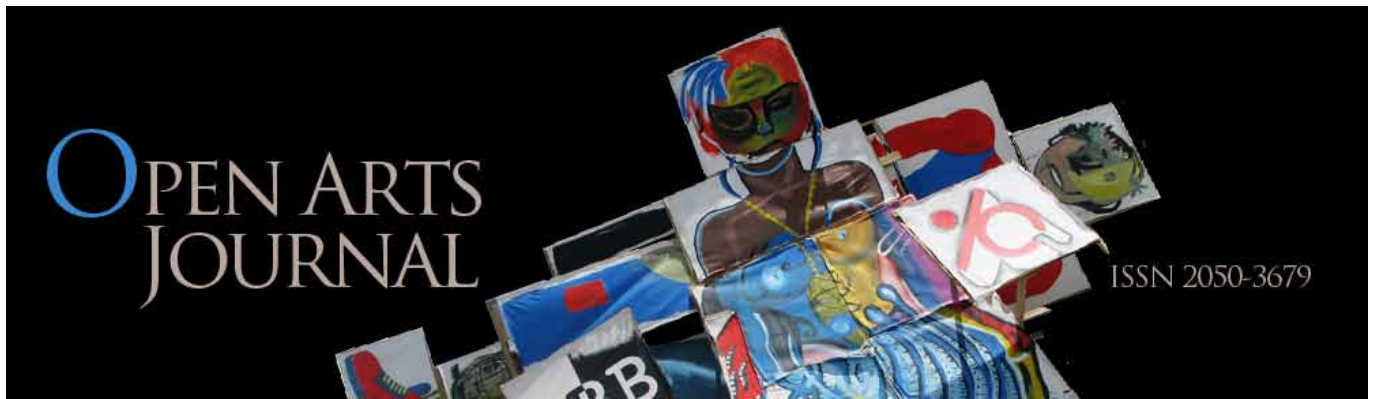




BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: LOCAL-GLOBAL DYNAMICS OF FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP IN CARIBBEAN ART

Winston Kellman

Abstract

This article argues in favour of a series of concepts whose origins hail directly from the Caribbean space. They encapsulate ideas that are significant to the production and development of Caribbean art, and are here expressed through the framework of the 'local'. They include notions of poverty, Caribbean identity, embodied practice, geographic location, nationalism, memory, trauma, the 'longue durée' and the effects of arts institutions. Globalisation, with its built-in power to determine and influence state policy in the forms of cultural elites with access to sponsorship and funding sources, is used as a counter position to be critiqued. The article also examines artworks by Ras Ishi Butcher and Winston Kellman, the author of the article. These two artists from Barbados work at the site of 'the local' and remain resolutely engaged in the traditional medium of painting, still critically articulating relevant ideas in the visual arts in Barbados and possessing what could be called a global sense of the local.

Keywords: Caribbean art, poverty, local-global dynamics, nationalism, memory and trauma, Commonwealth

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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:

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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: LOCAL-GLOBAL DYNAMICS OF FUNDING AND SPONSORSHIP IN CARIBBEAN ART

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The creative tension between the local and the global has been articulated by contemporary curators in ways that illuminate the functioning and sustainability of artistic communities in the Caribbean. The local, with its attendant ideas of nationalism and invented notions of traditional artistic production, is pitted against the global with its universalising tendencies and standards. In what follows, I examine this theoretical conflict between local specificity and the homogenising force of the contemporary (a term that can be linked to globalisation). I analyse the relationship between these local and global positions and the circuits that have been created by funding and sponsorship agencies for the visual arts, along with the roles they have played in terms of influencing artistic production and sustainability in the Caribbean over the last two decades. A better view onto these processes allows an approach to scholarship that could help to inform a more inclusive and developmental curatorial practice in and for the region.

What really is traditional Caribbean art? Is contemporary Caribbean art a rupture or a continuation of such a tradition in a different form? These interrogations into the field could provide the possibility of opening frames of reference to go beyond the tropes of immigration, hybridity, creolisation, border crossings, diaspora, new-media communications and post-black aesthetics, whose thematic exhibitions seem to dominate curatorial decisions in the Caribbean. Here I propose an 'aesthetics of place' which will hopefully move the perception of 'the local' to a definition beyond its current designated position – at best, a mere marker of identification, at worst a site of retrogressive nostalgia.

