

# A SENSE OF BELONGING

CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY IN BERMUDA ART



BERMUDA NATIONAL GALLERY



**The arts play a crucial role in society by revealing various points of view and initiating conversations on important matters. Whether artists intend to or not, their creative expressions often convey perspectives and insights that can prompt discussions and reflections among viewers. The works gathered for this exhibition are unified by a common theme: a sense of belonging.**

The impetus was the desire to reintroduce the public to two significant paintings by Robert Bassett (Bermudian, b. 1951). The pair were previously on display in Bermuda's L. F. Wade International Airport for many years. Both paintings prominently feature dancing Gombeyes, but the strong presence of the peripheral figures suggests that the intended emphasis of the artwork goes beyond the immediate spectacle of the dancers. The paintings convey the existence of an engaged community whose reaction centres on the Gombeyes; sometimes, they seem to match the energy of the dance troupe, and at other times, they appear mesmerised. What remains consistent is the sense of togetherness.

People in the paintings are seen imitating and their presence is supporting. This suggests a deeper connection, a sense of shared experience, and hints at the idea of connectivity. The exploration of the artworks' portrayal of cultural citizenship leads to broader considerations of relationships. In this context, the large Bassett paintings serve as an anchor, and the central theme throughout the exhibition is the concept of 'belonging'.

The artworks, through their portrayal of engagement and shared experiences, become a symbol of unity and belonging within the wider context of society as revealed by artists of Bermudian heritage. This sense of

belonging is depicted in various ways, large and small, representationally and implicitly, in two-dimensional and sculptural art forms. The exhibition brings together works, drawn from both from the Bermuda National Gallery's permanent collection and community loans, which collectively tell a story of connectedness.

The circle emerges as a metaphor for connection and belonging. It appears in Bill Ming's *Family Circle* which seems to address what it means to belong. While this work immediately suggests the dense geography of a small island with its depiction of people standing in close proximity within a confined space, its title and circular base suggest a caring connectedness between them. The erect and alert figures, complete with healing wounds, imply that the 'family' has faced and overcome significant challenges and has now adopted a protective and defensive stance.



02

At times, lines are utilised to develop the theme. Renowned artist Norman Lewis (American, of Bermudian descent, 1909-1979), initially a representational painter, discovered that moving away from literal depictions allowed him to capture deeper feelings and emotions. His aligned abstracted figures, seen in works such as *Untitled* (1950), reveal the universality of local themes while emphasising strength in numbers. Peter Lapsley (Bermudian, b. 1976) also employs lines in his art. His bold horizontal markings in *Crowd of One* suggest distant, indistinct figures standing shoulder to shoulder and facing the audience. The figures appear as a united vanguard or force, whether seen as stationary or advancing. These compositions convey a sense of unity and purpose, further contributing to the overarching sense of belonging.



03

Sharon Muhammad's (Bermudian, b. 1954) imagery contributes an important perspective to the theme; the intimacy of family, and the concept of a community as an extended family. Her imagery emphasises the importance of positive imagery and self-worth, promotes healing and unity, and underscores the shared responsibility and impact that individuals can have on their community. The overarching message is that a community is only as strong as the bonds and support within it.

