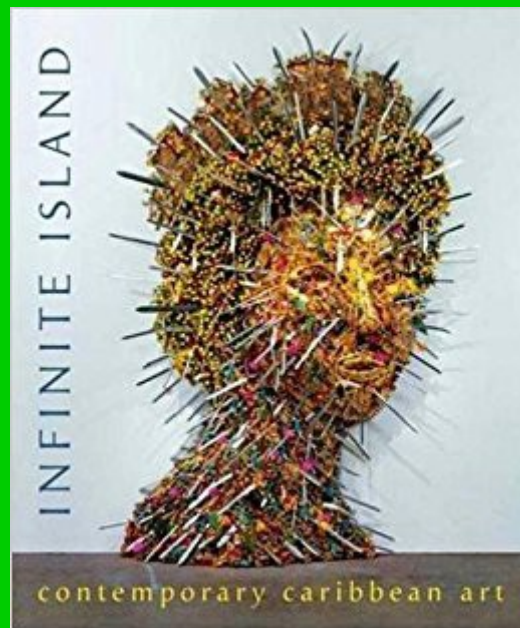


IZIBONGO

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The Map of

Undiscovered Treasure

a review of **Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art**
edited by **Tumelo Mosaka**

Natty Mark Samuels

EDITORIAL

We know the names of the figures of sport and music from the Caribbean, but not of those from the world of art. As we don't know the work of the pioneering figures of Modern Caribbean Art, such as Wifredo Lam, Albert Huie and Boscoe Holder, with this publication, we can begin to make sure that we are better acquainted with the contemporary creative spirits.

Good to see that the Brooklyn Museum is involved in this book; in 1923, it was one of the first venues to host an exhibition of African Art: I remember Stewart Cullin.

I am happy to present to you, *Infinite Islands: Contemporary Caribbean Art*.

Editor – Natty Mark Samuels – africanschool.weebly.com – An African School Production

Front cover mixed media – *El Dorado*©Hew Locke (Guyana) - photograph©FXP Photography from Amazon UK

Back cover painting©Marcel Pinas

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The Burqa Project

Jean Ulrick-Desert
(Haiti)

from *Flickr*

<https://reggaediscography.blogspot.co.uk/2018/01/izibongo-magazine-2018.html>

<http://rastaites.com/>

Map of Undiscovered Treasure

According to Thompson, "*England became the island's representational mirror.*" *Since English paintings featured white subjects and northern landscapes, artists in the Anglophone Caribbean would follow suit.*"

This comes from the essay by Annie Paul, in the book entitled *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*, published by Philip Wilson Publishers, in conjunction with the Brooklyn Museum.

The quote reminds me of three of the intellectual heavyweights of the New Negro Movement - Hubert Harrison, Alain Locke and William Du Bois – which generated the Harlem Renaissance. All three, especially Locke in his essay 'The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts', wrote and spoke of the need for Black subject matter in the arts, long overdue. Artists such as Aaron Douglas and Lois Jones would heed the call, bringing sub-Saharan and Egyptian motifs and symbolism into their creativity. Over the page, we are reminded of the influence of Mexican muralism on Caribbean artists, which once again takes me to early 20th Century America. Many of the artists associated with the aforementioned Harlem Renaissance, were also influenced by the Mexican muralists, especially the celebrated Diego Rivera; artists such as Charles Alston and Hale Woodruff. The latter actually went to Mexico City, to study under the master. The former met and spoke with Rivera on a few occasions, while he was painting the mural at the Rockefeller Centre in New York. We also have to remember that the New Negro Movement was fuelled as much by those from the Caribbean, as those from America; Hubert Harrison (St. Croix), Marcus Garvey, Joel Augustus Rogers, Claude McKay and Wilfred Domingo (Jamaica), Arturo Schomburg (Puerto Rico), Richard Moore (Barbados), Hodge Kirnon (Montserrat) and Cyril Briggs (St. Nevis), to name a few of the Caribbean contributors. The perpetual intertwining, between America and the Caribbean.

