

RA REPRESENTING ARTISTS

\$1.00 - FREE TO MEMBERS

WELCOME

to the very first issue of the RA (Representing Artists) newsletter! Our unified aim is to produce four newsletters a year that will inform our readers about what the organization is upto, introduce some information from around the region and begin to create a dialogue about local and regional issues. We must become more aware of our environs and we need to function regionally. It is our hope that this newsletter will contribute to our betterment as artists and as a Caribbean people.

The sole mandate of RA is to represent the common interests of visual artists working in Barbados, and hopefully regionally, after chapters have been set up in some of the other islands. We decided on four major objectives; first and foremost, to raise the standards of excellence. Second, to increase artist's incomes through collective action. Third, to address copyright issues, and fourth, to educate; A) each other to the variety of artistic expressions through group talks and, the showing of each other's work, and B), the public to the diversity and validity of various types of art.

Members have agreed that the attainment of these goals will require not only co-operation and collaboration with the existing arts organizations, but also with artists who must work hard and be committed to the ultimate goals and objectives over a long period of time.

Thus far, our meetings have been stimulating and we are all enjoying getting to know one another. We are attempting to bridge the gaps between the various groups of artists that exist on the island, and to realize our common needs. Our diversity will be an asset to this organization because it will enable us to permeate every sector of the society at the appropriate times.

Our aim is to produce a democratic organization where the members will make the decisions. We are attempting to use the concept of "Power with" as opposed to "Power over", So that all of our members will feel as though the organization represents them. This demands much more from our members, they must be active in directing the course of the organization. Due to the fact that almost all of us have jobs to supplement the sale of our art and many have families to support, our most precious common item, other than our creativity, is TIME! There is little of it and we are aware that to function in a professional way, we need to be organized. It would therefore be ideal for each of us to contribute two days a month to making this work.

To assist us on our way, we have had the kind cooperation of the following persons: Sharon Carmichael has volunteered her services as Chairwoman (and this includes more than you can ever imagine). It's

Representing Artists is a quarterly publication of
The Barbados Professional Artists Organisation

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been a real treat having Sharon on board, both a learning experience and a lot of fun. Mary Mahabir has kindly offered assistance to RA as a lawyer, to help us figure out that un-figure-utable language; and Rita Voeth kindly donated a Saturday afternoon to give advice on how to work together as a group, including conflict management tools, how best to organize meetings and some problem solving approaches. We video taped this for future.

Thankyou to each of them for their assistance.

We have formed the following committees and would be happy to have more help in any of these areas:

1. Archives, Documentation and Education
2. Arts Resource
3. Information Exchange
4. Professional Issues
5. Public Relations Committee
6. 1% Committee
7. Finance and Membership

Should you need any further information on these committees, please feel free to give either Gayle Hermick or myself a call at 433-5880. You can also reach me at 435-1595 or 433-1642. We will fill you in and let you know when the next meeting is, so you can be the most exciting art association to hit Barbados this century.

Don't be behind the times - join RA.

Our next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 28th 1993 at 5pm at the home of Hetty and Arthur Atkinson, No.2 Elizabeth Dr., Pine Gardens. (Come in by People's Cathedral, 5th gap on left, last house on the right)

Membership fees will be collected at that time. Our annual fees are \$50.00 and may be paid in 2 installments.

Our first newsletter proves to be quite dynamic. Nick Whittle wets our appetite with "Have you seen Miss Mary Lately?" speaking about the heated matter of artists dealing with taboo subjects and the inevitable censoring that will ensue. Alison Greaves presents her personal view of the 'Art Over Sugar' video that was recently shown at the Community College. Our Trinidadian correspondent, Chris Cozier takes us to Aruba and presents a hint of what's going on there, while Ras Akyemi and Ras Ishi speak about "The Great Controversy" as it relates to the Barbadian art scene. Allison Thompson debates the forming of a National Gallery, and I offer some personal comments about the Biennial in the Dominican Republic held late last year.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. If you are interested in submitting an article, you may send a typed copy to Annalee Davis, 'Prendoma, Walkers, St. George. We may not be able to run everything we receive due to space limitations, but we certainly welcome your response.

Thankyou for your support,

..Annalee Davis

HAVE you SEEN MISS MARY LATELY?

BY
NICK WHITTLE

The visual artist has always sought to discover new ways of sharing his/her vision with those that are willing to take the time to participate in the experience. This journey often leads to the redefinition of the materials and processes that the artist utilizes. This process is continuous. At this particular point in time we are at a position on a continuum which allows the artist the choice of employing technologies that are on the cutting-edge.

The cathedrals of Europe represented the pinnacle of technological development at a particular point in history. The process of oil painting was introduced into Flanders in the fifteenth century. It was only during the sixteenth century, when the materials and technical processes of oil painting became sufficiently advanced, that the artists of the Italian High Renaissance were able to demonstrate its superiority. During the seventeenth century it had become universally accepted as the medium for the artist.

The supremacy of oil colours as the preferred choice of the artist remained unchallenged for nearly five hundred years. It is significant that during this time span there occurred a parallel development which provided a method of organizing our vision which was to remain unrivalled until the early twentieth century, when its authority was temporarily disrupted. I am of course referring to the *Costruzione Legittima* which was invented in Italy during the fifteenth century and from which perspective as we now recognize it, was derived. It was left to the Cubism of Picasso and Braque to present an alternative vision to the European artist. The vision that perspective offered the viewer of the fifteenth century was one that was odd and

repellent, not unlike the twentieth century response to Cubism. The Elizabethan response to perspective is illustrated in the conversation between Edgar and Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The recently blinded Gloucester wishes to kill himself by throwing himself over the cliff. Edgar prevents this by describing the scene in the manner of classical perspective.

Edgar:

Come on, sir; here's the place Stand still. How fearfull
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eye so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross beatles. Halfway down
Hangs one that gathers sampire - dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminish'd to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge
That on the' unnumb' red idle pebble chafes
Cannot be heard so high I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong

Gloucester:

Set me where you stand

Edgar:

Give me your hand. You are now within a foot
Of th' extreme verge For all beneath the moon
Would I not leap upright.

