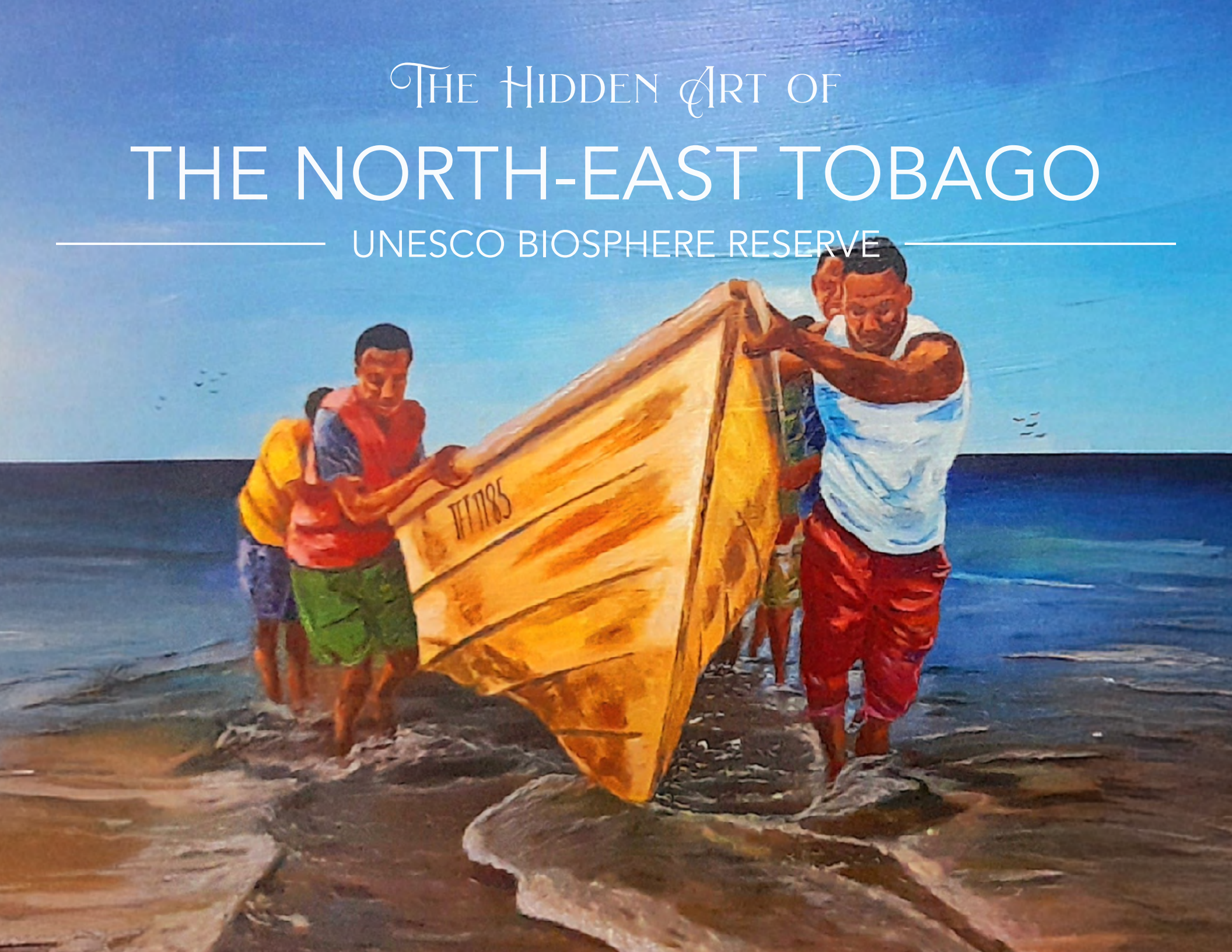
The Hidden Art of

THE NORTH-EAST TOBAGO

UNESCO BIOSPHERE RESERVE





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Left: Ah Ahwe Own
Artist: Tomley Roberts



Wood Carving
Artist:Jah'by

Remarks





Ambassador Dr. Christophe Eick

German Embassy
Trinidad and Tobago

The North-east Tobago UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve is well known for its natural beauty and extraordinary biodiversity. But it is so much more than that, as this beautiful publication illustrates.

Featuring the works of ten talented visual artists, The Hidden Art of the North-east Tobago UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve showcases those that draw inspiration from their Biosphere's land- and seascapes.

Supporting the development of creative economies based on their cultural and natural heritage is a key objective of the German Federal Foreign Office's cultural relations and education programme.

We are therefore particularly pleased to be able to join in this remarkable effort and to bring out into the open a "hidden treasure".

As one of the artists interviewed for this booklet aptly said: "Art is essential to preserve authentic cultural heritage. It is our identity and consciousness; it is what we are in the world".
Enjoy!



Linford Beckles

Director Department of the Environment, National UNESCO MaB Focal Point, Director TOBIMA

In October of 2020, when North-east Tobago was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, it marked a global recognition of what Tobagonians have long known, that this region is a treasure worth conserving for ecological, cultural and socioeconomic reasons. From the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, the oldest legally protected forest in the Western Hemisphere, to the coral reefs of Speyside, this biosphere reserve tells a story of balance, between conservation and livelihood, between heritage and future.

It is in this context that I am happy to associate myself with the launch of this art book, entitled "The Hidden Art of NETMABR" which pays homage to one of the Caribbean's most breathtaking and ecologically rich natural and cultural treasures, the North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

I regard this book as more than a collection of beautiful images and inspired works. It is a celebration of a living, breathing landscape where nature and community coexist in harmony; a model of sustainability and resilience, and a source of pride for all Tobagonians. It also celebrates and provides exposure to the many talented artists in North-east Tobago who tell powerful stories of social, cultural and ecological challenges and resilience, reflecting the soul of this remarkable place and the deep-rooted cultural traditions of the people who call it home.

This art book reminds us that the natural and cultural gifts with which we have been bountifully blessed are not just things to be studied or protected, but they are also meant to be seen, felt and experienced in deeply profound ways. The book invites us to pause deliberately, to look intently, and to fall in love with the unique beauty and culture that surrounds us. In so doing, it calls us to action to conserve, to educate, and to pass on this legacy to future generations.

Finally, I take this opportunity to recognise all who contributed to the development of the art book. Congratulations on a job well done.



Antonio Abreu

Director, Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences
Secretary, Man and the Biosphere Programme, UNESCO

There are places where the pulse of nature beats in time with the rhythm of human life, where the ocean's tide, the whisper of trees, and the hum of daily life form a single, seamless melody. The North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve is such a place, a sanctuary where biodiversity and culture are not only preserved but celebrated and where conservation becomes the bedrock of sustainable development.

This book, The Hidden Art of the North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, reveals a dimension of conservation too often unseen, the art born from the land, the stories etched into wood and canvas, and the resilience captured in every crafted line. It invites us to look beyond maps and species lists and into the soul of a living landscape where artists are guardians, and creativity is a language of ecological stewardship.

As part of UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves, North-east Tobago holds a global mandate: to show that safeguarding the natural world is not a hindrance to progress, but its most factual foundation. In this Reserve, conservation is not confined to protected zones, it flows through the economy, education, and expression of its people. It nurtures livelihoods, sustains cultural identity, and builds a future where humans and nature thrive together.

In this vibrant coastal and forested mosaic, the Man and the Biosphere Programme finds full expression. The sea, the hills, the harvest, the festival, all converge in a delicate, dynamic balance. And in the hands of the artists, that balance is made visible. Through brush, chisel, and voice, they shape beauty and a vision for living well with the Earth.

