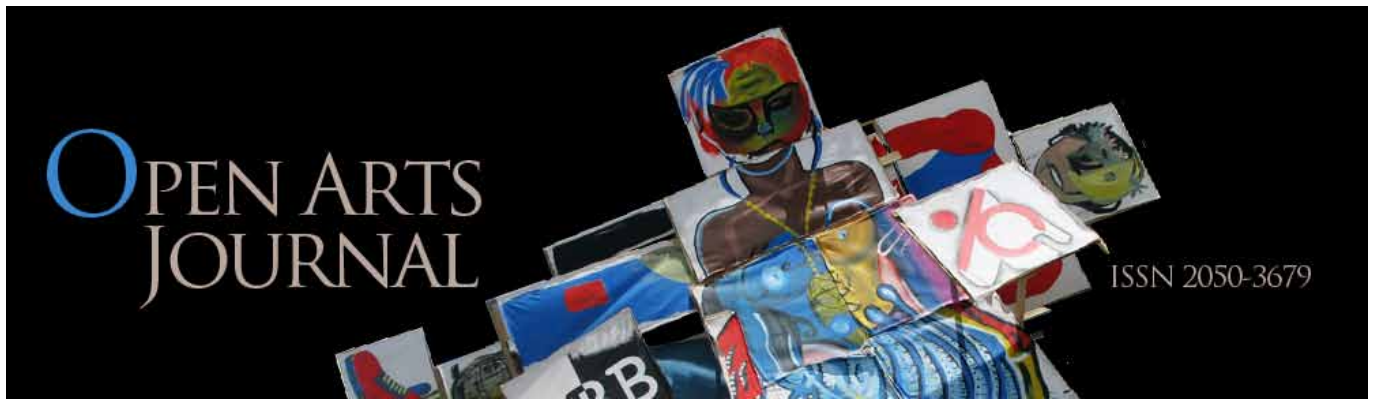




CHAMPAGNE TASTES AND MAUBY POCKETS? TOWARDS HEALTHY CULTURAL ECO-SYSTEMS IN BARBADOS

Annalee Davis

Abstract

After more than four and half years of programming, The Fresh Milk Art Platform is at a significant juncture, pondering what sustainability looks like in a region where the needs of visual artists outstrip the capacity of the environments they live and work in. As a social practice art project with a vision exceeding its financial means, Fresh Milk (FM) seeks a model that acknowledges the local and regional context. It is committed to expanding the critical arena, asserting itself in a way that is not driven by the market or by external forces out of sync with its own agenda. In the quest for sustainability, FM questions how a small, artist-led initiative might continue to respond to the needs of local contemporary visual artists. A new model is required to allow spaces like FM to maintain their intellectual and creative independence and become less vulnerable economically. What is a viable model for a social practice, artist-led project like FM that may contribute to strengthening healthy cultural eco-systems locally and in the Caribbean? This article merely shapes the contours of such a model.

Keywords: Fresh Milk, Caribbean, contemporary art, sustainability, innovation

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Biographical note

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To view the film footage on the Open Arts Archive, www.openartsarchive.org, follow this link:

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/archive/2nd-conference-sustainable-art-communities-creativity-and-policy-transnational-caribbean-0>

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CHAMPAGNE TASTES AND MAUBY POCKETS TOWARDS HEALTHY CULTURAL ECO-SYSTEMS IN BARBADOS

Annalee Davis, Independent Visual Artist, Founding Director of Fresh Milk

We had wanted something more than what the plantation had enabled, and we had wanted to make the road by walking even though we made lots of mistakes along the way.

(Ford-Smith, 2015)

The Fresh Milk Art Platform (FM) is a registered not-for-profit organisation formally launched at an on-site public event at its premises on 13 August 2011. This article presents the organisation as a case study in contribution to a larger conversation on sustainable art communities in the Anglophone Caribbean and the Dutch Antilles. Firstly, it offers background to the birth of the organisation and provides a sense of the activities and arts programming supported over the past four and a half years. Secondly, it describes the challenges, financial and otherwise, of building a contemporary visual-arts organisation in a post-colonial Caribbean island, including balancing the needs of a small contemporary visual arts community while necessarily reaching out to the region, the diaspora and various art-worlds. Lastly, the article addresses the inherent ordeals and possibilities in relation to the organisation's location on the site of a former sugarcane plantation.

The title refers to a well-known Barbadian phrase, often used critically, to speak to people who live beyond their means. In 2008, at CARIFESTA¹ in Guyana, I witnessed an exchange between the writer Derek Walcott and the then-president of Guyana, Bharat Jagdeo, demonstrating the vastly different value systems from the contrasting perspectives of a writer and a politician. President Jagdeo suggested that, given the choice, his electorate would vote for the government of Guyana to maintain the capital city's roads and the

¹ CARIFESTA is a regional festival of arts and culture that takes place, on average, every two years in a different Caribbean country. CARIFESTA is organised by the government of the country hosting the festival.

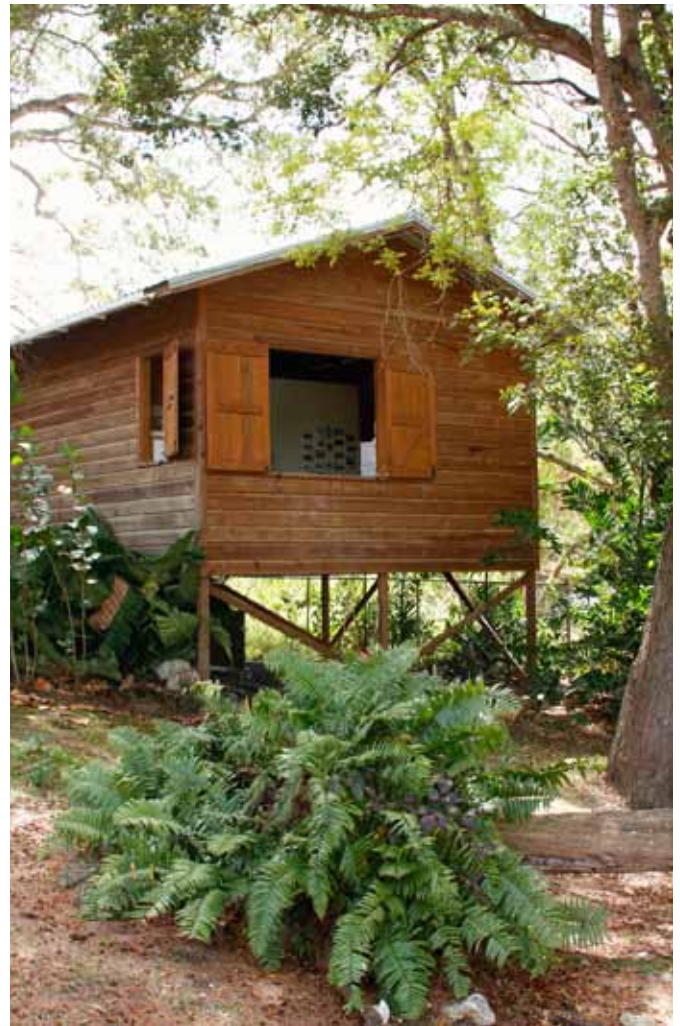


Figure 9.1: The Fresh Milk Studio, 2013. (Photo: Mark King)

coastal sea wall rather than make poetry available to the masses. Walcott replied, somewhat angrily, that Caribbean people should not have to choose and that there is a vital need for both bread and poetry to be made available to all. While many may only afford to drink mauby, the story of the Caribbean is that its people often aim for much more than what their current economic realities can provide. The title also suggests that the vision of FM goes beyond its current financial means. The radical goal then, is to design a sustainable model for an organisation that believes we should not have to choose between having a sea wall or pothole-free public roads, and poetry or visual art.

The beginnings

Fresh Milk's mission is to be an artist-led, interdisciplinary organisation that supports artists and promotes wise social, economic and environmental stewardship of the visual arts through creative engagement with society and by cultivating excellence in the arts. Its genesis was in response to the almost 100% attrition rate of students who graduate with a BFA degree from Barbados Community College, and who within a year of graduation stop working as visual

artists because of the lack of a developed infrastructure to support their practice. FM was set up to nurture these young Barbadian artists. Moreover, years of teaching at Barbados Community College have enabled me to develop long-term relationships with emerging local artists. Whiteness and inherent privilege are problematic markers in postcolonial societies but the classroom context, which brings races, ages, genders and classes together over an extended period, helps to break down ossified expectations and permeate boundaries.

The concept for the organisation developed over many years of conversations with other visual artists in response to a lack of opportunities for contemporary artists living and working in Barbados, as well as the desire to mitigate isolation by fostering a creative and critical community. Fundamental goals include strengthening links across all linguistic areas of the region and its diaspora, and the forging of new relationships internationally. This has more recently included developing partnerships with the Global South and North since 2013 and 2014, respectively. For example, in mid-2014, participation in the cultural component of the Commonwealth games hosted in Glasgow provided an opportunity to expand activities beyond the region and its diaspora. Collectively, these activities contribute to the overall aim of shaping an integrated, sustainable and healthy cultural ecosystem in Barbados while engaging with the wider Caribbean and beyond.

The ecological analogy for the visual arts sector attends to the dimensions and parameters of an arts ecology geographically, financially, conceptually and, more particularly, the lack of established formal arts infrastructure on Barbados. This includes the absence of a national art gallery, a contemporary art museum, limited primary and secondary art markets, auction houses, branded curators, art writers, dealers, collectors and the like. An example of how this ecosystem might continue to expand, including developing partnerships with local government entities, the private sector, individual artists and other artists' networks, is FM's consideration of a larger kind of sustainability that leads to such a healthy cultural ecosystem. The organisation is set up as a not-for-profit by default because in the Caribbean, like in many other places, there are three established sectors: private, not-for-profit and governmental. In the past fifteen years, there has been discussion about the emergence of a fourth sector:

While the mission and method of many organizations ... are becoming steadily more similar, something more than simple blurring

of the boundaries is occurring. Pioneering organizations in the three sectors are in fact converging toward a fundamentally new organizational sector that integrates social purposes with business methods: a Fourth Sector.

(Fourth Sector, n.d.)

The three pre-existing sectors have morphed somewhat by pulling strategies from one another, for example: the private sector speaks of corporate social responsibility and the informal network is moving towards more structured formats. This fourth sector requires a revision of corporate, not-for-profit, IP, tax and consumer-protection laws. In other words, capital is not seen exclusively in financial terms, rather this emerging model speaks to generating transparency, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness and social investing – values that inspire the work at FM. However, while there is value in considering some aspects of the fourth sector model, the legal framework of inter-operability between all stakeholders does not exist in Barbados at this time. The organisation is legally set up as not-for-profit and is considering developing a second status to register as a charity in order to access tax benefits for philanthropic donors.

The spatial and the historical ramifications of location

FM is located on the premises of Walkers Dairy, a former sugarcane plantation, operational since the 1660s. Historically, the plantation was an exclusive venue, hospitable only to the elite (usually white) planter class, who oversaw the inhumane treatment of the enslaved and indentured, and the exploitation of natural resources all in the pursuit of profit. Indeed, before the close of the seventeenth century, the entire island operated as a plantation. In 1920, my paternal great-grandmother, Edith Gertrude Davis, acquired Walkers plantation. After she retired it was managed by my grandfather and since the mid-1980s, my brother succeeded him and transitioned it from a sugarcane plantation to a dairy farm. Due to the island's traumatic historical legacy the appropriateness of the physical location of Fresh Milk on a former plantation is inevitably raised. Furthermore, it is managed by myself, a white Barbadian woman from a privileged background, raised on a sugarcane plantation and educated at art schools in the USA to graduate level, and this too prompts questions about who has the right to participate in this cultural space, and to what extent race and class facilitate or alienate involvement.

FM operates out of my studio on family property, deliberately flagging an alternative employment of the plantation for using the arts to imagine non-hierarchical

possibilities for human engagement and understanding. While inherited legacies present the island and the region as perpetually fractured, divided and broken, our goal is to shape new strategies that challenge by re-imagining and re-visioning this difficult heritage. As a Barbadian, I am acutely sensitive to the inequities of the island's colonial past and very aware of my inherent privilege; my commitment is to address these difficult issues head-on and find ways to shift ground, nurture culture and shape fresh possibilities.

This model of artists transforming family properties into artist-led initiatives is not uncommon in the Caribbean. Informal art networks have proliferated in the past ten to fifteen years and emerged from very specific and often intimate spaces.² Often, the lack of formal visual-arts infrastructure has initiated this repurposing of privately owned spaces or institutions in the Caribbean, transforming them into centres of critical thinking and creative output. It is in these spaces that artists are given permission to experiment and innovate, investigating the Caribbean not as exotic paradise but revealing more diverse lived realities, thereby becoming the subject rather than the object of representation. Ideally, these artist-led initiatives would be one of a range of sites working alongside ministries of culture, national art galleries, contemporary art museums and cultural foundations, each playing complementary roles in advancing the visual arts while supporting each other's mandates. Depending on location, this has happened in the Caribbean to greater or, far more commonly, lesser degrees.

Phytoremediation and rhizomatic thinking

The scientific process 'phytoremediation' offers a philosophical metaphor for FM's mission. It refers to the ability of some plants' root structures to absorb toxins from a toxic field and restore harmony. Similarly, FM, out of the toxic memories associated with a former plantation space, consciously designs local, regional and international programming to create other possibilities for alternate futures. Located on a site that was closed but is now striving to be open, it is a custodian of a library with some 2,500 books. This may also be seen as informed by Édouard Glissant's rhizomatic thinking (1989), which provides an additional conceptual framework for re-visioning the island's

2 Popop Studios in Nassau, Bahamas, was originally a bed-and-breakfast owned by John Cox's aunt while Alice Yard in Woodbrook, Trinidad, was the home and backyard of architect Sean Leonard's grandmother. Others have institutional histories, including: Ateliers '89, operating out of a former school in Oranjestad, Aruba, and the Instituto Buena Vista in Curaçao, which is located on a functioning psychiatric clinic.

poisoned history, largely by creating conditions that facilitate new growth. The model denies the existence of a single root, presenting instead the rhizome and its rhizosphere – the zone surrounding the roots of the plants – as a model for human interaction. In the context of FM, the rhizosphere includes its physical location on the plantation and its broader collective historical context both of which inform and determine contemporary relations in terms of race and class.

Through creative interventions and the development of critical, inclusive programming, the necessary reconciliation with the land and our collective history is attempted via using a socially engaged art practice to trouble old (colonial) paradigms that no longer serve contemporary society. In this contemporary moment, FM can also be seen as a place for resistance, actively working to shape a creative vision of the future and shedding colonial stigma by reclaiming this territory through one of the most powerful vehicles for social change: the arts.

George Lamming, in his 1985 essay 'In defense of cultural sovereignty', states that

[t]he original meaning of the word, culture, had to do with the tending of plants and the care of animals. In other words, this work and the process it describes, has its roots in the practice of agriculture, and it has never lost this sense of nurturing; of feeding, of cultivating, whether it be a body or a mind that is under consideration.

(Lamming, 2011, p. 142)

FM's physical location on a working dairy farm is a daily reminder of the original meaning of culture.

Fostering local talent

We need to do the work to nurture a space at home so folks like him – the countless others who have left and the countless others who remain – can find community and safety there.

(Ford-Smith, 2015)³

In a number of ways, the organisation offers both a place to study and opportunities for young artists. Fresh Milk Books (FMB) launched in April 2014. It is an initiative of the Colleen Lewis Reading Room (CLRR) at FM, housing approximately 2,500 books available for consultation by anyone interested in contemporary Caribbean visual practice and visual art. The goal is to continually develop the CLRR into a comprehensive, on-site arts library and intellectual literary resource,

3 By 'him' Ford-Smith is referring to Jamaican novelist Marlon James and his recent publication *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

specializing in texts which critically engage with Caribbean and diasporic life and thought. The FMB team comprises a small group of Barbadian artists and writers writing for the FMB online platform, and participating in workshops on long-form journalism, the art of essay writing and the history of curating. These workshops are led by international artists in residence and thus contribute to the professional development of the FMB group.

Another example would be the facilitation of opportunities for young Barbadian artists to present and speak about their work to other students, as well as to visiting university professors, professionals from the visual arts sector and both local and international artists who are in residence at FM, thus allowing young artists to expand their networks. In these ways, FM also demonstrates its commitment to local audiences as valid networks. Conceptualised as a zone of becoming, FM is at times a testing ground for creative experimentation, allowing practitioners a protected space in which to think, make and innovate. It therefore functions as a springboard for process-oriented and research-based creative practice and reasoning, in part through its residency programme. This provides artists with intellectual and artistic freedom to unpack

conceptual issues and experiment with aesthetic decisions. Furthermore, identifying specific skill sets among the FM team allows for growth and increased efficiency of the organisation. Developing skills in communication and social media, and community-based approaches for educational programming means that personal aspirations of team members can be supported through their involvement with the organisation.

At the moment, the core of the organisation includes three people who manage the daily administrative tasks and who are supported by several volunteers. The organisation has hosted eighteen local events in the past four and a half years including lectures, screenings, theatrical readings, workshops, book launches and exhibitions, all free and open to the public. In support of these investigations, the organisation expands visibility for and engagement with these ideas through public events, informal gatherings and collaborative regional and international projects, all archived on an active online domain. Continually fostering interaction, exchange and education happens through linking the development of emerging artists, writers, critics and cultural practitioners through residency programmes, workshops, exhibition opportunities and events.



Figure 9.2: Anna Christina Lorenzen and Alberta Whittle, *Blue*, 2012. Performance still.
(© Anna Christina Lorenzen and Alberta Whittle)



Figure 9.3: Matthew Murrell performing a theatrical reading at FRESH MILK X, 2013. (Photo: Dondré Trotman)

Regional and global relations – Being invited out | inviting in

In order for FM, as an inclusive initiative functioning out of a very small island, to be sustainable and healthy, its mission cannot be confined only to Barbados. Since November 2012, FM has hosted twenty-two international artist residencies, allowing local and international artists to broaden their scope of engagement and exchange. One pattern emerging via the international residency programme is that artists of colour located in Caribbean diasporic art communities see the artist residencies as opportunities to learn more about their relationship with the Caribbean. First- and second-generation Caribbean people feel connected to this region through family, culture and race. For some, having been culturally dislocated or marginalised as people of colour in the Global North reaffirms their sense of belonging to the Caribbean. On arrival to the island however, this romantic feeling is complicated, and the struggle to locate the self in the diasporic as well as ancestral home is often a large part of the learning process in the residency experience. A recent Afro-Canadian resident artist wrote in her blog: 'sometimes i feel like an ethnographer, because

even though i am bajan, i am not from here' (Robinson 2015). Thus, research-based international residencies allow for other kinds of engagements between the local and international art arena.

