to a consideration of modernity, Wainwright argues that the Caribbean has always maintained relations of proximity with the centers of power and knowledge of the metropolitan “global North” and that this should be regarded as essential for understanding the historical developments of ideas and practices of art associated with modernity: “There is a concrete and irrefutable record of interaction between the Caribbean and the wider Atlantic, which is configured in the field of art and the experiences of artists.”⁶ In pointing to the influential centrality of the Caribbean in an Atlantic history of art, he questions why this story was initially erased and, consequently, what vistas of theoretical priority it opens up for the entire enterprise of the historical study of art.

Referring to the work of Johannes Fabian as well as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Wainwright acknowledges the temporal discourse of anthropology as it was formed decisively under the

paradigm of evolution which has assumed a conception of time that was not only secularized and naturalized but also thoroughly spatialized, and which has constructed relations with its Other by means of temporal devices which have constructed difference as distance and can identify certain elements of the present as anachronistic.⁷ Through the conflation of spatial and temporal distance, the art of the Caribbean is presented not only as outside the mainstream but also outside of the contemporary, as a present visage of Europe's / Western culture's own pasts. This historicism, Wainwright argues, is among the reasons why art history has failed to adequately contemplate the Caribbean.

The prevailing attitude to time and space that is present in other, adjacent academic disciplines, has long been seen in the responses of critics and historians to art and artists of the Caribbean and its diaspora. Conventional ideas about temporality have worked to circumscribe the roles and the choices that were presented to artists. With historicism comes the accusation of anachronism that has been an impediment to many Caribbean artists' efforts to claim their place as artists. They have been forced to negotiate the view that their art was 'behind the times', the challenge of being regarded as somehow lagging behind the newest developments in the art of their day.⁸

Wainwright adopts the term "timed out" to refer to the processes by which the art and artists of the transnational Caribbean and its plural diasporas have found themselves excluded from the time of modernism and contemporaneity.⁹

Cotter's review of *Infinite Island* dismissed the discourse taking place within contemporary Caribbean art as outdated and irrelevant for the presumed more sophisticated Manhattan audience. While issues of identity may have still been raging in the Caribbean, New York audiences, according to Cotter, no longer cared. He is entitled to his opinion. But it is surprising to compare his response to the next big pan-Caribbean exhibition to open in Manhattan, *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*. Cotter had been anticipating this exhibition; he concluded his 2007 review by noting that even though *Infinite Island* was so uncool that it was

almost cool, he could offer hope that another contemporary Caribbean show, *Caribbean: Crossroads*, due to open in 2009 would provide another chance to perhaps get it right. Cotter had to wait until 2012 for the exhibition to open, but apparently he thought it was worth the wait, calling the exhibition which was spread across three museums (El Museo del Barrio, The Studio Museum, Harlem and The Queen's Museum of Art) "the big art event of the summer season in New York." This time Cotter declared the Caribbean exhibition had great relevance for viewers, not only because each venue is "dense and vivid enough to give you the flavor of the whole," but because New York, itself, is now described by Cotter as one of the largest Caribbean cities. Stating that the story of the Caribbean is woven from questions such as "Is the Caribbean a place? If so, what are its boundaries?...Is there a Caribbean culture, and how do you define it?" identity politics seems to have a re-born relevance for the art critic, seeing in the glitter-encrusted portrait by Jamaican artist Ebony Patterson, "the double-edged potential of radical identity transformation." While Cotter never references his earlier dismissive comments of the 2007 Caribbean exhibition, even though Patterson, like several other artists, was included in both shows, he can't resist the Old World explorer's advice that viewers will encounter "histories you never knew and artists you have rarely, if ever, heard of," adding "It's a summertime vision of worlds within worlds."¹⁰

Caribbean: Crossroads of the World was a much more ambitious exhibition, organized by a curatorial team led by Elvis Fuentes, including more than 550 objects and expanding its initial focus on contemporary art to include two hundred years of history, presenting not just Caribbean art, but art about the Caribbean. Why then were many stake-holders in the region disappointed with the outcome? Noting it was an exhibition preceded by eight years of research, and the scope of its reach requiring that it be spread across three New York museums, one

reviewer, Rob Perée, writing for a digital art magazine devoted to Surinamese art, called *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World* “a failed project,” and a missed opportunity that only confirmed many of the prejudices that the average visitor has concerning Caribbean art.¹¹

Trinidad artist and scholar Andil Gosine, reviewing the exhibition for *Art in America*, called *Caribbean Crossroads*, “a safe show.....full of engaging and important work, and some lovely surprises, but the choices mainly conform to normative, Euro-centered notions of "fine art."¹² While *ARC*, the leading Caribbean-based magazine on contemporary Caribbean art did not publish an independent review of the exhibition, it did post a short article by Dominique Brebion, president of AICA Southern Caribbean, the regional chapter of the International Art Critics Association. Brebion expressed her fury that while work from the French Departments of the Americas – Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guiana – was included in the exhibition, it was completely absent from the 496 page accompanying reference book, “And this despite thirteen members of the curatorial and editorial team [and she names them all] – having attended the seminar on contemporary Caribbean art, *Parcours Martinique*, held in Martinique in 2008.....Thus, the art of the French-speaking Caribbean does not feature in this study of the relationships and exchanges between the Caribbean Basin, Europe and the United States, which is a mistake in my view, for it has undeniably offered some original approaches that must surely count for something in the archipelago’s art history.”¹³

In a paper entitled “Writing about Art in the Caribbean,” Veerle Poupeye examined how international representation of regional art has been received in the artistic communities of the Anglophone Caribbean. She noted that “definitions and hierarchies of Caribbean art are increasingly negotiated outside the Caribbean, in North American and European academies and art worlds, which conflicts with some of the political premises of post-colonial Caribbean

culture, namely the drive towards cultural autonomy and self-representation.” Despite the growing interest in “non-western” art, the power remains rooted in the traditional centers; she cites Gerardo Mosquera who describes the division between the “curating cultures” and the “curated cultures.” Poupeye provides a comprehensive comparison of two important earlier exhibitions and related publications: *Caribbean Visions*, which toured in the USA in 1995 and *Caribe Insular* which toured Spain and Germany in 1998, to show how different curatorial agendas have constructed and shaped the presentation of Caribbean art.¹⁴ But she also identifies political and practical considerations that are completely extraneous to the art itself. While Poupeye sees *Caribe Insular* as the more successful exhibition, she criticized its over-dependence on other recent international events used to construct a “ready-made ‘wish list’ of artists” and the curators’ preconceptions about contemporary Caribbean art that “did not necessarily measure up to what existed on the ground.”¹⁵ Poupeye’s comments preceded both the *Infinite Island* exhibition and *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World*, as well as other significant exhibitions of contemporary Caribbean art, notably *Kréyol Factory*, curated by Yoande Bacot in 2009 (Paris: Parc La Villette.), *Rockstone & Bootheel: Contemporary West Indian Art*, curated by Kristina Newman-Scott and Yona Backer (Real Art Ways in Hartford Connecticut, 2009) and *Who More Sci-fi than Us*, curated by Nancy Hoffman in 2012 (Kade Kunsthall, Amersfoort, Netherlands), but many of her observations remain relevant.

With the recent and unprecedented global exposure for Caribbean art, albeit too frequently sequestered within exhibitions devoted to an exploration of the region, contention between stake-holders based in the region and external players closer to the established metropolitan centers of the art world have not diminished. This is undoubtedly linked to the historical traditions of representing the Caribbean with reference to external preconceptions.

Even in the contemporary context within the Caribbean, the act of representation remains intimately connected to external determinations whether it is a pre-existing visual language, a slow process of “decolonization,” a dependency on tourism and aspirations for recognition in the form of “international exposure.” While earlier Caribbean exhibitions were organized according to nations or sometimes language groups, the more recent shows have replaced this with broad themes. Nevertheless maps are requisite inclusions as frontispieces to the catalogues in order to properly “locate” each artist, substantiating their inclusion even if they reside and make work elsewhere. Usually accompanying the map, curators include written descriptions of the region with a list of countries which are included or not included within their particular definition of the Caribbean, because each time, the geographical parameters have changed. A review of the *Rockstone & Bootheel* exhibition, again appearing in the *New York Times*, stated that for many viewers the Caribbean region was a “blank slate,” this despite the fact that as the author himself points out, Hartford, where the exhibition was on view, had the third-largest West Indian population in the United States.¹⁶ After assuming that viewers are likely to know nothing about the region, the reviewer feels completely entitled to give free reign to his imagination, informing his readers that the show “takes you out of your comfort zone and into a strange new world.” In 2009, a review of contemporary Caribbean art is still being introduced and contextualized – in the very first sentence – as belonging to a “strange new world.”

Krista Thompson refers the “invisible,” that which is visible but the mainstream is blind to. Identifying the aesthetic practices and structures of visibility that influence Caribbean art might inform an approach to a better awareness. In her essay, “How to Install Art as a Caribbeanist,” Thompson focuses on curatorial practice, not surprising given that so much of the current, public thinking about Caribbean art has taken place in this context of exhibiting.¹⁷ But

these questions are also more generally relevant to how we write about Caribbean art as a basis for how we understand it. The traditional tools at our disposal: exhibitions, curatorial processes and spaces; but also by extension, methodologies and ultimately ways of seeing and knowing need to be transformed. In the face of a lack of in-depth attention to visual aesthetics in the discursive frames that surround Caribbean art, what is required is that greater attention be given to structures of visibility. There has been a tendency to view Caribbean art as illustrative of history and even of Caribbeaness itself, “instead of engaging what the work does visually.”¹⁸ Thompson points to the problem of framing Caribbean art through concepts like myth, ritual, *créolité*, hybridization or syncretism which reflect the early influence of the field of anthropology. Instead, we need to pay attention to the history of aesthetic practices and visibility in the region.

How is it possible that the Caribbean continues to be described as a blank slate, as unknowable even within spaces considered to be part of the Caribbean diaspora; or alternatively to be described using tropes and stereotypes that have continued to be recirculated from the very earliest descriptions of the region? The paradox is that the Caribbean is simultaneously invisible and over determined, and in either scenario is seen to have no place within the wider fields of modernity and contemporaneity. The discourse is further complicated by the fact that conceptions of the space of the Caribbean become conflated with a reading of the work that is exhibited and discussed within the rubric of the Caribbean and its diaspora. By returning to the theme of art in Barbados, how might a consideration of its place within the wider historical and spatial transatlantic, transcultural diaspora provide new insights into the work of these four artists?

Sense of Place

Barbados is about twenty-one miles long and fourteen miles wide across at its widest point, standing in isolation to the east of the Windward Islands of the Lesser Antilles and is characterized by several distinctive geographical and geological features. Barbados is not part of the arc of Caribbean islands since only its west coast lies in the Caribbean Sea; the north and east coasts lie in the Atlantic Ocean. While those islands lying within the chain of the Lesser Antilles consist essentially of volcanic rock, Barbados is primarily (85%) coral limestone with a base of sedimentary rocks that are covered by terraces of carbonate rocks. The largest and most dramatic array of sedimentary rock formations is visible in the area of the Scotland District where Bathsheba is located. The most dramatic visible feature of the Scotland District is the steep cliff face that borders the sea with its complex striations of tectonic folding that rise vertically along the shoreline, and monolithic boulders that through landslides in the distant past have tumbled onto the beach and into the sea. Some of these rocks have been estimated to be 30-50 million years old. The District also features the only two examples of the indigenous dense, jungle-like tropical rainforest which covered the island prior to British settlement in 1627 (Turner's Hall Woods and Joe's River Rain Forest). Today, the rest of the island which is flatter is largely deforested and historically transformed through agricultural use.¹⁹

Winston Kellman's Black Atlantic

Every day for the past five years, in the darkness of night or in the earliest hours of the morning, Winston Kellman has been visiting the same spot on the east coast of Barbados; the edge of a small fishing village known as Bathsheba which lies on the brink of the Atlantic Ocean. Every day he paints the same yet changing view; Gilroy's "changing same."²⁰ Day after

day, Kellman completes one work in one sitting, each piece recording the observation, the sensation, and the experience of that encounter. Collectively, (and ultimately this is how the works need to be understood), they form a diary or journal. The medium has shifted at particular moments from charcoal drawings to oil paintings to watercolor but the subject matter has remained constant. The intersection of place and time, the way that history and memory are contained in a location that bears witness to evolving time - this is ultimately the subject matter of Kellman's work, known collectively as the *Bathsheba Series*.

The meaning of this place, Bathsheba, is complex and multifaceted. Bathsheba, home to approximately 5000 inhabitants and a continual influx of itinerant surfers, is located in the Scotland District in the Parish of St. Joseph on the east coast of Barbados. This side of the island is the most easterly point of the Caribbean, the site closest to Africa, separated by approximately 3000 miles of the Atlantic Ocean.²¹ It is characterized by rugged coastline, rough seas, high waves, strong currents as well as the monolithic boulders that seem to have been miraculously deposited on the wide sandy beach or in the bordering sea. As a result of its unique geological features, the now iconic view has been captured multiple times by tourists, photographers and artists stretching back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when a now abandoned train line carried visitors and supplies along the picturesque coast.

Curator Gilane Tawadros examined analogies between geological formations and diasporic cultural practices in *Fault Lines*, the exhibition of contemporary art from Africa and the African Diaspora presented at the 50th Venice Biennial in 2003. She described how works of art “trace the fault lines that are shaping contemporary experience locally and globally....[and how they] have been etched into the physical fabric of our world through the effects of colonialism and postcolonialism, of migration and globalization.”²² While fault lines as a

geographical phenomenon signal significant shifts or even impending disaster, they also create new landscapes. In the same way these diasporic artists dispel the notion of a fixed and stable terrain – whether geographical, historical, political or social, by proposing its reconfiguration.

Contributing to the discussion in the *Fault Lines* catalogue, Stuart Hall, in his essay “Maps of Emergency: Fault Lines and Tectonic Plates,” refers to the pathways of global traffic that are increasingly tracked by the work of art in the age of transnational globalization to the space of the international exhibitions. And while the model of center and periphery has been challenged, differences and invisible frontiers persist within this model of “one world.” Despite the significant shifts brought by migration and transiency in this postcolonial moment, the result is a “shared, deeply intertwined, but highly uneven and unfinished global world, from whose impact none is excluded.” The work of diasporic artists, Hall argues, reflects this “crisis of representation.” Hall refers to Irit Rogoff’s *Terra Infirma* in which she challenges the notion of geography as a settled signifying system which situates people and identities in relation to place and territory, and instead proposes the notion of “unhomed geographies” to describe a prevailing condition of disrupted knowledge orders, a “crisis of the ability to represent any form of stable geographic knowledge as a set of guidelines regarding identity, belonging and rights.”²³

Kellman selects Bathsheba as an iconic Barbadian view, both in the sense of location and image. It has become the source of repeated pictorial presentations or “re-presentations” because of its spectacular geography – both the rugged coast of striated rock face formed through prehistoric geological shifts, as well as the dramatic surge of the Atlantic Ocean which meets it. Kellman commits to re-presenting this familiar and arguably overly pictorialized scene over and over again. The composition remains remarkably consistent and yet none of the works are the same. The challenge of capturing the image in one sitting is complicated by the fact that Kellman

often chooses particularly transitory times of day – as the dawn is breaking or the sun is setting in the evening. Through the focused investment in the location, he acquires a specialized familiarity with the geology and climatic conditions, becoming highly sensitized to the nuanced changes.

Throughout the series, the artist has transitioned through various media as the need has arisen. Writer Liz Lydiate has discussed Kellman’s decision to begin with charcoal drawings in order to explore his subject, focusing on volume and mass as well as the elemental differences between rock, sand and water, and movement of both sea and sky: “Any viewer familiar with the sea and its moods will recognize the mastery, vigor and physicality in these drawings.”²⁴ In the hundreds of oil paintings, all of similar size and composition, the thick impasto and heightened color predominate. The surface literally swirls with energy, physically capturing the intense force of the sea. The watercolors can be subdued and tonal or vibrant but applied with sweeping washes that best capture the serenity and surrender of the experience.

The majority of the works were executed in approximately an hour. As Lydiate explains, the artist does not carry out further work on the drawings and paintings afterward as this would destroy what he views as the integrity of the work, as a true representation or physical record of that experience in time; of that moment as it was lived. Lydiate calls this a “performative record of his presence,” suggesting that process cannot be seen as separate from the product and perhaps supersedes it. Lydiate’s suggestion points to the complexity of the work which on the surface appears very traditional. The tension between notions of traditional work and contemporary has often emerged in discussions of Kellman’s drawing and painting. In an essay entitled “Outside the Contemporary Game,” critic and curator Therese Hadchity argues that with his “single-minded and compulsive physical and psychological immersion in the landscape,” Kellman has

refused to engage in the forms and fashions of the contemporary art scene but at the same time has shown an unwillingness to accede to commercial strategies that might make traditional work commercially successful, particularly in a tourism-driven economy.²⁵ The tradition of landscape painting *en plein air*, particularly in watercolor, summons comparison with the work of British naval officers who produced some of the first images of the Barbadian landscape and coastline, although typically this was from the sea looking inland rather than from the shore looking out into the abyss of the ocean. The commitment to a particular location which the artist returns to repeatedly, discerning the variations due to weather conditions, time of the day and season, recalls the tradition of the Barbizon school and the French Impressionists, notably Claude Monet. Kellman's interest in the sublime force of nature and the gestural treatment has drawn comparisons to the German romanticists and expressionists. But Kellman is adamant that his paintings cannot be classified as traditional since within the context of Barbados, there is no such tradition and of course he is producing this work as an artist fully engaged in the contemporary, postcolonial dilemma. As a result, this tension between notions of tradition and contemporaneity is felt in tandem with the friction between local and global expectations.

Although Kellman had been interested to paint this location, for many years he felt it was "too much", in the sense that the burden of its significance was overwhelming. While rejecting the label of traditional landscape painter, Kellman is uninterested in working outside of this acknowledged tradition, both in terms of the media of painting (acrylic and watercolor) and the genre of representational landscape. It forms an inherited language through which the artist articulates a vastness of insufficiencies, absences and silences. He identifies his intense and sustained engagement with the subject, the re-imaging of the scene as a catalyst to release ideas which he claims he can't get away from.²⁶

Kellman identifies the depiction of Bathsheba, whether in a photograph, a painting or a postcard as an iconic national image, known to all Barbadians as a place of breath-taking beauty. It is summoned up by the island's most renowned writers, notably Kamau Brathwaite, who refers to Bathsheba as the "place of the hot angry Rocks where the sun comes from", situated along the easterly "wild Maroon coast".²⁷ In *Barabajan Poems*, Brathwaite describes the childhood memory of skipping pebbles over the sea as a dawning moment of awareness of origins, of Genesis, of creation, of the cosmos, as well as the artist's own creative possibilities. This knowledge is closely tied to his experience of the coastline, at first at Brown's Beach as a child, and later at Bathsheba: "[I was to have this very same or similar experience & sensation years later – in 1972 – at Bathsheba (BASHEEBA) – when Mother Poem was about to happen] & I picked that pebble up – and skidded it across water – and it bloomed into islands."²⁸

Kamau Brathwaite later described the profound meaning of this location as shared by all Barbadians:

All of us, I know, have Xperienced Bathsheba in a very deep & significant even religious way & from we are very young, growing up green, thirsty for knowledge and image, amazed (since most of us live in the West) at the strange transformation in our consciousness as we make the crossing over the heights of the island at say Joes River Station (via Horse Hill) or St. Elizabeth's or Lamming's or Spring Field. And then that sudden precipitous, vertiginous vision of the coastline in sunlight or cloud shade cloud shadow below us with the dark blue & purple-coloured wall of water rolling in from Africa all white at its edges & without sound at that distance but as we get nearer, the influence of that mass, that munificence, that glassy magnificence, the tons of boulders rolling in and crashing down white wild & spuming up like forever & the black rocks standing up also forever like 'thunder made visible' our eastern warriors of sound

.....

So that in the same way that on Brown's Beach there was the genesis of islands with my pebble; here now on the other side of the island, another beginning with these great eastern boulders, closest to maroon & slave & heroes & Africa; the god Legba I celebrate here, being the lord of beginnings²⁹

Brathwaite identifies the spiritual significance of the location, which he attributes not only to the revelation of its beauty and power as the viewer approaches it from the West, over rolling hills, (Brathwaite inserts a note clarifying to all readers that his reference to the “West” refers to the west coast of the island, “...not Cultural West...okay?”). He adds that its power lies in its proximity to Africa; it summons up the African *orisha* and it retains the memory of the terror of trans-Atlantic slavery. In another note Brathwaite describes the steep and treacherous Horse Hill, the road that leads down to the east coast, specifically before it was “‘modernized’ into a lower gradient.” He sees in the treacherousness of the approach and the revelation of the coastline as it comes into view, a metaphor for the Middle Passage itself: “legba to Bathsheba itself legba to Guinea.....I now (March 93) recognize that this ‘crossing’ (towards not only Bathsheba but the coast & coast of GUINEA since Barbados is the most easterly & therefore the nearest of all Caribb islands to Africa) helped Bajans, despite the countervailing LITTLE ENGLANDNESS, to understand the Middle Passage....”³⁰ For Barbadians, Brathwaite argues, Bathsheba provided an experiential connection to Africa not only through the geographical fact via the fluid and thunderous waves crossing the Atlantic, but also spiritually. The dramatic features of the landscape, wild and uncultivated in comparison to the rest of the island, provided an alternative vision to the colonial society of Bridgetown. It embodies the full notion of a black Atlantic.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy makes very few references to the visual arts, finding instead a ready body of examples for his concepts of the African diaspora within music. While American scholars of the African diaspora such as Robert Farris Thompson were much more engaged with visual culture, Krista Thompson points out that Gilroy does make significant “tangential” references to African diaspora art history.³¹ Specifically, Gilroy provides a

discussion of the work of Joseph Mallord William Turner, an artist who was particularly interested in maritime scenes, and whose paintings, Gilroy informs his readers, “represent, in the view of many contemporary critics, the pinnacle of achievement in the English school in painting,” and “an enduring expression of the very essence of English civilization.”³² Gilroy’s discussion focuses on Turner’s “celebrated picture,” *The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, of 1840, which he notes was exhibited at the Royal Academy to coincide with the world anti-slavery convention held in London in 1840.³³

The picture, owned by John Ruskin for some twenty-eight years, was rather more than an answer to the absentee Caribbean landlords who had commissioned its creator to record the tainted splendor of their country houses, which, as Patrick Wright has eloquently demonstrated, became an important signifier of the contemporary, ruralist distillate of national life. It offered a powerful protest against the direction and moral tone of English politics. This was made explicit in an epigraph Turner took from his own poetry and which has itself retained a political inflection: “Hope, hope, fallacious hope where is thy market now?”³⁴

Gilroy makes the point that after owning the painting for almost three decades, Ruskin offered it for sale at Christie’s, three years after his extensive involvement in the campaign to defend Governor Eyre over the Morant Bay riots in Jamaica. “It is said that he had begun to find it too painful to live with.”³⁵ The main point Gilroy wants to focus on though, is Ruskin’s comments on Turner’s *Slave Ship* in Ruskin’s book *Modern Painters*. Gilroy notes Ruskin’s inability or unwillingness to discuss the subject matter of the painting which was based on a poem that described a slave ship caught in a typhoon, as well as on a true story of the slave ship *Zong* whose captain was convicted of throwing overboard sick and dying slaves in order to collect insurance money available only for slaves “lost at sea”.³⁶ Instead, Ruskin focuses on the aesthetics of painting water; information that the vessel was a slave ship was relegated to a footnote in the first volume. Krista Thompson expands the point:

Gilroy uses Ruskin's text to describe the marginalized, aestheticized, or ignored presence of blacks in the social and representational landscape and as an instance of the ways in which these erasures become central to national art canons. The painting is an example of the ambiguous visual field that blackness and African diasporic subjects often occupied. Ruskin's resolutely formal analysis also calls attention to forms of criticism and visual analysis that naturalize and universalize the ways of seeing art that erase considerations of race.³⁷

Visual Amnesia

In Kellman's paintings of the Atlantic Ocean, there are no slave ships or human cargo. In fact there is virtually a complete absence of human content in these works; no fishing boats pulled onto the shoreline, no surfers, no figures standing on the beach, no cars parked out to enjoy the view, no evidence of the nearby cottages, none of the flotsam and jetsam that wash up regularly onto the sand. Kellman goes to the east coast every day not just to paint; like many Barbadians who have learned how to negotiate the dangerous currents, he goes to Bathsheba to swim. He relates stories of inadvertently interrupting young lovers or the occasional drug dealer but none of this is evident in the paintings. Instead, the focus is the expanse of sky and sea and the overwhelming feeling of absence.

Bathsheba is iconic for its unique and dramatic beauty and yet below its physical appeal and reflected in the violence of the rough seas and geological formations, is the history of slavery. For Kellman, as for Brathwaite, this is the history that is submerged and denied. Kellman argues that for Caribbean people, neither this history nor its legacies and ramifications are adequately comprehended within the contemporary society: "there is a denial of what is around us, the absence is a denial of your existence." The landscape for Kellman is the true witness to history – "the land and the trees are before and beyond what is presented to us as the legitimate ideas of history." The events of the past, according to Kellman, have been formulated through academic texts and mandates of heritage foundations, establishing a continuum or an

official narrative that is not to be interfered with or challenged; the “real” events are unacknowledged and silent or sanitized. They are presented as theoretical or archival; they are the documents of the history that fail to reveal how it was truly lived. Kamau Brathwaite writes that knowledge about the Caribbean has been “submerged” due to “ignorance, negative propaganda at home in her community and of course in the wider New York/USA world not least at University.”³⁸ Paul Gilroy has also explained that “absence” or silence about the impact of race or ethnicity from contemporary considerations of modernity served to inspire his decision to write the *Black Atlantic*.³⁹

For Kellman, the site of Bathsheba and the theme of absence resonate on a very personal level as well; in 1978 Kellman’s father drowned while swimming off Barbados’ east coast. The artist, who was living in Britain at the time, describes the very profound sense of loss he experienced, not only due to the death of his father, but also the subsequent disintegration of his family. The transience in his life at that time, moving between the Caribbean and the United Kingdom is reflected in a sense of disorientation and issues of belonging, not only on a personal level, but also in the way his painting was received publicly.

Kellman, who was born in Barbados in 1952, attended the Parkinson Memorial School in the mid 1960s and recalls his art tutor, Grantley Prescod winning national recognition as the designer of the flag for the newly independent nation (1966). Kellman recalls the design for the flag hanging on the wall of the classroom, an experience he credits with his early awareness of the place of visual icons in the construction of a sense of nationhood. Kellman left Barbados at the age of nineteen to study art first at Banbury College in Oxfordshire and then the Cheltenham College of Art and Design.⁴⁰ In 1979, Kellman returned to Barbados on holiday where he reconnected with former Parkinson classmates, twin brothers and artists, Omowale and Sundiata

Stewart. Omowale and Sundiata were formative members in the construction of dePAM, “de’ People’s Art Movement”, that formed part of a larger cultural group known as Yoruba House. This initiative was organized by Elliot “Elombe” Mottley, a teacher and later the first director of the National Cultural Foundation. Yoruba House was a forum for Afro- Barbadian cultural activity and offered workshops on African traditional dance, drumming, drama, painting, sculpture, creative writing and a wide range of crafts. The culmination of Mottley’s success was later identified as the institutionalization, through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1978 of the island-wide community and theatrical event which developed into the annual Crop Over Festival.⁴¹ DePAM challenged the artistic establishment by by-passing the modest gallery system to gain visibility for younger, predominantly male, untutored artists who organized sidewalk exhibitions in Bridgetown. While artists had organized outdoor art exhibitions during the 1960s and 1970s, these had been geared towards tourists and west coast foreign residents who were the primary art patrons. DePAM, in contrast presented itself as part of a counter-culture, bringing art to “the man in the street” with the aim of using it as a tool to raise a sense of Afro-Caribbean consciousness.

Through his friendship with Omowale Stewart, Kellman became involved with Yoruba House and was encouraged to travel to Martinique to observe the activities of a similar group there known as SERMAC, (*le Service Municipal d’Action Culturelle*/the Municipal Cultural Action Service) an art institute promoting Martinique’s heritage, set up in the center of Fort-de-France by Aimé Césaire who was then mayor of the city.⁴² Kellman, who was familiar with Césaire’s writings on *Négritude*, met the renowned poet whose office was located in the nearby *Théâtre de la Ville de Fort-de-France* (now renamed the *Théâtre Aimé Césaire*) and who frequently walked through the studios of SERMAC to observe the activities.

Kellman's involvement with SERMAC and Césaire in the early 1980s coincided with the early formation of the Black Arts Movement in the United Kingdom. He returned to London where he obtained a post-graduate diploma from the Chelsea College of Art and was aware of their activities, but he remained decidedly distanced, both in terms of personal affiliations as well as the absence of overt political content in his work. He later explained in a newspaper interview, "In England you're relegated to two categories: you've got the black art galleries, which are mostly in Brixton and the South, and then there's a general art market where you wouldn't find that many artists of African descent."⁴³ He took up a career as a free-lance illustrator for magazines like *Harpers & Queen* and *Vogue*, exhibited with the small but well-established Cadogan Gallery and acquired a British passport so that he now had dual citizenship. However, he was increasingly disillusioned by a sense of artistic isolation as he became viewed as an exoticized artist in both the Caribbean and Europe; a perpetual outsider. The Cadogan Gallery's promotion of his two solo exhibitions featuring Barbadian landscapes and the media reviews invariably framed the work in the vocabulary of tropical sensuality.⁴⁴ But equally a review of a 1990 solo exhibition at the Garrison Gallery described his "vibrant translations of the Barbadian scene [as]celebrations of all of the exotic colors of the tropics."⁴⁵

Crisis of Duality

Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, stands as the iconic Caribbean testament to the experience of venturing to the colonizing mother country, only to discover a status of "unbelonging." The return then is a reawakened encounter – presenting the familiar, and ultimately the self, in a new and more revealing light. Irit Rogoff explains that the strangeness of "unhomedness" or "unbelonging" is not a state of marginality or defiant opposition but rather a

critical refusal of what is presented as natural.⁴⁶ According to Rogoff, to “unbelong” and to “not be at home” is the very condition of critical theoretical activity.

Kellman’s return to Barbados after an absence of more than a decade was a conscious decision to locate himself physically and psychologically in the Caribbean as a Caribbean person and artist and from that location, inspired by the work of Césaire, assert a place and an acknowledgement of its culture. In a 1992 article Jonathan Small wrote that “All through the eighties he [Kellman] was secretly nursing a dream for Third World art: he wanted to see it brought into the mainstream international culture.”⁴⁷ Another local journalist, Margaret Harris, quoted Kellman as advocating for a “kind of authenticity based on our Creole experience, working on the hybrid character of Barbadian society,” and warning that “what is saleable and what is authentic do not always coincide.”⁴⁸ The call for a new kind of global art that was more inclusive that had brought real, if slow, change in the UK in the wake of the British Black Arts Movement had not materialized in the Anglophone Caribbean. Referring to the results as a “project gone awry,” Hadchity states that the Barbados of the 1990s “was not the post-colonial nation Kellman and many of his artistic generation had envisaged.”⁴⁹

Kellman’s transience between the two spaces of the Caribbean and the UK was manifested as a state of constant otherness which in turn inspired a heightened criticality and an intensified imperative to unearth the essence of experience. “Coming back to Barbados, he [Kellman] insists, was a deliberate return to be in a ‘contested territory’,” according to Hadchity who credits the artist with a “...profound understanding of the island as a place and space, of Barbadians and of himself and of that elusive concept referred to as ‘national identity’ [which] is inextricably linked to the historical, economic and symbolic reality of the land. Its many layers

of meaning are, he maintains, embedded in the carved-up fields, crop-cycles, alternating vegetation, the color and texture of everything.”⁵⁰

The act of return for Kellman has become an on-going ritual in the two decades since resuming residence in Barbados. After identifying his subject, whether it is the cane fields or the East Coast, Kellman is compelled to return again and again to the same subject as part of an intensifying investigation to see beyond and below the familiar. The predominant focus of Winston Kellman’s work throughout the 1990s was the rural landscape of Barbados. From the beginning of his career he worked in series, giving particular attention to the sugar plantation, his first iconic marker of the Barbadian landscape.

The Ghost of Slavery

Agriculture and specifically the sugar industry have been “fundamentally intertwined with the history and culture of the island and its people” as Liz Lydiate has noted.⁵¹ Kellman’s imagery can feel almost nostalgic in its concerted focus on the agricultural fields which were the backbone of the Barbadian economy and culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and as a result have, like Bathsheba, a long tradition of visual representation. Krista Thompson has demonstrated that images depicting the region, whether paintings, prints, photography or postcards, were constructed to reflect a deliberate “tropicalization” in an attempt to render the islands as pleasing and inviting to the growing tourism industry.⁵² What current debates make clear is that these landscapes are not simply objective recordings of the physical features of a specific location. Instead they are constructed around the power relations embedded in the cultures which produced them.

At first glance Winston Kellman's landscapes may appear to present some of the features of tropicalization, notably the imported flora that have become markers of the tropics, as well as the vibrant colors in which the scene is often rendered. In addition, Kellman focuses, like Gauguin had done, almost exclusively on the rural landscape with an absence of markers referencing modernist developments. Unlike Gauguin's Martinique scenes however, where the Afro-Caribbean woman is often central, in Kellman's landscape the human figure is decidedly absent. The scenes appear familiar and are closely linked to and influenced by traditions of representation in landscape painting and render recognizable features of rural Barbados; this includes the square mapping of fields, the plantation buildings and the rows of royal palm trees marking the periphery of plantations and dotting the distant horizon. Perhaps these scenes are hyper-familiar so that the viewer becomes anesthetized to the need to think about what is being presented. What disrupts this reading however is the thick impasto and unmixed color of the acrylic paint in which the majority of Kellman's landscapes are rendered. The vibrancy of the expressionistic handling and the densely modulated surface create a dramatic, somewhat ominous atmosphere requiring the viewer to rethink what is being delivered. The physical viscosity of the paint becomes the turgid earth or mud itself.

These works, like the later *Bathsheba* series, are marked by absence. The scenes are dominated by fields that have been tilled, planted or harvested. These are worked fields. What is absent is the labor or worker. The scene is presented as picturesque through the denial of the colonial rule and forced labor that completely transformed the land and its use. This is not the indigenous, wild landscape; this is a colonized landscape partitioned, subdivided, cultivated. The landscapes are clearly "worked" fields; even as they lay bare, the soil is tilled into rough, damp rows of dark earth. Although the field is barren, it is freshly so. Even though it is empty of

workers and machinery, this is a cultivated landscape, sectioned and subdivided. However, it is not peaceful; there is a history of trauma and violence that saturates this mud.

Darby English speaks about the nonrepresentability of particular pasts or histories that are “retrievable only as lost.”⁵³ Kellman’s paintings intend to convey the unrepresented past, or the ability to represent it only by presenting its absence. In that sense, the traditional language of landscape painting with which his work suggests a certain affinity conveys an unwillingness to move on, insisting instead that there is still more that needs to be said.

Kellman’s compulsive dedication to reproducing the scene removes it from the realm of leisure painting with which landscape paintings and watercolor sketches have been traditionally associated. The daily regimented ritual of this seemingly endless practice links it more closely with labor. One notable series during this extended focus on landscape was the *Sugar Cane Series*, a body of 365 works, one executed each day for a year. In this way it functions as a pictorial almanac, a diary for that annum, in the tradition of the Limbourg Brothers’ *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, the Gothic prayer book that includes illustrations of the landscape transformed through the seasons. Kellman’s works collectively record the cycle of transformations in the land as they occurred from start to finish, only to be resumed once again. His regime of production in which one work is produced each day, day after day, is a marking of time. Collectively his paintings and drawings document the changes in seasons as they are experienced in the Caribbean – the hardly perceptible lengthening or shortening of days, the subtle cooling of the “winter” months; the more dramatic passage from dry season to hurricane season, the rotation of crops, the advancing and receding of the tides. They function in this way as a diary or journal; moving from one to the next, to the next.

Kellman points out the laborious nature of creating the series itself. It is called “art *work*” he says, for a reason. The emphasis is on work as well as duration and endurance. Writing about the concept of “free time” particularly as it relates to artistic practice, Joe Scanlan considers the relationship between art and labor, and art and leisure, exploring the concept of free time as a birthright, a form of resistance, or a hard-earned reward. Scanlan continues, “...the degree of economic security in our lives has a profound effect on our perception of time, not only how or where to spend it but also whether time can ever be free at all...” Stretching the gamut from the idle rich to the unemployed, he refers to a tourist as “the embodiment of free time”.⁵⁴ Notions of labor and liberty take on particularly complex connotations in a postcolonial and post-slavery society.

The Dichotomy of Paradise

The irony is that Kellman’s paintings depicting the sites of agricultural labor are consumed primarily by tourists. The landscape of Barbados seems to be clearly differentiated between the sites of labor – the agricultural landscape much in decline since the early twentieth century, and sites of leisure – specifically the south and west coasts of the island where most of the hotels, beaches and tourists are located. At the same time, the model of binary positions is deceptively simple. The site of leisure for some (the foreigner) is the site of labor for locals, the tourist “industry” having replaced agriculture, and specifically sugar cultivation, as the primary source of revenue generation and foreign exchange in Barbados. Agricultural fields are continually being turned over as sites for condominiums and golf courses. Just as the labor of slaves afforded the leisure of the absentee plantation owners such as the Lascelles family and fed the wealth that resulted in magnificent residences such as Harewood Estate in Great Britain, the

tourist industry which has replaced the sugar industry as the primary economy, is fed by and serviced by local labor which is deemed to be at its most successful when it is least visible. Indeed the motto for the Barbados Tourist Board during the 1990s was “Tourism is our business, let’s play our part” – calling on all Barbadians, regardless of their occupations, to participate in the success of the local tourist industry and at the same time emphasizing the performative nature of the task as indicated by the reference to playing a particular role.⁵⁵

Memory and Tradition: Positioning the past in the present

Referring to Winston Kellman as a modernist within the landscape tradition, Liz Lydiate explores the artist’s complex or problematic approach to a seemingly very traditional mode of art making. She argues that Kellman’s work is not only a visual response to natural phenomena: it is also a physical record of the artist’s engagement with his subject matter. The work is a result of his time spent in the landscape, his experience and observations over a particular duration and is as such, an artifact or record of that experience. For this reason she describes Kellman’s work as performative – “the carrying out of a structured activity as a creative act in itself. This means that his presence and working activity becomes an integral part of the work – a past and no longer tangible time-based act that is enshrined in the resulting artifact.”⁵⁶

In the same way that Sonia Boyce’s *Crop Over* complicates its own presentation, seemingly at times a documentary focused on the carnival celebrations, it is in fact from its opening scenes in the grandeur of the manicured grounds of Harewood House, or in tall blades of the sugar cane fields of Barbados, a subtly articulated story about the relationship between accumulated wealth and sugar production, and by implication the exploited labor that transformed one into the other. Lydiate suggests that the real nature of Kellman’s practice has

often been overlooked by viewers who “pigeonhole” the work too quickly into the landscape category without acknowledging the performativity element which Lydiate argues has remained a constant in Kellman’s practice. She is referring to the scenes of cane fields, but more particularly the *Bathsheba Series*. “Kellman wants his work to be seen in not only a contemporary artistic context – as a truly modern and forward-moving take on the traditional media of painting, and the addressing of landscape as subject – but also within the related external frameworks of society, politics, culture, and identity.”⁵⁷

Kellman refers to Lucien Freud and Jenny Seville, two contemporary British painters who share his allegiance to representational figure painting as well as a heavy, expressionistic handling of the medium. In Freud’s figurative paintings, and Jenny Seville’s monumental nudes, the texture of the paint seems to transform the nature of the flesh it depicts, as if to make its life – that process of growth and decay – gel or solidify on the surface of the skin and on the surface of the canvas. While Kellman’s focus is the landscape, he also employs the physical properties of the medium as well as the energy of application to convey the intensity exerted in the study of his subject. Kellman refers to “the intensity of scrutiny”, a phrase used by Lucien Freud to describe the concentrated, almost violent force of his engagement with the object of representation: “I hoped that if I concentrated enough the intensity of scrutiny alone would force life into the pictures.”⁵⁸

Kellman cites his interest in Zen Buddhism and specifically the concept of facing the wall or “wall gazing” for long periods of time as a form of meditation by which to heighten the senses and ultimately to gain enlightenment. According to the teachings of Bodhidharma, the sixth century monk credited with bringing Zen Buddhism from India to China, “Seeing forms with your eyes, hearing sounds with your ears, smelling odors with your nose, tasting flavors with

your tongue, every movement or state is all your mind. At every moment, where language can't go, that's your mind.”⁵⁹ One of the recurrent ideas here is the insufficiency of verbal language as a path to ultimate knowing; primacy is given to the visual experience in the quest to gain true understanding. Through the process of his sustained and intense gaze upon nature, Kellman seeks to find “an essence”, a presence in the perceived openness of space. This presence is history and memory; an acknowledgment – both personal and collective - of a history that is inseparable from a present; tradition that cannot be intellectually excised from the contemporary. Kellman’s ultimate goal is not to transcend his mortality; he wants to know how best to live his life. Nor does he mean to transcend his own physical environment to reach the universal. On the contrary he simultaneously seeks out that which is quintessentially Barbadian.

At Kellman’s solo exhibition, “Time & Place,” held at the Morningside Gallery in Barbados (2012), curator Adam Werth was confronted with the problem of selecting from the hundreds of paintings that make up the *Bathsheba Series* to accommodate the modest gallery size while conveying the sheer volume and diversity of the series which is integral to understanding the meaning of the work. The decision was taken to combine twenty-five panels of primarily *Bathsheba* scenes, but also interspersed with works from the *Cane Fields Series* on one wall, unified as one work. The result (*Untitled*) is a shock of monumentality as the heroic nature of the scene is represented through repetition, multiplicity and variation. The juxtaposition of hot and cold colors of the same scenes captured at different times of the day creates the impression of a time lapse but one without an ordered progression. The result is a seemingly undifferentiated compression of sea and land, the expansive ocean and barren cane fields. At the same time the composition as a whole loses its representational-ness.⁶⁰

The passion for the tradition of painting, a fascination with the deceptive nature of representation, an unwillingness to turn away from the enormity of history, particularly one plagued by trauma: in many ways Kellman's work invites an interesting comparison with the art paintings by Gerhard Richter. In a recent interview with Nicholas Serota, Richter was asked about the purpose of art and about what it gave him. He responded that art was "For surviving this world....it has the measure of all the unfathomable, senseless things, the incessant ruthlessness of our world. And art shows us how to see things that are constructive and good, and to be an active part of that."⁶¹ Kellman attempts through his artistic practice to also engage with a history and space of trauma that at times seems invisible but is simultaneously inescapable. It appears to bow to the traditions of pleasing landscape painting and acknowledged traditions of representation but in its collective gesture harbors the seeds of subversion.

Ras Ishi Butcher: Remixing History

While Winston Kellman has continued to work in Barbados in relative obscurity, his contemporary, Ras Ishi Butcher, has received wider recognition as a significant figure within the study of black diaspora art for works such as *400 Years Remix* (1995) (Figure 5.10).⁶² Referencing four centuries of colonial rule since the start of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Ras Ishi focuses on the female field worker as the iconic symbol of the history of subjugation through labor, a figure, according to Powell, "whose presence made a socio-political statement about human agency and cultural intervention."⁶³ The theme of the middle passage has recurred in a number of other major works, notably the large diptych, *400 Years: New World Order* (1994) (Figure 5.11), which like the smaller *Remix*, links agriculture and sugar production with the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The thorn studded whip of the overseer snakes across the two

asymmetrical panels, through a dense patched landscape littered with skulls. The meaning of the title is a matter of emphasis: while the colonized and the overseer enforced “order” within the “New World,” Ishi’s call for a “New World Order,” a “Remix,” is not a cry for a rewriting of history but rather an invocation for revolution.

The later *Triangle* (2010) marks a dramatic redirection in approach which had occurred during the intervening fifteen years, but this was a matter of imagery more than message. Produced in Liverpool during a residency as part of the Liverpool Biennial, the work falls within the extensive *Secret Diaries Series* which preoccupied the artist for most of the first decade of the new millennium. *Triangle* (Figure 5.12) is made up of sixteen twelve-inch square panels painted in textured layers of either white or black, and arranged to create a checkerboard pattern. The bold color and proliferation of imagery from the earlier work of the 1990s seem to be obliterated now, replaced by a reductive geometric arrangement. On closer inspection the worn surfaces of each panel reveal layers of primary colors and imagery as well as imprints of imbedded nails that complicate the deceptively simple composition. Fields of red, yellow and blue covered the panels before they were plastered with thick white or black. In Ishi’s work the bright colors seen in earlier paintings such as *400 Years:New World Order* are covered over, a deliberate act to deprive the work of elements that have been used traditionally to characterize it as “Caribbean.” Also visible are underlying images of a map of Africa, the Union Jack and the comorant (or liver bird), taken from Liverpool’s coat of arms. Liverpool is one of Britain’s largest cities, its significance due to its importance as a port; at one point in the early nineteenth century, forty percent of the world’s trade passed through Liverpool’s docks. This history and growth are indelibly linked to the trade of goods and slaves through the West Indies, a story extensively narrated in the International Slavery Museum, located at the Albert Dock next to the

Tate Liverpool. Today the city is home to the oldest Black African community in the United Kingdom.⁶⁴ It is this underlying and compartmentalized history and network of relations that that Ishi's work speaks to.

The West Indies is noticeably absent in *Triangle*, represented only by inference in the title, unless the former colonies are presumed to be subsumed under the Union Jack's imperial realm. Whether the two toned panels refer to the reductive binaries of the race debate or the oppositional categories of Old World-New World; master-slave; civilized-savage that have structured the dominant narrative of colonialism, *Triangle* connotes the layered, concealed and unspoken sub-narratives as well as the gaps between them. The strategic maneuvering implied by the game board arrangement of the individual panels references the movement through the diaspora originating with Columbus' first encounter, followed by the Middle Passage, the ongoing transnational flow of exchange, and the provisional, improvised vigilance that is required. But equally there is a sense of powerless immobility experienced in the present moment, an ironic bi-product of a diasporic history. To aspire to the life of a transnational artist is to be at the service to the vagaries of the art world.

The *Secret Diaries Series* is Ishi's most ambitious body of work; produced over a seven-year period during 2003-2010 and comprising approximately forty medium and large-scale paintings, this series is based on the idea of a personal journal manifesting a daily practice, routine and ritual of mapping out experience over time. Through the process of reflection and documentation, it sets down the relationship of the individual to the wider world – ordering experience, making sense, and constructing meaning. These relationships are established through the repetition and re-use of images, both his own and appropriated from disparate sources.

A Personal Journal

Artistic practice is by nature diary-like in that it is an expression originating in subjective experience. The work produced by Ras Ishi during the past three decades that make up his career has remained closely tied to his lived experiences but the most recent body of work collectively titled *The Secret Diaries* is a particularly deliberate exercise in mapping out or archiving quotidian experiences – from the mundane to the epiphanous. The work raises questions about how much the viewer can read into the work of art as a revelation of the artist's identity. Ishi seems to taunt or dare the viewer to decipher his coded messages while simultaneously critiquing the fashion of identity politics.

Ras Ishi has, in a very deliberate manner constructed his identity as an outsider. When he made the decision in his early twenties to join the Rastafarian order of Nyabinghi, it involved a major conversion which included changing his name, his diet, his physical appearance (growing dreadlocks) but most importantly his philosophical outlook. He became immersed in pan-African literature and developed a lifestyle that was increasingly self-sufficient. In this way he was able to devote himself completely to his life as an artist. In his vocal rejection of a colonized civility, Ras Ishi bears similarities with Gauguin and Lam. Embracing the romanticized persona of the outsider, the civilizing forces of European/Western imperialism are countered by invoking its opposite- the savage, primitive, the animal, the hybrid. Ishi has often described himself as schizophrenic, a diagnosis frequently applied to the creative process in general. It has also been used to describe the diasporic, the black, and the postcolonial experiences. W.E.B. Dubois' concept of double consciousness identified the divided self, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness."⁶⁵ For Frantz Fanon, colonization

created in its subjects an inferiority complex through the suppression of local culture so that the Antilles was a “neurotic society” of comparison.⁶⁶ Henry Drewal described a state of “multiple consciousness” in the New World, not as a psychosis but rather “a survival strategy, a faculty of adaptation, a strategic pragmatism to multiple realities.”⁶⁷ Simon Njami describes the contemporary artist in Africa (and by extension the African diaspora) as a schizophrenic personality who gathers together “the scattered pieces of a fragmented personality...as though elaborating a puzzle, to assemble the elements of an unconscious whose workings they cannot seem to master.”⁶⁸ The condition of the outsider, one whose identity is regarded as other, is diagnosed not only as disorienting and alienating, but as an aberration. But it is not dysfunctional in the sense of non-working or unproductive. On the contrary, it has provided writers, musicians, philosophers and artists a perspective from which to examine the nature of society and one’s own relationship to it.

