

## About the National Gallery's - Cayman Islands Biennial

### What is a 'Biennial'?

A biennial is a large-scale multisite exhibition project featuring numerous artists, that recurs every two years and seeks to actively promote artistic diversity, experimentation, and critical thought. For the second Cayman Islands Biennial, artworks by 41 Cayman-based artists are simultaneously on display at six different locations across the Cayman Islands – the National Gallery, Owen Roberts International Airport, the National Trust's Mission House, the QEII Botanic Park, and the Little Cayman Museum, along with special programming in Cayman Brac. Working in a wide variety of media from painting, photography and video, to collage, drawing and sculpture, video, ceramics and installation art, the artists in *Reimagined Futures* actively respond to our contemporary experience and offer a window into contemporary art making on these shores.

### About This Year's Theme

In the wake of the monumental upheavals that have taken place at the outset of this decade, *Reimagined Futures* seeks to adopt a more affirmative vision of the world we are now inhabiting, recasting the long months of lockdown and its aftermath as an extended interlude— an opportunity for all of us to pause and reflect on where we are now and where we are heading.

Charged with reimagining our collective future, the participating artists have each responded to the task in distinct ways – contesting boundaries, challenging norms and questioning entrenched beliefs. Rather than fearing the disruption that may potentially ensue in a post-pandemic world, they seize on our potential to collectively envision a better society in 2021 and beyond. The resulting works and the venues in which they are situated, which range from historical sites and public spaces to outside installations, stage a series of dynamic conversations between the exhibited artworks and their broader social and cultural context.

From environmental efforts to mitigate climate change, the lobbying for racial and social justice, and the wider reimagining of our global community—now is the time to redraw, rethink and reimagine the world around us.

### Participating Artists & Supporters

The 41 participating artists for the 2021 Biennial are: Jawara Alleyne, Shane 'Dready' Aquârt, Megan Arch, Wray Banker, Heidi Bassett Blair, Cameron Bridgeman, David Bridgeman, John Broad, Kristy Capewell, Randy Chollette, Frans De Backer, Leonard Dilbert, Bryony Dixon, Al Ebanks, Davin Ebanks, Kerwin G. Ebanks, Kaitlyn Elphinstone, Kathryn Elphinstone, Carlos V. Garcia, Teresa Grimes, Jamie

Hahn, Heather Holt, Jenney Jackson, John Reno Jackson, Stoak'd (Marc Laurenson and Pam Kelly-Laurenson), Tansy Maki, Chris Mann, Sarah McDougall, Iain McRae, Michael A. Mothen, Christina Pineda, Yonier Powery Serrano, Brandon Saunders, Simone Scott, Gordon Solomon, Nasaria Suckoo Chollette, Scott Swing, Karoly Szücs, Simon Tatum, Debbi Truchan, and Marcie Wood.

The project is curated by Natalie Urquhart, Kerri-Anne Chisholm, Paige Jordison, William Helfrecht, and Maia Muttoo, with the original selection committee comprising Amanda Coulson, Davin Ebanks and Emérentienne Paschalides. It has once again been made possible through partnership with the inaugural Biennial supporters, Mrs Susan A. Olde, OBE, and Butterfield Bank (Cayman) Limited.

## About Our Satellite Venue Projects

**Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park** (Frank Sound) is hosting artist John Reno Jackson's mixed media environmental installation *Untitled* (2021), which comprises three outdoor canvas collages. Jackson's investigations into the formal properties of his chosen medium have led to an extended consideration of painting as both a physical object and performative relic of a live event; namely the moment in which the work was created. The artist's staging of paintings in natural landscape settings similarly questions the opposition of natural versus man-made, while also undermining the value we assign to finished works of art, which the artist symbolically desecrates by cutting up and reforming his canvases and submerging them in concrete.



**The National Trust's Mission House** (Bodden Town) is hosting Sarah McDougall's *Not My Cup of Tea* (2021), a dress made of repurposed tea bags. McDougall's use of recycled material and associative objects is informed by an awareness of the cultural and historical narratives that surround them: the colonial legacies of the tea and cotton trades respectively, and their centrality to Britain's empire building project in the Indian subcontinent. Such associations are implicit in this piece, which takes the form of an eighteenth century-style dress. The material constitution of the dress, which is made from generic tea bags (containing plastic threads) also points to present-day concerns over sustainability and single-use consumables. The work was completed with support from the artist's Art & Design students at CIFEC.