Working with informal arts organisations regionally and internationally facilitates the production of works, the movement of artists, the transfer of knowledge and the on-going development of professional skills of creative people. These activities aim to sensitise local, regional and international audiences to the contemporary arts coming out of the Caribbean and its cultural value. They also demonstrate an interest on the part of regionally based, artist-led initiatives to participate in broader dialogues, connecting artists beyond the confines of the insular Caribbean.

Mapping the Caribbean | Growing a diasporic network

FM's virtual online map of Caribbean art spaces, launched in October 2013, seeks to challenge the ways in which colonial powers segmented the region linguistically to produce artificial divisions between Caribbean people (Fresh Milk Barbados, 2013). This interactive map reinforces the possibility of forging links across linguistic divisions, reformulating an interrelated Caribbean region by showcasing arts entities from the nineteenth century until now. The map lends itself to giving greater awareness of what is happening across the region, facilitating research and allowing for collaboration among individuals and entities. The map also supports the establishment of relations with other regional networks in order to see how projects might be developed, possibly linking the Caribbean with the Americas, Asia, Africa, Oceania and Europe, thereby supporting a strategic goal to activate this network intra-regionally and globally through collaborations.

One example of the growing diasporic network is Aruba Linked/Caribbean Linked (2012) and the subsequent Caribbean Linked II and III (2013, 2015) in Aruba. This residency project formed strong bonds to continue after the residency through social-media platforms including Whatsapp.

Simultaneously, connections are being continually nurtured with extra-regional spaces including Videobrasil in São Paulo, the David Dale Gallery and Studios in Glasgow, the Pérez Art Museum Miami in the US and the Amsterdam-based global residency network Res Artis. FM is currently one of two Caribbean residencies registered with both Res Artis and TransArtists, both online residency networks with a directory of over four hundred global artist-residency programmes in more than seventy countries. The benefit of a Res Artis membership is increased visibility



Figure 9.4: Screening of Iara Lee's documentary *Cultures of Resistance* (2010) at FRESH MILK VIII, 2012. (Photo: Dondré Trotman)

for our international residency programme, leading to artists from all over the world submitting applications. Another benefit included a 2014 Res Support Fellowship programme being awarded to a member of the FM team, Katherine Kennedy. She spent three months as a fellow at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany, where she worked as a resident correspondent, interacted with personnel and fellows, conducted interviews and generally learned how to run an effective residency programme. This knowledge was then applied to FM allowing best practices to develop. In these ways, expanding networks serves to initiate constructive and innovative methods of working with collaborators to create visibility for and understanding of contemporary practice in Barbados and the wider region.

Collaborating digitally

FM maintains an active online platform with a website documenting the organisation's activities contributing to an archive of contemporary art practice in the region. Social-media platforms include a Facebook page for FM and FMB, and Twitter and Instagram accounts providing increased access to information about programming and activities. These tools facilitate FM's capacity to extend relationships being shaped

with individual artists as well as institutions nationally, regionally and internationally, allowing important projects to develop.

The International Artist Initiated (IAI) project is a concrete example of how digital interconnectivity allowed FM to expand its network to include artist-led initiatives from around the Commonwealth. The David Dale Gallery and Studio based in Scotland conducted online research for their IAI project and selected FM from the Caribbean to participate in the cultural component of the Commonwealth Games hosted in Glasgow in the summer of 2014. The works of three Barbadian artists (Mark King, Alberta Whittle and Ronald Williams) were taken to David Dale Gallery. In addition, FM coordinated a discursive project, 'Common-Wealth/Single-Wealth' (Davis, 2014), and invited the other participating artist-led Commonwealth-based organisations from Cyprus, India, New Zealand, Nigeria and Scotland, to contribute to this dialogical component. The aim of the conversation was in part to unpack ideas related to the Commonwealth of Nations, the association under which countries gather every four years to celebrate sport.

However, while the gaze of the contemporary art world is increasingly shifting by degrees to the Global



Figure 9.5: The audience at FRESH MILK X, 2013. (Photo: Dondré Trotman)

South, including the Caribbean, and awareness about FM grows exponentially because of its active web presence, there is some frustration about capacity. Greater visibility in a wider global pool means that opportunities are increasingly available, but the downside is that engaging with more networks or accepting many of the invitations are difficult due to a lack of human and financial resources. For example, while being invited to participate in the Stockholm Independent Art Fair in Sweden in 2016 or the THAT Art Fair in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2017, is promising, it will more than likely stretch the limits of the administrative and financial capacity of the organisation beyond its capacities.

Finding the right model and the right resources

At her keynote lecture for the Former West conference in Berlin (March 2013) visual culture studies scholar Irit Rogoff expressed the need to reoccupy infrastructure and to reframe questions, arguing for casting the dynamics in a different way. The suggestion was to understand the link between collectivity and infrastructure and to rethink the interdependence between resources and power that would be manifest among various strata of stakeholders (Rogoff, 2013). In

contrast with the 'Former West' that Rogoff has in view, the Caribbean is a context largely without a formal arts infrastructure, or at least with very limited provisions for the arts. That aspect of Rogoff's argument about opportunities to be had, not despite but *because* of such an absence of infrastructure, is a compelling one for the Caribbean. It may help to generate new models in the region rather than have the Caribbean mimic first-world infrastructures, ill-suited to Caribbean needs, goals and circumstances.

Such is FM's attempt. It operates in a local context with a very limited formal arts infrastructure. Like other Caribbean artist-led initiatives, keen to support the art-making process rather than marketing market-ready products, models of sustainability need to be envisioned and structured in ways that will allow them to fulfil their mandates and maintain intellectual independence. This is in a local context where there is immense pressure from the Ministry responsible for culture to encourage artists to become entrepreneurs. In a 2015 *The Barbados Advocate* Business Monday newspaper article on the creative industries development workshop entitled 'Towards a Sustainable Creative Sector at the Cave Hill School of Business', Lisa Cummins, Executive Director of the Barbados Coalition of Service Industries (BCSI),

said that the 'Cultural and Creative Industries is [sic] one of the development pillars in the economic trajectory.' Following on, Ruth Blackman, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth commented: 'Cultural practitioners must also position themselves for investment. While Barbados is the primary market, it is through the exportation of products that economic gains are maximised' (Cummins & Blackman, 2015).

This, however, is a more complex issue. In 2012, UK-based Andrew Senior of Andrew Senior Associates was hired by the government of Barbados with funding provided by UNESCO and the European Union to prepare a diagnostic report on Barbados' cultural industries. Two of his key findings were:

- (i) The concept of the creative and cultural industries is not well understood and the absence of robust and coherent economic data makes it impossible both to begin to counter these misapprehensions and undertake evidence-based policy making for the sector and (ii) Networks are underdeveloped, under-utilised and require support and investment.

(Senior, 2012)

But pressuring visual artists to enter the international art world as businesses is deeply problematic and demonstrates little understanding of the sector, especially when the government supports free education for a BFA at Barbados Community College, but gives little thought to how to nurture an environment in which artists might continue making work after graduation. In contrast, government entities tend to engage with culture at an amateur level.

It continues to be difficult for FM to generate adequate funding for programming and to remunerate three members of staff facing increased daily administrative tasks. FM is therefore at a crossroads. Given the growing interest in the organisation and the constantly expanding opportunities, the workload has become very heavy for the team of volunteers. While generating cultural capital and nurturing the local community, the small core group of staff is in danger of becoming financially unsustainable. Internal debate is about designing a more formal structure in order to grow and become more effective in responding to the needs and available opportunities, for instance: visual artists increasingly make structural contributions to the public as they shift from managing projects to growing an organisation. One such model for sustainability combines income from four revenue streams: international residency fees, grants, philanthropic donations, and government subvention.

• *Residency fees*

While the organisation has been able to periodically source funding and three benefactors generously support six local residencies through donations (including a stipend for the artists), international residents are charged a fee of US \$1,000 for a one-month residency period. This fee includes accommodation in a flat, access to a studio and the reading room and administrative support for the resident artist. Income from the residency fees has in part supported general overheads and some programming which often include a public event at the end of a residency.

• *Grants and the grant-writing dilemma*

In 2013, FM successfully received and managed four local grants: two from the US Embassy in Barbados and two from the Maria Holder Memorial Trust based in Barbados. In an effort to secure financial support, FM partnered with *ARC Magazine* in late 2012 and early 2013 to submit five major international grants in twelve months. Although unsuccessful, FM and ARC progressed through the first round of judging of the first Compete Caribbean attempt. This may be promising but considering the effort that goes into writing applications, the question is how to sustain this. FM has since been building relationships within the local arena, eager to find a model of financial sustainability at home. At the time of writing this article, a decision about a major grant application FM submitted to a local trust is pending. The request is to cover the expansion of the physical plant allowing the organisation to offer alternative art educational programming, and to cover overheads and programming for a three-year period. An initial decision has been made by the Trust, which states that at the outcome depends on an evaluation of the organisation by an international consultant. This will include the design of a comprehensive sustainability plan, which will permit the granting institution to decide whether or not to fund FM over a three-year period.

