Thinking Through Guyanese Women's Art: Postcolonial Nation-Building, Relational Difference and Enactments of Fugitivity

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Abstract

As host of the first Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (Carifesta) in 1972, Guyana was the location of a ground-breaking emphasis on the Caribbean as a site of cultural production situated within the context of Guyana's tumultuous postcolonial consciousness. While several male Guyanese artists of this period gained international acclaim, less attention is given to their female contemporaries who also taught and practiced art, such as Marjorie Broodhagen (1912–2000), Stephanie Correia (1930–2000), and Bernadette Persaud (b. 1946). This essay explores the roles these women played in the mission for a Guyanese national culture through art as a form of resistance and critique, considered alongside the intersections of racialized and gendered power imbalances in Guyana. Focusing on the practices of Broodhagen, Correia, and Persaud, their presence in cornerstone cultural events illustrates Guyanese women's cultural productivity and the pathways they paved for contemporary women artists. Guided by Caribbean feminist theories, such as "relational difference" and the Indo-Caribbean feminist praxis of "seeing difference," both of which acknowledge the unique, incommensurable experiences of people across the Caribbean, Broodhagen, Correia and Persaud will be centred as integral agents in the emergence and expression of Guyana's arts sector. Their practices are explored through fugitivity as a method, drawn from the Black radical tradition, to examine how both their actions and their artworks constitute a fugitive praxis. Despite the proliferation of women's art practice during this time, scholarship considering the role of women in Guyanese artistic culture is limited, particularly as it relates to the wider political context of post-independence. It is important to acknowledge Guyana as an active art-producing body in the Caribbean that women are a part of, as well as exposing the residuals left by colonizing bodies and centring women's creativity in the face of sexual and gender-based violence.

Biography

Xandr Vickers is a first-year student in the Master's of Art and Architectural History program and the Graduate Diploma in Curatorial Studies at Carleton University. Xandr completed their Bachelor of Arts in Art History at Carleton University in June of 2025, but decided to remain at Carleton for the valuable networks the School for Studies in Art and Culture provided. They are interested in intersectional feminist theories and how they may be applied to art-historical discourse and to women's art practices. They have been fortunate to complete an undergraduate practicum at the Ottawa Art Gallery and are currently completing another practicum with them at the graduate level, which has led them to consider a thesis on historical Canadian women's art.

As the host of the first Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (Carifesta) in 1972, Guyana was the location of a ground-breaking emphasis on the Caribbean as a site of cultural production, involving several acclaimed male Guyanese artists.[1] Less attention has been given to their female contemporaries who also taught and practiced art at the time of this event, such as Marjorie Broodhagen (1912–2000), Stephanie Correia (1930–2000), and Bernadette Persaud (b. 1946), despite their participation in various cornerstone cultural events including and beyond Carifesta. The proliferation of artistic culture in Guyana also cannot be separated from the embedded tensions between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese peoples on individual and organizational levels as they emerged in post-independence Guyana.[2] It is for that reason that an exploration of the roles the aforementioned women played in the move towards a distinct Guyanese art, whether through resistance or critique, and the pathways they paved for other female artists must be considered alongside the intersections of racialized and gendered power imbalances in Guyana.

Many Caribbean studies scholars have argued that the ethno-political tensions in Guyana obscure the "broader geopolitical events and imperialist interests" that sought the re-inscription of a "colonial political formation" in a newly independent Guyana.[3] The resultant political landscape saw the United States and Britain deferring independence until 1966 to ensure continued control through the People's National Congress (PNC), led by Afro-Guyanese Forbes Burnham, with suspected rigged elections and political violence that perpetuated colonially constructed divisions over the course of his leadership from 1964 to 1985.[4] The need for a fundamental restructuring rather than integration of oppressed populations into pre-existing structures is made clear in the articulation by professor of philosophy Daniel Loick as inevitably leading to "a reproduction of domination, since these institutions are not neutral."[5] Within this climate, the 1966 and 1970 Caribbean Writers and Artists Conferences held in Guyana saw Burnham as the head of government asserting his dedication to arts and literature in the mission for a Caribbean cultural revolution.[6] Formed in 1948, the Working Peoples Art Class had

[1] Adrienne Rooney, "Cartographies of Kinship in the Caribbean Festival of Arts," in *The Routledge Companion to African Diaspora Art History,* ed. Eddie Chambers (New York: Routledge, 2024), 309, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003295129-25.