The British artist, David Hockney, makes the following observation:

perspective "suddenly altered (the) picture: it gave a strong illusion of depth; it lost something and gained something At first the gain was thrilling, but slowly, very slowly, we became aware of what had been lost That loss was the depiction of the passing of time. We thought this way of looking was so true that when the photograph came along to confirm perspective because it was exactly the same way of looking, from one central point with one eye fixed in time.

We know perspective is not real: we know the lines don't meet; we know that if you move along them all is parallel. Clearly the photograph belongs to the Renaissance picture. " *Paul Joyce "Hockney on Photography" Jonathan Cape, 1988 Page 34.*

In Barbados we can be excused for being confused. The architect is recreating the past on a massive scale. The artist is recording the past with authenticity by using the ultimate hierarchical material of the artist - oil paint and remaining faithful to the theoretical abstraction called perspective.

There will always, hopefully, be those who will not be

satisfied with creating pastiches of the past. Their vision will be personal and their method of presenting it will often challenge the accepted materials of the artist.

New materials and processes will always become the focus of debate for the artist and the wider audience. In Barbados, the Art Over Sugar Event at the old Vacluse sugar factory continues this tradition. Within the Barbadian context it was innovative and exciting. It was the subject of the second lecture in the monthly lecture programme organized by the Division of Fine Arts of the Barbados Community College. The occasion allowed for the screening of the video recording of the event followed by a discussion among an audience comprised of participants and the curious.

The only record of such events are either in the form of the personal memories of those who participated and/or a visual recording. The "Running Fence" 1972-1976 a project by the artist Christo, only exists in the minds of those who experienced it or in the books that are devoted to preserving its occurrence. The fence, made up of white nylon, runs for twenty-five miles at a height of twenty feet. The recording of the event, whether in the form of an illustrated book or a video recording, require us to examine whether the recording of the event can be considered as a work of art when the original no longer exists or simply as a reminder of the conceptualization of an idea.

The nature of art should be part of a dialectical continuum. Within Barbados we must be careful that this continuum is not disrupted in order to concretize something prescriptive. In Barbados as part of Carifesta 1981 several murals were painted on public buildings. A mural which was painted at the St. James Secondary School was destroyed on the instructions of the then Principal.

Presently a joint select committee of Parliament is examining a Bill which will "provide for the regulation, distribution and censorship of films and the related matters" This proposed legislation needs to be examined with reference to the artist who chooses to document an event which may contain:

a) human or animal sexual activities or acts of force or restraint associated with such activities;

b) mutilation or torture of, or other acts of gross violence towards humans or animals;

c) human genitals organs or human urinary or excretory functions. (Part 111, 19.2 of the Bill)

Those scholars and guardians of our culture who like to draw on our indebtedness to the civilization of Ancient Greece forget their practice of bestiality and sodomerite behaviour. Could an exhibition of the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe or Andreas Serrano be held in Barbados?

"Serrano, whose subject matter is religious icons and body fluids, had photographed a crucifix in a glass of his own urine... Mapplethorpe was ...the photographer of celebrities, flowers, leather fetishes and men with fantastically large penises". *Index on Censorship Vol 19, No.1. 1990 pp 6-7.*

In the United States the National Endowment of the Arts has decided not to support difficult art. It is specifically targeting sexually explicit art, art with excessive violence and art that appears to insult religious views. A Channel 4 television documentary "Dammed in the U.S.A" which examines the limits of artistic freedom in the United States has itself been banned. It was awarded an International Emmy for Best Arts Documentary. One of the many ironies of the incident is the banning of a film that is itself concerned about bannings. It is now the subject of a law suit.

This wave of puritanism is not confined to the United States. In the United Kingdom ...

"Michael Bogdanov, director of the English Shakespeare Company, accused London Transport of censorship in early June, following its banning from the London Underground of an advertising poster designed to promote the theatre company's forthcoming London production of Macbeth. The poster featured an etching of three naked witches by 16th century German artist Hans Baldung Grien." *Index on Censorship Vol.21, No.8, 1992, page 34.*

All this is very pertinent to the Barbadian artist in that on the day when he/she decides to produce imagery which still remains a taboo, he/she will face censorship. This taboo is only concerned with the visualization of such images. The lyrical content of many calypsoes are loaded with 'double entendre' and blatant sexuality. Popular dances which mimic the sexual act are acceptable even at the sedate church fair, whereas a visual image is still viewed as posing a threat to the morals of society.

The artist must be vigilant in order to prevent the censor's curtain being drawn across their ideas. The forum offered by the lecture series at the Barbados Community College could provide artists and those who are interested in the arts an opportunity to engage in a meaningful dialogue on such matters.

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THE FIRST PAINTING BIENNIAL OF THE CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICA

October - December 1992. Galerie de Arte Moderna, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.
By Annalee Davis

Attempting to write comprehensively about an exhibition the size & diversity of the Biennial being held in the Dominican Republic is a massive undertaking and one I will not commit to doing. I will however pass on some of my own feelings about the exhibition, the art, our culture and Caribbean society.

The Biennial is the second event I have attended in the last few months that left me feeling energized and positive - the first being Art Over Sugar, held in August of 1992. These two events have left me feeling excited about the arts in this part of the world. We are creating a visual language that describes our varied experiences as Caribbean and Latin American people.

The strong showing of work from the entire region at the Biennial made it clear we are a force to be reckoned with. Amidst all the fanfare and protest surrounding Columbus and his 500 year anniversary, the 250 artists showing over 450 works at the Gallery of Modern Art were saying to the rest of the world, "we too have arrived!" We are also discovering the power of our unification, because never before have we been united as a creative people; African, Amerindian, Dutch, English, French, and Spanish; under the same roof in our own region, believing in the value of what we have to say about ourselves.

There are 4 floors of works - a lot to digest in one visit. I believe the show would have been more powerful had it been more selective. As a first time effort, I can afford the luxury of being positive for the most part and will be more critical the second time around. I also think the organizers have learned a lot from this, their first Biennial and that things may be different in 1994.

