

TROPICAL IS
POLITICAL:
CARIBBEAN
ART UNDER
THE VISITOR
ECONOMY
REGIME

AMERICAS
SOCIETY

EXHIBITIONS



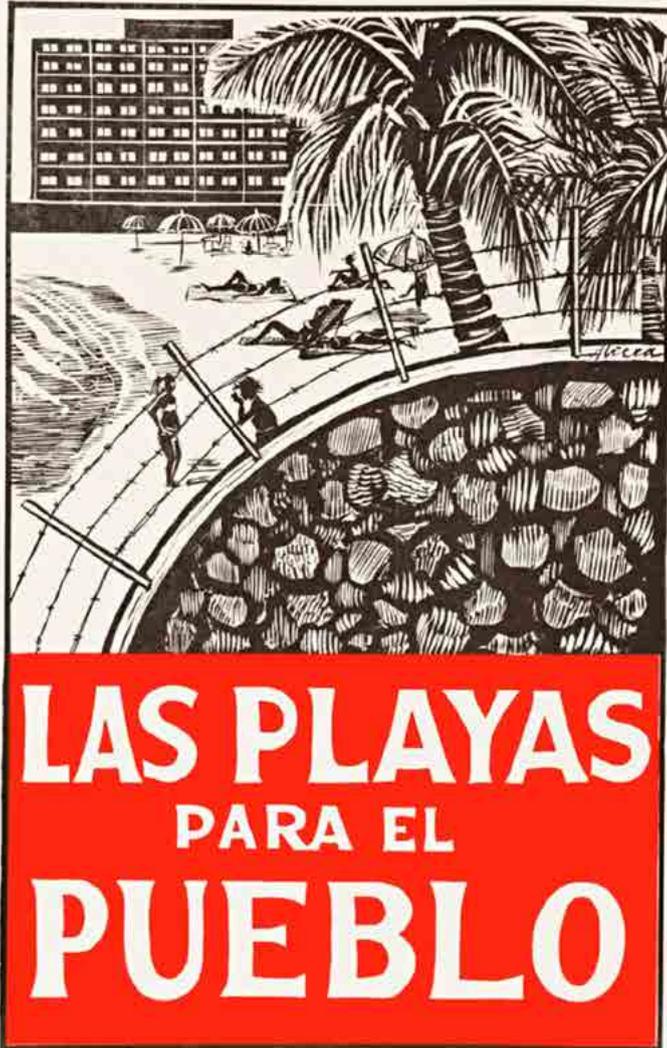


Previous: Piscina en el Hotel Caribe Hilton (Swimming pool of the Caribe Hilton hotel), March 1964. Colección de Fotos del Periódico *El Mundo*, University of Puerto Rico Digital Library

El Conquistador Hotel and Club, December, 1968. Colección de Fotos del Periódico *El Mundo*, University of Puerto Rico Digital Library

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MOVIMIENTO PRO INDEPENDENCIA

José R. Alicea, *Las playas para el pueblo* (Beaches for the people), 1971. Lithograph, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (36.4 × 23 cm). Collection Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras. Donation of SmithKlein Beecham Pharmaceuticals

FOREWORD

Americas Society is pleased to present *Tropical is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime*. A collaboration with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico (MAC), this exhibition features works by artists from several Caribbean islands, all of whom are interested in investigating critical ideas of paradise and their connection with the region's tourism economy. It is an honor for an organization like ours to collaborate with MAC in this important display of contemporary Caribbean art.

The exhibition is guest-curated by Marina Reyes Franco, curator at the MAC in San Juan, where it will be displayed after closing at Americas Society. I am grateful to Ms. Reyes

Franco for creating this insightful and provocative exhibition and for working with our team to bring it to our galleries. I also express my thanks to the Americas Society curatorial team: Aimé Iglesias Lukin, Director and Chief Curator of Visual Arts; to Assistant Curators Tie Jojima and Rachel Remick, who worked on the presentation of the show; and to the team at Karen Marta Editorial Consulting, for their work on Americas Society's publications.

The presentation of *Tropical is Political* is made possible by the generous support of The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the City Council, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Etant donnés Contemporary Art program from Villa Albertine and FACE Foundation, and the Smart Family Foundation of New York.

I also express my deep gratitude for the continued support of our Arts of the Americas Circle members, all of whom contribute to the success of the Visual Arts program: Estrellita

B. Brodsky, Virginia Cowles Schroth, Emily A. Engel, Diana Fane, Galeria Almeida e Dale, Isabella Hutchinson, Carolina Jannicelli, Vivian Pfeiffer, Phillips, Gabriela Pérez Rocchietti, Erica Roberts, Sharon Schultz, Diana López and Herman Sifontes, and Edward J. Sullivan.

SUSAN SEGAL
PRESIDENT AND CEO, AS/COA

FOREWORD

Since its founding, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico (MAC) has insisted on the importance of regional interconnectedness, which is a core part of how the museum developed its collection—spanning Puerto Rican, Caribbean and Latin American Art and its diasporas—and programming over the past thirty-eight years. As we look towards building better futures together, it is of utmost importance to present this exhibition, which centers the problems Caribbean artists have identified and addressed regarding the region’s history as the birth site of colonial empires and their legacies in relation to tourism and finance.

Tropical is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime should be contextualized within a broad institutional framework through which, during the last decade, MAC has conceived different artistic projects and formed alliances with community groups, particularly those most vulnerable to displacement and climate change along our coastlines. These issues, alongside the recognition of ancestral knowledge and historically marginalized identities, play a vital role in the work MAC does with vulnerable communities. We know firsthand how the climate crisis exacerbates inequalities and—in an era of extensive recovery projects in Puerto Rico—it is urgent for our institution to acknowledge the dichotomies in processes that affect the social fabric.

We are honored to present this project together with Americas Society, and are grateful that this fruitful partnership has brought about an exhibition that serves as a resource for raising awareness of the impact of the visitor economy. By sharing references from different locations, it fosters critical

perspectives and action among our audiences so we can confront the issues that concern us all now.

Our gratitude goes to MAC's curator, Marina Reyes Franco, for conceiving this exhibition, and to all participating artists for proposing other possibilities of Caribbeanness amidst the current challenges we face today. Our sincerest gratitude also goes to The Andy Warhol Foundation and Teiger Foundation for their support that has made possible the presentation of this exhibition.

MARIANNE RAMÍREZ APONTE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND
CHIEF CURATOR, MUSEO DE ARTE
CONTEMPORÁNEO DE PUERTO RICO
(MAC)

**TROPICAL IS POLITICAL:
CARIBBEAN ART UNDER THE
VISITOR ECONOMY REGIME**

Marina Reyes Franco

“Where I am from, hospitality could be viewed as a multifarious performance that is directly related to someone’s livelihood, to the extent that the performance almost becomes who you consider yourself to be. And we never really get to cut that off.”

—Anina Major, 2020

“But in our tourist brochures the Caribbean is a blue pool into which the republic dangles the extended foot of Florida as inflated rubber islands bob and drinks with umbrellas float towards her on a raft. This is how the islands from the shame of necessity sell themselves; this is the seasonal erosion of their identity, that high-pitched repetition of the same images of service that cannot distinguish one island from the other, with a future of polluted marinas, land deals negotiated by ministers, and all of this conducted to the music of Happy Hour and the rictus of a smile.”

—Derek Walcott, 1992

For all its diversity, multiculturalism, multiplicity of languages, and the logistical and financial barriers to inter-island travel, it is the colonial legacy of the occupation of European empires and the contemporary yoke of transnational capital which bind the islands of the Caribbean together. For an observant resident or visitor to the Caribbean, the link between the plantation and tourism economies is evident, whether measured by the economic impact of the industries; the resignification of spaces from one era to the next; the priority that is given to certain histories, sites, and architectural heritage; or the importance each has played in the creation of stereotypes for the region, which has left its trace on Caribbean identities and self-conceptualization.

