



'Sunday is coming', one of the paintings on show at the Jamaican Spiritual exhibition.

# When Jamaican art took centrestage in the city of London

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Contributor

**LONDON:** IT WAS a blessing to attend the recent art exhibition Jamaican Spiritual at St Stephen Walbrook Church in the heart of The City of London (not to be confused with London, the city). The City of London, also known as The Square Mile, is home to The Tower of London, St Paul's Cathedral and The Bank of England. It is essentially the hub of financial regulation, monarchical tradition and state religion in the United Kingdom.

It is within this context that 12 Jamaican artists thrust 18 amazing pieces of artwork onto the fabric of British society inviting stockbrokers, broke stockers, clergy, congregants, professors, pupils, medics, mendicants and virtually all willing and able within the realm to view and absorb the phenomenal energy and vibe of their splendid and spiritually significant works of art.

It was indeed an honour to present the opening remarks at the launch of this highly noteworthy show, which was sponsored, produced and curated by very popular and well-known art patron, Theresa Roberts. Imbued with a lifelong love and appreciation of Jamaican art, Theresa is a bonafide ambassador of Jamaica's ongoing cultural legacy.

Having curated a successful Jamaican art exhibition in the lofty House of Lords previously, she is determined to extend Jamaican creativity to a wider British audience whilst maintaining the values of prestige and accessibility in the selection of an ideal venue. The church St Stephen Walbrook met those requirements impeccably and Theresa wasted no time in convincing the vicar, Revd Jonathan Evens, to avail the church space to facilitate Jamaican Spiritual.

The display of the artworks within the church left the observer feeling like the pieces of art were purpose-commissioned for the sanctuary; such was the expertise and sensitivity of the curated effort. Laura Facey Cooper's "Prince of Peace" complemented the church fixtures so appropriately that viewers thought it was the central artwork custom-made for the church's decor. "The Redeemer" by Christopher Lawrence took residence in the sanctuary with such solemn yet invigorating aura that an onlooker requested it remain



Jamaica's High Commissioner Seth George Ramocan (left), art exhibition curator Theresa Roberts and guest speaker David Neita at the Jamaican Spiritual exhibition.

indelibly and inextricable associated with the place of worship.

Spirituality seeps into every crevice of Jamaican life and the life-giving force of that spirituality exploded with an infusion of inspiration in this special little chapel that was built in the 17th Century as a sort of maquette for St Paul's Cathedral.

The celebrated architect of both buildings, Christopher Wren, would have marvelled at the Jamaican Spiritual exhibition especially the jux-

taposition of medical healing and faith healing in Marlon James' "Trio", not to be outdone by the multiplicity of the commercial, social and spiritual utility of the said artist's realistic receptacle in "Request"

Lesli-Ann Balnavis' digital prints on paper brought to mind the angel Gabriel visiting the virgin Mary in "Eyes Wide Shut" and the Madonna's "Peaceful Resolve" just before she

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# ART

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utters the profound magnificent. Close inspection of Shaun Reid's "The Nature of Christ's Lessons" convinced the astute viewer that Golgotha, Jerusalem had been transmitted to Blue Mountain, Jamaica and the trepidatious path to 'Calvary' a reminder of the Shepherd's Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my Shepherd É") emerging into Psalm 121 ("I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help!É") as the sweep of the eyes settled atop the mountain in the painting.

Greg Bailey's masterpiece, "The Sacrifice of Isaac", emphasised the overlooked obedience of Isaac, often ascribed entirely to his father Abraham; and it was not difficult for the Jamaican viewer to imagine a ram goat caught in a nearby thicket, discovered in the moment the angel held back the cutlass, saving the future patriarch.

Sireita Mullings added the important contribution of the Rastafarian culture to an uplifted life in Jamaica with her digital prints on paper. The worshipful subjects in both her works are oblivious to the photographer, rendering their expressions of devotion wholly authentic.

Philip Thomas explored

past and present idolatry provocatively in his mixed media and Alicia Lisa Brown gave the viewers delightfully refreshing priests and saints in the personages of cherubic young females. Young girls, this time school students, also featured in Carl Abraham's oil on canvas and the prophet present on the far left appeared to validate the girl who is all but cut out of the painting on the far right, seemly restoring her personhood.

Mabusha Dennis celebrated the ritual of the camaraderie of the journey to and from church in his acrylics on canvas and a photograph of Edna Manley's "Orpheus", the legendary musician of Greek myth with the ability to charm even stones, brought to mind the Jamaican spirit of promoting social change by the force of personality undergirded by a deep sense of spirituality. Laura Facey Cooper's "Prayer" echoed the posture of thanksgiving and praise and seemed an ideal emoji for the remarkable contribution of Jamaican culture to global civilisation.

Britain has been left a better place as a result of the influence of this wonderful exhibition, Jamaican Spiritual, in the same way the society of the United Kingdom has benefited immeasurably from Jamaicans and the Jamaican Diaspora.