• *Philanthropic support*

The Aspire Foundation (Barbados)⁴ has selected FM as one of eight local not-for-profit or charitable organisations as part of its pilot phase. Given that the island has a number of high-net-worth individuals who make Barbados a second home (many of whom are keen to invest in the island), Aspire will function as a

⁴ The Aspire Foundation (Barbados) is newly formed (2015) not-for-profit entity that is committed to 'helping charities help'. Aspire is working with corporate and individual donors, and other key stakeholders, to strengthen and accredit charities to improve their impact and sustainability and to connect them with potential sponsors.



Figure 9.6: The Fresh Milk Artboard, featuring work by Evan Avery, 2013. (Photo: Annalee Davis)

conduit between these individuals and the selected organisations with a goal to creating relationships with philanthropists who will invest in selected organisations.

- *State subvention*

Since the government of Barbados proclaimed the Cultural Industries Development Act (CIDA) on 1 February 2015, Minister of Culture Stephen Lashley said the bill would provide 'for the establishment of a regulatory framework to facilitate and encourage the sustainable growth and development of cultural industries, (and) funding for cultural projects' (Lashley cited in Deane, 2015). The Ministry of Culture, in its current formation, does not have the capacity to support the kind of programming that FM undertakes and there is no other organisation on the island nurturing contemporary visual artists and their practices. It therefore seems feasible that with the proclamation of the CIDA, supporting FM with a state subvention should be in keeping with the state's goal to grow the cultural sector, including the visual arts, especially since the ministry is not equipped to carry out this work.

Exploring the role of the global diaspora

One way the global diaspora has engaged with the region's visual artists is by hosting exhibitions at museums in the US. Although these survey exhibitions

have increased awareness of art from the region, continuing to contextualise the works of artists in geo-political Caribbean frameworks has its limitations, and hopefully this trend is tapering off to allow for participation in less generic ways. Increasing numbers of individual artists are mounting solo exhibitions at galleries and fairs in the Global North. This includes, to give just two examples: Ebony G. Patterson's solo exhibition at New York's Museum of Art and Design (2015) and Jeanette Ehlers *Whip It Good*, commissioned in 2013 by The Art Labour Archives in Berlin and performed at Autograph ABP as part of this Danish-Trinidadian artist's first UK solo exhibition.

Given that Caribbean communities are to be found all over the world, it is only natural that Caribbean artists are forging bonds throughout the diaspora and within the global art-world. They are shaping associations with arts professionals, visual art and cultural studies departments in universities and institutes in the metropolitan cities of the Global North where significant power lies. One such example includes the 'Sustainable Art Communities' research and exchange project out of which this article developed. It was an openly accessible, state-funded project (UK and The Netherlands), which allowed stakeholders to convene at these knowledge-exchange symposia led by higher education institutions in the

two countries. Both symposia were run in partnership with public arts organisation, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam and the Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva) in London.

Another example is the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), which engages proactively with the Caribbean diaspora. One of its first exhibitions was 'Caribbean: Crossroads of the World'. A robust public program provided a platform for artists and scholars in the Caribbean and the diaspora to participate in dialogue about contemporary practice in relation to the exhibition's thematic layout. Under chief curator Tobias Ostrander, who visited the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, Alice Yard in Trinidad and FM in Barbados, PAMM's programming is actively involving artists from the Caribbean and its diaspora. This includes a commissioned work by London-based Guyanese artist Hew Locke; 'Bloodlines', a solo exhibition by Firelei Báez who is based in New York but from the Dominican Republic; and the exhibition 'Sun Splashed' (Nov. 2015 – Feb. 2016) from the New York-based Jamaican artist Nari Ward.

Lastly, a somewhat different example is 'Tilting Axis', a roving meeting conceptualised by *ARC Magazine* and FM who invited Res Artists and PAMM to become core partners, under the banner 'Tilting Axis: Within and Beyond the Caribbean | Shifting Models of Sustainability'. The two-day invitation-only conference (27–28 Feb. 2015) brought together 32 independent artists, art organisations and museums operating across the Caribbean, US, EU and China. The goal of the meeting was to negotiate strategic regional and international alliances for the further development of infrastructure, production and markets of the Caribbean's visual arts sector. Critically, the meeting took place on Caribbean soil from the perspective of artist-led initiatives driving the agenda from within specificities of the Global South. This is unlike meetings that frequently happen extra-regionally and often concern trade agreements, including for example the Economic Partnership Agreement.⁵ 'Tilting Axis' overall goal was to consider a direction for both the immediate and longer-term future of the visual arts sector in the Caribbean and discuss what sorts of interventions might contribute to 'tilt the axis', creating open access to reflect a more inclusive and equitable

5 The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) is an agreement between Europe and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. Norman Girvan argues that as ACP countries continue to export raw materials, food and consumer services and import manufactured goods and producer services, the same colonial model that Britain used centuries ago, albeit now consolidated with its European partners, continues to be repeated over and over again.

art-world. Three focus areas were determined, inviting participants to consider more deeply how to move forward, including: (i) education (ii) exhibitions and programming and (iii) artists' mobility and residencies.

Following up, and conceived as a mid-point meeting, 'Tilting Axis 1.5' (São Paulo, Brazil, 8 Oct. 2015) acted as a discursive moment to continue circulating the collective's core methodologies. Goals included addressing the Caribbean's peripheral position within larger global art conversations, generating awareness and sensitising cultural practitioners in the Global South. Lastly, 'Tilting Axis 2' was hosted by the Pérez Art Museum from 19 to 21 February 2016 and explored the current state of cultural work in the Caribbean, in order to fortify networks, increase administrative and programming capacities, as well as transfer knowledge and funding opportunities to those working in the region. ARC and FM will continue to work with each host, shaping the agenda from a Caribbean-informed perspective.

These examples demonstrate the role of the diaspora as collaborators and co-facilitators of opportunities for Caribbean-based and Caribbean-diasporic artists to increase visibility and understanding



Figure 9.7: The Colleen Lewis Reading Room at Fresh Milk. (Photo Dondré Trotman)

of the region's contemporary visual practice. Global partnerships are becoming more strategic and reciprocal – deepening and adapting over time, encouraging decision makers in the global art world to consider working with Caribbean artists in ways that are mutually beneficial. Reciprocal exchanges might also include research posts for Caribbean-based artists, writers, curators and art historians at metropolitan universities, or sponsorship of distance learning programmes and internships for emerging creative practitioners. Foundations might for example hire experts from the region working in cultural policy, while formal memoranda of understanding may be developed between universities offering practice-based graduate-level courses in Caribbean Studies, Art History and Cultural Studies. Finally, Caribbean-based, informal, artist-led initiatives can become points of contact and sites of local knowledge for regional counterparts and international scholars, students, researchers and curators. Given the region's history and within the context of the region's nascent visual arts economy, these kinds of reciprocal exchanges require that we explore what it means to be located in the Caribbean, our relationship with the Global South and metropolitan cities in the North.

Envisioning the future

FM began with much excitement and was born out of a need to create opportunities for young art graduates

from Barbados Community College and fostering community in the local visual arts sector. The pressing needs for longer-term sustainability lead me to believe that the most radical task we might achieve is to secure core funding allowing the organisation to continue to do the work that is necessary and to continue to expand the visual arts sector beyond national borders while nourishing artists working in Barbados to whom we are committed.

Marrying survival and longevity with experimentation and innovation requires an imperative call to action, given that the current national and regional frameworks for the sustainability of the visual arts sector is inadequate. For FM there has been a gradual, organic shift from coordinating temporal art projects to becoming an organisation, involving a different way of operating and regular programming at a local, regional and international level. In order to respond to the needs of the art community and its professional evolution in a region such as ours, FM's structure must either change to accommodate the needs, scale back or close. The current scenario speaks to the paradoxical nature of being self-supporting while supporting an environment to foster continual awareness of contemporary visual art: it is at a stage where it needs to determine how it might become both financially sustainable and intellectually independent without becoming overly bureaucratic.



Figure 9.8: The Fresh Milk Studio, 2011. (Photo: Samantha Davis)

Conclusion

All of writing is a huge lake. There are great rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky. And then there are mere trickles, like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters. You must keep feeding the lake.

Jean Rhys

The benefit of gatherings, such as the 2013 'Sustainable Art Communities' conference in London is to foster a tighter arts community across linguistic divisions in the region, the Global South and both sides of the Atlantic, while bolstering professional relationships and future collaborations. Continuous dialogue with artists and regular evaluation of best practices and developments in the field are important in order to understand the constantly shifting specificities of the numerous centres of art practice throughout the region. The increasingly complex global art landscape is testimony to that fact that there is no longer a single centre to which artists and their audiences must gravitate. Rather, if we pay attention to how Caribbean-based artist-led initiatives are evolving, trying to understand the specific demands of their varied contexts, looking at the art being made and listening to the critical discourse emanating, collectively our observations might reveal the kinds of structures we need to shape and support.

While FM as a socially engaged platform is more interested in the conditions that support the process of thinking critically and the act of making, grappling with the dilemma of financial autonomy while searching for models of sustainability over the long term, consume much of our time. It is thus vital to realise an alternative model that acknowledges the specificity of the local and regional context we inhabit. This has included creating opportunities for local, regional and international audiences to experience Caribbean contemporary visual art and developing platforms for Caribbean artists and curators to reach new audiences. The very idea of our collective survival as contemporary visual artists and the visual arts sector is necessarily connected to the idea of this larger cultural ecosystem. In this way, FM is a trickle that feeds the lake. Valuing a cultural biodiversity, not controlled exclusively by market forces but by an innovative, interdisciplinary, inter-dependent *modus operandi*, supports our desire for both mauby and champagne as well as for bread and poetry.

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