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Perspective on LGBTQ+ and Other Minorities.

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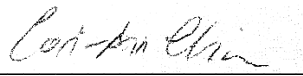
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ABSTRACT

Even with significant milestones such as Emancipation, Independence, The Black Power Movement, Women's Suffrage and Jason Jones vs the Attorney General¹, the battle for space by minority groups endures in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite global paradigm shifts which have given way to some topics becoming part of mainstream discourse, marginalization persists. The main objective of this study was to define safe spaces in the Trinbagonian context, identify the relevant ways in which the local art world has served as a safe space for marginalized classes, and examine the trajectory in which they are headed, with a particular focus on gender and sexual minorities. This was done by conducting interviews, literary research and a survey, the findings of which yielded expected and unexpected results.

¹ The ruling which was delivered on September 20, 2018, follows the initial historic decision on April 12 in the matter of Jason Jones v the Attorney General, which challenged Sections 13 (the buggery act: anal sex between consenting individuals of either sex), and 16 of the Sexual Offences Act as unconstitutional. It would successfully decriminalize same sex intimacy (Doodnath).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
LIST OF APPENDICES	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	4
CHAPTER TWO	9
CHAPTER THREE	26
CONCLUSION	32
WORKS CITED	35
APPENDIX A	a
APPENDIX B	A

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	11
Figure 2	11
Figure 3	12
Figure 4	12
Figure 5	13
Figure 6	13
Figure 7	14
Figure 8	17
Figure 9	17
Figure 10	20
Figure 11	27
Figure 12	27
Figure 13	28
Figure 14	29
Figure 15	29

LIST OF APPENDICES

A 1 Interview Questions.....	a
A 2 Survey.....	A

INTRODUCTION

In some way, every citizen of the Caribbean region can be said to be part of a minority group. Derek Walcott's Lecture "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" outlines this exceptionally as he compares the inhabitants to a broken vase, and our rich, diverse culture to its fragments, pieced together to make a whole, which is cherished more than the original (Walcott). One would be reasonable to assume that such a "vase", the Caribbean region, should therefore be a place of unity and acceptance for its diverse peoples. Remarkably, marginalized groups still exist and face constant challenges because of their ethnicity, ability, identity, gender or sexual orientation.

Representation matters. A nation's cultural identity can be described as a system of representations. Representation can generate many meanings. Meanings in turn are constituted by what is present, what is absent and what is different in any given text. In Trinidad and Tobago, the creative world has always been a source of freedom and self-expression. This can clearly be seen when one explores the evolution of aspects of the nation's cultural identity such as Carnival, the steel pan, calypso and even chutney. These aspects of our culture emerged from marginalized sections of the society and functioned as safe spaces for the people there. The evolution of these art forms from being marginalized entities to becoming intrinsic parts of the nation's cultural fabric is testament to what can emerge when marginalized sections of society are afforded spaces to let their voices be heard. Here 'other' have become representations of a nation whose cultural identity is shaped by the constant struggle of different members of its population to assert themselves.

Within the art world of Trinidad and Tobago, the queer community lacks representation. There is a struggle for space and visibility for artists belonging to this group on the art scene. Their exclusion from the mainstream affects not only their individual identities, but it also affects the collective identity of gender and sexual minorities. Their quest to make the invisible visible is limited as there is a dearth of safe spaces within which they are allowed to express themselves freely and exercise artistic autonomy. Art in any form gives way to a representation of our otherwise elusive subjective experiences. The curation of art spaces in Trinidad and Tobago often entails a process of sanitization where the work of those outside the cisgender, heteronormative framework is often demonized. Caribbean cultural ambassador Rex Nettleford highlighted the sensibilities that emerge when a diverse people are forced to engage with each other in an ever-changing climate. Caribbean identity, Nettleford asserted, relates more to a discourse of intertextuality rather than one of homogeneity. He dedicated his comprehensive work to Caribbean nationalists who took the stance and illustrated their creative selves rather than being “aliens in their land” (xxiii). The LGBTQ+ community walk the thin line of being aliens in their land.

Documentation of our local visual artists and creatives is already limited and focusing on the topic of safe spaces in the art world will allow the reader not only to hone in on research in this field but to develop a deeper appreciation of our Trinbagonian people and heritage. Furthermore, the creation of this paper will bring awareness to a topic that has been erased or minimized in the past, by providing insight into untapped data surrounding queer influences in art.

The main objective is to identify the ways in which the local art world has served as a safe space for marginalized classes, with a particular focus on gender and sexual minorities. By the end of this study, we will be able to determine the nature of our creative safe spaces, their history and

relevance, as well as and examine their trajectory, including ways in which art galleries can become more inclusive.

For the purpose of consistency, a safe space will be defined as a space which may be temporary or permanent, physical or non-physical space, where a marginalized individual can achieve freedom of expression, a level of acceptance, respect, dignity and a temporary pardon or escape from the challenges they may face in wider society. The term gender and sexual minorities will be used to describe the LGBTQ+ community. This approach will help to differentiate between gender identity and sexuality while being inclusive of every member in a concise manner.

Sanitization will refer to any act of erasure that resembles “whitewashing” in the context of the queer experience.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

Consistent themes arose when studying safe spaces within the art world, including freedom of expression, avant-gardismⁱ and intersectionality. The most relevant themes in the local art world revolve around Jouvert and the history of the Trinidad Art Society. Jouvert signifies the birth of freedom of expression and freedom of the creative spirit for Trinbagonians from all walks of life. It introduced citizens to the possibility of belonging in a society that initially belonged to the white upper class.

“I realize now that more than the mas, he needed the space of his mas camp, a marginal space that gave him a sense of his art, a place where he could rebel against the restrictions he encountered trying to live in a place like Trinidad, under a government that ignored the Indian Community. I was old enough to understand that the run down building on Irving Street that my father called his mas camp was not only his space to create, but also his space of escape (Mahibir 9).”

This quote from Joy Mahibir in her book “Jouvert” speaks of a universal experience within the marginalized community. Mahibir herself is a visual artist of Indo-Trinidadian descent, creating work in New York. She writes about her father, a mas man, and how his involvement Jouvert influenced her art making process.

Her work can be contrasted with “Jouvay Popular Theatre Process.” Tony Hall describes Jouvert as a type of rebirth. “The mechanisms of awakening and self-realization that are embedded in the emancipation traditions (107-109).” Although the authors are from completely different walks of life, both works speak of Jouvert as a place where individuals can use mas, art and performance not to cover up their true identity, but to find it and reveal it and to find community. The same

oppressive force that compels them to conceal their identity proves instrumental in the channelling of raw creativity within the bounds of the creative spaces in which they are allowed to operate.

The recurring theme of the Carnival scene as a safe space arises once again in “Transfiguring Trinidad and Tobago” by Lyndon Kamal Gill, where the sanitization of Trinbagonian creativity is discussed (Gill 107). As early as 1896, elements not seen as aligning with Victorian, western, morality were outlawed. Not only were drum bearing, torch bearing and stick fighting banned, but also anything perceived as “transvestitism” in “Jamette” mas. This would have included the Baby Doll and Dame Lorraine. After emancipation and the expansion of Carnival, artists like Peter Minshall would come on to the scene and boldly introduce subjects that had been pushed down for centuries. The book describes him as “Decidedly not the type of artist who surrenders his creativity to the whims of a sponsoring body (Gill 109). Minshall’s performance, “The Sacred Heart” brings awareness to HIV prevention and anti-discrimination. The book underlines the local misconception that violence and homophobia has successfully erased homosexuality. The community still very much exists and has always existed.

The forces within the art world which censor the existence of minorities must be discussed too as they shape creative safe spaces and Gill helps source that history. However, the erasure of gender and sexual minorities goes far beyond the scope of sexual desire. Instead, the very right of anyone who strays from gender and sexual norms to exist is called into question by society.

Amanda T McIntyre, a contemporary, afro-Trinidadian artist, does just that in her practice, which she outlines in her zine “Dolly Ma Bridgitta”. Similarly to Joy Mahibir, she marries her art practice with the Carnival, although the two come from different time periods, racial and spatial backgrounds. Interestingly, time, space, identity and existence are exactly what she discusses in

her creation of Dolly Ma. She is a character inspired by the traditional baby doll. The character was originally played by men to mock the mothers as gold diggers who did not know who the father of their child was. McIntyre reclaims the character in the form of Dolly Ma, a being who travels through space and time between the 19th-21st centuries in search of her lover. The being can take the form of any gender, including that of an enchanted doll. It challenges the idea of binary sex and gender and opens the discussion on same sex unions and transgender identity. Here, we see Jouvert embodying all forms of art, while merging with contemporary issues, evolving and becoming a space where queer voices can be heard (McIntyre).

The literary information regarding the Trinidad Art Society was fragmented. Several sources were pieced together in order to form a narrative. Older sources tend to gloss over information regarding the Society of Trinidad Independents and their disbanding, particularly mentions of queer advocacy.

According to “Art in the Caribbean: An introduction” by Ann Walmsley and Stanley Greaves, The Society of Trinidad Independents, founded by Sybil Atteck and Hugh Stollmeyer, created ground-breaking work in Trinidad and Tobago. Before them, there were not much records of Trinbagonian art and it was considered a middle class pastime akin to embroidery or violin lessons. Their work comprised avant-garde ideas, nudes and a range of modern, western art styles. They began meeting in their homes to discuss their work and ideas and eventually began to hold exhibitions there and to publish a journal. The TSI aroused and encouraged public interest in art. With creatives and thinkers such as C.L.R James in their ranks, this outcome is unsurprising. Its large number of exhibitors included those of African, Chinese, East Indian, European, and Creole descent. However their lifestyle, described as “bohemian”, coupled with their racial mixing, shocked the island’s conservative colonial elites (Anne et. al). They

disbanded in 1939, although no mention was made as to why in the book. This significant turn of events in art history was glossed over in a way that suggested erasure.

Peter Shepherd plainly states “vitriolic attacks of a fundamentalist press” as responsible for the disbanding in “The Beginnings”. Here, the essence of the event is captured in no vague terms such as in the aforementioned book. He outlines their interest in African art and African religion, Orisha and Baptist, as heavily influencing their art along with the avant-garde movements of the west, namely the work of the likes of Gauguin and Modigliani. “Their pioneering visual work, however, was to have a profound influence on the development of art in Trinidad and Tobago (Shepherd et al).” In 1939, art was no longer confined to privileged elites, but had been exposed to diverse peoples all throughout the country in large part due to the TSI. The now renowned local artist Sybil Attek, saw the importance of the movement and pushed for the formation of the Trinidad Art Society. Its first president was a woman, Mildred Faulkner.

