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The Visual Art Of The Francophone Caribbean

THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY, EMBARKED UPON IN 1939 IN CÉSAIRE'S NOTEBOOK of a Return to the Native Land, remains at the center of Caribbean creation. However, an increasing number of artists, without renouncing the expression of what is most individual in them, are seeking to enunciate this quest in the language that is most attuned to art's present condition. They explore Caribbean identity, through African or Amerindian roots, reawaken memory, and tackle the question of racial and cultural *mestizaje*. They also interrogate the modern social reality of the Caribbean, between insularity and emigration, as well as its past and present economic context.

Thus, the echo of an identical questioning reverberates throughout the archipelago — that of identity, between a return to the origins and foreign influences. How to define oneself amidst all these cultural strata? How to divide up one's ancestry between a vanished Amerindian culture and a pregnant African culture? How to locate oneself in relation to the dominant aesthetics of the Center? This brief introductory essay hopes to shed some light on these questions.

THE TRACES OF AFRICAN CULTURES HAVE BEEN VARYINGLY REINVESTED IN THE mestizo art of the Caribbean. The emblematic figure of Wifredo Lam remains the most renowned exemplar of this. His work displays a powerful syncretism but accords a great deal of room to African artistic models. Along with being initiated into African cults by his godmother, Mantonica Wilson, he was also aware of Picasso's formal research, inspired by black art, and furthermore, became even more intensely interested in *la cosa negra* after his meeting with Aimé Césaire in Fort-de-France and experiencing the revelation of reading the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Lam's painting does not carry out a simple transposition of an African form in its totality for imitative ends. Rather, he gleans certain visual solutions from the African formal universe: extreme schematization, frontal perspective, the absence of relief and moulding, priority of the lines of force that structure the figure, modification of bodily proportions, exaggerations of certain volumes such as the head,

monumental organization of the image itself in reduced formats, and a sense of synthesis. He does not adopt a particular mask, but his borrowings have diverse geographical origins. References to African arts in Lam's work goes well beyond the period between 1938 and 1940, which has traditionally been located as the time of his falling under Picasso's influence, and extend themselves to the entirety of his work. Upon Lam's return to Cuba, African influence on his art is no longer merely formal; what Lam is seeking to recover in Cuban customs is African soul, African poetry. Without making a realist or ethnographic description, Lam transposes the world of Santería into his highly personal pictorial universe.

In Martinique, René Louise avails himself of the same magico-religious practice, at least in certain installations. However, the voice of Africa is not solely expressed in modern Caribbean art through sacred discourse, as is frequently the case in Cuba. African resurgence takes numerous other forms. For example, in 1970, three Martiniquan artists created the Black-Caribbean school in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. According to their manifesto, "The Black-Caribbean school's objective is to make an essentially black painting known... It is currently made up of three Antilleans who have come from Martinique, passed through Europe, and finally discovered Africa, which reveals to them, free from all constraint, the profound intimacy of Black nature." If Serge Hélénon is to be believed, his discovery of Africa modified his artistic trajectory: "The Dogon country brought me truth in the raw sensation of things — without artifice. In 1965, my painting was decorative, and the Dogon country led me to authenticity, and Dogon statuary, in its hieratic austerity and severity led me to prune my work of all superfluity."¹

Bertin Nivor (Martinique) claims his links to the Boni of Guyana and draws direct inspiration from the art of the *tembé* to achieve his large, flexible panels decorated with abstract decorative motifs. The *tembé* is a set of geometrical drawings of a symbolic character that decorates the doors of houses, the blades of oars, the teeth of combs, and spoons in the Black settlements founded by maroon slaves in Guyana.

The forms of the pieces in untreated wood by Franz Absalon (Martinique) could well evoke Asmat shields. The relationship to the material is the same. But Absalon privileges abstract decorative motifs, not anthropomorphic drawings like the Asmat. The repetition of simple geometric forms, not unrelated to certain drum decorations or Fang spoons, the sobriety of the forms, the chromatic restriction to three basic tones (white, black, natural wood) situate Absalon's sculptures under the combined influence of primal art and minimalist art.

