

Dancehall: A Pedagogical Portfolio

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SYLLABUS

Dancehall: Culture, Protest, and Social Activism
ENGLISH 400+ Special Topics Course
Fall 2022

Instructor: Grayson Chong

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Meeting Info: Tuesdays and Thursdays | 10:00-11:15 hrs

Office Hours: Tuesdays | 13:00-15:00 hrs OR by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is dancehall? Often times, dancehall is associated with raunchy, sexual music and explicitly provocative style. It is also a very male-dominated space. Dancehall artist, Buju Banton, describes dancehall music as “the medium where which the young men of Jamaica were able to express their idea and concept and construct of life in their tongue, in their way, in their language, in their rhythms” (“Live N Livin” 2021). Dancehall music emerged in the late 1970s from inner-city communities and ghettos to protest systemic inequities and political turbulence as well as to speak against the violence within these communities. Such protest is best articulated in songs like “Welcome to Jamrock” by Damian Marley and “System” by Popcaan. With these songs in mind, how might dancehall as a music genre – and dancehall culture at large – be a mode of protest and social activism?

This course focuses on aspects of Jamaican dancehall culture, particularly music, fashion, and art. In it, students explore dancehall culture as a mode of social justice and protest against racism, sexism, colourism, and elitism. Readings include scholarship by Bibi Bakare-Yusuf, Carolyn Cooper, Donna P. Hope, Rex Nettleford, and Sonjah Stanley Niaah among others. We will also focus on artists and performers that incorporate dancehall culture in their works such as Don Letts and Rick Elgood; Ebony G. Patterson; and L’Antoinette Stines. Since dancehall as a culture engages all the senses – particularly visual, auditory, and tactile – reading material will include music videos, films, performances, and documentaries. Elizabeth Klett notes: “Dancers learn movement primarily through embodiment: by physically performing it through their bodies, rather than through language (either spoken or written).” In other words, the epistemology of dance comes from movement itself. Dancers come to know through dancing (read: moving). I use this way of knowing as the basis of this seminar: knowing through doing. Or to be put another way: knowing (and activism) through creation. Interdisciplinary and collaborative in scope, the seminar welcomes students from all departments – Art, Afro-American Studies, English, Film, Music and Dance, Theatre, etc.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By reading, creating, and engaging in this course, you will:

- Learn about dancehall culture and its political aims and abilities;
- Learn about the political potential of art and artistic movements and reflect on the political potential of art in your own work and practice(s);
- Collaborate with students outside your department and exchange skills with each other;
- Build networks and working, professional relationships with students who will (realistically) apply their skills to professions outside of the academy;
- Design and create works that you can include in future portfolios.

COURSE STRUCTURE

We meet on Tuesdays and Thursday. Tuesdays are reserved for discussions on the assigned course material and presentations on spotlighted artists. Thursdays are designated days to work on your final project. You will notice on the syllabus that some Thursdays will include “check-ins.” These check-ins are brief; you will show the class your progress on your semester-long project. These check-ins are opportunities to ask the class for help, ideas, and feedback as needed.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Niaah, Sonjah Stanley, ed. *Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture*. Kingston, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2020.
- All other readings, films, and videos will be found on Moodle and YouTube

ASSIGNMENTS

- Bi-weekly progress entries (30%)
- Artist spotlight presentation (20%)
- Final project accompanied by an artist statement (50%)

Biweekly Progress Entries (30%)

Throughout the semester, you will keep an informal document (either written or typed) on the progress of your final project. These entries will be due bi-weekly (see “Course Schedule” for the dates they are due). It is a space for you to reflect on your successes, challenges, and questions as you work towards your final project. It is also a fruitful place for you to reflect on the week’s readings and how you see similarities or techniques that you can use and/or are interested in incorporating into your own work.

Artist Spotlight Presentation (20%)

You will choose a week to spotlight an artist whose work intersects with yours and/or whose work you’d like to explore further. In a 15-minute presentation (max.), you will introduce the artist of your choice to the class and address the following questions: what is this artist trying to do and how? How is this artist’s work useful for my own work? To whom is the artist speaking to and where is their work circulating?

