

Marvin Dabideen  
Post-Structuralism  
12/5/12  
Diane Zeeuw

## The Role of the Artist in a Post-Colonial World

I am a product of a postcolonial environment and being an artist myself I've found that the postcolonial mentality of searching for an identity and a culture in which to relate is often reflected in my Art. Therefore the artist's role in a postcolonial world is vital to the creation of a dominant postcolonial culture and postcolonial identity beyond that of the influence of the colonial past.

Postcolonialism can be defined as the period of time after colonialism and Postcolonial study examines the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism (usually European and American) and the residual political, socio-economic and psychological effects of colonial history (Fisher-Tine). Franz Fanon states that colonial domination disrupts the cultural life of a conquered people totally by negating a national reality, banishing natives and their customs to outlying districts, by expropriation and by the systematic enslaving of men and women (190).

Philosopher Michel Foucault's theories relate well to that of colonial and postcolonial studies. Influenced by philosopher Alexandre Kojève's claim that History is not a predictable mechanism, but a site of often random struggle in a cruel world of master-slave relationships (Horrocks and Jevtic 12), Foucault's theories of Knowledge as Power, Genealogy, History as fiction and the questioning of what is an author will be examined in terms of the postcolonial world.

The postcolonial world in which I grew up was the Caribbean island of Trinidad, part of the twin island republic of Trinidad and Tobago, located off the coast of Venezuela. Trinidad was discovered by Columbus in 1498 and remained a Spanish colony until the 19th century

when the British took control of the islands. The abolition of slavery in 1834 brought about the arrival of Indian Indentured laborers in 1845 to 1917 which boosted the sugar production and cocoa industry on the island (*El Dorado* 8). Oil became an important export upon its discovery in 1910 and Trinidad developed into a more business oriented and industrialized island, attracting interests from Syrian, Asian and American businesses(*El Dorado* 10). The influx of new inhabitants resulted in Trinidad becoming the most cosmopolitan of Caribbean islands. Tobago, however, still relies heavily upon the Tourism industry. Trinidad and Tobago gained independence from Britain in 1962 and became a republic in 1979. By 1984, the year I was born, Trinidad and Tobago was slowly gaining a postcolonial identity and culture of its own.

I grew up reading novels, watching movies and listening to music from foreign cultures, based in foreign settings, mainly American and European. Therefore in a cultural sense my idea of having a culture and identity of my own as a Trinidadian was very limited. In effect it promoted a sense of self contempt as I felt as though everything from foreign cultures were automatically better than what existed in Trinidad and that the opportunities to invent, discover or do something of substantial meaning seemed nonexistent. However, in recent times after my migration to Michigan, I've noticed a lot of infrastructure being put into place by the government to promote cultural life in Trinidad beyond that of catering for tourism.

Oddly enough Tobago, based on the geographical description in the novel, is believed to be the island in which the novelist Daniel Defoe based the setting of Robinson Crusoe (*El Dorado* 13). The author James Joyce has described the character Robinson Crusoe saying "He is the true prototype of the British colonist..." "The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the persistence, the slow yet efficient intelligence, the sexual apathy, the calculating taciturnity." (64)

Michel Foucault theorized that power produced knowledge and that power and knowledge directly imply one another (Grenz 132). Crusoe's attempts to replicate his European society on the island are a demonstration of Foucault's theory of power/knowledge in relation to colonialism. He refers to himself as the "King" of the island and the master-servant relationship Defoe depicts between Crusoe and Friday can also be seen in terms of cultural imperialism. Crusoe represents the enlightened European whereas Friday is the "savage" who can only be redeemed from his barbarous way of life through conforming to Crusoe's Culture (Joyce 65).

Foucault's theory that traditionalist "continuist" histories tend to obscure conflicts and struggles in the past is evident in the case of Trinidad becoming a British colony (Grenz 136). The British explorer Sir Walter Raleigh and his troops overthrew the local Spaniards that colonized the island. This occurred mainly due to the race between the colonial powers to find the fabled city of gold "El Dorado" which many believed was in the heart of what is now known as Guyana. In the end El Dorado turned out to be merely a myth created by the native Indians and Raleigh was later imprisoned and executed by the British to appease the Spanish (*El Dorado* 4).

Foucault also proposed the question of "What is an Author?" and questioned the authors role in recording history. Historical texts pay no attention to the discourse that occurred as to how or why Trinidad became a British colony. Foucault states "The author does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses;..." (Grenz 137). Fortunately Raleigh's journal exists, such that a more complete and accurate record is given to the reader than the traditional historian's version which exclude the events entirely.

This interesting information of my country's history was provided by the Trinidadian born author V.S. Naipaul, whose book "The Loss of El Dorado" is based on detailed research of

documents that related to Trinidad's colonial history such as Raleigh's personal journal. As a product of postcolonial Trinidad, his writing examined the beliefs and cultures of his ancestors and that of his fellow Trinidadian community members; documenting his travels to India, The Middle East and Africa. Ironically Naipaul's novels, and works of non-fiction essays and travel literature, focus on the legacy of the British Empire's colonialism. Naipaul's writing relates well to Foucault's idea of Genealogy, by pointing out and focusing on "paths in history that were not taken, to unactualized possibilities and to events that do not fit within the traditional historian's narrative of progress." (Grenz 136). Thus Naipaul's effort as an author correlates well with the role of an artist in a post-colonial world such that he presents ideas and information to the community that may otherwise go unacknowledged.

Similar to Naipaul's approach, in order to comprehend the role of an Artist in Postcolonial Trinidad, I've felt it necessary to examine the roles of Artists in the postcolonial Middle East, India and Africa.

Edward Said's 1978 book "Orientalism" popularized the concept of Postcolonial studies. It examined and brought to light the Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture. Said argues that a long tradition of romanticized images of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture had served as an implicit justification of European and American colonial and imperial ambitions (273). Said, in reference to Foucault's theory, emphasizes the relationship between **power** and **knowledge** regarding European views of the Islamic Arab world (204).

Although Said focused his criticism on Orientalist Literature a similar case can be brought up against some of the Orientalist Art produced. From artists such as Delacroix, Ingres, Gerome and Matisse, there is a long tradition of Orientalist paintings of females often being confined to interior, private settings, while public places have typically been defined as male.

The odalisques and the harem scenes were often depicted (Contemporary Art of the Middle East 78).

Contemporary Moroccan artist, Lalla Essaydi, produces work that constitutes an engagement with Arab culture as well as the Western fascination with it. She has stated “I want the viewer to become aware of Orientalism as a projection of the sexual fantasies of the western male artist, in other words, as a voyeuristic tradition, which involves peering into and distorting private space” (Contemporary Art of the Middle East 78). Essaydi addresses the male/female dichotomy through the use of calligraphy as a medium. Calligraphy is usually practiced by men while Henna is associated with major celebrations of Moroccan women such as puberty, marriage and childbirth (Contemporary Art of the Middle East 78).