The miniature characters of Philippe Beaunol (Martinique), like *Selatamboulefan*, *Matadolo*, and *Selalescribe* have names that are neither French, Creole, nor African, but play upon evocative sonorities. Vegetable fibers, feathers, and shells enter into their composition, just as a shred of salvaged fur clothes *Papakayali*. They bring African fetishes to mind.

Henri Tauliant (Martinique) also summons up Africa, but more casually. His *Fetish Ashtray* is a

parody of an African mask. Conceived with a great economy of means, starting from recovered materials, these creations confusedly recall Africa but in a completely different spirit from previous generations.

On the other hand, Ernest Breleur (Martinique), who in his early years with the "Groupe FWOMAJE" quoted African art in his paintings, distanced himself from that practice. As Milan Kundera has written, "The initial period of his painting was still programmatically anchored in African culture: Wifredo Lam's influence was recognizable, and the motifs taken from African popular art were discernible. Ernest no longer cares for these pictures; he sees in them something forced, artificial; as he explains this to me, he gets carried away by his thoughts and even accuses himself of cheating for having wished to pass off a rationally preconceived collective program as artistic spontaneity. It is impossible to restore a black art by means of memories of a lost Africa. For, he tells me, these memories no longer exist. Africa is no longer our world. The subsequent periods of his painting are very personal, free from all program, all engagement. But this is the paradox: in this painting, which cannot be more personal than it is, Martiniquan identity, black identity, and Antillean negritude are present in all their striking evidence."²

THE OTHER QUASI-OBLIGATORY ASPECT OF THE RETURN TO ORIGINS IS THE Amerindian vein. Perhaps it is less evident, given that the genocide of the Amerindians was perpetrated too early for traces of their culture to be considerable. This tradition is the most buried, the least discernible. It is nonetheless the case that the Amerindian vein has been faithfully exploited by such artists as the Barbadian Jocelyn Gardner, the Guyanese Rosemarie Robinot and Thierry Tian Sio Po, the Aruban Ciro Abath, and the Martiniquan Victor Anicet. Abath and Anicet are ceramicists, as were their distant and hypothetical ancestors. Within his installations, Victor Anicet integrates painted canvases inspired by Amerindian signs and "trays" diverted from their current use. The word "tray," of English origin, has passed into the Creole language and designates a rudimentary board of white wood, used both for the transport of stones and of clothes to be washed in the river, and generally carried by women who balance it on their head; as well, it is used to carry ironed clothes or light foodstuffs to be sold in the street, and as a surface on which to play the dice-game known as *serbie*. From these trays, Anicet makes frames decorated with copies of Pre-Columbian anthropo-zoomorphic forms, sometimes colored and pasted on African fabrics.

Serge Goudin-Thébia also cultivates the Amerindian style, but takes a completely different approach, linked more to nature and spirituality. This artist-shaman practices a poetics of earth, in relation to a privileged place, the near-island of Caravelle, which he has explored hundreds of times for harvests of natural objects, drifting bamboos, madrepores, strange minerals, and cocoloba leaves, which are then inserted into his perpetually mutating installations, where they remain

interchangeable. This is a singular site where — he says — he is able to *survey the sacred earth*, like his Amerindian ancestors. Goudin-Thébia places his relation to the cosmos in the forefront of his work and defines himself as a surveyor of landscapes, a collector of signs, a receiver of energies, seeking to detect and decipher, within the traces, the rocks, and tree barks, the information conveyed by the cosmos.

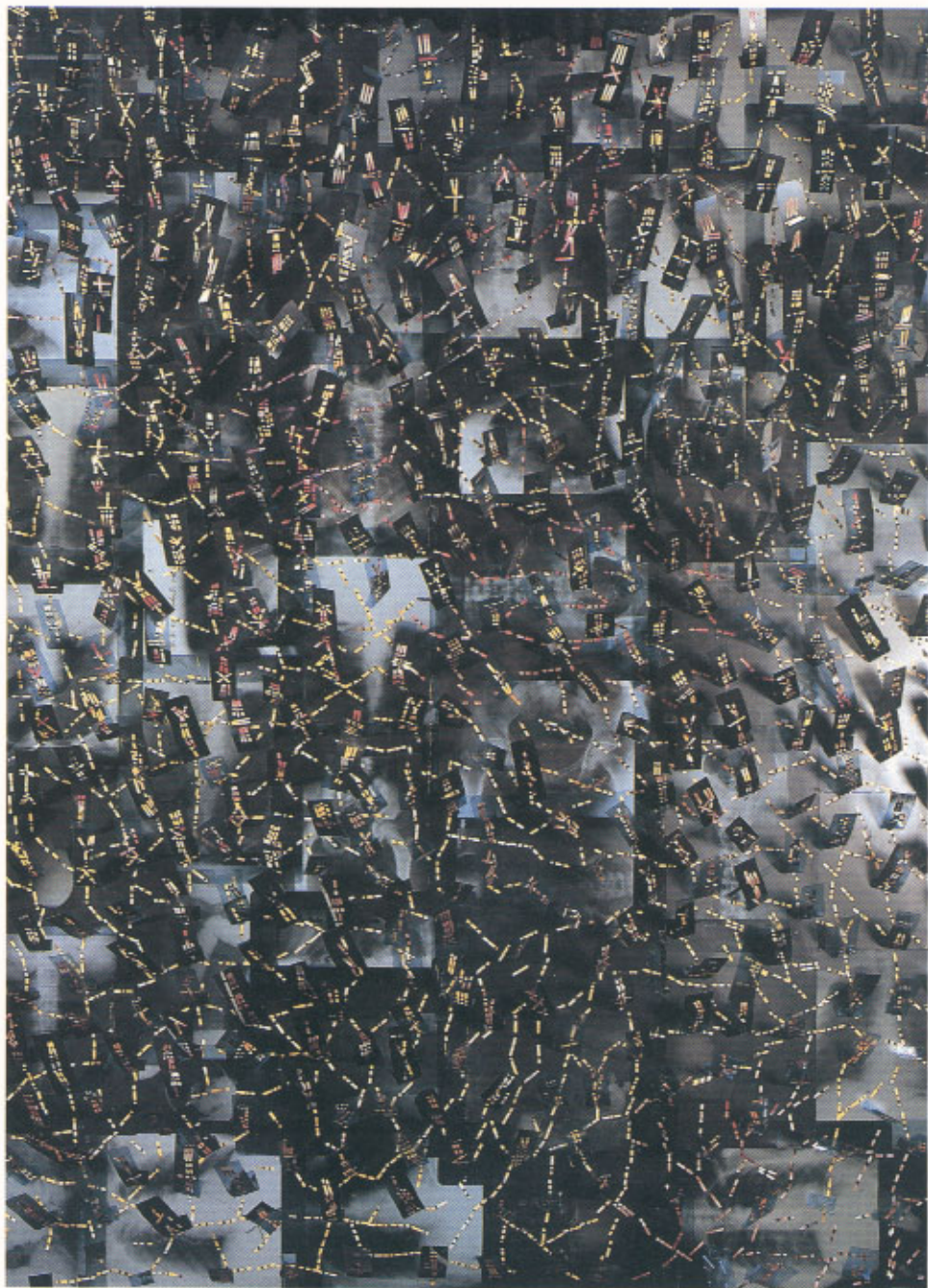
This ascent towards origins through African ritual or Amerindian shaping of the land does not exhaust the discourse of memory and recollection, which is inseparable from its obverse: anxiety about the future. Where do we come from? Who are we? What are we becoming?

MEMORY HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE FUNDAMENTAL THEME OF THE MARTINIQUEAN Alex Burke's work: traces, imprints, vestiges. From black boxes to blue and gold altarpieces, it wishes to bear witness to the passage of now-vanished, decimated humans, whose genocide is commemorated by no stela, no monument. A project for an Amerindian cemetery has yet to take shape. A pilgrimage to Gorée was carried out (In Memory of Gorée, 1998). Paradoxically, however, these black boxes inhabited by tiny white-chiffon dolls inspired at once by Vodou and by the giant marionettes of the Bread and Puppet Theater also evoke the bedroom communities of modern times, the isolation and imprisonment, the normalizing force of the city, of modern life.