Final Project (50%)

In this assignment, you will create a final piece *of your own design* related to aspects of dancehall that is most relevant to your own work. This can take a number of forms – an art installation, music production, short film, costume/fashion design, a chapter of a novel, a collection of poems, etc. An artist statement that identifies your intended audience and artistic decisions will accompany your final piece. The statement will also identify 1-2 cultural institutions that would host your final project. On the last day of class, you will present your final piece to the course participants.

Final Project due: December 6th – in class

POLICIES AND HOUSEKEEPING RULES

Office Hours. I encourage you to come to my office hours! Come and introduce yourself. Office hours is a time when we can discuss the questions and plays that most intrigue you. I am also interested in learning about who you are as a person and what I can do to help you succeed in your short-term and long-term endeavours.

Names and Pronouns. Everyone has the right to be addressed and referred to by the name and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity, including the use of non-binary pronouns. Students can indicate their preferred/chosen first name and pronouns on SPIRE, which appear on class rosters. Please let me know what name and pronouns you prefer if they are not on the roster. A student's chosen name and pronouns are to be respected at all times in the classroom.

Emails. Emailing me is by far the best way to reach me outside of my office hours. When sending me emails, please use your @umass.edu account. Entering our course code (ENGL400+) in the subject line will ensure that I do not miss it.

I check my emails once a day and will do my best to reply within 24 hours. If I feel that your inquiry requires more reflection, I will email you to confirm I received your email and possibly invite you to attend my office hours instead so that we can discuss your inquiries and concerns in detail. Please think about emails as letters to me instead of text messages.

Community Membership and Etiquette. Creating a community that enables us to grow as artists depends on each person fulfilling our responsibilities, offering mutual respect, and being receptive readers of one another's work. All students are expected to adhere to the university's "Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect" that is available at:

http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct.

Essential learning in this course will happen as you engage in collaborative activities with peers. Performing well in community membership means actively and respectfully contributing to *and* seeking to learn from our class community. Note that participation can take a variety of forms: e.g., asking questions and giving comments during class discussions and critiques, taking notes on behalf of a small group, sharing perspectives in writing with peers. The most vital part of being a part of this community is acknowledging that each one of you comes into this class with a multitude of diverse experiences, outlooks, and talents. In this unity of diversity, it is important to be respectful of people's opinions and points of view. We are here to learn from and support each other.

Academic Honesty Policy. When using ideas, words, and short passages from other people's writing in your own writing, *you are required to acknowledge the source*. Failure to acknowledge the contribution of others is considered plagiarism, a serious academic offense; fabrication of sources is another form of academic dishonesty. We'll discuss the Writing Program's Academic Honesty Policy later in the semester, but note that suspect papers (e.g., those without drafts or works cited pages, papers which make large departures in style from your other work) may be submitted to Turnitin.com as part of the grading process. Also, see the university's policy: www.umass.edu/dean_students/academic_policy.

All submitted work must be done with precision, insight, and care. If you decide to incorporate other people's ideas in your work, always acknowledge and cite these references. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be treated as such by me and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. If you have any questions about plagiarism, I am happy to speak with you during my office hours. Please remember that citing does not give the impression that you are lacking in ideas. In fact, it shows me that you have gone a step further to broaden your ideas and insights. Just remember to follow the golden rule: when in doubt, cite it!

Course Grade. Your final course grade for the semester will be based on the following breakdown:

Biweekly progress entries	30%
Artist spotlight presentation	20%
Final project and artist statement	50%
Total	100%

Final grades will be based on the following numerical equivalents and general definitions:

letter	grade pt	percent	meaning
A	4.0	100-94	excellent
A-	3.7	93-90	
B+	3.3	89-87	
B	3.0	86-83	good
B-	2.7	82-80	
C+	2.3	79-77	
C	2.0	76-73	fair
C-	1.7	72-70	
D+	1.3	69-67	
D	1.0	66-60	poor
F	0.0	59-0	failure

**Note: Grades of B and above are considered honors-level grades. The grade of A indicates excellence.*

RESOURCES

Office of Disability Services. All students are welcomed in this course. I am committed to making our courses accessible to all students. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the Office of Disability Services (<https://www.umass.edu/disability/>), and, *at the start of the semester*, do meet with me about tailoring accommodations identified by ODS to your work in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that requires accommodations, do not hesitate to speak with me and/or Disability Services as soon as possible. Staff are located in 161 Whitmore. You can also contact them at (413) 545-0892. It is my goal to meet your needs in any way I can.