Framing the local: history and poverty

The concept of poverty, which is directly linked to funding and sponsorship, can be seen as a fundamental

issue in relation to sustainability in the arts in the Caribbean. This poverty is the direct result of the infinite variations of imperialist, colonist domination in the region that has left most of the territories in a state of economic dependency. It is generally agreed, as proposed by Clive Thomas (1988, pp.37–8), that this early period of colonial rule was a time when a comparatively small group of countries – British, French and Dutch colonisers – emerged at the centre of the world capitalist systems and became their main benefactors, while the larger group – the colonised – remained at the 'periphery'. The growth and development of these colonial economies was based on policies dictated by and to the benefit of the colonial centre. The periphery by contrast is wholly dependent on the system because growth is considered to be largely a reflex of development internationally. This 'inherited' poverty becomes a large part of our Barbadian or Caribbean basic identity, as it shapes and conditions our daily lives as an inherited legacy and leads to a type of socio-cultural poverty in terms of consciousness and creative production. This has come about as a result of systems and institutions, which were essentially designed to maintain and enforce a certain type of cultural attitude that had its origins in the same 'centres', and where the notion of acculturation was and is the prescribed cultural norm for these dependent territories.

Counter to this cultural poverty however, alongside the antagonisms and conflicts, a system of what can be called indigenous values and thought processes, a characteristic way of looking at and perceiving the world, emerged. In other words, a regional social consciousness was forged and is reflected in the arts, literature, music, theatre, dance and religious practices. Against the backdrop of such contradictions, such contrariness, even such chaos, stands the unifying space, in which an identity that defies stasis, while it promotes order and stability is being forged. This concept of the 'local' sees Caribbeanness according to Édouard Glissant (1992, pp.221–22) as a thin thread woven together from one side of the Caribbean to the other. It is a culture-specific area with an African or East Indian base and a European peak, derived from plantations, insular civilisations, a language of compromise, general cultural phenomena of creolisation, patterns of encounter and synthesis, and a persistent African presence.

Nationalism and its construct

The consciousness that was forged had its origins in the independence struggles of the 1960s in the Caribbean region. It must be said that these efforts at

self-actualisation represent an exceptionally important period in the cultural life of these territories. The need for a reorientation of the culture found its formal outlets in institutions like national galleries and theatres, as well as in literature, music and dance with its concomitant festivals. This stimulated a national consciousness that looked beyond the universalist, global notion of 'social harmony', imported from the metropolis and conceived as the plantation model, to one of struggle that was defined indigenously and was democratically conscious of the historical legacy of the region. The 'nation' therefore played an important role as a site or locality/territory to be taken back from the coloniser, that is, from the global spread of empire that had determined the cultural formulations from inception. Patrick Taylor (1989, p.94) observes that, as a liberating narrative, the 'national' made the transformation of the drama of colonisation to the history of liberation possible.

This transition to politically independent states, the institutional phase of the liberation narrative, came with the expectation of a sustained effort at a reorientation of culture. In Barbados, an examination of the institutions and national events, whose features should have given a stronger sense of selfhood and identity nearly fifty years after their creation, reveals a kind of post-independence stasis as the determining feature of our cultural norms. What remains is in fact a vague cultural area that is polarised between a distancing 'afro-saxon' sensibility, to use Lloyd Best's descriptive term (2004), and token gestures of Afrocentricity combined with the intellectual remains of liberation ideas, and a sort of hysterical North American 'intervention' into the already splintered and fragile culture. The fact that there is still only a vague sense of national identity, one which is divisive and unruly, is perhaps due to an unremarkable production from the cultural areas (as outlined above), which have not allowed any kind of permeation into the society from these critical areas of orientation, a sort of negligence of their socio-cultural responsibility. These areas of cultural production or their lack will be addressed later in this article (under Institutions) and suggestions will be made of ways to encourage their development and sustainability.

In spite or perhaps because of the cultural conditions of the island of Barbados, the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of an 'alternative vision' of the Caribbean in the visual arts. This vision seeks to give legitimacy to certain forms and dismiss others. This approach suggests that the field of scholarship located in anti-imperial and anti-colonial battles has been fought, and that those visions and productions have

been exhausted or dried up, or are deemed to be no longer relevant to our contemporary artistic cultural needs. The contemporary curators responsible for these decisions would have us believe that the 'national' should be seen as an outdated Afro-Caribbean concern and that contemporary new-media production offers a more 'nuanced' reality for the region.

