

In a 1924 speech in Harlem, NY, Marcus Garvey, the founder of Garveyism stated,

The world today is indebted to us for the benefits of civilization. They stole our arts and sciences from Africa. Then why should we be ashamed of ourselves? Their modern improvements are but duplicates of a grander civilization that we reflected thousands of years ago, without the advantage of what is buried and still hidden, to be resurrected and reintroduced by the intelligence of our generation and our posterity

Garvey was referring to the black race. Following suit with other Pan African intellectual precursors such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, Alexander Crummell, Henry McNeil Turner, Henry Sylvester Williams his contemporaries including W.E.B. DuBois, he was addressing the prevalent negative view in which the West held Africa. The German philosopher Georg Hegel theorized on the continent's alleged inferiority and framed the discourse in his lectures. In 1830, he declared that Africa had no history and had made no contribution to the world. New scholarship on Garveyism is emerging in the United States. Researchers are reevaluating and contextualizing this major Diasporic movement whose significance had been overlooked in the past decades. They are bringing to the forefront its currency in the transnational approach to Diaspora studies.¹ From music to literature Jamaica's contribution to the arts has long been established. Two contemporary Jamaican-born visual artists occupy/have a strong presence on the current North American art scene.

In 2017, Nari Ward was awarded the Vilcek Prize in Fine Arts in recognition of his outstanding contribution as an immigrant to the arts and sciences. Ward explores issues of race, immigration, poverty, consumer culture, and Caribbean identity through found object assemblages. The Vilcek Foundation, who bestowed the \$100, 000 prize, referenced *Naturalization Drawing*

Table. It is a 2004 interactive installation of a large desk created from Plexiglas bodega barricades decorated with applications to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. “The work, now especially timely given President Donald Trump’s recent executive order, invites viewers to participate in the bureaucratic process of gaining citizenship,” states Sarah Cascone of Arnet, the art market website.

In 2018, a graduate of the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, Ebony Patterson was awarded the United States Artists Fellowship Award in Visual Arts the Stone and the DeGuire Contemporary Art Award from the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts. In 2017, she received the Louis Comfort- Tiffany Foundation Biennial Grant. This fall, the Perez Art Museum will launch a major traveling survey exhibition, accompanied by her first monographic catalog. Of Patterson’s work Wayne Modest and Rivke Jaffe say,

Ebony Patterson, a young artist who moves between Jamaica and the US, is arguably the artist most concerned with rethinking the social through the lens of the ghetto. In her flamboyant, carefully constructed scenes, Patterson explores the complexity of lives in the ghetto. The main protagonists in her work are Jamaica’s iconic gangster figures, known as the *badman*, the *rudebwoy*, and the *don*. Patterson’s work offers a more textured, layered exploration of these infamous figures, whose life is generally reduced to more simplistic ideas about violence. In her scenes these young black men from the ghetto – so rarely portrayed in previous works of art – are powerful social actors, in charge of their own futures and helping to shape a new Jamaican aesthetic (236)

Diaspora Vibe Culture Arts Incubator has been investigating this Jamaican aesthetic. This spring, we completed the last of three international cultural exchanges there.² The 2018

conversation “Voyaging Towards the Future: Living Sculpture III,” was a follow up to the 2012 “Living Sculpture II” and 2009 “Living Sculpture” themes. The title is a reference to the Caribbean Sculpture Park, the only open-air museum in an English-speaking Caribbean island.

Both Ward and Patterson live and work in the USA. I would like to continue to explore the idea of DVCAI’s International Cultural Exchanges as Diaspora in the making. Ruby Patterson and Robin Kelley states that Diaspora or migration is unfinished and constantly in the making at the intersection of race and gender across frontiers. This process operates along “legal, cultural, economic, imperial and social lines” according to the two scholars (37). Garvey correlates with Kelley and Patterson’s views on two levels. First, in the quote, he addresses cultural appropriation, white supremacy and colonization/colonialism that prevail in the West. A case in point is the recent appointment of a white woman as the chief curator of the Brooklyn Museum’s African collection. The Decolonize this Place movement sees the nomination as further proof of the lack of diversification of curatorial staff and executive leadership (most curators are middle-aged white males) nationwide. Robin Pogrebin of the New York Times wrote in an article last year that despite New York’s reputation as a racially and ethnically diverse city the number of colored board members is significantly low at most art institutions.

In a study conducted by the newspaper, it was further discovered that the most prestigious organizations employ overwhelmingly a white staff at the same time they are busy increasing membership among minorities. A survey conducted by New York’s department of Cultural Affairs revealed that the white job par excellence in art and culture is curator and conversely the jobs with the lower white workforce are in maintenance and security. Decolonize this place also views the recent nomination as part of the gentrification process that seeks to dispossess and displace minorities of prime New York real estate, based on race and ethnicity.

The second connection with Garvey refers to his life and career. They are perfect examples of diaspora making. They symbolize movement, migration, travel as well as the production of thought, culture, and political struggle. Garveyism was born of his experience in Jamaica, his stays in Central America (Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, and Belize), England, the US and Europe. His interactions with blue-collar workers at home and abroad as well as his readings and exchanges with Black thinkers shaped his intellect and the tenets of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The UNIA had hundreds of divisions throughout North and Central America, the Caribbean, Africa, Britain as well as Australia. It held international conventions attended by representatives from all over the world, and the newspaper the Negro World was published globally with sections in French and Spanish in addition to English.

A sophisticated network of communication buttressed the Garveyite mass organizing. In the book *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*, Adam Ewing states that Garveyism was also “a sustained project of diasporic identity building” (7). The author goes on to say that, “The primary goal of the organization was to refocus their gaze on racial cooperation and progress” (9). Ewing also points out that the “effect of Garveyist organizing was to empower black communities to direct attention to their own need, to build upon their own traditions, to confront systems of power within the purview of their own discretion” (7).

This year’s exchange was titled “Voyaging towards the Future: Living Sculpture III.” What is the topic of the conversation? What was the voyage about? Where were we going? How were we going? Who was going? How did the radical eyes see? What did they hope to see and capture? To what end? The answer to the questions was at the intersection of three entities/spaces/territories: 1) exhibition and performing spaces; 2) (art) institutions of learning and training; and 3) spaces of

creation. At the two ends of the equation stood the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts (EMCVPA) and the Sculpture Park, with artists' studios, and art galleries in between. They resonate with DVCAI's ICEs as pointed out in their respective mission statement and vision. EMCVPA seeks "To enrich the aesthetic sensibilities and promote the cultural diversity of the Caribbean through the highest quality education and training in the Visual and Performing Arts." For its part, the Caribbean Sculpture Park, the first open-air museum of its kind in the English speaking Caribbean, aims to "facilitate the sensitization of the UTech community and the wider populace to the arts. As such the park is earmarked for activities which offer cultural, educational, social and spiritual enhancement to the University."

The vision of both local entities intersect as artist Christopher Gonzalez's career illustrates. One of the first EMCVPA graduates and later on a lecturer at his Alma matter, he contributed "The Icon of togetherness" to the Park. In 1979, he moved to Atlanta to hold an artist-in-residence position at Spelman College where I teach. Like the college, the park integrates Pan Africanism by offering works by artists from various Caribbean islands and beyond, including Cuba, Barbados, Grenada, St Lucia, Kenya and Russia. This correlates with Kelley and Patterson who suggest that "shifting the discussion from an African-centered approach to questions of black consciousness to the globality of the diaspora-in-the-making allows for a rethinking of how we view Africa and the world, and opens up new avenues for writing a world history from below" (45).

DVCAI's mission statement echoes the quote. The collective's website reads, "Our artists break boundaries of traditional forms and work outside of institutionalized systems. They often must create new systems and infrastructures to sustain their practice." Similarly, the Jamaican participants pursue the same goal. Members of both groups make art in and/or for public places

that transform civic spaces and celebrate communities. Communities of men, women, and children whose very existence contests Western representation in the media and the arts; a skewed representation still informed for the most part by the discovery, conquest, colonization of the Americas, and the slave trade. The narrative of the DVCAI plasticians and crop of Jamaican artists participating in the ICE is mostly centered on the question of heritage, kinship, and learning. They contest the denial of representation of black and brown people. They challenge the Western conventions of pictorial depiction.

Their work integrate (urban and rural) cities including in the case of Jamaica garrisons and ghettos. Rather than the banking system of (art) education that holds that the instructor knows everything and students are empty vessels to be filled, they suggest a problem posing approach to education and urban planning that is congruent with the Edna Manley and Sculpture Park's strategies. UWI students and the larger population who interacts with artwork in public spaces throughout the island are invited to think of their place in the world through engagement with the artifacts. They are also empowered to think critically and contribute thoughts.

These community-led initiatives as well as the overall arching goal of DVCAI signal a departure from the Eurocentric art-for-art's-sake approach used to convey the idea that the chief or only aim of a work of art is the self-expression of the individual artist who creates it. However, they ground the works in the community and reveal a shift from the Western capitalist and individualistic mindset but reminds us that we are only as strong as our most important human connections. That in essence is the core of the African Ubuntu circle, the essence of being human. Desmond Tutu put it well when he said, "We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world... My humanity is caught up, inextricably bound up in what is yours."

During the 10-day exchange, we experienced the vibrancy and strength of the contemporary Jamaican art scene. We met with a cross section of the art world, including plasticians, museum directors, gallery owners, collectors, and art students. We visited museums, galleries, artist studios, and an art school. As we crisscrossed the island and navigated urban as well as rural settings, we were impressed with the strength of the art language, its pluralism concerning media, gender, and ethnicity. We agree with Petrine Archer with the groundedness of contemporary Jamaican art. In a 2011 essay she declared,

But in the past decade events “on the ground” in Jamaica have made a number of our contemporary artists more abruptly aware of the present. The art of this new millennium appears to be shifting in focus and style again in ways that reflect their acute sense of social issues and activism. Artists such as Ebony G. Patterson, Michael Elliot, Gerard Hanson, and Peter Rickards are engaging with concerns such as violence, homophobia and social dislocation that have been a feature of Jamaica's recent past. This generation of artists compete with the more glaring aspects of Jamaica's popular culture related to dance hall, ghetto fabulous fashions, and the aesthetics of bling funerals for a stake in the nation's visual memory. They are taking their art to the streets to meet that culture on its own terms with a visual language that now has the privilege of an art historical past, even as it moves forward

Philip Supersad, Katrina Coombs, Samer Tansley, Heather Sutherland, David, Leonia, Andranique, Munchi, Raymond Watson, Mazola Mwashigadi, Petrona Morrison, Deborah Anziger, Claudette Lopez-Lewis, Donette Zacca, Srefan Clarke, Paula Daley, Norma Harrack,

Laura Facey, Judith Salmon can be added to the list. The dialogue and with DVCAI's participants Rosa Naday Garmendia, Anna Carolyn Meier, Moises Aragon, Jacqueline Gopie, Onajide Shabaka, Asser St Val, Izia Lindsay and documenting photographer Roy Anthony Wallace was rich and fruitful. Carol Campbell, master jeweler who teaches at Edna Manley and for years managed a premiere art gallery was instrumental in facilitating the collaboration.

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End Notes

¹ See Mary G. Rolinson, Asia Leeds, Claudrena Harold, Adam Ewing, Taylor Coleman, Trent Vinson.

² The other two took place respectively in 2009 and 2012.

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