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Carnival Madonna: The Contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll Masquerade

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Abstract
In this essay, Amanda T. McIntyre examines the aesthetic impression of the contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll masquerade as an aspect of the mother and child trope and connects the trope to the Madonna archetype. McIntyre examines representations of the mother and child in visual art and argues that the Baby Doll is the Caribbean's most enduring representation of the trope. She gives an in-depth analysis of the Black Madonna of Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on its emergence within the Indigenous Warao community and its doll-like construction. McIntyre further examines the shifting characterisation of the Baby Doll masquerade and identifies a 1962 play that presented the Baby Doll as a Madonna fostering a messianic child as the locus of the intersection of the masquerade with religious iconography. She then connects this to twenty-first century representations of the Baby Doll as the Madonna, including: Siparee Mai (2016), Cursed is the Fruit of Thy Womb (2024), Lady of Loretto (2024-2026), and Siparee Mas (2025).

Keywords: Baby Doll, Masquerade, Madonna, Siparee Mai, Loretto

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Siparee Mas. Dolly Madonna, 2025.
Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, 2025. Watercolour, acrylic and ink on watercolour paper, 9 x 12 in.
Conceptualised by Amanda T. McIntyre.

Introduction

The Baby Doll masquerade is arguably the Caribbean's most enduring reimagining of the Madonna archetype. This archetype references the holy mother, or the Virgin Mary, of Roman Catholic traditions, but the figure has a much longer presence in art history. The archetype is connected to the pervasive figure of the holy mother in religious iconography. Many of these predated the Roman Catholic Madonna but became part of the Madonna archetype. In various world religions, the image of the holy mother dates back to earlier iconography with figures such as the Egyptian Isis and Horus symbolising fertility, rebirth and continuity.

It is from this archetype of the Madonna that the trope of the mother and child emerged to express a wide range of culturally specific symbols of motherhood. This trope is found throughout global art in works depicting maternity and fecundity. For example, the Austrian painter, Gustav Klimt's mother and child detail in his 1905 painting *Three Ages of Woman* (*Le Tre Età Della Donna*) presents the mother and child figures at rest in a gentle embrace. The child is snuggled against the shoulder and hair of the woman whose head rests on the head of the child.

In Caribbean art, there are several celebrated depictions of this trope. The Jamaican artist, Barrington Watson, for example, has works featuring the figures in domestic settings. His painting, *Mother and Child* (1958), can be viewed at the National Gallery of Jamaica. The Trinidadian artist, Marissa Yung Lee, rendered the mother and child in her painting entitled *Mother and Child(ren)* (2022), which thematically and aesthetically references Klimt's *Mother and Child*. Yung Lee's painting is important as it connects the Caribbean Baby Doll masquerade to the long record of mother and child paintings in art history, which then connects it to the history of the Madonna archetype in religious iconography.
In Caribbean Carnivals, the Baby Doll masquerade presents a performance of this long-established trope. The Baby Doll masquerade that emerged in the Caribbean in the late 19th century was the performance of a single, unmarried

mother, presented as a scathing parody of the evident sexuality of lower-income Black women. This was not at all the image of the holy mother. However, by the mid-20th century, an interesting turn took place when a critical performance of the masquerade became what I identify as the nexus of documented contemporary reimaginings of the Madonna archetype in Caribbean carnivals.

The visual language of the Baby Doll is the aesthetic impression of the mother and child. This makes the masquerade not only an artefact of Caribbean Carnivals and Caribbean art, but also of global art. In this essay, I will give a brief history of the masquerade and discuss one of the earliest reimaginings of the Madonna archetype through the prism of the contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll. Departing from this, I will discuss 21st-century reimaginings of the Madonna archetype in contemporary Caribbean Carnivals, focusing on Siparee Mai (2016) and Lady of Loretto (2024). I will also discuss the creative process and the unseeable self that is at the core of my art practice and its projections within The Dolly Mas Visual and Performing Arts Company in narratives of time travel. This essay features my 2025 reimagining of the Black Madonna in the photo series *Siparee Mas*, which I produced in collaboration with photographer Jason Audain and visual artist Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné. In these collaborations, I provided concepts, copious notes, references, images, the names of all the photographs and paintings, as well as the words incorporated into the artwork. I also managed production. I was assisted by Anton Berryman (styling) and Louris Martin-Lee Sing (production). Additionally, I performed the role of Kairi, who appeals to Siparee Mai and is blessed with the child, performed by Ma'Kari Roberts. For me, the child is the embodiment of my work with Dolly Mas. *Siparee Mas* features vintage garments: a dress donated by Charmaine Harper Blaize and a christening gown acquired from Dear Hunter.

My conceptualisation and production of this project were with consideration of the critical work of Aisha Khan (2004). In "Sacred Subversions? Syncretic Creoles, the Indo-Caribbean, and "Culture's In-Between", Khan interrogates creolization through an examination of racial and cultural tensions in Trinidad and Tobago.

She frames her argument with a reflection on the major contributions of Caribbean creolization theorists who see "creolization as an unceasing moment of progressive possibilities and the constant emergence of responsive cultural forms," (168) and interrogate these alongside Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity (Khan 2004). Khan uses the veneration of Siparee Mai as one of her case studies. The codified symbols in the *Siparee Mas* project arguably present what Khan described as a "sacred subversion" in the combinations of different bodies of religious knowledge (166) that undermine racial and cultural tensions in Trinidad and Tobago. *Siparee Mas* includes symbolic resources of Indigenous Warao, Roman Catholic and Hindu practices. Furthermore, it is a syncretism that challenges orthodoxy and dogmatism in masquerade cultures through juxtapositions of religious references with the iconography of the Baby Doll and the lore of Dolly Mas.

Siparee Mas. Myth and Legend, 2025.
Jason Audain 2025, Photograph.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

ii. The Early History of the Contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll

The history of the Baby Doll in Trinidad and Tobago is presented in the accounts of Lafcadio Hearn, Errol Hill, and Jeff Henry. Their foundational works describe various masquerades that emerged in Trinidad and Tobago from the late 19th century onwards. The first Caribbean documentation of the masquerade as the aesthetic impression of a mother and child came from Hearn, whose text focused on Martinique (2009).

Hill (1972) confirms that the masquerade did not "originate" in Trinidad. He suggests that a similar character was a precursor to the Caribbean Baby Doll. This character, Mother Babo, was part of the Greek Carnival in Thrace. Mother Babo was older, unmarried and carried a doll that represented her child. In performances of Mother Babo, there was also uncertainty about the child's paternity. Hill infers that this masquerade influenced the early characterisation of the Caribbean Baby Doll. Through cultural exchanges via Caribbean migrations, the masquerade moved from place to place with iterations in Martinique, New Orleans, and Trinidad and Tobago (Hill 1972). There were performances of the masquerade in other Caribbean islands, but it was not as popular in these locations.

In Trinidad, the masquerade emerged in the late 1900s as a parody performed mainly by men (Hill 1972). Henry notes that cross-dressing was part of the Carnival ethos, but there was a distaste for the practice, with complaints made about the morality of the performance. Apart from the narrative of the Baby Doll, including sex before marriage and the creation of families without father figures, there was also the cross-dressing, which was against the codes of behaviour regarding gender and sexuality at that time. Hill notes that the Baby Doll may have been one of the "transvestite" masqueraders banned in 1895 when the masquerade was not yet called Baby Doll (Hill 1972). Hill gives details of the masquerade's aesthetic, saying that the costume included a frilled dress, a bonnet tied under the chin, stockings, gloves, strapped shoes, a wire mask, a hood covering the back of the head and neck, and a small doll. The player

performed the role of "mother" while the doll was presented as "the child". The speech and movement of the Baby Doll were "loud and loose". Male passers-by were stopped and accused of being the father of the baby. The accused could relieve himself of the accusation by paying the masquerader.