[2] Rooney, "Cartographies of Kinship," 312; Ramaesh Joseph Bhagirat-Rivera, "Between Pan-Africanism and a Multiracial Nation: Race, Regionalism and Guyanese Nation-Building Through the Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts (CARIFESTA), 1972," *Interventions (London, England)* 20, no. 7 (2018): 1023-1024, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2018.1487798.

[3] Shayna Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference: Racial Gendered Violence and Dispossession in Guyana," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 23, no 3 (2019): 22, https://doi.org/10.1215/07990537-7912298.

[4] Bhagirat-Rivera, "Between Pan-Africanism and a Multiracial Nation," 1024.

[5] Daniel Loick, "Fugitive Freedom and Radical Care: Towards a Standpoint Theory of Normativity," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 51, no. 6 (2025): 983, https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537231185954.

[6] Bhagirat-Rivera, "Between Pan-Africanism and a Multiracial Nation," 1024-1025.

provided basic arts training for a generation of influential Guyanese artists, many of whom were active in the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) and present at the Caribbean Writers and Artists Conference, such as Stanley Greaves, Aubrey Williams, Donald Locke, Philip Moore and Denis Williams.[7] The prominence of these men in the mission towards a distinct Caribbean culture, within which Guyana might find its own national culture, begs the question of where female Guyanese intellectuals, artists, and writers were during these Conferences?

From their inception in 1966, which began with informal meetings in the homes of CAM's foundational members, there were English-born women involved, such as Edna Manley and Anne Walmsley, the former an advocate of the nationalist Jamaican art movement and the latter an attendant of informal CAM meetings since 1967.[8] Notably, the Guyanese-born Doris Monica Wellcome married Edward Kamau Brathwaite in 1960, and it was in the couple's London apartment that the Caribbean Writers and Artists Conference was formulated.[9] In addition, Guyanese historian Elsa Goveia had mentored Brathwaite at the University of the West Indies, and was the keynote speaker to open the first CAM conference in late 1967.[10] The presence of these women among others from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and elsewhere confirms that Caribbean women were involved since the earliest inception of these conventions and the CAM, although it also points to a uniquely feminized form of labour by hosting congregations of intellectuals in the homes of its founding members. Considering the limited presence of Caribbean women in these events, Natalie Hopkinson has pointed out that for all the advancements in elevating pan-Caribbean and Afrodiasporic culture—which were critical in engaging decolonizing narratives—this variety of "scholar-activism" possessed "gender-blind spots," drawing upon Nanjala Nyabola's framing of man-Africanism, a term she uses to emphasize the masculinist militarization of the pan-African movement, and its lack of concern for issues in the domestic realm.[11]

In 1988, the retrospective exhibition held by the Guyanese Women Artists Association (GWAA) asserted that many women were practicing and teaching art decades before independence, the catalogue presenting a directory of over a hundred women producing art in

[7] Anne Walmsley, *Art in the Caribbean: An Introduction* (London: New Beacon Books, 2010): 133, 134.

[8] Veerle Poupeye, "From the Archives: Ideas About Art and Postcolonial Society: Part 1," Veerle Poupeye, May 3, 2019, https://veerlepoupeye.com/2019/05/03/from-the-archives-ideas-about-art-and-postcolonial-society-part-1/.; Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966-1972: A Literary & Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992): xx.

[9] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 39, 43.

[10] Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement*, 97.

[11] Natalie Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled: Six Dissidents, Five Continents, and the Art of Resistance* (New York: The New Press, 2018): 64.

Guyana between 1928 and 1988.[12] Using the catalogue as a launching point, the kinship networks and knowledge-generating spaces formed by painter Marjorie Broodhagen, ceramicist Stephanie Correia, and painter Bernadette Persaud affirm their practices as significant to arts culture in Guyana.[13] Rather than taking a solely pluralist stance on Guyanese culture, the artwork and practice of the aforementioned women will be considered through a relational yet distinctive lens, and examine how they enact various methods of fugitivity.

While the celebration of Afro-Caribbean culture in a time of widespread decolonization initiatives were significant, there were structural hurdles that impacted this mission and complicated ethno-racial as well as gendered divisions in Guyanese society. Caribbean and transnational feminist studies professor Alissa Trotz argued that the entrenched divide between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese peoples sees a deadlock ensuring the marginalization of other racial-ethnic groups, namely Indigenous peoples and East Asian descended Guyanese, alongside Afro- and Indo-Guyanese women and children.[14] These entangled subjectivities may be considered overlapping unfreedoms that are incommensurable for the direct impacts they have on these groups, yet are interrelated under the legacy of colonial and imperialist logics. As a result, these subject positions will be examined alongside fugitivity as method, drawn from the Black radical tradition that theorizes fugitivity as a generative and relational practice of "imagining the world otherwise," in subversive gestures towards "the not-yet status of freedom."[15] In their article introducing this analytical approach, authors Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton advance three methods of fugitive practice that enact "alternative politics, social relations, and forms of cultural expression," being knowledge-making, kin-making, and place-making, each of which may be generated through artistic production.[16]

As indicated by Trotz and reiterated by Caribbean and feminist studies scholar Angelique Nixon, the Caribbean region remains "haunted by legacies of colonialism and dominant norms" that sustain particular socio-cultural practices and attitudes relating to gender, sexuality, race and

[12] Nasha Z. Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana, 1928-1988: A Historical Perspective*, vol. 88/3, Barbados: Women & Development Unit, Extra-Mural Dept, U.W.I. (1988): 7.

[13] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 8.

[14] Alissa Trotz, "Between Despair and Hope: Women and Violence in Contemporary Guyana," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 8, no. 1 (2004): 2, https://doi.org/10.1215/-8-1-1.

[15] Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and Alex A. Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method:' An Introduction to the Special Issue," *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 22, no. 5 (2023): 1263, https://doi.org/10.7202/1107308ar.

[16] Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'"1261, 1264, 1266.

ethnicity.[17] Anthropologist Brackette Williams uses similarly spectral language by referring to the "ghost of Anglo-European hegemony" that continues to "inform [the Guyanese] ideological struggle to selectively reconstruct and revitalize elements of their diverse traditions."[18] In further tracing the apparitions of Western dominance, Williams also points to eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideologies of nationalism that demanded an individual's ultimate loyalty be given over to the nation.[19] This is indicative of the deep structural forms which a journey towards national culture might reproduce systems of colonial domination and reveal the ghost of hegemony. It also resembles the evocation applied to fugitive freedom by Loick, in that freedom was central to much of Western philosophy yet compatible with multiple forms of unfreedom.[20]

Among other Caribbean feminist scholars, Shanya Cordis has emphasized how the "nation-building project is inherently heteropatriarchal and gendered," with attention to subjugation of Black and Indigenous women demonstrating "the connections between the nation, the territory of the body, and gendered colonial dispossession".[21] She posits that gender-based and sexual violence "may be better understood as particular yet deeply imbricated racial positions" through what she theorizes as "relational difference".[22] This is a pliable web of intersection that sees stereotypes of the Black woman, the Indian woman, and the Indigenous woman in the Caribbean as "related, but not entirely analogous" in their sexual-racial assemblages, much like the histories and legacies between slavery, indentureship, and dispossession.[23] In congruency with this consideration, the Indo-Caribbean feminist praxis put forward by Nixon of "seeing difference" also adheres to the acknowledgement of shared, yet distinct structural positions, which embrace the realities of unique experiences, people, bodies, landscapes, and identities expressed in the art of Indo-Caribbean women.[24]

Described by curator and arts professor Grace Aneiza Ali in an analysis of contemporary Guyanese women's art, she proposes "staying in place" or "rootedness" as an act of agency,

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[17] Angelique Nixon, "Seeing Difference: Visual Feminist Praxis, Identity, and Desire in Indo-Caribbean Women's Art and Knowledge," in *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought*, eds. Lisa Outar and Gabrielle Jamela Hosein (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016): 176, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55937-1_11.

[18] Brackette F. Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle* (Durham and London: Duke U Press, 1991), 257.

[19] Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins*, 16.

[20] Loick, "Fugitive Freedom and Radical Care," 974-975.

[21] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 24.

[22] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 19.

[23] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 26.

[24] Nixon, "Seeing Difference," 173-174; Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 19.

particularly for women, seeing as the socio-cultural climate is one of high out-migration for women pursuing alternatives to financially support their families.[25] With economic crises that saw worsening conditions under the PNC government through the 1970s, the neglect of social services and physical infrastructure facilitated gendered consequences with high levels of female emigration and unemployment.[26] The inclination towards migration in the face of political and economic instability that had consequences for the home makes visible a feminist analysis amplified by Trotz of the household as "a locus of political activity," or at the least as inseparable from it.[27] This is compelling when considering that the CAM and Caribbean Writers and Artist Conferences were conceptualized in the home prior to publicization. The act of staying in place constitutes a fugitive method in its subversive usage of mobility and geography, particularly for women striving to find alternative methods to care for kin—however that is not to say that migrating is not an agentic act.[28]

One of the most widely recognized women in Guyana's early arts scene was Marjorie Broodhagen of Dutch and Indigenous ancestry, who was foundational to the proliferation of women's artistic practice in Guyana by encouraging the exhibition of women's arts for decades.[29] Early in her career, a scholarship brought Broodhagen to the United States to study as both artist and art teacher, and later to Europe for further arts courses.[30] Always returning to Guyana, Broodhagen's practice of teaching and making art is situated within the networks of 'national culture' formation, since she was an exhibiting artist in *Carifesta '72 International Art Exhibition* with five paintings.[31] Of those included, her 1961 watercolour, *The Gossips,* portrays three rural East Indian women, likely market venders, and has been a part of the Department of Culture's national collection since at least 1972.[32] This painting was also made into a postcard for the inaugural Carifesta, creating tension between the presence of East Indian women in promotional material concurrent with the boycott of the festival by several Indo-Guyanese

[25] Grace Aneiza Ali, "Women, Art, and Activism in Guyana," *Women, Gender, and Families of Colour* 9, no. 1 (2021): 111, https://doi.org/10.5406/womgenfamcol.9.1.0102.

[26] Trotz, "Between Despair and Hope," 5.

[27] Alissa Trotz, "Gender, Ethnicity and Familial Ideology in Georgetown, Guyana: Household Structure and Female Labour Force Participation Reconsidered," *European Journal of Development Research* 8, no. 1 (1996): 249, https://doi.org/10.1080/09578819608426657.

[28] Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'" 1260.

[29] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 18.

[30] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 20-21.

[31] Ron Savory, ed., *Carifesta '72: International Art Exhibition* (Georgetown: National History and Arts Council, 1972): 20-21.

[32] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 18; Savory, *Carifesta '72*, 21.

organizations.[33] The work's commodification into a postcard demonstrates the convergence of the racialized, gendered body being used to articulate the national imaginary of plurality.[34]

Nonetheless, Broodhagen's practice contests the centrality of "man-Africanism" within the pan-Caribbean, forming extensive relational networks with women of various ethnicities and encouraging them to exhibit their artwork. This could be argued as an enactment of a Caribbean feminist praxis of "seeing difference," in that she recognized the dynamic realities of Caribbean people and identities, encouraging the production of visual arts to express these experiences and knowledge bases rather than imposing a particular teaching agenda.[35] In her art, she was inspired by the mannerisms, expressions and dress of East Indian women from the locality in which she grew up, and incorporated Indigenous petroglyph forms in several other paintings.[36] After her retirement from teaching in 1970, she began organizing arts and crafts exhibitions intended to encourage isolated young women to exhibit their artwork.[37] These exhibitions initially began as a solely Guyanese undertaking, but over time the wives of men working in Guyana became involved.[38]

Broodhagen's publicization of other Guyanese women's art practices re-enforces the assertion from Trotz that "the household cannot be abstracted from the external environments," constituting a feminist praxis by seeking to collapse the private and public sectors and uplifting the value of women's artwork.[39] Furthermore, the encouragement of art-making and facilitating relations between Guyanese and expatriate women constitutes a fugitive practice by forming alternative social relations whether these women remained in Guyana or not, to establish spaces for female creativity and aesthetic production on a collective scale. From the amplification of women's artistic output in alternative spaces to the creation of the GWAA, of which Broodhagen was the first president, her dedication to nurturing women's art practices in Guyana indicate the constant struggle towards freedom for the gendered subject.[40]

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[33] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 20; Bhagirat-Rivera, "Between Pan-Africanism and a Multiracial Nation," 1032-1033.

[34] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 24.

[35] Nixon, "Seeing Difference," 174.

[36] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 18, 22-23.

[37] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 21.

[38] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 21.

[39] Trotz, "Gender, Ethnicity and Familial Ideology in Georgetown, Guyana," 250.

[40] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 12; Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'"1263.

A close contemporary of Broodhagen, the Arawak-Portuguese potter Stephanie Correia was a revolutionary in ceramics. Drawing on motifs from Indigenous basketry imparted to her by her father, Correia was highly regarded for her archival and community research to honour the designs she would incorporate into ceramics.[41] Additionally, as Correia produced pottery with materials sourced from the sand and clay belt regions of Guyana, there were no glazing supplies readily available, inciting her experimentation with various clays.[42] This led to the recovery of a white and cream slip she would develop into black and brown, and then other colours that suited the clays used by Indigenous peoples.[43] Through innovating technical solutions while incorporating ancestral designs, Correia's ceramics demonstrate a practice of cultural sovereignty by bridging Indigenous knowledge with contemporary cultural production. Correia also revitalized the creation of vessels used by tribes of Guyana through studying the rim profiles of their pottery, producing specific cooking pots known as buck pots, and long-necked goblets.[44]

This is further enacted as sovereign in her sharing the rediscovered and newly invented techniques with her children, and other women.[45] For example, between 1979 and 1981, Correia trained a collective of twelve "housewives" in Georgetown on a voluntary basis, the group later forming the Lama Craft Group with a shop in the urban center.[46] Encouraging homemaking women to produce and sell art presents a similar initiative to that of Broodhagen, and a particular bridging of the interior and exterior dimensions in Guyanese society. From a study undertaken in Georgetown, Trotz notes how "ethnicity differentiates experiences of gender" in relation to the "household-labour force nexus" through structural and ideological constraints, and that women in the labour force who made the highest income were self-employed.[47] By teaching women pottery-making, Correia aided in their establishment of monetary sovereignty, offering alternative methods to financially support families with the introduction of "home-based income earning activities" that simultaneously invigorated Indigenous aesthetics and knowledge bases in a fugitive operation.[48] Through her study and visitations with Indigenous communities in Guyana, the knowledge generated and recovered by Correia constitutes an enactment of fugitivity as method, forming collectives that present alternative spaces to the formal centers of

[41] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 28.

[42] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 29.

[43] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 29.

[44] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 28.

[45] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 29.

[46] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 30.

[47] Trotz, "Gender, Ethnicity and Familial Ideology in Georgetown, Guyana," 251-253, 270.

[48] Trotz, "Gender, Ethnicity and Familial Ideology in Georgetown, Guyana," 265.

knowledge-making and aesthetic expression, and further forms undisciplined kinship networks by sharing the recovered techniques and designs with "housewives."[49]

In addition, Correia produced household items such as cups, tea sets, vases, and other objects, incorporating Indigenous motifs while rearticulating them with her own flair.[50] As a result, her work retains a poignant intersection between knowledge generation as a fugitive practice, cultural production as a move towards cultural sovereignty, and the political being inseparable from the household. By selling her dishware, the Indigenous forms derived from petroglyphs and oral histories would infiltrate the homes of those who purchased them, and be used to foster hospitality for one's houseguests. The significance of her ceramics as vehicles of hospitality is worth noting, as Williams has pointed out the importance of hospitality through offering or serving food in many Guyanese social interactions, mentioned in a case study of an interethnic marriage ceremony in rural Guyana.[51] Correia's works thus occupied Guyanese households and the national collection, which further blurs the distinctions between craft and art, and domestic and political. Considering once again the female spouses of founders of the CAM such as Doris Brathwaite who hosted gatherings of male intellectuals, the household can hardly be interpreted as a purely feminized and domestic space. Rather, its configuration aligns more with Trotz's assertion as a centre of political activity where relations are nurtured and politically-oriented movements are born.

Much like Broodhagen, Correia was oriented towards a more local and community-based practice of teaching and making art, holding the strong conviction that "mutual interaction provides a source of growth," demonstrating her affinity for kin-making.[52] Her innovation also caught the attention of the Guyanese government, who purchased four of her paintings exhibited in Carifesta of 1972 for the national collection.[53] Correia was also awarded the national Medal of Service in 1980 for her outstanding ceramic production and facilitation of craft making in Guyana, which further entangled her artistic practices with nationalist structures.[54] What's more, in 1981, a terracotta vase made by Correia was presented to Queen Elizabeth by Forbes Burnham in honour of the marriage between Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, further embedding Correia's work in a complex web of imperialist interests, a Guyanese national imaginary, and her

[49] Gross-Wyrtzen and Moutlon, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'" 1264.

[50] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 28.

[51] Williams, *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins*, 239.

[52] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 30.

[53] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 30.

[54] Haniff, *Sixty Years of Women Artists in Guyana*, 30-31.

own localized practice.[55] Cordis has argued how "Indigenous spaces and bodies are central to how the nation imagines itself to itself," and the same may be said of Indigenous designs put into ambivalent positions between nationalistic interests and cultural sovereignty.[56] As an Arawak-descended woman, the absorption of her artwork into the national cultural consciousness also reflects the assertion that recognition, as argued by Indigenous scholars, "merely masks the (settler) colonial imperative for land and territory."[57]

Between the work of Broodhagen and Correia, both of whom traversed beyond Guyana's borders to cultivate their practice and taught other women, a contestation of the divide between domestic and political, or interior and exterior, is made. This assertion can be further detected in the paintings of Bernadette Persaud, an Indo-Guyanese artist, teacher, activist and self-defined troublemaker.[58] Mentored by notable men such as Denis Williams at the E. R. Burrowes School of Art, founded in 1975, Persaud was set to be a part of their first graduating class.[59] However, she had been reported to the school's authorities for participating in meetings of the Working People's Alliance (WPA) led by Afro-Guyanese historian and activist Walter Rodney, and rather than stay away from the organization and submit her thesis, she walked out.[60] By holding strong to her convictions, her refusal to concede to the PNC government's demands and departing the Burrowes School of Art exemplifies a practice of fugitive freedom through mobility and a politics of refusal.[61] Studies of fugitivity have historically involved subversive and unauthorized movement as a tactic of survival, and although Persaud may not have necessarily entered a 'fleeing state,' she was subject to extensive surveillance resulting from her proximity to Rodney, leading her to flee government impositions rather than give up her imagining of an otherwise.[62]

A similar incident occurred in the aftermath of Rodney's death in 1980, which has long been considered a political assassination, wherein Persaud received a letter from the Guyanese education minister—then Forbes Burnham himself—declaring that she would be removed from

[55] "Stephanie Correia (1930-2000) - Vase, 1981," Royal Collection Trust. Accessed March 4, 2026, https://www.rct.uk/collection/92677/vase.

[56] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 32.

[57] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 23.

[58] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 22.

[59] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 24.

[60] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 24.

[61] Loick, "Fugitive Freedom and Radical Care," 977; G. Lesutis and M. Kaika, "Infrastructured Bodies: Between Violence and Fugitivity," *Progress in Human Geography* 48, no. 4 (2024): 468, https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325241232156.

[62] Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'" 1260-1261.

her teaching position if she did not transfer to the hinterlands, away from her family.[63] Yet again, Persaud remained rooted in her principles and walked off the job, continuing to produce and write about art, so much so that she received Guyana's National Award in Art in 1985, the year of Burnham's death.[64] The decision to leave behind her diploma and teaching position and risk economic hardship rather than concede to the increasingly authoritarian government demonstrates a fugitive praxis of making unauthorized moves, despite the continued hyper-surveillance she faced. Persaud also demonstrated a rooted-in placeness not only geographically, remaining in Guyana where she still resides, but through her adherence to her convictions despite the threats levied against her.

Her noteworthy series *Gentlemen in the Garden* began under these conditions, critiquing the increased militarization of Guyanese society under the guise of vibrant rainforest and garden-like backdrops, through which the silhouettes of military men in uniform blend into vegetation.[65] Created while Persaud was being surveilled and threatened, this series is the product of a fugitive freedom wherein the artist strove to continue making life after having witnessed British rule, Afro-Guyanese leadership, and Indo-Guyanese leadership.[66] Fugitive freedom is described as contestatory by Loick, wherein it illuminates and critiques the "violent justifications of dominant conceptions of freedom," providing a mode of analysis for the way in which *Gentlemen in the Garden* challenges the militarization of Guyanese society.[67] As pointed out by Hopkinson, changes in political leadership of Guyana have not concluded these issues, as in an echo of the words of Cordis and Loick, "the key players merely change collars under each administration."[68]

Nixon draws from Indo-Caribbean feminist scholarship that argues Asian influences through the region have remained relegated to the realm of the private, making Persaud's exterior gardenscapes reflexive of the policing of her own body, which the government had attempted to force into the hinterlands.[69] Persaud challenges the colonial packaging of the Caribbean as a tropical paradise through the tourist industry, presenting vibrant landscapes of covert critique and shrouding the realities of militarization in vegetation that subverts colonial

[63] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 25.

[64] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 26.

[65] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 25.

[66] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 21.

[67] Loick, "Fugitive Freedom and Radical Care," 977.

[68] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 27.

[69] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 26; Nixon, "Seeing Difference," 177.

ideation of the region.[70] As her more recent work has reoriented towards challenges veiled by Hindu mysticism, her enactment of spiritual searching for an otherwise may too be considered a fugitive practice of struggling towards freedom under the persistent, violent infrastructural forces of modern capitalism.[71]

Through their practice of producing and teaching art, Broodhagen, Correia and Persaud each enact fugitive practices in "shared, yet distinct" ways, contesting the heteropatriarchal imperialist nation building project even as they were implicated in it, whether through involvement in Carifesta 1972 as is the case with Broodhagen and Correia, or by association with the WPA as with Persaud.[72] These women foregrounded artistic practice and relationality rather than the inherently masculinist mission of attaining national sovereignty, as was being moved towards by preeminent male thinkers and artists, thus constituting relational networks of difference and forming undisciplined spaces of knowledge-making. The involvement of women within the artistic circles occupied by their male contemporaries establishes their connection and contributions to national culture building projects, but does not determine the absolutes of their artistic work. The primacy of their practices is located in the foundation of alternate spaces of female creativity, expressions of and appreciation for the unique lived experiences of women across racial boundaries, and challenges to the heteropatriarchal nationalist mission that solidify their art as vehicles for fugitivity as method.

[70] Nixon, "Seeing Difference," 178.

[71] Hopkinson, *A Mouth is Always Muzzled*, 27; Gross-Wyrtzen and Moulton, "Toward 'Fugitivity as Method,'" 1263.

[72] Cordis, "Forging Relational Difference," 19.

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