CRISS

Issue 001/999

Culture • Fashion • Travel • Lifestyle



10

Things Shaping How Caribbean Identity Is Worn, Remembered and Preserved

THE UNDYING

Richard Nattoo's shrines for the spirits Jamaica was told were dead

Plus: the iguana, the flower bat, and the case against forgetting

ANATOMY OF AN ATELIER

NEW CARIBBEAN IMAGE

What the Frame keeps with Romario Lynch.

Identity and Legacy Issue

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EDITOR'S LETTER

ISSUE 01 · IDENTITY & LEGACY · OCTOBER 2026

A NOTE ON BE-GININGS

From the Founder & Editor-in-Chief

There is something deeply personal about creating a space for stories you have spent much of your life wishing were told differently.

Criss Magazine began with a question: What would it look like to document Caribbean fashion and creativity with the depth, curiosity, and consideration they deserve?

Not simply to celebrate what is beautiful, but to understand what gives that beauty meaning. To look beyond the finished garment, the photograph, the performance, or the work of art, and consider the histories, decisions, people, and places that made it possible.

Growing up Caribbean taught me that culture is not something we encounter only on special occasions. It lives in the details of everyday life. In the way we dress, the things we preserve, the stories our families tell, and the traditions we carry with us, sometimes without realizing their significance.

Those experiences shaped the way I understand identity. They also shaped the questions I began asking about fashion, luxury, craftsmanship, and representation.

For too long, conversations about Caribbean creativity have often been confined to a familiar set of images. While those images may be part of our story, they cannot possibly contain its entirety.

Our creative identities are layered, evolving, and deeply individual. They exist across islands, generations, disciplines, and borders. They are shaped by migration and memory, by inheritance and reinvention, by what we choose to preserve and what we dare to imagine differently.

I founded Criss Magazine because I wanted a publication willing to explore that complexity.

I wanted to know not only who was creating, but why. What informed their work? What histories did they carry? What challenges had they navigated? What were they contributing to the cultural record, whether or not the wider world had learned their names?

Our inaugural issue, Identity & Legacy, is an introduction to that curiosity.

Through the artists, designers, and cultural voices featured in these pages, we begin exploring how identity becomes expression, how creative work carries memory, and how the decisions made today may become part of what future generations inherit.

This first issue is not intended to define Caribbean creativity. No single publication could. Rather, it is the beginning of an ongoing effort to document its range with care, context, and an understanding that the people behind the work deserve to be part of the story.

Building Criss has also required me to trust my own perspective. To recognize that the absence of something I wanted to read was reason enough to begin creating it, even before I knew exactly what the finished publication would become.

There is still much to learn, many stories to uncover, and an extraordinary creative world to explore.

But every archive begins somewhere.

Thank you for being here at the beginning.

Krystal Darby
Founder & Editor-in-Chief
Criss Magazine™

CRISS MAGAZINE

Issue 01 — Identity & Legacy
October 2026
An independent publication exploring Caribbean fashion, art, culture, and creative expression.

FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Krystal Darby

PUBLISHED BY
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Krystal Darby

COVER
Message of the Mantis and the Undying Iguana
Richard Nattoo
2026. Watercolor, water from the Rio Grande River, Jamaica

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The *Caribbean* is not merely the aesthe

It is the author.

WITH *CRISS* MAGAZINE

Krystal Darby

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CONTRIBUTORS

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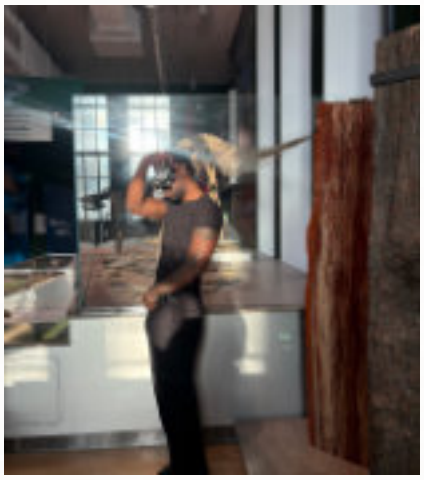


Richard Nattoo

Featured Artist

Richard Nattoo is a Jamaican artist born in Spanish Town. Trained as an architect, he paints in watercolor and ink with water from the Rio Grande River and frames his work in Jamaican blue mahoe and cedar. His series Blessings of the Night and the Undying reimagines Jonkonnu. Based in Jamaica

Credits
•Cover and all artwork photography: Richard Nattoo
•Portrait of the artist: Jodeane Nattoo
• Galleries: Eclectica Contemporary (Cape Town), Tern Gallery

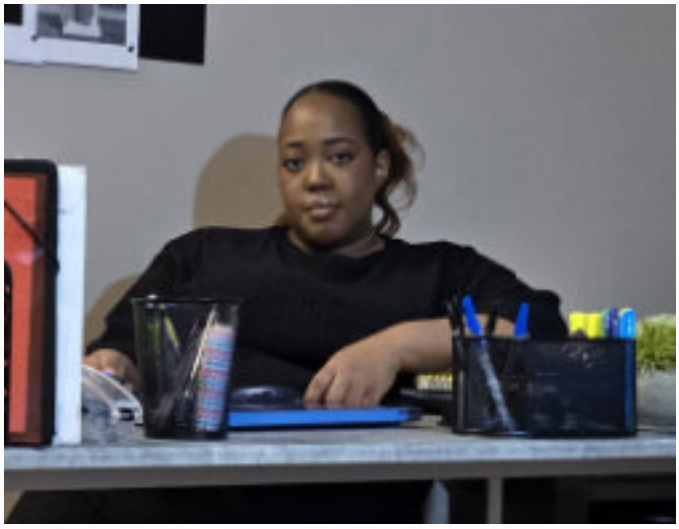


Romario Lynch

Photographer

Romario Lynch is a Jamaican photographer and the founder of Framed by Romario. He works as both the concept-maker and the image-maker, building portraits around the people closest to him. His series on his uncle treats the photograph as an inheritance. Based in South Florida.