This conceptual error seems to stem from the linking of 'national' with 'traditional' and does not take into account the uneven development of the 'traditional' to the 'modern', or even for that matter, to the 'contemporary' in these former colonies. It also denies the evolutionary development of new stories, new ways of thinking, new histories that come out of the same 'traditional' areas. I am suggesting that 'nationalism' should therefore not be seen as a national political unit linked to one ethnic group, but rather as an organic being that has been endowed with a uniqueness, a unique individuality, which should be acknowledged and cultivated by all in that particular society. This essentially paves the way for a concept of identity that takes into account and includes the significant historical, cultural changes and developments that have contributed to the ongoing developments in that particular place. This identity is therefore grounded and linked to a specificity of place.

Place as geographic location

Doreen Massey (1997) offers a conception of place in terms of qualities of uniqueness or specificity that holds additional promise. A place full of internal conflicts, not fixed but always in a state of change, capable of definitions not coming from the outside, but based on linkages with the outside, can enhance one's sense of identity in this troubled era of time-space compression, the result of globalisation.

This involves a character of place that is constructed through the linking of that specific place to areas beyond. This then demands a construction of your place, by the creative inhabitant who carries with him/her a kind of truth based on the lived experience. The descriptive creative practice that sheds light on this place resonates a kind of authenticity. This is perhaps one of the greatest challenges artists face: how to convey that lived intensity with identity that comes from being inhabited with and by place; that sense of inside-ness that brings with it an intuitive knowledge of place that goes way beyond surface appearances in representational forms. Location then becomes a conceptual tool to contextualise creative efforts. The representation of a place that is constructed on such specific historic principles of colonial expansion, conquest and domination, on such a structure of

violence, which brings with it an added obligation to reveal essential truths of that place, so Massey argues, particularly when significant elements remain embedded within that contemporary culture. If one is indeed trying to present a progressive sense of place, it would and should acknowledge those characteristics without being or feeling threatened by them.

Memory, trauma and the *longue durée*

Simon Schama (1995, pp.6–7) suggests that before it can be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from memory as from layers of rock. Location affords belonging, memories, routines, visions, and containment, a bounded space, a space, as Simon Njami (2010) suggests, reflecting on the nature of islands, whose contours are defined by the inhabitants, where one becomes essentially the architect of one's own confinement. The imagination is then put to work to transcend the historical limitations on the place.

It is generally agreed by the poets in the Caribbean (e.g., Aimee Cesaire, Derek Walcott) that to work with the memory of slavery is to work without witnesses; to work with the ideas of places is to work without ruins or with the absence of archaeological stele, the stone slabs or columns of commemorative events. To do this is to examine traces from oral histories, objects, buildings, images and traditions. In certain territories, Barbados for example, the memory of slavery is suppressed in favour of the apparent necessity to transform reality towards an idea of future renewal. But a renewal of what? The visual arts are signs and manifestations that involve cultural linkages to the history of colonialism and control, and as such cultural memory represents a significant inclusion in the range of artistic production. The logic of not wanting to interrogate the colonial past for fear of a resurgence of 'social disruption' is one that effectively denies a country its history and memory. When living memory is no longer present what then are the forms of remembrance?

German art historian Detlef Hoffmann (2006) observes that in the short term the artistic response to horrific events is not a deep one. Artistic production only reaches a significant level, the second level, when feelings about what has been destroyed or eradicated, or what has been traumatising can perhaps be represented. This second level of cultural memory refers to the symbolic order in the form of representations, produced by media institutions and in artistic practices, by which a shared past is constructed by affected social groups. Artists need some distance, more distance in time and sometimes

generational distance. This type of artistic production relates to the concept of the '*longue durée*', the long, slow, silent, seemingly motionless character that it possesses. It is a form of artistic production conscious of trauma that attempts to open up the discourse between the political and the aesthetic, between history and text, between engagement and the mission and function of art in these territories no matter how troubling it is. Memory then becomes the catalyst for work that forms an interpretive study of these human experiences, sometimes in order to clarify and give significance to centres of one's own experience through the lived intensity of place. The resort to memory, as opposed to a nostalgic construction of tradition, can then be seen to be a form of resistance to the utopia of a globalised vision that denies personal memory. This resistance offers a way of re-anchoring ourselves in space and time. Memory then has a redemptive power in response to disruptions of globalisation and its associated loss of place, involving feelings of loss, rootlessness and not belonging.