"Tobago may be small," artist Nazim Baksh reminds us, "but it holds abundant heritage and culture... Every piece I create carries a positive message. It must teach somebody, entertain somebody, or uplift a soul." His words speak to a more profound truth: that art is not ornament, it is the heart of a community's relationship with its environment.

Let this publication be a tribute to that heart, to those who quietly uphold the values of sustainability, creativity, and care. Let it affirm the power of Biosphere Reserves to serve as models of hope, where biodiversity conservation underpins ecological integrity and human well-being.

And above all, may it remind us that in every brushstroke, every carved line, and every living reef or rooted tree, we find the art of coexistence, hidden, yet waiting to be seen.

Acknowledgements

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- the German Embassy, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and the German Federal Foreign Office, for its support in securing and administering the required funding to publish this book;
- the Tobago House of Assembly, for its endorsement and support of the creative arts in the North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve;
- all artists that provided insights, inspiration, and shared their art with us; and
- staff and volunteers that contributed to this publication.

North-East Tobago
Man and the Biosphere Reserve

unesco
Man and the Biosphere Programme

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY



Avie Bacchus - Hopkins

To be honest, I stumbled upon art by chance. When in school, I decided to do art, and everything just seemed to fall into place. Now, art is my therapy. I grew up in Goodwood and my surroundings greatly influence what I produce and gravitate toward. Everything around me becomes part of my subject matter. Sometimes I paint landscapes, and I have a particular interest in antique buildings, but it all depends on my mood. My work can best be described as exploring "identity." Whether it's feminism, the power struggle between men and women, mental health, or domestic violence, I try to highlight these issues, giving a voice to the women and children who face these challenges. One symbolic piece I did focused on feminism. I used colours with a specific meaning and chose to give the figure no face, symbolising how, despite women's progress in leadership, there's still a bias that leads to a lack of respect simply because of gender. At the same time, I'm passionate about capturing the identity of Tobago and preserving cultural heritage. This is important because it's a unique niche, and it tells the story of where we've come from. I've noticed that as the older generation passes on, many stories and traditions fade away. That's why heritage festivals, with their street performances, are vital for preserving our culture. I see it as my responsibility, as part of the new generation, to capture these traditions in another form. One of my experiences was at the Moriah Heritage Festival, watching the wedding scene. As an artist, I noticed that while people usually focus on the dancers, I wanted to highlight the less-seen characters. I painted a woman I called "Vibes Mama," who carries the cake at the wedding. She was an expressive character, smoking a pipe, something you rarely see anymore. I wanted to capture her traditional vibe while adding modern touches like sunglasses and jewellery.



Top: Vibes Mama
2023

Right: Relic
2024


Hopkins


AGHopkins
2022

In the background, I included the dancers as part of the entourage. In the community my role as an artist aligns with my profession. I used to be a teacher and am now the curriculum officer for visual arts and music. My focus is on supporting teachers and promoting the arts, especially in primary schools, where art and music are often neglected. My big project is to integrate music and art more fully into the curriculum because I believe in the holistic development of the child. Creativity can reach different types of learners and it's essential for critical and creative thinking, which I find lacking in many areas. The arts aren't just about skill; they develop 21st-century problem-solving abilities, which are crucial. It's this potential that keeps me motivated to create and to inspire students. I'm invested in my role as a teacher because I see the possibilities for change. My goal is to shift the mindset of parents and the community to recognise that art isn't just a filler for children. Many great thinkers, artists, inventors, and engineers were driven by creativity. I didn't choose art; art chose me. Everything has flowed naturally, and I've realised that this is my calling. I have a purpose, and I'm embracing it.



Left: Dead Bed
2021

Right: Power
2022



Nazim Baksh

I draw much of my inspiration from nature. Growing up in the small village of Louis D'or, I began sketching various wildlife around me. As a child, I would wake up each morning to the sound of a woodpecker picking on the galvanised corner of my bedroom wall. Day by day, I wondered where this creature might be until one day I ventured outside and finally saw it. Since then, I've never stopped sketching birds and even created an entire series inspired by them. Everything on this island compels me to create art. Tobago may be small, but it holds an abundance of heritage and culture, things to express that the world doesn't really see. For instance, the Tobago Heritage Festival stands out as one of our most significant cultural events and tourist attraction. It has inspired many of my works, including pieces that capture Bele dancers, the Grand Bele, Panmen, the Ole Time Wedding, the Brush Back Dance, the Tobago Jig, and the Heel & Toe.

I use different colours, techniques, and styles. Mostly realistic, but not only, I do a lot of impressions and abstracts. I'm not pinned down to any one type of technique or medium. You want your colour, the size, and your medium to really show the viewer what you want to express and put out. The harmony, lines, colours, design, it is the whole composition; everything hinges on each other for the outcome. A great painting is stained with the very essence of the artist and though originated in the mind; it remains a production of the heart. It carries with it his meaning, his reason for being, his passion, and concerns of the day and remains almost untouchable, crossing every boundary, be it race, social status, gender, or time. Every piece I create carries a positive message. With my work displayed around the world, it's important to me that each painting represents Tobago well, represents me well, and remains untainted by negativity. It must teach somebody, it must entertain somebody, or it must uplift a soul.



Top:
Mortar and Pestle

Right:
People in a Ridge to Reef Environment





For the past 25 years, I've made a living solely through my art. It funded my education, allowing me to pursue three degrees. I founded Tobago Art, an organisation aiming to develop, market, and promote the islands' artists and artistic products, and later co-founded the Tobago Visual Arts Association. The appreciation for art in Tobago has grown, and I hope it will continue to flourish, but it wasn't always this way. In the first decade of painting, it was a real struggle, and it still is a fight and a suffering. When I first started to paint professionally, there were probably about five artists on the island. Now, 25 years later, there are many more artists. I encourage young people to get involved in the arts, but I know the journey is not easy. For today's emerging artists, the path is different, and with the growing number of creators on the island, it's essential to seek markets beyond our shores. That's no simple task. Still, I remain hopeful that we can build an environment where all our talented artists can thrive and sustain themselves.

Left:
Toucans

Bottom:
Box Cart





Top:
Dance d Bele



Jeannine Lethe Crouch

When my mother gave me a pen and paper I started to draw; I didn't try to write but to draw some flowers that were standing in the window. She told me, from when I was a child, I always wanted to do art, and I never stopped from young. I grew up in Trinidad but moved to Tobago as a young adult and have been an artist on our island for 30 years. In my efforts to preserve and promote our artistic legacy and to push for greater appreciation of art and artists, I've been on every board of art groups in Trinidad and Tobago. For me, art has always been about legacy, about documenting the things that define who we are. Who we are as a people, in our relationships, and in our surroundings. I believe that's what artists are here to do: create a connection between the viewer and things that may otherwise go unnoticed.

I became a professional artist and very early in my journey I also wanted to be an art teacher. Teaching is even more important because it means passing on knowledge to our young people, helping create a society that appreciates what we as artists contribute. This is what I strive to achieve. I teach a variety of art forms in secondary school, and I encourage my students to think creatively and develop different skills through art.

Much of my inspiration comes from an intrinsic need to create. I often work on several pieces at the same time. I encourage my students to do the same



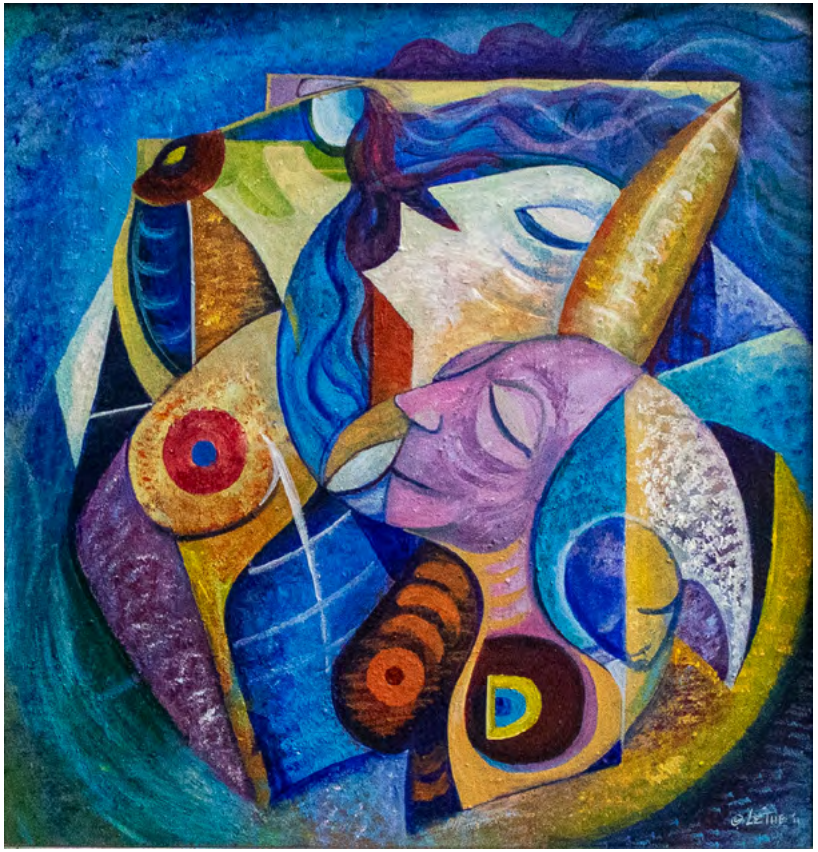
Jamming (part one)
2024



Jamming (part two)
2024



In D Bubble
2022



Journey
2013

because art is about solving problems, reconciling how you think and feel, and expressing that visually. Sometimes, stepping away from one piece and working on another helps you approach the first with fresh eyes. It keeps creativity flowing.

The style of my work is characterised by vibrant colours and emotion. I use slightly geometric breakdowns of forms and I often incorporate symbolic images and cultural elements. Art goes hand in hand with culture. I hope my work evokes a sense of reappreciation and reconnection with things we all experience collectively. There are so many layers to art, from what you see directly in front of you to what you sense around you. As artists, we peel away these layers to give a visual combination of emotions, senses, and experiences. For me, that's what art does, it creates a communal experience that evokes empathy and connection.

Everyone's art has a place and tells a story. We are all storytellers, sharing life experiences, things that matter, and sometimes things that don't. Art can be thought-provoking, even shocking at times, helping to open minds in new directions. I explore various media, and not all my work is traditionally Tobago. I believe there's room for artists who think outside the box. With art, your choice of material also makes a statement, I love using traditional materials in contemporary ways and use repurposed materials like old banners, vinyl rolls, and even an old school whiteboard. I think it's important to be conscious of our environment and to reuse materials that would otherwise end up in a landfill. If we don't repurpose, we risk losing the natural beauty of our island.



I Hear in Color
2022



Wain James

I've been doing this for over twenty-four years even though it can be hard sometimes, I'm always working and always at my shop. I truly love what I do. Growing up in Moriah definitely influenced my art. It all started naturally, just coming from my head. I developed skills on my own, no one really taught me. I've always enjoyed working with wood. The more I did it, the better I got. The work keeps me going and keeps my mind focused. Even when things are slow, I don't complain, I always give thanks.

I craft many different things. I enjoy making birds, like the Cocrico, Hummingbird, and Motmot. One of my favorite pieces is the Blue-backed Manakin, which you often see in the wild, especially in the rainforest up in Charlotteville. I also make all kinds of animals, unique characters, and houses. I enjoy to do traditional pieces like the man with the banana or the drums. I love capturing parts of our culture. My surroundings, the people and nature, constantly inspire me. The ideas just come to me. I look at a piece of wood and see what's there. I use the full length of the wood, sketching out what I envision. A piece can take at least a day, sometimes a couple of days or even a week for larger, detailed works. I use no machines, it's all handwork. If I had a shop with more tools, I could produce more, but what I do here has a rustic charm that people love. I work only with local wood: cedar, mahogany, and cypress, it lasts for years. To treat the wood, I use a natural wood treatment or sometimes linseed oil to keep it moist. If I add colour to my pieces, I use acrylic paint, as some people like colourful, shiny finishes, while others prefer more natural looks. I also sometimes burn the wood slightly to give it a different look. I hope to inspire the youth and pass on the craft, but many find it too time-consuming. I've had plenty of young people come by, but if they see they can't make it work, they tend to leave, it's not for everyone. However, I teach summer classes at Golden Lane Government Primary School, carving Calabash with the children and getting them introduced to the craft.




JAH'BY CREATIVE
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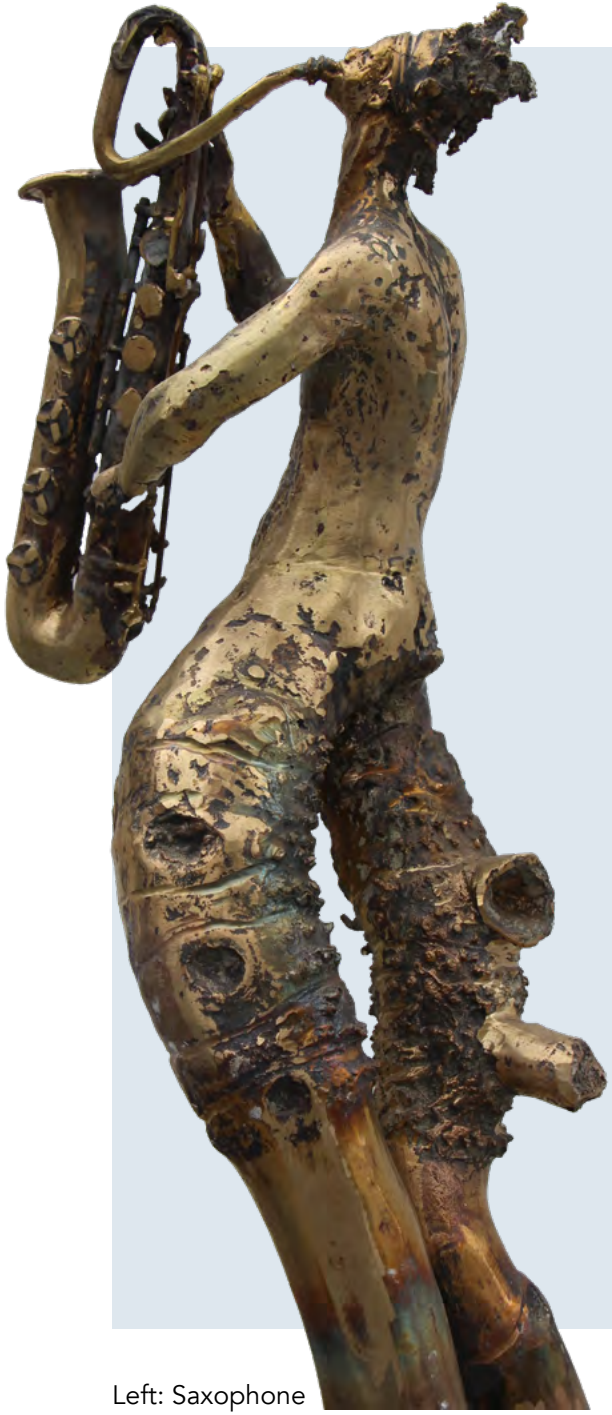
Dunieski Lora Pileta