Title IX at UMass. The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to fostering an environment in which all members of our campus community are safe from gender discrimination (including discrimination based on gender identity and expression), sexual harassment, and sexual violence. Our community expects that all interpersonal relationships and interactions – especially those of an intimate nature – be grounded upon mutual respect, open communication, and clear consent. We aspire to be a university environment that is free of

discrimination and sexual violence and we take allegations of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and other sexual misconduct with the utmost seriousness. The cornerstones of our processes are fair and prompt investigations, respect for the privacy of the parties, and commitment to due process. It is our goal that anyone who reports an experience of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, or other sexual misconduct feels safe, knows their rights, and is connected to resources and options that will support a safe collegiate experience. I will also assist you if you want to connect with any of these resources/options. Please go to the Title IX webpage at <http://www.umass.edu/titleix/> and the Sexual & Relationship Violence Resource Guide http://www.umass.edu/titleix/sites/default/files/documents/sexual_violence_resource_guide-09-15.pdf to find more information about resources and reporting options. If you want to make a report, file a complaint, find out about available resources and/or academic support, you can contact Débora Ferreira, Title IX Coordinator by email at equalopportunity@admin.umass.edu or by phone at (413) 545-3464.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Thursday, September 3 rd	What is dancehall? Watch: Sean Paul, “Live N Livin” Dancehall Documentary, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAD7YgjJEQo Watch: Vybz Kartel, “Dancehall” (found on YouTube)
WEEK 2 Tuesday, September 6 th	What is dancehall? (cont’d) Read: Hope, Donna P. “Setting the Dancehall Stage: The Historical Moment.” In <i>Inna Di Dancehall: Popular Culture and the Politics of Identity in Jamaica</i> , 1-24. ----- Cooper, Carolyn. “Slackness Hiding from Culture: Erotic Play on the Dancehall.” In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 29-62. ----- Niaah, Sonjah Stanley. “Out of Many... One Dancehall.” In <i>DanceHall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto</i> , 1-27.
Thursday, September 8 th	Project work period
WEEK 3 Tuesday, September 13 th	Dancehall and MUSIC / Artist Spotlight: Spice & Shenseea Listen: Spice, “Black Hypocrisy” and “So Mi Like It;” Shenseea, “ShengYeng Anthem” and “Bad Alone” (found on YouTube) Read: White, Garth. “The Development of Jamaican Popular Music.” In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 9-28.
Thursday, September 15 th	Project work period
WEEK 4 Tuesday, September 20 th	Dancehall and MUSIC / Artist Spotlight: Popcaan & Damian Marley Listen: Popcaan, “System,” “Silence,” and “Dream” and Damian Marley, “Welcome to Jamrock” (found on YouTube) Read: Howard, Dennis. “Dancehall Political Patronage and Gun Violence: Political Affiliations and the Glorification of Gun Culture.” In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 139-150. DUE: Progress Entry #1
Thursday, September 22 nd	Project work period / check-ins
WEEK 5 Tuesday, September 27 th	Dancehall and MUSIC / Music Circulation Read: Chin, Timothy. “Notes on Reggae Music, Diaspora Aesthetics, and Transmigrancy: The Case of VP Records.” <i>Social and Economic Studies</i> 55, no ½ (March and June 2006): 92-114. ----- Goffe, Tao Leigh. “Bigger than the Sound: The Jamaican Chinese Infrastructures of Reggae.” <i>small axe</i> 24, no. 3 (November 2020): 97-127. ----- Manuel, Peter and Wayne Marshall. “The Riddim Method: Aesthetics, Practice and Ownership in Jamaican Dancehall.” In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 283-302.

