Writers Who Paint

Kim Robinson-Walcott, PhD
Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies
UWI, Mona

I find it striking that a number of Jamaica’s creative writers are also artists: Roger Mais, Lorna Goodison, Earl McKenzie and Ralph Thompson spring readily to mind. The phenomenon is not of course restricted to Jamaica: there is Derek Walcott, among probably many others – including VS Naipaul who, I discovered recently, studied art in his teens and was considered proficient.

The coincidence should perhaps not be surprising. As Dolace McLean notes in her brief essay “Narrative Aesthetics of the Caribbean” in *Writers Who Paint/Painters Who Write: Three Jamaican Artists* (Peepal Tree, 2007), “all art, visual or written, is a transient, fragile and beautiful light contained within a creative energy that chooses each writer/artist as a means of expression”. Yet, is there a special creative sensitivity or sensibility revealed in the writings of those writers who also paint?

In Wayne Brown’s short story “Landscape with Heron” the protagonist finds that his ability to discern the heron in a landscape painting eventually leads to his discernment of much more; his life is enriched. This essay will explore the enrichment evident in the visual-verbal creativity of Goodison, McKenzie, Thompson and others. The painterly qualities in Goodison’s writings are remarkable, most recently in her memoir *From Harvey River* (2007). Thompson’s *View from Mount Diablo* (2003, 2009) is a panoramic landscape. McKenzie often paints visual versions of his poems, and sometimes executes scribal versions of his paintings.

Does the Jamaican or Caribbean environment in any way especially encourage or promote visual-verbal combinations of creative expression? Or, and I raise this point very tentatively, might there be a peculiarly Jamaican or Caribbean narrative aesthetic which lends itself to such dual expression?

BIO

Dr Kim Robinson-Walcott is editor of books and monographs at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, Mona. She is also the editor of *Jamaica Journal* published by the Institute of Jamaica. Her book *Out of Order! Anthony Winkler and White West Indian Writing* was published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2006. Her other publications include the children’s book *Dale’s Mango Tree* (Kingston Publishers, 1992), which she also illustrated. Her critical essays, short stories and poems have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies.