

BEYOND BOUNDARIES: SEEING ART HISTORY FROM THE CARIBBEAN

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ABSTRACTS

Petrina Dacres (Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, Kingston, Jamaica): “Heroic Sculpture in Contemporary Caribbean Art Practice”

The subject of the heroic statue has been directly addressed by contemporary Caribbean artists in various ways. Not only are Caribbean artists engaging colonial statues, proposing and creating new heroic sculptures, but they also respond to the corpus of post-colonial heroic images established after independence. Their work adds a post-colonial context to the recent global discussions of the meanings of heroic visibility in public art and architecture. While demonstrating the potency of heroic imagery in African Diaspora art practice, this presentation is particularly interested in highlighting some of the issues and questions on the making and meanings of new black heroic canons that their work engenders. The presentation considers how power, the past, and social visibility are being rethought and recast in contemporary practice.

Aldeide Delgado (Women Photographers International Archive, Miami, Florida): “The Archipelagic Method: A Model for Complexifying Latinx & Photography Art History”

Taking the essay “Feminist Thought and Curating: On Method” by cultural theorist Elke Krasny as a methodological reference, this paper proposes the archipelagic method as a model to complexify our understanding of Latinx and photography art history. What is the archipelagic method and how does it operate in practice? Does it focus on the archipelago as the subject of representation for a potential historiography? Or does it employ an archipelagic mode of thought to expand scholarship on Latinx & Photography Art History? By using the identifier Latinx & Photography Art History, this paper seeks not to classify a new field, but rather to describe an intersectional approach to investigating two disciplines central to my upcoming publication on the archipelagic method: Latinx Art History and Photography Art History. The archipelagic method can likely be applied to any and every cultural practice of producing knowledge. It forms part of the epistemic turn undertaken by decolonial, queer, and feminist thinkers to render evident the forms of oppression that narratives of modernity, colonialism, and patriarchy produce. Its peculiarity, however, resides in considering the archipelago—beyond the geographical or geopolitical—as a point of departure to question continental paradigms and perspectives. Thus, the use of the archipelagic method in a new understanding of Latinx Art History would avoid reductive synthesis

by reflecting the complex network of interrelationships among the various traditions around the world that coalesced in the Americas. Likewise, employing an archipelagic method for understanding Photography Art History rejects linear temporality by displacing the genesis of photography from the invention of the camera apparatus in the 1830s to the European imperial enterprise—as Ariella Azoulay denotes—in 1492.

Andil Gosine (York University, Toronto, Canada): “Queer-ing Art Methods and Practices: Caribbean Potentialities?”

This paper introduces and reflects on two exhibition -projects in which I have occupied varied roles: as a curator for *everything slacks in a wreck* (Ford Foundation, 2022) and as a creator-curator for *Nature’s Wild* (various iterations and venues, 2022–2026). Centering an analysis of class (as always imbricated with other relations of power, including those produced from discourses of “race,” gender, and sexuality), this paper draws on the experience of these projects to discuss the limits and potential possibilities of Caribbean incursions into and challenges to dominant frameworks of art history. I am especially interested in the convenors’ consideration of ways in which “deep engagement with the nuances of Caribbean intellectual thought” might “change tactics.” I have in another context argued that the Caribbean is *already* queer, both as a refutation of teleological, racist, homonationalist claims that have often been made about the region and as an affirmation of its historical unsteadiness, due to processes of creolization as well as to its landscape. I consider how the potential of this kind of critical approach—as aspired to in *everything* and *Nature’s Wild*—might similarly interrupt/disrupt the discipline of Art History.

Yanique Hume (University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados): “Of Art and Spirit: Sacred Practice in Caribbean Contemporary Art”

The intimate intersections of art and religion has generated significant bodies of work across several disciplines. In fact, the study of the “sacred arts” is a growing scholastic field that has brought greater visibility through a range of critical studies exploring this connection. Arturo Lindsay's *Santeria Aesthetics*, Donald Cosentino's *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, and numerous works by Robert Farris Thompson, but in particular his classic book, *Flash of the Spirit*, are among the pathfinding texts that have defined this dynamic area of inquiry. Notwithstanding these interdisciplinary advancements in the study of art making practices within the broader African diaspora, the art history of the Caribbean still engages matters of “Spirit” rather tenuously. This relative aloofness is curious given that several artists creating work are deeply inspired by varying sacred wisdom systems as not only aesthetic and performative modalities of expression but also from the intimate perspective of practitioners and Seekers. This essay explores the multifaceted ways that notions of the Spirit, as expressed across a range of faith systems, find tangible form in the oeuvre of the late Cuban multimedia and ethnographic artist Leandro Soto. Soto's work will also be situated along side that of his contemporaries María Magdalena Campos-Pons and José Bedia, as all touch on themes of transcendence and techniques of concealment in invoking the power of the sacred.

Deborah Jack (New Jersey City University, Jersey City, New Jersey): “Intertidal Imaginaries: The Resistant Geographies of the Shore(coast) in the Aftermath of Saltwater(storm) Surges”

In this talk, artist Deborah Jack presents recent and current projects that explore the shoreline of the (is)land as a liminal space. The fluidity of the water as it interacts with the shore and the lines that are created by that encounter as well as the temporal quality of those lines. Climate change has caused the warming of the oceans which has led to hurricanes that are explosive in strength, last longer, and storm surges that push further inland. Ongoing questions across Jack’s practice serve as a point of departure for this new body of work: Does water have memory? What is the resonance when the water and the land connect? If the hurricane is a natural memorial to the Middle Passage, how can we reimagine altered shoreline during the storm surge? What happens when the surge encounters architecture and infrastructure?

Erica Moiah James (University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida): “Criticism as Creation: The Political Aesthetics of Black Ecstasy in Multimodal Caribbean Art”

In an essay engaging the work of nineteenth century Cuban poet Julián del Casal, the writer José Lezama Lima reads del Casal’s poetry within a concept of Caribbean modernism that aligns with Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter’s position that the arts of the Caribbean take shape because and within conditions of devastation. In these spectrally violent colonial and postcolonial spaces, Caribbean modernism continually emerges as nonlinear, spatially mobile and fugitive, taking clear form in moments when Caribbean artists realize that as always “*we must begin again.*” For Lima, what is most powerful about this generative art form is its character of “*criticism as creation.*” I am curious about ways in which Caribbean modernist art can render simultaneously as criticism and creation within imperfect, unsettled conditions. In this paper, I explore these ideas by drawing on and extending Kevin Quashie’s notion of surrender through a reconfiguration of black ecstasy as a manifestation of Caribbean modernism in the work of sculptor Michael Richards, filmmaker Steve McQueen and dancehall star SuperCat. I want to attend to the ways these multimodal artists enact what Lima describes as Caribbean modernism’s need “to make do” and “settle into” what is present and what is remembered to imagine and shape black futurity. In process I hope to illuminate the ways this work becomes what Lima would have described as *contrapuntal forms* that generate *contrapuntal methodologies* where criticism becomes creation.

Daniella Rose King (Hyundai Tate Research Centre: Transnational): “From the Forest to the Concrete to the Ocean: Mapping a Poetics of Eco-Criticism in Caribbean and Diasporic Visual Art Practices”

This paper examines a number of contemporary art practices that advance a poetics of ecological criticism. These works probe the place and non-place of the Caribbean in the master narratives of western modernity, with a specific emphasis on the connection between the extraction set in motion from the point of settlement and colonization, and the social, economic, and environmental depletion

defined by our era of the Anthropocene/Racial Capitalocene/Plantationocene. This presentation will consider how the work advances our understanding of our collective pasts, ecological futures, and strategies for surviving and unpacking the multiple existential crises we face. Through a close reading of several projects by artists including Deborah Anzinger, Rhea Dillon, Ada M Patterson, Dominique White, and Alberta Whittle, this paper maps out the ways these artists have interrogated, redeployed, and undermined art history's languages and aesthetic strategies. Demonstrating how approaches to materiality, language, geography, and abstraction sit within a longer tradition of Caribbean and diasporic cultural production and black feminist critique, this paper further shows how responsive these works are to the urgencies of our contemporary conditions.

María Elena Ortiz (Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas): “A Caribbean Cannibalist under the Floridian Sun”

This paper is a critical reflection on how Caribbean initiatives in a United States museum transformed the institution, resulting in the establishment of a Caribbean Cultural Institute (CCI) and direct engagement with Caribbean art histories, artists, and thinkers. Considering the notion of anthropophagia—in this case, the act of consuming US museum tools with strategies rooted in the Caribbean—this study explores the impact of how a concerted institutional effort on the region is a tool for integrating Caribbean narratives into the US museum setting. This paper highlights a multidisciplinary curatorial model in practice, engaging exhibitions, programs, collections, and publications, to illustrate both successes and challenges, shedding light into the limitations of such initiatives when confronted with the shifting nature of US art organizations.

Jerry Philogene (Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania): “Beyond Vodou Iconography: Luce Turnier, a Feminist Modernist in Haiti”

This paper examines the work of Haiti-born, modernist painter Luce Turnier (1924–1994) to situate her as a pivotal artist engaged in the visual experimentation and aesthetic nuances of twentieth century modernism. I will highlight Turnier's contributions in creating a transatlantic visual arts aesthetic that reframes an African diasporic art historiography, which includes Haiti's cultural, aesthetic, and ideological contributions to Black intellectual thought and culture, especially during the mid-twentieth century.

Veerle Poupeye (curator based in Kingston, Jamaica): “Some Strategies for Rethinking Caribbean Art Histories”

This paper will offer reflections on the production of new art histories in the Caribbean context, taking Jamaica as its case study. The foundational essay “Jamaican Art 1922–1982” by David Boxer, the late Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica, serves as a point of departure. The new art histories, as they are being produced in the Euro-American context, have the advantage that they can argue against well-established art-historical narratives. That is not the case in the Caribbean, where those art-historical narratives that have been produced are often rudimentary and contested and were

articulated in an ambivalent critical dialogue with the dominant Western canons, challenging their exclusions but also re-confirming them by claiming validating space in them. “Jamaica Art 1922–1982” is a clear example of this, and furthermore illustrates how the foundational art histories in the Caribbean are wedded to ideas about the national that are inherently limiting. The foundational research on art in the Caribbean is also incomplete, leaving what are sometimes huge gaps in the empirical knowledge base while leading to the perpetuation of errors and misrepresentations. The conservative influence of the local secondary education system, which perpetuates the use of certain labels and classifications, is also a factor, as is the lack of investment of local cultural institutions and the local academy in producing new narratives. This paper will suggest ways in which the stories of art in the Caribbean could be told and retold in ways that are more relevant to the present moment, and it will also examine pedagogies that could open up the conversation at the educational level.

Adrienne Rooney (Rice University, Houston, Texas): ““What loveliness escapes the schools’: Carifesta’s Epistemological Critique”

When writer George Lamming addressed the nearly ten thousand people gathered at the opening ceremony for the fourth edition of the Caribbean Festival of Arts (Carifesta) held in 1981 in Bridgetown, Barbados, he spoke of an ongoing effort to redefine “ways of seeing” and “the terms of our meaning.” His speech paid tribute to six Caribbean cultural figures the festival honored that year, including visual artist Edna Manley of Jamaica, writer Aimé Césaire of Martinique, dancer Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad and Tobago, and poet Nicolás Guillén of Cuba. In exploring Caribbean realities, Lamming explained, these groundbreaking thinkers had recognized conflicts with predominant ways of seeing established by colonial rule. “Europe and their successors, the United States,” he orated, “have been trapped in the deceiving habit of seeing themselves not as a portion of mankind, but as the custodians of all human destiny.” For Lamming, those receiving tribute that day had sculpted, painted, authored, composed, improvised, and choreographed interventions that made palpable the colonially derived structures that shaped Caribbean life, social hierarchies, and cultural standards. Vitality, they also had been crafting alternatives. This paper considers Lamming’s words as a lens to look at the early Carifesta events themselves, transpiring in Guyana, Jamaica, Cuba, and Barbados across the long, heady 1970s. For many who envisioned the festival’s original contours, Carifesta was to embody precisely what Lamming stated: it was, among other things, a mode of epistemological critique. This paper assesses how that critique materialized, and where it fell short, through the festival’s panorama of visual art, material cultural, art writings, and “ethnographic” programming. It asks what (hi)stories of art and artmaking emerged that had been (and often continue to be) excluded from art history classrooms? What ways of seeing and looking surfaced? And what lessons can they teach us today?

Nicole Smythe-Johnson (University of Texas at Austin): “John Dunkley’s Photographic Eye: A Close Look at *Banana Plantation*”

Included in almost every major survey of Jamaican and Caribbean art, it’s difficult to overstate John Dunkley’s significance in Jamaican art history. *Banana Plantation* (1945), one of his best-known works,

includes several elements typical of the artist's distinctive oeuvre. The painting also brings together the three major themes of my dissertation: the assertion of a hemispheric American modernism defined by negotiations between elite and subaltern cultural production, the significance of circum-Caribbean travel in that vision of modernism, and the role of photography in perceiving that significance. The painting reflects on the often dangerous experiences of a generation of West Indian circum-Caribbean travelers whose working class cosmopolitanism shaped American modernity. *Banana Plantation* is also an example of Dunkley's photographic eye—his consistently dark palette, flattened perspective, and idiosyncratic handling of light, which I position as a kind of modernist formal innovation drawing on the new way of seeing that was early twentieth century photography. Within the context of this conference, engagement with Dunkley's work, outside the nationalist or primitivist frames that have historically shaped its reception, there is an opportunity to rethink modernism, shifting it from its decidedly elite focus and linking North and South American modernisms through the English-speaking Caribbean.