

ENTRE HORIZONTES INSULARES / AMONG INSULAR HORIZONS

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*An kalfou lavi-mwen oti pies chimen pa ka bout.
Au carrefour de ma vie, là où nulle route ne s'interrompt.
En la encrucijada de mi vida, donde no se interrumpe ninguna ruta.
At the crossroads of my life, where no route is interrupted*
NICOLE CAGE-FLORENTINY
“Katkwazé” (créole), “Carrefour”, “Encrucijada”

“We are in favor of a national creation sustained by the universal, a unique way of being, a creation without limits, without borders, and permanent.” This assertion could be repeated throughout the twentieth century, at the moment that each contemporary aesthetic trend leaves its European metropolis. We are dealing with an attitude found in Brazilian modernists, in the Mexican group *Contemporáneos*, among the Chilean members of *Mandrágora*, and in the islands of the Caribbean and the Atlantic. A double compromise with the personal and the universal—we may find its trace in the Cuban group from the 40s, *Orígenes*, in *Tropiques* from Martinique, or in *La Poesía Sorprendida*, of the Dominican Republic. At one point or another, this anxiety extends throughout artistic circles and people of letters on the islands from one side of the Atlantic to the other. In Cape Verde, this is evident in the eighties with *Ponto & Virgula*, soon after the archipelago won its independence. In the Canary Islands, this is already clear in the thirties, the era of the avant-garde journal *Gaceta de Arte*. The personal and the external, the Inner and the Outer, (as a contemporary Cape Verdean theorist and artist would say) constitute the horizons on which creative activity is debated when one wants to advance in the direction of insular identity: the identity of an art, of a culture, of an aesthetic, of a town. In the midst of often contradictory attitudes, the expressions that are raised about identity generate, in addition, fractures between the past and present. The insular spaces about which we are speaking are constructed with the arrival of colonizers, of slaves, of immigrants, with the destruction or assimilation of aboriginal towns with settlements. From Cape Verde to the Antilles, the Slave Trade was, moreover, one of the tragic points of departure. Remember *Ponto y Virgula*, how during the 16th and 17th Centuries ships left the Cape Verdean ports loaded with “peças” or “specimens” for the Canary Islands, Brazil, and Cartagena de Indias. The Inner and the Outer, the personal and the universal become authentic labyrinths when one questions the particular origin of each island and its cultural manifestations.

The initial project of building bridges between the personal and the foreign or the familiar and the strange has been established in distinct moments and has remained behind, as a substratum. In each insular space, in the midst of historical fluctuations, the dialectic between the exterior and the interior has been deepened. In Martinique the proposal of cultural “cannibalization” of Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, that is, of converting

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all that one receives from the outside into part of oneself, becomes an aesthetic and political point of departure. From Aimé Césaire's discourse on colonialism, one is led to Edouard Glissant's complex "discours antillais"/"Caribbean discourse" to the praise of the "créolité" of Chamoiseau, Confiant, Bernabé, and to the much less programmatic positions of the youngest. In Cuba, after the heyday of *Orígenes*, Castro shakes history, and if artists like Santiago R. Olazábal and Manuel Mendive have persisted in their open investigations or inquiries regarding Lydia Cabrera or Wifredo Lam, others are already moving in other directions, with diverse concerns (I'm thinking here of the writer Reina María Rodríguez, or the artist Sandra Ramos).

The complex processes of participation in universality from autochthonous perspectives began spreading out in the 20th Century, and they traced, in effect, complex communicative vessels between insular and continental territories. This already constitutes, in a manner of speaking, our memory. Long before the arrival of the Internet fast contact or connections between diverse places and cultures were being created, as circuits and networks were chosen and established through which the preoccupations of artists, writers, their imaginaries, and their affinities were passed. In these circuits, a fluid interinsular dialogue was already present, at times, without ever arousing complete consciousness of its existence.

The self and the other, the Inside and the Outside, spread out between the islands and arrange themselves in history. One single example is sufficient to reveal the creation of this state of coincidences and of interests that are already an inevitable substratum for the present. In 1939, Aimé Césaire published *Cahiers d'une retour au pays natal*, a book in which he adopts the African spirit of Martinique, and in which the language of the vanguard is expressed. In Paris he agreed upon the defense of negritude with Leopold Sédar Senghor, poet and intellectual who will be the first president of the Republic of Senegal. In 1939 Césaire appropriated the attitude of the North American group, Harlem Renaissance, as his own (Langston Hughes, Claude McKay...) by writing from and about the Afro-American condition. He also took Haiti as a point of reference, and adopted a language similar to the French poet, Paul Claudel, and the surrealists at the same time that he recalls the ancestral voice that lives on in their Creole language. He then returns to Fort de France.

There is more to come. In 1941 ships coming from Marseille loaded with exiles from the Second World War arrive in Martinique. Césaire then meets André Breton, André Masson, and Wifredo Lam; he also meets the anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss. Breton writes *Martinique charmeuse de serpents*, with Masson's illustrations, where he evokes, among other things, the voyage that he made to the Canary Islands with Benjamin Péret and Jacqueline Lamba to inaugurate the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1935. In the journal *Tropiques*, which Césaire has just founded, there is, moreover, talk of *L'amour fou* and citations from Breton's story from the trip to the Canary Islands. Immediately afterwards, Breton and Wifredo Lam move to Santo Domingo, where they find the painter and writer Eugenio Granell, who would become the co-founder of *La Poesía Sorprendida*. Shortly thereafter, Granell compiled *Isla cofre mítico*, a text that comments on Césaire, on *Martinique charmeuse de serpents* and on the mythical horizon that the islands awaken. *Isla cofre mítico* is published some years later in Puerto Rico. In 1943 Césaire's *Retorno al país natal* is translated into Spanish in Cuba, by Lydia Cabrera, a researcher on Afro-Cuban cultures, in an edition with illustrations by Wifredo

Lam, as well as a prologue by Benjamin Péret. That same year Wifredo Lam also produces his famous *La jungla/ The Jungle*. The surrealist poet, Benjamin Péret, who had previously studied the Candomble rites in Brazil, concurrently produces, as indicated in *Tropiques*, an anthropological investigation on Mexican culture. *Tropiques* addresses the *Cahiers d'Haiti*, in which the Cuban, Alejo Carpentier, and Pierre Mabilille collaborate... If we follow this road, we find ourselves before the luck of insular reverberation and before a circuit of creative encounters that uncover an often invisible “plot”, a web of inter-insular relations, links between continents and islands, and intercultural dialogues. The insular spaces are revealed to be united by numerous points of contact. Out of the historical, religious and mythical origin, which is always diffuse and often off limits to artistic creation, the vital itineraries of the creators and their works are advanced. In this way, a complex insular history is advanced.

If myth is found at beginning of the insular universes, if the myth of origin and its enigmas unite the islands, as Derek Walcott, from Saint Lucia, and Malcolm de Chazal, from Ile Maurice, point out, it is no less true that throughout the flow of history, between the spells of creation and the charms of its utopias, in the midst of creative twinkles and their phenomenology, an insular presence is hatched, which one could call “rhizomatic”, often concealed and with centers in all parts. The Outside and the Inside, the exterior and the interior, remain already in the substratum, for the era of Internet has strengthened and empowered the webs to astonishing extremes. The feeling of solitude and distance diminishes or disappears. In other words: today we may take a tour of the rooms of the MoMA in New York; soon afterwards, we may stroll through the streets of Saint-Denis, on the island of La Réunion in the Indian Ocean, we may approach the mosque or marvel at the exuberance of the images in the Buddhist temple; or we may situate ourselves next to the sea, in the plaza of Roland Garros, in this same city, before a sea covered with the memory of African slaves that sank in the shipwrecks. And we may, moreover, read texts from *Sombras de Harlem (Harlem Shadows)*, by Claude McKay, or a fragment of *Shakespeare in Harlem*, by Langston Hughes, the catalysts of the Afro-American poetry movement in New York during the twenties and thirties. The past and present, the distant and the proximal.