Creating art began for me as a child when exploring the craft of wood carving during my primary school years. It was during this time that someone recognised my potential and introduced me to the elementary art school in Cuba. I later advanced to the academy, where I spent five years enhancing my skills. Throughout my life, I have had the privilege of traveling to many places, each with its own unique culture, heritage, and perspective on the value of art. In North-east Tobago, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the Speyside High School on creating public sculptures related to our UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. These experiences have been a continual source of motivation and inspiration. Society often serves as a muse for artists. I try to reflect what is taking place in the communities I encounter in my work, capturing elements such as their culture, food, and traditions, with the aim of preserving these treasures. For me, creating art is not just about expression, it's also an opportunity to educate. Through my art, I always aim to inspire awareness and empowerment.

I incorporate current social issues into my work, addressing challenges such as environmental conservation, societal struggles, and poverty. I believe that art has immense potential to help address these challenges. For instance, skills such as fiber glassing, wood carving, or creating portraits can be shared, enabling individuals to apply them creatively and generate income. By fostering these skills, art becomes a tool not only for personal expression but also for improving livelihoods and reducing societal issues. Creating art has become the driving force behind everything I do. I am constantly collecting ideas and dreams, weaving them together into my creations, whether I am working with wood, metal, bronze, plastics or on canvas.

Right: Flowergirl









Left: Saxophone

Middle: Man with wings

Right: Torro







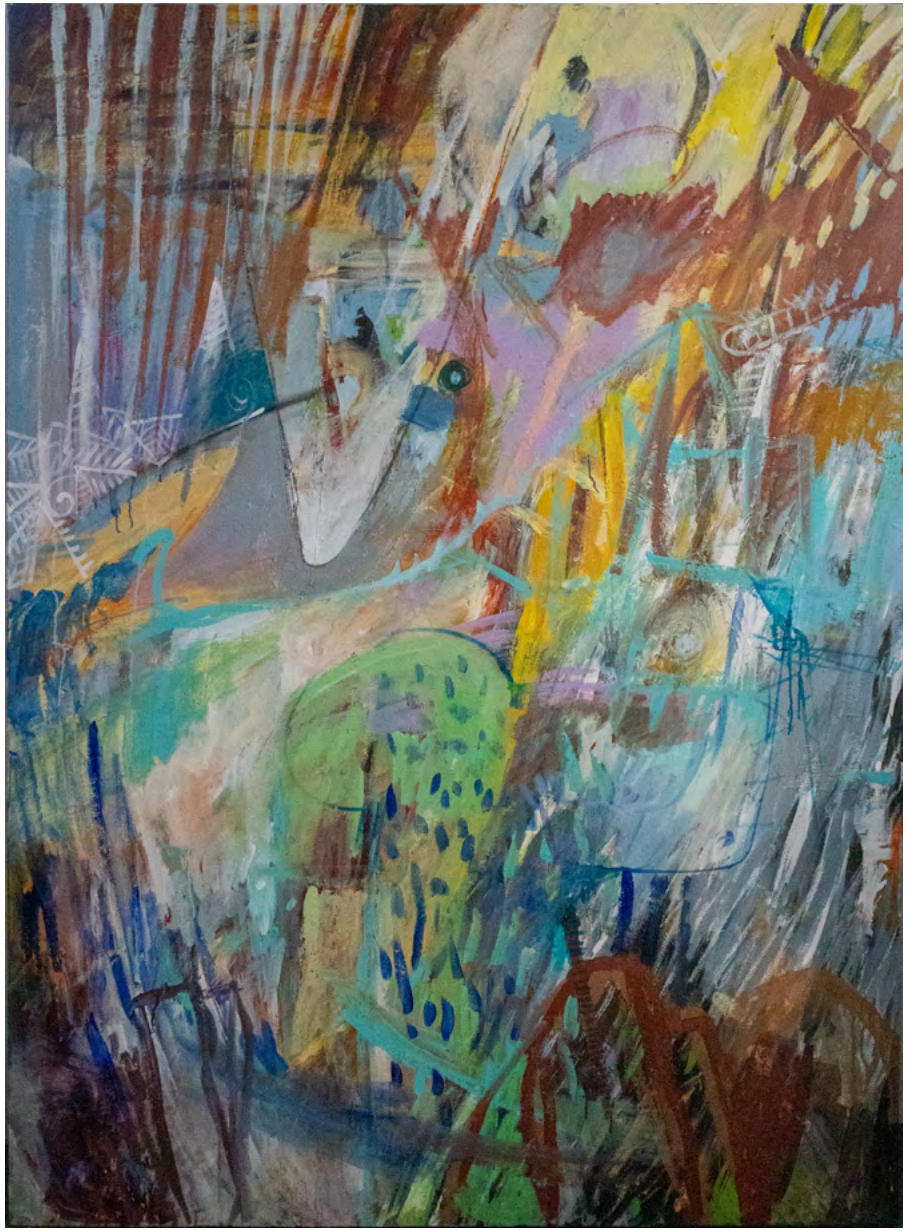
Left and Middle: Figures

Right: Boy with plane

The process of creating art feels natural to me, it is like a language I am speaking. Over a decade ago, I came to Tobago, where one of the most profound influences on my art was a German artist named Maria Luise Kimme. At the time, she was based on the island and had a deep connection to the culture, environment, and heritage of Trinidad and Tobago. Her work reflected this connection in an incredibly inspiring way, leaving a lasting impact on my artistic journey.