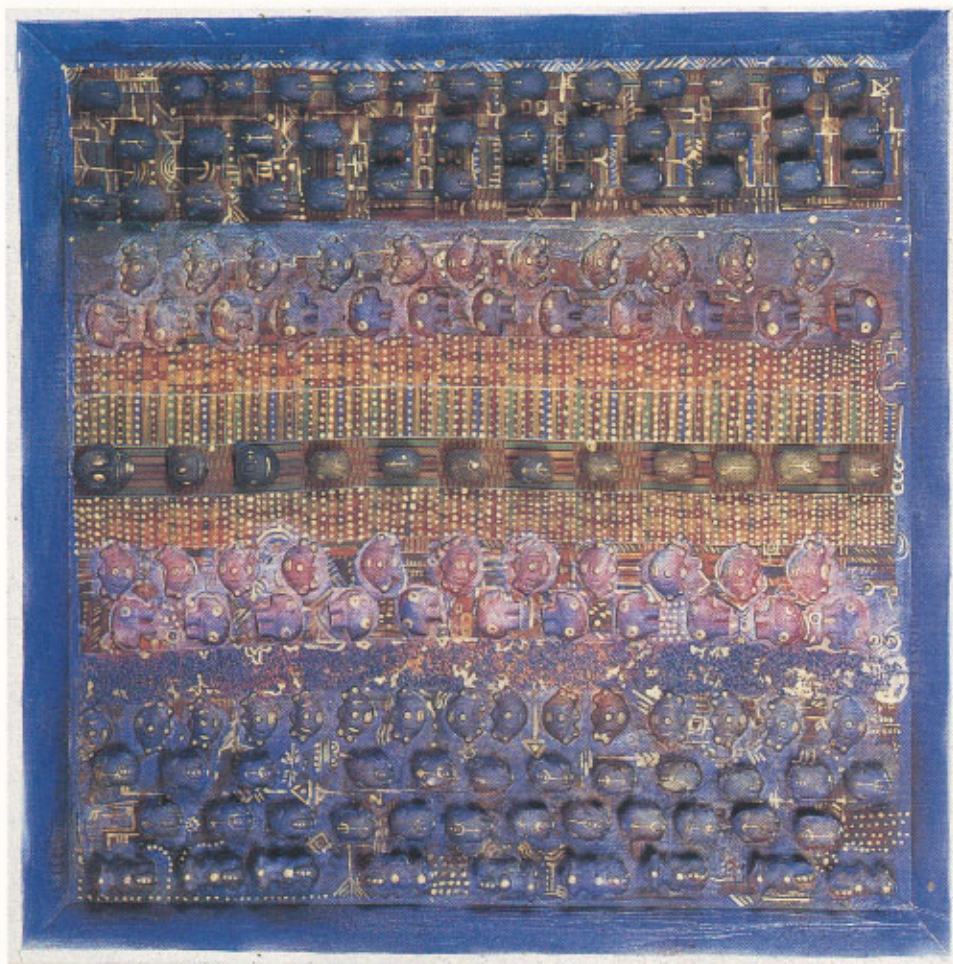
In his latest installations, Burke operates like an archaeologist of the present. Among the strata of daily objects, pious images, advertising labels, household utensils, televisions, old clothes accumulated and still impregnated with the lives of their owners, he tries to rediscover and recompose the scraps of the true identity of today's Caribbean individual: who can he be, this man torn apart by history, depicted by these fragmented phantom silhouettes, aligned against the wall where the principal dates of Caribbean history seem to be their ID numbers? In this way, through little touches, Burke reconstitutes the hidden side of the décor of these "islands in the sun," which appear so paradisiacal on the glossy paper of tourist brochures.

Other artists privilege certain issues that are more specific to modernity, such as quotation and new technologies. If Thierry Alet (Guadeloupe) returns to the past, it is the past of European and American art history. Alet moves from painting ("The Dethroned King," "The Laughing Heads") to installation ("Invisible Works") to performance ("Three Centuries in Three Days"), and always with a zest for provocation. During his 1994 performance, "Three Centuries in Three Days," Alet publicly painted, in Fort-de-France's Cathedral Square, superimposed reinterpretations of nine masterpieces from the history of art of the last three centuries: Canaletto's "Architectural Caprice," Fragonard's "Les hasards de l'escarpolette," David's "Oath of the Horatii," Millet's "Angelus," Ingres's "Large Odalisque," Monet's "Impression: Rising Sun," Picasso's "Les demoiselles d'Avignon," Warhol's "Marilyn Monroe," and Basquiat's "Dime a Dozen." Today, a gray monochrome conceals these nine superimposed paintings.