**Owen Roberts International Airport** (George Town) is featuring an installation by artist Heidi Bassett Blair and the students of Montessori By the Sea entitled *Message in a Bottle* (2017). The multi-part installation is comprised of 'whine bottles': a play on words since these are the empty vessels of

the eponymous libation (wine), while also the bearers of the children's 'whines' over the current state on the world – and specifically their concerns around environmental sustainability. Recording their hopes for the future on scrolls placed within the bottles themselves, which have been decorated with local thatch and repurposed materials, the children are presenting these 'messages in a bottle' to us, that is, our generation – calling upon us to take action to halt the progression of climate change and create a better world for those who will ultimately inherit it.



The **Little Cayman Museum** is hosting artists Megan Arch, Shane 'Dready' Aquârt, Cameron Bridgeman, John Broad, Frans De Backer, Al Ebanks, Kaitlyn Elphinstone, John Reno Jackson, Marc Laurenson and Pamela Laurenson (known collectively as STOAK'D), Debbi Truchan, and Marcie Wood. These artists all engage with the themes of sustainability, climate change, and environmental stewardship – concerns also shared by many of the Biennial's other participating artists. In Little Cayman, their call to action feels even more urgent, given the fragility and ecological significance of the island's pristine marine environment and terrestrial habitat. The Little Cayman Museum's location, directly across from the National Trust's Booby Pond Reserve and its protected wetlands, underscores this point further.



## Central Sub-themes of the Biennial

### ***Sustainability, Climate Change, and Environmental Stewardship:***

Environmental concerns have been a persistent and perhaps inevitable preoccupation for artists in Cayman, given our Islands' close ties to the sea, the fragility of our terrestrial and marine environment, and the finite nature of our precious natural resources. In recent years however, the subject has appeared with increasing prominence in the work of several artists whose practice

explicitly explores this thematic terrain: from sustainability and over-development to the looming threat of climate change and the existential crisis it poses, both to our economic livelihood and indeed to our continued existence as a low-lying island chain at the forefront of rising sea levels. Cayman's artistic community are now engaging with questions that hit close to home, as much as they share in broader, global concerns for the fate of our planet.

As such, many of the works in this exhibition position the artist squarely in the role of environmental advocate – blurring the boundaries between artistic creation, community activism, and impassioned participant in the ongoing conversation around collective responsibility for safeguarding our natural environment. While the likes of Marc Laurensen and Kerwin G. Ebanks have consciously championed the cause of protecting Cayman's reefs and lobbying for recycling initiatives – allying with environmental organisations such as Plastic Free Cayman – others have chosen to foreground these concerns through the very materiality of their work. From Sarah McDougall's repurposing of postage stamps woven into a fabric of tea bags, to the use of found objects in the work of Kaitlyn Elphinstone and Cameron Bridgeman, artists are turning to alternative ways of making that are more intentional in their use of materials, and more aware of the underlying messages such aesthetic choices convey. Similarly, the increasing visibility of habitat loss, the depletion of fish stocks, and our sensitivity to shifting weather patterns – subjects to which several of the works on display here allude – all speak to the need for climate action and remind us of our obligation to future generations.

### ***Identity, Social Justice, and the Politics of Place:***

Amidst the turmoil of a global pandemic, events over the course of the past year have heightened our collective awareness of the longstanding social divides that plague the global community in which we live. From racial inequality to socio-economic disparity – both of which have been thrown into sharp relief by the disruptive impact of the coronavirus and its ripple-like effects – artists are beginning to address these important concerns in their work, using the means of artistic creation as a positive vehicle for change. Whilst this heightened awareness to sensitive issues of race, class, and social status figures prominently in several of the works presented here, artists in Cayman are bringing renewed attention to more locally-defined questions of identity, and in particular the complex network of associations that tie our individual sense of self to a wider notion of belonging – be it to a culture, community, or place.

For Caymanian artists living in the diaspora, these questions are even more nuanced and multifaceted when viewed through the cultural lens of the adopted societies in which they now reside. In the midst of a summer of protests and the reinvigorated social justice movements that precipitated them, Simon Tatum and Davin Ebanks – both Caymanians living in the United States – have taken the opportunity to reflect on their own status and Caribbean heritage, creating works that speak to ideas of homeland and to the ways in which the 'other' has historically been perceived in western society. Elsewhere, Nasaria Suckoo Chollette's powerful installation touches on localised markers of identity that were historically a feature of Caymanian society, whilst Jawara Alleyne, Jenney Jackson, and Shane Aquârt similarly foreground the intersection of identity, gender, and race respectively, exploring these complex themes in a variety of ways. Notions of rootedness and dislocation, particularly as they relate to the interconnectedness of cultural identity and place, are likewise a recurring subject for several artists in this year's Biennial – as witnessed by the site-

specific installations of John Reno Jackson and others, such as Megan Arch, whose highly symbolic photographs indirectly reference similar themes.

