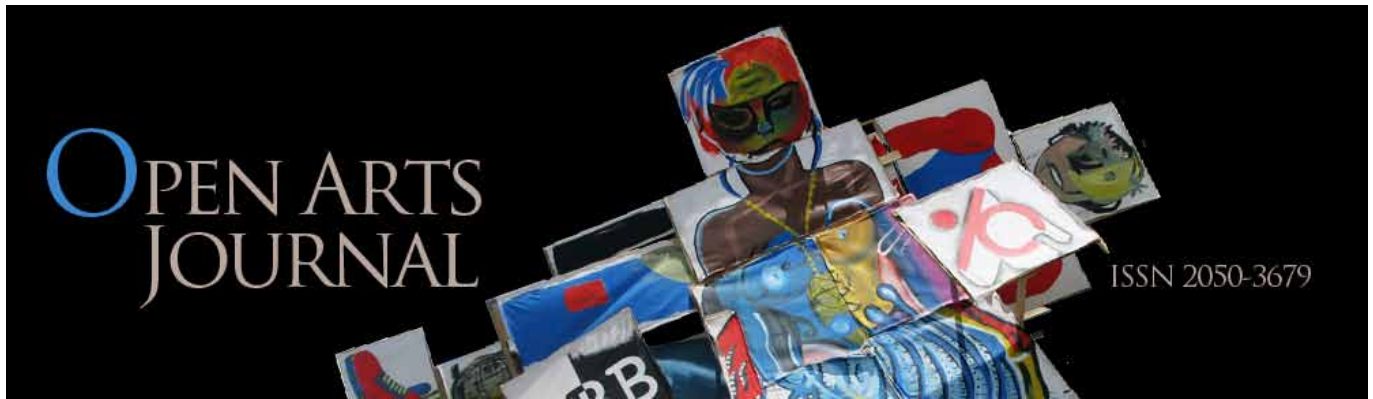




DREAMS OF UTOPIA: SUSTAINING ART INSTITUTIONS IN THE TRANSNATIONAL CARIBBEAN

Erica Moiah James

Abstract

This article explores the concept of sustainability in relation to formal and informal arts institutions in the Caribbean. Drawing on the American Renny Pritikin's 'Prescription for a healthy art scene', it argues that Pritikin's prescription outlines a utopian dream rather than a living place or real conditions for artistic development. It pictures a 'scene' that would be difficult to realise in America, and even more so in postcolonial Caribbean societies with limited resources and very different historical and cultural relationships to the arts. The article centrally examines the interdependent institutional model, forged during formative years of the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas (NAGB). With very few of the components suggested by the Pritikin model present to draw on, the NAGB developed policies, exhibitions and public programming initiatives in relation to and in partnership with various types of arts organisations and institutional forms, including local and regional artist-run spaces, national galleries, regional festivals, such as CARIFESTA, and directly with practising artists. This was done to fashion a vibrant arts scene, still far removed from Pritikin's utopia, but able to draw from local and transnational resources, fuelling an emergent model particular to and sustainable within the primary community it served.

Keywords: Caribbean, Bahamas, National Art Gallery, postcolonial institutions, utopia, transforming spaces, CARIFESTA, CARICOM, nationalism

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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/1st-conference-sustainable-art-communities-creativity-and-policy-transnational-caribbean-1>

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DREAMS OF UTOPIA

Erica Moiah James, Yale University

Introduction

Sustainability is not about mere survival, but implies an ability to grow and change to both meet and move forward the needs of a community in ways that are mindful and sensitive to the peculiarities of it. During the past few years, many arts bloggers have shared a proposal by the noted American curator and arts administrator Renny Pritikin entitled 'Prescription for a healthy art scene' (Pritikin 2009). In it, Pritikin prescribes, one by one, all of the elements he believes would together result in a healthy and vibrant art scene. It is a place dominated by a critical mass of artists with ample teaching opportunities, fellowships, art schools, accessible museums and curators, studio space, informal exhibition spaces, 'adventurous' dealers, fellowships, publishers, art critics and more. Seduced by this perfect world, few seemed to notice that it lacks the most important thing that defines prescriptions: an action plan on how to take the medicine, or in this case, establish, build, sustain, fund and connect the elements of the proposed art scene in real time, and in the context of actual social and politicised cultures and economies. What Pritikin offers, is a heartfelt dream of an arts utopia, very hard to find in America and almost impossible to imagine in the Caribbean. During my tenure as the founding director and chief curator of the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas (2003–11), I found that few, if any, singular Caribbean society was large enough, resourced enough, or deep enough in local talent to realistically dream of a version of Pritikin's model emerging on its shores.