Another facet of Caribbean artistic creation, without actually using new technologies, is inspired by or resembles them. Thus, Hugues Bellechasse (Martinique) weds photography, video, and installation art. He borrows the rigor of scientific language (aeronautical terminology, application of the physical laws of evolution in the air, use of research methods such as summaries, comparisons, and inventories) and applies it to the eroticized female body in order to simulate, not without humor, “test crashes” intended to measure the resistance of two female bodies propelled into space with equal velocity. He also plays with the physical notion of the *black body*, which absorbs all the radiation it receives, and with the situation of the black man reduced to slavery who integrates into his own the unknown culture he discovers.

A THEME OF FRAGMENTATION AND SUTURE MAY BE PERCEIVED IN AN IMPORTANT number of artworks from this region. Is this attributable to an — unconscious? — transposition of the “diffracted but recomposed”³ reality of the Creole world? Some will not fail to see in fragmentation a metaphor for the geographic scattering of the archipelago, the dispersion of the diaspora, identity dislocation — indeed, at times, even the fracturing caused by continental drift.

The ghostly photocopied and cut-up silhouettes whose ID numbers are the major dates in the history of the archipelago, presented by Alex Burke during the *Island in the Sun* exhibition — do these not evoke this fracturing of Caribbean man? Monique Mirabel (Martinique)’s installation *Fragments* (1997) consists of a fragmentary presentation of her own face: nearly thirty drawings, photos, photocopies, and paintings blending fragments of mirrors and representing isolated elements of her face make up an exploded self-portrait that, according to the artist’s statement, does not emphasize a disintegrated personality, but rather the individual’s propensity to reveal only facets of the self.

By means of techniques of collage, assemblage, and pasting, other works appear to correspond to the style of creole construction as defined by the fathers of Creoleness. An example is the series *Expressions-Shantytowns* by Serge Hélénon, who since the 1970s has abandoned the traditional canvas surface to paint on an uneven surface of salvaged pieces of wood, bearing the wealth of their previous use and put together in the style of the ramshackle constructions that are to be found in poor neighborhoods around the world. *Volga Beach* (1989)⁴ by Gérard Apat (Martinique) is in the same vein, juxtaposing broken Venetian blinds, an old, worn-out Coca-Cola sign, and salvaged boards. The irony of the title is as trenchant as Alex Burke’s *Island in the Sun*, and stigmatizes a Caribbean reality that is far from the exotic dream of a *paradisical* island. These works echo a few lines from *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*: “...and the thin roof patched with pieces of gasoline cans, which create swamps of rust in the stinking sordid gray straw pulp.”⁵ The assemblages of rusted iron, copper, brass, zinc, and sheet metal by Myrtha Richards (St. Martin) also seem to have

been inspired by these lines, as are the retables of Alex Burke, who, struck by the questions posed by squats — living spaces that have been abandoned and yet are filled with memories and traces — created basic constructions of strata of fresh-cut wood enhanced by pasted-on pieces of old paper, rags, dirt, and scraps. This tendency — or necessity — to create starting from everything and nothing, described by Aimé Césaire, leads to an aesthetics of hybridity:

with bits of string
with wood shavings
with anything all the cheap cuts
with low blows
with shovelfuls of dead leaves
with remnants of cloth
with lacerate lassos
with links snapped from the chain gang
with the bones of moray eels
with torn away whips
with sea conches
with flags and tombs mismatched
 by whirlwinds
 and waterspouts
to build thee ⁶

Unlike in Picasso's case, the assemblage does not, then, appear to correspond to the need to resolve formal questions. It bears closer resemblance to the African practice that inspired Picasso in his will to renew the Western tradition: namely, the mixture of heterogeneous materials, incompatible with the hierarchy and unity of materials demanded by the "fine arts" of that period but occurring frequently in African tradition, particularly during the creation of fetishes and emblems in which raffia, string, bark, metal, wood, and found objects are integrated. The African fetish is related to a collective ideology, and the meaning of the various elements is, in general, clear to the initiates, whereas in contemporary art the choice of materials is more of a formal than a symbolic matter.

At times, collage and assemblage metamorphose into sutures, as in the work of Ernest Brèleur. In 1991, convinced that he had reached the end of his pictorial investigations, Brèleur made a complete break with painting and embarked upon the exploration of a material used with relative infrequency, radiographic film, and working with light. Like Man Ray in 1922, he could well say: "I freed myself from the sticky medium of painting and I'm working directly with light itself." The choice of this medium corresponds to the artist's desire to plumb the secret regions of the body, to discover its internal structures, and to the attempt to unveil a secret, which could already be foreshadowed in a previous series of paintings on old wooden gates, entitled, precisely: "Radiographs of Doors."

Here, there is equally a will to reveal that which is hidden behind the trappings of the body as there is a resolution to advance a line of inquiry. After having explored the theme of death, notably in a series of white paintings where decomposing corpses seem to blur into the background of the picture, and where the liquefaction of the body is signified pictorially by multicolored hues, the obverse question — of life, of survival — has imposed itself: to see, in some way, from the other side of death. It is then that his work with transparency developed, where light is not directly utilized in the work but is integrated into its conception. As in a stained-glass window, contact and intensity of light transfigure the subject matter, creating forms and spaces in a modulation, a vibration where opacity and whiteness, darkness and transparency, are opposed. The differential value of shadow and light, notwithstanding, invites a metaphorical interpretation: darkness/light, night/day, death/life. And in this duel between life and death, it is life that wins out, because, in a simulation of a surgical action, Ernest Brèleur sutures these imaginary bodies. He operates under an old surgical lamp, with gloves and a mask — to protect himself from glue fumes — and several indispensable tools: pliers and cutters. The studio is a genuine operating room, with huge labeled compartments meticulously arranged along the wall and where the elements necessary for the realization of the work are accumulated: self-adhesives for the “sutures,” X-rays of skulls, limbs, and stomachs, not to mention the final compartment with the rather fascinating label, “Remains.”

It is the myth of Isis revisited. Like the Egyptian goddess, who left in search of the remains of her husband Osiris, assassinated and cut into pieces by his younger brother Set, so that she could reassemble them and bring them back to life, Ernest Brèleur, as a surgeon or magician would, restitches, repairs, and reanimates. Two extracts from Césaire’s poem, “Lay of Errantry,” which recalls the myth of Isis, unavoidably well up in memory:

Everything that was ever torn
has been torn in me
everything that was ever mutilated
has been mutilated in me
(...)
Long ago oh torn one
in bits and pieces. She
gathered her dismembered one
and the fourteen pieces
took their triumphant place in the rays of evening.⁷

However, what is involved here is the reconstitution of a multiple body composed of anonymous bits of different individuals that have been sewn and stuck together in the magical act of reanimation. There is an *a priori* incompatibility between the highly elaborate, quasi-ritualistic role-

playing, and the chance that guides the artist's hand in assembling and pasting on the labels-sutures. The coherence of the result might itself seem paradoxical in the eyes of the technique of work, a truly automatic writing.

From this random practice, a dancing, joyous life is born — "...the shivering spawn of forms liberating themselves/from facile bindings/and escaping from too premature combinings"⁸ — but nonetheless perfectly organized, an artistic illustration of the scientific relationship of *chance and necessity*.

Drawn from the reign of pure chance, harmonious structures emerge, constellations of stars on a shadowy sky, a field of signs from an improbable arithmetic, genetic and chromosomal charts, a theory of pixels...

The desire to renovate art by renovating the materials, transparency, the repetition of the same visual sign, the invitation to abandon a fixed position in relation to the artwork, the investigation of flickering movement, and the permanent scintillation of the surface — all these bring Brèleur close to kinetic art. Video projections and slides reinforce the luminous vibration of these installations.

Around this theme of fracture and suture, there is an ample range of contributions, from Raymond Médélice's relatively classical albeit complex pictorial technique to Bruno Pédurand's use of computer graphics, which enables him to appropriate scanned, juxtaposed, and superimposed photographic fragments. Marie-Jane Viator exploits the photographic medium, while Valérie John and Barbara Prezeau use collage and assemblage. The division of the image is immediately perceptible in the visual productions of Médélice and Viator. Conversely, the distinct fragments are associated, joined together, and juxtaposed in the work of John, Pédurand, and Prezeau.

Raymond Médélice (Martinique) superimposes two or three coats of the same color of paint to prepare the ground of the canvas, and then spreads a fresh layer of the desired color before the preceding coats have dried, which favors the migration of the colors. In this way, he obtains a specific coloristic effect by creating a full range of nuances through the more or less spontaneous blending of colors directly on the canvas. Next, he uses a trowel to etch swirls and scrolls into the colored layer, thereby endowing the surface of the painting with a virtual movement. The principle of declination of the same images occurs on a dual level, in the series and in the painting. In the series, it corresponds to a desire to go deeper, aesthetically and thematically. In the painting, the partitioning of the image, its grid structure, participates in the narrative and brings to light the influence of comic strips, as does the presence of written texts in the composition. Thus, one of the canvases of the "Dorliss Cycle" presents the viewer with sixteen squares, each of which encloses the same sign repeated four times on the horizontal plane, but modified very slightly each time. First, the moon, because night is the kingdom of the dorliss and the night-star its means of transport; then, woman, the victim of the dorliss, who takes possession of her spirit in order to more easily possess her body later on; next, the dorliss himself, always shown from behind, a mysterious character, at once feared and desired; and finally, the dog, a veritable Cerberus with his studded collar, pointed teeth, and his

huge mouth spitting flames.

The dorliss is a relatively recent character in Caribbean tradition, and it seems, specifically Martiniquan. To borrow Ina Césaire's terminology, he belongs to the family of "wandering spectral characters" who appear at random in society, like the "black hand" or the "headless man." This character does not appear in Creole folklore. He does, however, emerge in popular beliefs following the 1960s, and in his novel *L'Homme au bâton* (The Man with the Stick), Ernest Pépin introduces a similar character. He is one of the rare characters with sexual overtones, a local version of the incubus with the power of introducing himself into the best-protected homes to sexually abuse women while they are asleep. A whole series of rituals are practiced to protect oneself from him and keep him at a distance: for example, wearing red underpants or two black underpants inside out.

This same grounding in Caribbean reality may be found in the work of Bruno Pédurand (Guadeloupe). In the first place, there are borrowings from the terminology and the visual iconography of Vodou and Santería. The title of his series, *Ogun*, locates it under the sign of the god of fire and war, just as the choice of "Iwa" as a pseudonym confirms Pédurand's interest in Afro-Caribbean religions. In addition, the metallic bases, which are different for each of the works in this series, are rich in Vodou's *vèvè* forms. However, there is no single source of inspiration, since Iwa's creative process is an experiment in visually transposing the literary concept of Creoleness, by means of the juxtaposition, superimposition, and contrasting of images. Scanned images are chosen as elements of a theme and blended in view of an encounter that could perhaps be either a fusion or a misfortune. The figures of the dog and the boat have been part of Pédurand's visual alphabet for many years, and crosses, banknotes, and hearts also coexist in these images whose discrete grid framework emphasizes the reconstitution of the image.

Like Mirabel, Marie-Jane Viator (Guadeloupe) does self-portraits, but she accords greater importance to photography that has been transferred onto canvas and touched up with tiny reddish-brown brushstrokes. The fragmentation of the face appears in three portraits: *Woven Face*, *Untitled 1*, and *Untitled 2*. There is a clear inclination towards lightly woven veiling; there as well, the face appears only in fragments and always half-concealed. *Taut Bust* is clearly a homage to Man Ray: the posture — outstretched neck, exposed throat, face thrown backwards — presents many similarities to a 1930 photo, *Anatomy*. Moreover, a series of small photographs are juxtaposed with the primary image, which clearly call the Rayographs to mind, and particularly Man Ray's famous *Woman*, which depicts a kitchen whisk and its projected shadow. Viator frames the primary image with small negatives, simulations of the human face, somewhat in the style of Arcimboldo, composed with the help of such accessories as keys, belt-buckles, spectacles, or kitchen utensils like the whisk and the paddle. In the framework of these images, the ID number 03834 appears, in the artist's words, like a bar-code on a consumer product.