Within this context, *Tropical is Political* investigates ideas of paradise, including “fiscal paradise,” as portrayed in Caribbean Art. This exhibition approaches the Caribbean not with the intention of thematically encompassing and categorizing its artistic contribution as a whole,

but rather examining it as a region subject to a particular set of structural circumstances—a product of the visitor economy regime. Centered around three main focal points: the body, territory, and finance, the selection of works in this exhibition delves into the effects of tourism on Caribbean artists and their cultural production, and how the neocolonial relationship embodied by the tourism industry affects how Caribbean cultures are represented for visitors.

Tropical is Political showcases the work of a selection of Caribbean artists—or artists working in the Caribbean sphere—that directly relates to the research I undertook in the region over the past several years. In 2017, I received the ICI/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Travel Award for Central America and the Caribbean and travelled throughout the region to research the effects of the visitor economy. Specifically, I travelled to Trinidad, The Bahamas, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica, using Puerto Rico as my home

base, foregrounding my research in the initial notions which I had developed in a Puerto Rican context related to tourism and its impact on cultural production. The additional destinations were selected with attention to what each location represented in my imagining of where the research could lead, and the various curatorial projects that could be supported via my travels. These projects examined numerous topics including the resignification of post-military spaces; the messaging in national branding and publicity campaigns; issues of self-representation and sexuality; real estate, land rights and access to beaches and other natural resources; souvenirs and local craftsmanship as interpreted and adapted in contemporary art; and finally, the offshore banking economy.

In confronting ideas of paradise, both natural and fiscal, as they exist in the cultural imaginary of the Caribbean basin region, this exhibition maps areas where the intersection of tourism and finance shape a broad range of subjects, from artistic production to cruise ship

routes, economic policy, and national identity. The term “visitor economy” denotes the economic activity—the goods consumed and the services rendered—by the people who visit a place, and can permeate all aspects of life, transforming a society into one that is organized to serve the visitor.¹ Many Caribbean countries have transitioned from agriculture-based to tourism-supported economies. Economies once sustained by the cultivation of monoculture crops on plantations—sugar in particular—for export to metropole nations in North America and Europe now rely on income from visitors from the wealthiest countries, a population attracted by postcards of pristine beaches and the promise of banking secrecy.² This transition is a legacy of the projects of colonialism and empire, which have left an undeniable mark on Caribbean culture by shaping the way we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to nature itself. The plantation economy model, as introduced by Trinidadian intellectual Lloyd Best in 1968, and developed alongside Canadian economist

Kari Polanyi Levitt, hypothesizes that the system of plantation slavery and specialization in the export of primary commodities has played a determinant role in the evolution of the societies in which it existed.³ According to Best, the legacy of the plantation system’s institutions, structures and behavior patterns are so deeply entrenched that any adjustment results in a mere adaptation within the established framework. Thus, one might look at the islands’ continued reliance on foreign ownership and the repatriation of profits and transfer pricing techniques used by transnational corporations and interpret them as Jamaican economist Norman Girvan has: as echoes of the economic theft and extraction of the land and its peoples, and as a legacy of slave plantation to metropole economic flows.⁴

The contemporary turn towards the term “visitor economy” in lieu of tourism across the Caribbean can be interpreted as a contemporary manifestation of the slave-plantation-metropole economy, in the form of an invitation to

foreigners to come live and work in paradise or, for locals, to experience their own country through an “Instagrammable” prism. The metaphor of the Caribbean as a paradise is rooted in fifteenth century literary tropes, which today holds contemporary resonance with tourism advertisement campaigns. The fetishization of the perceived childish innocence of Caribbean “natives” made way for a narrative that described a “wasteland” of unproductiveness. The so-called “noble savage” discourse gave way to the “lazy black” stereotype:

As the ruled’s supposed laziness was seen to justify their forced labor, so the native Caribbeans’ presumed inability to conduct their own affairs and make productive use of their resources serves as reason for the metropolitan nations’ running Caribbeans’ affairs for them and making the islands’ produce wealth for empire.⁵

The capital produced in the Caribbean, a product of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation wealth, paid for the industrialization of Europe and the global rise of capitalism. Eventually, the Caribbean was transformed into paradise once again, via the turn-of-the-century proliferation of tourism advertisements that sought to relieve Europeans and Americans from the burden of work. These advertisements sold the idea that laziness was luxury.

Even after many Caribbean nations became independent in the mid-twentieth century, political decolonization did not free these new countries from the exploitative ideas which global tourism relies on to thrive. The plantation-to-tourism pipeline is alive and well in some parts of the Caribbean, where former plantation lands have become golf courses and resorts that exclude the descendants of the people who were exploited in them from the coasts they border, making the link between the settler-colonial legacy and present-day exploitation abundantly apparent. Although

the tourism industry in the Caribbean started in the nineteenth century, it experienced a “boom” in the 1950s and 1960s, when the region began to transform towards a service economy rooted in hospitality, an industry standard that stabilized and solidified in the 1990s.

Simultaneously, the rise of the financial services sector emerged in many Caribbean countries, becoming the second most important industry in the region, even as it occasionally attracts international condemnation due to its entrenched and unseemly, yet not entirely illegal practices. These decades in the late twentieth century also roughly encompass the period in which most of the participating artists in this exhibition (and myself) came of age in the Antilles. Tourism campaigns and a sense of performativity in our mere existence in relation to tourism has shaped and scarred us deeply, even amongst those who hail from countries in which tourism is not the main economic motor. The consequences of recent debilitating hurricanes (Matthew in 2016, Irma and Maria in 2017)

and economic hardship (the 2008 recession and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, to name a few that have affected people around the globe) have only deepened this dependency on foreign investment. Images meant to sell paradise—its people, landscape, imagery and land—to others have also been used to sell the importance of these ideas to ourselves, so we rationalize and prioritize our own needs accordingly.

For Puerto Rico and other non-sovereign nations, the visitor economy regime also necessarily includes the projected judgements and fantasies of each metropole—whether it’s the United States, France, the Netherlands, or Britain—on the colonies they claim. The insistence on using the term “regime” emphasizes the top-down economic, cultural, and social structures that reproduce and impose these ideas on the many peoples of the Caribbean, whether they are represented by international hotel conglomerates, tour operators, advertising agencies tasked with developing branding strategies, cultural organizations, or national

ministries. The incidence of Puerto Rico's economic bankruptcy in 2016, and its reputation as a tax haven, led me to delve into the history of tourism in Puerto Rico, as well as the contradictory portrayal of post-military occupation sites like the islands of Vieques and Culebra in Puerto Rico as paradisiacal destinations. Puerto Rico has been a (fiscal) paradise for outsiders since the industrialization-by-invitation days of the early 1950s, while locals have had to bear the brunt of militarism, austerity measures, the transformation of the landscape into consumable images for tourism, and the internalization of certain tropes of tropicality.⁶ The interests that have shaped this exhibition are rooted in noticing profound changes in economic outlook and development in relation to cultural production in Puerto Rico, as well as by the desire to establish regional connections that may offer critiques and creative ways out of the tropical tropes we have been groomed by and grown accustomed to. These issues are not limited to the Puerto Rican experience, nor are they

intertwined only with successive colonial histories in the Caribbean, but further encompass the self-image and nation building processes of the Caribbean's so-called postcolonial present. The artists included in the exhibition use diverse strategies and media to highlight the conditions of life and the works of art which emerge in a region besieged by the commercialization of its people and land under the visitor economy regime. Informed by the experiences, conversations, and relationships established in this context, this exhibition is a curatorial exercise that is intended to evolve, serving as an addition to a series of exhibitions that was inaugurated in 2017, and which will continue to be expanded as its themes evolve in real time, and as the geographical and temporal possibilities of the research grow.⁷

The exhibition consists of existing and commissioned pieces, mostly created within the last 10 years by Allora & Calzadilla (US and Cuba, living in Puerto Rico), Dionne Benjamin-Smith (The Bahamas), Ricardo

Cabret (Puerto Rico, lives in NY), Carolina Caycedo (UK/Colombia, lived in Puerto Rico in the mid 2000s), Blue Curry (The Bahamas, lives in London), Sofía Gallisá Muriente (Puerto Rico), Gwladys Gambie (Martinique), Dalton Gata (Cuba, lives in Puerto Rico), Abigail Hadeed (Trinidad & Tobago), Donna Conlon (US, living in Panama since 1994) & Jonathan Harker (Ecuador, living in Panama since 1986), Darién Montañez (Panama), Joiri Minaya (US/Dominican Republic), José Morbán (Dominican Republic), nibia pastrana santiago (Puerto Rico), Oneika Russell (Jamaica), Dave Smith (UK, lived in The Bahamas from 1973–1990), Yiyo Tirado (Puerto Rico), Viveca Vázquez (Puerto Rico), and Averia Wright (The Bahamas).