Credits (all images unless noted): Photography, Romario Lynch.



"Years from now, I want to be able to return to these pages and see not only what I built, but who I was becoming while I built it."

THE *CRISS* EDIT

A more personal perspective.

Essays, observations, and editor's notes from the woman behind Criss Magazine.

On style, ambition, culture, and the life taking shape in between.

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Identity & Legacy

Issue Statement

ISSUE 01 · EDITORIAL THESIS

An exploration of what we inherit, what we create, and what we leave behind.

Identity is neither fixed nor singular.
It is shaped by geography, ancestry, memory, migration, and the experiences that connect us to places we may have left but never entirely departed.
Across the Caribbean and its diaspora, creative expression has long served as a language of identity. Fashion, art, movement, and design carry histories that are not always written down. They reflect the relationship between the individual and the collective, between inherited traditions and contemporary interpretations.
Yet Caribbean creativity is too often understood through a narrow visual vocabulary, recognized for its aesthetics without sufficient attention to its intellectual, technical, and cultural foundations.
Identity & Legacy, the inaugural issue of Criss Magazine, begins with a different proposition: that Caribbean creative work deserves to be examined not only for how it looks, but for what it knows, what it communicates, and what it preserves.
We consider the designer whose work translates personal history into form. The artist who gives memory a visual language. The choreographer whose movemen ts carry cultural knowledge. The creative entrepreneur building institutions and opportunities that may outlast their founder.
These are not simply stories of visibility. They are stories of authorship, intention, craftsmanship, and continuity.
Identity asks where we come from, how we understand ourselves, and how we choose to be seen.
Legacy asks what remains.
Between the two exists the work of creation: the decisions, practices, and contributions through which culture is continually shaped.
This issue does not seek a singular definition of Caribbean fashion or identity. Instead, it makes room for their complexity, contradictions, and evolution.
Because the Caribbean is not merely an aesthetic to be referenced.
It is a point of view, a source of knowledge, and an active participant in shaping contemporary creative culture.

This is where the archive begins.

Criss Magazine™ — Issue 01, October 2026

Ten Things Shaping How Caribbean Identity Is Worn, Remembered and Preserved

Names, objects, places and ideas for Issue 01. Each entry points outward: to a maker, a collection, a book or a technique worth following.

THE *CARIBBE* INDEX

By: Krystal Darby

1. Madras A woven cotton check named for Madras, now Chennai, carried west by European trading companies. In Martinique and Guadeloupe it became the headwrap cloth of Creole women; in Saint Lucia and Dominica it is the pattern of traditional women's dress. Sources differ on whether it arrived in the 17th or 18th century, a reminder to date every claim. *Look for*: the Material Memory story in this issue, and Hélène Zamor's 2014 article on Indian heritage in the French Creole-speaking Caribbean. *Question*: who weaves it today?

2. Wòb dwiyèt The traditional dress of French Creole women in islands including Saint Lucia and Dominica, usually described as a madras headpiece worn with a long dress. One account traces it to the *grande robe* of early French settler women, adapted to the heat. A Smithsonian catalogue entry for a photograph of a woman in Saint Lucian national dress notes its French Creole elements. Spellings and names vary by island and community. *Look for*: heritage celebrations such as Creole Day in Dominica, and local dress historians.

3. Guinea cloth (indiennes de traite) Trade names for Indian cottons that reached the Caribbean by way of West Africa on European slaving ships. The names matter because they show a fashion material as a commodity in an atrocity's supply chain before it was a heritage symbol. A travel-history summary of economic

historian Kobayashi's research reports that most of one London merchant's 1801 Indian textile sales went to Liverpool and Caribbean buyers. *Look for:* Parthasarathi and Riello, eds., *The Spinning World* (2009).

4. Mundillo The handmade bobbin lace of northwestern Puerto Rico, brought from Spain and made in towns such as Moca, which calls itself the island's capital of the craft. Moca's Museo del Mundillo opened in 2004. Rosa Elena Egipciaco, an NEA National Heritage Fellow, learned from her mother and grandmother; Nellie Vera Sánchez, inducted into Puerto Rico's Artisan Hall of Fame in 2015, learned from her mother at age seven. Cheaper industrial laces cut into the trade in the 20th century. Mundillo is lace as inherited labor, not ornament. *Look for:* Moca's museum and the NEA heritage profiles.

5. *Texaco* (Patrick Chamoiseau) The Martinican novel, first published in French in 1992, is a prose archive of pre-abolition and post-abolition life, and it includes vividly painted madras scarves and the *madras calendé* hairstyle. It is cited in scholarship on madras and resistance. The English translation by Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov was published by Vintage in 1998. *Look for*: the passages on dress and hair, and how they read next to the visual record.

6. La Martiniquaise (Michel-Jean Cazabon) An undated painting by the 19th-century artist Michel-Jean Cazabon (1813–1888) that shows a woman wearing madras as a headpiece in Martinique, and is cited in discussions of the cloth's history. A painting is not a transparent record, since it reflects who painted and who is posed, but it is a rare early image of the wrap in use. *Look for*: where the original is held, and its provenance.

7. Smithsonian NMAAHC photograph records The National Museum of African American History and Culture catalogues photographs of women in French Antillean and Saint Lucian dress, including one described as an unidentified woman. The word "unidentified" is the point: the archive holds the image and often not the name. It is a prompt for The Living Archive. *Look for*: the museum's online catalogue and the records' rights notes. *Question*: who can name these women?

8. Claudia Jones and Notting Hill Carnival Trinidad-born journalist and activist Claudia Jones, founder of the *West Indian Gazette*, organized a Caribbean Carnival at St Pancras Town Hall on 30 January 1959, after the 1958 Notting Hill riots. The BBC televised part of it. Notting Hill's street carnival came later and had other makers too, including community activist Rhaune Laslett and the Russell Henderson Steel Band, and sources differ on whether its start is 1964 or 1966. English Heritage marks Jones's home with a blue plaque at 6 Meadow Road, Vauxhall. *Look for:* the Living Archive story in this issue, and the Black Cultural Archives' carnival collections.