However, this does not mean that vibrant arts communities have not and are not continually emerging in the Caribbean, or that formal and informal arts institutions and collectives are not continuing to rise, because they are. Despite dire economic and social circumstances, this is a particularly vibrant time for the establishment and growth of alternative informal artist institutions in the region. It also does not mean that new artists and writers are not coming to the fore or that transnational relationships have not been forged and developed. Examples can be easily drawn. But it has meant that in a place where paths are rarely smooth, cycles of growth have paralleled or been followed by periods of stasis while many leaders, artists, formal and informal arts institutions, networks and communities also dream of utopia, failing to recognise, value and deploy what is present and available to them locally and

transnationally. Using the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas (NAGB) as a living case study in this article, I examine the ways in which this Caribbean based institution was formed and sustained in part through the development of local networks simultaneously with and in relation to transnational ones. While it never possessed even half of the elements in Pritikin's prescription, it nevertheless thrived. I consider the ways in which the NAGB used what it had to create the society it needed, while mindful of the specificities and histories of the place and constituencies which it served. From the outset, it committed itself to considering successful global models adaptively and critically in consideration of the peculiarities, issues and problems of the local space.

In the Caribbean, a strong dose of pragmatism is helpful in the drive to move art forward. One learns to accept stasis as a part of the natural ebb and flow of cultures and economies, and the natural process of dissolution and reformation of powerful things – much like what happens as hurricanes continually form and reform. I am trying to trust these periods and places where it may seem as if nothing is happening, in order to maintain faith that something is always happening, even if we cannot see it. The Caribbean casts doubt on the possibility of Pritikin's perfect art scenes. It tests one's belief in utopias. What is possible is the potential for change and a belief that every community – no matter how reluctant it may seem – has the desire and the power to stimulate and embrace change. Sustainability requires a commitment to continuous growth and in the Caribbean that means change.

When thinking actively of ways and means to sustain arts communities in The Bahamas and the transnational Caribbean, it is perhaps most productive to begin by considering what 'is' happening locally and transnationally, and seeking to develop and nurture paths and networks that are conceived of in ways that allow these ground works to become mutually sustaining and foundational. This requires one to in part:

- 1 Release the expectations of perfection or the belief that a sustainable arts community can only take on a single prescribed form.
- 2 Think of models adaptively, i.e. not assuming a model conceived and working like gangbusters in one space – Amsterdam or New York – can be mapped onto the region and succeed overnight, or at all, without concern to the specificities of spaces and relations.
- 3 Recognise that no island, nation or department is the same in the way its arts community has been shaped, is funded and culturally engaged. Each has its own peculiarities, issues and problems. A way

forward has to be respectful of differences as much as connections across borders and boundaries, recognising points of intersection where we can mobilise for change, for art policies, art markets and economies, locally and transnationally in ways that can benefit the entire community.

4 Work to ensure that the Caribbean does not become a peripheral figure in its own discourse.

With this in mind, I will first share how the development of local networks, linked with transnational ones, effected positive change and the development of a sustainable arts community in The Bahamas and then discuss sites where attention can be placed to support the growth of this arts community and others, within a global Caribbean network.

The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas (NAGB)

In 2003, the National Art Gallery of The Bahamas (NAGB) opened in a society used to the sale of a limited range of art forms, and without a critical audience used to engaging work that was not for sale, or art made primarily for contemplation (Figure 1.1). Bound by the picturesque, the general population was not familiar with and or accepting of contemporary art forms and processes, and the concept of Bahamian art history, much less Caribbean and global art movements was foreign to many. Its audience was generally unaware of what a curator was or did. Very few individuals had been trained in curatorial practices or art history in The Bahamas, or in the diaspora. There were few local art writers and little critical engagement of work – even among artists. Art criticism in any productive form was completely absent. I recall soon after the opening, encouraging a young staffer to write critical reviews

of local exhibitions for a national newspaper. His first effort, which in my opinion was balanced and fair, was met with such vitriol from the artist under review that he never wrote another word. It was clear that a high level of sensitivity would have to be extended as the NAGB sought to facilitate change.