The works in this show address critiques of self-representation and Caribbean sexuality (Benjamin-Smith, Gambie, Gata, Minaya, Russell, Smith); currency manipulation, bond debt and economic systems from the plantation to the more recent crypto investors (Cabret, Caycedo, Conlon & Harker); the built

environment and the nation-building impulse (Curry, Gallisá, Montañez, Morbán, Tirado); resignified post-military spaces (Allora & Calzadilla, Tirado, Montañez, Vázquez); Airbnb, displacement and the struggle to retain access to our natural resources (Gallisá, pastrana santiago, Vázquez), as well as crafts and identity (Wright). Through their works, but also through the way they develop their lives and careers, these artists propose ways of seeing and reinterpreting life in the Caribbean; not merely pointing out flaws but also the opportunities to transform ourselves and our future. A further emancipation from these legacies is necessary, and that is where the realms of culture and art can play an important role in expanding our imagination.

ENDNOTES

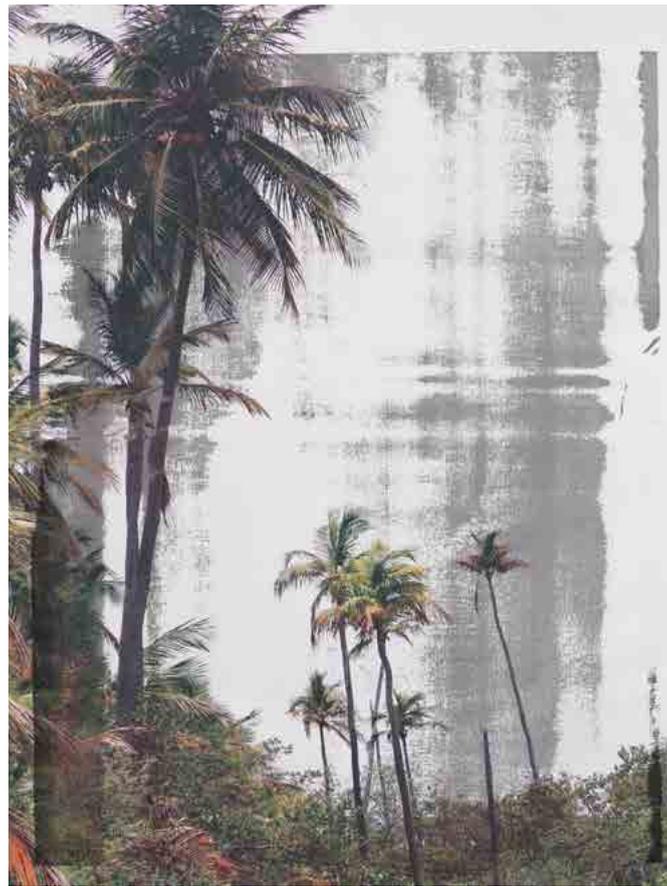
The epigraph is taken from Susannah Elisabeth Fulcher, "Anina Major Finds 'No Vacancy in Paradise,'" *The Provincetown Independent*, February 6, 2020; Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1992, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/lecture/>.

1. "This kind of economy considers a wide variety of touristic activity: medical, educational, business, cultural and artistic, agricultural, ecological, religious, sporting, literary, musical and artistic events, as well as people who own vacation homes or decide to retire there. The term permeates practically all aspects of life, transforming society to serve the visitor. Hospitals can be medical tourism destinations and university systems attract foreign students." Marina Reyes Franco, "The Visitor Economy Regime," *Independent Curators International*, January 2, 2018, <https://curatorsintl.org/journal/15278-the-visitor-economy-regime>.
2. A metropole is a state exercising power over a colony which it claims as its own.
3. Lloyd Best, "Outlines of a Model of Pure Plantation Economy," *Social and Economic Studies* XVII (March–December 1968): 283–324. See also: Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt, *Externally Propelled Industrialization and Growth in the Caribbean*, 4 vols. Montreal: McGill University, Centre for Developing Area Studies, 1968.
4. Norman Girvan, "Making the Rules of the Game: Country-Company Agreements in the Bauxite Industry," *Social and Economic Studies* 20, no. 4 (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, December 1971): 383–84.
5. Ian Gregory Strachan, "Caribbean Wasteland," *Paradise and Plantation: Tourism and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 79. Bahamian scholar Ian Gregory Strachan has continued this analysis of the plantation model in relation to the construction of the idea of paradise from the beginning of colonization to the present. In his extensive research, Strachan traces the evolution of the metaphor of the Caribbean as a paradise between the fifteenth and late eighteenth century using literary examples ranging from the journal of Christopher Columbus and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* to the writings of V. S. Naipaul and Derek Walcott. Strachan performs an analysis of tourism by examining advertising campaigns and the behavior of some political leaders from the Anglophone Caribbean.
6. The strategy of industrialization by invitation, as proposed by St. Lucian-born Nobel Prize Laureate in economics, Arthur Lewis, primarily promoted economic development by making direct overtures for foreign investment.
7. The first exhibition related to the subject of tourism in Puerto Rico was *Watch Your Step / Mind Your Head*, at ifa Galerie-Berlin (2017), and featured the work of Sofia Gallisá Muriente and Irene de Andrés Vega. A second exhibition, entitled *Resisting Paradise* (2019) and supported by Apexart, focused on the implications of the body-territory in the work of Joiri Minaya, Deborah Anzinger and Leasho Johnson. It was presented at Pública, San Juan, and later the same year traveled to Fonderie Darling, Montreal.

WORKS

ALLORA & CALZADILLA

Allora & Calzadilla (Jennifer Allora, b. Philadelphia, PA, 1974 and Guillermo Calzadilla, b. Havana, Cuba, 1971) are a collaborative artistic duo based in San Juan, Puerto Rico whose body of work explores themes related to militarism, music, power relations, colonialism, contemporary geopolitics, cultural artifacts, and archaeological history. In the *Contract* series, the duo catalogued sites in Vieques, Puerto Rico where palm trees were used to designate hazardous waste disposal sites. Planted by the U.S. Military to demarcate dumping areas for munitions and other industrial waste during their 60-year occupation of the island, these palm groves are currently managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service from the U.S. Department of Interior as "conservation zones." The black ink screen-printed on the image overlays visions of paradise with the realities of a post-military toxic wasteland.