Left: Plastic head



Right: Abstract painting

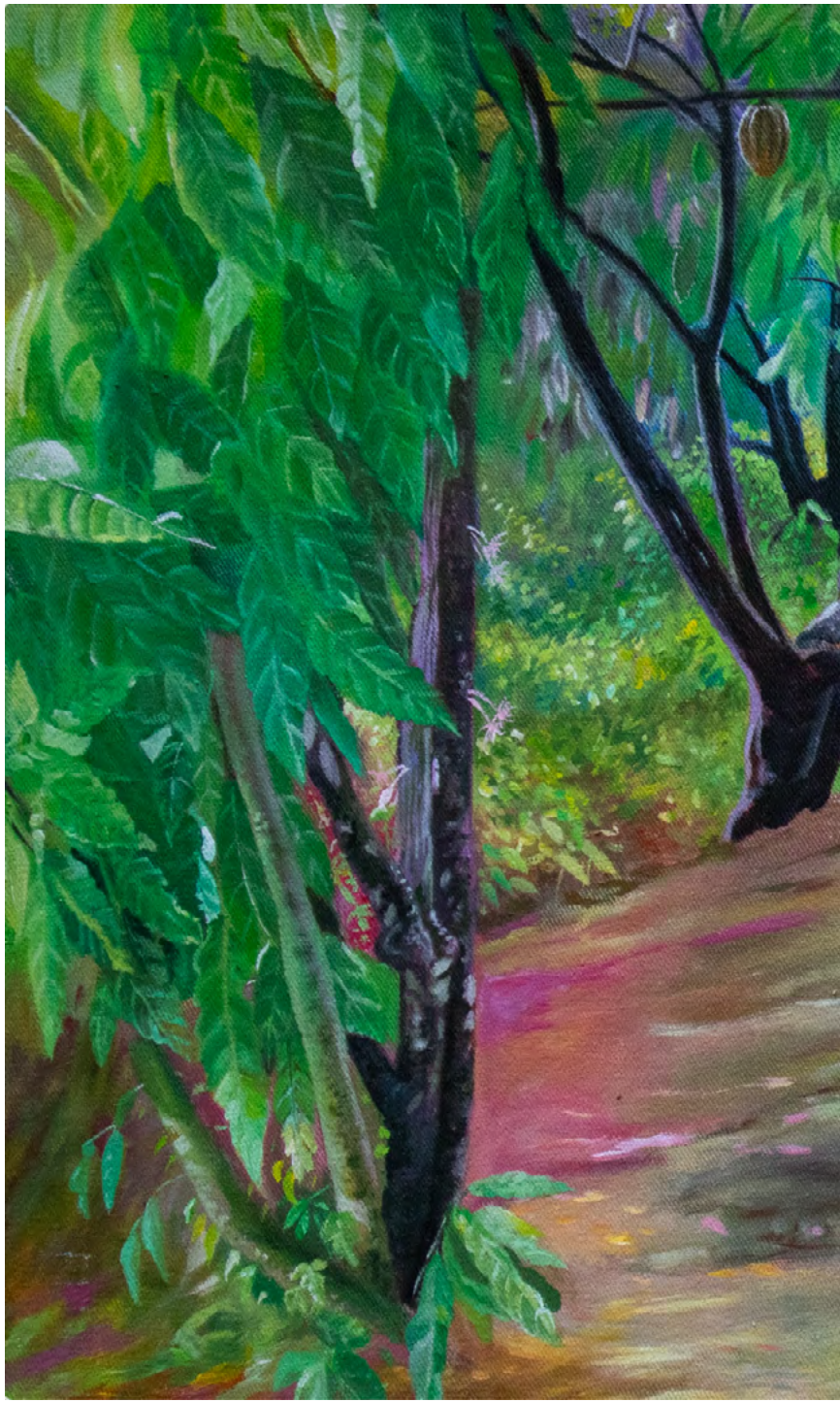


Earl Manswell

I've been creating art and drawing since I was a child, it always felt like a natural gift. For over 25 years now I've been painting, and I've always been passionate about it because I realised it was something that came naturally to me.

After school, I attended an art class run by the Tobago Art Committee, completed an international master art class, and earned a diploma. I've had the chance to participate in art exhibitions in Trinidad, which was a great experience, seeing my work travel to different places.

I grew up in the village of L'Anse Fourmi and was always drawn to painting nature, birds, and artifacts, especially old houses. I love capturing these things because, over time, they might disappear. For example, I once painted an abandoned house which was in Plymouth; the character of the house was intriguing, with its unique architecture and materials, likely crafted by a skilled carpenter. Sadly, the house was later broken down. This is why art is so important on the island, it preserves moments that might be lost over time as the scenery changes.



Breaking Cocoa
2022


Earl Manswell ©2022





When I see something interesting or a scene that inspires me, I usually take a photo of it and later sketch it onto canvas or paper and begin painting. That's my process. I mostly create realistic art, but I enjoy experimenting with different techniques. For example, I sometimes work with just dots, lines, or cross-hatching. I also love working with wood, building furniture, and experimented with doing some of my drawings on pieces of mango or almond tree wood.

Above all, with my work I capture people and aspects of our cultural heritage, like cocoa dancers, sugarcane pressing, or the man making a wooden roller. These traditional activities are fading and I believe art is a powerful way to preserve them. Unfortunately, at events like the heritage festival, art is often left out, and artists are overlooked. But passing on this cultural knowledge is essential,



Left top: Squeezing Cane
2022

Left bottom: Old House
2016



Top: The Roller Maker
2013

Coldpot
2015

especially to the younger generation. I enjoy teaching art to the youth and sharing what I've learned over the years. Today, many young people don't stick with the art because they don't see a future livelihood in it, but if you truly love it, you have to hold onto that passion and keep going.



Jason Nedd

Growing up in L'Anse Fourmi, in the countryside, had a profound influence on my work, and this connection can be seen in my paintings. I am fascinated by light and movement, elements that can be found in almost every subject. My work captures the environment and the diverse social activities within the communities that take place here on a daily basis. I enjoy exploring my subjects to uncover the movement within them. Whether it's seascapes, waves splashing against the rocks, waterfalls, fishermen pushing their boats to shore, or dancers performing the traditional Bele.

In particular, I am drawn to the depth, light, and shadows inherent in nature. Understanding and applying these principles is crucial in creating compelling art. Art is so interesting. As a self-taught artist, I continuously grow and evolve. Creating art feels natural to me. I like to explore many different ideas, and my art is very inspirational to me. When I finish a piece, or even when waiting for one to dry, I find myself sketching something new and diving right into the next piece. At the end of the day, I often pause to reflect on my work. When I feel I've truly captured my objective, I can't help but assess it from every angle, placing it under different light. This passion has been with me for as long as I can remember. I recall staying up all night to watch a piece I had just completed, until my mother came in when it was already morning. The inspiration, passion, and drive are always present when I create and the excitement never fades with each completed piece.

Since I can remember, I've been drawing, and naturally, much of my art captures



Coco Dancer
2022



our cultural heritage; it's my life. In school, we danced often, and at home as a child, I helped my grandparents prepare the cocoa from start to finish. Fishing has also always been a part of my life, and I love capturing fishermen, especially the scenes of pushing the boat on the beach or casting lines from the rocks.

To showcase my work, I've always relied on galleries. Visiting galleries is incredibly inspiring and can be especially valuable for younger artists. It allows them to see different techniques and styles, understand how the market works, and gain insight into the art world. For a young artist, just starting fresh out of secondary school, it's challenging to have the drive, passion, and understanding required to succeed. Visiting galleries, participating in shows, meeting collectors, and immersing oneself in the art community is important to see how it really is. These experiences ignite passion and drive, enhancing inspiration and motivation. I was fortunate to gain this exposure early in my career. The journey began when I brought my first pieces to a gallery back in 1995.



Washers at Fall
2022







Top: Old House



Avion Orr

Initially, I pursued craft studies when I attended teachers' college; my background was mainly in fabric work, doing macramé and other crafts. However, about a year into teaching at Speyside High School, I was inspired by the artwork and painting Mr. Tomley Roberts did with his students. I thought to myself, "I could do that." That was the start of my journey into painting, and I developed the skill over time. Now, I work with both fabric and painting. Growing up by the sea in the village of Delaford has greatly influenced my artwork: I'm drawn to nature and enjoy capturing country scenes. My work reflects what's around me: nature, culture, and everyday life. I don't usually plan my pieces in advance, I just begin and let the process guide me. I don't focus on myself while I'm creating; I simply let the art flow naturally. For me, art creates a sense of peace and relaxation. I like to look at my work and feel that calmness. Many of my paintings reflect those peaceful, tranquil moments. I focus a lot on colour. I start with the colour and let the scene or characters come to life from there. Sometimes, I paint upside down, so I'm not focused on the image itself while creating it, and it's only when I'm finished that I see the final result. That's my approach: letting the art surprise me. However, my main focus is on my students. As a creative, I want to inspire them and give them the motivation to explore their own creativity. In North-east Tobago, people know me more as a teacher than as an artist because I don't advertise myself and not many people in my community are interested in buying art.







