

ABSTRACT

Towards a National Identity in Art: Cultural Relevance of Contemporary Expressions in the Fine Arts in Jamaica

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In 1979, some 50 years into its development along conventional rules set by Western standards in the fine arts the Jamaican art movement saw the formal inclusion of a group of artists known as the intuitives, who practice an art form generally associated with naïve art.

The study traces the evolution of the art movement back to its inception as it investigates the motive that brought together both sets of artists. It explores the role of post-colonial hegemonic domination and the effect of this domination on the art institutions, notably, the Institute of Jamaica, the National Gallery and the Jamaica School of Art and the part they have played in the attempted merger.

The study probes aspects in the fine arts that expose the divisions between both art forms especially the concept of high and low art. It also brings into question the nature of the works of both art forms in the formulation of a national identity in the fine arts. The mixed methods research strategy combined the collection of data primarily from written material with a qualitative approach element in the form of interviews of a group of mainstream artists for a more current opinion of how the relationship is viewed today.

The findings challenge earlier writings that portray a cohesive art movement, combining different styles and genres. They show that the combination of two diverse art forms produced a dichotomous environment with cultural, economic and social consequences, in a climate of deep respect for the intuitives.

Key words: Gilberte Bauer; Jamaican art movement; mainstream artists; intuitives; national identity; national consciousness.