Shirin Neshat’s work also addresses historical issues of women in Iran while also confronting the contemporary concerns of an Islamic state. Recurring symbols in her Art are the veil and farsi script, which are predominantly from contemporary middle eastern poetry writers who often write about female sexuality and desire (Contemporary Art of the Middle East 74).

Like Essaydi and Neshat, the postcolonial artist should use Art as a means of social/political commentary and as a tool to address prejudices and wrongful preconceived notions about one’s national culture by the outside world.

Franz Fanon’s “The Wretched of the Earth” was written during and regarding the Algerian struggle for Independence from colonial rule and was first published in 1961. As a psychiatrist, Fanon explored the psychological effect of colonization on the psyche of a nation as well as its broader implications for building a movement for decolonization (27). His analysis includes the negative effects of colonialism on national culture and on the mindset of the native artist.

During the colonial period, Fanon observed that the native artist tends to turn towards the past and away from actual events to illustrate the truths of a nation (181). Fanon believes, however, that the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities (181). Before independence, the native painter is insensible to the national scene and sets a high value on non-figurative art, or specializes in still-life's. After independence his anxiety to rejoin his people will confine him to the most detailed representation of reality. Fanon describes this as representative art "which has no internal rhythms, an art which is serene and immobile, evocative not of life but of death." (pg 181).

Fanon also sums up the role of the postcolonial artist by stating that most urgent thing for the intellectual is to build up his nation, interpreting the manifest will of the people and discovering and encouraging universalizing values (199). In order to accomplish such a task the postcolonial artist should engage the community and create an ongoing dialogue among its members.

South African born artist Marlene Dumas embraces such an approach to Art making. She is an avid educator stating "Teaching is a very important thing, and not only because I teach the students things, but also because we have a dialogue, and you see what you really want. You find things out. I still believe in the Socratic dialogue. Art is really something that you learn from being around people" (Solomon).

V.S. Naipaul's last journey to the African continent produced the book "The Masque of Africa" which offers some insight into the common beliefs and superstitions of African society. Naipaul writes that all the music, painting, sculpture produced is linked with the forest and that every living thing is regarded as energy- "Everyone of us is like a battery" (*Africa* 169). Africa is also a Matrilineal Society- "Women are the real power. A woman may not exercise power but

she gives it to her son (*Africa* 167). There are many ritual sacrifices where eyes are removed and tongues torn out of living victims to get “energy” (*Africa* 168). Although much of Africa is becoming secularized these common beliefs remain with the people (*Africa* 169).

Marlene Dumas’ paintings strangely relate to these ancient African beliefs, stressing both the physical reality of the human body and its psychological value. Dumas uses the human figure to critique contemporary ideas of racial, sexual and social identity (Solomon). Dumas exemplifies the role of a postcolonial artist by addressing the major issues that hinder the growth and development of a postcolonial society and identity through Art.

In the mid-19th century the British established art schools in Madras (1850) and Calcutta (1854) in an attempt to impose their tastes and artistic values upon Indian culture (Craven 244).

V.S. Naipaul’s cynical take on the state of painting in his book “India: A Wounded Civilization” states that the great tradition of Indian painting died with British Colonialism; “...painting simply cannot go back to where it left off; too much has intervened.... It has declined into tourist art for new patrons with limited interests. A new way of looking is imposed as they depict native “types” in a European manner, suppressing their own feeling for design and organization (*India* 112).

Ravi Varma’s oil paintings depicted scenes from Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana as well as genre views. His westernized, realistic and romantic images gained him international success. Amrita Sher Gil was another painter heavily influenced by modern European artists such as Gauguin and Matisse (Craven 247).

Other Indian Artists, however turned against the artificial foreign style, motivated by a growing national desire to create new art and began to search India’s past for inspiration (Craven 244). MF Hussein is considered a true Indian artist working in a contemporary style, whose artistic roots are solidly anchored in his cultural past. He is self-taught apart from studying

calligraphy. Although the subject of controversy with his imagery of nude, copulating Hindu deities, he has won most of the awards in India for the Arts (Craven 246).

Indian Postcolonial photographer, Raghu Rai, claims that “All that we have in India still lives- several centuries at the same time. The eternity of it all, that is what matters finally” (Brown 75). Naipaul, however, feels that this mentality is hindering India’s progress into developing a striving postcolonial society and identity. Naipaul writes, “Art historians tell us that the European renaissance became established when men understood that the past was not living on; that Ovid or vigil could not be thought of as a kind of ancient cleric; that men had to put distance between the past and themselves, the better to understand and profit from that past. India has always sought renewal in the other way, in continuity” (*India* 161). Naipaul thus proposes that the role of the postcolonial artist should be to move ahead to something new rather than looking to the past and trying to recover what has been suppressed or dishonored (*India* 160). This train of thought is in accordance with Foucault’s theory of Genealogy in which he claims that History has no meaning (Grenz 136).

For the most part Trinidad and Tobago has managed to do just that, creating a hybrid identity from a variety of Influences. Creolization is the term used in the Caribbean to describe the process in which the formation of new identities and inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures. It refers to the mixture of different people and different cultures that merge to become one (Cohen). The artists in Postcolonial Trinidad have had to play major part in creating and maintaining such an environment.

In colonial Trinidad and Tobago a small group of painters, poets and writers dubbed the “Society of Trinidad Independents”, taking their cue from the modernist movements in Europe- pointed the country into the world of contemporary art. They reveled in Gauguin, Modigliani and the growing fascination with Indian and African art; their metaphysical leanings found a ready

response in Hinduism and Shango - Baptist beliefs with strong echoes of Orisha in Benin (The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago).

Indo Trinidadian painter Isaiah Boodhoo born in 1932, in an agricultural town in Trinidad, got a Government scholarship to study art in England and then went to America with the opportunity to study at Central Washington University and Indiana University under the influence of the abstract expressionists, and the action painters. He incorporated the Trinidadian landscape with figurative elements and also included symbols of Hinduism as a main element. His first exhibition at the National Gallery in Trinidad in 1970 was a strong social and political commentary in light of Trinidad and Tobago's own revolutionary turmoil (The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago) His artist statement states, "it is important through all periods of the history of Art that some art should comment on contemporary conditions- Social comment is not only valid but necessary and relevant" (The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago).

Therefore the role of the artist in postcolonial Trinidad should be to create an aesthetic that reflects the Creolization of its citizens and to create artwork that engages the community intellectually, creating an ongoing dialogue, presenting ideas, providing constructive criticism as well as offering solutions to sociopolitical problems.