While the art gallery can be said to have accomplished much, exhibitions, teaching seminars, workshops and art activities with the government, corporate bodies and other organizations, a clear comparison and contrast is not made between the TSI and the Art Society. It leaves one to wonder how similar or different the movements are to each other and if they share the same level of progressiveness. In addition Shepherd, like Walmsley, makes little mention of the artists’ personal lives or sexualities. However, the omission of their identities, in these sources and others, may not have been deliberate erasure, but an attempt to preserve the confidentiality and dignity of the artists in a world where people would not have been able to fully appreciate them for what they were. According to Geoffrey MacLean curator of the Medulla Art Gallery, who did go on to reference their sexualities in his work, he was accused by Sollmeyer’s family of

portraying him as a drunken homosexual instead of focusing purely on his artistic contribution to society (MacLean).

The term “bohemian lifestyle” could be used as a slur by conservative elites of the TSI’s era. It meant an unconventional lifestyle and was used to describe creatives, thinkers and vagabonds alike. This early concept of an alternative lifestyle also describes gender and sexual minorities. According to CAISO sex and gender justice website, many of TSIs leading members were from this category. They advocated an end to class divisions, capitalism, racism, religious extremism and prejudice against homosexuality (Remembering Our History). The topic of their sexuality goes unmentioned in most references to them even today. However, it is important to note because it shows that even as early as the 1930’s people of differing identities were using creative spaces to fight for their voice.

Of particular interest is Amy Leong Pang, an artist of Chinese descent and close friend of Hugh Stollmeyer. She is believed to have been lesbian. She hid her sexuality at the time using the safety net of a ‘lavender marriage” with John Albert Bullbrook. This is a marriage where one or both parties are homosexual and the union is entered with full knowledge of the participants in order to preserve their image in society. Bobbie-lee Dixon outlines this in the Trinidad Guardian article “Will you be my Beard” (Dixon). Her story is integral because her life and involvement in the society as a woman, a racial minority and a sexual minority is the strongest factor in the nature of the TSIs role as a Safe Space.

The inception of Jouvert and The Trinidad Art Society set the foundation for diversity and inclusion. Both play a substantial role in the discussion of creative safe spaces in a Trinbagonian context. As such, one must delve deeper into their beginnings in order to fully grasp how they speak to the people.

CHAPTER TWO

Interviews

The following interviews are from representatives of local creative spaces, art educators and artists from gender and sexual minorities with a vested interest in diversity and inclusion.

Although the gallery did not follow up for an interview in this particular study, David Cave, art historian, teacher, writer and journalist, gave the most substantial insight into the art gallery's history. The transition from the Independents to the Art Society was primarily fuelled by Sybil Atteck. "She may not have started it, but it was clear that during the 1960s she was a beast in the sense that she really made things happen (Cave)."

The status of the Art Society rose spectacularly during that period because of her efforts. She organized exhibitions, sponsorships, publicity events, and drove the art education initiative.

When asked if the Trinidad Art Society reclaimed and maintained its role as an artistic safe space since the Society of Trinidad Independents' disbanding, Cave indicated that Atteck was more concerned with community outreach. Although there was acceptance of queer artists and avant-garde works, the society was neither conformist nor rebellious. Their main goal was to indigenize art, adapting the revolutionary western genres they loved to the local experience.

Alfred Codallo, who worked alongside Atteck, stated that he wanted to create art that, "everyone could understand, free from confounding 'isms'".

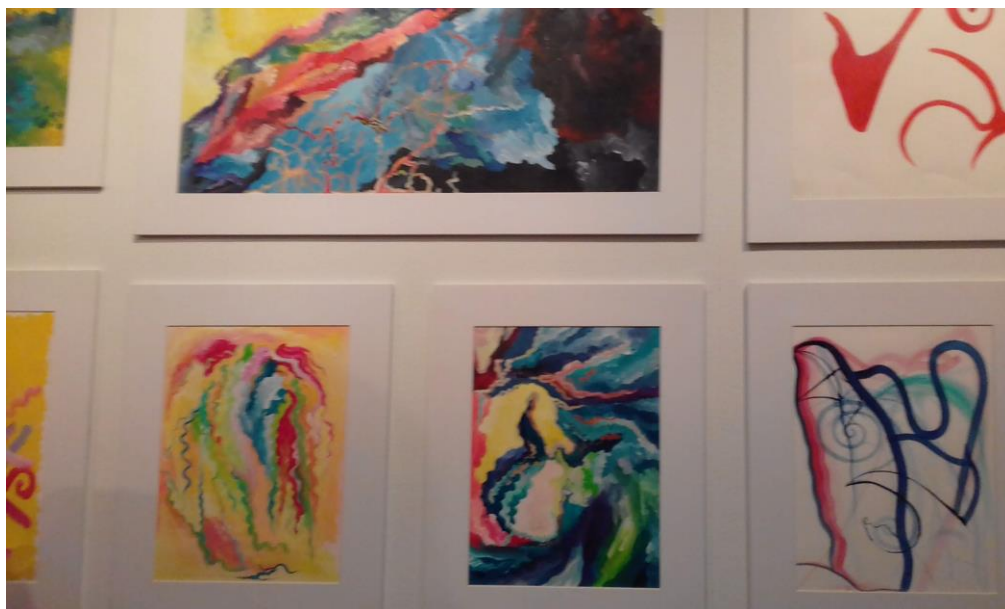
While this approach does allow for diversity and inclusion, Cave had some criticisms about the local art scene on the whole. He spoke about banality in art and the fact that though many of the artists in The Society were queer, their work did not adequately reflect their experiences.

“Even though Stollmeyer was gay, there were no paintings by him that make that explicitly clear. So, although homosexual artists are accepted, artwork about homosexuality remains hard to pinpoint. Likewise, I also feel that there is a serious degree of incongruity between traumatic events in our history and our art. There are few examples of art works that directly address the 1990 attempted coup. And that was a big event in our history. So in an overall sense, Trinidadian art remains mostly focused on benign issues. Because the power structure of Trinidad seems to require this (Cave).”

He spoke about the incongruity between artists and their artwork by referencing Leroy Clarke, who painted mostly beautiful abstract works, but as a writer and public figure he was contemplative and vociferous to the point where Rhoda Bharath labelled him as a “Leroysexual” because of his strong homophobic stance. Clarke’s creative genius, despite his homophobia, speaks to the fact that the art world isn’t one sided. Clarke chose selectively, supporting Orisha, the Baptist faith and the black power movement, but was unable to reconcile with the issue of queer existence.

The Art Society, largely due to Sybil Attek, helped the local art world to become what it is today. They moved from being an insulated activist group (The TSI), to an open forum which served to engage the public. Nevertheless, the society, like the rest of the local art scene, falls short when it comes to creating revolutionary art work, or at the very least, that sort of work is not adequately publicized.

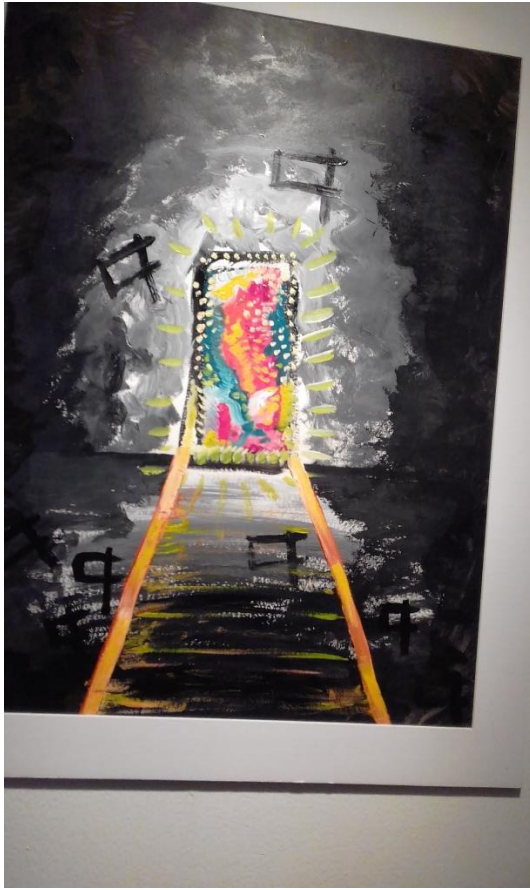
The Medulla Art Gallery can also be seen as a safe space. Its activities made it a beacon for this type of research. Of noteworthy mention is “Breaking Blue”, an interactive exhibition presented by The Art Therapy Association of Trinidad & Tobago. The art takes the viewer into the mind of someone suffering from mental illness.



“Breaking Blue”
 Untitled Unknown
 Author
 Figure 2



“Breaking Blue”
 Untitled Unknown
 Author
 Figure 1



“Breaking Blue” Untitled
Unknown Author
Figure 3



“Breaking Blue” Untitled
Unknown Author
Figure 4

An art board was set up to engage the public in art making. This resulted in the following works. Of particular interest is figure 5, which highlights LGBTQ+ advocacy as a result of the free expression.



"Breaking Blue" Untitled
Unknown Author
Figure 7

According to Moutett, the gallery, formerly Aquarella in 1985, went into hiatus until it reopened in 2010 as the Medulla Art Gallery. The name is significant because it means "core" and alludes to the intrinsic value of art making. They strive to veer away from commercialization and focus on quality, messaging and relevance. In that respect, the work featured has always been considered avant-garde.

Moutett went on to explain that the gallery engages in activism through workshops, social media and artist talks. Stuart Hahn's show "Revisitings" was held to commemorate Pride month in June 2019. "In-Between: Stories of a Refugee" was a three day workshop which engaged refugee

children in the form of mural making. The gallery also collaborated with The Silver Lining Foundation to launch “A Safe Space” film, a documentary which featured Mathew Shepherd, a victim of homophobic violence. George Kazanjian, a 16 year old local boy who succumbed to homophobia, particularly in the form of domestic abuse from his father, was also discussed.

