

While the song [Don't Touch My Hair (2016)], is very much relevant in the US, where hair has been used as an oppression tool against black people due to the various textures and styles black women's hair offers, we can only feel the song's message echoing in Mauritius too.

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[Questions to...]

DEBORAH POYNTON

"International curators often come to South Africa looking for something that they identify as African. And they don't understand the complexity of the history of South Africa"

Weekly speaks to South African artist Deborah Poynton, whose exhibition, 'You, Me, There, Here', is on at the Institute of Contemporary Art of the Indian Ocean (ICAIO), Port Louis, until 30 November. The artist from Cape Town, who has also lived in Swaziland, England and the United States, talks about her paintings, art work, being an artist in South Africa and the artistic scene in Mauritius.

By David ONSIONG

Deborah Poynton, what do you paint and why?

In my paintings, I use the language of historical and traditional paintings. It's realism but it's not at the same time. A landscape of mine will not be a real place; it's constructed out of lots of little references. On the canvas, I create a world that doesn't exist in reality. I also usually paint very large scale paintings of about 2x2.5 metres, where you have the illusion or feeling that you can step in. If it's a small image on the wall, it all takes place in your head. I also like painting things larger than life. There's a feeling of intimacy; you feel closer. I've been painting for nearly 30 years now and it helps comfort myself, for a sense of connection, to create an imaginative space where I invite you to enter. There, we can find connection even if we see different things in it. All arts are a kind of connection; otherwise what's the point of art?

What is impressive with your work is the amount of detail. Why go through so much detail?

The world is full of details. I want to draw you in, to entrance you; to make you feel like you're immersed or almost drowning in the image. I also like to create something that's beautiful and delightful, and that's the only way I know. Besides, the historical realist paintings that I admire are incredibly detailed and beautiful. So beautiful that I could never aspire to them.

You like painting friends and relatives. How does this relationship come about?

I only paint a few people and I've been painting them for years. The reason is that I'm not painting them; I'm using their image. It's not about a portrait. I'm just using that person as another way to invite you in, so that when you look into

the eyes of the person painted, you get drawn into an intimate space. It has nothing to do with that person. The more I paint these people, the less it becomes a portrait. They also allow me and we have a good trusting relationship. They don't tell me what to do or check up on me.

Art is often seen as an exclusive activity restricted to posh people. What is your take on that perception?

It's absolutely true; artworks are bought and commodified by extremely wealthy people.

There's another side to it though, with passionate collectors who love the work that they buy and bring it to the public. The money side can be kind of obscene, but it also elicits a lot of passion. We need art to present another way of looking at the world.

What is it like being an artist in South Africa?

I really like the gallery that I work with — Stevenson. Although they're based in South Africa, they have an international presence. As for the government, I don't really get any support from them, very few artists do. There isn't much money for art. There's been a lot of corruption for a long time; there are other priorities. International

curators often come to South Africa looking for something that they identify as African. And they don't understand the complexity of the history of South Africa, which is similar to Mauritius.

What do you think of the art scene in Mauritius?

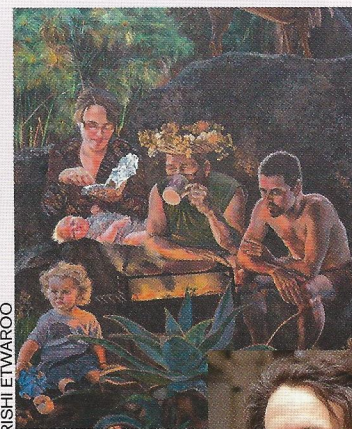
It's sad that there isn't an art museum which people can donate to and which could slowly gather historical and contemporary artworks of Mauritius. The public could eventually enjoy the collection. ■



Linzy Bacbotte (middle) performing Whitney Houston's I'm Every Woman in duet with Monique Thomas (far left).

a jazz jam session involving brass instruments. That is why it was fitting when more talents from *Atelier Mo'Zar* were called on stage for a jam session led by Dawn's Early Light musical director, Josiah Woodson, who swapped his bass guitar for his trumpet. Students of BPS Fatima brought a Mauritian touch to the jam by playing the *ravann* and the cajon box, with drummer Christophe Bertin shaking the *maravann*.

Linzy Bacbotte made a guest appearance at the end of the gig. She encouraged women to "be proud of who they are and where they are from" and not to "let anyone bring them down". She performed Whitney Houston's I'm Every Woman (1993) in a duet with Monique Thomas. Despite the mishaps in the balance of the audio sources, the overly compact seating arrangement, and the highly selective retrospective of American song and dance (no rock 'N roll or Broadway for instance), Dawn's Early Light gave the Mauritian audience a good performance and memories to cherish. ■



'Diorama', 2004. Oil on canvas.