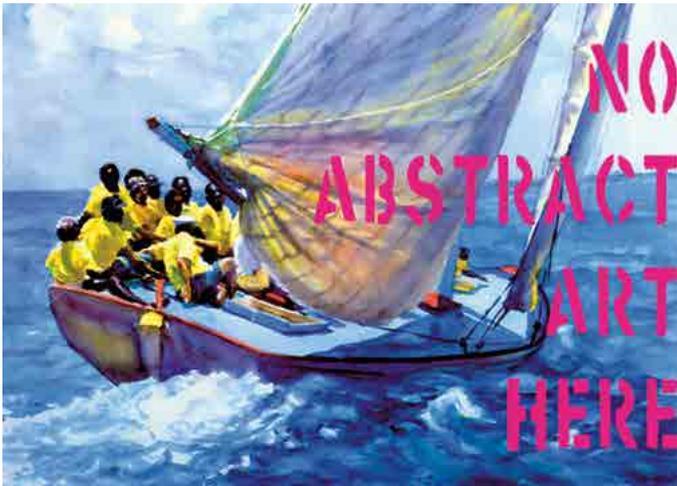
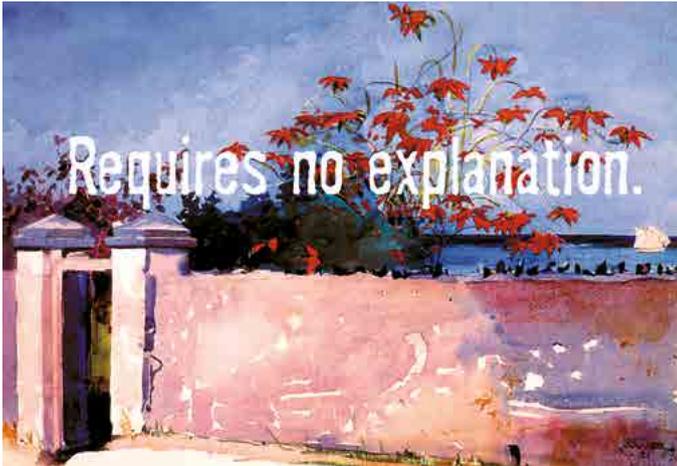
Contract (SWMU 6-2), 2015. Silkscreen on linen, 96 × 72 inches (243.8 × 182.8 cm). Courtesy of the artists and kurimanzutto, Mexico City/New York

DIONNE BENJAMIN-SMITH

Bahamian cultural worker, graphic designer, and printmaker Dionne Benjamin-Smith (b. Nassau, Bahamas, 1970) is hyperaware of the marketability of The Bahamas and its picturesque imagery of idyllic seascapes, quaint houses, and royal poinciana trees. Benjamin-Smith's *The Real Bahamian Art* series consists of appropriated artworks by Bahamian and international artists who create romanticized images of The Bahamas. The artists' signatures remain on their works so that credit is given. Over each appropriated scene, Benjamin Smith has overlaid the taglines "This is real Bahamian art," "Requires no explanation," and "No abstract art here," all of which are quotes by noted Bahamian artist Eddie Minnis from a radio interview Benjamin-Smith heard while he was promoting an exhibition. By layering images and discourse, Benjamin-Smith critiques the constructed nature of so-called "authentic" Bahamian art and culture, the refusal of abstract and conceptual styles in art, and the general public's perception of what art from a tropical place should look like.

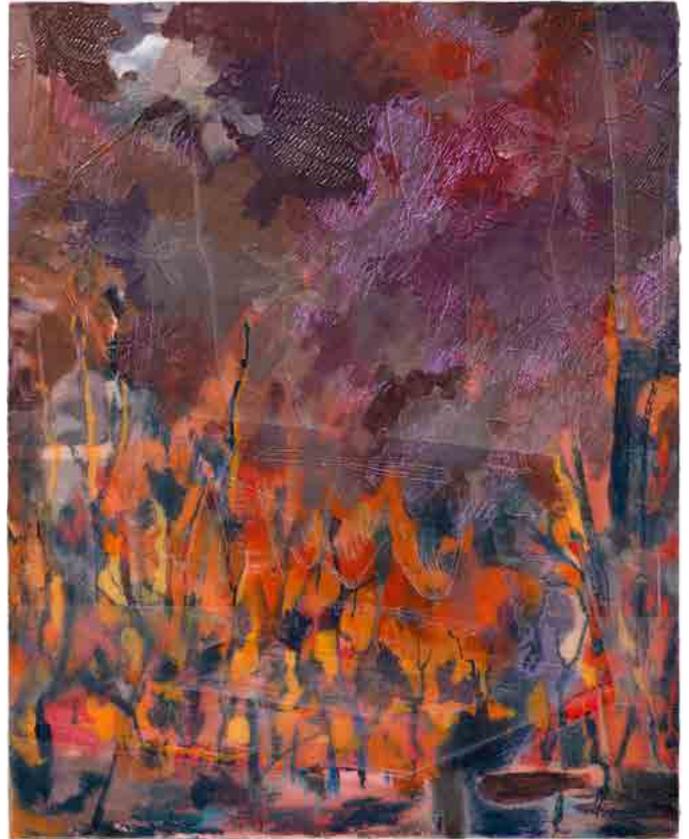


Real Bahamian Art, 2006. Quadriptych. Digital prints on paper, each approximately 36 × 28 inches (91.4 × 71.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist



RICARDO CABRET

Ricardo Cabret (b. Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, 1985) works at the intersection of computer science, coding, and painting, programming computer software to reveal and unravel tensions between humans, technology, and nature. In *Optimista remoto* (Remote Optimist), Cabret applies gel polymers to create translucent layers on canvas, creating abstracted coastal landscapes that reveal and conceal information. The ocean view is foregrounded by a laptop, the tool that is necessary to “work from paradise.” *Guión criptográfico (Ofuscación costera)* [Cryptographic script (Coastal obfuscation)] is a multimedia installation that uses software to scrap images from the Internet tagged with keywords that evoke paradisiacal places, which are then deconstructed one pixel at a time. Referencing investors in cryptocurrency who have moved to Puerto Rico to benefit from tax incentives, these works remind us of the connections to be drawn between images of paradise and Caribbean fiscal paradises.



Optimista remoto (Remote Optimist), 2022. Gel polymers, marble dust, and acrylic on canvas, 40 × 32 inches (101.6 × 81.3 cm).
Courtesy of the artist



Guión criptográfico (Ofuscación costera) [Cryptographic script (Coastal obfuscation)], 2022. Software (JavaScript) on browser installation, poplar wood, Mac mini, two 32" displays, HDMI cables, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

CAROLINA CAYCEDO

Carolina Caycedo (b. London, United Kingdom, 1978) is a multi-disciplinary artist known for her performances, videos, artist's books, sculptures, and installations. Her works showcase territorial resistance, environmental justice, and solidarity economies through an embodied knowledge and indigenous and feminist frameworks in order to confront the colonial gaze. In this selection of Puerto Rico-related works from the *Distressed Debt* series, Caycedo demonstrates the symbolic power of the images used to sell bonds to investors and, eventually, to predatory hedge funds: distressed debt investors who prey on debtors by buying cheap bonds on the secondary market while expecting large returns. Caycedo's *Distressed Debt* series references a 1970s campaign advertisement for the Government Development Bank for Puerto Rico, which reads: "If you think the charm of Puerto Rico is unique, let us tell you about the bonds of Puerto Rico," encouraging the conflation of leisure and financial investment for the tourist.



Let Us Tell You About the Bonds of Puerto Rico, from the *Distressed Debt* series, 2020. Digital print on silk, 98 ½ × 53 inches (250.2 × 134.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles



The People of Puerto Rico is Justly Indebted, from the *Distressed Debt* series, 2020. Digital print on silk, 98½ × 53 inches (250.2 × 134.7 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Commonwealth and Council, Los Angeles

DONNA CONLON AND JONATHAN HARKER



In their joint video pieces, Donna Conlon (b. Atlanta, GA, 1966) and Jonathan Harker (b. Quito, Ecuador, 1975) use a playful approach to address sociopolitical issues and environmental concerns, delving into the nuances of Panamanian national identity and Panama's relationship to the United States. The pair have worked together since 2006, though each also exhibits work individually. In *Bajo la alfombra* (Under the Rug), a grass rug is unraveled and used to sweep various kinds of debris, a metaphor for the country's tendencies to erase the past and evade the present.

Bajo la alfombra (Under the Rug), 2015. Video (color, sound), 2:49 minutes. Courtesy of the artists and DiabloRosso, Panamá



In *Manos invisibles* (Invisible Hands), the artists analyze the symbolic character of money and related power structures within a corrupt system. Two pairs of hands manipulate, exchange, and reorganize Balboas, a currency coined only once in Panama in 2011 by then-President Ricardo Martinelli. The currency was intended to be equal in value to the US Dollar. However, an equal amount of dollars—forty million—was never taken out of circulation, thus devaluing the currency. Seen together, the videos highlight the opaqueness of dealings in Panama, a country renowned as a tax haven and for its canal.