However, while he reiterated that the space was about diversity, inclusion and intersectionality, he stressed that the gallery doesn’t want to sacrifice quality in the name of diversity. “Good art is good art. Don’t just throw in random artists because they fit the narrative (Mouttet)”. This goes back to the meaning of the gallery’s name “core” and suggests that the gallery strives to remain indiscriminate, despite an ever changing social climate, and above all, to showcase exceptional artwork.

The W Art Gallery of Modern Art is a contemporary art space, opened in 2021, and is specifically geared toward queer creatives. Its placement in the heart of Chaguanas makes it unique as it is not an area known for progressiveness, or the arts.

The owner, Wayde Ramnerine, a queer artist and activist, explained that the location creates a space for queer persons in the area to push the envelope. As someone who grew up there, he saw progressive aspects about central that may be overlooked such as its diversity, and wanted to see new styles of art emerge, creating a “central identity”, rather than art being monopolized by the Capital. He worked for the UN for 15 years, and described the need to slow his pace and do something which fulfilled him.

The space also serves as a bistro and lounge. At the memorial for Brandy Rodriguez, a well-known trans activist and founder of the Trinidad and Tobago Transgender Coalition, trans persons expressed themselves in a process very similar to the experience of Mahibir’s father in

“Jouvert” (9). The gallery creates a sense of emancipation for the entire community in a world where gender non-conforming minorities are a prime target.

However, regardless of the intent, business remains slow. Apart from being a new business, the lack of predominantly wealthy and progressive patrons and its location away from the art world may contribute to this factor. A less progressive location also makes it a possible target of bigotry. Regardless, its success would no doubt signify a local paradigm shift.

Ramnarine shared that when he came out and started expressing his femininity as a gay, non-binary individual, he faced challenges at home and in the community. He recalled being followed to work and told that if he was killed, it would make the world a better place. Despite this, coming out helped him to discover his own people and find a “new family”. The evangelical movement was noted as a prime reason for the rise in bigotry in Trinidad and he recalled a time when central was a much more accepting place. “I opened the art gallery here because I want to bring Chaguanas back to its former glory. I truly believe that is possible and I think this community has so much potential (Ramnarine).”

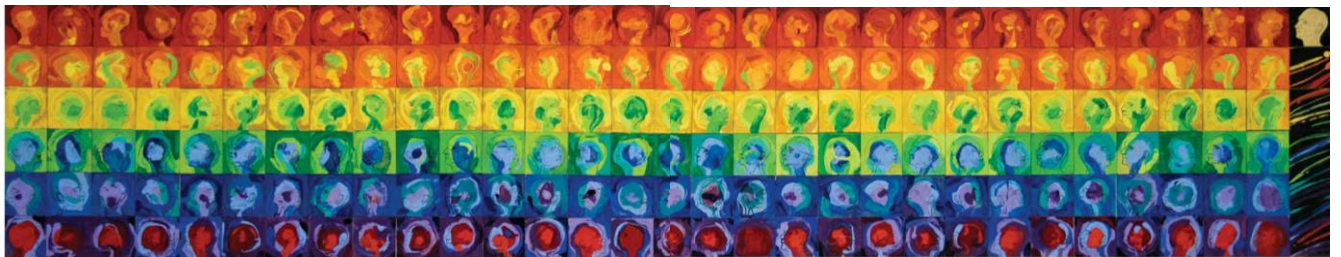
Despite challenges, The W Art gallery of Modern Art serves to expand the local art world, amplify queer voices and create a place of freedom of expression for queer artists and patrons alike.

The next interview was held at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, with its curator, art historian Naima Muwakil-Zakuri. The bank has collected art for 60 years. The art came before the museum, established in 2004, was even a thought. The curator described the museum as a place of cultural appreciation. They have many young, student visitors and aim to be part of that

educational ecosystem, featuring works which represent our cultural identity, including Carnival, dance, ethnic and religious practices.



“Steel Bands Men”
Sybil Atteck 1995 oil
on canvas 23.5 x
29.5” Acquired 1992
Figure 8



“A Rainbow for Every Man”
Peter Minshall 1986 ink stamp
and acrylic on card 12 x
62.75” Acquired 2008
Figure 9

Naima admitted that the museum does not currently feature much work from queer artists, or participate in much activism in that area, although she insisted that education of youth is important to them and if such art should feature in the collection, they would not shy away from it. Their acquisition committee looks for diverse artists and works which reflect the Trinbagonian

experience. She cited Kennedy Walcott, an artist who painted with his mouth after losing the use of his arms in an accident among prominent disabled artists from their collection. Their main form of activism has been making art more accessible to the differently abled. The museum has engaged by switching to an open floor plan and installing wheelchair ramps and brail. They also feature work which differently abled persons can interact with.

Naima was not hesitant to describe some of the drawbacks of the museum when it comes to operating as both an accessible space and a safe space. She cited that it is a cultural space operating within a financial institution and that always brings difficulties. Governments change, and subsequently what they deem is relevant. This factor restricts leeway and creativity and keeps progression slow. “You would think that after 2005, there are no new artists in Trinidad and Tobago.” She commented, adding that there was hardly any contemporary work in the last 20 years. “The museum has not been collecting in a serious way (Muwakil-Zakuri).” This balancing act may be what has contributed to the lack of representation of issues, most notably concerning queer politics.

However, the curator believes that the bank is opening up to change. For instance, including more types of art: photography, sculpture and portraiture. The museum, formerly part of the intimidating bank structure, now has a separate entrance. They have also expanded their reach, using social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, and creating a separate site for the art collection from the Central Bank’s site.

Overall, the Central Bank has, in some ways, provided a safe space in the local art world.

However, work needs to be done to progress the space forward into contemporary relevance.

Zinnia Cheewah is a transgender woman and self-taught artist. Although she possesses few academic accolades, she has a wealth of work experience as a graphic designer and youngest art director for McCann Advertizing at 21. Her career began as a coffee maker at AMC Avertizing. But her confidence and a positive attitude led to her being chosen above people who went to university. Although the competition in the job market seems tougher, she insisted the game hasn't changed. It's all about human connection.

She highlights the difference between sex and gender, bringing light to the fact that her femininity is not due to her being a gay man. In fact, she identifies as a lesbian. She was teased by straight men, who jokingly said they were lesbians too. But from 5 years old, she knew she felt like a girl. As a teen, she experienced the male gaze as the submissive gay stereotype was pushed on her. This, and her father's overbearing homophobia made her turn to toxic masculinity. Nevertheless, she now benefits from the toughness and resilience, feeling empowered as a transgender woman who can "handle herself" in violent situations.

She described coming out as transgender as a liberating experience, although it happened in her 50s. For her, full medical transition is not necessary. She simply enjoys expressing her true colours regardless of people's opinions, making her own clothing and revamping her old, male wardrobe.

However, the experience did not come without challenges. Presently, she faces strained family ties, putting a wedge between her and her child. Additionally, the corporate art world is not as inviting as it was when she identified as a cis man. This goes against the misconception that queer artists are readily chosen due to the "gay agenda".

Painting her murals in a “pump um shorts” and having great legs shocked men when they realized she was not cis. But the experience was described as a thrill. She enjoyed “pissing them off” and did not feel uncomfortable.

She currently has 15 completed murals in Port of Spain as part of the “Take the Jab Jab” campaign, commissioned by AMCHAM. However the artist revealed that she only received \$3000 for the job. Zinnia did not complain, and at her award ceremony at Napa she came decked out in heels and a flower crown. She was well received, despite the political climate and was glad for the awareness and publicity she was able to achieve as an artist and activist.



“Take the Jab Jab” Mural by
Zinnia Cheewah

Figure 10

Adele Todd is an artist, activist, writer and lecturer at the University of the West Indies. She studied graphic design at Pratt University in New York and has been an official artist since the year 2000 with her show “Hit” a visual documentation on domestic violence. She felt the local art community was not adequately addressing the issues and wanted to engage society with her gift.

According to Todd, a safe space begins in the mind. She made reference to her blog, which she titled “safe space”. The space is made in the mind, which then motivates an individual to find other people. “The thing about creativity is that it is irrepressible. Created during strife”. She described an intrinsic connection between the art space and Carnival Space. Bringing light to her experience of feeling silly at first in a costume, but then coming into the space, getting caught up in the role and embodying that character. She also noted that some people who aren’t being touched would not see the need for safe spaces.

When asked her affiliation with LGBTQ+ community, she responded that as a black person, she understands minorities and does not enjoy discrimination herself. This creates a territorial feeling when it comes to LGBTQ+ and other minorities.” When asked how her work promotes diversity and inclusion, she responded “I do beautiful work that talks about awful things”. This included police brutality, racism and sexism among other issues. She strives to make people think, and take time to process the work.

The parallels between interviewees’ responses to key questions help to paint a broader picture of the overall nature of local creative safe spaces.

The definitions of “safe space” although varied, held a core premise. Firstly, there was the notion of Carnival, which arose without prompting. Adele highlighted that Carnival is an opportunity to

be as creative as you want to be without permission. It is a safe space which is organic, and allows minority groups to confront the bully by existing.

For Zinnia, Jouvay, namely, the organization Rainbow Crew, was a safe place for gender and sexual minorities, as well as 3Canal, even though they did not “sing it from the mountains” which she believed they should. She expressed that any space where she is present becomes a queer space. “Queer persons are ambassadors whether consciously or not, and people listen and change when confronted by queer existence (Cheewah).”

The question “Do you believe art spaces are more welcoming than the general public?” was met with interesting commentary.

“Art galleries, by definition are spaces for the expression of ideas and thought. They create a forum where people can question and confront things they don’t like in the most abstract way possible (Ramnarine).”

“Definitely. We come to expect anything of artists and we want artists to push the envelope because it is exciting. People who are not artists are able to connect to things that they may not be able express themselves. (Muwakil-Zakuri).”

While the sentiment was unanimous, so was the feeling that the art world is not unified and not all creative spaces offer the same mind-set. A named gallery was the 101 art gallery, who more than one interviewee associated with commercialism and censorship.

Adele Todd postulated “It is alleged without no true research that gay people are generally in the arts. It is a foregone conclusion. Society is willing to hand us that crumb.” According to her, not all art spaces provide a place for freedom and self-expression. She spoke about her experience during her exhibition “Black Guard” at the National Museum. The Curator was nervous about a

comment that many local police officers are black. She expressed a similar sentiment to Muwakil-Zakuri, that government owned art enterprises are prone to censorship, and depending on who is in power, and whose personal sensibilities are offended, artists work could be stifled.

