

Caribbean Influences on Global Art

It is a heartfelt place, the Caribbean.
It is a place in the world where inhabitants are still within nature and
recognize the beauty, elegance, and authority of that realm.
And, of themselves as a part of that entirety.

The gut, the gut.
Knowledge comes from the gut in the Caribbean.
The peoples of the Congo would wrap a piece of cloth around a seed or
natural object and surround it with earth, dirt. They would tie this bundle at their
waist level. Called it an nkisi. It was to grow spirit towards desire.
Or need.
And, like Sidhartha, the Buddha, they would think, and fast, and wait.

How can one expect change to occur quickly when the decision-making is
based on knowledge from the heart and gut?

I was walking towards my gate at the O'Hara Airport on my way back to
the islands. I could hear the Caribbean peoples waiting at that gate long before I
could see them. As I turned the corner, I had to smile as I watched them talking
loudly, clapping, singing, story telling, changing diapers, eating, on the floor, out
in the isle, way over-spilling the area designated for the wait to go to Puerto Rico.
Emotive.

Directly across from the PR gate was the area to board the plane for Hong
Kong. The Asian people were standing in a straight line, long down the hall,
quietly watching their complementary counterpart across the corridor. Mindful.
Full of Mind. Cognitive.

At this time, I saw with clarity the concept I had been expressing in my
artwork for years. Cross-cultural understanding and experiences have been and
are foremost as artistic references. I seek understanding towards those aspects
of culture that cross; those aspects of all cultures that speak of a higher being, a
higher self. Leibnitz¹ called the relationship between humanity and divinity the
perennial philosophy. This philosophy states, "the divine element, Godhead, or
ground of the world is in fact within us and may be apprehended by the mind
itself. It is a "religion" quite different from salvation. The ultimate goal of this
philosophy is for one to discover the integral wholeness—and to find oneself
within that whole, and to be whole as well—not just to believe in God—but, to

¹ Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646 –1716) exemplified the Renaissance idea of the Universal man and defended the cultivation of reason as the hope of human progress. In the wide range of his studies and writings, one finds traditional ideas of God, freedom of the will and immortality of the soul defended. He believed in the pre-established harmony of the mind and body as reflecting one another's inner nature, but opaque to external influences.

actually discover God.”² All cultures have referenced this inner-personal discovery in some way.

How does one make a decision quickly? Why, just think it through! Weigh the pros and the cons, make a list, and logically eliminate all the objectionable considerations. Outline the affects of each choice and make a judgment of priorities. Think of what would be the best outcome for your future, your personal future.

Waiting for the spirit to move you. Tying a seed wrapped in cloth around your waist and waiting for spirit to come to your intention. Making an educated decision. On the one hand is a stillness that may lead to complacency. On the other is activity that moves towards aggression. Can executing change be anything but a balance of cognition and intuition? Can that balance be found anywhere other than within Nature itself? Ideas generated by receiving thought provoking information through one’s inner nature blend the gut and the head. Decisions so generated blend stillness and action soliciting confidence and empathy for others. “Be still and know that I am God”. Wait in anticipation as the ‘bridesmaid awaits the groom’. And as you wait, move confidently and unselfishly toward your desire, for “God gives you the desires of your heart”, not your heart’s desire. Be attentive and move. Begin. Start now. For it is the wave, not the particle, that indicates direction.

The climate and culture of the Caribbean affords opportunities to move at a slower pace. The climate and culture of the Caribbean encourage acceptance and forgiveness for those who have the courage to approach new ways of daily living and new paradigms for change.

The Chinese have had a way of projecting intention for centuries. It is in the feng shui practice of auspicious placement. The bagua is set on the floor plan of a home or room. Colored chu-chr strands representing the various aspects of an individual have designated places on the bagua. Strands for career, education, family, prosperity, fame, relationships, creativity, and helpful people are hung in specified areas of the room. These strands keep the intended energy alive. We now know that to visualize an event stimulates the same part of the mind as if one is actually living that event.³ Repetitive mental visualization strengthens manifestation. Drawing and painting positive images strengthens the imagination and visualization process as well as our cultural and moral beliefs. What kinds of images are our youth producing today broadcasting worldwide through music and video? Manifestation is a process, a creative process. Be joyful in the process. Be gracious, confident, and unselfish through the process. Set your intention pure, and wait and fast and MOVE.

² Male, Cindy, Art as a Means of Raising Consciousness, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, Vermont College of Norwich University, 1984.

³ Begley, Sharon, How the Brain Rewires Itself, Time Magazine, January 19, 2007

The Taino, meaning 'good people', evolved in the Greater Antilles as descendants of the Saladoid people who settled from South America around 400 BC to 600 AD. Their settlements developed into a highly sophisticated culture during 900 –1400 AD and by 1600, their civilization had been destroyed. Arawakan in language, they had various mythic characters and zemis who served to represent aspects of the culture that could connect the human spirit to the One Energy or Ashe, the "force that makes things happen". Many of the Taino images show the eyes swollen and closed; symbolizing the figure is filled with 'ashe'. Once connected, information could be received from the whole to motivate and direct action. But, as humanity became disconnected from nature's whole, information was less likely to be received. Yet, these characters and zemis reference those customs that were important, long ago, to the peoples of the Caribbean.

It is through aesthetic traditions like the fung shui bagua and the Taino zemis that ideas have historically been presented to alert and educate humanity. Picasso was one of the first European artists to utilize the African artistic tradition in his work. In "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)", he utilized African masks on the women of the brothel. Did Picasso know that these masks were utilized to bring forth spirit, to ward off spirit, or to remind the wearer of tradition? How does that extend the meaning of the intention of this work?

