



The Journeys and Dreams of Brooklyn's Caribtopolis
a mixed media, multi-disciplinary, interactive exhibition

Exhibition Concept
by curator Desiree Gordon

Caribpolitán:

Car ib pol i tán

/ keréb päletn /

noun

1. a person, place, or thing that is both Caribbean in origin or heritage as well as urban in setting, position, or scope, inclusive of populations and products on-island as well as diasporic persons, experiences, and products;
2. a Pan-Caribbean concept, experience or identity that is translingual, transcultural, translocal, and or transnational and through which participants transact in a global cultural market with related social currencies of memory, aspiration, and hybridity.

adjective

3. on island, relating to or denoting an urbanity that is primarily informed by and responsive to Caribbean ecology, sensibilities, aesthetics, markets, languages, and or interests;
4. in a diasporic context, relating to or denoting an urbanity that subverts place to center Caribbean sensibilities, aesthetics, markets, languages, or interests.

Nou La! Nou La! Nou La!

Kreyol for "We are Here!"

In contrast to a global trend of xenophobia and in response to our own administration's inflammatory comments, Haitian Americans affirmed their presence and celebrated their contributions with the phrase "Nou la," kreyol for "We are here," at rallies and gatherings throughout the city.

We Reach . . .

"Take it to the limits till we reach the top"- Destra

"When I reach, party tun up!" -Tian Winter

"Work hard everyday til we reach to the goal. Dis a fi de people dem who work hard."- Popcaan

“Savannah Mamma, we reach...we reach in de Savannah.” -Iwer George

“Hungry so we reach, humble so we reach. Look how we a suffer fi so long before we reach.” -Dexta Daps

“Tell dem leh we pass, When we reach is Bachanna!” -Mr. Killa

“Oh Jah, nearer to thee. For when we reach up in America, we are nearer to Mount Africa!” -Mighty Threes

“To speak means above all to assume the weight of a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”

-Frantz Fanon

“When we define ourselves, when I define myself, the places I am like you and the place in which I am not like you, I am not excluding you from the joining –I am broadening the joining.” –**Audre Lorde**

Nou La! We Reach. . .

By boat, by plane, by chance, or by choice, Caribbean people are here. For more than a century, via the alchemy that is immigration, “here” has shifted from sun and earth and belonging to concrete and yearning and striving, from Belize and Jamaica and Trinidad to East Flatbush, and Brownsville, and Crown Heights. **Nou La—We Reach!** Welcome to the Caribtropolis of Brooklyn.

Nou La—We Reach! is a mixed media, multi-disciplinary interactive exhibition designed to translate the polyglot voices of the Caribbean diaspora in Brooklyn, particularly Flatbush and Brownsville and in the neighboring communities of Crown Heights and Canarsie. The exhibition—the culmination of research, strategic partnership, and community investment—narrates the Caribbean journeys that have profoundly and irrevocably impacted the culture, commerce, and community of Brooklyn, a nexus of Caribpolitan experiences. The project will lift a mask of feathers and beads to reveal sensibilities, histories, aspirations, and imaginations that are transnational, transcultural, translocal, translingual, transgressive, transensual and, indeed, transcendent.

Nou La! We Reach! will be exhibited at the landmark Wyckoff House Museum, New York city’s oldest building, constructed on land once held by prominent slave trading agency, the Dutch West India Company. Situated in a place that saw the displacement of original indigenous inhabitants, the aspiration of the Dutch indentured servant turned wealthy landowner and, now, the reinventions of the myriad Caribbean inhabitants of today, the exhibition casts Site as a Witness in the drama of a people reimagining their own songs in a strange land. At this crossroads of wanderers, the exhibition centers place as the frame through which to peer at the details of Caribbean immigrant experiences - the dancing of the undocumented, the lingering of the displaced, the vulnerability of the privileged, the etiquette of the Road, the mastery of the hustler, the veils of the Believers, the strategy of the achievers.

Featuring artists from East Flatbush, Brownsville, and more, the exhibition will center the voices and experiences of this Caribpolitan community where more than half of the inhabitants are foreign-born. Artistic elements including painting, costume, performance, film, photography, sound installation, sculpture, and ancillary programs forming the corpus of the project. A timeline will drive and inform the visual artwork in addition to performance and interactive elements that converge to create an immersive experience of the Brooklyn Caribtropolis of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Thematic lines of inquiry may include:

Language, Dialect, and Meaning

What is the unique Brooklyn vernacular that is created when Vincentian and Trinidadian accents collide with Panamanian and Jamaican patois, with Bajan and Antiguan dialects, with Haitian and Belizean creoles? What new tongues and new meanings emerge at this generative vortex of sound? What intentions confound translation? What understandings defy difference?

Economics, Survival, and Sustainability

What infrastructures of Caribbean immigrant economies provide the means for survival and wealth that have sustained each new wave of Brooklyn's Caribpolitans, documented and undocumented, from the model immigrant to the criminal element? How have rubrics and markers of aspirations and achievement changed with each new wave of Caribbean immigrants?

Preservation, Tradition, and Memory

How does the preservation of Caribbean food traditions, musical styles, and sacred rituals mimic the preservation the Wyckoff House and other landmarked sites in Brooklyn? How are Caribbean cultural retention practices proxies for the physical homes they left behind, perhaps still standing somewhere in the sea or decaying under the assaults of time, hurricanes and deteriorating memories?

Popular Culture, Power, and Resistance

As the producers of the annual cultural festival on Labor Day weekend, generating one of the city's most significant streams of revenue, how does the Caribbean diaspora in Brooklyn leverage their presence and harness their political power to the benefit of their communities? As the originators of radical political movements like the Haitian Revolution, Rastafarianism, and Pan Africanism which have had global reverberations, how have Caribbean immigrants continued or abandoned the mantle of Resistance in Brooklyn?

Sexuality, Sensuality, and Radical Reveling

What uniquely Caribbean forms of masculinity and femininity are performed in Caribbean popular music and social gatherings? How do fêtes and the nightlife market in Brooklyn maintain or shift gender and sexuality norms from traditional to contemporary paradigms of propriety, respectability, and empowered irreverence? What freedoms or increased liabilities do non-gender conforming Caribbean immigrants experience in Brooklyn?

Health, Wellness, and Spirituality

How are Caribbean immigrants retaining and combining alternative healing modalities—spiritual, herbal, nutritional—to bridge gaps in access to healthcare and insurance? What are the uniquely Caribbean spiritual forms, practices, and traditions that immigrants from the region use as spiritual, psychological, and emotional compasses as they navigate the Brooklyn Caribropolis? How does foreign context evolve the content and practice of spiritual traditions from home?

Land, Isolation, Displacement, and Vulnerability

How are Caribbean property owners faring in current predatory lending markets? How does housing insecurity affect this community? How does the threat of deportation, increased in the Trump era, mitigate experiences and aspiration of Caribbean people in Brooklyn?