“Zammy²” a piece dedicated to lesbianism, was only allowed at the museum because the slang was unknown, allowing the subversive art to slip through the cracks, and enter the discussion. Adele spoke about UWI where she lectures, stressing that they are first and foremost a financial institution and don’t want to be sued. As such, they are willing to do what they must in order to be politically correct. In her words “Although the dialogue has started. It takes time for things to change and we can’t rush the process, but it doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try.”

It was also recognized across the board that safe spaces are necessary

Kazanjian, who tragically ended his own life in 1995 was cited as the main reason for their necessity by Mouttet, who expressed that there are many in the community with nefarious intentions. However, his observation was that in the past 5 – 10 years the atmosphere in Trinidad and Tobago has been shifting away from violence and toward acceptance.

For Ramnarine, the sense of community and freedom from the element of danger was cited as core reasons for safe spaces. He noted from his experience at the UN that the LGBTQ+ community was seen as the most disposable people, and an afterthought when considering human rights issues worldwide. However, he doesn’t believe that safe spaces *should* be necessary and conveyed frustration that such a thing was necessary in a country where the anthem stated “every creed and race, find an equal place (Ramnarine)”.

² Colloquial slang for lesbian which is less familiar to some

Naima remarked “I think it is necessary for any institution in Trinidad and Tobago to be welcoming to any individual. There should be no discrimination as I have faced as a Muslim woman throughout my life.” She highlighted prejudice she faced in school because of her faith. “There is a melting pot of personalities and people will have their differences, but we should strive to accept everyone that walks through our doors (Muwakil-Zakuri).”

When asked “Do you believe that safe spaces are welcomed in Trinidad?” Zinnia responded passionately with “Trinidad homophobic as fuck! Nowhere is safe!” Regardless, she did not want to waste the rest of her life living apologetically. “I am going to be 52 this year, I don’t have time to spoon-feed people (Cheewah).”

In stark contrast, Naima expressed that she believes that Trinidadians are friendly people who want to be able to share their work with everyone, but it is not always possible.

When asked how the art world can promote diversity and inclusion, there were mixed responses.

The shared sentiment was that better communication and activism through art is needed.

Additionally, the arts need to be more prioritized. David Cave highlighted that socio-economic issues cause citizens to prioritize survival over art.

Zinnia Cheewah suggested more funding for artists and an end to identity politics. “People need to understand that it’s not about me” she said, going on to say that it should be about the art and not the person holding the brush, their identity, or what they are wearing.

Similarly, Todd expressed that “You can’t be the poster child for everyone’s bad behaviour, that’s exhausting! There is power in numbers. We need to stand up and show them that we are not going away, that goes for the black movement as much as the LGBTQ+ community.”

However, she stressed the importance of not letting safe spaces become echo chambers, because that only encourages mediocrity.

Ramnarine also agreed, but had no confidence in the idea of providing more funding, stating that “If people are inherently hateful, and you build a bigger space, you just give them more room to hate.” The people’s mind-sets we need to change the most are those in power.

As a solution, Naima Muwakil-Zakuri, similarly to Martin Mouttet, posed a committee to see things through till the end. Because when government changes, certain institutions are left with less funding than others. Opportunities aren’t created for graduates in the art field to be hired locally. Abroad, artists are getting internships, jobs and their art sold. Above all, institutions need to recognize their power and come together to better support artists in a holistic way.

During covid19, the consensus among artists is that they were able to slow down more and focus on their work, with Todd going so far as to say she was grateful, because it allowed people to stop, think and reflect “in a world of constant consumption and “bullshit” (Todd). But it did not come without economical drawbacks. The art galleries were the last places to receive funding or support during the crisis. Ramnarine noted that “We cannot have a “was and now” art sale because it devalues art.” Some artists used it to their advantage to create art, but some have succumbed to depression and inactivity.

The interviews heavily substantiate the claim that the art community does serve as a safe space. However, it is still very much divided and creativity has been stifled and censored, especially by government institutions. Regardless, it remains a more inclusive space, and a consistent trend based on the experiences of these long time artists, educators and activists, is that the art world is becoming more open and progressive.

CHAPTER THREE

Survey

The survey outlines the main approach to minority groups and hones in on LGBTQ+ acceptance. It provides context in relation to the local paradigm, public understanding and reception of safe spaces. This survey is limited because of the small sample size of Trinbagonians and does not necessarily reflect the views of the wider society, but it does highlight possible links between the demographics and mind-set of individuals as well as anecdotal experiences of a diverse set of individuals.

Many of the participants were students, and some lecturers, of the University of the West Indies. 67% were under the age of 30 and 57% identified non-religious or spiritual, 43% and 14% respectively. Only 42% identified as Christian, which differs significantly from the wider demographic of 87% Christian across denominations according to a 2011 study (Index Mundi). 48% were from the LGBTQ+ community. The ratio of straight to sexual minorities was 57-43, and cis to gender minorities were 75-21, significantly higher than the wider population³. 82% identified as supporting minority groups. Additionally, all participants have ties to the local art world as practicing artists, lecturers in the field, art enthusiasts or free-lance and self-taught artists. So this study largely reflects the opinions of young, educated allies and queer persons within the art world regarding safe spaces.

³ By comparison, transgender and non-binary people make up at least 1% of the wider population.

Do you consider yourself a supporter of minority groups?

28 responses

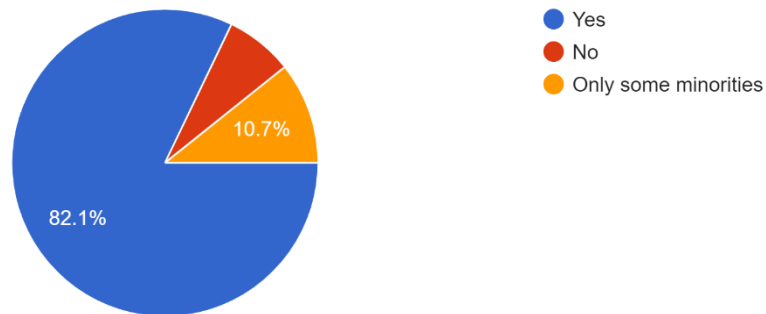


Figure 11

Age

18 responses

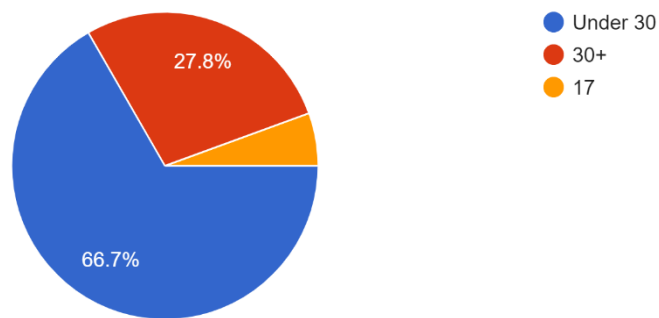


Figure 12

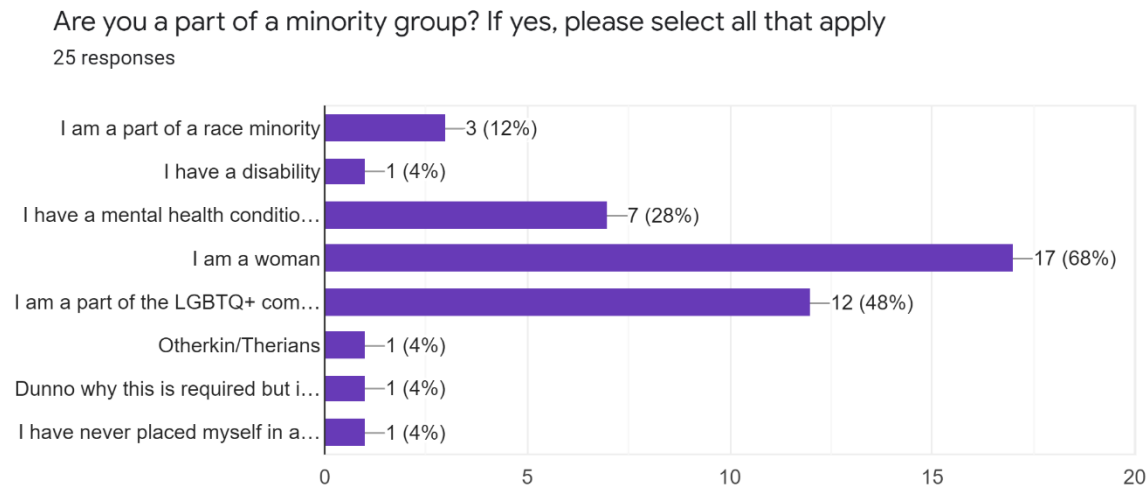


Figure 13

However, even though minority representation was higher in terms of religion and queer identity, the dominant demographic still represents the majority. That is, Afro, Indo and mixed Trinidadians who are straight and Christian. Other than non-religious persons, no persons of minority religions participated such as Muslims or Hindus.

The participants' responses reflect an overwhelming desire for social change, with 86% of participants being completely against violence, discrimination and inequality toward all minority groups. 18% were against violence and discrimination, but believed that is just the way things are. When it came to LGBTQ+ issues however, the number of supporters went down to 80% approximately, with 10% being on the fence and 10% being against it, but not believing in violence.

Regardless of the socioeconomic issues that continue to play into the stigmatization of minority groups, the overwhelming consensus was that they are somewhat welcomed in Trinidad (71%). The number dropped to 64% in relation to LGBTQ+ safe spaces. 57% believe art galleries

provide safe spaces for artists to exhibit their work and self-expression. 71% believe art spaces are more accepting than the general public. A combined 60% believed art galleries provide safe spaces for minority groups, inclusive of gender and sexual minorities. “Somewhat” changed to “yes” at 71% when asked if safe spaces are necessary.