Thursday, September 29 th	Project work period
WEEK 6 Tuesday, October 4 th	Dancehall and FASHION / Artist Spotlight: Don Letts & Rick Elgood Watch: Letts, Don and Rick Elgood, dirs. <i>Dancehall Queen</i> . 1997, Kingston, Jamaica: Hawk's Nest Productions. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRQdeadFiy8 . Read: Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi. "Fabricating Identities: Survival and the Imagination in Jamaican Dancehall Culture." <i>Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture</i> 10, no. 4 (December 2006): 461-83. DUE: Progress Entry #2
Thursday, October 6 th	Project work period
WEEK 7 Tuesday, October 11 th	Dancehall and FASHION / Styling the Body Read: Hope, Donna. "Fashion Ova Style: Dancehall's Masculine Duality." In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 223-237. ----- Shaw Nevins, Andrea. "Born in Chanel, Christen in Gucci: The Rhetoric of Brand Names and Haute Couture in Jamaican Dancehall." In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i> , edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 406-419.
Thursday, October 13 th	Project work period
WEEK 8 Tuesday, October 18 th	Dancehall and VISUAL ART / Artist Spotlight: Ebony G. Patterson Explore: http://ebonygpatterson.com/ Read: Mordecai, Rachel. "Scenes of (Un)making: Caribbean Women's Textile/Textual Practice." <i>small axe salon</i> 36, no. 1 (February 2021): http://smallaxe.net/sxsalon/discussions/scenes-unmaking-caribbean-womens-textiletextual-practice DUE: Progress Entry #3
Thursday, October 20 th	Project work period
WEEK 9 Tuesday, October 25 th	Dancehall and VISUAL ART / Artist Spotlight: Sharon Chacko Read: Chacko, Sharon. "Batik: An Ancient Craft as an Expression of Contemporary Jamaica." In <i>Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference</i> , edited by Selwyn R. Cudjoe, 329-335.
Thursday, October 27 th	Project work period / check-ins
WEEK 10 Tuesday, November 1 st	Dancehall and THEATRE / Artist Spotlight: NDTC Read: Nettleford, Rex. "Avatar and Living Monument: The NDTC 1962-2007," "The Repertoire and Choreography," and "Technique(s), Vocabulary and Style." In <i>Dance Jamaica: Renewal and Continuity: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica, 1962-2008</i> , 1-30, 97-133, 135-170. DUE: Progress Entry #4
Thursday, November 3 rd	Project work period

<p>WEEK 11 Tuesday, November 8th</p>	<p>Dancehall and DANCE / Artist Spotlight: L’Antoinette Stines Read: Stines, L’Antoinette. “Does the Caribbean Body Daaance or Daunce? An Exploration of Modern Contemporary Dance from a Caribbean Perspective.” <i>Caribbean Quarterly</i> 51, no. 3-4 (2005): 35-54. Watch: “Philip Sherlock Lecture 2021 presented by Dr. L’Antoinette Stines” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2jxHS8jR28; “Wine yu BABAT Lift up u Chest and Pointe yu TUOZ” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JswBEHVUpVM Explore: L’Acadco, https://www.lacadco.net/.</p>
<p>Thursday, November 10th</p>	<p>Project work period</p>
<p>WEEK 12 Tuesday, November 15th</p>	<p>Dancehall and DANCE / Artist Spotlight: Various Artists Watch: Ding Dong, “Fling Yuh Shoulda,” “Genna Bounce,” “Lebeh Lebeh;” Ding Dong ft. Voicemail, “Wacky Dip;” Sean Paul, “Get Busy,” “I’m Still in Love,” and “Like Glue” (found on YouTube) Read: Niaah, Sonjah Stanley. “Dance, Diva, Queens, and Kings: Dance and Culture in Jamaican Dancehall.” In <i>Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures</i>, edited by Susanna Sloat, 132-148. ----- Ryman, Cheryl. “When Jamaica Dances: Context and Content.” In <i>Making Caribbean Dance: Continuity and Creativity in Island Cultures</i>, edited by Susanna Sloat, 97-131. DUE: Progress Entry #5</p>
<p>Thursday, November 17th</p>	<p>Project work period / check-ins</p>
<p>WEEK 13 November 22nd to November 25th</p>	<p>Fall Break – No classes!</p>
<p>WEEK 14 Tuesday, November 29th</p>	<p>Dancehall and the TRANSNATIONAL Read: Cooper, Carolyn. “The Dancehall Transnation: Language, Lit/orature, and Global Jamaica.” In <i>Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large</i>, 279-301. ----- Muniz, Bruno Barboza. “Black Music, Popular Culture and Existential Capital: The Relationship between Appropriation and Originality.” In <i>Dancehall: A Reader on Jamaican Music and Culture</i>, edited by Sonjah Stanley Niaah, 453-467. DUE: Progress Entry #6</p>
<p>Thursday, December 1st</p>	<p>Project work period</p>
<p>WEEK 15 Tuesday, December 6th</p>	<p>Last day of class DUE: Final Project Presentations</p>

FINAL ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Final Project (50%)

Due Date: December 6th – in class

In this semester-long assignment, you will create a final piece *of your own design* related to aspects of dancehall that are most relevant to your own work. This can take a number of forms – an art installation, music production, short film, costume/fashion design, a chapter of a novel, a collection of poems, etc. An artist statement that identifies your intended audience and artistic decisions will accompany your final piece. The statement will also identify 1-2 cultural institutions that would host your final project. On the last day of class, you will present your final piece to the course participants.

