“Church inna Session”: Leasho Johnson, Mapping the Sacred through the Profane in Jamaican Popular Culture

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The overlapping, and at times contradictory, nature of anxieties shared between the church, the state, and artists appear most visibly in an array of Caribbean popular cultural modes of expression. In fact, there is a growing body of scholarship that focuses on these intersections, work that highlights the curious, and yet productive, moments of critical reflection that these “perverse modernities” make possible.[1] Arguably, visual excess is one of the primary modes of expressing and performing identity in Jamaican popular culture, and this is certainly the case with artists such as Ebony G. Patterson and Leasho Johnson. However, there are other artists engaged in similar critical conversations that draw on public spaces and state practices in order to consider the plight of black subjects who are struggling to remain visible and alive despite their limited access to the critical avenues for opportunity. Jamaican citizens have historically turned to the church for social and spiritual uplift, and when the church could not provide this, they turned to the rituals and performances that sustained them through slavery, emancipation independence, economic depression, and state violence. These places of respite—bars, streets, dancehall sessions,

clubs—helped to restore the spirit and humanity of the working poor and dejected, albeit through rituals and traditions that ran contrary to those of religious organizations.

The history of political and cultural rifts between secular and sacred institutions in the Caribbean has been well documented in myriad forms. Some would argue that the close proximities from which these epistemologies emerge have led to lasting intimate conflicts and contradiction. But the Caribbean region is not exceptional in this instance; I am reminded that similar histories of antagonism have also shaped the history and development of jazz music, rhythm and blues, and gospel music in African American culture. Perry Henzell's 1972 film *The Harder They Come* is one of the earliest Caribbean representations of this conflict in Jamaican popular culture, particularly of the fine line separating the sacred and the profane in the lives of the working poor shortly after Jamaica's independence. Henzell keeps his finger on the pulse of the forces that draw these seemingly desperate communities into conversation with one another through the poignant visual and lyrical representations of the passions of the poor in their love of the Lord and in their desire to better themselves. In the film, the church is at once the pathway to respectability and the institution that holds us all accountable to the "other powers" in our day-to-day lives that compete for our attention, our energies and, yes, our souls. Without the guiding hand of a disciplining institution (church, legal or political system, social mores), temptation, it seems, when paired with healthy doses of desire and inaccessible opportunities, can form the trifecta of elements that threaten the spiritual well-being of the nation and its citizens, or so the story goes.

What Henzell's film makes clear is that both entities—the music industry and the religious institutions—are so intimately bound up with one another that they are almost inseparable, particularly from the social and economic standpoints. Michael Thelwell's novelization of *The Harder They Come* highlights another aspect of the intimate relationship between these two institutional forces in Caribbean culture. During what can best be described as one of the novel's most pivotal scenes, Ivan visits Miss Ida's café for the first time. It is in this cultural space that he first hears a radio and the music that would simultaneously capture his spiritual and sexual imagination. But it is not *just* the music that takes hold of his spirit; watching Miss Ida move in response to the music evokes a recollection of a parallel spiritual experience:

> And the café filled with music. Or rather, to Ivan, the café filled with Miss Ida around whom throbbing, heady, erotically insistent rhythms swirled and played. The big lady was light on her feet; the carnal exuberance of her breasts and hips seemed to engulf him. She seemed transfigured, not unlike the ladies at Miss 'Mando's pocomania* meeting, but the dreamy expression on her face, the smile on her painted lips were not very spiritual. Nor was her sweet, heavy perfume as she danced around them. Ivan's sense were assaulted in a new way. This was city music, café music, the music of pleasure and fleshly delight, and Miss Ida was its incarnation. [. . .]
>
> *Oh Miss Ida*
> *Don't you lift up any widah!*
> *Seem to me that you set pon glidah!*
> *Oh Miss Ida . . .*
> *You a real rough ridah.*[2]

The confusion registering in young Ivan's mind is not simply a bourgeoning sense of sexuality; Miss Ida's presence is at odds with his understanding of women, which up to this stage was limited to Miss 'Mando and her pocomania sistren, whose embodiment of the spirit is of a different sort. The pleasures of the flesh are symbolized (at once) through Miss Ida's body, its movement, and the rhythm of reggae music coming through the radio. Although Ivan recognizes that this is *not* the sanctified body, the one filled up, so to speak, with the holy spirit, he realizes that it is indeed an empowered, possessed body, one that has the capacity, and indeed the ability, to evoke a desire toward devotion (and damnation) for those who worship it. Later, in the front of the café, the checkers game of several male patrons is "temporarily suspended" when Miss Ida "emerge[s] from behind the bar": "'Lawd,' one of the men breathed reverentially, but loud enough for the tribute to carry, 'what a woman walk nice, sah?' He shook his head slowly in rapt devotion."[3] Yes, Miss Ida is a woman, just like his grandmother and her friends, but Ivan realizes in this moment that there are worldly pleasures that can unsettle a man's soul as powerfully as the spirits in pocomania, and this is what distinguishes Miss Ida from the other women he knows. What Ivan and the men in the bar (and the narrator) observe in Miss Ida, as a woman of substance, is that her comportment—her style, walk, voice and gestures—are all purposefully constructed for a particular effect.

In an evocative essay titled “Accessories/Accessaries; or, What’s in Your Closet?,” Petrine Archer highlights the long storied traditions of exchange (coerced and voluntary), in all their perversions, between the planter classes and enslaved persons in Jamaica. These traditions, she argues, are most readily visible through a series of images and performances that recur across a range of historical and cultural venues that have come to inform, if not define, Jamaican visual and popular culture. By mapping the links between modes of oppression during colonial rule and modes and traditions of resistance, and by reimagining these histories of resistance and systems of oppression with independence, Archer develops a methodology that I want to engage in my reading of the work of one of Jamaica’s emerging contemporary artists, Leasho Johnson, who engages the historical struggle between the sacred and the profane in particularly productive, and often perverse, ways. Archer asserts,

> I have challenged narratives about Jamaican art that define the island’s art history as a relatively modern one in which black people have had little visibility to consider whether we have been searching in the right places. Images of blackness proliferate in the public domain, and despite their sometimes pejorative nature, we need to track and reread them. . . . I want to explore the repeating patterns of our subordinate colonial relationship, using a handful of images that make links between slavery, pageantry, racial uplift, dancehall, and dress.[4]

As Archer suggests, visual cartographies are invaluable because of what they show and tell us about our anxieties during different historical periods. Once more, these images of blackness chronicle a different array of cultural expression from what we have come to think of as “mainstream” or even, as Archer suggests, stereotypical representations. Johnson’s work is overtly aware of the extent to which public spheres of power, authority, influence, and access shape the ways working poor and working-class black subjects are both invisible and hypervisible in Jamaican culture.

Archer begins her critical engagement in the street with the work of Isaac Mendes Belisario, who chronicled Jamaica’s street culture during the colonial period in Jamaica. I begin in the same place, the street, as I analyze Johnson’s work in order to highlight his reimaginings of the links between Jamaica’s colonial postindependence future, particularly because these works appear in the public sphere. A good amount of Johnson’s work is staged in public spaces, on walls and buildings—in short, in the streets. As such, it is consumed, or at the very least viewed, by a different constituency of people from those who might enter the museum or gallery space. Much of his work is part of the everyday movements of people in Kingston, Jamaica; not cordoned off from the public, it occupies the unsanctioned spaces of the city: walls of abandon lots, sides of buildings, walls that mark the boundaries of public and private property. In fact, because of its public appearance, Johnson’s work could be considered “not-art” or even defacement of public property. However, in the Caribbean the reality of public spaces being occupied by unlicensed persons and industries has, more recently, grown to include works of art, all of which fly in the face of law, order, and respectability.

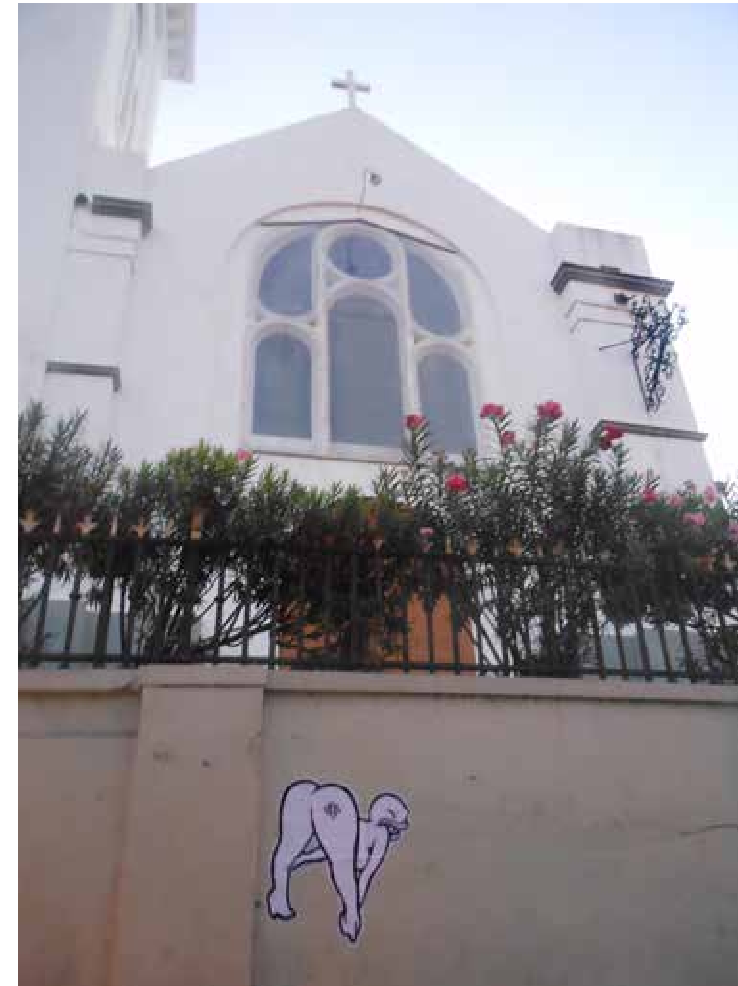


Figure 1. Leasho Johnson, *6:30*, 2014. Paper and yeast paste on wall; approximately 30 x 30 in. Kingston Parish Church. Photograph by Randall Island

Johnson's public installation of *6:30* (fig. 1) on a wall just beneath the Kingston Parish Church wonderfully embodies the myriad levels of negotiation between public and private and between the sacred and the secular that are always already at work in the country. This contemporary figure, juxtaposed against the landscape of one of Jamaica's oldest churches, creates an opportunity for viewers to consider if and how the image is connected to the edifice that occupies this public space. The positioning of the figure makes it appear as though the church is resting on her back. Its location also brings to mind the iconic power of the church, its looming authority over this mode of expression.

There has long been a tug of war over who has the authority to occupy public space and for what purposes. The working poor and working classes, in particular, even when attempting to ply their wares and, in so doing, improve their lives, are seen as infringing on the rights of the sanctioned businesses and citizens. According to Winnifred Brown-Glaude,

> Poor Black female street vendors in public spaces often spark public discussions around their legitimacy as entrepreneurs working in public economic spaces. We particularly hear this in public outcries that accuse Afro-Jamaican higglers of being "out of order," which in Jamaican parlance implies that one is "out of place." But representations of higglers as out of order are not simply economic matters; they are also social and spatial ones: these representations raise the question of whether these bodies—poor black women—rightfully belong in public economic spaces as independent entrepreneurs. . . . Such representations . . . reveal the presumed violations of social, economic, and spatial boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that are not only gendered but also racialized and classed.[5]

Johnson's use of public spaces as the canvas for his work provides a curious opportunity for thinking through some of these historical links between class color and visibility in Jamaica. The title of the installation *Back-fi-ah-Bend* (fig. 2) comes from a 2014 song by Vybz Kartel about the "wuk" endured by women during sexual encounters. The song title, like Johnson's images of the women, highlights different kinds of backbreaking work done by women in the public and private spheres. *Back-fi-a-bend* invites viewers to contemplate precisely what Archer describes as the ways "blackness proliferates in the public domain . . . despite their sometimes pejorative nature," in order to "track and reread them."[6] By creating a visual link between a contemporary representation of a woman in a dancehall pose and of nineteenth-century market women, who appear with some regularity on photo postcards set in Jamaica, Johnson reminds viewers of the weight of representation that rests on black women's bodies. We are invited, at the very least, to consider the link between the four women dressed in nineteenth-century attire, with their bananas on their head, and the female dancehall figure who also bears the weight of the "cash crop" (bananas, respectability, productivity), this time on her back. I would suggest that the iconography of the black female body in Jamaica, across two generations of women, speaks once again to what Archer describes as "the repeating patterns of our subordinate colonial relationship, represented by a handful of images that makes links between slavery, pageantry, racial uplift, dancehall, and dress."[7]