Henry confirms Hill's description of the masquerade as a young Black woman desperately searching for her child's father and begging for financial support (Henry 2008). In Henry's account, the doll carried by the Baby Doll was white, blond and blue-eyed. Hill says that the child was the result of an impulsive sexual engagement with a stranger. The mother didn't know who the father was and resorted to accusing random men on the street of paternity. Henry also describes another character, Bébé/ En bébé, in which another performer played the role of the child. Bébé/En bébé was dressed in infant's clothing and was sometimes pushed in a carriage. In this dual performance, both Baby Doll and Bébé/ En Bébé asked passers-by for financial assistance (Henry 2008).

Siparee Mas. En Bébé, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.

Siparee Mas. Petit Prince, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.

Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

Hill and Henry agree that the begging, accusations of paternity, and generally raucous performance of the Baby Doll contributed to its marginalisation within Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival. The Baby Doll masquerade's focus on Black single motherhood and the accusation of paternity that were central to the performance sparked concerns about respectability, not just of the women but also of the men being accused. According to Henry, at the time, there were statistics documented at the Colonial Office showing an increasing number of single mothers in Trinidad. This became a concern of the state.

To ameliorate this social problem, legislation similar to the St. Vincent Bastardy Ordinance (1880) was passed to make the fathers of the children accountable for their financial responsibilities and urged them to commit to supporting their children. However, because this phenomenon was considered a deliberate choice of the women involved, they received little social sympathy.

These Carnival performances were part of the unofficial chastisement of single Black mothers. These stagings were intended to shame the women the masquerade represented. Henry writes, "[The Baby Doll] was alone without a support system, to be pitied or ridiculed. The result: the victim became the buffoon, as men ran when she approached for help to support her baby. Spectators ridiculed and laughed uproariously at her situation" (Henry 2008). With these factors working against the masquerade, it fell further out of favour with the public, and its reception was often a mixture of scorn, annoyance, and mockery, which was offset by humour.

Henry also notes that by 1946, there was a major point of development when the masquerade received its name. The rationale for the use of Baby Doll as the name of the masquerade is steeped in speculation. A compelling account is that this was the title of a film that was popular in cinemas in 1956. The film, *Baby Doll*, showed a beautiful but child-like nineteen-year-old woman named Baby Doll who was pursued and sexually seduced by older men. Just like the masquerade, this film was criticized for its overtly sexual themes. This film may have influenced the naming of the masquerade, but Hill admits that this was his speculation.

Along with its new name, the styling of the masquerade also transitioned into what Henry described as a middle-class "upscale" appearance, compared to its previously shabby presentation. Thus, the masquerade went through aesthetic revisions over time in response to the socio-politics in which it was cast. Still, it remained the figure of the vulgar, irresponsible single mother with no money and no support.

Siparee Mas. Tabiz, 2025.
Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné.
Watercolour, acrylic and ink on watercolour paper, 9 x 12 in.
Conceptualised by Amanda T. McIntyre.

The Baby Doll was regularly cited in Trinidad and Tobago until the 1930s, but by the mid-20th century, according to Hill, it was considered "extinct". However, in 1962, there was a critical turning point when a play was commissioned to be presented as part of a suite of commemorations of Trinidad and Tobago's Independence. It was this production, *A Gala Performance* directed by Errol Hill, that was documented as the first presentation of the Baby Doll as a reimagining of the Madonna (Hill 1962).

iii. The Madonna of Caribbean Carnivals

This theatrical production that commemorated Trinidad and Tobago's independence was based on the Judeo-Christian myth of Jesus Christ. In the myth, there was a prophecy that a virgin girl would be the mother of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (The Holy Bible, New International Version). When the events of the prophecy start unfolding, an angel visits the girl. The girl, Mary, is told by the angel that she is already pregnant with the child. This raises the issue of consent since Mary was not asked if this was something she wanted. Instead, seeing that she was good for use, the Holy Spirit impregnates her without asking and then has the angel announce the pregnancy to Mary (The Holy Bible, New International Version).

