



Miguel Powery, *Riding High*, 2007.

Inspiration Artist: Miguel Powery

Age Range: Secondary +

Subject Areas: History

MARITIME HERITAGE



NATIONAL
GALLERY | CAYMAN
ISLANDS

DART



In This Packet

In this lesson, students will learn about Cayman's seafaring history and how the islands have become culturally tied to the sea.

This packet includes images of artwork by local artists who have been inspired by our maritime heritage; students will create their own maritime artwork with an activity at the end.

Chris Christian, *Reflecting*, 2007



Early Years

The first recorded sighting of the Cayman Islands was by the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, who sighted Cayman Brac and Little Cayman on 10 May 1503. He named the islands 'Las Tortugas' ('The Turtles' in Spanish) because of the number of turtles in the water.

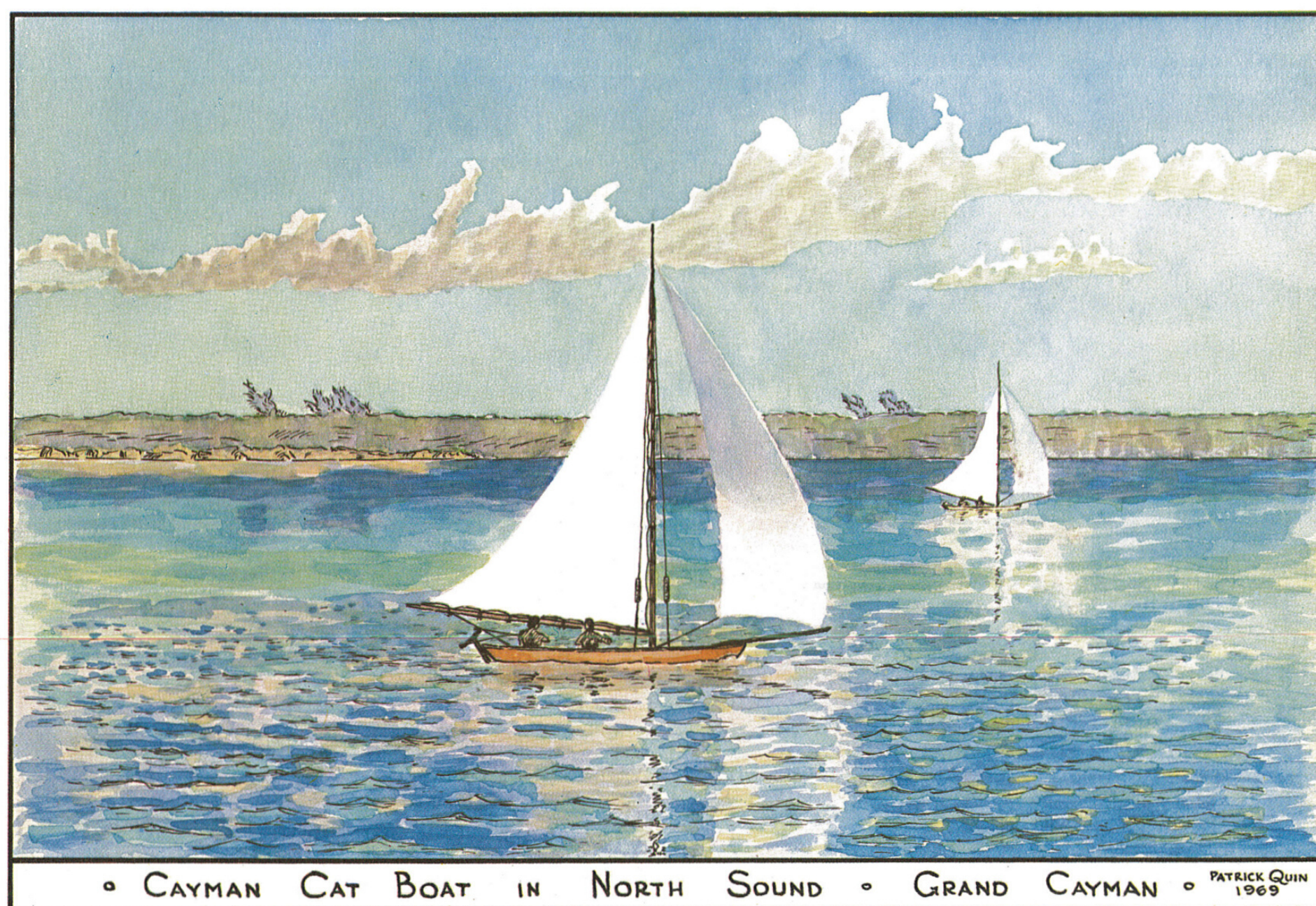
Columbus and his crew did not remain in Cayman. In fact, historians don't believe the islands were permanently settled until the late 1600s. Until then, the Cayman Islands were used as a waystation for passing ships to rest and fish for turtles.

The islands are bordered by reefs that were difficult for ships to see, particularly at night. Hundreds of ships were wrecked on these reefs including the *HMS Convert* (East End) and the *Pallas* (South Sound).

Early Caymanians gathered the materials and goods from these wrecked ships to support the daily life and economy on the small and isolated islands. This practice was known as 'wrecking'.

As small islands with few natural resources, Caymanians took to the sea for their living. They became expert shipbuilders, navigators and sailors, and sailed to Jamaica, Cuba and the islands near Honduras and Nicaragua to fish and search for turtles.

These turtles could be used in several ways: for food, or to make jewellery, decorations and utensils.



Patrick Quin, *Cayman Catboat in North Sound*, 1969

In 1904, Daniel Jervis of Cayman Brac built a special type of boat called a 'catboat'.

Catboats were typically made out of the plopnut tree because of its natural curves. They were often painted blue to help them camouflage and remain unseen to turtles and fish.

Catboats are extremely buoyant and less likely to capsize than their predecessor, the dugout canoe.

Catboats were used for turtling, sailing from district to district, to meet with friends, and for many other purposes. Many seafarers refer to them as the islands' first cars.



Saba, *Spirits in the Rain*, 2012.

20th Century

By the mid-20th century, Caymanians had become famous for their maritime skills.

Shipping companies from around the world began to employ Caymanians on their ships. They worked as everything from navigators to engineers to captains. Some joined these ships at as young as 17 years old to make money that could support their families back home.

One of the most popular American shipping companies that many Caymanians worked for was the 'The National Bulk Carriers.' Receiving an employment offer from the National Bulk Carriers was colloquially referred to as "getting the call".



Joanne Sibley, *Port Scene with Container Ship*, 1988.

Caymanians sailed to ports all over the world, sometimes staying away from home for years at a time.

Art Activity: Writing Prompt

Materials:

- Pen
- Pencil and eraser
- Paint (optional)
- Paper to write
- Paper for drawing or painting

The ocean is a realm of potentiality and poetic imagination - at once familiar and strange – a place of exploration, of trauma and loss, of threat and salvation. As the islands are in the heart of the Caribbean Sea, their identity is intrinsically tied to the surrounding ocean but the relationship continues to evolve.

Historically, the ocean provided sustenance and economy via seafaring and turtling. More recently this has been eclipsed by tourism and a reliance on the maritime-based import and export of goods and food.

Step 1: Describe how you would feel if you were away at sea, either in the turtling or shipping trades, and write down the dangers you might encounter.

Step 2: Draw or paint a piece of art based on your written description.

Follow-up Questions

- What do you think about Caymanians being willing to go so far from home to provide for their families? How does it make you feel? How do you think it made them feel?
- What personal skills do you think Caymanians needed to work in the maritime industries?
- Do you think you would like to travel the world the way Caymanian seafarers did? Why or why not?
- Do you know anyone who has worked as a seafarer or in the shipping industries? What can you learn from them?
- Which maritime-themed artwork in this lesson is your favourite and why?