Piecing things together is at the essence of the work of Valérie John (Martinique). She fashions

her medium out of the juxtaposition, superimposition, and amalgamation of several layers of paper that have either been salvaged or made by hand, and sheets of photocopier paper that preserve residual traces of everything that has been previously photocopied onto them. At the end of the process, the whole thing becomes rigid, resistant, hard, and thick; the surface appears dented, blistered, uneven. The color emerges from the material, even if it is touched up and at times brightened by pigments. It is the extraction of the carbon — chance and mastery — that creates these bursts of opaline whiteness, like trembling wings, in the density of blacks. The grid of this background, obtained through assemblage and fusion, guides the geometrical structuring of the surface, clearly inspired by the African kimono or *pagne*. The arrangement of the surface in different symmetrical spaces (usually seven in number), the declination of an identical motif with opening, development, and closing, the imperceptible irregularity within the repetition — all belong to the tradition of the *pagne*, whereas the all-over work, the primacy given to the background, the use of repeated geometrical forms, are part of a process that resembles the Supports/Surfaces movement. Africa remains present in the imaginary writing carved into the thickness of the picture before the final stages of drying and varnishing: a free calligraphy executed rapidly in order to avoid any message, but which strongly recalls Arabic writing, of which several signs may be recognized here and there. The whole of the work is serene, with several flashes of preciousness when occasional strokes of gold inscribe their vivacity on the luxuriance and complex sumptuousness of the blacks.

The work of Barbara Prezeau (Haiti) deals with *mestizaje* and what she herself defines as a *shantytown aesthetic*. Halfway between painting and sculpture, her works resemble a “patchwork obtained by the diversion of materials and objects that come to mind either from my own culture or from the outside.” In these assemblages, sheet metal is cut into forms that have been freely inspired by Haitian Vodou symbols, and as in Pédurand’s work, serve as a support for the whole, which is composed of heterogeneous materials, pieces of brightly-colored cloth, and colored pearls. Prezeau takes objects from her immediate surroundings, wherever she happens to be living — Haiti, Paris, Canada, or Africa (cf. the Ashanti comb in *Couple*). *Mestizaje* is also effected between traditional visual vocabulary and the language of modern art.

This brief introduction does not pretend to cover the whole of the region’s vital visual arts; however, it may well suffice as a demonstration of the undeniable presence of the creative impulse. The trump cards of Caribbean visual creation are the dynamics of its extreme youth — the tradition of the visual arts is only a hundred years old — and its originality, due in no small part to its capacity for integrating multiple influences: European, African, Amerindian, Asian, and Indian.

Incontestably, that *special sound* called for by the founders of *Tropiques* in 1941 is beginning to be heard. And its echoes will soon be heard even more widely. Everything shows that it will be capable of clearing a path for itself, between cultural anchoring and innovation.



■ N O T E S : ■

1. Serge Hélénon, *Hélénon*, Ed. Vision Nouvelle, 1991.
2. Milan Kundera, "Beau comme une rencontre multiple" (Beautiful as a Multiple Encounter), *Conjonction* 194 (Avril-Mai-Juin 1992).
3. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité / In Praise of Creoleness*, trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Gallimard, 1993).
4. To understand the irony of the title "Volga Beach," one should know that the Volga neighborhood, on the outskirts of Fort-de-France, was a squatters' settlement, built towards the end of the 1950s on flood-prone mangroves. It was once a labyrinthine heap of rickety shacks, built with diverse cast-off materials from the city. This reality is, then, far-removed from the exotic dream of sun and hot sand.
5. Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land," *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (U. of California Press, 1983).
6. Aimé Césaire, "link of the chain gang," *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (U. Press of Virginia, 1990).
7. Aimé Césaire, "Lay of Errantry," *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (U. of California Press, 1983).
8. Aimé Césaire, "Wifredo Lam..." *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry, 1946-82*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (U. Press of Virginia, 1990).