

The Caribbean has long been a world renowned tourist destination. Its clear waters, sun-bleached beaches and tropical allure have been the backdrop to many tourist marketing models. However, beyond this clichéd outlook, lays a complex landscape that sustains the intense interactions of many people and cultures. The daily realities facing the Caribbean culture have been greatly influenced by a long history of colonialism, slavery and recent sociopolitical changes. Overtime, the diverse locals forged a strong bond with their Caribbean homelands through various cultural traditions and ethnic identities. Diverse religion, art, music, literature, folklore, and vernacular languages constitute the cultural flavor of the region. These expressions have aided the residents of the Caribbean through the troubles of colonialism, the slave trade, economic underdevelopment, the current migration to metropolitan centers and the advent of globalization.¹ Cultural healing has thus been a part of life in the Caribbean since the arrival of the European conquerors. These cultural elements sustain important roles in the ongoing reconciliation of cultural identity while still reflecting the diversity and dynamism of current Caribbean culture.

[...]
*Clear seasons, the taste of soft clouds and curling salt
 Recur around her waist; kisses of round clouds descend sweet;
 The ears among her sands blossomed, quivered, caught
 In pubescence the first draught of alcohol from conquering
 beards...*

*Beyond her plumed forehead, beyond her fine objects of fine earth
 They plunged with prow and anchor, with cannon, with flag
 Into her navel of revolving waters.
 O Mayas, skies of saffron, of living gold. Crushed anthill!*
 [...]

The previous words were excerpted from the poem Archipelago by LeRoy Clarke, a Trinidadian poet and artist.² The poem is a cleverly worded history account of the Caribbean. The passage above reflects the beauty and innocence of the islands before its imminent conquest. The writer continues his beautiful narrative throughout the poem and in doing so comes to terms with the harsh history of his homeland.

The term Caribbean is derived from Los Caribes, a name first used by Spanish invaders to describe the inhabitants of this archipelago. The name means "man-eater" or "uncivilized", and is a token of the suppression and exploitation the invaders practiced in the region. Colonizing Europeans were able to justify the expropriation of the islands by debasing the natives as pure savages and cannibals. The name givers are usually in power; those named are subjects to this power.³ This act of subjugation was the first crack in the crumbling mask that is the Caribbean identity. The cultural diasporas currently ailing the local inhabitants of the Caribbean are a product of their fractured histories.

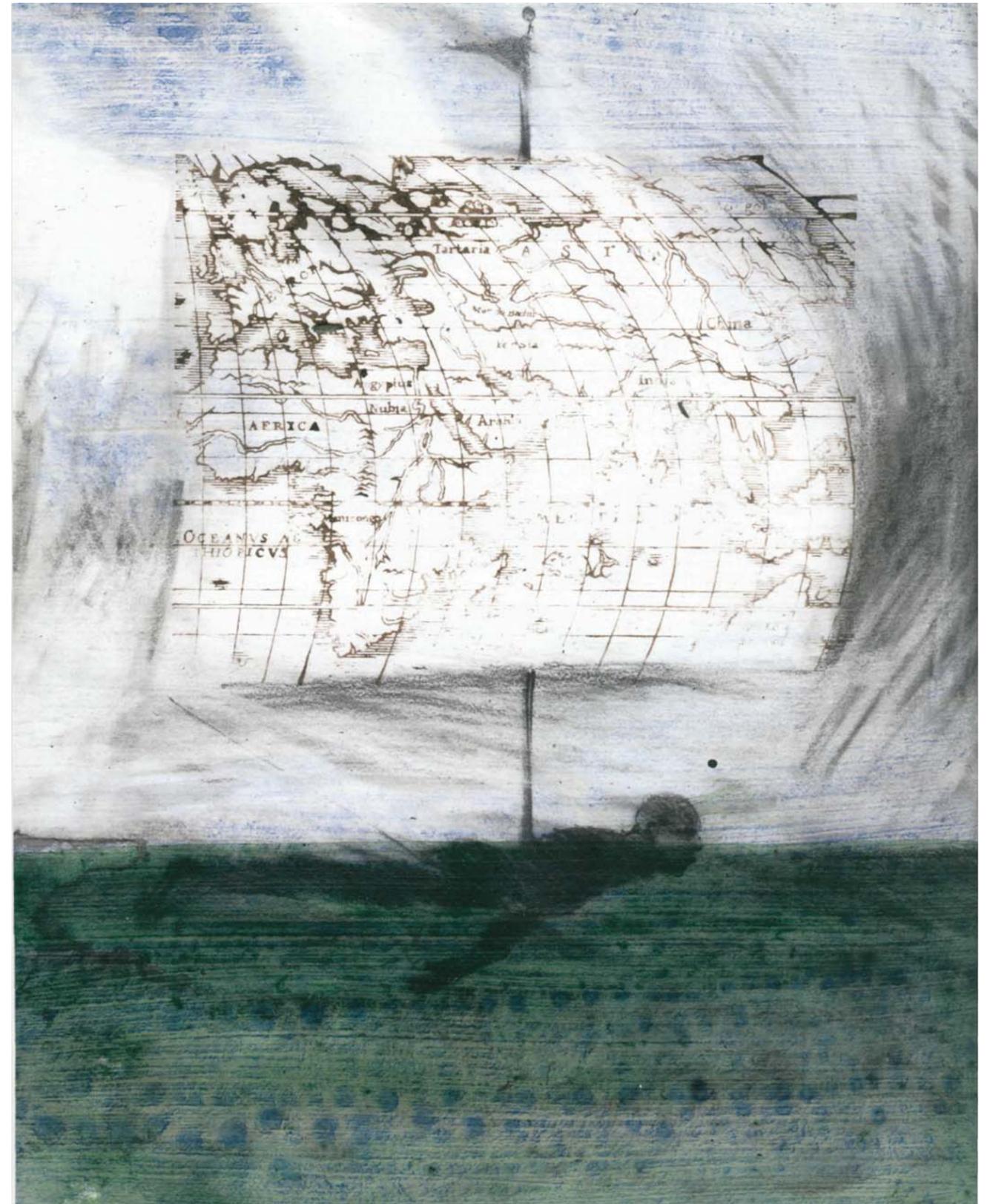


PHOTO SOURCE: <http://cache.virtualtourist.com/p/m/7.gif>

"The means by which the mind takes possession of the named, at once fixing the named as irreversibly other and representing it in crystallized isolation from all conditions of externality."⁴

The indigenous people of the Caribbean regarded their archipelago as an infinite island of which no one had seen the end. This altered perception of geography complimented the way these natives frequently migrated between the islands. Rather than impeding barriers they envisioned the open seas as corridors and bridges that connected and extended the borders of each physical place.⁵ Unfortunately, today's Caribbean residents are as fragmented as their splintered sense of identity. The island territories are a disjointed political fabric, its parts in constant competition. Caribbean art is the projection of local emotions and voices to mend the shattered histories, dialects and islands. It is the call for the creation of a unified Caribbean People. An attempt at this came about in the late 1980s, when the governments of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador and Honduras created 'Mundo Maya' or Mayan World. Even though they are located on the mainland, these countries are recognized as part of the Caribbean culture. Through intra regional cooperation, sponsored by this project, different localities would embrace their Mayan heritage and its significance to world history. Interestingly, there has been evidence for increased cultural resurgence amongst the people. Interest in the vernacular language and traditions has been on the rise, especially as a commodity for the tourist markets. There is a direct connection between the resurgence of Mayan cul-

Christopher Cozier
The Castaway, from Tropical Nights



ture and the growth of tourism in the area. However, one can also infer that this movement is an attempt by the Maya people to affirm their identity.⁶ This helps reverse the effects of the predisposed image that tourists envisage when they think of the Caribbean. The work of Trinidadian artist, Christopher Cozier, is an exploration of such social issues. Through it he poses the question: How do we define living in a site that was designed for others to play in? His series, titled *Tropical Night*, is a collection of narrative images that speak of a "sense of the night or of the recessed/repressed."⁷ The complexity of his work is hidden behind his ambiguous and simple imagery. However, one can infer his commentary on restriction and freedom, the self and the islands. This work and others like it are a voice of the present.

The dehumanizing nature of the sugar trade, which had brought slaves and indentured laborers to the islands, had mercilessly ripped its victims away from their identities. The harsh lives they were then subjected to only magnified when generations later the dream for "one Caribbean People" lay un-erased any remaining cultural memories. Unfortunately, this sense of loss was due to old nationalist crevices, linguistic divides, and exclusivist cultural identities.

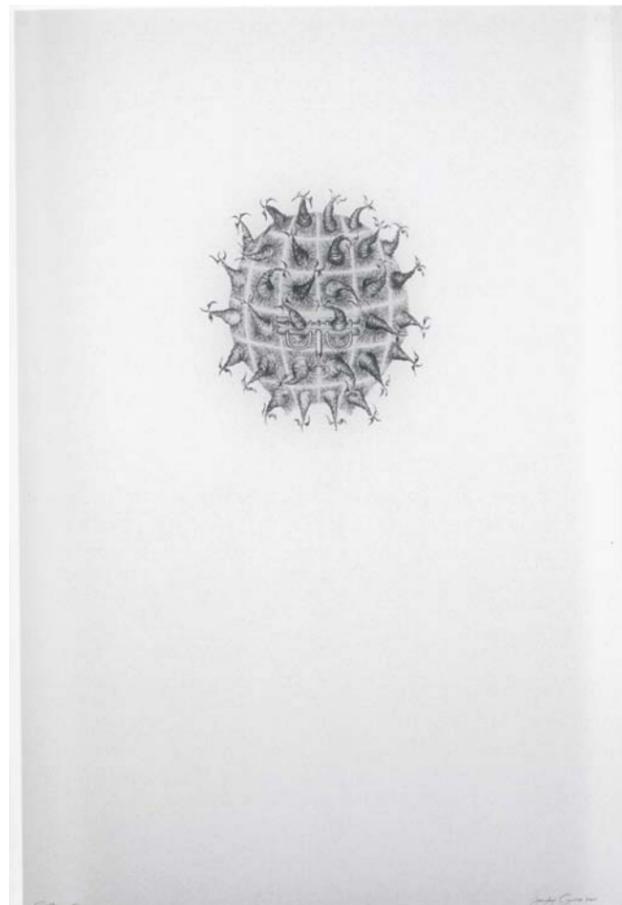
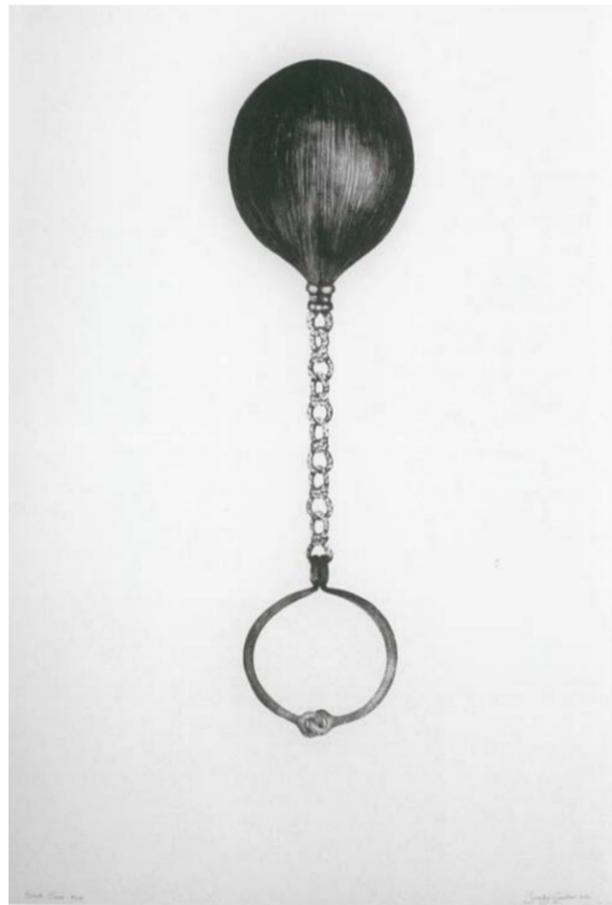
below:
Christopher Cozier
Tropical Nights (selections)



Slavery was an act so cruel and atrocious that the ensuing wails and cries still reverberate today. It is a topic that affects relationships in the Caribbean and the world.⁸ It was the thin lifeline to the motherland and its cultural teachings that kept the slaves and their descendants from forgetting all identity.

The loss of extended family was the first of numerous blows delivered to the sugar plantation slave. The loss of freedom and their family land prevented the slaves from ever visiting their ancestral graves in Africa. This deprived them of the spiritual blessings and protection of their forefathers. There were a few occurrences when, in desperation, captured slaves would take small sacks of motherland soil; allowing them to keep their connection to family, land, and religion. This relationship was the foundation for the emergence of "New World" families. Individuals from various backgrounds were given different kinship roles to satisfy the need for family and unity. This provided the slaves with a place in society, and a sense of identity and protection.⁹ Joscelyn Gardner, a white Creole artist, acknowledges the effects of slavery on current Caribbean relationships. Her prints are a token of this acknowledgement and seen as a social commentary on the subject. Each work in her Creole Portraits series presents a detailed rendering of the back of a braided head of hair. This type of hairstyle is an ongoing manifestation of African traditions throughout history. The intricate weavings in the portraits are combined with slavery era implements of torture.

below:
Joscelyn Gardner
Creole Portraits (selections)



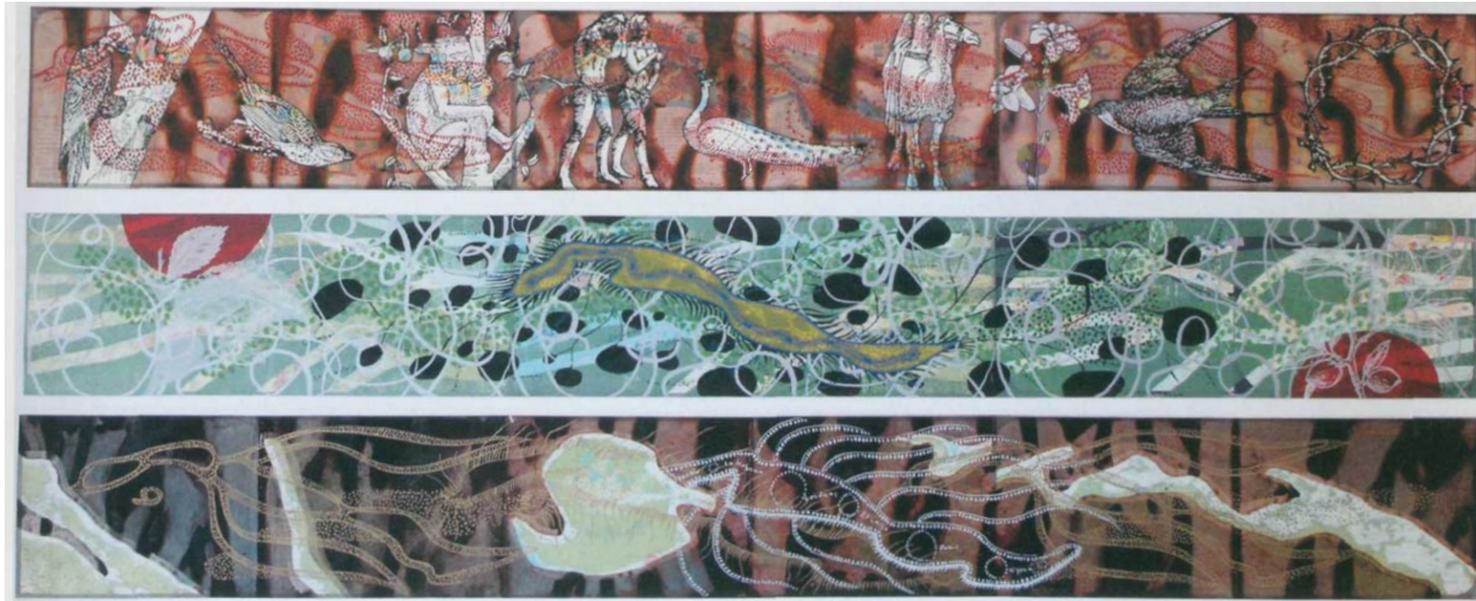
opposite & below:
Ibrahim Miranda
Noche Insular: Metamorphosis, 2004



ject is omitted, an absence that reminds the viewer of the negligence and disregard of black women in western art. The intricate complexity of the hair braids suggests the need for assistance with the braiding process. This speaks of the invisible community of women and is a reminder of the forced separation of friends and relatives during slavery. The artist successfully explored a fraught and sensitive subject. Her work

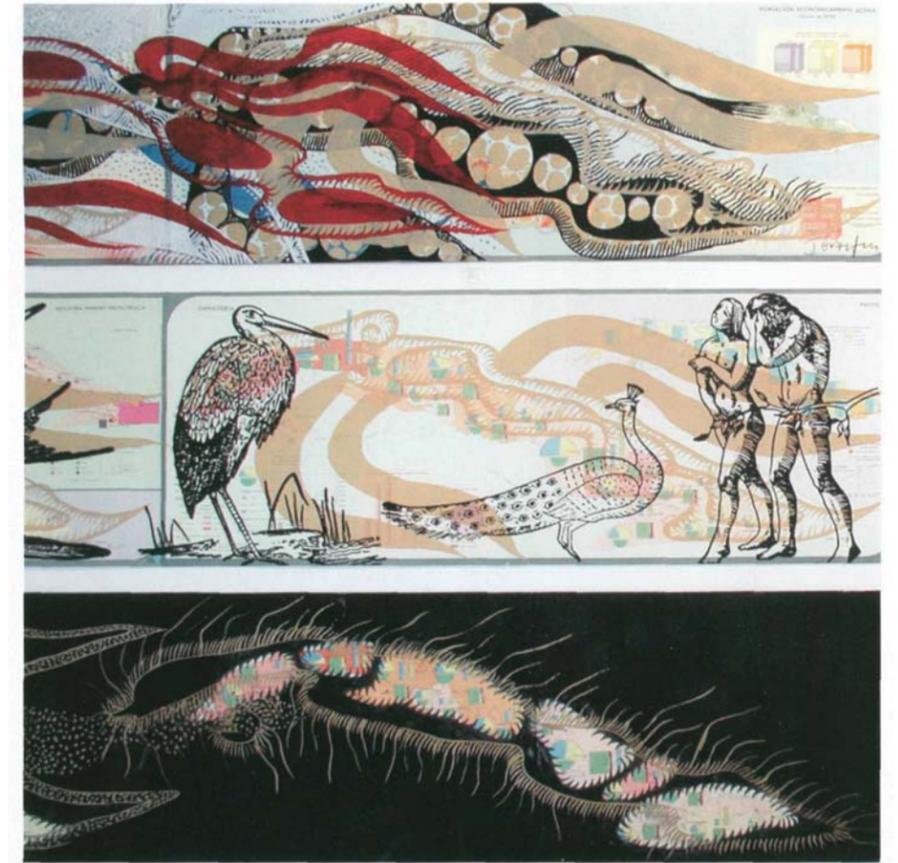
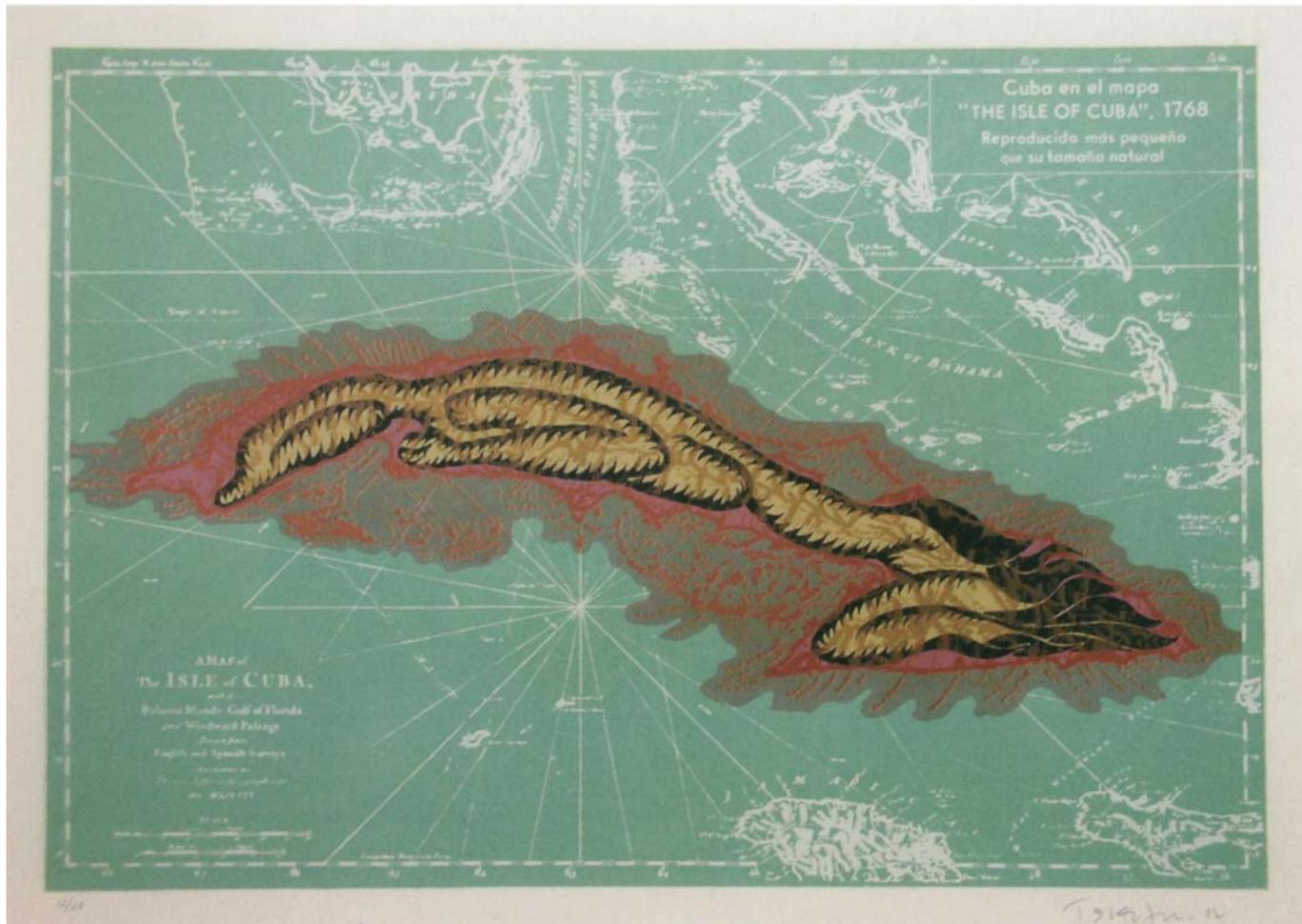
is a quiet reflection on the history of an early form of globalization.¹⁰ The sugar trade had almost deprived its unwilling participants of any form of identity. Their strong sense of tradition and art helped ease their hardships and is now a testament of their past.

As a student in the Landscape Architecture program at Rutgers University, I have inflamed my



once minimal fascination in maps, plans and cartography. The precision with which life scale objects are represented on paper captivates my attention. I have spent countless hours gazing at the world atlas relishing in the mosaics that make up the globe. Ibrahim Miranda is a Cuban artist that seems to share my passion for cartography. He uses the map of Cuba as an underpinning for his various paintings, collages and screen-prints. He redefines the precision of mapmaking into a poetic portrayal of the island's constant transformation.¹¹ Creative articulations such as this artist's work verbalize the relationship of the people to their landscape. As the senior Landscape Architecture continues to design the Salt River Bay area in St. Croix, I believe that their concepts should reflect this relationship. The site designs should reflect the constant mutation of the socio-political and economic fabrics in the Caribbean community. The designs should reflect the dynamic diversity in the histories, ecologies, and culture whilst addressing the continual metamorphosis of these islands.

opposite & below:
Ibrahim Miranda
Atzolotl, 2002



^{1, 2, 8, 9} Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora," (New York; Palgrave, 2001)

^{3, 5, 7, 10, 11} Tumelo Mosaka, Annie Paul and Nicollette Ramirez, "Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art," (London; Philip Wilson Publishers, 2007)

⁴ Kimberly W. Benston, "'I Yam What I Am': Naming and Unnaming in Afro-American Literature," Black American Literature Forum 16 (1982): 3-11.

⁶ Chandana Jayawardena, "Caribbean Tourism: Visions, Missions and Challenges," (Jamaica; Ian Randle Publishers, 2005)

All Art Images courtesy of *Infinite Island: Contemporary Caribbean Art*