When Orlando Britto and I initiated the literary and artistic project, *Horizontes Insulares/Insular Horizons*, we knew that a great web of exchange had already been established; we knew that the new generations with whom we wanted to remain in dialogue were moving with absolute freedom and without excess fear of the universal; they did not show great dependence on the insular frames nor much respect for their traditions. We had the cooperation of artists and writers from these territories of the Caribbean, of Cuba, of the Dominican Republic, of Puerto Rico, of Martinique, of Guadeloupe, and also of creators from the Portuguese-speaking islands of Cape Verde, Madeira and Azores, other Francophone territories like La Réunion and, for political and cultural reasons, French Guiana. We also won the support of artists and writers from Puerto Rico. The complicated negotiation of the project crystallized on May, 2010 with the publication of a collection of twelve small books in which insular artists and writers collaborate, with a great exhibition in which another twelve artists participated, and with the publication of a catalogue of artwork. *Insular Horizons* is travelling internationally in

2011. It departed from the island of Madeira (Portugal) and is scheduled to arrive at Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Martinique.

Horizontes insulares/Insular Horizons was thus continuing a long process of exchanges, of reflection on identity, and on overcoming the very idea of isolation. The exhibition *Islas/Islands*, curated by Orlando Britto, had taken place during 1997 in the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain), and included artists from numerous insular spaces from Japan to New Zealand to the Mediterranean islands of Corsica, Cyprus, Sicily, and the Atlantic islands, spanning from the Canary Islands to the American islands of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Barbados, Jamaica... The catalogue included reflections on insularity by numerous intellectuals, from Remo Guidere to Antonio Benítez Rojo. I collaborated on the catalogue and then directed a course with the participation of international writers and specialists, which inspired the book *Extrañezas insulares (Insular Strangeness)*. This book dealt with novels written by Caribbean immigrants in the US and England, the experiences of Derek Walcott, Renaissance utopias, philosophy, art and poetry. I later published, in 2006, *Encrucijadas de un insulario*.

Horizontes insulares/Insular Horizons was becoming, in this sense, a continuation of what we had learned from cultural experiences on both sides of the sea. We tried to stress the dense and close-woven intercommunication of the islands and their transnational preoccupations, with their roots in their own cultures and with their universalist displacement. The dialogue now ached for precision. As the project emerged with the support of the Government of the Canary Islands and the Government of Spain, we adopted three criteria for restricted dialogue. First: *regional restrictions*. This would link the Canary Islands to the zone of Macaronesia, where one finds Cape Verde, Madeira and Azores, based on geographical proximity. Secondly: *the importance of cultural exchange and historical relations*, which would extend dialogue to the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Puerto Rico, with whom the Canary Islands has maintained relations since the time of the Spanish conquest through emigration and commercial exchange. Third: *the present European status of the Ultra-Peripheral Regions of the European Union (R.U.P.)*. This would enable us to include regions due to their dependence on France, Portugal and Spain; specifically, the Francophone islands of La Réunion, Guadeloupe, Martinique (French Guiana is also part of the R.U.P.), the Portuguese islands of Azores and Madeira, and the Canary Islands of Spain.

Horizontes Insulares/Insular Horizons had both a plastic and literary dimension. If the language of art is universal, literature has linguistic limitations. The three criterion adopted restricted the number of languages to Spanish, French and Portuguese. Nevertheless, by empowering the inter-insular dialogue, we immediately notice the necessity of translation. The literary collection that I directed not only has at its service twelve artists and twelve writers, but also versions of the twelve texts in each one of these three languages, translated, moreover, by well-known Portuguese, Spanish and Francophone writers. While the literary collection contains twelve books, the exhibition consists of twelve artists and also the translation of the catalogue texts. If translation, displacement and exchange were the visible signs of the web of bonds established during the 1940s, from the age of Césaire or from the Cuban Lezama Lima and from the journal *Orígenes* (which translated Wallace Stevens or Saint John Perse), this same spirit visited *Insular Horizons*. It was a matter, also, of surmounting the isolation that these very

languages entail. There exists, no doubt, another language, Creole, that could very well serve to reveal other profiles of insular spaces. In fact, Creole could be, as an artist from La Réunion born in Martinique said, the space of identity: “I am Creole”, he affirmed whenever he was asked about the Caribbean, forgetting his birthplace. But, in addition to the complexity of translation, the Creole that is born in territories marked by a past of plantations and slavery is not a language suited to all the islands at all times. A Creole from Guadeloupe is not exactly the same as one from Martinique, Cayenne or Saint-Denis. On the other hand, the existing Creole of Cape Verde, as opposed to the characteristic Creole of the Francophone regions, is closer to that of other colonial Portuguese territories. The Creole (*crioulo*) from Cape Verde’s archipelago also varies from one island to another.

