

Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette



Image: Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette (2010), *Just Long Celia*, private collection

“I have said to people that my work is not about technique, it is about expression, the value in my work is what it is saying, what I need to say.”

The Artist

Nasaria was born the eldest of three children in Grand Cayman. An imaginative child without the luxury of television, she became an avid reader from a young age. Naturally, this appreciation for literature led to her being an active writer. She frequently wrote poetry, short stories and songs.

It was not until college that she took a real interest in painting, beginning with painting pictures on jeans for her college friends and the occasional canvas piece for others.

Suckoo-Chollette has often been described as a self-taught and intuitive artist. She took only the required art classes in high school and several art electives in college.

Suckoo-Chollette's early works were primarily acrylic paintings, but she has since diversified into oils and new, exciting media, often mixing several. She honed and developed her skills and local artist, Wray Banker encouraged her to submit work for an exhibition entitled *Native Sons* in 1996. The artists from this exhibition, including Suckoo-Chollette would later become the well-known local art fraternity of the same name and exhibit successfully at numerous local venues.

She took several art classes at New York University in 1999, while pursuing a Master's Degree in Educational Theatre. Upon her return to Cayman, her artwork has been informed by artists such as African-American, Jacob Lawrence and Mexican, Frida Khalo. Like these influences, she has used her artwork as a platform for societal issues - mainly race and gender.

The Artwork

Suckoo-Chollette's vibrant painting, *Just Long Celia*, disguises a very dark, profound subject. Historically, the Cayman Islands differed from the rest of the Caribbean in that there were no large plantations or natural resources to exploit. It is therefore widely-held that slavery - at its most inhumane - did not exist here. Celia was in fact a slave woman who was whipped in public in George Town in October 1820 - females were usually exempt from this punishment - and in excess - fifty severe lashes (eleven more lashes than the law prescribed). Her crime: "uttering seditious words, tending to stir up a revolution of the Negroes" when she encouraged friends to challenge their owners about the imminent Emancipation Proclamation being announced in Jamaica.

The painting, much like a poem Suckoo-Chollette penned of the same name, brings the issues of ethnicity and gender to the fore. Newspaper clippings and coloured translucent paper lurk beneath the surface of forcefully daubed paint, reminiscent of intra-personal tensions. Its colourful background contrasts heavily in value to *Celia's* indigo skin - an ode to the blackness of the character. Suckoo-Chollette's poem can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cu4yg9wzqpU>.



Photograph courtesy of:
Government Information Services

Discussion

- Nasaria says her artwork is about expression. What emotions does the artist evoke with her mixed media piece *Just Long Celia*?
- Suckoo-Chollette addresses the inherent denial of the existence of slavery in Cayman in *Just Long Celia*. Are there any other messages that are communicated in this work?

- Through the use of impasto and collage, Suckoo-Chollette has added texture to her painting. Discuss what this texture might resemble on Celia's skin.

Making Comparisons

- Conduct research on Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette and African-American artist Faith Ringgold. Watch videos found at the following links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mR5_ndfqZxY

<http://www.makers.com/faith-ringgold>

- Consider how the artists' techniques and styles are similar or different.
- Compare and contrast the spiritual, Afrocentric and feminist-centred themes explored by Ringgold and Suckoo-Chollette.

Follow Up Activities

- Use the following steps to complete a patchwork quilt. This activity is ideal for the GCSE objective, research.

i) Using 5-inch squares of watercolour paper, copy the following works by Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette. Experiment with various media.



Images (L-R): Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette (2006), *Maiden Plum* (detail), from the collection of CINM
Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette (2013), *Master Fisher* (detail), from the collection of the artist
Nasaria Suckoo-Chollette (2005), *The Women Have Become The Truth* (detail), from the collection of NGCI

ii) Copy three works of art by Jacob Lawrence on 5-inch squares in different media.

iii) Also on 5-inch pieces of paper copy three works by Frida Khalo.

iv) Shuffle the nine squares of artwork and paste onto a 15-inch square crescent board to complete the quilt.