

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Take Five Art Festival Brings Dynamic Series Of Performance And Visual Art To St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- Immediately following Art Basel Miami Beach 2016, artists Rashaad Newsome, David Antonio Cruz, Kharis Kennedy, La Vaughn Belle, and Oceana James debuted a dynamic series of performances and visual art as part of an inaugural program series called Take Five, according to a recently issued release.

The program series, happening here from December 4-8, is curated by Monica Marin and Carla Acevedo-Yates, and presented by Alaina Simone Enterprises. Cultural partners include the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts (CMCArts), Virgin Islands Caribbean Cultural Center, University of the Virgin Islands, and Crucian Heritage & Nature Tourism (CHANT). See all events [here](#).

Take Five is a celebration and exploration of shared histories of territories within the African Diaspora through the lens of personal narratives of “otherness” at the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. The program reflects on how these resistant communities have endured and expanded despite the ubiquitous, at times coded, isms of today’s society while employing performance and art to challenge mainstream perspectives. Beginning with St. Croix, rich in its history of rebellion and emancipation, as well as converging African, American, and European cultures, each participating artist, ranging in backgrounds from the U.S., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, will present new work that addresses elements of these themes after time spent and research on the island.

The series will feature a museum exhibition at CMCArts; private rain forest dinners; studio tours; film screenings, featuring work by Caribbean-Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers; and live music. A photo diary of the Take Five program and St. Croix community will be documented by internationally acclaimed artists Ray Llanos and Wyatt Gallery, and a presentation of the diary will take place in New York following the event.

About the artists

Rashaad Newsome’s FIVE, St. Croix (2016) is a multimedia, traveling body of work that abstracts the art of vogue, a dance form originating from the African-American and Latino LGBTQ community of 1970s Harlem, with live instrumentation. Five dancers will present the five elements of vogue: catwalk, floor performance, dips and spins, and duckwalk, in dialogue with five musicians who sonically respond to their movements in a live improvisation over an iconic vogue bassline. For Take Five St. Croix, Newsome, who draws richly from his native New Orleans musical and performative traditions, will cast five Crucian musicians playing the steel drum, congas, flute, squash, bass guitar, trumpet, and triangle. During the live performance, Newsome will use custom made motion-tracking technology to map the movement patterns of the performers and transform the collected data into digital drawings that will later become neoActionist drawings and sculptures.

Through merging custom Crucian instruments, entrenched in West African rhythmic structures, with traditional dance of the New York vogue and ballroom scenes, stylistically tied to African dance, Newsome presents a fluid conversation that addresses the synergistic spirit of resistance and agency that exists within African Diasporic communities, specifically by way of movement and sound.

Kharis Kennedy is a mainland American that has lived in St. Croix since 2011. Her new work shows documentation of a collaborative performance with Seattle-based modern dancer Bryon Carr; a filmed diary of tightly regimented choreography exchanged between the two artists on a daily basis via webcam. The ritualistic nature of the performance creates an intimate space for a shared experience between two artists. With their differing personal narratives, each artist instinctively brings his and her own style into the same 90-second choreographed phrase.

In What Can I Do To Kill It and Be Free (2016), Kennedy presents video documentation of herself strapped to a polygraph while undergoing a rigorous series of self-interrogations to reveal her inner subconscious truth. She uses personal, ongoing moments in her life as a woman, who is a mother and wife, to guide questions that challenge the comforts of her previously perceived equilibrium and control. In addition to

these performances, Kennedy will debut a series of paintings, *Touch Has A Memory* (2016), that further blurs the line between perception and reality within personal narratives, particularly those of women.

David Antonio Cruz's experimental, interactive, and bilingual performance *Green, howiwantyougreen* (2016), is based on the last eleven poems by the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca, *Sonnets of Dark Love*. Banned for 50 years after Lorca's assassination in 1936, these poems are blended with Cruz's own personal narratives. The artist incorporates his memories of coming out as a gay man in the context of a largely African-American and Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia as well as intimate relationships fused with queer text from Lillian Hellman's *The Children Hours* and *Oscar Wilde* by Leslie and Sewell Stokes; both written around the time of Lorca's assassination.

In St. Croix, *Green, howiwantyougreen* will take place inside of an old sugarcane plantation that operated during Danish rule of the island. Cruz will perform alongside Jennifer Jade Ledesna, Diego Carvajal Peñaranda, Lisa Strum, and Daniel de Jesus in costumes designed by himself. The music is composed by Daniel de Jesus.

La Vaughn Belle, an interdisciplinary artist living in St. Croix, will present *The House That Freedom Built*. This multidisciplinary project is centered in a 17th century historic property located in the abandoned neighborhood known previously as "Neger Gotter" during the Danish colonial era. Later called "Free Gut" the area housed the "free colored" population during the slavery period. Belle's project includes documenting the renovation of the house, various social engagement activities, and a recounting of the previous owners and residents of the space which have included African born market women to the most famous leader in Crucian history, D. Hamilton Jackson. Belle will present an immersive installation at *The House That Freedom Built* that will incorporate sound, text, photographs, and video.