From the ideas presented by the many writers, philosophers and artists examined in this paper, it is safe to conclude that the role of the artist in a postcolonial world is most importantly one which creates and shapes a culture and identity in which the community as a whole can relate to. It is a task of great responsibility and one which hearkens greatly to building a sense of community. Pragmatist Richard Rorty states "Our identification with our community- our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage- is heightened when we see this community as ours rather than nature's, shaped rather than found, one among many which men

have made. In the end, the pragmatists tells us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right” (Grenz 157).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago*. The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago, 2004. Web. 11 Nov. 2012.
- Black Dog Publishing. *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*. London UK: Black Dog Publishing Limited, 2009.
- Brown, Rebecca M. *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Cohen, Robin. "Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power." *Globalizations* 4 (2007) Web. 11 Nov 2012
- Craven, Roy C. *Indian Art: A Concise History*. London UK: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1976.
- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books, 1967.
- Fisher-Tine, Harald. "Postcolonial Studies." EGO: European History Online, 03 Dec 2010. Web. 28 Nov. 2012
- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.
- Horrocks, Chris, and Zoran Lerner. *Introducing Foucault*. New York: Totem Books, 1997.
- Joyce, James. *Daniel Defoe* New York: State University of New York, 1964.
- Naipaul, V.S. *India: A Wounded Civilization*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Naipaul, V.S. *The Loss of El Dorado*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.
- Naipaul, V.S. *The Masque of Africa*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Shonibare, Yinka. Interview by Nicole Davis. *Prospero's Monsters*. Artnet TV, 2008. Web. 11 Nov. 2012.
- Solomon, Deborah. "Figuring Marlene Dumas." *New York Times* 15 June 2008. Web. 11, Nov 2012.

# The Role of the Artist in a Postcolonial world

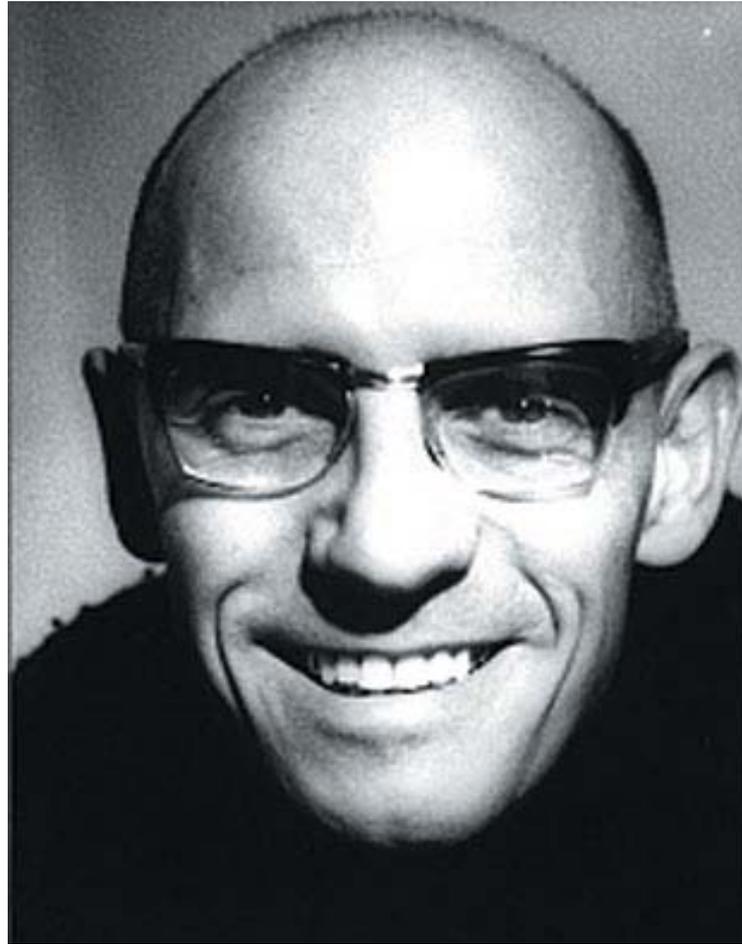
Marvin Dabideen

# Postcolonialism

- Period of time after colonialism
- Examines the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism ( usually European and American)
- Examines the residual political, socio-economic and psychological effects of colonial history.
- Addresses the matters of post-colonial identity cultural, national, ethnic, gender, race, and racism, and their interactions in the development of a post-colonial society, and of a post-colonial national identity



# Michel Foucault



- Power produces knowledge
- Genealogy
- History as Fiction
- What is an Author?

# Trinidad and Tobago





# Trinidad and Tobago

- Discovered by Columbus in 1498
- Spanish Colony until 19<sup>th</sup> Century when British took control of the islands
- Abolition of Slavery 1834
- Arrival of Indian Indentured laborers in 1845 to 1917 boosted sugar and cocoa industry
- Discovery of oil in 1910.
- Gained independence in 1962

# Robinson Crusoe



# James Joyce

- **Robinson Crusoe**-“He is the true prototype of the British colonist....” “The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence, the unconscious cruelty, the persistence, the slow yet efficient intelligence, the sexual apathy, the calculating taciturnity.”

# El Dorado- “City of Gold”



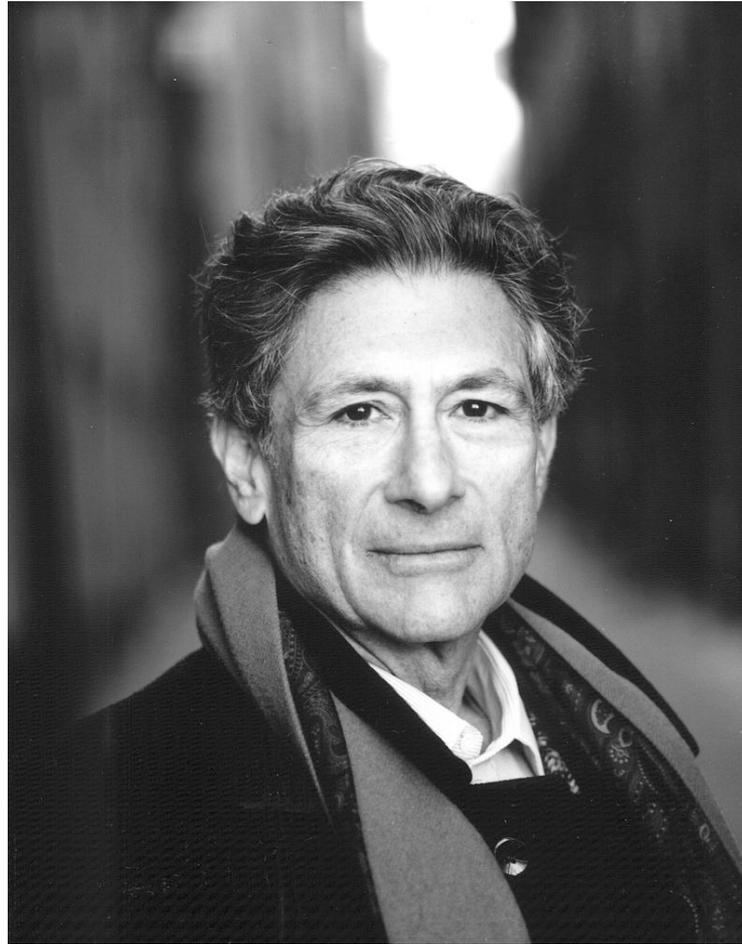
# VS Naipaul



- **Sir Vidiadhar Surajprasad "V. S." Naipaul**, (born 17 August 1932) is a Trinidadian-British writer of Indo-Trinidadian heritage.
- Novels focusing on the legacy of the British Empire's colonialism.
- Works of non-fiction, such as travel writing and essays.
- Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001