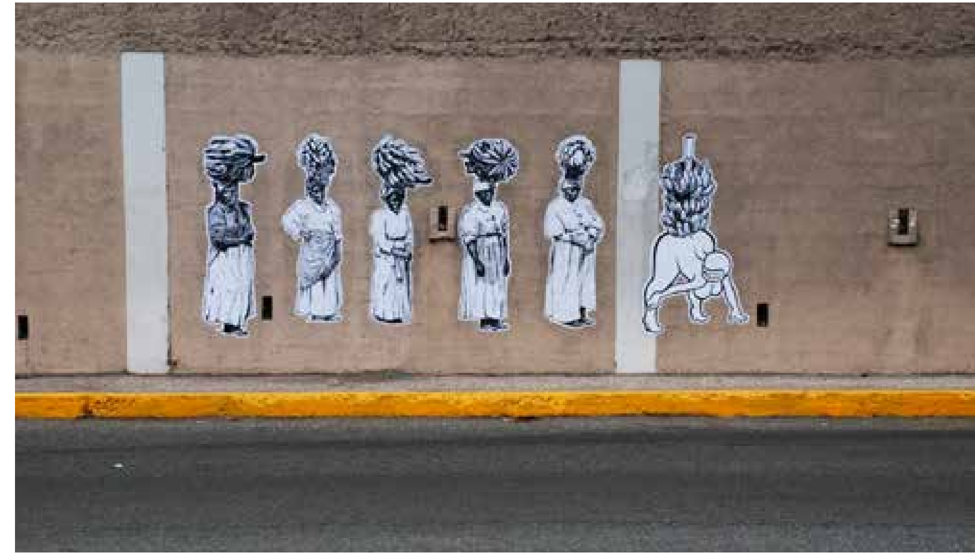


Figure 2. Leasho Johnson, Back-fi-a-bend, 2015. Paper and yeast paste on wall, Kingston. The work was installed for Labour Day and removed after three days by the apartment authorities. Photograph by the artist

The fundamental difference with the contemporary images is the absence of the more "respectable" attire for work that is, by no means, white-collar (or white-fabric) work. But there is also a visual ambiguity in the absence of clothing on the contemporary anime figure: does this signify that the new commodity for export is now black sexuality? Several of Johnson's newest works, such as *Land of Big Hood and Water* (fig. 3), directly link sexual tourism with the new branding of Jamaica in the global market place.

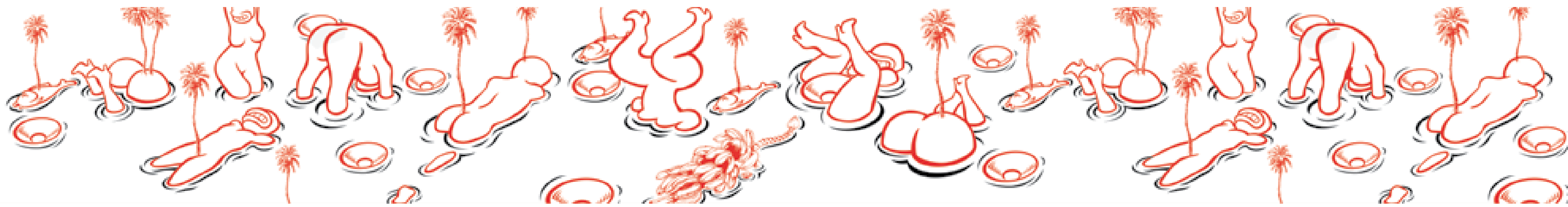


Figure 3. Leasho Johnson, *Land of Big Hood and Water* (detail), 2015. Paper and yeast paste on wall, Old Hope Road, Kingston

Johnson's contemporary images, inspired by the anime aesthetic and popularized by Tokyoplastic, are of female figures executing postures often assumed by female dancers in the dancehall. In *6:30*, the figure's large tattooed buttocks and legs seem disproportionate to the rest of her body, but this is part of the aesthetic allure of the Tokyoplastic phenomenon in which the heads and facial features (eyes, smile, teeth, and ears, the latter usually covered by large headphones) are disproportionally large when compared to the bodies of the dolls. "The figures," Johnson says, "have gone through various stages of evolution since I first used them in my installation 'The Product' during Young Talent V." However, it seems as though Johnson has reconfigured the aesthetic to reflect the preferences in Jamaican popular culture by enlarging aspects of the anatomy that are prized in dancehall culture. He admits that he "had to change them slightly" when he began *Church Is in Session* "so that the characters could imitate the human anatomy to do dancehall moves."[8] But the placement of the image in *6:30* brings us back to my opening comments on the relationship between the sacred and the profane in Jamaican culture.

One would imagine that the street sessions and the church would be incongruent spheres of spiritual expression, but musicians have found a way to fuse the sacred and the secular for generations, sometimes out of cultural necessity, other times out of circumstantial or industry necessity, especially in African diaspora cultures. *The Harder They Come* is as much a mapping of the musical and political journey of Jamaica as it is an accounting of the social and economic strictures of the country. In addition to charting the battle for the hearts and minds of the working poor, it also highlights the emergence of working-class cultural aesthetics. The story highlights the intimate overlap between music and labor, between songs sung in the fields (as slaves or maroon descendants) and those sung to dispel the pain and suffering of systemic racism and disenfranchisement after emancipation and colonialism. In both instances music provides the avenue to transcend (if only momentarily) the social ills while also acknowledging joy and thankfulness, even in the face of struggle. The vehicle and style of delivery vary between the church and the street, but the potential for experiencing spiritual uplift and redemption is invariably one and the same.

“Where Two or Three Gather in My Name”: Consecrating the Street and the Session

David Rudder’s 1998 song “High Mas,” in paying homage to the gift of calypso, borrows heavily from the rhythms and cadence of the Catholic liturgy (specifically, the “Our Father” prayer). Representatives of the Roman Catholic Church felt that Rudder had strayed too far away from the secular realm and into the sacred with his lyrics as well as in his evocation of the hymnal tradition of the church. However, for many carnival revelers, “High Mas” was a praise song in the most traditional sense of the word in African literary traditions. That is to say, it is a series of laudatory epithets sung in honor of gods, men, animals, places, women—all intended to capture the essence of that which is being praised. “High Mas” is a praise song for the creative spirit that is undoubtedly, according to Rudder, a gift from God. In his eyes, calypso is the salve, the balm; and the ritual of carnival (its dances, praise songs, oral traditions, costumes) is the vehicle to restore the spirit that has been stripped away during the course of the year. Rudder’s praise song acknowledges the sins that are part of man’s “natural state” but not without the possibility for redemption through praising God’s generosity and extending this invitation to all acolytes to celebrate in the mas’:

> Our father who has given us this art
> so that we can all feel a part of this earthly heaven . . . amen
> Forgive us this day our daily weaknesses
> as we seek to cast our mortal burdens on your city . . . amen
> Oh merciful father, in this bacchanal season
> Where some men will lose their reason
> But most of us just want to wine and have a good time ’cause
> we looking for a lime because we feeling fine, Lord . . . amen
> And as we jump up and down in this crazy town,
> You sent us some music for some healing . . . amen
>
> [Chorus]
> Everybody hand raise, everybody give praise [2x]
> And if you know what ah mean put up yuh finger
> And if you know what ah mean put up yuh hand
> And if you know what ah mean put up yuh finger
> And if you know what ah mean, then scream:
> Give Jah his praises, let Jah be praised
> The father in his mercy, he send a little music,
> to make the vibrations raise.[9]

Johnson’s series *Church Is in Session* parallels the spiritual (rather than the religious) sentiment that Rudder’s song espouses, albeit far more controversially in its iconography. The series includes several paintings, with two bearing the series title, along with several earthenware figures. Each of the earthenware pieces carries its own title: *Pum-Pum Tun-up East and West*; *Pum-Pum Tun-up Heaven Bound*; *Pum-Pum Tun-up North and South*; and *Pum-Pum Tun-up Dive*.[10] The paintings communicate to audiences that the sacrosanct nature of spirituality is no longer the domain of the church and its officials; it now extends to the streets, the balm yards, and the dancehall sessions and gatherings. Spiritual uplift and redemption are experienced through different rituals and performances, and the venues vary widely. In the secular realm, uplift and redemption can be achieved without the weight of moral authority, particularly vis-à-vis discourses of respectability and its byproduct: shame. Johnson’s *Church in Session #1* and *Church in Session #2* (figs. 4 and 5) are wonderful representations of the ways spiritual iconography have been reappropriated and dispersed among congregants of the dancehall. The ubiquitous “Jesus piece”—spiritual or religious jewelry popular in the hip-hop community—as well as other signposts of life in dancehall sessions feature prominently in both paintings.

The “Jesus pieces” are the central focus in the paintings, as are the facial expressions that suggest an exchange of sentiment between the two participants, one that is well known in African diaspora performances. The call-and-response between the singer (preacher) and the listener (parishioner) in the dancehall is usually the call for audience members to “put yuh lighters inna di air” to show their appreciation for the “boom tune” or an old classic that has stood the test of time.

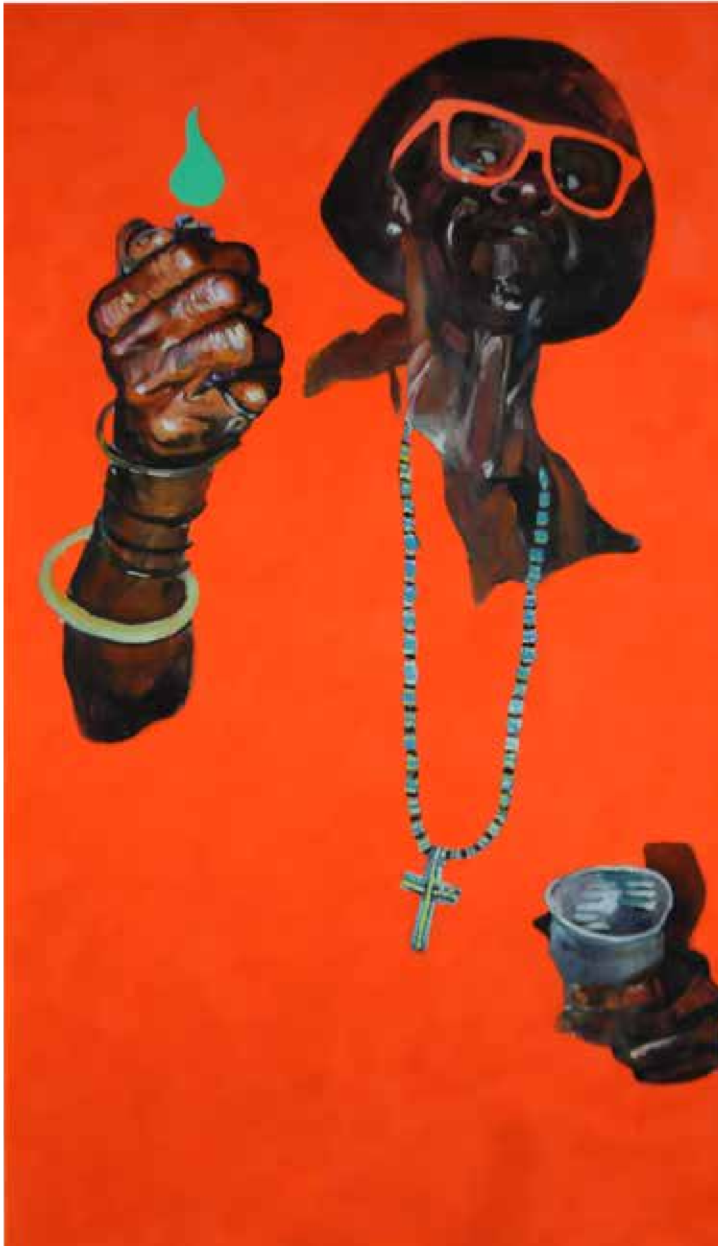


Figure 4. Leasho Johnson, *Church Is in Session #1*, 2012. Mixed media; 30 x 54 in. Courtesy of the artist