Secret Diaries

One of the most distinctive features of Ras Ishi’s *Secret Diaries* is its cast of multiple personalities. The human figure predominates but is represented in a wide range of techniques and stylistic guises drawn from his wide-ranging oeuvre as well as old master drawings, antique art, popular culture and digital media. The hybridity of globalized experience is homogenized within the artist’s studio into a card catalogue of images culled from all that passes before him from which he can select and reconfigure.

The *Secret Diaries* consists broadly of three distinct groups. In the *Diario Secreto* series, uniformly sized images of diverse origins are organized in horizontal rows and pinned in an illusionary fashion to the surface of large black or white canvases by the ghostly negative

impressions of nails embedded in the gritty paint surface. (Figure 5.13) The images are arranged sometimes symmetrically around a central point, other times sporadically spaced and interspersed with blank pages, reflecting those days the artist was uninspired or absent. Despite the borders at top and bottom or sides, the rows of pictures run off the canvas suggesting we are looking at the section of a wall, or a segment of a life whose scope we cannot measure.

The second series is also structured as an assemblage of paintings and drawings within paintings but now each work is an increasingly complex arrangement of individual square canvases within an expanding vocabulary of images organized into carefully structured relationships of repetition and inversion. Within these multi-paneled works (polyptychs), a deliberate and dynamic system maps out multiple readings and possibilities in interpreting the artist's relationship to history, to tradition, to place, to the media and to his environment. The third group, the *Gang Workers*, surprises the viewer in its dramatically different sensibility when compared to the rest of the oeuvre. These paintings present monumental robotic field workers set against stylized plantation fields of plaited white impasto. While their strong pictorial and decorative appearance seems at odds with the more abstracted fields of the other two series, it shares a schematized iconography of the colonial legacy within the island's rural existence as well as the horizontal incision through the painted surface, the ever-present horizon.

Ishi has frequently worked in this way, producing seemingly distinctive bodies of work simultaneously. Typically one is more traditional and pictorial, most clearly exemplified by his classical / romantic paintings in the *Nostalgia* series. These compositions deal with stock themes familiar not only in his own oeuvre but within the well-entrenched historical / mythologizing Barbadian or West Indian narratives that express his deep attachment to the local environment. A second body of work is more experimental, abstracted and aggressive, expressing themes of

disenfranchisement, isolation and defiance. The *Gang Workers* really combine both approaches, the romanticist theme rendered in a graphically stylized manner. At the same time, the more abstract *Diario Secreto* works combine images of distorted figures along with mini-versions of his own romantic paintings and copies of old master works. What becomes evident when the artist merges these two approaches in the triptych *Piece of de Rock* (Figure 5.14) is that the large single images are magnified versions of the miniature paintings contained in the *Diario Secreto* series. So while much of Ishi's painting has been described in terms of dichotomies and dualities, very little of it – despite first appearances – is simply black or white. The representation of the picturesque cane-cutting scene or the quaint chattel house can be political. The horizon balances overhead like the guillotine of history. And to appropriate renaissance imagery into new world contexts is to claim this tradition and admire its virtuosity but also to taint it with the virus of transculturation that infects the story of imperial discovery and colonization.

Secret Diaries is an attempt to document encounters - mundane, intimate, chance, routine – that make up his reality. Through the works these experiences are exposed and yet not wholly revealed or elucidated. But just as the external world seeps in through newspaper clippings, the internet, or memory, the works often simultaneously document events and histories in the wider social environment as they intersect with the more intimate vignettes from the artist's own life. Ras Ishi was born in 1961, five years before Barbados achieved political independence from Britain. Growing up as part of the first post-independence generation, he was known as Winslow Butcher for the first two decades of his life, before transitioning into his life as a Rastafarian. The 1960s was a decade of global revolution in which Barbados, like many former colonies in the Caribbean and Africa gained political independence. The newly self-determining states made conscious efforts to promote nationalism and encourage an independent

cultural identity. For many this meant a critique of European traditions and a new allegiance with pan-African ideals. Emphasizing that time is relative, Simon Njami has noted that African nations - like those in the Caribbean – have lived a young or compressed modernism where many of the inhabitants are older than their nation.⁶⁹ This was the case for Ras Ishi.

Ishi, along with fellow artist Ras Akyem Ramsay, with whom he has been closely associated since the mid-1980s, shared a desire to develop a creolized expression that presented Afro-Caribbean experience through an appropriated language of western modernism. Jean-Michel Basquiat was their mentor. Born to Caribbean parents who had emigrated to the United States (his father was born in Haiti; his mother of Puerto Rican descent, was born in Brooklyn), Basquiat, with his meteoric success in the 1980s art world and subsequent tragic death due to a drug overdose, became a heroic martyr, mentor and metaphor for artists throughout the African diaspora.

Njami has written that “It’s not untrue to say that self-discovery is easier in a foreign setting.”⁷⁰ While the impact of extended stays in Cuba and South Africa have been significant, Ishi is clear to point out that the work produced while away was as much a reflection on his new environment as it was a meditation on the one he left behind. Following his first solo exhibition (*Isolation*, held at the Barbados Museum in 1995), Ishi spent the next two years at the *Instituto Superiore de Arte* in Havana, the advanced art academy from which many of Cuba’s most renowned artists have graduated. The experience of immersion in Cuban culture was profound and was immediately visible in the images and symbols which populated his paintings. Churches which were familiar icons within Ishi’s landscapes now acquired Baroque cupolas and the symbolic language of *Santería orishas* joined the coterie of insects, plants and toy warriors that he etched into the painted and layered surface before it dried.

During a residency at the Bag Factory in Johannesburg a decade later in 2005, chattel houses became shanties and razor wire encircled and framed his geometric figures. More pronounced for Ishi however, was the impact of interacting with other artists and the opportunity “to learn the secrets of their materials.”⁷¹ Influenced by the impoverished conditions and the challenges in simply accessing art supplies, Ishi began to incorporate materials recuperated from his daily surroundings, an approach he had also experimented with in Cuba; newspapers, photocopies, fabric, wire mesh, coins, trinkets, string and nails became imbedded into the eclectic surfaces, so that the paintings literally became repositories for the artist’s experiences. But unlike the amassed detritus of Arte Povera, the ephemera of Ishi’s new environment was assembled with a deliberateness shared by conscientious travelers and scrap-bookers. Cutout imagery was introduced into his painted narratives in two ways that would be more fully developed in the *Secret Diaries* works: newspapers and photocopies were collaged onto the canvas; and mini-paintings were illusionistically ‘pinned’ into the composition.

The figure has remained central to much of Ishi’s work, a reflection of his preoccupation with the human condition: the impact of events and circumstances, historical forces and power structures, social environments and alienation; the physical and psychological dimensions of struggle and vulnerability but equally of endurance, and the capacity to renew and transcend. The body in all its various incarnations is ultimately the conduit through which the trans-physical, the spiritual or the magical is expressed. Jorella Andrews proposes that just as the body comes to represent experience primarily in periods or contexts of dysfunction, the same might be said of questions of identity since these questions are “inevitably symptomatic of some disorder, disease or desire.”⁷² The more abstracted or de-humanized the body becomes, the more extreme its psychological condition. Nakedness, whether idealized or expressionistic, can be seen as a

signifier of honesty and vulnerability. Pushed further, the body that has been flayed or x-rayed to reveal a contorted skeletal framework represents the contemporary martyr. Such is the amputated figure which appears in the *Nonidentified* series started in 1998 in Havana. His geometric and spare anatomy adheres to the artist's compositional and aesthetic concerns but equally conveys the psychological and spiritual imperatives of the figure: a cross of vertical and horizontal lines indicates his spine and ribs but equally his martyrdom; the square patched chest resembling aluminum paling fences speaks to his tribulations and endurance; and the central belly button designates his core, his inextinguishable essence. Employing a dramatically reduced palette, the figure is an assemblage of contrasting colors, positive and negative spaces – the divided self. With the repetition of these colors in the background, the amputated man seems transparent, contingent, on the brink of disintegration and decay. Miniaturized versions of the figure as well as floating portrait-heads 'pop-up' in the surrounding field of the picture plane, like an advancing army of undifferentiated aliens within a third-world video game.

The amputated man reappears in the *Nondisclosure* series, begun in 2000 and culminating with "New Paintings," the two-man show Ishi held with Ras Akyem at the Islington Arts Factory in London in 2004. Perhaps mediated by the classical *Nostalgia* paintings which followed Ishi's return from Cuba, the figure now appears monumental and resides in a more established setting stabilized by a prominent horizon line. In *Blazing 1* (2004) (Figure 5.16), the intensity of the figure's spiritual quest is conveyed through the penetrating red eyes, and his martyred status confirmed by the small portrait with barbed wire halo that floats nearby. Ishi explains that Rastafarians use the term "blazing hot" to express an extreme state; the red eyes indicate the figure is on a "spiritual high," facilitated by the use of marijuana - "he is red." There can be little doubt that the recurring image of the isolated martyr is on some level the artist

himself, as the impinging diary pages sutured to this image suggest. The title *Nondisclosure* acknowledges the self-referential nature of the series but also what the artist is not willing to surrender. This is the origins of the *Secret Diaries*.

Self-portraits, representations of the self, have appeared with some regularity throughout Ras Ishi's career, either as a physical likeness, as meditations on the struggles of the artist in his studio, or as metaphor for the isolated, amputated and skeletal realities of the black diaspora. As in the earlier work of Sonia Boyce, the presence of the self-portrait asserts the artist's intention to construct or reconstruct identity within and in response to particular contexts. For Boyce these widening spheres, the contexts in which her self-representation is framed, included family, the church and other dominant cultural and political institutions including mass media and popular culture. Referring to the long history of topographical and anthropological representations of the Caribbean, Christopher Cozier warns that we cannot take the agency of portraiture for granted considering the history of representations of both the land and the people where the ownership of both has warped any reading of traditional modes of representation. The subject's position within the frame or field of pictorial representation has been highly contested, not surprising given the complexity of social hierarchies within the society. While historical narratives of the Caribbean recount developmental shifts from persons being privately owned property – indentured workers and colonial subjects – to being citizens, this shift has not seen a corresponding evolution in the pictorial domain:

...we are still anthropological, cultural, national, ethnic or electoral commodities and signifiers. We remain labeled but nameless images. The moment of encounter and of exchange is what is at stake. The question is whether the purpose for taking the image shifts to real portraiture and not simply image-capture, in the worst sense of the term, leaving us as subjected signs of ourselves, in a kind of cultural *doppelgänger*-ing that disturbingly reminds us of our traditional role within a visual territory not exclusively of our own making, or coyly performed.⁷³

In some sense, all paintings are a “re-presentation” of the artist – products of his or her subjective experience, personal ideology as well as his physical labor. In one early manifestation of the *Secret Diaries* polyptychs entitled *Unknown (artist)* 2004, Ishi identifies himself in several guises from the recognizable to the increasingly ambiguous: the young artist with dread locks; his digital “on-line identity” or profile picture (an animated, child-like head in a tropical landscape); the non-identified amputated man; and a virtually featureless android masked in a black hood. By repeating the images and interspersing them with other references, the viewer’s focus bounces back and forth across the panels in a frustrated attempt to grasp some kind of cohesive meaning.

In the context of Ishi’s often verbose and contradictory imagery, *Alpha* (2006-08) and *Omega* (2006-08) (Figure 5.17) are commanding in their silence. Like John Cage’s chance composition “4:33” which is performed without a single note being played, the apparent absence of imagery heightens the audience’s perceptions of the subtle nuances of what at first is mistaken for emptiness. As with Cage’s work, the broken rhythms and fluctuating textures suggest a randomness which in reality is grounded in a syncopated structure. The paintings – one black, one white - contain the armature of the *Diario Secreto* series. The rigidity of the grid may at first conjure up associations with the geometric minimalism of artists such as Sol Lewitt or Agnes Martin. But in comparison, the varying textures and remnant imagery provided by the removal of twine and nails give Ishi’s work a hand crafted aesthetic that infuses a sensuality into the discipline of horizontals and verticals. The Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end – signifies the divine creator, God, in the Book of Revelation but more broadly refers to continuity and eternity or the infinite and absolute. The artist acknowledges its unknowable immensity, and yet dares to map it, to better navigate his way through the incomprehensible.

The clarity of these works stands in opposition to *Battlefield* (2006-08) (figure 5.15), an epic unfolding across 25 square canvases assembled five by five to create a mural-sized polyptych. Each square follows the same format: a centralized picture; collaged frame; and between them a floating matt of textured paint with imagery scrawled sgraffito-style through the alternating black and white layers. This checkerboard structure immediately superimposes a rational system onto what at first may appear as an underlying chaotic clutter. The complexity of competing and alternating and inverted imagery slowly filters into a system of checks and balances. In the *Diario Secreto* series, the varied images are slotted into place along horizontal rows, the axis of balance and reason that grounds much of Ishi's work. The *Secret Diary* polyptychs by contrast – as the inversion of the translated title might suggest – complicate this linear order and present possibilities for a multitude of parallel readings or counter-readings. In *Poetics of Relations*, Edouard Glissant introduces the idea of 'errantry' which is not a singularly directed travel or reading, but neither is it aimless wandering. Stressing the overtones of a sacred mission, Glissant explains "Wandering, one might become lost, but in errantry one knows at every moment where one is – at every moment in relation to the other."⁷⁴

The overarching context or narrative of *Battlefield* is literally framed by the collaged elements that border each canvas. One newspaper clipping reads, "Little respect for visual arts: recent vandalism shows its appreciated by a select few," reporting an incident when paintings by Ishi and Akyem were vandalized and slashed while on show in the Queen's Park Gallery in Bridgetown. "Barbados has suffered without a national gallery for too long"; "Revolutionary artists"; "Contemporary art in Barbados" – the story of art in Barbados is literally archived in this work. In years gone by, pioneer artist Karl Broodhagen, the consummate collector, compiled numerous scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and exhibition notices, amassing a unique

repository of Barbadian art history. Ishi assembles his own accounting of events and weaves them into a narrative of experience and sensations. Ishi in many ways is Broodhagen's successor, the artist who has best honored Broodhagen's legacy, not most of all through this scrapbook painting, not even through its companion piece, *Tribute to a Warrior* (2004) which is dedicated to Broodhagen. Rather the profundity of the relationship is evident in works such as *Lovely Girl* and *My Cousin*, both from 2004. These studies of the Caribbean female present images of a beauty depicted in the tradition of classical idealization as well as a formal abstraction of forms, a fusion of European and African, of ancient and modern. Broodhagen was equally eclectic and wide ranging in the sources he consulted and amalgamated although Ishi is perhaps more peripatetic in enumerating his encyclopedic sources.

The stated intent of the *Secret Diaries* series is humble enough – a simple and sometimes coded exposition of daily experience. The scale of the exercise however suggests otherwise. This body of work is self-reflexive, drawing into it the quarter-century of past days that constitute his life as an artist. Its significance lies in the way this life is interwoven into the story of wider narratives that ultimately speak of one's relation to time and space, to both history and the contemporary.⁷⁵

Joscelyn Gardner's Creole Portraits

Joscelyn Gardner's *Creole Portraits*, like Winston Kellman's *Bathsheba* series and like Ras Ishi Butcher's *Secret Diaries*, is a substantial body of work that has been the focus of the artist's production for a number of years. It is once again a very personal, sustained investigation into the nature of Caribbean experience that acknowledges the burden of a traumatic and unresolved, shared and yet divisive history that continues to haunt the present. *Creole Portraits*

is a three-part series of lithographs on mylar, produced over the period of a decade between 2002 and 2011. They are portraits in that each one depicts an individual person, centered, posed perfectly still, carefully and meticulously rendered with great attention to detail. However, each figure, and collectively there are more than thirty, is viewed from behind, described by the artist as “inverted” so that the face, and therefore the identity of each figure is hidden. Not only are the faces concealed, the entire body is negated. Instead the subject is referenced by an elaborate hairstyle which identifies the sitter as black and female, and by iron shackles, chains and whips that identify the women as slaves. The slave’s body has no corporeal physicality other than the hair but the intricate and varied patterns of the braiding depict each one as a unique individual. The title of each image links it with a particular name – Old Betty, Princess, Esther, Dolly...but these are constructed identities which Gardner has grafted onto each work in an effort to reconstruct a visual presence within the gulf of absence that represents the experiences of African female slave women in the Caribbean.