- The Loss of El dorado- a colonial history
- The Middle Passage
- India- A wounded Civilization
- Among the Believers- An Islamic Journey
- The Masque of Africa

# Edward Said- Orientalism



# Orientalism

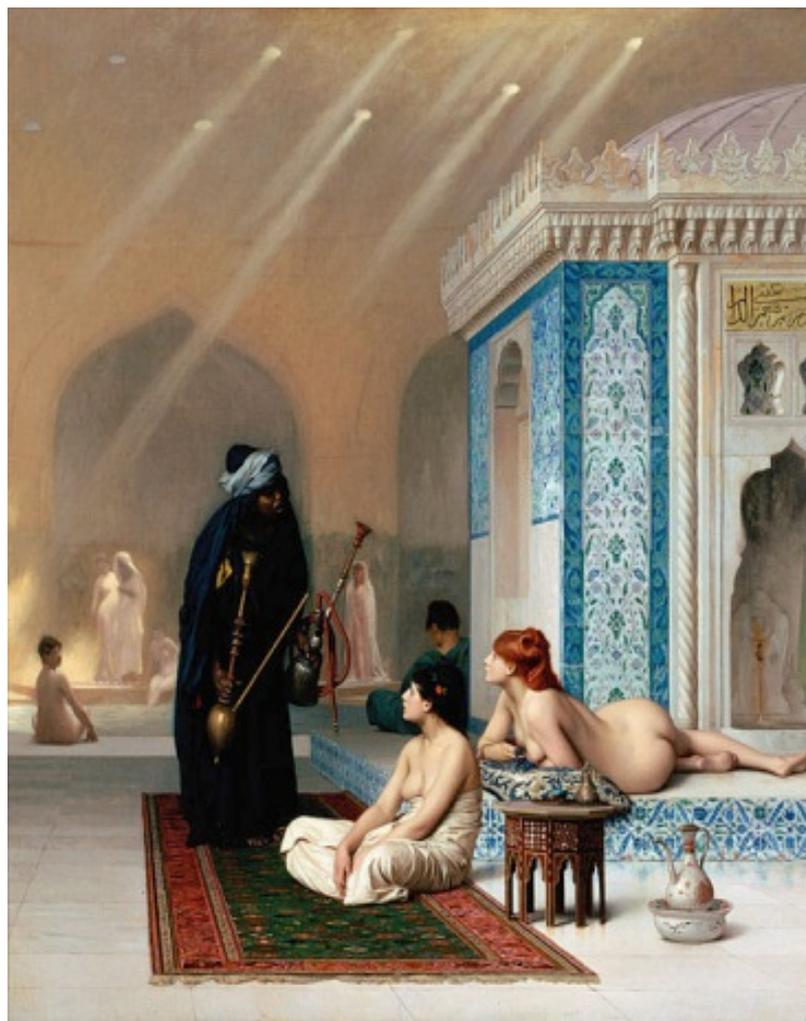
- Examines the Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture.
- Argues that a long tradition of romanticized images of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture had served as an implicit justification for European and American colonial and imperial ambitions.
- **Foucault**- Said emphasized the relationship between **power** and **knowledge** in scholarly and popular thinking, in particular regarding European views of the Islamic Arab world

# Orientalist Art









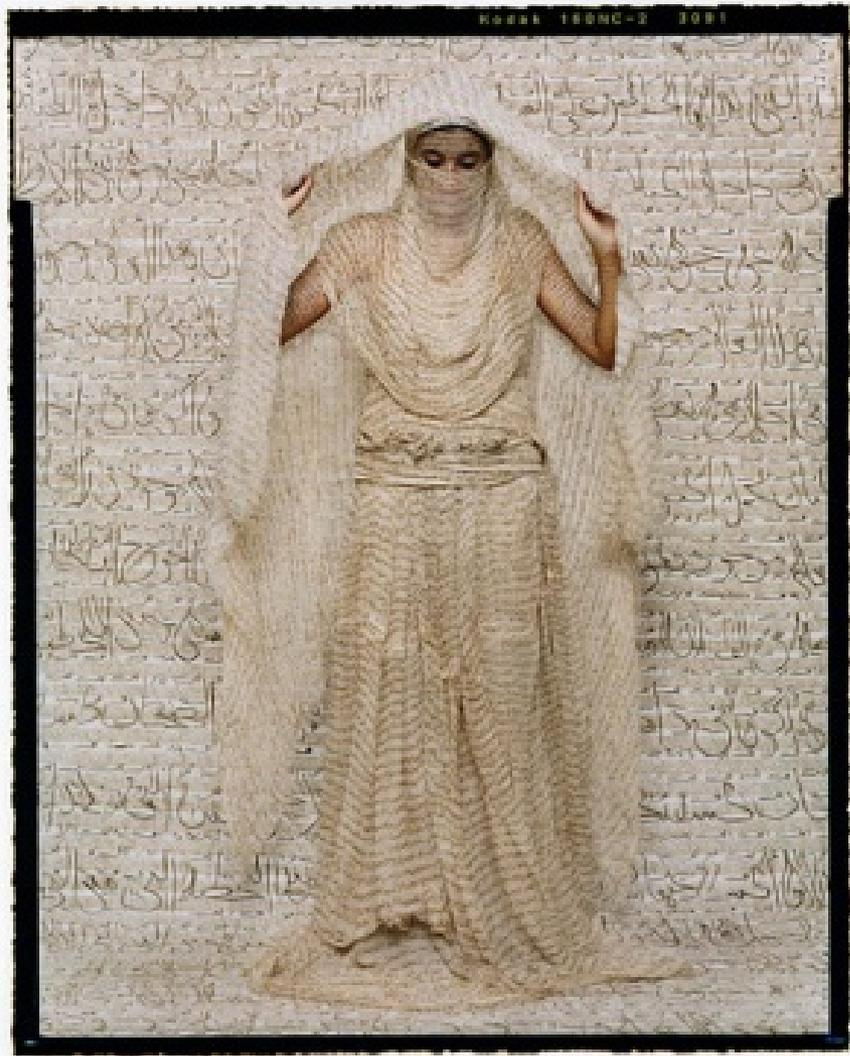
# Postcolonial Middle-Eastern Artists

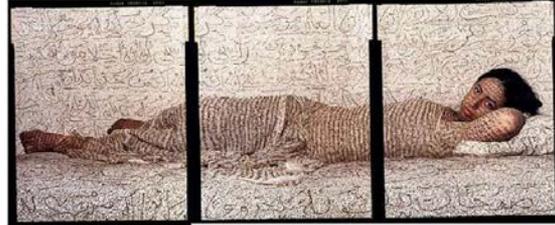
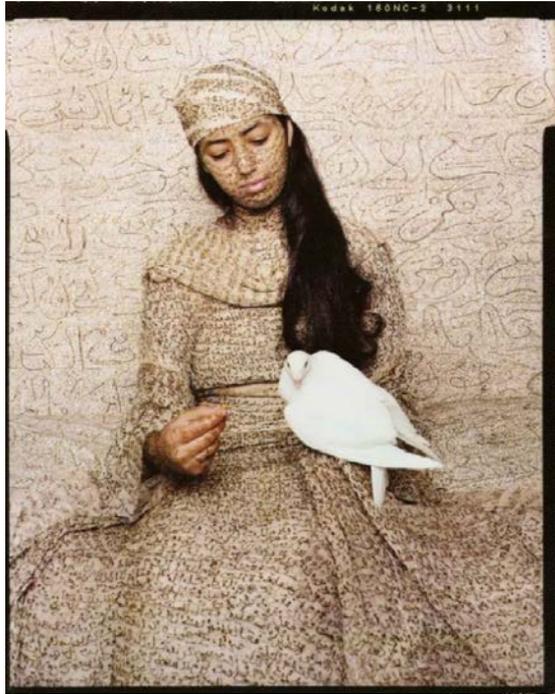
- Shirin Neshat
- Lalla Essaydi