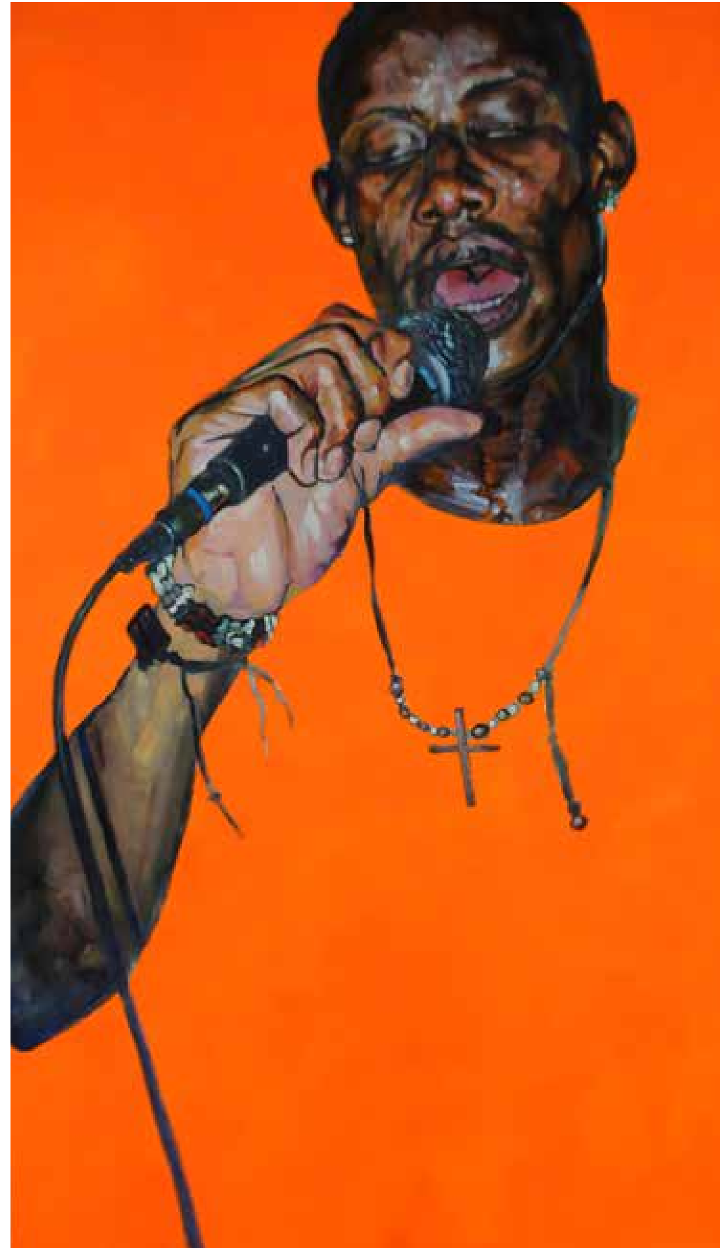


Figure 5. Leasho Johnson, *Church Is in Session #2*, 2012. Mixed media; 30 x 54 in. Courtesy of the artist

The lighter represents a moment of rapture for *both* the singer and the audience. It is a moment of recognition and visibility, a means of paying homage to a mutually uplifting moment. This is most apparent in *Church Is in Session #2*, in which the subject's closed eyes leave viewers to imagine what he is experiencing while simultaneously inviting them to join him by reflecting inward. His facial expression certainly reminds viewers that performance, like spirituality, is a deeply personal experience but one that is also shared and enjoyed through fellowship with members of the community. And it is this last aspect of spirituality that makes the dancehall session a space for redemption and community building through sharing in the good vibes. At the same time, however, the usual markers of style, fashion, or "bling" that traditionally accompany performers in the session are totally absent. Viewers are instead given large orange spaces that force their eyes toward the stark contrast of the singer's/listener's dark skin and accessories. The "Jesus piece" in *Church Is in Session #2,* which appears to be made of wooden beads, is distinctly different from the shine of the cross in *Church Is in Session #1*. But bling still makes an appearance, albeit a subtle one, in the ear of the performer, enough to articulate the "tun-up" element that is essential for visibility in the session. These subtle distinguishing features encourage viewers to reflect on the nature of materiality in Johnson's work and on the role of materiality in articulations of faith as well.

Praise Songs for "Tun Up" Pum-pum: Queering Aesthetic Practices in Dancehall Culture

As noted earlier, the phrase "perverse modernities" best describes the confluences of ideologies, performances, bodies, desires, histories, economies, and institutions that collide in critical conversations about popular culture in Jamaica. Jamaican popular culture, particularly reggae and dancehall music, share some of the equally problematic ideological foundations that inform the ironic, contradictory nature of secular and sacred traditions. This irony is most visible in the overlapping anxieties about sexuality among religious, national, and popular cultural institutions. More than a decade ago, in an essay titled "Is Not Everything Good to Eat, Good to Talk," I argued,

> Despite the discursive and ideological similarities between Jamaican popular and national culture, the stark differences and disagreements emerge at the level of praxis, particularly about how workers (politician, ganja farmer, tourism worker, or gun man) and sexuality (the stallion, whore, batty man, "pussy watchman") are defined. In the end, men who cannot uphold their political and economic roles as (and with their) member(s) of society are relegated to the den of sexual and political inequity. However, when these seemingly separate categories are fused (gunman/battyman, "whore"/sex tourism industry, don/politician), the line that separates these constructions seems less and less sturdy. This is the problem that many of these songs attempt to negotiate through explicit assertions that "gunman and batty man" have no business with one another (figuratively and literally).[11]

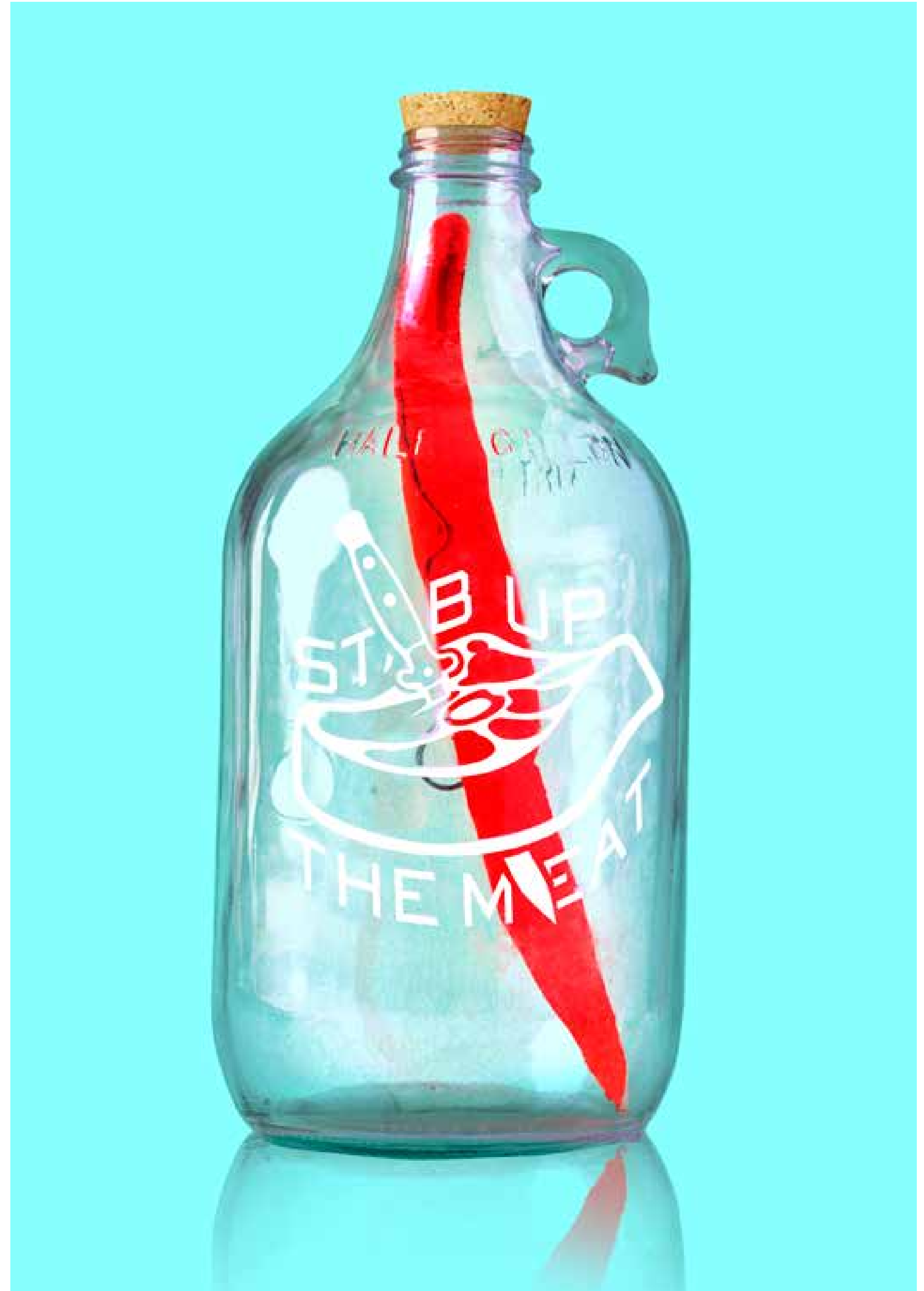
This argument is as culturally and politically relevant now as it was in 2003, when that essay was published. As such, the aesthetic and discursive landscapes of Jamaican popular culture have accelerated the need for more theoretically sophisticated ways to engage with the changes that are underway. Though these unholy alliances remain unencumbered by emergent critical discourses, the turns in the aesthetics of Jamaican popular culture suggests the boundaries I outlined before are no longer simply being "fused." Rather, they are being queered such that a completely new aesthetic that borrows liberally from both "camps" (i.e., "gunman" and "batty man," "don/politician," "whore/sex tourism") to create a new aesthetic that rests un/comfortably outside of both of these realms.