In dealing with the relative weight of history and memory and the construction of place, my image of the iconic rocks off the east coast of Barbados, consumed by visitors and locals alike, presents a visual engagement with the history of representations of the island. This series of mine is an attempt to deconstruct notions of the Exotic. Outsider views of 'tropical paradise' are transformed into personal 'insider' memories and reflections on the significance of the land and the sea, and its associations with the Black Atlantic. By working with the two ideas simultaneously, the past is unfolded into the present and offers a reinterpretation of a past's determined iconography while providing a visual gateway to other forms of representations of the place. This creative exercise relates to the concept of auto-ethnography, in which the artist undertakes to describe his position through images that historically others have determined as pleasurable representations of place. This surfers' 'paradise' is in fact the Atlantic coast of the island. The pleasure paradise is then progressively deconstructed to gesture to an alternative reading of the Atlantic: a reminder of the middle passage to these shores and the cultural memory of death that is carried in these waters. This is suggested by the highly charged emotional use of colours and the turbulent expressive treatment of water. The same view is further fragmented with subsequent renderings, visually as well as metaphorically indicating a breaking up of this idyll. The process of deconstruction does not suggest that there is no history or subjectivity, but simply questions the privileging of identity, for instance in tourist brochures and their construction of 'truth'.



Figure 6.1: Winston Kellman, from the *Bathsheba Series*, 2012. Oil on canvas, 45 x 60cm. Private collection London. (Photo: Winston Kellman)

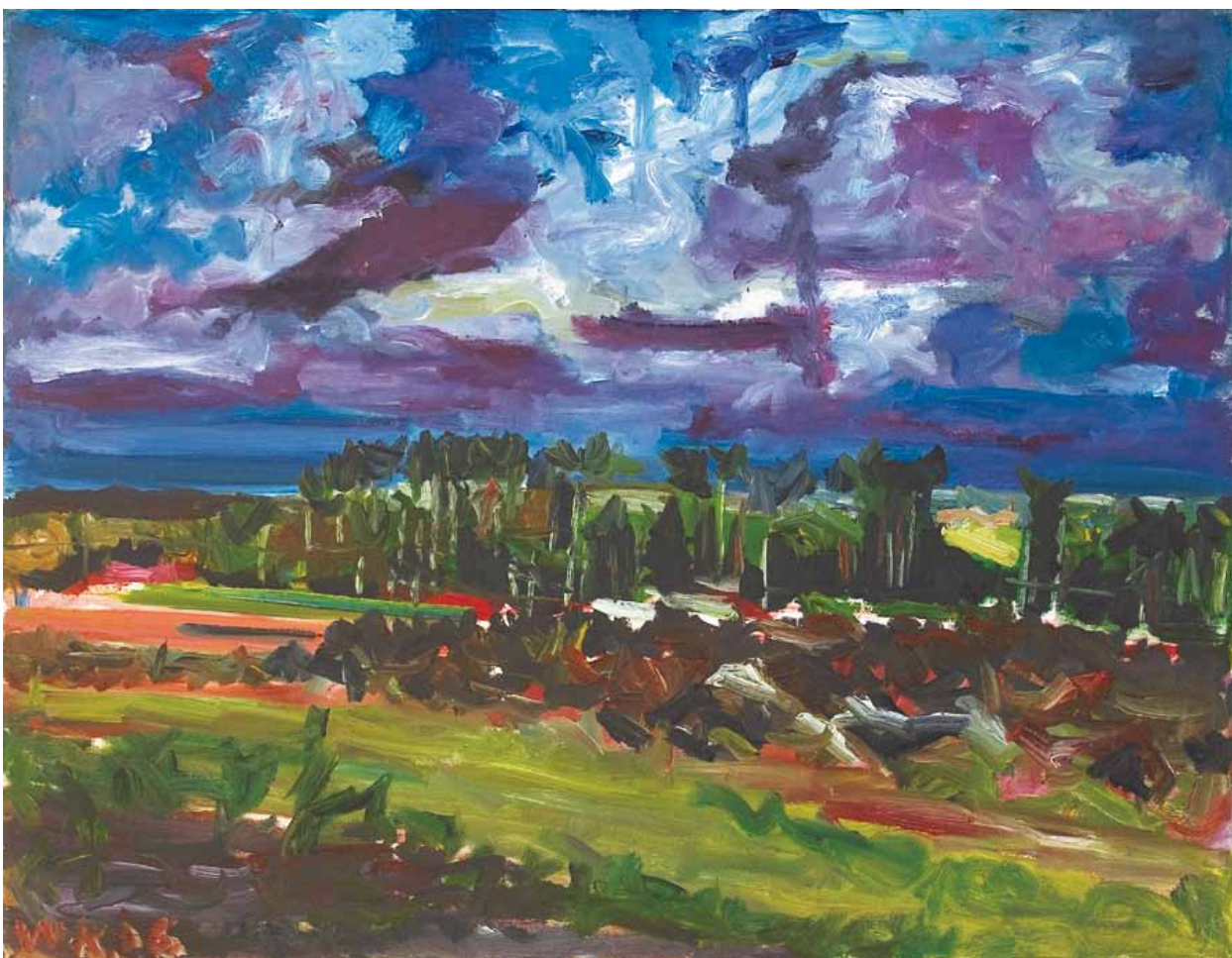


Figure 6.2: Winston Kellman, from the *Mud and Flowers Series*, 2004. Oil on canvas, 110 x 77cm. National Art Gallery of Barbados. (Photo: National Art Gallery Committee)

