

What kind of art would people create while throwing off five hundred years of slavery, colonialism, and oppression?

ART OF A NEW NATION

Jamaicans only began to discover their true culture in 1922, dawn of the Jamaican Art Movement, when they began to depict real people living real lives in real dignity, for the first time. Neither the Taino natives, nor the Spanish who conquered them, had left much in the way of art. Jamaica's planters, leaders of an English colony from 1670 to 1962, did commission some art from Europe. So churches, graveyards, and squares hosted fine neoclassical sculptures. Travelogues displayed genteel English watercolors. Hobbyists made picturesque landscapes and florals.

But where were all the bright colors and traditional wood carvings of the Africans? Even though 95 percent of the population was African, slavery had stripped African culture from Jamaica well before its abolition in 1838. As a result, almost no African art survived here.

TOWARD INDEPENDENCE. The 20th century brought new spirit, new freedom, and new art. Edna Manley, wife of Jamaica's last colonial premier, linked art to politics. For the first time, she sculpted real Jamaican people, and recruited others to do the same. Having labored in isolation, the Eurocentric training of local artists had not prepared them for Caribbean light, landscapes, or skin tones.

"Jamaican Art Movement" refers to the new anti-colonial mind-set of the 20th century. It began in 1922 when Edna Manley arrived on the island. Born as Edna Swithenbank, March 1, 1900, in Bournemouth, Yorkshire, to an



"Negro Aroused" ver. iii 1932, from a private collection exhibited at CAGE Gallery, Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, with the Edna Manley Foundation, February 21 to March 2, 2006.

English father and a Jamaican mother, Edna had married Norman Washington Manley in 1921.

Her sculptures captured the rhythm of the markets and the songs of the plantations. They displayed the physiques and gestures of real Jamaicans. With heads up in hope, or down in anger, works like "Negro Aroused" (1935), "The Prophet" (1936), and "Tomorrow" (1939) became icons of the new social order. Other pioneers of the

Jamaican Art Movement included Karl Parboosingh, Albert Huie, Carl Abrahams, Barrington Watson, Mallica "Kapo" Reynolds, Michael Lester, and Cecil Baugh.

Extrovert Karl Parboosingh, born 1923 in St. Mary, filled paintings with ribald drama. Trained in New York, Paris, and Mexico City, cubists like Picasso influenced his expressionist paintings. Heavy paint, arresting colors, and thick dark outlines characterized his Rastafarian series. He died in 1975. Albert Huie, born 1920 in Falmouth, may have been Jamaica's foremost landscape painter, employing subtle colors and staccato brush strokes. Later he turned to portraits and compositions from everyday life.

Carl Abrahams, born 1913 in St. Andrew, began as a cartoonist, then taught himself to paint. In the 1950s he created ironic send-ups of great religious themes. He told stories of everyday life using wit. He died in 2005. Trained in London, Amsterdam, Paris, Rome, and Madrid, Barrington Watson, born 1931 in Lucea, introduced the canons of



Albert Artwell, "Port Maria," acrylic on canvass, from Harmony Hall, Lower Isle



Graham Davis, "Basket & Pot," acrylic on Masonite, from Harmony Hall, Tower Isle



Carl Abrahams, "Peter Contemplating the Crucifixion," from a private collection

scale, composition, and draftsmanship. He contributed straightforward depictions of both historical and routine subjects like fishermen gathering nets.

Mallica "Kapo" Reynolds, born 1911 in St. Catherine, was the first Jamaican to paint by "divine inspiration," and still find acceptance by the critics. In 1947 the Revivalist preacher painted his first important work, a black Christ. He also carved, capturing the movement, rhythm, and emotion of Revivalism. He died in 1989. Michael Lester, born 1906 in Dolina, Poland, settled in Jamaica in the 1950s, where his style became freer and more colorful, despite heavy black outlines. Lester opened a Montego Bay gallery to sell seascapes and landscapes to tourists. He died in 1972.

