

## Through the Looking Glass

Through a collection of self-portraits by some of the island's established and emerging artists the National Gallery's new exhibition 'Portrait of an Artist' offers the public an intimate insight into the life of its contemporary artists. The exhibition introduces the function of the self-portrait and raises questions of identity, style and technique as well as exploring social, historical and gender issues.

Since the early fifteenth century artists have taken on the dual roles of subject and creator in order to explore themes of identity, social status, individuality and mortality, posing the question "Who am I?" and "What part do I play in the greater scheme of things?"

"The art of self-portraiture has always been an intriguing medium for analysis and self-expression," explains the exhibition's curator Natalie Coleman. "From simple preliminary studies, where artists have used themselves as models through which to explore the human form, to their most self-consciously public work, which often cements their place in the history of art, this intimate art form allows the viewer the unique opportunity to see the artist represented in their own terms."

The self-portraits in the current show are no exception. In a wide variety of media, ranging from traditional oil painting, through photography, found objects, sculpture and video installation, the artists have successfully reflected aspects of their own characters and that of the society in which they live.

For example Gordon Solomon's "I am .....", in acrylic on canvas, serves as a reflection of his personality and the way in which it influences his work while Lennon Christian's "Fa Who?", an installation of found objects, highlights aspects of his heritage and culture, especially focusing on the traditions of the past.

Native Son Wray Banker's work '10"x 20" x 72"?' reflects his belief that anything an artist creates can be deemed a self-portrait. "The way in which we do the things we do, our histories, the likes and dislikes, the choices we make all create an identity of 'self'," he argues. "Rather than just a representation of my likeness I feel that this collection of items say more about me, everything from my physical presence, personality to religious convictions. As in a set of identical twins it's the sum of our differences that identify us."

In 'Introspection' by Aston Ebanks video installation, a relatively new medium for Caymanian art, the artist considers the possible ramifications of his impulsive actions.

For some of the artists such as Charles Long this was the first time that they had worked in this genre.

After walking through this exhibition one is left with the lingering question of self-analysis. In contemplating this series of self-portraits we, the viewer, have been placed in a privileged and challenging position. Standing, often in the precise spot where the artist stood in moments of contemplation, we rise to the challenge of this confrontation, exploring the motivations behind the self-portrait, studying its effects, and discussing the very different understandings of the self which

these artists project. Ultimately, we face the same questions of identity and reasoning that inspired the artist's to create.

This exhibition marks another collaboration between the Gallery and the developing arts community, reasserting the potential of contemporary portraiture and extending a visual handshake to the community at large.

All are welcome to attend. August 5<sup>th</sup> – September 23<sup>rd</sup>  
For more information call the Gallery at 945 8111.