There were some political and organisational problems. These seem to pervade every Caribbean country and are an impediment to our interacting with international institutions. Unless we artists make our dissatisfaction clear, and convince government to keep art and cultural events at arms length from political patronage & opportunism, Caribbean culture will remain marginal on the world stage. Artists have become so conditioned to accepting mismanagement and political opportunism as *modus operandi*, because as individuals we are compromised and powerless, that we sometimes

find it difficult to be critical. So desperate are we for showing space, we feel our backs are up against the wall. We are beginning to realize we must learn to function independent of these government or other institutions representing art and artists, until they operate in a fashion that is agreeable to artists.

All this aside, the importance of such an event cannot be overstated. I felt the Biennial contributed in a more effective way to true Caribbean integration than either the Federation or CARICOM. The artists and their work have contributed understanding of the Caribbean context and will enhance the development of a visual language that we can all own.

The work I personally responded to at the Biennial, I shall describe as humanist in nature. It became evident how very different our lives are from our friends up north. Our concerns and realities make us feel insecure at times and our work reflects a painful and torrid past that we are still obviously attempting to come to terms with. In many ways, we are still human beings in the old fashioned sense, trying to catch up with the "post-human" era that is fast in taking over. Our work is most times passionate and often political. These are our personality traits. Many of the people in our region are concerned with life and death questions daily. We don't have the time to question whether or not we exist; we feel the hunger in our bellies, we live through the harsh realities of international embargoes, we understand political oppression, corruption and opportunism, we suffer from the monkeying of the north and we understand what it means to be vulnerable and dependent.

The real question arising from this event however, is, do we understand the power of our union? Instead of fearing European unification, we need to get our minds in gear for Caribbean and Latin American unification and let others know our strength. Of course, a major problem is different language groups. Our educational institutions need to educate students to be multilingual - our future depends on it. English-speaking people may feel confident that many speak our language, but try going to a conference organized by the Spanish speaking countries within the region, and you will feel that the world is Iberian. The point is, our immediate neighbours are Spanish, from Venezuela right up to Cuba and everything south west. We are too complacent as English-speakers and it is to our benefit to be multilingual.

As you will see from the list following, the organizers invited only one English-speaking person to serve on the jury. The jury comprised the following persons: Raquel Tibol, art critic, Mexico; German Rubiano Caballero, art critic, Colombia; Alissandra Cummins, Director, Barbados Museum; Mirn Rodriguez, Interamerican University of Puerto Rico; Ruth Vasallo, Dominican Republic; Belgica Rodriguez, Director, Museum of the Americas, OAS, Washington DC.; Klaus Steinnee, art critic, Costa Rica; Lillian Llanes, Director, Wilfredo Lam Centre and Havana Biennial, and Dominique Brebion, Director, Ministry of Culture, Martinique.

The jury selected a number of individuals to receive gold medals for their entries, the stipulation being that works had to have been executed within the last 2 years. The winners are: Barbados - Ras Ishi Butcher, Cuba - Gustavo Acosta and Carlos Alberto Garcia, Jamaica - David Boxer, Martinique - Ernest Breleur, Puerto Rico - Antonio Martorell, Venezuela - Luis Barreto and finally Dominican Republic - Jose Perdomo, Jose Garcia Cordero and Tony Capellan. Gold Medals were awarded to the best showing from the country as a unit and these included Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela.

It seemed to me that the rules for this match changed after the game began. Barbados lost eligibility for the country award because some of the artists submitted work executed prior to 1990 and we were penalized for this; even though it was made "clear" in the unclear translation of rules and regulations that this would not jeopardize our contesting for the gold. It was

apparent however, that the jurors were highly impressed with the work from Barbados and I believe that we were somewhat compensated by their decision to hang our work in a focal area on the first floor of the Gallery. The Biennial has given Barbados the opportunity to proclaim to the rest of the region that we do in fact have something to offer, we are most definitely a serious contender, and old stereotypes are being eroded. I think most would agree with me that our showing was even stronger than that of Jamaica, which was a surprise for both of us and many others. I was very disappointed that Trinidad was not able to present a stronger and larger body of work, their representation was made up of James Boodooh and Kenwyn Crichlow. These events are never without their own internal strife and politicking. The event really called for a wider cross-section than these artists and demanded something more contemporary from Trinidad.

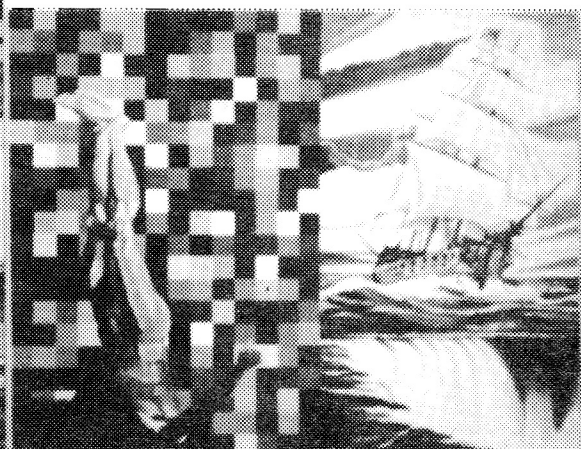
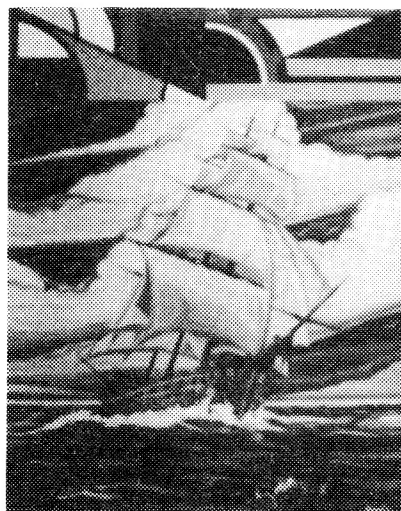
The significance of these awards cannot be underestimated. In speaking with Ras Ishi Butcher recently, he made the comment that his receiving the Gold Medal propelled him to produce more work and with greater confidence. He is now beginning to touch on topics that at one time made him somewhat nervous to investigate. He feels legitimized and as though he can speak with more authority. Maybe he feels greater responsibility to the recognition bestowed on him. Whatever his euphoria, it is clear that artists benefit from, and sorely need these forms of recognition. It forces the adrenalin to flow in a kind of exciteable manner that turns us on to producing work in an almost frenzied fashion. It also makes us feel valuable in our society, an emotion rarely experienced by those in the art community.