9. Anya Ayoung-Chee The Port of Spain designer won *Project Runway* season nine in 2011 and launched her first collection, Pilar by Anya, in 2009. She is also the founder of ExhibitA at #HOME, a rotating retail collective for local and regional de-





signers, which makes her a case study in building the missing retail layer. *Look for*: her collections and any current reporting on ExhibitA and cANYAval.

10. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" The Jamaican-born cultural theorist's 1990 essay argues that identity is produced, never finished, and always in process, which is the intellectual frame for this issue's opening proposition. *Look for:* the essay itself and the writing that followed it.

MATERIAL *MEMORY*

The Cloth That Was Never a Costume

By: Krystal Darby

Madras reached the Caribbean as trade goods and stayed as a language. Before it was a national symbol, it was a rule, a workaround and a way of being read.

The check is so familiar that it is easy to stop seeing it: a woven plaid folded into a headwrap, cut into a skirt, worn for a national day or a folklore performance. In much of the Caribbean, madras is treated as the dress of an occasion. This story asks what the cloth meant before it became an occasion.

A name from somewhere else

The cloth is named for Madras, now Chennai, on India's southeast coast. One travel-history account notes that weavers around Madras made cotton checks with natural dyes, and that the East India Company founded the settlement at Fort St. George in 1639. European trading companies carried the cloth across oceans.

Sources disagree about when it reached the French Caribbean. A reader in a Chennai history magazine reports the cloth was sent to the French colonies as early as the 17th century, while *Caribbean Beat* places its popularity among colonists in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the 18th century, through the French Compagnie des Indes and the British East India Company. Without a primary source, the date stays contesed.

Some cloth also arrived by a second route. Scholarship cited by the Age of Revolutions blog describes bolts reaching plantation societies by way of West Africa on European slaving ships, under trade names such as guinea cloth and *indiennes de traite*.

A rule, and what women did with it

The headwrap began as a requirement. According to one account, plantations required enslaved women to cover their hair, and over time women turned the requirement into a statement by buying vivid madras in local markets. The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture catalogues the shift in a photograph record: madras became popular among Creole women in the 18th century and replaced the plain white kerchief tied to the dress codes of enslavement.

DESIGNING WITH PURPOSE



That is the center of this story. The same cloth can stand for coercion and for authorship, and the people who wore it did not have to choose one.

What the wrap said

The cloth was folded, not just tied. The same museum record describes a square or rectangular piece worn over the forehead and folded to show varying numbers of peaks. Several modern accounts go further and say that the way a wrap was tied could signal social or marital status in the French Antilles. That claim is widely repeated but thinly sourced in what I found, so a published version needs a scholarly source for each specific meaning.

The headwrap has a literary and visual record to work with. The *madras calendé* (also called *tête calendée*) appears in Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *Texaco*, set partly in pre-abolition Martinique, and in Michel-Jean Cazabon's painting *La Martiniquaise*, both discussed in *Caribbean Beat*.

From daily dress to national dress

In Saint Lucia and Dominica, madras is the traditional pattern of women and girls' dress, with the madras headpiece known as *tèt anlè.* The ensemble descends from the long *grande* robe worn by early French settler women and adapted to a warmer climate. The same account says women in Guadeloupe wear madras at the *Fête des Cuisinières* (the cooks' festival), and in Dominica on Creole Day. A national dress gives a cloth public status, and it also fixes the cloth to calendar dates. That is the costume problem.

The costume problem

A garment becomes a costume when its context is removed and only its silhouette remains. For visitors, madras can read as a generic island print with no maker named. For some Caribbean wearers, it carries a harder history, and wearing it can feel like pride, burden or both. A story that picks one response is incomplete.

One way out is to look at communities that commission the cloth for their own purposes. The St. Croix Heritage Dancers reportedly won a grant to create a special madras for their quadrille dancers, a reminder that the pattern is still being made for specific people and occasions.



Material Memory documentation pa

• **Place and community:** Martinique a Guadeloupe (headwrap and dress traditions); Saint Lucia and Dominica (national dress); other islands noted in sources

• **Date or period:** Contested: 17th versus 18th century arrival; see above

• **Materials and construction**: Lightweight cotton or cotton-silk blend, checked weave; white, red and pink are commonly cited colors

• **Who made it, who wore it:** Woven in the Madras region of India; worn by Creole women, both enslaved and free



NMAAHC photograph records; *Cazabon*, *La Martiniquaise*





By: Krystal Darby
Portrait by: Jodeane Nattoo
Artwork and photography by: Richard Nattoo

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Richard Nattoo (b. 1993, Spanish Town, Jamaica) studied architecture at the University of Technology, Jamaica, before becoming a full-time artist. He works in watercolor and in pen and ink on canvas, using water from natural sources. He has shown at the National Gallery of Jamaica and internationally, including The Passage Between Worlds (2025) and the Investec Cape Town Art Fair (2026) with Eclectica Contemporary, and Seein' Sperrit (Bahamas, 2025) and Untitled Houston (2026) with Tern Gallery. He received the 2020 Prime Minister Youth Award in Arts and Culture. His work Moonlight Meditations of Mama Nanny was installed at the Institute of Jamaica in 2022. The International African American Museum acquired River Mumma II in 2025, and the Scotiabank Collection acquired The Majician's Arrival in 2026.



RICHARD *NATTOO*: THE *UNDYING*

The painter Richard Nattoo has built a night-lit world, a boy magician and a set of cedar and blue mahoe shrines to argue that Jamaica's Jonkonnu was never dead, only under-remembered.

