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**Curatorial Multivocality through Caribbean Collaborations:  
A Conversation with Holly Bynoe, Annalee Davis and Katherine Kennedy**

Curatorial approaches across the Caribbean region have often been vehicles for challenging and dismantling exclusionary global frameworks in visual art engagement. From breaking the barrier of marginal international visibility of artists of colour, to questioning the relevance of white cube spaces in effectively supporting the visual inquiries of Caribbean artists, curatorship as praxis in the Caribbean is as malleable and diverse as the region itself. Nestled within this, have been artist-led platforms in the Anglophone Caribbean, such as Fresh Milk, ARC Magazine and Sour Grass, and the collaborative projects that stem from them. Such initiatives have arguably endeavoured to engage diverse archipelagic connections and expand self-determination in Caribbean visual languages, exploring new approaches to curatorship.

ARC Magazine was established in 2010 by Holly Bynoe and Nadia Huggins, who described the publication as focusing on a collection of works by contemporary visual and literary artists practicing in the Caribbean and its Diaspora. Spanning eight print issues and approximately 4,500 online articles written by a variety of Caribbean creatives and thinkers, ARC became a key repository for connecting the vast variety of voices in Caribbean and diasporic cultural landscapes. The launch of such a nucleus coincided with the recent establishment of artist-led initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean, such as Alice Yard in Trinidad and Tobago, NLS Kingston in Jamaica, PopupStudios: International Center for The Visual Arts in The Bahamas and Fresh Milk in Barbados. This heralded a new era of artistic engagement, one that Therese Hadchity (2020) has described as the rise of ‘alternative’ spaces that often generate their own ideologies as forms of activism, mostly oppositional to government or institutional operatives in the local arts. However, Hadchity acknowledges the risks of these spaces as alienating sectors of

the local arts community in favour of regional or international collaborations. How then, can Caribbean regional connections strive to strengthen the local visual arts context?

It can be positioned that one of these alternative spaces, Fresh Milk, sits in the context of an already somewhat fragmented visual arts sector/milieu in Barbados. It was created out of the perception by founder Annalee Davis that there was no tangible space for local contemporary visual artists, particularly recent graduates of a BFA programme at the Barbados Community College, to expand their art practice and be supported to continue creating art. Davis had a space, a studio attached to her house on a former plantation that is now a dairy farm, which has housed the Fresh Milk platform since its inception. Negotiating imperial remnants in Anglophone Caribbean cultural spaces is a key consideration to foster open exchange and critical inquiry into decolonial practices. Davis' ongoing vision is to dismantle the gatekeeping that is traditionally associated with plantation sites, and open up the landscape itself for critical inquiry through visual arts, archaeology and botany.

When Fresh Milk officially launched on August 13th 2011, it seemed to embrace this decentralization of space, hosting components that became almost a blueprint for the mandate of the organization that followed. There was a collaborative mixed media exhibition by Projects and Space, a collective founded by Barbadian artist Sheena Rose. There was a screening of experimental film and new media works from across the Caribbean; and there was a trans-Caribbean discussion on contemporary art between Fresh Milk founder Annalee Davis and ARC Magazine founders Holly Bynoe and Nadia Huggins. Issues such as the creation of ARC, and its relevance towards the metamorphosis of art in the Caribbean were covered. However, the site of Fresh Milk on a former plantation still held remnants of trauma for some of the local arts community, who over the years would respond by choosing not to support events, or even creating an art installation that articulated their rejection of the space. Despite navigating these sometimes contested terrains, the team behind ARC Magazine and Fresh Milk – Holly Bynoe, Annalee Davis and Katherine Kennedy, began to develop integrated, collaborative programming that sought to better connect contemporary visual arts in the Caribbean at all levels of engagement and discussion.

Caribbean Linked is one of the projects arising out of these collaborations. Established in 2012, it is a Caribbean wide artist residency, bringing together creatives to work in the studios and grounds of Ateliers '89 in Aruba (the oldest art education organization in the Dutch Caribbean) run by founding director, Elvis Lopez. It declares a manifesto that includes functioning as “an act of resistance against failing political and resolute nationalistic systems. It raises issues of collective futures by discussing the survival of artists and the sustainability of local and intra-regional creative communities.”<sup>1</sup> As writer-in residence for Caribbean Linked III in 2015, one of the striking aspects of participating in this project for me was the critical inquiry into “Caribbeanness” that arose in the space, as artists formed intangible connections that transcended linguistic boundaries. For example, I wrote on the popular Papiamentu term “Kiko ta Kiko”

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<sup>1</sup> “About”, Caribbean Linked <https://caribbeanlinked.com/about/> last accessed 15/10/2021

“This informal Papiamentu greeting for ‘what’s up?’ translating directly into what is what? is usually answered with suave, meaning chill, or cool. Papiamentu as a language encompasses the creolized Caribbean – a mix of Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, African and English – and the exchange definitely emulates the amicable nature of the Ateliers ’89 environment, the familiarity that grew into a strong connection between the residents of Caribbean Linked III. But the question could also reflect a deeper inquiry, one that mirrors the interrogation of these residents into the Caribbean experience. What is what? What is it to come from the Caribbean? What is an island, having a background of living in more than one island, living in the diaspora? What is belonging, the experience of home? What is the sense of self, the sense of existing ‘in-between’?”<sup>2</sup>

These questions seem to reiterate and take shape in varying forms with each annual residency and exhibition, making Caribbean Linked a foundation for explorations of identity and self-determination in cross-Caribbean contexts.