Appropriation of the Black Caribbean Woman

Pointing to the glaring omissions in the history of colonial representation, Gardner designates these as “Creole” portraits. Born in Barbados in 1961 and currently residing in Canada, Gardner identifies herself as a member of the “first generation of (white) Creoles to be brought up in a postcolonial space where black consciousness has sought to challenge the colonial dogma of the generations before.”⁷⁶ Here she uses the word Creole in its traditional/original sense of a person of European descent born in the Caribbean. But the meaning of the word has evolved to also refer to people of mixed race, usually African and European, synonymous with mulatto. Gardner speaks of wanting to construct a “shared Creole

identity,” in the sense of collectively occupying a space and a history. This body of work emerged in response to her own sense of displacement after moving from Barbados to Canada in the late 1990s, from a predominantly black society to a white one, and finding herself as a white woman, confronting her own sense of alienation and otherness there as a result of cultural differences that still made her feel like an outsider. As a result she began to explore her own Creole identity as a white Caribbean woman. Finding very little material to work with, she turned instead to the theme of black Creole women and the space they shared – specifically the plantation house, but also the plantation owner. It would have been common, Gardner explains, for the plantation to include children from the owner’s relations with his wife as well as with his female slaves, and she refers to the example of colonial portraits in which this is evident. For Gardner this became a point of connection, and an opportunity to reconstitute and refigure this space from a postcolonial feminist perspective.⁷⁷ She also seems to use the term Creole to refer to the combined, constructed nature of her depictions which bring together diverse elements, not to imitate historical portraits that were never made, but rather to attempt to depict the void, the absence, the injustice, and also the guilt; and to honor the legacy of these unrepresented women .

The two juxtaposed elements that form the basis of the *Creole Portraits* and remain constant throughout all three manifestations of the series are the intricately braided hairstyles and the manufactured devices used as instruments of torture. Reflecting Marcus Wood’s observation that slavery’s memory has been objectified through the exhibition and reproduction of the tools of torture rather than the slave body, Gardner references that body by signaling its absence – or its ghostly presence. The chains, collars, whips and branding irons are incorporated into the intricate patterns of braided hair which Gardner calls “the second most important corporeal sign of race,” skin color, which is absent in these works being the first.⁷⁸ The endless creative

potential expressed through the woven hair designs is evident in the fact that each of the thirty examples is different. Gardner relies not on historical material but on contemporary photographs and drawings of black female hairstyles. Hair, and specifically black hair is a politicized topic and Gardner employs it as a signifier of individual expression and identity. Hair, as Jennifer Law points out, was a primary measure of differentiation in the taxonomic classification of human subjects, “a principal marker of social, economic, sexual and racial boundaries between subjects” but it was also an important medium for individual expression as a form of resistance. The braiding of hair into elaborate hairstyles was also a “labor of love” necessitating a sisterhood of hands.⁷⁹

The first of three suites, *Creole Portraits* (2002-03) (Figure 5.18), consists of ten lithographs on frosted mylar. The intimate ritual experience of braiding hair, shared by women, as well as its medium as a form of creative self-expression is juxtaposed by the masculine engineering of the forged implements of torture. As the series progresses, these implements become increasingly more elaborate and fetishistic contraptions, rivaling the hairstyles in their display of imaginative symmetrical design. Through this comparison, Gardner alludes, according to Jennifer Law, to “a lengthy history of socially sanctioned misogyny and repression of the feminine subject not only with specific reference to the black female body, slavery and colonialism, but also more generally in relation to a history of ‘fashionable bondage’ designed to literally shape the female body to the desire of a patriarchal gaze.”⁸⁰

The second suite, *Creole Portraits II: A Collection of Singular & Scarce Creole Portrait Heads to perpetuate the Memory of the Women of Egypt Estate in Jamaica* (2007) (Figure 5.19) was commissioned for the Brooklyn Museum’s exhibition *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*, and was presented as a wall installation, nine by fifteen feet, displaying the

lithographs with vinyl wall elements imitating a neo-classical display of architectural pilasters, frames and text panels. In this second suite the text panels list the names of individual slaves who are recorded as belonging to the Egypt Sugar Estate in Jamaica through the remarkable and disturbing diary of its overseer, Thomas Thistlewood. Thistlewood arrived in Jamaica in 1750, and worked on sugar plantations until his death in 1786, during which time he kept detailed diaries, carefully recording financial transactions, slave logs, weather patterns as well as his violent discipline and systematic rape of his slaves. All were recorded with the same detached matter-of-factness. Over the course of many years and thousands of pages of records, Thistlewood documented 3,852 acts of intercourse with 138 women, noting in Latin details of where, when, how and with whom.⁸¹ Alison Donnell points out that while each of the named portraits represents an individual presence, even these names may have been invented or imposed by the master and signify ownership and colonialism's efforts to erase any autonomous identity.⁸²

The third suite, *Creole Portraits III: "bringing down the flowers" (2009-11)* (Figures 5.20 and 5.21) introduces to this construction the addition of botanical studies and color. Here each individual portrait is assigned a separate label with the name of one of Thistlewood's slaves inscribed along with the additional Latin term for the botanical specimen that hangs suspended from the portrait head like a spine. The delicately hand-colored plants allude to the practice by slave women on Caribbean plantations of using tropical flowers, leaves, roots and bark as abortifacients, a form of resistance, refusing to give birth to children born into the condition of slavery. Through each of the series Gardner devises means by which to inscribe to each faceless portrait a more elaborate and distinct identity; grafting the plant name onto the deceptively affectionate, sometimes derogatory names the owner assigned to each of his Africans (Myrtilla,

Suke, Agnes, Old Moll), provides them with an identity associated with their acts and spaces of resistance. There were severe penalties for slave women suspected of deliberately aborting their pregnancies. Donnell points out that “By smuggling this culturally embedded knowledge into view, these portraits imply the unspoken rebellion of the enslaved woman to her always already object position within the epistemologies of art, science and colonial governance.”⁸³

By adopting the language of eighteenth century print culture with the meticulous precision and assumed objective, scientific, empirical study, Gardner masks the constructed nature of her portraits while simultaneously indicting the civilizing veneer that masked the colonial project and plantation slavery. The delicacy of handling which is emphasized by the frosted mylar on which the images are presented and the precision of detail in rendering the finely braided hair, the almost whimsical iron collars, some ornamented with bells, and the brightly colored plant studies combine to create an image of great beauty. How then does the viewer reconcile this with the atrocity and inhumanity of slavery? Both attractive and repellent, the hybrid images seduce the spectator and open up a space for contemplating the experience of slavery and its after-effects. Gardner describes them as “these very beautiful horrible ugly images.”⁸⁴

Gardner starts with the aesthetics of the Age of Enlightenment, and its fascination with knowledge production and dissemination in tandem with global expansion and empire building to gain mastery over the world and all that it contained through empirical process of systematic collection, classification and dissemination. The imperial project of global expansion necessitated the transfer of people, labor and commodities on an unprecedented scale. Part of the rationalizing of power and authority and the right to govern distant lands and peoples involved a new way of looking at and “knowing” the world. Classificatory episteme were devised in which

the body of the colonial subject was invented “as an object of knowledge and analysis, as well as a site of domination and resistance.”⁸⁵ This becomes a starting point for Gardner whose ultimate objective is to reveal the ways in which this history continues to inform contemporary post-colonial Caribbean social relations and identity politics. The process of archival research is central to the production of work but her real subject matter is what is not in the archives, what is absent, the unwritten narratives of black female slaves.

Law emphasizes that sovereign power is dependent upon making itself visible and that it was the development of the printing press that enabled “the mechanics of sovereign visibility, revolutionizing the ways in which knowledge was produced and circulated across vast distances in order to maintain and enforce absolute power.”⁸⁶ Printing then is both Gardner’s medium and her subject matter. She uses the print medium to investigate ways in which it was employed in the past as a tool for disseminating information. Book production was a major part of the printing revolution, a format she incorporated in the production of a 48-page “faux eighteenth-century folio” entitled *A Collection of Creole Portrait Heads of the Female Sex*. Commissioned by and published in the academic journal *Small Axe: a Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, the folio reproduces ten lithographs from the *Creole Portrait* series.⁸⁷ Gardner has also described the laboriousness of the lithography process undertaken in the making of these very detailed images as a gesture of investing in trying to re-empower anonymous persons who were never recognized in history. Describing the work as emotionally draining, she has made a conscious effort to distance herself from the material, presenting it in a non-personalized way but at the same time, the devotion required in dedicating the required number of hours to the making of each print stands for the artist as “a gesture of embracing this history as much as I can.”⁸⁸

White Skin, Black Kin

As discussed in Chapter Two, the images by the De Brys in Volume IV of the *Great Voyages* provided some of the earliest representations of slaves working in the New World including their torture and attempts at rebellion. In general, however, depictions of slaves on Caribbean plantations were rare during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; if they were included in portraits, it was as an attendant, an appendage to the central representations of the white elite.⁸⁹ Gardner also refers to the unequal representation of women historically within the tradition of portraiture, a reflection of the unequal biographical records which in turn is a factor of their marginalized social status. Women have typically appeared as ancillary to the biographies of their male counterparts (husbands, brothers, fathers). Allusions to allegorical, classical or biblical characters were not uncommon so that individuals were associated with broader attributes of femininity such as motherhood, beauty or modesty, tropes that deflected any focus on women's individual subjectivities. The complex social relations and subjectivities often masked by portraiture was the focus of an earlier video by Gardner, *White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece* (2003) (Figure 5.22). The video formed part of the exhibition "White Skin, Black Kin: 'Speaking the Unspeakable'" shown at the Barbados Museum and Historical Society in 2004. Gardner described the exhibition as an intervention, spread across four galleries which also included the first suite of *Creole Portraits*, along with other video projections, sound recordings, and installations including furniture, painted portraits, printed pillow cases and a "Topsy Turvy doll," dispersed throughout the Museum's exhibition spaces which included the historical prints gallery, period rooms of plantation era domestic settings, and a colonial-era prison cell.⁹⁰

White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece, as its title implies, brings together a number of references that relate to modes of representation, visibility and identity and situates them within an eighteenth century Barbadian plantation sitting room. The “conversation piece” refers to a subgenre of portraiture that came into vogue in Britain during the early eighteenth century as an alternative to the allegorical portraits preferred by the aristocracy with its emphasis on middle-class domesticity and material wealth.⁹¹ Gardner’s video presents a “tableau vivant,” the frozen image of a white creole woman, holding a baby, her two daughters posed attentively on either side. During the fourteen minute video, the scene is interrupted by three ghostly black female figures, domestic slaves who drift in and out of the frame, performing various chores such as sweeping or filling water glasses, chiding one another or alternately, moving unobserved in a carefree manner, paying particular attention to the portrait of the master hanging prominently on the wall. They remain invisible to the white female figures who remain caught in their static positions; an absent presence.

Simpson explains that black bodies were included within conversation pieces as part of the material wealth accumulated by the master and emblematic of his status, but the reality of the exploitive and violent nature of the relation between the master and his slaves, the forced labor, beatings and unhindered sexual access remains unacknowledged. While numerous travel narratives, diaries, and works of fiction by British writers of the period documented the abuse of slaves and the moral degeneracy of many slave-owning families, portraits such as these were constructed to reinforce a veneer of civility and decorum. “Colonial conversation pieces tended to deliberately excise any reference to the field space so that the unsavoury realities of plantation labor would not intrude on the carefully constructed images of gentility and refinement that their sitters wanted to create.”⁹²

The portrait visible in the background of the video is an undated, unattributed painting in the Barbados Museum's collection entitled the *Portrait of Seale-Yearwood Esq.* Gardner also included it as part of the Museum intervention hanging behind the suspended screen on which *Creole Conversation Piece* was projected. It is clearly a portrait of a plantation owner; his manservant discreetly and silently positioned in the shadow of the background holds a large crystal goblet of amber liquid, most certainly rum, a conclusion supported by the plate of limes with knife positioned on the table below.⁹³ Once again the slave is part of the accoutrements including the rum, and even the tobacco in the master's pipe that referenced the extent of the sitter's wealth accumulated in the colonies. Gardner, however, points to the physiognomy of the manservant as an indication of the more complex relations within the colonial West Indies, noting a strong resemblance with the features of the master: "we see that it is evident that what we are looking at is really a 'family' portrait. The male slave butler standing behind the seated planter bears a remarkable resemblance to his white master. Of obvious mixed racial heritage (either mulatto or quadroon), his facial features (especially his long prominent nose and receding hairline) closely mirror those of the planter. It becomes clear that the slave is in fact the planter's son – the fruit of his licentious relationship with one of the slave women."⁹⁴

Simpson described the hierarchical classifications for eighteenth-century women in Britain and the colonies based on class and race:

Middle- and upper-class women epitomized true 'Womanhood' and embodied its virtues: decorum, physical and moral delicacy, gentleness, industriousness, discipline and refined sensibility. Working-class British women were thought to be generally deficient in these virtues, but the true opposite of the Woman was the black female whose supposed intemperateness, promiscuity, laziness, and general moral degeneracy served to consolidate the construction of white femaleness. Middle-class white Creole women who could avail themselves of the material comforts of their social position fell somewhere in the middle: they were not quite savages, but neither were they considered as British. Their representation in travel narratives, diaries, journals and letters, especially those written by British men,

often described their difference from their British counterparts, in the process more closely aligning white Creoles to black women. White Creole women, as Kathleen Wilson points out, were seen as ‘gauche, simpering, indolent, sluttish, vain’, and their moral and physical inferiority to their British counterparts was thought to derive from their exposure to a tropical climate and slavery and to a lack of education.⁹⁵

The title of the work and exhibition also references the importance of Frantz Fanon’s writings on colonial race relations but inverts his title, *Black Skin, White Masks* as part of an attempt to insert a white perspective. Simpson observes, “Gardner uncovers a psychopathology of racial denial and anxiety, but in this case it is the white Creole psyche that comes under scrutiny.”⁹⁶ Gardner’s ultimate goal is to argue for the shared marginalization of black and white women within the colonial plantation society, noting the complex if unacknowledged sexual and filial relations that were the norm. But Gardner also wants to acknowledge the complicity of white women who as Anne McClintock points out, were not “hapless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.”⁹⁷ Her work also speaks to the way in which British colonial art served to legitimize and reinforce these social structures.

The inequity in the visual record is clearly a reflection of inequities within the wider society and in fact served to reinforce them. This is most acute for black women, who are almost entirely absent as primary subjects with historical Western portraiture traditions. More often than not, historical portraits of black women have been used to reference the social status, such as Brunias’ *Barbados Mulatto Girl* where they remain anonymous types identified most often by adjectives referencing location or race. Where individuals were named as in Le Masurier’s *Madeline* – these usually fell into the categories of caricatures or curiosities.

Gardner’s *Creole Conversation* was filmed in Wildey Great House, the Georgian-era plantation house, preserved as a historic building and headquarters for the Barbados National

Trust, and the same location in which Sonia Boyce filmed the interior scenes for *Crop Over* four years later. Instead of actors costumed as members of the eighteenth century planter class and their slaves, Boyce invited the hybrid folk characters associated with the sugar cane harvest to invade this domestic space usually barred to them. And both artists presented the video within the galleries of the Barbados Museum, contextualizing the way in which collective memory is assembled and re-presented to its viewers. Boyce and Gardner both return to the past, specifically to the space of the domestic plantation house as sites of contested relations. By restaging or re-performing the past, representations of history as factual and normal are exposed as constructions that served a specific constituent, that being the land owner.

Sheena Rose - Depictions of the Urban Space

“Versia ready to ride the bike to the shop” is a comment under an image posted by Sheena Rose on the *Projects & Space* Facebook page. The image is an alarmingly ordinary and familiar snapshot of two bicycles and Sheena’s colleague standing on a concrete walkway, by the hedge between two modest middle-class Caribbean suburban homes.

Alarming, because in many Caribbean islands the everyday visual is heavily regulated. It is a visual space that remains seen but simultaneously unknown.⁹⁸

Christopher Cozier uses this anecdote to introduce the young artist, Sheena Rose in her first solo exhibition and catalog, *Town to Town* (Morningside Gallery, Barbados 2011). Rose’s interface with the world at large is often presented through this pairing of image and caption, the primacy of the image accompanied by its contextualizing text which is the language of *Facebook*. Cozier observes that what makes Sheena Rose’s images “alarming,” – and there is arguably great overlap between Sheena’s *Facebook* life and her artistic life – is its ordinary middleclass suburban everyday-ness; a reality that is, if not absent, then unacknowledged and

uncritically circulated. While Winston Kellman aims to recoup his chosen subject matter of cane fields and Atlantic coastlines which arguably have been over-pictorialized to the point of banality, Rose's subject matter is the under-pictorialized urban spaces that artists from the time of Paul Gauguin excise from the realm of the representable – or at least the “paintable.”