The response of the artists and writers to this project has been magnificent; one has been permitted to continue one’s own international showing: others, above all writers, have been able to travel with new works beyond their own language. The result is an open field of exchange that could have at its center the mythical idea that islands communicate in their origin, in a poetic and subterranean way, but also the staging of an insular web of concerns that, despite arising from the modern traditions of each community, move at full speed through the interior of art, thought and the writing of our present. The imaginaries, the images, the islands, today, just as yesterday, continue their metamorphosis, their changes, their mutations, and they do it through the hands of concrete beings, of men and women from the islands that recognize and are recognized in the vertiginous time that cannot always dispense of a hidden and labyrinthine memory. There is no mistaking that if we elect any of the artists or writers from *Insular Horizons* one will be able to study their bonds with the traditions of their cultural territory and, more immediately, their relations with the culture to which it belongs, above all if we are dealing with languages; namely, French, Spanish and Portuguese. At the same time, one will be able to follow the trail of one’s interests in those other linguistic and cultural circles that fuel imaginaries from the exterior. In *Insular Horizons*, we opt for the simultaneous cut, we choose artists that devise their works in the present. We flee from pursuing unity and we accept the diverse as intercommunicative space. We choose artists and writers that we consider representative. The result is an exchange of voices that carry from one to another, that move through the present, that bring to memory or propose new paths, that speak of islands and come from continents, from great European, American and African cities. The creators of the first half of the twentieth Century were often attentive to all that happens outside, but since the sixties, they come and go, from one place to another, they drag images with them, they speak of themselves and of a globalized world.

But let us now acknowledge the artists that have collaborated in the *Insular Horizons* exhibition: Teresa Arozena (Canary Islands), Ricardo Barbeito (Madeit), María José Cavaco (Azores), Joëlle Ferly (Guadeloupe), Tchalê Figueira (Cape Verde), Gregorio González (Canary Islands), Thierry Hoarau (La Réunion), Belkis Ramírez (Dominican Republic), Sandra Ramos (Cuba), Roseman Robinot (French Guiana), Shirley Rufin (Martinique), Julio Suárez (Puerto Rico). As critics and interpreters of the diverse spaces: Cristina R. Court (Canary Islands), Assunção Melo (Azores), Isabel Santa Clara (Madeira), Irineu Rocha, Benjamin Brou (vision of the Francophone with his “The

Modern Maroon”, David Mateo (Cuba), Amable López Meléndez (Dominican Republic), Haydee Venegas (Puerto Rico), Alain Gili (La Réunion).

In the literary-artistic collection, an artist and writer collaborate in each one of the volumes. Cuba: the poet, Reina María Rodríguez and the photographer, Alejandro Pérez Álvarez. Dominican Republic: the poet, Alexis Gómez-Rosa, and the artist, Gerard Ellis. Puerto Rico: the writer, Mayra Santos-Febres and the artist, Carles Juhasz-Alvarado. Guadeloupe: the writer, Ernest Pépin and the painter, Michel Rovelas. Martinique: the writer, Nicole Cage-Florentiny and the artist Hervé Beuze. French Guiana: the novelist, Lyne Marie-Stanley and the painter, John Lie A Fo. Azores: the writer, Carlos Alberto Machado and the artist Márcio Matos. Cape Verde: the poet, Vera Duarte, and the artist, Leão Lopes. Madeira: Ana Teresa Pereira and the illustrator, Eduardo de Freitas. The Canary Islands: the narrator, Anelio Rodríguez Concepción, and the artist, Elena Galarza; the poet, Verónica García, and the artist, Jorge Ortega. La Réunion: the novelist, Jean-François Samlong, and the artist, Migline Paroumanou-Pavan.

