

Dolace McLean

NARRATIVES AND AESTHETICS OF CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN



Welcome to yet another exciting issue of *Calabash Journal* as we focus on some old and several new voices in contemporary Anglophone Caribbean writing and the visual arts. This time around, *Calabash* is doing something unusual in that this is a special issue dedicated to the art and writing of just one Caribbean language group. One language group is a rare treat indeed, but this special issue was inspired by several outstanding poems and essays submitted by writers from throughout the English-speaking Caribbean and compiled by Claudia Rankine and Tiphonie Yanique Galiber.

Through their narratives, the poets and essayists translate their identities and experiences into language that re-writes the Caribbean as a space where creativity and invention are possible. The writings contained in this special issue offer readers a sense of that which conventional wisdom teaches: the first step for the writer is to write of what he knows. From that starting point then, the featured poets, writers, and essayists draw their inspiration from the Caribbean that they know; a place that is a spiritual and cultural, if not an actual, home for many of our contributors.

In the visual arts section we feature the literary and artistic talents of three writers who paint, painters who write, which include the art and poetry of Jacqueline Bishop, our own founding editor, Earl McKenzie and Ralph Thompson. Writing and painting for these authors/artists, is an impulse, an imaginative and authoritative act born of the Caribbean that shaped their artistic awareness. When they poeticize their art and paint their poetry, the creative energy of Bishop's purple-blue mountains resonates in *The*

Transformation Series, while Earl McKenzie's muse speaks to him in a *Coconut Alphabet* that moves beyond words to find its expression on canvas. And, still, Ralph Thompson realizes that all art, visual or written, is a transient, fragile and beautiful light contained within a creative energy that chooses each writer/artist as a medium of expression.

There in is a moment in the artist statement of Ralph Thompson when he shares the secret behind the creative impulses of the writer and the artist: an attempt to make permanent the transience of the world. Thompson is correct because writing, like art, is a creative act that seeks, as Bishop says, to leave in what is essential to the creation of a poem or painting, and take out what is not. Through the process of shaping images into art, or putting words into writing, the three authors/artists listen to images and paint with words to capture a Caribbean sensibility, to preserve a feeling, to celebrate a moment that heightens the aesthetic experience of the reader/viewer. As the authors/artists respond to the demands of their art, they give life to a narrative that has chosen them to speak their message, and to articulate the contours of their expression within creative space.

In addition, this issue also contains a new section entitled "Narrative Re-Routing" that features the work of Tregenza Roach, an emerging Virgin Islands writer with St. Kitts roots. In a personal essay and three poems, Tregenza traces the many middle passages of some of his female ancestors from St. Kitts, to St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, to the colonial mother country of England in search of a better life. Roach is a wonderful complement to another Kittian writer, Caryl Phillips, who was gracious enough to share the inner workings of his writing process with the *Journal*. A prolific writer who has won numerous awards for his fiction and plays, Caryl Phillips produces work that interrogates the meaning of grand concepts such as identity, memory, and home.

Finally, all our contributors are people of considerable talents who hear words, or look at objects, and make it possible for others to see with those words and to hear those visions. As the words and visions emerge from within the crucible of the experience of each author/artist, the readers/viewers share in the process, visual and verbal, that makes artistic creation possible in the first place. As our contributors heed the sights and sounds of the experiences that shape their art, the *Journal* looks forward to sharing in the

aesthetic journeys that have the power to transform constantly and enhance the creative landscape of our Caribbean lives.

Until next time,
Dolace McLean