# Lalla Essaydi







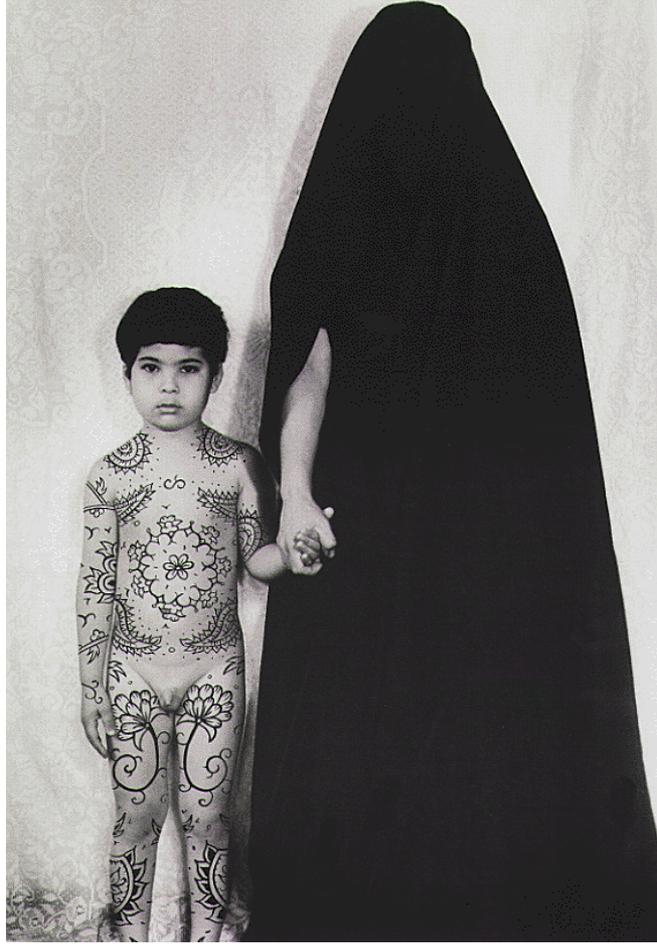


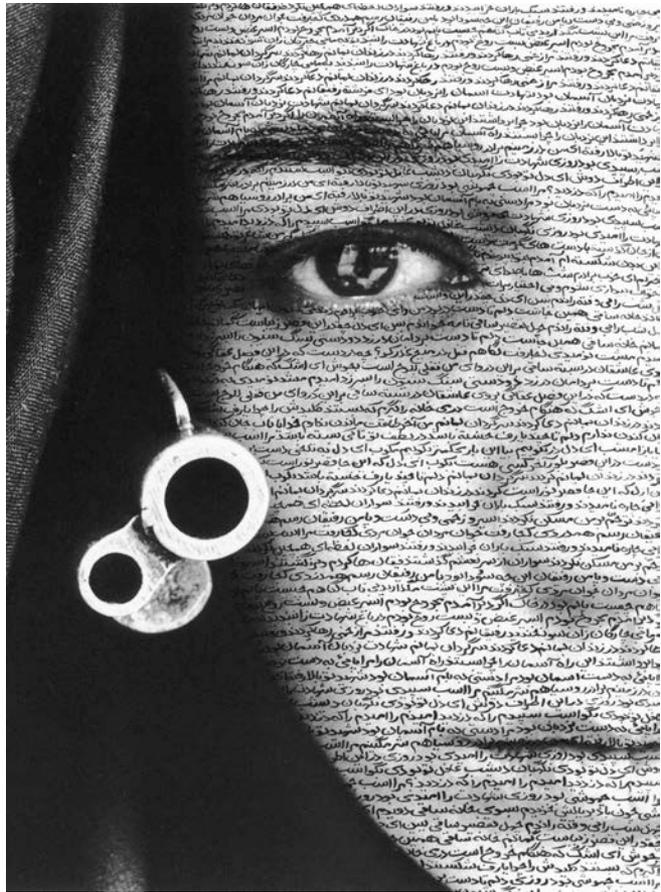
# Shirin Neshat











# Franz Fanon- The Wretched of the Earth



# The Wretched of the Earth

- written during and regarding the Algerian struggle for independence from colonial rule and first published in 1961.
- As a psychiatrist, Fanon explored the psychological effect of colonization on the psyche of a nation as well as its broader implications for building a movement for decolonization.

# Fanon on the Native Artist

- Artist tend to turn towards the past and away from actual events to illustrate the truths of a nation
- Before independence, the native painter is insensible to the national scene
- Sets high value on non-figurative art, or specialized in still-lives.
- After independence his anxiety to rejoin his people will confine him to the most detailed representation of reality.

# Postcolonial Africa

- Marlene Dumas
- Yinka Shonibare

# Yinka Shonibare











# VS Naipaul- The Masque of Africa

- All the music, painting, sculpture, everything is linked with the forest.
- “Every living thing is energy. Everyone of us is like a battery.”
- Matrilineal Society- Women are the real power. A woman may not exercise power but she gives it to her son
- There are many ritual sacrifices where eyes are removed and tongues torn out of living victims to get “energy”

# Marlene Dumas





Maulana is honoured for many things now, but he was as he is also a very attractive and elusive man.



— He has been called many names and he has taken on many different names.

Artist proof.  
print of a portrait  
of a young man in data.

Would you take this man with your daughter?  
He's been called  
Polihlahla, by his father at his birth 18.07.1948. Nelson by his British teacher at 7.  
The Black Panther by the press in the 60s. David Muzumayi on his false passport  
4.6.66 as prisoner of Robben Island. Maulana, his claimant as sign of respect,  
and Terrorist on the list of USA foreigner affairs until this year.

in Durban 2002.