Tilting Axis has been a second ongoing programme, fueled by the desire to harness “the collective power to make the arts more visible and sustainable in ways resonating with our lived realities in the Caribbean.”<sup>3</sup> The annual meetings of arts professionals and creatives aims to centre the Caribbean as a key hub and stakeholder in the global contemporary art scene, to provide a flow of art ideas outwards from the region to the world, rather than the region always being the recipient of global ideas.

In the decade that has followed since ARC and Fresh Milk were established, Annalee and Holly, alongside Katherine Kennedy have developed a kind of curatorial multivocality in the transnational collaborative projects that they champion, such as Caribbean Linked and Tilting Axis. Curatorial multivocality can be described as the decentralization of authority in developing curatorial frameworks, in favour of approaches that seek to include multiple perspectives on an equal plane. In museology, this practice is articulated through participatory models of curatorship such as Dewdney et. al’s (2013) post critical-museology. Post-critical museology functions on the basis of collaboration with communities, application of work in a transdisciplinary manner, and work that is reflexive, constantly revisiting the accountability of both the practice and the ideas that inform that practice.

In 2020, this ethos of multivocality evolved into the founding of another arts enterprise, Sour Grass, a curatorial agency aiming to provide representation for Caribbean artists through transnational partnerships. Sour Grass emphasizes its alignment with decolonial practice in arts pedagogy, as well as drawing on theories of botanical activism. In 2021, Sour Grass represented

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<sup>2</sup> N.McGuire, “Kiko Ta Kiko?”, Caribbean Linked, 2015, <https://caribbeanlinked.com/editions/caribbean-linked-iii/critical-writing/natalie-mcguire/> last accessed 15/10/2021

<sup>3</sup> Davis, “Archipelagic Affinities in an Ocean of Shifting Tides” *Sea is history: Caribbean Experiences in Contemporary Art*, 2016, p.15

nine Caribbean artists who exhibited in the Atlantic World Art Fair hosted on Artsy, and also has formed a long-term partnership with Kunststituut Melly in the Netherlands, which will involve solo exhibitions over a three-year period.

However, at the same time, ARC Magazine shut down its door completely in 2018, existing now only as its publication archive and digital fragments on third party websites. And Fresh Milk has scaled back as an organization, slowing internal programming and visible mainly through discreet projects and partnerships, and the co-running of its core programmes such as Caribbean Linked, Tilting Axis and Transoceanic Visual Exchange. The local and international residency programmes are on pause, and the future of the organization is uncertain, especially as the region continues to navigate resilience in the increase of the climate crisis and COVID-19 pandemic. Its programming since COVID includes off site and virtual engagement including the pan-Caribbean project, CATAPULT and collaborations with local artists including the upcoming Healing Arts Initiative.

As someone involved in the development of Fresh Milk programming since 2011, serving on its board from 2011-2015, and being active in projects since such as Caribbean Linked, and co-curator of Transoceanic Visual Exchange, I have experienced firsthand the enormous impact these spaces have on the arts community, as well as the challenges of sustainability. In this context, one filled with the reverent remembrance of organizations coming to a close or scaling back, combined with the optimism of those just beginning, I sat down to have a conversation with Holly, Annalee and Katherine, to reflect on the last decade of their work and discuss the possibilities of the future under their ethos of a multivocal curatorial framework of care.<sup>4</sup>

*Natalie McGuire Batson (NMB): Fresh Milk turned 10 this year, and ARC was founded 11 years ago, which just seems incredible. Could you to share some reflections you have on how these platforms have grown and shifted from their inception to today, and if this is the direction you envisioned when you first started out?*

**Holly Bynoe (HB):**

I know that when we were conceptualizing ARC Magazine, one of the first conversations we had was that nothing lasts forever. And that because the Caribbean is such a hard and at times impossible space for creativity and joy, that ARC would be this thing, and when it gets tired, it might transform into something else, but not necessarily extinguishing. So I was a little bit surprised by the way it played out, blazing in but then fading out. And there was a lot of holding on, of grieving around that process. One of the ways in which I tried to process its intention, its mission and what it did accomplish in terms of making and fortifying the network of Caribbean creatives, was through a piece “After Life” that I wrote as a performance, not as a performance artist, but it felt like this thing had to be about discipline, introspection, and reflection to speak about possibilities and ways of being beyond. And so we're not speaking about a sun setting, we

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that some responses have been slightly edited for clarity

might be speaking about a long rest, or we might be speaking about another transition /transmutation. So I think that the sort of stopping and or the closing of ARC led to all of these other openings, other possibilities, and it taught me that naivety is a beautiful thing to have. Right? And it's a beautiful thing to learn through. And coming out on the other end, I want one of the biggest lessons learned from that project, to be that the value of community is so essential in creating safe space, like a communicative and somatic space for people to touch each other, to know each other. It was profound, it certainly gave me a deeper understanding of the nuance of our space, and how we could make meaningful deep relationships. So rather than, trying to cover everything and to be everything to everyone, now the lesson is dig an inch wide, but 10,000 metres deep. And perhaps, if we start to think about the trench in that way, the trench of war, the trench of friendship, the trench of this collective Caribbean movement, then perhaps that gives me a new way to think through that closing.