### ***Adaptation, Transformation and Collective Healing:***

Whilst it is still very much premature to speak of a post-pandemic moment, Cayman has to this point escaped some the worst effects of the global coronavirus crisis such as repeated lockdowns. As a community however, we are nevertheless grappling with many of the same issues being faced the world over – from border closures and limited access to loved ones living abroad, to concerns around job security and so forth – placing us in a strange state of limbo: one in which anxieties and a persistent longing for life to return to normal have had an indelible effect on each and every one of us. Yet this sense of a collective, lived experience, while traumatic for many, has also had the effect of bringing our Islands and communities closer together, leading to a renewed feeling of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Rather than dwelling with despair on the monumental challenges that lie ahead, or indeed the pain and suffering that have marked the beginning of this new decade for so many across the globe, artists such as Gordon Solomon and others have chosen instead to showcase the remarkable adaptability of our contemporary society, as well as the ways in which we have evolved, both individually and collectively.

For some, artistic expression has remained an invaluable creative outlet, be it through our responses to nature and the solace this provides, evident in the video work of Jamie Hahn and its meditative reflection on the passage of time, or in the healing capacity of the creative act itself, which artists such as Scott Swing and Teresa Grimes have called upon to channel their inner emotions and feelings. Finding beauty in the quiet, still moments of everyday life, as the photographs of Kathryn Elphinstone and Heather Holt have so eloquently captured, is likewise an experience almost all of us can identify with – through which the long months of lockdown have seemingly instilled both a greater attentiveness to and appreciation for the everyday world that surrounds us. Amidst the disruption and uncertainty of the present, an unyielding sense of faith in our universal humanity is nowhere more evident than in Kristy Capewell's portrait of a young girl: a member of the 'COVID generation' who is nevertheless the embodiment of our collective hope for the future.

### ***Past, Present, Future: Reimagining Tomorrow***

The intertwining of history, memory, and modernity has for some time been a defining feature of Caymanian culture – no more so than in a moment such as ours, in which rapid development is radically altering both the built environment and the social fabric of our society. The jarring clash of past and future – symbolically embodied in Carlos V. Garcia's juxtaposition of a dilapidated wooden cottage and the hazy outline of gleaming towers whose construction is seemingly imminent – reappears in subtle ways throughout this exhibition.

While works such as Al Ebanks' anthropomorphic sculpture and Randy Chollette's installation of rocks wrapped in a web-like tracery of red yarn appear strikingly contemporary in their execution, both speak to histories and models of close-knit communities that are still deeply entrenched, harking back to simpler times that were perhaps less fraught with questions of social cohesion than our own. If Cayman is indeed in a moment of transition, as addressed in the mock political campaign of David Bridgeman and Leonard Dilbert, this symbolic passing of the torch is powerfully captured in

Bryony Dixon’s portrait of a retired seaman from Cayman Brac, who in his ninetieth year is representative of an entire generation of Caymanians who have witnessed first-hand, for better or worse, the changes brought about by our Islands’ social and economic transformation.

Elsewhere, the rise of digital technology is reflected by the presence of works whose appearance suggests the arrival of artificial intelligence and, in some instances, a darker and more dystopian vision of where we are headed. From Wray Banker’s robot-like found objects sculpture; Michael A. Mothen’s digital animation of an eerily deserted George Town with its perennial ‘for sale’ signs; the sculptural works of Karoly Szucs and Cameron Bridgeman, their metallic forms calling to mind a cataclysmic rift and alien-like structures; to Simone Scott, whose use of computer software explores the potential of augmented reality – in varying ways all of these competing visions speak to our present reality and the future that possibly awaits. When seen collectively, however, the works in this Biennial strike a decisively optimistic note on where we have come from as a society and indeed where we are heading, allowing us to picture a way forward – one that we still have the ability to steer and in which technology and change are not to be feared, but rather taken as tools we can use to positively shape the world we inhabit.

### Installation Views