When I think of the sadness concerning the 1962 break up of the West Indies Federation, after the lifelong struggle of Theo Marrayshow, page 27 reminds me that all well as giving us the West Indies Cricket Team, it gave us the University of the West Indies, with campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados. It was to the latter campus that the aforementioned Richard Moore donated his collection of fifteen thousand books.

One of the salient aspects of the essay, is the information given on page 29, about the Hispanophone countries; of how Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic can tap into the wider, Latin-American network, taking advantage of the links to the Central and South American continents and the Spanish-speaking people of America. This section goes on to tell us that "*Aside from Cuba, the Dominican Republic probably has the most active art scene in the Caribbean in terms of number of art galleries, curators, art collections, critics and artists.*" The first art school in the Caribbean was founded there, in the early forties: Jamaica got hers in 1950. Sad to hear that in Jamaica "*the population at large has remained ignorant of and untouched by the artistic sphere*"; especially when you think that the country, has produced artists such as Albert Huie and Tamara Madden. The aforementioned issue is mainly due to elitism, so its good to read that in "*Cuba and Haiti...art is no longer the exclusive preserve of the middle and upper classes.*" The cut-metal sculpture of Haiti, of which Serge Jolimeau is the greatest living exponent, was pioneered by working class artists. If we associate stone sculpture with Zimbabwe, then cut-metal sculpture has its home in Haiti.

After the introduction, the art...

This review is like a pilgrimage, as we stop here and there at the Stations of the Creative Spirits, who tell the stories of their fellow sufferers. They are continually inventing ways of telling the Caribbean Saga – and the legacy of its interaction with colonialism; such as the simple but effective way of using a stack of white bricks in a series of photographs by the Cuban **Alexandre Arreche**; or the version of the American flag in the work of the St. Nevis photographer, **Terry Bodie**, in which he also uses salt and pepper.

I like the way the work of the Martiniquen **Alex Burke**, is described; "*the artist evokes ways that oppression and hardship take the living hostage in the globalized world, transforming them into zombies, the living dead*". We see an installation consisting of tall, mummy-like figures – standing and laying – wrapped in cloth of multi-coloured patchwork, or dark spectral figures drawn on brown paper.

The Jamaican **Charles Campbell** likes to work with oil and vellum. The piece entitled *Flock-Flight*, conjures up so much; the African-American migration north in the early 20th Century; group camaraderie; the movement of refugees; a team building day out. *Untitled* could be an aerial view of a prison, but we know they are slave boats of the transatlantic trade.

The Dogon elder uses designs in the sand, as part of the divining process. The Cuban artist, **Liset Castillo**, sculpts in sand, constructing road systems and flyovers; "*the artists commentary on the transience of life and humankind's constructions on earth.*"

In *The Burqa Project*, **Jean Ulrick-Desert**, a Haitian artist, challenges religious intolerance and sexism, with four figures; their burqas bearing the national flags of Germany, France, America and Britain. Overleaf, in '*Postkarten von meinen Lieben*' (*Postcard of My Love*), he invites questions and debate on belonging and xenophobia, as he is seen in German localities, dressed in lederhosen. It would have been more engrossing for me, if he'd been caught in more natural settings – like crossing a road or hailing a taxi – rather than in the model-like poses we see.

Staying in the Greater Antilles, **Dzine**, who moved to America from Puerto Rico, has given us *Classic Dub Classics*; a Technics deck, covered in gold leaf and glass beads. And so it should be – that the gems by King Tubby and Augustus Pablo are played with a stylus of gold. Where much of the art in this publication is a form of protest or awareness raising, this is simply a celebration, of the root and the culture it germinated: from Lee Scratch Perry to Mad Professor.

Going south into the Lesser Antilles, the lithographic work of Barbadian **Joscelyn Gardner**, is part homage, part historical marker. Homage to the camaraderie and mutual support of womanhood, as seen in the intricacy of the hairstyles; historical marker, as we see attached to the hair, the implements of constrained movement: the everyday item of the enslaved. Her focus on African hairstyling reminds me of some of the work of the Nigeria photographer, J.D Okhai Ojeikere.

Returning north, in a series of four photographs, **Alex Hernandez Duenas**, gives us a vignette of water: the daily struggle for some to access it. The series is called *Zona Afectada (The Affected Zone)*.

Going west of Cuba, going back to Jamaica, the ancestral island of **Satch Hoyt**. One

installation gain references reggae, in a piece entitled *Dub Ramp*; a double paen: to the national game of cricket and to the alchemy of King Tubby. My favourite of the three is *Say It Loud*, where a stack of selected books - at the sides and at the back of a ladder - are topped by a microphone, inviting you to shout the aforementioned song title. Books on subject matter such as African Art, Frederick Douglas Black Panthers, Richard Wright and Muhammed Ali. I would enjoy walking around this piece, wishing I could play Jenga with the stack; removing the books I'd like to flick through, without dismantling the pile.

South across the sea to the northern tip of South America, encountering a mixed media creation by the Guyanese artist **Hew Locke**. With its protruding spikes, it reminds me of an *nkisi* power item, from the Congo/Angola region. With the aid of the text and another look at the piece, I see that the protrusions are actually plastic silver swords, coming from the face of the Queen of England; a comment on the "*violence inherent in conquering lands and obtaining wealth.*"

Next door in Suriname, film maker **Melvin Moti** undertakes work that I'm sure Anton de Kom, the Surinamese writer, journalist and activist would have approved of and given his full blessing: the filming of the lives of all who have resided on the island, whether they be of Asian or African ancestry. The descendants of the enslaved and of the indentured, collected in a series called *Stories from Surinam*.

Returning to the Greater Antilles, the photographer **Fausto Ortiz** utilises shadows of people and barbed wire, to present a picture of the lives of Black people in the Dominican Republic: shadows as symbolism of second-class citizenry. Ironically, one of the individuals wears a Superman t-shirt, in a country where his manhood is often denied.

Like the pioneering Cuban modernist Wifredo Lam, both **Marta Maria Perez Bravo** and **Santiago Rodriguez Olazabal** use motifs and imagery from Santeria to express connection to the spiritual, in their photography and prints. Olazabal, a priest of Ifa, talking of his creativity, said it is "a form of praise to the memory of my ancestors."

We return to Surinam: to the Ndjuka Maroon community. The solo National Heroine of Jamaica, Nanny, was a Maroon. Her female counterpart amongst the Ndjuka would have been called *Uman Kabiten*. The mission of **Marcel Pinas**, is to share his heritage with the rest of the world. Their tradition of decorating domestic items, reminds me of the Kuba of the Congo, who also embellished household objects. His mission has a focus on the Ndjuka youth, the future custodians of their ancestry. Painter, collagist and sculptor, he says "*Preservation of the culture does not have to be always in a museum but by using it in daily life*" ...

Back in the Dominican Republic, the brainwashing of the child soldier is depicted in one of the installations by **Jorge Pineda**, where we see a piece of menace; three small figures clad in lead, with coloured masks, brandishing guns of equal size to their bodies. The child soldiers of Rwanda, the Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan...

My only criticism of this book, is that I would have liked to have seen more painting, as there is a noticeable focus on installations, photography and mixed media. Everyone has their personal favourites, so I would have liked to have seen a painting or two by **Tamara Madden** of Jamaica and **Lucia Mendez** of the Dominican Republic, as well as the collage work of the Trinidadian and Tobagan artist, **Brianna McCarthy**.

This is a necessary publication, giving exposure to those less known, who are making a

valued contribution to contemporary art. So I give thanks, for the pivotal tercet of Tumelo Mosaka, Annie Paul and Nicolette Ramirez: for giving us the map of undiscovered treasure.



Marcel Pinas
from a Suriname Maroon Community

from *werkgroepcaraibischeletteren.nl*