There are a couple of individual artists that I would like to mention because their work fascinated me. Award winner Gustavo Acosta of Cuba, presented 2 large, dark and foreboding canvasses. The left canvas, mostly dark umbers, showed a striking absence of human life. A building with classical columns appeared in the far distance, feeling like a heavily polluted industrial landscape. The canvas to the right, emphasised the detail of the base of one of the columns and a few steps. The overriding feeling was drab, morose. There was some sense of leftover control or order. Very powerful and moving work.



Ciro Quintana of Cuba presented, "El dulce camino de la verdad" (The sweet way to the truth). This two part series presents a bitter contradiction both formally and conceptually to the viewer. We are seduced by brilliant colour, luscious pastries and an unfamiliar juxtaposition of oh so familiar shapes and objects. The artist's combinations of the old with the new, monochrome with multi-colour, motion and inertia, desire and restraint; throw the viewer into a state of contemplation about these sea-men, shipwrecks and repeating patterns. The endless "isms" that seem to permeate/penetrate our world only serve to confuse the issues. The artist expresses ideas about collision in a startlingly refreshing way.

There was a lot of intriguing and very relevant work that incited discussion and introspection. Space does not permit me to pass on my thoughts about many of the powerful images I saw there. In closing, I urge my colleagues to become informed and aware of what's going on in our region, to try to participate as artists, or at the very least to attend some of these events. It is vital for individual development and will stimulate regional integration. Attending these events blasts us out of our relatively easy living, and forces us to take stock, reevaluate and hopefully move in to that part of ourselves that will make us examine our realities and stretch our existing definitions.



BOTH ILLUSTRATIONS THIS PAGE THE SWEET WAY TO TRUTH CIRO QUINTANA, CUBA

SMALL

ISLAND

BIG ART

Real art says something about the reach- the largeness of the human spirit rather than the smallness of each particular island community or the landmass.

BY CHRISTOPHER COZIER

Previously published in the Sunday Guardian

WHAT'S happening in Aruban Art? Well, their Mira Arte '92 exhibition which closed this weekend was an attempt to bring to the fore a discussion about contemporary art. They were putting together their presentation for the Carib Art project a regional exhibition and publication on contemporary art in the region on our own terms, to distinguish it from craft, tourist art and folk art; to release our art from the usual anthropological associations.

The Aruban artworld is not as diverse or as large as that of Trinidad or Barbados, but one encounters similar problems. For our artists, there is always a split between how or what we choose to see and how we think, as well as a split between nationally representative art and more individualistic forms of artistic expression.

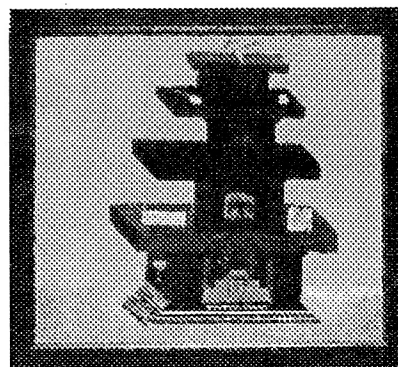
In the same manner that we have settled for coconut trees, shacks, mansions and fishing boats as the tropical idyll the Arubans have their cactus, big stone and goat painters. Because they do not have our English influence their paintings are done in oils rather than in watercolour.

Their artists of this genre have not taken the convention to the same level of proficiency as some of ours. Theirs are less academic than Jackie Hinkson and less illustrational than our various architects. It is more related to the Jones Gilbert or Lewis Lovelace school of thought and thus more committed to narrative and to describing a specific place or type of scene. From this type of production there is a giant leap in attitude to more experimental works with an internationalist thrust, there is no middle ground. This drastic shift from what can be described as a 19th century "Naturalism" to "Modernism" must have something to do with the composition of our societies and the way that they have developed; the manner in which different time zones butt up against each other in very small spaces.

There is little one can do to anticipate the direction that artists will take from one society to another, and it would be quite vulgar to even discuss the appropriateness of these options or how they fit in. Contemporary experience; access to travel; mass communication etc. affect individuals and communities in various unpredictable ways. Aruba is just off the south American coast. It is a territory of the Netherlands. It attracted many people from the English-speaking islands after the

second world war to work on their large refinery. They speak Dutch, Spanish, English and Papiamentu, their own hybrid language.

I was taken by the large sculptural work of Osira Eman Muyale entitled "Symbiose"; a large metal figure rusting and emaciated. The pose suggested that of a sun bather, perhaps creating a connection between the present day tourist as



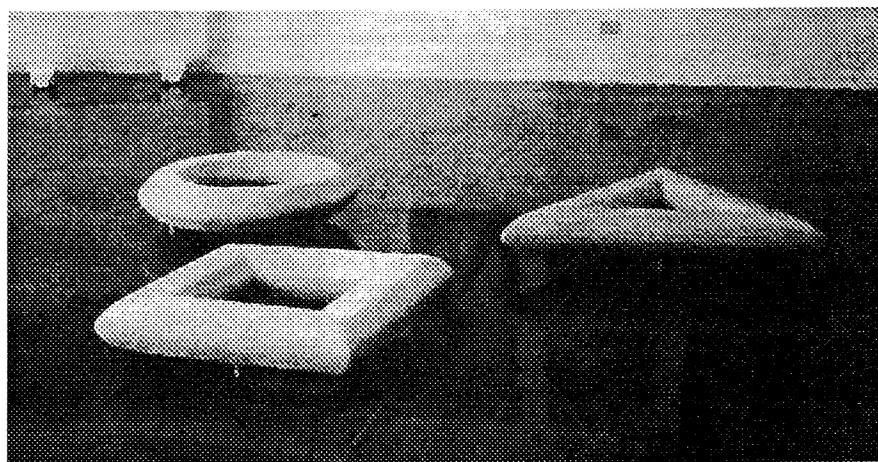
UNTITLED BY MARCELO WERLEMAN

industrial product and the era of the Sint Nicolaas refinery? The three Astro Turf balls invoke a consumer response to nature. The general effect is one of infertility and industrial waste. Tourism like the refinery will one day leave behind its respective ghosts? "Tansion" by Elvis Lopez, conveyed a cool and indifferent attitude to art making, similar to the "primary structures" of American art of the late sixties. However, the formal coolness of his geometric forms is playfully undermined by the fact that they stand on little pegs as if on a cake stand and also by the emotive title.