The material remains of processes that have shaped the land have informed the series of *Mud and Flowers*. The land is treated as an embodiment of cultural memory. These fields are essentially graveyards to the previously enslaved population, the negro yards, their material remains transformed into mud. Memory here is understood as that fluid negotiation between the desires of the present and legacies of the past. An attempt to represent the island that is neither the interpretation of an imposed colonial model or archetype, nor a false category of a mythic, nostalgic past, but rather an expression that allows memory to re-anchor and therefore hopefully to create a sense of belonging, bringing peace at sites of contestation.

Institutions and globalisation: United States and Caribbean art

Finding a place to exhibit artworks was always a major challenge for Caribbean artists as the need to be 'international' is seen as the final seal of success and approval for artists who are coming from that Caribbean space. With globalisation and the rise of the 'internationalisation' of Caribbean art which occurred in the past two decades, an analysis of the system reveals how the functioning and networks of curatorship and institutional policy have determined the outcomes and the visibility of Caribbean art.

This cultural shift towards the international occurred essentially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the Caribbean region during this period, cultural loyalties were established based on shifting socio-political involvements, as well as available development and funding opportunities. In the English-speaking region, this was towards the USA and away from Great Britain, whose interests progressively dwindled following decolonisation. The United States therefore initiated these efforts with the first of the 'Caribbean Survey Exhibitions'. This was essentially the first of such exhibitions, focused on Caribbean carnival, under the heading 'Festival Arts'. It was supported by the Smithsonian Institute in 1989. This was really a travelling show and possibly set the tone for others to follow.

In the catalogue for the most recent exhibition in 2012, entitled 'Caribbean Art Crossroads of the World' (Cullen and Fuentes, 2012), Edward T. Sullivan (2012) charts the rise and development of these 'themed shows' up to the present. The contemporary Caribbean shows of the last decade and their continual proliferation appears, on examination, to be dominated by curators and critics attached to those large US institutions, museums and universities (like the Brooklyn Museum and the Art Museum of the Americas, Washington), who seem to possess what can

only be described as a shared knowledge of theory, expertise and curatorial preference as demonstrated by an unrelenting sameness of selection. This privileged insider position for the most part dictates the funding and sponsoring opportunities. They function as essentially brokers between the institutions and funding agencies and as such determine what gets visibility as definitive of the region.

These groups of individuals, the international curators, are themselves trans-cultural, global operators and therefore do not demonstrate any real cultural-historical loyalty to any area. They interpret Caribbean cultures according to themselves, which creates and contributes to the disseminating practice of what is remembered as cultural definitions of the places covered in these exhibitions. In doing this, it again confirms and reinforces views and definitions from outside the region as the determining and significant cultural features of these local cultures. This is effectively achieved and constructed by a form of saturation of the field of production by what is deemed contemporary effectively eradicating any semblance of a 'past' Caribbean, which is actually still presently unfolding. These areas include thematic renderings of creolisation, migration, diaspora, digitally driven communication, installation and performance to the exclusion of other areas that are seen as traditionally orientated, for example, painting and sculpture. Painting and sculpture have been ascribed the qualities of possessing an assumed backwardness, thus representing media that must presumably be overcome in order to qualify for entry into the ranks of the contemporary.

In addition to the medium, the themes of the exhibitions, given and decided by the curators, impose limitations. In an insightful essay on African diasporic art history, Krista Thompson (2011, pp. 19-20) makes the observation that some parties, in hailing creolisation and cultural blending, may in fact be hostile to the idea of African diasporic cultures. In the broader, theoretical claiming of diaspora, the term becomes less associated with place, that is, with Africa, and more with a process of becoming. This non-acknowledgement of place therefore presents a number of obstacles to cultural development especially in societies where the African diasporic presence and perspective is subsumed into a category of non-importance as it relates to dominant cultural norms, and where the cultural origins and formulations of society deny or ignore constituent components of that same history.

This form of 'Internationalism', seen from the region, is predominately driven by a North American perspective, where funding is supported by institutions (linked to universities or colleges) and museums that

claim to represent a Caribbean diaspora. Hence, the wide geographical catchment areas of these themed exhibitions. The very real possibility of collapsing the Caribbean into this new world space in fact leaves the physical, actual Caribbean behind or out of the question of relevance. Does a physical Caribbean exist as a tangible lived place? Is it of interest to anyone? Does its history, memory and the daily grind of the imaginary, and by extension its future, have a place in the story of Caribbean art?

These particular concepts of the global Caribbean, which have been applied to contemporary art, run the risk of over-determining the Caribbean, as they operate entirely in the realms of theory and abstraction, neglecting both concrete events and processes that are occurring in the present. The result is a reduction of the reality of life and the overshadowing of daily engagements 'on the ground', while at the same time ignoring the possibility of developing narratives at the source and site of continued contestation. This is a significant omission in Caribbean art.

The fact that some institutions in the Caribbean region seem to encourage the production of work to meet the market needs of an outward/international-looking audience means, to some extent, that younger artists are in danger of denying their lived realities in order to find acceptance in this more globalised space. It is possible to observe that lived realities are now being constructed in this virtual space and actual physical space does not represent a significant reality in any form. This formulation however, does not sufficiently factor in the economic dimension to the production that drives this form of creativity (an advanced technological set of aesthetic practices), which is still enacted at the 'local'. There is still a general understanding that without resources, infrastructure, funding, a certain ease of travel, access to technological systems, easy involvement and access to this virtual world, the production possibilities for digital works, installations and large-scale 'conceptual' works, could and will be compromised or limited to available infrastructure. This then introduces and renders an unsustainable element to the production because it is ultimately predicated on an economic assumption of stability at the site of production. The idea of economic stability for the inhabitants of the region has always been a contested notion.

With this avenue of visibility secured through the same universities and museums, and facilitated by travelling curators, the acceptance factor for recognition now becomes an issue, and another dynamic unfolds. What is occurring in these societies

is in fact an adaptation to a new situation defined by relations between the dominant and the dominated. These themed shows essentially occupy a peripheral place in the global art markets. If and when they make their appearances, they are essentially tacked on to 'bigger ideas' coming from the usual centres New York, Washington, New Jersey and several other large American cities. Their interloper status is confirmed by the general aura of provincialism clinging to the exhibited works as they fill the appropriate gap for 'Caribbean art'. The follow-up usually reveals a lack of positive reviews, dealerships or representation in these same centres, if and when they are acknowledged in the (inter)national press.

This paradoxical situation of wanting to belong and being dissatisfied at the level of belonging can be traced to the degree of control determined by institutional involvement and management in the region. How much autonomy does the region have when presenting itself? What are the policies that determine involvement? Who are the facilitators? How do we represent ourselves? All of these questions are to a great extent tied to local institutional policy and decision.

The very agents who help to generate production in the region through institutions, and the roles they have played and continue to play in shaping and developing artistic production, have to be considered ready for re-evaluation if we are to remain optimistic about artistic production and sustainability.

Institutions and globalisation: United Kingdom and Caribbean art

Stuart Hall (1990) states that in culture, the polarising tendencies present everywhere in that highly contradictory formation called 'globalisation' (between the pull towards fundamentalism, ethnic and religious particularism on the one hand and the homogenising, evangelising assimilations on the other) have left the ground in-between more embattled. On the other hand, the black diaspora arts stand in a more engaged position in relation to contemporary art practice, in part because the art world has been obliged to become more 'global', though some parts of the globe remain, in this respect, more 'global' than others.

The institutional involvement of the Caribbean with Britain that began in the colonial period has continued into the present and charts the socio-cultural involvement through the arts from dependent territories to independent states. Institutional structures were initiated through the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Commonwealth Institute, meaning that continuity was determined by

collaborations. The local, infrastructural, educational component and the 'international opportunities' for exposure were some of the ways the region benefited from these arrangements. The reciprocal benefits to Britain can be assumed to be in the areas of showing the absorption of multicultural influences in society, a consequence of the colonial involvement. In 1948, what was originally the Commonwealth of Nations under the colonial British crown was reconfigured as the Commonwealth of Independent Nation. Part of this organisation's mandate was to create cultural, educational and economic exchanges and the Commonwealth Institute in London became an important venue.

Initially, this commonwealth generation of artists, those who went to Britain, had some measure of support and recognition. The varying outcomes for most of these artists is testimony to the uncertain value of their acceptance as part of a British artistic avant-garde in the 1960s, as the careers and reputations of these artists have yet to receive serious scholarly attention. Jean Fisher (2009) in her thought-provoking essay on the 1989 exhibition 'The Other Story', a survey exhibition in London at the Hayward Gallery curated by Rasheed Araeen, suggests other reasons for this falling off of interest. One main reason was that by 1973 the British Government had lost its enthusiasm for the Commonwealth as an economic and cultural market and joined the European Community. At the same time, Britain was increasing political associations with the USA, and the Caribbean was dropped from the cultural list of important areas. The Commonwealth Institute continued with reduced activities because of difficulties with funding and support. One of the first major international art events for the region coming out of Britain was the exhibition '1492-1992: A New Look at Caribbean Art' (Un Nouveau Regard sur Les Caribes) at Espace Carpeaux, Courbevoie, France, which was sponsored and facilitated by the Commonwealth Institute in 1992.

This exhibition still has a particular significance for me in both personal and professional terms. I was a participating artist representing Barbados, and 1992 was also the year I relocated to Barbados after having been a London-based artist for two decades. This was the first exhibition of Caribbean art in Europe that reflected on post-colonial legacies. However, it did this within a frame that involved the quincentenary 'celebration' of Columbus' arrival in the new world. This resulted in a number of contested situations in the region that challenged the 'celebratory' position of the exhibition, and there were deliberately staged alternative exhibitions that suggested counter-

narratives and other stories of Columbus' arrival in the region, for example, 'Haiti/500 Years' by Jean-Marie Drot and Florence Alexis. This exhibition traced the history of Haiti from 1492-1992, as recounted by its painters, a response to the other self-celebrating ceremonies at the time. Although well intended, and global in its reach, the disappointments of '1492-1992: A New Look at Caribbean Art', again showed how there was a (dis)connection between local and global expectations for Caribbean arts.

It has been noted that the last decade, at the turn of the twenty-first century, has brought about an important shift with the emergence of British-born black artists who have the same Commonwealth-Caribbean genealogy. Unlike the Commonwealth generation of artists, they have insisted in getting their voices heard and articulating their relevance to British society through art and education, possibly because there was 'nowhere to return to'; the option offered to and taken by some Commonwealth artists of the previous generation. This is indeed a considerable achievement given the relative economic disadvantages and socio-political hostilities directed at this group of British citizens during this period.

These black British artists have in turn have demonstrated an acknowledgement of past legacies and have moved to forge links with the Caribbean by setting up initiatives for bringing educational and exhibition possibilities to the region through this shared historical connection. This took the form of the Black Diaspora Visual Arts Symposium in 2009 and the International Curators Forum, an open conceptual network that was designed to meet emerging issues of curatorial practice in relation to the international circuit. In essence, it is this British Commonwealth connection, the history that links Britain to its former colonies that presents the possibility of connectivity at the critical site of cultural convergence, this acknowledgement of the shared past. It is through institutions like this, in my view, that sustainability can be considered through the creative linking of resources and educational opportunities that are bilateral, collaborative and discursive in approach.

The local-global alliance: the idea of the Commonwealth as a site of regeneration

What I would now like to propose is the notion of the 'commonwealth' as a site of hope, a cultural institution if you like, but in fact it is more 'the ideals of a Commonwealth', in the sense of mutual exchanges based on a recognition of shared identities defined by the entanglements of colonial history. This acknowledgement I believe, is crucial in the English-speaking Caribbean and Barbados in particular.

In a very interesting and thought-provoking essay on the legacies of colonialism, Ruth Craggs (2010) concludes her extensive investigations by suggesting that a Commonwealth that insists on its modernity and its break from the past, yet continues to unquestioningly utilise ideas that originate in imperial discourse and practice will struggle to overcome the deep inequalities and problematic relationships on which these ideas are based. In summary, a Commonwealth that is open but critical of its imperial heritage can be more successful in its stated aims of reducing economic and socio-political inequality.

These ideas that argue for bringing the Commonwealth as a concept or an area of cultural involvement into critical view, fostered through sites and schemes such as exhibition spaces and financial support for scholarship would promote an understanding of the networks that continue to link Britain to its former colonies creating what could possibly be seen as a creative bridge between the local and the global. In this area of reflection on ideas and analysis, particular descriptions of shared experiences can create a site of shared heritage that I believe is an avenue for growth and sustainability as both sides of the story will have to be articulated with regard to their present positions.

Funding and sponsorship which looks at a shared responsibility, as opposed to one that dictates the terms of engagement based on narrow concepts of 'inclusion,' which in essence means that the region should try to 'catch up' with an established mainstream, therefore holds to my mind more hope for arts communities in the Caribbean.

An aesthetics of place or visual arts as post-colonial response

Octavio Paz (1961) states that art cannot be reduced to the land, the people and the time that produce it, nevertheless it is inseparable from them. It escapes history, but is marked by it. Place then sets the frame of reference for the analysis; location matters, because the drama of colonisation took place *somewhere*.

In these post-modern times, painting exists generally in a constant curious relationship between its present situation deemed *passé* or moribund, and its past heritage of traditional importance. Did it ever have credibility in the Caribbean as an artistic form? Its continual presence allows us however to review the various ways of viewing the 'past' in the region and by virtue of the short period of modern developments in the visual arts, it can therefore function first and foremost as a reflective field.

Why are they still painting when all around technology seems to have determined the means of artistic communication? The simple answer is that this direct way of constructing forms of representation speaks to an engagement, a bodily engagement, a ritual that has its roots in a particular place and time. It also acknowledges the accumulation of related experiences through a sustained involvement with the medium. The works by both artists in this article therefore suggest how this artistic production located within local histories and memories helps us deconstruct particular readings of history, and how historical content can be the catalyst used to inform artistic creations. This reinterpretation or (re)presentation heightens our awareness and sensitivities, and leads us to the formation of new realities.

In the works of Ras Ishi Butcher, the images of place reveal an interest in transformations of history and culture.



Figure 6.3: Ras Ishi Butcher, *Piece of the Rock*, 2006-08. Mixed Media, 167.6 x 416.5cm. Collection the artist. (Photo: Ras Ishi Butcher)

The chattel house and the colonial plantation figure, two iconic motifs relating to the colonial past and present, are separated by a gulf of historical details. These details of personal observation, art-historical references and collective images of cultural domestic details serve as an anchor to these two polarities. The narrative therefore is one of separate existences in the same place although a shared history links them. The fact that they are presented together in one piece

creates a stark graphic image of social separation, a separation the artist insists remains present in contemporary society, and leaves the field open to speculation on the consciousness each area has of the other's existence.

These works although painted in the early 1990s carry a strong cultural emotional charge as they refer to an actual, present landscape activity, that of indentured labourers working in the canefields on the



Figure 6.4: Ras Ishi Butcher, *Black Orchids*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 189.9cm. Private collection Barbados. (Photo: Ras Ishi Butcher)

plantation. The formal language is one of abstraction and figuration, demonstrating a skilful use of the medium that does not obscure the conceptual ideas. Indeed this use of painting strengthens these ideas as it presents the multiple layers of images and activity simultaneously. Workers are completely integrated into the body of the works, so as to make them almost indistinguishable from the land. The workers of the land become the land. A potent series of paintings, which to my mind give layers of meaning to the expressions 'shaping the land' or 'sons and daughters of the soil', as well as the notion that identity is intricately intertwined with the land and its history.

Conclusion

These works are essentially based on emotional responses to the landscape. By emphasising our surroundings as active forces, the environment is used not only to reinterpret the past but also to conceptualise new subjectivities. The emotions play a significant role in the way that memories are shaped by art production. The vantage point of 'painting emotion' – a structure of feeling – allows space for indigenous artists to address social issues within a framework of self-determination, decolonisation and social justice.

Without a deeper knowledge of one's place and faithfulness to it, it is inevitable that place will be used and described carelessly, perhaps eventually even destroyed. The art produced will be superficial and decorative, functioning only as a symbol of prestige, the attributes of an 'in-group'.

The works I have examined are concerned with showing landscapes of memory and history, beyond the associations of the tropics as a scene of pleasure. Such painted landscapes carry the 'uncomfortable truths' of loss, pain, trauma and deep social fractures, the other elements that serve as a horizon for memory.

Places and communities such as ours, that have undergone brutal violent histories, are now in the process of forging a collective identity no matter how hybrid or fragmented that identity may have been before, during or after colonisation. As such, the retrieval and re-inscription of a fragmented past becomes a crucial contemporary site for determining a resistant collective identity. Hopefully, such an approach can provide the possibility of a reconciliation with the historical past, and lead to a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of place.

Artists whose position or frame of reference is still an African diasporic one are finding themselves included among selections of contemporary art from the Caribbean region, and this inscribes a sense of presence and indeed a greater sense of place itself.

Establishing this sense through art serves the purpose of expanding awareness of the Caribbean – taking us beyond the status of being just a holiday destination or simply a place you pass through. In turn, this will assist in the goal of locating Caribbean arts communities that are worth sustaining.

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