Master potter Cecil Baugh, born 1908 in Portland, had to plow his own field, since there were no creative ceramists in his era. Baugh explored Jamaican clays and formulated his own glazes. In 1950 he co-founded the Jamaica School of Arts and Crafts. He died in 2005.

INDEPENDENCE. The art of the 1950s agitated for independence, which finally arrived in 1962. The Manley home in St. Andrew was the nexus of politics and culture, with Edna as matriarch. Major commissions in this period included "Crucifix" (1950), "He Cometh Forth" (1962), and a monument to national hero Paul Bogle (1965).

In 1963 the Contemporary Jamaican Artists' Association began to encourage the purchase of local art for hotel rooms, business offices, and bank lobbies. For 10 years the CJAA provided meeting and exhibition space and offered jazz sessions, fashion shows, concerts, poetry readings, and other dramatic events.

The CJAA was the brainchild of Karl Parboosingh, Barrington Watson, and Eugene Hyde. Born 1931 in St. Andrew, Hyde trained in California. He applied abstract expressionism to large canvasses and ambitious etchings that exposed the atrocities of colonization. His subjects were displaced, dismembered, and deranged persons who roamed the streets, metaphors for Communism, which he feared. He drowned accidentally in 1980.

POST-INDEPENDENCE. Prosperity in the 60s gave way to social unrest in the 70s. The work of Christopher Gonzalez, born 1943 in Kingston, often courted controversy. His most debated piece, "Bob Marley Monument" (1983), used complex symbolism, such as roots entwined in Marley's figure, exaggerated features, and somber colors. Gonzalez may be the most vivid sculptor of his generation.

Stafford Schliefer, born 1939 in Kingston, creates bright semi-abstract paintings of cane cutters with so much rhythm and energy they almost make the viewer dizzy. Although he traveled the American Southwest for 10 years, his subjects remain very much Jamaican.

Neo-expressionists Robert "Omari Ra" Cookhorne (1960)

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and Stanford Watson (1959) emerged in the 1980s as part of the black nationalist perspective. The Edinburgh-trained Hope Brooks (1944), now a vice principal at the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts; Milton Harley (1935); and Margaret Chen (1951) became influential abstract artists.

INTUITIVES. Self-taught painters and sculptors get their influences from God, Africa, or just their immediate surroundings. A 1979 exhibition, “The Intuitive Eye,” by David Boxer of the National Gallery, brought them together for the first time. “They are not guided by fashions. Their vision is pure and sincere, untarnished by art theories and philosophies, principals, and movements,” wrote Boxer, himself a prominent artist. Harmony Hall, a gallery east of Ocho Rios in Tower Isle, showcases the work of prominent Intuitives with an annual show.

Intuitives tend to be skilled self-employed workers with enough leisure time to pursue art as a hobby. John Dunkley, born 1891 in Savanna-la-Mar, was a barber. His surreal landscapes contained strange creatures — jerboas, spiders, crabs, and birds. Dunkley died in 1947. David Miller Sr., born 1872 in Kingston, worked as a carpenter and his son, David Jr., as his apprentice. When house-building slowed, they carved curios to sell to tourists. Miller Sr. captured African fetishes with rough natural finishes. He died in 1969. Miller Jr., born 1903 in Kingston, produced faces with exaggerated negroid features, which he finished smoothly. He died in 1977.

Everald Brown, born 1917 in St. Ann, and Albert Artwell, born 1942 in St. James, load their paintings with religious symbols and the Rastafarian colors of red, green, and gold. They depict a fanciful version of heaven, or Zion, with kings and queens living idyllic lives. Brown died in 2002.

ART TODAY. Graham Davis, born 1944 in Kent, England, studied under David Hockney. He came to Jamaica in 1970. Part of the group that restored Harmony Hall, his subjects range from flowers to architecture.