# India

- British established art schools in Madras 1850 and Calcutta 1854

# VS Naipaul- India- A Wounded Civilization

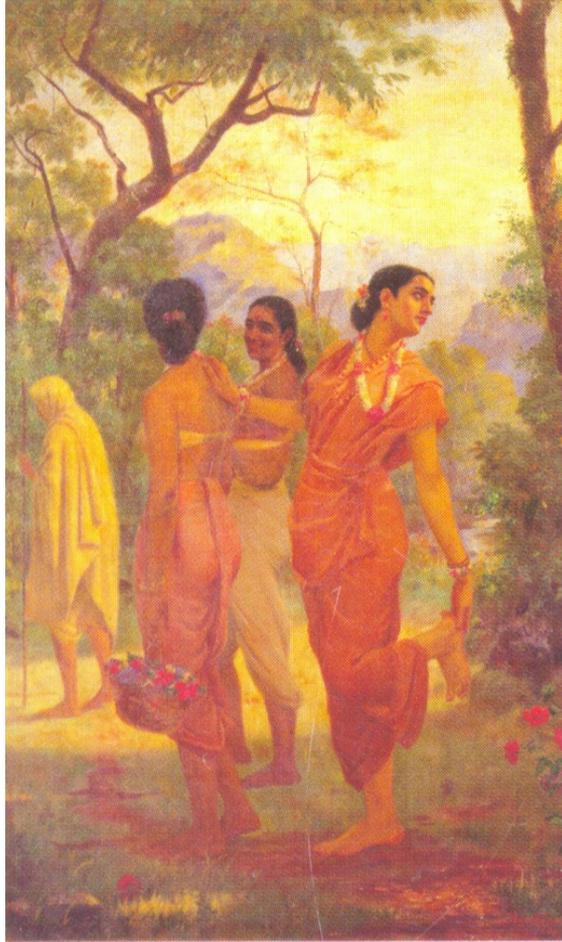
- Claims that the great tradition of Indian painting died with British Colonialism; “..... painting simply cannot go back to where it left off; too much has intervened”
- Declined into tourist art for new patrons with limited interests.
- A new way of looking is imposed as they depict native “types” in a European manner, suppressing their own feeling for design an organization

# Ravi Varma











# Amrita Sher Gil



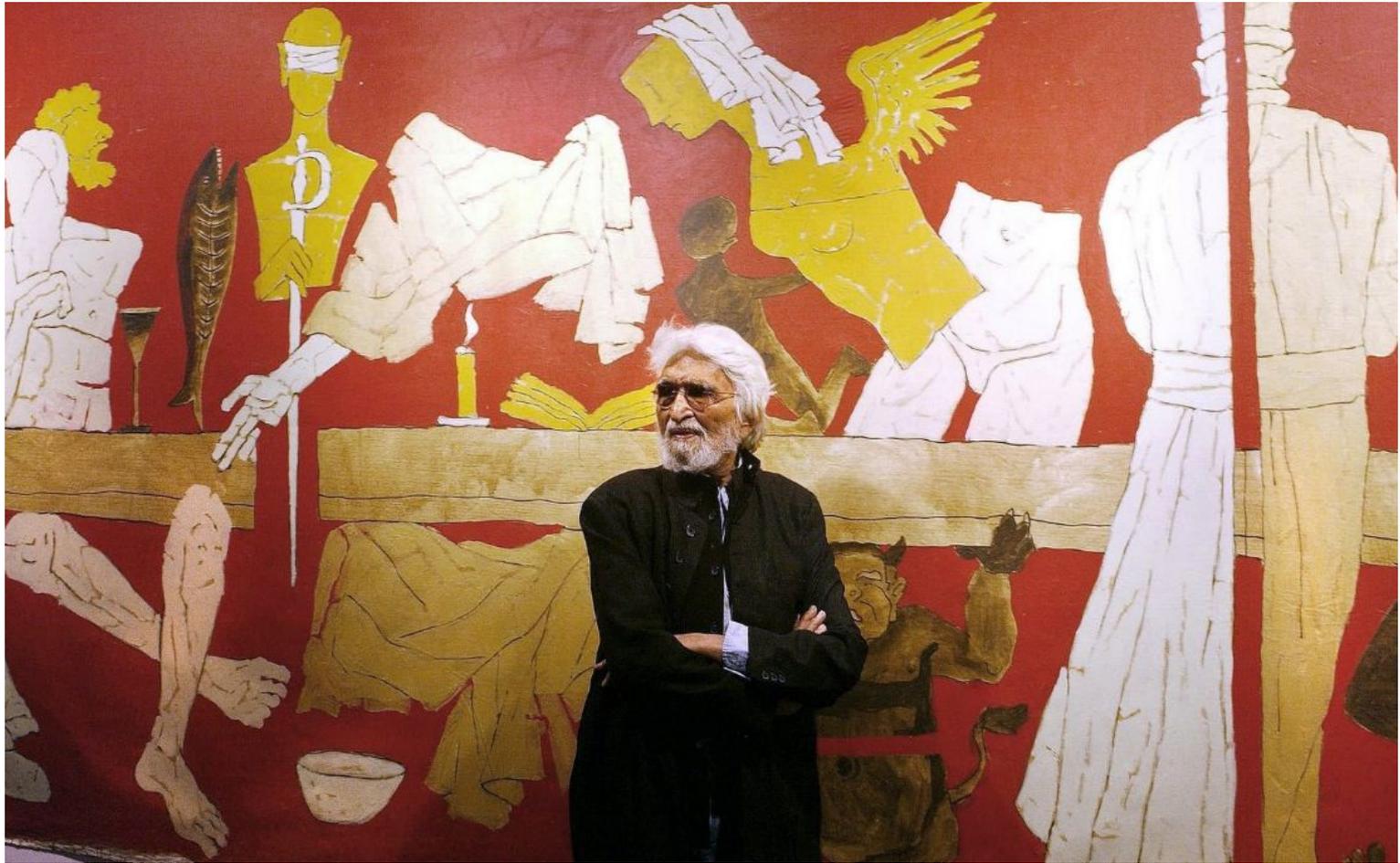


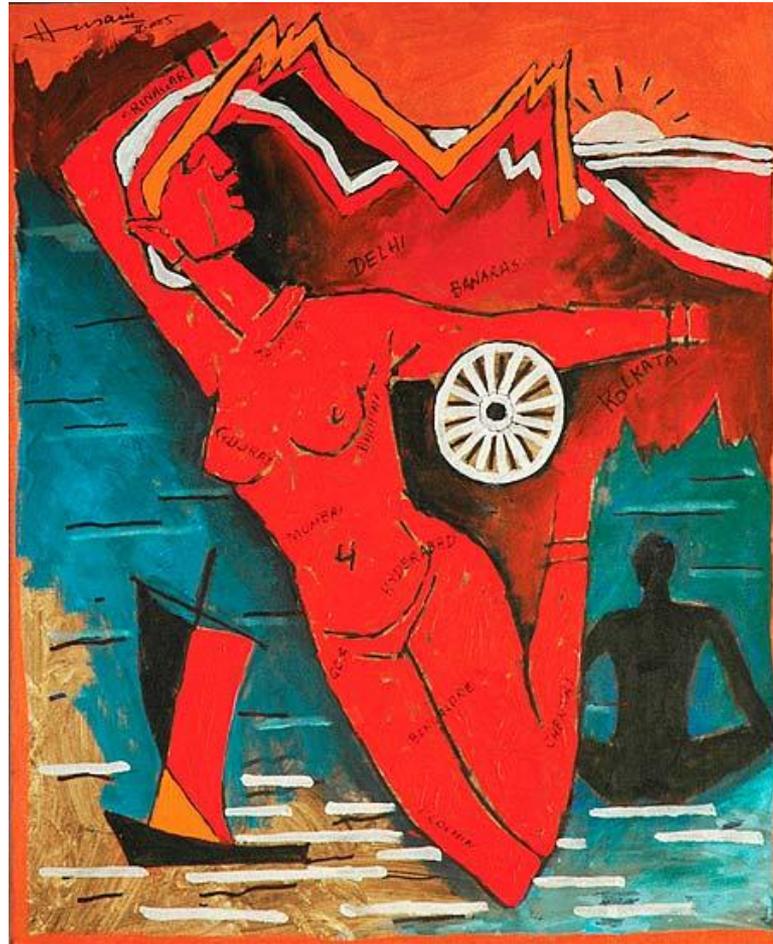


# Raghu Rai

- All that we have in India still lives- several centuries at the same time. The eternity of it all, that is what matters finally

# MF Hussein









# KCS Paniker











# Trinidad and Tobago

- a small group of painters, poets and writers dubbed the "Society of Trinidad Independents", taking their cue from the modernist movements in Europe- pointed the country into the headwinds of contemporary art.
- They revelled in Gauguin, Modigliani and the growing fascination with African art; their metaphysical leanings found a ready response in Shango - Baptist beliefs with strong echoes of Orisha in Benin.
- The group ran afoul of a fundamentalist press whose vitriolic attacks were partially responsible for the disintegration of the body (after nine years) in 1938. Their pioneering visual work, however, was to have a profound influence on the development of art in Trinidad and Tobago.

# Creolization

- Creolization is a condition in which the formation of new identities and inherited culture evolve to become different from those they possessed in the original cultures

# VS Niapaul in Trinidad

- In 2007 he returns to Trinidad
- Urges Citizens to shrug off the notions of “Indian” and “African” and to concentrate on being Trinidadian.”