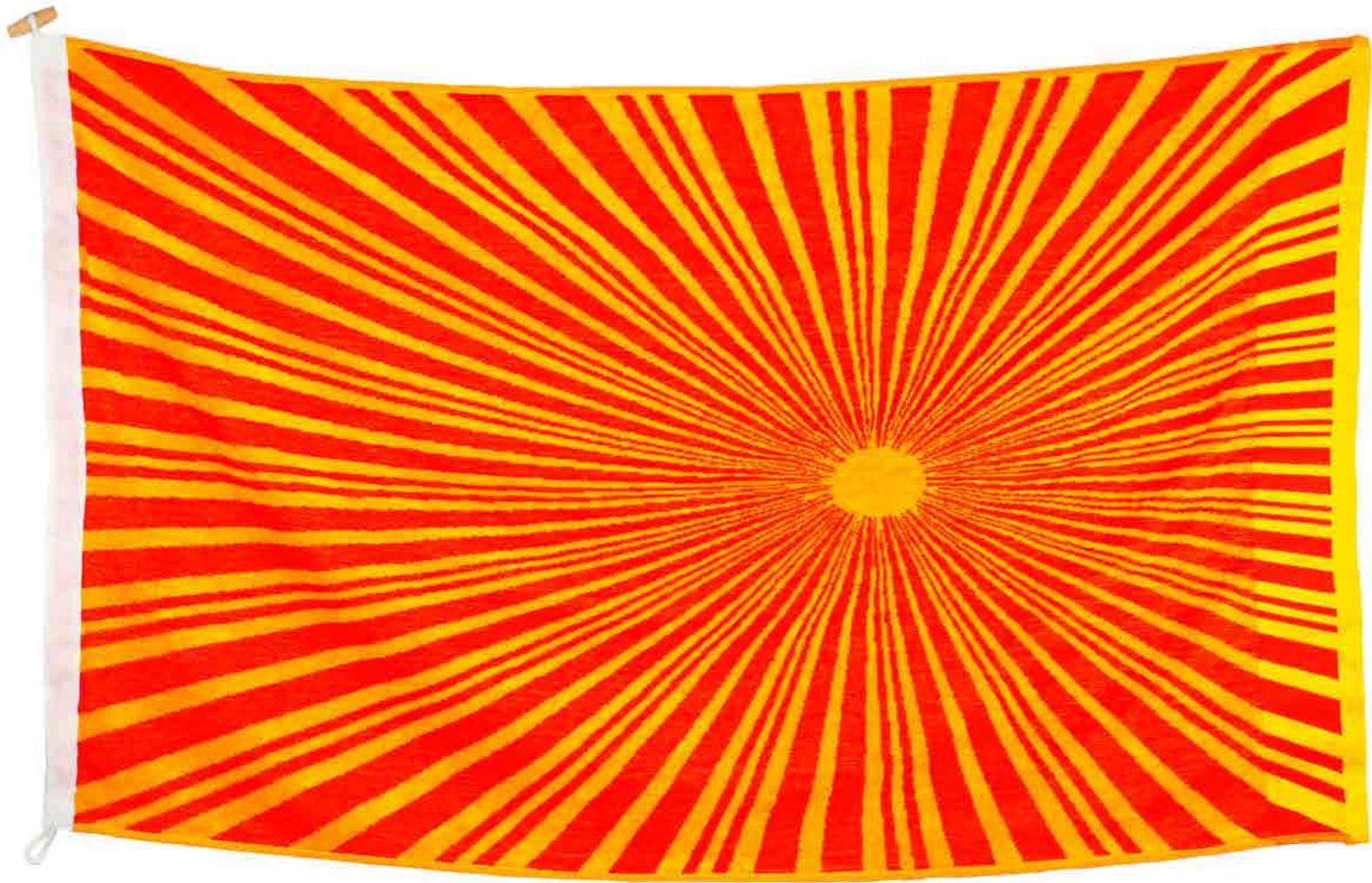
Manos invisibles (Invisible Hands), 2014. Video (color, sound), 8:56 minutes. Courtesy of the artists and DiabloRosso, Panamá

BLUE CURRY



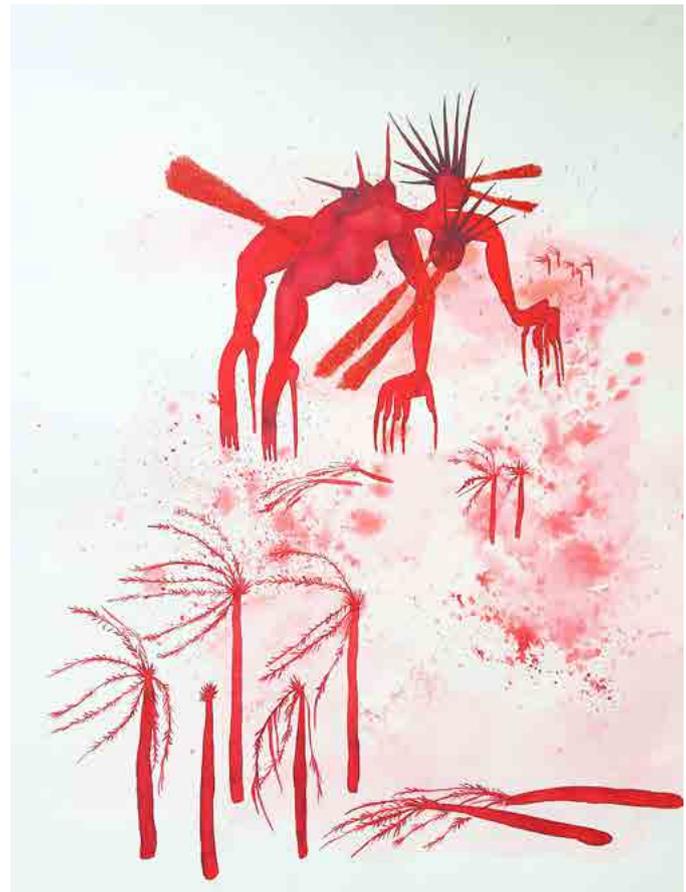
Blue Curry (b. Nassau, The Bahamas, 1974) creates sculptural assemblages and installation art using commonplace objects that communicate exoticism and the material culture related to leisure and tourism. Based in London, Curry dislocates materials from the Caribbean, which allows him to address issues of tropicalism and the stereotypical expectations of paradise. Originally commissioned for SITE Santa Fe in 2014, *S.S.s.* consisted of a set of customized beach towels hanging from a nautical flagpole that changed positions according to the flow of arriving cruise ships in Nassau, which were documented on camera and transmitted on a live feed. Displayed as flags, the towels signaled the coming invasion of tourists to the port city.

***S.S.s.*, 2014. Flagpole, customized beach towels, dimensions variable; video, 48:49 min. Courtesy of the artist**

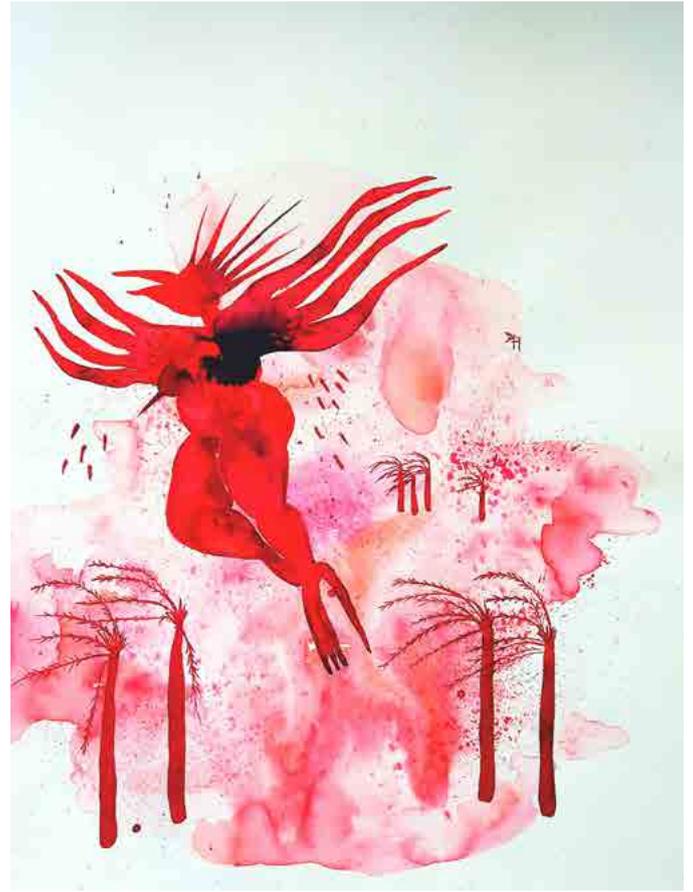


GWLADYS GAMBIE

Gwladys Gambie (b. Fort-de-France, Martinique, 1988) creates images that incorporate personal mythology centered around the Black Creole woman's body as a social and poetic territory. Gambie examines her own *Manman Chadwon* ("mother sea urchin" in Creole) character in order to open up discussion around social and environmental issues which affect Martinique, as well as to reflect on her personal experience of femininity. Over time, she has used this figure to address her relationship with nature, the Moon, Africa, and mysticism. In *Insurgées* (*Insurgents*), Gambie depicts this character—covered in urchin-like spikes and with extremities like mangrove roots—seemingly rising in protest over a landscape destroyed by a hurricane, a metaphor for contemporary Martinican society and its complicated colonial relationship to the Republic of France, which continues to govern the "special collectivity" of Martinique.



Insurgées (Insurgents), 2019. Ink on paper, triptych, each 25% × 19% inches (65 × 50 cm). Courtesy of the artist



SOFÍA GALLISÁ MURIENTE



Sofía Gallisá Muriente (b. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1986) engages with media and decolonial thinking. Through videos, prints, and sculptures, her work approaches the history of Puerto Rico and its political status, as well as the aesthetics, ideology, and impact of the tourism industry. In the video *El enviado (aunque no sea más que una tregua)* [The Envoy (Even If It's Just a Truce)], Gallisá Muriente joins a group of friends to explore the former country house of Puerto Rico's last American governor, Rexford Tugwell, which was designed by German architect Henry Klumb and can today be rented on Airbnb. The video reflects on the preservation of Puerto Rico's architectural heritage, the relevance of Tugwell's policies, and the figure of the so-called benevolent settler colonialist as embodied by each of these two men.

El enviado (aunque no sea más que una tregua) [The Envoy (Even If It's Not More Than A Truce)], 2022. Video, 24 minutes. Courtesy of the artist

DALTON GATA



Dalton Gata (b. Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, 1977) is a painter of surreal landscapes, still lifes, and portraits which explore queer and popular culture, delving into a semiotic analysis of their psychological and mythical influences. Informed by fashion and interior design, these works are often inhabited by hybrid creatures—those existing in the territory between animal and human—in the process of becoming more fabulous selves. *Beware of the Chango* presents us with a man-bird—a Quiscalus niger or chango, as it is known in the Hispanic Antilles—as a warning. This quintessential Caribbean bird, with a plucky and daring personality, acts as a guardian of the landscape. Gata's imagining of a beautiful, diverse, and gender-fluid Caribbean proposes ways of representation that stem from pride and joy, ultimately seeking liberation.

Cuidado con el Chango (Beware of the Chango), 2022, acrylic on canvas, 70 × 60 inches (200 × 152.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Galería Agustina Ferreyra

ABIGAIL HADEED



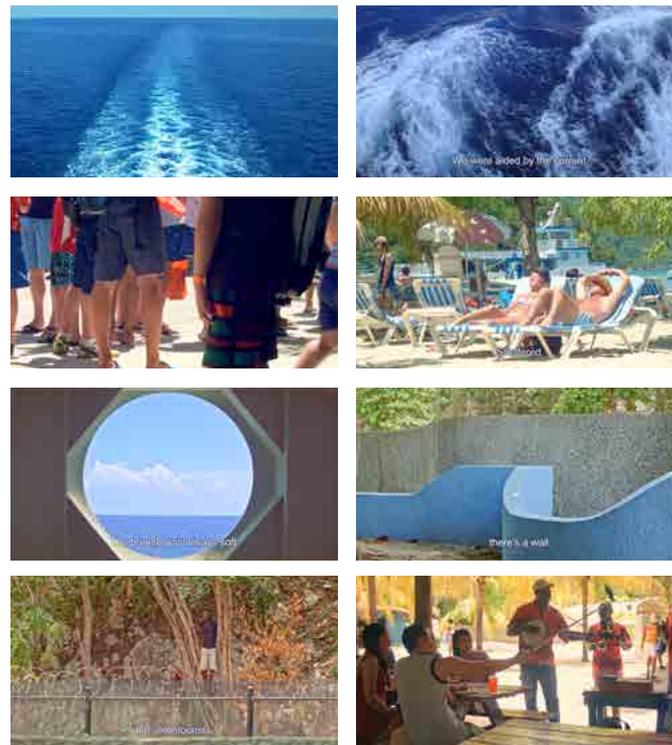
Abigail Hadeed (b. Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1963) is a photographer interested in Caribbean culture. Hadeed's *Still Life, Still Lives | Not so Enchanted* series captures the Royal Caribbean cruise ship *Enchantment of the Seas* on a particularly stormy day in Trinidad's Gulf of Paria. On one morning in June 2020, Hadeed had gone in search of the ship by boat, which at the time held 300 workers, all Trinbagonian nationals, waiting to be repatriated after the spread of COVID-19 put cruising on hold worldwide. The highly racialized climate and poor working conditions on cruise ships, where workers live in close quarters and are often subject to many months-long exploitative contracts, echoes the history of Chinese and Indian indentured servitude in the Caribbean, only this time within the visitor economy.

The Ghost Ship, from *Still Life, Still Lives | Not so Enchanted* series, 2020. Archival pigment print, 5 × 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (12.7 × 16.8 cm).
Courtesy of the artist



Rock the Boat, from *Still Life, Still Lives | Not so Enchanted* series, 2020.
Archival pigment print, $5\frac{3}{4} \times 15\frac{7}{8}$ inches (14.6 × 39.8 cm). Courtesy
of the artist

JOIRI MINAYA



Joiri Minaya (b. New York, 1990) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work investigates the objectification and interchangeability of women's bodies and landscape in visual culture, as well as constructions of identity across various social spaces and hierarchies. Her pieces are informed by and exist at the intersections of tourism, sexuality, gender, botany, and the internet. *Labadee* documents parts of a Royal Caribbean cruise trip to Labadee, Haiti, oscillating between scenes aboard the cruise, reproductions of passages from the diary of Christopher Columbus when his crew first saw land, and a visual account of the dynamics of leisure and misery within and around the (officially named) Royal Caribbean Labadee Beach. In *The Upkeepers* and *Ayoowiri/Girl with the Poinciana Flowers*, Minaya uses images of women created for tourism promotion for the islands of Saint Croix and Martinique, respectively, to establish a link between slavery, colonization, and the tourism industry.

Labadee, 2017. HD video installation, 7:10 minutes, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist



The Upkeepers, 2021. Archival pigment print, 17 × 11 inches (43.2 × 27.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist



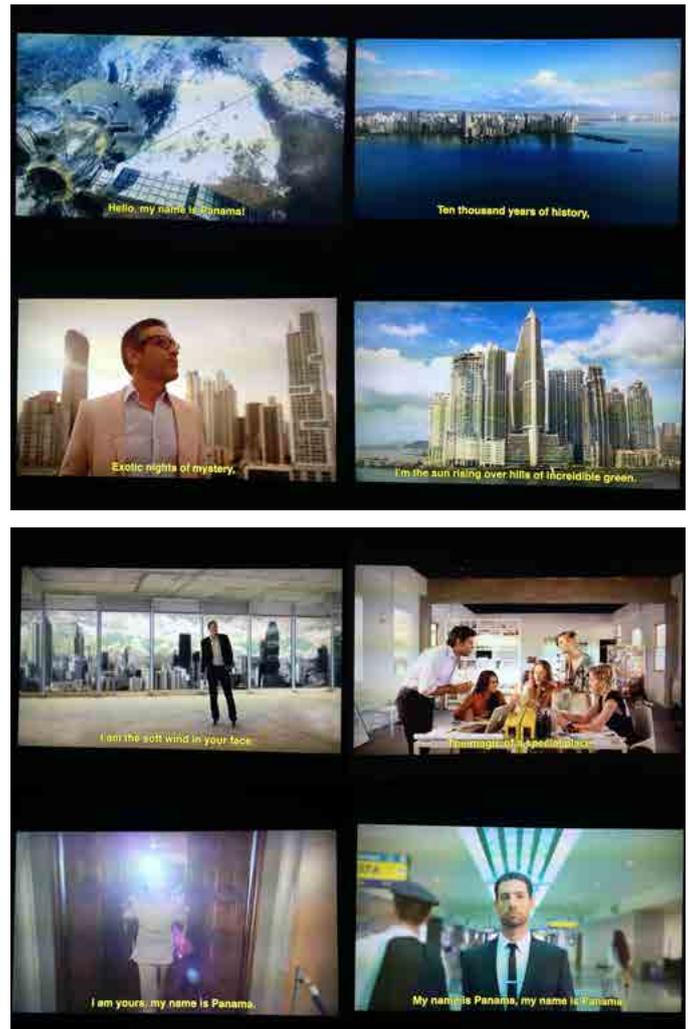
Ayoowiri/Girl with Poinciana Flowers, 2020. Archival pigment print, 17 × 11 inches (43.2 × 27.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist

DARIÉN MONTAÑEZ



Darién Montañez (b. Panama, 1977) is an architect, curator and visual artist who is as fascinated by the Feoclásico (“Uglyclassical”) architecture that dominates the upper-class condos in Panama City as he is by his country’s fascination with its own identity. In *Dark Side of the Moon (Sides 1 and 2)*, Montañez visually and sonically mixes two conflicting tourism campaigns. In “My name is Panama” (1983), the country is pristine, natural, indigenous, but in “Panama, The Way” (2013) it is a globalized, white, neoliberal non-space. As the videos and audios become intertwined, disturbing coincidences begin to appear, suggesting that the truth may lie somewhere between these opposing narratives.

Dark Side of the Moon (Sides 1 and 2), 2015. Video installation, 1 minute loop. Courtesy of the artist



Dark Side of the Moon (Sides 1 and 2), 2015. Video installation, 1 minute loop. Courtesy of the artist

JOSÉ MORBÁN



José Morbán (b. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 1987) is a painter engaged in historical research on the Dominican Republic who focuses on politics, social transformation, and political movements. This selection of paintings from the *Tropo, trompo, trampa* series depicts iconic structures around the Santo Domingo Las Américas Airport, the Hotel Jaragua and the Columbus Lighthouse, which were built during the dictatorship of Rafael L. Trujillo and his intellectual successor, Joaquín Balaguer. The selection represents different historical milestones that helped establish and communicate power and progress in relation to tourism in the Dominican Republic during the twentieth century.

Jaragua (c. 1945), 2021. Oil on linen, 21 × 21 inches (53.3 × 53.3 cm).
Private collection

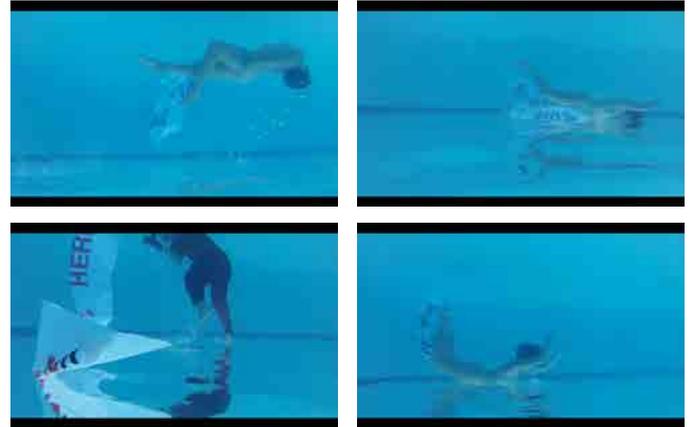


Faro (1992), 2021. Oil on canvas, 21 × 21 inches (53.3 × 53.3 cm).
Courtesy of the artist



Las Américas (1976), 2021. Oil on linen, 27 × 27 inches (68.6 × 68.6 cm).
Brugal Leon Collection

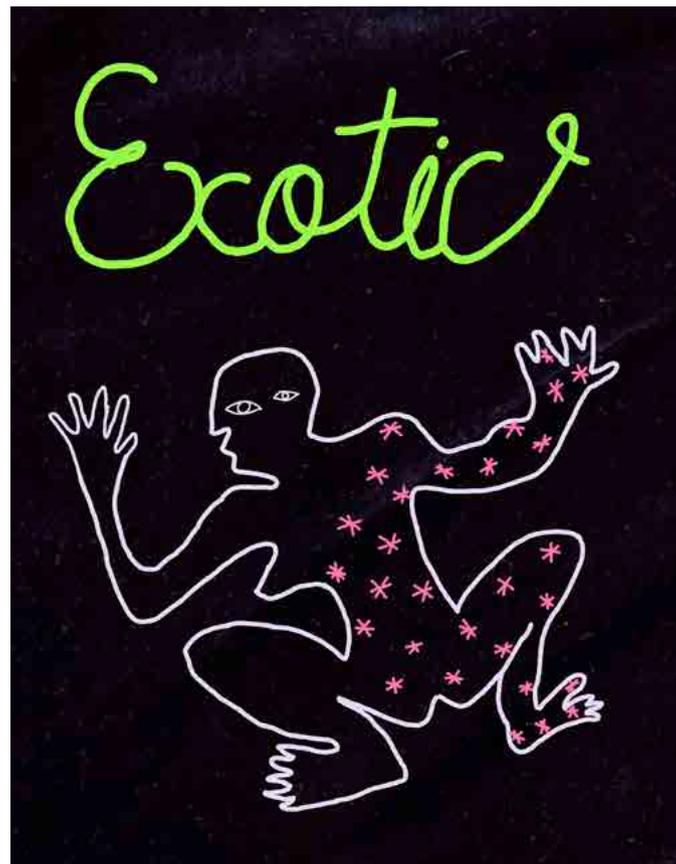
NIBIA PASTRANA SANTIAGO



nibia pastrana santiago (b. Caguas, Puerto Rico, 1987) is a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and co-director of Beta Local, an arts organization based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Looking to investigate how corporeal ideas can be manifested, she has turned to writing, video, and photography to materialize her dance practice. Developed during a residency on the highly privatized Captiva Island in the state of Florida, *Baliza (Beacon)* was inspired by the myriad of creative protests that emerged during the summer of 2019 and led to the ousting of Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rosselló. The video features pastrana santiago improvising underwater while dragging a banner that repurposes advertising language to instead turn tourists away, reading, “YOUR ISLAND HERE.”

Baliza (Beacon), 2019. HD video (color, silent), 9:58 minutes.
Courtesy of the artist

Oneika Russell (b. Kingston, Jamaica, 1980) is a multimedia artist, teacher and cultural worker who researches cultural and national identity as expressed through the messages conveyed in visual culture. Her body of work comprises installations, drawings, and video animations focused on the consumption, reappropriation, and resignification of identities within Jamaica. Her installation *Custom Velvet Souvenir Wall Hanging*, composed of 15 machine-embroidered wall hangings reminiscent of velvet souvenirs made in Jamaica in the 1970s, crafted using discarded materials from the fashion industry, showcases Russell's interest in the intersection of handcraft and technology. In its current iteration, the piece depicts a selection of Russell's drawings along with words such as "fantasy," "exotic," and "native." The artist intended the pieces to hang in daily spaces such as people's homes and office, to open conversations around the inscribed words.