Artist Statement Guidelines

In 2-3 pages (single-spaced), you will write an artist statement that addresses the following:

- Why did you choose your medium for your final project?
- Who is your intended audience?
- What is/are central question(s) you're trying to open up through your project?
- Explain your artistic decisions (what is the meaning/symbolism embedded in your work? Use of colour? Use of line(s)? Use of form?)
- Who are your inspirations for your piece? Artists? Writers? Readings/films/music selections from class?
- Identify 1-2 cultural institutions where you'd want your piece to be displayed/published

This course is focused on the progress of your final project in addition to how well you have synthesized the political aims and potentiality of dancehall. Since this project is ongoing, you will be assessed on the following throughout the semester:

- Consistency – Were you able to work on your project regularly? If not, what made it challenging to do so? Can you articulate what motivated and inspired you (readings/artists/time management) as you worked on your project?
- Collaboration – Were you willing to share your knowledge with your peers when asked? Did you give helpful, constructive, and thoughtful feedback to your peers during check-ins and project work periods? Did you offer help to peers when they were faced with a challenge?
- Communication – Were you able to articulate how particular aspects of dancehall might be useful to your own work? Are you able to communicate the usefulness of art as protest? Is your final project clear in its purpose, scope, and audience? Are you able to clearly articulate these elements in your artist statement? Are you able to envision how your intended audience will receive your work? Are your central questions clear?
- Reflection – How self-aware are you in your own creative process? How well are you able to identify your strengths and challenges as the course progressed? Were you able to make connections between the course materials, dancehall aspects, and your own work? How would you assess your growth and progress from the beginning of the semester to the end of it?

SAMPLE FINAL ASSIGNMENT EXAMPLE with ARTIST STATEMENT

Fi Di Dancehall Queen Dem

By Grayson Chong

“[T]here things define Jamaican women: shame, cunning, and the gift of rebirth [...] Of all the Jamaican women that embody this, there is none that does it so completely as those who shirk the mundaneness of life and choose with vigour the position of dancehall queen.”

- Omi Ra, from *fi di gyal dem*¹

At its core, dancehall is a litany and celebration of survival. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf observes that dancehall women respond to their socio-political and economic plight through the multi-textural imprint of enculturated cloth.² According to her: “Fashion is a prominent and constitutive part of dancehall culture *and* the site for vigorous debate about lower-class women's morality and sexuality in Jamaica [...] It allows dancehall women to challenge the patriarchal, class-based and (Christian and Rastafarian) puritanical logic operating in Jamaica.”³ Despite being a male-dominated genre (particularly in the music aspect), dancehall culture is unique in that women are highly visible.

My top with dancehall elements stitched onto it, entitled “Fi Di Dancehall Queen Dem,”⁴ pays homage to women in dancehall – the artists like Lady Saw, Spice, and Shenseea; the dancehall queens like Carlene Smith and Sandra Lee;⁵ and perhaps more importantly, the women that use dancehall culture and fashion as modes of self-expression and survival. The central question that has guided this final project is: how do we honour women as the centre of dancehall culture? How do we pay respect to these women as creators, transmitters of knowledge, and bodies of resistance? Like all art, this top can be shown to anyone, but my intended audience are dancehall participants and people of the Jamaican diaspora.

Originally, I had intended for this top to be a corset. The corset, with its boning, was intended to symbolize “high culture,” and the dancehall design was to represent resistance to this high culture.⁶ However, I decided against adding boning while constructing the top as not to ruin the design that had been handstitched. In a way, the top *not* becoming a corset becomes a sign of protest against the restrictive policies against (black) women. Because dancehall fashion is colourful and vibrant, I used black as the base colour of the top so that the colours of the figures could stand out more prominently.

