

## From Spanish Town to Swift River

*An exhibition of paintings and sculpture by 6 Jamaican artists*

This selection of work looks at how ancestral memories of Africa, of slavery, colonialism and, more recently, America's political influence, have fed into the work of Jamaica's Intuitive artists.

The term 'Intuitive' was coined by the late Dr David Boxer, Director and Chief Curator of the National Gallery of Jamaica for over 35 years, to describe this powerful branch of contemporary Jamaican Art.

He defined the word in his introduction to the groundbreaking The Intuitive Eye exhibition, which he curated at the National Gallery of Jamaica in 1979:

'These artists paint, or sculpt, intuitively. They are not guided by fashion. Their vision is pure and sincere, untarnished by art theories and philosophies. They are, for the most part, self-taught. Their visions (and many are true visionaries) as released through paint or wood, are unmediated expressions of their individual relationships with the world around them - and the world within. Some of them reveal as well a capacity for reaching into the depths of the subconscious to rekindle century old traditions, and to pluck out images as elemental and vital as those of their African fathers.'

The importance of The Intuitive Eye exhibition cannot be overstated. It was the first time that the National Gallery of Jamaica devoted a show to Jamaican art with African roots .... and it altered the course of Jamaica's art history. The island had gained Independence from Britain in 1962, but the legacy of colonialism continued to pervade every sphere of society - including the arts. Only art which followed Western traditions was seen as acceptable.

Dr Boxer, who was born and brought up in Kingston, Jamaica explained, 'At the root of the controversy was this idea that if you are not trained in a Western tradition, then something is wrong. But there are other traditions. There are African traditions, Chinese traditions... We are not African, but Africa is part of us.'

This show's title, From Spanish Town to Swift River refers to the contrasting geographical backdrops of two of the artists - Christopher Harris and Kingsley Thomas - as well as the many startling contradictions within contemporary Jamaica. Once the capital city of Jamaica, Spanish Town's imposing colonial architecture and its infrastructure is crumbling. It is also home to two of the island's most notorious gangs. Many miles away, Swift River is a small, rural community which, below its idyllic tropical setting, resonates with claustrophobic gossip and intrigue.

The work of the artists in this show continues to be exhibited at the National Gallery of Jamaica and in major international museums and galleries. It also forms part of The Onyx Foundation which was set up to preserve Dr David Boxer's life-long collection of Jamaican Intuitive and African art, and Jamaican photography.

What is notable about the Intuitive work is that it is unique to each artist. Unlike many other Caribbean countries with similar histories, there has been no attempt to group self-taught artists into stylistic schools as happened for a time in Haiti. It is also because Jamaica is a mountainous country with poor roads and with very little public transport, so many of the artists are geographically isolated. Artists find ways to express themselves with whatever materials are at hand. Many, for instance Leonard Daley, were/are visionaries, painting their inner worlds and what their ancestors communicate directly to them.

From Spanish Town to Swift River is a continuation of the exhibition 5 Jamaican Intuitive Artists which was shown at the Highgate Gallery, Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution, London in 2017.

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