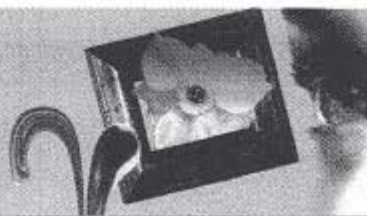


# arts and culture



## Made to measure?

*Walking through the National Gallery's new exhibition "Cayman: an ever-changing landscape", I couldn't help but notice that ironically something seems to be never-changing: the idyllic images of majestic palm trees, mangroves and catboats favoured as subjects by local artists. But then I saw Wray Banker's painting "Ode to Milo". The way the artist challenges our expectations is not of course as provocative as that of notorious Tracey Emin, the "bad girl" of British art, but Wray Banker nevertheless appears to be the "bad boy" among other Caymanian artists: why can't he paint pretty cottages and pleasant sunsets like everybody else instead of an old crumpled tin?*



The painting could easily be mistaken for a commercial advert for the Milo drink; the graphics and the drawings show no trace of the artist's "hand", even, as if they had been produced digitally rather than with paint and brushes. This theme and technique are characteristic of Pop Art, one of the major art movements of the 20th century. In fact, the can of milk straight away evokes the notorious 32 cans of Campbell's soup painted by Andy Warhol, the eccentric American artist known as the "Pope of Pop" who sparked an artistic revolution in art and whose work still influences young artists worldwide.

Like Andy Warhol, Wray Banker chose for his subject a product which is immediately recognisable in contemporary consumer society. Like Andy Warhol, Wray also paints in series such as "Ode to Milo", "Oh Ma Toe!" and "Big Eye Guys". Like Andy Warhol, Wray Banker is probably quite fun to have at a party. But is being as entertaining as Andy Warhol and painting like the Pope of Pop still so relevant today and in a quiet place like Cayman instead of the big smoke of 60s Manhattan?

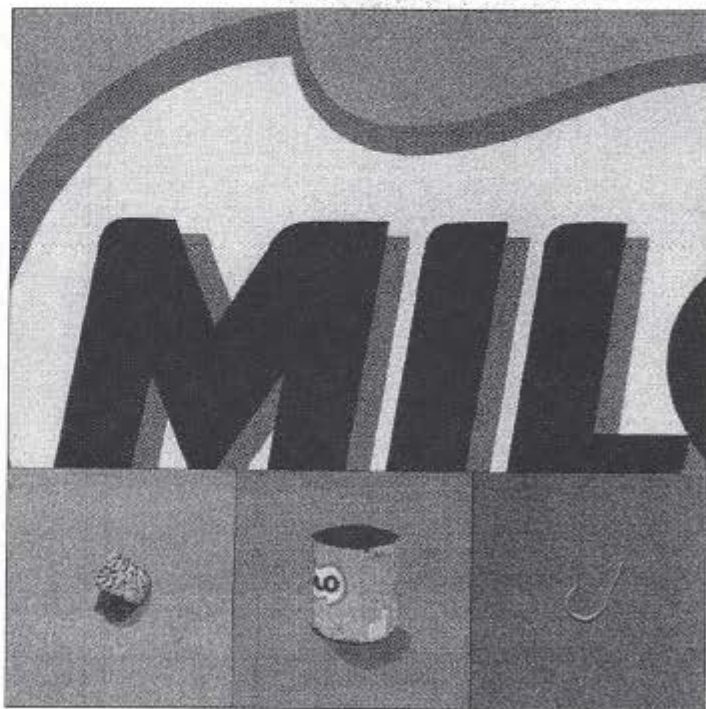
Coincidentally, both artists began their careers with similar training: Warhol as a commercial illustrator, Wray as a graphic designer. However, whereas Warhol's innovation was painting in a commercial style, Wray seems to paint in an innovative designer's style, illustrating that our era is no longer marked by the concept of "mass production" but rather by the concept of mass customisation.

Take, for example, the ease with which I

illustrated storybook with him as the hero of a pirate, space age or medieval adventure. I can also have his face emblazoned on a mug, a t-shirt or a calendar or have his voice morphed into a personalised alarm clock greeting (check out the catalogues next time you are flying). Ours is not Warhol's world of mass produced, identical items: we want products which look like they've been made only for us. Technology has assisted and now there is a whole service industry based on design: garden designers, interior designers ... is Wray some sort of design consultant in the art sector?

The Milo painting, titled 'Fishin wid Soljahs', is compartmentalised into four sections, each of which contains its own illustration: a logo, a hermit crab, an old rusty can and a fishing hook. These images are ordered like in the sequences of a strip cartoon, not unlike a comic book sequence in a Roy Lichtenstein, another renowned Pop artist. However, if you look more closely at the way Wray's sequence is divided, you'll notice that each image is not separated by a simple line but that each image is in fact on its own panel, a separate painting placed next to the other like a square in a sliding puzzle. You get a sense from this assemblage that one picture can be taken out and another inserted in its place.

In fact, I vaguely remember seeing before at least two other paintings from the same series which seemed almost identical to this one. One of them, "3 A Lick, No Taws" is currently exhibited in the Marriott Hotel, so I went to have a look at it again and found



painting: does Sir prefer an afternoon's trolling? No problem, those marbles can easily be switched.

Consequently the painting has become a product which can be tailored to the viewer's tastes by bringing together a new combination, like assembling the optional components in a vehicle so as to deliver the customer's "dream machine". This has important implications on the

tastes found their way into artistic representations (and then moulded our tastes).

So in fact Wray's Milo is not so much a cynical joke about the cheapness of mass culture, but more an homage to what art is and always has been: an interaction between the viewer and the work, each of which is modified by the other. I now also realize that the painting does lend itself to the theme of the exhibition after all, per-