81° Degrees WEST

Cartographic Explorations in Contemporary Caymanian Art

This exhibition explores the connection between art and cartography (or the practice of making and interpreting maps), the history of which stretches from ancient times to the present day. As a discipline rooted in scientific inquiry and evolving technology, cartography has wide-reaching social, political, and philosophical implications. It has been associated with exploration and conquest, the visualisation of global power dynamics, the assertion of national territories and identities, as well as the more straightforward human need to find one's way in unfamiliar circumstances.

As such, cartography embodies a unique form of image-making whose empirical objectives seem to be far removed from the aesthetic priorities of fine art. Yet there are instructive similarities that unite these two forms of pictorial representation. Much like the cartographer who surveys uncharted territory, the artist embarks upon a similar journey—evocatively transcribing the world around them in all its complexity and myriad detail, revealing new insights and interpretations in the process.

Taking this analogy as its departure point, *81° Degrees West* examines the work of Caymanian artists who utilise the iconography of maps and their material traces, or processes that are symbolically related to map-making, as the basis for creative exploration. Exhibited alongside antique maps of the Cayman Islands and the wider Caribbean, these works of art highlight the imaginative and symbolic potential of cartography and its resonances within our Islands' maritime history and wider cultural heritage.

William Helfrecht, Curator