Henry Ossawa Tanner was, the first artist, of which I am aware, to paint the angel of the annunciation as pure white light. Tanner was an African-American working at the end of the 19th Century/beginning of the 20th Century, trained in the European tradition in Philadelphia. Yet, his angel was not a European angel. His angel was painted as pure spirit. As we learn to intend and manifest with a Co-Creating frame of mind, how can the arts of the Caribbean extend individual experience? What types of images can transcend present Newtonian lifestyle to the quantum and chaos mechanics of the mind? Is it not here in the Caribbean that Impressionism was REALLY born? Is this former rock-the-boat art style not our invitation to yet another totally unrealized artistic venture?

Music of the Caribbean has already begun to do just this. Poetry of the Caribbean and South America with a right brain, non-local and non-linear orientation, are attracting praise and acclaim. Stories of the beauty of the ordinary, love of life and one another revive the elegance of restraint. Songs of social awareness call forth the warrior in each of us.

The visual arts need to raise consciousness beyond natural beauty and cultural traditions. We need to move beyond the ocean sunset and johnnycake lady to the simplicity and elegance and love and peace that can mentally be achieved through our creative practice. John Biggers met this challenge in his sacred quilted geometry images that went well beyond the concepts he brought home with him from the African art festivals in the 1960's. Bert Samples fused

the African and American, right brain and left-brain cultures, in his work, “Jubilee, Jubilee”. The visual images of these men allowed their viewers to stretch understanding beyond contemporary values.

The Caribbean offers a chance to become reconnected to nature. Not just because there are areas of natural beauty to be visited and enjoyed, which of course, needs to be sustained; but, also, because there is much to be learned from a people who understand the wisdom gained from living so closely with their natural environment. To some islanders, the love of nature still exceeds the love of material possessions and lavish living.

The various islands are hot spots for the synthesis of the mind and the gut. It is here that will meets intuition. Humanity was made in the image of God. God creates. We were made to create. Reconnect! Engage yourself in pure simple, creative living. Paint a mural in your home. How about some yard art or a collective beach sand sculpture? Islanders still create in day-to-day life much as the African Artistic Tradition utilized the creative endeavor in daily living to keep a connection with spirit. From the lavish carnival costumes to decorative braids and shaved hair designs, the Caribbean culture offers up opportunities for the individual to become engaged with his or her artistic self. The artist is no longer a shaman, a slave to a pharaoh or king, priest, court, bourgeois fantasy, gallery, or museum. The artist has already explored formal aspects, content, emotion, and the abstract. The concept of “artist” extends to all a we. All a we. Is it not the Caribbean heritage for all people to create and thus know their inner artist/creative self? Is not this tradition found as well in the Tea Master Ceremony and the Arts and Crafts movement of the early 1900’s? I am an artist. You are an artist. The difference in our artistry is consciousness.

In conclusion, the Caribbean artist has the challenge of reflecting a culture that centuries ago synthesized elements from the entire world.

The Caribbean artist has the challenge to present images that alert the global community towards the balance of mind and spirit, affording opportunities that support change of lifestyle.

The Caribbean artist has the challenge to process in new ways mind-brain studies and create images that extend farther than the ego towards unselfish love. The mind is the first bondage, but, as Bob Marley so aptly lyricized, it is also the first liberation.

The Caribbean artist has the challenge to encourage lifestyle change towards restrained elegance, where over consuming is passé and spirituality is revived through simple living.

The Caribbean artist has the challenge to direct intention tempered with intuition through reconnection with nature.

And, finally, the Caribbean artist has the challenge to create an entire community of artists. We must take back the “inclusiveness” of the creative endeavor!

May our intentions be to co-create and move with consciousness in our efforts to invent images that have verve. Sex, drugs, and violence, used as propaganda to lead an unsuspecting generation by those who want wealth and control, is the ego extended out of bounds. Opinions are dogma of everyday life, but, one's consciousness determines how one moves through the world. I say to ALL artists, "Weave art into the fabric of everyday life."

"El, Ka, Leem, Om", Earth, Water, Fire, and Air, in an earlier body of work in which I was studying the relationship of chaos theory and fractal geometry to consciousness I utilized the eight aspects of the bagua not only in terms of specified color and polarity, but also in coordination with a particular element. I moved, then, from a real understanding of our latest computer generated paradigm of science and math as related to my personal intuitive spiritual belief, my perennial philosophy as it be, to an inquiry of unrelated opposite perhaps, cultural traditions for manifesting intention. I would like to acknowledge artist Iona Rozeal Brown who has already fused the Eastern and Southern Hemispheres in her exhibition, "a³...black on both sides".

I would like to thank Cynthia Hatfield, artist and art educator in St. Croix, for her research and drawings into the symbols and meanings of the Taino. Her publication, "Art of the Pre Columbian Caribbean People" is the basis of the imagery in my chu-chr fabric installation.

I would also like to thank Meredith D. Hardy, Archeologist with the National Park Service's Southeast Archeological Center. Ms. Hardy studied nearly every collection of St. Croix prehistoric artifacts housed in 5 institutions: Smithsonian Museum of Natural History (Washington D.C.), the National Museum of the American Indian (Washington D.C.), Yale University (New Haven, CT), Christiansted National Historic Site (STX), and the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark. These studies, conducted as part of her NPS work, and as part of her Ph.D. dissertation, resulted in the collection of imagery from which I executed the Chu-Shr, "Legends".

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