**Annalee Davis (AD):** Fresh Milk became so much more than I ever anticipated it would. You would remember the very first event, Natalie, which was really an experiment. On reflection, I hoped to mitigate the loneliness for young artists that I felt coming up. I thought that if there were a nurturing space that would allow people to gather, that would add value. I never anticipated that it would have the kind of regional and international reach that it has had. And I also imagined, maybe naively, that at some point, we would have been able to get state subvention to make it sustainable. I really was hoping that we would have been able to grow out of my studio, and that we could have built studios for artists to work in, that there would be a succession plan for Fresh Milk to have been handed over to younger folks, who would have run with it. But that hasn't happened.

Early in the life of Fresh Milk, one of the first questions asked by Russell Watson, was 'is there enough critical mass for such a platform?' I think there is enough critical mass if we function transnationally. However, while there have been some collaborations and state funded grants, what has been disappointing is the inability of state mechanisms in this fiscal environment to more adequately support entities like Fresh Milk. Difficult discussions about scaling back, which we had a couple of years ago were buttressed by the realisation that maybe, as Holly said, these things have a short life, and they spawn other things even if the original vision isn't fully realised. There's also a kind of a realistic understanding about what a small place like Barbados can actually do for contemporary visual art. On a more personal level, my desire since finishing my work with the British Council in 2018 is to recommit to my own art practice.



*Figure 1 Holly Bynoe, Nadia Huggins and Annalee Davis speaking at the launch of Fresh Milk, August 2011. Photographer: Dondre Trotman. Image Courtesy Fresh Milk*

**HB:** Yeah, and I guess just responding to that as well, taking into consideration the sheer number of hours of unpaid labour that we have committed to. A few months ago I took on an exercise to do the calculation, right, and I'm ashamed to even mention the number. So I'm not going to mention the exact figure, but it's about 5000 hours, over the last five to six years. So when I was speaking about ARC territory, now, we might be entering into, 7,000 hours of just passion and labour. You just go because your will is so profound. And because you want to see transformation happen in this space. So you put a lot of other things on the backburner, and the things that might make you cynical because there's a kind of momentum you feel in that energetic moment. This is intuitive, and as a woman, I think we have the ability to birth creative projects and squeeze as much as we can from opportunities. In return, the labour is skewed, we end up damaging ourselves and having so much trauma around labour, income savviness, generational wealth and looking at the at the financial responsibilities of life. And while I'm speaking about the material realm, this is very important, the creative spirit attaches itself to something that is very ephemeral, organic, undefined and very much in the ether of inspiration. I think that this is why we sometimes become side-lined, caught up and sucked into these constructs of depletion and exhaustion.

On reflection, that relationship is healing and getting better, and I feel that we can bring this knowledge to the new projects, so we don't commit the same atrocities to self and others. It's really important because there's a lot of damage due to late stage capitalism that moved into the

creative ecologies, as artists are still very undervalued and seen as decorative, especially by the state.

**Katherine Kennedy (KK):** It's kind of interesting, to think back 10 years ago. I would have been about 21 when I came back from university, so there's always been input from three generations, with the three of us working together. We had always been social activists in a lot of senses, but I guess we all kind of entered into that space of activism and advocacy in different ways than we had before. I was probably the most naive, because I was only 21. I knew nothing, and I was just excited to come back to Barbados and see that there was something happening, because it really - and this has been expressed by a lot of people - has been a source of hope, and it has had an impact. But it's been a difficult journey. I feel differently now than I did when we first had the conversation about scaling back Fresh Milk. And because again, I'd gone from graduating straight into this thing that blew up in a way that I couldn't really have predicted. So the idea of not doing this kind of work, or giving up was very hard a couple years ago. Now it's not that I want to give it up, but I think that we're all in different places than where it started. And reflecting on this impact, a lot of the things that people are building and doing now would not have been possible without this journey. So it's humbling to even have been a part of that legacy, with everything else that's going on in the region; to know that we have all been working towards something that has made a difference.

**AD:** I know, it's encouraging to think about the relationships that have been formed personally and professionally through these various platforms that have led to other independent projects developed organically by artists. Both Fresh Milk and ARC have developed regional and international interest while it's been more challenging to do so locally, something we have been addressing within our capacity.

**HB:** I have to say, the very striking thing is that I'm an introvert. If I looked at my life in terms of being like a galaxy, I would say that I was this one infinitesimal speck and my family. When I started ARC it became expanded, in this very three dimensional way. And now when I when I close my eyes, and I think about everybody mapped out in this extraordinary web of relations, something that I can't quantify nor put a value on. Not the time or the memories, friendships and the knowledge. So much knowledge. So touching back on that word that Katherine said, the legacy, making sure that we honour the things that makes this creative space possible. And while I am in awe of it, I know that was a once in a lifetime opportunity and it would be hard to think that something like that could happen again. It was in time, of time.

It has been and continues to be an organic, easy collaboration all around, with respect and wisdom sharing and reciprocity at the core. We share candidly and honestly about the things that we observe. The working relationship, it's something that I treasure, it is so dear to me. I respect and love Katherine and Annalee very much. I feel as though I've grown, outgrown, then, grown back in and it feels like a natural ebb and flow dynamic. And that challenges me, keeps me engaged with the now and this is very important, having Katherine so close is a way for me to rise to the challenge of this moment. I read somewhere if you don't have friends in your listening

circles that are at least 10-20 years younger than you, then you are doing something wrong and need to re-evaluate. The young energy keeps my fire and hope alive.



Figure 2 Holly Bynoe, Annalee Davis and Katherine Kennedy, 2021. Image Courtesy Katherine Kennedy

**NMB:** *One of the things that becomes apparent on reflection is the multivocal cultural ecology that has arisen from the work that Fresh Milk and ARC have done. ARC has included many different voices to contribute to articles, particularly on the online platform, but also through the magazines. And Fresh Milk has several projects - Transoceanic Visual Exchange, Fresh Milk Books, the artist residencies, the My Time residencies in particular. So I wanted to inquire about the processes of generating that multivocality? Was it something that just aligned with your own ethos as practitioners? Or was it something that was a kind of conscious cultivation as a curatorial framework or a project based framework?*

**HB:** I've always been very humble about our Anglophileness, we occupy such small spaces. So coming out of academia, finishing up my Master's in 2010, I was looking at the Caribbean space

and questioning my place, art practice, return and action. I wanted for whatever action that manifested to converse with multiple people's spaces, etc. So when we sat down to create ARC it was just an implicit understanding that we would try to make this as dynamic, as broad, as inviting, as inclusive as possible. I don't use that word as a way to speak about elitism or exclusion. I use that word to speak about community. One of the things that we wanted to foster and care for was ourselves and the artists' communities. Social media and in particular Facebook was emerging and curious in 2010 when we started to ask questions, we were just trying to figure out, what is out there? Who feels like they're being seen? Who isn't being seen? Why aren't you being seen? What would you like to see happen? And then all of these inquiries gave us data that allowed us to look at the space as it was. And it was also important, because I was reading a lot, because the MFA does that to you, I was reading all of this material, and I started to think about the gaps in my knowledge and how my gaps would mirror, parallel and contradict other gaps. Nadia and I wanted to create something that was broad, energetic and multifaceted. I thought it was really important to have this comprehensive look in to see what new understandings, new visual realities were arising.

**AD:** I always felt that Fresh Milk was something that should be driven by multiple people. For example, I really love how Transcoceanic Visual Exchange has become this thing that has been guided by you, Natalie, and Katherine. Or, I loved when Amanda Haynes came on to develop Fresh Milk Books, which I'm sorry didn't have a longer spell, because that was such a generative moment where we saw artists who'd never written before starting to write book reviews. We offered several great writing workshops. I thought it was important for people to feel that Fresh Milk was a platform where they could express themselves and develop projects that they wanted to see happen. I also feel that the multigenerational component is really, really critical. I've have been mentored by younger people which is so important for me to feel connected to different generations of voices. It also has been important that Fresh Milk operates out of the site where it's located. Inspired by the idea of phytoremediation, being on a plantation, believing that spaces can change because of the work that is carried out on those spaces, have been important for me in considering the potential transformation of places and people.



*Figure 3 The Fresh Milk Books team in 2014: Kwame Slusher, Amanda Haynes, Christian Campbell, Versia Harris, and Tristan Alleyne. Image Courtesy Fresh Milk*

**HB:** Totally, I mean, collaboration is key. I come from a small space, I had to leave that space, I had to learn myself, learn about myself in a small space to communicate to a bigger space. And naturally, my creative tendencies were about trying to negotiate my position as a photographer with someone else. And that's when the natural collaboration started, whether it was a person and/or object, and/or nature, I always felt as though I had this internal dialogue with the thing in front of me, even if that thing wasn't necessarily animate. I think that transition happened when I started to become more grounded in my photography-making and felt kinship to collaborative practices, this is also deep within my curatorial praxis. It is how I work with artists, it is all very intimate, and it starts with sharing, reactions and then some kind of spontaneous movement where I'm taking in what they're saying, manifesting or understanding, something changes in them and myself and there's all this cyclic motion with the movement and elevation of ideas. You sit down at a table and what starts as a very innocuous conversation, three weeks later becomes this full blown ball of manifestation that you can see and realize and there's just so much energy, so much liberty, so much daring. To continue making and loving is the very act of not giving up on that space.



*Figure 4 ARC and NLS partnered to stage a group exhibition at (e)merge art fair in Washington, DC, 2014. Image courtesy ARC Magazine*

**AD:** I would also just add one more thing. I think the most critical thing for human beings is to feel a sense of belonging. Many of us might feel a sense of isolation for different reasons, whether it's around queerness, feeling that you're on the periphery because of race or class, or because you're working in the arts. Many of these platforms across the Caribbean have become foster homes for contemporary visual artists. Somebody recently visited Fresh Milk and said they were so happy to be in what felt like a safe space for them. It's important to create spaces where people can be who they are.

**KK:** Another thing in terms of multivocality is the blogs that we have asked artists in residence to write; it's a very simple and tangible thing, but I think it really comes out of the discussions that we're always having about archiving, and who is telling our own stories. I think people have approached the blog in different ways, but we always try to emphasize that we want it to be a space for somebody to just share their experience and their process, and their journey. I think it's important, and it feels good if, for example, you Google some of these artists' names, and their

Fresh Milk blogs are often within the first five or six hits, as opposed to a lot of artists for whom the first thing that might come up may be something someone else has written about them or, in a lot of cases for emerging Caribbean artists, they may not have that presence. I think it's been a really good starting point to build some kind of an archive around Barbadian artists, Caribbean artists, or artists interested in working within the Caribbean.

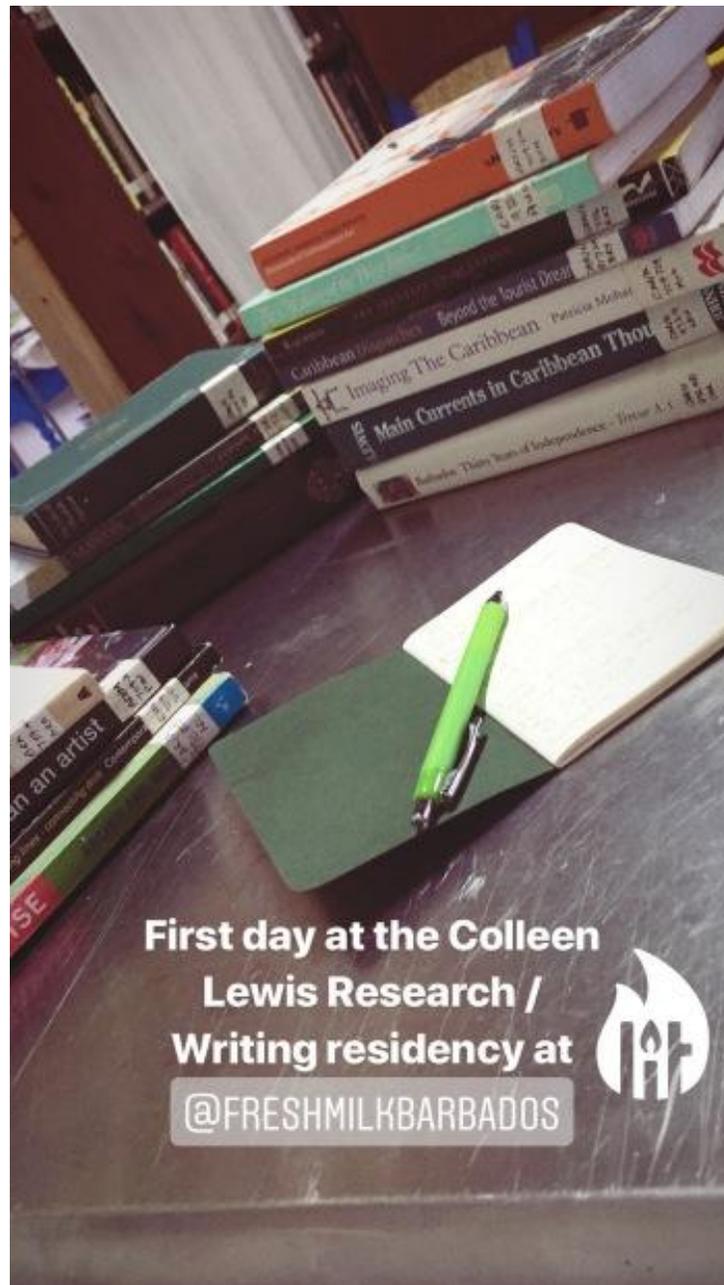


Figure 5 Image from the blog entry of local artist in residence Kia Redman, 2019. Image courtesy Fresh Milk



*Figure 6 2019 artist in residence Kia Redman during her community outreach activities at Workman's Primary School, Barbados. Photographer: Ethan Knowles. Image Courtesy Fresh Milk*

**NMB:** *So there is this overwhelming evidence of multiple projects on inclusiveness, and yet there still seems to be a lingering critique of Fresh Milk in particular as an exclusionary space. How have you been navigating that in the past in terms of the work that you do?*

**KK:** I think an external perception, and in some ways what we have struggled with internally as well, is the separation of self with organization. People often conflate Fresh Milk or Annalee Davis as one of the same, and it's something that, even within our own discussions, we try to cat ourselves or pull ourselves up on like, are we making these decisions based on what we think? Or are we seeing a bigger picture? I know how we've tried to responsibly navigate that, and I think we're still navigating it. We need to keep ourselves as accountable as we can. We can't change every perception, but we need to check in on ourselves and make sure that we're not in any way feeding into that perception, that we are trying to be as open and inclusive as possible. And that we can accept critique and take it on and make sure that what we're building is evidence in itself to say that this is not what we stand for or what we want to stand for, but that we still hear what people are saying and still are sensitive to the reasons that people may have to critique a space that's run by a white person or run out of a former plantation. If these critiques come up, it's important to not shy away from it, but to find sensitive ways of addressing it.

**NMB:** *Two of the main regional projects arising from Fresh Milk have been Caribbean Linked and Tilting Axis. Can you start by sharing how Caribbean Linked was conceptualized?*

**AD:** I would say Elvis<sup>5</sup> is one of the colleagues that I have been working with for the longest in the Caribbean. Elvis invited me to teach a drawing course in 1991 at Ateliers '89 in Aruba. I left my teaching job at the St. Michael's School in Barbados because I wanted to spend a year moving through the Caribbean and to better understanding my regional community. Elvis invited me back in 2011. And I said, well, I don't want to come in on my own. I want to bring some people with me. At that time I started to get to know Holly, and wanted to meet John Cox of Popopstudios<sup>6</sup>. Elvis invited Rocio Aranda Alvarez (USA) and Paco Barragan (Spain). And it was in that moment that we thought that what we really need is a Caribbean residency for Caribbean artists.



*Figure 7 Elvis Lopez and Annalee Davis at Ateliers '89 Aruba in 2012. Photographer: John Cox. Image courtesy Annalee Davis*

**HB:** I remember the meeting well, and it was very clear that Elvis, Annalee and I clicked immediately. And, when we left we were also deepening our relationship with the IBB<sup>7</sup> and Tirzo and David<sup>8</sup>. And it just seemed as though the environment of the Dutch Caribbean was just very different. They had art schools that want to do stuff with us. So there was a lot of excitement and it felt like flying by the seat of our pants.

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<sup>5</sup> Elvis Lopez, founder of Ateliers '89 in Aruba and key founding partner of Caribbean Linked

<sup>6</sup> Who had opened Popopstudios in The Bahamas

<sup>7</sup> Instituto Buena Vista in Curaçao

<sup>8</sup> Tirzo Martha and David Bade, founders of IBB

**KK:** Yeah, unless you're there in person, I don't think you can understand exactly what it's like to live in a space with these other people from 10 or 12 other Caribbean islands, speaking different languages, learning different things for each other. It all comes together in a very special way that you can't really anticipate. And, it is a lot of pressure, because it is an externally funded project with set outcomes, so an exhibition must happen at the end of three weeks. It does kind of add to the experience of feeling it all and supporting one another, as a group. It is a very special programme.



Figure 8 Caribbean Linked IV participating artists with Holly Bynoe and Elvis Lopez at Ateliers '89 Aruba, 2016. Image courtesy Caribbean Linked.

**NMB:** *There definitely seems to be a notion of care coming through these reflections. At larger institutions and museums, there's this kind of superficial aspect of what care is, it's almost performative. And it really, it's more about outreach, having people engage during pockets of time and then never having a kind of sustainable relationship after, whereas I find with Caribbean Linked and Tilting Axis, you have that sustainability of connections that arises out of a certain context of care for the artists in the space. So I wanted to ask each of you, which instances stand out to you in particular, that demonstrate this commitment to care?*

**HB:** I think, from the get go, our conversations revolved around this kind of generosity and care, creating something that was generative, that would allow for connections and not something that would only respond to the limitations but listen into the constellations and the configurations of

people that were coming into and under our care. We also, through Elvis, and with the support of the Ateliers '89, created this backbone and skeleton that could easily be outfitted and adapted. The foundational tenet of Caribbean Linked is looking at our space, and trying to think about the kinds of collaborations and partnerships that could allow for us to have something meaningful and challenged. And even this year, doing our virtual gathering, there is a deep sense of camaraderie and openness that has grown and is a by-product of project's merit and intent..

**KK:** I think that there's also a kind of dynamic set up where it isn't hierarchical, even if the curators and artists are at different levels of their career. There is something that feels very lateral, and like everybody's coming in with the same level of curiosity and hoping to grow from this experience. And I think that, setting it up like that, and making sure even in how the administration interacts with the artists is very important. Being on site, attending everything with them, making sure that they're taken care of, but not speaking down to them, just being very supportive. Instances where that especially comes out is in the setting up of the exhibition every year. As I mentioned, it's only three weeks; you're going on insane amounts of tours, you're trying to absorb this whole new environment of Aruba, and at the end of this, there is this tangible exhibition that has to be put out. Everybody comes together every time, even when we always think we're not going to be able to pull it off. But you do, because everybody supports one another. If your work is done, you are helping someone else finish theirs. And I think, to contrast that with the curation in some spaces, that's a very different dynamic to work within. I think that has been key to the success as to why people want to continue these relationships afterwards; you have that sense of what it is like to work with this person and care about this person's success. You want to be able to continue that, and find ways for it to grow.



*Figure 9 Jodi Minnis, Ronald Cyrille, Simone Asia and Alex Kelly working in the studios in Ateliers 89 for Caribbean Linked III, 2015. Image courtesy Caribbean Linked*

**AD:** What stands out is working together to create spaces of camaraderie, equity in the gathering of people from across the archipelago and its diaspora, to create spaces of belonging and curiosity, and fun! Also, for me, with Fresh Milk, Caribbean Linked and Tilting Axis, it's important that we make decisions on Caribbean soil, advocating for what our needs are, driving our own agenda, not have it be prescribed externally. These platforms have become magnets for people across the region and the diaspora to reconnect and grow their network.

**HB:** I want to call in the memory of the baseboard cracking at Fresh Milk.

**AD:** Oh my God, yes, the support beam at Fresh Milk broke with the weight of all of the attendees at the first Tilting Axis the in first hour of the meeting!



Figure 10 Participants in the first Tilting Axis meeting at Fresh Milk, 2015. Photographer: Sammy Davis. Image courtesy Fresh Milk

**HB:** And with that I just want to address the intimacy of projects like Tilting Axis and Caribbean Linked. So we're moving from bigger gestures to more deeper concerted efforts around one thing, and this one thing is deepening the relationship, putting our hand out to meet someone else, inviting folks into our space, and setting up a safe space for engagement, a safe space for complex conversations to happen. Essentially, we are welcoming in a group of people who feel under supported, disconnected, malnourished (in the sense of having creative food to feast on), orphaned, irrespective of where they are coming from. I think that this is something that a lot of art professionals and artists feel. So it was not only a moment to address these bigger industry challenges, but it gave us a sense of what might be possible with these meetings and gatherings and this convivial method, where you sit with somebody, you look them in the eye, form a circle, have lunch and tea, laugh, squirm, deal with your discomfort and get to the work of knowing. And here we are in the middle of a dairy farm in the middle of Barbados with the foundation breaking from the weight of it all.

**AD:** We very much wanted to have conversations with our colleagues building artist led initiatives, or working in museums, and those who we respect and care for from all around the region as well as from the UK, the USA and Brazil, in the case of the first iteration. We were committed in that initial gathering that this was to be action oriented, and we wanted something to come from this gathering. And that happened. Four more annual gatherings took place and a fellowship programme emerged.

**AD:** As you know, Caribbean Linked was virtual this year. And while it's unfortunate not to be in Aruba in person, the group has cohered quite well already so when they get together in person next year, they would have had a head start in terms of getting to know each other Caribbean Linked VI should go very well. The Tilting Axis fellowship is continuing. We've just announced our new fellows for this year, and we could potentially have more fellowships happening with different institutions. And I think those are really important. The annual meeting, while it would be lovely to do that again, it's administratively very demanding and very expensive Could we have one in 2023? Maybe?

**HB:** I think we'd have to go back to the drawing board and to see what the new needs are now that we're facing, the climate crisis....how do we become more responsible for our actions, our inaction in the world? Although the five iterations were challenging and tough to produce, the programming grew from strength to strength. I think it's also really hard to think about institutional partnerships in a region that is collapsing institutionally. We've seen reports from leading national institutions exhibiting poor governance and museum practices, rampant corruption, discriminatory, racist and misogynistic ideology and an eruption of all-around toxic work culture that has risen up with the # movements. Here, I am citing institutions like the National Gallery of Jamaica, the National Art Gallery of the Bahamas, the Mémorial ACTe and God knows what's happening with other museums and national galleries regionally as they come into the social realities of this time. If you look at it from a distant perspective there is a way in which regional institutions are operating in retrograde. Not all of course, but there is great suspicion, now more than ever, around the systemic abuse of power and the institution.

Tilting Axis is not circulating in that fashion, it is a different organism, nor can you compare it. So I think that if we can potentially think about what a gathering or a meeting will look like in two years, it will have to take into consideration all of the all of the lessons, hard learnt and otherwise. It would also have to follow true participatory and hospitality dynamics; what it means to welcome someone and really hear them, what new things will we learn about the slowness of our pandemic realities, how does labour, equity, parity, gender and sexualities come into play as we dialogue during climate collapse and the sunseting of late stage capitalism? I mean, there are so many important conversations to have.

I think it's really good that we can have this moment of pause and de-growth to question and clarify our intentionality around the Fellowship, because that feels like a tangible output as we build guidance for our lives and of course, shoring up the archives. For instance, the current Fellows, Fernando Martirena and Anadis González are from Cuba. They've never travelled outside of Cuba and are going to be going to the Netherlands to do research for three months. So how do you quantify what that experience is going to do for them?



Figure 11 Tilting Axis 2017 Fellow Nicole Smyth-Johnson in conversation with Tiffany Boyle at Tilting Axis 3 in The Cayman Islands, 2017. Photographer: Roy Wallace. Image courtesy Tilting Axis

**NMB:** *I wanted to touch on the notion of an archive, as I think that in a way is another legacy of professional projects that come out of these spaces in a way that really, there hasn't been a centralized archive like it before that has ever been accessible. In accessing information about what has happened, historically, throughout the visual arts in the Caribbean, particularly the Anglophone Caribbean, there can be instances of gatekeeping, there's a lack of material that still exists, a lot of material gets destroyed. And so I think that one of the ways that these aspects of multivocality and care are sustainable is through this archive, that people can access again and again and begin to engage with in new ways.*

**AD:** Eddie Chambers said something in the Cayman Islands (at Tilting Axis 2016), in a panel on archives. He talked about how difficult it was to find information about a Black British gallery that had shuttered, and he stressed that who has the archive has the power. This collective work demonstrates that the Caribbean is not an empty slate. In these archives that we are continually building, we demonstrate that people are thinking critically, that many things are happening across this region. This cannot be disputed and our growing archives prove that.

**HB:** Yes, it's very deliberate. It's a very deliberate action to make that recording, and to have it be of the moment, of its time. And because the archive is there, we're also able to reflect differently on the work because oftentimes, once you move away from projects there is this learning, generation and mourning. So we don't ever have to mourn that loss because in some

way the archive recalls a sound, a feeling and that embedded movement and stillness. We don't ever have to exist in states of long term grieving because the archive buttresses the absolute loss, and we have deliberately put it in its place.

***NMB:** The nature of Sour Grass is quite a different approach from these previous collaborations and projects we've been discussing, because it's of its insertion into the commercial art world. And so I wanted to ask two things. So first of all, for you to share a bit about how Sour Grass was established and the aims of the initiative, but particularly how the process has been with regards to all these values that we've been talking about from both of your practices - the values of curatorial care and multivocality - how has that translated into Sour Grass as an entity that exists in the commercial art world?*

**AD:** I would say that the conscious act of care we now consider in our work means we are finally learning from the times when we did not care for our own labor. The price we've paid has been very high in terms of the hundreds of hours of volunteering and unpaid labor working in the arts.

If through, for example, the inaugural Atlantic World Art Fair that Sour Grass was a part of on the Artsy platform, we can generate some economic viability for artists so that their practices could be sustained, that is an act of care, right? With Sour Grass we are thinking about our capacity to generate income, to be sustainable for ourselves and the artists we work with. We see this as an opportunity for our networks to invest in Caribbean artists, to be respectful of the administrative labour and to bring excellence to the table. Sour Grass recognizes that there is growing interest in what's coming out of the Caribbean, and by entering these international platforms it means they aren't continually driven by external forces but from within the region. Sour Grass recognizes that we need to be financially responsible and sustainable, while bringing power into the region

**HB:** For me, it was important to not commit an atrocity towards myself again, so thinking more deeply about what I would like to give my time, energy and knowledge to while leaving the institution behind me. Sour Grass comes at an interesting time in my life when I am making a more deliberate attempt to think about equity, my (self)care, daily responsibilities to my families and loved ones, and then thinking about the artistic community that have become our family as well - what is our obligation and responsibility to them? To ourselves? For our collaboration with the Atlantic World Art Fair making a virtual gallery space with work of artists whom we respect and admire with other Caribbean women gallerists and entrepreneurs, and some of them working in this field for three generations, is such a profound and deeply rewarding collaboration. There is so much that we are cycling to and from at any given moment and this is deeply generative and humbling. It is a very straightforward, nurturing collaboration and one that I hope continues. I also had to think about my personal biases and how entrenched and myopic those of us in the industry/museum world become when we are around deep concepts and thought all of the time. There was a lot of rewiring and questioning my "ways of thinking" and in the end, it turns out that we know very little about this market game, but we have big heart and curiosity. How can we share our strengths with others, accept our flaws and transform our weaknesses?

There is always hesitation around things that are new and I felt as we're launching this thing into the world that oh, it's easy to say that Annalee, and Holly, are again taking the assets to the marketplace. But there's this kind of crassness that might have existed seven, eight years ago, that can't exist in this world at this moment. The reality is we don't have other economies/grants/payment schemes/aid to fall back on.-So what remuneration earned, cements that relationship as something worthwhile. This is how we provision ourselves, and we have an amazing time working with the artists. It is joyful.

During the first iteration, it was profound, we had all of this poetic language coming forth when we asked our cohort to prepare their stories, and I'm like, oh, wow, they did these incredible videos, storytelling scenarios that were deep, revealing, personal, humble and just glorious. We got so much more than we asked for, in terms of how they negotiated their relationship with us. And through that, I understood that they had a deep respect for us. And by the asking, it showed that we had the same for them. So that kind of camaraderie and loving action, love in action, is something that our space could benefit from. And the wonderful thing about Sour Grass is that it is actually amphibious, we can swim in any water and walk on land. We also want to work with people that want to work with us, working with people that you respect makes you find more curiosity within and that can only engender good, good things.



*Figure 12 Holly Bynoe, Annalee Davis and Jasmine Thomas-Girvan at the Kunstinstituut Melly, 2021. Image courtesy Jeroen Lavèn.*

**AD:** In wrapping up, I do want to throw out two terms that I've been mulling around since I left the British Council, which is de-growth and slow cultural work. De-growth challenges the constant desire for more, bigger, better, larger—desires that are killing the earth. At Sour Grass, this notion of slow cultural work, in part, came out of what I learned in the British Council where the pace was so fanatic, there wasn't an opportunity to reflect on the work we had done. The idea of slow cultural work, reinforced by COVID, is teaching me to have a more meditative approach to creating, working, and to slowing down. I also think that the Caribbean can be a very, very hard place that requires us to form a harsh exoskeleton when working in the arts, because it is a place that can also drive you mad. It can be a tough place in terms of its value system, one that doesn't revere its artists, which can in turn contribute to a retreating. But at the end of the day, this is the space to which we are all committed to nurturing and indeed loving, through our collaborative work.

**KK:** In some ways though, this wouldn't have been possible in any other kind of space. We wouldn't have known each other's work in the same way or done the things we have, even though we have these other challenges that still need to be addressed. But we could have been swallowed up in a metropolitan art scene where we never met, never formed relationships, and never had the opportunity to be this passionate about building something.

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