The three geometric forms hover above the floor and next to each other, ripe with contradictions. Their construction is revealed, they are made of compressed plywood and they have rounded edges like children's toys. There is tension between and within these forms.

To bestow this work with this kind of emotive content divorces it from the theoretical posture of the Americans. It becomes style or methodology from history appropriated for the uses of the individual. Only with the utmost confidence and will can the individual take on such a challenge.

Stanley Kuipieri's "Kibaima Wedding" conveys the idea of ritual. His works are the clearest sign of the Amerindian influence on Aruban art. The surface of the painting appears quite measured. It is an arena upon which the artist calculates his next move or gesture. Painterly mark is juxtapositioned to a collaged feather. Earth is adhered to the surface



TANSION BY ELVIS LOPEZ

PLAYING WITH NATURE
BY MARITZA ERASMUS

into which pictograph-like markings are inscribed. There is a persistent symmetry to the composition of each image which corresponds to the starkness or purity of his use of colour.

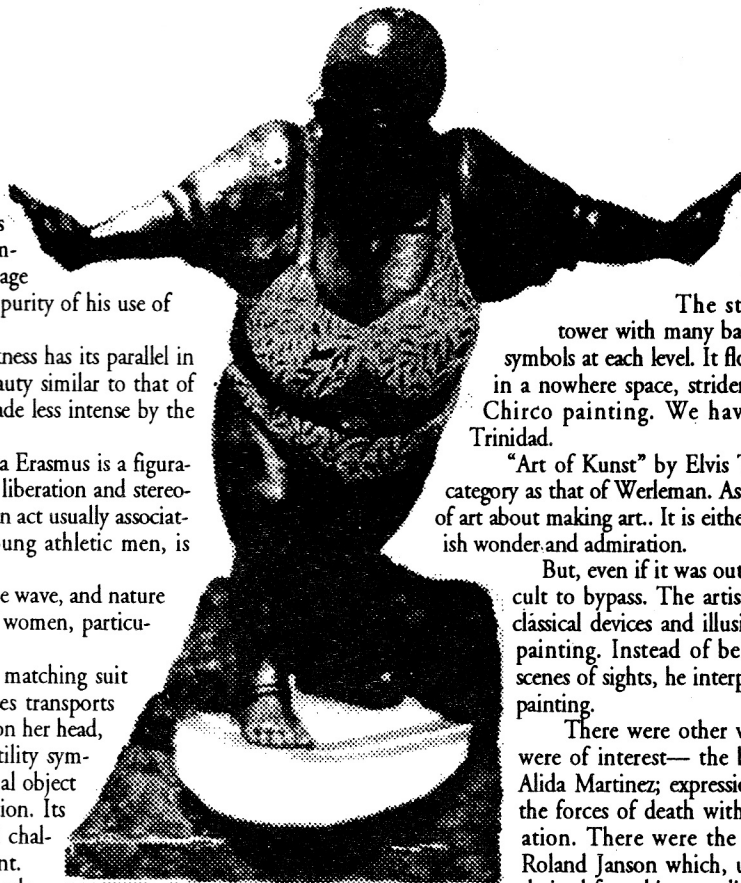
It is not surprising that this starkness has its parallel in the Aruban landscape which has a beauty similar to that of the American South West but it is made less intense by the surrounding ocean.

"Playing with Nature" by Maritza Erasmus is a figurative sculpture. It expresses ideas about liberation and stereotypes. The corpulent woman surfing, an act usually associated with the vigour and daring of young athletic men, is quite engaging.

She is confronting nature as in the wave, and nature as in the stereotypical expectations of women, particularly of this physical type.

This figurine with its polka dot matching suit and bath cap with hornrimmed glasses transports us out of the usual. She has no basket on her head, she is neither African mother nor fertility symbol. This becomes more of a conceptual object than a representative icon or convention. Its sculptural style borders on kitsch and challenges us not only in terms of its content.

The untitled paintings of Marcelo Werleman are those of an "intuitive" artist. Unlike ours in Trinidad, his themes do not address ethnicity or nationalist sentiments. One image portrays a mysterious structure that echoes antique Aruban architecture, thick walled with surface articulation. It is painted in a graphic non-painterly style reminiscent of Spanish tarot cards or the signs outside the



Botanicas which sell sweepstake tickets and other things.

The structure which rises like a tower with many balconies is ripe with signs and symbols at each level. It floats on a white field of colour in a nowhere space, strident and enrapturing like a de Chirco painting. We have nothing quite like it in Trinidad.

"Art of Kunst" by Elvis Tromp falls within the same category as that of Werleman. As the title suggests, it is a work of art about making art. It is either snide commentary or gawkish wonder and admiration.

But, even if it was outright kitsch it would be difficult to bypass. The artist appears to be engrossed in classical devices and illusionism; the idea of artifice in painting. Instead of being tied down to recording scenes of sights, he interprets the devices of traditional painting.

There were other works in this exhibition that were of interest— the bone and spiral paintings of Alida Martinez; expressionistic in tone and balancing the forces of death with those of fertility and recreation. There were the Clemente-like paintings of Roland Janson which, unlike Clemente's images are derived from his own disturbed sensibility rather than

the devices of artmarking.