In the painting at the center of this issue, a boy in a red-and-white striped shirt stands in front of an iguana the size of a hillside. White flowers grow along its back and egrets settle among them. Pale streaks fall through a blue night. The iguana, Richard Nattoo explains, is looking down at a mantis that holds the light, and the boy is pointing back.

The painting is called Message of the Mantis and the Undying Iguana, and its argument is in the title. The Jamaican iguana was declared extinct in 1948 and found alive in 1990. Nattoo, a painter born in Spanish Town in 1993, has placed it in a world of perpetual night alongside a second animal with the same history, the Jamaican flower bat, and a third thing that many Jamaicans have written off: Jonkonnu, the masquerade of costumed characters, music and dance that takes to the street at Christmas. "The problem," he writes in his artist statement, "is that too many Jamaicans have settled with the idea that Jonkonnu is dead."

His answer is a body of work called Blessings of the Night and the Undying: fourteen works in watercolor, ink and wood, a story and a thesis. The thesis is that a tradition is not lost when it goes quiet. It goes to sleep, and the work of the living is to wake it.

A yard without sun

Nattoo grew up in Spanish Town, in a big yard where his father worked on cars. Old cars stood in the grass and became the setting for his adventures. Roosters called through the window with the sunrise. At the back of the yard, a dense canopy of trees kept the ground in permanent shade, so thick he doubts much sunlight reached it. When he looks at his paintings now, a world of "perpetual night," he suspects that yard is why he is comfortable there. Trips to the country added stories told around a fire, in the voices of cousins and elders.

The first thing he remembers wanting to make, he saw on television at four. At the end of a children's program, the host drew a peacock and made it come to life. His mother handed him paper, a pencil and a pen. "I want to make things that will come to life," he decided.

The support that followed was practical. When he was starting out, he took over the living room table to work, and the family ate elsewhere because Richard had a piece on it. His parents were proud before art was a career, he says, and the pride rippled outward through the family and community. He went on to study architecture at the University of Technology, Jamaica, where his interest in art grew into a full-time practice. In 2020 he received the Prime Minister Youth Award in the Arts and Culture category.

His relationship with the spiritual side of the tradition came later. He did not like funerals or nine nights as a child, and found the energy too much. As he approached adulthood he wanted to know more about African spirituality, which felt wrong and taboo in a predominantly Christian society.

He did his own research and arrived at his own understanding. When his work began to draw on it, the older generation of his family backed it, which he says he did not fully expect. He has noticed that even devout Jamaican elders keep African undertones in daily life. They still tell the young to bring the baby's clothes in before night catches them on the line.





the Set Girls
(celebrating the ancient Black sibyls and the Flying Africans)

SEE INSIDE THE CREATIVE MIND

"Have a starting point, and then you can build up on that."



the Igbo Ijele, a walking Jamaican house)

The word everyone used

The earliest picture of Jonkonnu entered his life before he cared about it. After high school, an art tour around Jamaica ended at a house where people were looking at the work of Isaac Mendes Belisario. Nattoo took home a packet of Belisario's work and information, not especially interested at the time. Later, at the National Gallery, he looked at Belisario's version of Jonkonnu and thought it looked different from the one he knew.

Belisario matters. His Sketches of Character, a series of hand-colored lithographs published in Kingston in 1837–38, is described by the Yale Center for British Art as the earliest visual representation of Jonkonnu. It includes Actor Boy, the Red Set-Girls and the figure titled "Jaw-Bone, or House John-Canoe." Scholars note that its costumes mix African and European elements and that it reflects the racial hierarchies of its time.

Nattoo's objection is to what the picture became: the default. In his artist statement he says he understood the resistance of mocking oppressors but disliked how it was "centred around the colonial gaze." He does not reject Belisario. It is important to know how that version came about, he says, but not to mistake it for where Jonkonnu began.

His account of the history, which should be checked against the scholarship, goes like this.

Jonkonnu had African roots before emancipation. Plantation owners then sponsored costumes and competitions, and the look grew more European. After emancipation it moved back toward its African roots, but with the sponsors gone, there was nothing outside supporting the bands, and they fell away. Younger Jamaicans, he says, rarely learn that full story. They inherit the plantation-sponsored version, and the verdict that it is dead.

He decided not to accept the verdict. A big fire starts with one match, he says, and one voice can help. The method he chose was to ask a different question. "What Jonkonnu would have looked like without the interruption of colonisation," he writes, led him to West and wider African masquerade traditions as a source for the characters. Only afterward did he learn that a purely African pre-emancipation Jonkonnu had existed. When he researched it, he found that many of the references he had chosen were the same ones that fed the original.

Research in layers

Nattoo calls research an artist's responsibility. "Know what it is," he says of any tradition you reinterpret. "Have a starting point, and then you can build up on that."

He works in three layers. First he compares each character visually with African masquerade figures and notes what resembles what. Then he digs into what those resemblances mean. Then he makes sure the meaning serves what he wants the character to be.

The Set Girls show the process. He had read that Jamaican set girls were said to be less elegant than their French counterparts, with French theater cited as their inspiration. He decided to discard that origin entirely and look for another. He found it in the Gullah Geechee folklore of the flying Africans and, through them, in the ancient Black sibyls, women of prophecy whom he says history has whitewashed. The red and blue Set Girls in his world celebrate both.

The House was a larger rebuild. As Nattoo reads Belisario's "House John-Canoe," the original figure carried a great house on its head. After years of enslavement, he reasons, the colonial house became a new symbol of fear. After emancipation, nobody wanted to celebrate the plantation, so the character had to be erased or rewritten.

He turned to Nigeria's Ijele, the towering Igbo masquerade inscribed by UNESCO in 2009, which Britannica puts at about twelve feet high and which looks, he says, like a walking house. His House is that: a walking Jamaican house, built from gable roofs, fretwork and verandahs. It is not a plantation.



It is “the idea of Jamaican culture itself,” he says. “That is the home, that is our house, this culture in which we live.”
Two more characters carry their own origins. The Devil, a reminder in Jonkonnu to be wary of malevolent spirits, becomes a trickster in his world, with a parallel to Anansi. The Red Indian is reimagined to celebrate Taino heritage in Jamaica, and its mask is that of a Taino zemi.

The Majician and the Wanderer

To carry these characters, Nattoo built a story. His world has two journeys. The Wanderer is an adult searching for himself. The Majician, the inner child, is the one who knows how to remember and who teaches the Wanderer how. The Majician is modeled on Nattoo’s nephew, Devante, who wants to be named whenever the character is mentioned, so let's thank Devante for his inspiration.
The Night, an omnipresent spirit, notices that the pulse of the Jonkonnu spirits has dropped. It is the same, Nattoo says, as in Jamaica today, where the Jonkonnu beat is softer because fewer people are playing it. The Night sends the Majician to wake them, and gives him a Moon Flower to prove his errand. The roosters, who in this world are cartographers, draw him a map. His first stop is the Pitchy Patchy Tree, keeper of the spirits’ true names, which gives him his first blessing: the ability to wield a Feather Fife. The fife is made on Cereus Hill, from loose feathers shed by the egrets and from Nightfire. The egrets are the world’s archivists. Whenever something significant happens, they land



The Mantis: a songmaker who turns stories into songs, and fire into stars.

and strike a match, and the Nightfire records the story. A fife, Nattoo notes, is also an instrument in Jonkonnu bands. The Flowerbat, who alone knows where the shrines are, gives the Majician passage and the second blessing: the Mantis. The Mantis is a songmaker. He can turn a story into a song, a piece of Nightfire into a star. A story, Nattoo explains, is corruptible, because it changes with each retelling, while a song is permanent. A flame bobs in the wind, but a star stays in the sky. The Iguana gives the third blessing, a scale that holds the spirits' true names. It becomes one with the fife, so that when the Majician blows it, the shrines will open. First he must cross the Black River.

He tells it as a fairy tale for a reason. When you flip and reimagine a tradition, he says, you give different generations a way in. A younger audience can engage with the story, even though it is not the story of Jonkonnu. "It's an interpretation," he says, "and it gives access."

Declared dead, found alive

The iguana and the flower bat are not decoration. Nattoo chose them because both were said to be extinct and came back. The Jamaican iguana, the island's largest native land animal, was declared extinct in 1948 and rediscovered in 1990 in the Hellshire Hills, where a hunter's dog is said to have chased one into a hollow log. The Jamaican flower bat, an endemic species with unusually pale fur, was declared extinct twice and presumed extinct for about twenty years before it was



the Red Indian (reimagined to celebrate Taino heritage, with the mask of a Taino zemi)

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the Devil (a trickster with a parallel to Anansi)

found at Stony Hill Cave in 2010.

Neither is safe. Both are now listed as Critically Endangered. Nattoo does not dwell on that, but it is the sharpest point his animals make. Not dead is not the same as saved. A species, or a tradition, can survive somewhere out of sight and still need help to stay.

The red moon over the series says the same. "The red moon is not a red moon," he says. "The red moon is an eclipse." It is there because "we cannot allow our history, our culture, to be eclipsed by erasure. We have to keep that sliver of light alive."

The shrine

The works that open and close are what Nattoo calls shrines.

His idea is that the Jonkonnu spirits are not dead but sleeping, and sleeping spirits need a place to rest that is home, "off the land," until they re-emerge in the street at Christmas. The shape comes from Jamaican vernacular architecture. According to his statement, the point at the top is a gable roof, the sides that fan out are a nod to the ve-

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randah, and the doors that open and close carry fretwork and alternating slots that remember louvred windows. He trained as an architect and no longer practices, but says he preserves these traditions through his work, because traditional buildings are disappearing and efforts to protect them are few.

He frames the works himself, in two Jamaican woods. Blue mahoe is the national tree. Its grain shows striations where the tree was damaged, and he reads them as a Jamaican habit of mind: “we always flip it and make it into something beautiful.” Cedar is, to him, the smell of home. It is the wood of traditional houses and furniture and is naturally termite-resistant, and he adds that anyone would like to be as unappealing to harm as cedar is to termites.

The watercolor is mixed with water from the Rio Grande River, and his statement describes the work as a collaboration with the river and the two trees.

Not every piece is a shrine. The cover painting hangs like a ban-



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ner, from a pole with pointed ends, bordered in woven trim and white fringe. Across the works, the Majician appears again and again in the same red-and-white striped shirt, a costume detail that lets a viewer follow him from frame to frame.

Active remembering

Nattoo does not say Jamaica has lost its culture. “I would never want to claim” that, he says, because culture “is inside of your blood.” If Jonkonnu were forgotten for generations, people would start making costumes again. “It go bloom back,” he says, and “come back up through the ground, like caladium.”

What he does say is that Jamaicans have been forgetting things about who they are because they have not done enough active remembering. The tradition, he argues, needs support from everyone: from local businesses and Jamaican corporations, and from ordinary people who put money into a band when it comes by. Street Jonkonnu has always depended on that exchange, he says, and nobody should treat it as someone else’s job. If everyone simply declares it dead and does nothing, he warns, something else, Halloween for one, will take its place. “They misunderstand their own power and how much they can do for the tradition,” he says of people who believe it is beyond them. Active remembering, in practice, means something simple: talking to grandmothers and aunties and listening to their stories.

Standing in front of strangers

He takes the same care when the work leaves Jamaica. At the Investec Cape Town Art Fair in 2026, where Eclectica Contemporary showed his work, he explained Jonkonnu to an audience that already understood masquerade. That made it easier to explain without flattening. He could say this is how we do it in Jamaica, while crediting what he draws on from the continent. Viewers found it familiar and fresh at once. He says he could have simplified it, but “I don’t think I would be doing the work justice.” This fall, his series was shown at Untitled Houston with Tern Gallery. The fair closed in early October.

An archive

Asked what he hopes someone will understand about the Jamaica that shaped him when they meet his work fifty years from now, Nattoo describes a vibrant place with rich culture, storytelling and history, and then says what the work is. “It is an archive,” he says. “It is a space for active remembering.”

Institutions are starting to agree. In 2022, his work Moonlight Meditations of Mama Nanny was installed at the Institute of Jamaica in Kingston. In 2025, the International African American Museum acquired River Mumma II. In 2026, the Scotiabank Collection acquired The Majician’s Arrival. On the cover, the V holds still. There is the iguana’s head, the mantis’s light and the Majician’s outstretched arm. When Nattoo asked that it be protected, he was asking for the diagram of his own argument to survive. The great old animal looks down at the small bright thing. The child points back. If the artist is right, back is where the work begins: with the grandmothers and aunties, and with everyone who decides whether the beat gets louder.

Every archive begins somewhere. His begins at night, where a sliver of light is easiest to see.

THE ANATOMY OF AN ATELIER



Before a couture house cuts into its final cloth, it sews the garment in cheap cotton. One Paris house describes the toile as an unbleached cotton prototype that lets the atelier's hands adjust proportions and test volume without risking the expensive fabric. The same page says a gown needs anywhere from 100 to several thousand hours of work and, on average, two or three fittings, the first on the toile.

That sequence, which runs from pattern to toile to fitting to finish, is the anatomy of an atelier. This essay asks what it protects, and what happens to the knowledge when the sequence isn't written down.

The first draft

The toile is the cheapest place to be wrong. It is cut, pinned and fitted on a body or form, and the errors it reveals are corrected on paper before anyone touches the final fabric. The house's own description calls each fitting a conversation among the designer, the atelier hands and the client. The detail worth stressing is who is in that conversation: not one author but a team, and the person pinning the toile makes decisions the label never mentions.

The pattern as memory

A fitted toile can be taken apart, pressed flat and used as the template for a permanent paper pattern, which then serves future garments, according to a historical-costume tutorial that advises labeling it with the wearer's name, the piece and a date.The practical point is that a pattern is a record. It holds a body's measurements, a maker's corrections and a decision about how cloth should hang.

The finishing stage works the opposite way. Hand-finished hems, seams and linings are meant to disappear into the garment, so the labor behind them is invisible by design.

When the pattern isn't paper

Not every atelier keeps its memory on paper. A 2011 Cay-

A garment is made twice before it is made once. Where that first draft, and the knowledge behind it, is kept says a great deal about who gets credited.

BY:Krystal Darby



A completed structural calico toile displaying seam mapping, annotations, and fit architecture.

man Compass profile of a women's crafting group quotes one member saying the older women did not cut by pattern: they laid an existing garment on the cloth and cut around it, and she still works that way. She and others describe learning by watching relatives, with no one formally showing them. That is a different archive, held in hands and habit.

A scholarly chapter in Patternmaking History and Theory (Bloomsbury, 2019) goes further. Its abstract argues that a Jamaican freehand patternmaking technique is unique to Jamaica and examines how patternmaking has been used across Jamaican dress and fashion history.

The atelier at the kitchen table

What the couture model leaves

SOME PIECES NEVER *ASK FOR ATTENTION,* THEY SIMPLY HAVE PRESENCE.

The iconic gallery wall showcasing architectural Dior muslin mock-ups.

out is that much skilled dressmaking happens at home. Dress historian Carol Tulloch's oral-history article on home dressmaking follows one woman, Mrs Anella James, from sewing as a child in Jamaica to womanhood in London, and uses the work to show how dressmaking marks the transitions of a life. Designer and researcher Joy Prime documents the same story among the Windrush generation. Her Lewisham project describes Caribbean women who made made-to-measure garments for family and community, including gowns for formal occasions, alongside day jobs in London's textile factories. One of them, Sylvia, had been an accomplished designer and seamstress in the Caribbean, found her skills were not recognized in Britain, and worked as a sample machinist. Prime's doctoral research studies three generations of dressmakers in Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and post-war Britain and aims to make their contribution to couture history visible.

Learning, and what it costs

How people acquire these skills





An intricate look at drafting lines directly onto structural base layers.

is itself a documented story. An ethnographic article on Trinidadian garment workers examines how they gain sewing skills through formal, informal and illicit means, and links that to unstable economic opportunities. A Jamaican writer's essay in the Small Axe Salon describes women passing crochet to each other by watching, a government program that taught needlework to rural women, and how little of poor Black Jamaican women's work was ever archived or recorded, so that oral history is often the main way in.

What an atelier protects

The argument that links these cases is simple. A couture atelier keeps its knowledge in patterns, toiles and fitting records, and a home dressmaker may keep it in a cut-around garment and a memory of watching. Both are systems of measurement and transmission. The difference is who documents them and who is credited. The sample machinist and the aunt who made the wedding dress did the same technical work, and only one of them has a name on a label.

For Criss, that makes crediting a question of method as well as ethics. Naming the maker is how the archive keeps the knowledge.



A detailed close-up of a designer pin-fitting muslin structural lines on a form.



Romario Lynch did not set out to make a series about his uncle. He had a hoodie brand at the time, SCCRRP, and he bought one for his uncle and asked him to try it on. “Naturally, I reached for my camera,” he says, and took a few photographs. The images came out far better than he expected, and he kept going.

Romario now describes those pictures as “pieces of a relationship and memories of someone I can no longer create with.” That sentence changes what the portraits are for.

A wish for more pictures

Romario’s route to photography began with a gap. He says he sometimes wishes he had more photographs of his younger self, not to see how he looked but to reconnect with moments, places and feelings that time has taken away. Photographs, he says, can “preserve a version of life that we can never physically return

A MODERN STYLE OF NEW CARIBBEAN IMAGES

What the Frame Keeps

By: Krystal Darby
Photographs by: Romario Lynch

A Jamaican photographer on the uncle who became his muse by accident, the patience that shaped his practice, and the portrait as inheritance.

to." His mother encouraged him to take them for the same reason.