Kartel's 2012 song "Ever Blessed" could easily be described as an excellent example of the phenomenon I'm describing, and Johnson's work reflects this aesthetic in productive, provocative ways. If Rudder's "High Mas'" left the churchgoing community at odds with his appropriation of traditional liturgy for street mas', one can only wonder what church officials, and even the dancehall faithful, make of Kartel's praise song to pum-pum. I have long argued with several friends and colleagues that in light of Jamaica's long tradition of exceptional (formal and informal) poets, and the subsequent naming (in 2014) of the country's first poet laureate, that there could well be something of a similar order for recognition in dancehall culture. Quite naturally, any such title would have to be considered by category, and I would venture to say that of all the dancehall artistes, Kartel would undoubtedly be a finalist for the pum-pum laureate of Jamaica. This is not to suggest that he

is the first dancehall DJ preoccupied with female sexuality, sexual expression, and genitalia; dancehall music is always already a referendum on sexual appetites, proclivities, positions, and politics. “Ever Blessed” spares no biblical analogies in praise and worship of “pum-pum”:

> Yuh pussy comin like bible when it open up
> Mi see heaven, yuh punnany blessed my angel
> Loving yuh, loving yuh, like Rachael
> Yo pussy comin like bible
> A parable of some great sex
> From yo born till now that stay bless
> Never never fraid a di AIDS test
>
> [Chorus]
> Yuh have di ever blessed pum pum
> Ah God ah go wid yuh
> And am in love with yuh like woah
> The ever blessed pum pum
> God ah go wid yuh
> And am in love with yuh like woah
> The ever blessed pum pum[12]

Yes, the ubiquitous “run di place red,” “slammin in de bed,” “stabbing up di meat” tunes have always populated the playlists in every dancehall session. But these songs, and indeed this aesthetic, are distinctly different; there is a newfound reverence toward pum-pum, spearheaded in music by Kartel and chronicled wonderfully in Johnson’s series of modified spirits bottles that feature terms and phrases that have come to embody and represent this “love affair” with pum-pum in a most succinct fashion.



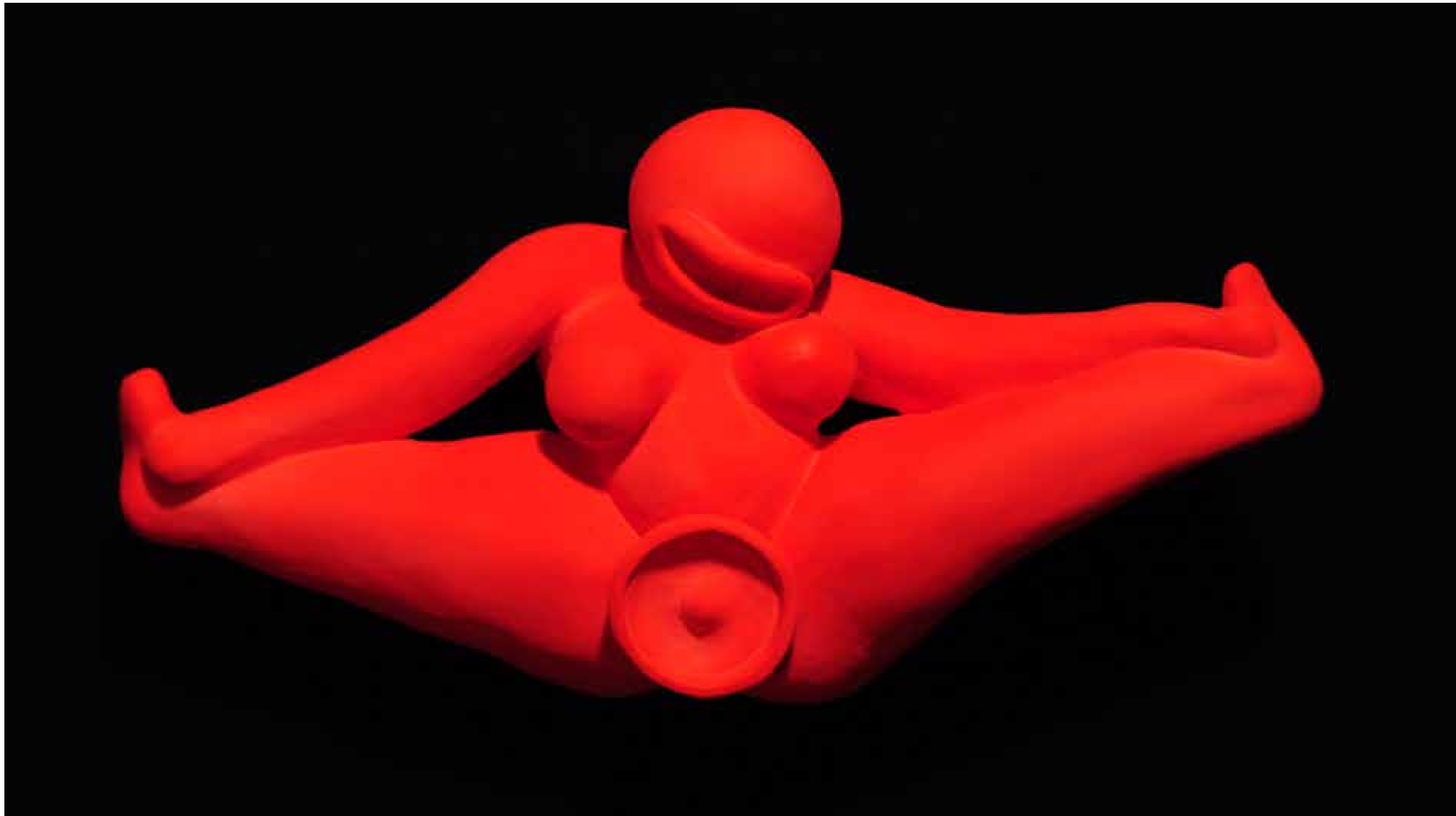
Left to right: Figure 6. Leasho Johnson, Stab-up the Meat, 2014 . Bottled “ratchet” knife with white cut-out label, 4.4 x 11.5 in. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 7. Leasho Johnson, *Gumtion*, 2014. Spray-painted bottle with vinyl cut-out label, 3.5 x 13 in. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 8. Leasho Johnson, *Di Good Hole*, 2014. Bottled pink paint with clear vinyl printed label, 4.5 x 11.5 in. Courtesy of the artist

