Henry Fraser Behold article

THINGS THAT MATTER: Behold! Women’s Work: “never done” but ever better!

Henry S. Fraser

“There is something bigger than fact; the underlying spirit – all it stands for; the mood, the

vastness, the wildness.” (Emily Carr, Canadian artist and icon [1871 – 1945])

“Men resent a woman getting honour in what they consider is essentially their field.”

(Emily Carr

“As artist and ‘almost Bajan’, I am an observer and a witness – constantly on the lookout

for people who ‘speak’ to me – for the look or gesture which prods me to hang on to that

moment, their moment, in paint.” (Heidi Berger, “Almost Bajan” artist)

Don’t miss it! The Gallery of Caribbean Art in Speightstown is host to an extraordinary

and perhaps ground breaking exhibition “Behold! Women’s Work.” It’s a splendid, rich

collection of the work of a dozen Bajan or “almost Bajan” artists, as Heidi Berger puts it.

The show is Heidi’s brainchild. Not only is her own main body of work based on women –

their lives, their challenges, their beauty and strengths, and their stories, which she seeks to

read and interpret with feeling, sensuality and conviction – but by her work she seeks to re-

dress the imbalance in the recognition of women in art.

This is a much debated subject, because through the centuries there have been no women

artists to match the great male artists – Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael,

Rodin, Cezanne, Van Gogh or Rodin. Was it genetic, and something to do with biological

differences in the left brain and creative focus – perhaps the opposite of that remarkable

female ability to multi-task? Was it sheer discrimination, and part of the suppression of the

rights of women, that took the suffragettes and the Second World War to change? Or was it

simply the obligations of motherhood and child rearing?

It was not until the last century that really creative giants such as Canadian icon Emily

Carr, American artist Georgia O’Keeffe (1887 – 1986) and the British sculptor Barbara

Hepworth (1903 – 1975) gained fame. It suggests that removal of the discrimination and

the obligations of motherhood allows women artists to hold their own. Here in Barbados we

had Golde White many years ago, while Edna Manley, wife of Premier Norman Manley,

mother of Michael Manley and grandmother of Rachel, poet and author, was the doyen of

art in Jamaica. She was artist, sculptor, teacher, mover and shaker extraordinary. And our

own explosion of local art in the last 30 years has produced many performers, to whom this

exhibition opens a wonderful window, but, because of lack of space, leaves us begging for

more!

Heidi’s own work is brilliant both in content and technique. She manipulates surfaces and

with occasional collage and other devices creates textures, moods and ideas that leave us

enviously thinking “I wish I could do that”. She’s not just an artist but a philosopher and a

story teller. She’s joined by the greatly loved Alison Chapman-Andrews, “best known for

her splendid expressionist landscapes”. Alison evokes the moody and moving masterpieces

of Emily Carr of British Columbia, whom I’ve quoted above.

Heather Dawn Scott evokes the past, painting from old photographs, with a free, almost

lyrical style for her women of the “olden days”. On a larger scale they would make great

murals. Tracy Williams also paints her women with a lavish, free and colourful style.

I was

particularly attracted to the beautiful, poignant “Spirit of the Goddess” series of Lilian Sten-

Nicholson. These mysterious, spiritual and perfectly framed miniatures had the strength

of Russian icons, and worked superbly, individually or together. If I could have chosen a

Christmas gift from the show it would have been at least a pair of these precious gems.

Corrie Scott’s photos of Bajan life - Bajan women - were evocative moments in time. I

especially liked Baskets 2, the Bajan Trolly Vendor and the series Tropical Carriage –

women with loads of different kinds. Corrie has a remarkable gift for spotting the significant

– moving or still!

This column’s space doesn’t allow detailed comments on all of the work, but I have to

mention the extraordinary sculptures of Nakazzi Hutchinson. Nakazzi is the daughter of

Ikael Tafari and the brilliant Jamaican artist the late Dawn Scott, and her work – her painting

and her sculpture is every bit as innovative and brilliant as her mother’s. Patrons of Brown

Sugar restaurant will recognise her masks and the romantic mural there. Her work should be

purchased by local banks and business houses for PUBLIC appreciation. The Gallery also

has on sale a beautiful retrospective compilation (book) of some of her work to date.

Others in the show are Anne Rudder (two large, rich and dramatic textile panels), Joyce

Daniel’s multi-media works, Natalie Atkins-Hinds’s mixed media works, and Martina and

Simba Pilé – mother and daughter artists of enormous creativity.

The show is a brilliant showcase of our women’s work. It emphasises the potential of art

to enrich us all. It continues until January 15th

art and creativity, don’t miss it. Head for Speightstown and start the new year with some

creative inspiration!

Bouquets of the week: To the authors of the two books which provided my Christmas

reading – Steven Gerrard, Michael Owen and … Me, by Mike Yates with Keith Miller,

available from Miller Publishing or SOCCER FAN at Sheraton; and Down Danesbury Gap

– Echoes of Memory, by Austin Yearwood, from the Barbados Museum shop. Both are

quite splendid, in very different ways – more about them in due course …

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, so if you have the slightest interest in Bajan