The practice became more ambitious when he started to work, in his words, "almost like a filmmaker," recreating scenes from movies and building concepts through images. It felt serious once he began photographing himself and found he was more fulfilled behind the camera than in front of it.

His conclusion is a useful one. He is "not necessarily the muse," he says. He is the person who creates the concept, finds the right muse and brings the vision to life.

The first frame

His uncle became the muse "almost by accident." What surprised Romario in the first set was how easily his uncle translated in front of the lens. "He wasn't trying to be a model," Romario says. "He was simply being himself," and the images were more compelling for it.

The trust between them did the rest. Romario describes an unspoken understanding that let him direct his uncle naturally while leaving room for his personality. His uncle was both subject and, in a quiet way, collaborator: "such an easygoing soul," willing to wear a particular outfit or follow a direction without hesitation.

What the clothes do

Romario is clear about the role of dress. In his words, clothing



establishes the mood, the setting gives context, and gesture and expression carry the emotion. The portraits show the method. His uncle wears a black blazer with satin lapels over a white stand-collar shirt with lettering embroidered down the placket, a black beret with a small embroidered bow, and dark sunglasses. In one frame he adds black leather gloves and stands against dark pine with a black dog at his feet. Romario wears a black leather vest over a white T-shirt with striped sleeves, a black hood with long ties, and cargo trousers.

In the black-and-white frame, Romario lies on the grass with his camera raised toward his uncle, who stands over him with a hand on his hip. It reverses the usual order of photographer and subject. The man who says he is not the muse hands the position to the person who believed in the work.

THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY TO KEEP THINGS SIMPLE, BEAUTIFUL & DISTINCT.

Patience as a collaborator

The contribution Romario names most often is time. “He never made me feel rushed or pressured to get the shot,” he says of his uncle. He learned something about himself in return: when he has time and freedom to explore an idea, his creativity “truly flourishes.” His uncle’s patience “gave my imagination room to breathe.” Sometimes, he says, the greatest thing someone can give your art is to believe in you enough to let you create.

An inheritance

Asked whether he thinks of the photographs as an archive, Romario answers without hesitation, and with a qualification. “Yes, especially now.” The pictures are “pieces of his life that can continue to exist long after him,” preserving his presence and personality and part of their relationship. They are, he says, an inheritance, “not just for me, but for anyone who wants to know who he was and the impact he left behind.”

That answer puts the series in the territory this issue is about. Identity & Legacy asks what we leave behind, and here the answer is concrete: a set of photographs made with consent, over time, by someone who loved the subject.

What the portraits argue

Romario says his Jamaican experience shapes what he sees: the character of the people, the richness of the culture and the everyday details of the environment.
swer on this point was brief.

He is more specific about what the pictures are for. He hopes they challenge the idea that masculinity must be expressed through toughness or emotional distance, and shows “a different kind of strength, one rooted in character, presence, and authenticity.” He also wants to preserve the beauty of ageing and family. “There is something extraordinary about ordinary moments,” he says, and the people we love “deserve to be remembered in all their complexity.”

What comes next

Romario’s ambition for Framed by Romario is plain. He wants it to become a household name in the photography world, “a brand people trust, believe in and are excited to create with,” known for attention to detail, reliability and the ability to turn a vision into something special. He wants everything it touches to “turn to gold.”

The more telling line comes after that. Beyond the images, he says, he wants people to remember how it felt to work with him, and to expect passion, creativity and his very best. It is hard not to read it alongside what he says he learned from his uncle: that being given time, trust and room to create is what lets work flourish. The brand he describes is built on the same terms.

THE LAN-GUAGE OF DRESS

A Visual Essay in Five Plates



Plate 1. Status: Dienstmeid Willemstad (1904)
Object: A photograph from Henri Hubert van Kol's travel book Naar de Antillen en Venezuela (Leiden, 1904), held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. Catalogued under servants, women's clothing and dress, and Willemstad, Curaçao.

By: Krystal Darby

Clothing speaks before its wearer does, and archives keep what it said. In the Caribbean record, dress is seldom neutral. It shows what a colonial publisher chose to photograph, what a headwrap turned from rule into choice, what a nation decided to call its own, what migrants carried with them and what a newspaper offered as style. The five plates follow those five questions: status, authorship, belonging, migration and continuity. They are deliberately few. Each is captioned to say what the image shows, what the record says about it and what the record leaves out.

Plate 2. Authorship: the folded madras
Object: Michel-Jean Cazabon's La Martiniquaise, an undated painting that shows madras worn as a headpiece



The same folded cloth was imposed and chosen. Plantation rules required enslaved women to cover their hair, and Creole women in Martinique and Guadeloupe made madras a vivid, readable dress. The museum's catalogue describes a square or rectangle folded to show varying numbers of peaks.

Plate 3. Belonging: national dress, Saint Lucia
Object: The NMAAHC photograph record titled as a woman in national dress, Saint Lucia, whose catalogue entry notes French Creole elements.

A woman described only by her occupation, a domestic servant (dienstmeid), photographed in Willemstad, Curaçao, for a Dutch travel book published in 1904.



National dress makes belonging official. In Saint Lucia, madras is part of the traditional pattern of women's dress, with a headpiece known as tèt anlè, and the ensemble descends from the grande robe of early French settler women, adapted to the heat.



