

diario di un Caribe

exhibition

/ˌɛksɪˈbɪʃn/

noun

*a public display of
works of art or items
of interest.*

DISRUPTING IDEALIZATIONS IN CARIBBEAN ART EXHIBITIONS

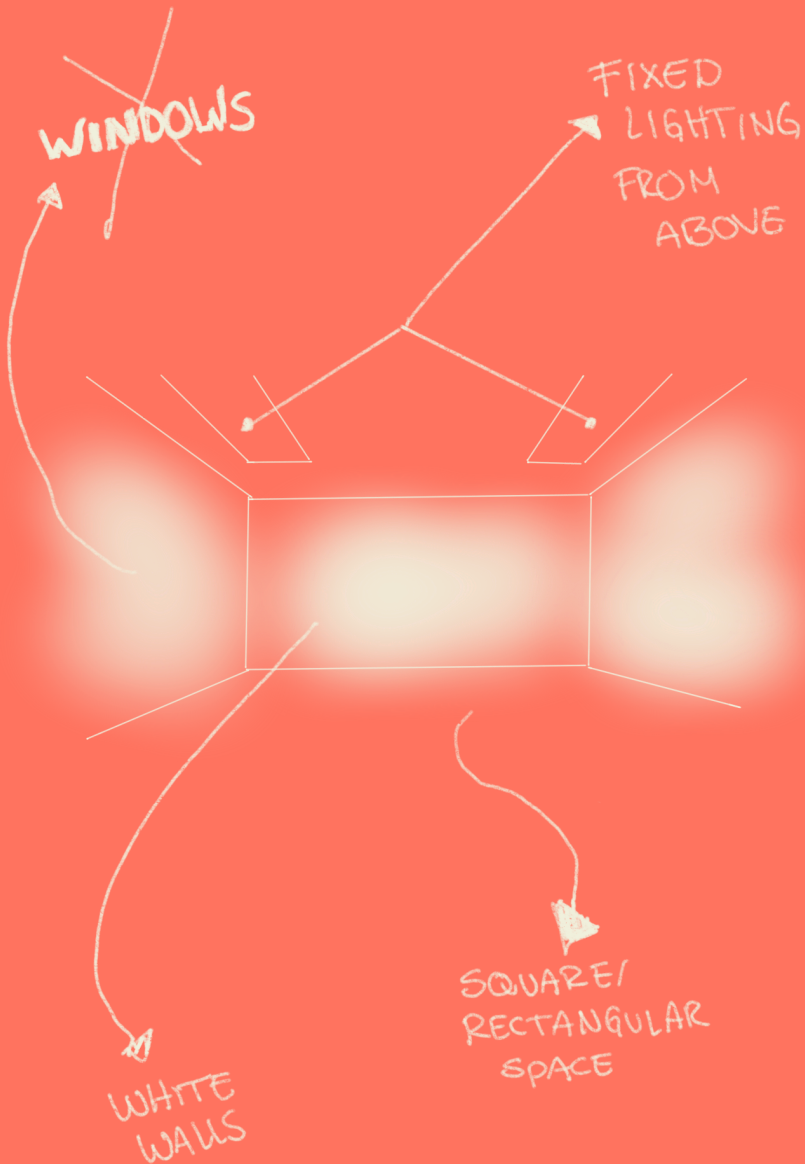
Ana María
Hernández
Curator & Cultural Producer

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**I don't like to work in 'white cubes':
the standard format for art
presentation that is characterized
by its white colored walls and which
is often seen as a marker of quality
and status.**

Don't get me wrong, this presentation format has its merits and history. It's a format designed so that art stands out from its context and its environment. It claims to offer a neutral space. A space that promotes the idea that art should speak for itself and only about itself, that art is free from any responsibility outside of itself.

But that's exactly the problem for me with the exhibitions in a 'white cube', that it presents art in some sort of limbo without any weight of context. It's exactly that weight that I find crucial to anchoring the concepts that art brings forward. I don't think it's possible to disconnect art from any reading, idea, or question related to its social or political surroundings.



One thing I've noticed about the way we present art on our island is the value we still give to white walls. I always ask myself

**WHY ARE WE LOOKING FOR
THE VALIDATION OF OUR
EXPERIENCES AND AESTHETIC
LANGUAGE IN A SPACE
DESIGNED TO EXCLUDE AND
ISOLATE?**

We often find ourselves, complicit to some degree, working within a structure that stems from colonial, oppressive, and violent attitudes. But we must remain conscious of possible positive and negative outcomes when we agree to go along with these structures. And when we are working on the presentation of art for a

place that has been historically and continuously marginalized, this is crucial.

The reality is, that we don't have a strong tradition of critical self-reflection about our approach to art presentation. What are the interests and goals behind an art exhibition? What importance do we want these exhibitions to have within the community and the local artists? Are we confusing 'amount of visitors', 'posts on social media', or 'sponsors on the poster' with 'impact'?

For me, the real impact is in the collaborations, interactions, and ultimately the life, that takes place in the space and time of the exhibition. An exhibition is ultimately an encounter between the views of the professionals who organize it, the artists who create the works of art, and the audience who engages with the exhibition.

An exhibition is a moment of discovery. For all of us. A moment to find possibilities outside of the usual structure. It is a physical, digital, or imaginary, space where we do something with the questions or statements posed by the artist(s). A space that creates tension, questioning, reflection, dialogue, and some sort of resolution.

The way we present art has an enormous influence on how artistic work is perceived and understood. One reality we must bear in mind is that the blue, sunlight-bathed waters that host us, carry a past that has profoundly conditioned how our culture and human experience is perceived.

The presentation of art from the Caribbean region is often linked, in one way or another, to a certain label heavy on prejudice and tropes. You can surely spot in the texts from exhibitions of the Caribbean terms like 'decolonization', 'folklore', 'slavery' and 'systems of oppression' or 'our relationship with indigenous ancestors'. These are all based, in one way or another, on the relationship between the Caribbean region and the colonial structure. My colleague Gyonne Goedhoop observed that it's about "shaping our identity in relation to the resistance against the colonial relationship".

Of course, the relationship between the region and the topics mentioned above is relevant. But the danger of falling into sensationalist attitudes on our identity and history is there.

If we are not careful enough, we may promote narratives that reduce our experiences to colonial heritage, discriminatory ideologies, and cultural dominance. Precisely the things we say we want to leave behind.

There is no true neutral space or objective approach. I am confronted with this realization every time I'm working on an exhibition. And this is why we are here: me writing and you reading. For the past year, I have been looking at how we can engage with and present the visual artistic production of our region in a way that supports unbiased representation.

This research started with a simple question:

**how can we
disrupt the
idealizations
present in
exhibitions of
the artistic
production of
the Caribbean?**

But over the course of six months, this question has expanded into a larger matrix of important, but complex questions.

In this series of texts, I will share with you my research process and invite you to think out loud with me. It's important to clarify here that the Caribbean region

is extensive in every sense. This means that delving deeper into this question on a regional scale is a life-long effort. This is why I will focus my approach, for now, on my locality: the cultural ecosystem of Aruba.

I have divided this main question into six sub-questions that will help me to get closer to a concrete idea. These questions are only some of the multiple possibilities that exist to approach this question. I hope these texts will promote a critical (self) reflective attitude on how we present, understand, and interact with the cultural expressions of our island through our artistic (visual) practice.

My proposal here is simple. Let's think about approaches far from the standards of a world that is known for exploiting, extracting, and occupying our region. Let's develop real or symbolic spaces that are based on our real surroundings. This will bring us closer to our artists and community.

Let's allow for art to be infused by the stories, readings, and traditions of its surroundings. Let's leave the white walls, full of prejudice and codes, behind and let art play with the reality of the space.