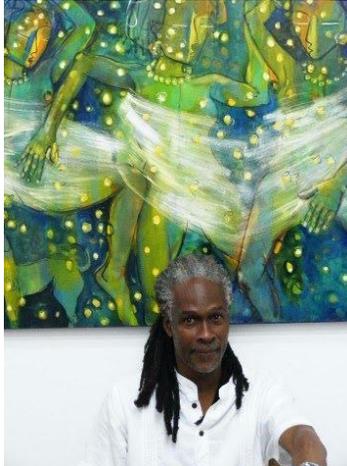


## Interview with Ras Mosera

By John Robert Lee

Ras Mosera is a Saint Lucian artist, long resident in St. Martin. He talks with fellow St. Lucian, writer John Robert Lee. Lee's latest publication is his *Collected Poems 1975-2015* (Peepal Tree Press, 2017).



JRL: Ras Mosera, St. Lucian born, but long resident in St. Maarten. Had you begun to paint in St. Lucia and was the move here strategic to your artistic career?

RM: Yes I began painting in St. Lucia (Dabbling more so) and I was not aware of the role of the arts or artists, or either how wide was the art spectrum, meaning, music, sculpture etc. simply because our environment did not allow such, because the education system was narrowed to mostly English and Maths. Moving here, (St. Martin) was not strategic, accidental rather; I had a craft workshop in St. Lucia and wanted to open one in Guadeloupe, the rest is the gravity of life.

JRL: Your style is very distinctive. Would your influences include Wilfredo Lam, Romare Bearden, Latin American painters, even more than European and American? What about Caribbean painters? Of course one may find echoes of ancient Egyptian motifs as well as the modernist Picasso and the cubists in your work.



RM: With my style - I have heard of influences of Picasso and Jean Michel Basquiat and Romare Bearden, I love Romare Bearden's work, because of its sincere (Black Magic ) interpretation (*as once mentioned to you* ). Bearden and I also had deep discussions about one claiming his environment etc. I admire many Caribbean painters, though am aware that there is a strong influence on our art in all the different genres; with the ever looming Tourist industry. (*Read the Last Resort , by Polly Patullo* )

JRL: Would you describe yourself as a “political” painter? Is it important to you that artists (painters, sculptors, writers, musicians et al) remain socially and politically engaged?



RM: The cool tradewinds sometimes becomes a violent hurricane and soft waves become tsunamis. As products of nature , I think we should behave the same , one should not remain totally political or socially engaged, but should, when the occasion arises; I suppose this means a time for peace and time for war. To remain politically and socially engaged might have us stuck in a long suffering mode, (A

*litany of pain* ). Sometime we need to just claim our humanity by just ( Being) and seek genuine leisure, not always about the grief of our existence, though our grief appears to be Chronic , we should have moments of respite .

JRL: Many of your paintings also seem to explore man-woman relationships, in their romantic, social and sexual complexities?



RM: I love watching human interaction , kind of sociological assessment , also my admiration of the female , they never cease to amaze me and how we as males try to decipher what they're really up to. Human interaction is interesting .

JRL: You live in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural society in St. Maarten. How do you evaluate Caribbean painting today? What are the particular challenges facing serious painters throughout the Caribbean? For that matter, serious Caribbean artists in all genres?

RM: Yes I live in a multi- lingual society St.Martin, a meeting place of all Caribbean people and beyond. My evaluation of Caribbean painters are that the majority fall under the umbrella of tourism except for more serious painters ; the problem is , most Caribbean islands lack proper evaluation of the arts, which leads to few proper infrastructures , both for the performing and the visual arts. If I could also mention - many of our local radio stations seem to have their heads in the US mainly and there is no agenda for proper promotion , stimulation and incentives for our local products, this only happens in the Carnival season. I reiterate: Sir Arthur Lewis once said; “50% of the Caribbean’s economy is dormant” when asked what’s the 50% ? He mentioned the ARTS &CRAFTS. This is a big problem to overcome where the arts in all genres are concerned .

JRL: How much international attention has your art received? Have you exhibited in the art capitals of the world?

RM: I have had good reviews, mostly in Rotterdam and Washington . My international exhibition list comprises: Amsterdam , Rotterdam Schiedam, The Hague NY, Washington, Philadelphia, Paris , Austria , Stockholm . Hope I could add more to this list, one of my goals.

JRL: What are some of the goals you have set yourself as a Caribbean painter? In the context of our troubled Caribbean today?



RM: The goals I set are mainly to have the strength to continue producing , exhibiting ,to be ever inspired, hope to be understood, as I try not to fall in the pitfalls of “*Nostalgic Masochism*”, the long suffering cliché. About our Caribbean troubled context?: It’s like taking the red pill , the more knowledge you acquire in our context , the more saddened and enraged one becomes , which I suppose tempers the imagination, but it’s a bitter- sweet situation , a racial sociological nightmare , cause and effect of our history. My goal is to survive this, all those romantic tales about masters and slaves.