Through these couplings, a universe is opened of signs that move and intercommunicate with unsuspected rapidity. Non-virtual encounters are also produced. To name just one example: when artists come to the Canary Islands, beyond the readings that each one exercises over others, a dialogue is produced on diverse languages (Spanish, French, English, and Portuguese), in which insular *sympathy* is highly present. Among multiple interests, the wish for self-recognition prevailed. They were artists who came from territories characterized for centuries by their submission to the metropolis, by a feeling of isolation, and yet, they had traveled throughout the world without complexes. Joëlle Ferly, of Martinique (originally), is trained in London, participates in Dakar’s biennial art exhibition in Senegal, and she directs an art center in Guadeloupe. Julio Suárez was educated in Mexico City, he participates in exhibitions in New York, and is a teacher who emerges out of various generations of Puerto Rican artists with aesthetic expressions that differ radically from his own. Marc Latami, who comes to give one of the lectures with the motive of attending the exhibition’s opening, is an artist who lives between New York and Martinique, but is present in Johannesburg, Dakar and Sao Paulo. The “Canary Islander”, Elena Galarza, was trained in Switzerland and lives in Tenerife. The Cape Verdean, Tchalê Figueira, was also trained in Switzerland, has exhibited his work in Basel, in Lisbon, in Nantes, in Boston... Charles Juhasz-Alvarado works in San Juan, Puerto Rico, was trained in the Yale School of Art, and exhibits his work in San Francisco, in Moscow, in the Museo del Barrio of New York or in Prague. The examples may multiply... Art feeds on the universal, it advances from the insular borders, but it expresses itself with great freedom. Not even the projects of previous generations determine altogether their steps.

Something persists, nevertheless, in these creators: the sign of the crossroads “Nous sommes à la croise. Croisée de races et de cultures”, were the words of the supporters of *Tropiques* in 1942, most likely written by Aimé Césaire, and which served as a preface to the African investigations of Leo Frobenius. Crossroads. Nicole Cage-Florentiny, as seen in the citation that heads my intervention, also has a bearing on this idea, as she stresses: “At the crossroads, where no route is interrupted”.

As the first phases of self-awareness and identity of the twentieth Century were outdated and superseded, as its death rattles were felt, and as the new roads of an insular and transnational art were being opened and paved, the myth of origin, the vision of the authorial landscape, the contradictions and movements that they trigger or unleash, the permanent and swift displacement among aesthetics...all of that, as suggested above, presents us with the patterns of an expressive “rhizome”. Or, to put it in more classical terms: it puts before our eyes itineraries or routes that at each step reveal new, bifurcating paths and through which we can come, go, return or lose ourselves/go astray. It is the sign of our time: an immense web of possible routes. But also in the age of Internet and of intercontinental trips, it is necessary to choose a route in order to appreciate the number of writers and artists present in the intercultural investigation of *Insular Horizons*. It becomes obligatory, moreover, in a symposium with a fixed time (limit) for each presentation. It is necessary, then, to select some images.

Let us choose, more than texts, images by some of the artists treated here. Let us limit ourselves to select routes or paths, among the many possible, to expose the metaphysical, political, and mythical crack that is opened in the history of the conquered islands. We are dealing with visions that range from poetic vision to political discourse; from aesthetic purity to ethical compromise; from simplicity to inebriation, that take as their point of departure the island, the landscape, the origin..., or the memory of the ancestors... Let us follow, for an instant, some of these flashes of lucidity in order to concentrate on the *cimarronismo* we hoped to put an end to.

In Guadeloupe we chose an artist, Michel Rovelas, of Asian origin, educated in Paris, who agreed to pair up his pictures of seductions and towns, with the poems of Ernest Pépin, so closely related to the teachings of the *creolité* of the recently deceased Edouard Glissant.

In Martinique, a narrator, Nicole Cage-Florentiny, who has been translated to Spanish in the publications of Casa de las Américas de La Habana, situates the protagonist of her story, *Entre îles (Entre ilhas, Entre islas, Among Islands)* in Guadeloupe and Martinique, with references to the most recent strikes in the Francophone Caribbean. Nicole Cage-Florentine honors her commitment with a culture that comes from Aimé Césaire: her story alludes to the impact of the death of Césaire. Hervé Beuze, an artist of her generation, constructs an image of the island with diverse surfaces, with diverse materials: the insular salamander became the area of packaging, packing, wrapping—a significant sign of the current times.