Rose's primary subject is *Town* (Figure 5.23) which initially was Bridgetown. But she is not representing Bridgetown as Barbados' capital city as it appears in postcards depicting the Parliament Buildings or the Careenage, or Trafalgar Square (now renamed National Heroes Square). Rose shows the commercial streets – Broad Street and particularly Swan Street, where merchants spread their crowded wares out the front doors of shops onto the pavement. Cozier notes, “Casually, Rose is ushering us straight up to the frontlines of where contemporary practice is reshaping the purpose and value of the visual everyday. The work asks: what has been the purpose of our presence within the pictorial frame? What is our role as makers in altering these conventions? Neither fantastic nor abject, the image asks further questions about the expectations of the intended viewer.”⁹⁹

The urban space as a social space has been Rose's primary preoccupation. *Town*, a short animated video (2'30”), was one of the first works she made after graduating from art college. Influenced by the work of William Kentridge, Rose collages together drawings, photographs and photocopies which are spliced together in a makeshift ramble through the streets, negotiating human and vehicular traffic, the pedestrian crowds, and allure of shopping. Rose features as the central character in her own video, waking up in her bedroom, talking on the phone, driving, walking through crowds of people who often appear as silhouettes of printed text, reflecting their overheard conversations or private preoccupations. Rose has been described as a “tropical *flâneur*,” observing and recording urban life and everyday encounter as spectacle.”¹⁰⁰ In one

frame, the artist is singled out in the crowd by her gold t-shirt, highlighted in the manner of historical hand-colored prints. To emphasize the point, she carries a bag with the “monogram” ME clearly printed on it, pronouncing her presence in much the same way that she affirms her identity at the opening of her *One Person, Many Stories* performance - “My name is Sheena Rose.”

Commissioned as part of a public art project coinciding with the “Black Diaspora Visual Arts Conference” in Bridgetown in 2009, Rose’s video was one of eight site-specific installations located throughout the city. With the absence of a national gallery or adequate exhibitions spaces, and consequently the infrequent public exposure to contemporary art, this event provided an opportunity to place artwork within the public domain and provided significant exposure for the young artist. *Town* was presented in the front window of Collins Pharmacy on Broad Street, the main commercial thoroughfare around which Bridgetown is structured. The position was ideal since the artist was interested in not only recording her impressions of the urban space, but in showing it back to her subjects. Rose’s work is a mirror in which the subjects and the audience merge. Located within the congested commercial district, the video projection in the front window of the drugstore attracted crowds of interested viewers which often spread out off the narrow sidewalks into the streets and oncoming traffic. Rose’s art has had the capacity to draw in audiences typically immune to the language and relevance of contemporary art. She has been able to bypass convention and subvert the expectations of the art world to appropriate the visual culture of the urban spaces around her.

A three-month residency in South Africa inspired the title of her exhibition *Town to Town*, as she was struck by the similarities between the urban spaces of Cape Town and Bridgetown. Rose focused increasingly on large drawings of these spaces as she moved through

Trinidad, Surinam, Cuba, and Martinique. The graphic *Many Streets* (Figure 5.24) presents an overlay of a street view in Fort de France with one in Havana, a reflection of her synthesizing transnational experiences.

Sweet Gossip

Returning to her role as chronicler of Bridgetown street culture, Rose began work in 2012 on the series, *Sweep Gossip* (Figure 5.25 – 5.28). Inspired by conversations she overheard as she moved through the city, and trying to identify what she felt was typically “Bajan,” she focused on the role of the town gossip, the malicious, snide narrator in local dramas and comedies, who reflects the comments made in a crowded environment where everyone is on display and under surveillance. Whether taking the inspiration from eighteenth century print culture, story books, comics or *Facebook*, Rose focused on the format of image and caption. Using large sheets of plywood, Rose transfers candid images she has photographed in town, tracing the contours in pencil onto whitewashed panels and filling in areas with bright flat color. Unpainted passages of pencil outlines are left visible so that the works appear to be still in progress, if not abandoned. These are close-up, cropped moments of awkwardness or indiscretion within the crowded spaces of Bridgetown: girl falling over on her high heeled shoes, or tugging at her panties; a young man’s baggy pants riding low on his hips revealing his boxers. If the faces or identities of the individuals are not revealed in many of the images it is not because they are turning away from the viewer, but rather that they have been caught unaware with no opportunity to compose or censor themselves. Rose’s tool of the trade is her cell phone, used to capture images or record conversations. Every fleeting daily exchange is now subject to “capture” on someone’s cell phone; no indiscretion or uncensored curse escapes being overheard or recorded. Every social

interaction is the raw material for its re-deployment that evening – if not instantaneously – via social media. The caption added at the bottom is the spectator’s voice: “She thinks she’s all that...”; “Look how she digging she panty...”; “All of his backside by the door!” Rose captures these malicious phrases which she identifies as national preoccupation, a defining characteristic of what it is to be Bajan. “I’m not writing it in raw Bajan,” Rose says referring to the strong dialect in which these comments are made, “but by what they are saying, you know it is said that way.” The pronunciation is inferred, decodable by those initiated into the language of contemporary Caribbean culture. The figures become contemporary “types,” modern “*cartes de visite*” emphasizing dress (usually inappropriate) and gesture.

In most of the images Rose inserts a reference to the tradition of tropicality associated with visual representations of the region such as fabric printed with pineapples, or a palm tree engraved onto a gold tooth. It is a blatant acknowledgement of the tropes associated with “Caribbean art.” Rose explains she was conscious of typical tourist-oriented depictions of coconut trees, beaches and tropical fruits but that imagery was foreign to her; it did not reflect the reality of her environment and so she incorporated it as kitsch decoration on fabric or wallpaper, repeated like a logo or monogram on a designer handbag in a duty free shop. But Rose’s fashion is drawn from the other end of the street, down by the bus stand. This is Rose’s inversion, reducing the entire weight of colonized traditions of representation to a pattern on a pair of rude-boy boxers.

As a follow-up act, Rose takes her plywood placards into Bridgetown and shows them back to her subjects/audience, because there is no distinction between the two. In these pseudo-self-portraits, Rose obscures her own face as she is photographed holding up the panels, confronting startled or confused passers-by who, in the midst of the over-stimulated environment

of the busy urban center, glance or stop and stare. She holds these paintings up like a mirror, reflecting back to her young audience a glimpse of their own indiscretions. Rose re-inserts these moments she has appropriated from the urban streets back into them, as interventions interrupting the city traveler's field of vision.

But Rose is not finished. She then takes each of these large compositions and creates "saleables," small limited edition reproductions of each image in the series. These 8 x 10 inch "multiple originals" make her images more readily available to the public. This is linked to the tradition of artists making prints of their works, both to increase sales and to make their work more widely known; this was previously discussed in the case of Gauguin's *Volpini Suite* as well as Brunias's depictions of the West Indies. But each of Rose's reproductions is hand drawn and painted. They are faux-reproductions; original copies. At every turn, Rose appropriates visual language and re-purposes it to suit her needs or whims. It is no surprise that she is also a fan of Andy Warhol's work. Rose is the urban anthropologist, every watchful, collecting data, analyzing the subtle gestures within social interactions. Increasingly it is the crudeness of urban life that attracts her, the vulgar sexual come-ons, the bold kitsch. It is a stark contrast to the rural idealized paradisiacal depictions usually associated with the Caribbean.

Projects and Space

If Winston Kellman is preoccupied with geographical place, Rose is obsessed with the social space. The relationship between the local and the global has been transformed in the age of the internet. In response to a sense of isolation as an artist in Barbados and in reaction to the disorienting highs and lows of moving between projects and their different geographic locations, Rose launched *Projects and Space*, a *Facebook* page through which she invited everyone who

was involved in the arts in any of its manifestations to share what they were doing. Within a matter of weeks Rose had drawn together hundreds of mostly young creators throughout the region and within a year membership approached 1000 – a fabric designer in Antigua, an animator in Grenada – a network of people who like Rose wanted a community. “What is the next project? Where is the next space?” she asks visitors to the site. This contingency and improvisatory nature of projects, and the locations in which they can happen proved to be very popular; exhibitions could be organized like raves, so that the dissolution of distinctions between art and everyday life was not confined to the choice of subject matter but the contexts in which it is manifested. The title *Projects and Space* taps into something particularly meaningful; the ownership of space. As Cozier observed, “Something was happening! Something could happen in a space like this! The value of spaces and places like these was being transformed.”¹⁰¹

One Person, Many Stories

Sheena Rose’s transition into performance, with the staging of *One Person, Many Stories* (Figures 5.29), impressed her audience, which perhaps should not be surprising given the performative nature of much of her work. For the performance, Rose again assembled together like a travel journal the re-telling of the many experiences and encounters she encountered during various residencies and exhibitions abroad but revealed them with an intensified vulnerability. The inspiration for the performance originated with her experiences working as a nude model in life-drawing classes at the Barbados Community College where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2008. Rose was conscious that her on-going discussions with the art students while she was posing breached the traditional barrier presumed to exist between the objectified body of the model and the artist / observer. She used this experience as the starting

point of her performance in which she invited her audience to a mock life-drawing class. Dressed in jeans, boots, a shirt, Rose briefly introduced herself, and began to strip down in a very unceremonious way, freezing at various points as if allowing the spectators time to make a quick sketch. A naked Rose then confronted her audience: "...You tink I ginna talk bout race....." The artist presents her viewers with a narrative of experiences of encounter on her travels, not so much about what she has observed but rather how she has been seen as a black female artist from the Caribbean.

The last item she removes is her head tie, a not inconsequential gesture given the sumptuary laws that governed the eighteenth century Caribbean women depicted by Brunius, to reveal a wreath of red silk roses that frames her dread-locked hair, and ornamenting the display of the black female body. There is an uneasy relationship between her choice to accessorize her otherwise naked body with these cheap dollar-store flowers, and the fact that she really does look beautiful, a juxtaposition made more evident when she later rips the flowers from her hair to incorporate them into a typical domestic, "Bajan" still life with plastic table cloth, glass Pepsi bottles and made-in-China ornaments. Rose acts out a range of encounters: a Cuban man trying to come back to her hotel room; the Manhattan taxi driver who informs her they don't usually pick up her "type;" the art aficionados who see "nothing" in her concepts. The audience sits in perfect silence, captivated and scared to breathe. Rose moves through the crowd, referencing every trope established to characterize the Caribbean – the naked body, available sexuality, exoticized nature, difference – and places them at the feet of her audience.

Cozier's essay provides an important critical contextualization of Rose's work within the conservative and skeptical local art scene, placing her within both the contemporary urban language of dancehall and online social media, but also squarely

within the discourse of local and regional art histories. Like early dancehall protagonists of the late 1980s who “shouted out” or were “bigging-up” the names of various cities around the globe, Rose’s work, which often premieres on Facebook, is a pronouncement, a declaration of intentions, where she is now and where she hopes to be. This “looking out” challenges traditional and rigidly maintained notions of the national and the nation space even in its transnational reach.

We are observing an act of becoming. What is at stake is a sense of self-worth, not exclusively dependent on local hierarchies and conventions. The work is not speaking to an alleged power structure, the supposed “them”, defiantly; but to others like herself, motivationally. This work is not just assembling a “mirror image”; it’s about looking outwards beyond the island. It’s also about who is looking and from which location within the social dynamics of the island communities today.¹⁰²

Rose is fascinated with observing people, their everyday activities and familiar gestures that are typically Caribbean or “Bajan.” Cozier links this to the work of the “pioneer artist,” Karl Broodhagen and specifically his publication, *Character Studies, From my Sketch Book*, an accumulation of images documenting faces and activities in and around Bridgetown across a span of four decades from the 1940s throughout the 1970s. But Rose is equally attentive to the eccentricities of youth culture and its constant transgressive challenges. This is vaunted through a display of conspicuous consumption and excess. In this era of heightened visibility, in town everyone and everything is on display and available for consumption. As the everyday merges with the burlesque, Rose’s fashionistas are not all that different from Boyce’s folk characters. There is a constant pronouncement of identity.

The notion of “space” is more flexible than “place” and better accommodates the shifting and multi-sited allegiances that characterize the diaspora. Cozier argues that the old promises and expectations inherent within constructs of nationhood have vanished. “So in this new space,”

Cozier asks, “what would be the value of defining [Rose’s] work as Barbadian, if the way that has been made viable or visible has excluded or devalued the artist’s immediate, real, and tangible interests, or the world she occupies?”¹⁰³ Another consideration is the impact of a tourism-driven economy which continues to reinforce the repetition of traditional, tropicalized images of the region which is undergoing rapid transformations and redefinitions. In Rose’s performance, *One Person, Many Stories*, the artist removes all her clothing to present herself as the tropical Eve, the indigenous native of the Caribbean, and equally the female muse of Western art history. But confronted with these guises, the audience must then acknowledge its own preconceptions and expectations because Rose does not take on the burden of conforming to them. It is those very preconceptions and expectations that she has stripped off. Rose’s self-portrait is synonymous with her “profile picture,” an endlessly mutable, performative pronouncement of who she is or where she is today. The internet has revolutionized the space of encounter. Cozier writes, “The digital world so far has no overly determined and owned history in the field of representation, so [Caribbean] artists are not burdened by the baggage of, for example, the history of painting or the status of the black body within the frame or field of representation. It is open season. And access to digital equipment allows a new generation of artists to create images and to disseminate them in ways that break down traditional hierarchies of skills and specialized knowledge as means to define value.”¹⁰⁴



Figure 5.1 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas
Artist's Collection.



Figure 5.2 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas
Artist's Collection



Figure 5.3 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, acrylic on canvas
Artist's Collection



Figure 5.4 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, watercolor on paper
Artist's Collection



Figure 5.5 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, charcoal on paper
Artist's Collection



Figure 5.6 Winston Kellman – *Untitled (Bathsheba Series)* 2010-2011, watercolor on paper
Artist's collection



Figure 5.7 Vishni Gopwani, *Winston Kellman at Bathsehba*, photograph, 2012.



Figure 5.8 Winston Kellman – *Mud and Flowers Series: Plantation*, 2009, acrylic on canvas
Private collection, Barbados



Figure 5.9 Winston Kellman – *Mud and Flowers Series: Field*, 2009, acrylic on canvas
Private collection, Barbados



Figure 5.10 Ras Ishi Butcher – *400 Years: Remix*, 1995, oil on canvas, Private Collection.



Figure 5.11 Ras Ishi Butcher – *400 Years: New World Order*, 1994, oil on canvas, Private Collection.



Figure 5.12 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Triangle*, 2010, mixed media, Private Collection, UK.

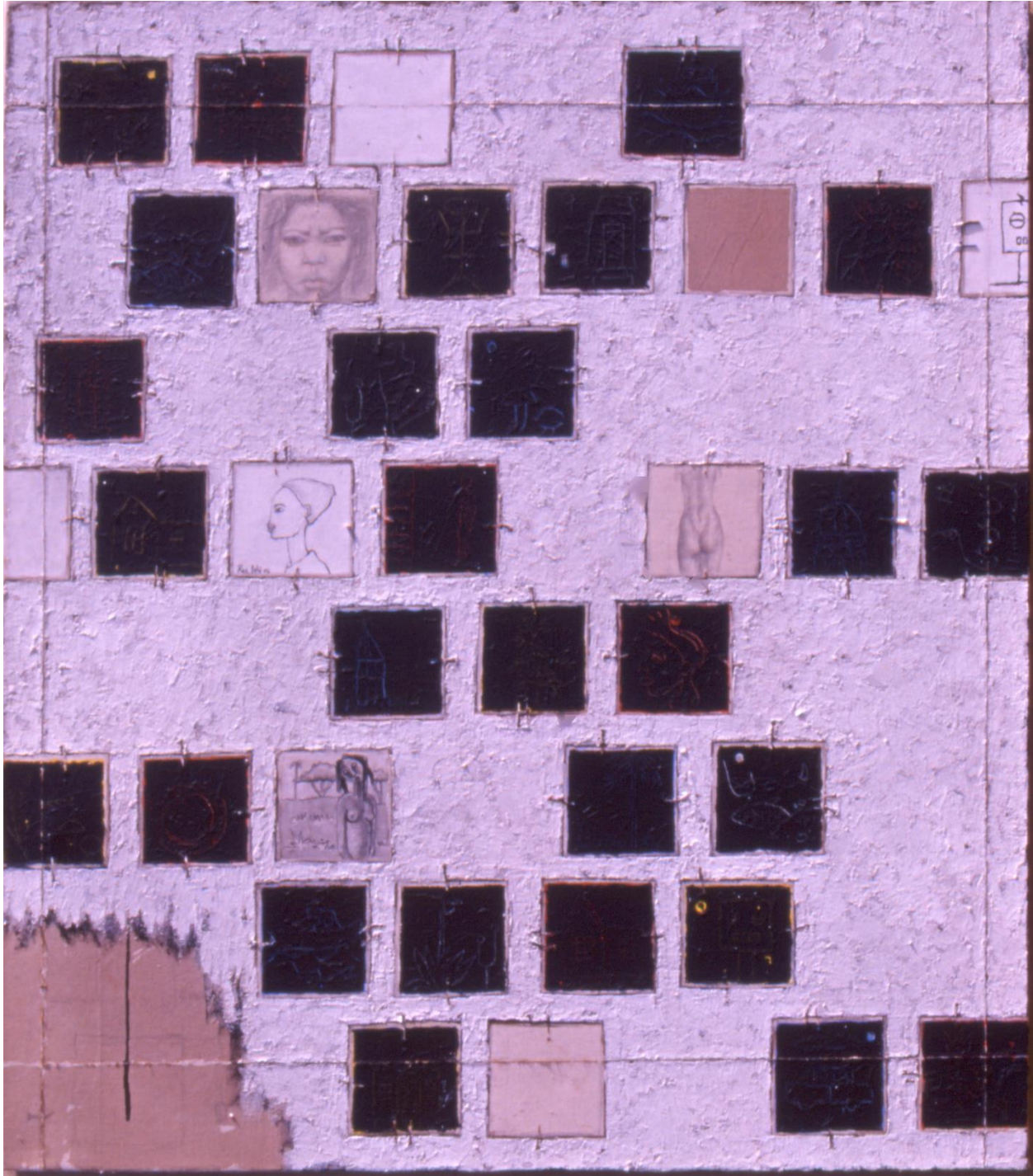


Figure 5.13 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Diario Secreto*, 2003-2004, mixed media, Embassy of the United States of America, Barbados.



Figure 5.14 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Piece of de Rock*, 2006-2008, mixed media, Private collection, Barbados.

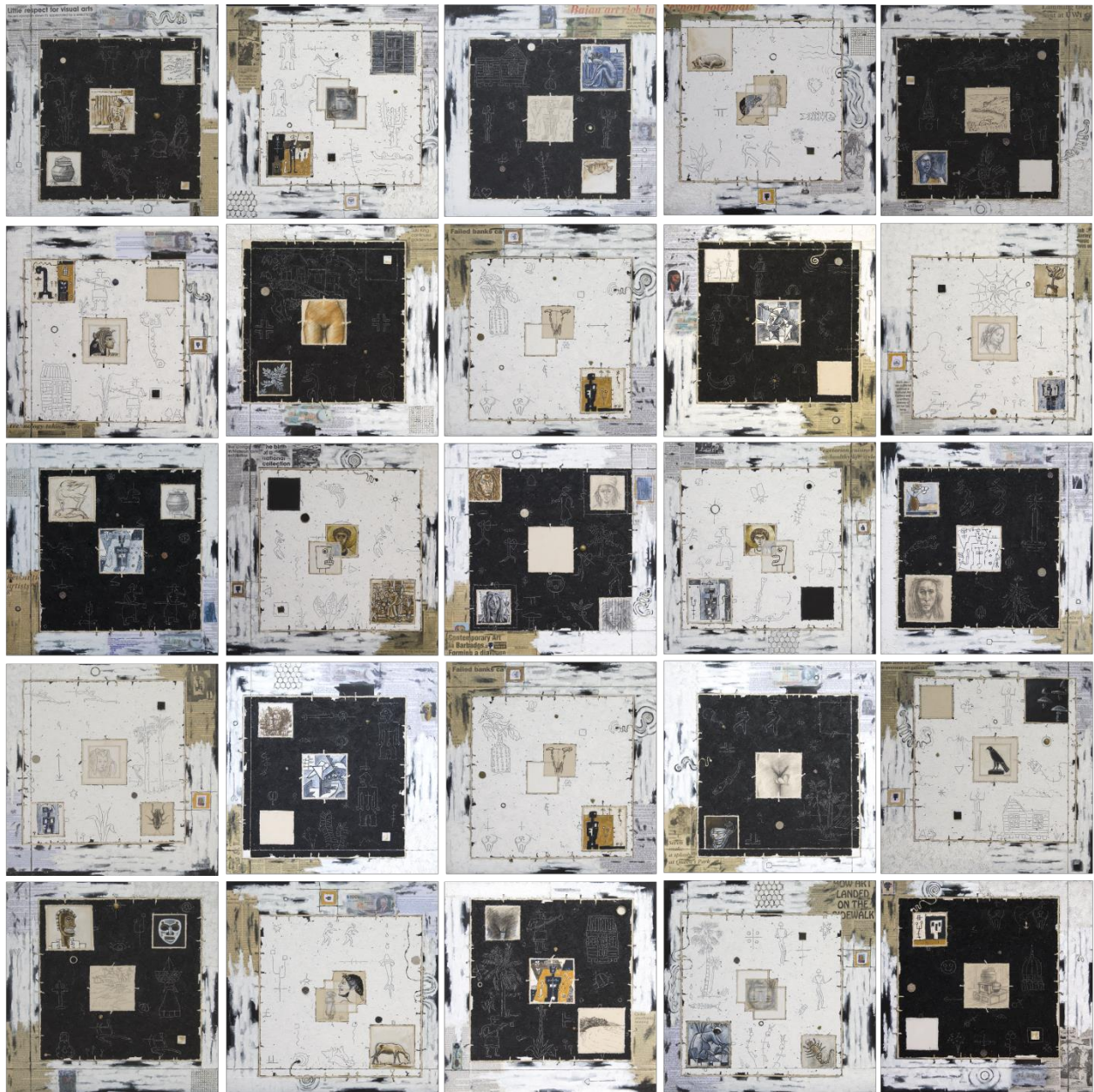


Figure 5.15 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Battlefield*, 2006-2008, mixed media, Private Collection, UK.



Figure 5.16 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Blazin*, 2003-2004, mixed media, Private Collection

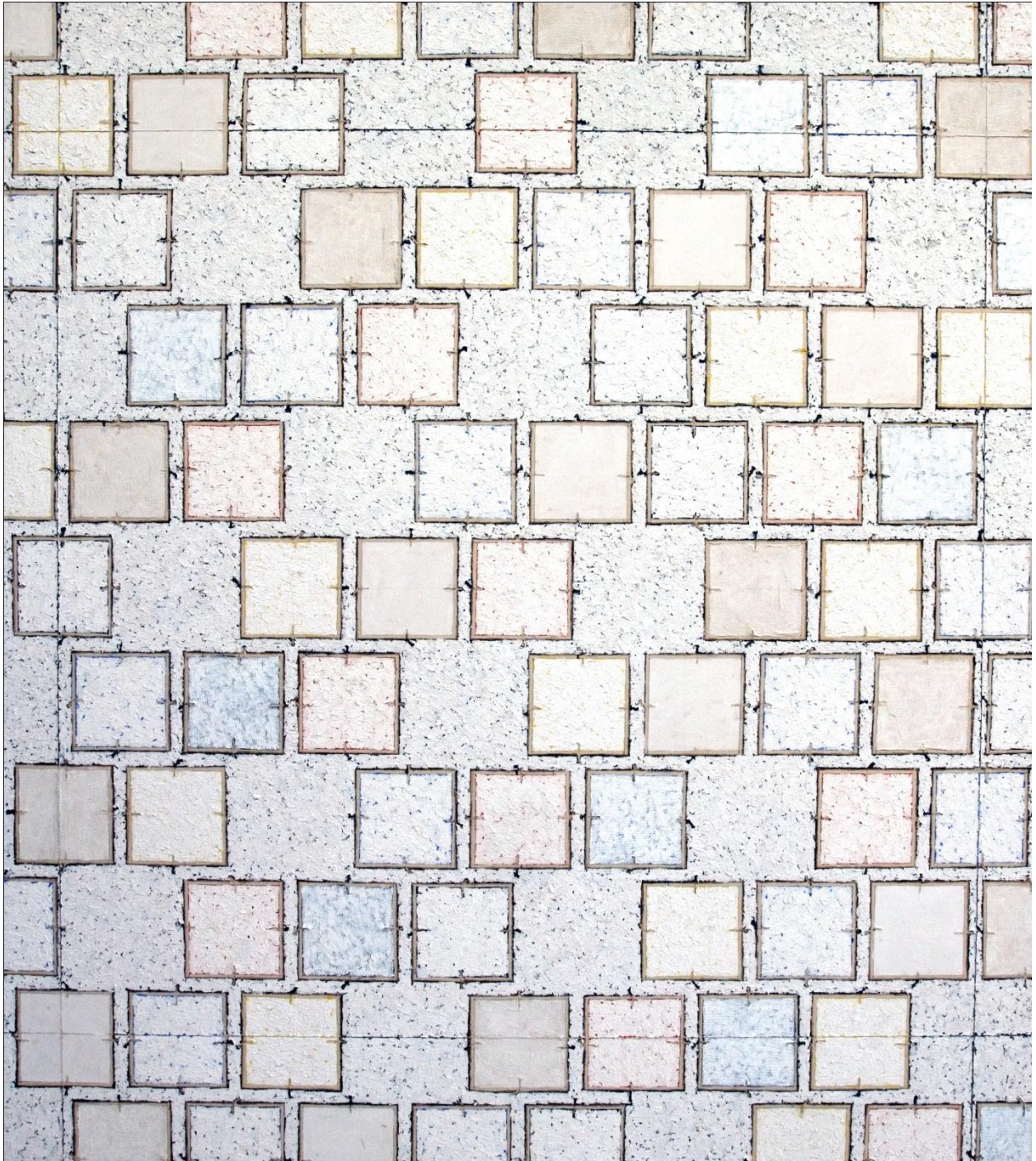


Figure 5.17 Ras Ishi Butcher – *Omega*, 2006-2008, mixed media, Private Collection



Figure 5.18 Joscelyn Gardner – *Creole Portraits*, 2002-2003, lithography on frosted mylar



Figure 5.19 Joscelyn Gardner – *Creole Portraits II: A Collection of Singular & Scarce Creole Portrait Heads to perpetuate the Memory of the Women of Egypt Estate in Jamaica*, 2007, wall installation with stone lithographs on frosted mylar with vinyl wall elements

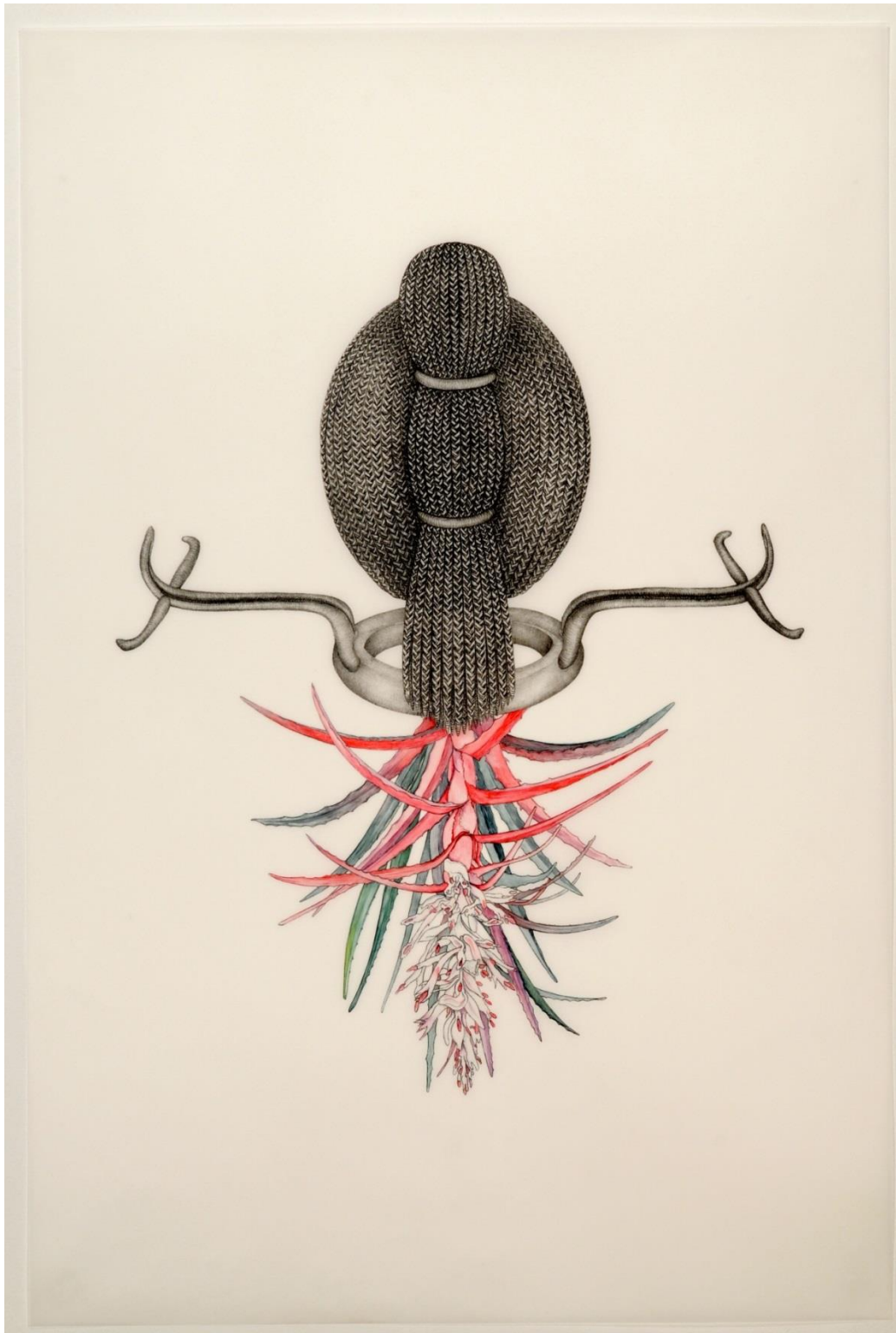


Figure 5.20 Joscelyn Gardner – *Creole Portraits III, bringing down the flowers:* *Bromeliad penguin (Abba)*, 2011, hand colored lithograph on frosted mylar



Figure 5.21 Joscelyn Gardner – *Creole Portraits III, bringing down the flowers: Mimosa pudica (Yabba)*, 2009, hand colored lithograph on frosted mylar



Figure 5.22 Joscelyn Gardner – *White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece*, 2003
Multimedia video/sound installation



Figure 5.23 Sheena Rose, *Town* 2009, mixed media (still from video)
Artist's collection



Figure 5.24 Sheena Rose – *Many Streets*, 2012, mixed media
Artist's collection



Figure 5.25 Sheena Rose – *Sweet Gossip: She Feels she's all that...* 2012, acrylic on plywood
Private collection.



Figure 5.26 Sheena Rose *Sweet Gossip: All of his backside by the door!* 2012, digital photograph.

Artist's collection; Photo by Adrian Richards



Figure 5.27 Sheena Rose – *Sweet Gossip: I wonder how she does bathe...*, 2012, digital photograph,
Artist's collection; Photo by Adrian Richards



Figure 5.28 Sheena Rose – *Sweet Gossip: Man I want piece of that*, 2012, digital photograph
Artist's collection, Photo by Adrian Richards



Figure 5.29 Sheena Rose – *One Person, Many Stories*, 2013, performance
Photo by Adrian Richards

Endnotes

¹ Kobena Mercer, ed. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (London and Cambridge: InIVA and The MIT Press, 2008), 25.

² Holland Cotter, "Caribbean Visions of Tropical Paradise and Protest," *New York Times* (August 31, 2007) www.nytimes.com/2007/08/31/arts/desing/31cari.html.

³ Daniel Kunitz, "Treasure Islands: The Brooklyn Museum hosts a broad exhibit of contemporary Caribbean art," *The Village Voice* (September 11, 2007), www.villagevoice.com/art/0737,kunitz,77732,13.html.

⁴ Therese Hadchity, *Art for Export: An exhibition of works of art, which have represented Barbados abroad* (Bridgetown: National Art Gallery Committee, 2007).8.

⁵ Allison Thompson, "Responses: Allison Thompson," in Hadchity, 49. See Ariella Budick, "Infinte Island at Brooklyn Museum," *Newsday* (September 2007), www.newsday.com/entertainment/arts/ny-etart536058sep07,0,4455455.story.