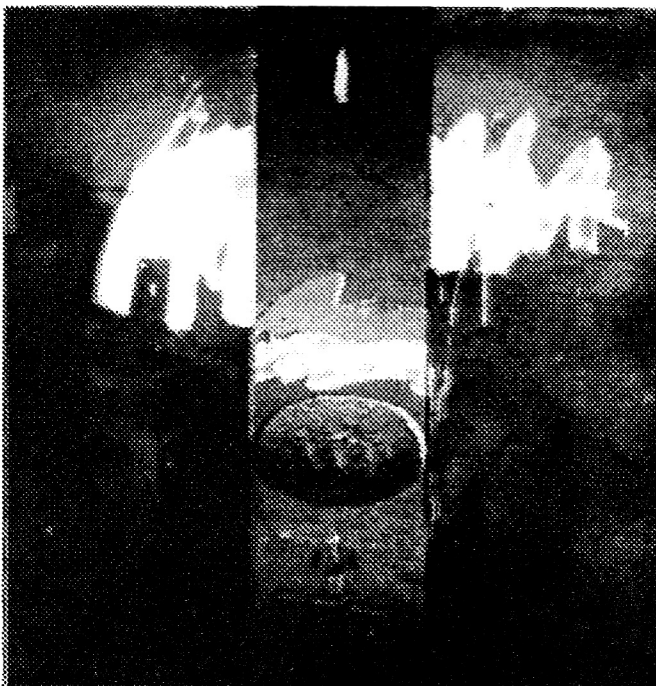
The Mira Arte '92 exhibition indicated that whether self taught or university trained, as artists in the region we are faced with the same problems of whether to stay within the confines of national formulae or to search out authentic forms based upon individual sensibility and our knowledge of art in the region and internationally.

Real art says something about the reach- the largeness of the human spirit rather than the smallness of each particular island community or the landmass. We must advance to a regional idea, anything else would amount to creative genocide.

Aruba seems aware of this, they brought in people from other territories to evaluate their exhibition. They wanted our opinion. They wanted to know what and how we think. They seem anxious rather than comfortable about where they are going - one can only admire them for it.

(The Mira Arte '92 exhibition was a collaboration between Aruba's Instituto di Cultura, UNOCA, their organisation for funding art projects, The Caribbean Mercantile Bank, The Atrium Mall and the artists.

Carib Art project is a UNESCO-funded idea that originated in Curaco. Others present were Ari Martis, Aruban critic living in Holland and Rhiena Ibert from the Dominican Republic.)



KIBAIMA WEDDING
BY STANLEY KUIPIERI.

There have been times in the past when artists in Barbados believed they were witnessing a new vitality in the art scene (artists were producing new and exciting work, exhibitions were challenging, the public was responding), only to experience a subsequent decline in momentum. So I am hesitant to suggest that art in Barbados is at an important, even critical stage in its development - but there are a number of important developments which seem imminent, which will have a significant impact on how art in Barbados is interpreted and presented, and artists should consider these developments seriously.

Firstly, Barbados has suffered without a National Art Gallery and a written history of art for too long. But efforts are underway to redress both these shortcomings. Institutions, both individually and collectively have been making serious efforts to establish a permanent space in which to exhibit work which documents the development of art in Barbados. And currently the Barbados Museum has commenced work on an exhibition and publication documenting art in Barbados during the past sixty years. Both of these are vitally necessary and long overdue. And in both these cases, the history of Barbadian art will be interpreted and moulded and to a certain extent transformed.

Galleries or museums can restrict and transform works of art. For example, the current exhibition spaces available in Barbados place, by their physical space, limitations on the size of work that can be shown. In some instances, the content of the work may become an issue. Permanent collections here and throughout the world must consider the durability of a work of art and many will not acquire a work they cannot conserve and preserve - this may impact upon the type of medium used. And the placement of a work of art in a gallery often changes the context in which that work was meant to be experienced. For example, the experience of a religious altarpiece in the centuries-old church for which it was designed is dramatically different when the same work is displayed within the controlled environment of a museum. Furor was sparked at one exhibition of native North-American art when sacred artifacts reserved for ceremonial purposes were publicly displayed as part of an exhibition, a practice which was in direct opposition to the intended use and display of these objects. At a recent public art lecture, it was suggested that some of the works from the 'Art Over Sugar' happening at Valcluse Factory be placed in a museum or gallery for preservation. In each case, the museum or gallery fundamentally alters the context in which the

work was originally meant to be experienced and understood.

Now I firmly advocate the establishment of a national art gallery. And I believe the Barbados Museum is a most valuable resource which has made a dedicated effort to help the public to understand the original context of the artifacts on display. But we need to understand how art is affected through its placement in an institution to understand what we should demand from these institutions as well as to explore alternative outlets and alternative spaces. 'Art Over Sugar' was important in this respect. Artists can take it upon themselves to provide the resources they need when institutions are unable or unwilling to. Hopefully Barparo will help in this respect.

The forthcoming publication on the past sixty years of art in Barbados (to co-incide with the Museum's sixtieth anniversary) is particularly significant since it will be the first comprehensive assessment of this development. The Museum has enlisted a number of writers and advisors from the fields of art and art education which will hopefully provide a broad basis of knowledge, experience and approach. But this first attempt should not be viewed as a definitive oeuvre which will fully redress the paucity of research in this area. It is, of necessity, a selective process and certain artists and events will inevitably be overlooked or excluded. A thorough and healthy comprehension requires continued research and assessment.

A number of other recent events, regionally and internationally, suggest that art in Barbados and the rest of the Caribbean is at an important point in its development. A number of exhibitions of Caribbean and Latin American art have been staged overseas as far away as Japan and France (although, ironically, we'll never see them). Ras Ishi was recently recognized with a gold medal at the Biennale in the Dominican Republic, one of only two artists in the English-speaking Caribbean to be so honoured. On a wider scale, the Arts in the Caribbean are gaining

increased recognition: Time magazine recently wrote that the Caribbean was becoming a major centre for the writing world following Derek Walcott's award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in October and Patrick Chamoiseau's Prix Goncourt, France's foremost literary award (November 23, 1992, No.47, p.67). This recognition could reflect upon the visual arts in efforts to increase its presence in an international arena.

The establishment of a national gallery of Barbadian art, and the publication of a history of art in Barbados will both be important landmarks in the development of art in this country. But artists should ponder the implications of these developments, for some of them are far-reaching.

Barbados has suffered without a National Art Gallery and a written history of art for too long.

Allison Thompson

R E V I E W

ART OVER SUGAR

- The Video -

*A personal view, concentrating on the Visual Arts.
Alison Greaves.*

Monday, 2nd November at Community College, The Fine Art Department hosted the second 1992 art history lecture. Sculptor and activist, Gayle Hermick, and painter/printmaker, Annalee Davis showed their edited video ART OVER SUGAR, a "happening" at Crop-Over that they devised and orchestrated. Artists painted banners, walls and machinery, becoming background on the day to poets, prose readers, comedians, musicians in classical, folk and jazz idioms responding to a derelict sugar factory and the closing era of sugar.

The video brought attention to the art. Close-up shots showed colour and texture missed on the day. For instance - plantation houses, mechanical cutters, cranes, though weak in situ looked good on screen due to its episodal character. She herself, (Hillary Armstrong) appeared poignant, contemplating with a bewildered expression, a future without sugar. Gail's chairs, made from iron parts retrieved at the factory, showed clearly on film, crowds hid them on the day.

The only visual artist to do a performance was Annalee Davis - (wrapping Colin Hudson like a mummy while he sang the National Anthem). Her training made her comfortable in this. She was the star of both video and the actual event, and came over as by far the strongest artist although others tried to provoke. Goldie Spieler's excellent pottery dinner set depicted

(to her), tourism taking over from sugar. This seems anachronistic as 1992 may also be tourism's last good year.

Akyem and Ishi worked with images of the crucifixion. Akyem's more abstract used factory parts bolted on the wall. Sharon Oran's use of the government slogan "Sugar For Export" started as signs on the road leading to Vaucluse. This variety of responses was the strength of the film.

The video became a work in its own right, separate from the event. Those that missed the day were given a chance to share the experience, and give their opinions. Nick Whittle's comment afterwards - artists should not have to explain work - poets don't, dancers don't, so why did artists appear on the film, doing so? Gayle and Annalee replied that it was so the film could be used as educational material. However in my opinion, it helped where the images were not easily understood. Some artists were not photogenic, so a voice over would have been better.

I felt more artists should have been involved for more impact. Gayle and Annalee disagreed, they wanted to avoid the overcrowding seen in local exhibitions.

The question of professional T.V. equipment was raised. This would have been preferred, but as the total cost was \$600.00, the result was astonishing. Gail's and Annalee's planning, enthusiasm and faith in the project refreshed everyone. A group of artists celebrated the past in a way unique for Barbados.

Cast were: Ras Akyem (painter), Geraldine Archer (clarinet player), Hilary Armstrong (visual artist), Alison Chapman-Andrews (painter), Annalee Davis (painter and performance artist), Anne Dodson (painter), Winston Farrell (poet), Bill Grace (painter), Gayle Hermick (sculptor), Ras Ishi (painter), Richard Layne (folk singer), Eric Lewis (poet/MADD comedians writer), Sharon Oran (sculptor), Ken Corsbie (storyteller), Goldie Spieler (potter), Arlette St Hill (painter), Arturo Tappin (saxophonist), Derek Went (visual artist), The Barbados Dance Theatre Co., Jeanette Springer (storyteller), and guest, Colin Hudson. The video was produced by Len Corsbie and Melanie Springer with the cooperation of the Audio Visual Aids Department.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

RAS AKYEMI AND RAS ISHI

Barbadian art has become of age. For the past 75 years, Barbadian art has been in a slow gestation period and, with the development of the society, we have seen certain organisations form in the visual arts (and other Creative Arts) to further encourage and assist the practitioners of such fields. In the past, the aged Arts Council, the National Cultural Foundation, and the Art Collection Foundation have all been providing certain facilities for the artist.

The conception of the arts (visual) over the past 10 years has been so rapid and tremendous, that it has either outgrown or matured too quickly for the existing organisations. These organisations either lack the knowledge of the professional art world, or they have just decided to stick in their safe and conservative mould. Whatever the case, serious neglect has been dished out to the artist, and has placed art into a serious crisis, something which we have uttered continuously to the art and Barbadian society (see newspaper article).

During this swift development, certain infections have affected both the artist and the organisations. This must be highlighted and examined, and we must try to find some cure so we can move into another period of our growth (existence).

ADULTHOOD - The innovative "happening", Art Over Sugar, which was a cooperative effort amongst various Artists, including poets, writers, musicians, sculptors, painters, etc, who interpreted the title individually in an alternative setting to the traditional theatre, hall, gallery, etc - the old demised & haunted Vauclose sugar factory. It was out of this happening, and

the unprofessional way in which CARIFESTA 5 (held in Trinidad) was organised, that some of these visual artists formed the group Barbados Artists' Representation (BAR). These artists showed their dissatisfaction by submitting a piece of work, well framed for judging, to CARIFESTA. The work was a written statement explaining their grievance. It was signed by the artists and rejected by the judges.

The first and foremost objective of BAR is to raise the standards of excellence. A diagnostic test on artists has proved that a terrible disease has penetrated our realm.

MEDIOCRITY - This problem is not only endemic among artists, but seems to have become a norm throughout society. For in Barbados, things that are exceptional and original give way to cheap and foreign, and society drives its creative minds into exile or isolation, due to ignorance and the drowning of self.

This major problem is very painful and difficult to cure, for artists can only acquire certain "taste" when a continuous assessment and interrogation of quality are instinctively directed towards each other's work. And, in Barbados, most artists avoid and abhor criticism, feeling that their works have reached a pinnacle. For if you try to give any critical analysis of most artist's work, they respond with serious remarks, such as, "who do you think you are?"; "you think that you are the best artist?"; and, "it is my work, and who are you to criticise it?".

Some may even go further, in threatening to deal with you legally. So everyone shies away from this operation.

With such prevailing conditions, art critics, the few there are, avoid making any critical reviews of shows. We have now reached a chronic stage where every artist

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believes that he/she is a master, or is fooled into believing that the works in the exhibitions are great because newspaper journalists, who are not art critics, glorify these exhibitions in their so-called reviews. Using words or phrases such as "one of Barbados' greatest" or "one of Barbados' leading exponents of the arts," their articles only make a descriptive analysis of a show, mentioning the number of paintings, talk about subject matter and high prices, etc.

If these artists are labelled as "greats" (& are not), don't you expect serious prices for their work? For the so-called critics (journalists) must realize that quality must be paid for. But, since most of the so-called critics (reviewers) are not satisfied with the prices, it means that something must be wrong in relation to quality.

Art critics must have the guts and courage to express their feelings instinctively about the artists' works, because it is a creative response and analysis. We must be honest in admitting what is good or bad, or be taught to acquire the knowledge of what is considered to be refinement.