# Boscoe Holder





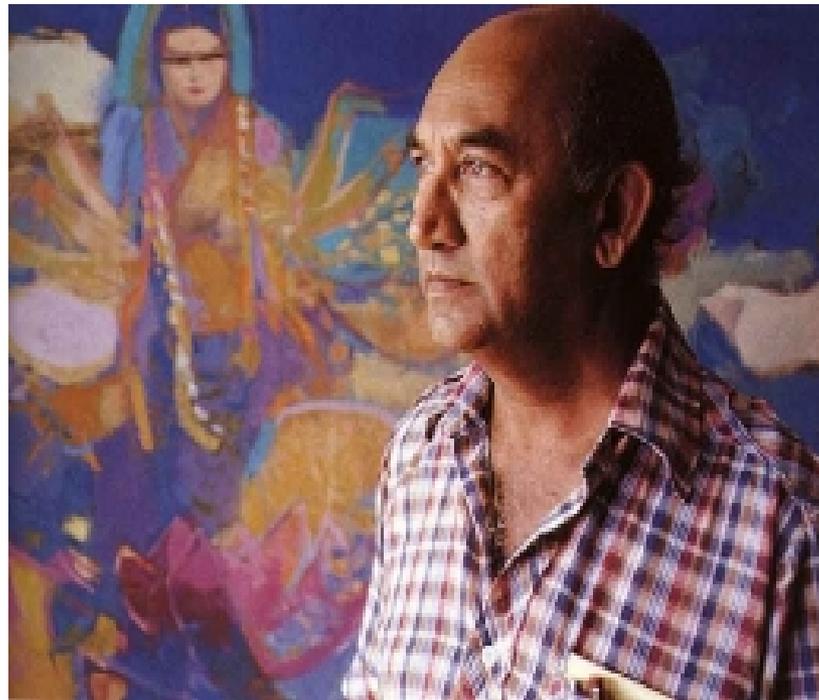




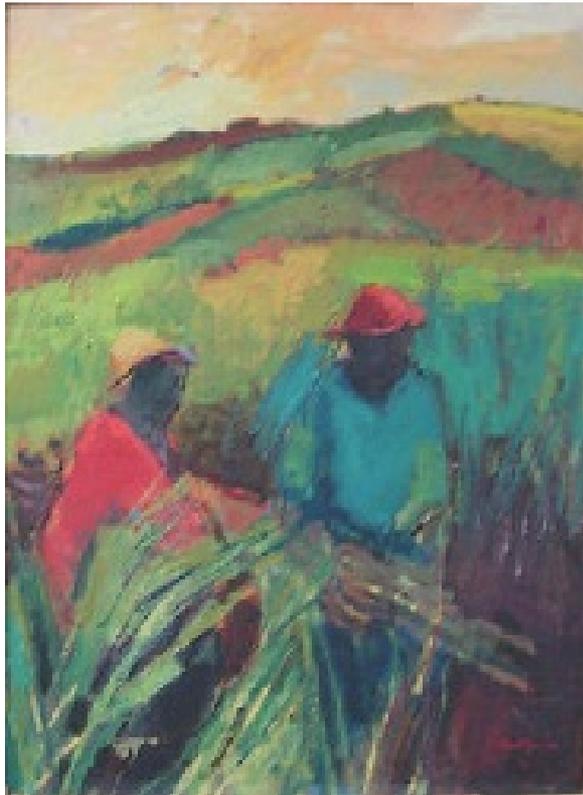




# Isaiah Boodhoo













# Leroy Clarke













# Che Lovelace



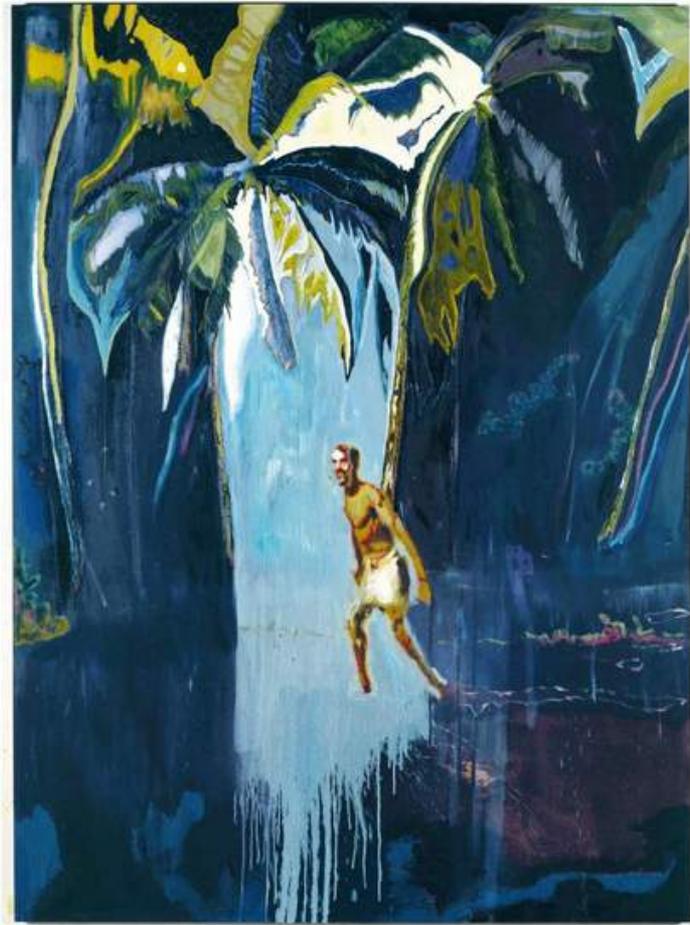






# Peter Doig

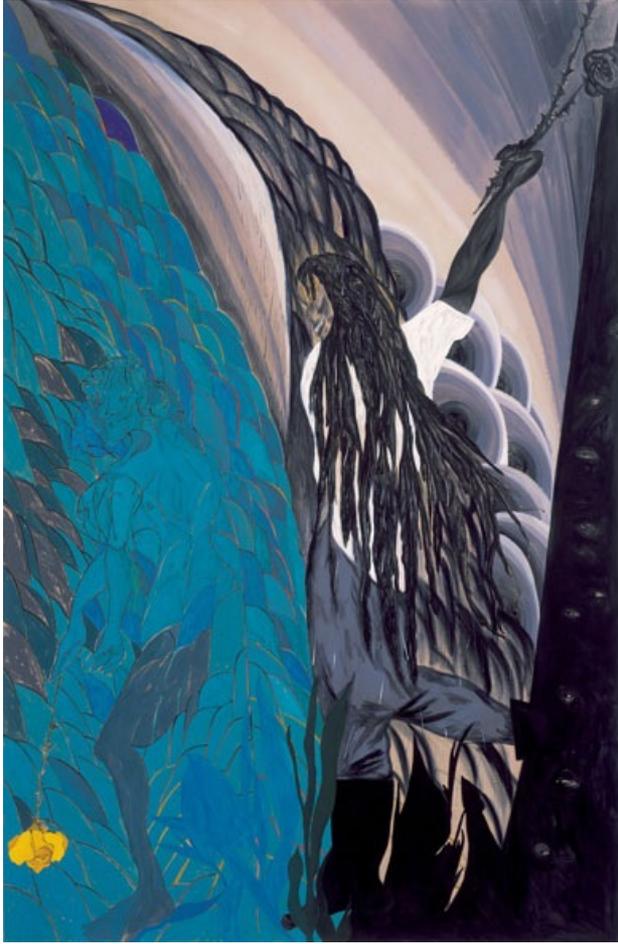


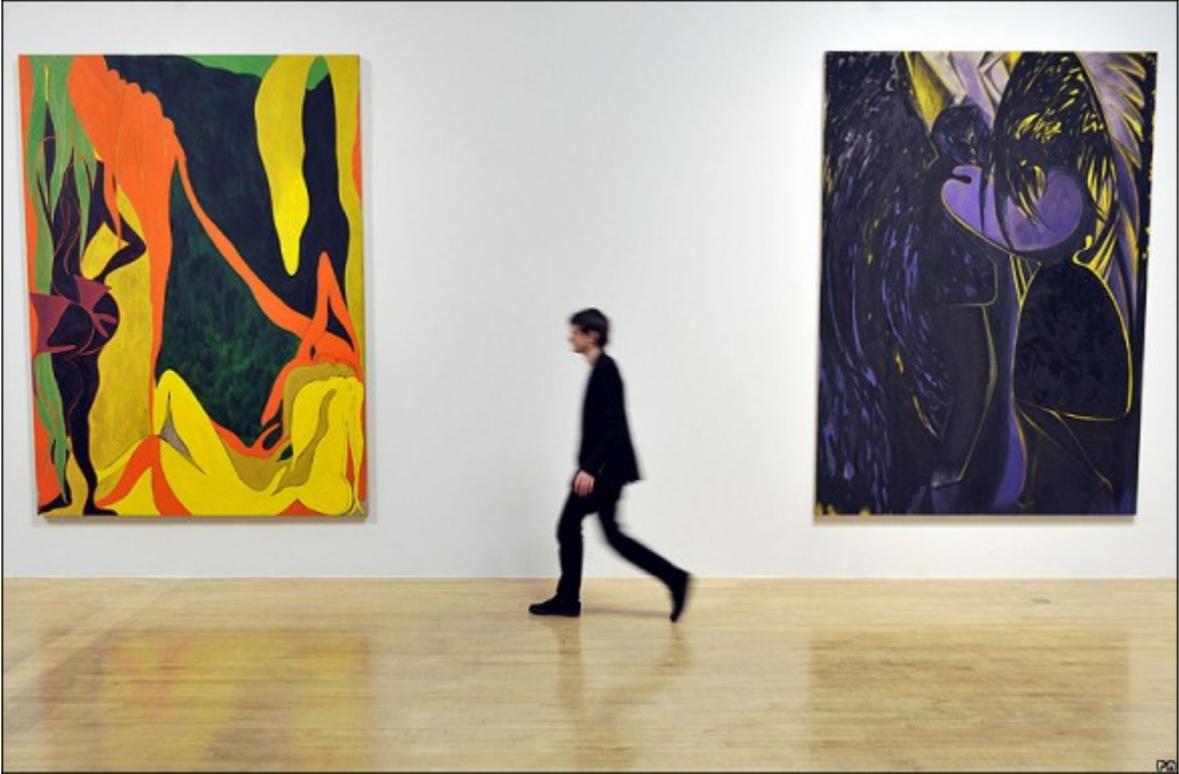




# Chris Ofili







# Carnival- mas

- French planters, indentured laborers and their slaves emigrated to Trinidad during the French Revolution (1789) from Martinique, including a number of West Africans, and French creoles from Saint Vincent, Grenada, and Dominica, establishing a local community before Trinidad and Tobago were taken from Spain by the British.
- Carnival had arrived with the French, indentured laborers and the slaves, who could not take part in Carnival, formed their own, parallel celebration called Canboulay.

# Peter Minshall- Mas Man





© mark lyndersay | LYNDERSAY DIGITAL.COM







Noel P. Norton



Noel P.Norton

# Role of the artist in a Post colonial world

- Interpret the manifest will of the people
- Discover and encourage universalizing values within the nation.
- Illuminate and pay attention to human struggles – the local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges (genealogy).
- Learn from the past, such that history doesn't repeat itself
- Advocate Knowledge is power rather than Knowledge as Power.
- Be a role model, present Art as a viable option of expression as well as a career choice.

- Advocate Cultural pluralism within the Post Colonial world

# Richard Rorty

- If we give up this hope (to become a properly programmed machine), we shall lose what Nietzsche called “metaphysical comfort,” but we may gain a renewed sense of community.
- Our identification with our community- our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage- is heightened when we see this community as *ours* rather than *nature’s*, *shaped* rather than *found*, one among many which men have made.

- In the end, the pragmatists tells us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right.
- Advocate Cultural pluralism within the Post Colonial world