Like the 19th and 20th century iterations of the Caribbean Baby Doll, the biological father is also absent in the myth of the Madonna and Christ child. Since the circumstances of Mary's pregnancy did not align with the respectability politics of the culture and time, Mary and the unborn Christ child were at risk of dishonour. To mitigate this, Joseph, a carpenter, married Mary. Joseph raised the child and was seen publicly as the father. However, the myth is clear that Joseph was not the child's biological father.

Similarly, in the play, the Baby Doll was not a single mother with her illegitimate child, but a compassionate woman who finds and fosters a messianic figure that represented the new independent nation of Trinidad and Tobago. In the play, the child's arrival fulfils an old prophecy and signifies the beginning of a new, prosperous age. A crisis ensues when the enemies of the country try to capture the child. This leads to a battle between the child's protectors and the enemy forces. God intervenes with a plea for tolerance when it becomes clear that the battle will cause immense destruction and will benefit neither party. When the time comes for the child to be baptised, competitions are held to determine who the godparents will be.

These competitions within the play recreated the annual Carnival competitions, resulting in the awards of the titles "Calypso King" and "Masquerade Queen" to players who were also awarded the roles of the child's godparents. They named the child "The Independent Nation of Trinidad and Tobago". This presentation of the nation as not only a Christ child but as the child that the Baby Doll cares for, presented a reimagining of the masquerade that challenged the stigma of sexual immorality associated with the Baby Doll, and instilled elements of altruism and the suggestion of divinity in the masquerade's characterisation.

The presentation of the Baby Doll as a Madonna figure on a national platform outside of the Carnival season was bold and risked controversy but was generally well-received. Though the masquerade had fallen out of popularity by that time (so much so that it was considered extinct), the impression of the Baby Doll was still so well established in the collective memory of the audience that, despite being marginalised in Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival for over thirty years, the masquerade was still recognized by the audience. It was also reimagined in a way that challenged the previous characterisation of the masquerade.

Since the time of that production, there have been other creative attempts in Trinidad and Tobago to link the Baby Doll to the Madonna. For example, in 2024, Sariyah Mohammed performed in the Traditional Mas Competition at Adam Smith Square, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. She was registered in the Baby Doll category with a presentation entitled, "Cursed is the Fruit of Thy Womb" that aesthetically and thematically referenced the Madonna and Child. When I interviewed her in 2025 about this performance, Mohammed recounted being based in Manchester for her studies, and while there, she made trips to various art museums in Europe where she viewed works that featured the Madonna. She says that this was the motif that inspired the way she presented the aesthetic of the Madonna in her performance.

In her performance, she inverted the angel's annunciation Judeo-Christian myth, which states "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb". In my interview with

Mohammed, she said that her inversion of the blessing to a curse was a commentary on genocide with reference to Israel's war crimes against the people of Gaza. Her appeal was to god to save the child. She projected the appeal towards the audience, so that they were both in the dual role of god and the absent parent. Mohammed had also considered creating a work based on the Siparee Mai, Trinidad and Tobago's Black Madonna (Mohammed 2025).

Siparee Mas. Kairi, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

iv. Siparee Mai, The Black Madonna of Trinidad

Years earlier, in 2016, I presented my first reimagining of the Madonna. This included my creation of a doll using upcycled material from my clothes. I named the doll Siparee Mai after the Black Madonna that is venerated in Siparia, a town in south Trinidad. The name Siparee Mai (also: Siparee Ke Mai, Siparee Kai Mai, Siparia Mai and Sipari Mai), gives the geographical placement of this Madonna in Siparia, and it also informs us about the plurality of her cultural significance. The word mai comes from Trinidad's Indian community,

some of whom revere her as a manifestation of the Hindu goddess Kali. In Bhojpuri Hindi, mai means mother.