The NAGB opened in service to a citizenry who primarily believed that art museums and galleries were places for ‘the elite’ and not for them. As one might expect, a very conservative aesthetic vision prevailed and a general feeling of malaise existed among younger artists, particularly young women who found it exceedingly difficult to near-impossible to practice as an artist fulltime while remaining in the country.

Generally, The Bahamas was also marginal within a broader Caribbean art conversation and seemingly non-existent in terms of more international discourses. In Pritikin’s terms, one would expect such a community to be on life support. Yet, I cannot say that it was not sustaining itself. In spite of these conditions, it was an art community that was quite vibrant in terms of the number of exhibitions that occurred, artists that it produced, and its ability to support an art market that managed to nurture several fulltime artists. It was an art community that was sustaining itself or treading water so to speak, but it was not growing. The number of those benefiting from these conditions remained quite limited.

Society needed a turbo boost and that came through the formation of the NAGB and, what I believe to be crucially important, a system of relations the gallery’s presence generated that enabled something unscripted to unfold. In 2013, just ten years after the gallery’s formation, this tiny country supported a pavilion at the Venice Biennial (see: <http://venicebahamas2013.org/>). To move that far and fast in the space of ten years is pretty



Figure 1.1: National Art Gallery of The Bahamas. (Photo: Derek Smith)

remarkable. But in order to get here, everything had to change. The community, the culture, the art, the market, the audience had to grow. The gallery was in a position to direct that growth, but could not accomplish it on its own. Therefore, the vision for the institution in relation to the community was important and always prismatic. It had to be, in order for the institution to do the work necessary to cultivate a broader arts community and in turn itself.

There were practical concerns that needed to be considered. The gallery had to operate at a consistently high level that was policy driven, supported and reinforced. This emphasis on governance was necessary for a number of fundamental reasons not specific to The Bahamas. The need to:

- 1 Establish the NAGB as an institution with core values in the eyes and minds of the people.
- 2 Define the gallery's mission, and put rules and mechanisms in place that would enable it to implement its values and achieve its mission in ways the community would come to not only to appreciate but also expect.
- 3 Protect the institution from changing governments, political cronyism, entitlements and personal agendas.
- 4 Spend the money entrusted to it wisely and without a hint of corruption. Bahamian culture is generally suspicious of anything associated with 'government'. It also does not have a comparable culture of philanthropy to the one found in the United States, or a national lottery as one finds in the UK to support the arts. Though the gallery was an independent (government) corporation, its affiliation with the government marked it as a place where money was expected to be mismanaged and this was a reason often cited in response to early requests for donations. Few wanted to give.

Therefore, a major part of the NAGB's strategy to sustain itself was to distinguish itself. It literally could not appear to be a government operation. In other words, it had to be well-managed fiscally and operationally, and it had to be physically maintained.

The pressure level was high because the expectation of failure was higher. The NAGB had to work to cultivate a supportive community that would value it. It had to work to break down prevailing provincialism, encourage local artists not to be fearful, wilfully ignorant or envious of artists and art movements abroad (but to cultivate appreciation, mutual respect and opportunities in both directions). It had to teach about the past even as it engaged the present. It had to break down barriers between The Bahamas, the region

and the world. It recognised that cultivation of the local could not be sacrificed in the vain pursuit of the elusive 'global' and that the way forward would be to focus on local development while connecting the local to regional and global communities.

In 2003, there were ethical and institutional goals and policies in place and an awareness of what was required and what was at stake, but no master plan. The plan, or in modified Pritikin terms: 'the prescription', emerged in response to the community. Programming was developed based on what the staff sensed the community needed, then tweaked and/or expanded based on community response. What emerged was a battle plan on four fronts. The gallery would work to:

- 1 Research and document the art history of The Bahamas and share this work with the community through exhibitions, the development of an archive through publications, public programmes and teaching this new art history to teachers.
- 2 Present research and exhibitions using a language that was accessible to the general public, but not without heft and weft.
- 3 Chart an open future with respect to a broader global community by supporting Bahamian artists no matter where they practiced and creating avenues for them to share their work; insert locally based artists into regional and international communities and enrich the local conversation through artistic interventions.
- 4 Connect the gallery to a network of local and regional arts institutions in order for its workers to enter a broader collegial environment and to nurture institutional partners.

Many programmes were developed in an attempt to fight on these fronts and I will discuss a few key initiatives that played special roles in building local consciousness, community and a critical language for the arts.

Forging local and global art networks

One of the first broad-based programmes was the development of *Transforming Spaces* (ongoing since 2005), an arts tour aimed at locals with the expressed purpose of introducing the public to spaces that had literally been transformed for the event – a big yard, a deserted building, a living room, a sidewalk – and thus expand its conception of what an arts space could be. Through this process, it was hoped that the tour format would assist in:

- 1 Demystifying artists, artists' studios and art galleries by allowing the public to enter those spaces and engage with the artist and their work directly.

- 2 Cultivating new collectors by providing reasonably priced work for sale.
- 3 Introducing an increasingly receptive public to arts spaces many did not know existed and creating awareness through interaction with this community.
- 4 Extending the audiences knowledge and appreciation of the variety of work possible in The Bahamas, while developing new social spaces.
- 5 Assisting in the development of new commercial gallery spaces, expanding the market for new work.

Does this seem to intersect with Pritikin's proposal? Yes, in some ways, but not entirely. The immediate service population was small and the goals compact. The idea was to focus on small steps building towards something larger. In some ways, all of those goals were met through the project and it did stimulate the formation of formal and informal spaces (but we have seen them come and go). *Transforming Spaces* also revealed possible reasons why a New York-styled commercial gallery system has never quite taken root in The Bahamas.

Pritikin's model references size and the need for large pools of working artists tied to a deep buying public. That is not a possibility in The Bahamas nor most of the Caribbean. Even if one considers the visiting tourist population (reportedly 6 million per year for The Bahamas alone), in addition to local populations (approximately 350,000 persons for The Bahamas), the developmental potential of an expansive local market for fine art is limited. Many spaces start with blind faith and enthusiasm rather than a full knowledge and assessment of the market and an accompanying business plan. What is already a tough road becomes filled with thorns as artists who have committed themselves to galleries cut side deals with buyers looking for a break in price. This in effect destroys the gallery's bottom line, undermines the bargaining position of the gallerist in the market and sows enmity in the relationship between gallery and artist.

The sustainability of commercial gallery spaces have also been impacted by gallerists following the New York profit model, but failing to do work that warrants a 60/40 or 50/50 split, not physically caring for art in their possession and failing to learn about the work in ways that would assist in cultivating buyers. Without clear curatorial and business visions, and limited income streams, the hope and enthusiasm that helped launch these spaces tapers off rather quickly. For these and other complex reasons specific to each site and situation, commercial galleries in The Bahamas have for the most part failed. In most cases, the spaces that

continue to survive are those with limited or focused agendas, started by and strongly associated with individual artists. These spaces are more often attached to artists' homes or studios, and are not stand-alone gallery enterprises. There is definitely a competitive advantage to building ownership and direct self-interest into this format, and while not a guaranteed model of 'success' or sustainability, it appears to be a viable model for now. For a time, *Transforming Spaces* reached as many as twelve spaces on a six-hour tour, which for a seven by twenty-one mile island was quite incredible. It stimulated hope and energy in the community, and is still going strong.

Community outreach

The NAGB also developed and cultivated a variety of public programmes and partnerships with a range of organisations, such as theatre companies, musical organisations, foreign embassies, international organisations (such as UNESCO), The College of The Bahamas, Bahamas International Film festival etc., to encourage people interested in other art forms, but who would not think of visiting the gallery, to do just that. These programmes and partnerships encouraged the cross-fertilisation of the arts, and broadened and multiplied linkages within the local community (Figure 1.2). It may seem a simple and obvious task, but these communities were very divided in The Bahamas. The NAGB became a neutral meeting place and the programmes and partnerships that developed across disciplines went a long way in helping to build and diversify the community.

Let me be clear: the NAGB did not have vast monetary resources with which to do this work. After operational expenses, its yearly programme budget in the first eight years, which covered exhibition development, publications, programming etc., never exceeded 100,000 US dollars. What it did have was a building and extensive grounds. It made it known that it was willing to rent out its facilities, and was also interested in working with arts organisations or on arts-related programming through an in-kind donation of space. This, along with the growing support of local professionals, who sometimes volunteered to give their services free of charge, enabled the gallery to develop a vast programming schedule that included film programmes, plays and musical performances, discussions, round tables, even dance classes, in addition to standard gallery fare like artist talks, guest lectures, discussion groups etc.

Sharing its space with these groups (and by extension its growing audience and institutional support) enabled the NAGB to assist in the



Figure 1.2: Poetry reading by Christian Campbell. (Photo: Erica Moiah James)

development of fledgling arts programmes and organisations. I believe that these connections strengthened the arts community in ways we cannot quantify. These programmes brought people to the gallery and were coupled with community-focused programmes that gave the gallery greater visibility beyond its walls. This outreach required that the NAGB work with non-traditional partners such as government ministries, police departments, local businesses, the Nature Conservancy, the Humane Society and even a convent. One of my favourite programmes was called *The Liveable Neighbourhoods Project* (2008–11), designed to use art classes, mural painting and tree planting to transform abandoned parks in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, into spaces that could be used once again by broader sectors of the community. We discovered that except for two incidents involving the desecration of statues of Columbus and Queen Victoria, Bahamians rarely, if ever, defaced public art. This project led to the gallery being invited to supervise murals in schools facing the challenge of graffiti, or in some cases being invited by organisations,

simply because they saw work the programme had completed and wanted art on their walls. The Gallery employed the artist Allan Wallace to lead this charge at various parks and schools, such as Woodcock Primary School, Stapeldon School, St Martin's Convent and others.

The Teacher Workshop Program (2005–11) was another important step in extending the reach of the NAGB. It brought public and private school teachers to the gallery to view new exhibitions and help develop lesson plans in relation to new exhibitions, but also took the teachers into artist studios (to participate in hands-on projects) and on specialised art and architecture tours on the island. The programme was open to educators from any discipline interested in creative learning practices and incorporating the arts into their curricula. In addition to connecting the gallery to a fundamental audience and future partners, projects like these required that the gallery hire artists and craftspeople to facilitate the programmes, allowing it to enter a small, but vital part of the culture industry.

History and criticality

To engage artists directly, the NAGB began to present programmes aimed at them. Workshops on topics from copyright laws to preparing portfolios and classes on art techniques from woodcarving and welding to paper-making and screenprinting were some of these initiatives. These sessions were always taught by artists

hired by the gallery. When the time came to challenge artists and the community in the area of practice and accepted notions of 'Bahamian art', the gallery began to invite artists, curators and gallerists from the Caribbean diaspora to come in to share their work and conduct in studio critiques with local artists. To make the exchange as natural as possible, if a local artist attended



Figures 1.3a: Artist talk by intuitive painter and sculptor Wellington Bridgewater; 1.3b: Collector Marina D'Aguilar and Barbadian artist Ras Ishi at Ishi's artist talk; 1.3c: Author with Ras Ishi Butcher and Ras Akyem Ramsey at NAGB (Photos: Erica Moiah James)

the presentation and connected with what the visitor said or did, they voluntarily signed up with NAGB to schedule a studio visit with the guest. It was the first time a formal programme for artists designed to address criticality had occurred and was in response to the single major complaint locally: the desire for critical engagement with work. Artists felt isolated and often lamented that they did not have anyone to really talk to about their work. The level of distrust within the local community at the time was rather high and had to be un-wedged by persons not directly invested in it.

The NAGB began this programme in 2005 by inviting the artist Chris Cozier, and went on to host Peter Minshall, Leroy Clark, Veerle Poupeye, Richard J. Powell, Deborah Jack, Erman Gonzalez, Edouard Duval Carrie, Reynald Lally, and Bahamian artists such as the late Brent Malone, Stanley Burnside, Blue Curry, Antonius Roberts, Lillian Blades and Wellington Bridgewater (Figure 1.3a). Artists began a broader conversation with other artists, but also writers, curators and commercial gallerists from the region, Miami and elsewhere. The intellectual, critical and conversational boundaries kept expanding. The general public and art community

responded very quickly to these initiatives, though not without bumps and bruises. The 2003 *Inaugural National Exhibition* reflected a relatively narrow representational art history and practice. This changed slightly for the second national exhibition and by the time the third one rolled around, curated by Krista Thompson, the door was wide open. The community had opened to work beyond the representational, beyond painting and beyond traditional media and processes. Things had changed.

From its early days, the NAGB began sharing information on regional and international art happenings. As interest grew, it began arranging group trips to events such as the Havana Biennial (2006), Art Basel (2007) and in 2008 to CARIFESTA (Caribbean Festival of the Arts) in Guyana. Though the intention was also to exhibit artwork in Guyana, logistical problems made this impossible. However, attending CARIFESTA allowed some of the country's premier artists – in some cases for the very first time – to get a chance to visit another Caribbean country and consider what being a part of that aesthetic and historical discourse might mean to them personally.



Figure 1.4: Exhibition of Bahamian Contemporary art the Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden, Germany. The sculptural assemblage *Sacred Women-crossing the Atlantic* by Antonius Roberts is pictured in the foreground. (Photo: Erica Moiah James with permission of the artist)

Each initiative led to another connection, another opportunity. Chris Cozier's visit led to Alice Yard invitations for several artists. CARIFESTA led to Bahamian art being introduced to a Guyanese audience via a group talk Elfrieda Bissember arranged at Castellani House. In Guyana, Bahamian artists encountered the work of Aubrey Williams and were able to meet amazing artists like Philip Moore and Winston Strick. CARIFESTA was also the symbolic beginning of the artist Kishan Munroe's *Universal Human Experience Project* (2008). Networks allow people and ideas not only to move, but also be transformed. They allow the artist and the arts organisation to re-imagine the boundaries of community and extend the system of relations.

Prior to CARIFESTA 2008, in response to requests from artists for exhibition opportunities beyond the islands, the gallery connected with a Bahamian curator based in Germany, Amanda Coulson (the current Director of the NAGB). Coulson wanted to develop a show of contemporary Bahamian art in Germany. The exhibition was a meaningful experience both for what happened and what did not. What happened was an amazing exhibition at the Nassauischer Kunstverein in Wiesbaden, Germany (Figure 1.4). The show led to an exhibition invitation from another European country. The German exhibition happened. The artists felt respected during the process and came through the experience reinvigorated. The director and curators at the Kunstverein understood that the artists wanted to be taken seriously, and that the NAGB wanted the work of the artists to be positioned and engaged in a certain way. The NAGB facilitated the exhibition in Germany, but had to say no to the other opportunity because the organisers of that exhibition wanted work that reflected a touristic kind of exoticism, which the gallery refused to support.

Decisions like this were and are often very hard to make by leaders in the arts. There is a lot of pressure coming from many sides. Artists are sometimes difficult to deal with because the level of trust is not always there and their focus is on the opportunity to show work internationally. They do not always understand the context in which their work will be shown, used or redeployed, and it often takes quite a bit of work to convince them why certain decisions are being made. The experience of the German exhibition allowed some of the participating artists to enter a broader network, and the gallery was able to reinstall the show in Nassau for a Bahamian audience once it closed in Wiesbaden. It was the first purely conceptual art show mounted at the NAGB in 2006.

The National Art Gallery of The Bahamas has been an important organisation for The Bahamas because, without any government interference, it was able to become a means through which local networks could be stimulated. Personal differences that had prevented certain connections and conversations from happening – sometimes for decades – were deflected through, or mediated by, the institution. But, in an increasingly grave economy and with growing social violence, what is required for this arts community to maintain its health and continue to grow locally and within transnational networks? Might these needs intersect with those of other Caribbean locations?

Points of convergence: Regional and transnational relationships

There are no art utopias, but there is still work that can be done to continually cultivate communities in which the arts thrive. For various reasons, the foremost being funding, I am a proponent of the development of a series of national art galleries and museums in the Caribbean as long as they are free of government influence, responsive to their community's needs (historically, in real time and in terms of articulating a vision for the future) and are not stand-alone spaces, but generative bodies working within a network of formal and informal galleries, arts spaces and artist initiatives locally, regionally and transnationally.

To close, I want to step away from the Pritikin prescription by asking and beginning to answer the following question: where can we focus funds and efforts to initiate or sustain programmes that will assist in the ongoing development of formal and informal arts institutions and communities in The Bahamas and the transnational Caribbean? Issues to be dealt with are:

Transnational dialogue: The Caribbean is fragmented both internally by histories, geography, language and politics, and externally through its diaspora. Finding ways to have conversations, like the 2013 conference 'Sustainable Art Communities: Creativity and Policy in the Transnational Caribbean' held at the Tropenmuseum Amsterdam, in order to expand the number and variety of voices and stakeholders, can assist in relieving the isolation cultural workers often feel in small places, while helping to broaden the impact and influence of local art communities through these transnational linkages.

Training and documentation: Transnational networks will also be important for training to move forward. Not everyone who puts a painting on a wall is a curator. Not everyone who can put two words together is a writer. Not everyone who can cite Stuart Hall is

a cultural theorist. We have to figure out ways to continue to train persons interested in working on and within the Caribbean arts. This may ideally happen transnationally, as most individual communities do not have adequate training facilities on their island. The lack of professional training is a serious problem in Caribbean arts and cultural development – and I do not mean just on the level of formal instruction for artists, art critics and historians. Many galleries, museums and archives in the region are in need of collections-management training and assistance. We simply do not have proper records of what we have, how we got it and what exactly it is. It is not a sexy part of arts development, but it is imperative for us to address this because it leads to broader access to collections, knowledge of where to fill in gaps and build collections, broader dissemination of information on the collections both locally and globally, in academia and museums and galleries.

Conservation: The documentation process would also allow for improved maintenance of items in collections. Funding the programmes designed to develop innovative, economical and creative conservation practices in the context of the Caribbean would be of service to the world. I am currently working on a team project centred on a group of nineteenth-century Haitian portraits at Yale that has brought home the dire need for conservation in the region – books, documents, paintings, works of art. Since reading Stuart Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1978) in graduate school, I am careful how I deploy the term 'crisis', but in this case, I believe we are facing a crisis. The Caribbean is simply losing too much too quickly within the region, and at the same time it is not fully aware of the incredible objects and materials from its history stored in archives and museum collections across the globe. It would be amazing if transnational conservation projects could be developed with the region that bring and transfer expertise, leaving not only good work, but also trained locals to continue the work.

Exhibition development: I have become wary/weary of the Caribbean being the focus of major blockbuster exhibitions, outside of the geographic Caribbean, that seem unable or unwilling to allocate any funding, or negotiate any agreements to have portions of these shows exhibited in the region, even when they are spearheaded by well-meaning diasporic Caribbean professionals. The Caribbean cannot continue to be a wallflower at its own party and marginal in its own discourse. It is not an object of study, but a generative space capable of and fully interested in self-reflexive engagement and critique through access to these

shows. The number of local curators is relatively small in the Caribbean, but creative ways must be explored to lighten the curatorial burden by having exhibitions move through the region. While online exhibitions are useful, they cannot take the place of direct contact and engagement with the object. How might a show curated in The Bahamas also be shown in Havana and Kingston and vice versa? Much effort and precious resources are invested in exhibition development only to have them die far too quickly and experienced by limited audiences. Understanding transportation limitations, should even more shows be developed in situ? Do we need to learn to pack art differently, move art differently, where jumbo jets are not required to transport massive crates? How can we begin to rise above frustrations and think strategically in order to break through colonial and economic limitations, as well as language barriers?

Leadership: I recently did a cursory review of the length of time individuals have led certain arts institutions in the region and realised in some cases it has been a very long time. Though there may be valid reasons for this in some places, generally these tenures have lasted too long. How can we focus funding efforts to develop leaders in the arts? Even if leaders have made notable contributions, it is my view that arts leadership has to be dynamic. The cultivation of new leaders at larger, more formal institutions (and also less formal ones) must become a part of the culture of these organisations. Too often informal spaces that emerged out of vitally important initiatives die along with their founder and more formal institutions are left rudderless without clear succession plans. The Caribbean has to be vibrant enough, open enough and bold enough to look to its transnational community for local leadership, encourage locals to gain experience abroad, and put mechanisms in place that would ease the transition of trained individuals back into local society.