Do you believe safe spaces are welcomed in Trinidad and Tobago?
28 responses

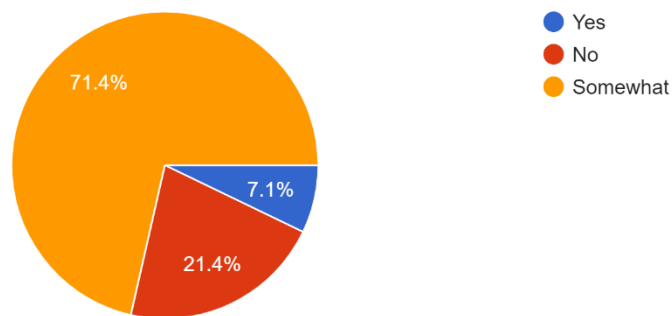


Figure 14

Do you believe that safe spaces are necessary?
28 responses

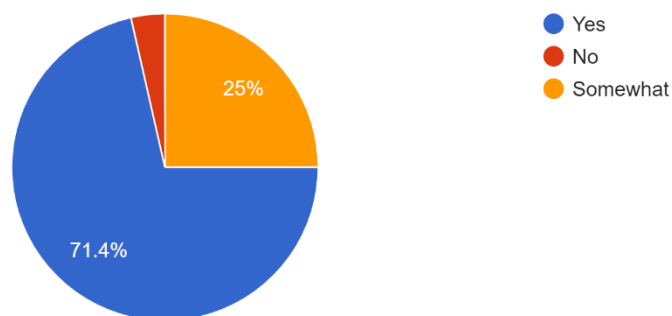


Figure 15

Written comments and conversations with participants, although anecdotal, provide important reflections for those researching this topic. As such, they have been included below.

A comment which represents the progressive majority's definition of safe spaces was "A safe space can be defined as a space, community, or setting where all persons, regardless of their category can feel welcome, accepted, protected, and comfortable". An all-encompassing description of feelings about necessity of safe spaces came from a commenter who stated "We all need one and in a way we try to create ones without naming it. So a safe space doesn't need to be some corner room. It can be a bar, a group chat with friends, a party, a fete, etc. To more extraverted Trinidadians jumping up in a carnival band can be their safe space. In a social environment governed and defined by a majority group, that social environment becomes an unspoken safe space." In order to promote diversity and inclusion in the art world, the consensus was that visibility, better education and more resources would create a positive impact. On the more conservative side, one commenter viewed safe spaces as "a bubble". They were of the opinion that safe spaces were not necessary because an individual can simply "be themselves, always." In order to promote diversity and inclusion, another commenter said that we need "A shift from the victim mentality and associated activism to a more holistic understanding that we are all human, that as humans we are infinitely diverse in infinite combination." However removing activism epitomizes silencing, and the term "victim mentality" has often become a means to ridicule and blame victims, rather than empower them.

Although most participants believed that art galleries function as safe spaces, commenters were adamant that issues exist. With one commenter stating "Due to T&T's conservative nature, some public art spaces may not necessarily appreciate certain forms of self-expression" and another stating "Our artistic community is a lot more open than other local communities but certain themes still aren't welcome to the general public."

Two queer Visual Arts Students at the University of the West Indies, expressed a lack of representation and protections at the university which ultimately resulted in one of them dropping out. Although queer art was not censored, the arts was not as welcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals as anticipated. One artist experienced a lecturer having a “talk” with her about the art she wanted to display in the yard during her certificate exhibition. She said she felt intimidated into changing the subject of her art as the lecturer was afraid the piece would upset sensibilities. Although the lecturer insisted she could continue with the piece and see where it goes, she decided it was not worth the risk as he also made mention of the possible lowering of her grade. The artist that dropped out shared that queer students and allies among staff were largely closeted, such that it was difficult to understand if she was in a safe place. Furthermore, some artists made explicitly homophobic or denigrating work that misrepresented the trans community. Despite there being a plethora of works both for, against and neutral, she admitted feeling triggered by the art and unsure if hers would be censored. The overall tone of queer support at the creative arts centre on Gordon Street was ambiguous at best and censorship appeared to be a minor issue. The both students described more open support of gender and sexual minorities as a solution to the issues they faced.

Alternatively, a devout Christian student of cis, straight identity, who stands firmly against LGBTQ+ existence, believed that the university, and by extension the local art world, was extremely accommodating toward queer individuals, often preferred to straight artists. He cited Peter Shepherd as one example of the prevalence of queer representation. In his experience at the creative arts centre it was a diverse space filled with many different types of individuals, beliefs and artwork.

Although the results support the need for social reform, and thus, safe spaces, some findings indicate progressive aspects of Trinbagonian society are emerging, including the fact that the majority of people believe that Trinidad is “somewhat” accepting of minority groups, inclusive of gender and sexual minorities. This finding is bolstered by the fact that a large number of participants are queer, including 4 transgender participants, and still hold to the opinion that Trinidad and Tobago is somewhat accepting as opposed to “yes” or “no”. Additionally, the desire for violence and discrimination among participants was non-existent, even among those who disagreed with LGBTQ+ rights. In regards to art spaces serving as safe spaces, only a small majority believed art galleries played a part (57%) while a larger majority thought art spaces were more accepting than the general public. Overall, the survey supports the premise that safe spaces exist in the art world.

CONCLUSION

Artistic spaces are often creative, flexible, and open since experimentation and change are pivotal to artistic fields and their progression. Art targets the reflection of all groups and experiences, and it can be practiced by everyone. For this reason, many consider the art world to be a safe space for marginalized persons in society. Activism, intersectionality, diversity and inclusion remain central to local art. This stems from our diasporic culture, and the fact that so many of us fit into these minorities and thus it is what many of us can relate to. Queer artists especially have had a big impact on the art scene in Trinidad and Tobago. This can be evidenced by looking at the beginnings of the local art scene and art identity, which was driven largely by the artists of the Trinidad Society of Independents and later the Trinidad Art Society. So, in a

sense, art spaces can, do and must function as safe spaces in order for creativity to thrive and art to remain relevant.

There is an undeniable trend of mentioning Carnival and Jouvert as a safe space for artists and people of all walks of life. This experience, unique to Caribbean people, continues to define our identity, freedom of expression and sense of belonging. Therefore, the shaping of the Carnival space as our culture progresses and evolves, as well as people's attitudes toward it, is a reflection of the experiences of the people and the spaces where they feel most at home.

However, though the art world can be described as a safe space, certain creative spaces, art galleries and museums do not live up to that potential in the way they deliver. Cited as a major reason for this across the board is governmental censorship, bias and ignorance i.e. a lack of proper education about minority groups and their struggles leading to undue stigma. LGBTQ+ individuals often times face the brunt of this stigma. It was also noted that the socioeconomic crisis, namely poverty, lack of resources and poor organizational framework also pushes diversity and inclusion to the back of the priority list in Trinidad and Tobago. These issues seep into the art world in a major way, causing division and the deterioration art as well as a lack of revolutionary artwork.

Education is cited as one of the primary ways to solve this issue. This can be done through education in schools about minority groups, and proper sex and gender education, inclusive of queer identities. Art galleries and museums also serve as places of education on these issues. Secondly, more communication and unity within the art world, as well as some form of political reform which allows arts and culture to be recognized and prioritized can bolster creativity, diversity and inclusion in the local art world. Setbacks caused by Covid19 have also negatively impacted the community, but many artists used it as a space to create meaningful work.

Overall, positive progression is taking place within wider society and that reflects in the art scene as well, notably with the opening of the W Art Gallery in Chaguanas and the positive reception of transgender artist Zinnia Cheewah. Even government owned facilities such as the Central Bank and the UWI have begun making positive strides toward diversity and inclusion. However, there is still a long way to go in destigmatizing minority groups on an intersectional level. Until then, the art world continues to function as a safe space for diversity and freedom of expression and artists continue to push boundaries, using their visibility to create the world they wish to see through their artwork.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

General Questions:

First: Origins

Where are you from?

What is your educational background?

What is your background in visual art?

How did you establish an art gallery? Why this location? When was it established?

How many exhibits have been shown here?

Second: Interviewee's particular interest in safe spaces and queer community

How do you define a safe space?

What is your affiliation with the LGBTQ+ community, if any?

Are safe spaces necessary?

Are safe spaces welcomed in Trinidad?

Are LGBTQ+ specific safe spaces necessary?

Are LGBTQ+ specific safe spaces welcomed in Trinidad?

Would you say art spaces are more accepting than the general public and why?

Is the local art world unified? Why or why not?

Are there any issues within local art spaces that may negatively impact diversity and inclusion?

How do art galleries provide spaces for artists to exhibit their art and self-expression?

What do you think is needed for more positive change and progressive thinking in regard to promoting diversity and inclusion in Trinidad's art scene?

How has COVID-19 impacted your space/art making?

Unique Questions:

David Cave

What is your affiliation with the Trinidad Art Society?

Why was the Society of Trinidad Independents disbanded?

What is the history behind the Trinidad Art Society?

Do you believe the Trinidad Art Society has reclaimed/maintained its' role as an artistic safe space promoting diversity and freedom of expression? If yes, then how?

Naima Muwakil-Zakuri

Has the Central Bank changed over the years concerning openness, diversity and inclusion? How so?

Wayde Ramnerine

Why do you think people have concerns about this location?

Was coming out easy?

How has your identity affected your art space/art making ?

Adele Todd

Is the school of art at UWI a safe space that promotes diversity and inclusion, how so?

What are some of the activities engaged in by the school of art at UWI to be more inclusive?

Zinnia

What is your experience being a transgender artist in Trinidad and Tobago?

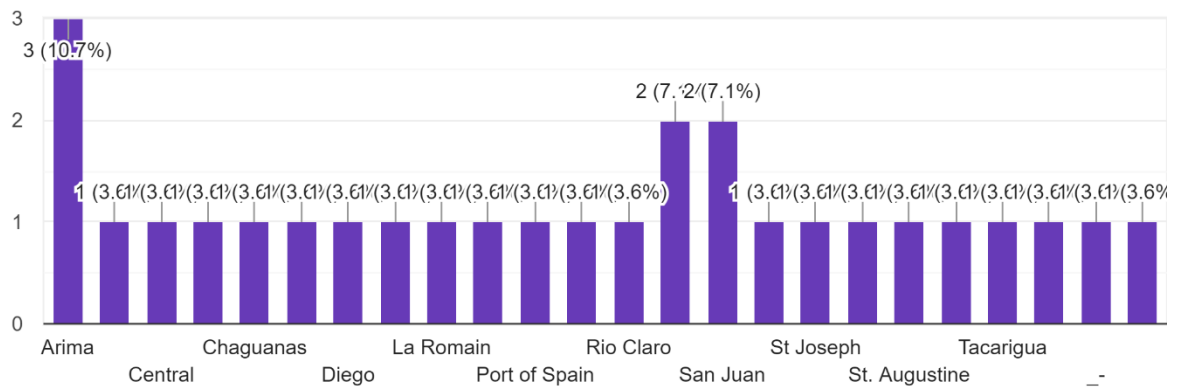
How has your identity affected your art space/art making ?

