



THE ROCK/TRANSFER

by Janet Cook-Rutnik
and William Stelzer

Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts


Frederiksted, St. Croix

opening
Friday, March 6, 2009
4 - 8 PM

FACING LOCALITY

curated by
Luis Camnitzer
23 artists from the Virgin Islands
and Puerto Rico

Sponsored in part by the Virgin Islands Council on the Arts,
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THE ROCK/TRANSFER

“For amidst these crumbling walls echo a multitude of voices, and each has its own tale to tell. For some, the story begins in the sweltering jungles of West Africa; for others, on cold and rocky Northern European coasts; for still others, it begins on these very shores. Some sought wealth and opportunity; others, escape from strife or ethnic persecution. The majority, found only enslavement and misery; few, very few, endured.”

This quote is by David Knight's UNDERSTANDING ANNABERG, his book about the history of Estate Annaberg on St. John.

The Rock/Transfer is about the weight of history – collective and personal as well as an attempt to reconnect the past with the present through a symbolic gesture in which an object that signifies the past is moved from one historical place (Annaberg Sugar Factory on St. John) to another (restored Colonial building housing the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted, St. Croix). This project, THE ROCK/TRANSFER, came as a response to the FACING LOCALITY proposal. The thought of dealing with colonial history, structures and ruins from this period in Virgin Islands history felt ponderous - how heavy – mentally, physically and spiritually this tumultuous, violent, tragic, bloodstained history is for all of us: descendents, witnesses, testifiers; survivors all. The rock is an integral part of daily life - the ground we walk on, the landscape, the architecture, our homes; the past and the present.

It was decided to take a day out of real time and transfer a rock from Annaberg on St. John to St. Thomas, to St. Croix using all forms of inter-island travel including the donkey. This journey put me in touch with “involuntary memory” as I reconnected emotionally with the past and was transported back in time to feelings I had when I walked along Mary's Point, near Annaberg 40 years earlier. This is the kind of memory that gives life its' transcendental quality and enables us to experience the

connection of the past with the present in an intrinsic, cellular way as opposed to the academic narrative of a history book. This quality is what gives life in the Caribbean its' profoundly mystical aura, making it a place where joy and sorrow mix freely.

This project attempts to "jar" our personal and collective memories – it is a conscious effort to connect to an unconscious awareness of the stories, the people, the events that imbue the objects and the landscape that we walk in as we traverse our daily lives creating our own stories that will become embedded in the path we travel. Unless we find some way in our daily lives to reflect and remember the stories of those who went before us they will not endure. The act of moving the rock, this silent witness to the tides and turns of history and nature, had a transforming effect on me personally but also on the public. In the course of the journey the rock took on a life of its' own. With minimal explanation, merely that it was an "historic" rock; it came from Annaberg, an historic place; some people bestowed a holiness to the rock while others felt comfortable reaching out and touching it – patting it the way you might pat a baby. People talked to it, wishing it a safe journey – one woman responded so personally

Janet Cook · RUTNIK

Janet Cook-Rutnik
born Albany, NY - St. John resident since 1969, www.cookrutnikart.vi
Cook-Rutnik has completed undergraduate art studies, sculpture with Richard Stankiewicz at SUNY (graduate level), printmaking at Skidmore College in New York and residencies in public art and sculpture, installation and new media at the School of Visual Arts in New York (2006). Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation Creative Fellow, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (2008). Exhibitions include a solo show at Museo de las Americas in San Juan (1999), participation in THE LAST BOOK – curator: Luis Camnitzer – National Library of Argentina, Buenos Aires (2008), Bienals in Santo Domingo (1992-96), Cuenca (1994) ; Caribbean Art shows in museums in France, Germany, Washington DC and NY. Current work involves collaborative and solo projects in multi media, which deal with migration and journeys in a personal and collective way.

and enthusiastically to the project that it was clear that she felt herself and her history to be invested in the rock and its' journey. There was no accounting for the depth of feeling she conveyed and expressed instantly and instinctively.

In the Virgin Islands men are constantly pushing rocks up and down hills, in and out of construction sites, making walls, buildings, roads. What makes one man feel like Sisyphus, condemned to a life of labor and another like Michelangelo, a creator of lasting substance and beauty?

Janet Cook-Rutnik
William Stelzer (in collaboration)

William Stelzer

William Stelzer
born Southfield, Michigan – St. John resident since 1992
Education, Michigan State University - Industrial and Graphic Design
University of Texas at Austin - Radio-Television-Film
Stelzer is a freelance artist/filmmaker who has worked on a wide array of commercial film and video projects in the Virgin Islands. Prior to living in St. John he worked as Graphics Director for the ABC-TV affiliate in Central Texas during the First Gulf War and as a Special Effects Director using computer and model animation for accident reconstructions. He was also part of a research expedition into the Venezuelan Amazon to study burial cave artwork, has taught computer graphics in West Africa and shot documentary footage high on a Peruvian glacier. Over the past year he helped set up pilots and produced a series of mini documentaries in Haiti, Nicaragua and St. John for the Waveplace Foundation, created to teach Caribbean school kids using OLPC's revolutionary children's laptop computer.