⁶ Leon Wainwright, *Timed out: Art and the transnational Caribbean* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1-2. Wainwright's discussion focuses on the Anglophone Caribbean, the former British territories, which he notes "have received scant art historical treatment in comparison to the Greater Antilles including Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Haiti."

⁷ Wainwright, *Timed Out*, 4, quoting J. Fabian, *Time and the other: How anthropology makes its object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.16. and Dipesh Chakrabarty *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸ Wainwright, *Timed Out*, 4.

⁹ Wainwright, *Timed Out*, 11.

¹⁰ Cotter, "Islands Buffeted by Currents of Change," *New York Times* (June 15, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/15/arts/design/caribbean-crossroads-of-the-world-spans-3-museums.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

¹¹ Rob Perrée, “Two Exhibitions with Caribbean Art, Missed Opportunities?” in *Sranan Art Xposed* (digital art magazine - <http://srananart.wordpress.com/2012/09/22/two-exhibitions-with-caribbean-art-missed-opportunities/> September 22, 2012). Tran Cassandra Gummels-Relyveld. The other exhibition in the review was *Who More Sci-Fi Than Us, contemporary art from the Caribbean* (Amersfoort, the Netherlands: Kunsthal Kade, 2012).

¹² Andy Gosine, “Caribbean: Crossroads of the World,” *Art in America* (November 8, 2012), <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/caribbean-crossroads-of-the-world/>.

¹³ Dominique Brebion, “AICA-SC reports: No work from the French Departments of the Americas featured in the Caribbean:Art at the Crossroads of the World catalogue January 7, 2013.” In *ARC* online version, <http://arcthemagazine.com/arc/2013/01/aica-sc-reports-no-work-from-the-french-departments-of-the-americas-featured-in-the-caribbean-art-at-the-crossroads-of-the-world-catalogue/>. *ARC*’s online version did post Gosine’s *Art in America* review.

¹⁴ See Samella Lewis, *Caribbean Visions: Contemporary Painting and Sculpture* (Alexandra, V.A.: Art Services International, 1995), and Maria Luisa Borrás, and Antonio Zaya, *Exclusión, Fragmentación y Paraíso: Caribe Insular* (Madrid: Museo Extremeno e Iberoamericano de Art Contemporáneo, 1998).

¹⁵ Veerle Poupeye, “Writing about Art in the Caribbean” (paper presented at the College Art Association Annual Conference, New York, February 2007).

¹⁶ Benjamin Genocchio, “Colorful, Witty, Noisy: A West Indies Mélange,” *New York Times* (December 6, 2009). http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/nyregion/06artct.html?_r=0&pagewanted=print . The first two largest Caribbean communities in the U.S. are New York and Miami.

¹⁷ Krista Thompson, “How to install art as a Caribbeanist,” in *Curating in the Caribbean*, ed. David A. Bailey, Alissandra Cummins, Axel Lapp and Allison Thompson (Berlin: The Green Box, 2012), 97-112.

¹⁸ Krista Thompson, “How to install art,” 99.

¹⁹ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1993> (accessed July 25, 2012).

²⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), xi.

²¹ The distance from Barbados to Senegal is 3028 miles according to <http://www.distancefromto.net/distance-from/Barbados/to/Senegal> (accessed 25.07.2012). Bathsheba apparently earned its name because the frothy sea was reminiscent of the milk baths the biblical figure Bathsheba was renowned for, however in Barbados the name of the village is pronounced *Bashee 'ba*.

²² Gilane Tawadros, *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes* (London: inIVA, 2003)14.

²³ Stuart Hall, "Maps of Emergency: Fault Lines and Tectonic Plates," in Tawadros, *Fault Lines*, 32-34. Also see Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 34.

²⁴ Liz Lydiate, "A Modernist within the Landscape Tradition" in Winston Kellman, *Time & Place: Winston Kellman* (Bridgetown, Barbados: National Art Gallery Committee, 2012), 60.

²⁵ Therese Hadchity, "Outside the Contemporary Game: the oeuvre of Winston Kellman," in Kellman, *Time & Place*, 29.

²⁶ Winston Kellman, Personal interview (St. Joseph, Barbados: April 15, 2011).

²⁷ Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* (New York: Savacou North, 1994), 228.

²⁸ Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 117.

²⁹ Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 228-230.

³⁰ Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, p 328, footnote 54.

³¹ Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States," *Art Journal* 70:3 (Fall 2011): 16.

³² Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 13.

³³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 14.

³⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 14. Gilroy cites Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (London: Verso, 1985).

³⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 14. Gilroy goes on to note that no buyer was found at that time, and Turner eventually sold the painting to an American three years later. “The painting has remained in the United States ever since. Its exile in Boston is yet another pointer towards the shape of the Atlantic as a system of cultural exchanges.”

³⁶ <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/31102>

³⁷ Krista Thompson, “A Sidelong Glance,” 22.

³⁸ Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems*, 328.

³⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, x.

⁴⁰ Winston Kellman, Personal interview (St. Joseph, Barbados: April 15, 2011). Although Kellman arrived in the UK in 1971, he did not begin college until 1974 during which time he worked at a range of odd jobs to earn money and to wait the mandatory three years until he as eligible for a grant.

⁴¹ Alissandra Cummins et al., *Art in Barbados: What kind of mirror image?* 146.

⁴² Césaire was elected mayor of Fort de France in 1945 and held this office for 56 years until 2001 except for a brief period during 1983-84.

⁴³ Margaret Harris, “Winston true to his world,” *Nation Newspaper (Sun Shine edition)* March 2, 1997, 10.

⁴⁴ *Winston Kellman: Caribbean interiors & landscapes*. London: Cadogan Gallery, 1987. Also see *The Times*, “Gallery Listing” of June 22nd 1987. (Winston Kellman personal archives).

⁴⁵ Valerie Jones, “Bajan art goes on display at Garrison,” *Nation Newspaper*, n.d. (Winston Kellman personal archives).

⁴⁶ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: geography’s visual culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 5-6.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Small, “Winston Kellman: The Master of Tranquility,” *The New Bajan*, November 1992.

⁴⁸ Margaret Harris, “Winston true to his world,” *The Nation Newspaper (Sun Shine edition)*, March 2, 1992,10.

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- ⁴⁹ Hadchity, "Outside the Contemporary Game," 31.
- ⁵⁰ Hadchity, "Outside the Contemporary Game," 28.
- ⁵¹ Lydiate, "A Modernist within the Landscape Tradition," 57.
- ⁵² Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 1-26.
- ⁵³ See Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007).
- ⁵⁴ Joe Scanlan, "Free Time: An Introduction," *Art Journal*, 70:2 (Summer 2011): 26.
- ⁵⁵ "Teaching tourism starts at home," *The Barbados Advocate*, November 14, 2009, online version, <http://www.barbadosadvocate.com/newsitem.asp?more=editorial&NewsID=7307>.
- ⁵⁶ Lydiate, "A Modernist within the Landscape Tradition," 59.
- ⁵⁷ Lydiate, "A Modernist within the Landscape Tradition," 59-60.
- ⁵⁸ Lucien Freud in Nina Caplan, "Très Chair Lucien," *Metropolitan*, January 2012, 62.
- ⁵⁹ *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*, trans., Red Pine (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 23.
- ⁶⁰ The construction of a 25-panel diptych of separate panels to create one monumental painting was done two years before by Ras Ishi Butcher in the *Secret Diaries* exhibition at the Lancaster House gallery. Unlike Kellman's richly colorful and organic imagery, Ras Ishi's work, *Battlefield* (2006-2008) is grid-like and almost devoid of color.
- ⁶¹ Gerhard Richter in "I Have Nothing to Say and I'm Saying It: Conversation between Gerhard Richter and Nicholas Serota, Spring 2011," in Mark Godfrey and Nicholas Serota, eds., *Gerhard Richter: Panorama* (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 24.
- ⁶² The painting was included in Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1997). The second edition was published in 2003 as *Black Art: A Cultural History*. Krista Thompson, in her survey of black diaspora art history,

acknowledges Powell's book as a "ground breaking survey text" (Krista Thompson, "A Sidelong Glance," 23). Powell confuses the title of this work with another, larger diptych, calling it *400 Years New World Order*. In a later text, "The Systems and Semiotics of Ras Ishi Butcher," in *Secret Diaries: Ras Ishi* (Bridgetown: Miller Publishing Company Limited, 2009) Powell reproduces the two works side by side and here they are correctly labeled.

⁶³ Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, 169.

⁶⁴ Allison Thompson, "Caribbean Pavilion at Liverpool – some thoughts," in *Black Jacobins at the Caribbean Pavilion* (Bridgetown: National Art Gallery Committee, 2011), 9.

⁶⁵ W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 5.

⁶⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 213.

⁶⁷ Henry J. Drewal, "Memory and agency: Bantu and Yoruba arts in Brazilian culture," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London: Routledge, 2000), 241.

⁶⁸ Simon Njami, *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2005), 55.

⁶⁹ Njami, *Africa Remix*, 14.

⁷⁰ Njami, *Africa Remix*, 18.

⁷¹ Interview with Ras Ishi, (St. John, Barbados: July 6, 2009).

⁷² Jorella Andrews, "Identity: Introduction" in Rasheed Araeen et al eds., *The Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*. (London: Continuum, 2002), 135. The first part of Andrews' statement references Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁷³ Christopher Cozier, *Wrestling with the Image: Caribbean Interventions* (Washington: Organization of American States, 2011), 9-10.

⁷⁴ Edouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 14.

⁷⁵ The *Secret Diaries* works were exhibited in Barbados as two series in two separate exhibitions, the first, *Diario Secreto* in 2004 at the Zemicon Gallery in Bridgetown, and the subsequent one, *Secret Diaries* at Lancaster House and the Pharmacy Gallery in 2010 before travelling to the National Gallery of the Bahamas. Curator Holly Parotti included an additional twenty works in the Bahamas exhibition so that it resembled a retrospective. This was the first time the entire gallery was turned over to the work of a non-Bahamian artist, a decision which caused considerable controversy locally.

⁷⁶ Joscelyn Gardner, *White Skin, Black Kin: "Speaking the Unspeakable,"* (Bridgetown, Barbados: The Barbados Museum & Historical Society, 2004), 54.

⁷⁷ Joscelyn Gardner, public talk, *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art* exhibition, New York: Brooklyn Museum, n.d. See the artist's website (Prints / Creole Portraits II) <http://www.joscelyngardner.com/>.

⁷⁸ Joscelyn Gardner, <http://www.joscelyngardner.com/>. See also Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁷⁹ Jennifer Law, "Knowledge is Made for Printing: Joscelyn Gardner's Creole Portraits Series" in *Bleeding & Breeding: Joscelyn Gardner* (Whitby: Station Gallery January 14-February 12, 2012), 12.

⁸⁰ Law, "Knowledge is Made for Printing," 11.

⁸¹ Douglas Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistleweed in Jamaica 1750-86* (Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago: The University of the West Indies Press, 1999).

⁸² Alison Donnell, "Contesting Thistlewood: Slavery, Agency and the Limits of Representation," in *Bleeding and Breeding*, 33-34.

⁸³ Alison Donnell, "Contesting Thistlewood," 35.

⁸⁴ Gardner, public talk, *Infinite Island*.

⁸⁵ Law, "Knowledge is Made for Printing," 9.

⁸⁶ Law, "Knowledge is Made for Printing," 9.

⁸⁷ Joscelyn Gardner, "A Collection of Creole Portrait Heads of the Female Sex," *Small Axe* 37 (March 2012).

⁸⁸ Gardner, public talk, *Infinite Island*.

⁸⁹ Law also refers to the absence of depictions of slaves prior to 1800. With reference to Gardner's images, she quotes Tom Barringer who writes that when these images did appear, "considerable amounts of capital, both financial and ideological, were invested in these images, in the production of which artists and their patrons colluded in an attempt to naturalize the moral injustice enshrined in laws that made some men and women the property of others". See Tim Barringer, "Picturesque Prospects and the Labor of the Enslaved," in Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, and Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, eds. *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica: Isaac Mendes Belisario and His Worlds* (New Haven and London: Yale Center for British Art, 2007), 41 as cited in Law, 10.

⁹⁰ For a detailed description of the exhibition design see Hyacinth M. Simpson, "Re-framing the colonial Caribbean: Joscelyn Gardner's White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece," *Postcolonial Studies*, 15:1 (2012), 87-104. A topsy-turvy doll was a traditional colonial-era fabric doll in which the upper body of a white figure was attached to the that of a black one, joined together by a large fabric skirt which could be flipped to conceal or reveal either half.

⁹¹ Simpson, "Re-framing the colonial Caribbean," 92.

⁹² Simpson, "Re-framing the colonial Caribbean," 96-97.

⁹³ Rum, made from fermented and distilled sugar cane, was produced in Barbados from as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. See Mount Gay Barbados, <http://www.mountgayrum.com/>.

⁹⁴ Joscelyn Gardner, *White Skin, Black Kin: "Speaking the Unspeakable."* (Bridgetown: The Barbados Museum & Historical Society, 2004), 49-50.

⁹⁵ Simpson, "Re-framing the colonial Caribbean," 101. She cites Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, empire and gender in the eighteenth century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 154.

⁹⁶ Simpson, "Re-framing the colonial Caribbean," 101. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

⁹⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: race, Gender, and sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 207-208 as cited in Simpson, “Re-framing the colonial Caribbean,” 101.

⁹⁸ Christopher Cozier, “Notes on Sheena Rose: Nobody’s subject but her own.....” in *Sheena Rose: Town to Town* (Bridgetown: Morningside Gallery, 2011), 9.

⁹⁹ Cozier, “Notes on Sheena Rose,” 9.

¹⁰⁰ Cozier, “Notes on Sheena Rose,” 12.

¹⁰¹ Cozier, “Notes on Sheena Rose,” 11.

¹⁰² Cozier, “Notes on Sheena Rose,” 11.

¹⁰³ Cozier, *Wrestling with the Image*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Cozier, *Wrestling with the Image*, 13.

Conclusion: The Re-turn without end

Images and words come to us loaded with signification; definitions, histories, analogies, connotations. Contemporary Caribbean artists wade their way through this weight of tradition which is made more onerous by what has remained unspoken and unrepresented, that is the history of the transatlantic slave trade and its place in the construction of modernity. Presenting this work – or re-presenting it – through texts, lectures and exhibitions is no less problematic. Stereotypes and tropes of tropicality and alterity have been recycled across centuries of images as the mingling of fact and fiction, observation and imagination. Caribbean economies reliant on European and North American tourism are willing to reflect back to potential travelers the fantasies of the pre-modern paradise that framed the original colonizing projects.

In seeking out revised approaches to thinking through the meaning of visual culture in the Caribbean, expanded perspectives can prove useful. This includes incorporating the diaspora as a more comprehensive frame of reference, acknowledging the central importance of a black Atlantic field of exchange as a challenge to national paradigms and the structure of modernity; and also considering a counter-historical discourse that can re-examine the narratives and readings from multiple perspectives rather than through a single hegemonic model. Adopting a diasporic genealogy, identifying and linking together particular “moments” of transatlantic and transnational encounter highlights the deliberate constructedness of representation as well as trajectories of recirculation.

The experience of travel and the encounter of difference have been central to the process of representing the Caribbean. Travel, whether literal or metaphorical, presents the observer with

new horizons but simultaneously throws into relief through comparison the pre-existing knowledge of home, nation and self. The process of comprehending what is new comes about in tandem and with reconfiguring what was already known as well as reconfiguring available languages and methodologies to describe both the past and the contemporary.

The turn or rupture that Stuart Hall refers to compels the observer to reflect back on what has transpired and in response, shift the present course. To re-turn is to reappraise the past narratives that combine to form history and tradition, and expose the spaces of absence as part of reconfiguring the present moment. The archive emerges as a useful tool in laying out the past as evidence that can be reordered and reprioritized, providing additional readings and multiple perspectives. If the archive appears static as documenting the past, the performative exists as endlessly improvisational and unpredictable. Carnival is a particularly potent model for diaspora aesthetics. It is a thoroughly public and mass performance, taking place in streets, seemingly outside traditional institutional infrastructures and hierarchies. The role of costume as the display and ornamentation of the body stands as the primary signifier of both the established and transgressed social hierarchies. Duplication, doubling or multiplicity functions in opposition to notions of authenticity and originality as well as the model of transition from one single point to another. The model of mass production, whether it was the manipulation and distribution of bodies, goods or knowledge forever altered the intersection of the local and the global. Pronouncing the re-turn is to claim visibility within an expanded and multi-directional trajectory, exposing or defying hierarchies and narratives that have served to exclude, deride or marginalize the Caribbean, or simply declaring them irrelevant.

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