¹ Ra, Omi. “Journal Entry #1: What’s in a Name.” *fi di gyal dem*, art pieces by Jorian Charlton and Kadine Lindsay, curated by Roya DelSol, <https://dorismccarthygallery.utoronto.ca/fi-di-gyal-dem>.

² Bakare-Yusuf, Bibi, “Fabricating Identities: Survival and the Imagination in Jamaican Dancehall Culture,” *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 10, no. 4 (December 2006): 476.

³ Bakare-Yusuf, “Fabricating Identities,” 461, 462.

⁴ The name of this fashion piece is inspired by *fi di gyal dem*, an online exhibition of works by Jorian Charlton (photographer) and Kadine Lindsay (visual artist). It celebrates the interior lives of black women through a series of portraiture, paintings, animation, and commissioned mixed media pieces. Check out this beautiful exhibition at <https://dorismccarthygallery.utoronto.ca/fi-di-gyal-dem>.

⁵ A dancehall queen is a female dancer known in the dancehall scene for her charisma, dance moves, and fashion sense. The tradition of dancehall queen originates from Jamaican dancehall parties in the ghettos. It is a highly coveted title to describe the best local female dancer.

⁶ Donna P. Hope outlines the difference between “high culture” and “low culture” in Jamaican society. High culture refers to the predominantly brown or light-skinned, educated, middle classes while low culture is used to describe the predominantly black or dark-skinned people of inner cities in Kingston, St. Andrew, St. Catherine, and the lower classes of Jamaica. Hope, *Inna di Dancehall: Popular Culture and Politics of Identity in Jamaica* (Mona, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2006), 9.

In my graduate seminar, “Shakespeare, Race, and Social Justice,” one of the central goals of the course was to evaluate the purpose and value of Shakespeare studies scholarship and how it can be adapted in the world. With this goal in mind, I sought for the design of the top to represent a *dancehall adaptation* of a celebration from one of Shakespeare’s plays. I chose to base my design off of Act 4 Scene 1 of “The Tempest” where three goddesses – Juno, Iris, and Ceres – perform a masque to celebrate Miranda and Ferdinand’s engagement. The three figures handstitched into the top represent the three goddesses. The middle figure is representative of Juno, the Queen of the Gods. My design of Juno is taken from a particular image of a woman dancing dancehall.⁷ This image of the woman has become a stock image of sorts; it has proliferated on many dancehall posters and graphics. Those aware of dancehall images will recognize the figure right away which makes using this figure fitting on my piece because of how the woman’s silhouette is well known in dancehall culture. In fact, upon seeing the piece for the first time, my grandfather was able to identify the woman right away saying: “You included the Jamaican dancehall lady! Carnival Time!” My figure wears a red, yellow, green, and black dress. The mesh fishnet of the dress is important because fishnet is commonly worn among women and men to dancehall parties. The colours of the dress pay homage to Rastafarianism whose main tenet is liberation from oppression. In relation to dancehall, the middle figure represents how dancehall becomes a site of liberation through dress. The figure to the left represents Iris, Juno’s messenger and the goddess of rainbows. Her purple top is inspired by an image of Carlene Smith, a dancehall queen who wears a purple top similar to that of my figure.⁸ I added an extra layer of sequins and mesh to make it representative of a Carnival costume. Caribbean Carnival is important for Caribbeans (living on the islands and in the Caribbean diaspora) because it is a celebration of cultural survival against centuries of colonization. The purple of my Iris figure also pays homage to Marcia’s *iconic* purple dress in *Dancehall Queen* when she first appears as “The Mystery Lady.” Finally, the figure to the right represents Ceres, the goddess of agriculture. The image of Ceres is taken from the graphic that appears on “Sweet Melanin” by V’ghn.⁹ In the graphic, the woman wears a headtie. In relation to Ceres and agriculture, this is significant because Afro-Jamaicans often wore headties when working in the fields and when carrying produce to and from the market. The headtie itself is representative of the Jamaican working-class woman, a socioeconomic sector that dancehall women originally emerged from.

