

Art Odyssey

showcasing Jamaica's rich cultural heritage

By Nicola Cunningham-Williams
Pure Class writer

"In the last 80 years, native and modern Jamaican art has grown in leap and bounds," so said Gilou Bauer, curator of the Mutual Life Gallery in a public lecture at the Oxford Road gallery on Monday May 16, the third day of activities in the week long 'Jamaican Art Odyssey' series organised by Dr. Paul Rhoden.

Showcasing paintings, sketches and sculptors in a variety of media, Bauer weaved a tapestry of Jamaican art dating from the early pioneer, Isaac Mendes Belisario through to Edna Manley, Albert Huie, David Pottinger, Carl Abrahams, Osmond Watson, Ralph Campbell, Cecil Baugh and John Dunkley who cleared the ground for Barrington Watson, Alexander Cooper, Christopher Gonzales, Judy Ann MacMillan who in turn laid the foundation for contemporary artists such as Stafford Schliefer, Laura Facey and Basil Watson.

What is Art?

At the opening dinner of the 'Jamaican Art Odyssey' on Saturday May 14 at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel, Kenyan artist Mazola answered the question, "What is art and how is it created?" Delving into the philosophical foundations of art, he demonstrated that art is quite subjective, yet he explained that there are also objective criteria for determining what art really is.

Drawing on Leo Tolstoy's 1896 essay, **What Is Art**, as a point of reference he presented Tolstoy's view, which states that in order to correctly define art, it is necessary first of all, to cease to consider it as a means to pleasure and to consider it as one of the conditions of human life and that viewing it in this way makes it impossible not to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between mankind.

Mazola agrees with Tolstoy that art is a condition of human life and that it is a means of communication but stoutly defended the position that "... for art to be of any value to humanity the aesthetics of it all must be a source of pleasure even if at times what it communicates shocks the conscience of the viewer, such as Edna Manley's *Negro Aroused* shocked the consciences of the white colonials and outraged the sensibilities of the brown minorities who still believed in 1935, when the work was created, that Africans should still be kept out of the mainstream of economic life of Jamaica, only to be co-opted

when he was needed to further the ends of the colonial masters and its huge unjust bureaucracy."

Influencing the creation

Day two of the Odyssey saw a trip to the studio of master sculptor Gene Pearson and even though he was at his foundry in California, his daughter Tania was on hand to open up his home and studio in the cool hills of St. Andrew. There were many finished and unfinished sculptures of the kind for which he has become famous. Perhaps it is their energy, which inspired the intense conversation on art when the rains came pouring down.

The agreement reached at Pearson's studio was that the interplay between music, politics, culture and ethnicity all come together to influence the creation art. This prepared the gathering for Hugh Dunphy and his Bolivar Gallery, which he (Dunphy) asserted is perhaps the oldest private gallery in Jamaica. In his presentation, Dunphy spoke of his travels to acquire pieces and spoke of how owning a gallery and treasure hunting for pieces have led him to some wonderful experiences, which culminated last year in sponsoring a child in the Orient.

Magnificently complex

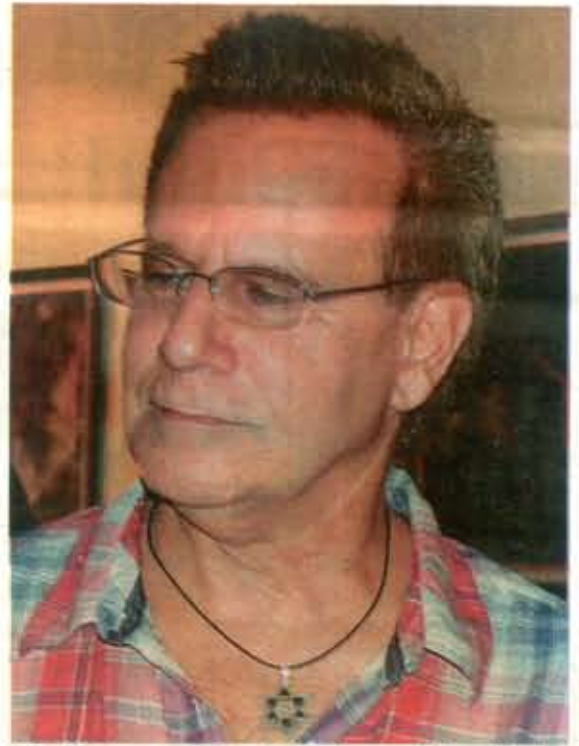
The final stop on this Odyssey was at the Olympia Gallery where Rosemary Thwaites spoke of finding a home at 202 Old Hope Road in Kingston. The complex was the brainchild of the late Ainsworth David 'A. D.' Scott, Jamaica's well-known engineer who became an avid patron of the Arts. His dream was to provide a centre encompassing a gallery, an art supply store and an artist resident programme but alas the last element did not materialise.

Edna Manley's 'Man Child' is prominently displayed outside the gallery and inside Alvin Marriot's lifelike busts of the seven national heroes with Garvey's being elevated thereby telling the tale of the respect, which Garvey is accorded in Marriot's world.

The complete 360 degrees mural by Barrington Watson on the top floor is magnificently complex, multi-faceted and demonstrates the genius of this master painter as well as his relationship with Scott. The Kingston leg of the Odyssey ended with a guided tour of the National Gallery on Tuesday morning. In an interview with Pure Class, Dr. Rhoden stated that he is a "... a lover of the visual arts and that he likes to develop programmes, which showcase Jamaica's rich cultural heritage, educate and stimulate the vitality and imaginations of guests in the areas of history, black consciousness and pride, spirituality and the visual and performing arts."



Kenyan artist Mazola answered the question, "What is art and how is it created?" at the opening dinner of the 'Jamaican Art Odyssey' on Saturday May 14 at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel. NCW PHOTOS



Dr. Paul Rhoden, owner of Great Huts and conceptualiser of Jamaica Art Odyssey.



Rosemary Thwaites speaking of the Olympia Gallery Story during the Jamaica Arts Odyssey tour of the gallery Monday May 16.



Gilou Bauer (right), curator of the Mutual Life Gallery sharing a moment with Sharon Hare of Edna Manley School of the Visual and Performing Arts at a Jamaica Arts Odyssey lecture on the History of Jamaican Art at the Mutual Gallery on Monday, May 16.



Veteran photographer Howard Moo Young (left) chats with German Grisales, Colombian diplomat and artist

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Edna Manley's 'Man Child' on the grounds of the Olympia Gallery, Old Hope Road across from University of Technology, Jamaica.



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