

Cultural Currents III: The spatiality of art and culture

Introduction

Traveling to Guadeloupe for the third time provided some insight into the geography of the art and culture landscape on the island both literally and figuratively. The landmass has the shape of a butterfly with the two wings separated by a body of water, the Rivière Salée. From our base at the tip of the east side of the archipelago, we drove to artists' studios, art galleries, cultural centers, museums, and organizations' headquarters across the land. As we engaged a new pool of artists and collaborated with entities different than in 2015 and 2017, we acknowledged the diversity of working arrangements and the variety of exhibition and conservation centers. Also, our innovative collaboration with the art association Agence Kultur'Tour led to a pop-up art gallery/museum experiment. The partnership fostered a deeper reflection on the animation of public places in a/the Caribbean context.

Work setup

Access to adequate and affordable studio and exhibit space is limited on the island. During the important 2009 social protest movement, which disrupted the economy for 44 days, the paucity of working real estate prompted a collective of artists to occupy a federally owned building that had been vacated for years. For a while, they turned the edifice that had become a drug users and prostitutes haunt into a live-work-(dis)play complex. It was opened to the community for studio visits and exhibits. Sadly, the occupants could not come to an agreement with the state/government and had to return the structure.

Anaïs Verspan, Chantaléa Commin, Corentin Faye, Bruno Métura, Félie Lucol and Jérôme Jean-Charles graciously opened their doors to us. The workplaces fell in two categories: home studios or stand-alone spaces. 80% of the ateliers are part of the artists' compound. Since most

Guadeloupeans own the land on which they live, this arrangement combines affordability and practicality. In 25% of the cases the workroom is an area by itself connected to the house and dedicated solely to the art practice. It is complete with equipment, material, works in progress, completed works, and an extensive library. The format provides the creative a measure of domesticity and intimacy. As a single mother raising two school aged children, she can attend to her familial duties and still dedicate time to her skill without traveling outside. Even though the studio is an integral part of the design of the home, the owner has managed make a clear distinction between the two areas.

In another instance, 25% of the work structures visited, the studio comprises the entire house. The land art creative works with recycled materials and consequently every room inside as well as the front and back yard are filled with art pieces, original creations. The homestead is a virtual innovation lab where the artist tries out new ideas. The other 50% of domestic studios are converted decks or verandas. Finally, the alternative to the home atelier is the stand-alone construction which represents 20% of the options encountered. In this particular context it is a part of the city different from the artist's main residence. Whereas the other spaces are located in urban settings this one is situated deep in the countryside on a family property. The closet neighbor is several hundred miles away. Taken all together, design wise, the studios are in keeping with the architectural and construction practices on the island. They don't differ from residential dwellings. Pressed with financial and time constraints, the artists we met find creative ways to transform their residences into working spaces and in so doing personalize their practice by offering an intimate touch.

Museography

Compared to our two previous international cultural exchange projects, the 2020 edition deepened our understanding of museography on the island. Three areas in particular stood out: planning, conservation, and exhibition. Museal operations are carried by the public and private sector with the former having a substantial lead. We encountered an assortment of exhibition and conservation sites. Guadeloupe General Council has a vast real estate portfolio part of which is used for the promotion of art and culture. Located in Saint-Rose on the Western part, L'Habitation la Ramée hosts a residency program. We were in conversation with designer Georges Rovelas and a cross section of artists including Yeswoo Dini, Céline Bernabé, and Carine Michaux.

Additionally, the General Council has steadily invested in Guadeloupean art is by acquiring contemporary art pieces. Located in Saint-Claude, L'Habitation Beausoleil houses the collection which is available for viewing. In addition to conserving, L'Habitation Beausoleil offers also exhibitions. The crown jewel of the current Guadeloupean art and culture landscape remains the Caribbean Center for the Expressions and Memory of the African Slave Trade and Slavery. Erected on the site of a former sugarcane factory the center opened in 2015. The interactive permanent collection comprises works by several current native and Diasporan artists. The Director Laurella Rinçon reiterated her desire to further collaborate with DVCAI.

At the other end of the spectrum, the privately owned and operated Hotel Arawak Beach Resort complements the work of the Cultural Affairs Commission. DVCAI Izia Lindsay, Kurt Nahar, Alix Pierre and our consultant Simone Pierre took part in a conversation with artist-in-residence Jérôme Sainte Luce at the Arawak's art gallery. The Arawak art gallery welcomed the opportunity to expand its programming and embrace a transnational vision. Collaborating with

Miami-based Diasporan artists was also at the forefront of our other partner the art association Agence Kultur'Tour's (AKT) strategy.

Animating public places

Rather than a conventional exposition in a brick and mortar exhibition hall, our partnership with AKT led to an experiment on pop-up art gallery and further deliberation on the animation of public places. Troy D. Glover defines the animation of public places as follows, “Animating public space refers to “the deliberate, usually temporary, employment of festivals, events, programmed activities, or pop-up leisure to transform, enliven, and/or alter public spaces and stage urban life.” To address the dearth of alternative exhibition spaces on the island and the need to democratize access to art, AKT approached the regional airport authorities with the idea of a pop-up gallery outside the arrival terminal. Aisha Tendiwi Bell contributed a performance, while Izia Lindsay and Kurt Nahar each created in situ an art piece. Since its inception, the even has drawn a large crowd made of residents and international travelers. This bottom-up initiative represents a successful association between the community, the city, and an industrialized urban landscape. It resonates with DVCAI’s passion for community cultural development through community capacity building and civic capacity. It speaks to the *leisurization* of public spaces and offers cities managers new ways of promoting cities and making art available to a larger segment of the population.

Works Cited

Glover, Troy. The transformative (and potentially discriminatory) possibilities of animating public space. *World Leisure Journal*, Volume 61, 2019-Issue 2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2018.1550438>

Alix Pierre, Ph.D., African Diaspora and the World

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