In the Dominican Republic, the poet, Alexis Gómez Rosa, who has lived between New York and Santo Domingo, and who now lives in Uruguay, offers poems filled with references to film, to music and to “the Dominican style”. The artist, Gerard Ellis, resident of New York, accompanies this work with drawings of iguanas, birds, isolated beings, stained and speckled animals. In the exhibition *Insular Horizons*, the Dominican artist, Belkis Ramírez, constructs an isolated and violent circle, fractured by wire fences that make terrible the relationships between men and women. Criticism, commitment, and ironic vision are some of the many other components of insular art. Charles Juhasz-Alvarado, without the blunt sign of the work of Belkis Ramírez, expressed from the Puerto Rican hillside another critical vision of the present day marked by warmongering.

The Cuban artist Sandra Ramos is not very far from the critical visions of Belkis Ramírez or of Juhasz-Alvarado, but she does it from an expressive angle replete with

vitality: from the ironic look of infancy that slams against the wall of reality. Her videos and works address Cuba, but they no longer have as a reference the ancestral and familiar memory of the artists of the promotions that precede her work: for example, the work of Manuel Mendive or of Santiago R. Olazábal, where the African roots do not cease to appear. In a manner of speaking, with Sandra Ramos, the road that stretches back to the age of the magazine, *Orígenes*, from the work of Lydia Cabrera and *El monte*, from Wifredo Lam and *La jungla/The Jungle*, comes to a halt. Immersed in the new technologies applied to art, contributor to artistic events in Montreal, in Boston, in New York, Mexico City, London or Tokyo, in some of these works one discerns reality as a hallucinatory witness, somewhat reminiscent of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. Frequently, she observes the reality of Cuba from an *alter ego*, with the gaze of a girl who appears in her engravings, in her paintings, in her videos and who subverts it all with humor, with irony, in an implacable way. The valiant attitude of whoever lives in La Habana reveals that another perspective already cuts through the insular history and its recent historical myths, each time weaker. Her art is already distinguishing itself far from immediate references. This is the same attitude that we encountered in the poet, Reina María Rodríguez, who observes how everything has changed after the march of the Russians while the more personal memory remains, persisting in *María Mariosh*, the book that we published in our project and that examines memories and converts that black ship, el Mariosh, into symbols: “Weariness, consolation, symbol: I call you, but only the seagulls flap their wings.” Also, Reina María Rodríguez abandons the coat of the great Cuban voices of the twentieth century.

In Azores, Márcio Matos makes drawings that accompany the poet, Carlos Alberto Machado, director of the magazine, *Magma*, and founder of the Centro de Artes e de Ciências do Mar (Center of Arts and Sciences of the Sea), in Lajes do Pico, an old whale oil factory. Márcio Matos demonstrates his peculiar vision of an Azorian universe frequently marked by Catholic devotions. In the Canary Islands, Elena Galarza speaks, like Sandra Ramos, of an island, of childhood, of memories, of broken dreams, of volcanoes, but she does it with a poetic vision that evokes contemporary masters like Paul Klee, who, for some years studied in the European city of Berne.

Nevertheless, in *Insular Horizons* some works stand out due to a certain family resemblance that we do not search for in a premeditated manner. With them I want to advance towards the end of my presentation.

As I continue to indicate, some works highlight the crack that is opened in the insular territories when the creative language becomes aware of the aesthetic distance between contemporary art and the world that it evokes. We are dealing with the islands that have endured the conquest, but also the annihilation or assimilation of their aboriginals. We are dealing with an attitude that, if in the Spanish-speaking world is backed by figures such as Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, Wifredo Lam, Olazábal or the younger Puerto Rican, Santiago Flores, in the Francophone world this same attitude appears obsessive. In the Canary Islands, we have a precedent of this attitude: Manuel Millares, a Spanish artist who espoused the “informalism” of European art, and who utilizes fabrics and sack-cloth that he then breaks and sews, leaving behind the holes and the tears. With his paintings, he evoked not only the existential void of the European post-war but also the “disappeared” aboriginals, those “guanches” who were mummified, buried, and wrapped in very rudimentary materials. We are dealing with a position,

nevertheless, that above all acquires great strength, at least with respect to our project in the Francophone territories, that is, out there where identity discourses exist that bump up against the European metropolis, with Paris.

The “negritude”, the “creolité”, the world of the ancestors, the political vindication faced with the metropolis, the African roots of the imaginaries all arose here immediately. The center of influence or the “gravitational center”, so to speak, was located in the islands in which the “mestizaje” or crossbreeding of African roots and their vindication was opposed to or contrasted with European states that had maintained colonial domination. To the Francophone world, one must add the peculiarity of the archipelago of Cape Verde. But the Cape Verdean archipelago achieved its independence from Portugal in 1975, its citizens speak Portuguese and Creole and its cultural and geographical nature is African.

Let us pay attention, finally, to these images. In French Guiana, Lyne-Marie Stanely becomes one of the first female novelists of her country. Her work addresses black populations, fugitives who penetrate deep into the Amazon jungle, fleeing their owners; her novels deal with the Guianese community’s difficult relationship with Paris. Since the 1960s the community has been maneuvered by the French authorities into a process of cultural assimilation and a siege of the memory of their ancestors. The artist, Roseman Robinot, also lives in Cayenne. Upon superficial analysis, we might say that she works with dolls, like some other artists of her generation (I am thinking, for example, of the French, Annette Messenger, born, like Robinot, in 1944), but we quickly learn that her installation in *Insular Horizons* deals with ancestral rites related to death. John Lie a Fo also lives in Cayenne. This artist, born in Surinam, worked for many years in Amsterdam, in Holland. His works may evoke the European creators of the group, CoBrA and even Picasso, but his masks, his particular bestiary, fishes, birds, snakes, heads, dancers, share an accent, an eroticism, an inebriation, in which African traces are present. Contemporary daily products, such as fabric, screws, cardboard cartons and bottles, often glitter of a universe replete with vitality that is not difficult to liken or relate to the universes of Ernest Pépin, to the naked couples of Rovelas and his visions of the colonial town, that is, to West Indian enclaves in which *mestizaje* and memory are shared.

Are the works of Cape Verdeans such as Tchalê Figueira, Leão Lopes (who was the director of *Ponto & Virgula*), or the feminist and African vindications of Vera Duarte very far off from this universe? Perhaps it appears so if we direct our attention to her collaborations in our project. However, the references to the plant/vegetable world trace more than one point of encounter with the African animist signs.

Tchalê Figueira is a central artist of the Cape Verdean world, polylingual and nomadic, as he wandered for many years throughout diverse European and American capitals. He lives today in Mindelo, the capital of São Vicente, very close to the market, in one of the busiest streets in the city. From his studio he watches, observes, and participates: his art is a celebration. Tchalê Figuera, the product of American, African and Portuguese ancestors, recreates a universe that comes out a night, replete with masks, animals, dogs, cats, fish, birds, that becomes entangled in the constant return of a rhythm without end: it is the party of the dead and the living, of the ancestors and the newborns. It is the hour of inexhaustible desire, that which leads to the metamorphosis of forms, and, at times, an unexpected, shadowy presence. The artist, Tchalê Figuera, who is both

a writer and musician, realized a work that could be linked to the imaginings of John Lie A Fo, but also to that which the artists and writers create on the other side of the world, in La Réunion.

In this other extreme, in La Réunion, political and economic status, the use of language and Creole, even the obsession with cars on the island are common in other French territories overseas; they also share the trace of the slaves brought to the sugar plantations. But the *mestizaje* of La Réunion includes the presence of Chinese, Hindu, Malgasy...emigrants who arrived in a state of semi-slavery during the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth Century.

The artists and writers who have collaborated with us quickly teach about the roads through which they travel: Jean-Francois Samlong tells of the history of Sitarane, a slave who rebels and flees the plantation. We are dealing with a *marron*, a maroon. Migline Paroumanou-Pavan, who was trained in France and in the workshop of the artist, Jack Beng-Thi, in Le Port, collaborates on a book of Samlong with images over which he superimposes writings, like graffiti, that speak in *Créole* of the diverse origins of the habitants of La Réunion, of their past, of Madagascar, of Africa, of the Comoros Islands (“fouy nout passé”, fue nuestro pasado/it was our past), and of their *encountered memory* in China, in France, in India: “trouve nout memwar”, I found our memory. His other works speak of the roots and exiles of the face of a woman from La Réunion, of doors and holes in the body and in the heart (“trou dann kor, dann ker”), of European soldiers and of workers, of things that he misses, of negritude. He also photographs his grandparents and inserts them into the arborescent surface with the appearance of other familiar beings, beneath a handprint. His landscape, his country: volcanoes, sea, island, a Christian temple, another Chinese, a Mosque, an animist altar. The vision that Migline Paroumanou-Pavan generates on slavery is very immediate: three figures in black, two of them come from the photos of their families, they are superimposed over an island; next to the sea, a port and abandoned vessels. This is also the tragic memory of La Réunion: the sea in which one encounters thousands of cadavers; and the island from which one cannot return. And something more that we are able to notice in Paroumanou-Pavan and which one finds in *Sitarane ou la gueule du monstre*, but also to the other extreme of the world, in the narrative evocations of Lyne-Marie Stanley, in the theoretical visions on Latin America and the Caribbean: over a wall, a photo is installed like a door to nature, it is directed perhaps towards the region of the ancestors, over the wall that appears painted, a graffiti, the word *maronaz*. Again, the *marron*, the maroon, the one who escaped, the slave who searches for liberty in the journey of return, the journey back to the forest, where the living and the dead coexist. The lost origin and the recovered origin: or the evocation of one and the other in the *collages* of Migline Paroumanou-Pavan.

In the catalogue of our exhibition we reflect precisely on “modern brownness” / “marronismo moderno”, which is characteristic of insular identity art. The point of departure of this reflection may be found in René Louise and his books, *Le marronisme moderne. Traditions populaires et recherches artistiques à la Martinique* (1980) and *Manifeste du marronisme moderne. Philosophie de l'esthétique des artistes de la Caraïbe et d'Amérique Latine* (1998). One finds here the central ideas like that to which Migline Paroumanou-Pavan alludes in Creole, el *maronaz*. “El cimarronismo”/the treatment of Maroons/runaway slaves is, as René Louise points out, an aesthetic philosophy whose dialectical foundation lies in three principal elements: the struggle,

cultural *mestizaje* and exile... From one extreme of the Francophone world to the other many of these ideas reemerge in *Horizontes Insulares*. From one end to the other, the universes that establish writers and poets weave a dense net through which we may both advance and move back.

The Outside and the Inside, the transcendence of boundaries, the real or imaginary displacements by geography and culture constitute insular obsessions. The Lost Origin, the reinventions of identities through the superimposition of stratum of memory, carried out by creators and by the succession of historical events, constitute the complex territory of insular imaginaries: their creative laboratory, their space of invention or of battle. Without a doubt, a great part of the insular identity battles have taken place on the islands of the Caribbean, in Cape Verde or in la Réunion; those theoretical, philosophical or political battles turn out to be less radical in the cultural zones that are closest, geographically, to Europe.

But in any case the reality of the arts and the insular literatures is developed without the exacerbated feeling of distance of previous centuries. The islanders move today in all directions, they are displaced, they come and go, literally, or in an imaginary way; and they advance through the web, they inform themselves, they go missing, they return. The identities then reach a more vertiginous scale, with the danger of extinction or of permanent *mestizaje*. Without a doubt, the notions that we have simplified with the terms Inside and Outside are still up to the competence of the artist, writer, politician, anthropologist..., but locating the markers, the limits, the borders is no longer easy. It is possible that the strong identity knots of the literature and art of the twentieth century follow the path of dissolution or of new metamorphoses. The islands of which I speak, even considering the insufferable traffic of their vehicles, no longer find themselves far off from the major continental cities. We can travel across their webs and find writers and artists of great expressive intensity, in their crossroads, where no route is interrupted: “An kalfou lavi-mwen oti pies chimen pa ka bout”, as Nicole Cage-Florentiny would say in Creole.

Translated from the Spanish by Joanna Barros.