The series, in which these "repurposed, reimagined alcohol bottles are experiments about Caribbean identity as a by-product of colonial commerce," is, according to Johnson, "a comment on a lost identity transformed (or bottled) for the sake of commercial gain."[13] Somewhere around 2010, as the titles in Johnson's series highlights, "pum-pum tun up," and in so doing, pum-pum became an overt focus in dancehall culture like never before. The fundamental difference between the "pum-pum tun-up" aesthetic and the previous "spread out inna bed" representations seems to be a matter of agency. In Jamaican parlance, the phrase "pum-pum tun-up" connotes high quality, exceptional stature or power, or (in the interest of not overstating the obvious), as one of Johnson's titles indicates, "the good hole."

Figure 9. Leasho Johnson, *Pum-pum Tun-up East and West*, 2012. Earthenware, 12 x 8 x 5 in. Courtesy of the artist



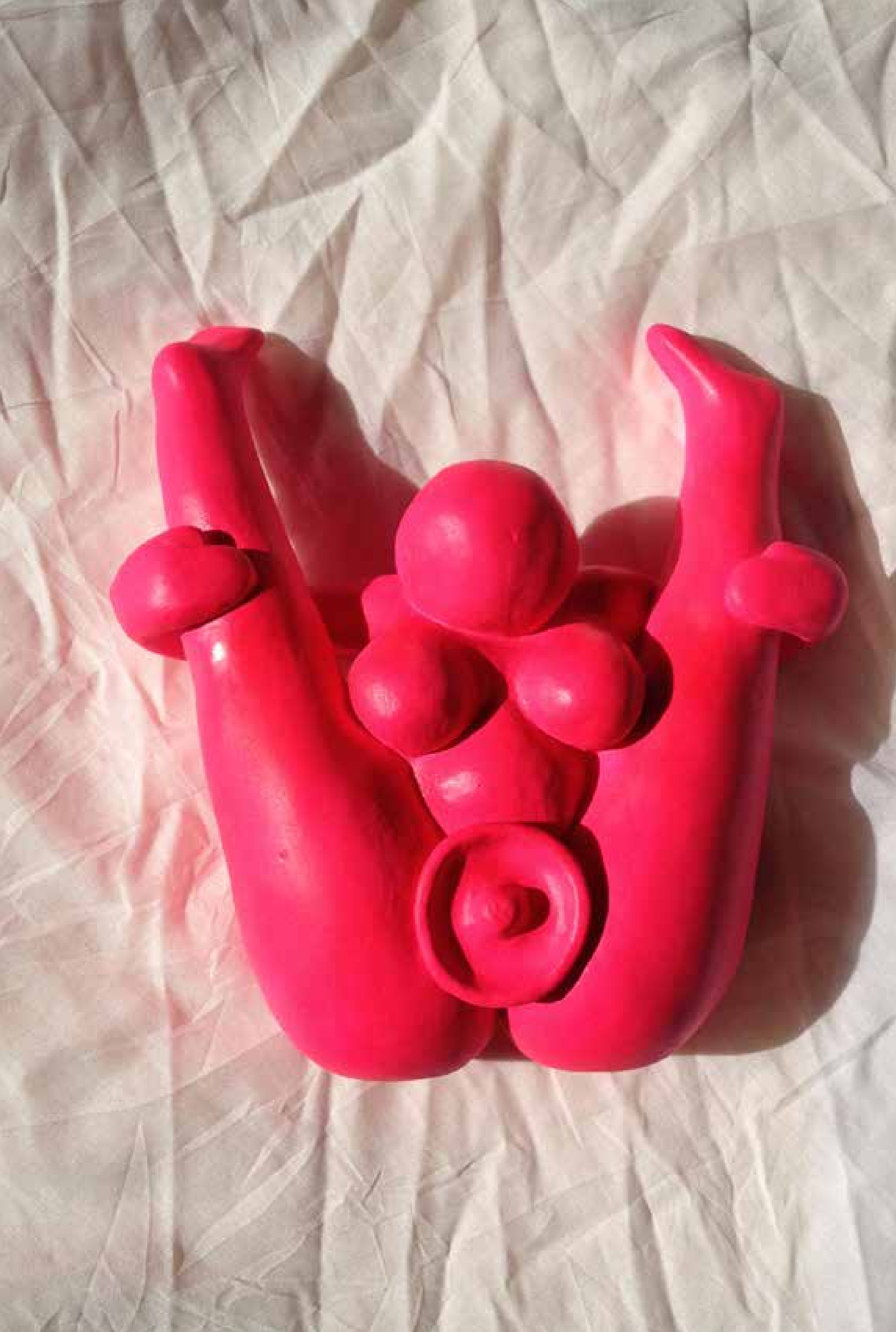
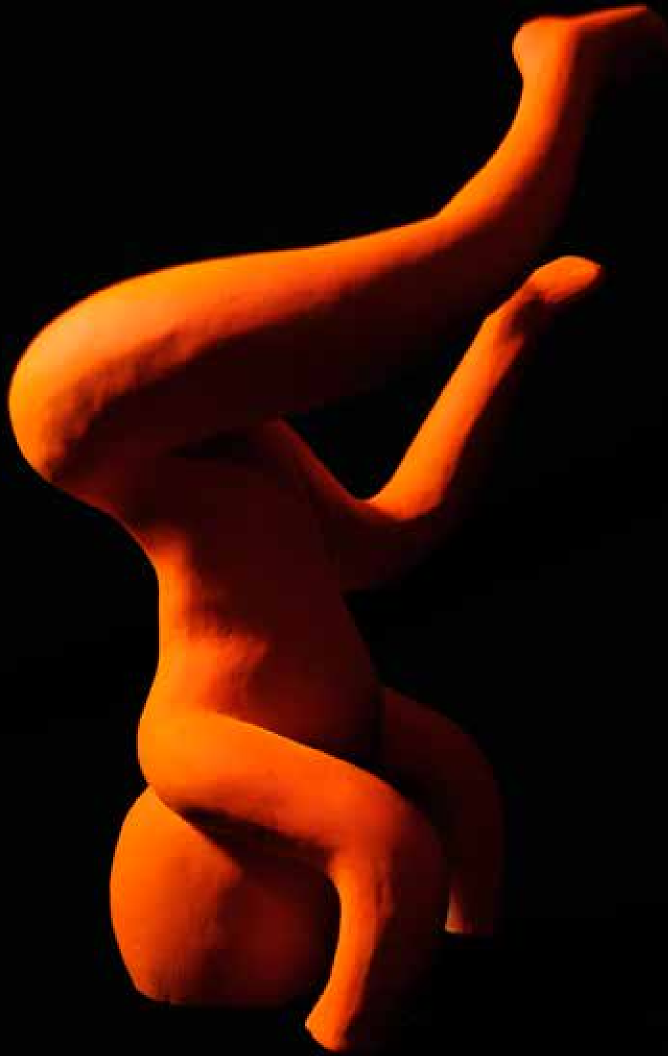