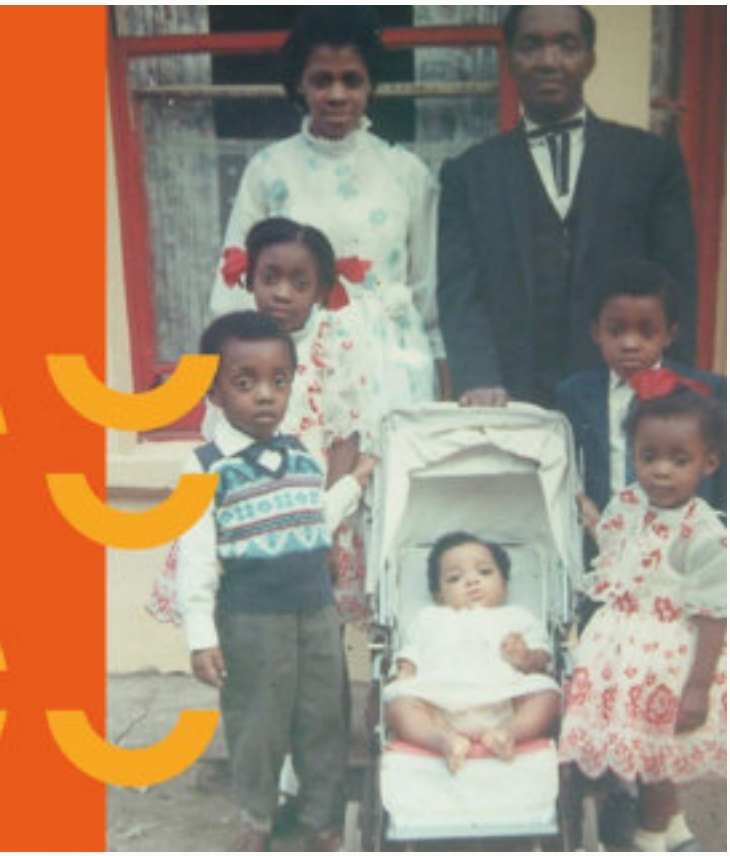
Plate 5. Continuity: style, Jamaica, April 1976
Object: The Daily News photograph "Two women posing in long evening dresses" (April 1976), in the Daily News Collection at the National Library of Jamaica.



A newspaper fashion photograph from April 1976. It shows what the press offered as style, not necessarily what most people wore. The catalogue record does not name the women.

"Clothing says who belongs, who serves, who left and what continues."

Plate 4. Migration: made to measure in London
Object: Photographs from the Lewisham project A Caribbean Couturier, which celebrated Caribbean women who made made-to-measure garments for family and community after settling in Britain in the 1960s.



Many Caribbean women who migrated to Britain made gowns and dresses for formal occasions alongside factory work. One of them, Sylvia, had been an accomplished designer and seamstress at home, found her skills were not recognized in Britain and worked as a sample machinist.





On a January night in 1959, around a thousand people packed into St Pancras Town Hall in north London for a Caribbean carnival. According to music writer Lloyd Bradley, almost as many stood outside in sub-zero temperatures listening to the music through the walls. It was winter, indoors, in a city that had spent the previous summer in racial violence, and it was the work of one woman.

Who Claudia Jones was

Claudia Jones was born in Trinidad and moved to Harlem with her family as a child. She became a prominent figure in the American Communist Party, served four jail terms on political charges, and was deported to Britain in 1955, settling in Notting Hill, according to Bradley. In 1958 she launched the West Indian Gazette, which English Heritage describes as a monthly paper meant as a mouthpiece for a Caribbean community in London then estimated at 100,000 people. Bradley calls it the country's first Black newspaper, a claim a published version should check.

Why a carnival

After the 1958 racial attacks in Notting Hill, Jones called a meeting of local people to ask how to lift spirits and show resilience. Bradley's account has the answer coming back that they should have a carnival like the ones at home. A scholarly article in the journal Angles ties the event directly to the 1958

THE LIVING *ARCHIVE*

The Carnival That Came Indoors

In January 1959, Claudia Jones filled a London town hall with Caribbean music, a beauty queen and costume. The BBC's film of it no longer exists. What survives, and who has been left out of the story?



Notting Hill riots.
A common version of the story says the carnival responded to the murder of Kelso Cochrane. Bradley says that is wrong on timing, because Cochrane, an Antiguan-born carpenter, was killed in May 1959, months after the event.

The night itself
According to Bradley, Jones booked the hall for 30 January, took on Edric Connor as overall director and Trinidadian dancer Stanley Jack as choreographer, and spent eight hours turning a chilly civic building into a West Indian setting. The program included Boscoe Holder, Fitzroy Coleman and Mighty Terror, a Black beauty contest and the crowning of a Carnival Queen. The BBC televised part of it. Jones's slogan for the event, sponsored by the Gazette, was "A people's art is the genesis of their freedom."
The dress record is thin. A 2022 interview with Corinne Skinner-Carter, a friend of Jones, quoted in a revision guide, recalls people from many islands and costumes among the crowd. I found no catalogued photograph or description of specific costumes, makers or the Carnival Queen's outfit. That is the gap this story names.

What came next, and the disputed ending
The 1959 event became annual. It moved to Seymour Hall in 1960 and the Lyceum Ballroom in 1961, and Jones died in December 1964; without her there was no carnival the next year and the Gazette folded, Bradley writes.
The street carnival has a separate and contested origin story. Bradley describes a children's street party organized in August 1964 by community activist Rhaune Laslett, at which the Russell Henderson Steel Band set off on an impromptu march. He concludes that Notting Hill Carnival probably would not have happened without Laslett and the band, though Jones is rightly remembered as its mother in his view. The London Museum instead dates the street festival that created the carnival we know to 1966. Sources differ on dates and emphasis, which is why this account lays out the chain (Jones, Laslett, Henderson) rather than naming one founder.

THE *ARCHIVE* CONTINUES

An archive is never finished.

It grows through the stories we choose to tell, the people we remember, the work we preserve, and the questions we leave for those who come after us.

This first issue is not a complete account of Caribbean creativity. It was never intended to be.

It is a beginning. An invitation to look more closely, to ask better questions, and to recognize the cultural knowledge that lives in our artists, designers, makers, and communities.

There is still so much to document.

Until the next issue.

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