

National Art Gallery of The Bahamas

Lesson:

Fluid Art Practices:

Curatorship & Visual Artistry as Activism

by Marielle Barrow, PhD

Grades: 7-12



Overview:

In this lesson, students will explore how Bahamian artists are creating fluid art practices that extend to other disciplines like curating by researching thematic interests as the core of this activism. Students will create a public artwork, project or letter developed as a poster celebrating these artists while deepening this thematic approach.

Content:

The work of visual artists has traditionally been understood as a separate pursuit to curatorial work. Although some artists are also curators, these are typically distinct and separate modes of practice. In the US and other Western societies, artists seldom practice as curators. In the Caribbean however, where the art worlds are smaller than in larger countries, artists often practice simultaneously as artist and curator and often enliven various forms of activism. This is potentially in part due to lesser numbers of practicing curators, fewer museums or limited opportunities for exhibition in the Caribbean compared to other regions. Perhaps, Caribbean artists understand art in less compartmentalized roles and so curatorial practice and artistic practice merge and re-emerge as an alternative form of arts practice. Art museums can embrace these diverse approaches to art practice in presenting the uniqueness of Caribbean artistry. Bahamian artist **Antonius Roberts** is a painter and sculptor but also a curator and educator. Often along preservationist themes or themes of connection and the Sacred, at the nexus of his arts practice and curatorial practice, a cultivated form of activism emerges.



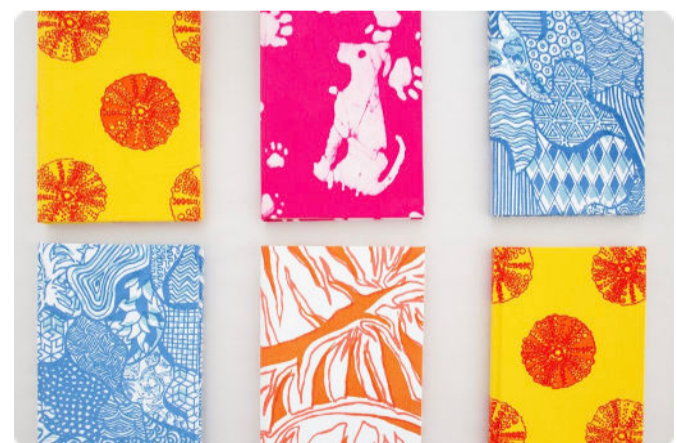
Photo: Antonius Roberts

Sonia Farmer is the founder of **Poinciana Paper Press** which works with writers and artists using multiple forms of publishing to advance the diversity of narratives in Caribbean literature. In many ways, the layers of the wood that are unfurled through Roberts wood carvings, like Sonia Farmer's hand printed books at Poinciana Paper Press, work toward corresponding ends: an indexing of a multi-layered public through the creation of a shared memories that goes beyond the touristic imaging of The Bahamas. The project of Poinciana Paper Press similarly represents a fluid practice via physical, tactile symbolism that enjoins the mechanisms of investigative journalism—the press, to fine art, much as curatorship is adjoined to fine art. As a nano-press for handmade books, Poinciana Paper Press is also an occasion of **space-making**—these books require a physical space that online media do not require—and occupy a space between art-object and book that the typical large-run printing mechanism does not achieve. Space-making as a technique gives us agency by allowing us to plot a culturally- and socially-specific project of indexing, layering, and materiality through the use of woods, paper and space as portals that activate aesthetic memory via tactility and community building. In an era where space is rapidly subsumed through the effective space-travel device of the Internet, where time consumes the consumer, the book object, like the tree, seem to provide a stabilizing experience of space, past and present time, that can be distinctly and personally remembered. Carving space and time for reflection through differentiated tactile experience, through kinship is the project of the **subaltern** space-maker.

(Adapted from Doctoral Thesis “ Counter-Cultural-Memory and Cultural Capital: the arts as sustainable civic practice in the Caribbean”, 2016, by Marielle Barrow, PhD)



Photos: Poinciana Paper Press [Instagram](#)



Discussion:

- What is the traditional role of a curator and visual artist? How do these roles overlap?
 - Why do you think Caribbean artists practice in multiple or fluid ways?
 - How can activism emerge at the nexus of curatorial practice and visual arts practice?
 - How can museums support this type of fluid artistic practice?
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Activities:

Students will research a Caribbean artist who practices in an independent or ‘backyard’ space. Students will use [Canva](#) to create a project as a series of Instagram posts, a video or letter to the artist that celebrates and asks key questions about the work of this artist. Whatever form you choose for your project, it should include the artist’s name, the space in which the artist works, an artist statement (by the artist), images of key works along with the size, dates and medium of works. The project should pose key questions surrounding the artist’s work and include discussions based on these questions. Students should share their work in the The Meeting Place Community mobile application.

Extension:

Students can also create an activist project using one of the themes that the artist works with. Students can create a backyard space of their own and host an event that explores one of these thematic areas and include artwork by other students.

Glossary:

- **Activism** - the action of organizing or campaigning to bring about change (social, political etc.).
Some artists use their work to convey messages for change.
- **Curator** - a person who cares for, maintains, researches, and writes about art. They also organize exhibitions and thus work very closely with artists and art communities.
- **Fluid art practice** - an artistic or creative practice that crosses disciplines. For example, an artist might also work with an environmental scientist to create projects that focus on and bring positive change to the natural environment.

- **Space-making** - actively creating physical (or emotional) space to explore an idea, topic, or theme. It is a way of building community.
 - **Subaltern** - in postcolonial theory, the subaltern refers to people in a lower social class during colonial rule. The term subaltern may be used as a synonym for sociocultural or marginalized groups who tend to build their own communities.
 - **Thematic** - a theme used to explore or express an idea. Art may take on many themes to express an idea. Spirituality, identity, sustainability, love, and rebirth are a few examples of themes.
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Resources:

Castellano, Carlos Garrido (2019). Beyond Representation in Contemporary Caribbean Art: Space, Politics and the Public Sphere.

Kennedy. Kennedy, Katherine.; Voids and Representations: Surveying the Growth of Artist-led Initiatives in the Caribbean. Caribbean InTransit Arts Journal Vol. 3, Issue 6 (2021): 85

The Meeting Place Community mobile application, Apple App Store

[The Curators' Lens: A Series—Antonius Roberts, Chief Curator at Central Bank retires](#)

[Sonia Farmer/Poinciana Paper Press - Website](#)

[Canva - Free Design Tool](#)