Left: Fisherfolk
2022

Top: Granny's Hair Comb
2022






Avion Orr



Tomley Roberts

I believe my journey with art began as a child, when my mother recognised a spark of talent in me and enrolled me in an art class. During primary school, my grandmother introduced me to carving. She saw me trying and encouraged me to go in the valley to look for a hog plum tree to take of the bark and practise on the branches. Pretty early I was creating things like transformers and racing cars. In high school I was introduced to painting and later I became more involved in sculpting. A famous woman sculptor from my village became a great mentor and I learned a lot from frequenting her studio. While I've had these influences, I consider myself a self-taught artist because I honestly believe that art develops through practice. I refer to myself as an "artist practitioner" committed to staying true to the form and continuously developing and evolving. Eventually, I began exhibiting my work and became an art teacher. At Speyside High School, where I am fortunate to be both the art teacher and visual arts subject leader, I was given the latitude to explore new art forms with my students involving them in hands-on experience, the design, the wire bending, plastering, and actual modelling; it's a therapeutic experience. It's important for them to engage in the art and realise that it cannot only be a source of financial gain but also a way to capture and preserve culture. It's vital that our children see themselves in art. Art becomes a powerful icon for them, something they can look up to. Many years ago, I and my wife





Market Vendor
2016



Baker Angie
2004

initiated Prestige Arts International, a multi-disciplinary organisation that focuses on the production of art in Tobago. Art is not just a practice but a part of our cultural heritage and creating artwork that reflects our culture is very important for both our society and future generations. Art is a cultural vehicle, and it's important to have something that represents us in this way. In my own work, I traditionally focus on a realistic genre. Later, I was mentored by one of the greatest artists from this region, who taught me various artistic fundamentals, including cubism. For example, in my piece "Market Vendor," it might first appear to be a collection of lines. But upon more careful inspection, you'll realise that it's a realistic depiction of a woman carrying a basket of fruits and a lobster. It is exciting for me to create work that is more free-spirited. For each piece, I always plan carefully, writing out my ideas and making preliminary sketches. What we create today will outlive all of us. In Tobago, we've unfortunately lost a lot of cultural knowledge due to a lack of documentation, and I aim to prevent that with my own work.



The Farmer
2005



Hand in Hand with
the Environment
2022



Amber Shaw

I grew up in Tobago and have always lived close to the sea. My inspiration is drawn from an awareness of my surroundings, the people I interact with, my struggles, my childhood, my everyday experiences, and my children. The elements that influence me interplay at times, provoking emotion, thought, and contemplation. I use my art to express myself, to interpret, communicate, and reflect those entities and thought patterns.

Art has always been an innate part of me. I started both painting and sculpturing at an early age when I began creating imaginary figures from plasticine, carefully collecting them in a small box. My first work on display, a painting entitled "Underwater", depicted a vibrant scene of Buccoo Reef and was exhibited at the Tobago Museum at Fort King George. Throughout my years in primary and secondary school in Tobago, I received numerous accolades and awards. Later, my dedication to art earned me a full scholarship to the International Fine Arts College in Miami, where I attained a bachelor's degree in fine arts.

For more than 20 years, I have been a Visual Arts teacher at Goodwood Secondary School, contributing to the development of the school from its initiation. Teaching allows me to share my knowledge and inspire my students to explore their creativity. I have worked on numerous community outreach programmes and initiatives, creating spaces where children and young adults can develop their artistic potential and pursue their dreams.

As an artist, I see myself as playing an essential role in capturing and reflecting truth. Simple everyday things and the rich tapestry of Tobago's culture inspire my work.

One of my artworks is titled Kalang-ka Tang, inspired by the sound of the noise and commotion depicted in the painting. The scene is set in the countryside typical of Tobago, featuring the mountain range and prevalent banana patches. Bright colors convey a cheerful, carefree mood as young villagers cast their slippers aside to take to their stilts and express themselves. These Moko Jumbies are enjoying themselves, playing musical instruments loudly and dancing to the rhythm they create. Two female jumbies are making their way down the hill to join the excitement, while two little boys, sheltered under the banana leaves, watch the lively scene unfold. This piece celebrates Tobago's vibrant cultural traditions. It captures the spirit of events like the Tobago Heritage Festival (symbolised by the top hats, fiddle, white pants, and jacket shirts), the Jazz Festival (represented by the waistcoat and trumpet), and Tobago's Traditional Carnival, as seen in the wings



Kalang-ka Tang
2014



and the presence of the Moko Jumbies themselves.

Art is an undeniable realm of everyday life; it shows the world itself. Art heals and encapsulates history; it is essential to preserve authentic cultural heritage. Art teaches us our traditions and what we should hold dear to our hearts for the evolution of generations to come. Art is our identity and consciousness; it is what we are in the world.

Pan Man
2023



Sailor Boy



Ancestral Pull
2023



Seaside Lullaby



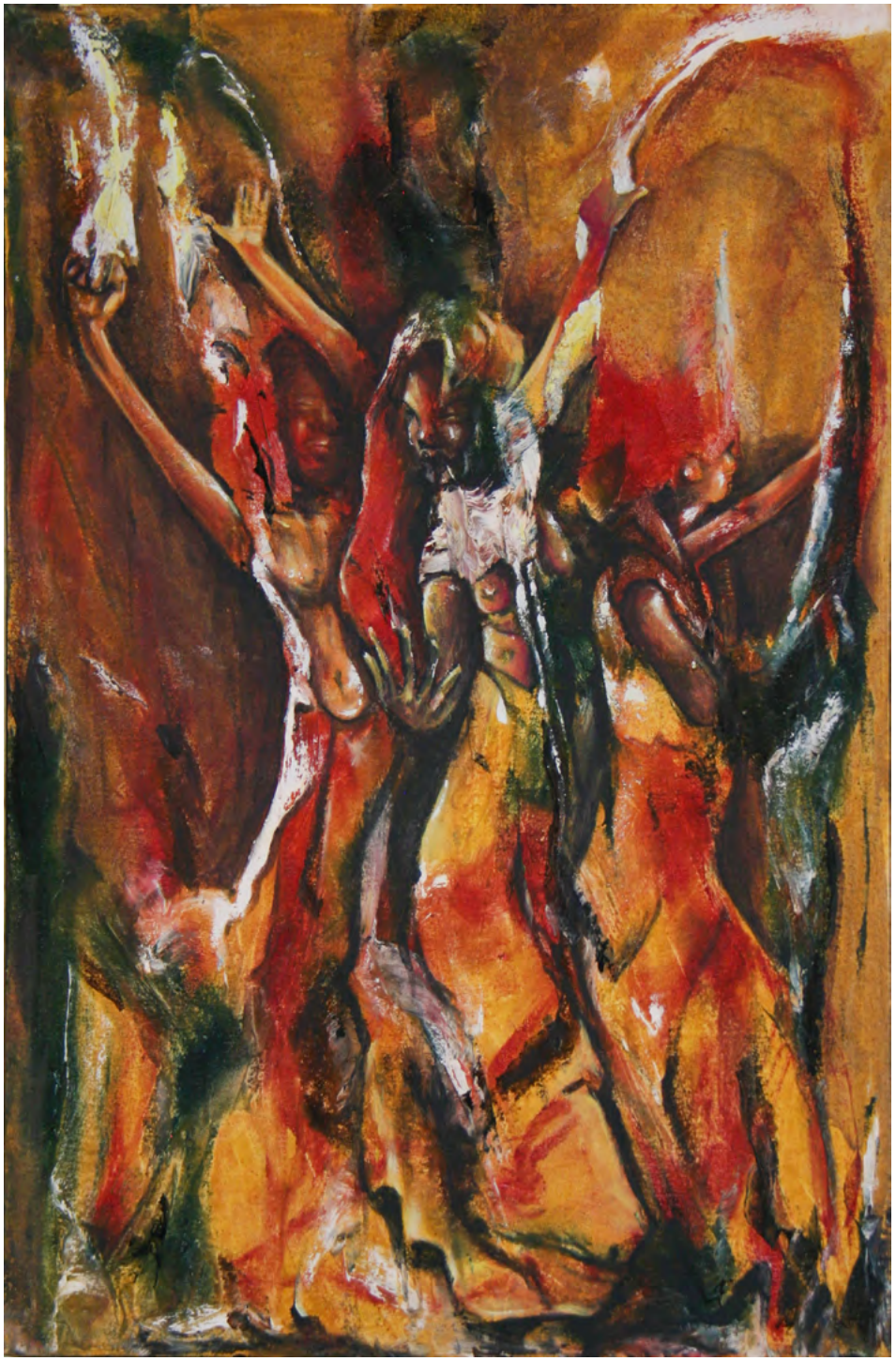
Chris Thomas

I've been creating art all my life. What first inspired me were some street artists who used airbrushes to paint. They would create fantastic work on cars and murals, and I found it fascinating. I started hanging around where they worked, asking questions and practicing on my own. Art was a gift I took for granted as a child until my early twenties. I had an art teacher who, while we were working with airbrushes, accused me of "cheating" because my work was too effortless. She thought I must have used a brush instead of an airbrush. I did a few miniature pieces, and she was impressed, encouraging me to sell them, which I doubted at the time. She suggested I take them to an art gallery for an assessment, so I brought them to Horizons Art Gallery in Trinidad. To my surprise, they were intrigued, and the gallery owner, who was always on the lookout for young artists, agreed to display my work. They sold all of my pieces. That moment changed everything for me. I have to thank that teacher; she challenged me and I believe she was sent by fate to push me forward. I went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in art. While much of what they taught, I already knew, I gained valuable skills in research and process. Though I grew up in Trinidad, I've been living in Tobago for over 13 years now, teaching art at Speyside High School. I've been very enthusiastic about and deeply involved in their art programme, encouraging students to think outside the box.



Pandemic
2021





In my own work, I use canvases that already have paint on them. I search for compositions within the existing layers. None of my work is preconceived or planned. Once color is on the canvas, it comes alive. I start to see multiple formations—some grotesque, some incomplete. I look for one that feels complete and tells a story. Every time I do this, it's an exciting process because I never know what the final outcome will be. That's my style: finding stories in what's already there. Sometimes it takes months to find it; sometimes I see it right away. All my pieces tend to be socially and culturally based. I'm always learning and try to be mindful of what I paint. I avoid anything negative. I've realised that my abstract style is rooted in Caribbean culture. Cultural identity and heritage are vital parts of our history, and they influence our future. As artists, we have an impact on society. Art isn't just about self-expression; it can solve problems. Art starts with an idea, a concept, a composition, it's never static and always has the power to evolve.

Dance Ritual
2020

Right:
Gone to Market
2021

Right top:
Sheltered
2020

Right bottom:
Dance
2017









Coryse Wright-Kerr

Growing up in Betsy's Hope, my career as an artist began at Speyside High School. From my first year, I was always drawn to art and passionate about it. For me, art is a way to release tension and let my creativity flow. Each piece an artist creates is a unique reflection of who they are, personally and individually. That's what I love most about it: art isn't meant to be judged in the same way as other things. Each piece speaks in its own way.

I focus on traditional, yet contemporary art. People are drawn to pieces that resonate with them and, as times change, there's a need for new perspectives and ideas. As an artist, I see my role as pushing the boundaries of what art can be. Art isn't just about painting; it's about mixed media and exploring different forms. I incorporate my artistic background into creating a variety of things whether it's postcards, wedding backdrops, or something else entirely. It's about playing with creativity and offering something meaningful to society.

When it comes to painting, I sometimes feel it's not taken as seriously in Tobago as it should be. Our island is full of talented artists, but there aren't many opportunities to showcase that talent. We don't have the proper infrastructure to really support the arts. It would be wonderful if Tobago could unite and build something that gives artists the space they need.

One of the pieces I really enjoyed creating is "Generational Gap." It's a split image that contrasts the traditional with the contemporary. I created it for a competition focused on evolution, and this was my interpretation. At first glance, you see one image, but it's actually two different pictures merged into one. The left side of the woman's face represents our parents, with symbols like huts and the cotton that was once picked, as well as the beaded necklaces significant to



Generational Gap
2012

African ancestors. The right side of her face shows her progression into the world of work, with braided hair and a modern cityscape in the background.

This piece reflects the transitions we go through in life. As each generation passes, it's important to preserve knowledge and cultural heritage, not necessarily to practice everything as our parents did, since many things are different in the modern world, but to understand where we come from. I believe it's essential to keep that heritage alive.

Long Time
2017



Preservation
2022



Majestic Speyside
Waterwheel
2022



What is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve?

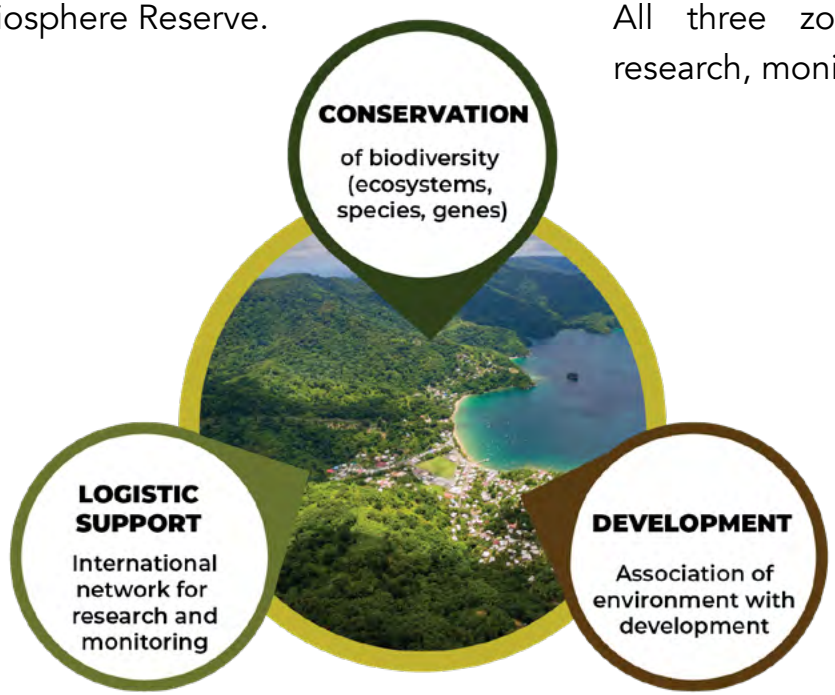
UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and seeks to build peace, ensure that each child and citizen has access to quality education, and promote cultural and natural heritage.