APPENDIX B

Survey

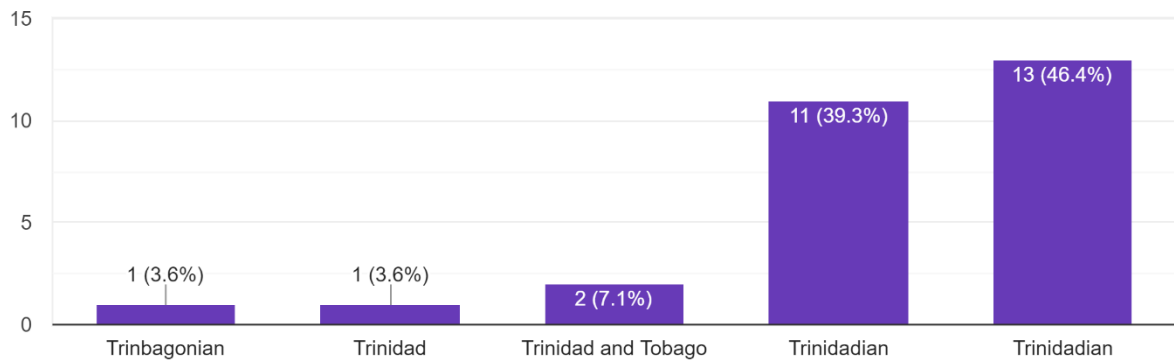
Where in Trinidad are you located?

28 responses



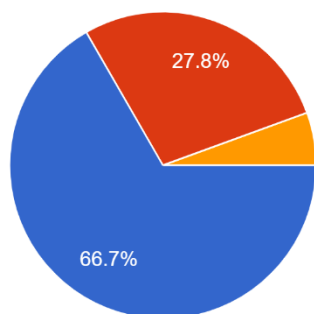
What is your Nationality?

28 responses



Age

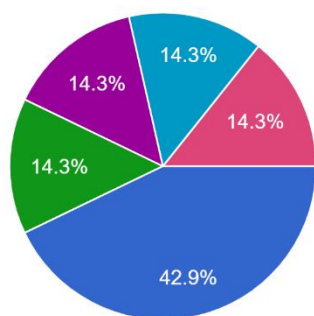
18 responses



- Under 30
- 30+
- 17

What is your Religion?

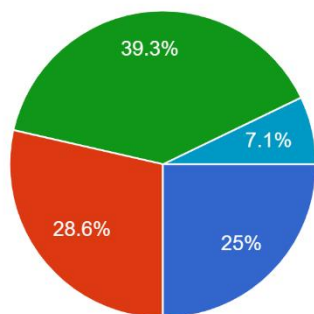
7 responses



- Christian
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- None
- Spiritual

What is your ethnicity?

28 responses



- African
- Indian
- Chinese
- Mixed
- Venezuelan
- Other

What is your background in visual art?

28 responses

Self taught artist

- Currently a freelance Artist - Worked on art as a hobby since childhood - Completed art academically up until O'Levels

Paint

Amateur artist

None

Bachelor's Degree

Visual Arts Student

Traditional art, digital art and graphic design

Tertiary

Painting, sculpture, digital media

Professional Photographer (30 years)

Painter

A level certificate, hnd graphic design, freelance digital n traditional artist.

Did Visual Arts (Drawing and Graphic Design) at CAPE level

None (I paint and write as a creative outlet)

Secondary School

UWI Bachelor Degree

I've Been Doing Digital And Traditional Art for More Than 10 Years Now.

Sat CSEC Visual Arts

Secondary school

I have done visual arts for a around 10 years now. I was awarded the most outstanding in my form when I graduated. I have 10 years of traditional experience and 4 months of digital experience.

I have studying art at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels

High school, some university

Artist/Art teacher/UWI VISUAL ARTS GRADUATE

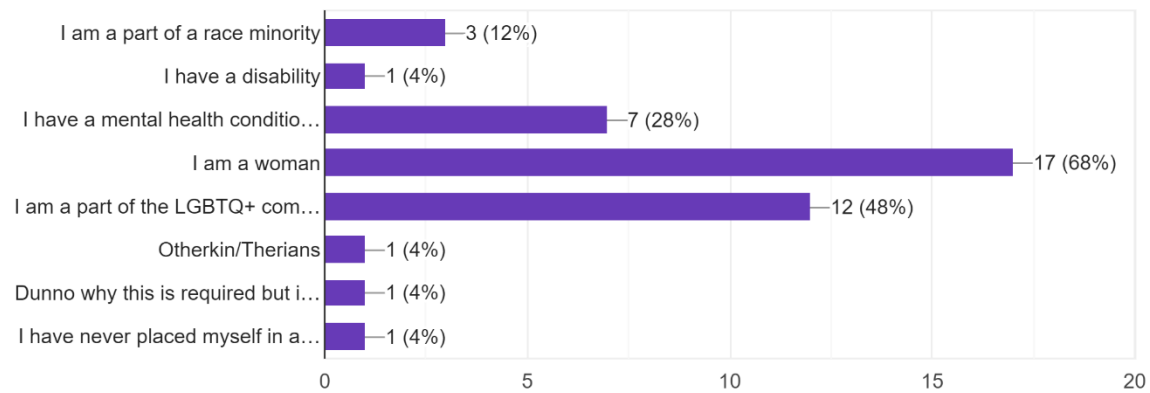
Im a portrait artist

Professional

up to Form 3

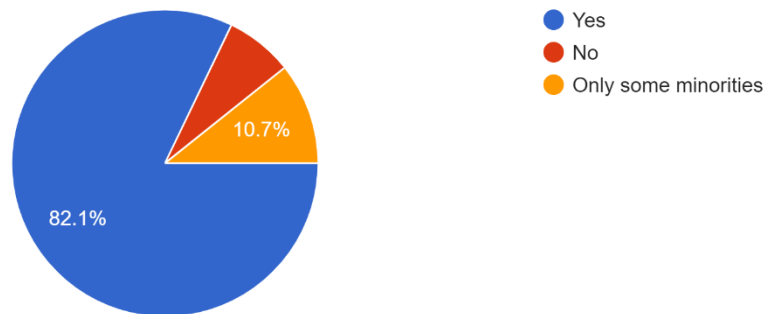
Are you a part of a minority group? If yes, please select all that apply

25 responses



Do you consider yourself a supporter of minority groups?

28 responses



If you Selected "Only Some minorities" please specify

3 responses

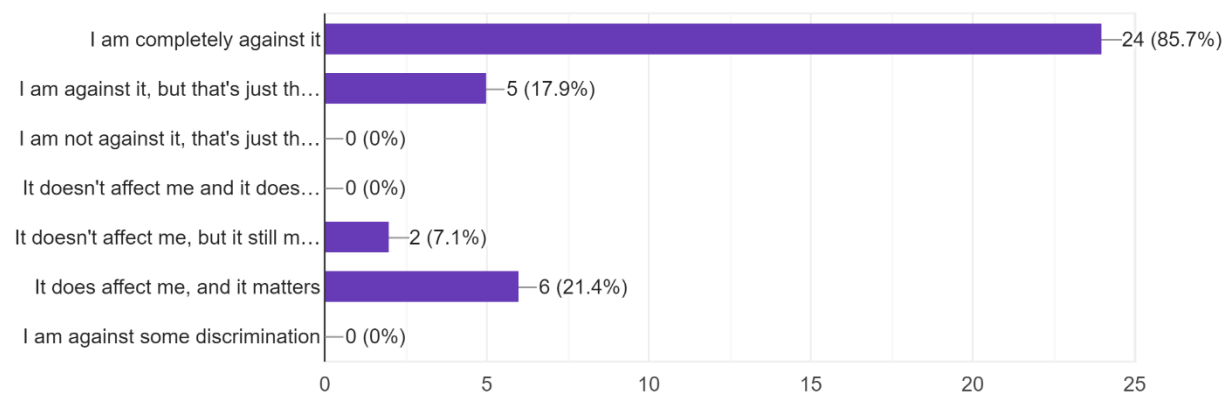
Religious reasons

Those who experience economic hardship

I'm not a supporter of the LGBTQ community. But i support other minorities.