Publishing and the cultivation of a discourse: At CARIFESTA 2008, an amazing exchange occurred between Derek Walcott and the President of Guyana on a panel chaired by David Dabydeen. The President was commended for appearing on the panel. Though he had agreed in principle to attend, as Mr. Dabydeen intimated, few expected him to follow through. The central question posed to President Jagdeo required an explanation for the lack of active and organised governmental support for the cultivation of the arts across the fifteen nations that comprise CARICOM (The Caribbean Community and Common Market). The President expressed a desire to support the arts,

but indicated that for Guyana, he had to consider that that support stood in competition with servicing the country's debt, the protection of the capital Georgetown from rising sea levels etc. I am notoriously hard on Caribbean politicians, but even I found myself sympathetic to his argument. What Guyana faced seemed daunting to me. At the time, it was paying more than ninety cents out of every dollar it earned to service its debt, as well as having to consider the possibility of moving an entire city, or finding ways to improve seawalls to keep the ocean at bay. Art suddenly seemed insignificant. But Derek Walcott quickly brought me, and all those in attendance out of our sympathetic reverie. He did not stand down to the President, insisting that the test of good leadership is seeing value in all of it and finding ways to meet these needs simultaneously.

The writers Austin Clarke and Earl Lovelace, who were also on the panel, called for a publishing house for the Caribbean and wanted CARICOM to commit 100,000 US dollars towards its start-up costs (not a large sum of money). To my knowledge nothing came of it – but I believe this is a place where possibilities lie for transnational transformation. It is already happening through the work David Scott and others are doing centred on the *Small Axe* journal and its relationship with Duke University Press. While in print, *ARC The Magazine* did a phenomenal job, by physically placing its issues in museum shops around the world, forging connections transnationally and sharing Caribbean contemporary art practices with a global audience. The *Caribbean Review of Books* and *Callaloo Journal*, have both extended their literary focus into the fine arts and there are many other journals both online and in print, that are emerging or have done a yeoman's job for years. Following Walcott and Dabydeen, I want to put forward a proposal for a Caribbean-based press, or a partnership with a more established academic press to produce a series of texts on art, culture and aesthetic practices from across the global Caribbean. I believe that the market is there, but we have to work tirelessly and walk boldly to service it. I am sure the National Art Gallery of Guyana would like to see a complete monograph produced on Philip Moore and other senior artists, and would welcome the support of such an enterprise. Teachers and scholars no doubt wish that they had more texts to turn to on Caribbean art, material and performance culture. The work of the late Petrine Archer Straw, Krista Thompson, Veerle Poupeye, Leon Wainwright and many others have laid and are laying the groundwork for this initiative. We must continually work to expand this archive, making it accessible and available to a global audience.

Working with governments: Though I am a supporter of national institutions in the Caribbean, I generally have very low expectations of governments in terms of art and cultural development. I have witnessed many instances where government bureaucracy and national agendas have stood in the way, handicapped and in some cases ruined arts and culture initiatives. But I have also seen where things can move with warp speed if the power, pull and funds of the government operate in service to the arts. So I am not willing to call the relationship dead or a lost cause just yet. Is it possible to operate transnationally at this level for the benefit of the arts? Are there issues that resonate transnationally that may be helped by broader alliances on the governmental level, or the formation of a lobby group at CARICOM? Recognising that human resources are short, might it be advantageous for such a group to develop virtual forums on the impact of global agreements on Caribbean art, culture and intellectual property (agreements such as the European Partnership Agreement, EPA, and those entered into with the World Trade Organization and Canada). The European Development Fund appears to have money to give for the development of transnational projects, but how does one access it? How do we explain in plain and multiple languages the impact of some of these agreements and their effects on arts policy and practice country by country? I learnt of a recent case where Caribbean-based grant writers made their way through the application maze for one of these funding sources, only to be told that to get the money from their *successful* grant, they would have to raise the same amount locally. We all know how difficult to impossible that prospect will be anywhere in the region. How can we work transnationally to access these funding pools? Can we convince CARICOM, Organization of American States (OAS) and similar transnational government entities to service a pool that would match funds 'won' by arts organisations in their smaller member states, enabling greater access to global funds and greater local resources for the arts? Or better yet, change the terms of these agreements and initiatives to better suit the cultures of the region.

Conclusion

These are just a few critical areas where funding and programmatic efforts can be focused and transnational networks established to develop, impact and sustain the arts in local and diasporic Caribbean communities. They suggest that, though the transnational Caribbean might be far removed from the model of Pritikin's utopia, it is not beyond its intentions. For Caribbean arts to continually evolve, utopia cannot be imagined as a place

or destination, but as a way of being that requires us all to actively contribute to the arts by conceiving and creatively implementing generative strategies that will lead to the fulfilment of clearly defined goals. Utopia can be a state where we consider the limits and difficult peculiarities of our local and transnational communities and commit ourselves to breaking through them.

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