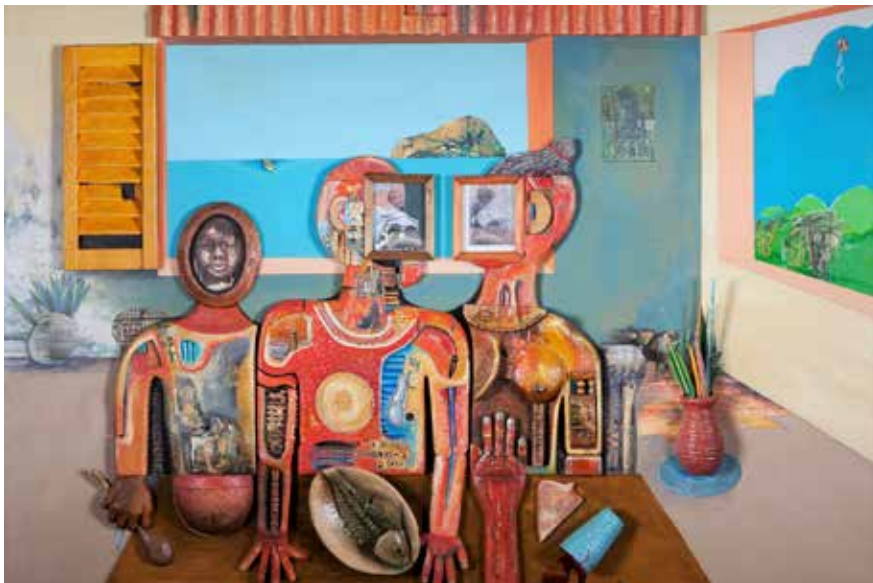
Charles Lloyd Tucker (Bermudian, 1913-1971) and Robert Barritt (Bermudian, 1927-2015), who were personal friends, used their paintings to address a significant moment in Bermuda's history, the 1959 Theatre Boycott. These artworks reflect the artists' interest in the island's social issues and their identification with the protestors. Tucker's abstracted figures in *Storm in a Teacup* are

twisting and rising vapour-like forms, that address a specific derogatory comment – authorities underestimated the severity of the situation by referring to it as nothing more than 'a storm in a teacup' – but also symbolise unified people. Barritt's *Theatre Boycott, Upstairs Right*, with its painterly collage approach, compresses time and space and portrays incredulity and defiance at the treatment by the status quo. Tucker and Barritt recognised their shared responsibility as citizens, and they saw their art as a voice and a valuable contribution to the desired change and transformation in the community.

Graham Foster's (Bermudian, b. 1970) sculptures extend the consideration of family and transformation in the community. His work prompts important questions about how we regard one another and our shared responsibilities. This extends to



04



05

concern for the well-being of future generations. *Tribal Darts*, featuring a trio of components with extreme vertical symmetry, references the interconnectedness of individuals. The work, resembling a family portrait, exudes aspirations, dignity and importantly, belonging. In *Seas of Europa*, man is depicted as a small part of a greater environment. While referencing maritime history, Foster communicates that the success of any community depends on the relationship between its members.

Existence demands working together and a desire to do so. His imagery builds on the concept that belonging is associated with personal responsibility. This is revealed in personal representation and the dignity and value of shared activity and labour.

Exhibition curated by  
Dr Edwin M.E. Smith

With support from  
Bermuda Arts Council



## BROCHURE ARTWORKS

COVER

**Robert Bassett** (Bermudian, b. 1951)  
***Gombeys in the Hood*** (detail)  
1999  
Acrylic on canvas  
68 x 108 in.  
Kindly loaned by the  
Government of Bermuda

01. **Robert Bassett** (Bermudian, b. 1951)  
***Here Come the Gombeys***  
1999  
Acrylic on canvas  
68 x 108 in.  
Kindly loaned by the  
Government of Bermuda

02. **Norman Lewis** (American, of  
Bermudian descent, 1909-1979)  
***Untitled***  
1950  
Oil with scraffito on Masonite  
24 x 20 in.  
Private Collection

03. **Charles Lloyd Tucker**  
(Bermudian, 1913-1971)  
***Storm in a Teacup***  
c. 1959  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 19.5 in.  
Collection of Carolyn and Charles Webbe

04. **Robert Barritt** (Bermudian, 1927-2015)  
***Theatre Boycott, Upstairs Right***  
1959  
Oil on board  
20 x 24 in.  
Collection of Bermuda National Gallery  
Gift of the artist

05. **Bill Ming** (Bermudian, b. 1944)  
***Hands Across Da Table***  
2008-2009  
Mixed media  
38 x 62 x 3 in.  
Collection of Bermuda National Gallery

Brochure design: Linda Weinraub, Fluent

## NOVEMBER 2023

# BERMUDA NATIONAL GALLERY

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