How do you feel about Violence, Inequality and Discrimination against minority groups? Please select all that apply

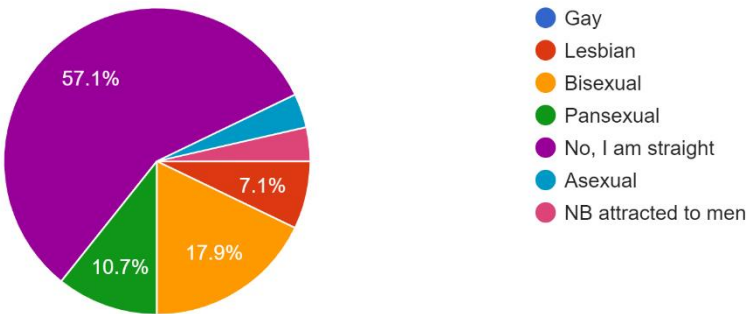
28 responses



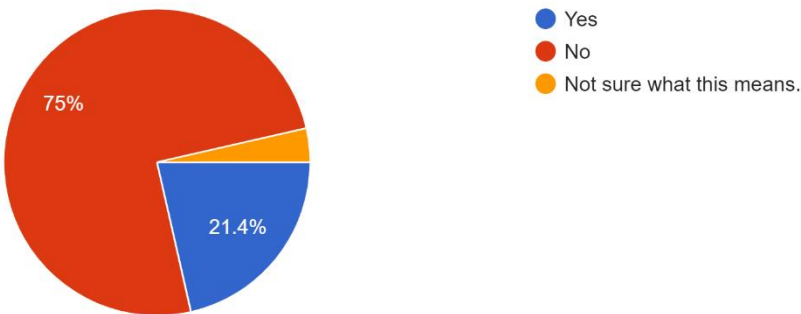
If you chose "I am against some discrimination" please explain

1 response

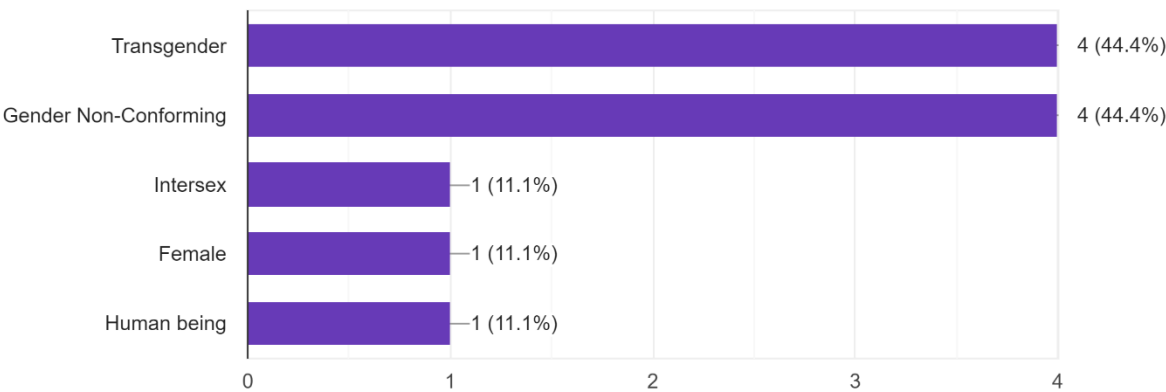
Are you a sexual minority? Please specify
28 responses



Are you a gender minority?
28 responses

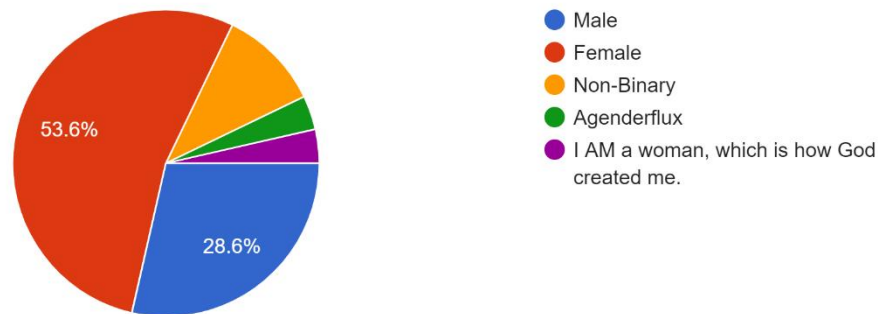


If you answered yes to the above question, please select all that apply
9 responses



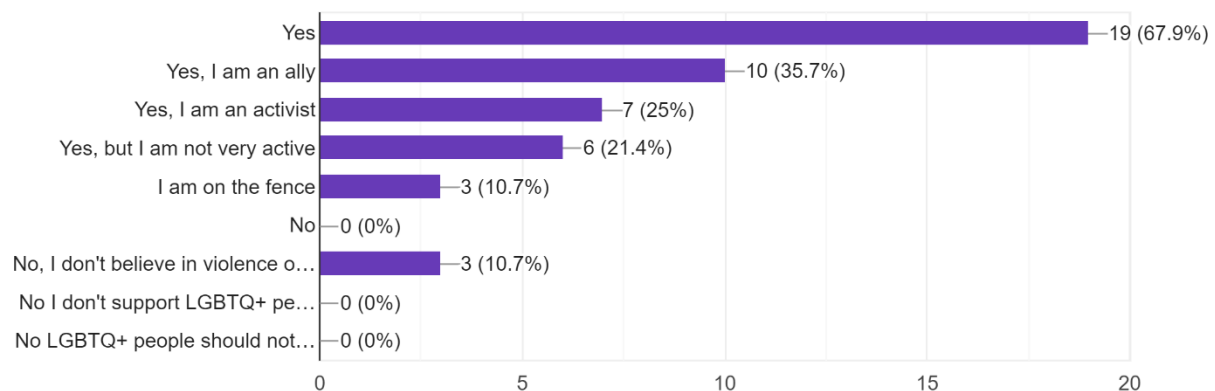
What gender do you identify as?

28 responses



Do you consider yourself an LGBTQ+ supporter? Select all that apply

28 responses



How do you define a safe space?

28 responses

A safe space can be defined as a space, community, or setting where all persons, regardless of their category (race, gender, orientation, education, etc.) can feel welcome, accepted, protected, and comfortable.

Safe space is where you are comfortable with yourself and around others. The person is able to feel a sense of freedom to express self through security/safe, within the environment.

A place where differences are celebrated rather than used as a divisive criteria

A space where an individual can relax and be themselves without fear of discrimination and judgment

A place where people can be free to be and express themselves

A place where minority groups are free to express themselves without discrimination or judgement

A environment where one feels comfortable and at home with themselves and others

A safe space is any place where persons can feel physically and mentally comfortable within it

A place where minority groups can express themselves freely of discrimination, criticism, harassment, emotional or physical harm.

Where all of humanity in all its classifications, are treated with respect and equality,

A safe space should be a space without any form of discrimination

An area where you're free to be true to yourself

A safe space is any group, friend or place you feel comfortable being yourself.

A space, gathering or event where otherwise disenfranchised groups can speak or express themselves on par with the/a majority

A safe space in my opinion is a place whether it be a building or designated room where you speak on particular ideas and problems without feeling judged or discriminated against for you opinions. You also get to hear other people's perspectives

A bubble

Safe space is a space where i feel free to create art or open up about my feelings.

Any Place Where People Can Be Themselves~

A safe space would be a place on which people (regardless of whatever group they belong to) are able to feel safe and understood

Library with good security

A safe space is where a person can go and be themselves without judgement and can be free in their own experience.

Any space where there is fairness and mutual respect for all individuals

A place where you're comfortable to be and express yourself

A place where everyone can feel free from discrimination, violence, abuse etc.

A place where people can be themselves without judgement

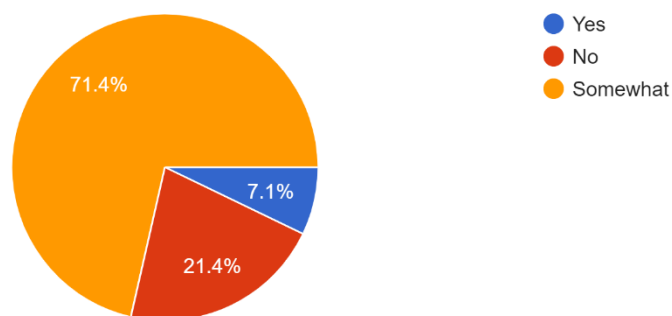
People treating each other with respect

Any space where people are free to express their opinion, be their true self and not face any intentional threat.

A place where all people feel unjudged and safe to live their life

Do you believe safe spaces are welcomed in Trinidad and Tobago?

28 responses



Explain your answer (Optional)

14 responses

The younger generation may socially accept safe spaces however the older generation who still hold control are very conservative and stick to their exclusionary tactics

I believe that it depends on where you go, and that things are changing slowly

though there are many people who want them and some do exist, even if they aren't labeled as safe spaces, the idea isn't one that a majority of people find comfort in using and advocating for. the general consensus is that it is on the individual to adapt to the world around them as much as possible and as fundamentally as possible. the idea of purposefully separating yourself for the sake of your own sense of safety and comfort is seen as a selfish and childish act, and not a mature acceptance of identity and personal needs.

In spite of the large number of citizens belonging to the LGBTQIA community in T&T, our culture is very conservative, so a safe space may definitely be publicly frowned upon
Depends on a number of things.

The country itself is not publicly very welcoming to minority groups due to the older generation but younger people tend to be more welcoming.

Depends on people's education and willingness to learn and accept others

I think safe spaces should be more available in Trinidad and Tobago but based on our culture as a country it won't be the optimum of a safe space as it should be.

Some People Are Fine With It, And Some People Will Shoot You On Sight For Trying To Be Yourself.

I see safe spaces being created for women (and even then we still aren't heard) but not necessarily for other minority groups

It is a nuanced thing. I don't think it's encouraged but some safe spaces still exist because we need them.

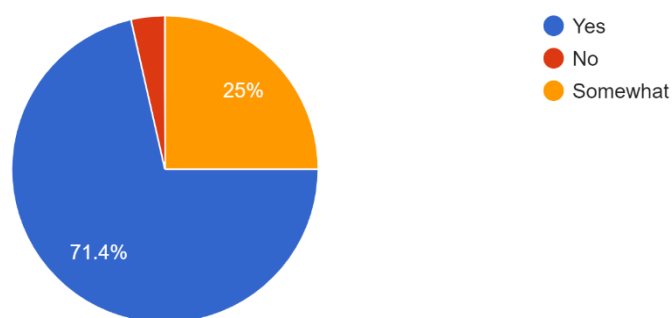
Attitudes suggest volatility at any given moment

Victims and activist welcome it. Others who do not feel unsafe because of discrimination could care less. Most Trinibagonians are not serious about human rights.

I'm sure there are some

Do you believe that safe spaces are necessary?

28 responses



Explain your answer (Optional)

9 responses

I believe they are necessary until equal rights can be obtained

the LGBTQ+ community is made up of humans no more or less broken or divergent than any other group, that in of itself is its validation to exist and seek comfort within the world. to say differently is to dehumanize or reject the inherent diverse differences that exist all across humanity.

For the most part we live and let live.

Some people do not have the means or confidence or security to express and be true to themselves

People should feel free to express themselves in any aspect and have people like them who can understand what they go through.

Yes because everyone deserves to have a place that they belong to

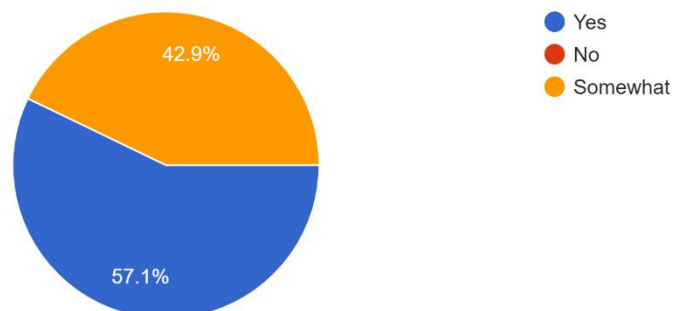
Every law abiding community that does not negatively affect the lives of others deserves a place they can safely gather

Our culture is mainly homophobic so it is necessary for queer people to have a positive influence to encourage them to hold on and to help their mental health.

This is a repeat question

Do you believe art galleries provide safe spaces for artists to exhibit their art and self expression?

28 responses



Explain your answer (Optional)

12 responses

It depends on the gallery and the group of people in attendance, sometimes there can still be issues

Due to T&T's conservative nature, some public art spaces may not necessarily appreciate certain forms of self expression

Many of our famous artists identify under the LGBTQ+ spectrum.
Some galleries exploit

The owners of the art galleries tend to either hide information or deny art that gives an expression that they do not want to promote.

It is technically a safe space as it showcases your emotions on display and it is welcomed into society in the form of a gallery

Art Galleries Make Me Anxious.

Our artistic community is a lot more open than other local communities but certain themes still aren't welcome to the general public.

In my experience going to art galleries there isn't much variety in the subject matter or type of art exhibited

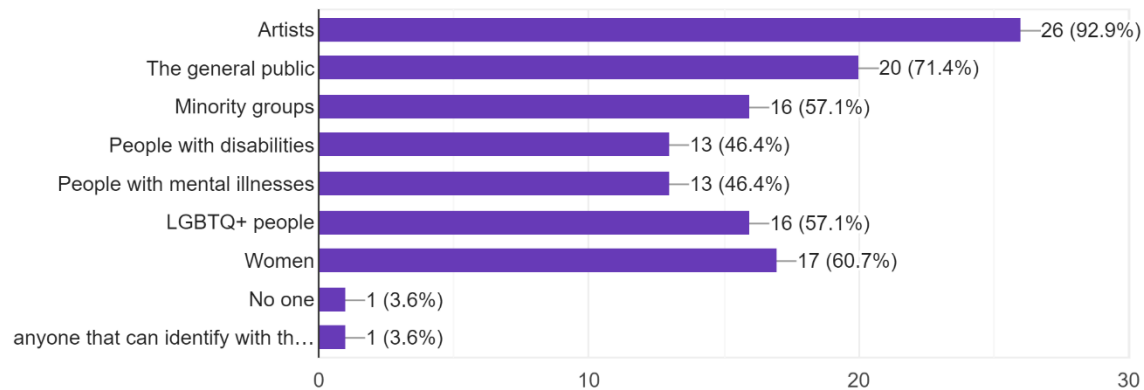
I think some established galleries tend to favour established, well known artists not so much new, emerging artists.

I took part in the first queer exhibition as a guest

Most galleries create spaces for queer expressions but are seldom vocal about human rights issues.

Who do you think art galleries provide safe spaces for?

28 responses



Explain your answer (Optional)

5 responses

Exhibitions/ workshops in galleries can have that ability

Artists and art enthusiasts tend to find comfort in what they feel from the art and being in such a space gives them time to see something that others have made so they can also feel inspired.

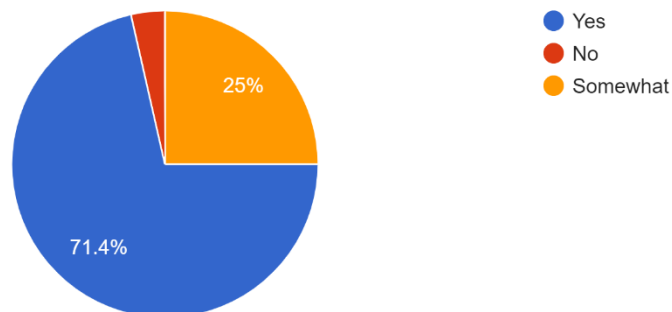
All of the above to varying degrees, depending on the gallery.

Art Galleries can, do and must function that way

Galleries create spaces for exhibits but I don't recall them identifying as safe spaces.

Do you think art spaces tend to be more accepting of minority groups than other spaces?

28 responses



Why do you think that is?

27 responses

Artistic spaces are often creative, flexible, and open since experimentation and change are pivotal to artistic fields and their progression. Art targets the reflection of all groups and experiences, and it can be practiced by everyone.

Yes, because for some who are apart of the arts and also with the minority groups portray works which sometimes gives the essence of self expression that can educate and an inspiration to others.

Because art galleries focus on the creativity and interpretation of the artists and what message the art conveys and not the artist

Because art isn't defined by superficial boundaries, as life is
Because it is a safe place for people to express themselves without judgement
I can only go on what I've seen and heard, and i may be somewhat biased on that due to a limited experience within active artist spaces, but given all that i've only seen support and embrace of queer persons and their artwork.

Because it is a safe space for everyone
Because many creatives belong to minority groups, and exhibit often
Many minority groups use their experiences to express themselves through art.
Yes because majority of artists are able to freely discuss and portray how they feel about minority groups

Creative minds tend to be more open and accepting of things and people that aren't necessarily considered the "norm"

Galleries then to chose what groups they want to promote so some galleries tend to be more welcoming of minorities where as others disregard them.
Because anyone can create art and should be allowed to showcase it
It depends on the artist

Creativity is oppositional in nature so I can see alot of artists and creative people in general not discriminating against a group just because it is the norm or against their belief. Creativity builds on norms or opposes them and to me atleast the differences in society is one of it's many beauties

Its a safe space.

Art Is Art, Doesn't Matter who Does IT. IT's About What It Expresses.

I think because art is subjective and artists tend to think outside of the box more and tend to be more open minded.

It appeals to everyone

Artists in general are very open people. I think it comes with art being a very story driven narrative. We as artists should be open to hearing everyone.

The intellectual capacity of the audience tends to be above average.
Depends on the particular space

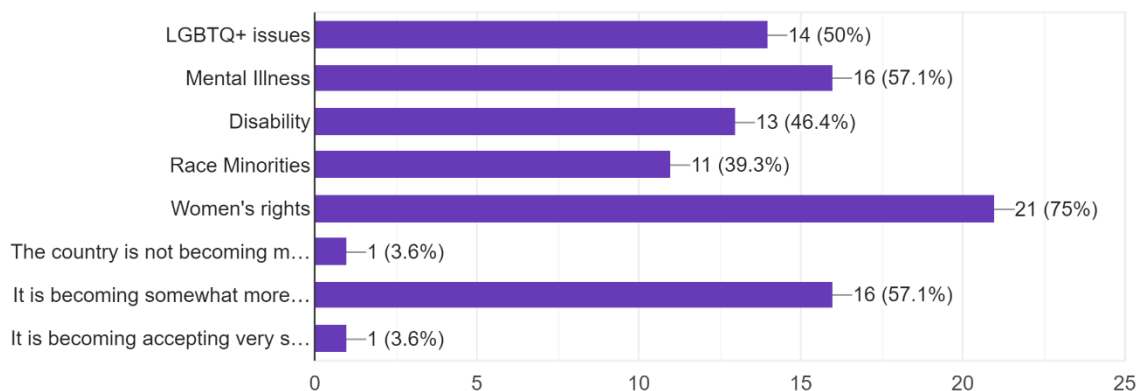
Artists and art lovers tend to be more open minded generally speaking.
Most artists are part of these minority groups or are allies
I have witnessed it

Because the most talented people are queer.

Because a lot of artists understand being different or are minorities themselves

Do you think that the country is becoming more accepting of minority issues? Choose all that apply

28 responses



What do you think is needed for a more positive change and progressive thinking in regard to promoting diversity and inclusion in Trinidad's Art Scene?

28 responses

promoting better access to artistic spaces and resources among minority groups, and ensuring that their work is seen

Introduce minority groups in the education system.

More open discussions with the general public to educate them and more positive inclusion of minorities and at risk groups

People need to be more inclusive and accepting of individuals in a minority

Honestly, more exposure from countries and people who are already active

People need better education, less economic struggle and a higher quality of life in order to start focusing more on helping others ie. minority groups

visibility and education. teach them from young, teachers are often guides and role models to students, a progressive minded teacher can go a long way to developing a progressive classroom of students.

The public needs to be educated in this regard

A cultural shift

A shift from the victim mentality and associated activism to a more holistic understanding that we are all human, that as humans we are infinitely diverse in infinite combination.

I believe there should be classes or forums where diversity should be discussed in the VA department

I'm not sure, maybe more awareness or activities

More artists from minorities should get a chance to showcase their work and give others in their minority something to look forward to and to be inspired by.

Boosting the works of women, minorities and LGBT persons, having events and raising awareness around said persons.

Development of culture and the way that we think. Once our minds evolve so will our views on this situation

Show people that talent is not the be all end all. If people think it's something that they can never acquire through hard work and dedication they will not try. As well as why they should do it. Give people and incentive to be dedicated and want to get invested.

Tough question to answer given my circumstances but promoting art by making a profit from it. I find myself only creating just to get money and quite frankly, i love it this way. Money makes the world go around and people pay to see your art.

I'm Unsure.

I think major stakeholders need to recognize the importance of showing perspectives and experiences that are unique to the typical Trinidadian or generally Caribbean experience.

More opportunities for artists more exposure in order for people to be more familiar with it
We need to be more open and discuss that people outside our own binary exists. We should be taught about these things from young. Nothing is off the table for children to learn

I believe that the most important issue is not then recognition of minorities, but rather the consistent adherence to art principles and the art creation process.

More allies in positions of authority willing to create change

More public spaces where art can be displayed and enjoyed by all. Street art, more art murals on buildings, more art displayed in public squares, gardens and parks etc.

Open and respectful conversations about minority issues

Action.... It will normalize' these things in society

Increased investment in art spaces, greater public education about the value of art and artists. Involvement of national artists in international issues. And artists could make an effort to paint, sculpt, express more than those pretty caribbean scenes.

More advertising to YOUNG people. Not their parents

ⁱ The avant-garde is a person or work that is experimental, radical, or unorthodox with respect to art, culture, or society. It is frequently characterized by aesthetic innovation and initial unacceptability (Wikipedia).