

apexart

2018-19 INTL Proposal

submitted February 2018

Resisting Paradise

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Exhibition location: San Juan, Puerto Rico

Resisting Paradise is an exhibition featuring a selection of work by Jamaican and Dominican artists creating work in the intersection of tourism, sexuality, gender, music and the internet. Through their work in sculpture, video, and installation, these artists reference shared histories of invasion, slavery and economic exploitation of natural resources, and how that translates into the commodification of their bodies in the West's imagining of paradisiacal tourist destinations. The process that started with the colonization of the Americas by Europeans and the images they circulated via paintings, prints and photographs, magic lantern lectures and films is being complemented by a tourism industry that literally sell the Caribbean and an image of its people. The show takes its title from a book by Bahamian Angelique V. Nixon, which discusses the perils of living in a crafted, imagined paradise, but also the powerful ways in which cultural workers resist and transform those given narratives.

The exhibition consists of both existing and commissioned work by Joiri Minaya, Leasho Johnson and Deborah Anzinger that result from an examination of the preconceived notions of paradise and tourism as a new means of colonization. Whether by representations in art history, the media, the carefully constructed narratives of nationhood, or the economic need and self exploitation that follows, tourism also directly affects bodies. Resisting Paradise is a result of ongoing research into the effects of tourism on artists and cultural productions within the new colonial relationship that the tourism industry represents. The shared experience of the plantation to resort economic development model, make evident the transition from slavery to a service economy under the visitor economy model. This term is used to denote the economic activity -goods consumed and services rendered- by people who visit a place. The term permeates practically all aspects of life, transforming society to serve the visitor. Resisting Paradise explores what happens when the visitor economy also applies to bodies; when sex and desire are also a currency. The project of colonialism and empire have left an undeniable mark on culture, by shaping the way we relate to ourselves, each other and to nature itself. Through transgression and appropriation, these artists envision new paradigms of life in the region and its diaspora, by challenging preconceived notions of what it means to be Caribbean; a colonial, sexualized subject.

Though geographically close, Caribbean artists aren't often able to travel and show within the region. This exhibition presents an opportunity to establish a much needed dialogue between cultural agents in the region. Resisting Paradise will be produced in partnership with Hidrante, an independent art space, Casa Fantasmés, a recording studio that operates in the same building, and Radio Red, an online radio station, for its public programming outreach. By renting the space for the exhibition and hiring recording professionals, we will also be providing much need financial support to cultural spaces that were affected by last year's Hurricane Maria. The show's subject is particularly relevant now, in light of the increased vulnerability of the situation.

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