

## **Moment and Momentum**

Yes it was a moment and the momentum was there in Paramaribo. After ten years I was back and I felt the enormous energy moving all over the city. Paramaribo SPAN is indeed not just an exhibit. It is a process of expanding and exploring what is being experienced in the reign of visual culture in this country of the Caribbean. The exhibit was marvelously set up in the garden of the DSB Bank. And the opening night was an amalgamation of exuberance and creativity in all media. Food and drinks were part of this passage. The dynamics of Paramaribo SPAN had a strong impact on me. I felt like being in an incubator where everything is boiling and amalgamating. The Caribbean at its best, I dare say. Boundaries were stretched and the Surinamese artists did that in their own space and environment. In fact they created their own space and that is indeed the strength and power. Paramaribo SPAN is without any doubt a refreshing space and statement about the visual culture in Suriname. It is open and inviting and not at all a stiff platform. It keeps on going, even now that the exhibit has closed. Dialogue is inherent in this format where venue and visibility intertwine in a very inviting manner.

The works of art that struck me as extremely powerful are too many to discuss all of them. I would like to mention the huge blazing red work by Sri Irikodomo hanging high up there in a tree of the DSB garden. Not only as an overpowering visual esthetic manifestation but because the artwork is a result of a search and quest for what lives in the heart of the artist. And then there are in a very different vein the works of art by Kurt Nahar. He searches for a dialogue with the bloody past. He digs deep and the confrontation is hard to digest. I saw his work in Readytex Art Gallery. The 'Curacao Group' visited this venue on the next day and we were all impressed by the dedication and professional drive of Monique Nouh Chaia, owner and director of the Readytex Art Gallery in the heart of Paramaribo. The gallery has certainly moved on, since ten years ago.

The so called Curacao Group consists of art aficionados and gallery owners from Curacao that travelled together with me to Suriname for this event. I had given a series of lectures on art and visual culture in the Caribbean during the last months of 2009. The group got very enthusiastic when we heard about the upcoming SPAN exhibit in Paramaribo in 2010. So we decided to go. As a preparatory I gave a lecture on Surinam art a week before we left.

On Friday morning February 27, the Curacao Group had a well guided tour by Chandra van Binnendijk along the collection of the DSB bank. This was a marvelous morning, the beginning of the journey. The DSB Bank's collection of artworks is a well kept and most interesting historical collection of the visual imagery of Suriname. It could not have been

a better start of this exploration of Paramaribo. It leads us through history to the opening night just described.

Much less invigorating was the discussion held in the garden of the DSB Bank on Saturday afternoon February 28. It resulted in a boring and cliché repetition of the question of the necessity of a museum of modern art in the Caribbean or elsewhere. The international panelists could not sufficiently express their thoughts about the experience of Paramaribo SPAN. That is really a pity. But in terms of networking and making new contacts it was very fruitful. I was glad to hear new voices and new perspectives on the visual culture in the Caribbean region, especially by professionals from outside the region. Caribbean art is not a fashion thing anymore but is taken seriously.

Paramaribo SPAN was launched as a result of the cultural exchange between Rotterdam and Paramaribo. Similar cultural exchange took place between Curacao and the Netherlands at the end of the nineties of the last century. The results then were disappointing for the Curacao arts community. It was an one way stream. Curacao artists never went to Holland because of red tape and lack of funding. If I compare both exchanges I can only marvel about the results in Paramaribo.

Sunday morning we took a three hour bumpy ride to Moengo to visit Marcel Pinas' project. The dedication of this artist to accomplish new impulses to his community is really touching. His efforts are enormous and could be seen and felt by everyone. 'Moiwana', his monumental tribute to those who perished in a bloody mass murder in the jungle is by all means an incredible and invading work of art that still has me without words.

Jennifer Smit

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Jennifer Smit (1951) werd op Curaçao geboren, behaalde haar doctoraal kunstgeschiedenis aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam en was vijftien jaar verbonden aan het NIOD. In 1992 remigreerde zij naar haar geboorte-eiland en is er werkzaam als kunstcriticus en onafhankelijk curator. Zij schrijft kunstrecensies voor het *Antilliaans Dagblad* en werkt momenteel aan een opdracht voor didactiek over beeldende kunst voor Kas di Kultura. Zij gaf van 2006 tot 2009 Caraibische en Westerse kunstgeschiedenis aan het Instituto Buena Bista. In 1999 was zij hoofdcurator van de megatentoonstelling "Arte 99", waaraan ruim 60 Antilliaanse en Arubaanse kunstenaars deelnamen. Samen met Adi Martis publiceerde zij in 2001 het eerste overzichtswerk over de geschiedenis van Antilliaanse en Arubaanse kunst: *Arte Dutch Caribbean Art*. In 2003 ontving zij van het eilandgebied Curaçao de prestigieuze Cola Debrotprijs voor cultuur. Zij is vice-voorzitter van Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, AICA Southern Caribbean.

Jennifer Smit (1951), born on the island of Curacao, received her doctorate in Art History at the University of Amsterdam and was associated with the NIOD for fifteen years. In 1992 she migrated back to her native island, where she works nowadays as art critic and independent curator. She writes art reviews for the Antillean newspaper *Antilliaans Dagblad* and is currently working on an assignment for didactics on visual art for Kas di Kultura. From 2006 until 2009 she taught Caribbean and Western Art History at the Instituto Buena Bista. In 1999 Jennifer was head curator of the major art exhibition "Arte 99" including more than 60 Antillean and Aruban artists. Together with Adi Martis, she published in 2001 the first overview of the history of Antillean and Aruban art: *Arte Dutch Caribbean Art*. In 2003 she received the prestigious Cola Debrot prize for culture from the island of Curacao. Jennifer is vice-president of the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art, AICA Southern Caribbean.