Oceana James, a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in St. Croix, uses performance to reflect on the socio-political and economic realities of people of African descent. Her research is centered on epigenetics, the biology and mythology of trees, the intersection of science and religion, and the use of the body to embody and then exorcise traumas of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Her performance *Take Five For Gowie the Deceitful Fellow* examines the institutional racism of our society through the cosmic dialogue of a haunted Caribbean woman and a young man claiming his identity. This deeply personal story examines slavery and how it plays a part in who we all are -- the oppressed and the oppressor. This experimental piece will take place in the historic town of Frederiksted otherwise known as "Freedom City" by many Virgin Islanders after the successful Emancipation uprising of 1848 and "Fireburn" labor revolt thirty years later.

Curators

Monica Marin is a curator, artist, and educator from the Virgin Islands. She earned a BA in Art History, Theory and Criticism and a BFA in Painting & Drawing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She founded the Artist Advisory for the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts (CMCArts) and worked as the first residency coordinator at the Rauschenberg residency in Captiva, FL. Her work and research addresses the structural history of colonialism and the ways in which coloniality is manifested today through tourism, environmental racism, and the privatization of public land. Current projects

examine the missing African-Caribbean art history in the archive, and dance and vernacular cultural expressions as a space of resistance. Recent projects include Invisible Heritage a community arts project in collaboration with CHANT, Migrating Histories with Carla Acevedo-Yates (CMCArts); The Great House: A Reimagining of Power, Place and History with La Vaughn Belle (Whim Great House, St. Croix) and Paradise Lost at CMCArts and AREA Lugar in Caguas, Puerto Rico. She works for the VI Department of Public Works on historic restoration projects that promote arts and culture and works as an independent curator helping to manage CMCArts artist in residency program and some of their exhibitions.

Carla Acevedo-Yates is a curator, researcher, and art critic. She earned an M.A. in Curatorial Studies and Contemporary Art at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (Ramapo Curatorial Prize) and a B.A. in Spanish and Latin American Cultures from Barnard College, Columbia University (Clara Schifrin Memorial Spanish Prize in Poetry). A recipient of a 2015 Creative Capital | Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant, she is currently working on an article that examines the queer semiotics in Zilia Sánchez's work. Recent projects include Corporalidades and Crónica(o) at Fundación Casa Cortés, Turn on the bright lights at the Hessel Museum of Art (Ramapo Curatorial Prize), and Soy Isla: A conversation on and around Zilia Sánchez at Artists Space Books and Talks. Her writing has appeared in Art Agenda, Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism, Artpulse, La Tempestad, Mousse, and South as a State of Mind. She was a curatorial resident at Espaço Fonte (Recife, Brazil) in 2014 and R.I.C. (Santiago, Chile) in 2015. She is Assistant Curator at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.

Presenters

Alaina Simone has over a decade of experience as an independent artist liaison, gallerist and private dealer. She has presented international emerging and established artists to those both within the contemporary art sphere and beyond. Her topical focus on the African diaspora and art created in response to the Transatlantic slave trade has taken the primary form of public art projects, embedded with educational programming. She has worked with The Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, The National Museum of African-American Art, among other public and private institutions. She serves on the boards/committees of SculptureCenter, The National Arts Club, 3-D Foundation (Verbier, Switzerland) and Bronx Charter School of the Arts. She lives and works in New York City.

The Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts (CMCArts) is located in a historic waterfront building in Frederiksted and offers exhibitions, art residencies, and workshops. The CMCArts mission is to collect, preserve, and exhibit the visual arts of the Caribbean community and to provide an interactive environment that encourages children, youth, and adults to explore and learn positive forms of expression. The CMCArts is funded by donations, grants, and memberships.

University of the Virgin Islands and its College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, the Virgin Islands Caribbean Cultural Center collaboratively serves as a liaison designated to create a reservoir of resources and initiatives for faculty, students, administration, staff, and the community to maintain and sustain access to materials that nurture, preserve, research, document, restore, promote, protect, and respect Virgin Islands and Caribbean culture.

CHANT is the architect of a new tourism platform upon which a wide array of vibrant, high-quality Crucian heritage and nature tourism products are developed and expanded over time. Working closely with existing heritage and nature tourism product providers, as well as identifying and nurturing new providers, CHANT helps to develop and maintain a high level of authenticity and quality among St. Croix's heritage and nature product providers. CHANT simultaneously works with international and regional heritage and nature tourism market promoters and tour packagers, as well as members of the local community, to link the CHANT provider with those seeking a unique, high-quality heritage and nature experience.

Feature Image: Take Five Producer Elaine Simone takes a moment to thank participants of a Take Five private reception held at Mango Hill Greathouse Monday night. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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