

RELATIONAL UNDERCURRENTS

CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGO



PUBLISHED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE GETTY FOUNDATION.

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago*, curated by Tatiana Flores for the Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA), on the occasion of the Getty-led Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA.

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CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGO

EDITED BY TATIANA FLORES AND MICHELLE A. STEPHENS





RELATIONAL UNDERCURRENTS: CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGO is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 to January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions across Southern California. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty.

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FOREWORD

LOURDES I. RAMOS-RIVAS, PHD
PRESIDENT & CEO
MUSEUM OF LATIN AMERICAN ART

The Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA) is proud to present *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago* for the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California. For the second time in our twenty-one-year history, we dedicate the entire space of our museum to one exhibition, featuring the work of over 80 artists in one of the largest museum surveys of contemporary art from the Caribbean to date.

MOLAA was honored to participate in the first iteration of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA, 1945–1980 in 2011 with the exhibition *MEX/LA: “Mexican” Modernism(s) in Los Angeles, 1930-1985*. We are grateful again to the Getty to be taking part in Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles from September 2017 through January 2018.

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA wholly aligns with the Museum's mission—expanding the knowledge and appreciation of modern and contemporary Latin American and Latino art. Through a series of thematically linked exhibitions and programs, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA highlights different aspects of Latin American and Latino art from the ancient world to the present day. With topics such as luxury arts in the pre-Columbian Americas, 20th century Afro-Brazilian art, alternative spaces in Mexico City, and boundary-crossing practices of Latino artists, exhibitions range from monographic studies of individual artists to broad surveys—such as *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago*—that cut across numerous countries. By focusing on the art of the Caribbean islands, MOLAA's exhibition expands the geography of Latin America beyond its conventional borders to include artists from Haiti and the Anglophone, Francophone, and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, as well as from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.

Relational Undercurrents challenges the notion that the Caribbean is “isolated, hermetic, and beyond comprehension,” as stated by curator Tatiana Flores. The exhibition explores unifying elements and shared experiences of life in the Caribbean islands and their diasporas in four thematic sections: Conceptual Mappings, Perpetual Horizons, Landscape Ecologies, and Representational Acts. Presented here are paintings, installation art, sculpture, photography, video, and performance.

Supported by over \$16 million in grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA involves more than 70 cultural institutions from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, and from San Diego to Santa Barbara. MOLAA wishes to thank all who contributed to this exhibition through its stages of development. We are grateful to the Getty Foundation for providing major grants in support of our PST: LA/LA exhibition and publication. Additional support for *Relational Undercurrents* and related programming is generously provided by the Robert Gumbiner Foundation and the Arts Council for Long Beach.

We extend our gratitude to Bank of America, the presenting sponsors of PST: LA/LA, for their investment in Southern California institutions that are celebrating the rich connections between Los Angeles and Latin America through this initiative. We also wish to thank the curator Tatiana Flores, our previous President Stuart A. Ashman, the advisory committee, and the museum board. Special thanks to the catalogue contributors, the lenders to the exhibition, the artists, and to the entire production team and professionals from MOLAA. We look forward to working with the other museums who will host this groundbreaking show.

PART I

RELATIONAL UNDERCURRENTS:
CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGO

RELATIONAL UNDERCURRENTS:
TOWARD AN ARCHIPELAGIC MODEL OF INSULAR CARIBBEAN ART

TATIANA FLORES AND MICHELLE A. STEPHENS

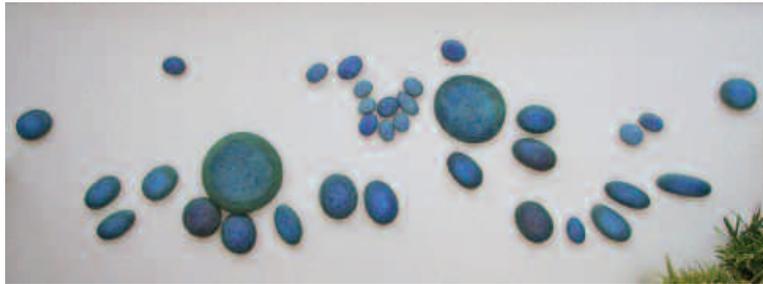


Fig. 1
Ellen Spijkstra, *La Teoria del Caos*, 2010/2012.
Glazed stoneware, 200 x 60 x 6 in. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

The trope of the Caribbean as a locus of heterogeneity and fragmentation has almost become a truism. When the Caribbean is approached as an object of study and not as a vacation destination, descriptions of the region typically begin by evoking its variegated colonial history, resulting in a staggering “ethnic and cultural diversity,” to paraphrase Stuart Hall.¹ Antonio Benítez-Rojo famously referred to the Caribbean as “a discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of Chaos.”² Yet locating a distinct Caribbean poetics has long been an urgent project for literary scholars, writers, and theorists, including Benítez-Rojo.³ When he and other authors, such as Édouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, and Derek Walcott, sought to define a particular Caribbean aesthetic, however, they often came up against linguistic barriers. Kelly Baker Josephs elucidated their motives: “Caribbeanness is not some insubstantial, inexplicable connection between the people living in the region; rather, it is specifically based in a shared experience. The sharing may not be conscious, but the idea is to make it conscious, to protect it by stating/naming it.”⁴ This is what the exhibition *Relational Undercurrents: Contemporary Art of the Caribbean Archipelago* strives to do.

In the ceramic relief *La Teoria del Caos* (2010/2012), Ellen Spijkstra visualizes Benítez-Rojo’s approach to the Caribbean through circular shapes that seem to be heading in the same direction, as though attracted by a magnetic force (fig. 1). The sculpture recalls an

archipelago, or group of islands. All the components are painted in shades of blue with a greenish border, underscoring uniformity as opposed to diversity—a single ecosystem despite the physical separation between its constituent elements, belying the purported heterogeneity of the region. In the same spirit, while acknowledging that Caribbean diversity is undeniable, we nonetheless argue that the visual arts are uniquely equipped to bridge the region’s language and cultural divides. By employing the archipelago as an analytical framework for approaching contemporary art of the insular Caribbean, we locate correlations in the visual aesthetics across different linguistic regions. While recent exhibitions of Caribbean art have largely embraced the narrative of heterogeneity itself as an organizing principle, such diversity often emphasizes the linguistic divisions, imperial histories, and contemporary conditions that separate the different areas in the Caribbean from each other.⁵ Through our approach, Hispanophone, Francophone, Anglophone, Dutch, or Danish origins and the particular traits of each linguistic region become less relevant, for the goal is to identify the continuities and junctures between experiences of the islands and their diasporic communities, in much the same manner as visualized in Spijkstra’s relief.

The idea of the archipelago shapes our approach to the Caribbean as less a bounded or fragmented cultural area and more as a geo-material and geo-historical assemblage of sea spaces and islands. We delineate an idea of Caribbean space shaped by experiences of “disjuncture, connection and entanglement *between and among* islands,”⁶ and an insular imaginary focused less on romantic ideas of island interchangeability—the timeless, repeating “island of the sun”—and more on interchanges that occur between island, mainland, and sea in a

“world of islands [that] might be experienced in terms of networks, assemblages, filaments, connective tissue, mobilities and multiplicities.”⁷⁷ Our approach identifies “subterranean contiguities and undercurrents that extend to the conceptual” to reveal the spaces of continuity and legibility in the Caribbean archipelago.⁸ We counter the understanding of the islands as discontinuous, isolated, hermetic, and beyond comprehension and challenge the conceptual boundaries imposed on spaces that are geographically contiguous and share similar ecologies and historical processes.

We began to formulate an archipelagic approach to contemporary Caribbean art in response to the Getty Foundation’s Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, which impelled us to question the conceptual divisions that separate the Caribbean from “Latin America.” While the geography of Latin America is popularly—albeit problematically—accepted as the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries of the Western Hemisphere, the Caribbean itself is notoriously hard to categorize. Often overlooked or folded into other narratives, no one knows where it begins or ends. Is the Gulf of Mexico Caribbean? Northeast Brazil? Bermuda? Venezuela? Colombia? Why is Belize typically accepted as Caribbean, but not the countries that surround it? The sea itself has been known by many names, including the North Sea, Sea of the Antilles, Sea of Venezuela, West Indian Sea, Great Western Ocean, Gulf of New Spain, and Gulf of Mexico. Antonio Gaztambide-Géigel points out that the very terminology of the Caribbean “is a 20th century invention.”⁷⁹ Describing the region as a locus of imperialist and neocolonialist expansion, he observes, “This invention comes about, precisely, as the result of our region’s transition from European to United States hegemony.”⁸⁰ Noting that Antilles was the most common denomination for the region prior to the last century, Gaztambide-Géigel identifies three categories for charting the Caribbean: “1) the *insular or ethno-historic* Caribbean [which includes Suriname, the Guyanas, and Belize], 2) the *geopolitical* Caribbean, and 3) the *Greater Caribbean or Caribbean Basin*.”⁸¹ The first refers to territories that “share the experience of the slave-driven sugar plantation”; the second “places the emphasis on the regions where most of the US military interventions took place,” including Central America and Panama; and the third incorporates Venezuela and “at

least some portions of Colombia and Mexico.”⁸² He further observes that “many speak about the Caribbean without defining it,” and urges, “we should demand of others as well as of ourselves a definition of which Caribbean we speak of.”⁸³ Yarimar Bonilla and Max Hantel offer a definition of the Caribbean in terms of sovereignty, mapping only those countries that have experienced challenges in gaining or maintaining autonomous status or that continue to exist as non-sovereign states.⁸⁴ International organizations group the region differently. CARICOM does not contain any Hispanophone countries among its member states. The Association of Caribbean States comprises twenty-five countries located around the Caribbean basin, including Venezuela, Colombia, and those of Central America, but not Puerto Rico.

We wish to suggest that the question of defining the Caribbean, and where it may sit in relation to the broader regional cluster known as “Latin America,” is at heart a question of “mapping,” of creating different kinds of “cognitive maps” to (re-)imagine and (re-)think the relation of various Caribbean spaces, and peoples, to each other and to a greater world.⁸⁵ Maps afford different conceptual frameworks for organizing our understanding of the Caribbean. Our map(ping) begins from the islands. We believe that emphasizing the region’s insularity, in its archipelagic dimensions, captures a visual logic of analogy and continuity that provides one framework for distinguishing a particular regional experience that has been marginalized in the discourse on Latin America.

If Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic are commonly understood to belong to Latin America, the status of Haiti has always been that of an outlier. Although the social sciences, especially political science and economics, commonly include not only Haiti but also the British and Dutch Caribbean in considerations of Latin America, it is in the humanities that the separation between Latin America and the Caribbean persists and conceptually has remained relatively unchallenged. In this field, Latin America and the Caribbean are regarded as discrete regions despite their geographical proximity and, in the case of Hispaniola, shared land borders. The very concept of Latin America came into being when many of the former Spanish colonies obtained their independence in the early nineteenth century. As the second nation after the United States in the Western



Fig. 2
Jeannette Ehlers, *Atlantic (endless row)*, 2009.
C-print, 23% x 47% in. Courtesy of the artist.

Hemisphere to gain independence, and given that it provided aid to South American revolutionary movements, Haiti should have been a regional leader. Instead, it was shut out of the first hemispheric congress of independent nations, held in Panama in 1826. In *The Idea of Latin America*, Walter Mignolo highlights the problematic relationship of Haiti to the rest of Latin America. Noting that Haiti was colonized first by Spain and later France, he remarks, “Haiti was ‘Latin’ from day one, since both Spanish and French are Latin languages.”⁸⁶ Nevertheless, “Haiti did not fit the pattern of ‘Latin’ America because ‘Latin(s)’ were supposed to be of European descent . . . and not of African descent!”⁸⁷ Indeed, according to the sociologist Anthony Maingot, “Haiti inspired nothing but racially based distrust” among Europeans, Americans, and Latin Americans in the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ Before the British Caribbean islands started becoming independent in the late 1960s, Haiti was classified as a part of Latin America, but more recently it has been grouped into a reading of the Caribbean as African diaspora. In the historiographic essay “African (Black) Diaspora History, Latin American History,” Ben Vinson III notes that the consideration of ethnicity in Latin America was for a long time relegated to the study of indigenous

populations and *mestizaje* (miscegenation that generally connotes the union between Indians and Europeans), so that “it has long been possible to do Latin American history without referencing blackness or the African Diaspora.”⁸⁹ Jeannette Ehlers’ *Atlantic (endless row)* (2009) is emblematic of the disappearance of African peoples from historical consciousness (fig. 2). Her immediate reference is to the Danish slave trade, but it is equally relevant to Latin American history. Working against this tendency, Scherezade Garcia’s “cognitive map” of Hispaniola visualizes the island as a single territory of one people of African descent forming the five points of a star, which, despite having become separated from its center, remain interconnected (fig. 3).

Though the islands were the first point of contact in the time of exploration and “discovery,” it is of crucial import that “America” emerged when the territory encountered in the Western Hemisphere was known to be a continent. For the European powers, it was the existence of a fourth continent that was so remarkable—the islands on their own were considered a more ancillary discovery, insular accompaniments to a massive territory, a “New World.” As the region began to be mapped, the smaller islands were divided into groups, a tendency



Fig. 3
Scherezade Garcia, *In the garden of dictators / it is raining caudillos I*, 2015.
Archival inkjet print, collage, charcoal, watercolor, ink, plastic toy on paper, 22 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist.

that continues to this day; Christopher Columbus originally designated those known to us as the Lesser Antilles or Windward Islands as the “Cannibal Islands,” and Spanish conquistadores referred to the islands around Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire—today the Leeward Antilles or ABC islands—as the “Useless Islands” for their lack of lucrative natural resources. These geographic designations favored the larger islands or Greater Antilles, comprising Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Hispaniola. When it was not outright forgotten, the Caribbean archipelago—named the Archipelago of Mexico in a series of maps—was subsumed into a continental narrative.

“Latin America” presupposes a continental identity. Alfredo Jaar’s signature piece *A Logo for America* (1987/2014), a light animation first displayed in a public space in New York, first features the phrase “This Is

Not America” superimposed over a map of the United States and concludes with a map of the hemisphere’s continental landmasses with the word “America.” The Puerto Rican artist Karlo Andrei Ibarra, in a work tellingly titled *Continental* (2007–10), ironically reminds his viewers that Puerto Rico is both part of the American continent and the United States by displaying the sentence “Vivo en América” (“I live in America”) in neon lights (fig. 4). The Hispanophone islands strongly identify with the notion of “Latin America,” so much so that it was the Cuban intellectual José Martí who wrote one of the most fundamental documents articulating an Americanist identity, the treatise “Our America” (1892).²⁰ Today’s popular music from the Hispanic Caribbean is full of invocations to continental Latin America in such songs as Calle 13’s “Latinoamérica” (2010) and Gente de Zona’s “La Gozadera” (2015). In



Fig. 4
Karlo Andrei Ibarra, *Continental*, 2007–10.
Neon powered by solar light, 6 x 36 in. Courtesy of the artist.

the latter, the performers ask Latinos of the hemisphere to join them, and they involve the diaspora by calling out to Miami. Although the refrain of the song is “Del Caribe somos tú y yo” (“You and I are from the Caribbean”), the rest of the lyrics list the countries of Latin America, including Brazil, but fail to name non-Hispanophone Caribbean countries. To be sure, it is unlikely that many, or any, Haitians, Trinidadians, Jamaicans, Vincentians, Bahamians, etc., consider themselves Latin Americans or Latinos.

Aware that collapsing the insular Caribbean into a broader, continentally informed vision of “America” or “the Americas” limits the islands’ particularities at best or obviates these spaces altogether at worst, our thinking through an archipelagic framework for contemporary visual production began as an intellectual exercise pondering what would happen if Cuba, the Dominican

Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico were separated from a continental Latin Americanist narrative and inserted into a story that is only about islands. An exclusively insular narrative makes sense partly because of the distinction between island and continent, but also because it brings to the fore issues arising from the colonial legacy—such as sovereignty, migration, sustainability, and, of course, race and ethnicity—that are relevant to the region as a whole but simply cannot be overlooked when dealing with the Caribbean. The discourse on Latin American art largely has focused on the interrelated topics of modernity, formal innovation, relation to mainstream movements, and an anxiety about originality. Art scenes in major capitals eclipse those of smaller cities or other areas, and though attempts at forming South-South networks have recurred, for the most part, countries look toward Europe and the United States rather than toward



Fig. 5
Fausto Ortiz, *Approaches*, from the series *Exodus*, 2013.
Digital photograph, 20 x 30 in. Courtesy of the artist.

each other. A center-periphery paradigm—with the seats of colonial and neocolonial power understood as the “center” and the Latin American countries as “peripheries”—has dominated discourse, revealing a constant preoccupation to measure the region’s artistic production against hegemonic standards.²¹ The Caribbean (island) often becomes precisely what a modern “Latin America” strives to define itself against—hence the Venezuelan artist Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck’s bold declaration, “If the grid is the new palm tree of Latin American art we are making progress.”²² Revealing a decidedly Eurocentric perspective, the quotation celebrates the move away from seemingly backward insular tropes, such as the palm tree. In so doing, however, it avoids the ways in which Caribbean realities challenge received understandings of modernity as a movement toward “progress,” resulting in formal purity and homogeneity. In the words of Sibylle Fischer, “If we read modernity from the perspective of

the Caribbean colonies, the opposite view seems more plausible: that heterogeneity is a congenital condition of modernity, and that the alleged purity of European modernity is an a-posteriori theorization or perhaps even part of a strategy that aims to establish European primacy.”²³

Two presumptions then shape the relationship of the Caribbean to Latin America. First, as the awkward place of Haiti attests, it is the Caribbean aspect of Latin America that has often allowed for a more explicit discussion of the colonial politics and discourses of race as they shape the region’s past, present, and future. In this sense, blackness and an “Afro-Caribbean” thought space provide one set of possible “ties” or connecting links between the Hispanic Caribbean and the rest of the French, English, Dutch, and Danish Caribbean. Second, the focus on the archipelago, a networked insular space, problematizes a continental bias inherent

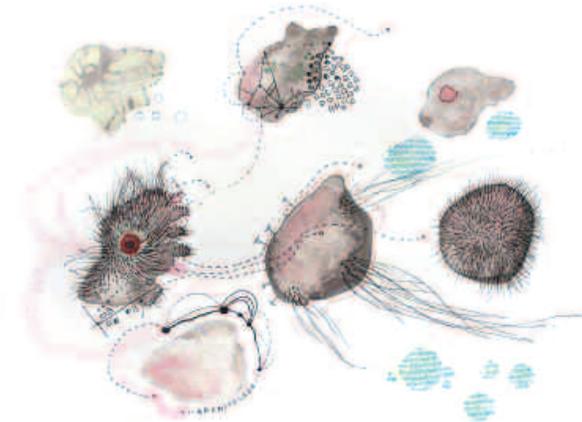


Fig. 6
Ewan Atkinson, *Archipelago I*, 2007.
Mixed media on paper, 14 x 17 in. Courtesy of the artist.

in the hemispheric model, and an oceanic bias evident in the notion of diaspora. As Martin W. Lewis describes, both the continent and the ocean as totalizing geographic forms overdetermine our view of both terrestrial and maritime space.²⁴ The planet is divided into cultural areas organized by continents and their surrounding ocean basins, and each hemispheric map becomes a subset of this global totality with its island chains subsumed under, within, and alongside defining continental landmasses. To the degree that diasporic models tend to focus on circulation on the oceans and movement toward the continent and away from the island, they also lead, unconsciously, away from the insular as a geo-material form.

An archipelagic model therefore underscores a different set of concerns around race, history, the legacy of colonialism, and diasporic experience, upsetting the accepted geographic and conceptual boundaries of Latin

America. An insular approach that opens itself up to countries beyond the Hispanic Caribbean turns a spotlight on the exclusion of other territories from a regional narrative. The idea of the archipelagic thus serves as a bridge between the insular and the “mainland,” as imagined by Fausto Ortiz in the 2013 series *Exodus* (fig. 5), promoting the kind of relational comparative model many Caribbean scholars invoke with the poet Brathwaite’s now famous line, “the unity is submarine.”²⁵ A more totalizing imaginary can only understand the unities constituting Caribbean America in a continental frame. As a result, an archipelagic vision of the Caribbean holds in tension, and in relation, the points of fracture and fragmentation as well as connectivity and shared histories that organize the region. It is ruled less by the visual logic of difference—one thing is not like the other and is therefore unique—and more by a logic of analogy, whereby the very strategies, themes, and mediums



Fig. 7
Manuel Piña, *Untitled*, from the series *Aguas Baldías*, 1992–94.
Digital C-print, 48 x 103½ in. Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, gift of Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez.
Courtesy of the artist and Collection of Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez.

engaged by contemporary Caribbean visual artists encourage a recognition of unexpected mirrorings and inevitable unities across Caribbean spaces and bodies.

These mirrorings and unities coalesce around a shared set of themes we have identified in the visual arts across the contemporary Caribbean and its diasporas, which form the four sections of the exhibition: Conceptual Mappings, Perpetual Horizons, Landscape Ecologies, and Representational Acts. **Conceptual Mappings** proposes alternative forms of cartography to plot regional and insular constellations that encompass both fractures and links. In photographs and installations, Juana Valdes evokes the shared colonial past by using objects of global trade, such as chinaware and objets d'art, and positioning them like islands in the sea. In contrast to imperial maps, whose exclusive purpose was charting possessions, these archipelagic assemblages embark on a project of decolonization, a feature evident in Firelei Báez's drawings of female body parts and decorative elements over nineteenth-century maps that impart a distinctly feminist perspective. In the drawing *Archipelago I* (2006), Ewan Atkinson visualizes the islands as body parts that have been torn asunder yet remain connected by networks of lines and geographical

proximity (fig. 6). Other artworks involve a process of counter-mapping, whereby imagining the archipelagic provenance of a particular work or idea means reframing a different paradigm, plotting new points of connection, and imagining and imaging new coordinates, features repeatedly exemplified in the art of Nayda Collazo-Llorens.

Perpetual Horizons underscores how the horizon figures prominently in contemporary art of the Caribbean archipelago, calling attention to the condition of insularity while functioning both as a limit and threshold of possibilities. Thinking about the shoreline, Peter Hay describes the edge as an important feature of insular imaginaries, shaping island sensibilities around fixed boundaries, enclosing borders, and isolated identities.²⁶ In Cuban art, the horizon often signals the sense of entrapment wrought from living in a communist regime, as in Manuel Piña's classic photograph of a young man diving into the ocean from the *Aguas Baldías* series of 1992–94 (fig. 7), but it is a common referent for other Caribbean islanders as well. Tony Cruz continually returns to the horizon in his drawings and installations. His distance drawings, which also fall into the category of conceptual maps, proportionally measure the distance from his given location to his hometown of San Juan,

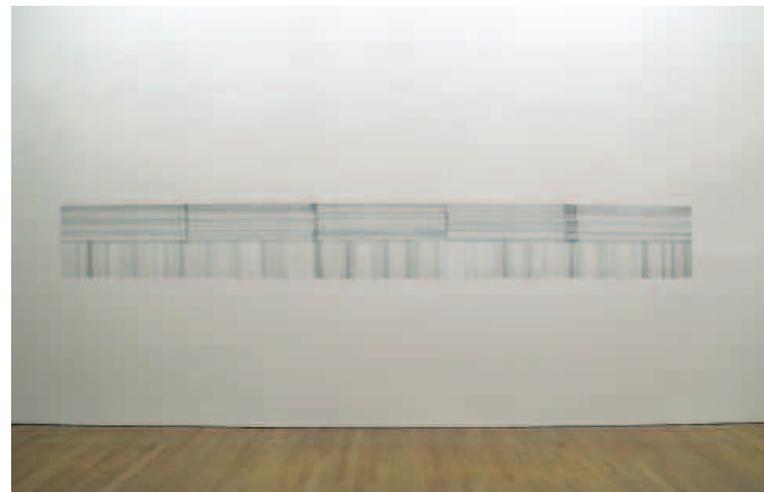


Fig. 8
Tony Cruz, *Distance Drawing from San Juan to Bogota: An attempt to draw the distance from San Juan to Bogotá (1763 km). Realized only 9.132 percent (1610 m)*, 2012.
Pencil on wall, 24 x 108 in. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 9
Frances Gallardo, *Untitled*, from the series *Landscape*, 2012.
Watercolor on cardboard, tissue paper, 4½ x 31½ x 5 in. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 10
Tony Capellán, detail of *Mar invadido*, 2015.
Found objects from the Caribbean Sea, 360 x 228 in. Installation view at the Pérez Art Museum Miami.
Photo by Oriol Tarridas. Courtesy of the Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Puerto Rico, through meticulously rendered straight lines (fig. 8). The horizon focuses our attention on the borders that divide and mark off land, as well as on the movements that circulate across the currents of sea and air. It also captures the yearnings and uncertainties that exist in the liminal, relational spaces between islanders, looking outward across the seas. This looking point to moments of self-similarity between insular spaces and island bodies and an archipelagic world that reveals itself through a horizontal logic of connection, similarity, and analogy.

In *Landscape Ecologies*, new depictions revise old, worn paradisiac tropes of the Caribbean, the very ones parodied by Frances Gallardo in *Untitled* from the series *Landscape* (2012), a watercolor of a beachscape in the aftermath of a hurricane on a box of tissues (fig. 9). Instead, artists reconsider the Caribbean as a region of shared ecosystems and habitats that contains the historical memory of one of the darkest episodes in human history. The tourist view of the Caribbean landscape as

endless beaches that the industry promotes as a blank slate is repeatedly challenged, through references to the slave trade, migration, social divisions, vulnerability to natural disasters, and the threatened environment, a topic repeatedly addressed by Tony Capellán, whose primary medium is objects that wash up from the sea (fig. 10). Contemporary Caribbean environments are depicted as being acted upon in tangled webs of state interests and capitalist, corporate motives. The use and exploitation of the natural environment also leads to its transformation and changing cultural and political meanings. A wide spectrum of images showcases a vision of Caribbean landscapes that are more mangrove-like, offering a rhizomatic, as opposed to arboreal, portrayal of the Caribbean natural, not as ordered landscapes, but as dense webs and thick weaves of interrelation.

In *Representational Acts*, artists take up representation as an active process rather than a passive translation of the visible world. As opposed to the mimetic function associated with representation in traditional art history,



Fig. 11
Guerra de la Paz, detail of *Follow the Leader*, 2011.
Sculptural installation, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artists.

artists from the Caribbean tend to regard representation in a political sense. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on the behalf of others.”²⁷ All of the Caribbean islands, even those that obtained independence early in the nineteenth century, have seen their sovereignty challenged through colonialism or occupations, and in some cases—most visibly Puerto Rico—they continue to exist as non-sovereign states. Political agency has been an elusive notion and, in many instances, an unattainable ideal. For this reason, representation takes on added urgency in an insular Caribbean context. Artworks in this section actively reconfigure the world they inhabit, whether through social practice or by encouraging an interactive relationship with their viewers. Artists also project an active, dynamic relationship with their surroundings or those around them. Others employ representation for the purpose of commemoration. Through representational acts, artists comment on agency in relation to

race, gender, and sexuality, and showcase the analogous ways in which they are enmeshed with the environments they inhabit, as wistfully visualized in Guerra de la Paz’s 2011 installation *Follow the Leader* (fig. 11).

A vision of “submarine,” rather than continental, unity animates our sense of the “subterranean convergence(s)” of the histories of the islands in the Caribbean, as well as the archipelago as a metaphor for “the interconnectedness of the world.”²⁸ An archipelagic approach is therefore inspired by the opening of Braithwaite’s poem “Calypso,” which begins:

The stone had skidded arc’d and bloomed into islands:
Cuba and San Domingo
Jamaica and Puerto Rico
Grenada Guadeloupe Bonaire²⁹

Though an archipelagic model often collapses the distinction between island and continent, it is useful to maintain an awareness of the differences between

both types of territories. Not only does a continental narrative tend to swallow up the insular perspective, as discussed above, but it bears remembering that indigenous cultures, for the most part, did not endure on the islands, yet they are very much a part of the continental Caribbean. This is a fundamental difference, courtesy of the colonial enterprise. The poet Walcott, speaking of West Indians, states that every citizen “has been severed from a continent, whether he is Indian, Chinese, Portuguese, or black.”³⁰ The statement holds true for the people of the insular Caribbean—islanders who hail from elsewhere and for whom maritime culture is, frequently, not an ancestral heritage. This makes the experience of Caribbean peoples inherently different from that of Pacific Islanders. For indigenous Polynesians, the sea was not a barrier, and voyaging depended on a millenarian knowledge of the interconnected trajectories between the movements of islands across the sea and the stars across the sky. The late Polynesian scholar Epeli Hau’ofa posited that European colonialism introduced the concept of islands as isolated, bounded entities. In the Pacific Islander worldview, “Oceania denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. . . . Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers.”³¹

The Pacific provides both a counterpoint and a relevant analogy. Archipelagoes may appear to be natural geographic formations, but in a Caribbean divided geopolitically and linguistically with different imperial pasts and constitutional forms, forging archipelagic connections is an intentional act. Archipelagic assemblages describe a performative geography, one that deliberately imagines the connectivities of the region, connections that extend to include Caribbean diasporas on mainland shores. As Elaine Stratford et al. describe, an archipelagic assemblage “is not simply a gathering, a collection, a composition of things that are believed to fit together. Assemblages act in concert: they actively map out, select, piece together, and allow for the conception and conduct of individual units as members of a group.”³² A vision of the archipelago as assemblage centers the insular Caribbean not as exclusive, isolated,

bounded sites but rather as unique vantage points from which to view relational patterns that extend outward in multiple directions, horizontally linking island to island, island to continental mainland, island to ocean and sea, and islanders to each other across far-flung waters and shores. Relevant artworks engage in an active counter-mapping of the insular Caribbean, whereby the visual plays a key role in capturing syncretic undercurrents, intentional continuities and relational patterns, and analogous formations across Caribbean islands and diasporic imaginaries.

Notes

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¹ Stuart Hall, “Myths of Caribbean Identity,” in *The Birth of Caribbean Civilization: A Century of Ideas about Culture and Identity, Nation and Society*, ed. O. Nigel Bolland (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 580.

² Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

³ Think here, most prominently, of Édouard Glissant’s overarching project in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989) and *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); or Kamau Brathwaite’s in *Roots* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). Benítez-Rojo and Silvio Torres-Saillant made similar moves in relation to the literature of the Hispanic Caribbean; see Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2013), in which “West Indian” aesthetics expands from the Anglophone Caribbean context to include writers from places such as the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

⁴ Kelly Baker Josephs, “Versions of XSelf: Kamau Brathwaite’s Caribbean Discourse,” *Anthurium: Caribbean Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2003): 3.

⁵ Large group shows, such as *Caribe Insular: Exclusión, fragmentación y paraíso* (Casa de América, Madrid, 1998), *Kréyòl Factory* (Parc de la Villette, Paris, 2009), *Who More Sci-Fi Than Us? Contemporary Art from the Caribbean* (Kunsthal KAdE, Amersfoort, 2012), and *Caribbean: Crossroads of the World* (El Museo del Barrio, New York, 2012), emphasize the variety and heteroglossia borne of the region’s complex history. See Yolande Bacot, Claude Archambaut, and Christian Coq, eds., *Kréyòl Factory: Des artistes interrogent les identités créoles* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009); Deborah Cullen and Elvis Fuentes, eds., *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, in association with Yale University Press, 2012);

Nancy Hoffman, ed., *Who More Sci-Fi Than Us? Contemporary Art from the Caribbean* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2012); and Antonio Zava, ed., *Caribe Insular: Exclusión, fragmentación y paraíso* (Madrid: Casa de América, 1998). For an in-depth analysis of exhibitions of contemporary Caribbean art in the 1990s, see Carlos Garrido Castellano, “Periferia de la periferia. Sobre el papel de las exposiciones colectivas en la definición del arte caribeño contemporáneo,” *Arte, individuo y sociedad* 25, no. 1 (2013): 65–75.

⁶ Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko, and Andrew Harwood, “Envisioning the Archipelago,” *Island Studies Journal* 6, no. 2 (2011): 114. Emphasis in original.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Paul Lyons and Ty P. Káwika Tengan, “Introduction: Pacific Currents,” *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (2015): 553.

⁹ Antonio Gaztambide-Géigel, “The Invention of the Caribbean in the 20th Century (The Definitions of the Caribbean as a Historical and Methodological Problem),” *Social and Economic Studies* 53, no. 3 (2004): 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138. Emphasis in original.

¹² *Ibid.*, 138, 141, 143.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁴ See Yarima Bonilla and Max Hantel, “Visualizing Sovereignty: Cartographic Queries for the Digital Age,” *SX Archipelagoes* 1 (2016), accessed July 6, 2016, <http://small-axe.net/sxarchipelagoes/issue01/bonilla-visualizing.html>.

¹⁵ The term “cognitive map” was first introduced by Edward Tolman in the essay “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men,” *Psychological Review* 55, no. 4 (1948): 189–208. Defined as “a type of mental representation which serves an individual to acquire, code, store, recall, and decode information about the relative locations and attributes of phenomena in their everyday or metaphorical spatial environment” (“Cognitive Map,” *Wikipedia*, accessed July 9, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_map), it was used in relation to literary and aesthetic theory by the Marxist theoretician Fredric Jameson who argued for applying “an aesthetic of cognitive mapping” to spatial analyses of literature and culture. For Jameson, cognitive maps facilitate a reader’s or viewer’s ability to map in their minds their position within a greater, more complex totality. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 52–53.

¹⁶ Walter Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (London: Blackwell, 2005), 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Anthony Maingot, “Haiti and the Terrified Consciousness of the Caribbean,” in *Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in Honor of Harry Hoetink*, ed. Gert Oostindie (London: Macmillan, 1996), 53; see Gert Oostindie, “Introduction: Ethnicity, as Ever?,” in *Ethnicity in the Caribbean*, 15.

¹⁹ Ben Vinson III, “African (Black) Diaspora History, Latin American History,” *The Americas* 63, no. 1 (2006): 3.

²⁰ José Martí, “Our America,” in *The Cuba Reader: The Making of a Revolutionary Society*, ed. P. Brenner et al. (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 24–29.

²¹ See, for example, Nelly Richard, “Postmodern Disalignments and Realignments of the Center/Periphery,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 4 (1992): 57–59.

²² Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck, quoted in Kaira M. Cabañas, “If the Grid Is the New Palm Tree of Latin American Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 3 (2010): 367.

²³ Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of*

Slavery in the Age of Revolution (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 22.

²⁴ See Martin W. Lewis, “Dividing the Ocean Sea,” *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 188–214.

²⁵ Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Identity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1974), 64.

²⁶ See Peter Hay, “A Phenomenology of Islands,” *Island Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 2; also, see the editors’ discussion of the horizon, the edge, Caribbean art, and Hay’s work in Sean Metzger, Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián, and Michaeline Crichlow, “Introduction: Islands, Images, Imaginaries,” *Third Text* 28, no. 4–5 (2014): 335–38.

²⁷ Suzanne Dovi, “Political Representation,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, Spring 2014 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, January 2, 2006; revised October 17, 2011, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/political-representation/>.

²⁸ Shu-mei Shih, “Comparison as Relation,” in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 85.

²⁹ Kamau Brathwaite, “Calypso,” in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 48–50.

³⁰ Derek Walcott, quoted in Edward Hirsch, “An Interview with Derek Walcott” (1977), in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 56.

³¹ Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 153–54.

³² Stratford et al., “Envisioning the Archipelago,” 122.