The problem of mediocrity also came about because of certain social illnesses that exist in our society. Social stratification by race and class has caused the arts in Barbados to be starved and undernourished. For, in the early 1900-20, the exponents of visual arts were mainly white, with few fortunate blacks. This feature mainly arose because most of the whites control the economics and were able to educate their children abroad, while the blacks were mainly self-taught with some assistance from educated whites. This left little room for communication and the analysing of each others works in the open society - for there were no galleries (to our knowledge), at the time. And Barbados was strictly a polarized society, Black and White, or master and servant. This trend continued until around the 60's & 70's, when some blacks could afford education or won scholarships so that they could have studied abroad. By that time also certain expatriates who had also received artistic education began to visit the island.

But the division further continues with the whites and privileged educated blacks, either isolating themselves in their studios or teaching at certain secondary schools or Barbados Community College.

Very little artistic knowledge was shared with the self-taught artists and there was no participation in exhibitions. The development of the Arts Council did, at that time, allow some association of artists, but the issue of polarization was still a major factor.

By that time the Barbadian society was changing,

allowing more education to blacks, and more young artists sprung up who had little or no contact with the whites and privileged educated blacks. They were forced to find refuge in a group such as De Pam, in order to improve their skills and find a means of exposure. This group, also polarized, came under the same problems as the upper class - stagnation due to the inbreeding of ideas and techniques and lack of artistic education (historical and philosophical). Most of the artists in the group were actually doing the same thing, which was drawing and painting small water colours and knowing very little about things such as composition and form, and different stylistic approaches.

This infectious polarization no doubt has caused serious problems - for no mixing means no sharing of ideas or techniques, lacking of discussions, etc, and this leads to serious repetition and dormancy.

Although this problem was being chipped-at in the 80's & 90's, we are still faced with it seriously. For you will see certain artists & patrons turn up at the exhibition openings of the white and privileged few, but not turn up at some of the other exhibitions. Some of these patrons even perpetuate the idea by only buying from certain individuals (although it is their choice to buy whatever they want).

Like the patrons, artists have never discussed the issue or refuse to face up to the problem, like the society in general. Now that the Barbadian society is under economic strain, most of the artists realize that in order to survive, one cannot only depend on the small patronizing Art society which buys very little, but one must extend one's wings abroad. But a serious question arises: Can most Barbadian artists do work of serious standard to compete in the monstrous art world?

To be continued

The Coffee and Cream Gallery has reopened. They will operate five days a week. Tuesday to Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Along with the usual selection of original paintings and prints, sculptures, carvings, pottery, batik and jewellery, they have also extended their social services. There is a full bar service, a wonderful selection of deserts, as well as tea and coffee. They look forward to again representing and selling artists of Barbados.

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW...

...Altos de Chavon, The School of Design in affiliation with Parsons School of Design is an innovative center for the arts located in the Dominican Republic (DR). It is committed to education, design excellence, international creative exchange, and the promotion of Dominican culture. The center is located on the southeastern coast of the DR in the town of La Romana. It is a drive of only 80 minutes away from the Santo Domingo International airport. The center offers an Artist-In-Residence programme bringing established artists, writers, and performers to the village to spend a season working, lecturing, and teaching. Twelve such positions are available each year. If you are interested in finding out more about this programme, you may write to either Lic. Stephen Kaplan, Rector, Altos de Chavon Cultural Center Foundation, 66 Fifth Ave, NY, NY 10011. Tel/fax 212-299-8907; or, Departamento de Artistas-en-Residencia, Directora - Ingrid Bircann, Altos de Chavon, Apartado Postal 140, La Romana, Republica Dominicana, Tel 809-523-3333 ext 2354 or fax 809-523-8312...

..... The Wifredo Lam Center in Havana, Cuba organizes a high quality Biennial under the direction of LLiliam LLanes. The next Biennial is scheduled for December 1993. Artists have to be invited, there is no application process. However, you may only be invited if they know that you exist, so send all relevant information including slides (they will keep them), resume, artists statement, and any articles on your work. The address is LLiliam LLanes, The Wifredo Lam Center, Oficinas 420, Havana 1, Cuba. Tel 613419/fax 612096.

ART GALLERIES

ART WORX Quayside Centre, Rockley, Ch.Ch. 435-8112
... Sue Carter

THE BARBADOS MEUSEUM St Anns, The Garrison, 436-1956 / 427-0201... Leslie Barrow

PELICAN GALLERY / Barbados Arts Council Pelican Village. 425-4305

BLACK RENAISSANCE ART GALLERY & FRAMING SHOP St.Lawrence Gap, Ch.Ch. 428-6333, 431-0587...Clairmont Mapp.

COFFEE & CREAM GALLERY Paradise Village, St. Lawrence Gap, 428-2708....Darla or David Trotman.

FINE ART FRAMING LTD. Dougleston, St.Micael's Row. 426-5325 ... lola Ganteume.

FINE CRAFTS Chattel House Vlg. St.Lawrence Gap.428-4289...Ronald Watson

THE FLOWER SHOPPE & GALERIE 17 Pine Rd, Belleville. 426-7559...Hetty Atkinson

THE GREAT HOUSE GALLERY C/o Bagatelle Great House Restaurant, H'way 2A, St.Thomas. 421-6767... Mr Richings / Jo Robinson.

MANGO JAM GALLERY #1 Pavillion Court, Hastings, ...Sharon Oran.

ORIGINS Waterfront, Bridgetown. 436-8522...Pat

THE POTTER'S HOUSE GALLERY Edghill Heights, St.Thomas. 425-5463 ...David Spieler

THE STUDIO ART GALLERY Speedbird House, Fairchild Street, B'town. 427-5463. ...Rachelle Altman

THE VERANDAH GALLERY Upper Broad St. 426-2605
...Indrani Whittingham.

ARTIST'S MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

ART EXPRESS Skyway Plaza, Hastings, Ch.Ch. 429-4251...Mrs Wright

ART WORX Quayside Centre, Rockley, Ch.Ch. 435-8112...Sue Carter

BRYDENS STATIONERY Victoria Street, 431-2600
Hastings Plaza, 435-8112. Sheraton Mall, 437-0970.