The use of contrasting colours and fabrics speaks to how dancehall fashion and adornment goes against the ‘ideal’ look for Jamaican women perpetuated by society and culture.¹⁰ This sartorial excess becomes a solution to “sufferation.”¹¹ While the masque in “The Tempest” is meant to celebrate love between the couple; my dancehall top is meant to celebrate love, life, and survival through dancehall. Dancehall fashion speaks to the social and political conditions in which many women in Jamaican ghettos find themselves.¹² Bakare-Yusuf explains

⁷ To see the image I am referring to, click here: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/348606827377571278/>.

⁸ For the image of Carlene Smith’s top, see “What Does It Take to Be the ‘Dancehall Queen’?” by Bee Quammie, <https://medium.com/the-establishment/what-does-it-take-to-be-the-dancehall-queen-86cb53ccd4f0>.

⁹ V’ghn. “Sweet Melanin.” *Sweet Melanin Riddim*, YouTube, December 26, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW2X--FJoz0>.

¹⁰ The ideal look for elite Jamaican women is essentially a *white* look: slender, restrained, calm, straightened hair, and light or brown skin. Bakare-Yusuf, “Fabricating Identities,” 467-468.

¹¹ Sufferation within a Jamaican context refers to one’s suffering due to poverty, repression, and/or oppression.

¹² For *excellent* examples of dancehall fashion, watch Vybz Kartel, “Come Home,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an_ZPYqAkl8 and Koffee, “West Indies,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvOABOa3IrU>.

this most eloquently: “women's overinvestment in extreme forms of adornment in this culture is therefore an essential aspect of what it means to survive. Against the legacy of plantation slavery, global economic inequality, hetero-patriarchal constraint, the violence of class inequality and religious conservatism, survival entails the transcendence of social death, through an attempt to overcome the horrors and anxieties of daily life.”¹³

If I could display this piece at any cultural institution, I would choose: 1) the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and 2) the National Gallery of Jamaica (NGJ). My work is – and always has been – for everyday people. Like Daniel Vitkus, I strongly believe we must engage with communities outside the academy.¹⁴ I believe this piece (as part of a larger collection) would be a good fit for the AGO because the gallery recently hosted “Fragments of Epic Memory” (<https://ago.ca/exhibitions/fragments-epic-memory>), the first exhibition organized by the AGO’s Department of Arts of Global Africa and the Diaspora. The exhibition showcases mixed media works from the period following emancipation to the present day. Curated by Julie Crooks, it featured art works by Sandra Brewster, Andrea Chung, Nadia Huggins, Wifredo Lam, and Ebony G. Patterson among others. To see these Caribbean artists (so many of them I take inspiration from) have their work featured in one place (in my own hometown) is a beautiful thing. In addition, Toronto has one of the largest Caribbean diasporas, so it makes sense to feature my work there in the future. I chose the National Gallery of Jamaica (<http://natgalja.org.jm/>) as another possible venue. Located in Downtown Kingston, it is the largest and oldest public art museum in the Anglophone Caribbean. They recently hosted an exhibition entitled “Jamaica Jamaica! How Our Music Conquered the World” which celebrates the island’s musical innovations as well as the impact of the local sound system culture, street culture, and visual arts on today’s global pop culture. The multimedial exhibition featured classic fine arts, contemporary art, mural art, photographs, and audio, video, and musical artifacts. Given that my top pays homage to dancehall as music and culture, it would have been a good addition to the exhibition. In general, the incorporation of dancehall-inspired pieces helps change general perception that dancehall is “brass” and “brash” and “base” by being displayed in public art museums like NGJ. In addition, the NGL has exhibited the multimedia works of Ebony G. Patterson. Since her work and mine use similar mediums, knowing that the NGL has hosted works like Patterson’s shows me that it would be a viable space for my own pieces. And finally, as mentioned before, the title of my piece, “Fi Di Dancehall Queen Dem,” is taken from the online exhibition, *fi di gyal dem*. Given that *fi di gyal dem* is currently hosted at the Doris McCarthy Gallery at the University of Toronto Scarborough (which is my alma mater), it would be an honour to have my piece(s) in an exhibition there as well.

¹³ Bakare-Yusuf, “Fabricating Identities,” 475.

¹⁴ Daniel Vitkus, “How the One Percent Came to Rule the World: Shakespeare, Long-Term Historical Narrative, and the Origins of Capitalism,” in *Shakespeare and the 99%: Literary Studies, the Profession, and the Production of Inequity*, eds. Sharon O’Dair and Timothy Francisco (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 171-172.

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