Carlos Garrido Castellano, *Beyond Representation in Contemporary Caribbean Art: Space, Politics, and the Public Sphere*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019. vii + 218 pp. (Paper US\$ 34.95)

Beyond Representation takes us to the heart of the problematic of Caribbean art. Its title signals an important conceptual shift that has marked the development of contemporary Caribbean art, from a mandate to represent Caribbean culture, which was defining of modern postcolonial art, to less prescriptive strategies of “creating culture,” as the Trinidadian artist and critic Christopher Cozier has put it (p. 8). This has challenged what had become the canons, dogmas, and institutions of the Caribbean art world, and how the Caribbean is typically perceived and represented externally.

The book explores how “artistic agency actively constructs [the] Caribbean self in multiple, heterogeneous ways” (p. 3), by means of acts of refusal, institutional critiques, curatorial projects, and artist-led initiatives that illuminate the way the power dynamics of the Caribbean art world are embedded in a contested politics of collective and individual space and agency. The case studies include Dawn Scott’s *A Cultural Object* installation (1985), which inserted the visceral realities of Jamaica’s inner-cities into the “high culture” ivory tower of the National Gallery of Jamaica; Maurizio Cattelan and Jens Hoffmann’s parodic “invisible” *6th Caribbean Biennial* in St. Kitts, which amounted to a paid vacation for international art world personalities but was disrupted by a hurricane; and artist-run spaces such as Alice Yard in Port of Spain and BetaLocal in San Juan, which have offered innovative, community-based and transnationally networked alternatives to the region’s official, national culture-focused institutions.

“Beyond Representation” also alludes to another side of Caribbean representational politics, where questions about who writes, about what, and how matter greatly, resulting in endless controversies about new publications. The book is not a canonical survey and is unlikely to generate such contention, but it is impossible to review it without considering the author’s relationship to his subject.

Writing credibly about Caribbean art is a challenging undertaking. It involves researching across multiple languages and in diverse sociocultural settings and intellectual cultures. It involves a field where foundational art histories have not as yet been written, or only partially and problematically. Because of island geography, travel is time-consuming and expensive, which is a challenge to even the most conscientious or well-funded researcher. The closeness of the Caribbean art world also hampers critical independence, even for visiting researchers.

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Carlos Garrido Castellano, who is from Spain, has apparently experienced some of these challenges. It is not clear, for instance, what the rationale was for his case studies, beyond the most readily available networks and itineraries, but the exclusion of the Bahamas and Suriname is incomprehensible as there have been relevant developments there. There are also irritating inaccuracies: for example, Charles Campbell is described as a Trinidadian artist although he is Jamaican, and the claim that Barbados has an art museum must be news for those who have been agitating for one to be established. Things were lost in translation, while the book's lack of expository clarity and needlessly dense theoretical framework require their own translations.

For a book that examines artistic developments steeped in criticality, there are surprising critical blind spots, which may result from Garrido Castellano's close and perhaps overly enthusiastic engagement with his subject. Contemporary art is a contested field in the Caribbean, as he acknowledges, but representing it as a quasiheroical challenge against a monolithic "establishment" fails to do justice to the complexity of the relationships involved. It also overlooks how rapidly the contemporary art scene has become the new, internationally supported establishment of the Caribbean art world, despite its countercanonical, antihierarchical intentions. This has resulted in significant alienation within the Caribbean art world and has precluded creative and intellectual dialogues that could have been very productive.

Some of the initiatives discussed, such as BetaLocal, are well-grounded in their communities but much Caribbean contemporary art exists in a troubling disconnect from the societies in which it is created. At its worst, the contemporary Caribbean art world is one that talks primarily to itself, and to receptive foreign curators and writers. This involves performing a new kind of Caribbean-ness that is just as reductive as the stereotypes that are challenged by contemporary artists.

Garrido Castellano cautions against "the use of the Caribbean by foreign thinkers as a world laboratory" (p. 165), to which critical theories are applied that do not always resonate with the realities on the ground. The question arises whether *Beyond Representation* is also guilty of this and whether this is accommodated by contemporary Caribbean art. The book is a valuable addition to the literature on Caribbean art, but it would have been even more significant if it had engaged these emerging critical issues, with the probing self-reflexivity this requires.

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