

Leisure & Entertainment

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Project and Space founder Sheena Rose with Natalie McGuire, Art Historian.



The theatre at FRESH MILK.



Barbadian artists from left to right – Alicia Alleyne, Mark King, Sheena Rose, Cindy Jackman and Joanna Crichlow

Fresh Milk

THE LAUNCH OF
AN ARTIST-LED
INITIATIVE

by Annalee Davis

On August 13 at the Milking Parlour Studio, located in St. George, FRESH MILK (<http://freshmilkbarbados.wordpress.com>) – an artist-led initiative offering an informal platform for exchanges among contemporary practitioners, writers, and makers – was launched.

The inaugural event offered a rich programme including an artists' talk, an exhibition and a screening of sixteen video shorts from around the region. The focus of the FRESH MILK event was the launching of **ARC III**, a quarterly Caribbean art and culture print magazine published out of St. Vincent and the Grenadines by Holly Bynoe and Nadia Huggins. (www.arcthemagazine.com)

But first, a bit of background; What is FRESH MILK?

The idea for FRESH MILK has developed over years of conversations with other practising artists around the need for artistic engagement amongst contemporary practitioners living and working in Barbados who are concerned with a contemporary Caribbean space – which maybe in Bridgetown, Toronto, Port of Spain or East London.

My interest in founding FRESH MILK was renewed after having returned to teaching in the Art Department at Barbados Community College after a five year hiatus and realizing



Musings from the Milking Parlour Studio
by Annalee Davis

community that acknowledges their practice.

FRESH MILK's aim is to support interactions across disciplines and contribute to an increasingly rich discourse surrounding creative production within the informal networks of the Caribbean. Its seasonal programming will offer events in the wet season and the dry season in its commitment to bring people and ideas together. This venture is connected in spirit to the increasingly rich informal artist-led networks spawning from the Bahamas in the North to Suriname in the South.

FRESH MILK is located in the southern Caribbean, a region often referred to as a hybridised space, well known for its capacity to fuse various elements and remake itself over and over again. In this tradition,



Viewing the video shorts.

FRESH MILK appears to be a singular space – a simple wooden deck used as a private eating area for a family but which, on occasion, transforms into a platform for ideas – bridging the divide between private and public, disciplines or territories; transformable into a gathering space for contemporary creatives who are thirsty to debate ideas and share works.

The humble FRESH MILK space straddles my residence with my working studio and gallery. It is literally a wooden deck – a platform if you will, that connects my home with the place where I think, write, and make things; becoming a point of connection between living and working environments as well as between myself and others.

The launching event

The evening's proceedings began with my conversing with Holly and Nadia about the birth of **ARC** — a delicious magazine which "offers insight into current creative industries, while bridging the gap between established and emerging artists".

The founders spoke to their interest in creating something beautiful and worthwhile to showcase the work coming out of the region and also about their need to develop a collaborative project to mitigate isolation — especially for Holly who was returning to quiet Bequia from energetic NYC.

Their interest was to honour creative practitioners and provide a space for people to come together. The founders acknowledged that embarking on the **ARC** project was a huge leap of faith. Now into preparing the fourth issue, they feel as though they are being understood in the Caribbean and that their jump of faith has resulted in being "caught" as manifested by the encouraging support they have received throughout the region.

Holly closed by speaking about our need to form a united front, to think about the power of coming together and the need to harness this energy right now and acknowledge the groundswell taking place.

The second component of the launch included Project and Space, founded by Barbadian artist, Sheena Rose. This initiative was also born out of a need to mitigate isolation and to develop collaborative projects with others by using both her private studio space and public venues for monthly meetings with younger practitioners.

Having just returned from a three-month residency at the Tembe Art Studio in Suriname where she felt isolated at the programme's deeply rural location, she felt surprised on returning to Barbados that the isolation was ever present here as well and decided to do something about it.

Sheena thought that the separate circles of artists, writers and filmmakers should come together "and make one big circle." Project and Space participated in the FRESH MILK launch by co-curating a small exhibition with **ARC**, to showcase the works of five Barbadian artists working in photography, mixed media, sculpture and painting.

This collaborative action was in keeping with **ARC**'s intention to inspire and give voice to a new generation of emerging artists, and provided the opportunity for the audience to see some of the new work evolving while alleviating the isolation many practitioners experience.

The third feature of the launch consisted of the viewing of video shorts produced by 16 artists from the region. A homemade screen was suspended from my children's very tall swing set, large blankets were laid out on the lawn, and more than seventy people viewed a fifty-one minute selection of video works curated by the **ARC** founders.

One of the artists who attended the event wrote to say that it was the arts event of the year. I do not know where these people came



From left to right – Holly Bynoe and Nadia Huggins, ARC Founders in conversation with Annalee Davis, FRESH MILK Founder – on the platform.”
(Photos by Dondre Trotman.)

from — many I did not know. The audience spanned generations and the excitement felt by recent graduates and young practitioners was palpable.

Some confessed their eager anticipation about the event and everywhere someone was meeting someone else for the first time — we were getting to know ourselves — still! A young animated Barbadian man is entering his second year in Arts Administration at Goldsmiths in London, an eager Art Historian returned to Barbados three weeks ago with degree in hand from the University of Leicester, a recent graduate from BCC is now in Kenya at an arts residency, another just back from one at Alice Yard in Trinidad.

As Holly suggested, there is a groundswell in the arts. It is a moment to be harnessed and a time to be savoured. The shift is happening, and our challenge is to keep up the momentum.

Just as Holly and Nadia were leaving to return home and prepare for their next stop at the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival where they will present a new media programme at the September event, my parting gift to them was copies of **RA**, a quarterly publication of the informal group, Representing Artists from 1993/1994.

RA was an artists' union and watchdog organization, co-founded to, again, mitigate isolation, born out of the lack of acknowledgement and support expected from the formal art institutions. Re-reading my editorials from that comparatively humble publication eighteen years ago reveals what has and has not changed in the region.

What has not changed is that many formal institutions are still dysfunctional and in dire need of rehab, but are in denial about their failure to function properly — part of the general malaise and crisis of leadership we all know too well and which continues to mash up the region. The other thing that has not changed is that the oxygen being pumped into the art community continues to come from the blood of artists, not state institutions whose mandate it is to grow the arts.

What has changed is that the Internet has democratised access to information and to each other, making it impossible for those who once controlled access to maintain absolute control. I was reminded that the **RA** publications were reaching out to the region in the same ways that **ARC** is doing today — the six issues a precursor to the efforts of Holly and Nadia who are offering a much more sophisticated publication, carefully designed and printed so beautifully in a fancy art house printery in Iceland and not by a primitive machine in black and white.

ARC's mission to “foster and develop dialogue and opportunities for individual and collaborative visual artists across the region and to stimulate sharing and creativity by providing an outlet for self-expression and uniqueness” was in essence the mission of **RA**.

The fact that visual artists are still working to alleviate isolation and build opportunities means that their own production wanes, making the efforts sweeter because the sacrifice is so great. And it is this sacrifice that makes each of us complicit in the failure or success of all the artist led-initiatives throughout the region.

As an artist-led initiative, **ARC** magazine is made possible by the subscription and support of its readers. In other words, if we don't support it, it cannot sustain itself. And isn't this the question for the Caribbean as a whole?