It was the striking dark appearance of Siparee Mai that inspired and continues to inspire me. In Roman Catholicism, a Black Madonna or Black Virgin refers to dark-skinned representations of the Virgin Mary. The church states that some of these statues darkened over time due to the ageing of the lead-based paint used on the statues, or the exposure of the statues to smoke from candles placed on altars (Moss and Cappannari 2025). Another explanation for the phenomenon of the Black Madonna is that these representations were done in attempts by missionaries to reflect Indigenous population (Moss and Cappannari 2025). Trinidad's Siparee Mai is part of this phenomenon of Black Madonnas.

Siparee Mas. The Spell Begins in Space, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

I was attracted to Siparee Mai because of her dark skin, her Indigenous associations and her doll-like appearance. When I was a teenager studying at Holy Faith Convent in Couva, Trinidad, one of my teachers proudly and reverently spoke about how blessed we were to have a Black Madonna. I was proud too. As a Black girl, to see myself in divinity was powerful. Also, this particular divinity was so charming in its beauty and femininity.

Siparee Mai is unlike the customary aesthetic of Madonna sculptures as she is more akin to a doll, with ball-jointed arms that move, real hair that could be combed and real clothes that could be changed. Siparee Mai has an extensive wardrobe. She also has groomers who are appointed to attend to her. The principal attendee is the Queen of the Indigenous Warao nation. Also, only women are allowed to groom Siparee Mai. No men are involved in these rituals of care. There is a legend in Siparia that once a man tried to look under Siparee Mai's dress, and he was immediately blinded.

However, she can be carried by men. On her feast day, the third Sunday after Easter, Siparee Mai is taken out of the church for a procession. She is securely attached to the roof of a car and is driven through the streets or carried by parishioners atop what resembles a litter of palanquin. Her entourage includes priests and parishioners. On the day of the procession, the streets are flanked by people who come to see her. The feast day is part of the larger festival of Siparee Mai that includes days of music, markets, and gatherings celebrating the Black Madonna. Father Armand Massé referred to her as "the miraculous Virgin" who was "of great renown in the whole of Trinidad" (QuadTT 2025).

While my formal connections to Roman Catholicism were severed over time, my interest in this compelling figure remained, and when I was coming of age in Carnival, I made my own offerings through my art practice. My 2016 Siparee Mai doll was foundational to what later became the Dolly Mas position that the contemporary Baby Doll does not have to carry a child. The mother is not tethered to the infant and is assured of its care through the support of the other members of the family.

Siparee Mas. Queen of Swords, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

It is important to note that while "La Divina Pastora/ Siparee Mai is not styled with an infant Christ, it is still part of the larger Christian myth that includes the image of the mother and child, as well as the question of paternity." Instead of a child, she carries a shepherd's staff. She is the one who leads the flock. The staff suggests that all who follow her are her children. She is the symbolic mother.

Siparee Mas. Warao Steel, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

This became more meaningful to me after I experienced a miscarriage in 2022. In the trauma of that time, I wondered whether I would ever perform Baby Doll again and if so, with what considerations to my lived experience of losing a child. Since then, I don't often carry the doll-child in my performances. However, I carry the company, the various projects, the artistic direction, the narratives, the world building. I, too, am a symbolic mother. For my photo series *Siparee*

Mas, I carried a living child, Ma'Kari, who, in this reimaging, symbolised Dolly Mas with its rootedness in myths, legends and oral histories, and also its futurity.
The history of this Madonna is complex. Concerning the legend of Siparee Mai, Surgeon-Major D. W. D. Comins's 1893 *Report on Indian Emigration to Trinidad* provides details of Capuchin monks fleeing persecution in Venezuela. They found asylum in Trinidad and are credited with bringing the statue to Trinidad in 1730. Another account gives a later date, circa 1870, when there is a shipwreck and the Capuchins all die except one who clings to the bow of the boat. He would later say that on the bow of the boat was the Divina Pastora statue, which was later named Siparee Mai (McNeal 2002).