Master potter Cecil Baugh glazed a path for younger ceramists, including Gene Pearson, born 1946 in St. Catherine. Famed for his faces in terra cotta, Pearson experiments with clay forms that look like formal sculptures. The Wassi Art studio, whose name means “stings like a wasp,” employs 50 potters, painters, and others in the hills over Ocho Rios. They turn out delightful aesthetic and functional pieces, featuring fish, fruits, flowers, and faces. Found in gift shops, Wassi art cheers the homes of the rich and famous, as well as tourists.

Some people assume Jamaican art comes mainly from craft markets, the intersection of creativity and entrepreneurship. While many insightful pieces do come from the markets, they remain separate from the Jamaica Art Movement. Still a young society, Jamaica has just begun to invent its true culture, which makes this an exciting time to witness and collect Jamaican art. 🍌



*Michael Lester, “Courthouse at Lucea,”
from a private collection*



*Karl Parboosingh, painting in the Reggae Series,
from a private collection*



*Nene, “Market Day,”
from the Negril Craft Market*



ART GALLERIES STUDIOS & SHOPS

Kingston

Amalcraft

30 Red Hills Road, 920-9168

Art Centre Gallery, The

202 Old Hope Road, 927-1608

Bolivar Book/Gallery

1D Grove Road, 926-8799

Collection, The

14 Leonard Road, 929-3595

Contemporary Art Gallery

1 Liguanea Av., 927-9958

Easel Gallery

134 Old Hope Road, 977-2067

Frame Art

2A Kensington Crescent,
926-5014

Frame Centre Gallery

10 Tangerine Pl., 926-4644

Gallery Pegasus

Jamaica Pegasus, 926-3690

Grosvenor Galleries

1 Grosvenor Terrace, 924-6684

Hi Qo / Spanish Court Centre

1 St. Lucia Avenue, 926-4183

Institute of Jamaica

12 East Street, 922-0620

Mutual Life Gallery

2 Oxford Road, 929-4302

National Gallery of Art

12 Ocean Boulevard, 922-1561

Revolution Galleries

52 Lady Musgrave Rd.,
946-0053/4

Things Jamaican

Devon House, 26 Hope Rd.,
926-1961

Things Jamaican

Norman Manley Airport, 924-8556

Colette (appointments)

Queensway, 926-6071

Montego Bay

Elgo's Art Gallery

31 Gloucester Av., 971-3310

Gallery of West

Indian Art

11 Fairfield Av., Catherine Hall,
952-4547

Things Jamaican

Montego Bay Airport, 979-1929

Negril

Gallery Hoffstead II

Vendors Plaza, West End Rd.,
957-3903

JAJA Originals

Norman Manley Blvd.,
957-4326

Jamaica Jane

Norman Manley Blvd.,
957-9079

Ocho Rios

Art Professionals

Pineapple Place, 974-9564

Harmony Hall

Tower Isle, 975-4222

Wassi Art Pottery

Great Pond, 974-5044

Port Antonio

Gallery Carriacou

Hotel Mocking Bird Hill, 993-7267

For more information, contact the Jamaica Tourist Board, the National Gallery, the Chamber of Commerce or your hotel concierge.

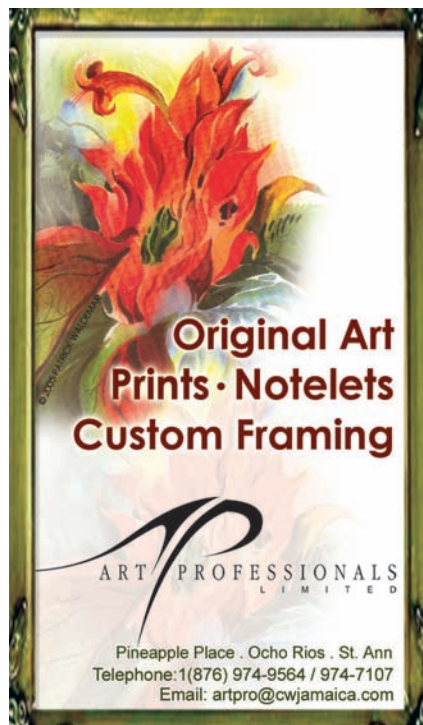


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