Custom Velvet Souvenir Wall Hanging, 2022. Wall installation of embroidered, found fabric, fifteen wall hangings, each 17 × 14 inches (43.2 × 35.6 cm), overall dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist

Fantasy

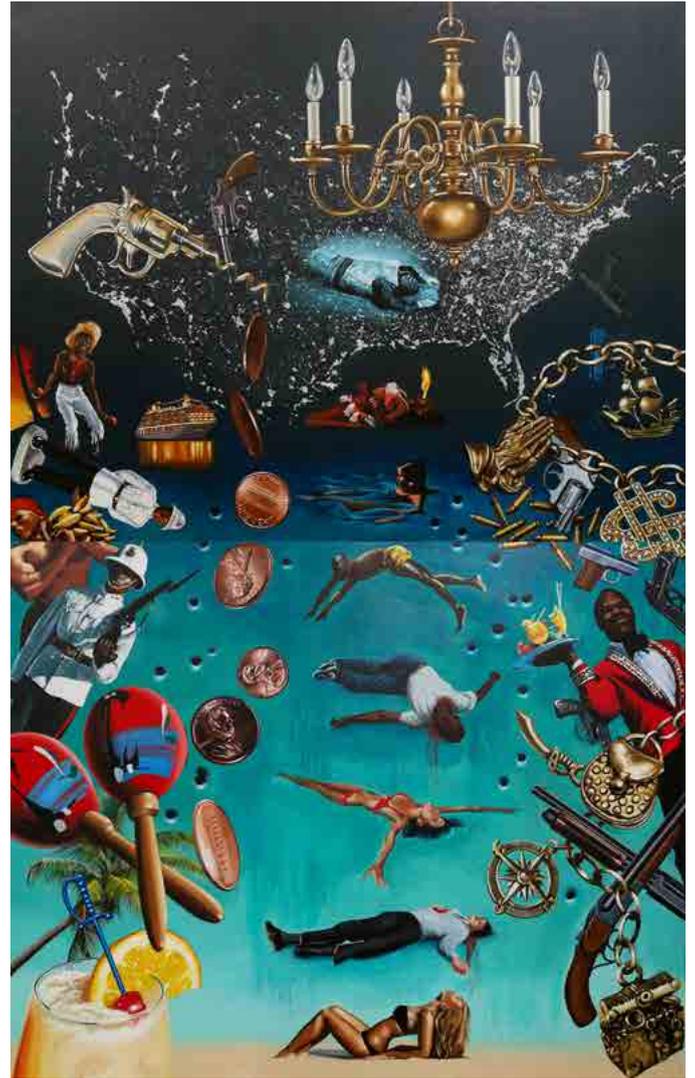


Island



DAVE SMITH

A consummate painter and a resident of The Bahamas between 1973–1990, Dave Smith (b. Derbyshire, U.K., 1944) has been a keen observer of Bahamian art and society. Arriving in the archipelago when The Bahamas declared independence, he bore witness to societal transformations that included a shifting cultural focus from the UK to the US, the impact of the crack epidemic, and the country's overreliance on tourism—in particular, the cruise ship industry—to sustain its economy. *Night and Day-O* is an epic painting that exemplifies the dichotomies of Bahamian life, offering depictions of pleasure and paradise for foreign consumption and local struggles, clichés of representation, hospitality, and violence.



Night and Day-O, 2012. Acrylic and glitter on canvas, 96 × 60 inches (228.6 × 152.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Working in installation, photography, and sculpture, Yiyo Tirado (b. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1990) has developed a body of work that problematizes our relationship with the tourism industry. Tirado examines the implications of a tourism-based economy for the Puerto Rican landscape, and how it is consumed and transformed for others. In *Caribe Hostil*, Tirado alludes to an emblematic architectural project that was deeply intertwined with the development of a modern Puerto Rico: the construction of the Caribe Hilton hotel. Here, Tirado appropriates the hotel's typeface to reject the discourse of unconditional hospitality.

Caribe Hostil, 2020. Blue glass neon. Dimensions variable.
Courtesy of the artist and Km 0.2, San Juan

VIVECA VÁZQUEZ



Viveca Vázquez (b. Puerto Rico, 1950) is a movement artist who has had a resounding impact on the field of Puerto Rican dance since the 1980s through her work as a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and producer. In *Las playas son nuestras* (The Beaches Are Ours), a group of women is summoned by the sea in Vieques—an island which is part of the archipelago of Puerto Rico—as they metamorphose into warrior fish who battle settler occupation. Vieques was occupied by the U.S. Navy between 1941–2003, thus becoming a contested site for human, land, and environmental rights until a mass civil disobedience movement (2001–2003) led to their exit. The video's central claim—the beaches are ours—echoes today as communities battle beach privatization and displacement.

Las playas son nuestras (The Beaches Are Ours), 1989. Video, digital transfer from VHS tape, 4:09 minutes. Courtesy of the artist

AVERIA WRIGHT



Artist, curator, and cultural worker Averia Wright (b. Nassau, The Bahamas, 1987) creates sculptures, performances, photography, and video which center ideas of tropicality, identity, folklore, crafts, and critiques of the tourism industry. Hailing from a family of artisans and Straw Market vendors, Wright incorporates materials and techniques that come from the souvenir-making industry into her practice. Her sculptures *Impenetrable Straw I* and *Impenetrable Straw II* are bronze breast-plates cast from Bahamian straw designs, signaling a recognition and appreciation of the knowledge passed down to her by her family, but also highlighting contemporary conflicts around performativity, the sale of cultural products, and Bahamian identity.

Impenetrable Straw I, 2018. Bronze, 22 × 20½ × 11 inches (55.9 × 52.7 × 27.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist



Impenetrable Straw II, 2018. Bronze, 20½ × 20¾ × 10 inches
(52.7 × 52.7 × 25.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Marina Reyes Franco (b. San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1984) is a curator at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico in San Juan (MAC). She studied art history in Puerto Rico and Argentina, where she also co-founded and directed La Ene, an itinerant museum and collection. She has investigated artistic and literary manifestations on the frontier of political action, Caribbean art and the impact of tourism on its cultural production, and the work of Esteban Valdés. At the MAC, she developed the group exhibition *El momento del yagrumo* (2021); the public art commission *De Loíza a la Loíza* by Daniel Lind-Ramos (2019-2020), and solo projects by Tony Cruz Pabón and Amara Abdal Figueroa (2021). Other projects include *Resisting Paradise* at Pública in San Juan and *Fonderie Darling* in Montreal (2019), *Watch your step / Mind your head* at ifa-Galerie Berlin (2017), the 2nd Grand Tropical Biennial in Loíza, PR (2016); *C-32: Sucursal* at the MALBA in Buenos Aires (2014), and numerous exhibitions at La Ene.

CREDITS

pp. 39, 41: Original artists' work by Eddie Minnis, Alton Lowe, Dorman Stubbs, and Winslow Homer.

pp. 85-87: Concept Illustrations by the artist, Oneika Russell

p. 93: Directed by Viveca Vázquez in collaboration with David Ferri, Mari Martín, and Pilar Álamo. Cast: Teresa Hernández, Mari Martín, Pilar Álamo, Rayza Vidal, Eva Vázquez, Dorcas Román, Viveca Vázquez. This work was funded by Fundación Puerto Rico and National Endowment for the Arts

pp. 95, 97: Photo: Jackson Petit

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Tropical is Political: Caribbean Art Under the Visitor Economy Regime

This exhibition is guest-curated by Marina Reyes Franco and presented in collaboration with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico.

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