Figure 10. Leasho Johnson, *Pum-pum Tun-up North and South*, 2012. Earthenware, 12 x 8 x 5 in. Courtesy of the artist

Suddenly, female genitalia went from having a supporting role in dancehall culture to being the star, now headlining in more than one genre of Jamaican popular culture. What makes Kartel's songs (and there is a wide array of them, which include "Benz Punaany," "Happy Pum-pum," "Pum-pum Paradise," and "Ever Blessed") unique is the unabashed manner in which each song expresses its reverence for "pum-pum." As Kartel's lyrics suggest, the perversity is not coincidental nor is it necessarily contradictory in its origins. This is the same irreverence shown to Miss Ida by the men in her bar; the only difference is that their comments about how she walks and moves are cloaked in a very thin layer of respectability. In these recent representations of female genitalia, the layer of respectability is still there (in a manner of speaking) but not at all in the ways we imagine. So, quite naturally, several questions come to mind in response to this current trend: How should we account for this shift in representation of black women's bodies in dancehall culture? Can we understand this shift as corresponding to a heightened awareness of the failures in the rhetoric of respectability, particularly in the face of increasing demands to brand Jamaica for consumption? Or is this shift a kind of performance which functions similarly to the kind of "consecration" of the dancehall space that opens up new terms of engagement for performances and practices that are not traditionally welcomed in the dancehall?



I have made a similar argument about the work of another contemporary Jamaican artist, Ebony G. Patterson.[14] However, the works of these two artists are distinctly different in form, content, and modes of delivery. Where their work overlaps is in their interest in dancehall culture and how we might begin to understand and interpret many of the social and political changes taking place in Jamaica by paying closer critical attention to the fashion, style, and various modes of performance in dancehall, and, in the case of Johnson's work, its ability to queer traditionally stable boundaries that have effectively demarcated who has a right to be seen, in which venues, and for what purposes. Both these artists have sought to engage their audiences through their artwork by appropriating public spaces to highlight issues that affect black subjects whose lives, struggles, and rights have been erased by the state and the church. Their approaches are markedly different, but their critical interests mark them as contemporary artists who understand the power of the popular and the public sphere. Johnson's representation of dancehall performances raises curious questions about the relationship between secular rituals and performances, juxtaposing them directly against religious and political institutions that have castigated these modes of expression as vulgarity dressed in the vices of excess. Of course, the deep irony in re/cycling the "disposable" elements of Jamaican popular cultural expression and consumption highlights an engagement with the politics of class and identity formation in Jamaica, which makes Johnson's work across the range of media (paints, ceramics, public art/ graffiti, and graphic art) all the more insightful.

Figure 11. Leasho Johnson, *Pum-pum Tun-up Heaven Bound*, 2012. Earthenware, **4.5** x 5 x 9 in. Courtesy of the artist

Endnotes

1 I am borrowing and deploying this phrase in the sense evoked by Duke University Press in its name for a critical series edited by Jack Halbserstam and Lisa Lowe. According to the press's overview, "[The series] Perverse Modernities transgresses modern divisions of knowledge that have historically separated the consideration of sexuality, and its concern with desire, gender, bodies, and performance, on the one hand, from the consideration of race, colonialism, and political economy, on the other, in order to explore how the mutual implication of race, colonialism, and sexuality has been rendered perverse and unintelligible within the logics of modernity." To date, the series includes twenty-three books. See www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ProductList.php?viewby=series&id=73.

2 Michael Thelwell, *The Harder They Come* (1980; repr., New York: Grove, 1988), 29 (italics in original). Thelwell footnotes the definition of *pocomania* as "African-inspired religious sect noted for possession by spirits during ceremonies."

3 Ibid., 27.

4 Petrine Archer, "Accessories/Accessaries; or, What's in Your Closet?," *Small Axe*, no. 32 (July 2010): 99.

5 Winnifred Brown-Glaude, *Higglers in Kingston: Women's Informal Work in Jamaica* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011), 4. A higgler is (more often than not) a woman who sells fruits, vegetables, and sometimes other household items in the marketplaces and on the sidewalks in Jamaica.

6 Archer, "Accessories/Accessaries," 99.

7 Ibid.

8 Leasho Johnson, e-mail conversation with the author, 8 June 2016.

9 David Rudder, "High Mas," on *Beloved* (New York: Musicrama, 1998).

10 See *Small Axe*, no. 46 (March 2015): 144–45.

11 Patricia J. Saunders, "Is Not Everything Good to Eat, Good to Talk: Sexual Economy and Dancehall Music in the Global Marketplace," *Small Axe*, no. 13 (March 2003): 95–115.

12 Vybz Kartel, "Ever Blessed," on *Rvssian Presents Free Worl Boss* (Head Concussion Records, 2013)

13 Leasho Johnson, artist's statement.

14 See Patricia Joan Saunders, "Gardening in the Garrisons, You Never Know What You'll Find: (Un)Visibility in the Works of Ebony G. Patterson," *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016): 98–137.