Apart from the church history of Siparee Mai, there are various oral histories told among the Indigenous Warao nation that is located along the Orinoco River delta in Venezuela, and also in south Trinidad. One Warao legend of Siparee Mai states that it was an Indigenous girl who saved the priest after the shipwreck. I remember hearing this as a teenager and believing that it was her image that was the model for Siparee Mai. Now, in consideration of the history of the violence Indigenous people experienced at the hands of Europeans, my reflections on that legend are shrouded in grief for all the girls and women who suffered at the hands of colonisers.

Another folk history, which accounts for the Siparee Mai's physicality, gives details of the Warao nation fleeing persecution on the mainland. The Capuchins are not involved in this version of the legend. In this narrative, the statue came from and belongs to the Indigenous people. They brought the statue to Trinidad and hid it in the forest. They later returned to the spot and tried to recover it, but by that time it was already found and taken to the church (McNeal 2002).

Siparee Mai remains one of the most fascinating figures of Trinidadian folk/oral history, with lesser-known accounts of her being discovered by gardeners who dig her up from the earth (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 2025).

Further to these legends of Siparee Mai, there is also the account of the statue's relationship to Hinduism and Indians in Trinidad. It is said that:

> Siparee *Mai* appeared at the La Divina Church as a baby to grant the wishes of East Indian forefathers who were subdued by the colonial regime. Believers say the baby, who appeared close to the altar, aged as the hours of the day trickled by. By evening, she turned into an old woman and disappeared as the sun went down. It is believed the statue bestows fertility to barren women, marital success to couples, healing to the sick, proper husbands for young girls, and blessings to the poor and needy. Children who are unable to walk or speak could be healed if offerings are made to the Goddess (Begg 2017).

Further, the church in which she is housed in Siparia was, at one time, a *tapia* construct. The typology of the *tapia house* is part of Trinidad's Indigenous architectural heritage. The walls of the *tapia house* are made of clay with reeds incorporated within the clay to strengthen its materiality. This aspect of *Siparee Mas* became more important to me when architecture became integral to my design practice. The *tapia house* is related to the Trinidadian vernacular gingerbread architectural style that is referenced in the Dolly Mas designs and narratives of time- travelling Baby Dolls.

Siparee Mas. Her Bright Materials, 2025.
Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, 2025. Watercolor and pencil on paper 8.5 x 11 in.
Concept Amanda T. McIntyre.

v. The Lady of Loretto and Time Traveling Baby Dolls

I engaged in another reimagining of the Madonna archetype when I developed the Dolly Mas narratives of retrofuturistic time travelling in which the Loreto family carried their real estate atop magical parasols/parasoleil. The family was guided by their patron saint, the Lady of Loreto. In Roman Catholic mythology, the Lady of Loreto is the Madonna associated with the literal house of Loreto. This myth gives the account of a house in Italy that has been time-travelling. It is said that the Virgin Mary was born in this house in Nazareth, and since then, the house has been carried across time and space by angels in an effort to protect it from destruction (Wells 2026). Its last landing was in Loreto, Italy, in 1294. Offerings are made to the Madonna of the house, referred to as the Lady of Loreto, for safety in air travel:

> Catholic tradition holds that the Holy House arrived suddenly in Loreto, Italy, on December 10, 1294, after a miraculous rescue from the Holy Land as the Crusaders were driven out of Palestine at the end of the 13th century. It was the first shrine of international renown dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and has been known as a Marian centre for centuries. Popes have always held the Shrine of Loreto in special esteem, and it is under their direct authority and protection. In a homily in 1995, Saint Pope John Paul II called the Holy House of Loreto, "the house of all God's adopted children." He added: "The threads of the history of the whole of humankind are tied anew in that house. It is the Shrine of the House of Nazareth, to which the Church that is in Italy is tied by providence, that the latter rediscovers a quickening reminder of the mystery of the Incarnation, thanks to which each man is called to the dignity of the Son of God (Wells 2026).

These details of the time-travelling Holy House of Loreto are the basis for the inclusion of this Madonna in the Dolly Mas narratives. In 2024, the company began the presentation of the trilogy, Coming of Age in Carnival, which follows the quest of La Niña and the adventure of the Loreto family. I use the Loreto Family and the Lady of Loreto in these productions to reimagine the Madonna archetype. The trilogy connects to my earlier reimaginings of the Madonna and

to Hill's first documentation of a reimagining of the Madonna Archetype in the commemorative Independence play of 1962.

Siparee Mas. Gang Gang, 2025.
Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, 2025. Watercolour, acrylic and ink on watercolour paper, 9 x 12 in.
Conceptualised by Amanda T. McIntyre.

vi. Dolly Mas and Caribbean Retrofuturism

In the reimagining of the Madonna archetypes through the prism of the contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll masquerade, I've engaged in what I identify as Caribbean retrofuturism, a regionally focused subcategory of retrofuturism, which is itself a subcategory of futurism. Futurism was an art movement started in Italy in 1909 that focused on the aesthetics and sensory details of what was at the time called "modern technology". Filippo Marinetti was a central figure in this movement that ended in 1918. This early iteration of futurism influenced and continues to influence cultural practices labelled as "futuristic". It has come to reference a broad category of ideas, trends and aesthetics that anticipate the future.

Retrofuturism is also concerned with the future, but more specifically with how it was perceived and anticipated from earlier times, using aesthetics that could have been categorised as futuristic in those times. Retrofuturism is concerned with a historical collective memory of futurism. Like other art movements, futurism and retrofuturism can be sub-categorized according to region. Caribbean retrofuturism is a subcategory of retrofuturism that is specific to visual and performing arts that speculate on Caribbean history and reimagines that history with futuristic features, which may be contemporary to the artist, and which also speculate on possible as yet unrealized Caribbean futures.

An example of Caribbean retrofuturism is the work of Trinidadian visual artist Rodell Warner, who creates animated digital composites for his "Augmented Archives" using archival photographs of the Caribbean, taken in the mid twentieth century (Warner 2023). His animations explore the complexities of race relations in the Caribbean. Warner uses Artificial Intelligence technology to produce images that reimagine Caribbean histories and speculate on Caribbean futures (Warner 2023).

Warner's speculation on the 19th-century Caribbean, which is one of my periods of focus in Dolly Mas, is done with a consideration of the personae who are

absent in archives due to either not having been documented or by the exclusion of their documentation from the archives. These considerations of erasure inform Warner's revision of the past with a correlated understanding of the present, and that includes projections of possible futures. These are the main reasons why I find my work to be strongly in conversation with Warner's and others whom I identify as Caribbean retrofuturists.

The retrofuturism of Dolly Mas is rooted in speculations on Caribbean history with the anticipation of 21st-century Black queer feminist politics, and speculation on possible, yet unknown, Caribbean futures. The main differences between Warner's projects and mine are our materials. While Warner uses Artificial Intelligence, I use the more traditional materials of design (pens, pencils, paper) to make sketches and then transfer these sketches to digital platforms on which I apply colouring. The visual and performance artworks of Dolly Mas are rendered through literature, theatre, montage and photography to reimagine the zeitgeists of the Caribbean in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, with an anticipation of 21st century politics concerning race, class, geography, gender and sexuality. These are sci-fi and fantasy narratives about time travel that connect the aesthetics to the periods from which they emerge and contribute to the rationalisation of their use in present time, while also qualifying their future projections.

It is important for me to show how the characters engage with the same locations in different historical periods, particularly the sites at which Baby Dolls were once negatively presented. For example, in 2024, when the troupe performed at the Piccadilly Street stage during the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, a jubilant band of children ran towards the players and later joined them on stage. In response to this, the troupe members passed parasols and dolls to them, and in this way included them in the performance. In the video recording of this, the children can be seen first pointing and whispering to each other before racing on to join the masqueraders.

This took place exactly at the historic East Port of Spain location of the jamette Carnival in which the traditional Baby Doll masquerade was first documented in Trinidad (McIntyre 2025). For me, this performance was a metaphorical time loop. This experimentation with retrofuturism in the work of Dolly Mas connects how the masquerade is reimagined to what Alejo Carpentier described as "the marvellous real", in which reality is altered in unexpected ways that present new insights about the richness of reality. This may be manifest in the amplification of the scale or categories of reality (Carpentier 2006). It's not just retrofuturism but also a heightened magical reality within it. This was the return of Baby Dolls to the 19th-century Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. However, instead of being staged as destitute and abandoned, the Baby Dolls were presented as joyful and supported, with their children laughing and dancing happily. This was a spontaneous reflection of the retrofuturist vision of the Contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll that I imagined and provided a possible answer to my question about what an alternate Caribbean Carnival in the 19th or 20th century would look like.

Siparee Mas. A Myth of Creation, 2025.
Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, 2025. Watercolour, acrylic and ink on watercolour paper, 9 x 12 in.
Conceptualised by Amanda T. McIntyre.

vii. Conclusion

The Dolly Mas Visual and Performing Arts Company is a portal for time travel, imagination and reimagination. In my consideration of the visual language of the company, I thought about the images at the core of my art practice. The artworks are projections of my personal history, including my unseeable self, and the histories of various aesthetic influences, including the Black Madonna.

This intrigue with the Black Madonna started in my youth. I grew up as a Roman Catholic and attended a prestigious Catholic girls' school. This fascination was later harmonised with my focus on the Baby Doll masquerade. It was intrigue and fascination that fostered my investigation of this intersection between Caribbean festival cultures and Caribbean Carnival cultures. In these years, I thought through the ways in which they are related and how one supports the other's position in Caribbean art.

When I founded Dolly Mas, I already had a decade of experience with the contemporary Caribbean Baby Doll masquerade that included the aesthetic connection between the masquerade and the Black Madonna, and this consideration remained with me as I moved forward. But beyond this, I could also see how that aesthetic, coupled with the visual language of Dolly Mas, projected my unseeable negotiations.

The Dolly Mas narratives are my continued speculations on earlier iterations of the masquerade, and my attempts to address the ways in which the women they represented were dishonoured by these performances. Not just the women but their children also, who, at a moment's notice, travel through time and memory. They find me in my dreams, challenging me to do more for their possible futures.

In my visions, I first see them as they are described in the foundational accounts of Caribbean carnivals: destitute, abandoned and making errant paths through the city (Hartman 2020). But thankfully, they survived that time. They develop,

and the vision is no longer just an impression, such as is described by Hearn. The mother grows up intellectually, politically, and spiritually. She learns to gently parent the child. The masquerade that represented her ceases to be performed as parody. It becomes a celebration and an antidote to her dishonour (Saunders and Hartman 2008).

Connecting the Baby Doll Masquerade to Caribbean retrofuturism, in the Dolly Mas narratives, is part of my urge to challenge their dishonour. Through the creative capacities of this work, I travel back in time to meet them, and we leap forward on the timeline, so that in the 21st century, they craft their own paths towards beauty, love and perhaps even divinity. In this cathedral of their stories, this work is my offering to the Carnival Madonna. This is the shrine that I am tending.

Siparee Mas. In all my dreams, 2025.
Photographed by Jason Audain.
Conceptualised and Produced by Amanda T. McIntyre.

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