The Man and the Biosphere Programme is designed to help participating countries to:

- manage natural and cultural resources for the benefit of their people and the environment,
- find new approaches to economic development that are socially, culturally, and environmentally friendly,
- combine economics and education to improve wellbeing, and
- support the equitable sharing of benefits.

The Man and the Biosphere Programme is implemented in so called "Biosphere Reserves", which are designated by UNESCO upon application by a country. These areas are not "reserves" as the term is used in conservation, and laws do not change because an area becomes a Biosphere Reserve.

Biosphere Reserves are divided into three zones: a core zone (i.e., Main Ridge Forest Reserve), a buffer zone, and a development zone. The core and buffer zones are primarily responsible for nature conservation, while the development zone focuses on sustainable regional development. All three zones are involved in research, monitoring, and education.



The three functions of UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserves

The Tobago Biosphere Management Alliance

Understanding the significance of the North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve for the sustainable economic development of Tobago, the Inter-American Development Bank funded, in 2022, the preparation of an institutional and corporate governance framework for a not-for-profit / non-governmental organisation NGO that would be empowered to receive and manage substantial funding.

The resulting Tobago Biosphere Management Alliance (TOBIMA) was mandated by stakeholders to implement the North-east Tobago Biosphere Management Plan, which includes supporting the THA in the management of the Main Ridge Forest Reserve.

Once operational, TOBIMA will consist of a:
Stakeholder Council of appointed representatives: four from the THA, three from civil society, and three from the private sector; it represents the expectations of societal sectors and guides the Board regarding the overall goals of sustainable development in North-east Tobago.
Board of Experts on key areas such as sustainable financing, communication, networking, protected area management, economic development, culture, and governance. Directors of the Board are formally recruited based on a stringent and transparent recruitment process from local and international applicants. The Board translates stakeholder expectations into overall strategies and objectives, based on the North-east Tobago Biosphere Management Plan (2025), and oversees the Programme Management Unit regarding the achievement of the strategies.

Programme Management Unit consisting of programme management and subject matter experts, which are recruited by the Board. The PMU mobilises and provides resources and capacity building, and enacts the Biosphere Management Plan through the design of programmes and projects implemented by THA Divisions, NGOs, and the private sector. Furthermore, it communicates with and seeks guidance from Regional Councils, where community stakeholders have a special voice.

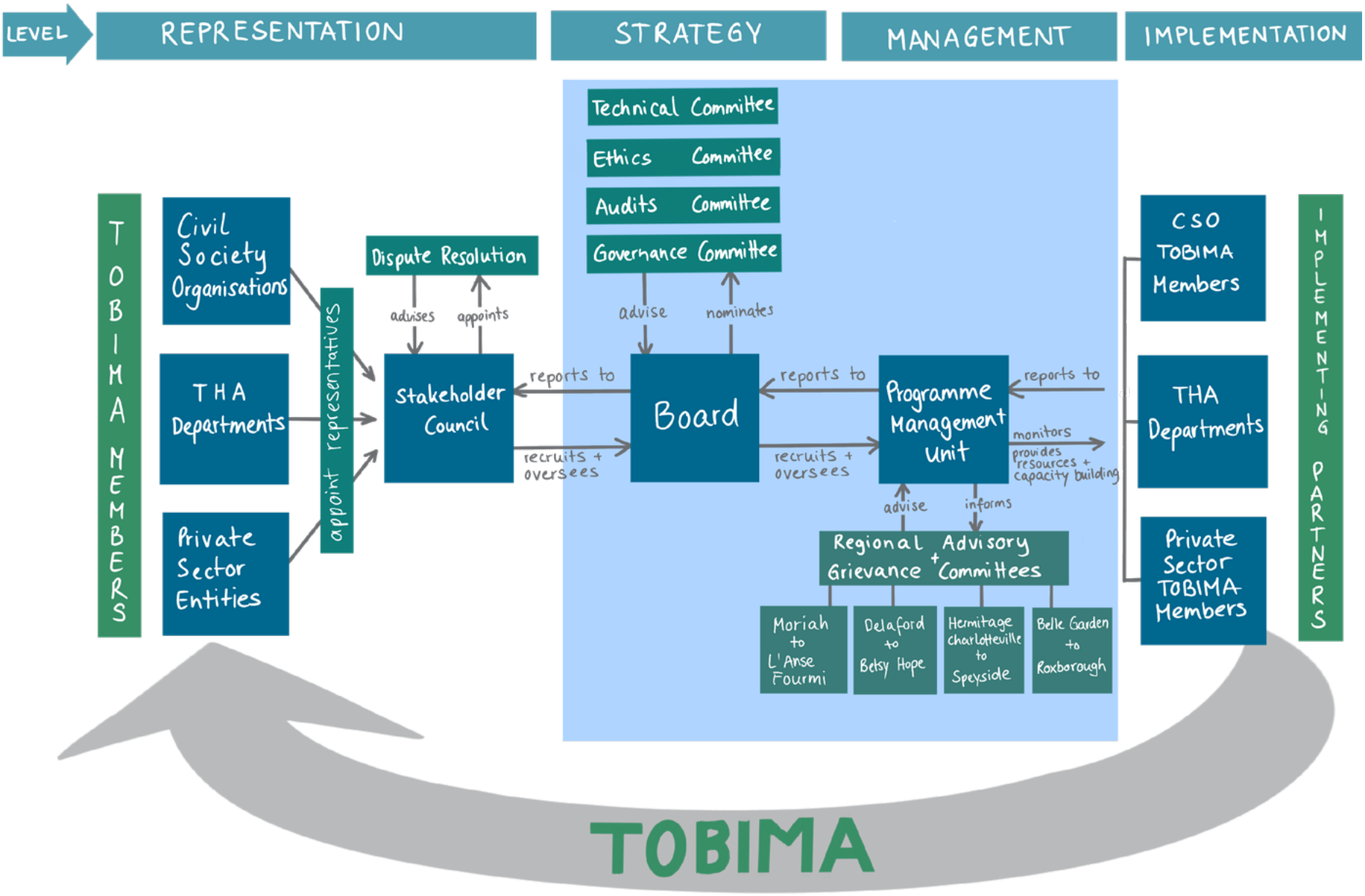


Louis D'or wetlands

TOBIMA was carefully designed to:

- provide access to such funding the THA and other civil society organisations in Tobago have currently no access to,
- attract sustainable investment and business opportunities,
- built capacity of stakeholders,
- facilitate research and knowledge exchange,
- help the THA, NGOs, and private sector to work together and achieve common goals, and
- achieve the goals of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The TOBIMA logo



The TOBIMA governance structure



Credits

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Left: Chris Thomas
Boys at Play
2022

The Hidden Art of the North-east Tobago's Biosphere Reserve

Uncover the soul of North-east Tobago with The Hidden Art of the North-east Tobago UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Beyond its lush forests, vibrant reefs, and extraordinary biodiversity lies an untold story, one of creativity deeply rooted in the island's culture and connection to nature. This exquisite collection features the works of ten talented visual artists, including painters, sculptors, and carvers, who draw inspiration from their Biosphere's landscapes, wildlife, and traditions. Through intimate interviews, the artists share their stories, revealing profound connections to their craft, culture, and the natural beauty of the Biosphere Reserve. Through vivid imagery and compelling narratives, this booklet celebrates the intersection of art and conservation, inviting you to explore a world where nature and creativity flourish in harmony. A masterpiece for lovers of art, culture, and the natural world.

North-East Tobago
Man and the Biosphere Reserve

unesco
Man and the Biosphere Programme

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT